

vourable decision and the longer the case went on the longer its preferred 1983 regime continued.

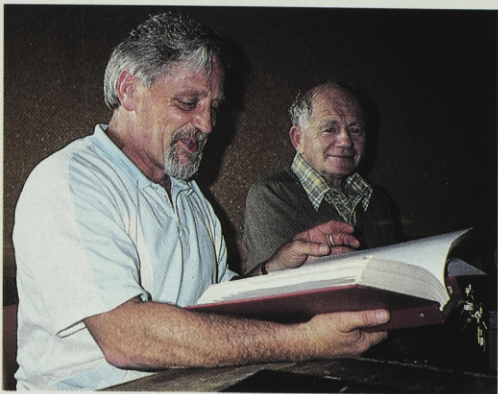
Thirdly it showed how, despite the odds, a group of local activists can take on a mighty corporation. It was the first time that the electricity industry in this country had lost a major battle. In many ways, says Chapple, Electricorp was the perfect villain. "They never did anything right. Every time they opened their mouth they put their foot in it. Their public relations were awful."

The case drew attention to issues of energy efficiency and conservation – mere empty words before the mid 80s. They now mean something and Electricorp's only real future option is to promote them. Its loss on the Whanganui has sent it the message that it cannot rely on its present water allocation. And under the new Resource Management Act all the

corporation's hydro as well as thermal operations will be subject to more rigorous environmental scrutiny.

For DoC's John Ombler one of the major lessons of the whole campaign was in showing how DoC's advocacy role is not enough in isolation. DoC needs to work in tandem with environmental groups, so that the department is not seen as getting too far ahead of public opinion. "Without the coalition, DoC may not have been able to go so far," he says. "And that's important in the ongoing relationship between environmental groups and the department".

MEANWHILE back in Owhango, the members of the now-disbanded River Flows Coalition have moved along to the hotel. Reminiscences of the five-year battle



The final meeting of the Wanganui River Flows Coalition. Keith Chapple (left) and Tom Wells revisit some of Electricorp's evidence.

flow as freely as the Waikato bitter. Tales of how one witness was cross-examined by Electricorp lawyers for three and a half days, how a mole in Electricorp ("we never found out who") provided Chapple with internal documents showing how the corporation would try and split the coalition, the shock at seeing the size of the lever-arched files of Electricorp evidence, and how the tribunal conveniently went into recess for two weeks so that Chapple could attend the birth of his son.

At the Chapple homestead at Kakahi the stories continue into the early morning. The Whakapapa, in full flow from the rain, roars away below, as it has down the centuries. There are further battles for this river and its wildlife in the years ahead. Is it too much to hope that one day it will flow free again? ♦



Ian Close is the editor of Forest & Bird.



The Mangatepopo River. Another tributary of the Whanganui and completely de-watered.

A brief chronology

1958.....
Order-in-Council signed by the government giving the NZ Electricity Department authority for the Tongariro Power Diversion. No public discussion or consultation.

1964.....
Peter McIntyre launches his "Hands off Tongariro River" petition.

1967-72.....
Construction of the western section of the scheme. The scheme diverts water by a system of intakes, tunnels and canals from six headwater streams of the Whanganui River, effectively removing all their flow.

1983.....
After pressure from recreational users, the National Water and Soil Conservation Authority sets a minimum flow at Te Maire (17 kilometres downstream from Taumarunui) of 22 cubic metres a second in summer (not enough to get your shorts wet) and 16 cubic metres a second (about knee deep) at other times. In effect Electricorp loses only three per cent of the total flow. This decision is to expire in 1988.

October 1987.....
Formation of the Wanganui River Flows Coalition at the instigation of the King Country Branch of Forest and Bird. The 35 organisations in the coalition argue for a more equitable sharing of the available water. The coalition's first act is to organise petitions to force Electricorp

to apply for a water right.

March 1988.....
Electricorp bows to pressure and agrees to apply for water right. Rangitikei-Wanganui Catchment Board sets up tribunal in Taumarunui to review the 1983 minimum-flow regime.

October 1988.....
Catchment Board tribunal rules that the upper Whanganui be restored to full natural flow. Increased natural flow (33% in winter; 66% in summer) to Whakapapa. Overall, Electricorp's share of the water reduced from 97% to 69%. Electricorp announces it will appeal. The 1983 regime continues.

September 1989 – March 1990.....
The Planning Tribunal hears appeals by Electricorp (wanting *more* diversion) and