

to their cause. In 1980 when gold prices hit \$US800 an oz, a small black-sanding claim at Green's Beach north of Harihari seemed an attractive way to boost the family income. On some West Coast beaches fine alluvial gold which has been washed down river and out to sea can be deposited again near the high tide line, clinging to grains of black sand. When and where it is found depend on recent weather and coastal erosion patterns.

The family worked the claim on and off for nine years. They now have access to a similar beach claim at Okarito and McLachlan believes many tourists would be keen to try their luck should favourable seas expose the yellow glister again.

From the State Highway much of the West Coast appears an ocean of untouched nature, thanks to the former Forest Service's practice of leaving narrow strips of roadside forest as scenic or amenity corridors. Seeing the carnage of clearfelling in Ianthe Forest, every time they drove out to their Green's Beach claim, took McLachlan behind the

"beautiful facade of the show along the road". Flying over Ianthe in a plane piloted by Ian during trips north was another shock. "The landscape created by clearfelling is like looking at pick-up sticks or something akin to Hiroshima."

**D**ISBELIEF at the scale of the devastation hardened into action in late 1989 when a Timberlands logging gang ventured over the skyline in Wanganui Forest and began to flatten part of the forest backdrop to the Harihari township. The whine of chainsaws and crashing trees was uncomfortably close.

A phone call from local farmer Lindsay Molloy prompted McLachlan to poke her head up from out of the shy and silent majority. She and Molloy spent two days door knocking with a petition calling on Timberlands not to allow clearfelling over the skyline near the town or in other identified vista areas visible from the State Highway. Around 70 per cent of the town's adult residents signed and the

logging gangs retreated.

These days when McLachlan speaks out she still does so as an individual but one who knows that a sizeable local constituency also cherish the forest landscapes which distinguish South Westland. At a

umes of high-priced native timber for the domestic market. Her passion for the forests is not just for their antiquity, beauty and the web of life they support but for the "huge waste of a resource which could have been used on a small



*Behind the show along the road: logs at a landing in Ianthe Forest in February 1993. "We're cutting so much rimu that it's being burnt up smoke-stacks and going rotten sitting round in the yards."*

recent meeting with Timberlands several residents from each of the Whataroa, Waitaha Valley, Harihari, Franz Josef and Okarito communities were loud in their opposition to the possible clearfelling of Poerua Forest.

"As local people have become aware of how the Accord is being twisted to justify large areas of forest being clearfelled we're seeing a real body of opinion come out in opposition."

Despite their best efforts, McLachlan knows that locals on their own cannot end clearfelling in South Westland. In the spate of lobbying before the Accord was signed, "the loudest voices" on the West Coast were those of industry. At that time McLachlan welcomed the letters written from "off the Coast" in defence of the forests and believes they are just as necessary today. She is delighted that Forest and Bird has made the campaign a national priority.

McLachlan sees a legitimate role for a long-term milling industry on the West Coast which operates under sustained yield prescriptions to produce small vol-

scale to provide long-term employment and wood products".

"We're cutting so much rimu it's going rotten sitting round in the yards and they have signs out which say trailer-loads of firewood for \$5.00 – that's for our 500-year-old trees."

There's a catch in her voice as she describes the vandalism which clearfelling in Poerua Forest and the remnant stands of trees in Waitangi and Ianthe Forests would involve. The lively warmth and generous hospitality which make her paddling clients feel more than welcome give way to a formidable blend of emotion and concentrated determination. The listener realises that it is not just the natural taonga of the forests which are at stake but the identity and sense of place of South Westland's human inhabitants. ♦



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