



*Looking east across the valley to the Diadem range from near Ahuriri Road.*

# Preserving the High Country

The Crown purchase of Birchwood Station opens a huge area of South Island high country for New Zealanders, writes AINSLIE TALBOT.

Photographs by GILBERT VAN REENEN.

Travelling into the Ahuriri Valley in North Otago, it's easy to understand why conservationists, trampers, climbers and fishers have long enthused about this outstanding high country. There are very few alpine valleys east of the Main Divide which are as scenic and as ecologically significant as this. Or as accessible — by a dusty, shingle, no-exit road that runs off the northern side of the Lindis Pass which links inland Canterbury with Central Otago.

The Ahuriri is a delight. The countryside runs from wide, grassy, valley floors, with their mixture of tussock, introduced species, and extensive alpine wetlands, through thousands of hectares of dense beech forest, up to alpine tussock and shrublands and high alpine fellfields.

Peaks like Mt Huxley and Mt Barth soar over 2000 metres with permanent snow and large glaciers. Through the centre of this stunning landscape flow the crystal-clear waters of one of the best trout rivers in the country, the braided Ahuriri and its tributaries; Canyon Creek, Watson's Stream, Hodgkinson Creek and Snowy Gorge Creek. The Ahuriri and its glistening mountains are a superb example of a glaciated valley landscape, an iconic part of New Zealand's natural heritage. It would