

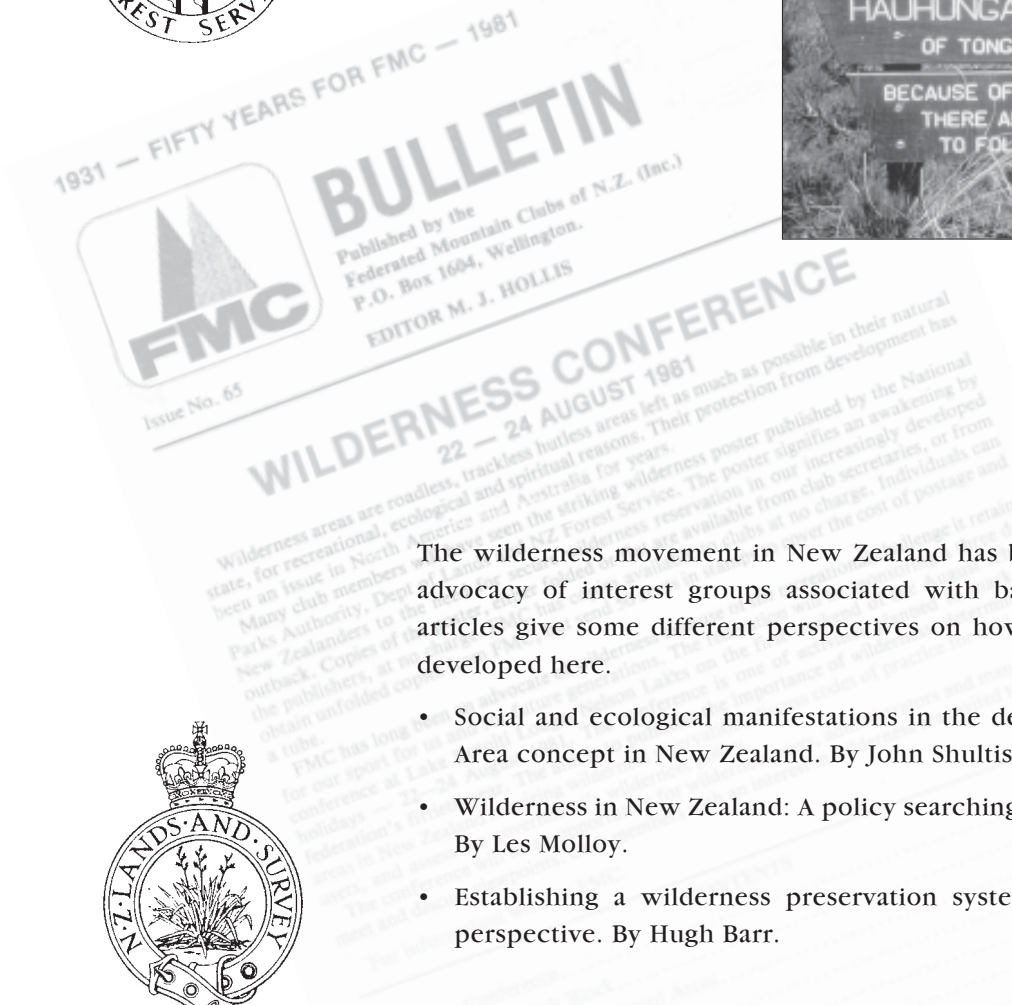
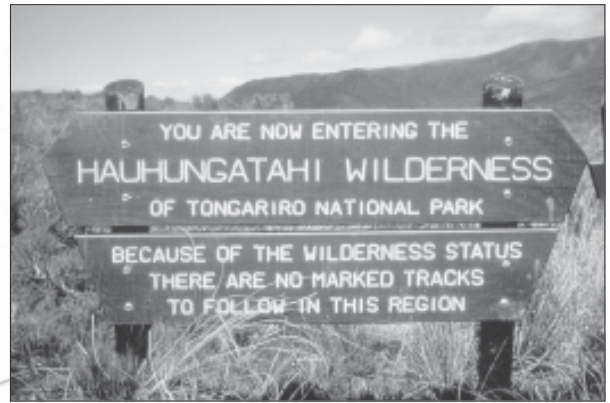
A photograph of three hikers in yellow raincoats crossing a river in a mountain valley. The hikers are carrying large backpacks and using trekking poles. The background features steep, rocky mountains with patches of snow and a waterfall on the left. The sky is overcast.

Part 1

The wilderness movement



An old entry sign to Hauhungatahi Wilderness Area, created in 1966 and rezoned to 'remote experience' in 1990.
Photo: Gordon Cessford



The wilderness movement in New Zealand has been largely derived from the advocacy of interest groups associated with backcountry recreation. These articles give some different perspectives on how the wilderness concept has developed here.

- Social and ecological manifestations in the development of the Wilderness Area concept in New Zealand. By John Shultis.
- Wilderness in New Zealand: A policy searching for someone to implement it. By Les Molloy.
- Establishing a wilderness preservation system in New Zealand: A user's perspective. By Hugh Barr.



A Wellington group in the proposed Adams Wilderness Area, Easter 1974. Standing (L. to R.): Paul Green, Neil Pilbrow, Ian Bunckenburg, Chris Kinzett, Jan Heine, Owen Cox, Les Molloy. Sitting: Arnold Heine, Kevin Thompson.
Photo: Brian Hunt



Previous page: Crossing the Adams River, in the proposed Adams Wilderness Area. *Photo: Chris Kinzett*

Social and ecological manifestations in the development of the Wilderness Area concept in New Zealand

By John Shultis

Like the earlier concept of the National Park, the American concept of wilderness has dispersed throughout the world, particularly in temperate nations settled by the British. Countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa have all begun to expand the acreage and number of designated wilderness areas in their territories. While the philosophy behind the establishment and management of national parks has remained consistent in Western nations, the concept of wilderness areas has begun to develop in unique directions in New Zealand. With the wilderness policy of 1985, the New Zealand government applied more stringent criteria that eliminated 'developments such as huts, tracks [trails], bridges, signs, and mechanised access'. This paper discusses the new concept of designated wilderness in New Zealand and outlines the social and ecological antecedents of these changes.

1. FROM GONDWANALAND TO AOTEAROA TO NEW ZEALAND

Approximately 80 million years ago, the islands of what is now known as New Zealand broke away from Gondwanaland and began to drift away from the super-continent in an easterly direction. One of the most conspicuous outcomes of the resulting biogeographical isolation was the evolution of a high number of endemic species, particularly in bird and insect populations. Whereas earlier, more primitive species in less isolated land masses were slowly replaced by competitors better adapted to changing environmental conditions, in New Zealand these atavistic species—evolving at a much slower rate and in less conventional directions—continued to flourish (Burns 1984). Most notably, these islands evolved without the presence of mammalian predators: the only native land mammals are three species of bat. Many indigenous species have since been exterminated by the activities of humans (the first mammalian predators to invade the islands), particularly through hunting pressure,

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landscape modifications, and competition with introduced species (Salmon 1975; Veblen & Stewart 1982).

Present-day New Zealand remained completely isolated from human influence until approximately 1,000 years ago, when Polynesians began to make what is thought to have been a series of migrations to the land they came to call Aotearoa (Davidson 1984; Biggs 1990). The Maori had considerable impact upon the New Zealand landscape (Orbell 1985). Approximately 30 avian species became extinct (Veblen & Stewart 1982; Cassels 1984; Atkinson 1989), and from one-third (Nicholls 1980) to one-half (McGlone 1989) of the original forest cover was cleared by approximately 1800.

Nevertheless, the arrival of Europeans in Aotearoa heralded even more significant changes for the New Zealand landscape. Though the country was first sighted in 1642 by Abel Tasman, sustained European settlement did not begin until 1788, the year New Zealand formally fell under the jurisdiction of the newly formed New South Wales colony in Australia.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS IN NEW ZEALAND

In 1840, the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi cleared the way for organised British settlement of New Zealand. Just one month after the Treaty of Waitangi had been signed, the Royal Navy requested that suitable areas of kauri forest in the Northland region be set aside for naval use (timber and spars) before further settlement of the area took place. However, the Colonial Land and Immigration Office opposed the establishment of forest reserves, as they perceived them to be incompatible with settlement. Eventually, a national system of forest reserves was established through the New Zealand Forests Act (1874) and the Land Act (1877). In 1881 the Thermal-springs Districts Act was passed, which allowed the government to reserve hot springs and related features for recreation and tourism purposes: an excerpt from the Yellowstone Park legislation was quoted during the discussions of the Bill (New Zealand Parliamentary Debates 1881, vol. 40) to help elucidate the principles behind the protection of natural features for park purposes.

New Zealand was the fourth country in the world to establish a national park. The nucleus of present-day Tongariro National Park was deeded to the New Zealand government by the Maori chief Te Heuheu Tukino IV in 1887, and enabling legislation was passed in 1894. The delay was due to confusion over the concept of the national park, and concern that the area was suitable for settlement or resource extraction (Shultis 1992). One Member of Parliament attempted to alleviate these concerns using typical New Zealand imagery: he 'pitied the unfortunate sheep that had to try to get a living out of [the proposed park area]' (New Zealand Parliamentary Debates 1893, vol. 79).

As these early parks were primarily seen as tourist resorts, where possible the wilderness was 'improved' with facilities suitable for the establishment of tourist resort destinations catering to the upper classes. While in theory the lands and biota within park boundaries were subject to varying levels of

protection, in actuality parklands proved to have little defence from unauthorised exploitation apart from their remoteness and their 'worthlessness' for anything other than recreation and tourism.

3. EVOLUTION OF THE WILDERNESS CONCEPT IN NEW ZEALAND

The idea of providing wilderness areas in New Zealand was first discussed in the 1930s, soon after activity to protect wilderness in the United States occurred. However, the Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC)—the most influential of all non-governmental groups lobbying for the establishment and management of protected areas—tended to conceive of these areas as being of little use for recreation, though perhaps of some use for search and rescue training operations (unpublished, Tararua Tramping Club¹).

The concept of wilderness areas gained momentum when Lance McCaskill, a celebrated advocate of protected areas in New Zealand, visited the United States in the late 1940s to study managerial techniques utilised in American protected areas (Molloy 1983a; Thom 1987). McCaskill discussed the concept of wilderness while visiting Aldo Leopold and other American advocates of the wilderness concept. But it was the visit of Olaus Murie, then president of The Wilderness Society in the United States, that provided the crucial impetus to the establishment of designated wilderness areas in New Zealand. In addresses to the Auckland and Christchurch branches of the New Zealand Geographical Society in 1949, Murie expressed his dismay over the chaotic state of national park administration in New Zealand and discussed the American experience with wilderness areas (McCaskill 1949). A recent popular history of New Zealand's national parks states that Murie provided a 'direct American input' into the appearance of a section dealing with wilderness areas in the 1952 National Parks Act (Thom 1987). McCaskill himself stated that the concept of wilderness areas was 'introduced to New Zealand by Olaus Murie' (McCaskill 1965).

Similar to the earlier national park concept, the provision of wilderness areas was made possible by the American precedent and mirrored the American conception of wilderness areas and wilderness recreation.

Since the 1970s, the FMC had been tenaciously lobbying for changes in the legislative concept of wilderness areas. Les Molloy of the FMC spearheaded this sustained effort that finally culminated in the FMC 50th anniversary wilderness conference and the consequential establishment of the Wilderness Advisory Group in 1981 (Molloy 1983b).

The resulting Wilderness Policy, established in 1985, provided an altered version of the vision contained in the 1952 and 1980 National Parks Acts and an earlier joint policy produced by the National Parks and Reserves Authority and the Forest Service in 1980. Wilderness areas were now to be preserved and

¹ These unpublished documents are in the Tararua Tramping Club Collection. MS/Papers/1858. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

perpetuated in their natural state, with only minimal signs of human interference tolerated. The continuing affinity with the American wilderness system was reflected in the wording of the definition of wilderness, much of which reveals a marked resemblance to phrases contained in The Wilderness Act passed by the United States Congress in 1964. However, unlike the 1952 and 1980 national park legislation, foot tracks were now specifically prohibited in designated wilderness areas. Where such facilities such as huts, tracks, bridges, and route markers existed, they were to be 'removed or no longer ... maintained' (Wilderness Advisory Group 1985).

This new policy, endorsed by both the National Parks and Reserves Authority and the Forest Service, signalled a significant alteration of the wilderness concept among the FMC, other lobbying groups and government officials. As opposed to wilderness areas in the United States, Canada and Australia, wilderness areas in New Zealand have become much more stringently defined areas designated as such 'will not have developments such as huts, tracks, bridges, signs, nor mechanised access' (Wilderness Advisory Group 1985). Where such facilities exist (still considered 'improvements' in other protected areas), they are required to be either removed or allowed to weather and age until consumed by the elements. Buffer zones between road access and wilderness boundaries are also encouraged. Thus, wilderness areas in New Zealand have become more strictly geared toward the actual preservation of relatively unmodified landscapes than in other countries. Though recreational use of wilderness is welcomed in New Zealand, it is neither actively encouraged through the identification of wilderness areas in national park/topographical maps, nor facilitated through the traditional establishment of vehicular access and recreational facilities such as huts, tracks, bridges, and signs.

Wilderness areas designated after the establishment of the 1985 Wilderness Policy were normally larger, had fewer existing recreational facilities and larger buffer zones, and were more likely to incorporate ecological principles than earlier wilderness areas. Indeed, as stipulated in the Wilderness Policy, Otehake, Te Tatua-Pounamu, and Hauhungatahi Wilderness Areas were later downgraded to 'remote experience zones', as they did not conform to required standards (principally minimum size). Table 1 lists the designated wilderness areas existing in New Zealand as of 1996.

4. SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL MANIFESTATIONS

The reasons behind the New Zealand transformation in the concept of wilderness areas are:

- First and foremost, the strengthening of the New Zealand identity. New Zealand, like other ex-colonies, has developed a more robust national identity, one familiar to itself and to other nations.
- The development of the environmental movement
- The growing influence of ecological principles in the management of protected areas

TABLE 1. WILDERNESS AREAS IN NEW ZEALAND.

NATIONAL PARK WILDERNESS AREAS	HECTARES	ACRES	YEAR ESTABLISHED
Glaisnock (Fiordland National Park)	124,800	308,260	1974
Pembroke (Fiordland National Park)	18,000	44,500	1974
Tasman (Kahurangi National Park)	86,946	214,800	1988
WILDERNESS AREAS			
Hooker/Landsborough	41,000	101,300	1990
Raukumara	39,650	98,000	1988
Total	310,396	766,860	

Source: 1993 United Nations List of National Parks and Protected Areas (http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cgi-bin/un_list.pl); [Les Molloy pers com. 27 September 1996]

Editor's note: For updated Wilderness status (including newly designated wilderness areas) refer to the Map in the Preface and to Appendix 3.

These trends are both international and national. While the field of ecology is not strictly a 20th century phenomenon (Worster 1977), the second half of the 20th century saw an explosion in its scientific significance and public awareness (Bramwell 1989). In New Zealand, the field of ecology is particularly significant because of the high number of endemic species and the endangered status of many native animals, a result of its biogeographical isolation and the enormous impact of introduced species. The instability and singularity of the New Zealand terrestrial ecosystem is much more conspicuous than in North America or Europe. In this way, the idiosyncratic biogeography of New Zealand has had a decisive impact upon the way in which the New Zealand wilderness is perceived by its citizens.

These three primary factors—the strengthening of the New Zealand identity, the growth of the environmental movement, and the increasing importance of ecological principles—provided much of the basis for the change in the New Zealand concept of wilderness during the 1970s and 1980s. A secondary reason behind the change is the belief in New Zealand that remaining indigenous species are of greater value than exotic species. Plants or animals that best typify or support the national identity, and that highlight the uniqueness of New Zealand (the kauri, kiwi, or kakapo, for example) are more valued than species that do not have these characteristics. The precarious existence of such indigenous species as the Chatham Island robin, kakapo, kiwi and tuatara have helped ignite public support and sympathy for these animals. Similarly, research based upon ecological principles has emphasised the destructive power of introduced species such as rats and deer on indigenous species and landscapes. Also, both the New Zealand public and government agencies have become more comfortable with unmodified (wilderness) environments. The strengthening of the New Zealand identity has led to increasing identification with and pride in so-called 'typical' New Zealand landscapes and species, which in turn has resulted in the increased affection for the unmodified, uniquely New Zealand environment, i.e. wilderness.

5. CONCLUSION

Beginning in the early 1970s, and culminating in the mid 1980s, policy makers began to envisage a new more indigenous conception of wilderness areas in New Zealand. The strengthening of the New Zealand identity and increased public knowledge about endangered indigenous landscapes and species are deemed largely responsible. Increased support for unmodified representative New Zealand landscapes was also necessary for the recent more stringent modifications of the wilderness area concept. As recreational and commercial pressures increase over the years, it remains to be seen if New Zealand bureaucrats and politicians will be content to allow these relatively undisturbed wildlands to remain as designated wilderness areas. The laudable goal of creating these tiny islands of primordial New Zealand, largely unvisited but still deeply valued representations of the original New Zealand landscape and the contemporary national identity, may be considered as yet a largely unknown and uncontested ideal.

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Wilderness in New Zealand

A policy searching for someone to implement it

By Les Molloy

In 1976 I wrote the article 'Wilderness diminishing' for the New Zealand Alpine Journal (Molloy 1976), which painted a picture of recreational development sweeping through New Zealand's mountain lands. I lamented the rapid loss of wildness in one of the world's most remote island groups— islands so ancient in their origins, yet so new in their colonisation by humans. It is interesting now, 20 years later, to review what has happened to wilderness in the intervening years, a period of rapid change in the country's social and economic environment, as well as in attitudes toward the protection of biodiversity and wildness.

The decade 1976–1986 was a time of environmental controversy in New Zealand. Public opposition particularly focused on state-sponsored natural resource exploitation, especially the loss of wild and scenic rivers to hydro-electricity generation, the Think Big petrochemical projects in Taranaki, wide-scale loss of wetlands and shrublands through agricultural subsidies, and the non-sustainable milling of indigenous forests. The number of national parks—10 in all—had remained static between 1964 and 1986; there was poor progress in the protection of marine ecosystems; wild, introduced animals were wreaking havoc on New Zealand's unique flora and fauna; and, the overseas tourist boom was just beginning to impinge on the traditional outdoor recreation activities of New Zealanders.

1. THE BEGINNING OF A WILDERNESS AREA SYSTEM

In 1981 the country's first wilderness conference was organised by the Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC) of New Zealand, a loose federation of approximately 100 mountaineering, bush tramping and hunting clubs. Subsequently, FMC proposed the establishment of 10 new wilderness areas (Molloy 1983), sufficient to protect about 3% of New Zealand's land area in a completely undeveloped condition.

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Interestingly, this initiative did not come from the Green Movement, which was more concerned with the protection of forest, river, tussockland, and coastal natural heritage. Rather, the push for wilderness areas was a response from the outdoor recreation community, concerned about the loss of wildness in New Zealand's most extensive ecosystem, the mountain lands. Because mountains, hill country and steep lands make up more than 70% of New Zealand's land area, they have always been taken for granted, assumed to be still wild, always there, etched in purple on the horizon. Mountain lands also made up the largest proportion of the protected landscapes at that time, the national parks and forest parks. Ironically, the outdoor recreational community, which spent the previous 50 years promoting the development of roads, tracks and huts in the mountains, suddenly became concerned that there would soon be few truly wild places left.

The legacy of the 1981 wilderness conference was a government-appointed Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG), which spent the next two years developing a wilderness policy (see Box next page) and evaluating 10 wilderness area proposals endorsed at the conference. Only two of these proposals, Raukumara and Tasman, were advanced through public consultation procedures by the relevant government agencies; both, in fact, lay in forest parks administered by the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS). On the other hand, the National Parks and Reserves Authority showed little interest, with no further wilderness areas being formed in the national park system for another 15 years. The NZFS had strong philosophical ties to the US Forest Service, with its multiple-use management concepts, and it quickly adopted an American planning approach using the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) as a tool to help provide a wide range of recreational opportunities in state forests.

2. THE ADVENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

During a government restructuring in the mid-to-late 1980s the NZFS, the Department of Lands and Survey (which administered national parks and reserves), and other land conservation agencies were abolished and replaced in 1987 by the Department of Conservation (DOC). The legislative provisions for wilderness areas in the National Parks Act 1980 and the Reserves Act 1977 were now supplemented by similar provisions in the Conservation Act of 1987. With the Forests Act eclipsed by the Conservation Act, the so-called 'conservation estate' (public lands administered by DOC) now included about 29% of New Zealand, including hundreds of smaller islands of high significance for biodiversity conservation.

Formal wilderness area protection soon became a low priority for DOC in lieu of the protection of threatened habitats in the lowlands (lowland forests, wetlands, estuaries), in the tussockland intermontane basins of Canterbury and Otago, and in the coastal and marine environments. Mountain wilderness was considered to be secure, at least in the short term. However, one substantial wilderness area of 41,000 ha, centred on the Hooker Range and the headwaters

New Zealand's Wilderness Policy

Wilderness Areas will be managed in accordance with 1985 Wilderness Policy, as follows:

Wilderness Areas are wildlands that appear to have been affected only by the forces of nature, with any imprint of human interference substantially unnoticeable. Designated wilderness areas are managed to perpetuate their natural condition.

Tracts of land chosen to be protected as Wilderness Areas should meet the following criteria:

- They will be large enough to take at least two days by foot travel to traverse.*
- They should have clearly defined topographic boundaries and be adequately buffered so as to be unaffected, except in minor ways, by human influences.*
- To retain natural wilderness qualities, developments such as huts, tracks, route markers, and bridges are inappropriate, in the few cases where such facilities exist they should be removed or no longer be maintained.*
- Adjoining lands should be managed as buffers to assist in the protection of a wilderness area; buffers may contain huts, tracks, and bridges, but these should be few, and vehicle access will be discouraged near the wilderness boundary.*
- Wilderness is a fragile resource, susceptible to overuse; while Wilderness Areas are open to everyone, overuse will be minimised by selecting areas for their remoteness rather than regulating access by permit.*
- To ensure the use of Wilderness Areas at levels compatible with the maintenance of wilderness values, commercial recreation activities may only be undertaken under license or permit.*
- Because Wilderness Areas are places for quiet enjoyment, free from obvious human impact, and require physical endeavour to achieve in full measure the wilderness experience, the use of powered vehicles, boats, or aircraft will not be permitted.*
- Horses may be allowed where strong historical links exist and where legislation permits.*
- Users of Wilderness Areas should be self-sufficient and depend on the natural environment for shelter and fuel only if the use of such resources does not detract from the values of the wilderness.*
- Logging, roading, hydroelectric development, and all but hand methods of mining, are also incompatible.*
- Because of the overriding importance of protection of intrinsic natural values and the safety of visitors to Wilderness Areas, restrictions on air access may be lifted temporarily for management purposes such as search and rescue operations, fire fighting, and control of introduced plants and animals.*

of the rugged Landsborough River in South Westland, was established by DOC in 1990.

During the early 1990s, each of DOC's 14 conservancies was required to produce comprehensive Conservation Management Strategies (CMS) after undertaking wide public consultation. Essentially, a CMS is a regional statement of the value of places and how they will be managed to protect conservation values, including their value for wilderness recreation. Gradually, the list of potential wilderness areas evaluated by WAG was dusted off and, where viable, such areas were incorporated into the CMS as an indication of the Department's future management intent.

3. THE UPSURGE IN OVERSEAS VISITORS: THE 1996 VISITOR STRATEGY

The public lands and visitor facilities managed by DOC are of vital importance to the tourist industry because they include two World Heritage (natural) Sites, 13 national parks, 19 forest parks, and thousands of scenic, nature, scientific, recreational, and marine reserves. The range of visitor facilities within these protected areas is equally impressive: 960 backcountry huts, 250 campsites, more than 11,000 kilometres of tracks (trails), and hundreds of picnic sites, interpreted features of interest, roads, jetties, airstrips, and so on. Many department-managed sites are of prime importance to international visitors—Milford Sound, Mount Cook, the Tasman Glacier, Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers, and the volcanoes of Tongariro National Park. In addition, the Department manages the eight Great Walks—Milford, Routeburn, Kepler, Rakiura, Lake Waikaremoana, Heaphy, Abel Tasman, and Tongariro Northern Circuit—which contribute most to New Zealand's international reputation for outstanding opportunities for wilderness tramping.

During the decade 1985-1995, New Zealand experienced an unprecedented increase in overseas visitors, more than doubling from 0.67 million in 1985 to 1.41 million in 1995—with an almost static domestic population of around 3.5 million. This sharp increase was largely due to intensive marketing of New Zealand's image of 'clean, green outdoors,' especially by the newly formed New Zealand Tourism Board (NZTB). While this rapid growth in overseas visitors was occurring, DOC—responsible for managing most of the network of parks and natural attractions that the tourist wanted to see—was experiencing steadily diminishing budgets for managing visitor facilities and services.

The predictable backlash from New Zealanders occurred. The international visitor growth targets set by the NZTB were widely criticised for failing to recognise the extent to which increased visitation would impinge upon traditional wilderness uses. Of particular concern was pressure from the tourist industry for more roads and sightseeing flights through a number of South Island national parks. Many of these proposed mechanical intrusions into formal or *de facto* wilderness areas. They included, for example, a Cascade-Hollyford Road beside the Olivine Wilderness Area in Te Wahipounamu (Southwest New Zealand) World Heritage Area, and a Karamea-Collingwood Road beside the Tasman Wilderness Area in Kahurangi National Park. Likewise, increases in

sightseeing flights in Milford Sound and across the glaciers and peaks of Westland and Mount Cook National Parks impacted on the quiet enjoyment of these parks.

In all of this DOC tried, with diminishing staff and finances, to protect wilderness values yet also foster appropriate visitor use. The main vehicle for dialogue with all interested parties was a Visitor Strategy (Department of Conservation 1996) addressing key issues, such as how many visitor facilities should be provided, to what standard, and at what sites. The strategy proposed allocation of visitor facilities and services (hut, tracks, campsites, visitor centres, visitor publications, etc.) between the frontcountry and backcountry, and seven different types of visitor groups.

It is anticipated that many backcountry huts and tracks, with low numbers of backcountry adventurer visitor-group users, will no longer be maintained. Over time, the effect will be for a gradual increase in true wilderness without visitor facilities—the type of landscape sought by another visitor group: the remoteness seeker. At the same time, this strategy places a lot of emphasis upon the need to protect natural quiet, particularly through the restriction of aircraft flying over the backcountry. The strategy commits the Department to ‘seek restrictions on airspace ...’ to ‘maintain natural quiet to ensure visitor enjoyment.’

The Visitor Strategy further commits DOC to seek designation of the remaining five viable wilderness areas proposed by WAG in the early 1980s:

- Olivine (Mount Aspiring National Park)
- Paparoa (Paparoa Range, adjacent to Paparoa National Park)
- Adams (mid Southern Alps, north-east of Westland National Park)
- Southern Fiordland (Fiordland National Park)
- Tin Range-Pegasus (Stewart Island)

The proposed Olivine Wilderness was finally designated in early 1997, having been planned for nearly 20 years. In December 1996, the New Zealand Conservation Authority endorsed DOC’s intention to initiate planning procedures during 1997, with a view to eventual designation for the Paparoa and Southern Fiordland Wilderness Areas.

4. CONCLUSIONS: TAKING WILDERNESS FOR GRANTED

The evolution of a system of formally protected wilderness areas throughout New Zealand has been a slow process, and is far from complete. The first wilderness—Otehake, 12,000 hectares of mountain and gorge in Arthur’s Pass National Park—was designated in 1955; since then, only another six areas meeting the strict criteria of the wilderness policy have been so protected (totalling 400,000 hectares, or about 1.5% of the country’s land area). This is only half the area suggested at the 1981 wilderness conference.

New Zealand has an international reputation for its commitment to biodiversity conservation and for the high quality of its parks and other protected areas. Yet, why has there been such modest progress on wilderness area protection over the last 20 years? I think there are two main reasons. First, many New Zealanders simply take their wilderness for granted. They consider that most of the 29% of the country managed by DOC is, in effect, wilderness, and highly protected through its status as national park, reserve, or conservation land. Second, the Conservation Act of 1987, creating DOC as the management agency, downgraded the importance previously accorded to the backcountry recreation. The Conservation Act requires DOC to foster recreation on the lands it manages, but this has been interpreted by successive administrations as less important than DOC's mandate to conserve indigenous ecosystems and to advocate for conservation in general. Since its creation, DOC has been preoccupied with:

- Biodiversity conservation (especially recovery plans for threatened species and the eradication or control of pests and weeds)
- Developing a partnership with Maori tribal groups in the management of conservation lands
- Managing the increasing number of international visitors and regulating (through concessions) the use of the conservation estate by the tourism industry.

Only with the renewed emphasis provided by the Visitor Strategy exercise of the mid 1990s has the need to protect New Zealand's remaining true wilderness reassumed some degree of its former priority.

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Establishing a wilderness preservation system in New Zealand—A user's perspective

By Hugh Barr

New Zealanders have always considered it their birthright to go to the beach, climb or ski the mountains, tramp (a New Zealand term for backpacking or hiking) the forests and wildlands, hunt for introduced deer, goats and pigs, and fish the rivers for introduced salmon and trout. We relish the ability to get away from all the stress of civilisation, relax in a simpler, natural and more stress-free environment, and choose our own level of challenge, whether it be climbing, tramping, skiing or hunting. Access to the backcountry, rivers and beaches is a fundamental component to what New Zealanders see as quality of life and as part of our identity as a fit and free outdoors people.

1. A BEAUTIFUL BUT RUGGED LAND

New Zealand's 27 million hectares (100,000 square miles) makes it about the size of the United Kingdom, or the average North American state. This smallness belies the wide range of landscapes, climate, and vegetation types. This is because New Zealand is on the edge of two major tectonic plates—the Pacific and Australo-Indian plates (Stevens et al. 1988). New Zealand's principal mountain range, the Southern Alps, results from the Australo-Indian plate sliding under the Pacific plate. These Alps rise to over 3,500 m, the highest peaks in Oceania. New Zealand mirrors the range of climates and landforms of an east-west transect across North America, over the distance of only 160 km across the South Island.

New Zealand is separated from the nearest major land mass, Australia, by more than 2,000 km. As a small piece of the old southern super-continent, Gondwanaland, it has evolved separately for the last 80 million years, with a large range of unique native plant species, but almost no mammals.

Because of the tectonic and ice-age glacial activity, most mountain areas are young, rugged, and often rapidly eroding. Some 30% of the country is mountain land or forest-covered steep land in its natural state and is unsuitable for productive use such as pastoral agriculture or timber production. Almost all of these 'wildlands' are in public ownership as national or forest parks (15% of New Zealand), protection reserves, or public conservation land. The philosophy of management of these public wildlands, commonly called the 'conservation estate', is one of preservation and protection, not production.

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Subject to protecting native ecosystems, the public has the right of free entry for enjoyment and recreation in these wildlands.

New Zealand was one of the first countries to set up national parks, with its first being initiated in 1887 over the North Island's Tongariro volcanoes. Setting up these parks was a lengthy battle against development interests (Thom 1987; Burrell 1983). It was only during the second half of the 20th century that New Zealand recreational and conservation users realised that if public land was not protected by a nature protection designation, it would be privatised, and cease to be available to all. There was also broad public sympathy for protecting forests such as the South Island West Coast beech forests (Searle 1974) and North Island podocarp forests, and generally for protecting magnificent scenery such as Lake Manapouri from hydroelectric dams (Peat 1995). Because of this, recreation and conservation interests have been able to ensure protection to approximately 28% of the country. Protecting the remaining 3% of predominantly dryland mountain grassland (tussockland) is the subject of a current public campaign.

2. NEW ZEALAND'S WILDERNESS ETHIC

New Zealand has been colonised by humans for only 1,000 years. At first it was by the Polynesian Maori tribes, followed in the last 225 years by European settlers. In that time vast changes have been wrought on the native bird life. The giant moa and giant New Zealand eagle have been exterminated, along with many other bird species. The native forest cover has been removed over 60% of the country, turned initially to grassland farms, with more recently an increasing area being planted in exotic pine for timber.

Since European arrival there has been an ethic of exploration, adventure and going into the unknown, both for pragmatic reasons such as finding grazing land or gold, and for the recreation gained from discovering untrodden areas and scaling unclimbed peaks. The rugged and inaccessible nature of much of the land, coupled with the wet and stormy climate, make such expeditions highly challenging to this day (Spearpoint 1996; Crothers 1987).

The Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC) of New Zealand is a national alliance of tramping, mountaineering, skiing and deer-stalking clubs with some 15,000 members throughout the country, from a total population of 3.7 million. The FMC has been the major advocate for wilderness in New Zealand. To address confusion over the wilderness concept, the FMC executives concluded in 1960 that there was a general and widespread desire by trampers and climbers to have some large undeveloped areas of public wildlands set aside as wilderness areas (Burrell 1983), to give future generations the same opportunities to 'pioneer'. Consultation with member clubs gave rise to six proposed areas, of which two especially—the Olivines and the Hooker-Landsborough—were designated 'mountaineers wildernesses'. In spite of forwarding these proposals to the relevant government minister, no progress was made.

Concern continued in the 1970s. It centred on the increase in huts, tracks, and tourist and deer recovery aircraft flights (fixed wing and helicopter) that were diminishing wilderness values (Molloy 1976), and the threat of hydroelectric

damming and large-scale mining (Molloy 1983). In 1977, the FMC resolved to promote the concept of a 'Wilderness Commission' to set up a wilderness system.

3. FEDERATED MOUNTAIN CLUBS' 1981 WILDERNESS CONFERENCE

The Federation's landmark 50th Jubilee Wilderness Conference in 1981 (Molloy 1983) proposed 10 major new wilderness areas throughout New Zealand, covering lands that were largely *de facto* wilderness. But rather than being small, peripheral, uninteresting lands, they were large core areas pioneered and used by the tramping and mountaineering fraternity for their wilderness recreation. Some were up to 100,000 ha and all were more than 30,000 ha in extent (Molloy 1983), the total area encompassing 3% of New Zealand's land area.

Wilderness areas are at the difficult end of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) (see Taylor 1993, fig.1). Users are, of necessity, more fit, capable and experienced than the average backcountry user who is used to easier terrain, huts and tracks. Wilderness users need to be fully self-sufficient, able to cope with rugged country and possess the skills and stamina necessary to carry all their gear and food for at least five days. Skills, such as river-crossing, route-finding in inclement weather and through rough country, glacier travel, snow-and ice-climbing and survival in storms, are necessary as is the ability to carry a 60-pound (25-kg) backpack and travel for 10 to 12 hours a day.

Within the 10 wilderness proposals there is, however, a significant gradation of difficulty. Four areas—Kaimanawa, Tasman, Garvies, and Pegasus—are relatively open tramping wildernesses, without glaciers, that are not particularly difficult outside winter. Another three—Raukumara, Paparoa, and Poteriteri—are more rugged, with occasional difficult rivers, but do not involve glaciers. The final three—Adams, Hooker-Landsborough, and Olivine—are the toughest, with extensive glaciers, very rugged terrain, high passes and difficult rivers.

The conference made good progress, leading to the formation of a Wilderness Advisory Group comprising government department officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which developed a joint wilderness policy and appraised the 10 wilderness area proposals during the early 1980s.

4. PROGRESS SINCE 1984

The change of government in 1984, and subsequent amalgamation of government backcountry recreation and conservation agencies into a new Department of Conservation (DOC), slowed progress towards designation of the FMC-proposed wilderness areas. Strong political lobbying resulted in the designation (gazetting) of the Raukumara and Tasman wildernesses in 1988. The approach of a general election led to the successful gazetting of the Hooker-Landsborough wilderness in 1990. Lack of funds and the general diversion of conservation board and departmental work to meet other priorities have heretofore stalled progress on

the remaining seven proposals. This under-funding has been crippling to the Department's performance (Barr 1996), and staffing levels have dropped to approximately half of that in the agencies it replaced in 1987. However, it is legislatively required to carry out significantly increased responsibilities, and there has been greatly increased use of conservation land.

The DOC Visitor Strategy (DOC 1996a) supports wilderness as part of a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum approach. And the DOC Conservation Management Strategies for Stewart Island and the West Coast (DOC 1996b) advocate gazetting of five proposed wildernesses, namely the Olivine, Paparoa, Tin Range-Pegasus, Southern Fiordland, and Adams Wilderness Areas. These wilderness proposals are also generally supported by the tourist industry, and are not opposed by the main South Island Maori tribe, Ngai Tahu. An additional proposal for a Garvies Wilderness Area deals with lands managed as Crown grazing leases and cannot be considered for wilderness until surrendered from these leases.

5. MAORI LAND CLAIMS

The New Zealand government has embarked on a programme of compensating Maori tribes for acknowledged wrongs in government purchases, and confiscations of land from tribes, during the establishment of New Zealand as a British Colony from 1840. From the first arrival of Europeans, up to 1840, the Maori population had been greatly decreased by inter-tribal wars and introduced disease (Evison 1993).

As a primarily stone-age, hunter-gatherer society supplemented by some agriculture, most Maori settlement was near the coast, or in the fertile river valleys. There were no permanent settlements in the areas proposed at the FMC conference for wilderness. The lack of productive value of these areas was precisely the reason they were left alone by Maori and colonial developers alike. The government and the Ngai Tahu tribe agreed in principle to settle the tribe's claim just prior to New Zealand's 1996 general election. This claim concerns the greatest land area of any claim: the lower half of New Zealand. The area contains eight wilderness areas, but no existing or proposed wilderness areas are involved in the settlement.

6. CHANGING USER PERCEPTIONS

In recent years New Zealanders have had one of the most capitalistic governments in the Western world. Unemployment has soared and working hours have increased significantly. Those with jobs have less leisure time, and a consequent desire to use air access or guides to the back country, rather than rely on their own efforts and skills (Gabites 1996). The interests of the New Zealand backcountry user also appear to be changing. The most experienced are as interested as ever in challenge and feats of endurance. But many now see this as being fulfilled through a 'conquering nature' type of short duration fitness challenge, rather than the more long-term, symbiotic and skills-based

philosophy of primitive wilderness users (Crothers 1987; Spearpoint 1996). Two-day Coast-to-Coast and Mountains-to-the-Sea competitive endurance races are in vogue. Also, for climbers there is the lure of South American, Himalayan, and European climbs, as travel is relatively cheaper now than in the past. Hard climbs and transalpine wilderness expeditions still provide vital experience and training, just as they did for Sir Edmund Hillary, joint first conqueror of Everest, more than 40 years ago. It is likely that the current reduced activity phase will pass, and New Zealanders will return in greater numbers to enjoy the challenge of their primitive wilderness recreation in the future.

7. THREATS TO THE ECOSYSTEM

The threat of over-development of visitor facilities has diminished with the major reductions in DOC funding. Overseas tourist numbers have more than doubled in the past decade or so. This has led to government directives to DOC to 'withdraw from the backcountry' (DOC 1996a) and instead provide more services to frontcountry users and overseas tourists. This is a major setback for New Zealand backcountry users generally. However, it removes any threat of over-development of wilderness areas.

The threat of mining will be greatly diminished in the future. Legislation is now being passed banning mining in national parks, as well as in gazetted wilderness areas. The hydroelectric damming threat has diminished because of the difficulty, remoteness, and expense of most sites, although it will probably re-emerge in the future.

The major conflict is that contradiction in terms 'Adventure Tourism'—i.e. guided activities, such as white-water rafting and thar hunting, are issues in the Hooker-Landsborough wilderness, as is air access for commercial fishing guides to the mid Karamea river, in the Tasman Wilderness. Heliskiing was a threat on the Ramsay Glacier of the Adams Wilderness (FMC 1985, 1994), but attractive heliskiing opportunities outside the wilderness area proposal are now being used instead.

Both of the North Island wilderness proposals, Raukumara and Kaimanawa, face threats of air access by recreational hunters seeking deer and other introduced wild animals. This is currently allowed by the wilderness policy, to provide wild animal control. The desire for a primitive wilderness hunting experience is not strong in the North Island, in contrast to the wilderness Wapiti hunters in Fiordland National Park's rugged terrain.

8. CONCLUSIONS

New Zealand wilderness advocates have adopted a very purist concept of wilderness, often in a more difficult and hostile environment, than their North American colleagues. The struggle by users and administrators to set up adequate wilderness areas to preserve the challenge of primitive backcountry recreation in New Zealand in perpetuity has been a lengthy roller-coaster ride. But it is nearing completion.

Threats to wilderness such as creeping development, overuse, mining and hydroelectric development have receded, at least for the time being. There is a consensus among users and administrators in favour of designating more wilderness areas, as well as acceptance from Maori and tourism groups. This is likely to translate into passage of most of the FMC remaining wilderness proposals by the year 2000. If this occurs, New Zealand will have adequately recognised the outstanding and varied wilderness qualities of its natural wildlands, and preserved their major recreational challenge, not only for New Zealanders, but also for a world in which wilderness is forever diminishing.

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