



The Remarkables Conservation Area



Otago

The Remarkables is an extremely steep, rugged mountain range that extends to a height of 2234 metres and that is a prominent part of the quintessential Queenstown landscape. The area contains a number of beautiful features, such as Lake Alta, a small lake nestled within a natural amphitheatre at the head of a glacial valley (a 'cirque') and below the towering Double Cone peaks. Glacial tarns, schist outcrops and bluffs, waterfalls, unique flora and fauna, recreation opportunities and spectacular views over Lake Wakatipu draw large numbers of visitors to this special area.

Human history

To the people of Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Mamoe and Waitaha, the peaks and valleys of the region were places of Atua (gods) and traditionally it was said that supernatural people like the Maeroero lived and roamed over this vast area. The Maeroero were in fact hapū (kin groups) belonging to the Rapuwai tribe. They lived very early in the human history of Tē Wai Pounamu before they became absorbed into the Waitaha people.

Tapuaenuku and Kawarau are the traditional southern Māori names for the Hector Range and the Remarkables Range respectively. Tapuaenuku is a contraction of Tapuwae Uenuku referring to the footsteps of the rainbow god and is placed on several mountain ranges throughout the Otago region and elsewhere in Tē Wai Pounamu.

In 1857, a European surveyor gave the 'Remarkables' range its English name. Wakatipu's first coal mine was opened in the Doolans catchment in 1863, and today it is protected within the Coal Pit Saddle historic reserve. Hilltops, as the mine was known, was a welcome source of fuel in a large, treeless landscape until a fire forced its closure in 1921. Today the reserve provides a magnificent view of the Crown Terrace and Gibbston and is home to a treasure trove of discarded equipment and traces of mine workings and remains.

Tarns at Double Cone
N. Simpson



Flora and fauna

The area has a wide range of habitats (rock bluffs, boulder fields, cushion fields, tussockland, wetland, forest and shrubland) from 350 metres up to 2320 metres. This range in habitat supports a huge diversity of species, which are often specially adapted to a particular habitat type. As a result, changes to or disturbance of the landscape can have significant effects on these species. In addition, the challenging climate allows for very short growing and breeding seasons, and so if they are disturbed, communities recover only very slowly (if at all).

The Remarkables are rich in insect fauna including endemic moths, beetles, giant weevils, cicadas, wētā, grasshoppers, stoneflies and snails. Rock skinks are present at all elevations right up to the summit ridge.

The birds found in the alpine environment of the Remarkables and the Doolans include New Zealand falcon (kārearea), kea, black-backed gull (karoro), New Zealand pipit (pihoihoi) and the introduced chukor. Kea are especially visible during winter months when they are attracted by skifield activity.

Because the Remarkables and the Doolans lie between the wet Southern Alps/Fiordland area and dry Central Otago, the plant life is an interesting mix of species, some of which are very special. Snow tussock grasslands dominate but as you venture upwards you encounter a mosaic of plant communities. Tiny alpine flowers adorn these areas in spring and summer. The Doolans Catchment (east of the ski area) is also home to small alpine wetlands and while similar to the Remarkables, it is a significantly less modified environment.

One unique plant that grows in the tussock grasslands is the native wild spaniard or speargrass, a very sharp, tussock-sized plant with long, narrow leaves that divide into a sharp spine at each tip. The plants produce

a cluster of yellow/orange flowers, which also have large spines, on one-metre long stems. These plants, which once also flourished on the lower hills and flats around the Wakatipu basin, were the nemesis of early explorers walking through the District or (worse still) trying to persuade animals to pass through. The spear grass is also home to giant weevils.

On the lower mountain slopes and in the valleys, remnant areas of mountain beech and native shrubland are present. One particular shrubland plant (*Oleria oderata*) supports at least 14 moth species that feed exclusively on this one plant species.

Conservation in the Remarkables

The Department of Conservation presently administers a large tract of land on the Remarkables and Hector Mountains. The park has high visual, recreational and ecological values. The area offers a diverse range of activities year-round and its close proximity to Queenstown means a large number of visitors come to the area. As a result, the balance between maintaining the ecological and scenic values of the mountains and providing for on-going recreational use must be managed carefully. The Department of Conservation continues to refine their methods of management in order to protect this unique place and to maintain sustainable use and enjoyment of these special resources for many years to come.

Further information

For more information about the Remarkables area, contact the Queenstown Department of Conservation office phone – (03) 4427933, email – queenstownvc@doc.govt.nz or see www.doc.govt.nz.



Alpine fellfield
N. Simpson

South Wye below Lake Hope N. Simpson

