

# FOREST RECREATION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PROPOSED WESTLAND BEECH SCHEME

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## SYNOPSIS

*Forest recreation, and the recreational needs of people, are examined in relation to wild forests and managed exotic and indigenous forests, as a background to the potential recreational values of the proposed West Coast beech scheme. It is concluded that all types of forest offer their own special opportunities for recreation. The West Coast beech scheme, although it will expand recreational opportunities, will also lead to the loss of many irreplaceable values, and it is a moot point whether gains outweigh losses. The only safeguard of the remaining forests, if the scheme proceeds, will be public opinion based on the very recreational opportunities which the scheme should provide.*

## INTRODUCTION

Foresters are used to thinking of forest recreation in relation to wild indigenous forest, but are now faced with the problem of deciding what is the potential for recreation in managed forests, both exotic and native. It is first necessary to decide what is meant by forest recreation, and then to find out what people want. Having done so, the recreational potential of wild native forests, managed exotic and native forests can be examined — especially the proposed beech management areas — and finally the whole question of safeguards to ensure that there is no commercial encroachment on the reserved areas.

The writer is not a forest manager or an economist, but is concerned with the recreational values of forests, and has been able to draw on the observations and experience of competent people on subjects related to the theme of this paper.

## DEFINITION

In the words of one dictionary, recreation is defined as: "Refreshment of the strength and spirit after toil; diversion; play; also mode or means of getting diversion or refreshment." But forest recreation is such a personal occupation

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that "doing one's thing" is more concise and expressive. One can recognize two categories — active and passive. Passive recreation includes simple viewing, when travelling, picnicking, or when engaged in other activities. But it must be noted that the motor car outing must be recognized as legitimate recreation. By active recreation is meant physical participation, generally accompanied by mental stimulation. This can be simply a walk through a forest area, or a picnic, through more purposeful "nature walks" where one can learn of the ecology of an area, and finally to the deepest level where one goes into the forest with all senses fully receptive to experience and assimilate all that the forest has to offer.

### WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT?

An editorial in the *N.Z. Journal of Forestry* (1973) states that "conservation is for people, not for its own sake. How many people will visit Warawara Forest? Do they not flock to beaches and river banks?" The average "Kiwi" appears to be interested in football, racing, beer and "the telly", and for recreation is happy with a bit of sand. It is only the young and more highly educated who are really interested in forests and National Parks for recreation. Macnab (undated), studying the users of the Tongariro National Park in summer, found that they were an educated élite. None of the workers on the nearby power scheme showed any interest. My own experience in Westland is that the "workers" reject recreation in National Parks on the whole. It is fairly clear, therefore, that the forest environment is used for recreation by only a small percentage of people, and that it does not offer the things that most people want.

In regard to the type of recreation required, Macnab found that, while there is a demand for snow sports in winter, the summer visitor tends to take what is offered. Kelly and Black (1972), analysing data from Coromandel Forest Park, concluded that the major user of the Park is the weekend family motorist out for a pleasure drive and demanding of the Park sightseeing, a place to picnic, and the opportunity to take short walks to places of interest. It appears that a recreation programme can be planned to suit a particular environment, and the summer visitor will tend to accept what is offered. It is probably significant that Kelly and Black found that 5% of respondents (to the questionnaire distributed to visitors) were opposed to commercial developments, in particular the provision of shops.

As to the question of indigenous versus exotic forests, Kelly and Black reported that "one third of respondents considered exotic stands as attractive as, or more attractive than, native bush", but they doubted whether some visitors knew the difference. My own experience reinforces this doubt; many visitors to Westland National Park do not know what "indigenous forest" means and do not know the difference between a radiata pine and a rimu tree — a few even think rimu forests were planted! It is apparent that the majority of people consider forests to be relatively unimportant to them. Their recrea-

tion consists of getting away from the urban scene — whether to a hydro lake with a backdrop of pines or to a beech forest is immaterial — and they would not know a rimu tree if one fell on them.

This is the situation today. However, there is increasing awareness of forests and the environment generally, and this is finding its way into educational curricula. I believe that today's children, when they become the adults of tomorrow, will form a generation to whom trees, air, lakes, coasts, cities and mountains share equal prominence in love and care.

## THE RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF WILD INDIGENOUS FORESTS

The native forest is part of our heritage (if I may use a grossly overworked word). It is a reminder of old New Zealand. Its story of evolution through scores of millions of years is beyond all but the crudest glimmers of comprehension. The marvellously intricate ecological relationship between birds, trees, soils, fungi, bacteria, climate and altitude are still only slowly becoming understood; even in its present state, much reduced and ravaged by browsing animals, it is a thing of grandeur, unique on this planet. It cannot be copied artificially; it cannot be lugged around the world and be reproduced in other lands. It belongs to us and we, in a sense, belong to it. It possesses a mysticism, for those who take it deep into their minds, that defies logical description but is akin to environmental feelings felt by many of the world's less westernized peoples. An idea of this is given by a Sioux Chief: "The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the earth, and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth".

On whichever level of mind or spirit we wish to accept it, the native bush, be it kauri in the north or beech in the south, offers tremendous potential for recreation. Because of its diversity, because of dwindling area, and because of a much-belated guilty conscience, the bush is felt to be "something special", and recreational activities related to it are far wider than will ever be possible in exotic forests. National Parks and Scenic Reserves, most of which are native forest, are becoming increasingly important, and Nature Walks are the core of the summer programme in the Parks. In this context we must applaud the development of State Forest Parks which opens up vast additional areas of native forest, and in which the roles of protection and recreation are often complementary and of mutual benefit. The number of people enjoying these Parks is rising dramatically. Their use is taking some of the pressure off the National Parks, in the North Island at least, and will lead to increasing flexibility in the use of wild forests by people. As Thomson (1970) put it, recreation is the "growth and glamour" sector of multiple-use forestry, and the "ready availability of native forests is one of New Zealand's great social assets".

## THE RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF EXOTIC FORESTS

The place of exotic forests in the New Zealand scene is a topic with great potential for polarizing people into hostile groups, and one on which people as disparate as forest managers and counter-culture writers have uttered a great deal of nonsense. The exotic forests are certainly not ecological deserts, as some would lead us to believe; and they are often quite beautiful — a well-tended stand with an understorey of giant pongas has its own unique attraction. It is also possible to see, within a small compass, all stages of growth from recent cutover, through developing stands, to a mature crop. Many will find this fascinating, especially over a period of time as the cycle of harvesting and regeneration proceeds. So people are demanding access to these forests for both active and passive pursuits. In the older stands — at Whakarewarewa, Dusky and Hanmer — have been established walking tracks through fine groves of trees which are of tremendous value for recreation of the mind. It has indeed been claimed that if Whakarewarewa were managed for tourism and recreation it would be more profitable than managing it for wood production.

But, to come down to earth, exotic forests, however attractive and sought-after they become, are still designed for wood production. An editorial in *Forest Products News* (1970a) explains the attitude of a large forestry company to environmental values: "But we must realise, too, that we need to communicate with the man in the street to tell him what we're doing and explain our problems, the problems of maintaining a balance between a proper regard for ecology and the need to manufacture our products at a cost and on a scale which will enable us to compete on the world's markets." It is therefore worth while to discuss briefly how this company's attitude has changed over the years. A huge industrial complex depends for its continued existence on the production of a vast quantity of wood grown as rapidly and efficiently as possible. The forest planted for this purpose could, it may be assumed, be the last place for public access and recreation. Ten years ago the public was warned off with large signs advertising that anyone entering the forests would be prosecuted. This was a logical approach, since the disastrous fires of 1946 and subsequent problems with people indicated that this large and valuable resource could be in great danger from casual visitors.

As public interest in the environment burgeoned there was an upsurge in interest in exotic forests as possible places for recreation. The company began to change its approach and drew up its "Environmental Policy" (*Forest Products News*, 1970b), creating three Recreation Zones with walking tracks, access for boating and swimming, nature rambles, and so forth. Even the company's advertisements now reflect concern with the magic word "environment" and speak of the production forests as a "place for wildlife".

It is quite clear, therefore, that exotic forests will increasingly be in demand for recreational pursuits — for instruction and for relaxation.

## THE RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF MANAGED INDIGENOUS FORESTS

I once went on an official trip to a State Forest in the Kai-manawas where red and silver beech were being logged to provide a managed second crop. We were taken through the stands roughly in the order of their management; from recent logging, leaving seed trees, we proceeded to young seedling stands, and gradually through to superb glades of pole beech ready for thinning. Aesthetically the walk was excellent, and as the tale unfolded, so one's interest grew. I am only sorry that a permanent walk, open to the public, was not put in this area.

This sort of "educational recreation" could, if handled properly, be of great value in kauri, rimu and beech forests, and show that the stands are not "oncercs" but that they can be managed without the necessity to log, burn and convert to other types of cover. Species' adaptability to domestication, so long discounted with indigenous forests, could well be shown here. A native forest will be regenerated, then managed step by step to maturity and clearfelling, or selective logging. All the interest of the managed exotic forest will be there, heightened by the fact that this is occurring in a native forest.

With regard to enrichment, or supplementary planting, in beech forests, little can yet be said. The beech forests, managed or wild, are beautiful. The eucalypts being planted (especially those of the "ash" group) are also beautiful. A fusion of the two could be most pleasing, and the management of such mixed forests may well provide recreational values, especially "instructional recreation".

## RECREATION IN RELATION TO THE PROPOSED WEST COAST BEECH SCHEME

In passing, as far as the proposed Nelson section of the scheme is concerned, the majority of people will not be affected. Those who are interested in exotic forests and managed beech forests will be pleased and will visit the managed areas, while those opposed will find the Nelson Lakes National Park more of a haven than it is now, and its value will correspondingly rise.

The Westland part of the scheme involves very large areas and a variety of management practices which will lead to a large upsurge in the recreational use of the region. There is already a wide range of activities, from passive recreation along the major tourist routes, to such activities as tramping, shooting, canoeing and caving, together with all the inspirational benefits which such pursuits involve. Figures in man-days per year, supplied by a member of the Federated Mountain Clubs (M. Heine, pers. comm.) indicate a fairly high level of activity in 16 of the scheme's resource areas. The more favoured localities are the upper Grey tributaries, Matakita and Maruia Rivers, coastal areas (e.g., Fox River) and Upper Glenroy. The F.M.C. supplied detailed submissions to

the N.Z. Forest Service which indicate a thorough knowledge of these areas possessed by the member clubs. Other information is limited. For example, it is known that at Palmers Bend, on the Rahu Saddle, 85% of visitors are picnickers from Christchurch and 15% are shooters. But for the bulk of the huge area involved information is scanty.

If the scheme proceeds, assuming access is provided and the public is allowed to enter the forests, recreation must play a considerable part in the activities of the region. The landscape of the future will form a series of facets complementing one another, from "disciplined" areas such as National Parks, through Scenic Reserves, State Forest Parks, managed indigenous and exotic forests, to hydro lake foreshores and similar heavily modified areas, and lastly industrial and urban areas. It will be similar in its diversity, in some respects, to the Taupo basin, and the range of possible recreational activities will be correspondingly wide — the prospects are endless and would cater for most people's needs. Two requirements must be met. First, the Forest Service should plan and provide for recreation in both protection and production areas. Secondly, the public must use the areas with understanding and discipline, so that the Forest Service is encouraged in its efforts to open up the forests for the people. In a nutshell — I consider that the recreational potential of this area will be greater, if the scheme proceeds, than it is at present.

However, there will be losers — those people for whom the unmodified forest means most. The roading systems vital to the scheme will spell the end of an era for those who tramp, climb, shoot or simply wander in the natural forests. For these people, many of them prominent in scientific and cultural fields, the progress of the scheme will be another battle lost in the rearguard war to save unmodified New Zealand from diminution. Should not these large unbroken tracts of wild forest be managed for science, for the people, and for posterity? Is this not a higher moral goal than profit? For however much wider the range of recreation becomes, the losers will stand to lose more than the winners will gain, and this is the main objection to the scheme. On the other hand, perhaps a ritual sacrifice of some beech forest must be made in order that the rest may be preserved. The people who live in Westland have no doubts about the value of the scheme to their livelihood.

### SAFEGUARDS

It was said at a recent meeting of the N.Z. Institute of Foresters (Grayburn, 1972) that "foresters, probably more than any other group, have influenced the recreational use of forest lands". This may have been true in the past, but I doubt if it will be true in future. Foresters sometimes appear to be so carried away with fast-growing exotics that they cannot see beyond them. For example, an exotic forest manager (Henry, 1972) justifying conversion for logged native forest in the central North Island, said: "The derelict native forest

I have been talking about is biologically stagnant, consuming as much oxygen as it gives off, and making no gain in fibre growth. An average acre of vigorous young radiata pine forest, in contrast, consumes between  $12\frac{1}{2}$  and 15 tons of carbon dioxide a year, giving off 10 tons of life-sustaining oxygen and producing 10 tons of new wood fibre. Vigorous radiata pine forests are therefore one of nature's greatest anti-pollution devices." I may be wrong, but I feel that many foresters in the employ of the State are also rather overwhelmed by the capacity of their wonder tree to produce fibre and money, and may be over-keen to get as much slow-growing indigenous forest converted as they can. This attitude shows up clearly in an editorial in the *Forest Industries Review* (1973) with regard to public unease that landscape changes may destroy values which cannot be quantified. It states: "Which brings us back to the conservationists. They're proving to be the bane of our lives holding up sound, factual exploitation programmes with their flighty, uneasy feelings." What is conveniently overlooked is that sound exploitation programmes, while being economically justified, may be ecologically, morally and socially unjustifiable.

It has also become obvious that current legislation is insufficient to protect wild forests. The lesson of Manapouri makes this clear, for public opinion was all that saved Lake Manapouri in its natural state. It therefore seems likely that public opinion is all that will save those areas set aside under the beech scheme for recreation and amenity, and for beech management, should there be moves, in the future, to increase yield and to convert further areas to exotics. The Forest Service will be powerless to stop such developments, even though it has stated that these areas will be inviolate and that the introduction of intensive management will ensure that this is so.

Today's protesters are convinced that the beech forests should not be subjected to large-scale alteration precisely because they see these possible future dangers. Even though the proposed beech scheme will allow expanded recreation activity, the conversion of further areas of beech forest will inevitably lead to its decline. But the Forest Service is under severe scrutiny by a number of competent groups and will continue to be; this is a new phenomenon. In future, as the recreational opportunities increase, together with the number of people taking the opportunity to enjoy the forests, the public may well come to a full realization of the true value of the native forests and will then ensure their perpetuity and proper management.

In the long run it may be that a checkerboard pattern of native and exotic forests becomes the norm, with National Parks and State Forest Parks becoming retreats, disciplined and specialized monasteries of our remnant heritage, and that New Zealanders will come to love this modified countryside as much as we today love the things for which we fight. This is the sort of future into which proposals like the beech schemes are leading us. We shall be judged, eventually, upon the relative values that evolve.

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