

Southerners "chill out" in the Rees/Dart

Richard Thum

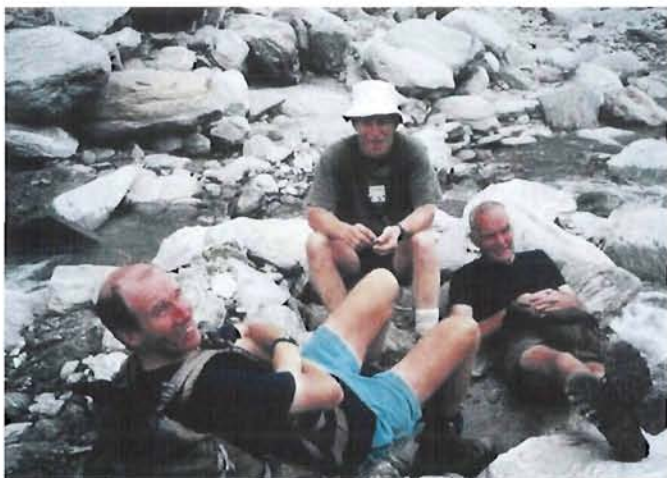
In what is becoming a serious habit for a few Southern members of the local section, a well-known location was chosen for this year's NZIF Study Trip – the Rees and Dart valleys. This was the second visit by local section members to these popular valleys (and the author's fifth!). The Otago/Southland section of the Institute is fast approaching the dilemma of finding new accessible areas to venture into within the southern part of the South Island.



Upper Snowy Creek as seen from Rees Saddle (1470m) (Richard Thum).

Many members throughout the NZIF might question the logic of looking at (and studying) the indigenous woody vegetation of these two valleys. For most of us that go on these trips, it is an opportunity to take a stroll over several days through some forest that may or may not have been modified by man, weather or other influence. It is also a near perfect outlet to 'chill out' from the ever-increasing hassles of urban life and those near 'monocultural' forests that we work in for most of the year. And for the record, our group of 17 enjoyed five days of great company, near perfect weather (again), and the solid organisational skills of Jim Smith. Jim says that he'll soon be writing a book on how he has managed to do it so consistently well!

So who comes on these trips to some great parts of New Zealand? While we don't have any formal criteria



Some members of the party relax beside a valley stream (Phil Taylor).



An enthusiastic group at the start (Richard Thum).

as such, we have managed to maintain trips so that 80-100% of participants are members of the Institute. Over the past five years or so, we have attracted a solid, elite base of North Island members ranging from farm foresters, consultants, to commentators of the share market. These northerners have eventually managed to understand the southern way of doing things too!

Where are the Dart and Rees valleys? These two valleys are two of the larger valleys at the north end of Lake Wakatipu. They are your classic U-shaped glacial valleys. The Rees/Dart forms part of a series of walks in this area that include the Routeburn and the Caples/Greenstone. As a consequence, these walks are receiving a significant proportion of DoC funds to upgrade facilities to satisfy the increasing demands from both the New Zealand public, and tourists from everywhere (and it seems, anywhere) else. Flashier 'huts' and graded, benched and metalled tracks are soon to be the norm in these areas. *Nothofagus* forms the predominant forest vegetation type with some truly magnificent specimens of *N. fusca* at the lower end of the Dart – a fact that has been captured in many well-known photographs by the late NZFS photographer, John Johns. Towards the other end of the vegetation continuum are the tussock/shrublands that are encountered from about 800m above worry level. A large portion of the lower Rees valley has also been grazed over many years by sheep and more recently, cattle.

And what about 2003? The local section is looking at revisiting the Young, Siberia and Wilkin valleys, which are in the Wanaka catchment. Details will be out soon.



Spotting imaginary trout in the Dart River (Phil Taylor).