

High Country Parks for Everyone



Hawkdun Spring 1996

Grahame Sydney



www.forestandbird.org.nz

Six Pack of Parks



www.fmc.org.nz

Six Pack of Parks Worth Protecting

Introduction

The South Island high country - the mountains, valleys and inter-montane basins east of the main divide from Marlborough to Southland - is different from the rest of New Zealand. It is a place of big skies, wide open spaces and vistas, landforms which have been carved by glaciers, twisted by earthquakes, and shaped by large rivers. The distinctive plants and wildlife of the high country include tawny tussocks, spiky matagouri, tangled and wiry small leaved shrubs, lizards, grasshoppers and braided river birds. Pastoral leases used for farming dominate much the high country. Its natural ecosystems and distinctive landscapes are not well protected.

Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC) and Forest and Bird are promoting six new high country parks to unlock more of the high country for public enjoyment and to protect its indigenous plants and wildlife. Many more parks should be created in the long term. The Department of Conservation has suggested the network could include 22 parks. These six new park proposals are priorities, which are achievable in the immediate future.

The Government's creation of three high country parks since 1999, Korowai/Torlesse and Ahuriri in Canterbury and Te Papanui in Otago has helped to correct the long-standing under-representation in protected areas of tussock grasslands, shrublands and associated communities. Now these three areas are protected as conservation parks the public have free access without needing permission from a lessee, and there are more opportunities for walking, tramping, mountain biking, fishing and other recreation.

Two of FMC and Forest and Bird's proposed parks (Kaikoura Ranges and Upper Rangitata/Arrowsmith/ Lake Heron) are comprised largely of existing conservation land. The Upper Rangitata/Arrowsmith/Lake Heron and Hawkdun/Oteake parks would be enhanced by positive outcomes from tenure review on nearby pastoral leases. Large areas within the proposed Remarkables, Hawkdun/Oteake and Pisa Range parks are also already conservation land, however, additional land is needed to better protect biodiversity, and improve public access. The St James/Spenser Mountains park requires the purchase of New Zealand's largest pastoral lease.

The "six pack" includes four conservation park proposals: Kaikoura Ranges, Hawkdun/Oteake, Pisa Range, and Remarkables. The St James/Spenser Mountains and Upper Rangitata/Arrowsmith/Lake Heron areas deserve further investigation to determine whether they merit national park status.

Creation of these areas as parks would recognise their importance for nature conservation and recreation, encourage coherent and proactive management by the Department of Conservation (DoC) to control pests and weeds such as broom and wilding pines, manage tourism and other commercial uses, and promote improved recreational access and facilities. This should be achieved through management plans for each new park. The park proposals are outlined below.

1. Kaikoura Ranges Conservation Park (Marlborough)

The proposal comprises 78,000 ha. of existing conservation land on the Seaward and Inland Kaikoura Ranges, including the 37,450 ha Clarence Reserve conservation area, transferred to DoC in 2002. Some 68,000 ha. is a continuous area along the Seaward Kaikoura Range. The park would unify management of scattered conservation areas and scenic reserves, including those at Tone, Tapuae-o-Uenuku, Mead, Clarence Bend, and Isolated Hill. Future additions could occur as a result of tenure review on pastoral leases.

A Kaikoura Ranges conservation park would give a higher profile and status to dryland landscapes (annual rainfall is less than 1600 mm) and their specialised rock and scree plant communities and habitats. It would provide a higher level of protection for existing stewardship land.

Values include

- The Kaikoura Ranges contains the highest mountains outside the central Southern Alps, and the youngest.
- Most of the conservation land involved has been identified as an outstanding or significant landscape in the proposed Kaikoura District Plan.
- The South Marlborough area, of which the Kaikoura Ranges is a major part, is one of New Zealand's five most important mainland areas for species diversity, evolution and endemism. Forty-six plant and animal species or sub-species are found naturally only in South Marlborough and nowhere else in the world. These include the showy Marlborough rock daisy, weeping tree broom, pink flowered tree broom; and three species of sun hebe.
- The Mt Uwerau Nature Reserve on the Seaward Kaikoura Range provides New Zealand's only mainland nesting area for Hutton's shearwater. The area is the eastern-most habitat for kea.
- Notable invertebrate species include three giant weta species (the Kaikoura, the Bluff and the Scree) and speargrass weevil.
- Lizards including New Zealand's only alpine lizard, the black-eyed gecko, as well as green gecko, scree skink and long toed skink.
- The ranges are popular for horse-riding, tramping, short walks, hunting, fishing, and mountain biking. The Kowhai-Hapuku Track provides accessible multi-day tramp in the shadow of the mountain, Manukau. The Clarence River provides a nationally important multi-day wilderness rafting and kayaking experience.

Progress to date

The 2002 proposal for a Kaikoura Ranges national park has been amended to a conservation park in response to public concerns about enabling a wider range of recreation activities, and Ngai Tahu issues with new national parks.

In a recent report the Department of Conservation considered that the conservation land involved would meet the legislative requirements for a conservation park.



The Inland Kaikoura Range contains the highest peaks in New Zealand outside of the Southern Alps, and contains many unique species adapted to the cold, dry environment.
Photo: Shaun Barnett/Black Robin Photography.

2. St James/Spenser Mountains (Canterbury)

The proposal compromises all of the 76,550 ha St James pastoral lease, and former Timberlands' managed forests on the east bank of the Maruia valley. These forests are now conservation land. Creation of this park would require a whole property purchase of St James. The pastoral lease (and 1,500 ha of freehold) covers the upper Waiau Valley catchment and western flank of the Clarence River.

Values include

St James is New Zealand's largest pastoral lease and adjoins Nelson Lakes National Park, Lewis Pass Scenic Reserve, Lake Sumner Forest Park and conservation land at Hanmer and Molesworth. It merits protection because:

- It includes the headwaters of two major rivers, the Waiau and the Clarence, and four mountain ranges - Spenser, St James, Opera and part of the Crimea Range, and is crossed by the main trace of the Awatere fault and the Clarence fault.
- It covers an important biogeographic transition zone between the cooler, high rainfall beech forests and mountains of the main divide and the milder, drier and more sparsely vegetated mixed shrubland/grassland landscape of the St James Range and Molesworth in the east.
- Its large size and ecological diversity make it important for the protection of altitudinal, biological, hydrological, climatic and soil sequences. The natural vegetation sequences of beech forest, shrublands, and alpine tussockland are virtually unbroken.
- It contains a significant part of one of the most extensive area of species-rich mixed beech forest ecosystem in New Zealand (Lake Sumner/Lewis Pass/St James).
- St James includes large areas of intact grassland and herbfield with diverse mixed shrubland and grassland. It contains some of the best remaining tall matagouri shrublands in the Lewis Ecological District.
- It contains important populations of several threatened species such as kaka, karearea/ NZ falcon, rock wren, long-toed skink, the whip cord hebe (*Hebe cupressoides*) and red and yellow-flowered mistletoe. There has been no recent fauna survey of the western half of the property, however, it is likely to contain populations of threatened species such as great spotted kiwi, and pekapeka/native bats.
- Except for the main valley floors it contains predominantly natural and little modified landscapes. Much of the property is steep, mountainous and classified as erosion prone. Continued burning and grazing is not sustainable. DoC's tenure review reports identified 90 % of property as deserving protection.
- St James is virtually weed free, especially in the north and west. Recovery potential is high for those areas modified by farming and introduced plant and animal pests.

- The pack tracks and old musterers' huts such as Fowler's in the Clarence Valley have some historic value.
- If protected St James' location and natural landscapes mean greater recreational use is likely for walking, tramping, fishing, mountain-biking, horse-riding, hunting, nature study, and photography. Existing use is moderate, even with currently restricted access. The St James Walkway is regionally significant. The upper Waiau (Waiau Pass) and Spenser Mountains (Gloriana and Faerie Queen) are popular routes for more experienced trampers and climbers. Lakes Guyon and Tennyson are popular fishing destinations.



Lake Thompson, Spenser Mountains, Canterbury.
Photo: Shaun Barnett/Black Robin Photography.

The red and silver beech forests of Station Creek and the east bank of the Maruia River:

- contain extensive tracts of unlogged forest with spectacular landforms, and landscapes of high scenic value.
- provide nationally important wildlife habitat for kaka, kereru, kea and NZ falcon, pekapeka/long-tailed bat and short-jawed kokopu. The forests support high populations of kakariki/parakeet and the highest recorded populations of South Island robin.



- are an accessible area with potentially high recreation values for walking, tramping, and fishing.

Progress to date

St James' lessees have withdrawn from tenure review. Because of the predominance of areas of high conservation value, other approaches such as whole property purchase are required.

Mountain-biker on Maling Pass track, St James.
Photo: Andy Dennis

3. Upper Rangitata/Arrowsmith Range/Lake Heron (Canterbury)

The proposal comprises the Rangitata-Rakaia conservation area in the headwaters of the Rangitata, Ashburton/Hakatere and Rakaia rivers. This 52,246 ha area of existing conservation land includes the Jollie, Arrowsmith, and Ragged ranges, and the Ashburton and Cameron glaciers.

The proposal also includes Lake Heron and Maori Lakes nature reserves, Harper Range conservation area (5,577 ha), Lakes Roundabout and Camp, and the new Clent Hills conservation lands (10,000 ha on the Longman and Manuka Ranges). Because of its importance for birdlife, unoccupied Crown land (currently managed by LINZ) in the beds of the Rakaia and Rangitata rivers and their upper tributaries deserves to be transferred to, and managed by, DoC as part of the park.

Values include

- The Rangitata-Rakaia conservation area includes snow tussocklands, scree, bluff and sub-alpine shrublands with pockets of beech and hardwood forest. As DoC's Conservation Management Strategy (2000) notes, "The overall character is one of space, remoteness and grandeur in an alpine setting of snow and ice, glacier and lakes, interspersed with remnants of upland forest, tussock grassland and several major wetlands." Mt Sunday in the upper Rangitata valley was the dramatic setting for Eodoras in *The Lord of the Rings*.
- Lake Heron is the largest of the Hakatere/Ashburton lakes. It and the associated Lake Stream wetland is the most important lake/wetland complex in the South Island high country for wildlife. 54 bird species have been recorded on the lake. It is New Zealand's most important breeding site for southern crested grebe and an important breeding site for NZ scaup. Lake Clearwater is also a wildlife refuge, hosting southern crested grebe and scaup populations.
- The Heron Basin is notable for its unusually well preserved and extensive assemblage of glacial landforms and its lakes and wetlands. There are diverse indigenous plant communities around the lakes and wetlands with red tussock, sedges, rushes, and short turf lands. The remaining red tussocklands around Lake Heron are some of the best in Canterbury.
- Braided riverbeds are rare internationally and the upper Rangitata and Rakaia rivers are important because they are largely unmodified. They represent the largest and second largest areas of intact and largely unmodified habitat for aquatic birds respectively, in New Zealand. Species diversity is high and viable populations of almost all braided river bird species occur. In addition to the open gravel areas, tributary stream deltas and swamplands bordering the river provide diversity and provide for high food production of aquatic invertebrates and other species.

- More than six threatened species breed on the Rangitata and Rakaia riverbeds and their tributaries, including wrybill, black-fronted tern, banded dotterel, Caspian tern, and black-billed gull. Nearly 80% of the world's population of around 5000 wrybill use the riverbeds for their breeding grounds. The black-fronted tern has a world population of between 1,000 and 5,000 pairs.
- The Rakaia water conservation order acknowledges the outstanding values of the Rakaia River. The Environment Court's recommendation for a water conservation order for the Rangitata River also recognises its outstanding values.
- Both the Rakaia and Rangitata have dramatic gorge systems, which are distinctive natural features. They are highly valued for recreational enjoyment by walkers and river users such as rafters and kayakers.
- Recreational values are high with easy road access from both Christchurch and Ashburton. The Lake Heron and Lake Clearwater area is used extensively for camping, picnicking, fishing, mountain-biking, and bird watching.
- The Arrowsmith Range and Cameron Valley are popular with climbers and trampers. There are numerous walking and tramping opportunities on the east side of the Heron basin on the Taylor Range and links with the Rakaia Valley to the north.



Maori Lakes, Rangitata Valley, Canterbury
Photo: Jim Harding/Hedgehog House.

Progress to date

Tenure review on Double Hill and Glenariffe leases is nearing completion and should add 4,890 ha and 3,211 ha respectively to existing conservation lands. Tenure review on other pastoral leases could enable future additions to the park.

4. Hawkdun/Oteake Conservation Park (Otago)

Through the work of artist Grahame Sydney, the Hawkdun Range has become an icon of Central Otago landscapes. The St Bathans, Hawkdun and St Mary Ranges form a substantial mountain barrier between Otago and Canterbury. The steep south-western escarpment of the Hawkdun Range rises between 900 and 1050m above the Maniototo Plain and the upper Manuherikia valley. The north-eastern slopes dip gently into a large and deeply incised and glaciated peneplain upland, known as the "Hawkdun Plateau."

The upper Manuherikia valley contains some of most intact valley floor short tussock grassland remaining in New Zealand, as well as many threatened invertebrates and plants. The valley floor grasslands, shrublands and wetlands and the semi-braided river system of the Manuherikia River are regionally threatened ecosystems. The altitudinal sequence from the lowland short tussocks to the narrow and slim leaved snow tussocks on the crest of the Hawkdun Range is ecologically important for its completeness. Cirque basins with large wetlands and tarns are a special feature of the crest of the Hawkduns. Frost-heave has created interesting ground patterns and stone circles in screes and fellfields here.

The wild, unscarred landscapes of the area offer enormous scope for backcountry skiing, tramping, walking, mountain-biking, botanising and fishing. Cross-country skiing enthusiasts can explore more than 50 km on the range crest and the extensive Hawkdun Plateau, in day or multi-day trips. Nearby Mt Ida, which would also be part of the park, offers spectacular ice climbs, and good training grounds for Dunedin climbers.

Values include

- Some of the most recognisable and least modified scenery of Central Otago. The Hawkduns are largely unscarred by obvious tracks or human structures.
- Extensive area of montane grasslands, especially red tussock, which are not well represented in the current parks and reserves network.
- High biodiversity values as the Hawkdun/Oteake area lies in the geological transition zone between the schist of Otago and greywacke of Canterbury. The area supports rare and threatened plants and wildlife, as well as endemic species, including a large undescribed weevil, giant wetas and scree skinks.
- The Manuherikia River is important for native fish, and the valley has red tussock grasslands and wetlands. This valley floor plants and wildlife are not well represented in the current network of parks and reserves.



Hawkdun Range
Photo: Gilbert van Reenen/Clean Green Images

- The expansive, remote character of this landscape is highly valued by those seeking solitude. It is popular with back-country skiers, trampers, and fishers. Summertime four-wheel driving along existing formed tracks is popular.

Progress to date

A Hawkdun/Oteake conservation park was first proposed in 1998 by the Department of Conservation in its Otago Conservation Management Strategy.

The core of the proposed park, some 10,000ha, has already been protected. This area is almost contiguous along the crest of the Hawkdun Range, except for one pastoral lease, which dissects the northern Oteake Conservation Area (7,200 ha) and the southern conservation lands. Two pastoral occupation licences (POL's) flank the southern 2,800 ha of conservation land.

Tenure reviews on nearby pastoral leases and the POL's could provide future additions to the park. Tenure reviews on their own, however, are unlikely protect the lowlands or provide a park gateway. It will be important to ensure that tenure reviews do not result in long term grazing over any lands being restored to full Crown ownership and conservation management.

5. Pisa Range Conservation Park (Otago)

A familiar landmark near Wanaka and a backdrop to Cromwell and Lake Dunstan, the Pisa Range reaches almost 2000 m. It dominates the Clutha Valley and is the highest of Central

Otago's distinctive block-faulted mountain ranges, displaying impressive cirque basins, and curiously shaped tors. In the afternoon light its tussocked, slumped eastern slopes ripple like an eiderdown, making it a defining landscape of Otago.

During the summer months the extensive rolling terrain on the crest of the Pisa Range offers superb mountain biking on 4WD tracks. In winter it is a ski-touring destination par excellence. An old pack track traverses the range, making it a popular route for calvacaders on horseback and trampers.

As well as its recreational values, the Pisa Range is home to a number of rare alpine plants. Its shrubland, Halls totara and silver beech forest remnants allow a glimpse of what these now dry hills once looked like.

Values include

- The Pisa Range is one of New Zealand's most distinctive landforms. It has a long and wide alpine plateau studded with clusters of rock outcrops expanses of wind sculpted-surfaces, glacial tarns within cirque basins, and distinct fault and ice shorn escarpments.



During winter the Pisa Range offers superb opportunities for Nordic or cross-country skiing.
Photo: Colin Monteath/Hedgehog House.

- A representative and diverse range of ecosystems typical of Central Otago's flat-topped mountains.
- Some of the best remaining mid to low altitude Halls totara, dry silver beech forested gullies, and kanuka-manuka shrublands in Central Otago.
- The Pisa Range offers Nordic and alpine skiers the full gamut of skiable terrains, from gently rolling plateaux and valleys, to steep cirque walls for the experts. Tramping, botanising, horse riding and mountain biking, already popular activities are likely to grow with the expanded opportunities and as of right access a conservation park provides.

Progress to date

The Department of Conservation first proposed a Pisa Range Conservation Park in 1998 in the Otago Conservation Management Strategy. More than 20,600ha of the crest and flanks of the Pisa Range have been protected, mostly through tenure review. With two more key leases about to enter tenure review, a Pisa Range conservation park could very soon be a reality.

6. The Remarkables Conservation Park (Otago)

The Remarkables, backdrop to Queenstown, are an iconic landscape, made internationally famous by the Lord of the Rings. The "saw toothed" summit ridge dominates the views from everywhere in the Queenstown Basin. This national and international recognition means there are significant tourism pressures, which are not well managed, as there is no comprehensive management plan for the area.

Biodiversity values are high as the Remarkables lie in the transition zone between the wet Southern Alps and the dry tablelands of Central Otago. Some of New Zealand's more showy and colourful alpine flowers that characterise the wet mountains west of Lakes Wakatipu, Hawea and Wanaka mingle with high alpine cushion plants that are a feature of the drier Central Otago highlands.

Thousands of day walkers visit Lake Alta, many venturing further to walk in the valleys or climb on Double Cone. Creation of a Remarkables park would expand the opportunities for skiing, botanising and mountain biking. The Nevis Valley also contains significant historic goldfields.

Values include

- Some of the most recognisable and spectacular high country scenery in New Zealand, the foundation for much of Queenstown's tourism business.
- Extensive area of montane grasslands, not well represented in the current park network.
- High biodiversity values as the Remarkables lies in the transition zone between the wet glaciated Southern Alps and the tablelands of Central Otago's block-faulted mountains

further east. The high profile keas are at their eastern limit here, as are a number of spectacular alpine plants, including the large showy snow bank buttercup, *Ranunculus buchananii*.

- The Nevis River is important for indigenous fish, and the valley has significant red tussock grasslands, wetlands, and valley floor flora and fauna which are not well represented in the current network of parks.
- Diverse recreational opportunities including ice climbing, tramping, botanizing, all forms of skiing including cross-country, mountain biking, and 4 wheel drive access along well formed tracks.

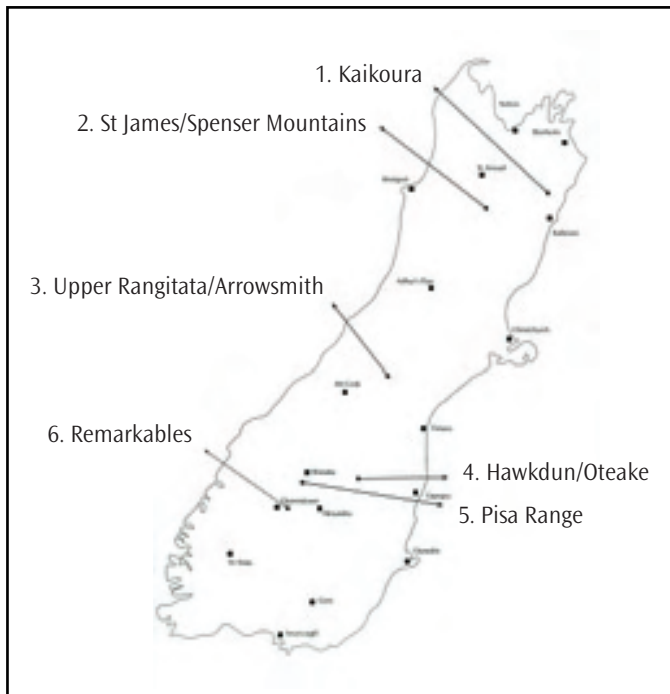
Progress to date

Forest and Bird first proposed a conservation park for the Remarkables in 1990. The Department of Conservation included a park proposal in its 1998 Otago Conservation Management Strategy.

A core area of 19,000 ha stretching along the Remarkables from north of the Remarkables Skifield to Loch Linnhe in the south is already protected as conservation land. Two pastoral leases lie between this core and conservation land to the south. Creating this park requires the addition of land from these two leases.



On Queenstown's doorstep, The Remarkables form a familiar landmark with Lake Wakatipu in the foreground. Photo: Hugh van Noorden/Hedgehog House.



Further Information



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