

## BOOK REVIEWS

**HOLD THIS LAND — A HISTORY OF SOIL CONSERVATION IN NEW ZEALAND**, by L. W. McCaskill. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1973. 274 pp, illus. Price \$8.50.

A sense of history is indicative of a people's maturity for it shows they have gained perspective; people can see where they have been, where they are now, and where they can go. A growing maturity is evident in many aspects of New Zealand life today by a developing sense of history. The growing interest in New Zealand forestry history, exemplified by A. L. Poole's historical account, *Forestry in New Zealand*, shows that New Zealand forestry is coming of age. This fine historical account of soil conservation in New Zealand by L. W. McCaskill indicates that New Zealand soil conservation is doing likewise.

The dominant impression conveyed by the book is its comprehensiveness: it covers all relevant facets with both scholarship and appeal. It shows the advantage, too, of the author not being "departmentally-connected" for he throws brick-bats as well as bouquets at Government administration, and some of the brick-bats are thoroughly deserved as when a report on research needs was expediently suppressed by a department.

The treatment is largely chronological which makes reading easy. The early chapters describe the contributions of the early workers: of people like Grossman and Furket who became uneasy about the portents in the twenties and before; of the advocates like Campbell and McCaskill himself — the author is modestly reticent about his celebrated illustrated address to parliamentarians in 1941; of the early scientists like Cumberland, Gibbs, Raeside and Grange who conducted the primary surveys; and of Newnham, the first chairman of the Soil Conservation Council, and his early soil conservators. The author made another important contribution in the training of these soil conservators who were to do so much. An early directive from the Soil Conservation Council that research should be carried out simultaneously with and not before all conservation activity conveys the urgency of the forties (such an approach is still applicable today in many fields of resource management).

The middle chapters emphasize how the job was done and provide, *inter alia*, succinct descriptions of soil conservation techniques and of land capability mapping. There is also a record of activities on more than twenty soil conservation reserves. Also useful is an account of the various catchment authorities and the achievements and problems of each. Soil conservation research is mentioned fully, warts and all; the fragmentation of effort is freely acknowledged and it is also admitted that little published material resulted to point the way for the more difficult sites in the tussock grasslands. The

controversy over burning and the development of the aerial transport industry are covered fully, the latter making an especially interesting story. The role of harmful animals is explained and the periodicity of crises and conferences documented. The regional and catchment control schemes — the four regional schemes cover 3 000 000 acres and the 23 catchment schemes cover nearly 1 000 000 — are described, many of them patently success stories through co-ordinated self-help.

The latter chapters include accounts of troublesome periods: the struggle of the Council to refute the damaging allegations of the 1949 Report of the Sheep Industry Commission; the soil conservators' relegation to the Agriculture Department in 1955 and then their return to the Ministry of Works in 1966; the dispute about the setting up of the Waikato Valley Authority; and the struggle for the allocation of more resources to soil conservation, instead of the disproportionately large allocation to river control. In 1967 the passing of the legislative keystone, the 1967 Water and Soil Conservation Act, established a supreme Water and Soil Conservation Authority in charge of the troika of the Soil Conservation Council, the Water Pollution Council and the Water Allocation Council. The agents at the local level of each of these lesser councils were to be the catchment boards and commissions. The extension of the purviews of these grass-root organizations to take in water allocation and regulation of waste disposal is seen as a desirable development.

The book ends on a high note by restrainedly listing achievements and looking confidently to the future. This is a good story, well told. Through it run the political philosophies of persuasion and voluntary contribution rather than compulsion, and justifiable cost-sharing by the public rather than hand-outs to the farmers. The only regret the reviewer has is that L. W. McCaskill waited until 1969 — when he published the story of Molesworth — before he wrote at length about what he knows so well.

P.J.McK.

**A BIT ABOUT THE BUSH**, by George N. Baur. Government Printer, New South Wales, 1972. 87 pp., illus.

This book, subtitled "Forests and Forestry in New South Wales", is an interesting attempt at educating the public in forestry. Parts are very good for this purpose, but the value of the book is considerably diminished by heavy opening chapters, a lack of imaginative presentation, and by poor supporting illustrations.

Baur starts with a description of the commercially important trees indigenous to N.S.W. The tree descriptions are too short to be meaningful and the illustrations of leaves and fruits are too generalized and small to be of much use. Some photographs are included but these also are too small and mostly of low quality. The chapter could have been markedly improved by good photographs supported by simpler descriptions. The second chapter, on the forest types of N.S.W., also