



65 Years of State Forest Recreation

PART I

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The Beginnings 1919-1939

It is not generally appreciated that from the very beginnings of the Forest Service recreation was recognized as a desirable use of State Forest land.

The first Director of Forestry spent much of his first year preparing a "Report on Forest Conditions in New Zealand, and a base for a National Forest Policy" which was recommended to Parliament in 1920. This report proposed, amongst other things, that land should be used for forestry to provide for "hunting, fishing, recreation and public health and advocated progressive administration by the Forest Service of the national parks, scenic reserves, and other State areas along recreational lines". Nevertheless, the Forests Act 1921-22 made no specific provisions for recreational use in State forests. The Act placed most emphasis on production management, control of the use of indigenous forest resources, and afforestation with exotic trees. One may muse how events would have evolved had these recommendations been accepted. However, the Director clearly considered recreation an important use since it was featured in all the early annual reports of the Service. Some extracts are:

"The value of the State forests as recreation playgrounds is just beginning to be appreciated. Every means will be given to prospective campers, tourists, and travellers to enjoy the recreational resources afforded by the State forests." (1921)

"The year is notable for the extended use that has been made of the State forests by tourists, trampers, fishermen, and hunters. During the year a general instructional policy has been prescribed for the guidance of the Service staff with regard to forests and bushes bordering lakes, streams, and public roads, as follows: To all Conservators and Field Officers

Scenery and Timber Sales

As the national economy of New Zealand develops and her popula-

tion increases the recreational value of State forests will likewise increase. The time will come when the national forests will be extensively utilized as vacation playgrounds by the people. It is therefore desirable that all officers carefully regard this aspect when defining timbersale boundaries. Virgin forest growth bordering lakes, travelled highways, camping-places, bits of forest adjacent to summer resorts, etc., should be carefully excluded from the operation of the sale. Trees of outstanding size or magnificence, where easily accessible, might well be reserved, and generally wherever the forest or woods have a potential scenic or amenity value every consideration should be given by the responsible officer in preserving these assets from exploitation or destruction by exploitation." (1922)

This important instruction was codified in Manuals of Timber Sales Procedures and remained in force for decades. It was directly responsible for the existence today of many scenic drives through State Forests, including those of the Mamaku Plateau (Charles Fleming's "pathetic hedge") and most particularly the magnificent scenic corridor between Ross and the Westland glaciers.

Other extracts from early Annual Reports are:-

"Probably some 30,000 persons found relaxation and recreation in hunting, fishing, tramping and picnicking within the precincts of State forests during the past year. In addition 381 trappers entered the forest for the opossum trapping season and some hundreds more in pursuit of goats, pigs and deer." (1923)

"It is only as the community values the forests that the community will demand the proper use and conservation of the forests. It is for that reason the Service has continued to extend the many opportunities for visitors, trampers, fishermen, and hunters to travel

through and use the national domain. As finance permits, camping-sites and fireplaces are being built, for property provided for recreational use will add valuable elements to our national life without seriously impairing the capacity of the forests to create wealth or render other public services." (1924)

Despite all these protestations the fact remained that a permit was still required to enter on any State Forest land and abrupt uncompromising "KEEP OUT" notices abounded, particularly in plantation forests. In practice and for indigenous forests the situation was quite different and trampers roamed freely over the extensive State Forests of the North Island ranges, without permits. The Tararua and Rimutaka Ranges got particularly heavy use. In the South Island there was less forest-based recreation but trampers and climbers commonly passed through State Forests, again without permits, to get to the mountain lands beyond.

In his 1925 quinquennial review the Director stated:-

"Appreciation of the policy of the Service in adopting an open-door attitude in regard to reasoned and careful recreational use of State forests, the policy of preserving areas of scenic beauty by their elimination from milling-areas and protection from fire, the provision of camping-sites and fireplaces as finance permits, is shown in the remarks of the yearly increasing number of pleasure and health seekers resorting to the forests. It is now proposed to place permanent forest-users upon a better footing by granting permanent camping and hut-building sites upon the payment of a nominal sum."

And in 1926 he reported:-

"... Automobile associates, tramping clubs, tourists and the general public are invited to apply to the Conservator of Forests in their respective regions for infor-

mation concerning the use of State forests for this ('public playgrounds') purpose." (Annual Report 1926).

This trend towards the granting of exclusive rights over State Forest land was to be the subject of much controversy in later years.

The 1927 and 1928 reports commented on increasing use with attendant problems and did record a gratifying decrease in vandalism – fewer fires and more respect for native birds and their habitats.

Comments about the importance of forest-based recreation as one of the benefits which forests can confer and about the growing usage of State forests for these purposes continued during the 1920s but they dropped off markedly during the next decade. We can perhaps see here the impact of a forest administration dominated by ex-Lands Department administrators whose views were in sharp philosophical contrast to the liberal and looking multiple use policy so strongly propounded by MacIntosh Ellis during his term as Director.

Although "Recreation" did not regularly appear as a specific item in reports of the 1930s it was clear public use of State forests was growing apace.

Fallow Years 1939-1949

1939 saw a change in leadership to A. R. Entrican who was to rule the Forest Service for over 20 years. He started with a discourse on single-use versus multiple-use forestry, concluding:-

"Multiple-use management and unification of control must therefore be the essence of New Zealand forestry . . . At the same time . . . multiple use is not rigidly pursued to the complete exclusion of single-use forestry. The State Forest Service has for many years made substantial additions to, and assisted in the administration and protection of scenic reserves and natural parks . . . The feeling of the public that a certain number of these single-use forests should be kept divorced from any ordinary forest areas on which other types of management may be imposed appears to be a very real one . . ."

This was an early expression of what was to become subsequently a consistent Forest Service viewpoint – maintain the sanctity of National Parks, Scenic Reserves, Forest Sanctuaries and all forms of strict scientific reserves, but apply controlled forest management over the rest of the forest estate. Although this was a philosophy which did not win wide public support it played a far more important part in the reservation and preservation of large areas of

NZ's forests than is generally realized. And it had most important implications for subsequent recreational policy.

Entrican's more positive approach to forest recreation led to the early preparation of guide maps and the dissemination of information (including safety rules) for campers and trampers. There was also greater activity in sign-posting.

During the war years usage declined, although it is noted unauthorized visitors caused anxiety to the reduced staff in regard to fire control. Hunting parties remained numerous, it was believed, probably due to meat rationing. Forests were used for army training. The 1946 Annual Report was the first to note the cancellation of permits by radio and newspaper notices over large areas, due to high fire danger and numerous outbreaks of fire.

Renaissance : The Genesis and Development of Forest Parks 1949-1975

Entrican explained one important aspect of his philosophy in the 1949 annual report.

He said:-

"The educative value to forest visitors is also highly important; they get to know the forests and its trees and birds, and are likely to develop a personal interest in the care of the forests and their protection from harm. Such a feeling of sharing ownership in the forests leads to a diminution in vandalism and in carelessness with fire which will be infinitely more stable and permanent than if left to 'officialdom' to inculcate by means of warnings and prosecutions."

This year saw a major revision of the Forests Act, with the functions of the Forest Service expanded to recognize the role which State Forests had inevitably assumed over the first half of the department's existence. Scientific, recreational and amenity purposes were specifically acknowledged, though only with the proviso that they should not be "prejudicial to forestry". "Forestry" in this context meant production forestry. Powers to acquire and lease land for recreational purposes were also given.

Despite some caution engendered by the disastrous 1946 forest fires there were early moves towards implementing this more liberal recreational policy. In 1950 Conservators were asked for their views on relaxing access restrictions. Most replies were in favour but for indigenous forests only; one, ahead of his time, advocated conducted tours in exotic forests, their use by organized groups and their availability to private hunters in the winter.

The big move came through the development in the early 1950s of the forest

park concept. This was deeply influenced by the then popular and currently accepted US Forest Service philosophy of multiple-use forest management. Later, A. P. Thomson described these events. After stressing that foresters had reasons other than freeing up public access for wanting a change, he wrote:-

"In the 1950s foresters were realizing that more formal expression should be given to their long-held principle of multiple use of forests, and that State forests which were primarily protective in nature but with an important recreational use or potential, should be accorded more formal management rather than be administered in an almost completely laissez faire fashion. This combination of circumstances, the need to change the law in respect to entry, and the need to recognize the multitude of uses of hill and mountain State forests, led to the genesis of the Forest Park concept. The catalyst was the strong pressure being exerted in the early 1950s to have Tararua State Forest proclaimed a National Park. First, we did not then think, nor do I now, that the Tararua ranges conformed to the very high criteria set for national park designation. Second, the importance of the Tararuas as a playground for Wellington trampers, though very considerable, was overshadowed by their importance as protection forests, vital to the well-being of the lowlands around them. Because of this overriding importance some restorative measures could prove to be necessary for reasons of soil and water conservation. Third, the Tararuas had a small exotic plantation potential on some burnt marginal areas which had reverted to gorse, fern and second growth. Finally, they included several domestic water supply catchments, implying some restrictions on human usage, and they had, as they still have, a small but controversial hydro-electric potential. In other words multiple-use forest management rather than national park management, seemed to be more appropriate."

These arguments proved to be sufficiently compelling for the Government of the day and its advisers on such matters, the Lands Department and the National Parks Authority, to agree, if with reservations. Thus Tararua Forest Park was set up, though without formal legal status, for a ten-year trial period only and with annual accountability to the National Parks Authority. It was a

significant event for many reasons, one of which was the compromise it represented in the long-standing departmental battle about which arm of state had the responsibility for recreational policy in publicly owned indigenous forests. Also of great importance was the fact that the development was accepted and even welcomed by the organization which had led the fight for Tararua National Park, Federated Mountain Clubs.

According to its usual practice the Forest Service then produced a formal Working Plan for the area. The plan broke new ground in making provisions for free access, for the setting up of an advisory committee, and for subsidizing the maintenance of club huts. It also gave prominence to the erection of high altitude huts, and (by contrast) to the provision of picnic and other facilities at road ends and forest margins.

The Forest Park idea was then given further expression by the establishment in 1957 of the Craigieburn Forest Park. This was a relatively small area in the Canterbury ranges but it embraced important remnants of the Canterbury mountain beech protection forests as well as two ski fields and NZ's major protection forestry research centre.

Craigieburn Forest Park was also an early, if small, demonstration of the emerging policy of encouraging recreational use as an important means of reducing pressures on the vegetation brought about by high populations of wild animals. The policy was the result of the transfer in 1955 of noxious animal control from the Department of Internal Affairs to the Forest Service. In facing up to this new major responsibility the Forest Service realized from the start that all possible control measures should be tried and in particular that increased hunting pressure should be applied not just by Government hunters but also by the very large body of very keen private hunters spread throughout the country. In the years that followed the Forest Service spent a lot of time and money in providing an infrastructure to enable this combined hunting force to operate effectively, i.e. in the provision of huts, tracks and bridges. They were to become important recreational assets for other forest users as well, particularly climbers and the more rugged trampers. They did though create some problems, since their presence was not welcomed by a small but vocal and influential group of trampers and conservationists who claimed, with some justification, that they were destroying the actual and potential wilderness values of large parts of New Zealand.

This conflict, between what could be termed popular and elitist demands on the forest, was not confined to the

wilderness issue and was a recurring one in the evolution and implementation of recreational policy. It found its more general expression in the difficulty of catering for all sections of the public from the most active to the almost entirely passive, and in setting equitable priorities for the allocation of limited capital and other resources. Annual reports show that the department was well aware of the problem and from early days was trying to solve it. Thus in 1949 it was said:-

"The development of this multiple use of State forests has received prominence in other countries both old and new, and must be actively and progressively pursued in New Zealand by opening up tracks, providing camping facilities at key points, and so on. State forests are being used increasingly for recreational purposes - mainly shooting, tramping, and climbing - but they can have a very much wider appeal than they do at present if their use for recreation is developed with initiative and imagination."

And in 1964:-

"In the mid 1960s it became apparent that facilities provided for animal control were catering for the young and fit recreationist but little had been done for 'parents of young children and middle-aged or elderly people (who) are frequently enjoying the forest areas more, mainly because of increase in car ownership and better roads . . . usually seek their recreation at the edge of the forest tracks. The Forest Service is taking this trend into account by planning the provision of picnic sites and camping grounds."

In 1964 the Department undertook a major review of recreational policy. The review took heart from the indications that the forest park concept, and its expression in practice, seemed to have gained favour both officially and from the major recreational users as represented by F.M.C. Thus plans were laid for other forest parks; the most suitable seemed to be North West Nelson, Lake Sumner, the Kaimanawas and the Coromandel Ranges. The review also advocated a more active role in making exotic forests available for recreational use, thus recognizing what was a growing demand and a growing need. It suggested a concentration on selected public usage areas such as picnic sites, scenic viewpoints, fishing reaches and scenic drives. The review stressed the importance of anticipating needs and

providing for them rather than making concessions from a defensive position. Finally it pressed for special legal status for forest parks.

The 1965 Forest Amendment Act legitimized this status and also provided for informed public participation in the management of forest parks through both legally constituted advisory committees to advise on recreational aspects, and by allowing public comment on draft working plans. Although it was another decade or so before the legal restriction confining advisory committees to recreational aspects was broadened, several Conservators took a liberal viewpoint adopting the approach that all management interrelated with public use and seeking committee input over a wide range of issues. The first new park to be created under this legislation was Northwest Nelson containing high scenic values, hunting, fishing and tramping opportunities and also active timber utilization and mining.

A most important provision in the new legislation was that giving legal status to "Recreational Areas". The idea behind this was to enable permit-free access to exotic forests of high recreational value, whether or not there were important production forestry values also at stake. The Blue and Green Lakes area of Whakarewarewa State Forest was the obvious case in point.

With the legislation in place and apparent public acceptance of forest park rather than National Park status for most large areas of hill and mountain land forests the Forest Service went ahead during the next decade with establishing and subsequently gazetting no fewer than 13 forests parks, totalling over 900,000 hectares. Four have already been mentioned; the others were Coromandel, Pirongia, Rimutaka, Haurangi, Kaweka, Lake Sumner, Hurangi, Catlins, Kaimai-Mamaku and Whakarewarewa.

All of these have their points of interest and significance but three deserve special comment.

Rimutaka Forest Park, though small in area, was of special importance for two reasons. Firstly because of its proximity to Wellington it catered for a quite intensive use by city dwellers; and secondly because it was a good example of the visual and other benefits of well tended exotic forest on the (non-regenerating) margins of native forests. Recreational use of this Forest Park is now intensive both on the margins and in the interior; the aim of catering for the

active young and less active old was here achieved.

It was a disappointment that the Forest Service was not able to expand this park by resuming adjacent State Forest land which had previously been vested in a local body. Had this been done, two more facets of multiple-use forestry could have been demonstrated – the management of a domestic water supply catchment and the use of an indigenous forest area primarily for ecological research. The reluctance of the Wellington City and Suburban Water Supply Board to release the area under its control highlighted the current conflict between the guardians of public health and the advocates of public recreation. Here and elsewhere the Forest Service argued, though to no avail, that since the entry of wild and domestic animals cannot be completely controlled and hence that some contamination would inevitably take place, the appropriate solution would be to permit human access as well, at the same time providing appropriate water filtration and sterilization.

The Forest Service cannot take special credit for establishing the **Kaimai-Mamaku Forest Park**. This was an enforced response to public pressures to prevent any further logging, or exotic conversion, or management of any sort in these potentially productive forests. The Forest Service was fighting for its belief in multiple-use management but it was here on the back foot and it lost the battle. The subsequent creation of Pureora and Whirinaki forest parks were similar knee jerk reactions. Although their establishment were most important events in the history of New Zealand

forestry, in the context of the subject at hand, forest recreation, they were not of great significance.

The decision to confer forest park status on **Whakarewarewa Forest** was important for two reasons; it was the first exotic forest park to be created, and it was the first forest park for an area whose prime object of management was (and still is) timber production. The motivation was twofold – to demonstrate that intensive recreational use could still be compatible with intensive production forestry even in the presence of wood processing industries within the forest; and to cater more adequately for what was obviously a rapidly growing public demand. Whakarewarewa Forest Park was successful in both these objectives. Visitor numbers grew quickly from 100,000 to over 300,000 per annum, and this despite the fact that the tourist industry in Rotorua signally failed to exploit its full potential as a tourist attraction. The only other exotic forest park subsequently gazetted, Hanmer, was also a great success. It will be of interest to see what happens to these two forests under Corporation control.

Other events of note during this period were:

The Forestry Development Conference of 1969 decided that recreation was a facet of multiple use which should be applied to all forests. Recreation was also seen as a matter upon which the Minister of Forests should be advised by a National Advisory Committee, a role taken by the Forestry Development Council set up following this conference.

In 1971 the Forest Service re-organized to form a separate Envi-

ronmental Section in order to give greater emphasis to social and environmental forestry. An early move of the new Division was to introduce a trial zoning system for forest park land management, based on indicating a mosaic of zones of predominant and compatible uses.

In 1972 the Forest Service conducted a survey of the extent of recreational activity in State Forests as evidenced by man-made structures “regularly used in the pursuit of recreation”. It came up with this impressive list: “644 huts, 36 shelters, 26 vehicle bridges, 142 foot walkway bridges, 22 cableways, 29 vehicle fords, 2900 km of car road, 1300 km of 4x4 track, 3700 km of cut track, 370 km of benched track, 270 km of pony trail, 96 picnic sites, 10 swimming holes, three (scenic) lookouts and 21 airstrips”.

In 1976 a Forest Service – Lands Department Forest Parks Co-ordinating Committee was established in order to co-ordinate and harmonize policies and practices, in as much as this was possible in the light of the differing roles of National and Forest Parks and the different legislation governing them. Co-ordination was also facilitated by cross-representation on the National Parks Authority (and some Park Boards), and on Forest Park Advisory Committees. In 1975 the practice of having annual conferences of forest park advisory committees was introduced.

Amongst the problems mentioned in Annual Reports covering these years were: over-use of huts and tracks (particularly the Heaphy); difficulties in securing legal or practical physical access to boundaries (particularly Kaimanawa); and vandalism.

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