

Another Forest Park?

The following has been extracted from a letter written to Mr. Northcote Bade by Mr. Frank Soper of Puramahoe, Takaka.

The Minister of Lands and Forests is considering declaring the whole area dealt with in the narrative a National Forest Park, and Mr. Soper's remarks will indicate the wisdom of doing so before more of that unique area is lost for ever.

I did a traverse of the Snowdon and Douglas Ranges as follows. First day, up the old goldmining trail on the Kill Devil from near upper Takaka to the forks of the Waingarō and Stanley; two hours walking and wading up the Stanley to our first camp. Next morning up the Big Slip, a gigantic rock fall which blocked the river and created a lake over a mile long (which was once Wattie's run, now Wattie's lake). This climb of 2¾ hours set us on the Snowdon range at 5,000ft. and better with magnificent views and a fascination of flora, *Ranunculus* (about five species), *ourisias*, *Haastia*, *Drapetes*, *aciphyllas*—the lot! Too early for most of the *celmisias* but huge rosettes of *C. traversii*, *C. dallii*, *C. monroi*, and *C. petriei*. *Celmisia petriei* is the Botany Division's verdict on the *pseudo-serrata* from Boulder. I'm not quite convinced yet. There are some tough ridges to negotiate from Snowdon to Douglas; it is not tourist country, and in fact I don't know of anybody's having done the complete trip. Max and I (a day overdue from a bad patch of weather) gained Anatoki Peak on the fourth day. Here going is perilous, and we encountered finally a sheer cliff over 100ft. high running from the crest of the range down to the river below. Given time we might have found our way down, for we wanted to reach Boulder Lake. However, we turned down off the mountain to camp that night at the Anatoki River forks and so home. O, Boy! A reasonably abundant bird life—paradise ducks and young on the Stanley, a family of teal on a little lonely lake at the head of the Burgoo, and blue duck plentiful in the Anatoki; deer in velvet, and wild pigs, at Kill Devil and Anatoki, also goats in the latter, and all over the highest tops, if you please, hares!

It's a wonderful, wonderful, country but you need to be fit and it helps if you're lucky.

The Brown Cow sidling is a four-lane highway in comparison and so to business.

Michael, whom you will remember from

your first trip, flew over the area this past weekend, 1st Dec., and checked on the fire, which began in the Clark at a fork which is formed by a tributary and which encloses a triangle of tussock-covered flat. A camp fire was simply lit too near the tussock and the whole thing literally exploded. Mike reports "many ridges of native forest stripped up to 4,000ft. One tongue of flames almost made the Clarke-Aorere divide." This would have been devastation plus, for all the tussock land of Olympus would have been stripped bare. The fire worked up the slopes of the peak south-west of Goren Saddle, and one ridge of burnt secondary growth is completely isolated from the main fire. A screaming gale, still blowing when we crossed the Cow at midnight in fog and rain, simply swept the flames across the intervening gullies, which in many cases were not burned out. Mike says that much of the vegetation of the eastern side of the valley was secondary growth rata (southern) and reckons that a number of kiwis and fernbirds would have been killed.

Apart from the above fire, which was an accident, though due to carelessness, we have our normal quota of spring fires. Some thousand or so acres of manuka, fern, secondary growth, and bush have gone from the foothills. South-west of Takaka a six-mile strip all the way from the Aorere River near Barnham into the Quartz Ranges has been blackened, and here you can write off a few fernbirds. Behind Puramahoi a spur running into the bush is still smouldering after a second fire in a few weeks.

That is the tragedy of this area. A botanists' paradise may be hackney stuff but if you had been with me on Snowdon and Douglas we wouldn't be home yet! I sent specimens to the Botany Division and should have sent boxes more.

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was a weasel chasing a rat in full view of several men, the rat taking to a tree. The weasel followed till the rat was edged along the branch to the thin end, when it fell to the ground and was stunned. Before it could recover, the weasel was down the tree, and had grabbed the rat, which was bigger than itself, and struggling made off, dragging the rat along. The rat started to squeal while on the branch just before it fell off.