

JACKSON'S BAY

A KORERO REPORT



WHERE ON the West Coast can you put the sea between yourself and the sunrise and still stay on the mainland? Not many Coasters know the answer to that one. Still, if you like getting up early (and if you've got as far as that) you can stand on the foreshore of Jackson's Bay and watch the sun come up over the shoulder of Mount Cook. In front of you are the waters of the Tasman Sea, behind the Bay is the coast-line clothed to the water's edge with dense bush, and beyond the beach rise the Southern Alps gleaming coldly in the morning air.

The phenomenon of sunrise over an arm of the Tasman means that the coast-line has swung sharply to the west and pointed a nose north before returning to its original course of south-west. It means that on three sides the land has enclosed the sea. You don't need to be Captain Cook to understand that this means a sheltered harbour.

Anywhere else in New Zealand there would be nothing remarkable about this—we are fortunate in the number and size of our harbours—but on the West Coast a protected seaport is about as rare as a morning on which you can see the sunrise. These have been two of the Coast's chief handicaps—weather and bar-bound shipping. They are complementary, for the rain fills the rivers and the river silt blocks the harbour mouths. And so from above Westport to the Sounds there is only one harbour (two, if Bruce Bay is counted) where ships can anchor irrespective of the state of the bar or tide. The two main towns of the

Coast, Greymouth and Westport, on the Grey and Buller Rivers suffer the serious drawback of a bar which is often unworkable. This inconveniences not only the Coasters, but coal-consumers as far north as Auckland.

Jackson's Bay, over a hundred and fifty miles south of Greymouth, is a natural harbour. It is protected not only from southerly storms, but also from heavy north-west seas, and the fickleness of a harbour bar doesn't worry the shipping that calls there. The only trouble is that ships are few and far between. For Jackson's Bay lacks what the northern ports have in abundance—roads.

This isn't so remarkable. The northern ports were opened up not because they provided safe anchorages, but because they were centres of commercial activity. Gold, the great colonizer, brought thousands to that part of the Coast, and coal, timber, agriculture, and commerce helped to keep some of them there. With the colonists came roads and railways. So did the ships, from necessity, as it were, rather than choice. Here there were cargoes for them, and though the captains might curse the location of the coal-mines they had to accept things as they found them. The Harbour Boards might be less fatalistic and buy a dredge, but in the end the rivers called the tune.

Jackson's Bay with an all-weather harbour had neither gold nor coal—such is the contrariness of Nature—and so had few settlers and fewer roads. But for the war there would be a road