

Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review

Lease name : EMERALD HILLS

Lease number : PO 158

Conservation Resources Report - Part 6

As part of the process of Tenure Review, advice on significant inherent values within the pastoral lease is provided by Department of Conservation officials in the form of a Conservation Resources Report. This report is the result of outdoor survey and inspection. It is a key piece of information for the development of a preliminary consultation document.

Note: Plans which form part of the Conservation Resources Report are published separately.

These documents are all released under the Official information Act 1982.

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to full Crown ownership and management, as an additional conservation area on the range, and hopefully an integral part of the proposed Rock and Pillar Conservation Park when this is initiated.

The lower half of Emerald Hills should be capable of ecologically sustainable pastoral use. There are steep slopes between about 400 and 1,000m, with some ecologically very significant shrubland-woodland in several of the gullies, the Scrub Burn and Fairleigh Stream at ~350-700m elevation in particular. Both shrubland/woodland gullies are dominated by *Coprosma propinqua*, matagouri (*Discaria toumatou*) and *Muehlenbeckia australis* with significant broadleaf (*Griselinia littoralis*) regeneration. Other common shrubs here are *Corokia cotoneaster*, *Gaultheria antipoda*, *Rubus* spp., *Melicactus alpinus*, native broom (*Carmichaelia virgata*), and koromiko (*Hebe salicifolia*). There are also sites with numerous lianes of *Parsonsia* sp. and shrubs of *Helichrysum aggregatum* and *Corokia cotoneaster*, together with the generally uncommon scrambling fuchsia (*Fuchsia perscandens*), particularly on sunny mid-altitude slopes. Occasional small trees of *Olearia lineata* and *Pittosporum tenuifolium* are present, mostly at lower altitudes. Damper parts of the Scrub Burn at ~350-700m contain several ferns: species of *Polystichum*, *Asplenium* and *Phymatosorus*, in addition to small tree-shrub species of local occurrence on the Rock and Pillar Range, such as *Hebe rakaiensis*, *Olearia bullata*, *Fuchsia excorticata*, *Coprosma rugosa*, *C. crassifolius*, *Coriaria sarmetosa*, *Melicope simplex* and the toe toe tall grass *Cortaderia richardii*. These species reflect the generally moist conditions in these gully systems. Most of these shrublands-woodlands justify formal protection, either by transferring to Crown ownership and control or covenanting, and desirably protected from continued grazing with fencing but, if not, with periodic monitoring using permanent photo-points and also conditions of management to ensure sustainability of these regionally important, relic woody plant communities.

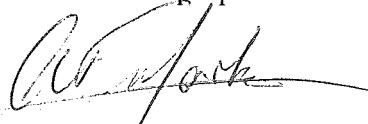
In this context, the heritage, including landscape, values of the whole Emerald Hill leasehold property are such that consideration should also be given to a whole property purchase should the lessee be a willing seller. Because these significant inherent values are spread widely over the whole property, it is suggested that whole property purchase should be seriously considered for Emerald Hills. Such a decision would be consistent with the Otago Conservation Management Strategy in which the Rock and Pillar Range was identified as a 'Special Place' (No. 15). The CMS proposed the following objectives for this Special Place:

"To nurture and encourage study of the natural processes to allow healing of the vegetation after grazing and fire and to improve landscape values. To continue to document the values and permit research where it will lead to conservation benefits. In the case of the Rock and Pillar Range, to extend the protected area along the summit and to take in altitudinal sequences and secure access where opportunities arise. Pastoral lease tenure review on properties on the Rock and Pillar Range will provide opportunities to achieve protection of areas of significant landscape, scientific, natural and historic resource and recreational value. Overall management of these new areas with the existing reserve will confer net conservation and management benefits (eg, fencing efficiencies), and will provide extensive recreational opportunities. Management of contiguous areas will be integrated and public awareness developed through the concept of a Rock and Pillar Conservation Park."

Public access to and through this property is not straightforward. Access to a track which climbs a spur between two branches of an un-named tributary of the Scrub Burn can be obtained from the Otago Central Rail Trail but requires the crossing of freehold land below the boundary of the leasehold. Negotiating this access as a formal easement would be desirable as part of the review process.

I trust that this response and recommendations will be given serious consideration and I thank you again for the opportunity to assess and comment on the proposed review of the Emerald Hills leasehold property.

Yours sincerely,



Alan F. Mark. FRSNZ Professor Emeritus

Preliminary submission on Emerald Hills Pastoral Lease, May 2009.

On behalf of the Dunedin Branch Management Committee of Forest and Bird.

This submission is written on behalf of the Dunedin Branch of the Forest and Bird Protection Society which has approximately 565 members with strong interests in botany and natural history in general and in the High Country. Many of the members enjoy active recreation in the back country and are very aware of the need to ensure the protection of natural values, vegetation and landscape, historical sites and to improve public access through the tenure review process.

The submission is made on the basis of an inspection trip to the property in February 2009 and on knowledge of the whole Rock and Pillar Range gained over many years. It is written with reference to the objectives of tenure review as set out in the Crown Pastoral Land (CPL) Act 1998, and the recently stated government objectives for the South Island high country, especially the following:-

- *to promote the management of the Crown's high country in a way that is ecologically sustainable.*
- *to protect significant inherent values of reviewable land by the creation of protective measures; or preferably by restoration of the land concerned to full Crown ownership and control.*
- *to secure public access to and enjoyment of high country land.*
- *to ensure that conservation outcomes for the high country are consistent with the NZ Biodiversity Strategy to progressively establish a network of high country parks and reserves.*

Introduction

Emerald Hills is a small lease of about 1000ha which is bounded to the south by Rockvale (tenure review completed) and to the west by Riverslea, now in post preliminary proposal stage. The front face of the lease is an integral part of the Rock and Pillar Range landscape as seen from the Middlemarch - Kokonga road and from other parts of the Strath Taieri Plain.

Landscape and ecological values.

The high plateau of Emerald Hills, about half of the lease, is a gently rolling largely tussock landscape ranging from about 1000 to 1200m, with a number of impressive rock tors and associated plant and lichen communities. (Figures 4-5). This plateau is the catchment of a number of creeks around the northern end of the Rock and Pillar Range, including the Wee Cap Burn, which has some wonderful bogs and wetlands with significant inherent botanical values, and at least four un-named tributaries of the Scrub Burn. One water race, originating in the Sowburn, runs across the lease at about the 1000m level en route to Coal Creek where it dropped down to be used for sluicing in the Hyde gold workings.

The botanical values (well documented during the survey for the CRR) over all the tussock/tor country are high and a potential joy for botanical trampers. Large areas of narrow-leaved snow tussock, *Chionochloa rigida*, are found all over this block, together with areas of cushionfield and herbfields and some patches of blue tussock, *Poa colensoi*. Much *Aciphylla hectori* is seen in the shorter grassland together with localised wet flushes of sedges and mosses. *Kelleria* sp are present, as is *Pimelea oreophylla*, *Myrsine nummularia*, *Gaultheria* sp, *Pentachondra pumila* and numerous other herb species

The plant and other biodiversity values are high in the plateau area above about 900m. Taken together with the landscape values there is a strong case that this land should become a Conservation area under full Crown ownership and management, which would be a welcome addition to the existing Rock and Pillar Conservation Area leading in the future to a Rock and Pillar Conservation Park, when this is initiated.

The woodlands/shrublands, particularly in the gully below the 4WD track up from near the NE corner (Figures 1-2) and in another gully to the south are of very high ecological significance with over 30 native shrubs and tree species. They are very striking when viewed from or close to the above track (Figure 2) and must warrant full protection, ideally by return to full Crown ownership.

On our inspection trip, with just a limited look at the gully adjoining the track we identified *Coprosma propinqua*, matagouri, *Muehlenbeckia Sp.*, and significant broadleaf regeneration. Other common shrubs seen were *Corokia cotoneaster*, *Gaultheria antipoda*, *Rubus* species, *Melicytus alpinus*, native broom, *Carmichaelia kirkii* and *petrei* (also found in the tussock areas), *Hebe salicifolia* and *H. rakiensis*). Also present were *Parsonsia capsularis*, *Helichrysum aggregatum* and *Corokia cotoneaster*, together with the rare scrambling fuchsia, *Fuchsia perscandens* and *Fuchsia Xcolensoi*. Occasional small trees of *Olearia lineata* and *Pittosporum tenuifolium* are present, mostly at lower altitudes. The botanical survey done by DOC shows the presence of many other species in these woodland gullies

The land from the eastern boundary of the lease up to close to 100m is also in good condition with flourishing tussock (Figure 3) which is a joy to see and healthy inter-tussock species levels.

Suitability of the lease for sustainable pastoral use.

Below the top plateau, i.e below about 1000m, are steeper slopes, still sprinkled with rock tors and with some very valuable and impressive shrublands in several of the un-named Scrub Burn tributaries, particularly the branch that adjoins the zig-zag track up the hill that starts near the NE corner of the lease (Figures 1-2).

The plateau is characterised by soils assessed in LUC Class VIIc due to climatic limitations on plant growth. It therefore has severe limitations for pasture production and are best considered for their significant inherent natural and conservation values which are higher than their pastoral value (Fig.9). The slopes from 1100m down to 1000m are rated as LUC Class VIIc or VIIe in the steep-sided gullies. The soils below about 1000m down to 400m are LUC Class VI with only moderate limitations for pastoral production. The land below 400m is classed as LUC class IV, and thus is suitable for disposal as freehold, but there is very little of such land within the pastoral lease.

Recreation Values

Although Emerald Hills does not have some of the higher altitude features of the higher parts of the Rock and Pillar Range it provides many possibilities for recreational enjoyment. Tramping and botanising up the 4WD track and on over the high plateau is likely to be popular and, with the completion of the Riverslea review, there would be opportunity to drive up on that lease and walk on over onto Emerald Hills as an alternative to walking/biking up from the Hyde side of the lease.

The main access track which we used on our inspection trip runs up a spur between two branches of an un-named tributary of the Scrub Burn and gives both views and access into the spectacular woodland gully. Access to this track would be possible from the Central Otago Rail trail with an easement up the fenceline to the start of the Emerald Hills lease, a small way above the current fence. The track runs out, or rather simply becomes a route along the fenceline at around 960m. It does continue down a steep gully and up onto the neighbouring property which we understand is freehold. Thus there is no track access for the short trip to the water race and on over to the Riverslea Boundary, though it is easy and enjoyable walking country with very scenic landscape.

If access was possible from the Rail Trail via an easement up onto the 4WD track this would provide an interesting and enjoyable side excursion up onto the range for Rail Trail riders as well as others. The views over the Strath Taieri are extensive from just a short distance up this track, e.g., Figure 6.

THE OTAGO CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Rock and Pillar Range was identified as a 'Special Place' in the Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) for Otago. The declared objectives for this Special Place are as follows:-

"To nurture and encourage study of the natural processes to allow healing of the vegetation after grazing and fire and to improve landscape values. To continue to document the values and permit research where it will lead to conservation benefits. In the case of the Rock and Pillar Range, to extend the protected area along the summit and to take in altitudinal sequences and secure access where opportunities arise".

It was intended that these objectives would be achieved through a number of implementation statements which included the following which is pertinent to the tenure review of Emerald Hills:-

"Pastoral lease tenure review on properties on the Rock and Pillar Range will provide opportunities to achieve protection of areas of significant landscape, scientific, natural and historic resource and recreational value.

Overall management of these new areas with the existing reserve will confer net conservation and management benefits (eg, fencing efficiencies), and will provide extensive recreational opportunities. Management of contiguous areas will be integrated and public awareness developed through the concept of a Rock and Pillar Conservation Park."

We note that the priority for the Rock and Pillar Special Place is:- *"Negotiation, principally through pastoral lease tenure review, of an extended protected area along the crest of the Rock and Pillar Range will be a priority in this Special Place"*.

The tenure review of Emerald Hills presents an excellent opportunity to advance the objectives and priorities as stated in the CMS.

Tenure review outcome

We believe that there is a strong case for whole property purchase here which would encompass the significant inherent values woodland gullies as well as all the tussock country below the top plateau. The landscape visible from the Middlemarch-Kokonga Road should certainly be fully protected from burning, planting and any erection of buildings

The upper plateau above around 950m should become a Conservation Area under full crown ownership and control.

Full protection should be given to the gullies with the extensive shrubland/woodland and access provisions into those gullies for the general public is important to allow full appreciation of their botanical values.

Acknowledgements

Forest and Bird would like to thank DTZ New Zealand Ltd., for arranging our inspection trip, done with another NGO, FMC. Forest and Bird is grateful to the runholder Tony Richards and his neighbour David Kinney for co-operation and granting permission for access for our inspection in February 2009.

Janet Ledingham for Dunedin Branch Forest and Bird



Figure 1. View of the woodland/shrublands in the gully below the 4WD track running up form near the NE corner of the lease.



Figure 2. Looking down onto the extensive woodland/shrublands form the 4WD track



Figure 3. High quality tussock seen from the 4WD track well below the top fence.



Figure 4. Typical tussock and tor scenery on the high plateau.

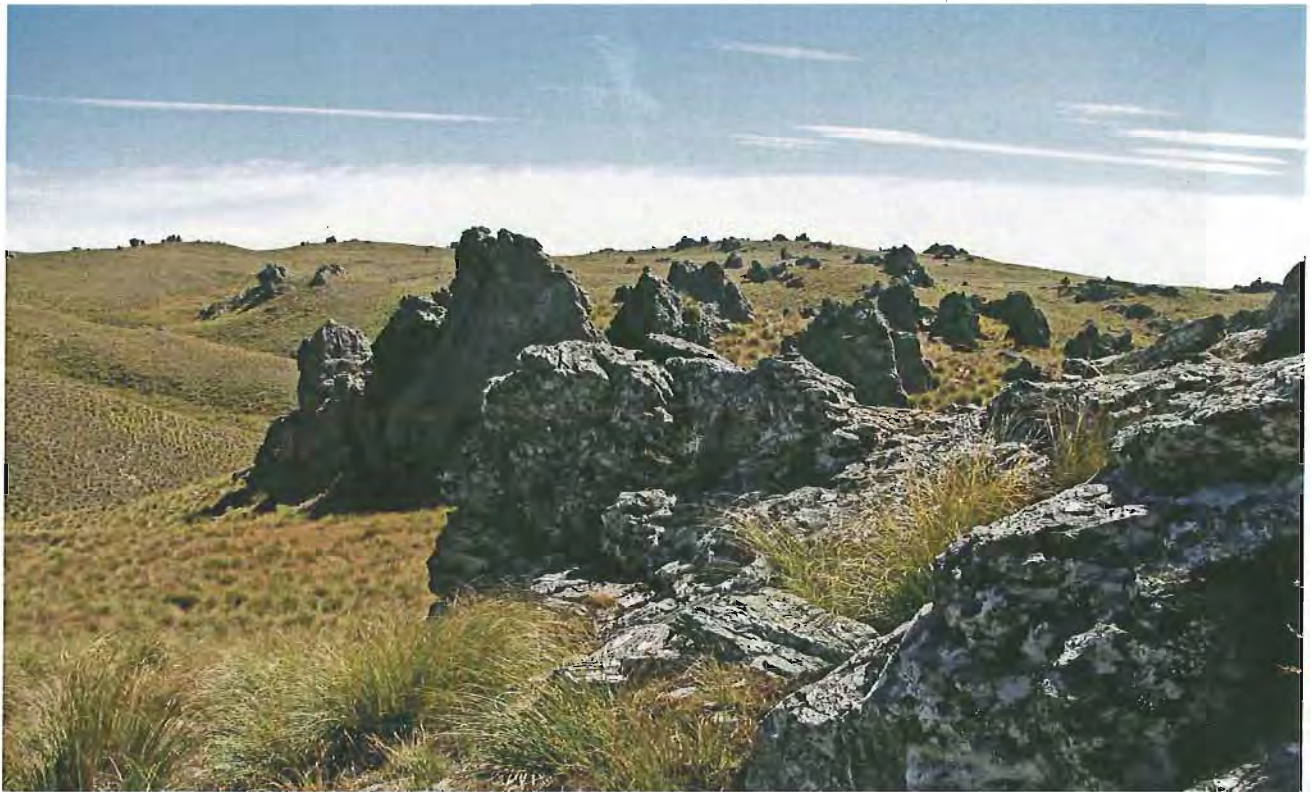


Figure 5. Typical tussock and tor scenery close to the fence at about 960m.



Figure 6. The sort of view obtainable from even a brief excursion up the \$WD track and looking down to the StrathTaieri – The ape-man of Emerald hills.