

## **Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review**

**Lease name :Ben Avon**

**Lease number :PO 251**

### **Conservation resources report**

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.

The report attached is released under the Official Information Act 1982.

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**DOC CONSERVATION RESOURCES REPORT ON TENURE REVIEW OF BEN AVON PASTORAL LEASE****PART 1****INTRODUCTION**

Ben Avon Pastoral Lease lies on the west side of the Ahuriri Valley about 12 kms up the valley from the junction of SH 8 between Lindis Pass and Omarama. The lease covers 8324 hectares and extends over into the Dingleburn Valley. There is an area of freehold flats around the homestead (81 hectares).

To the south of the lease is Longslip Pastoral Lease while to the north is Birchwood Pastoral Lease. Across the Ahuriri River to the east is Quailburn Station. To the west, at the southern end of the lease, is Unoccupied Crown Land, which is grazed at times by Ben Avon. At the northern end of the lease the western boundary drops down to the floor of the Dingleburn Valley. Birchwood, Quailburn and Ben Avon Pastoral Leases are being dealt with as one tenure review.

A wetland area of 24 hectares adjacent to the road near the homestead has been purchased by the Crown and gazetted as a Scenic Reserve. A further area of 64 hectares adjacent to the reserve is protected as a Conservation Covenant under the Conservation Act.

Ben Avon occurs in two Ecological Districts – the Dingleburn area is in the Wanaka Ecological District and the major portion of the lease is in the Ahuriri Ecological District. The districts are characterised by glaciated mountain ranges and river valleys with bedrock of schist and greywacke and alluvium in flat valley floors. The districts have a mountain climate of moderately high rainfall and a covering of bare rock, scree, valley floor grassland, montane and subalpine beech forest, scrub, alpine tussockland and high alpine zones.

The Ahuriri Ecological District has been surveyed as part of the Protected Natural Areas Programme. The Ahuriri River was recognised as a priority area for protection. The river is now protected by a Water Conservation Order.

**PART 2****INHERENT VALUES: DESCRIPTION OF CONSERVATION RESOURCES AND ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE****2.1 Landscape**

Ben Avon is in a transition area of landscape types. Three distinct types occur across the property. The first is a broad *Upper Waitaki/Mackenzie Range and Basin Type*. This includes the Ahuriri Valley floor section on Ben Avon and the front faces.

The second landscape type is a *Western Mountains Type*. This type is characterised by glacial U-shaped valleys typical of valley systems close to the Southern Alps and with a significant forest and shrubland component. On Ben Avon this includes the northern and western basins and gullies of Birch Creek (and the Dingleburn U.C.L.)

A third landscape type is also apparent, the *Lindis Landscape Type* which is drier, has landform more akin to a Lindis Pass Type i.e. distinctive ridge and gully landform with smooth colluvial slopes and is predominantly an open tussock landscape. This includes Ben Avon (the mountain) and also extends south into adjoining Longslip and Dalrachney pastoral leases which have similar characteristics.

Ben Avon can be divided into three landscape units, which equate to the three landscape types described above. For each type a description of landscape character and a description of visual and scenic values is given followed by an evaluation.

#### **1. Ahuriri Valley** (*Upper Waitaki /Mackenzie Range and Basin Landscape Type*)

##### **Description of Landscape Character**

This unit includes the valley floor and the front faces, which collectively form a logical landscape entity. The front faces overlap with landscape units 2 and 3.

The flats are formed of glacial till, outwash gravel and low moraine material and are part of the broad and expansive Ahuriri Valley. Steep mountain slopes on the western side enclose the valley. The river forms the property boundary and its meandering pattern is a dominant feature on the valley floor. The valley floor appears at first relatively flat but is made up of hummocky, terrain, low hills, terraces and flats. Old stream courses, flushes, and ponds intervene with drier areas.

Cultural elements include the public Birchwood Road, power poles and wires, and some fencing. Grazing blocks are large on the drier terraces and flats at the southern end. Farming patterns are gradually more intensive toward the heavier ground near the farm facilities. South of Birch Creek the flats have been drained and developed into farmland with green pasture paddocks, cropping and scattered willow.

Wetlands are a feature of the flats particularly in the low-lying middle and northern section. The wetlands include small lakes, oxbow ponds, moraine bogs and flushes and kettleholes. These, and the associated wetland vegetation, and wildlife are very important to local character and identity.

The front faces comprise steep slopes with prominent fans at the base. Pockets of beech and shrubland occur in gullies and as patchy shrubland elsewhere. Slope wash and slump areas are a feature on very rocky steep slopes and scree below Puke Makariri.

## Visual and Scenic Values

The Ahuriri Valley unit has high visual and scenic values being part of a wider landscape context and setting which is of regional significance. The Canterbury Regional Landscape Study (Boffa Miskell and Lucas Associates) identified the Ahuriri Valley as regionally outstanding.

The open unobstructed views across the broad glacial and alluvial valley floor and to the mountain landscape beyond are highly scenic and the essence of the South Island back country landscape. The river, the intricate wetlands, plant associations and wildlife provides added diversity and visual interest. The small lake and islands with *Carex nigra*, and oxbow ponds are the focus of interest, and often appear in photography for calendars and pictorials as icons of backcountry New Zealand.

The visual and scenic values on Ben Avon contribute to the recreation experience. The area is popular with fishers, campers, picnickers and pleasure drivers. While the Ahuriri valley is not viewed from any major tourist road, all of it is viewed from the public road that runs through the property.

## Evaluation Summary -Ahuriri Valley Unit

Intactness: Vegetation modified but natural patterns mostly intact

Coherence: High degree of visual coherence. Landform very legible

Distinctiveness/uniqueness: High - especially wetland area and water bodies

Visibility: High visibility from public backcountry road

Significance: Regionally significant landscape. Wetland possibly nationally significant.

## 2. Birch Creek North and West Catchments (*Western Mountains Landscape Type*)

This unit includes the Birch Creek ridge and gully system extending down from the boundary ridge to the saddle below Ben Avon. It does not include the north face of Ben Avon (mountain) within the Birch Creek catchment.

Very steep rugged glaciated ridges and extensive scree, rock, and pavements are a feature of the upper ridges leading down from the skyline ridge. The upper basins are typically ripply slump topography with uniform vegetation cover and boulder fields. Snow bank vegetation occurs in the upper basins, notably *celmisia*, blue tussock and *dracophyllum* with little or no snow tussock. The two northern catchments are very steep with extensive shrubland on the shady faces and mountain beech in the lower catchment. Below the bushline, the exotic grass component increases significantly.

## Visual and Scenic Values

Jagged towering ice plucked rocky ridges and scree combined with snowbank vegetation, alpine shrubland, tussock and forest form a landscape with high visual values.

### **Evaluation Summary - Birch Creek Unit**

Intactness: Upper slopes intact apart from absence of snow tussock in some areas.

Coherence: High. No intrusive elements

Distinctiveness/Uniqueness: Medium - not dissimilar to other high country lands

Visibility: Ridgeline and upper slopes visible from public road.

Significance: Locally significant

### **3. Ben Avon (*Lindis Landscape Character Type*)**

The unit refers to Ben Avon (the mountain as opposed to the pastoral lease). Northern aspects of this unit drain into Birch Creek and southern aspects into the Avon Burn

The north faces consist of a series of smooth, gentle and steep ridges, colluvial slopes, scrubby gullies and conical hills (*Lindis Landscape Type*). The south faces above the Avon Burn are steep broken ridge and gully landform with similar patterns to the northern side. A notable feature is little or no forest or even shrubland cover - probably due to burning over a long period. There is a marked difference in the condition of tussock between sunny and shady faces i.e. greater stature and cover on the shady faces. Sheet and gully erosion is evident on steep slopes

The east facing slopes (above the Ahuriri Valley) are steep mountain slopes. Small pockets of beech forest and shrubland occur in gullies with patchy grey shrubland on the lower slopes. Scree and snow tussock are dominant above 1200 m.

#### **Visual and Scenic Values**

This unit has no individually outstanding visual attributes. Its primary value is that much of it is part of the wider Ahuriri Valley landscape, (especially the east and northern faces). Several access tracks within this unit (on the north and east facing slopes) tend to detract where they cut across bare open slopes. However they are minor compared to adjoining Longslip pastoral lease. A degree of land degradation in the form of bare ground, erosion and hieracium also tends to detract from visual values.

### **Evaluation Summary - Ben Avon Unit**

Intactness: Medium to high on upper slopes. Low on lower slopes

Coherence: Medium. Visually coherent in term of natural landform and vegetation patterns.

Distinctiveness/Uniqueness: Similar to distinctive Lindis Pass Type landscape, which is unique to area, within New Zealand

Visibility: East and north faces visible from public road. South faces less visible.

Significance: Regionally significant. North and east faces very significant as a component of wider Ahuriri Valley landscape.

## 2.2 Landforms & Geology

The lease includes three landforms – the flat country stretching from the foot of the mountain ranges to the Ahuriri River, the southern mountain block of Ben Avon and a larger, northern mountain block rising to Puke Makariri at 1858 m, the highest point on the lease. The flat country includes river terraces, rolling morainic country with several quite large kettle holes and significant wetlands containing small lakes, oxbows and cutoffs along the Ahuriri River.

On the southern boundary the land drains into the Avon Burn with the lease boundary being the river. Most of the lease drains into Birch Stream which flows from extensive headwater catchments down through some small gorges and out on an alluvial fan to the Ahuriri River. Small, incised streams also run off the eastern faces of Ben Avon and Puke Makariri directly into the Ahuriri.

The basement rocks on Ben Avon are a mixture of greywacke and argillite and low grade schists. The eastern faces of the mountain range are strongly schistose rock, while the valley floor is mostly alluvium with outwash gravel and glacial till.

## 2.3 Climate

The climate of the property is strongly influenced by its proximity to the Southern Alps and is characterised by a steep rainfall gradient and prevailing north-west winds. Precipitation increases from 2800 mm at the south end of the valley to more than 6000 mm on the mountain tops. Above 1300m there is usually a heavy winter snow cover. Temperatures are generally cool with some warmer temperatures at lower altitudes.

## 2.4 Vegetation

Plant communities found on Ben Avon include high altitude cushionfields, snowbanks, boulderfields, screes and fellfield, snow tussock grasslands, shrublands on high, mid altitude and valley bottom, cliff vegetation and mountain beech forest. Significant parts of the property show the effects of past fire and continuous grazing with the tussock cover much reduced and *Celmisia* prominent on higher areas. Other signs include the comparatively small patches of remnant beech forest, the large areas of regenerating shrublands with much matagouri of small stature, and the mainly grassy fans, cleared or partly cleared of shrubs. The effects of fire and grazing have probably been exacerbated by the very dry to arid climate at this end of the Ahuriri valley.

Adventive plants are found in every community and particularly on much of the flat land, lower rolling country and hill slopes. Even so, these later areas still have an important native component, which forms the ground cover and may be co-dominant. This is especially so above about 1100 m and lower on some south and east facing slopes. Above 1300 m indigenous plants dominate. The vegetation pattern on Ben Avon can be divided into 3 areas.

- (1) Valley Floor: Most of the river terraces, rolling moraine and valley fans are grassland. This varies from largely adventive grassland of sweet vernal (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) and brown top (*Agrostis capillaris*) with scattered hard tussock (*Festuca novae zelandiae*) to hard tussock with sweet vernal and brown top. Mouse ear hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*) can be prominent and is present throughout with cats ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*). A number of indigenous plants such as *Leucopogon fraseri*, *Raoulia subsericea*, *Rytidosperma pumilum*, *Poa colensoi*, *Pimelea oreophylla*, *Luzula rufa*, *Coprosma petriei*, *Gaultheria novae-zelandiae*, *Scleranthus uniflorus*, *Wahlenbergia albomarginata*, *Carex breviculmis*, *Anisotome flexuosus*, *Helichrysum filicaule*, *Acaena caesiiglauca* and mosses and lichens are included in the grasslands.

On stony ground, stones and bare ground can make up 10-15% of the cover with mouse ear hawkweed up to 35%, adventive grasses 15%, hard tussock 10%, *Rytidosperma pumilum* 5%, *Leucopogon fraseri* 5-10%, lichens 5-10% and other minor species. Speargrass (*Aciphylla aurea*) occurs as scattered plants but can be more prominent in places. In hollows and areas with better soils the grasses are more dominant with more mosses and less hawkweed. Shrubs of matagouri (*Discaria toumatou*) and native broom (*Carmichaelia petriei*) occur as scattered plants in the grassland, particularly on shingly areas and grow thickly along shingly water courses and on the fans where they have not been cleared away. Where the ground is damp, such as hollows at the foot of hill slopes and shallow gullies, rushes, sedges and mosses grow with *Bulbinella angustifolia* and grasses such as Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*).

At the northern end, wet lands, comprising of small lakes, oxbows and river cutoffs and sedgeland, are extensive. Their importance has been recognised in several reports (Grainger 1990, Johnson 1991) and now in the protection, by reservation and covenant, of probably the best of the area.

Vegetation types associated with the oxbow ponds include the sedge grasslands on the toe slopes with the reddish sedge tussock, *Schoenus pauciflorus*, often dominant. Maori onion is usually present, as are the common grasses, Yorkshire fog and sweet vernal. On the moister flats there is more meadow grass, stitchwort and *Carex sinclairii*. In the ponds pondweed and milfoil are common. *Callitriche petriei* and *Eleocharis pusilla* are also present. Stream courses linking and feeding the ponds also contain pondweed and milfoil, but water buttercup, water forget-me-not and *Montia fontana* are also present. Small streams with soft mud bottoms typically contain *Ranunculus cheesemanii* and *Hydrocotyle sulcata*. Islands and promontories are densely covered in tussocks of *Carex secta*, along with curled dock and scattered small trees of crack willow. Wet swards of jointed rush (*Juncus articulatus*), spike sedge (*Eleocharis acuta*) and foxtail occur beside the ponds and streams. On the moist but firm, hummocky ground a sedgeland of *Carex diandra*, *C. sinclairii*, meadow grass, browntop, Yorkshire fog, *Deschampsia caespitosa*, alsike clover and the moss *Drepanocladus* occurs.

Johnson (1991) has described the vegetation of the Kettleholes as being a very important feature and "the best concentration of kettleholes in the Ahuriri Ecological District". When water levels are low with considerable exposed lake edge stock, in particular sheep, have apparently camped around the edges leaving an enormous amount of excreta which must have an effect on the ecology and the water quality as the water level rises.

The vegetation of the kettleholes consists of a rich flora of small creeping and tufted herbs. The lowermost of these are aquatic plants while progressively more elevated zones have species more tolerant of seasonal drought. The grasses *Agrostis stolonifera* and *Glyceria declinata* grow in the water along with rushes (*Juncus effusus*). Above the water level *Agrostis stolonifera* and *Epilobium angustifolium* dominate. Minor species are *A. muscosa*, *Carex gaudichaudiana* and *Scirpus setaceus*. Around the margins are *Poa lindsayi*, *P. colensoi*, *Hypericum japonicum*, *Gnaphalium mackayi*, *G. paludosum*, *Gonocarpus micranthus*, *Pratia perpusilla*, *Epilobium alsinoides*, *Pimela prostrata*, *Coprosma petriei*, *Luzula rufa*, *Anthoxanthum*, *Viola cunninghamii* and *Cyathodes fraseri* var. *muscosa*. The flora (29 native and 7 naturalised species) is not as large as the kettleholes near Lakes Ohau, Pukaki and Tekapo but does exhibit the usual marked variation in vegetation found between individual kettles.

The valley fans and lower hill slopes of the Ahuriri faces contained similar grassland vegetation to that of the valley flat land though in many places the shrubland is making a valiant attempt to return.

- (2) Ben Avon: On north and west facing slopes below 1100 m there is a mosaic of exotic grassland with mouse ear hawkweed and hard tussock as well as exotic grassland, native herbs and small shrubs and a few remnant narrow-leaved snow tussock (*Chionochloa rigida*). The snow tussocks are of short stature (400 mm) and often chewed. In places small matagouri shrubs are present. On some slopes this induced community climbs to about 1300 m. On south and east faces the vegetation has a higher native component with snow tussock more prominent and present down to 800 m in places such as in sheltered gullies. Boulderfields, which occur on some spurs and faces, are usually colonised by snow totara (*Podocarpus nivalis*).

Two of the deep rocky gullies draining towards the Ahuriri contain remnant beech forest and/or good, diverse shrubland. Species found here include matagouri, mountain ribbonwood (*Hoheria lyallii*), mountain wineberry (*Aristotelia fruticosa*), mountain flax (*Phormium cookianum*), *Corokia cotoneaster*, *Melicytus* sp., *Coprosma rugosa*, *C. propinqua*, *C.sp. "t"*, *C. ciliata*, *Hebe rakaiensis*, *H. salicifolia*, *Carmichaelia petriei*, *Muehlenbeckia complexa* and brier (*Rosa rubiginosa*). Associated boulderfields contain snow totara, *Gaultheria crassa*, *Hypolepis millefolium*, *Melicytus alpinus*, bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) and speargrass. On nearby bluffs can be found *Helichrysum intermedium*, *Celmisia densiflora*, *Poa colensoi*, *Elymus solandri*, *Festuca mathewsii*, *Brachyglottis haastii*, *Anisotome brevistylis*, *Chionochloa rigida*, and the rock fern *Asplenium richardii*. *Hieracium*



*lepidulum*, the tussock hawkweed is common also. Small remnant patches of mountain beech (*Nothofagus solandri* var. *cliffortioides*) also occur on the rocky faces above the gullies.

Above 1100 m the indigenous plants generally dominate with hard tussock, blue tussock (*Poa colensoi*), *Rytidosperma pumilum* and the many small native grassland herbs and shrubs that are also found at lower altitudes. Narrow-leaved snow tussock occurs as isolated plants (all small) on north and west faces with scattered bushes of *Ozothamnus vauvilliersii* and *Dracophyllum uniflorum*. Brown top, sweet vernal and mouse ear hawkweed are still present and prominent and occasionally dominant. Occasional kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*), a plant which has virtually disappeared from the area, presumably from the effects of frequent fire, can be found. On south and east slopes the narrow-leaved snow tussock cover is slightly better and shrubs such as *Leucopogon colensoi*, *Ozothamnus vauvilliersii*, *Gaultheria crassa*, *Dracophyllum uniflorum* and *D. prorum* can be important. A small patch of kanuka persists above Avon Burn.

Good snow tussock and shrubland is found in the gully below point 1145 m just south of Ben Avon homestead. The good, relatively dense, snow tussock continues up the west face above the old 4WD track to point 1411 m. This point is at the head of another good beech remnant, shrubland, snow tussock sequence in a small catchment containing the shrubland described above .

At about 1200 m narrow-leaved snow tussock begins to become dominate on all faces although it is still less than 50% cover and is short in stature. Adventive species become less prominent as altitude is gained. On the ridge where soils are shallow, snow tussock has a cover of 10%, hard tussock 20%, sweet vernal and brown top 25%, mouse ear hawkweed 15%, *Raoulia subsericea* 10% and bare ground 5-10%. Several other native plants are present including *Pimelea traversii* where it is rocky, *Gaultheria nubicola*, *Pentachondra pumila* and *Pimelea oreophylla*.

At 1400 m the narrow-leaved snow tussock has about 60% cover although on rocky areas and around scree slopes it is more open. Above about 1550 m slim-leaved snow tussock takes over and continues to the upper slopes of Ben Avon. Other plants appearing here are *Schizeilema hydrocotyloides*, *Leptinella pectinata*, *Kellaria villosa*, *Stellaria gracilentia*, *Scleranthus uniflora*, *Carex wakatipu* and *Epilobium pycnostachyum*. Sheep camp on the summit area and have removed all snow tussock except for a few plants chewed right down to the base. Hard and blue tussock dominate with *Rytidosperma pumillum*, *Raoulia subsericea*, *R. grandiflora*, *Scleranthus uniflora*, *Luzula pumila*, *Anisotome flexuosus*, and the adventives sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) and mouse ear hawkweed. Chewed down tussocks are found on the south slopes also, above a large scree which is criss-crossed with animal tracks. Plants on the scree and rock outcrops include *Hebe pinguifolia*, *Chionohebe densiflora*, *Acaena saccaticupula*, *Celmisia angustifolia*, *C. viscosa*, *C. lyallii*, *Kellaria childii*, *Phyllachne colensoi*, *Aciphylla montana*, *Uncinia fuscovaginata* and chewed down slim-leaved snow tussock. Below the summit area,

the tussock health and density improves with good slim-leaved snow tussock down to about 1350 m on the south and east facing slopes and narrow-leaved snow tussock below, at least to 1100 m.

- (3) Puke Makariri: The catchment of the south branch of Birch Creek draining part of the lower west face of Ben Avon contains a similar vegetation to that described for the lower Ahuriri faces, a mixture of native hard tussock and adventive grassland, the later often dominant. There are few snow tussocks. Native shrubs are scattered across the grassland and in places are quite prominent as in the lower slopes above the Homestead where *Dracophyllum uniflorum* and *Leucopogon suaveolens* with *Gaultheria novae-zelandiae*, *Pimelea oreophylla* and *Ozothamnus vauvilliersii* grow thickly amongst the sweet vernal, brown top and mouse ear hawkweed. Matagouri is prominent in gullies. A sheltered south face in one small gully has very good, dense shrubland with a diverse community of *Dracophyllum uniflorum*, *D. longifolium*, *D. pronum*, *Podocarpus nivalis*, *Ozothamnus*, *Gaultheria*, *Coprosma* species and matagouri.

North of this area, large tributaries of Birch Creek penetrate steep mountain country northwards and westwards. Large areas of mountain beech forest fill the lower valley bottoms in places. A threatened plant, Category 'B' species *Pittosporum patulum* has been found in the lower stand of beech forest and is probably in the upper stand as well.

A diverse shrubland extends above the forest, especially where the bushline has been depressed by fire. It contains similar species to those listed above and includes *Brachyglottis cassinioides*, *Phyllocladus alpinus*, *Hebe anomalus*, mountain wineberry and mountain ribbonwood. Large plants of snow tussock and speargrass are also found here. Lower ridge tops where the soil is shallow contain brown top, sweet vernal and mouse ear hawkweed with blue tussock, *Celmisia lyallii*, *Dracophyllum pronum* and other small native herbs and shrubs, the latter dominating in places. Off the ridge top, native plants dominate with hard tussock, blue tussock, speargrass, *Celmisia* species, particularly *C. lyallii*, with *Dracophyllum* and *Ozothamnus* shrubs. On some sunny faces, the adventive grasses dominate. Narrow-leaved snow tussocks appear as scattered plants except in shallow, sheltered gullies where it is dominant.

Above 1300 m the indigenous species are dominant and the plant communities vary depending on aspect and substrate. Slopes with deeper soils contain snow tussock grassland with its associated species. A rocky ridge with numerous large boulders covering 30 - 40% of the ground, typically contains narrow-leaved snow tussock, blue tussock, hard tussock, *Celmisia lyallii* and *Dracophyllum pronum*. Boulderfields and screes, which are common in the larger gullies and upper faces contain *Polystichum cystostegia*, *P. vestitum*, *Myrsine nummularia*, *Melicytus alpinus*, *Lycopodium fastigiatum*, *Epilobium pycnostachyum* and *Colobanthus strictus*.

The summit ridges are primarily cushion vegetation with bare ground in exposed areas. *Dracophyllum pronum* often dominates on rocky ground with other cushion plants such as *Kellaria dieffenbachii*, *Chionohebe densiflora*, *C. thomsonii*, *Celmisia sessiliflora*, *Raoulia hectorii*, *Phyllachne colensoi* and *Hectorella caespitosa*. In snow hollows *Celmisia haastii*, *Coprosma niphophylla*, *Raoulia grandiflora*, *Agrostis muelleriana* and *Ourisia glandulosa* are common. *Celmisia viscosa* forms large patches and *Celmisia lyallii* appears to have taken the place of slim-leaved snow tussock, the latter being uncommon.

## 2.5 Fauna

### 2.5.1 Birds

The Ahuriri Riverbed and associated wetlands are extremely valuable habitat for wildlife because of the low level of invasion by exotic species such as willow and lupin. The river and wetlands are also important for the variety and number of habitats they provide for birds feeding and breeding. The wetland and river bird species found on Ben Avon, the majority of which are known to breed in this area, include black stilt (category A threatened species), black-fronted tern (category B), Wrybill (category B), banded dotterel (category C), Australasian bittern, shoveler duck, pied stilt, South Island Oystercatcher, marsh crake, New Zealand scaup, black-backed gull, black billed gull, black shag and little shag.

The beech remnants on Ben Avon are regionally important as a habitat for bush dwelling species. Because of the remnant nature of the habitat, species diversity is less than in larger patches of forest such as that protected in the Ahuriri State Forest. However, the following species can be found - rifleman, grey warbler, New Zealand falcon, fantail, brown creeper, bellbird, pigeon, South Island tomtit and Long-tailed cuckoo.

### 2.5.2 Fish

Four species of endemic and one introduced species of fish have been recorded in the rivers, streams and wetlands of this property. These are alpine galaxias (*Galaxias paucipondylus*), koaro (*Galaxias brevipinnis*), common galaxiad, (*Galaxias vulgaris*), upland bully (*Gobiomorphus breviceps*) and the introduced brown trout.

### 2.5.3 Reptiles

Three species of skink and two geckos have been recorded in the area. They are the spotted skink (*Oligosoma lineoocellatum*) on screes and boulderfields, McCanns skink (*Oligosoma maocanni*), and common skink on rocky areas and grasslands; the common gecko on rocky areas throughout and the jewelled gecko on lower altitude bush and scrub.

## 2.6 Historic

Ben Avon and its neighbour, Birchwood, were originally part of Longslip Station. The original Longslip stretched from Lake Hawea to Lake Ohau. In 1873 a new homestead for Longslip was built where the Ben Avon homestead is today. In 1883 the homestead site was freeholded and in 1897 Longslip was divided into three parts. Ben Avon Country (Run 429A) was reduced to 6060 acres and a 21 year lease was given to Hodgkinson. In 1906 the lease was transferred to Edmund Cameron (Hodgkinson's son-in-law).

The old woolshed at Ben Avon was originally Longslip's woolshed. Trees around the original homestead site are of some historic interest. The only area of some historic interest on the station hill country is the track used to clear the beech forest in the late 1800's and early 1900's and the associated regeneration of the beech since clearing stopped early in the 1900's. The present lessee is well known for his evocative poetry of the High Country.

## 2.7 Public Recreation

### 2.7.1 Physical Characteristics

Ben Avon varies from valley flats bordering on the river to rugged mountaintops. Extensive wetlands occur on the valley floor. Hill slopes are, at first, gentle but then rise steeply to the ridgelines. Puke Makariri, in particular, is rocky and precipitous.

A 4wd track skirts the southern side of Ben Avon and two other tracks climb the gullies behind the homestead on to Ben Avon and up to the boundary with Longslip. A track diverts off the road to give access to the river. Otherwise the lease is relatively undeveloped and access is gained, primarily, by foot or horse.

### 2.7.2 Legal Access

Birchwood Road, which runs through the property, is a legal road. A marginal strip follows both banks of the Ahuriri River along the length of the lease. There is no other legal access on the property.

### 2.7.3 Activities

Existing activity includes the occasional hunter (pigs, thar, deer and chamois), some tramping in combination with trips into the Dingleburn or onto Longslip and some horse riding trips. The lagoon in the Scenic Reserve is a favourite site for tourists and photographers. Fishing parties gaining access to the Ahuriri River make the greatest use of the lease.

Climbs onto Ben Avon and Puke Makariri could become popular as would the opportunity to mountain bike, horse ride and tramp up the track behind the homestead and over into the Avon Burn on Longslip or the Dingleburn and Timaru Creek.

## **PART 3**

### **OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS & PLANS**

#### **3.1 Consultation**

At early warning NGO meetings in Timaru and Christchurch in August 1999 NGO's were asked for comment on Ben Avon. A written submission has been received from Federated Mountain Clubs. The submission calls for:

1. The covenanted wetland should become public conservation land to provide a more secure form of protection.
2. The Birch Creek catchment and the upper slopes of Ben Avon should be transferred to DOC.
3. Marginal strips should be set aside on Birch Creek, Avon Burn and the Ahuriri River.
4. An easement from the road to the Ahuriri River should be set aside with car parking arranged off the road.
5. An easement could be needed for trampers along the South boundary from Avon Burn to the road to link with access on Longslip.
6. An easement would be needed from Avon Burn or Bush Creek to allow trampers, climbers and possibly mountain bikers access to Ben Avon peak.
7. The lower slopes of Ben Avon and the gully behind the homestead should only be considered for freeholding provided some way can be found to prevent grazing animals entering the areas to be transferred to DOC.
8. The fenced area on adjoining Birchwood lease suitable for freeholding to be transferred to Ben Avon in compensation for loss of grazing on Ben Avon which cannot be fenced.

Comments from other NGOs supported the greater protection of the wetlands and the river and the provision of access to the Ahuriri River and on to, and around, Ben Avon.

#### **3.2 Regional Policy Statements & Plans**

Not applicable.

#### **3.3 District Plans**

Ben Avon lies mainly in the Waitaki District, except for the Dingleburn catchment which lies in the Queenstown Lakes District. The Waitaki proposed plan was publicly notified in December 1996. Under this plan Ben Avon is zoned RS (rural scenic). The Rural Scenic Zone contains areas of the District which have significant scenic values generally being the high country, rangelands and inland basin areas.

There are no significant sites identified in the plan on Ben Avon (or anywhere else in the Waitaki District) i.e. none of the RAPs identified in PNA surveys or SSWI's in Wildlife Surveys have been recognised despite the Departments belief that they should be.

There are controls on buildings, earthworks, indigenous vegetation clearance and forestry – but only on areas within 20m of a lake, river or wetland, or above 900m. There are also controls on earthworks (including tracking) on slopes greater than 20° and controls on clearance of indigenous bush.

The Council has recently issued interim decisions, which have no legal status, but indicate what the final decisions are likely to say – and which are to be notified in September/October of this year. These decisions have sought the deletion of controls on activities on land over 900m, clearance of indigenous bush and earthworks. Some controls on earthworks are likely but are looser than shown above.

The final decisions on the Queenstown Lakes District District Plan have been notified. References to the Environment Court are currently in mediation to identify significant sites and include general indigenous vegetation clearance rules (which the Plan has none of). The only controls on forestry are on planting of *Pinus contorta*, Scotts pine, Douglas fir, European Larch and Corsican pine (discretionary activities). There are some controls on earthworks over 2m vertical height, 1000m<sup>3</sup>, and 2500m<sup>2</sup>, (limited discretionary activity)

### 3.4 Conservation Management Strategies & Plans

Ben Avon occurs in the Waitaki Unit of the Canterbury CMS and in the Hawea-Lindis Special Place of the Otago CMS. Key priorities recognised in the Waitaki Unit include:

1. To negotiate with landholders to protect significant areas of native vegetation and wildlife habitat.
2. Seek formal habitat protection for wading birds.
3. Seek the gazettal of key areas of Crown riverbed with high wildlife value as conservation areas or reserves.
4. Negotiate for enhanced public access as part of tenure review.
5. Identify areas suitable and unsuitable for off-road vehicle use in conjunction with 4wd groups and district councils.
6. Manage mountain biking by identifying suitable tracks and areas.
7. Identify areas suitable or unsuitable for horse travel.

Objectives for the Hawea-Lindis Special Place are:

1. To manage and enhance recreational opportunities on lands administered by the department in the Hunter-Hawea area to maintain the natural and historic resources of areas while providing for an appropriate range of recreational activity of high quality.
2. To achieve permanent protection for areas of significant nature conservation importance in the area.
3. To maintain and where appropriate enhance the quality of aquatic habitats in the area.

### 3.5 Freshwater Fisheries Plans

Not applicable.

## **PART 4**

### **MAPS ETC.**

#### 4.1 Additional information

##### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Jim Morris (lessee) for assistance with this survey. Also the members of the survey team – Phil Blakely (landscape), Neil Simpson (botanical), Joy Comrie, Dave Massam and Simon Elkington (DOC).

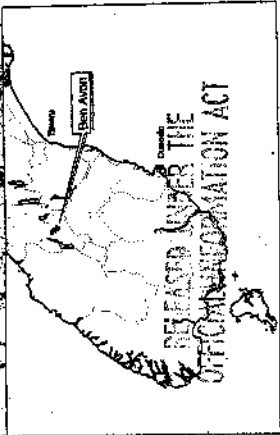
#### 4.2 Illustrative Maps

##### 4.2.1 Topo/Cadastral

##### 4.2.2 Values

RELEASED UNDER THE  
OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT

Ben Avon  
Topo/Cadastral

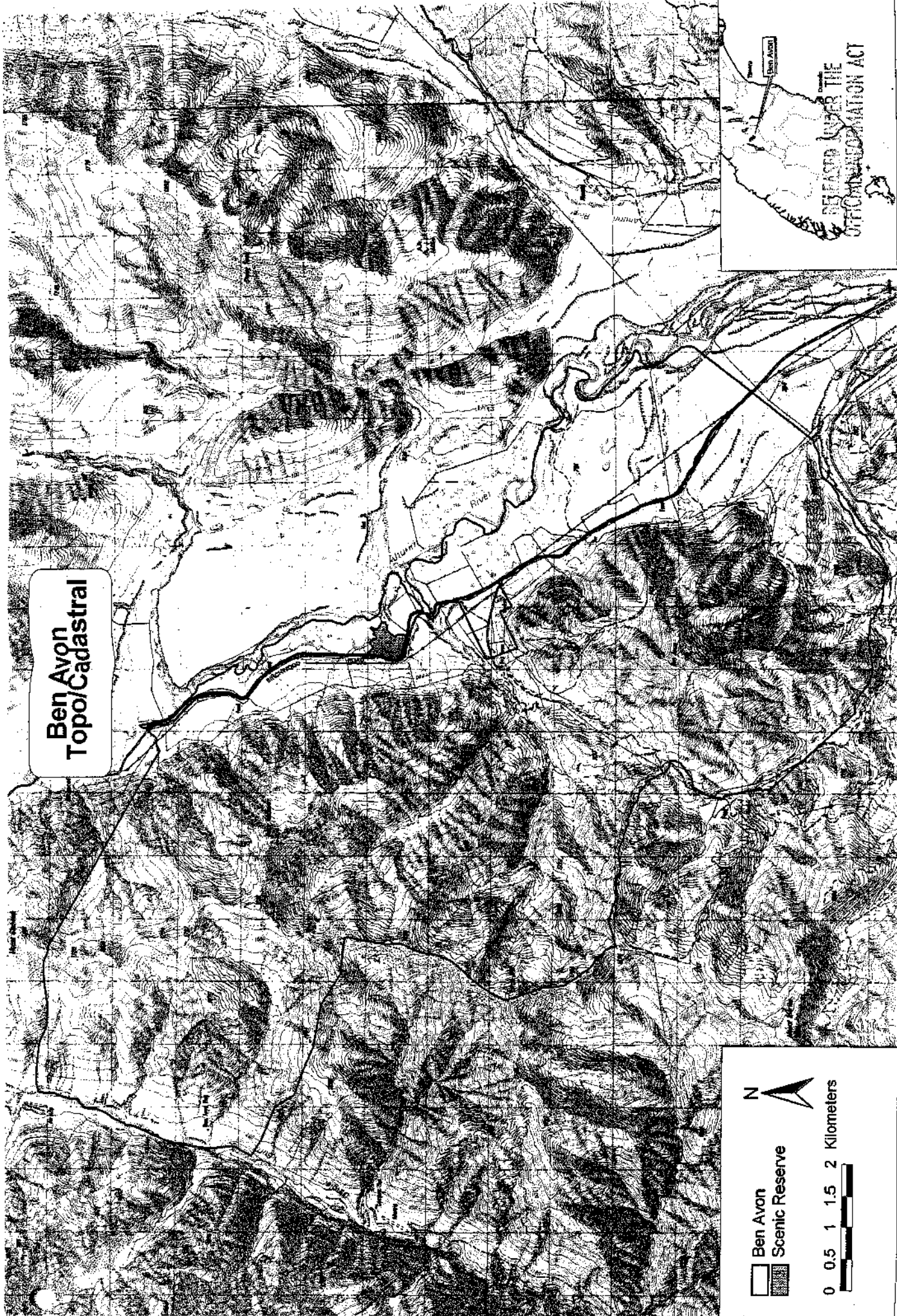


**N**

**Ben Avon**  
**Scenic Reserve**

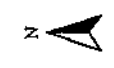
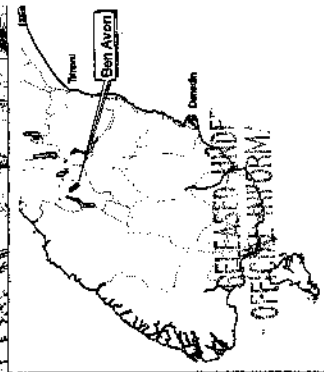
0 0.5 1 1.5 2 Kilometers

This block contains a north arrow pointing upwards, labeled with the letter "N". Below it is a legend with two entries: a white square labeled "Ben Avon" and a square with diagonal hatching labeled "Scenic Reserve". At the bottom of this block is a scale bar marked with 0, 0.5, 1, 1.5, and 2 Kilometers.





# Ben Avon Values



- Ben Avon
- Ecological Value
- Scenic Reserve
- Landscape Value
- Recreation Value

