

## **Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review**

**Lease name : CORONET PEAK**

**Lease number : PO 195**

### **Conservation Resources Report - Part 5**

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.

**January 06**

## **Preliminary submission on Coronet Peak Pastoral Lease, May 2005.**

### **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 May 2005 and on knowledge of the area 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**

Coronet Peak Pastoral Lease is bounded by the Shotover River on the west and the Arrow River on the east. The northern boundary runs from the diversion tunnel on the Polnoon Burn (Figure 1) eastwards along the Polnoon Burn and continues on to the east to a point above the Motatapu headwaters after the Polnoon Burn turns sharply to the north. It takes in Mt Hyde on the eastern boundary before reaching the Arrow River below its junction with Tui Creek. The southern part of the Harris Mountains (well-used for recreation, both winter and summer), are included in the lease. The southern boundary is roughly the line of the Arrowtown-Arthurs Point road and the Coronet Skifield area is excluded from the lease. The north-east corner of the run appears to adjoin the Motatapu Conservation Area at that point and runs with it south for some distance. The lease contains outstanding landscape (Figures 3-7), historical and gold mining values (Figures 8-10), ecological values and the ultimate hope must be that a large part of it, together with land from Branches Station, may eventually be included in Mt Aspiring National Park.

### **Landscape and ecological values.**

On the north-western boundary, the lease marches with the Branches Station and provides a wonderful area of outstanding natural landscape (Figures 4,6). There are several tramping routes over to the West Matukituki Valley, one via Lochnagar and Shotover Saddle and another through Black Peak Conservation Area and through to Sharks Tooth. There are routes which

follow the Shiel Burn and Polnoon Burn and could lead to the Mototapu Conservation Area and Treble Cone, thus providing good opportunities for botanical tramping trips. There are important wetlands adjoining the lower reaches of a side branch of the Polnoon Burn east of Lindsays Tarn (Figure 7). Above 1000m, there are good representative areas of snow tussock running up into intact alpine areas, largely in good condition. Below 770m on the Shotover margins there is modified shrubland and a major problem with wilding trees below 900m (Figure 11), including sycamores, which still has to be addressed though there are signs that some control efforts have been made. There are also important populations of skinks and geckos. CRR

On the Arrow side, there are numerous tramping routes, both high level (via Big Hill) and low level along the River, to Macetown and beyond to Advance Peak (Figures 10-12) and over to the Shotover side of the Harris Mountains. The landscape is still outstanding, though different from that on the Shotover side (Figures 9-13). There is a major problem with sycamores close to the Arrow River in places and other wilding trees also in need of removal.

There are significant numbers of falcons in the gorged and steep rocky areas and keas, on the higher country.

### **Goldmining Heritage Values**

The whole length of the Shotover River on the western boundary of the lease is an area of goldmining and historical significance about which much is known and the sites on the true left bank of the Shotover and the hillsides above must be returned to the Crown to secure protection for these goldfields. There are already a number of protected and conservation areas ; at Skippers itself and other areas, but many are associated with the true right banks of the Shotover and not on the Coronet Lease.

Similarly, all of the numerous mining sites and relics along the Arrow River on the eastern boundary of the lease should be protected by the return of this land to the Crown. While Macetown (part of the Otago Goldfields Park) and some surrounds are already included in a Conservation Area, protection of mining sites, batteries etc must now extend to the areas further up the Richburn and onto the mines on Advance Peak, take in the considerable goldfields heritage values up Sawyers Creek and its tributaries, Bush Creek, Scanlans Gully, Sylvia Creek (aerial tramway remains and Skytown), and Eight and Nine Mile Creeks. I have spent a week based at Macetown and working on the Homeward Bound Battery (Figure 8) as a conservation volunteer with the late Brian Ahearn and during that week I gained further knowledge of the extent of the less commonly known mining sites still unprotected in the above areas (Figures 9,10).

Aside from the sites associated directly with the Shotover and Arrow Rivers, there are those remains stretched between the two rivers across the southern end of the Harris Mountains, about which we know less, and provision should be made for archaeological assessment of these sites (if it has not already been done) and also protection where appropriate.

Perhaps one solution for protection of the Goldmining history would be to create a special Goldfields Heritage area covering all the sites within the Coronet Peak lease

We note that the Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) for Otago (1998) lists the Upper Shotover as one of the special places and the objective stated is:-

***'To protect the natural and historic resources of the upper Shotover area, particularly their biodiversity, relative remoteness and landscape values, and to provide for or allow an***

*appropriate range of commercial and non-commercial recreational activities consistent with the protection of the resources and a high quality visitor experience.'*

Within Coronet Peak lease it is difficult to pursue a tramping or tramping/botanisising trip without coming across mining remains and these in themselves can have botanical interest especially if people have for instance, an interest in lichens colonising mining debris (Figure )

## **Access**

The main point of access on the Shotover side of the lease is logically the road to Skippers and the section that continues on to The Branches. The question of vehicle access beyond Branches other than for management or scientific puposes needs to be considered. The track beyond Branches is well suited to walking and biking, but is not maintained to any high degree and if there was unlimited 4WD access would be likely to become a problem in some places sooner rather than later as has happened elsewhere. To maintain the 'wilderness' character of the area we suggest that 4WD access might stop at the Branches. This then allows less fit people to get a bit beyond Campbells Saddle which is where, before the Ironstone Creek ford (Figure 5), the full glory of the Upper Shotover is most evident (Figure 4).

On the Arrow River side, the road to Macetown needs to be secured as the legal access, but in view of the track and riverbed damage and destruction caused by 4WD vehicles up there already the question of unlimited access for vehicles to Macetown needs to be seriously considered. In no circumstances should 4WD vehicles be permitted beyond Macetown. As a tramper/walker there are few things more unpleasant than having to contend with 4WD vehicles splashing through the fords and along the road at inappropriate speeds. The tracks over Big Hill and Sawpit Gully, up to Advance Peak and Vanguard Peak need to be secured for foot access and good access provided up all the side valleys containing mining relics near and beyond Macetown.

## **Tenure review outcome**

### **Option 1**

While we believe a case could be made for whole property acquisition and with it the opportunity to extend the boundaries of Mt Aspiring National Park and to add to the Otago Goldfields Park there are some areas of Coronet Peak that may be suitable for sustainable management, but under conditions prohibiting burning, limiting stock numbers and providing for the removal of wilding trees. There are however some steep bluffed areas on the Shotover faces (Figure 14) beyond Skippers Saddle which cannot sustain grazing.

### **Option 2**

If whole property purchase is not possible then we suggest that at the very least, the area to the north of a spur running up from Skippers Bridge to Vanguard Peak (Figure 15) and then down to the southern end of the Macetown reserve should become a Conservation Area to be returned to the Crown. This line should be possible to fence. Some areas south of this boundary have significant landscape values, sites of ecological importance and mining heritage values and might still need protection by covenant. This option would ensure protection for the main ridge of the Harris Mountains which have major ecological and recreation values and provide opportunities for cross-country trips over into the Matukituki area in a semi-wilderness environment which is important to many of us.

**Note on landscape protection.**

If any of the front face below Coronet Peak ski area or the lower slopes on the true left of the Shotover were to be free-held it would be important that conditions were imposed to prevent landscape despoilation by building activity

**Acknowledgements**

Forest and Bird Dunedin Branch would like to thank the Lessee for permission to inspect the lease.

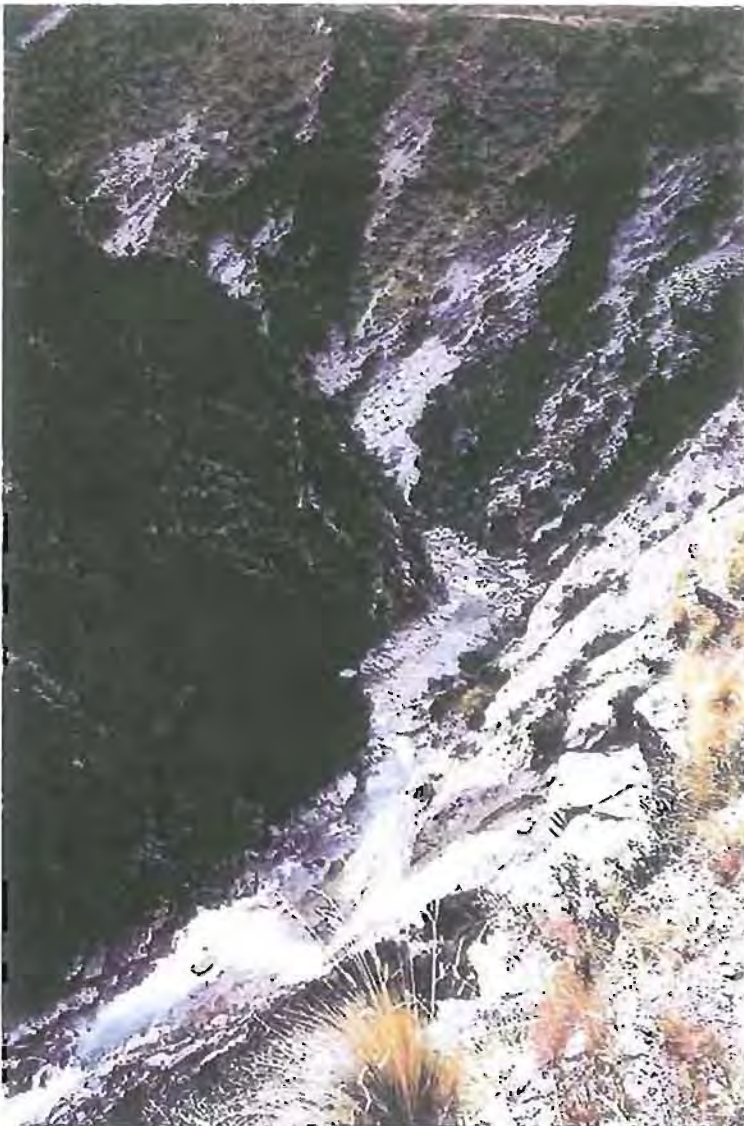


Figure 1. At the northern boundary, the Shiel Burn at the point where the diversion from the Polnoon Burn joins it.



Figure 2, The view from from Skippers Saddle





Figure 3. Harris mountain landscape from the Branches Road, with good tussock cover higher up

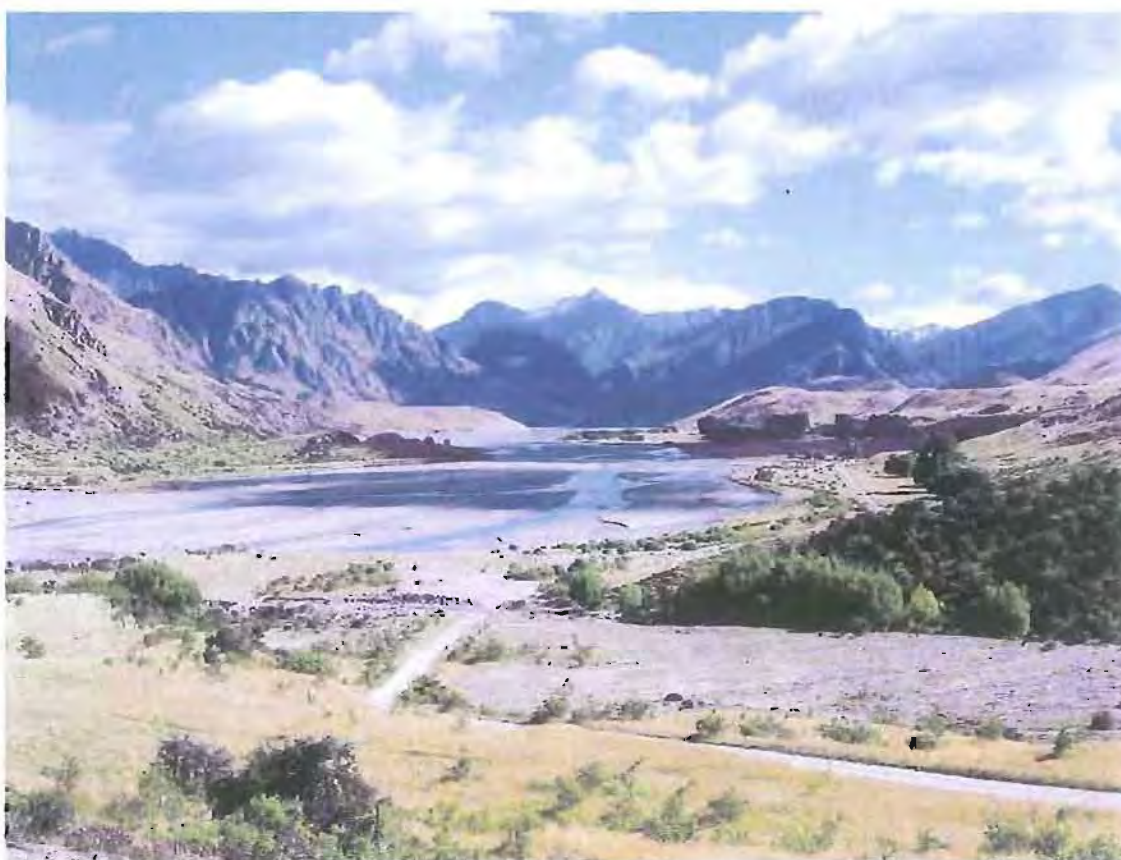


Figure 4. The breathtaking view up the Upper Shotover from Campbells Saddle just before Branches Station.





Figure 5. Landscape at Ironstone Creek which is forded at the foot of Campbell's saddle.



Figure 6. Carmichaels Creek, beyond Branches Station.





Figure 7. Lindsay's Tarn, adjoining the Polnoon Burn and just outside the lease. The major wetlands near the Polnoon are east of this tarn.



Figure 8. The Homeward Bound battery beyond Macetown.





Figure 9, The Premier Mine in the Sawyer Burn, beyond the Homeward Bound Battery.



Figure 10. The Sunrise Mine workings up on Advance Peak.





Figure 11. View into the upper Arrow from Advance Peak.



Figure 12. Further view from Advance Peak on a botanising/tramping day trip.





Figure 13. Landsape up valley at the top end of Macetown.



Figure 14. An example of the wilding tree problem from the Barnches road



Figure 15. The view from the true right of the Shotover at Skippers showing the spur leading up to Vanguard Peak which we suggest as a possible boundary for a conservation area from land returned to the Crown.

#### 4.1.3 Photographs



The south facing hillslopes below Coronet Peak Ski Field form the scenic backdrop to Wakatipu Basin.



Remnant beech forest is present near Station Creek on the Wakatipu faces.





Wilding pines are spreading across the snow tussockland and *Dracophyllum* shrublands present on the Wakatipu Faces below Coronet Peak Ski Field.



Snow tussockland and schist bluffs contribute to the striking landscape of Dirty Four Creek, which flows from Coronet Peak into Long Gully.



Looking up to Green Gate Saddle along Green Gates Gully. The remains of Green Gates Hotel, located amongst the poplar trees at the confluence of Green Gates Gully and Deep Creek, lies along the path of the Old Skippers Track which was the original 'official' track into the Shotover built in 1863.



Upper Deep Creek, looking up towards Coronet Peak itself.





Below Vanguard Peak ~1500 m, *Peripatus* was found here.



The Shotover Faces, between Deep Creek and Long Gully, support grey shrubland interspersed with rocky bluffs and grassland. Skippers Road has been cut into the rocks.





Skippers Road clings precariously to the side of Devils Elbow, near Deep Creek. This locality supports several threatened moths and the threatened shrub *Hebe cupressoides*. Wilding trees are becoming prevalent. Deep Creek mouth is a popular access point for rafters and kayakers to the Shotover River.



Tree daisy (*Olearia odorata*) dominated grey shrubland in Deep Creek.



Wong Gong Terrace, near Blue Slip in the Shotover Valley is the site of Wong Gong's store and dam, which illustrate the activities of a complex gold-mining community from late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The flats are used for informal picnicking and camping, with a rough track providing access down to the Shotover River.



Skippers Bridge can be seen crossing the Shotover, while The Branches Road winds its way across Cotters Creek/Deep Gully above. The terrain is steep with bluffs, grey shrubland, wilding trees, grassland and tussockland present. The ridge between Mt Marsden and Vanguard Peak forms the skyline.



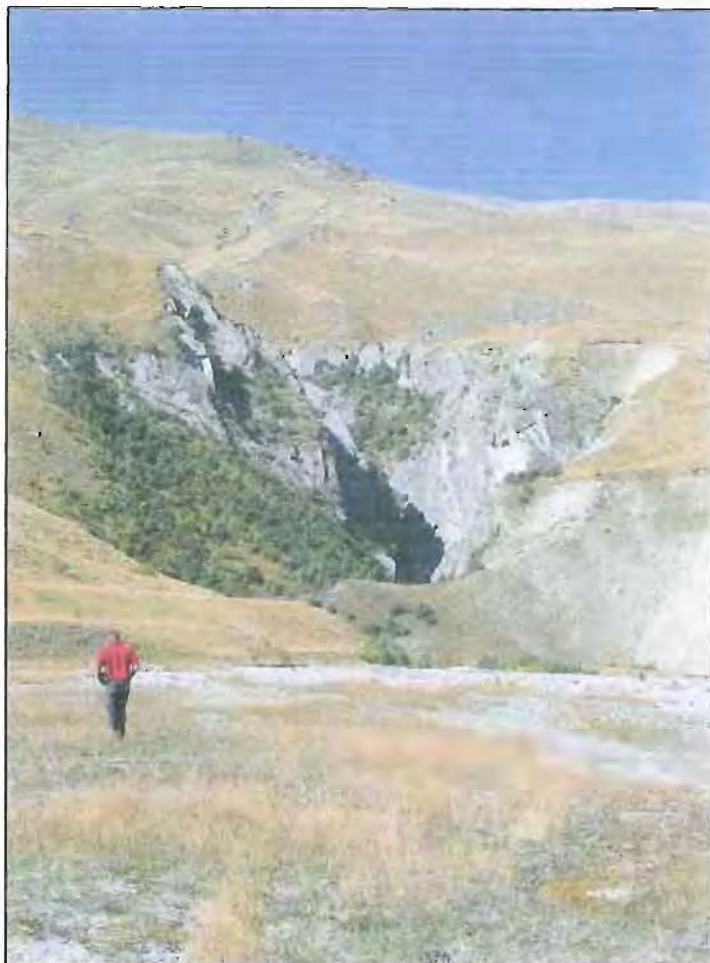


The upper Cotters Creek/Deep Gully supports snow tussockland and subalpine *Dracophyllum* shrubland. The conifers which can be seen growing on Mt Aurum Recreation Reserve are a ready seed source for wilding tree spread onto Coronet Peak Pastoral Lease.



Mature shrubland occupies the precipitous sides of Carmichaels Creek. A small remnant of beech forest (not in the photo) is also present in this catchment.

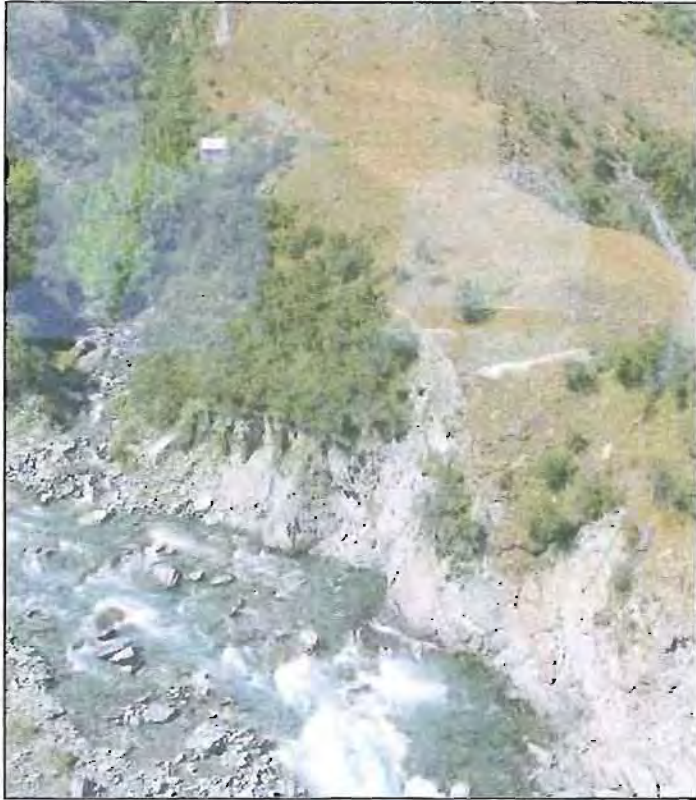




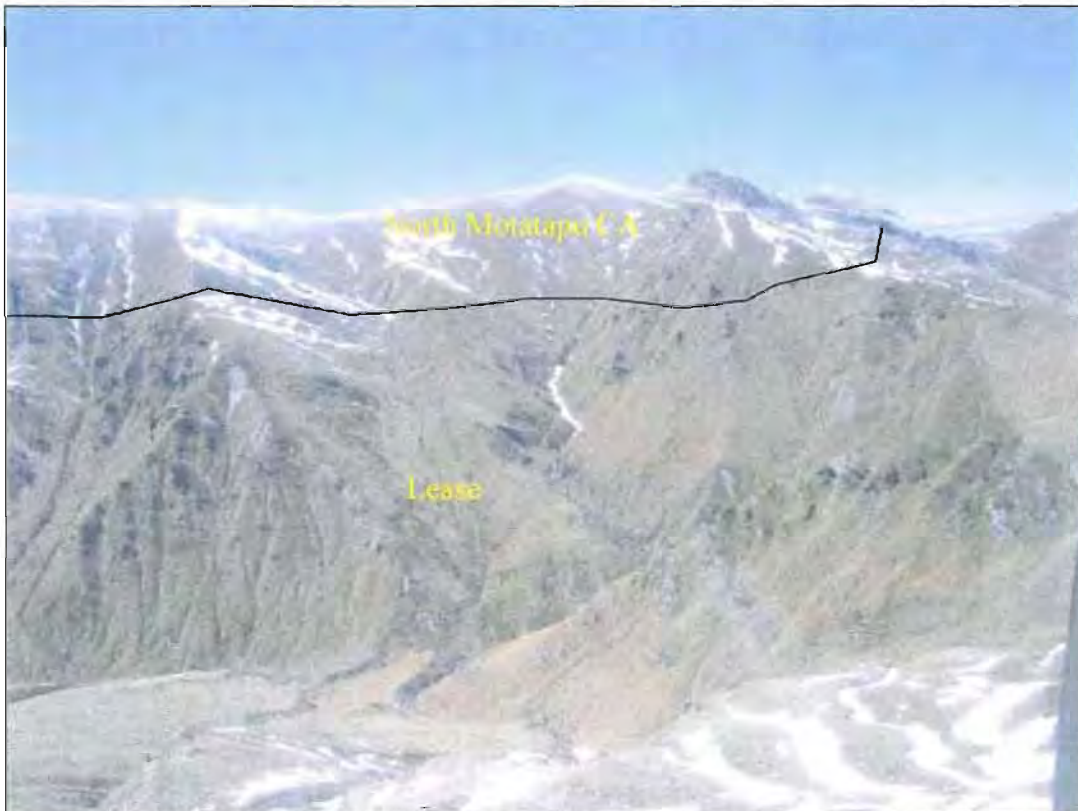
← Outwash gravels at the mouth of Stockyard Creek support native cushionfield vegetation including a threatened wood rush *Luzula celata*.

This deep tarn is at the top of a fault-determined basin wetland complex which occurs east of the lower Polnoon Burn and runs south to nearly Stockyard Creek. The tarn is fringed with *Carex secta*, *C. gaudichaudiana* and *C. sinclairii*. Its outlet feeds into a *Schoenus pauciflorus* dominated fen at lower altitude.



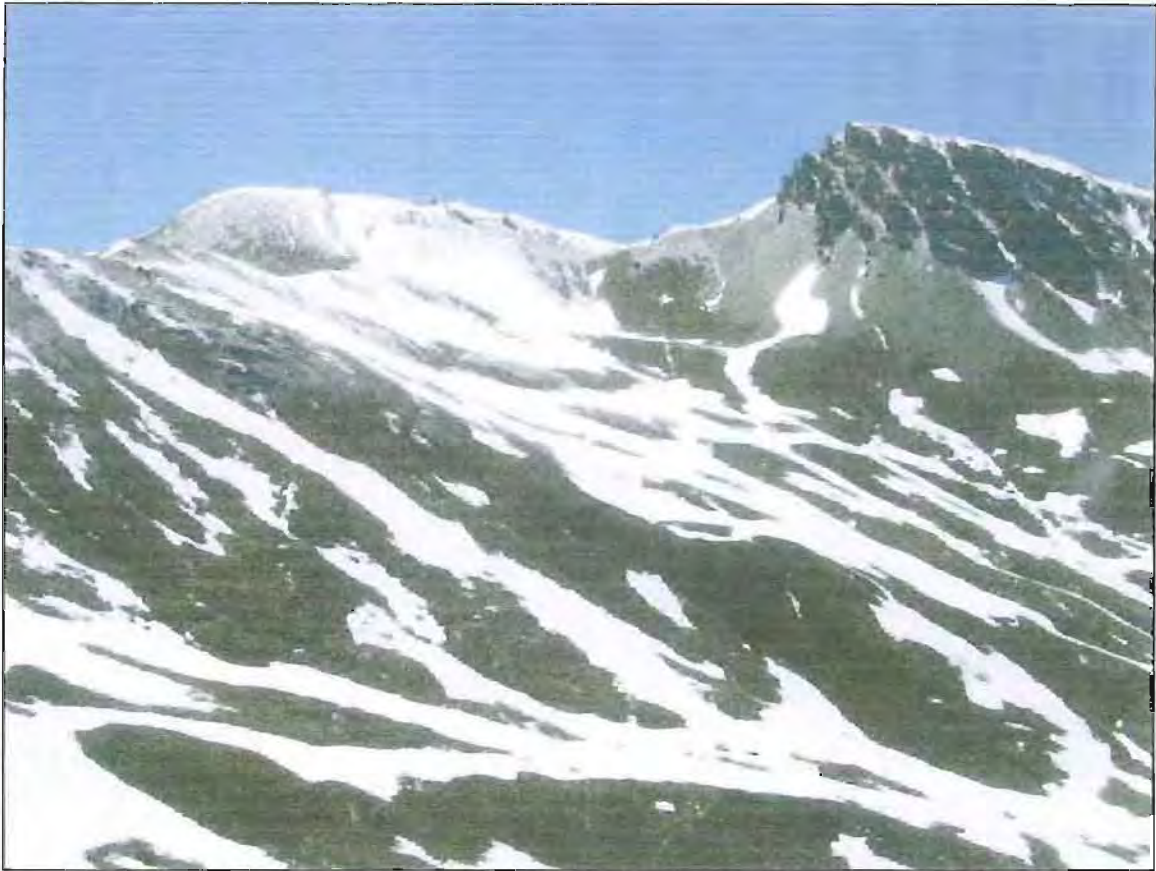


Cabin Hut is located at the confluence of Cabin Creek and Polnoon Burn. Grey shrubland and grassland are present, as well as willow trees along Cabin Creek.



Upper Cabin Creek at the north of the property, which extends two-thirds up the (Mount) Siberia ridge. The ridge itself is within North Motatapu Conservation Area.





Snow persists into early summer on the upper slopes of Mt Hyde, which at 2056 m, is the highest point on the property.



Mount Aspiring and the Main Divide provide a spectacular backdrop to the northern crest of the property.





Much of the property is above 1700 m, where a mosaic of fellfield, cushionfield, snowbank and slim-leaved snow tussockland is present. This view is from near Mt St Just, looking southwards towards Vanguard Peak in the distance.



The upper Arrow landscape is one of the best examples of an intact backcountry tussock landscape in Otago. Land to the left of the river is within the property.



At Vanguard Peak, the original 19<sup>th</sup> century trig station is evident as a stone cairn. The exposed summit is dominated by fellfield vegetation. An historic gold miners route is present here, which follows the ridge behind the trig, down to the Shotover Valley at Maori Point Saddle. It was along such routes that people, provisions and large pieces of equipment travelled between the huge gold claims on either side of the Lease.



Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) is a problem near the Arrow River, just upstream of Maccetown Historic Reserve.





The batteries, mines, water races, tracks etc. surrounding Macetown are important historic sites which are associated with the Arrow River 19<sup>th</sup> century gold-rush.

The sites shown are from Sawyers Creek and Rich or Gold Burn, and include the Premier Battery and hut (see photo to right). A gold miners track can be seen on the hillslope behind the Battery, which ascends Vanguard Peak. Today, this track is used by day-walkers exploring the area.





Beech forest clings to the sides of the Arrow Gorge, and extends up side gullies, such as Pizolls Gully as seen here. Exotic trees and shrubs are also common, with willow occupying the river bed, and rowan, cotoneaster, sycamore and elder present elsewhere.



Bush Gully forms the southern boundary to the property. Beech and exotic forest is present, which grades into subalpine *Dracophyllum* shrubland with altitude. Bush Creek Walkway is a popular short walk from Arrowtown, which can be seen in the top left hand corner.