

Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review

Lease name : Mt ASPIRING STATION

Lease number : PO 231

Conservation Resources Report - Part 3

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.

November 05

APPENDIX 11: Forest & Bird Report

Preliminary submission on Mt Aspiring 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

Mt Aspiring Pastoral lease is in two parts. The part, (run 715) on the true left of the East Matukituki runs high up onto the Buchanan Range in the North taking in the whole of the Mill Creek catchment and the high country adjoining it. There is a forested area running around the section close to the Matukituki River which is protected as the West Wanaka Conservation Area and currently through which cattle move to graze on the surrounds of Mill Creek above the forest. Another section of Run 715 takes in the East Matukituki Flats including the site of the old homestead and up to just beyond the Glacier Burn where it becomes part of the National Park. The rest of the property goes from Cameron Flat up the West Matukituki to a point just short of Aspiring Hut which is again National Park, but cattle have frequently been seen grazing up beyond the boundary. From Cameron Flat the property runs down to Niger Creek and up the ridge of the Harris Mountains that takes in Niger Peak, Sharks Tooth and round to beyond Shotover Saddle.

Tenure Review Outcomes

1. Ideally to ensure that the East Matukituki Flats were returned to the Crown together with the whole of the Mill Creek catchment and across to the Albertburn Saddle, all of which has outstanding ecological and landscape values, and would be a further addition to the National Park. The hut on the Albertburn saddle should be removed.

2. In practice, the loss of the grazing on the East Matukituki Flats may well be unacceptable to the lessee, and it is highly modified vegetation. Mill Creek however should be secured for the Crown and cattle must be prevented from invading the West Wanaka Conservation Area at its base and also from moving up the Glacier Burn and into the bush close to the Matukituki River at the margin of the lease.

3. In the West Matukituki and round to the Niger Face, there is evidence of major modification of the flats, but the country above 1000m has inherent ecological values and landscape values and should be secured by the Crown. Access would need to be secured to Shotover Saddle as a major tramping route over to Lochnagar and beyond. In addition any patches of olearia hectori need to be formally protected. Cattle grazing into the National Park near Aspiring Hut needs to be prevented.

8th June 2005

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Mr Tony Perrett
The Manager Tenure Review
Department of Conservation
77 Stuart Street
PO Box 5244
DUNEDIN

Dear Tony

MT ASPIRING - An early report.

This property was introduced to us at the last meeting of stake holders held in Alexandra on 23rd September, 2004 and again discussed on 12th April 2005.

We would be pleased if you would accept this report on Mt Aspiring from our branch of the Forest and Bird Society.

This property is well known to us but an inspection was made from the road in May 2005. In addition we have drawn on various publications to complete this report. In particular the Conservation Management Strategy for Otago which was adopted in August 1998. In this regard it is pleasing to note that a few of what were regarded as Management Issues in 1998, have now been rectified, i.e: (i) The securing of land and establishment of a parking area and provision for public shelter, interpretation and toilets at Raspberry Flat, (ii) The fencing off of a stand of *Olearia Hectorii* on the road to Raspberry Flat. (iii) The erection of toilets at the end of the track into the Rob Roy Glacier. This is positive but there is still plenty to do.

The Conservation Management Strategy states:-

The Conservation Management for Matukituki, are:

“To protect the high landscape and ecological values of this major access corridor and buffer to Mount Aspiring National Park and provide for an appropriate range of recreational use compatible with the character of the valley and surrounding mountains and the maintenance of high quality visitor experiences” - and.

The Priorities for Matukituki, are:

Improving the security of and opportunities for enhanced public enjoyment of this special place will be a priority.

In this report we have taken a broader view than just looking at Mt Aspiring in isolation. We have looked at what has happened in the past and what is likely to happen in the future to this and neighbouring properties. We believe this to be necessary to get a true picture and a full appreciation of the reasons for the CPL Act 1998.

1.0 General.

- This property is the main access point to the Mt Aspiring National Park.
- This property has its centre at the junction of the East and West branches of the

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Matukituki river; down as far as the Niger Burn on the west side, and Corner, or Mill Creek on the east side. In the East Matukituki river the property takes in the flats up as far as the Glacier Burn, and in the West up almost to the New Zealand Alpine Club Hut. There is also a small portion at the head of Tyndall creek and the Tunnel burn.

- It also takes in all that country to the east of the junction of the two branches of the main river, except the lower beech forest around its base which is Crown land ex New Zealand Forest Service land. This consists of the all the Mill Creek Catchment and part of the head of the Minaret Burn; the land above the beech forest in the east branch of the Matukituki river including the land on the true left of the Hester Pinney Creek up to the Albert Burn saddle.
- In most parts the boundary is merely a straight line between two known points on a map. Right from the start of pastoral farming in New Zealand - when it was assumed all land from the sea shore to the mountaintops could be farmed - even if it has been proven to be otherwise since, this was a practice that was sometimes adopted when a title was drawn up for a particular run. A major river or mountain was often used to give the run or lease its name. In this case this property came to be known as Mt Aspiring. In the nineteenth century the higher country of the South Island was not usually disposed of by way of freehold title as in those earlier days of settlement it was sometimes considered as waste land, or also, in case the land was required for closer settlement at a later date, at which time it was resumed by the Crown. On Mt Aspiring, and in the course of time that portion of the lease not being farmed, or unable to be farmed, was taken into the Mt Aspiring Park when that came into being some forty years ago; it could be said it was a form of tenure review.
- Also about that time the higher country was considered to be at risk due to erosion and the then catchment boards encouraged farmers, by the use of run plans and subsidies, to retire the higher parts of their leases. A good example of this was West Wanaka, to the south of this property; when a major portion of the higher parts of that run were fenced off and retired. This then brought about the development of the lower country and flats. Today with the knowledge land managers have acquired over time, and the greater knowledge we now have in New Zealand of the country's bio-diversity and unique eco-systems, the Crown Pastoral Land Act 1998 was introduced and enacted. Part II of the Act, the tenure review process, has come into being to enable the separation of land with inherent conservation values from that land that can be farmed in an ecologically sustainable manner and disposed of under freehold title.
- The flats have been cultivated where possible and aerial over sowing and topdressing have been undertaken. Aerial spraying has been used to remove bracken fern.

2.1 Inherent Conservation Values.

- While the valley floor has been considerably modified with exotic pasture, structures and trees, the surrounding mountains with their crags, spires and snowfields give the property its landscape character and reputation. While a lot of the landscape on the valley floor has been modified it is still a scenic landscape, or more of a working landscape.
- The Mill Creek corner is high in conservation values especially the beech forest surrounding the whole block.

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- The margins, or banks, of the two branches of the river are more of a natural landscape as they are forever changing.
- Recreation is an inherent value on Mt Aspiring Station as not only the valley floor itself is used for fishing, kayaking and walking but it is also used by trampers and mountaineers going to and returning from places further afield.
- The rare *Olearia Hectorii* is present in the valley and one area has been fenced and interpretation signs erected. There are also several plants outside the enclosure.
- The higher land above the rocky bluffs above the alluvial fans on the south face of the property appear to carry a good cover of tall tussock in reasonable order. These upper faces can only but improve if stock is removed. This strip of land below the ridge adjoins the Mt Aspiring National Park in the west, the Shotover Conservation Area and the Black Peak Conservation Area in the south.

3.0 Boundaries.

- There are very few actual fenced boundaries on this property. Natural boundaries appear to be used; either the bush at the edge of the river flats, or the rocky bluffs below the tussock uplands above the alluvial fans.
- This could change if any future management programme were to include merino sheep. Such sheep might have an inclination to climb high, or go over the Shotover Saddle.
- A boundary is being created by spraying bracken and fertilising up to the bluffs on the sunny faces from the Shotover Saddle to Niger Stream. (See Photos # 1,2 and 3)
- The Mill Creek Block should be taken as a separate unit as it is mostly surrounded by forest on Crown Land.

4.0 Discussion.

4.1 The Mill Creek block and the upper faces above the bush on the true left of the East branch of the Matukituki have been used mostly for cattle grazing (See Photos # 5 and 6). As it has high conservation values serious consideration must now be given to the advisability of continuing this practice bearing in mind that both above and below this block there is now conservation land; in the north there is Albert Burn conservation area, to the south is the West Wanaka Conservation Area and to the east is the Mt Alta Conservation Area. The effective grazing in this block start at about 1000ms and the highest point is Dragonfly Peak 2165ms. It should be noted that the narrow strip of land on the river bed between the mouth of Mill Creek stretching down to Bent Creek and beyond, remains part of West Wanaka after that property's tenure review but now has a protection covenant over it. This points to the fact that there are considerable conservation values present in this strip which would indicate to us that there are also considerable conservation values in the floor of Mill Creek valley above. The grazing of cattle cannot be ecologically sustainable in the valley, or, for that matter the upper slopes above the bush in the east branch of the Matukituki if no fertiliser is ever put on the areas. If fertiliser were to be flown into the valley it would spell the end of what is left of the bio-diversity still present.

4.2 At present the boundary between the property and the Mt Aspiring National Park behind the Old Homestead is high in the bush, starting at the north on the ridge on which the track into the Glacier Burn runs and climbs up to a point about a kilometre east of Homestead Peak and then descends to the west branch of the Maukituki River at a narrow point about one kilometre east of the Otago Boys' High School Lodge. As this is land that cannot be considered ecologically sustainable for farming due to its aspect, now or in the future, we believe it would be sensible to redraw the boundary at the edge of the bush on the valley floor, (See Photo # 4)

4.3 At present on the river flats cattle have access to the bush in many places: if the conservation values inherent in the beech forest are to be given adequate protection consideration will have to be given to having the bush fenced off wherever possible. This will certainly be necessary to stop cattle working their way up the ridge on the track into the Glacier Burn.

4.4 As it would be very difficult to fence the boundary between Mt Tyndall and the head of the Niger Stream use will have to be made of the present system of establishing a boundary between that land to become freehold and that land above and through the bluffs on the south side of the face running from Shotover Saddle around to the homestead which could be conservation land. These higher slopes would then be added to the three adjoining conservation areas. If necessary some fences could be established in any gaps that may be obvious after the surveying is done.

5.0 Access.

5.1 The map we were supplied with shows a legal road running the length of the property from the homestead up the west branch of the Matukituki river to the Aspiring hut. This will require to be retained and secured for the public to use. Any differences between the present legal road and the preferred route, or formation, can be resolved at the time of surveying.

5.2 The present marginal strips should all be retained.

5.3 Suitable access will have to be found and secured for people wishing to use the Shotover Saddle route.

5.4 Access will also have to be secured for people wishing to climb the various peaks on the south ridge of the property.

5.5 We have been given to understand that the present hut on the Albertburn Saddle will be removed if tenure review is completed.

6.0 Summary and Conclusions.

If it is ecologically sustainable the valley floor and the alluvial fans on the slopes adjoining the valley floor could be considered for disposal on a freehold basis.

We believe we have indicated in this report what is required to meet the requirements of the Conservation Management Strategy and the needs of the public at large if the following issues we have raised are attended to:

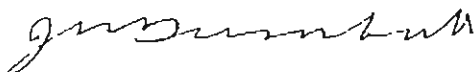
6.1 *The Mill Creek block should be returned to full Crown ownership and control.*

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- 6.3 *The boundary behind the old homestead should be brought down to the flats.*
- 6.3 *A suitable boundary between that to become freehold and that to be returned to the Crown on the south boundary be arrived at and fenced in places where required.*
- 6.4 *The legal road up the valley from the homestead to the Aspiring Hut be made secure in every way for the "Public to Enjoy"*
- 6.5 *That suitable access be arranged through the freehold land established for climbers and others to the Shotover Saddle and other peaks on the south boundary.*
- 6.6 *The hut in the Albertburn Saddle should be removed when tenure review is completed.*
- 6.7 *The edges of bush where they are boundary with the national park should be fenced.*

We thank for this opportunity to have this input at this consultation stage of the tenure review process. We await with interest to see if any preliminary proposal eventuates for Mt Aspiring.

Yours faithfully,



John L Turnbull

For Upper Clutha Branch Forest and Bird.

Attached: Map and Photographs.

4.1.3 Photographs



1, Photo shows country on which a boundary is required. Area has been sprayed, oversown and topdressed. Tussock above appears in reasonable order.



2. Photo looking east from Raspberry flat, shows developed alluvial fans below steeper ground above.



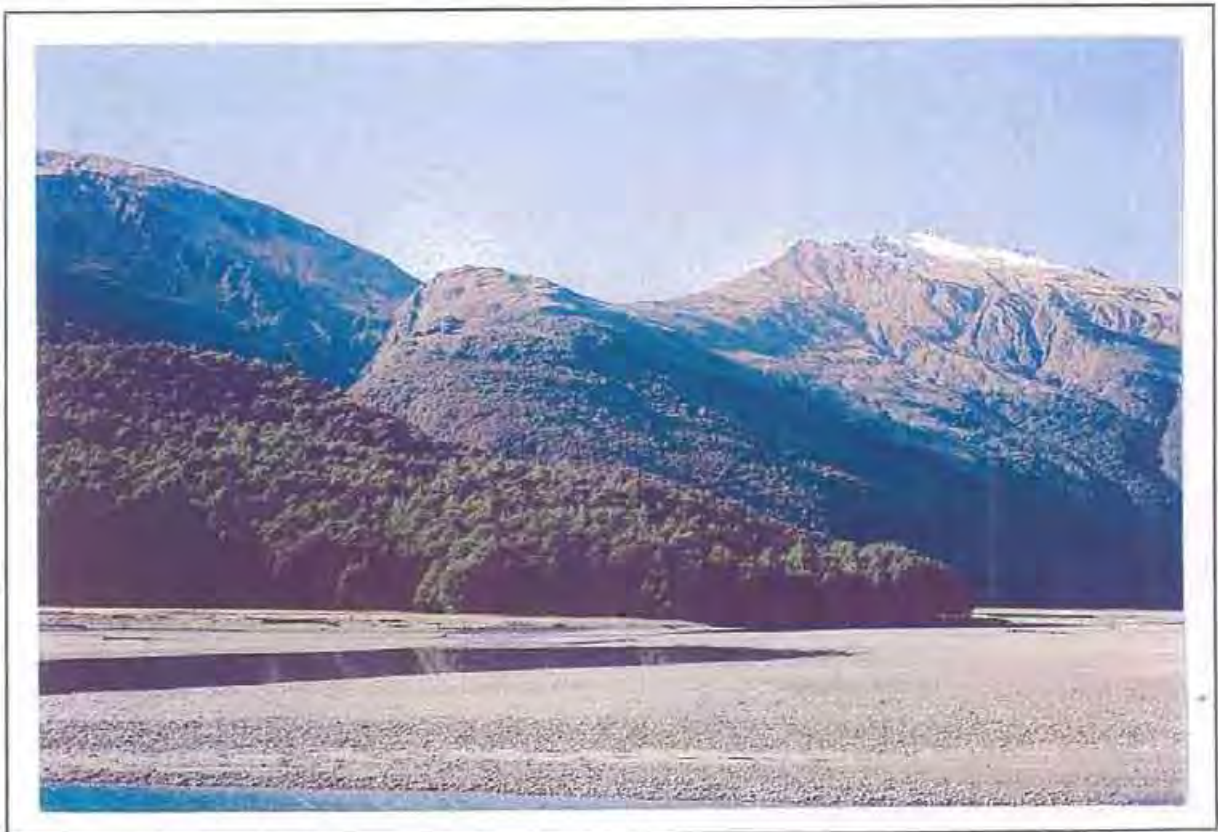
3. Photo looking up valley towards Shotover Saddle showing developed slopes above Raspberry Flat. Some fencing may be required in a few places to keep stock off higher ground. Otherwise it will be the improved country that will be required to hold the stock below that which is to be returned to the Crown.



4. The steep country behind the old homestead that should be considered for retirement.



5. Photo shows Mill Creek block with high tussock country above Crown land which should be returned to Crown.

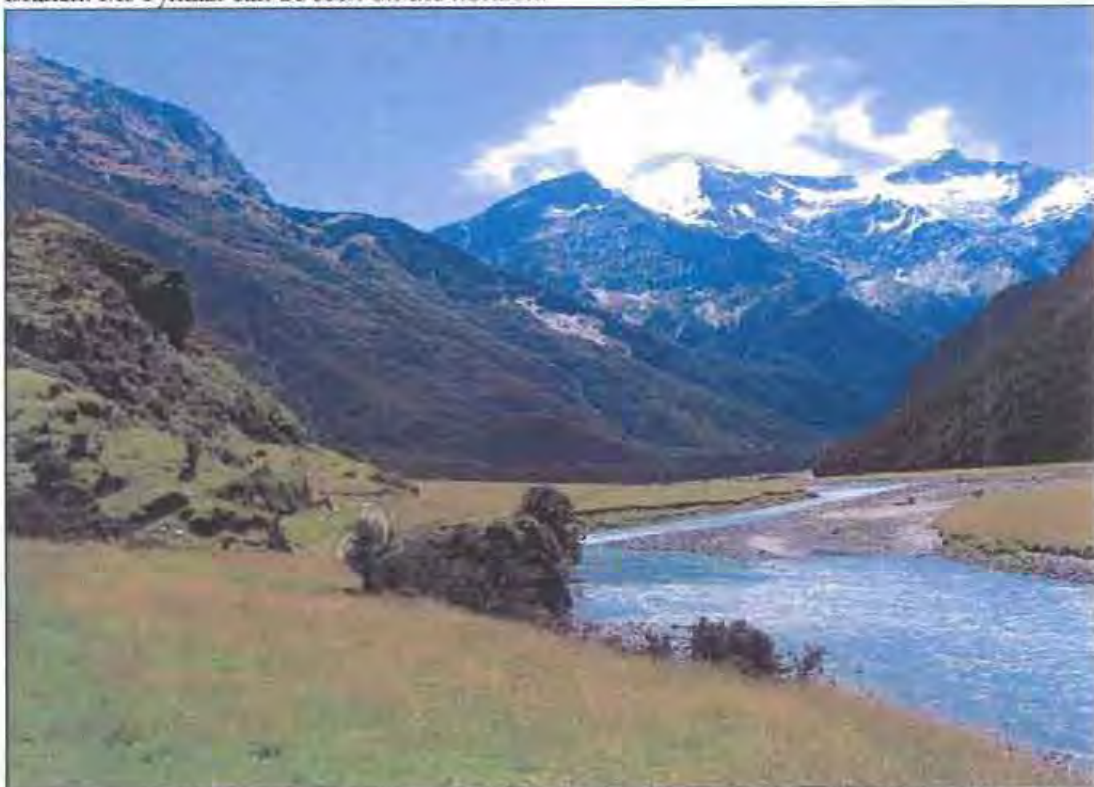


6. Photo shows bush covered Crown land through which stock must pass through to reach flats in Mill Creek above the gorge on the left.

4.1.3 Photographs



Red Rock Creek forms the Lease's western boundary on the hillslopes of Matukituki River West Branch. Mt Tyndall can be seen on the horizon.



An internationally renowned walking track follows the Matukituki River West Branch river flats within the Lease, until the Mount Aspiring National Park is reached (background). Much of the land surrounding the Lease is designated as Te Wahi Pounamu - South West New Zealand World Heritage Area.



The hillslopes of Matukituki River West Branch have been pastorally developed to about 1000 m, above which, tussockland and subalpine shrubland dominate. The demarcation line can be clearly seen. Sharks Tooth Peak is in the distance.



Cattle grazing the valley flats in Matukituki River West Branch. The cattle cause damage to accessible margins of beech forest.



Remnant diverse shrubland and beech forest can be found in rocky refuges and damp gullies in the upper Matukituki Valley West Branch. The Brides Veil Falls can be seen to the left.



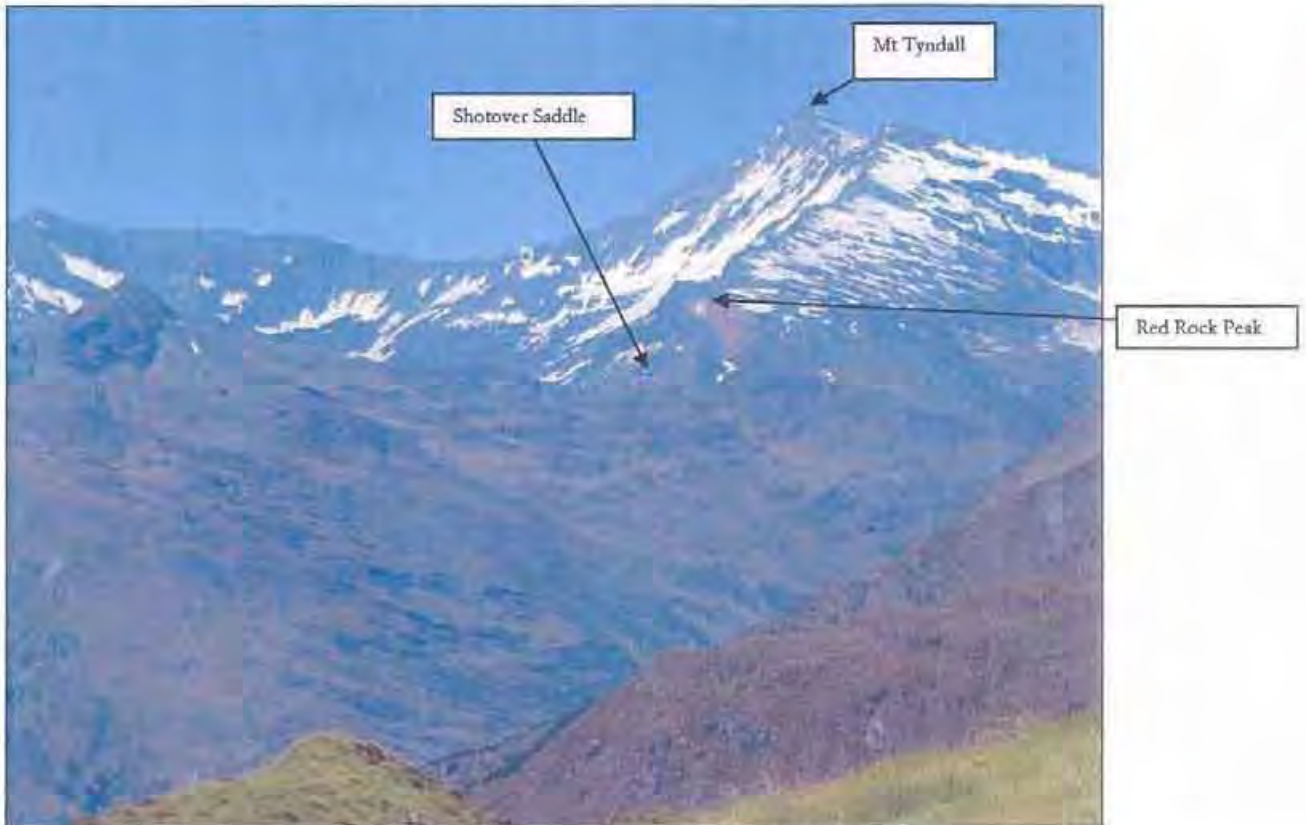
All but the actual top of Craigroyston Peak is within Mount Aspiring Pastoral Lease. The tops are within the adjoining Shotover and Black Peak Conservation Areas. These peaks can be climbed from the Matukituki Valley West Branch.



Looking down Matukituki River West Branch. The flats on both sides of the river are within the Lease, and bound the beech forest within the National Park.



A mountain tarn located near Shotover Saddle. This is a recognized tramping route for experienced trampers, traversing the mountains between the Matukituki River West Branch and the Shotover catchment.



Views of Mt Tyndall, Red Rock Peak and Shotover Saddle from Mt Eostre ridge.



View from near Red Rock Stream towards peaks within Mount Aspiring National Park.



← The upper hillslopes of the Matukituki West Branch are very steep, with frequent waterfalls, bluffs and screes. Stock do not frequent these parts of the property.

Raspberry Flat road-end carpark development. This is a popular destination for an estimated 10000 people a year who travel just to the carpark, take photos and have a picnic, before returning to Wanaka. From here, popular trips include walking up the West Matukituki Valley to Aspiring Hut and Rob Roy Glacier Walk and elsewhere within the Mount Aspiring National Park.





Views from Fog Peak into the Te Wahi Pounamu - South West New Zealand Heritage Area are spectacular.



Looking down the Matukituki River West Branch from near the Rob Roy Glacier footbridge. The hillslopes are a mosaic of developed grassland, surrounded by regenerating bracken fernfield, shrubland and bluffs.



Looking up the Matukituki River East Branch from slopes below Fog Peak. A strategic tramping route exists at the base of the bluffs, which is utilised when the Matukituki River is high. This route provides access from the Wanaka – Mount Aspiring Road via Otago Boys High School footbridge to Tititea Lodge, Glacier Burn track and beyond to Mount Aspiring National Park. The beech forest at the head of the grassy flats demarcates the Pastoral Lease-National Park boundary. The popular Glacier Burn track crosses the Lease within the beech forest on the lower slopes.



Cameron Flats. The bluffs support regenerating shrubland, while the flats are used for hay production.



The Matukituki Valley is the stronghold for the threatened tree daisy *Olearia hectorii*, with over 50% of them being found on Mount Aspiring Pastoral Lease. A suite of threatened moths which host on *Olearia hectorii* have previously been recorded on these trees.



Glenfinnan Faces from the lower slopes of Mt Eostre. The Mount Aspiring Station homestead is located on the fan amongst the trees. The slopes have been pastorally developed up to about 1100 m. Beech forest persists in the Niger and Glenfinnan Streams.



Leading spur from the confluence of East and West Branches of Matukituki River to Mt Eostre, at the southern end of Cattle Faces. Pristine snow tussockland and subalpine *Dracophyllum* shrubland occur above beech forest (located within West Wanaka Conservation Area). Rock wren have been recorded on Mt Eostre.



Mountain daisy (*Celmisia semicordata*) grow prolifically in subalpine areas of Mill Creek and upper Matukituki East Branch hillslopes.



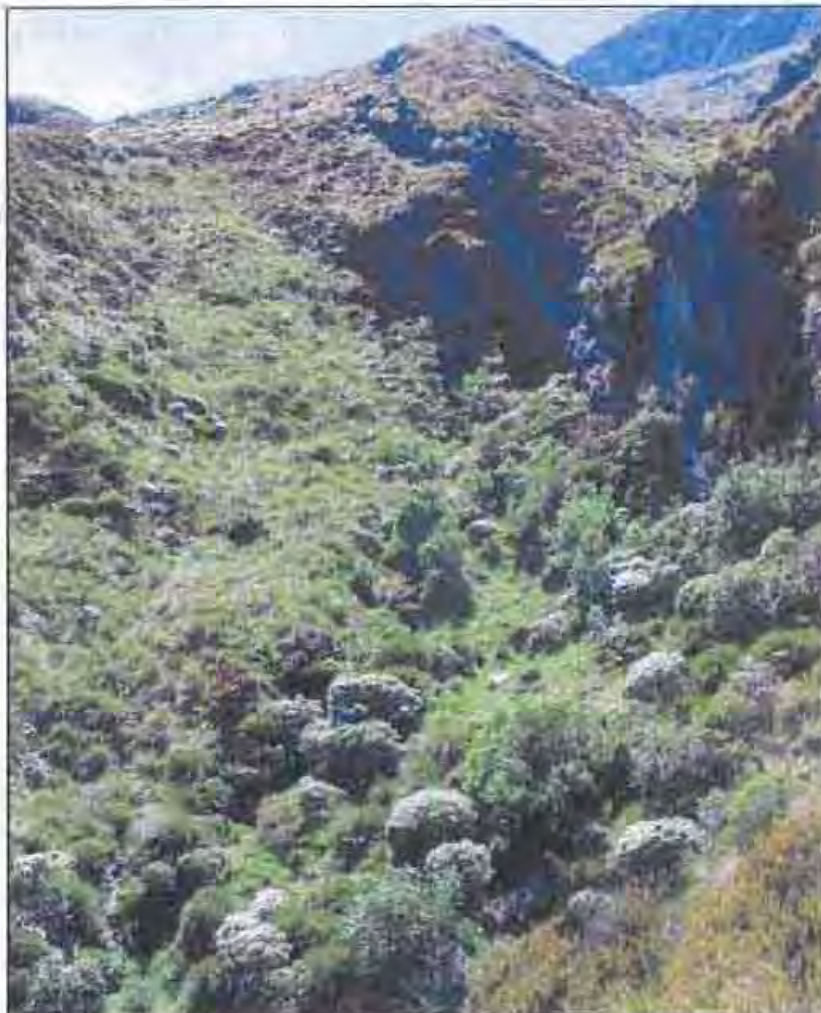
← Cattle have caused localised damage at the southern end of Cattle Faces. Here, tussocks and *Astelia* have been browsed out, and *Hieracium praealtum* is taking over.

Wetlands are particularly vulnerable to cattle damage. Here, cattle have pugged a small wetland located on the Cattle Faces above Matukituki River East Branch.





Steep gullies dissect the Cattle Faces. Snow tussockland and *Dracophyllum* subalpine shrubland are present, with herbfields growing beside the damp watercourses.



← Mature shrubland occupies some of the steep inaccessible parts of the Cattle Faces. Here *Hoberia hallyi*, *Olearia ilicifolia*, *O. bullata*, *O. arboreascens*, *Brachyglottis rotundifolia*, *Phyllocladus alpinus* and *Coprosma* spp. form a dense cover.



The northern end of Cattle Faces has been modified through a combination of burning, grazing and pastoral development. Vegetation cover has been opened up to create a grassland-shrubland.



The flowers of *Lotus* give the most developed part of Cattle Faces a yellow hue. While dominated by exotic pasture species, pockets of beech forest, fern and grey shrubland are present, which provide the potential for native woody species to regenerate.



Tititea Lodge, located at the site of the Old Homestead, is nestled amongst the amenity plantings on the river flats beside Homestead Creek in Matukinuki River East Branch. Rowan, barberry, cotoneaster and *Prunus* sp. have started to spread up the hillside behind the Lodge, and were sprayed in Summer 2005. This is a superb location for an outdoor education centre. The Homestead Peak hillslopes are within the Lease, and adjoins the National Park above ~1000 m.

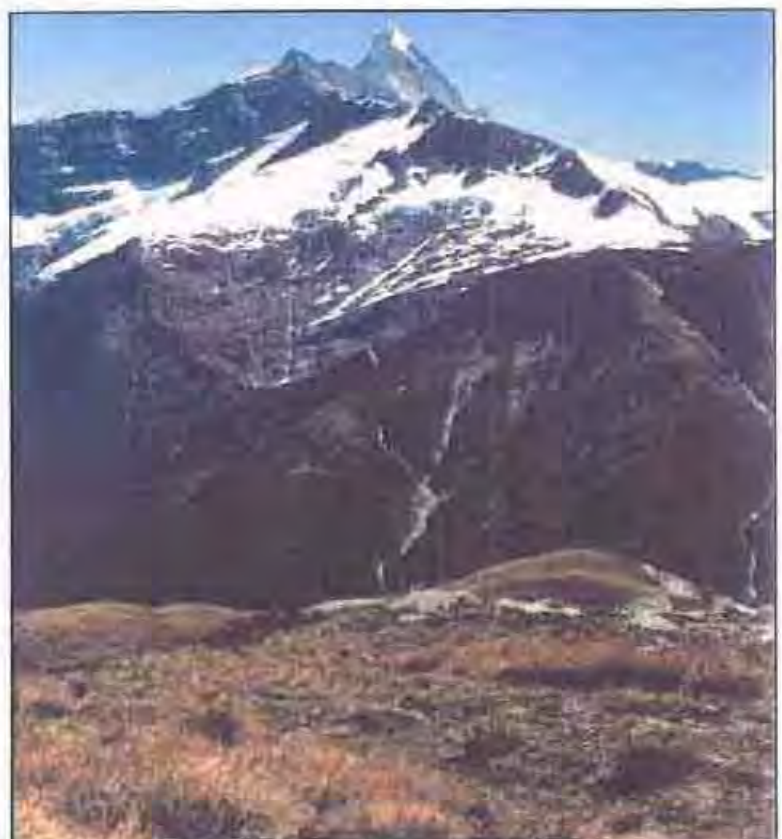


Upper slopes above Hester Pinney Creek, looking towards Albert Burn Saddle.



← The Albert Burn Saddle hut is located in an alpine environment below Dragonfly Peak. This hut is private, and is used by commercial guided heli-trekking groups.

The views from Albert Burn Saddle toward the Main Divide are outstanding.





The headwaters of the Minaret Burn is predominantly an alpine environment with an altitudinal range of 1000-2000 m. There is little evidence of any browsing or grazing, apart from a little deer sign.



The Minaret Burn supports a diverse tussock/shrubland. Slim snow tussock (*Chionochloa macra*) is common along with *Hebe hectorii*, *H. subalpina*, *Dracophyllum uniflorum*, cottonwood, *Coprosma cheesemanii* and *C. ciliata*. Large herbs are also abundant, especially *Astelia nervosa*, *A. petriei*, *Calmisia semicordata*, *C. hyalii* and Mt Cook lily



← The headwaters of Mill Creek, with Dragonfly Peak in the background. Permanent snow persists at high altitude.

Looking down Mill Creek to beech forest within West Wanaka Conservation Area. The U shaped valley has a meandering watercourse with wetlands present. The surrounding hillslopes are steep and rocky. The rest of the property can be seen in the top half of the photo.





The large weta *Deinacrida connectens* (Orthoptera: Stenopelmatidae) was found in scree near Shotover Saddle. This large iconic species is restricted to alpine habitats.