

Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review

Lease name :Mt Nimrod

Lease number :PT 094

Conservation resources report

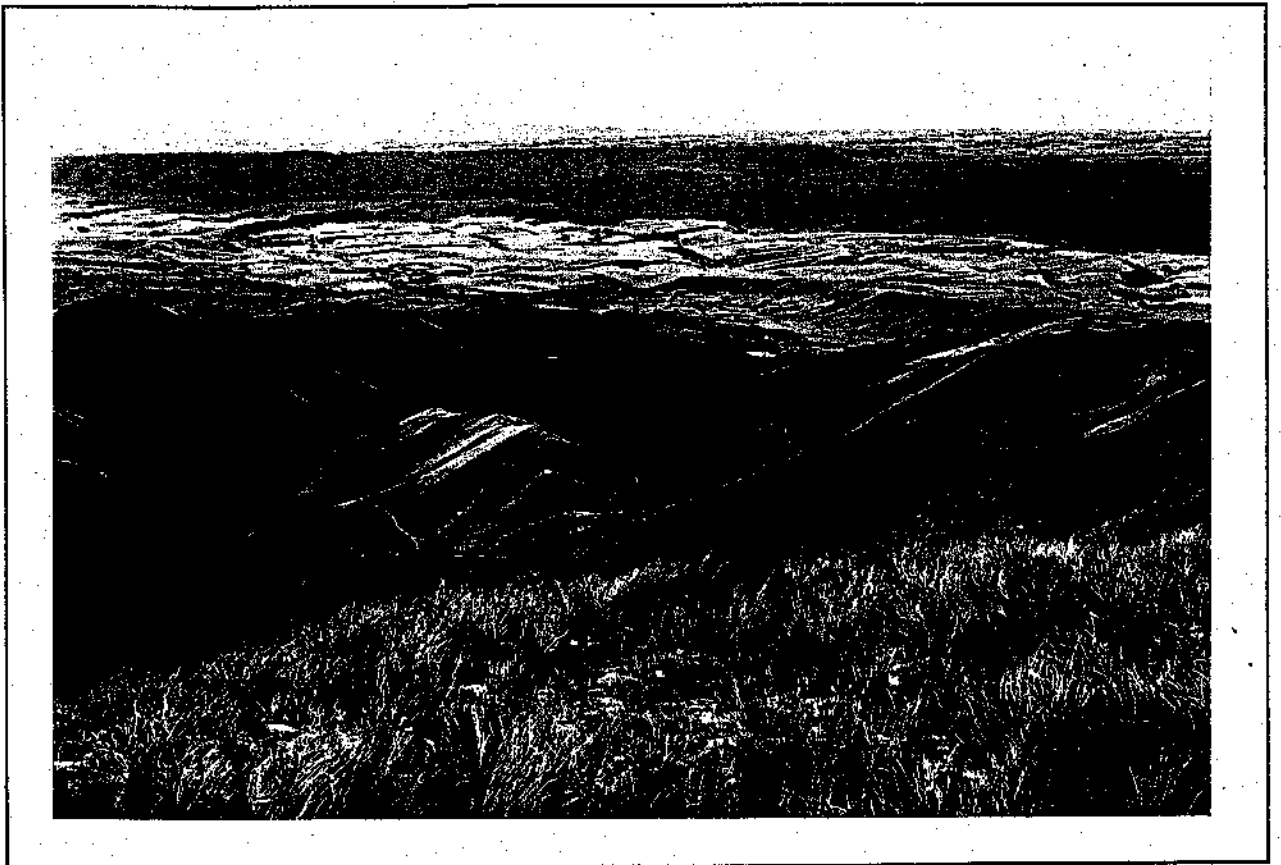
As part of the process of tenure review, advice on significant inherent values within the pastoral lease is provided by Department of Conservation officials in the form of a conservation resources report. This report is the result of outdoor survey and inspection. It is a key piece of information for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

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

Copied October 2002

CONSERVATION RESOURCES REPORT

MT NIMROD PASTORAL LEASE



RELEASED UNDER THE
FOIA ACT

DOC CONSERVATION RESOURCES REPORT ON TENURE REVIEW OF MT NIMROD PASTORAL LEASE

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Mt. Nimrod pastoral lease lies at the northern end of the Hunters Hills. The lease covers 1,816 hectares on the eastern slopes of the range. The lessee's homestead is on the eastern side of the hills some 25 km from Timaru.

Mt. Nimrod is the second highest peak in the Hunters Hills at 1525 metres. The top part of the lease was surrendered from the lease in 1995 and will be gazetted as a conservation area. Further to the west is a conservation area surrendered from the Wairua pastoral lease and to the north is a further area surrendered but not yet formally protected. South of the Mt. Nimrod pastoral lease is Stravon Station which is freehold.

To the east, at the foot of the lease, are the Matata and Mt. Nimrod Scenic Reserves. The latter reserve does not, in fact, include Mt. Nimrod. The reserves are bounded by the lease and by Mt. Nimrod station freehold land.

The pastoral lease lies in the Hunters Ecological District of the Pareora Ecological Region and is characterised by non-glaciated low ranges to 1525 metres a.s.l. No assessment has been made of the ecological district as part of the Protected Natural Areas programme.

PART 2

INHERENT VALUES: DESCRIPTION OF CONSERVATION RESOURCES AND ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

2.1 Landscape

Mt. Nimrod is the dominant peak at the northern end of the Hunters Hills and the Hunters Hills, in turn, are an important visual resource for South Canterbury.

The Mt. Nimrod lease is divided into two landscape units. The units are described below.

Landscape Unit 1:

This unit encompasses the White Rock River catchment. The unit contains a variety of landforms including the mountainlands at the head of the catchment, a series of dissected high hills in mid-catchment and large rocky outcrops at the bottom of the catchment. The variety of landforms contained within the unit is markedly different from other areas of the Hunters Hills. The lower "knobbly" landform and shrubland remnants combine to form a striking and memorable landscape.

The most conspicuous visual impact is the extensive network of farm tracks including recent zigzag tracking at quite a high altitude. A hut high on the property has been painted a neutral colour and has only a minor impact on the landscape. Remaining natural linkages are very lineal and the unit is vulnerable to further subdivision and intensification.

Landscape Unit 2

This unit is confined to the watershed of the Nimrod Stream with two tributaries, one originating from the north-east slopes of the Hunters Hills and one in a separate valley system at the northern end of the property. Similar to landscape unit one, the drainage pattern becomes confined to a deep gully after leaving the main block of hills and this entrenchment becomes more pronounced near the entrance to the Scenic Reserve.

The physical characteristics of the large valley at the northern end of the unit are quite different to the rest of the property with a series of small ridges running down to an encised stream.

The unit contains a distinguishable geological feature in the form of a fault scarp which protrudes from the rocky slopes below Mt. Nimrod.

Similar to landscape unit one this unit has been compromised by extensive tracking. However, there are coherent areas of tall tussocklands above the 875 metre level and lineal vestiges of mixed shrublands in the deeper gullies.

2.2. Landforms and Geology

The lease lies across the eastern face of the Hunters Hills. The Hunters Fault runs north/south on the eastern edge of the range and has been instrumental in causing the uplift of the range. A subsidiary fault that runs along the range itself is evident on the lease in the form of a prominent fault scarp.

The underlying rock is predominantly dark greywacke, black argillite and conglomerate with interspersed beds of red and green spilite. These rocks belong to the Torlesse group from the Permian (Paleozoic) age and are about 270 million years old.

Soils are from the yellow-brown group and are predominantly Kaikoura steepland soils comprising silt, sandy and stony loams developed under snow tussock grasslands and Hurunui steepland soils developed under fescue tussock grassland. Both these types of soil are susceptible to wind and sheet erosion if the vegetation cover is reduced.

There are two major stream catchments in the lease. Nimrod Stream drains the northern part of the lease flowing steeply at first off the hillsides and flattening out very quickly in the middle of the lease before flowing out through a gorge in Mt Nimrod Scenic Reserve. White Rock Stream, in much the same way, drains the southern part of the lease.

2.3. Climate

The annual rainfall is between 1000 and 1100 mm and is mainly from the southerly quarter. Easterly cloud drift often results in fog remaining around the tops, providing cold, moist conditions. Heavy frosts are common during winter and the occasional snowfall may cover the whole area, but usually lies only on the higher faces. The area is exposed to strong, dry, north-west winds which dry the vegetation and soils and lead to wind erosion.

2.4 Vegetation

Mt. Nimrod, itself, is a very rocky area with extensive screes and an interesting assemblage of plants including the vegetable sheep *Raoulia eximia*, *Celmisia ramulosa*, *Celmisia ramulosa*, *Dracophyllum prunum* and other cushion plants as well as large areas of *Chionochloa macra*. The lower ridges can be sharp and knobby with the rocky cones generally clothed in remnant forest as are the valley bottoms, particularly on south faces.

The lower, eastern side of the lease is bounded by two Scenic Reserves, Mt. Nimrod to the south and Matata to the north. Both have diverse, interesting vegetation which extends upstream into the Pastoral Lease. Several large streams dissect the lease, all tributaries of the Pareora River. White Rock River, and its tributaries, is the largest with Nimrod Stream almost as big. Much of the mid-altitude country is in pasture or rough pasture with native hard tussock (*Festuca novae-zelandiae*) but the upper areas above about 750 m. have a good cover of narrow-leaved snow tussock (*Chionochloa rigida*) with few or no exotic plants.

Grassland

The highest point of the lease is at the south-west end where the retirement fence is at 1350m. The whole of the upper area, below the retirement fence, has an excellent cover of narrow-leaved snow tussock varying from 50% cover on more rocky, shallow soils and dry faces with *Dracophyllum uniflorum*, *Celmisia spectabilis*, speargrass (*Aciphylla aurea*) to 70-80% cover on better sites with higher soil moisture and deeper soils. A typical range of native inter-tussock small herbs, grasses, sedges and small shrubs is associated with this community. *Dracophyllum* can dominate on rocky ridges and faces with both *Dracophyllum uniflorum* and *D. longifolium* occurring. Mosses, lichens and bare soil are present as well as the cushion plant *Coprosma perpusilla* and *Oreobolus pectinatus*. *Coprosma cheesemanii* and *Gentiana corymbifera* can be common. The good snow tussockland extends generally down to about 700m but can be found at lower altitude on some shady faces and only reaches about 850m in other places.

Around the hut at 770m the grassland is primarily exotic with hard tussock and *Celmisia*. A west to south-west slope is 20-30% *Celmisia* with brown top 10-15%, mosses 5-10%, lichens, the grass *Deyeuxia avenoides*, *Coprosma* sp. "t" and *Coprosma cheesemanii*. A south to south-east face is hard tussock 10-15% with brown top, sweet vernal, mosses, lichens, and occasional snow tussock changing to hard tussock/silver tussock with white clover, sweet vernal, brown top and Yorkshire fog and, in some places, to a *Celmisia* dominated community. Above Matata Scenic Reserve at 550-600 m. silver tussock dominates (50-60%) over exotic grasses with scattered shrubs.

Forest/shrubland

Diverse forest and shrub communities are protected in the adjacent Scenic Reserves. These communities extend upstream into the pastoral lease from both Reserves but especially above Mt. Nimrod Scenic Reserve along the White Rock River and its tributaries. The forest remnants and shrubland primarily occupy the steep, rocky slopes above most of the incised streams and especially on the south faces. They extend up to about 800m in places. Broadleaf (*Griselinia littoralis*) is the most common tree with kowhai, various *Coprosma* species (*C. propinqua*, *C. rugosa*, *C. linariifolia*, *C. sp "r"*, *C. crassifolia*, *C. rigida*, *C. pseudocuneata*), cabbage tree, mahoe (*Melicactus ramiflorus*), three finger (*Pseudopanax colensoi* var. *ternatus*), kohuhu (*Pittosporum tenuifolium*), *Hebe salicifolia* and *Melicactus* species, all relatively common. Other plants of note are the speargrass *Astelia fragrans*, *Aciphylla scott-thompsonii*, snowberry *Gaultheria antipoda* and numerous ferns. Bracken patches occur as do scattered plants of snow tussock and mountain flax. Matagouri is found but is not common here. Several silver beech (*Nothofagus menziesii*) remain in a small gully towards the north end of the lease.

2.5 Fauna

Birds appear to favour the shrubland areas with bellbird, tomtit, silver-eye and fantail noted. N Z falcon have also been seen and red polls and N Z pipit are seen in the open country. Mt. Nimrod and Matata Scenic Reserves are both S.S.W.I's (Site of Significant Wildlife Interest) and, as well as some of the above birds, contains rifleman, brown creeper and NZ pigeon.

There is a rich tussockland insect community with three species of grasshopper including *Sigaus campestris* which has a very scattered distribution and is known from only 10 sites of which the Hunters Hills is one. Other invertebrates noted include the tussock butterfly, several day flying moths, hoverflies and Katydid.

The streams contain numerous small fish including *Gallaxias*, upland bully *Gobiomorphus breviceps*, longfinned eel and brown trout. In some of the smaller tributaries koura and brook char may also be present.

In the past, wallabies (*Macropus rufogrisea*) have been a problem with there being almost as many wallabies present as sheep. Poisoning and hunting have dramatically reduced the number of wallabies but they are still present. Hares, rabbits and possums are present and possums continue to be a problem in and around the bush remnants. Wild pigs and chamois have been occasionally seen in the area.

2.6 Historic

The Maori knew Mt. Nimrod as Kaumira, and the crown settlement offer to the Ngai Tahu includes the dual recognition of both European and Maori names.

The station had a chequered early European history starting off as part of the Cannington run which was taken up in 1856 by Henry Alphonso Knight. By 1862 it had become part

of the Otaio run. In 1872 Charles Meyer added the area of land around Mt. Nimrod to Bluecliffs station and in 1879 this station was taken over by Robert Heaton Rhodes.

The farm became identified as a separate unit in 1898 when it was taken up by T Pringle. Pringle transferred the lease to Mrs K Howell in 1922 who, in turn, transferred it to her husband in 1924. Howell transferred the lease to M.R.Patterson in 1957 and in 1970 land was surrendered for the Matata Scenic Reserve. By 1985 Mt. Nimrod Scenic Reserve had also been formed. In 1995 the surrender of 487 hectares for soil conservation at the top of the lease occurred.

There are no known sites of historic value on the lease.

2.7 Public Recreation

2.7.1 Physical Characteristics

The Mt. Nimrod lease includes the headwaters of the White Rock and Nimrod Streams. The environment of the upper part of the lease has been modified but is generally dominated by natural vegetation or landscapes. The lower part of the lease has been extensively modified. It is accessible by off road vehicles, mountainbikes, horses and walkers. The area qualifies as a 4x4 Drive In Back Country Experience under the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.

2.7.2 Legal Access

A legal roadline runs from the end of Guerins Road to the northern boundary of the lease. This roadline continues over Mt. Nimrod and southwards along the Hunters Hills. Joining on to this "paper" road is another, which starts off Backline Road near Matata Scenic Reserve. This roadline may follow the old bullock track which crossed the eastern flanks of Mt. Nimrod.

A further legal roadline leaves the Backline Road south of the Mt. Nimrod homestead and connects with the pastoral lease but does not continue on into the lease. None of these legal roadlines follow routes that are practical for track development over all their length.

2.7.3 Activities

Wallaby hunting is the most popular recreational activity on the lease. The extensive tracking system allows the lessee and invited hunters to maintain a very effective control of wallabies as well as other pests such as rabbits, hares and possums. Also popular are 4wd and motorbike excursions over Mt. Nimrod and along the range to the north or south.

The lease is also used by parapenters, horseriders, mountainbikers and walkers. Mt. Nimrod Scenic Reserve is a popular picnic spot and there is an interesting circular walking route around the reserve. Matata Scenic Reserve does not have good physical access and is seldom visited.

PART 3

OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS & PLANS

3.1. Consultation

NGO's were notified of the inclusion of Mt. Nimrod in the tenure review process at meetings in August 1998 and August 1999. A submission has been received from the Federated Mountain Clubs of N.Z which calls for the retention of all legal roads and for the legalisation of the main 4wd track on Mt. Nimrod. Other NGO's supported the need to ensure the track on Mt Nimrod is legally accessible and that wallaby hunting pressure is maintained. Other comments included an observation that the tussock grasslands on Mt Nimrod regenerated very well after destocking occurred and that it would be good to see a wider range of vegetation communities protected in the reserve.

3.2. Regional Policy Statements and Plans

Not applicable.

3.3. District Plans

Mt. Nimrod lies within the Waimate District. The proposed District Plan was notified in April 1996 and decisions on the plan were released in May 1998. The lease is all on land zoned rural. The forest remnants are listed as sites of natural significance. The Nimrod Stream catchment is further zoned as the Cannington Motukaika Water Supply Protection Area.

Objectives of the Rural Zone include:

1. Enhancement and protection of the conservation values of areas of conservation significance;
2. High country land use to be managed to ensure a robust and intact vegetation cover is maintained to assist in sustaining the life supporting capacity of the soil;
3. Protection and enhancement of the outstanding landscape values of the district, and of those natural processes and features and cultural values which contribute to the overall character and amenity; and
4. Maintenance of waterways, wetlands and water supply intakes and their margins to avoid degradation of the natural values of these areas and their associated waterbodies.

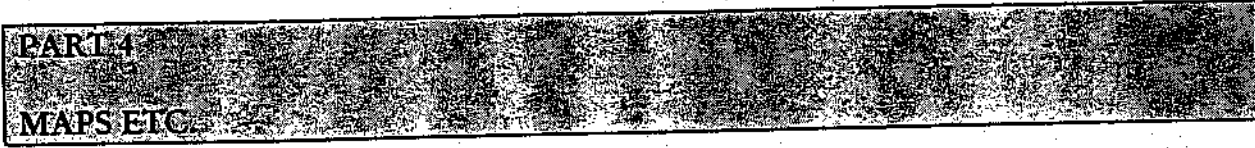
There are controls over indigenous vegetation clearance, forestry, earthworks and the erection of structures in areas over 900 metres in altitude (principally the main summit ridge) and in areas containing sites of natural significance. There are also specific rules relating to building, removal of dead stock, stocking, storage of silage, earthworks, clearance of vegetation and exotic tree planting for the water supply protection areas.

3.4. Conservation Management Strategy

The draft Canterbury Management Strategy recognises the Hunters Hills as the most seaward alpine area in Canterbury. An ecological survey of the Hunters Ecological District is recommended. Wallaby control is to be implemented in the future through a wallaby control plan.

3.5. Freshwater Fisheries Plans

Not applicable



4.1 Additional Information

- (i) Terms and conditions of qualified designations
- (ii) Terms and conditions of protective mechanism

4.2. Illustrative Maps

4.2.1. Topo/Cadastral

4.2.2. Values

Acknowledgements

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