

Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review

Lease name : REES VALLEY

Lease number : PO 311

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.

They are released under the Official information Act 1982.

March

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4.4 Federated Mountain Clubs Report on Recreation and Related Inherent Values on Rees Valley Station.



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PASTORAL LEASE TENURE REVIEW

Preliminary Report on
Recreational and Related Significant Inherent Values

REES VALLEY STATION

June 2004

Compiled for Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC) of NZ (Inc.)
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**RECREATIONAL AND RELATED SIGNIFICANT INHERENT
VALUES ON REES VALLEY STATION**

**A Preliminary Report to FMC based on field inspection
and other research to assist in the Tenure Review Process**

June 2004

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Fig. 1 The Rees is one of two major rivers with deltas at the head of Lake Wakatipu. Rees Valley homestead is located in a spectacular setting on the true left of the Rees River (middle distance left, in this view from Mt Alfred) with paddocks running down to the river and the Richardson Mountains as a backdrop to the east (extreme left in this view).

Fig. 2 This view is of the Upper Rees leading to Rees Saddle which is the northern extremity of Rees Valley Station and the highest point on the very popular Rees-Dart tramping track. Mount Aspiring National Park occupies the land on the true right of the Rees (western, or left hand side of the valley in this view). The entire Upper Rees is worthy of consideration as an addition to the National Park.

Fig. 3 This view from the Upper Rees shows Shelter Rock Hut (S) in a small clearing near edge of the bush (middle distance) and Slip Flat on the true right a little further down stream. The valley floor at the hut is at 900m while the bush line is at about 1,200m. All the land on the true left is within the pastoral lease but has significant inherent values which warrant protection by return to full Crown ownership. This would allow the scrub to recover its true ecological potential.

Fig. 4 Trampers on the Rees-Dart track take a break at Clarke Slip and enjoy the view to the Forbes Mountains. The land on the true right of the valley (the grassy flats in this view) is part of the National Park while the bush on the true left is in the pastoral lease. The bush should become conservation land and is part of the area which warrants consideration as an addition to the National Park.

Fig. 5 In the Rees Valley there are two public huts: Shelter Rock [DOC] and in this view, 25-Mile Hut [OTMC]. These huts reflect the recreational use of both the main valley and the more remote side valleys such as 25-Mile Creek. Shelter Rock Hut is well positioned in the main valley on the Rees-Dart track while 25-Mile Hut sits on a small terrace well above the valley floor, not far from the mouth of 25-Mile Creek.

Fig. 6 This view shows the impressive Mt Earnslaw and the track to Kea Basin seen across the Rees Valley from the confluence with 25-Mile Creek. Traditional access to places like Kea Basin and Lennox Falls has been available for over 100 years and continuing legal public foot access should be confirmed through this tenure review.

Fig. 7 Lochnagar is situated just over the Richardson Mountains, not far from the boundary of Rees Valley pastoral lease. It is the only lake in the northern part of the Richardson Mountains and, although access from the west (Rees Valley) is difficult, it is a constituent part of the same landscape which should be considered for addition to Mt Aspiring National Park.

Fig. 8 This view is looking down the Rees Valley with Mt Alfred on the right. The valley floor and improved pastures in paddocks are the 'engine room' of the farming system and are clearly being managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable, and are therefore suitable for freeholding.

Fig. 9 The mid-altitude lands (approx 1,000 to 1,200m) above the bushline in this view, have been classified LUC Class VII with severe limitations for pastoral use. Because it is probably uneconomic to apply the fertiliser necessary to balance the removal of essential nutrients in animal products, it is unlikely that pastoral use of these lands will be ecologically sustainable. Instead, they should be assessed on the basis of their inherent natural and landscape values.

Fig. 10 Above 1,200m there is a large area of High Country Yellow Brown Earth soils together with Alpine Steeplands on the Richardson Mountains which have been classified LUC Class VIII. These lands are entirely unsuitable for pastoral use but have very highly significant inherent natural, landscape and recreational values. These lands also have qualities which would warrant consideration for addition to the Mount Aspiring National Park.

Fig. 11 The lower and mid slopes of the valley sides present farming problems with the perpetual battle against invading fern and 'woody weeds'. Alternative land use possibilities arise because what is a 'woody weed' problem for the farmer is an indication of the potential for natural shrub and forest regeneration which

is an argument for conservation management, and a valuable conservation asset. This potential is shown by the extensive areas of mature beech forest, and by the areas of scrub which are reverting to native shrublands.

Fig. 12 Recreation potential on Rees Valley Station is not confined to the major mountains and valleys but includes many opportunities for travel in untracked side valleys. Many kiwi trampers look increasingly for such opportunities as the traditional back country is turned into 'Great Walks'. Rees Valley could provide almost endless opportunities for untracked routes in challenging places.

Fig. 13 The Station lessees have established a private skifield in the head of Invincible Creek. This is usually accessed by helicopter but has not yet proved very popular. It is however, an example of new opportunities which can be offered and, because it includes an accommodation hut, might be used on a year-round basis for high level trips or ecological studies.

Fig. 14 There are extensive areas of tussock grassland on Rees Valley Station which are generally above about 1,200m where they have only been grazed lightly and are therefore in a semi-natural state. This scene on the western slopes of the Richardsons typifies Mason's statement that "*the Richardson Mountains are predominantly tussock grassland... ..*". Because there is doubt about the sustainability of pastoral use on these lands, to maintain biodiversity, to protect significant inherent values and to provide new recreational resources, such tussock grasslands should be part of the new conservation area.

Fig. 15 Examples of remnants of beech forest are to be found in several places including the access road to Muddy Creek and in the mid reaches of the valley around Clarke Slip. In some of these places there is evidence of regeneration. It is strongly recommended that the regenerating bush should be protected as conservation area by the return of an appropriate area to full Crown ownership and control. These forested areas also indicate the potential that other areas of scrub may eventually attain.

Fig. 16 The historic remains of goldmining, including some unusual equipment, provide added interest for recreational visitors and indeed are the reason why some people come to the valley. Most of the historic sites in the vicinity of the Invincible Creek and Invincible Mine are already protected as small isolated historic reserves. It would be sensible if through tenure review, these sites were collected together into one historic reserve which might still be able to support limited stock grazing.

INTRODUCTION

This Report has been prepared following the Early Warning Meeting in September 2003 at which the properties entering the tenure review process in 2003 were introduced. Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ (FMC) made some comment at that meeting and have subsequently had an opportunity to visit and inspect the property. Following that inspection, this report was compiled from field, map and literature information. The report is offered as a contribution to the statutory consultation process undertaken by the Department of Conservation (DOC).

The Report focuses on those features of the property which are important for public recreational interests. It should be noted that while some of this interest focuses on access, the natural values and landscapes of Rees Valley are outstanding and have a fundamental impact on the recreational value of the property and greatly influence the quality of recreational experience enjoyed. It is for this reason that reference is also made to these features in this Report. In the case of Rees Valley Station, much of the property has outstanding natural, and landscape values which complement the adjoining Mount Aspiring National Park. Its recreational significance is also greater because of its proximity to the National Park and to Queenstown, which is rapidly becoming the adventure capital of NZ. There may be a case for adding a significant part of Rees Valley pastoral lease to Mount Aspiring National Park.

METHODS OF SURVEY AND ASSESSMENT

A site visit and field inspection was carried out in January 2004. This report is based on the field inspection and a general knowledge of the Rees-Dart area. It is also based in part, on information gathered from other sources. The other sources include studies of topographical and Land Use Capability (LUC) maps, consultation with recreational user groups and a knowledge of the landscapes acquired from other tramping trips in the general Wakatipu area. LUC maps have been used to assess the extent of soil types and topographic areas and their significance with respect to sustainable pastoral use. A study of "Outdoor Recreation in Otago" was undertaken by Mason (1989) and published by FMC. Reference is made to this Recreation Plan for Otago in this Report. The Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) for Otago has also been used as a source of reference.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF REES VALLEY STATION

Rees Valley Station is a large pastoral lease of almost 19,000ha situated between the Rees River and the top of the Richardson Mountains (Fig. 1). It stretches for over 25km from Rees Saddle in the north (Fig. 2) to the homestead and the Ox Burn near the mouth of the Rees River in the south (Fig. 1). Towards its southern end it straddles the Richardson Mountains and boundaries with Mt Aurum and The Branches. The homestead is situated at about 300m in the lower part of the Rees River Valley. Upstream, the valley floor rises to about 800m near Shelter Rock Hut (Fig. 3) while the open grassy flats on the valley floor rise to about 600m on the 25-Mile Terrace near where the Hunter Creek joins the Rees. Beyond this point the valley floor rises more steeply among beech forest or scrub.

The highest point on the property is Mt Ferguson (2,480m) on the Richardson Mountains which form the divide between the Rees and Shotover catchments. Other high points along the Richardsons, close to the eastern boundary, include Cleft Peak (2,250m overlooking Rees Saddle at 1,471m), Mt Aurum (2,245m) and Stair Peak (2,175m), together with many unnamed peaks over 2,000m.

Rees Valley Station is probably best known (at least among recreational people) as the place where the Rees-Dart track starts (Fig. 4). Trampers usually drive to Muddy Creek and start walking from there to Rees Saddle and thence down the Snowy and Dart Valleys. Within Rees Valley there are two public huts: Shelter Rock [DOC] and 25-Mile Hut (Fig. 5), which is maintained by the Hokonui Tramping Club for the owner, Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club (OTMC), although it is situated on Rees Valley pastoral lease.

Rees Valley has a long history of recreational use and popularity. Rees Valley became famous in the 19th century for trips for Victorian ladies to walk up to Kea Basin to enjoy the mountain scenery (Fig. 6). More recently, the valley became popular as climbing and tramping clubs became established. OTMC was established in 1923 and later took over the 25-Mile Hut which was originally built by James Dunery in 1897.

It was the base for a number of NZ Alpine Club (NZAC) climbing camps in the 1930s. It is situated on a high terrace almost opposite Lennox Falls. NZAC used the upper valley as a popular climbing base. The OSONZAC Twins in the Forbes Mountains are, for example, named after the Otago Section of the NZAC. The sheer beauty of the valley and the grandeur of Mt Earnslaw and the many other peaks are natural attractions which cannot fail to appeal to those with a love of the NZ outdoors; but there is another reason for the popularity of the Rees valley: That is the welcoming hospitality shown to trampers, climbers and others by several generations of the Scott family at Rees Valley Station.

Mason (1989) states that within the entire Richardson and Harris Mountain area (230,000ha), the landforms are predominantly mountainous with few lakes or tarns other than Lochnagar (Fig. 7) (on the Branches Station), Lake Luna and Moke Lake (on or near Mt Creighton) and Lake Dispute (on the former Closeburn pastoral lease). Although Rees Valley Station occupies most of the western faces of the Richardson Mountains there are no lakes on the property.

LAND RESOURCES OF REES VALLEY STATION

There are three main classes of land on Rees Valley Station which can be broadly described as (a) valley floors and improved pastures, (b) valley sides often covered in fern, scrub or beech forest, and (c) the open tops.

Land Use Capability (LUC) surveys show that there are only about 3,000ha (or about 15% of the property) of LUC Class VI land or better. This is characterised by Moonlight and Haast Steepland High Country Yellow Brown Earth soils on the valley sides and Matukituki recent alluvial soils on the valley floor (Fig. 8). The valley floor and improved pastures in paddocks are the 'engine room' of the farming system and are clearly being managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable, and are therefore suitable for freeholding. Class VI land on the lower slopes could be capable of productive use but fern and 'woody weeds' are a real problem for farming – see discussion below about alternative land uses.

There is a mid-altitude zone (about 1,000 to 1,200m) characterised by Moonlight Steepland soils which have been classified LUC Class VII with very limited suitability for pastoral farming (Fig. 9). This zone occupies about 30% of the property, mainly on the upper slopes of the valley sides. It is very doubtful if this land could be managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable. The reason being that there is little economic justification for fertiliser application because herbage production is limited by climatic constraints. To be ecologically sustainable, nutrients removed in animal products (especially sulphur in meat and wool) must be replenished by farming practices, or sooner or later the nutrient reserves will be depleted. Most particularly, the replenishment of sulphur from natural sources (soil parent material or atmospheric returns) is inadequate to balance losses. It must therefore, be concluded that pastoral use is unsustainable in the long term.

Above about 1,200m there are some 10,000ha (or about 50% of the property) on McKerrow and Moonlight Steepland High Country Yellow Brown Earth soils, together with Alpine Steeplands along the Richardson Mountains and associated spurs which have been classified LUC Class VIII (Fig 10). These lands are entirely unsuitable for pastoral use but have very highly significant inherent natural, landscape and recreational values. Such lands are important because of their conservation and recreational value and potential. These lands also have qualities which would warrant consideration for addition to Mt Aspiring National Park.

ALTERNATIVE LAND USE

The lower and mid slopes of the valley sides have real problems for productive land use (Fig. 11). One reason for this is the perpetual battle against invading fern and 'woody weeds', while the other is the doubtful economic justification for fertiliser use which is probably more important to maintain nutrient reserves than to promote pasture production. Fertiliser use is necessary for long term ecological sustainability, but may not be economically justified by pasture production responses, especially above about 1,000m.

Alternative land use possibilities arise because what is a 'woody weed' problem for the farmer is an indication of the potential for natural shrub and forest regeneration which the conservationist sees as a real

advantage for conservation management and a valuable conservation asset (Fig. 11). This potential is shown by the extensive areas of mature beech forest in some parts of the valley (Figs 3 and 4), and by areas of scrub which are continually trying to revert to native shrublands (Fig. 11). There is a case for this potential recovery and restoration of forest and shrubland to be recognised and encouraged by protection from burning and grazing.

Tenure review will provide an opportunity to assess the relative merits of these alternative land uses. It is the FMC view that conservation and recreation values will continue to increase while the future of sheep farming is more doubtful. Additional factors to consider are the potential to revert to natural ecosystems, the place of such natural ecosystems in the whole landscape from valley floor to range crest, and the possibility of future additions to the adjoining National Park. It is possible that a short-term grazing lease might allow for adaptation of farm management to accommodate the longer-term loss of this grazing.

FMC recommends that these alternative-use mid slopes should be returned to full Crown ownership and control, to be managed for conservation and recreation purposes for future generations of New Zealanders and tourists to enjoy to full measure, but that a short-term grazing lease over some of this area could also be considered.

RECREATIONAL USE AND POTENTIAL NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Mason (1989) has stated that *"the region [the mountain country between Lakes Wakatipu and Wanaka] provides settings for the most diverse range of outdoor recreational activities in Otago. A powerful combination of striking scenery, rich history, continental climate and close proximity to major holiday centres provides a focus for year-round and at times intensive recreation. It is a resource of major significance, providing outlets for Otago and Southland residents, as well as for other NZ residents and overseas visitors."*

The recreational significance of Rees Valley Station has long been recognised and lies in its setting between a mighty river and a magnificent mountain range, with scenic views in almost all directions. Its eastern boundary along the Richardson Mountains includes icon peaks such as Cleft Peak (2,250m overlooking Rees Saddle and Lochnagar), Mt Ferguson (2,484m), Mt Aurum (2,245m) and Stair Peak (2,175m), together with many unnamed peaks over 2,000m (Fig. 12). Just east of the boundary are the more popular climbing destinations of Centaur Peaks (2,518m) and Lochnagar (2,299m). The Rees River is one of the major rivers draining from the Main Divide which, because of the close proximity of its headwaters to that of the Dart River, makes a natural choice for a round trip (Rees-Dart, 4-5 days) from the head of Lake Wakatipu.

Recreation potential on Rees Valley Station is not confined to the major mountains and valleys but includes many opportunities for travel in untracked side valleys. Many kiwi trampers look increasingly for such opportunities as the traditional back country is turned into 'Great Walks'. Rees Valley could provide almost endless opportunities for untracked routes in challenging places (Fig. 12).

Most prominent among the scenic views must be Mt Earnslaw which, with its challenging twin peaks, has been a draw card for climbers for over a hundred years and is the 'crown' of the valley (Fig. 6). Although not actually situated on Rees Valley Station, it dominates the entrance to the valley and stands proud above the entire valley throughout most of its 30km length. Great mountains dominate the skyline throughout the Rees-Dart trip and, in the Rees valley, include Mt Clarke and the Forbes Mountains as well as Mt Earnslaw itself on the true right, and the many peaks along the Richardson Mountains on the true left of the valley.

The true right of the valley, across the river from Rees Valley Station, offers opportunities to visit Lennox Falls and Kea Basin (Fig. 6) or cross Lennox Pass into the upper Earnslaw Burn. On the true left, on Rees Valley pastoral leasehold land there are limited opportunities as Mason (1989) has pointed out: *"The Richardson Mountains provide an almost unbroken obstacle for access, with most tramping activity tending to be confined to the Shotover and Arrow catchments. The main extended through routes are Rees Valley via Sixteen Mile Creek, or Duncans Flat-Cashes Flat-Twelve Mile Creek."*

Crossings have been made to Lochnagar (Fig. 7) over high and difficult routes but there is a better (but still difficult) route via the upper Snowy Creek as Mason has observed: *"The upper Snowy provides one of very few routes to Lochnagar. This involves a high-level traverse through the bluffed Pine Creek faces and a descent to the loch outlet, this being the only practical route between the Snowy and the head of the Shotover."*

The best known, and most popular recreational activity in the valley is of course, walking the Rees-Dart Track (Fig. 4) which is approaching the popularity of the Routeburn now that the capacity of the latter is limited by the booking system. In part, this popularity is related to its proximity to Queenstown which is fast becoming the outdoor adventure capital of NZ. While much of Queenstown tourism is related to thrill-seeking activities, the increasing numbers of hikers and trekkers are displacing traditional kiwi users to more remote destinations (Fig. 12). It is important that a wide range of opportunities remain available for all recreational users and especially those who are attracted to the mountains. New opportunities on Rees Valley Station can help to satisfy this need (Fig. 12).

It is noteworthy that Dick Hubbard of Hubbards Foods Ltd. has recently enthused in one of his 'Clipboard' newsletters about the Rees-Dart track: *"Those river valleys, bush covered hills, and glacier covered mountains are beautiful, just beautiful. And how that beauty is so much more focused when it is 'discovered' on foot rather than through a car window."*

The Station lessees have recently established a private skifield in the head of Invincible Creek (Fig. 13). This is usually accessed by helicopter but has not yet proved very popular. It is however, an example of new opportunities which can be offered and, because it includes an accommodation hut, might be used on a year-round basis for high level trips or ecological studies.

FMC is in the business of promoting those kinds of recreation which involve facing nature on nature's terms, and without motorised assistance. The tenure review of Rees Valley Station provides an opportunity to add to the number and range of such opportunities available in the Queenstown - Lake Wakatipu area (Fig 12).

We believe that tenure review needs to take a wider view than just what is available within the boundaries of the lease under review. We would argue that factors which relate to an overflow of recreational activities onto neighbouring properties should also be taken into consideration, and provision made for access where appropriate. On Rees Valley Station these factors would include the following:-

- The situation adjacent to Mt Aspiring National Park.
- The possibility of incorporating parts of Rees Valley into the National Park.
- The possibilities for untracked travel on the Richardson Mountains and over into the Shotover catchment.
- Exploration of the historical sites in the lower Rees Valley, including scheelite mines on nearby properties.
- Increasing public use of the Invincible skifield not only in winter, but also as a base for sub-alpine exploration and ecological study throughout the year.

FMC believes that the recreational importance and value of leases in the tenure review process should be assessed not only on its present usage but also on its potential. This is because current usage is usually less than its potential for a number of reasons. Unlike many other pastoral leases undergoing tenure, public use of Rees Valley has long been extensive, but there is significant potential for greater use and it is the full range of possibilities which should be considered during this tenure review.

There is also significant potential for commercial guided recreation based on Rees Valley. This could include both winter and summer activities based at the Invincible Hut and perhaps from accommodation near the homestead. Such activities could still be operated by the holders of Rees Valley as a concession over newly created conservation land, assuming that much of the high country is returned to full Crown ownership.

SIGNIFICANT INHERENT VALUES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR RECREATION

This report focuses on those features of Rees Valley Station which are known to be important for public recreational interests. It should be noted that while some of this interest focuses on access, the natural values and landscapes of the areas concerned have a fundamental impact on the recreational value of the back country. For a variety of reasons, including the hospitable attitude of generations of the Scott family, and the traditional freedom of access to Lennox Falls, Kea Basin and the Rees Saddle on the Rees-Dart track, access has not been a problem on Rees Valley Station. This situation could change drastically if the Station passed into the hands of overseas or unsympathetic owners.

It has been stated above that Rees valley has been known as a tourist and recreation destination for over a hundred years. This is largely because of the quite outstanding natural values and landscapes and variety of recreational opportunities located in and around the valley (Figs 3, 4 and 6). The views to be had from the many vantage points and opportunities for exploring not only the natural features but also the relics of the gold mining era, also greatly influence the quality of recreational experience enjoyed. It is for this reason that reference is also made to natural, historic and landscape values of this property.

The outstanding inherent value of Rees Valley is the splendour of a major river and adjacent mountainous country so close to the head of Lake Wakatipu and Queenstown (Fig. 1). *The striking landscape of the region is a major component of the total recreational experience (Mason 1989).*

Mason (1989) has described the vegetation of the area as follows:- *"The vegetation on the Richardson Mountains is predominantly tussock grassland [Fig. 14], but there are also considerable areas of sub-alpine shrubland, beech forest, and high-alpine vegetation. Alpine fellfield and shingle scree [Fig. 10] are also extensive at higher altitudes in the Richardsons, in some places extending well downslope. These normally only support sparse vegetative cover. Alpine cushion communities are more localised. Tall tussock grassland dominated by the narrow-leaved snowgrass is the dominant vegetation above 900 m on sunny faces, or 600 m on shady faces, and may grow up to 1,900 m on stable slopes. Sub-dominant species may include varying proportions of hard tussock, blue tussock, dracophyllum species and alpine herbs."*

"Mountain beech appears to be a relict of a much more extensive, possibly continuous forest cover under wetter climatic conditions. It is now largely confined to shady aspects and in gullies. The presence of widely scattered stands of silver beech is another indicator of relict status. Pre-European fires, burning of adjacent grasslands, and timber extraction for mining and domestic purposes has reduced forest to less than 2 percent of the region. Under grazing pressure from both feral and farm animals, the future of many of these forests is precarious. In several localities beech forest is rapidly invading manuka when left undisturbed by fire" (Mason 1989).

"Bracken fern grows as a dense low altitude belt along the Lake Wakatipu and lower Rees faces of the Richardsons. It appears to have succeeded from forest destroyed by fires dating back to pre European times."

"At lower altitudes pastoral activity has either partially destroyed or replaced tall tussock grassland with hard tussock or in places silver tussock. Exotic sward grasses such as browntop and sweet vernal have become dominant on many valley floors, terraces and sunny faces, as a result of the depletion of low altitude short tussock grassland."

The LINZ Scoping Report indicates that there is strong conservation interest in the property which includes *"extensive tussocklands, native cushion- and herb-fields, unmodified alpine areas, pockets of native beech forest and high recreation and public access interest"*.

Examples of remnants of beech forest are to be found in several places including the access road to Muddy Creek (Fig. 15) and in the mid reaches of the valley Clarke Slip (Figs. 3 and 4). In some of these places there is evidence of regeneration. It is strongly recommended that the regenerating bush should be protected as conservation area by the return to full Crown ownership and control.

The historic remains of goldmining, including some unusual equipment, provide added interest for recreational visitors, and indeed are the reason some people come to the valley (Fig. 16). Most of the historic sites in the vicinity of the Invincible Creek and Invincible Mine are already protected as small isolated historic reserves. It would be sensible if, through tenure review, these sites were collected together into one historic reserve which might still be able to support limited stock grazing.

Most of the land above about 1,000 to 1,200m has been classified LUC Class VIII or VIIe which is either entirely unsuited (Class VIII) or of very limited suitability (Class VII) for pastoral farming (Figs 10, 13 and 14). Because sheep grazing on high country soils is a depletive process, it is most unlikely that the land could be managed in a way that would *"promote the management... in a way that is ecologically sustainable"* (as required by the CPL Act 1998) unless nutrient removals are balanced by fertiliser (nutrients, especially sulphur) applications. Such applications are not likely to be economically justifiable above about 1000m because of climatic limits on growth potential. The alternative is that these lands are restored to full Crown ownership and control to be managed by DOC for conservation and recreation purposes. The removal of grazing and burning would allow recovery of formerly more extensive ecosystems such as shrublands and eventually forest on the lower slopes, and alpine cushionfields higher up. The tussock grassland would also benefit from the cessation of grazing and their vigour would improve. FMC favours this approach.

Based on the discussion above in the section on alternative land use, FMC has concluded that actual and potential conservation values are higher than the productive value of the same land on the low to mid valley sides. Such values include present and potential conservation and recreation values and the proximity of Rees Valley to Queenstown and Mt Aspiring National Park. Furthermore, we believe that future conservation values are likely to increase more than production values. A short-term grazing lease might be considered to allow the transition from the present farming use to conservation.

AREAS TO BE PROTECTED

There are two major reasons why FMC believes that significant areas of Rees Valley Station, on most land above about 1,000 to 1,100m on the western flanks of the Richardson Mountains, should be restored to full Crown ownership and control. The first of these is the existing significant inherent natural, landscape and recreational value and the potential of the existing tussock grasslands, herbfields, shrublands and bush remnants to recover from past grazing and burning and regain their former ecological status. The second is that they cannot be managed in a way that promotes ecologically sustainable management (as required by the Act) without nutrient replenishment (see the discussion above).

FMC therefore recommends that these lands (generally of LUC Class VIII and VIIe, above about 1,000 to 1,100m) should be restored to full Crown ownership and control to be managed by DOC for conservation and recreation purposes.

Future use of the 'alternative-use' lands on the lower to mid slopes on the valley sides has been discussed above. On balance, FMC believes that the best long-term use of these lands will be for conservation and recreation purposes and recommends that through tenure review they be returned to full Crown ownership and control, with a possible short-term grazing lease to permit the transition in land use.

ACCESS REQUIREMENTS

We note that *"the securing of public access to and enjoyment of reviewable land"* is one of the statutory objectives of tenure review. Although there have been no problems with recreational access in the past, there is no guarantee that this would continue to be the case under some new freehold ownership. The following access provisions will be required:-

- Confirmation of the formation on the ground as the legal road up Rees Valley, at least as far as the terrace opposite Hunter Creek.
- Guaranteed public foot and non-motorised access (perhaps as an easement) over the entire length of the Rees-Dart Track over any new freehold land established through tenure review.

- Guaranteed public foot and non-motorised access (perhaps as an easement) up Twelve Mile Creek (or Ox Burn) to Cashes Flat, over any new freehold land established through tenure review.
- Guaranteed public foot and non-motorised access (perhaps as an easement) to 25-Mile Creek and 25-Mile Hut and Big Devil Hut, over any new freehold land established through tenure review.
- Guaranteed public foot access (preferable as a continuation of the wander-at-will access arrangement) across the Rees River Flats to Lennox Falls and the Kea Basin Track, and to the river itself for fishing, over any new freehold land established through tenure review.
- Guaranteed public foot and non-motorised access (perhaps as an easement) to the Historic Reserve(s) at the Invincible Mine site(s), over any new freehold land established through tenure review.
- The laying off of marginal strips along all qualifying waterways.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (CMS) FOR OTAGO

There are important statements in the Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) for Otago, in which the Queenstown Area is recognised as a Special Place. The objective for this area which includes Rees Valley Station is:-

"To recognise the value of an extensive protected area system around Queenstown as a basis for the protection of amenity, landscape, natural, cultural and historic resources of significance to Queenstown and New Zealand and for recreational enjoyment. Then to implement and protect that system."

The implementation methods by which the objective would be achieved include:-

"Walkways will be secured and gazetted where not on land administered by the Department. Walking tracks will be upgraded to prescribed standards for short walks and will be maintained. Opportunities such as tenure review will be taken to negotiate expansion of the network, close gaps in the lake edge and backcountry continuous walkways. Support will be given to walkways in the rural basin." And

"Opportunities arising out of negotiations for tenure review of pastoral leasehold properties will be taken in order to improve the protected area system and access to it."

Finally, it should be noted that the stated priority for the Queenstown Special Place is: *"The protection and enhancement of indigenous natural resources and recreational opportunities in natural walk-in settings on the higher ground around Queenstown will be the priorities in this Special Place."*

CONCLUSIONS

The tenure review of Rees Valley Station is important as it provides an opportunity to secure public use and enjoyment over an area of outstanding scenic and recreational value; an area which also has significant landscape and historic gold mining features.

The main conclusions reached by this report are as follows:-

1. Much of Rees Valley Station has outstanding natural and landscape values which complement the adjoining Mt Aspiring National Park. Its recreational significance is greater because of its proximity to the National Park and to Queenstown which is rapidly becoming the adventure capital of NZ. There may be a case for adding a significant part of Rees Valley Station to Mount Aspiring National Park.

2. This review provides an opportunity to increase the range of opportunities available in the general Lake Wakatipu/Queenstown area where there is increasing demand for recreational opportunities. This is due to the increasing numbers of tourists, related to both the general growth in tourism and the sealing of the Glenorchy-Queenstown Road. It can provide opportunities to cater for the demands of tourists and to satisfy a real need for true back country and remote experiences for traditional kiwi recreation seekers too.
3. The review is also an opportunity to ensure that the quality of recreational experience on those lands is maintained by recognising and protecting the significant natural, landscape and historic values described in this report.
4. Rees Valley has a long history of recreational use and popularity, starting in Victorian times and intensifying with Alpine Club and tramping club activity in the 1930s. NZAC has long used the upper valley as a popular climbing base and the OSONZAC Twins in the Forbes Mountains are named after the Otago Section of the NZAC. The sheer beauty of the valley and the grandeur of Mt Earnslaw and the many other peaks are natural attractions which cannot fail to appeal to those with a love of the NZ outdoors.
5. There are three main classes of land on Rees Valley Station which can be broadly described as (a) valley floors and improved pastures, (b) valley sides often covered in fern, scrub or beech forest, and (c) the open tops. (a) is probably suitable to become freehold, and (c) should be returned to full Crown ownership and control to be managed for conservation and recreation purposes. Alternative land uses may be possible on category (b) land.
6. Category (b) land on valley sides may be capable of sustainable pastoral use but 'woody weeds' will be a continuing problem. 'Woody weeds' are also an indication of ecological restoration potential. On balance, FMC recommends return to full Crown ownership to allow vegetative regeneration but with the possibility of a short-term grazing lease to allow farming adjustment to the loss of grazing land.
7. The recreational significance of Rees Valley Station lies in its setting between a mighty river and a magnificent mountain range, with scenic views in almost all directions. Its eastern boundary along the Richardson Mountains includes icon peaks such as Cleft Peak, Mt Ferguson, Mt Aurum, and Stair Peak. Just east of the boundary are the more popular climbing destinations of Centaur Peaks and Lochnagar. When the high country (LUC Class VIII which is entirely unsuitable for pastoral use) is returned to the Crown these climbing destinations will become freely available for public recreational use.
8. The best known, and most popular recreational activity in the valley is of course, walking the Rees - Dart Track which is approaching the popularity of the Routeburn now that the capacity of the latter is limited by the booking system. Public access (either as legal road or easement for foot and non-motorised vehicle use) over this traditional route must be maintained if the valley floor becomes freehold.
9. Despite the pressures of tourism and commercial use, it is important that a wide range of opportunities remain available for all recreational users, and especially those who are attracted to the mountains. The Station lessees have recently established a private skifield in the head of Invincible Creek. This is an example of new opportunities which can be offered and which might be used on a year-round basis for high level trips or ecological studies. It could continue as a concession even if the land is returned to Crown ownership.
10. The following factors should be born in mind when considering the outcomes of tenure review on Rees Valley Station in the wider context of the Rees Valley, the Richardson Mountains and Mount Aspiring

National Park:-

- The situation adjacent to Mt Aspiring National Park.
 - The possibility of incorporating parts of Rees Valley pastoral lease into the National Park.
 - The possibilities for untracked travel on the Richardson Mountains and over into the Shotover catchment.
 - Exploration of the historic sites in the lower Rees Valley including scheelite mines on nearby properties.
 - Increasing public use of the Invincible skifield not only in winter but also as a base for sub-alpine exploration and ecological study throughout the year.
11. For a variety of reasons, including the hospitable attitude of generations of the Scott family, and the traditional freedom of access to Lennox Falls, Kea Basin and the Rees Saddle on the Rees-Dart track, access has not been a problem on Rees Valley Station. This situation could change drastically if the Station passed into the hands of overseas or unsympathetic owners. Public access must be guaranteed into the future. Individual routes which should provide guaranteed public access are listed above under the heading 'Access Requirements'.
 12. Examples of remnants of beech forest are to be found in several places including the access road to Muddy Creek and in the mid reaches of the valley around 25-Mile Creek. In some of these places there is evidence of regeneration. It is strongly recommended that the regenerating bush should be protected as conservation area by the return of an appropriate area to full Crown ownership and control.
 13. Most of the historic sites in the vicinity of the Invincible Creek and Invincible Mine are already protected as small isolated historic reserves. It would be sensible if, through tenure review, these sites were collected together into one historic reserve which might still be able to support limited stock grazing.
 14. The outcome of the tenure review of Rees Valley Station, if it includes the important recreation and conservation recommendations included in this Report, could contribute significantly to the achievement of the objective declared for the Queenstown Special Place in the CMS for Otago.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FMC is grateful for assistance from the runholders, the Scott family and the Crown agents in making this assessment possible. The site inspection was carried out in January 2004 and FMC is very grateful to the runholders for co-operation and granting permission for access, and to DTZ New Zealand staff for making the appropriate arrangements. FMC is also grateful to staff of DTZ for access to LUC maps of the area.

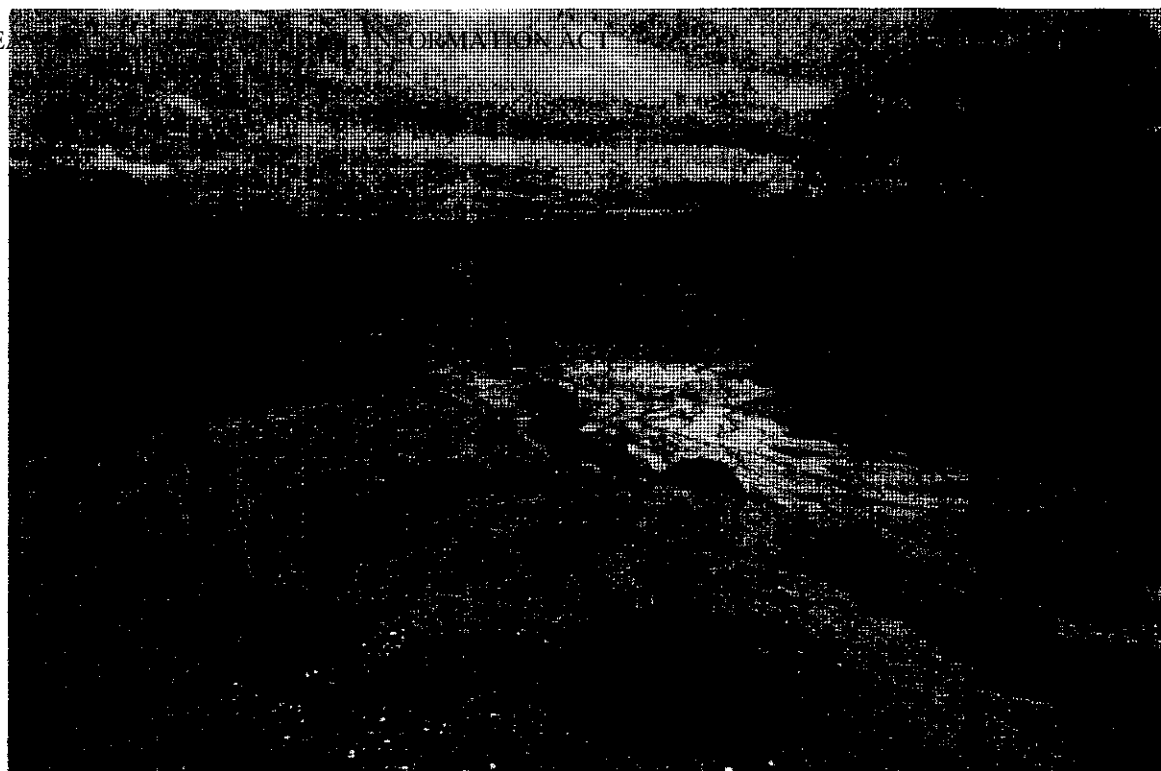


Fig. 1 The Rees is one of two major rivers with deltas at the head of Lake Wakatipu. Rees Valley homestead is located in a spectacular setting on the true left of the Rees River (middle distance left, in this view from Mt Alfred) with paddocks running down to the river, and the Richardson Mountains as a backdrop to the east (extreme left in this view).

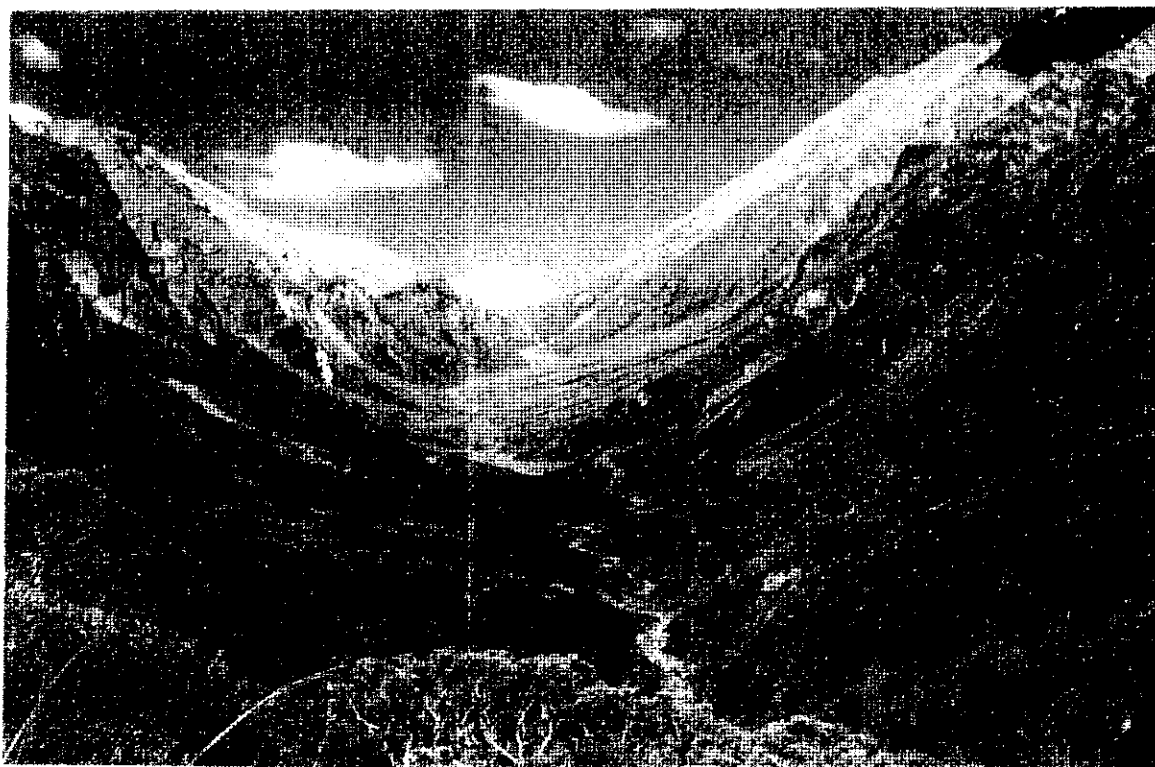


Fig. 2 This view is of the Upper Rees leading to Rees Saddle which is the northern extremity of Rees Valley Station and the highest point on the very popular Rees-Dart tramping track. Mount Aspiring National Park occupies the land on the true right of the Rees (western, or left hand side of the valley in this view). The entire Upper Rees is worthy of consideration as an addition to the National Park.

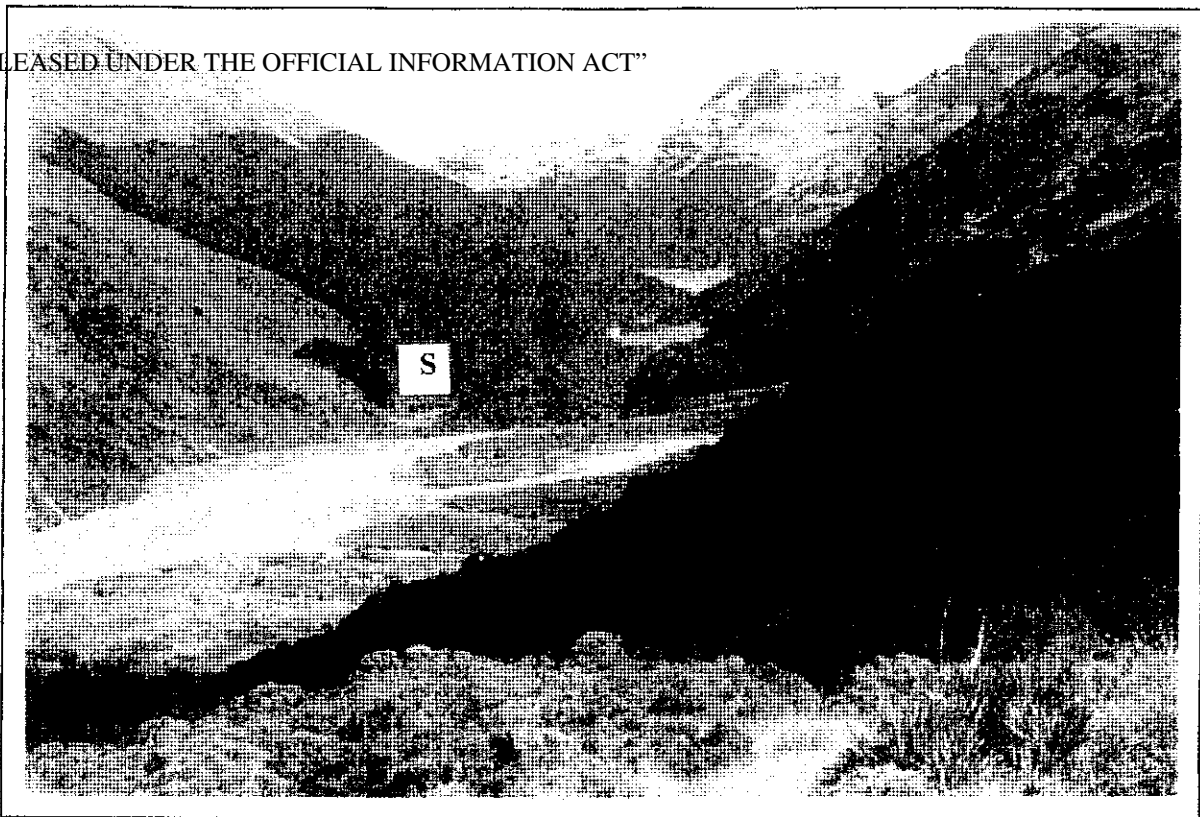


Fig. 3 This view from the Upper Rees shows Shelter Rock Hut (S) in a small clearing near edge of the bush (middle distance) and Slip Flat on the true right a little further down stream. The valley floor at the hut is at 900m while the bush line is at about 1,200m. All the land on the true left is within the pastoral lease but has significant inherent values which warrant protection by return to full Crown ownership. This would allow the scrub to recover its true ecological potential.

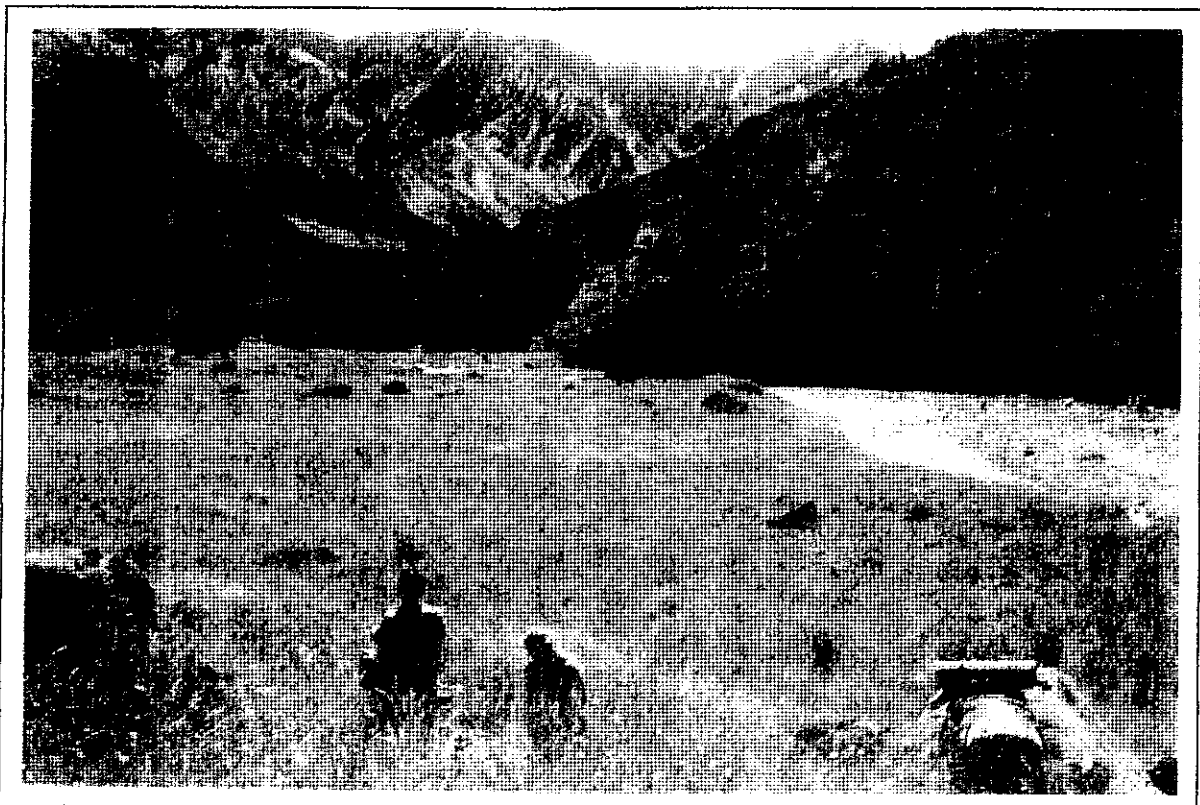


Fig. 4 Trampers on the Rees-Dart track take a break at Clarke Slip and enjoy the view to the Forbes Mountains. The land on the true right of the valley (the grassy flats in this view) is part of the National Park while the bush on the true left is in the pastoral lease. The bush should become conservation land and is part of the area which warrants consideration as an addition to the National Park.

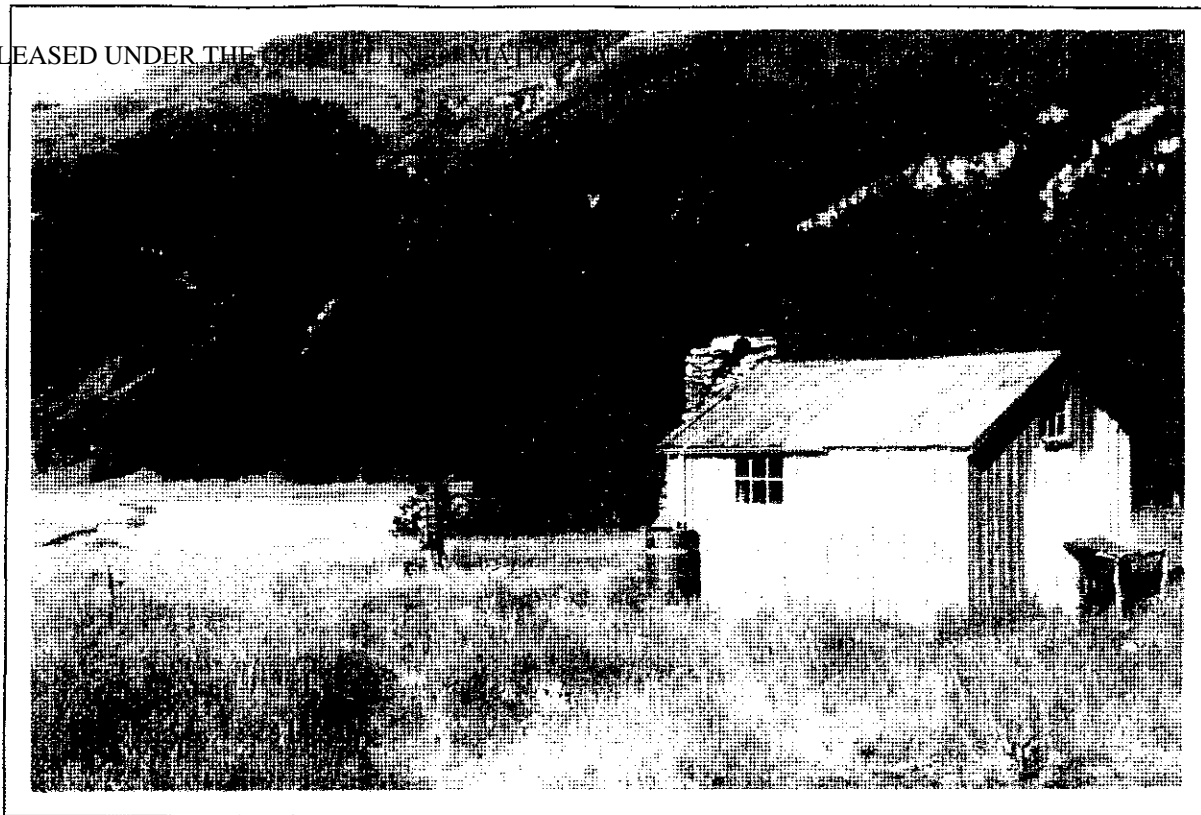


Fig. 5 In the Rees Valley there are two public huts: Shelter Rock [DOC] and in this view 25-Mile Hut [OTMC]. These huts reflect the recreational use of both the main valley and the more remote side valleys such as 25-Mile Creek. Shelter Rock Hut is well positioned in the main valley on the Rees-Dart track while 25-Mile Hut sits on a small terrace well above the valley floor, not far from the mouth of 25-Mile Creek.



Fig. 6 This view shows the impressive Mt Earnslaw and the track to Kea Basin, seen across the Rees Valley from the confluence with 25-Mile Creek. Traditional access to places like Kea Basin and Lennox Falls has been available for over 100 years and continuing legal public foot access should be confirmed through this tenure review.



Fig. 7 Lochnagar is situated just over the Richardson Mountains, not far from the boundary of Rees Valley pastoral lease. It is the only lake in the northern part of the Richardson Mountains and although access from the west (Rees Valley) is difficult, it is a constituent part of the same landscape which should be considered for addition to Mount Aspiring National Park.

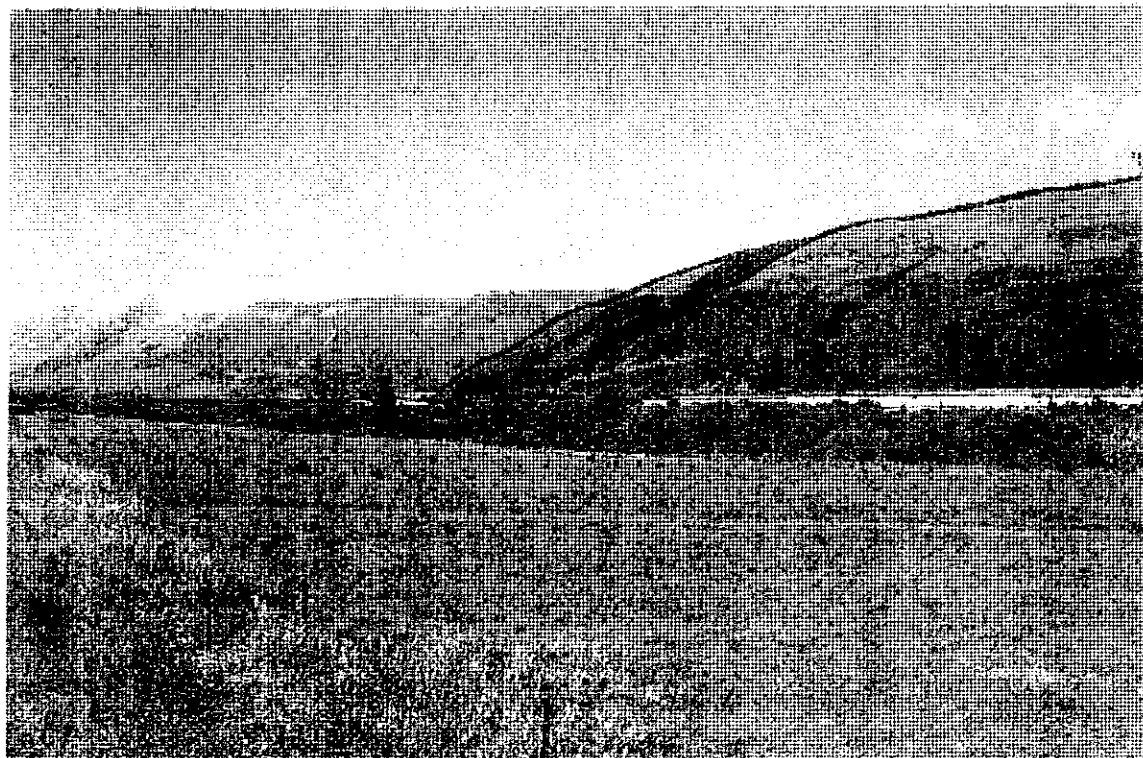


Fig. 8 This view is looking down the Rees Valley with Mt Alfred on the right. The valley floor and improved pastures in paddocks are the 'engine room' of the farming system and are clearly being managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable, and are therefore suitable for freeholding.

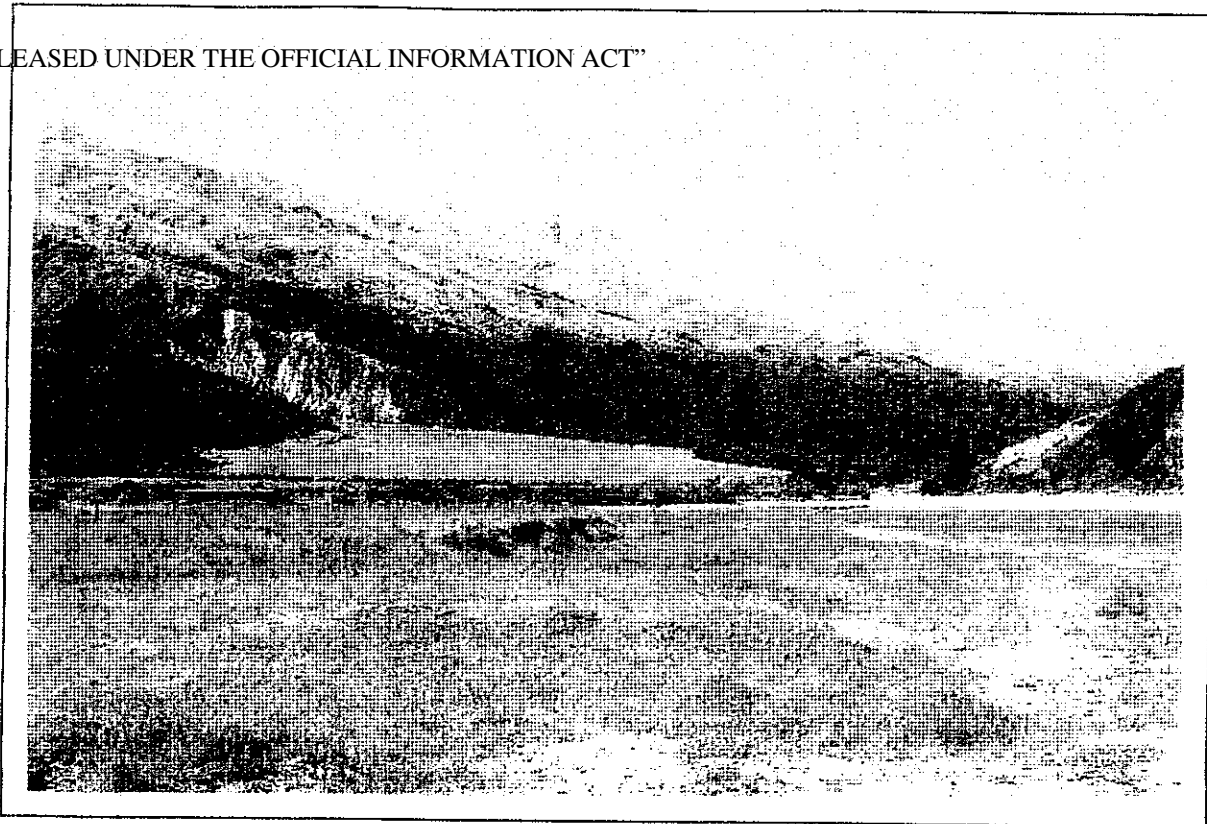


Fig. 9 The mid-altitude lands (approx 1,000 to 1,200m), above the bushline in this view, have been classified LUC Class VII, with severe limitations for pastoral use. Because it is probably uneconomic to apply the fertiliser necessary to balance the removal of essential nutrients in animal products, it is unlikely that pastoral use of these lands will be ecologically sustainable. Instead, they should be assessed on the basis of their inherent natural and landscape values.



Fig. 10 Above 1,200m there is a large area of High Country Yellow Brown Earth soils and Alpine Steeplands on the Richardson Mountains which have been classified LUC Class VIII. These lands are entirely unsuitable for pastoral use but have very highly significant inherent natural, landscape and recreational values. These lands also have qualities which would warrant consideration for addition to Mt Aspiring National Park.

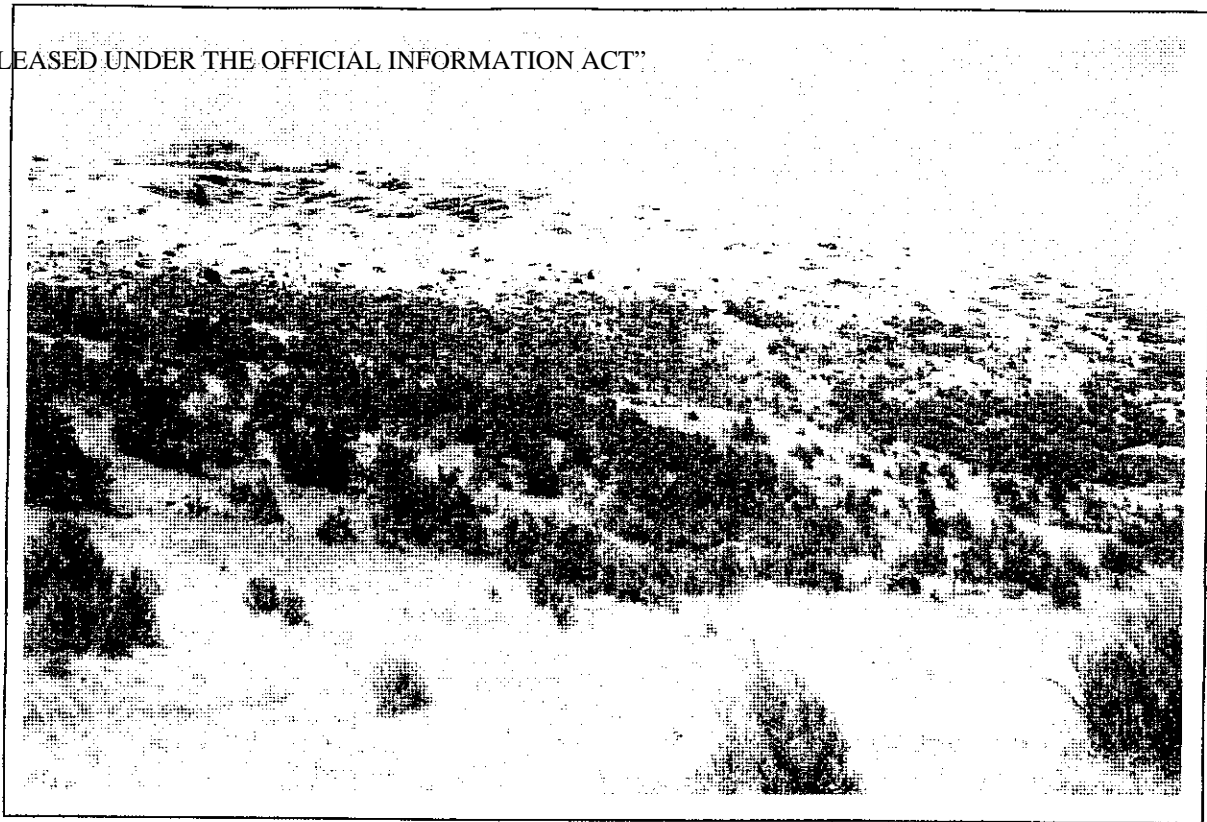


Fig. 11 The lower and mid slopes of the valley sides present farming problems with the perpetual battle against invading fern and 'woody weeds'. Alternative land use possibilities arise because what is a 'woody weed' problem for the farmer is an indication of the potential for natural shrub and forest regeneration which is an argument for conservation management and a valuable conservation asset. This potential is shown by the extensive areas of mature beech forest, and by the areas of scrub which are reverting to native shrublands.



Fig. 12 Recreation potential on Rees Valley Station is not confined to the major mountains and valleys but includes many opportunities for travel in untracked side valleys. Many kiwi trampers look increasingly for such opportunities as the traditional back country is turned into 'Great Walks'. Rees Valley could provide almost endless opportunities for untracked routes in challenging places.

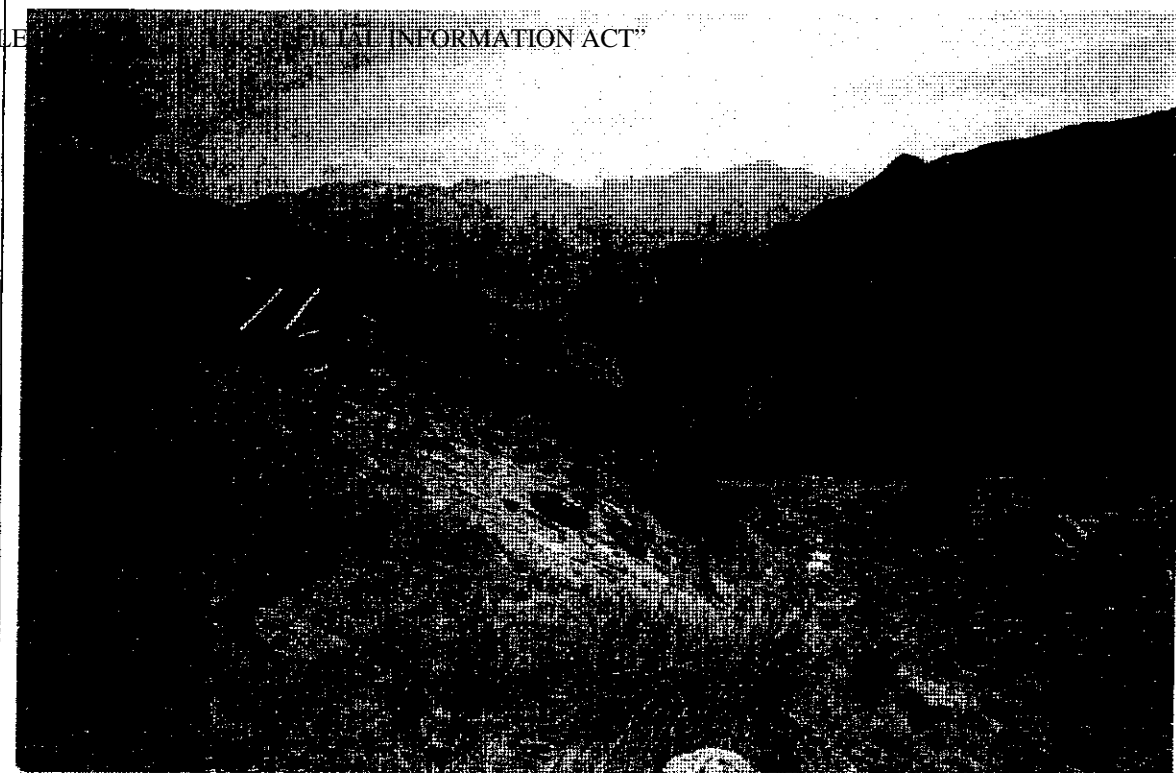


Fig. 13 The Station lessees have established a private skifield in the head of Invincible Creek. This is usually accessed by helicopter but has not yet proved very popular. It is however, an example of new opportunities which can be offered and, because it includes an accommodation hut, might be used on a year-round basis for high level trips or ecological studies.

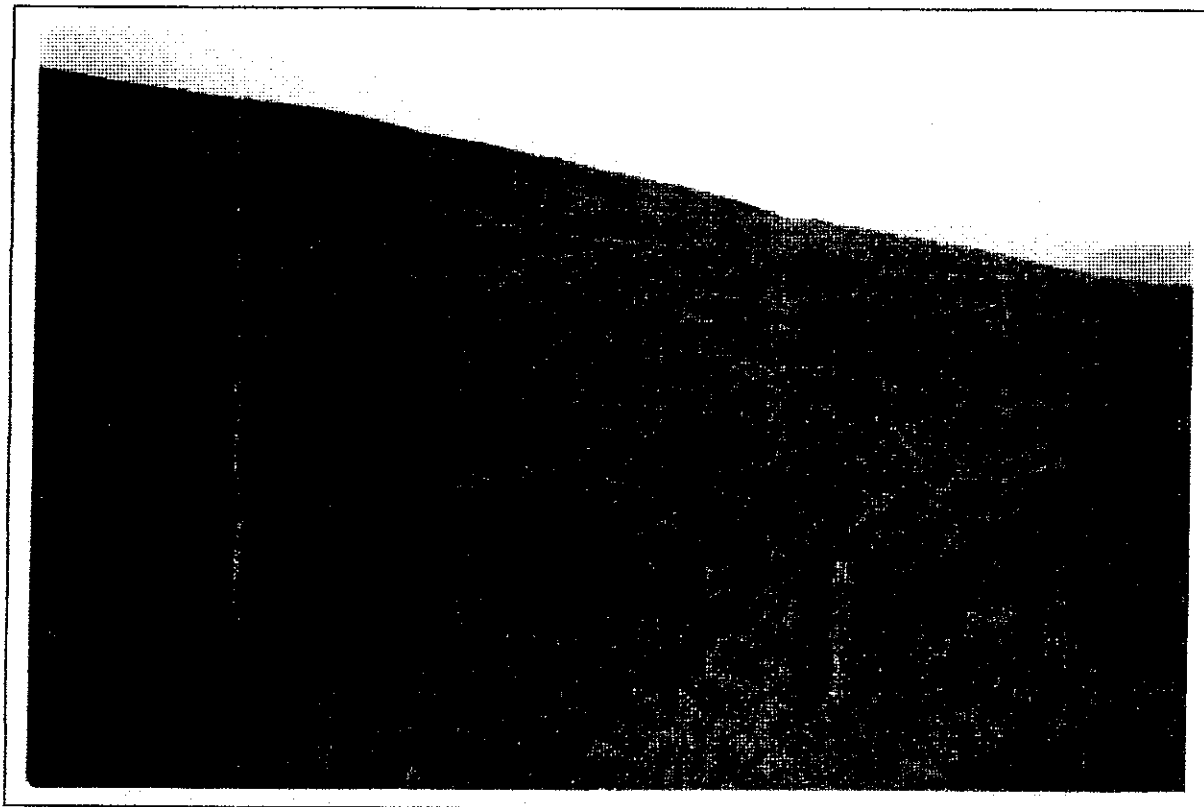


Fig. 14 There are extensive areas of tussock grassland on Rees Valley Station, which are generally above about 1,200m where they have only been grazed lightly and are in a semi-natural state. This scene on the western slopes of the Richardsons typifies the statement that *"the Richardson Mountains are predominantly tussock grassland....."* Because there is doubt about the sustainability of pastoral use on these lands, to maintain biodiversity, to protect significant inherent values, and to provide new recreational resources, such tussock grasslands should be part of the new conservation area.

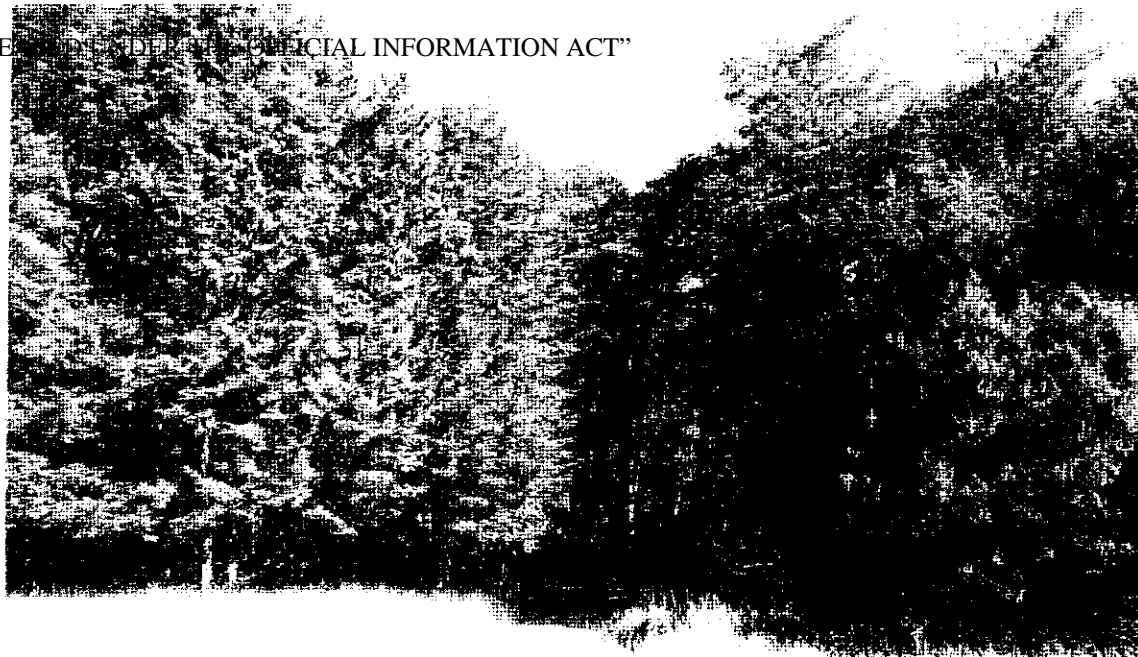


Fig. 15 Examples of remnants of beech forest are to be found in several places including the access road to Muddy Creek and in the mid reaches of the valley around Clarke Slip. In some of these places there is evidence of regeneration. It is strongly recommended that the regenerating bush should be protected as conservation area by the return of an appropriate area to full Crown ownership and control. These forested areas also indicate the potential that other areas of scrub may eventually attain.

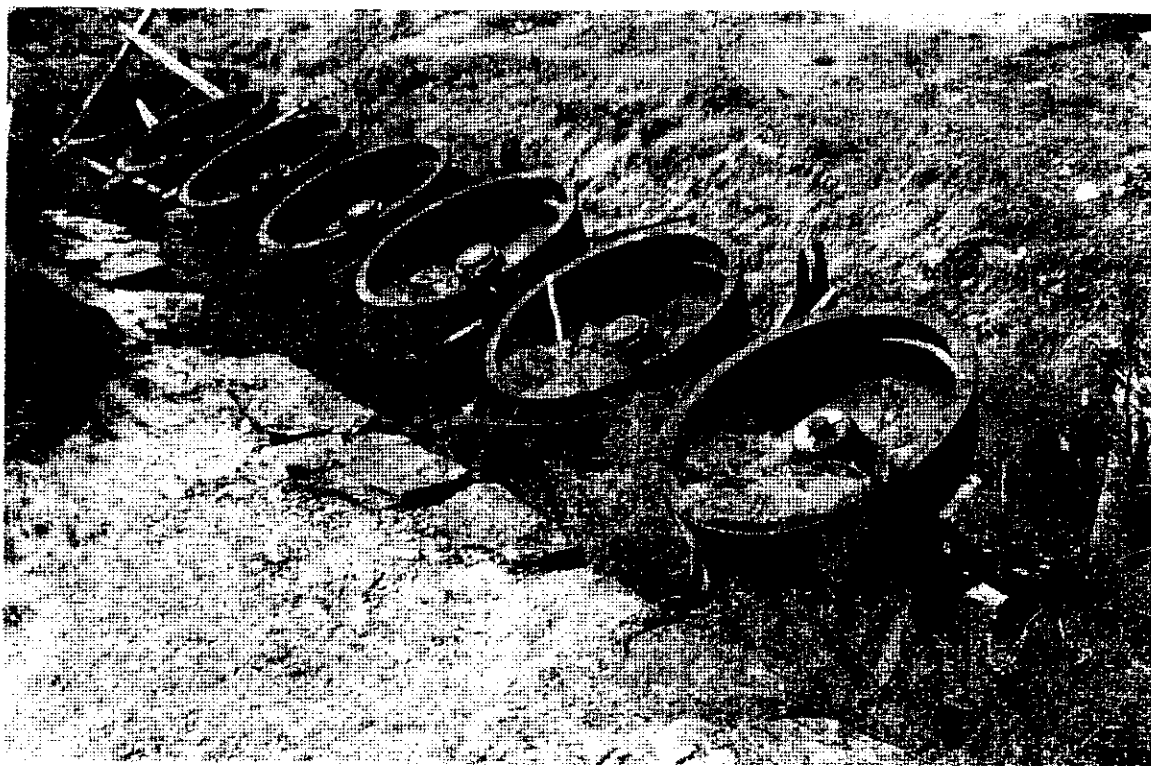


Fig. 16 The historic remains of goldmining, including some unusual equipment, provide added interest for recreational visitors, and indeed are the reason why some people come to the valley. Most of the historic sites in the vicinity of the Invincible Creek and Invincible Mine are already protected as small isolated historic reserves. It would be sensible if through tenure review these sites were collected together into one historic reserve which might still be able to support limited stock grazing.