



FIGHT FOR THE FORESTS

THE PIVOTAL CAMPAIGNS THAT SAVED
NEW ZEALAND'S NATIVE FORESTS

PAUL BENSEMANN

GUIDE TO FOREST CONSERVATION GROUPS

A for E Action for Environment. Wellington-based NFAC ally and effective lobbyist of government departments and Cabinet ministers, especially in the 1970s.

BAC Beech Action Committee. Break-away group from NFAC that started in Wellington in the mid-1980s, mostly in protest against the West Coast Accord, and spread to other centres.

BFA Beech Forest Action. Formed in the late 1990s combining young activists, especially from universities, with BAC. First based in Wellington but quickly formed other branches around New Zealand.

BFAC Beech Forest Action Committee. Started in the early 1970s by Auckland University students and friends. One of the most effective nationwide campaign groups. It designed the Maruia Declaration.

CAUSE Coalition of Auckland University Students for the Environment. Some of its members became stalwarts of BFA and NFA during the late 1990s West Coast protest.

CoEnCo New Zealand Conference on Environment and Conservation. An umbrella body set up in the early 1970s to harness the energy of the ‘Save Manapōuri’ campaign, with FMC as one of the driving forces.

ECO Environment and Conservation Organisations of Aotearoa New Zealand. Essentially CoEnCo after a 1976 name change. By the late 1970s it had 130 member groups when counting FMC’s out-door clubs.

Ecology Action A movement that started in California in 1970 focused on recycling but in NZ became a loose collection of mainly high school and university-based groups working on a range of environmental issues in the 1970s.

FOE Friends of the Earth. A northern hemisphere-based network focused initially on nuclear weapons from 1969. In the mid-1970s, FOE NZ became an influential campaigner on native forests.

FMC Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand. An umbrella body formed in 1930 of alpine, skiing, tramping and hunting clubs. It became more political during ‘Save Manapōuri’. By 1981 it had 84 member clubs.

Forest and Bird Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand. Starting in 1923 as the Native Bird Protection Society, it was a big player in the ‘Save Manapōuri’ campaign and saving forests in the 1980s and 1990s.

NFA Native Forest Action. BFA with a name change when the group occupied podocarp trees behind Charleston in early 1997. The most active campaigner, with Forest and Bird help, in the late 1990s.

NFAC Native Forests Action Council. BFAC with a name change at the Maruia Declaration launch in 1975. The most effective campaigner in the late 1970s and early ‘80s. Predecessor of Maruia Society (1988).

VEG Victoria Environment Group. Wellington’s Victoria University student group that provided many of the leaders and founding members of BFA and NFA in the late 1990s.

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FIGHT FOR THE FORESTS 1972–2002

Campaign victories

1977 Horohoro forest near Rotorua is saved. The first North Island victory – a small taste of bigger successes yet to come.

1978 The headline grabbing tree-top protest at Pureora halts the logging in a final remnant of tōtara forest, and draws national attention to the plight of the endangered kōkako.

1991 An internationally unique peace treaty with private foresters, the 'Forest Accord' is signed between conservationists and the timber industry, with a promise that clearing native bush on private land would stop.

1980 Logging in Puketī kauri forest in Northland is suspended and a moratorium declared.

1989 Conservationists and forest giant Tasman Forestry sign the Tasman Accord to save 42,000ha of North Island remnants including 8900ha of leased forest in Mamaku State Forest, Bay of Plenty.

1985 The Government ends native logging in Whirinaki State Forest after a campaign of about eight years.

1982 Legal protection is finally given to Pureora and Waihāhā forests, west of Lake Taupō. A giant mixed podocarp forest which once clothed the central North Island has by now been reduced to an area no bigger than Lake Taupō itself.

1987 A new Department of Conservation (DOC) replaces the former Forest Service, shifting focus from development to protection. Such a department was one of the key requests of the Maruia Declaration 10 years earlier.

1975 The West Coast Beech Scheme for a 600 ton-per-day pulpmill based on native beech forests is side-lined after a campaign by the Beech Forest Action Committee, changing its name in 1975 to the Native Forests Action Council when launching the Maruia Declaration petition at Maruia.

1988 Governor General Sir Paul Reeves opens Paparoa National Park after a decade-long campaign by native forest activists.

1977 After a huge signature-gathering effort, the Maruia Declaration petition is presented to Parliament. The 341,159 signatories called for better protection for native forests throughout New Zealand.

1986 The West Coast Accord is signed in Greymouth by conservationists, West Coast millers and mayors, and the Government to save nearly 200,000ha of native forest.

1972 Labour wins election in a landslide, with the promise not to raise Lake Manapōuri. It follows a record 264,907-signature petition against raising the lake and drowning surrounding forest.

1983 The Forest Service halts its burn-off programme in the Ōpārara valley near Karamaea. This enchanted lowland forest around the famous Honeycomb Hill caves is reprieved.

2002 About 130,000ha of former Timberlands forests on the West Coast is transferred to the conservation estate and all native logging ended in New Zealand after five years of tree-top and other protest by the Charleston-based group Native Forest Action.

1981 Ōkārīto and Waikūkupa forests between Westland National Park and the sea are saved, later to be added to the park. A 10-year moratorium is also declared on all logging south of the Cook River.

1991 New Zealand's largest reserve, the 2.6m ha Te Wāhipounamu SW NZ World Heritage Area is mandated as such by UNESCO after campaigns to save these forests over some two decades.

1984 Feltex pulls out of its contract to log the Waitutu forest along the southern coast of New Zealand.

FOREWORD HELEN CLARK

Fight for the Forests

My love for our country's distinctive forests and their wildlife goes back as far as I can remember. I spent my first years at an incredibly picturesque place - my family's farm in Te Pahu in the Waikato which was located on the border of Pirongia Forest Park. I will always have a strong affection for the area and for Mt Pirongia. My life-long passion for tramping in the bush and mountains developed in those early years.

I myself was sickened by the ongoing scenes provided by conservation campaigners and on television of ancient forests being ploughed down by industrial logging over the years. By the late twentieth century, we had already lost so much of the primeval forest over the period humans had occupied New Zealand and it was long past time to save what we had left. In the run-up to the 1999 general election, the Labour Party under my leadership took a strong stand on that. On the day we were sworn in as new ministers in December of that year, on our return from that ceremony at Government House in Wellington an order was signed to stop the logging of native timber on Crown-owned land.

This was no small step. It resulted in some of the very best surviving remnants of the magnificent lowland native forest which once carpeted New Zealand being added to the conservation estate. Parts of the 130,000ha of forest on the West Coast which was formerly under threat from logging by the state-owned enterprise Timberlands then became part of the World Heritage-listed area on the Coast. Other portions of this land were added to ecological areas, scenic reserves, scientific reserves, wildlife management areas, amenity and conservation areas and parks, or was used to create new ones. About 18,000ha of the total area were of such enormous value that they were added to the existing national parks of Kahurangi, Paparoa, and Westland/Tai Poutini. As I said at the time, what a tragedy it would have been if logging had proceeded through these precious taonga.

As *Fight for the Forests* recounts, such political moves, of which I was proud to be part, came at the end of decades of campaigning, especially by young New Zealanders who postponed careers and family life while they worked as unpaid or poorly-paid activists, sometimes for many years. They are the real heroes – they were the strategically-smart conservation group leaders and spokespeople as well as the thousands who helped behind the scenes. A handful became courageous front-line activists – several of



Helen Clark, left, pictured on New Year's Eve 2016 on the Pouākai Crossing, Egmont National Park, at the edges of Mount Taranaki, with husband, Peter Davis, and sister Sandra Clark. HELEN CLARK

whom are named and acknowledged for the first time in this book. They took non-violent protest action such as sitting on makeshift tree-top platforms in the face of significant and threatening opposing forces.

I agree with Paul's epilogue that the 'fight for the forests' is far from over. In New Zealand, tens of thousands of dedicated volunteers are the new, largely-unheralded conservation heroes. I am pleased to be directly associated with some of them, for example as patron for both Friends of Flora, active in Kahurangi National Park, and the Routeburn Dart Wildlife Trust focused on the Fiordland and Mt Aspiring national parks. These groups are not only working hard at targeting pests; they are proving to be very ambitious. The Routeburn Dart Wildlife Trust is greatly assisting the Department of Conservation to protect bird species which could otherwise face extinction in the area, including the rock wren. Friends of Flora have reintroduced breeding populations of both whio (blue duck) and roroa (the great spotted kiwi) into their focus area. Freeing New Zealand from introduced pests such as the rats, stoats, and possums which have devastated our forests has been a new target set by conservation leaders – and is a huge ask. But so was stopping native logging some decades ago when the battle was against corporate forestry giants, a conservative government, and communities fearful for their prospects if logging stopped.

At the global level, there are truly massive challenges to saving the world's forests. In 2014 as Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, I promoted the *New York Declaration on Forests*, an unprecedented commitment by a coalition of

countries, states, companies, indigenous peoples, and NGOs to halve deforestation world-wide by 2020 and end it by 2030. In a speech in 2015, I noted that many major players in the palm oil industry had committed to eliminating deforestation and human rights violations from their supply chains. As a result, the proportion of the world's palm oil trade covered by sustainability commitments had grown from fifteen per cent to over ninety per cent – an inspiring achievement. But I also described in 2015 how more than thirteen million hectares of forests were still being cleared each year – that's an area around three times the size of Switzerland. This ongoing destruction is contributing up to twenty per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and threatens our common future. It is impossible to meet the ambitious goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change without decisive action to protect the world's forests. Sadly, despite the many commitments made, in a few pivotal countries, clear-felling tropical rainforest for palm oil plantations and other agricultural projects continues apace.

We have learned lessons in New Zealand which could be of help globally; for example, in developing accords and compensation packages which encouraged and enabled alternative and longer-term economic development on the West Coast. As well, a growing body of evidence around the world shows that when indigenous rights are recognised and upheld, indigenous people will successfully protect and manage their forests, making crucial contributions at the same time to climate change mitigation.

As *Fight for the Forests* has noted from the New Zealand experience, dialogue with those in power always paralleled protest. Our negotiators and others must continue talking to busy leaders of both developed and developing countries which still log their ancient forests and encourage a shift from creating permanent damage to supporting sustainable practices like low-impact traditional food-gathering by indigenous communities and tourism. In a small, informal but significant way, publications like this one, with such stunning vistas by photographer Craig Potton, could be used as lobbying tools. While it might be against our nature as New Zealanders to boast, we need only say, 'This is what we saved. Isn't it beautiful?'

Helen Clark

The Right Honourable Helen Clark ONZ was the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from April 2009 to April 2017. She is the first and, thus far, only woman to have led UNDP. Prior to her appointment there, Helen Clark served as Prime Minister of New Zealand for three successive terms from 1999–2008. She was the first woman to be elected to this position. Throughout her tenure as Prime Minister, she engaged strongly on a wide range of issues, including sustainability, climate change, economic growth, employment, education, health, and arts, culture, and heritage. Previously, she taught at the University of Auckland and had an extensive parliamentary and ministerial career, including serving as Conservation Minister from August 1987 to January 1989.

OVERVIEW CRAIG POTTON

The reflections of an insider

Hugh's huge Vauxhall Velox swayed through the winding curves as we crossed over Arthur's Pass on the way to the West Coast. In the backseat, a friend was strumming his guitar as we traded improvised verses: 'Going down to Ōkārito, gonna save myself a rimu tree, yeah I'm going down to Ōkārito, to save myself a rimu tree ...'

This was 1975 and we were on yet another road trip on our mission to stop the logging of native forest on the West Coast. While we were angry about this destruction, we were also young and confident. We sensed something new in the air, a hopeful buoyancy that had endured since the late 1960s. Change seemed everywhere.

We thought our parents' generation had got some major issues very wrong and it was our job to put them right. They had rushed into Vietnam, nuclear weapons, supported apartheid, and failed on women's and animal rights. Big companies were lathering over government schemes to exhaust every natural resource, be it oil, coal, timber, or hydro-electricity, in a less-than-holy path to material progress.

Nature had become objectified as a resource and sentimentalised as a pleasant scenic backdrop – just another roadside attraction. There was a growing sense, though, that this attitude was wrong; we believed that major mind shifts and a passionate commitment to the intrinsic value of the natural world was required, a new social model of compassion to replace a more manipulative, hierarchical and chauvinistic world. We had found our inspiration in diverse places – Eastern ways of thinking about the natural world, the Romantic poets, Burke's philosophy of the sublime, the Beat poets and the hippies of California. This is what fueled our passion as we drove, singing our made-up songs, down to the Coast and south to the rimu forests of Ōkārito.

The story that Paul Bensemann tells in this book is an insider's narrative. He, like me (as well as many of my still close friends), was there through the decades as the fight to save our native forests unfolded. It was a battle that shaped our lives – and that we finally won makes it worth telling, warts and all, as an exemplar to others who have fought and failed, or who have not fought at all but simply whined about how everything is wrong but have done nothing to change it. It is a story which shows that with reason, passion, energy and teamwork, you can change your world. Because for all the early losses and setbacks and the equivocal and uncertain endings along the way, we did

Clear-felling of beech forest in the Longwood Forest, Southland.
CRAIG POTTON



eventually succeed, and were instrumental in turning New Zealand’s relationship to our native forests, wetlands and wildlife on its head.

The conservation movement that is the subject of this book was led by two extraordinary personalities. The early leader and original brains-trust was Guy Salmon. His combined skills of information-gathering and retention, superb rhetoric and investigative journalism, and ability to formulate viable economic and political packages were formidable. His belief from the early days was that solutions needed to be found which respected the needs, feelings and interests of all stakeholders. This approach inevitably led to arguments at times, but without Guy, I strongly suspect the road to our success would have been even longer and rockier than it was.

The movement’s other great leader was Gerry McSweeney, who amassed an encyclopedic knowledge of all the wild landscapes of New Zealand and made and retained personal and professional contacts with hundreds upon hundreds of individuals from all sides of the forest campaigns. Gerry was unbelievably energetic and politically savvy and went on to lead significant campaigns as the director of Forest and Bird. He is one of the most important conservation figures New Zealand has ever produced.

This story is far wider than these two leaders, however, and began with a small group of activists who started a public movement that not only shifted public opinion but also led to ground-breaking political decisions to save native forests.

But perhaps one of the most significant achievements, often overlooked, is that these campaigns also completely destroyed two of New Zealand’s major government departments, Lands and Survey and the New Zealand Forest Service, and created in their place the Department of Conservation. This achievement, generated by a citizen group acting entirely non-violently, is possibly more exceptional than protecting the forests, and may

be unrivalled in any other country. Certainly it put New Zealand’s conservation story on the world stage and the newly created Department of Conservation, with its coherent conservation mandate, became the envy of environmentalists around the world. This alone is a story worth telling and retelling.

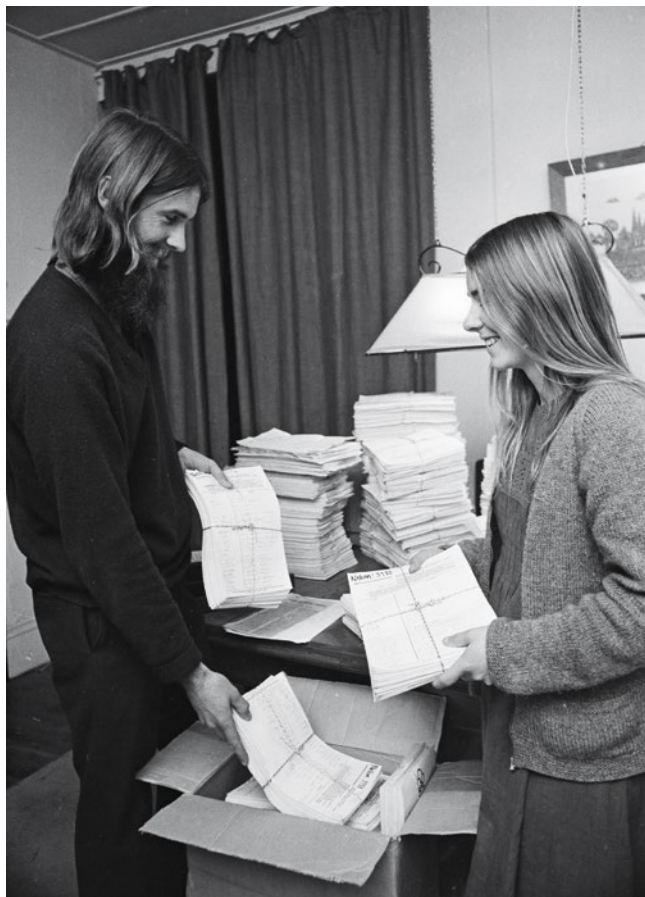
From the beginning we knew that our foremost aims had to be political, based on the pragmatism of forcing change in government strategies and policies through select committees, party policies and ministerial directives, and then finally driving it home with legislative change in Parliament. It might sound complex and removed from daily life but it is not – it is exactly how we collectively convert our societal aspirations into binding rules. In fact, the success of our movement was neither in the depth of our philosophy nor the passion of our followers (although we had these in spades), but in following the Athenian ideal of social change through the democratic process.

We could organise well-attended conferences, whip up public feeling and elicit deep passion, but neither talkfests nor picnics at the bush edge was the essence of our task. Guided by Guy Salmon’s astute nose for strategy, our success was more complex, and I’ve come to believe that we succeeded because of five well-honed campaigning principles: we relied on good science and rational argument; we managed to align visionary values; we consistently developed viable socio-economic packages; we created a very public movement; and last but not least, we established good relationships with key stakeholders. Most of the time I’m sure it requires all five of these principles to be manifest if necessary legislative change is to be achieved.

It may seem unusual to emphasise the need for good science to underpin a movement so obviously emotional, value-laden and overtly political. But if a movement’s core values are not driven by an irrefutable rationale and scientific base, those opposed to the changes it promotes will be easily able to undermine its credibility. In our case, good science scored deep incisions into the edifice of the status quo. The New Zealand Forest Service had imported from forestry schools in Europe and America notions that managed forests were more ‘healthy’ because selective logging removed our ‘over-mature’ trees, supposedly allowing accelerated new growth when not impeded by these ancient trees.

It might have seemed on the face of it to be logical, as it did work in the Northern Hemisphere temperate forests, though even there it denied the intrinsic biodiversity values of the ecosystem. In New Zealand it singularly failed to work in our temperate rainforest. It was a form of forest eugenics masquerading as good management, and it failed to understand that the biodiversity and ecology of a forest thrives on the full range of aged trees. Birds like kākā, for example, need old trees to roost in and break open for grubs, while lichens and fungi equally thrive in breaking up and recycling the nutrients of the aged trees.

The use of science to justify a resource-use philosophy bordered on the irrational, and we quickly discovered that any science contrary to Forest Service management philosophy was usually suppressed (leading to a long battle to achieve a Freedom of Information Act), while too often the methodology and conclusions of their science were suspect. As a result of our exposés it became all too clear to the public that in many cases the official science behind the logging was corrupted by the old adage ‘that he who pays the piper plays the tune’.



ABOVE Craig Potton and Annie Wheeler packing boxes of signed
Maruia Declarations for presenting to Parliament, 1977.
GEOFFREY WOOD COLLECTION, NELSON PROVINCIAL MUSEUM, GCW3.3471_FR17
RIGHT Rimu forest, Bruce Bay, South Westland. CRAIG POTTON



It was critical that the movement gained respected sanction through the public voice of some brave, eminent scientists such as Sir John Morton, Sir Charles Fleming and Sir Alan Mark. Many others in the science community spoke out stridently and publicly while others put their jobs in jeopardy by leaking reports useful to our campaigning.

In retrospect it seems quite surreal that it took decades of public campaigning and the passing of an Official Information Act to bring to the fore such obvious truths that our native birds need the warmer, more fertile and food-abundant lowland forest to survive in highest numbers. Seeing this was where all of the really valuable timber was, were the blinkered attitudes of the Forest Service really all that hard to fathom?

If there is one essential principle I would promote over the other four, which ultimately brought about the success of our forest campaigns, it was in the redefining of our mainstream values towards a more connected and compassionate feeling for our forests. As always, this was foreshadowed by artists and thinkers. There always seems to be a tipping point, where deeply ethical currents surface into mainstream culture around issues, such as how we treat the disenfranchised, and more recently all living beings. Such an upwelling of concern occurred around the way we mistreated nature in the late 1960s.

Initial manifestations came loud and clear in the early fights to save Lake Manapōuri and Northland's kauri forests. It had been a slow train coming. Two hundred years prior, poets like Wordsworth and thinkers like Thoreau postulated that while humans had developed the capacity to alter or destroy the natural order forever, the world of nature which we are inextricably part of had an intrinsic right to exist and that we humans have, as a part of that order, a responsibility to protect its beauty and diversity.

Often, as it did with Lake Manapōuri and the kauri forests, such upwellings spring from a smoldering sense of the beautiful – a beauty that is beyond our ability to make yet within our capacity to destroy. And it was hitting home that our beautiful forests and their wildlife were being destroyed. That our land was a natural taonga had been an obsessional theme in our literature and art for a long time. In the 1950s, Colin McCahon, our greatest painter, had written across his masterpiece *The Northland Panels*: 'A land with too few lovers'.

Happily these lovers finally arrived, and our forest campaigns would unlock the well-spring of pleasure Kiwis feel in wild and green places. We were opening our personal and collective imagination to the original forest and our goal encompassed a redemptive mission to protect and restore it. We would create a new national narrative for our relationship to our forests that combined Polynesian creation reverence with a European Romantic sense of awe.

The third factor that greatly aided our success was we consciously set out not just to extol new values of protection for our native forest but also to articulate and actively promote socio-economic packages that gave all of those involved in the destruction, including the loggers, Forest Service workers, and the service providers in small and large communities, viable alternative employment opportunities.

We also realised we could not run a campaign if we were seen as marginal radical outsiders. While many of us had alternative, bohemian leanings, we were quite happy to dress fashionably and/or conservatively in a conscious effort to find and speak to middle New Zealanders. By employing staff and using volunteers with a range of economic,

Forest in the Ōpārara Basin,
Kahurangi National Park.
CRAIG POTTON



sociological, statistical and community service skills, we could speak the same language to businesses and community leaders in a genuine attempt to find an alternative to milling native trees. This was where Guy Salmon's star shone brightest. He tempered our more radical instincts into ones that played to the traditional socio-economic outcomes, creating win-win solutions between conservationists and the loggers with whom politicians love to work.

The fourth element in our success was the intensity and noise with which we took our cause to the public. In those pre-social media days, it was intentionally face-to-face. A public movement doesn't happen – especially in politicians' eyes and ears – unless it gets loud in the media. We aimed for the front page of the major newspapers, the first item on the TV news, and we set out specific goals for each separate forest campaign to include positive editorials, radio interviews in key time-slots and with key presenters, and all the TV time we could scrounge. To get on television we created visual spectacles, taking the cameras to valleys of burnt-out forests, using street theatre, and holding meetings so large they became national events. We became good at creating drama, both comedic and tragic, about real trees and birds. There were summer festivals for the forests, downtown stalls, cottage meetings in private homes, public displays and full-page advertisements in newspapers.

In *The Press*, for example, for just one forest campaign over Ōkārīto Forest in South Westland, we generated 30 metres of column inches in just 15 weeks! And we were diligent in who we talked to; service groups like Jaycees and Lions, church groups, tramping clubs, unions, women's groups and branches of political parties. It was often a fine line between creating a storm of controversy and confrontation to get media and public attention and curbing this through reasoned dialogue and sentiment.

It was creative fun but it was a hard grind. In my home town of Nelson, we door-knocked almost every house in the town to collect 10,000 signatures for the Maruia Declaration, our petition to save the forests. Through these kinds of efforts, one in nine New Zealanders signed it. We shamelessly used celebrities, artists, actors, sports heroes and other national figures to speak for the forests.

The final element that drove our success was a desire to connect as empathetically as we could with everyone. In other words, there was a healthy drive to avoid too much typecasting of 'us and them'; to try and find common ground with those of opposite ilk, and to genuinely gain a rapport with them. After an initial period of character assassination from both sides, and with a few uncharitable exceptions, we made genuine attempts to get alongside those in the political, bureaucratic, local authority and business arenas. There always were a few combatants on each side, but the majority of interchanges were more than civil, and personal friendships were formed with those in opposition. I, for one, a young, long-haired activist elected to the local catchment board, found myself sitting alongside conservative farmers and foresters, bureaucrats and accountants. It was a salutary experience to find just how likeable and funny many of them were.

If our conservation movement was initially driven and largely led by Guy Salmon, it marked its fullest success and maturity under Forest and Bird's Gerry McSweeney. In Gerry we found someone who positively welled over with enthusiasm for both nature and people, and who had an exceptional ability to find common ground with everyone.

After we had successfully instigated the reinvigoration of Forest and Bird, Gerry took over as its conservation director and from then until this day it remains the most significant and successful conservation organisation in New Zealand, steering huge areas of private and public land into the protection of the Department of Conservation.

Paul Bensemann's tale of our fight for the forests is something I have long wanted to see documented. It should not be forgotten, however, that this story also has its fair share of internal bickering and politicking and some might be surprised by the tensions and disagreements that existed within the movement. But is it really surprising that infighting and strained relationships occurred? Every family has its tensions, every social movement erupts at times. Strong personalities don't always agree or live in harmony. What is surprising is how the shared objectives diminished the differences amongst us and that we hung together so long. Whatever the problems, these pale in my memory when placed alongside the sense of meaning found in working for a cause, the lasting friendships forged, the humour and absurdity of some situations and the victories won.

Protecting our native forests and establishing the Department of Conservation, whose primary goal is protecting our biodiversity, is an extraordinary success, of international significance. It is baffling to me, a case of historical and cultural amnesia, that this story is not lauded more publicly. There are no monuments, few public displays and little official celebration of a political breakthrough, which was as morally significant as the welfare state and women's rights legislation.

Despite the environmental progress made in New Zealand, there is little respite for conservation activists, who are now having to deal with global issues such as climate change and the destruction of our oceans. The continued assault on the natural world is something we all share responsibility for but it will not stop unless more people are encouraged to become politically active. If we are to avoid an ecological disaster it will again be a story of hard-working individuals coalescing into an organised movement to bring about new political paradigms. In other words, it will be a contemporary version of the story recounted in this book. If *Fight for the Forests* has any value, then I hope it is to inspire and remind a new generation that it is possible to succeed; that if we do it right, our nature can be saved.

– Craig Potton

PROLOGUE

‘A young rabble of protestors’

I am not prepared to call a halt to it on account of this sort of pressure by a young rabble of protestors – Prime Minister Robert Muldoon.¹

Pureora Forest, King Country, 1–2 p.m., Friday 20 January 1978: Bernard King was alone and well hidden, perched 18 metres high in a dense canopy of mature tōtara, rimu, mataī, tawa and miro.² He had no idea whether any of them was about to be cut down. For three days now he had listened to chainsaws screaming, then the high-pitched creaking groans of giant trees as they toppled, and he could see none of his fellow protestors if he needed to seek help – not that he had any intention of doing so. The 17-year-old had the kind of fearlessness only found in youth, and a ridiculously naïve goal. This was the world’s first tree-sitting campaign to save a forest, and he and his companions were going to stop the logging.³

Bernard was not the youngest of the protestors, nor was he as high up as others. His brother Sam, only 12 but perhaps the most agile, was 30 metres up the ‘Lookout Tōtara’ on a low ridge, watching mostly for reporters and police. Colin Fox, 18, a friend of the Kings from Northcote College, was some 20 metres up a rimu in the other direction. Shirley Guildford, 61, a stalwart of Auckland Native Forests Action Council (NFAC), was leading a small ground crew, making constant trips between the forest and Mangakino, more than an hour’s drive away. She varied her exits and entrances to avoid capture, passing up food and water with buckets on ropes, and taking out the waste. Bernard’s older brother Stephen, 25, the protest leader, was away lobbying politicians and conservation group leaders from the Benneydale public telephone box, having sneaked out hidden in the boot of a *New Zealand Herald* reporter’s car.⁴

Stephen hinted to reporters his team was spread throughout the forest canopy, but there were only four that Friday, and just one – Rosalind Derby, 22, from Freemans Bay, Auckland – had stayed up in a tree both nights, in a sleeping bag roped around a little platform. ‘I slept well. I had a book and lots of food,’ she remembers. Less confident in climbing than the Kings but fiercely determined, she was 15 metres above ground in a rimu that had taken an hour, from 5 a.m. on Wednesday, to climb via a rātā vine. ‘It was really, really hard. Stephen was waiting and watching below and had lots to do.’



Protest leader Stephen King climbing a rātā vine during the Pureora protest.
NEW ZEALAND HERALD.



ABOVE Tōtara, Pureora State Forest. CRAIG POTTON

RIGHT A Native Forests Action Council field trip visiting a clear-felled and burnt-off area of Pureora podocarp forest around Pikiariki Road, just before the tree-top protest off this road. ECOLOGIC FOUNDATION ARCHIVES



According to an *Auckland Star* reporter, she was nursing heavy bruising on both legs and bleeding scratches on her arms.⁵

Rosalind and Bernard were hundreds of metres apart, both deep in the forest. ‘We had to be invisible but, with all the birds, I didn’t feel alone,’ Rosalind says. The three days were ‘restful and very beautiful’. Bernard had been in his miro, in the 40ha forest remnant’s heart, for just a couple of hours. It was his second site. Two days earlier he had been the most exposed, 30 metres up the so-called ‘TV Tōtara’, just off the road for easy filming but too close if police raided or marked trees fell.

It had been a hectic few days. A helicopter occasionally sprayed the clear-felled wasteland of logs and branches around the forest remnant, and there was a stench of chemicals.⁶ The young men and a few on-the-ground supporters, in hidden campsites, debated each evening if it was 245T or a kind of napalm but suspected the Forest Service, a government department, was hoping the smell would drive them out. In newspapers on Thursday, Forest Service officer-in-charge Jack Walker and district ranger Austin (‘Ozzie’) Kirk had warned of a heat wave and critical risk of fire.⁷

Bernard had no climbing gear, and Walker had caught him twisting up macramé string to make ropes at the TV Tōtara’s base on Tuesday. He told the teenager to warn the others to leave. The following afternoon, the macramé ropes and rātā vines were well employed; the group stayed hidden and quiet, and five police officers from Te Kūiti found



RIGHT Colin Fox, 18, standing, and Bernard King, 17, setting up a pallet platform on the first day of the Pureora protest.

MORRIE PEACOCK, ALEXANDER TURNBULL
LIBRARY REF: MP-2440-1-1-14-F

OPPOSITE The two young protestors (circled) high in a tōtara, barely visible from the ground.

MORRIE PEACOCK, ALEXANDER TURNBULL
LIBRARY REF: MP-2440-1-1-16-F



no one. Kirk told the *Auckland Star* logging would continue. ‘If we come across any trees with Tarzan and his mate up them, we will bypass them.’⁸

The miro retreat was like the other five platforms, just a pine forklift pallet jammed between large branches with no room in the ‘V’ to lay it flat. Set up on Tuesday for Stephen, the angle seemed perfect. ‘It was like the tree was made that way especially for us,’ Bernard says. ‘I put my feet against one branch and lay back with my pack on another branch for my head. It was really dark with trees so close, especially all the tawa. Couldn’t see the ground except through little gaps in the leaves.’

Bernard was meant to be there. Like his brothers, he had a Māori middle name, but his was most appropriate: Tānemahuta, God of the Forest. From an early age Bernard had followed his father Doug’s interest in Māori language and culture and his brother Stephen’s passion for nature. Exactly six months earlier, on 20 July 1977, NFAC had presented to Parliament one of New Zealand’s largest petitions, the Maruia Declaration, seeking to stop all native logging. After school and at weekends Bernard had installed a makeshift ponga tree-fern hut on Queen Street, and at suburban shopping malls; inside it were photos of the forest giants of Pureora. No one, anywhere, collected more signatures than Bernard’s 10,000 – about a sixth of the Auckland NFAC branch’s total.

There were omens for Bernard at Pureora. Ten or maybe a dozen riflemen, New Zealand’s smallest bird, and usually seen alone, welcomed the group on Tuesday by darting up and down the trunk of the TV Tōtara that he was about to climb. In the middle of the logging road Bernard had seen Prince of Wales feather shoots poking through the shingle. ‘That kind of fern is supposed to need moisture and shade. They were in full sunlight, as if fighting back.’

The birds around the miro seemed to sense his purpose, with white-headed kākā screeching and whistling just above him, and the chattering of smaller light-green and red parrots – the kākārīki – that buzzed past in flocks. Rarest of all was the kōkako, which has the most haunting, echoing and beautiful of New Zealand bird calls. The large slate-grey birds with black masks and blue wattles were so little known in 1978 that the *Press* called them ‘New Zealand crows’, and the *Auckland Star* ‘blue parrots’.⁹ Bernard watched a pair of these semi-flightless birds perform a ‘leaping zigzag’ up and down the canopy. ‘Kōkako are usually quite shy, but these were so close I could hear the whooshing sound of their small wings,’ he recalls.

Suddenly ‘it was like a monster clanking through the forest, crunching everything up’. The bulldozer, heading for Bernard, stopped some 50 metres away; then chainsaws started, and ‘went on and on’. His mood sank: this meant the end of another forest giant. Bernard could see nothing, but heard the tree crash into others and felt the thump when it hit the ground. The bulldozer started up again ‘and came thundering through’, bringing with it the sound of saplings snapping and branches breaking right up to Bernard’s tree.

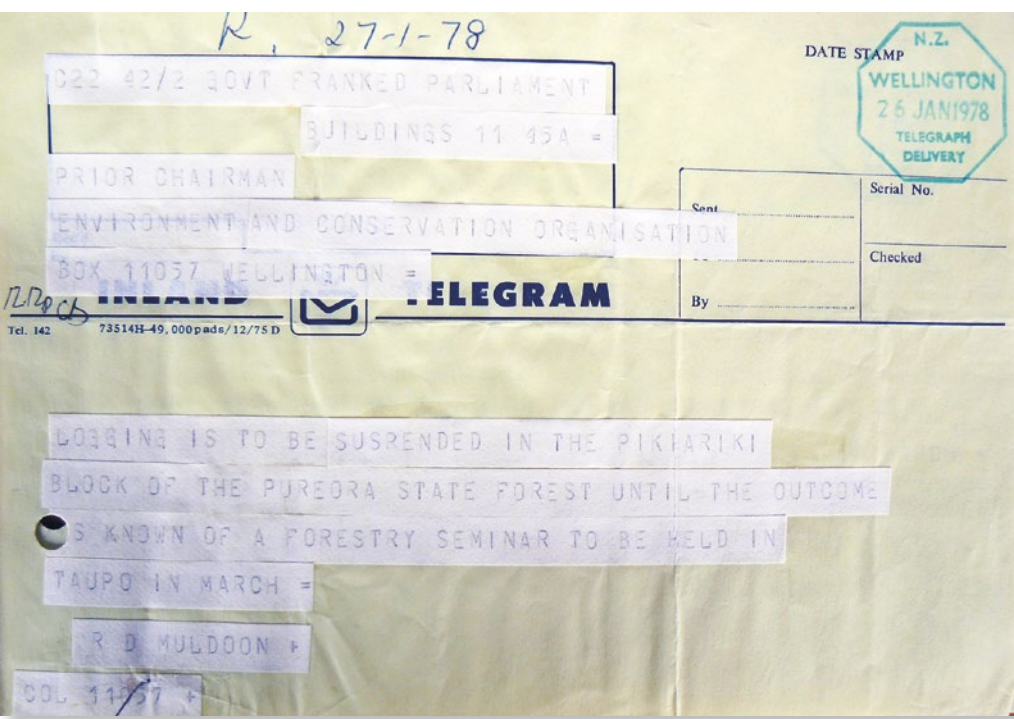
‘There was a reporter – he must have known Stephen’s platform was here. I could just see his face looking up through a gap.’ Bernard put his forefinger over his lips, so as to urge the journalist to keep quiet. He still had no thought of danger. The protestors had agreed that whatever happened they would hide. Chainsaws started again and Bernard knew it was the end of the big mataī, perhaps 700 years old, beside him. Only then did he

think of the mataī’s size and the risk if it leaned his way. ‘That tree took a long, long, long time to fall.’ It toppled at right angles to Bernard, cracking into and flattening small trees, and seemed to shake the whole forest when it hit the ground.

All the protestors had whistles and an agreed alert code: long calls for loggers or police, and short calls for media. Bernard took a deep breath and blew the whistle as hard and as long as he could. When he stopped he could hear the timber workers debating whether the whistling was a kākā. Bernard knew then they had not deliberately targeted Stephen’s tree and had no idea anyone was up there. It was time to stop hiding.

‘Hey,’ Bernard yelled. ‘Why did you cut down my tree?’ There was silence, then swearing. ‘They got such a shock. They were stunned. They knew they could have killed me.’ The mataī was the last tree in the 40ha block that the government department would fell. The loggers walked out. The forest was saved.

Logging is to be suspended in the Pikiariki block of the Pureora State Forest – Prime Minister Muldoon, a week later.¹⁰



Telegram from Prime Minister Rob Muldoon to ECO Chairman Dr Ian Prior announcing that logging would stop in the Pureora State Forest block occupied by tree-top protestors. ECO ARCHIVES

3 THE BEECH SCHEME 1970–1973

‘A bunch of upstarts’

Denys Trussell had bought the 1953, rusty-red, three-tonne Fordson for \$226 after falling in love with the false promise of fast travel on its doors: *Wilson’s Express*, from its freight-delivery past. Its open-road speed was 65km an hour, the indicator was a small manually operated artificial arm, there were no seats on the back, and its only air-conditioning was wind that blew through a canvas tarpaulin tied over the metal canopy-frame, chilling those taking a turn lying among the bags and packs on a wooden tray.

He and his four companions were city kids, mostly from Auckland University, in their early to mid-twenties and, said Trussell, ‘in transition’. Trussell, who had majored in history and literature, was born in Christchurch but now shared a rambling old house, Sarnia, in Bradford Street, Parnell, with fellow traveller Elizabeth Dowling who was in between education studies.¹ The others were mutual friends whose parents moved in similar Auckland music, literature and art circles.² They guessed even then that in future years, when stuck in nine-to-five jobs, an unstructured journey like this would be impossible, so they chose the longest, winding, scenic route west from Picton, around the Marlborough Sounds, to start their South Island trip.

On the Queen Charlotte Drive next day, their planning was typically haphazard. Glancing at a road map, they spotted a dirt road from Pakawau in Golden Bay down the west coast. This was new country for all of them, though someone had heard of sub-tropical bush, including nikau palms, reaching to the sea – perhaps there’d be a perfect campsite at the road-end. When they reached the Anatori River mouth and could drive no further, they saw exactly the site they had hoped for. None of the travellers had any inkling this place would be the genesis of the most well-organised, serious and successful group to protect native forests in New Zealand’s history.

Trussell recalls driving the truck through water to an island in the river, and the students building a campfire with driftwood ‘while wandering around in a dream’. They spoke rarely, and almost in whispers, listening to the low murmur of the stream, to waves crashing on the beach, and an evening chorus of native birds from hills and cliffs around them. At the campfire next night they discussed politics, and Dowling talked about what she knew of plans to pulp South Island lowland beech forest and turn huge areas into pines, with logging tenders to be sought within two years. ‘We didn’t know,’



Trussell recalls. During the next two weeks, as they travelled through beech forest down the Buller Gorge and into Westland, the group’s ‘spontaneous anger’ grew.

That same month, March 1972, two 15-year-olds, Kevin Hackwell and Simon Walls, went with Simon’s father Jack to a Forest Service ‘beech scheme’ launch at Waimea College, Richmond. Of some 400,000ha of lowland forest under its control that could be logged in Nelson, Westland and Southland, the Service proposed leaving only 60,700ha in reserves and replacing 173,205ha with plantations of radiata pine. But at the public meeting, Director-General Priestley Thomson talked of ‘dynamic conservation’ and said 34 varieties of birds could live in pine plantations. Westport deputy mayor Peter Roselli claimed that ‘to a man, Coasters are behind this scheme’.³

Walls and Hackwell had helped set up a small Nayland College branch of Ecology Action the year before, focusing on local issues such as the Nelson Haven estuary and recycling.⁴ Listening to Thomson outline the beech plans, they recalled the scarred and

Coastal forest on the west coast of Golden Bay, south of the Anatori River. CRAIG POTTON

burnt hillsides they had seen on the way to tramping trips around Lake Rotoiti and the West Coast. Hundreds of hectares of beech were being clear-felled for farming, and the wood chipped, often with the incentive of government subsidies. ‘The scale was mind-blowing. We got really wound up. We couldn’t believe it,’ Hackwell said of the new scheme. Nile River, with its limestone cliffs, reflective waters and dense subtropical nikau stands, had become ‘Resource Unit 2’, for example, with most of the area earmarked for rows of pine trees; the popular bush walkway up Charming Creek, behind Ngākawau, was ‘Resource Unit 18’ for plantations of beech and gum.

Meanwhile, as Trussell and his friends in *Wilson’s Express* drove down the Coast, Guy Williams searched remote roadsides for commune sites, and argued with his partner Frances Duff about the need to escape. The others, including Duff and Philip Alpers, were more focused on changing the system from within. All had joined fast-growing and innovative movements around issues of peace, race relations and women’s rights. At the time of the *Wilson’s Express* tour, a thousand students and supporters gathered outside Auckland Magistrate’s Court in support of Australian feminist Germaine Greer, who was in the dock for using a word in a speech at the university that meant, the court heard, ‘excrement of a male animal’.⁵ Now her supporters outside the court were throwing ‘showers of jellybeans’ at police and chanting, ‘Bullshit! Bullshit!’⁶

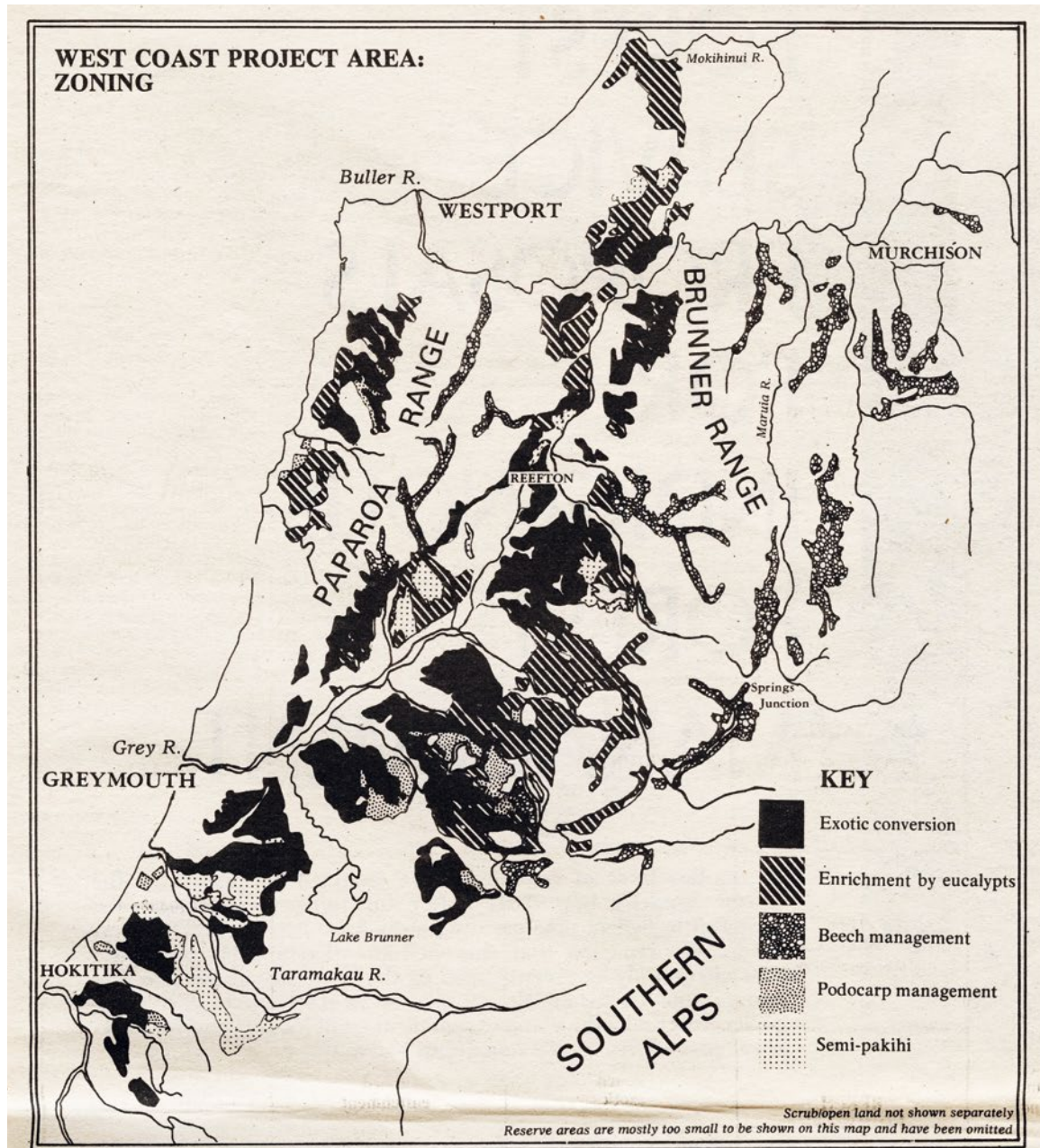
The word became a university catch-cry, including for the Anatori five, when they got back to Auckland, and began reading Forest Service media statements. They scanned the beech-plan fine print and saw through the spin. About a tenth of all remaining South Island native forest would be logged, including most lowland remnants.⁷ Yet it seemed, publicly, that hardly a native tree would be cut down. Headlines included ‘Beech forests to be preserved’, ‘Pine salvation of NZ native trees’, ‘Adequacy of forest reserves’ and ‘Reassurance on rare birds’⁸. The forests would be ‘silviculturally treated’, ‘enhanced’ and ‘enriched’.

Forest and Bird, the country’s largest conservation group, with nearly \$250,000 of assets and a membership of around 11,000, failed to clearly challenge such headlines.⁹ Some of its public statements opposed burn-offs and conversion of native forest to exotics, but these were undermined when the group also backed Forest Service claims that native forest could be ‘enriched’ by gum trees and pines.¹⁰ A March 1972 article in the *Nelson Evening Mail*, headlined, ‘Utterly opposed to forest changes’, quoted Forest and Bird also saying, ‘We recognise that there may be good reasons for utilising the areas of beech forest specified ... for commercial and other reasons.’¹¹

The official scientific advisory body the Nature Conservation Council was slightly more effective; in August 1972 it urged that biological surveys be carried out.¹² But despite saying it was ‘a little puzzled’ how beech forests could be ‘conserved and managed’ by being turned into radiata pine, the council’s majority refused to oppose beech woodlands. In many areas the Forest Service planned to leave young timber trees as in European-style woodlands but clear all the ground around them. Most native birds needed diversity – such as old rotting trees and high canopies – for survival.¹³ Walls and Hackwell found mentors outside such official watchdog bodies in individual conservationists Perrine Moncrieff, Frank Alack, Henk Heinekamp, Jack Walls and others, who were provoking angry Forest Service responses in their flurry of letters to South Island newspapers. ‘I challenge the

Typical beech forest in the upper South Island. CRAIG POTTON





In approaching the zoning of the Westland beech forests, the Forest Service claims to have excluded first those areas which are too steep or erosion prone to be safely logged, and second those areas that would be required for biological or amenity reserves. In fact, about a third of the hill country zoned for conversion is underlain by erosion-prone parent material, and erosion is now occurring on several burnt-off areas. Again, the zoning for biological reserves was strongly biased toward deforested or cutover areas, so that very little merchantable forest was actually reserved by the Forest Service. The amenity reserves are equally a token offering. They make up less than 9 percent of the lowland project area, and do not include at least 100,000 acres of forested country that would normally be considered of national park quality. The small area allowed for reserves; the inclusion of erosion-prone land; the large planned extent of exotic conversion:—all these reflect the fact that this scheme was designed to meet the minimum requirements of a kraft pulp mill which, to make a profit, must produce 500 tonnes of pulp a day [and use about 1,000 tons of wood].

Forest Service to publish a map showing in detail the extent of the proposed destruction,' Nayland College outdoor education teacher Brian Devonshire wrote in the *Nelson Evening Mail*. 'To replace beech with pine and be proud of it demonstrates the incredible fact that the very people who should be able to appreciate the aesthetic differences between pine and beech forests are entirely unable to do so.'¹⁴

Nayland College's Ecology Action joined CoEnCo, the New Zealand Conference on Environment and Conservation, formed in Wellington in the summer of 1971–72 immediately after the beech scheme was announced, with Professor John Salmon CoEnCo's founding chairman. Salmon had a key role during these years in stiffening the spine of the forest conservation movement. Many outdoor-lovers believed the main advocacy group Forest and Bird had become ineffective under the long-term presidency of a Petone-based Boy Scouts leader, Roy Nelson, aged in his seventies. Nelson was dedicated, but his brand of protest was letters to Cabinet ministers that were so polite and lacklustre they were generally ignored. Salmon became deputy president from 1971 to 1973 and distanced himself from other office-holders in the group who supported the Forest Service, especially over the beech scheme, saying 'priceless national heritage' was about to 'pulp down to Japan in ships'. Salmon described the 'constant sombre green' of pines as 'depressing', and strongly criticised an unnamed leading forester for saying 'pines provided a better scene than our native bush'. He pioneered calls for a new government agency to advocate for wildlife, waters and forests, saying the Nature Conservation Council was advisory only, 'like a tiger with trimmed claws'.¹⁵

More importantly, while in office as Forest and Bird deputy president, Salmon helped set up CoEnCo as an organisational rival. Salmon and Federated Mountain Clubs' conservation and environment committee convenor Arnold Heine hoped the new body could harness the energy of young people who joined 'Save Manapōuri' but had avoided Forest and Bird because they saw it as a relic of their grandparents' generation. Heine discovered Britain's CoEnCo during an overseas trip to research hypothermia for the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council manual, *Mountainscraft*. He and Salmon believed New Zealand's dozens of student environmental committees, such as Nayland's Ecology Action, could jointly advocate with tramping clubs as part of a permanent and powerful alliance to oppose native logging. Initially, despite Salmon's urging, Forest and Bird declined to join.¹⁶

CoEnCo proved its mettle within months. The first issue of the *New Zealand Journal of Forestry* in 1972 rubbished the new group as being made up of 'strange bedfellows': 'a mixture of wild uninformed emotionalism and sober informed expertise'.¹⁷ CoEnCo's executive responded with venom: 'There are environmental aspects of which foresters are obviously ill-informed despite your grandiose stand.'¹⁸

The movement was further boosted by the establishment of the Values Party, the world's first green political party, set up at Victoria University in May 1972. Its manifestos promoted a blueprint for New Zealand as egalitarian and ecologically sustainable, restoring a respectful relationship with nature. The party's 1972 manifesto began: 'New Zealand is in the grip of a new depression ... It is a depression in human values, a downturn not in the national economy but in the national spirit'.¹⁹ Values polled about 2 per cent in the General Election that year.²⁰

OPPOSITE The West Coast beech scheme as presented by NFAC's *Beechleaves*, Issue 3, 1975.

Also in 1972, Trussell and his flatmates at Sarnia were having trouble convincing their many student visitors there was an issue. ‘Most had no idea what a beech forest was,’ Trussell says. ‘They thought it was something that happened in England.’ They called their new group the Committee to Save NZ Beech Forest, the Beech Action Committee or Save Our Beech Forests Committee, but could not raise enough people for a decent protest.²¹

Trussell and Alpers knew the big issue was beech but, as Hackwell and Walls worked with older mentors in the south, so the Auckland group was drawn to Barney McGregor, now retired from Auckland University, and his struggles for the preservation of kauri. They learned that native forest had been declining around New Zealand at the rate of 400ha a year since 1967.²²

The young people speculated on the motive. Two departments, the Forest Service and Lands and Survey, controlled more than a quarter of New Zealand’s land area – roughly 13 per cent or four million hectares each. Like the Forest Service, Lands and Survey had a land development role and by 1965 earmarked more than a million acres (405,000ha) for turning into farms over the next decade or so, especially in the Bay of Plenty, Southland, Northland and the King Country. This would mean the loss of tens of thousands of hectares of wetlands and regenerating bush.²³ At the same time, it was reserving the mountains. About 85,000ha had been locked up and ‘sterilised’ by Lands and Survey in Westland National Park in 1960, and 199,000ha in the Mt Aspiring equivalent in 1965.²⁴ Thanks to the enthusiasm of Director-General Priestley Thomson, who was inspired by visiting ‘partially managed’ United States forest parks, the Forest Service was scrambling to secure high country too, setting up its ‘state forest parks’ – seven by 1971, with the largest, North-West Nelson State Forest Park in 1970 – that tied up 376,572ha.²⁵

New Zealand’s renewed commitment to national parks was obvious during the Manapōuri campaign, and in the way politicians reacted. The Lake Manapouri Select Committee’s recommendation to Parliament on 9 June 1971 that the lake not be raised ‘in the meantime’ was followed by Prime Minister Keith Holyoake extending the postponement in September 1971. The Forest Service presented *Utilisation of South Island Beech Forests* to Parliament in October 1971 – a timing some thought suggested the scheme’s driving force was a departmental turf war and a rush to make vast areas of virgin forests permanently unsuitable or out of reach for its Lands and Survey rival.²⁶

Students brought energy and passion but lacked experience to tackle such bureaucratic power. Victoria University zoology student Geoff Walls, Simon’s brother, said he ‘totally believed in the [conservation] cause’ when joining the Nelson Forest Service at age 20 for the summer of 1972–73 on a student holiday job, hoping to debate ecological science in the office. ‘I was naïve.’ He was told to do his work and keep his mouth shut, under the Public Service Act 1912’s secrecy provisions, while the department made personal attacks on conservationists, including his father.²⁷

This was 10 years before the Official Information Act allowed public scrutiny of state development plans, and although Walls did not set out to spy on his employer, he was in the vanguard of young students gathering much-needed detail from the inside. ‘My job was studying handwritten spread-sheets to work out timber volumes for the beech scheme ... on logging sites throughout the West Coast. I was horrified by what I saw.’

On the Coast, especially, wildlife and rare plants were largely a mystery.²⁸ The Wildlife Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, set up in 1945, was at this time ‘a badly neglected bureaucratic machine’.²⁹ It had about 80 staff around New Zealand but most were promoting introduced trout, salmon and pheasants, and regulating fishing and hunting.³⁰ A handful of staff, working largely on predator-free offshore islands, were making a panicked effort to save a narrow range of native species listed as extinction threats in the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources’ *Red Data Book* – notably lizards, takahē, kākāpō, black robin, black stilt and little spotted kiwi.³¹ The Forest Service suggested the Wildlife Branch and Botany Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) carry out beech surveys, knowing these agencies had few resources to do so.³²

This meant the foresters ‘owned’ the official story. Director-General Poole’s *Conservation Policy and Practice* described ‘conservation as applied to the forest’ in 1970 as ‘the management and husbandry of the forest for the specific objective or objectives to fulfil human needs’.³³ Native fauna were excluded from his book *Forestry in New Zealand*.³⁴ In *Beech Forests*, a 50-page Forest Service promotion, new Director-General Thomson said ‘clearly some people have formed judgments based on unsubstantiated opinions rather than on facts’.³⁵ On a later page the Service’s forest management director, Andy Kirkland, argued for logging under the heading ‘A BEECH FOREST NEEDS LIGHT TO GROW’. Nowhere does the booklet list the effects on wildlife of the foresters’ plans to turn dense bush into European-style open woodland.

Trussell decided to do his own on-the-ground research, not only to photograph the scheme’s forests but also to see ongoing milling of podocarps, especially by Fletchers in what he called the ‘gigantic forest bowl’ of the Ōpārara in North-West Nelson State Forest Park near Karamea. By this time Fletcher Holdings was one of New Zealand’s biggest companies and the largest exporter of manufactured goods, establishing the country’s first major steel mill, Pacific Steel, and the Tasman Pulp & Paper Company, and involved also in a range of other industries from ready-mix concrete to linseed and rapeseed oil. Trussell took the Fordson to the South Island in February 1973 with a supporter, engineering student Gilbert Bogle, whose father Gordon Bogle, was Auckland University’s electrical engineering professor and coincidentally a good friend and former university colleague of Thomson’s. After two weeks, mostly on the West Coast, Trussell returned to Auckland and started a publicity campaign against the beech scheme, with an illustrated four and a half pages in Auckland University’s *Craccum* magazine in April and a half-page headed ‘The fate of a forest’ in the *Auckland Star* in May.³⁶

Like CoEnCo, Trussell did not hold back, saying Fletchers was ‘leaving a trail of



An all-to-common sight on the West Coast in the 1970s: the Forest Service clear-felling native forest and replacing it in pines, in this case Nemona State Forest southeast of Greymouth. Conservation groups knew this practice would become even more widespread under the beech scheme. DAVID HARDING, ACTION FOR ENVIRONMENT

devastation amongst our last great stands of rimu and white pine’ in the Ōpārara, and accusing the Forest Service of ‘intellectual ineptitude’ and calling its beech plan an ‘ecological obscenity’. Thomson complained to his friend Bogle senior about ‘an uninformed bunch of upstarts’, or words to that effect, and the professor suggested Thomson could meet his son and Trussell next time he was in Auckland.³⁷

That meeting took place in an Epsom motel weeks later, with Andy Kirkland there too. ‘He [Thomson] yelled at us for about 20 minutes non-stop and went very red in the face,’ Trussell recalls. He and Gilbert Bogle tried to widen the focus by arguing that destroying eco-systems to create capital was short-sighted and outdated, but Thomson and Kirkland were on a much narrower wavelength. Kirkland, Trussell recalls, was ‘good cop’ and ‘a smooth operator’ who argued science and ‘fibbed to us about successful regeneration of beech when properly “managed”’. In comparison, the young activists liked Thomson for his collegial ill-temper and passion. While the meeting changed neither minds nor policy, it was historic as the start of many off-the-record talks with the Forest Service’s leadership.

Trussell’s confrontational stance that so upset officials attracted more student followers. On Sunday 24 June 1973, 17 people, mostly students, officially became the Beech Forest Action Committee (BFAC) at their new ‘registered office’ at 5 Bradford Street, having ‘subscribed hereto’ under the Incorporated Societies Act 1908 and filling in and signing the required forms.³⁸ Trussell was elected chairperson and Philip Alpers secretary. Diana Wichtel, another of the signatories, thought of the first campaign slogan: ‘WE WILL FIGHT THEM ON THE BEECHES!’, and for weeks Trussell drove *Wilson’s Express* at

nights and in the early morning, stopping often so that fellow campaigners could stand on its cab roof to paste the slogan high on power poles and commercial buildings around Auckland. Trussell thought New Zealand Forest Products, the country’s largest industrial company, was a potential bidder for the beech, so the group hit its Penrose head office and surrounding streets especially hard.³⁹

Former Auckland University Students Association executive member and ex-editor of its *Craccum* magazine, Tim Shadbolt, led the first demonstration, outside the Auckland Post Office in lower Queen Street, during early-morning rush hour. He talked briefly about the issue’s importance, then handed the megaphone to Trussell, a reluctant public speaker. ‘Speak to the people, Denys,’ Shadbolt said in his slow, iconic drawl.⁴⁰

BFAC flourished, and with the help of Radio Hauraki manager David Gapes, who became a member, the group collected some 33,000 of a 110,000-signature nationwide Forest and Bird petition in just 10 days before its deadline of mid-July. The petition called for a reduction in the area clear-felled and converted into pines.⁴¹ BFAC also became a part of CoEnCo, strengthening CoEnCo’s stance on native forests at a time when Forest and Bird was vacillating wildly.

Alpers argued that the fledgling Auckland group was too far away from either Parliament or the South Island to run an effective nationwide campaign, and set out to create southern branches. One obvious prospect was Guy Salmon at North Terrace, Wellington, who had hopes for his own career path, studying sociology, geography, anthropology and economics, and making a name for himself as an articulate youth leader, but was finding it difficult escaping his father John Salmon’s shadow. A year earlier, Simon Reeves, an Auckland lawyer and supporter of BFAC, had contacted Salmon junior to tell him a United Nations conference on the environment was to be held in Stockholm in June 1972 and he wanted to help sponsor him to go. In an impassioned address to the United Nations Association of New Zealand in Wellington in April, 21-year-old Salmon called for a ‘massive campaign’ by the UN to educate people on a pending collapse of Earth’s life-support systems. ‘I also went to the *Dominion* and said if I give you a couple of “op-ed” pieces will you give a few hundred towards airfares,’ Salmon recalls. ‘They said “yes”.’ He found Sweden had a strong conservation movement, with major victories, for example, in saving rivers from hydro-electric dams. ‘I arranged to stay for a couple of weeks interviewing people in government and in civil society. It was a mind-blowing experience.’⁴²

Alpers promoted BFAC’s cause when he spoke to Salmon after Stockholm. ‘Before starting to save the forests of the world, we need to fix New Zealand forests,’ he urged, and Salmon remembers thinking, ‘Here is someone of my generation, saying what my father was saying.’ Alpers also spoke to Gwenny Davis during that same call. ‘He had a wonderful voice and we were awed by it,’ she says. Toll calls were expensive in those days, and Davis remembers that Alpers chatted with no sense of urgency. She and Salmon thought the Auckland group must have a campaign fund; they had no idea Alpers was working nights on a telephone exchange and that his toll calls were free.

On 18 July 1973, within weeks of BFAC’s formation, Salmon took the Sarnia-based activists into entirely new territory – the Land and Agriculture Select Committee at Parliament – to present an eight-page BFAC submission. Alpers and Salmon also listened



An early Beech Forest Action Committee logo.

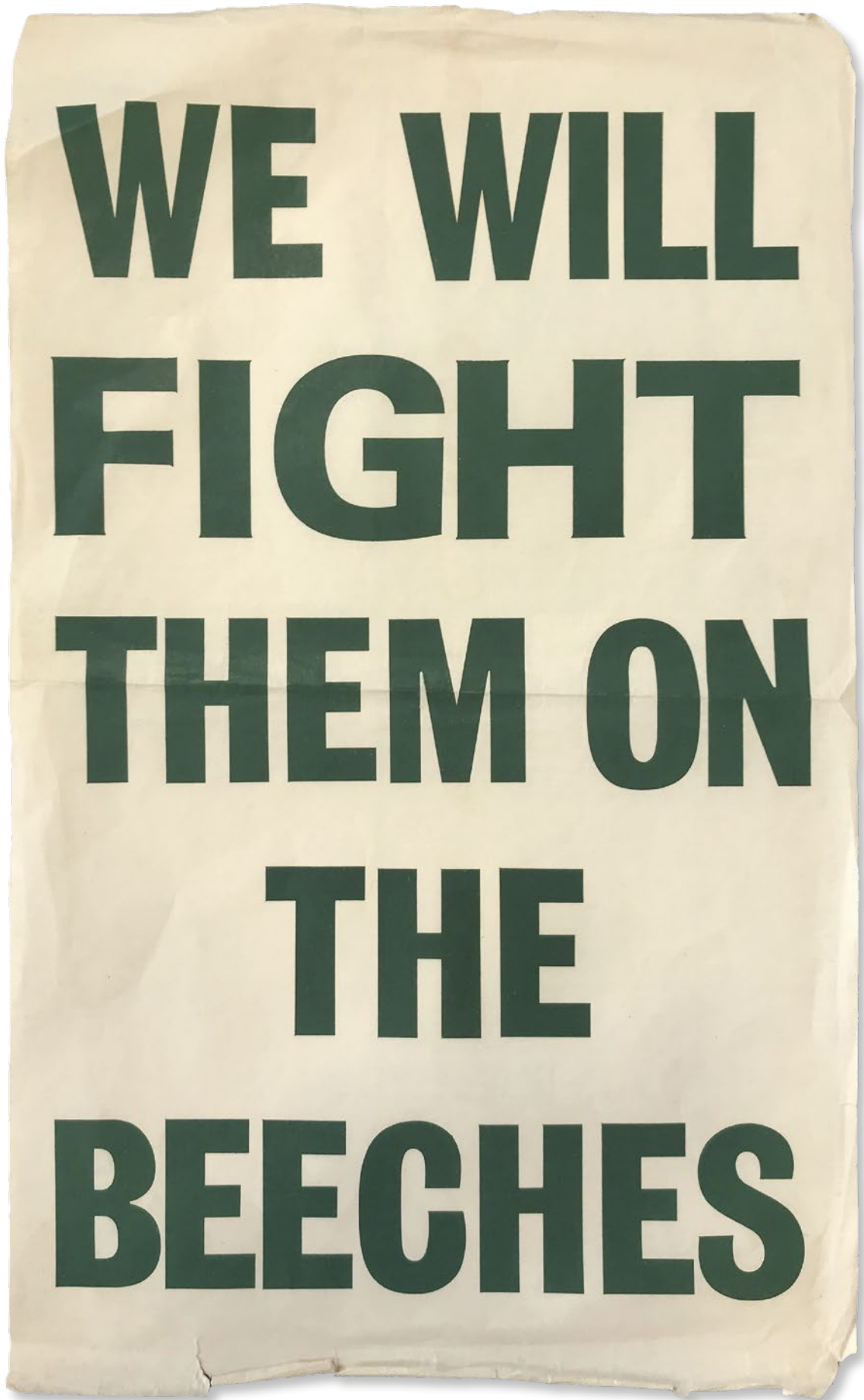
to Forest and Bird's Roy Nelson, now 76, tell committee members there was no hostility between department officers and Forest and Bird, and that New Zealand had 'one of the finest forest services in the world' and 'there was a case for using some of the beech areas for production'.⁴³

Sarnia was amazed too when Salmon, in efforts to create a credible Wellington branch, compiled a list of possible members, rang or wrote to each individually about the planned 500 to 600 tons-a-day pulp mill threatening large areas of the West Coast, and invited them to meet at North Terrace to start 'an active campaign'. Within months, Alpers, Davis, Salmon and Trussell did the same in the South Island, setting up branches in Nelson, Christchurch and Invercargill. 'One day Christchurch residents woke up to the message "WE WILL FIGHT THEM ON THE BEECHES!" plastered everywhere across the centre of town,' Annie Wheeler recalls. 'Denys Trussell and other folk had come to the city and drove around in the middle of the night putting up posters. That was what got Craig [Potton] and me and others like Gerry [McSweeney] to a public meeting, and soon after we set up the local BFAC committee.'⁴⁴

As a way of giving new members a job, BFAC set up nationwide 'working groups'. Wellington was the most ambitious, with 10 such groups: policy review, public relations, alternative industries, ecology, sociology, general organising, fundraising, the sawmill industry, economics and organising public speeches.⁴⁵ Public speaking was essential in getting BFAC's message across. Guy Salmon and Philip Alpers were confident and natural speakers, and made an impression on students, particularly. 'He was charismatic,' Simon Walls says of Salmon's lunch-time presentation at Stoke's Nayland College. 'It was a powerful message and we took it all in.' Like Trussell, others were less keen. 'It was bad enough Friday nights handing out BFAC broadsheets to people on the street,' Geoff Walls remembers. 'I hated it.' Botany student Gerry McSweeney became chair of Christchurch BFAC in late 1973 at age 19: 'There's nothing like having to front up to conservation forums and the like to make you grow up fast.' Davis, like McSweeney, displayed no sign of nerves in public, but for a start occasionally threw up in the toilet just before public meetings.⁴⁶

In September, Salmon took Action for Environment leaders Helen and Tom Rainforth, who had previously tackled Wellington regional issues, for a 'Westland Project Area' tour with foresters Alec Johnstone, Kurt Gleeson and Peter Allan. In November and December Alpers and Salmon ran 'activists' training' sessions, first at Auckland University, then at Victoria. Public speaking was the main topic at an all-day Wellington session. Each participant was coached by debater and *Speak Easy* author Jim Milburn and Wellington lawyer Hector MacNeill. Armed with BFAC's research and helped by Salmon, the students then gave 'model talks' on beech forests and faced 'sticky questions' from the floor.⁴⁷ 'Being an effective leader of a campaign group was like a full-time job,' Trussell says. 'Guy Salmon seemed heaven-sent.'

OPPOSITE One of the first BFAC campaign slogans, 'We will fight them on the beeches' was used on a poster that appeared throughout New Zealand.



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