

Hakaterere Conservation Park

Guiding Concession

Tussock & Beech Ecotours is a guided nature tour business based in the Hakaterere Conservation Park. It has been operating for eight years and has a Department of Conservation guiding concession. This concession system ensures that businesses operating on conservation land do so with safety systems in place and in a manner which is of minimal disturbance to the environment, plants and animals. The activities they cater for include walking and tramping, birdwatching, alpine flowers, history and geology – and even tours to the site of Edoras (in the upper Rangitata basin) in the Lord of the Rings movies. Their website is www.nature.net.nz

Background

The 67 000 hectare Hakaterere Conservation Park brings together 19 separate areas of conservation land and extends from the headwaters of the Rangitata River in the east to Mt Hutt and Mt Somers Conservation Areas in the east and the Rakaia River in the north

Important Conservation Values

The conservation importance of this area is becoming increasingly recognised:

- The Department of Conservation recognises that the complex of basins within the Park (the Heron, Ashburton Lakes, upper Rangitata and Hakaterere basins) is the last extensive area of high country in the South Island where wilding pines and willow species are not out of control. Poisoning and removal of these invasive trees has already begun.
- In 2007 it was one of three areas nationally to receive funding for wetland protection from an initiative that the Green Party won with the present Labour Government.
- World Heritage status has been recommended for this area by the Natural Heritage Advisory Group - further emphasis of the status and significance of Hakaterere Conservation Park.

Glacial History

Glacial landforms are usually on a large scale, but the mosaic of glacial erosional and depositional landforms in this area are of a more intimate scale. Cirques, U-shaped alpine valleys, terminal and lateral moraines, kettleholes, roche moutonnées, large greywacke scree, river and glacial terraces and deep gorges are all found here.

Braided Rivers

There are three braided rivers in the Park – the Rangitata, Ashburton, Cameron & Rakaia. Braided rivers need steep, mountainous, glaciated terrain in the headwaters and a plentiful supply of gravel. They also need a basin or plain to flow over with a gentler gradient that allow the braids to form. The Cameron River is a small braided river that runs some 30 kilometres from its source in the Arrowsmith Range to its mouth at Lake Stream (the outlet of Lake Heron). It is a fine example of an unmodified braided river. From its source in the Cameron Glacier, it tumbles through an alpine basin, into a gorge before spreading out in its braided form over the Cameron Fan. There is very little evidence of human influence on this river – it is

largely weed free and no water is abstracted for irrigation. Being a part of the Rakaia catchment it is protected by a National Conservation Order.

Bird Habitats

On the Canterbury Plains the Rangitata, Ashburton and Rakaia rivers carry high densities of introduced weeds including broom, gorse, willows and lupin. However in the upper reaches within the Hakatere Park, these same braided rivers are largely weed free and in this natural state support some very special and threatened native birds. The rivers and the Hakatere / Ashburton lakes provide the largest habitat for aquatic birdlife in New Zealand. Some 40 000 birds can be present at any one time. Over 80% of the total population of the endemic wrybill nest in this area, as do 10% of the threatened endemic black-fronted tern and 5% of the total population of the threatened black-billed gull and white-fronted tern. 20% of the world population of the endemic New Zealand Scaup are found on the lakes, as are 20% of the New Zealand population of the rare Australasian crested grebe (there are fewer than 400 of the birds surviving in New Zealand).

Tussockland Plants

The drier tussocklands of the eastern South Island have not been well protected in the past and the establishment of conservation parks such as Hakatere is an attempt to change this.

Braided riverbeds have their own flora and specialised low growing plants such as the mat daisy (*Raoulia* species), the mat brooms (*Carmichaelia uniflora*, *C. monroi*) and geranium (*Geranium sessiliflorum*) can be found. The flowers of the braided riverbed plants are important food sources for a wide range of native pollinators - moths and butterflies and other native insects.

Scree slopes on the greywacke mountains are another demanding habitat for some specialised endemic plants – and a favourite hunting ground for alpine flower enthusiasts. South Island edelweiss (*Leucogenes grandiceps*), black scree button daisy (*Leptinella atrata*), scree buttercups (*Ranunculus crithmifolius* & *R. haastii*), and the rare penwiper plant (*Notothlaspi rosulatum*) can be found on scree slopes – but they take some effort and time to find!

Landscape Values

The moraines, wetlands, lakes, braided rivers and mountains make for a magnificent landscape in this new conservation park. With careful and appropriate management the survival and growth of the unique plants and animals which live in the many and special habitats of the park should now be secure.

Acknowledgement

Eugenie Sage *Rakaia-Rangitata-Hakatere* Forest & Bird, No.342, May 2007