Representations

Leith Saddle Motorway Realignment *Abe Gray*

Most of our members will be familiar with the area where State Highway 1 crosses the Leith Saddle. If you're not, it's the bit when you're driving on the northern motorway and you find yourself for a brief moment surrounded by lush native rainforest with emergent podocarps thrusting themselves majestically into the sunlight. This magnificent vista is generally accompanied by the sound of calling bellbirds and tuis. Many of us marvel at such a site, especially when it occurs along a major metropolitan motorway, but we also take it for granted and assume such wonders will be available for our viewing indefinitely. Sadly, this may not be the case, and as with so many of New Zealand's natural treasures, it is threatened by the spectre of "progress". Transit New Zealand is currently evaluating several options for the realignment of a sharp bend in the motorway at exactly this point where it passes through the native bush. The Botanical Society of Otago, along with several other interested community groups, is seeking to work with Transit New Zealand to minimize the extent of any impact that this realignment could have on the vegetation. Members of the society have contacted those involved and are planning to participate in a meeting between all parties, scheduled for the 2nd of September. Members of the society are also currently undertaking a statistical analysis of road safety data surrounding previous realignments to independently confirm the stated benefits of the proposed realignment and have offered their services to Transit NZ to assist with any sampling that will be needed to monitor the impact. This area is of particular conservation value as it is one of only a few examples of kaikawaka (NZ Cedar, *Libocedrus bidwillii*) cloud forest. The bush is comprised of cedars, as well as podocarps (Rimu, Miro, Totara, Matai) thrusting themselves high above a canopy of Peppertree (*Pseudowintera colorata*) and Stinkwood (*Coprosma foetidissima)* among others. Many of the emergent trees are covered in epiphytes, which include two species of native orchid (*Earina autumnalis* and *Earina mucronata*) and the ground is covered in multiple fern species. The society is interested in minimizing the negative impact of any sort of development projects that could potentially damage the vegetation in areas of botanical interest, with the hope that such areas may continue to be appreciated and investigated by botanists, both amateur and professional for generations to come.

For further information or involvement email Abe: *graab419@student.otago.ac.nz*

Proposed Realignment of Northern Motorway around Leith Saddle – Report on Consultation Meeting - 12 noon – 2 pm, 2 September, 2004, Dunningham Suite, Dunedin Public Library. *Toni Atkinson*

The meeting was attended by at least 18 people, the majority from environmental and community groups. There were two representatives from Transit NZ, two from Opus Consulting, and one from Dunedin City Council.

Transit's concern is that the two corners immediately south of the Leith Saddle are an accident area – although they could not tell us exactly how much higher the crash

numbers are than for other sections of the road. Most crashes result from "loss of control" while cornering. Their preferred solution to this problem is major road realignment, cutting off both corners, and digging the road down around 6-7 metres below the current Leith Saddle. They presented the group with three possible plans along these lines. They had not drawn in the "off-ramps almost to full motorway standard" which they said "will have more impact than the realignment itself", because the off-ramps are dependent on the yet-to-be-decided route. However, some form of spaghetti-junction would be likely at the Saddle itself.

The groups present are concerned that present environmental and scenic values will be compromised or lost. The Resource Management Act requires the planner to "avoid, remedy or mitigate" adverse environmental impacts. Transit's preferred option is to "mitigate" the effects of major realignment. Many of the others present preferred to "avoid" the realignment altogether. Expressed another way, roading engineers begin with their "best case scenario" which is the most "efficient" curve from a roading point of view. In contrast, the members of interested groups started from *their* best case scenario – the present curve of the road. We tried, and I think succeeded, to persuade Transit to draw up another much more low impact scenario as an option for debate, however they doubt that this will provide an adequate solution to the accident problem.

One of the most interesting aspects of the meeting was entomologist Tony Harris stating that the forest to the west of the road is the type locality for a considerable number of New Zealand invertebrates. He provided Transit with a detailed written description of the invertebrate species present.

Transit and Opus are "available for one-on-one meetings". They will present their options to the public in early October. If the BSO would like to have an input, I think it is likely to be most effective between now and then.

Fate is on a lean for Leaning Lodge

Katrina Spencer

Over the last 40 years a considerable amount of botanical & ecological research has been conducted on the Rock and Pillar Range including work on alpine plant communities (Talbot *et al.*1992) (University of Otago Alpine Ecosystems Research Group, ongoing research), tussock grassland (Mark & Holdsworth, 1990) to name but a few. The Rock and Pillar Range is an excellent location for research given its close proximity to Dunedin and easy access. Tussock grassland, sub-alpine shrubland and alpine plant communities are well represented on the Rock and Pillar Range providing researchers with a wide range of communities to study. From a botanical perspective the Rock and Pillar Range is home to a number of endemic species including *Abrotanella* cf. *inconspicua, Celmisia haastii* var.*tomentosa, Kelleria villosa* var.*barbata* and *Brachyscome humilis*. The presence of Leaning Lodge hut on the Rock and Pillar Range has provided scientists with the means to conduct their research on these special species and their respective communities for many years.

However, days of the Kiwi backcountry hut are numbered. As the number of people venturing into wilderness areas increases, the pressure on hut facilities in these areas