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

grows. The Department of Conservation (DOC) is attempting to improve huts in a number of our national parks and conservation areas, but in some situations their existing state is considered too poor to warrant replacement or repair leading to removal instead. Leaning Lodge on the Rock and Pillar Range is one such back country hut. Those members who attended our Botanical society trip to the Rock and Pillar Range in April may recall having our lunch beside the wee hut.

Leaning Lodge is a small corrugated iron hut full of history and character that continues to provide shelter in the sometimes inhospitable conditions that the Rock and Pillar Range can produce. The hut was originally established by the Otago Ski club as a place for members to stay during ski season. When the first commercial ski fields opened in Central Otago the ski club shifted its focus away from the Rock and Pillar Range and as a result sold the hut to the Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club (OTMC). DOC also has a vested interest in the state of Leaning Lodge given that the hut is situated on conservation land. Despite the hut being under the ownership of OTMC, DOC is potentially liable for any accidents that may arise from its current condition.

Recently concern has been raised about the general safety of the hut and DOC has proposed to remove the hut by end of 2005 unless other appropriate measures can be taken to improve Leaning Lodge's current state. The OTMC held a meeting in late June to discuss the fate of Leaning Lodge. Rob Daly and I attended the meeting on behalf of the Botany Department, Alpine research group and the Otago Botanical Society. We decided to make an appearance at the meeting to ensure that the members of the OTMC were aware of how often we use the lodge for research purposes as well as recreation and provide support to assist them in the negotiation's with DOC. The majority of the members of OTMC present expressed an interest and concern with the Leaning Lodge situation and were delighted to receive any additional support.

One member of the OTMC pointed out there is also Big Hut on the top of the Rock and Pillar range that could be used by trampers and other outdoor enthusiasts as an alternative. Big Hut Trust has recently received some funding to begin a restoration project up there this summer. However, Leaning Lodge remains the most readily accessible site for research and recreational users being lower down than Big Hut. Another member of OTMC highlighted the historical value of preserving Leaning Lodge.

My greatest concerns over the possible removal of Leaning Lodge are:

1. The threat that this action could pose to future scientific research in our alpine environment. Numerous studies have been conducted up there, particularly around Leaning Lodge, providing us with valuable data that could potentially assist in conserving this special environment.
2. Furthermore, I feel that there could be a greater risk to people's lives were they to remove the hut. Even though Big Hut will remain it may not be feasible for people in the Leaning Lodge area to retreat to Big Hut if the conditions on the top of the Rock and Pillar Range are dangerous.

It was agreed in the meeting that the OTMC, with the support of other interest groups, could approach DOC and attempt to reach a compromise over the situation.

References

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Notes and Articles

***Gingidia grisea* – a new species from north-east Otago** *John Barkla*

In the *Bot. Soc. Otago Newsletter* (No. 38) Peter Heenan from Landcare Research commented on the importance of the proposed Mt Watkin reserve for an unnamed species of *Gingidia*. It had initially been drawn to his attention by BSO member Brian Patrick who noted it had a different invertebrate fauna from *G. montana*.

In the *New Zealand Journal of Botany* (Vol. 42: 175-180) Heenan formally describes and names this new north-east Otago endemic as *Gingidia grisea*. The specific epithet *grisea* refers to the grey appearance of the leaves. The dense glaucous bloom on both leaf surfaces, along with secondary bracts which are broad-elliptic and long-acuminate, distinguish this species from the more widespread *G. montana*.

Gingidia grisea appears restricted to a small geographic area of north-east Otago from Mt Watkin in the south to near Herbert in the north. Its western limits are the upper parts of the North Branch Waikouaiti River. Altitudinal range is from near sea level (Shag Point) to about 600 m (Mt Watkin).

Gingidia grisea is restricted to base-rich substrates of igneous, schist and sedimentary rock. Rock outcrops and bluffs are favoured habitats and a stronghold of the species is the bluffs of Trotters Gorge Scenic Reserve.

Heenan cites several examples of habitat loss due to the ingress of shrubby weeds and shading by forestry plantations. He refers to the observations of BSO members that goats pose a threat to the vegetation of Mt Watkin, where *G. grisea* is now confined to inaccessible rock outcrops. In light of the decline in the total number of populations during the past 20 years Heenan recommends *G. grisea* have a conservation status of Nationally Vulnerable $_{DP}$. The qualifier Data Poor recognises that more field survey is required to fully elucidate its distribution, population size and extent of recruitment.

New sites for *G. grisea* in the Kauru River and Shag Valley have been discovered since Heenan's paper went to press. I would be very pleased to hear of further records from members.

(You can see a colour version of John's *Gingidia grisea* image on our website – *ed*)