South Westland Moraine Podocarps

Sir,

May I congratulate Messrs Stewart, White and Duncan (Feb 1998 NZ Forestry) on an article that seems to make better sense of these forest patterns than anything I have seen published previously.

Perhaps, however, there is still room for consideration of effects of climatic fluctuations, possibly, as I believe Jack Holloway suggested, thinning of the hardwood canopy by insects during times of climatic stress.

Also, it may be timely to record some of the background to the 'typing' pattern shown on the National Forest Survey plans.

The system used was derived by the first Unit Leader, Bob Lawn, and while it was modified a little and expanded considerably as work progressed southward through different associations, the basis remained intact, with a strong topographical bias in the interpretations.

While the extreme complexity of patterns in the Haast area demanded a much greater number of 'types' with narrower parameters, in the North (Rimu Forest etc.) the highest volume Type P1 remained fairly complex, for several reasons:

- That was how Bob Lawn saw it, and who was I to make major changes in my earlier work?
- The exercise was, after all, basically to determine timber volumes, and 250 merchantable rimu per ha agree fairly closely in this respect with 150 somewhat larger trees.
- Some of the densely stocked patches were so small that acre plots would have crossed boundaries.

When at a later stage a request was received to delineate these, it came onto a personality clash, (undoubtedly well earned by a brash young forester), which resulted in information being returned that I was not capable of doing this and myself being forbidden to attempt it.

In fact, this type could have been split quite easily into two or more subtypes, and for ecological purposes this could have been as important as the delineation of the other 'pure' rimu 'types' recognised.

Should anyone attempt to use these plans from NFS Sub-Unit I and possibly further south towards Bruce Bay, I recommend strongly that they retrieve the original aerial photographs from whatever dark hole they now reside in and belatedly attend to this job.

I realise the article referred to dealt with moraine forests only, but in terms of a more general understanding of Westland's ecology I am sure some of the answers must lie in probably later establishment of 'reclaimed' dunes etc. in the Haast.

Finally, may I support Messrs Stewart, White and Dunca's 'notion that lesser storms ... initiated local canopy collapse ...' Anyone who has lain in a small tent, with water rising through the slightly sloping ground beneath us, listening to a strong 'nor'wester' bringing tree after tree in laminate forest crashing to the ground at distances that seemed far too close is a believer!

As, of course, must be anyone who has seen the fringes of a major pahiki in the Haast during a summer made dry by prevailing north easterly winds, with the ground rising and falling in waves as the trees swayed.

My only reservation is the paucity of regeneration observed where canopy collapse had occurred previously, suggesting that we must also consider other factors such as climatic variations.

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