



# Contested and Mediated Rurality

## A Case of the South Island High Country

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# Introduction

- Rurality and represented images
- South Island High Country
- Traditional recreational usage
- Land Tenure Review changing supply and demand
- Movies and images of the High Country
- Film tourists in the High Country
- Implications
- Conclusion

# South Island High Country

- Maori travel route, and resources
- Colonial land holdings
  - Vast tracts of land for pastoral grassing
- Owned and controlled by the Government
  - Land Act (1948) rolling long-term leases to run holders
- Limited management and production possibilities
  - Pastoral (grazing) leases
- Relatively free public access
- Range of recreational opportunities

# Contests in the High Country

- Rural v urban
  - Providing for rural community whilst providing for urban demand and perception
- Rural v nature
  - Modifying a nature landscape for farming
- Rural v conservation
  - Farm production and nature protection
- Private v public ownership
  - Government owned, long term lease with rights of occupancy



# Recreational Users of the High Country

- June 2000-June 2001
- 98% New Zealanders
  - Compared with 51-55% in the Conservation Estate
- 62% male
- 81% aged between 25 and 64
- Modal group size of 3
- On average groups spent 3 days
  - 31% only made a day visit
- Primary reason for each respondent's trip
  - 99% decide before leaving

# Recreational Users of the High Country

- 9% first time High Country users
  - 80% of respondents had been to other High Country locations in the past 12 months
  - Median of 14 days of visiting High Country a year
- Friends and family main information source (72%)
- 47% of respondents belonged to recreation organisations or clubs that make specific use of the High Country
- Increasingly, displaced users from the Conservation Estate

# Recreation in the High Country

## Recreationists

## Owners

Activities	% Respondents	Activity	% of Respondents
Tramping	29	Hunting	71
Hunting	28	Tramping	61
Skiing	11	4WD driving	43
Visit Family/friends	4	Fishing	30
Relaxation	4	Mountain biking	20
4WD driving	3	Skiing/snow sports	17
Mountain biking	3	Horse trekking	16
Orienteering	3	Trail biking	15
Horse Trekking	3		
Other	5		

# Mediated High Coun

- In part reflecting traditional practice and recreational use
- Romanticised and nationalised images
- Product advertising
  - *Mainland* cheese
  - *Speights* beer
- Regionalisation
- Increasingly tourism promotion

# High Country after Tenure Review

- More recently Land Tenure Review has been implemented
  - Crown Pastoral Land Act (1998)
  - Privatised the valleys, and placed the tops within the Conservation Estate
    - Contests over what land is within which camp
  - Reduced limitations on land management
- Tourism has been actively sort
  - Tool to economically (and socially) sustain stations and the High Country

# Tourism Contests in the High Country

- Production v recreation
  - Diversified production now including recreation
- Traditional v new, Rural v urban and Domestic v international tourists
  - Small number of low yield visitors, compared to large(r) numbers of high yield
- Active v passive activities
  - Move to passive interaction in rural environment
- The last bastion of the traditional user?
  - Supply for yield
  - International visitor focus

# Selection of Films in the High Country

Film	Theme	Time Setting
<i>Off the Edge</i> (1977)	Adventure trip documentary	Contemporary
<i>Good Bye Pork Pie</i> (1980)	Road trip run from the police	Contemporary
<i>Starlight Hotel</i> (1987)	On the run from the law	Historical (1930s)
<i>The Grasscutter</i> (1988)	Hiding from the Ulster Volunteer Force then running for life	Contemporary
<i>Willow</i> (1988)	Protecting baby from evil queen	Mythical
<i>Forgotten Silver</i> (1995)	Documentary of film genius Colin McKenzie	Historical (1888-1939)
<i>Magik and Rose</i> (1999)	Fertility and wild foods	Contemporary
<i>Perfect Strangers</i> (2002)	West Coast abduction	Contemporary
<i>The Lord of the Rings – Trilogy</i> (2003)	Taking a ring on an adventure	Mythical
<i>The Lion Witch and the Wardrobe</i> (2005)	Children save a parallel land	Mythical

# Images of the High Country

- National images of rugged or old codgers
  - Direct contrast to urban lifestyles
  - Get away from it all (and the baddies)
  - Bad urban people travel through
  - A pace behind
- Increasingly national and international images of the High Country mythical lands
  - Mythical, magical and even further times behind
- Further contrast to urban lifestyle and actual provision
- All presented through mediums of influence

# High Country Films' Effect on Tourism

- Increased international awareness of New Zealand and especially the High Country
- Very limited impact on overall New Zealand tourism numbers
  - Despite all the reports
- Influence what tourists do and see when in New Zealand
  - Made some places popular, and others changed what is seen

# High Country Film Tourists

- Substantial self-organised tourism to publicly accessible sites
  - Generally not sign posted (guide book)
    - Ashburton Council issued an Edoras information leaflet
      - Detailing distances and advises of precautions that should be taken while travelling in the Upper Rangitata Valley
- Organised tour groups
  - *Lord of the Rings*
    - Queenstown
      - Lothlorien, Isengard and Fangorn
    - Upper Rangitata Valley
      - Edoras
- Not many special interest tourists



# Upper Rangitata Valley *LOTR*

- Mt Sunday – Edoras November 2004-April 2005
  - Increase in day visitor numbers since construction of the film set begun in 1999
- Privately managed High Country station
  - Access is free for pedestrians
- Nine operators with half or full day-tours available
  - Two tours as part of a nationwide tour of *Lord of the Rings* film locations
  - 4WD vehicles and minibuses
    - Also a small number of helicopters and small planes



# The Tourists

- From Australia, the United States or England
  - Only a few domestic visitors
- Slightly more women than men
  - Mid 20s to mid 40s
- Most tourists had planned the chosen tour for at least two months
  - Minority had chosen the tour because other tours into the High Country were fully booked
- A third of all participants had not read the *Lord of the Rings* books nor seen all films
  - Following friends' recommendations to do a *Lord of the Rings* tour

# Activities

- Drive in and talk from guide
- Groups are allowed to walk to the top of Mt Sunday
  - 40 minutes each way
  - Limited by tourists' fitness and weather
- One tour allowed to drive halfway up the hill
- Photo taking and talking loudly

# Film Tourists' Outcomes

- “The panorama was more visually magnificent than expected”
- Return conversations tend to focus on the landscape
  - Compared to the conversation topics at the beginning of the tour
    - Often focused on New Zealand culture, general tour itineraries and *Lord of the Rings* themes
- Some tourists' suggestions for tours to visit more remote areas of the High Country



# Film Magnified the Contests

- Dramatic difference with users
  - Demographics, activities, time, places, prices
- Currently film tourism in localised sites
  - Though film tourists noted they want to see more of the High Country
- National urban awareness of the High Country, and greater perceived accessibility
- Recreational/tourism impacts localised, on much greater scale
  - More people coming in without awareness of appropriate behaviour
  - Also more getting into trouble – lost, breakdowns...



# Implications

- Provides another image of the High Country
  - Reinforces the rural (mythical) versus urban dichotomy
- Luxurisation and privatisation of recreation opportunity
  - Land Tenure Review and increased profitable demand
  - Further emphasised with the film market
- Limiting 'free' access and range of activities
  - Largely due to the increased 'urban' user
- Further displacement of traditional recreationists

# Conclusion

- South Island High Country in a state of change
- Traditional recreational usage as displaced from the Conservation Estate
- Land Tenure Review changing opportunities to supply visitor experiences
- Films present a mythical High Country and inducing a new type of visitor
- Film magnifying the contests, including mediated images now a contest themselves
- Rurality is attractive, though implications for economically managed availability