



## **A History of the Hanmer Heritage Forest**

The Hanmer Heritage Forest covers 203 ha of land adjacent to the western side of Hanmer Springs, North Canterbury.

The land, including the forest, was publicly owned from 1860 until 2000 initially by the Nelson Provincial Council and then by a succession of Government departments. During this time it was used:

- as open space around the hot pools of Hanmer Springs
- as an experimental forest to trial exotic timber species for commercial production
- for landscape amenity values
- as a recreational resource for the local community and visitors.

Today it is a unique forest of century old exotic trees with an extensive recreational infrastructure, mainly of walking tracks and mountain bike trails.

Below is the chronological history of the forest.

- 1860 The Nelson Provincial Council set aside a Thermal Reserve of 2560 acres (1036 ha) around the hot pools of Hanmer Springs. It included the open tussock country of what is now the Hanmer Heritage Forest land. This was the first indication of public interest in the area.
- 1900 The newly established Forestry Branch of the NZ Department of Lands and Survey acquired 243 ha of the Thermal Reserve land for forestation. The land became incorporated into the Hanmer State Forest. Included were the present Hanmer Heritage Forest land, the open areas near the former Forest Park Information Centre and the Woodland Walk.
- 1902 The Forestry Branch began establishing exotic trees on the 243 ha along with other lower parts of the Hanmer State Forest. This was part of the Government's policy to 'use waste lands while improving the natural environment'. The trees were mostly planted by prison labour and a large nursery was established. It became one of the earliest State Forests in NZ with the first plantings being on the present Hanmer Heritage Forest land. The main planting program continued until 1935, eventually covering 3500 ha, almost a third of the wider Hanmer State Forest.
- 1919 The Forestry Branch was separated from the Department of Lands and Survey to become the State Forest Service. (In 1958 the State Forest Service acquired the Conical Hill Reserve from the Department of Health.)

**Hanmer Heritage Forest Trust**  
**PO Box 216, Hanmer Springs 7360**  
**[www.hanmerforest.co.nz](http://www.hanmerforest.co.nz)**



1968 The State Forest Service formed the Forest Walk in the Hanmer Heritage Forest. (The Woodland Walk and the Mt Isobel Track were formed in 1971)

1970 The State Forest Service set aside and gazetted 203 ha as a Recreation Area with its primary use to be recreation rather than timber production. The area was bounded by Dog Creek, Jollies Pass Road, Fowlers Lane and the southern edge of the forest – the same as the present Hanmer Heritage Forest land.

1978 The Hanmer State Forest (of 9458 ha and of which included the Recreation Area) and the adjacent Grantham State Forest (of 7375 ha) were combined to form the Hanmer Forest Park. The Hanmer Forest Park was owned and administered by the renamed NZ Forest Service (the former State Forest Service). Forest Park status was for those State Forests which have a high potential or actual value for recreation.

The NZ Forest Service established the Hanmer Forest Park Advisory Committee. It was the only such committee apart from the Whakarewarewa Park Advisory Committee in Rotorua.

1981 The gazettal status of the Recreation Area (and Conical Hill) was revoked by the Government to allow for multiple use management under the Forest Park legislation.

1987 The Hanmer Forest Advisory Committee expressed concerns to the Government over the possible sale of the Hanmer Forest Park. A petition was formed asking for protection over the land and this was successful with the Government agreeing to make provision in the form of a general conservation covenant on the scenic and recreational values of the Hanmer Forest Park.

The NZ Forest Service was abolished. Its environmental and conservation values were taken over by the newly established Department of Conservation while the commercial functions of logging and associated land were passed into the new Forestry Corporation. The former Recreation Area was absorbed into the Forestry Corporation.

The Forestry Corporation disbanded the Hanmer Forest Park Advisory Committee. Soon after the Friends of the Forest was established as an informal advisory group. Their main aim was the preservation of public access particularly of the 203 ha former Recreation Area and hopefully to retain it in public ownership.

**Hanmer Heritage Forest Trust**  
**PO Box 216, Hanmer Springs 7360**  
**[www.hanmerforest.co.nz](http://www.hanmerforest.co.nz)**



1990 The Forestry Corporation decided to sell all its forests but not the land on which they stood. The forests were thus sold as transferable cutting and management rights called Crown Forestry Licences (CFL) and the land was split up into parcels of State Owned Enterprises (SOE). The exotic forests around Hanmer Springs, along with other South Island forests, were transferred into the SOE of Timberlands NZ. Timberlands NZ operated the CFL for the trees on its land.

The Government placed a covenant on the former Recreation Area, as recommended by the 1987 petition. It was called Protective Covenant No 2 and its purpose was 'to preserve and protect the natural and historic resources of the Covenant Area and, in particular, to protect the landscape of the Hanmer Recreation Area.'

1991 Timberlands NZ sold its CFL to Carter Holt Harvey, a private company. Carter Holt Harvey formed the Forest Amble and the Forest Journey Walk in the former Recreation Area.

2000 The Government, as owner of Timberlands NZ, sold the North Canterbury Crown Forests to Ngai Tahu as part of a Treaty of Waitangi settlement. The sale covered 5500 ha of publicly owned exotic plantations including the Hanmer Forest and the former Recreation Area. Thus, the land was passed from public to private ownership. Land that was unproductive was passed to either the Department of Conservation (the higher land around Hanmer Springs, most of the former Grantham Block and the Woodland Ponds) or to the Hurunui District Council (Conical Hill and Lower Dog Creek).

Carter Holt Harvey operated a Forestry Right with the new owner, Ngai Tahu, instead of the CFL with the Government. The covenant that was gazetted in 1990 remained in place.

2001 The Friends of the Forest presented a petition to the Government asking for it to secure public ownership of the former Recreation Area. The petition was unsuccessful with the Government replying that a resolution should be found between the local stakeholders, namely the local and regional councils and Ngai Tahu. Instead, the Government gave a single grant of \$30,000 to the Hurunui District Council to provide maintenance of the track network. The Hurunui District Council needed somewhere to put this grant and there was a need for a more formal advocacy group so the Hanmer Heritage Forest Trust was formed. The Friends of the Forest consequently disbanded. The former Recreation Area became known as the Hanmer Heritage Forest.

**Hanmer Heritage Forest Trust**  
**PO Box 216, Hanmer Springs 7360**  
**[www.hanmerforest.co.nz](http://www.hanmerforest.co.nz)**



- 2005 Carter Holt Harvey sold its Forestry Rights to Matariki Forests, a consortium of Rayonier Inc, AMP and the Deutsche Bank. Rayonier manages the forests for the consortium. Matariki Forests, through its Management Plan, honours the Protective Covenant No 2 that was placed on the title underlying the Forestry Right.
- 2008 A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the Hurunui District Council, Matariki Forests and the Hanmer Heritage Forest Trust agreeing that the public has an ongoing right of access to the Hanmer Heritage Forest, the forest is available for outdoor recreation and recognising it is a significant recreational asset. In exchange the Hurunui District Council is required to meet the cost of maintaining the tracks with the Hanmer Heritage Trust acting as the Council's agent for this. The MOU can be terminated without reason by giving three months notice.
- 2009 2014 The land continues to be owned by Ngai Tahu with Matariki Forests having the Forestry Rights of the forest.



### **Footnotes**

#### **The Hanmer Heritage Forest Trust:**

The Hanmer Heritage Forest Trust's constitutional purpose is to benefit the community through:

- preserving and managing the public values of the Heritage Forest block,
- promoting the preservation of the public values of the wider Hanmer Forest, and
- preserving and managing the public values of the adjacent public land.

#### **Public Access:**

Legal public access to the Hanmer Heritage Forest was lost when the Government sold the public land to Ngai Tahu. There is presently no statutory provision for public access to the Hanmer Heritage Forest although the Hurunui District Plan and the Council's MOU with Matariki Forests recognise the importance of maintaining this access.

From Ngai Tahu's perspective, private land can accommodate both commercial activities and provide public benefits. It supports the tracks in the Heritage Forest being maintained in the safe and appropriate state that is necessary for public access.

It is generally considered that Protective Covenant No 2 is, on its own, insufficient to maintain public access if there was a change of ownership or use of the forest.

### **References**

- Hanmer Forest Park Management Plan 1983-1093 by the Canterbury Conservancy
- Report on petition 1990/170 of Ross Erin Carter and 7447 others by the Local Government and Environment Committee
- Copy of the Hanmer Forest Protective Covenant No 2 in a Hurunui District Council paper, 2001
- Matariki Forests Management Plan of the Hanmer Recreation Area.
- Dissertation by Jan Weaver titled 'Restoring Public Access to Hanmer Heritage Forest'.
- Various reports and papers kept by the Hanmer Forest Advisory Committee, Friends of the Forest, Professor Roger Key and Dr Jan Crawford.

Prepared by Pauline Bennett  
June 2014