

# The New Zealand Enclosures

## or Stealing Our Publicly Owned Land

By *Tony Holman QSO*

Between 1604 and 1914, huge areas of England known as *The Commons* used by large numbers of rural people, were taken from them under *Enclosure Laws*. In total, the area amounted to over 28,000 square kilometres – or about one-tenth the area of New Zealand.

*The Commons* became the property of private landowners, greatly increased their wealth, drove many agricultural families into towns as the Industrial Revolution gathered steam, and transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of country people, who were forced to work in horrific conditions for subsistence pay in the new industrial slums.

It seems that New Zealand is now also seeing the invasion and subversion of its public lands. This is also for the sake of private profit, though largely not for New Zealand firms, but rather for international conglomerates.

*continues* ➔



*Oceana gold mine in Victoria Conservation Park, near Reefton (May 2009)*

👉 *continued*

Our National Parks and Conservation Estate have long been considered generally inviolate from any serious commercial activity. But permits are now being parcelled out to every come-lately mining, oil, or gold prospecting firm that flies in for a cosy chat with the government. And *Minister Bridges* seems very happy to sign permits even if he doesn't know where the area is.



In 1887, *Te Heu Heu Tukino IV*, paramount chief of Tuwharetoa gifted the peaks of Tongariro, Ngaruahoe, and Ruapehu to the people of this country, and thus began our first National Park. Many others have since been provided for all of the people, sometimes by gifting or by government purchases on behalf of the people, for the people, using their money.

These parks are there for our wonder, our enjoyment, and our heritage, and to help protect our unique flora and fauna. Coincidentally, these lands have become one of New Zealand's major selling points for our international reputation as a very beautiful, scenic, green and clean country, indirectly bringing in billions of dollars through tourism, films and other related activities.

But that is not enough for this government. They want to have their cake while others eat it, through direct commercial activities within these precious lands, particularly noxious mining. This is destructive to all that these parks are intended to provide. It also precludes access by the public to more and more areas of their public land. It is a type of 'enclosure' – a sort of legalised theft.

Regrettably, incursions into public open space don't stop there. The government is directly heavying local government representatives and their constituents to roll over and accept that various sectoral interests should be allowed to alienate public land for their special purposes.

But there's more! The corporatisation emphasis in the government's "super-city" legislation, amendments to the *Resource Management Act*, the

secretive 'special housing areas' the *Unitary Plan* all shrivelling of real democratic input, compound to remove the traditional roles of public and council working together to protect open space and determine its best public use through the traditional management plans and other means.

Unfortunately the intensification imposed on Auckland is not confined to accommodation (again with the government telling us that poor people should live in shoeboxes), but includes proposals for much more intensive use and commercial use of council parks and reserves by sectoral and business groups than has ever happened before. Most of this will be done behind closed doors in discussions between the interested parties and council officers. No public notification or input is required and our elected representatives are largely excluded from the loop.

In the *Unitary Plan*, within public open space zones, there are at least twenty new activities which can be dealt with in this way – as either 'Permitted Uses' or 'Restricted Discretionary.' These include: new buildings, accessory buildings, satellite dishes, clubrooms, camping grounds, marae complexes, halls, visitor accommodation, places of assembly, stadiums, plus the following (if associated with one of the above activities): retail, restaurants, offices.

Then to help the corporate world further, there is to be a reduction in the amount of informal open space by converting much of it to sand-based playing fields, artificial turf, and the like. Infilling our open space with more equipment, concrete, buildings of all descriptions, commercial uses (including satellite towers) will undoubtedly please the contracting world. But unless we, the owners of these precious places really fight back, so much will be lost to us.

To avoid that means that we have to be much more active and persistent in making our views strongly known to MPs, councillors, local board members and the directors of the Council Controlled Organisations. Now is the time. We stay silent at our peril and those who come after us will live in a diminished world, as did the dispossessed agrarian workers of an earlier England, if we fail.