



Title: "Mount Rochfort Paradox"

Description: Mount Rochfort and the Denniston Plateau

Photographer's name: Noelle Bennett

Where and when: Mount Rochfort, West Coast, August 2021

Sustainability: Standing 1040m above sea level, Mount Rochfort is located at the southern end of Denniston Plateau. It overlooks Westport and the Buller coastal plain and was named after John Rochfort who was a surveyor-engineer involved in the exploration and mineral surveys of the Buller District. The craggy knob of the summit of Mount Rochfort can be seen for some considerable distance across the ancient Denniston Plateau making the actual distance to the summit seem much less than it really is. Standing somewhat obtusely on its summit is a transmission tower, accompanied by a single-story building and a sign warning visitors to 'Beware of falling ice'!

Large areas of the landscape on the Denniston plateau leading up to Mount Rochfort are capped with slabs of sandstone which look surprisingly like man-made pavements and yet there is a beauty in its construction that far surpasses anything that could be created by man. The plateau is pretty much devoid of vegetation of any significant height, that being restricted to the deep, narrow gullies that the numerous small streams have carved out whilst the diminutive, almost bonsai-like specimens of prostrate manuka, pygmy pines and yellow-silver pines dominate the sandstone pavement areas. Most of these are less than half the height that I am. But this lack of tall vegetation allows expansive views north towards the Stockton Plateau and east towards Mount William.

There is something strangely paradoxical about the juxtaposition of the man-made with the natural world at this altitude. Although the vegetation adopts such a low profile, there is no sense of austerity apparent, except for, that is, the tower, the building and that bizarre sign warning of falling ice. Many of New Zealand's debates about landscape preservation are illustrated in this scene. Does the human imprint spoil wild nature? What price do we put on a natural landscape when we also benefit from transmission towers for communication? And, as the Denniston Plateau is already marked by the settlements and mining activity there, does that mean there is less concern about erecting a tower on the highest point?

The wish to protect some areas from all human touch led to the creation of "Wilderness Areas" within some remote parts of the Department of Conservation estate – no huts, no bridges, a no-fly zone ... a chance to get immersed in nature at its "purist", provided of course you are fit enough to get in there (and hopefully out!). This Wilderness concept drives much of the preservation movement in New Zealand, USA and Canada and has led to the creation of wonderful National Parks. But, I can also drive up onto the Denniston Plateau and lug my camera gear into a stunning and rather surreal place in minutes and learn history and see amazing plants and animals, even though it's a highly modified environment and overlooked by an edifice of cutting edge 21st century technology. Nature is everywhere,

not just in our National Parks.

Photographer's notes: Despite, or possibly because of, its history I love this area. It is a place I happily return to over and over again and every visit produces a totally new experience. This is one of a series of four in the Ecosystems Photography portfolio captured from the plateau: "Mount Rochfort paradox", "Tussock haven", "Coy" and "Bonsai beauty".

I still hope that on one of my visits I may just find a Denniston snail or even one of the beetroot red giant native earthworms. I live in hope...

Photo specs: This image is a composite of three images which have each been taken using different exposure levels in order to maximise the dynamic range of the finished photograph. Technical specs: The image was taken using a Panasonic DC-G9 camera and a Panasonic Lumix G-Vario 12-35mm f/2.8 lens. Exposure details - 1/800 sec at f7.1 with an ISO of 100 and a focal length of 24mm (48mm full frame equivalent)

Digital specs: 10,000 x 7496 pixels (74.96MP) @ 300dpi

Key words: Mount Rochfort, Denniston Plateau, West coast, Westport, Buller, mine, mining, sandstone, National Parks, wilderness, transmission tower, Noelle Bennett, Ecosystems Photography, Sustainability

Price: \$300 (incl. GST) for use of the digital image. Visit www.ecosystemsphotography/sales for details & to order, or to get a quote if you would like a high-quality print.

Donation: The price includes a \$100 donation to a sustainability organisation or project of your choice, or otherwise to the West Coast Branch of the *Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society* <https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/branches/west-coast>.

We recommend that the donation goes to West Coast branch of *Forest & Bird* to support their work on predator trapping, environmental advocacy and education. They have a Kiwi Conservation Club for younger members. Mobilising conservation action on the West Coast is a formidable logistic challenge – the district is 400 km long and there are about 80 members only – they could do with our support.

Image ref: NB#003 (please use this reference in all orders and correspondence).

Noelle Bennett

9 December, 2021