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EDITORIAL: THE ROCKS OF PUKERUA BAY

M.H.Holcroft

This year's editorial was written by a man who died at Sanson ten years ago. M H (Monte) Holcroft (1902–94), perhaps New Zealand's finest essayist, edited the *Listener* from 1949–67 and 1972–3. Michael King commented that Holcroft applied sanity, a sense of history and ethics to the issues and events of his time, producing as he did so the finest canon of editorials in the history of New Zealand journalism.

Holcroft's views on protecting the environment are as relevant as ever. While there has been progress, many of his gloomy prophecies have come to pass. Our best protection, the Resource Management Act, is under attack from what he called 'practical-minded people'. Within sight of Pukerua Bay, projects to four-lane Centennial Highway, to subdivide the classic landscape of Paekakariki Hill, spreading suburbs, and plans to re-route the growing cascade of motor traffic throughout Kapiti require vigilance and action. We must never lightly 'solve' present problems at the expense of the past and of the future.

About 20 miles from Wellington, on a coast which takes the last thrust and surge of the Tasman Sea, is a small settlement known as Pukerua Bay. In recent years many new houses have been built there by people who travel to their work in Wellington in fast – and overheated – electric units. Most of these houses are on a plateau under the hills; but some are reached by a road which drops steeply to a small beach that so far has stayed unspoiled. This beach 'belongs' to the whole settlement: it is one of the reasons why people who love good surroundings are prepared to rely on tank water and to live 20 miles out of town. Among its best features are some large boulders, fingered by the waves for so many years that they have taken their place in Māori legend. To this place there came recently a bulldozer. Its job was to provide access to the beach, so that heavy trucks could be loaded with boulders, which would then be taken to the Hutt Road reclamation on the shores of Wellington Harbour. But three women went out with their children on a stormy morning and told the driver that his bulldozer must be taken no further. They placed themselves in front of the machine and refused to budge. The driver, a good-natured man, helped to build a fire at which the protestors could warm themselves while a spokesman for the contractors came in haste to negotiate. No agreement was reached, and it was then revealed that the question of access was still under consideration by the Marine Department. In the end the bulldozer was banished, and the beach was saved.

There will be differing opinions about the action of these women; but it was at least successful in drawing attention to a matter of public interest. It also emphasised a problem which in some form or another is being faced in almost every part of New Zealand. And it gave forthright expression to a resentment which people feel increasingly while their districts are marked and spoiled in the sacred name of progress. There is at present a wide-ranging assault on our landscapes. Earthmoving machines are now so formidable that hills can be levelled, and the face of the country changed; and the monsters leave