

Cross country journey in Fiordland

Presentation by Roland Dale, photographer

Retired farmer and award winning photographer Roland Dale has been tramping in Fiordland for 25 years. Roland's presentation was on his 2010 trip to the area with six companions.

Roland's interest in flora and fauna began when he acquired a good camera at high school. He said he was a farmer "so you've got to have an interest."

Initially Roland showed us slides taken around his property at Fox Creek ski field. There was a delightful movie clip of a pair of goldfinches feeding their nestlings, and a nest of baby fantails where he used a stepladder to photograph the birds. There was another photo - taken in winter - of a dozen or so fantails huddled under a veranda for warmth.

Then it was off to Fiordland. A helicopter flew the group into the area where they began a three-week tramp. Food drops had been flown in, which included a rifle. Only one deer was shot on the tramp which provided them with a tasty venison stew. Roland said there was also a little bottle of Scotch (or two) to accompany the stew and a subsequent feed of mussels prised from a lake.

In the course of their journey – ostensibly following deer tracks - tents were pitched for several nights allowing them time to explore. They discovered a flower "DOC thought was extinct" and Roland photographed a morepork, robin, a pair of NZ Falcon which were "were slightly different" in appearance. A spider with white oval egg sacs was also photographed, as were keas and "huge numbers" of fungi.

Roland showed us a slide of a flowering shrub inviting the audience to identify it. There was a long silence amongst the audience of "experts" before a bemused Roland said there were "millions out in flower now." Silence reigned again before Roland finally told us it was matagouri in flower.

Eventually the helicopter returned and the group spent the night in Queenstown where there was a magnificent sunset.

Roland ended his talk with a questionable statement: On a trip to Fiordland in the late 1990s he said although it was teeming with rain he had spotted three South Island Kokako.

- *Allan Horwell*