

*Theatre Country: Essays on Landscape and Whenua.* By Geoff Park. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2006. 286 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-457-3.

THIS CHALLENGING AND STIMULATING SET OF ESSAYS helps explain why I feel such a deep, primal thrill at the sight of tui feeding in the kowhai tree outside the window. Park makes it clear that much more than the cheesy appropriation of 1930s poetry anthologies and school texts is involved. He also explains the even stronger sense of awe I experienced when a flock of over 100 kereru descended upon my wife, mother-in-law and me as we walked to an old saw milling site in the Catlins. Imagine what it must have been like when such sights were commonplace rather than exceptional!

It seems that we New Zealanders, both Maori and Pakeha, have a very fraught and complex relationship with our distinctive and much-transformed landscape. Yet we can experience a sense of connectedness and develop a sense of place if we think hard about how we might read that landscape. Park's 16 elegant essays will assist all of us in reading our landscapes in more illuminating and exciting ways. Topics range from the Polynesian forest through the real estate spin of Wakefield, the elemental Urewera murals of Colin McCahon and conservation in New Zealand, to our distinctive version of *terra nullius* and relatively early regard for the pristine. Those familiar with Park's work will expect that all essays will be of a high standard and they are. The three most interesting from the New Zealand historian's perspective are: 'Conservation–Extinction Wave or Healing Tide?'; 'Our Terra Nullius' and 'A Regard for Pristine Loveliness'.

The 1997 essay on conservation makes many telling points regarding the need for the conservation movement to incorporate Maori values and involve Maori communities in the drive to achieve biodiversity. Park repeats this need several times throughout the essays in a manner which reminds readers of the necessity of resisting unduly élitist and technocratic solutions. Unless a majority of the population becomes involved in a search for greater biodiversity, results will always be unsatisfactory. If strategies can be found to win such interest and support, however, there is hope to offset the all-too-often gloomy, apocalyptic tone of some modern conservationists.

In 'Our Terra Nullius' Park quickly disabuses the reader of the comfortable idea that because of the Treaty of Waitangi New Zealand avoided the disastrous consequences of the notion of *terra nullius* (literally meaning 'seemingly without people'), which so afflicted the settlement of Australia. On the contrary he shows that every major early explorer, including Cook, Banks and the Forsters, celebrated New Zealand's primeval 'emptiness' and glorious 'wilderness'. A host of nineteenth-century scientists, whether 'professional' like Hochstetter or amateurs such as William Swainson and George Bowen, wanted to fill the apparently 'empty' spaces by developing the 'useless' wilderness into farms, but also hoped to preserve some remnants for scientific observation. Along with early preservationists such as Thomas Mackenzie they also hoped to keep people, including Maori, out of these areas so that scientists and future generations could experience New Zealand's very own 'terra nullius' only through controlled and intermittent visits. Consequently, a powerful anti-humanist stance developed within the conservation movement, with activists trying to separate New Zealand citizens and nature. People came to live outside and distant from nature except at weekends and during holidays. Park concludes that this sense of disconnection persists to the present. Many Maori find such separation incomprehensible because they want to continue living 'in' nature so that they might still harvest its resources and maintain ongoing organic links. In sum this is the best piece so far written on the largely neglected topic of the role played by the notion of wilderness in New Zealand history. It builds expertly on the earlier work of Ross Galbreath on Walter Buller. The major dimension absent from Park's compelling analysis is the critique made by some American feminist scholars that the notion of 'wilderness' is nothing more than a conceit of élitist, white men.

In the 2003 essay on the early New Zealand interest for preserving the pristine, Park reveals that we can be justifiably proud of pioneering such activities even by global standards. The 1892 Land Act made some attempt at preserving scenery and the 1903 Scenery Preservation Act put in place many more systematic policies and processes to ensure that the beauty of places such as the Wanganui River and Lake Waikaremoana were left relatively unspoiled for the appreciation of future generations. Park struggles to understand why a populist politician like Richard John Seddon showed so much interest in this matter, but concludes that he hoped to encourage tourism and further break down Maori separatism by forcing isolated communities into contact with both international and local visitors. In other words, although scenery preservation was both undoubtedly forward looking and well intentioned, it constituted an interesting extension of the essentially imperialist project we call New Zealand history.

This is a challenging interpretation but I fear it is a little glib and overly tidy. I am hoping that an examination of Seddon's library full of annotated copies of major books will reveal that he was much better read than has formerly been realized and took a rather more intelligent interest in this subject than Park suggests. Seddon's interest in scenery also went back into the early 1890s when he tried to promote the Haast Pass to none other than Governor Lord Onslow, because Seddon realized that if the new colony hoped to attain prosperity in the long haul it needed to develop industries in addition to stock farming.

Park writes at much length about Wordsworth and the influence of the English romantic movement upon New Zealand's settlers. He should also add Robbie Burns, whose influence on attitudes towards the natural world was even better known amongst the aspiring working classes of northern England and Scotland. Thomas Mackenzie also loved the wilds of Fiordland and the West Coast, yet he comes in for some flack because of his condescending views on Maori. This judgement strikes me as rather unfair because Mackenzie's preservationist instincts ran well in advance of his time and his passionate advocacy helped save important natural areas from development. He was still a man of his time whose views on race look rather awkward to the modern reader, yet he was no Walter Buller and moved well beyond Darwinism in his support for protection of habitat as well as native birds.

In any such collection essays inevitably repeat motifs. McCahon's Urewera murals and the painterly notion of 'landskap' turn up in several essays along with quotes from the likes of Herbert Guthrie Smith and Darwin. Such repetition though does drum home key points in much the same way as recurring themes in a classical symphony connect the disparate movements together.

Before concluding I would also like to take the opportunity of explaining what I meant in an article published in this very journal in October 1996 about the 'unfortunate' obsession of both indigenous and settler people with land. I acknowledge that Park is right in arguing that in terms of conservation and preservation we are fortunate that both communities are inclined to imbue land with transcendental qualities. What I meant, though, is that both groups, especially the more recent arrivals, have seriously overestimated the land's productive capacity and its ability to recover from long-term exploitation and abuse. Had British settlers been less enthusiastic about farming they might also have harvested the forest in a more sustainable manner and striven harder to find other ways of making a living from these islands.

On balance, then, this is an excellent collection of essays written with the passion and grace of a poet. Victoria University Press must also be congratulated on the superb production. Evocative photographs front each essay and the cover is handsome and eye catching. It shows Lake Waikaremoana framed inside a Victorian-style locket suggesting all sorts of possibilities concerning the appreciation and appropriation of landscape. These are quite simply the best essays on how all of us might gain a stronger sense of place

and belonging and thereby learn the ‘trick of standing upright here’. Park responds to some of the questions raised in Michael King’s *Being Pakeha* and *Being Pakeha Now* in imaginative and challenging ways. Building on his earlier powerful lament for the loss of lowland wetlands, *Nga Uru Ora*, this superb collection deserves widespread recognition for one of our best nature writers. Thanks to Park this reader, at least, will gain even more pleasure every time he looks at tui, koromako and kereru.

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*Caught Mapping: The Life and Times of New Zealand’s Early Surveyors.* By Janet Holm. Hazard Press, Christchurch, 2005. 302 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 1-877270-86-5.

IN COLONIAL NEW ZEALAND the land surveyor’s brief was multifaceted. Beyond exploring and evaluating new country, his critical role (this was rigorously a male profession) was to prepare land for settlers, consolidating property rights through the accurate delineation of boundaries. At the same time, the surveyor was settlement modeller, designer of rural cadastres, planner of townships and definer of road lines. Yet, to date, surveyors have attracted limited interest from New Zealand historians. The majority of past studies have been overly romantic, drawing mainly from published reminiscences and collected tall tales, placing emphasis on the experiences and hardships of individuals confronting the wilderness. Very recently there has been a switch to viewing surveying in post-colonial terms, the focus being on the agency of surveyors in the dispossession of Maori and the cultural appropriation of landscape through renaming. In neither instance has much attention been paid to the actual conduct of surveys, the techniques and underlying philosophies, or to the emergence of surveying as a genuine profession. Equally, there has been little attempt to investigate colonial surveys within the economic and political contexts which largely determined their conduct.

Readers who anticipate this volume might at least partially fill some of the major lacunae in New Zealand survey history will be disappointed. To be fair, Janet Holm makes it clear at the outset that her book is ‘not particularly (concerned with) . . . measuring angles and taking trigonometrical readings, for my understanding of these mathematical intricacies is slight’ (p.12). Despite the catchy label, the book is not primarily about mapping. Nor is it really about the ‘life and times of New Zealand’s early surveyors’. Rather, it is about the lives and times of a small group, mainly surveyors but also including engineers and geologists, who practised their professions pre-1900, and for the most part in Canterbury and Westland. Few of the big names of nineteenth-century New Zealand surveying — the likes of Theophilus Heale, Henry Jackson, J.T. Thomson or Percy Smith — appear more than in passing. Indeed, of the individuals selected for special attention, probably only two might be considered even in the second rank of New Zealand’s early surveyors.

It may be the problem lies in the packaging, for Holm suggests a more modest aim in her preface: ‘simply to glimpse a random selection of [surveyors] . . . and try to bring them alive within the social milieu of the time’ (p.12). If this is the intention, she succeeds admirably. The reader encounters, for example, James Wylde, former railway engineer, arguably the first man to write a school textbook on ‘The Geography and History of New Zealand’, later backed by Richard John Seddon when suspended by the Kumara Borough Council for questionable financial dealings. Then there is Robert Preston Bain, another former railway engineer, whose persistent efforts in the 1860s to accurately survey tracts of South Westland were invariably thwarted by environmentally induced disasters. The lives of two young surveyors brought to the colony in the 1840s, Edward Jollie and