

several substantial 'worm's-eye' accounts of the fighting, ends movingly with a long letter to a dead comrade's family, outlining the significant trouble taken to try to find his belongings and have them returned (pp.263–68). Beyond this, what is striking is how similar the New Zealanders' priorities were to those of soldiers in other places. Food was rarely good or plentiful enough and the soldiers, contrary to older scholarly perspectives about soldierly alienation from civilians, were anxious to receive letters from home, and eager to describe the interesting sights of the new places they saw.

While prioritising the letters' content, Harper is, nonetheless, concerned to prevent his collection from confirming unwarranted myths. Gallipoli was not, he insists, a brilliant strategic opportunity let down by poor organisation. Even if it had succeeded, the war would probably not have been shortened. New Zealanders, meanwhile, should not flatter themselves that sustained retention of Chunuk Bair would have won the campaign. It was 'just another hill' (p.23). Harper divorces these 'realities' from any suggestion that the campaign was meaningless, however, regarding it instead as 'a victory of the human spirit over death, suffering and the futility of war' (p.33). I am not entirely persuaded that the materials he supplies bear out this claim, but the individual perspectives his book reveals are valuable and eminently readable contributions to a much-discussed event.

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Making Sheep Country: Mt Peel Station and the Transformation of the Tussock Lands. By Robert Peden. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2011. 280pp. NZ Price: \$49.95. ISBN: 978-1-86940-485-7.

SHEEP HAVE BEEN ON THE MINDS of New Zealand authors recently. In the past few years we have seen the appearance of Christine Fernyhough's best-selling children's book *Ben & Mark: Boys of the High Country* (Random House, 2009) about Mt White station, Hazel Riseborough's AUP double *Ngamatea* (2006 and reprinted twice in 2007) and *Shear Hard Work* (2010), along with Roberta Macintyre's more panoramic Penguin general history *Whose High Country?* (2008). One has to wonder whether the tenure review process renewed the focus on high country stations, or if the ascendancy of dairying and agribusiness has created nostalgia for sheep and their country. Nostalgia and romance are not words I would associate with Robert Peden's book, however. *Making Sheep Country* is assiduously researched and carefully argued.

In large part, the book is a rebuttal of what Peden calls the 'orthodox account of pastoral impact on the tussock grasslands' (p.x). He makes a convincing case that much recent thinking about high country environments has been based on outdated science published in the early and mid-twentieth century. Given that the science of tectonics (and the uplift of the Southern Alps and deposition of scree) was not well understood until the 1980s, earlier authors cannot be blamed, I don't think, for linking 'erosion' with over-grazing and rabbits. Peden is right to question, however, the 'self-perpetuating' view (p.48) that pastoralists' misunderstanding of the landscape, 'indiscriminate burning' and overstocking have led to ecological disaster across the entire high country. This, he shows, is based on selective evidence and has been accepted by eminent botanists and historians without interrogation (pp.48, 238). In his chapter about fire as a management tool, Peden cites several historians who have used the — let's face it — terrific story of Lady Barker and her friend Alice setting the hillside alight for an afternoon's entertainment. But, as the author points out rather laconically, the example describes one person's 'feeling of elation . . . it is not a statement about the use of fire as a tool of management of a pastoral

property' (p.41). Peden examines the diaries of ten stations between 1853 and 1912 to show that burning was used for a range of specific purposes, at specific times, and was more likely to occur in damper rather than drier areas.

Three of the first four chapters address the 'orthodoxy': the use of fire, the rabbit plagues and overgrazing and stocking rates. Chapter five, 'Constructing the Landscape', examines draining land, fencing and cultivation. Peden describes the transition which took place on many properties from pastoralism to pastoral farming, 'where capital and energy are employed to augment and manage pasturage' (p.134). The increase in fencing was linked to changes in the mix of sheep on properties: meat sheep and wool sheep needed to be kept separate, necessitating fencing. 'Shaping Sheep to Suit the Land' is chapter six, where Peden lays out the combination of environmental and market reasons for breeding changes. The final substantive chapter, 'Not Much of a Business', examines the changing fortunes for pastoralists and argues that physical environment and luck had significant effects on the outcome for various ventures.

This book reminds me very much of the early work of Australian historical geographer Joe Powell, and that is both praise and criticism. *Sheep Country* is in some respects masterful. It is impossible not to admire an historian who can handle the level of detail, the minutiae of a place and an industry in which margins were tight, the weather capricious and prosperity, if attained, was ever-vulnerable. Added to this, because of Peden's own background in shepherding, he can bring 'insider' knowledge to specificities such as 'the smother' (one of the risks of handling a flighty mob that gets itself into difficulty is that the leaders are smothered by the followers, p.222). It is this willingness and capacity to really understand the history through all its station diaries, stock records, purchasing receipts and wages books that creates a book that is authoritative. And this is nowhere better demonstrated than through the captions for the many illustrations in the book. Peden makes the reader *really* look. He uses photographs, paintings and sketches as sources, not simply to beautify the text. An example of this is on page 140: the photograph is of 'Christchurch from the Provincial Chambers looking south-west'. It shows scattered single-storey houses made of weatherboards and wooden shingle roofs, brick chimneys, outbuildings, one double-storey building and a windmill. Peden's caption points not to the buildings at all, but to the five different kinds of fencing used to separate the sections. Late-nineteenth-century photographs of stations show stands of native bush, tall tussock and short tussock, 'English' grasses and 'living fences' of vegetation. There is a wealth of information in visual sources if you know what you are looking at, and Peden knows.

Having said that, the other way that this book reminds me of Powell's early work is that it is somehow untouched by 30 years of history-making that has rejected the notion of land as neutral and uncontested. That Wakefield objected to pastoralism as socially damaging (as Peden notes on p.viii), and Australian parliamentary commissioners saw it as basically an 'extractive' industry not much better than mining, signifies deep contests about appropriate uses of land in the colonial world. Ownership was constituted in cultural as well as legal ways. Acland legally acquired Mt Peel between 1855 and 1861 in a context of increasing tensions and the outbreak of war over land on the North Island, the granting of universal manhood suffrage in New South Wales and the subsequent cascade of land reform acts breaking up the large pastoral runs in all south-eastern Australian colonies. By the 1880s indigenous people in the Tasman colonies (including New Zealand) had been dispossessed of their lands and Europeans had developed elaborate measures to occupy those lands. Fences and sheep breeds were part of that elaborate mechanism. A very narrow view has been taken of 'pastoralists' economic, social, cultural and natural environments [which] shaped the way they operated' (p.241). For all that Peden adds to the 'orthodox' story of sheep country, there is something big missing in *Making Sheep Country*.

I have some small gripes about the book, too. The chapters are stand-alone to such an extent that there is a degree of repetition: for example, the list of severe snowstorms hitting Mt Peel between 1862 and 1908 appears four times. There is also much in common between the introductory and concluding chapters. The maps do not match the approach of the book: Peden emphasises environment, and while one map lays out differing vegetation zones, there is no rainfall map, which would have been helpful in identifying the arid and semi-arid zones described in the text, particularly in chapter three about rabbits (where aridity is important!). Peden (and the AUP editor) also assume a lot of South Island knowledge on the part of the reader in that, for example, not all places mentioned in the text feature on maps. These are small complaints but they were distracting in a book where the author has otherwise taken scrupulous care to bring precision and vigour to the topic.

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Trading Cultures: A History of the Far North. By Adrienne Puckey. Huia Publishers, Wellington, 2011. 382pp. NZ Price: \$45. ISBN: 978-1-86969-454-8.

ADRIENNE PUCKEY'S *TRADING CULTURES* suffers from something of an identity crisis. Is it, as the subtitle claims, a history of the Far North, a history of far northern iwi, or a history of Māori and Pākehā economic encounters in the region? In truth, the work covers something of all three facets, though with the emphasis firmly on the economic component. That would seem, in part, to reflect the book's apparent origins in the author's doctoral thesis on the economic history of the area between 1860 and 1940.

Another factor may also be evident in the shape of the work. Perhaps the lack of a clear focus in itself reveals something almost unique about the history of the region. Unlike in most other parts of New Zealand, Māori in the Far North did not fade to the economic and social margins of society under the onslaught of nineteenth-century colonisation. Settlers came in a trickle rather than a flood, leaving Māori major players in a region that (as the blurb declares with a touch of hyperbole) went from being a 'bread basket' in the late eighteenth century to 'an economic basket case' by the 1990s.

Puckey, a descendant of Kaitaia-based missionary William Puckey, writes that her book seeks to weave a path between triumphalist pioneer history and more recent 'grievance' histories. Yet as the Waitangi Tribunal's 1997 *Muriwhenua Land Report* graphically demonstrated, the expropriation of Muriwhenua Māori lands and resources was to have a serious impact upon local hapū and iwi. That is a history that Puckey draws upon freely in her own work, if sometimes rather too uncritically, especially when it comes to the contentious question of the nature and meaning of early land dealings between Māori and Pākehā.

It is not that Puckey is necessarily wrong in her acceptance of the so-called 'tuku whenua' thesis — a concept promoted during the Waitangi Tribunal's Muriwhenua hearings that Māori in the region did not understand themselves to be selling their lands to the incoming Europeans, but rather letting them occupy these on a more conditional basis consistent with tikanga. The problem is instead her failure to engage with — or even to acknowledge in any serious way — the considerable volume of evidence to the contrary promoted by Crown historians in that inquiry. As Puckey observes later in the book, the Tribunal's report was a contentious and controversial one. But whereas Michael Belgrave's *Historical Frictions* carefully and critically sifted through the evidence available in that debate, highlighting a more complex set of cultural exchanges than