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BOOK REVIEWS

Stevens, G., M. McGlone and B. McCulloch (1988) Prehistoric New Zealand. Heinemann Reed, Auckland. \$39.95.

Prehistoric New Zealand is a rare example of a book that puts across a tangle of facts, suppositions, and theories in a simple but attractive and stimulating way. It describes both the processes and effects of key stages in New Zealand's evolution. They are presented in a logical way that makes the story easy to follow.

The book has an eye-catching dust jacket depicting some large marine reptiles, described by Stevens as "the undoubted monarchs of the Mesozoic seas". The illustration is in fact an artist's impression of three mosasaurs attacking a plesiosaur in the shallow waters of the Hawkes Bay a million years ago. The authors manage to maintain this feeling of excitement, in a fashion obviously designed to entice the curious but also to satisfy more serious students of New Zealand's ancient past.

The book describes the evolution of New Zealand, its landscape, flora and fauna, from the beginning of the Cambrian period 570 million years ago through to the present day. It is presented like a good TV documentary, with attractive illustrations and a simple, informative narrative.

For those brought up on earlier theories of continental drift, it explains how these ideas had to change to accommodate new information, giving rise to the current ideas of plate tectonics. Graeme Stevens, the principal author, describes an ever changing planet in which the land masses are likened to slag on top of molten iron in a blast furnace. Major convection continued to change the shape and position of the land masses by welling up through cracks in the slag, pushing the crusty plates apart, to collide with their neighbours. At these junctions, immense forces generated by the collisions have continuously buckled the land and forced one plate to ride up, and the edge of the other to be pushed back down towards the molten core.

From this simple model, Stevens examines the fragmentation of one of the larger pieces of crust, the mighty continent of Gondwana. He follows the fate of some neighbouring fragments that later became New Zealand, South America, Antarctica, Australia, and New Caledonia, showing how their common flora and fauna fared. As the land masses moved, the effects are seen of changing temperatures and rising and falling sea levels. Some species evolved to take advantage of the new environments while others died out. These changes are followed through to the survivors that we see today.

Matt McGlone brings the reader closer to the present by describing the post glacial events of the last 14,000 years. This is the chapter that finally sets the scene for the Aotearoa known to its Maori and Pakeha settlers and for the changes that took place during this instance in geological time. Bev McCulloch rounds off the book by looking at the impact of human settlement on New Zealand's landscape, and particularly its fauna.

Specialist inserts are provided by Dallas Mildenhall (Mesozoic flora), Richard Holdaway (the birds), and Bev McCulloch (the moa). Considerable credit must go to Vivian Ward as the illustrator of this fascinating book.

Prehistoric New Zealand is a book that will be widely read and referenced for many years to come. The authors have managed a successful blend that will generate an informed interest amongst newcomers to this field of study and will provide a valuable reference for those with more specialist interests. I would regard it as essential reading for anyone with an interest in the making of New Zealand's landscape.

Brian Sheppard

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Johnston, M. (1987) High Hopes. The History of the Nelson Mineral Belt and New Zealand's First Railway. Nikau Press, Nelson. 152 pp. \$36.95, available from the publisher, P.O. Box 602, Nelson.

This book is the first comprehensive account of attempts to mine copper and chromium ores of the Nelson Mineral Belt in the eastern hills behind Nelson. The book traces the history of the Mineral Belt from prehistoric to modern times; from Maori argillite adze quarries to European mining relics.

The bulk of the book deals with the controversies surrounding the early European colonists who were involved in attempts to create great wealth from mining, first copper then chromite. In fact the only mineral which was modestly successful was lime for fertiliser. After many delays, New Zealand's first railway, albeit horse drawn, was opened in 1862 to transport ore from the mines of the Dun Mountain Copper Mining Company.

The author of this book is Nelson District Geologist, and President of the Nelson Historical Society. He is also author of "Geology of the Nelson Urban Area" and five geological maps of the Nelson region. His geological expertise and long interest in the history of the Nelson area are amply evident throughout this well researched book. Most of the information

was gathered from contemporary Nelson newspapers. Other sources of information include Reports of Geological Explorations, Nelson Provincial Council papers, historical photographs, Lands and Deeds records of early mining maps, Nelson City Council minute and letter books, and items in the National Archives, National Museum, and Alexander Turnbull Library. All these sources are referenced.

The book is amply illustrated with numerous good reproductions of old photographs as well as excellent modern photographs, many from the air. Many reproductions of old maps as well as modern maps are also included. Some more complicated geological processes are explained and these are clearly illustrated. A glossary of the more technical terms used in the text and index is provided.

This very scholarly book should appeal not only to those interested in New Zealand's industrial history but also those interested in social aspects. The book could be used as a guide by those wishing to visit the prehistoric and historic sites in this area, although the author suggests that "readers intending to visit the more remote and lesser known mines will find the 1:50,000 topographical maps (NZMS 260) very helpful." Despite the book's detail, I found short chapters made it very readable.

Pam Chester

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Morton, Harry and Carol Morton Johnston (1988) The Farthest Corner - New Zealand. A Twice Discovered Land. Century Hutchinson. 315 pp. \$44.95.

"In their own words" - from Abel Tasman in the 17th century to the surveyors in the 19th - the discoverers and explorers speak to the reader. From log books, diaries, journals and pictorially the authors have compiled descriptions of the discovery and exploration of New Zealand.

But the Polynesians who found this land first, probably 900 years earlier, left no written record. Harry Morton and his daughter Carol have used the first two chapters to explain how through oral tradition, linguistics, customs, physical appearance, art and material culture in artefacts and by archaeology, the remarkable discovery and exploration of New Zealand, and the adaptation to the new conditions.

The next three chapters cover the exploits of Tasman (whose picture has the oddest caption), the ubiquitous Cook, de Surville, Marion du Fresne, Dumont D'Urville, and Bellingshausen.

Missionaries, marine and land surveyors, sheepmen and settlers all speak in their own fashion. Morton as an historian rates his discoverers according to their literary ability. The final chapter of high country exploration is the most successful.

Carol Morton Johnston has contributed 45 information boxes, set throughout the book. These I found irritating. They are like expanded footnotes and would be better at the end of each chapter. Some are repetitions of the main text.

Illustrations are many, and show every sort of recording from rough sketches to photographs. Although well provenanced, the artists themselves are often not named.

The Farthest Corner is disappointing because although the aim is laudable, tandem authorship has made for an indigestible book not worth the price.

Mary Jeal