

Carol Morton Johnston and Harry Morton, *The Farthest Corner: New Zealand--A Twice Discovered Land*. Auckland: Century Hutchinson New Zealand Limited; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988. Pp. 315, maps, illustrations, index, bibliography. US\$25.00, hardcover.

*Reviewed by Gordon R. Lewthwaite, California State University, Northridge*

This work is at once a labor of loving scholarship and a source of recurrent irritation for the meticulous researcher. In conception, it is intriguing and timely. Polynesian voyaging and European discovery are topics of lively interest in current Pacific research, and their juxtaposition within the manageable realm of New Zealand sharpens the focus of the story: it is somewhat of an academic coup. But the reader's interest may well be blunted by the introduction, both prolix and debatable, which insists on differentiating "exploration" and "discovery"--the former a process which may or may not be accidental, the latter a result which isn't really discovery until it is firmly lodged in the public record. The distinction may be valid enough, but, stumbling over these reiterated terms at sundry intervals, the reader may wish he could remember which was which. Furthermore, while the breadth and depth of scholarship are impressive, the precise sources of the numerous quotations, and sometimes the identities of the persons cited, are incongruously omitted.

But, due allowances must presumably be made for considerations of publication cost and potential readership, and for those who stay the course the rewards are indeed commensurate. For this is one of those books where appreciation grows with the reading. The story is an interesting one that--occasional verbal thicket apart--is interestingly told. For New Zealand was at once the last of the islands that roving Polynesians incorporated in their vast oceanic triangle and the last substantial fragment of the habitable earth that was plotted onto European maps.

One of the strengths of this erudite work is the fact that it places the exploration and discovery of New Zealand within a panoramic rather than a parochial framework, and, though erudition is a tempting virtue that may sometimes lure the authors into distracting bypaths, it enables them to drop some illuminating hints on possible connections or contrasts touching events in Victorian England and post-Napoleonic France, Canada and Tsarist Russia, Aboriginal Australia and Maori New Zealand. Much deeper than a surface skimming from Kupe to Cook, it fruitfully combines Maori and "Pakeha" in the dual unveiling of "the farthest corner," with two far-ranging peoples, each operating within its separate complex of concepts and technology, converging on a single archipelago. And, all things considered, the presentation remains coherent, thanks in part to the relegation of many a potentially distracting detail or technicality to some parenthetical "box."

Naturally enough, exploration and discovery begin with the Polyne- sians. In two successive chapters, Johnston and Morton first bring the tropical islanders to temperate New Zealand and then seek to trace the pattern of adaptation and discovery within their new homeland. Though well aware that there's many a trap for the unwary in the inter- pretation of Maori tradition and attempted correlations with archaeo- logical data, they weave the tale together as best they can. Touching cautiously on vexed questions as to the range of purposeful voyaging, they lean towards deliberation rather than accident in the initial occu- pation of New Zealand, and link exploration by sea and inland river with development of different canoe types. Inevitably, the transition from Moahunter to Classic Maori receives attention, and, though arts and crafts are not neglected, it is the discovery, utilization, and exchange of resources that are most appropriately highlighted. And fur- ther service is rendered by the authors as they project the story into the nineteenth century, tracing the changing Maori response to the advent of the Pakeha and recording the role of Maori guides and their sketch- maps in the initial phases of European exploration.

But the emphasis is necessarily on Western man as New Zealand is inscribed on the world map. First the coastline and then the interior come into scientific view, and neither the human nor the technological aspects are neglected. Abel Tasman, if not entirely exonerated for his sketchy and tentative probe in A.D. 1642, at least emerges as a respect- able explorer given the context of time and resources, though Tasman's effort was inevitably overshadowed by the superb competence and determination of James Cook--a human figure, admittedly, but lus- trous enough to convey a hint of halo. And still more welcome are the

subsequent chapters on “Resurgent France” and “French, Russians, and Maori,” for it too often escapes attention that a number of nations played an honorable role in the discovery of New Zealand. French and Russian expeditions in particular made substantial contributions to both Maori lore and the charting of the shoreline.

Thereafter, the unveiling of the North Island interior becomes central to the story as Johnston and Morton sympathetically trace the advent of Christianity and the efforts of missionaries of various creeds to contact the inland tribes. Here bush trail and river canoe were essential. But the shoreline again assumes prominence as attention returns to the contributions of whalers and sealers and especially to the meticulous application of the haven-charting art: Captain Stokes of the *Acheron* and a few other professionals take pride of place. And, once the coast is clear, attention reverts to the interior again, especially the interior of the South Island. The pioneering journeys of pastoralists, fossickers for gold, and those in search of routes to potential West Coast harbors are told, and these in turn were surpassed by a noble (and notably international) company of surveyors and scientists, Tuckett and Thomson, Hector and Haast, Brunner and “Explorer Douglas” --to name some of the most prominent-- searched the South Island to its farthest corners, recording flora, fauna, minerals, and mountains and steadily locking peak and valley into triangulated place. The closing chapter, “High Challenge,” appropriately records Dieffenbach’s ascent of Egmont, Bidwill’s venture to the *tapu* crest of Tongariro, and, as European mountaineers discovered the virgin challenge of the Southern Alps, the culminating conquest of Mount Cook.

It’s a comprehensive story thoroughly told, and though the wearying reader may sometimes wish that surplus words and repetitions had been more ruthlessly excised, the book is not lacking in leisurely charm. There’s a wealth of direct quotation from a multiplicity of observers and authorities, and, though sterner protocol would have required the documentation of sources, there are lively accounts of past personalities to add life to the telling, and carefully boxed explanations to take care of such specific matters as Polynesian languages, chronometers, ships’ logs, and Maori music. Yet in a number of respects the reader is given precious little help. The list of contents conveys not one hint of the existence (let alone the location) of forty-five informational boxes, eight historic coastal and harbor charts, ninety-four illustrations, and five maps: presumably the reader will discover them by accident. The illustrations show every sign of judicious and tasteful selection to depict relevant aspects of the past, but the maps, which respectively outline the Polyne-

sian Triangle, moahunting regions, the locations (but not the characteristics) of physical features in the North Island and the South Island respectively, and important North Island mission stations, do not begin to be adequate. Diligent readers would therefore be well advised to have a large-scale New Zealand atlas handy as they read. It would also have been helpful if the title of each chapter, rather than the overall title of the book, had appeared at the head of each page. And although the authorship is proudly plural, it seems a little odd to give pride of place to Harry Morton's name on the dust jacket and outside cover and to Carol Morton Johnston's name on the inside title page.

Of course there are a few misprints, and occasional questions of fact inevitably arise. Widespread though acceptance of the idea may now be, there is still reason to query the assumption that a traditional quarrel over breadfruit implied a population problem in the tropical homeland. Also, the assertion that climatic change made an impact on prehistoric Maori culture still seems a little too categorical, and there's room to doubt the conclusion that New Zealand's geographical shape could be envisaged by precontact Maori.

But, such issues of format and documentation apart, the book is a very fine presentation of the fruits of mature scholarship. Some may object to an occasional tendency to moralize and others to some slyly humorous political digs, but neither is tasteless nor obtrusive. It's a healthy sanity of viewpoint that prevails, a balanced assessment of human motivations and achievements. And, along with broad coverage of an intrinsically interesting theme, there are lively insights into the lives and characters of those who explored and discovered the farthest corner of the earth.