

## Parihaka-tecture

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**ABSTRACT:** At 5.00am of November the 5th, 1881, government-sanctioned troops entered the Taranaki Pā of Parihaka, arresting key leaders, expelling occupants and destroying the buildings. The impetus for the assault was highly political. On the one hand Parihaka represented a focus for a broad fear of Māori political independence. At the same time the demand for fertile farm land by colonial settlers was not being met. Scattering the people of Parihaka was a central strategy for alleviating the former and satisfying the latter. Similarly, the destruction of the material fabric of the village – its architecture – was a purposeful action designed to erase any legitimate presence over the land. Not until the publication of Dick Scott's *The Parihaka Story*, in 1954, were the events of Parihaka brought to a wider Pākehā audience. Today it is largely, and correctly, understood as a particularly ugly moment in our history. However, while we may have developed a certain social self-consciousness toward the racial and political ramifications of Parihaka, not enough has been made of the extraordinary architecture that framed it. In this paper I wish to add to what we do know by reviewing period photographs of Parihaka Pā at the time of the invasion. In particular, I will be giving consideration to Miti-mai-te-arera (the house of Te Whiti), Rangi Kapuia (the house of Tohu), Nuku-tewhatewha (the communal bank) and Te Niho-o-Te-Ātiawa (the dining hall). It is my view that the colonial government were right to interpret these prominent buildings as symbolically threatening and in this paper I hope to show why they were so, but also how their presence nonetheless continued well into the twentieth century.

### Introduction

It wasn't always so, but the historical circumstances of Parihaka are now widely acknowledged. At 5.00am, on November the 5th 1881, government-sanctioned troops entered the pacifist native Taranaki pā of Parihaka, arresting key leaders, expelling other occupants and systematically destroying the buildings. The impetus for the assault, it is now also widely understood, was highly strategic. Firstly, Parihaka represented a tangible location for a broad Pākehā fear of Māori political independence. Secondly, and more crudely, the demand for fertile farm land by colonial settlers was not being met. Scattering the population of Parihaka was a central strategy for alleviating the former and satisfying the latter. Moreover, the destruction

of the material fabric of the village – its architecture – was a purposeful action designed to erase any legitimate presence over the land. Popular understanding owes much to the publication of Dick Scott's *Ask that Mountain: The Story of Parihaka*, in 1975, which brought this history to a wider audience. In this paper I wish to add to what we do know by reviewing a small part of the visual record we have of Parihaka. As a late event in the New Zealand Land Wars, Parihaka – unlike earlier conflicts – was able to be photographed. These images now provide a valuable visual record but it is not one without problems, not the least of which is the extent to which we accord certain photographs an elevated status while other images remain undiscovered. In this paper I

begin by discussing the latter in the example of some photographs of Parihaka that have otherwise not yet been "discovered." I then turn my attention to one particularly period photograph of Parihaka - "Parihaka Mt Egmont & Comet, 4th October 1882" - that has achieved iconic status. Along the way, I will be giving consideration to the representational politics of image-making and history in the 1880s.

### *Ask that Mountain* (1975)

Modern appreciation of Parihaka starts with Dick Scott's *Ask That Mountain*. I won't be dwelling here on the particulars of this important work except to emphasise how it provided the fulcrum for contemporary appreciation of the events that took place in

1881. However, I would like to observe that Scott thanks one Rigby Allan as a "Pākehā authority" for his generous knowledge.<sup>1</sup> It is not sufficiently acknowledged that Allan made a significant photographic record of Parihaka, and I wish to begin there.

At the time *Ask that Mountain* was published, Rigby Allan was the director of the Taranaki Museum, New Plymouth, and between 1962 and 1973 he made a series of photographs of Parihaka that provide a vivid visual documentary of the pā at that time. Given his profession, it is surprising that most of these images offer little by way of visual insight than any ordinary snap-shot. This is apparent in the casual framing, questionable focus and inconsistent subject. Allan's record is not helped by the way in which the colour scale of the photographs has aged to a soft seventies' hue, nor by the fact he often managed to include himself in the scenes. At their worst they look like the kind of "snap" an indiscriminate tourist might take. At their best his photographs depict "ordinary" life in Parihaka in the example set by Ans Westra's 1964 *Wash Day at the Pā*. As in Westra's images of Ruatōria life, the photographs that contain

people, especially children, loom from the near past with a taint of cultural voyeurism. For example, in an image, such as "Preparing hangi, Parihaka" (7 November, 1969), we are left in little doubt that life for Māori in rural areas is rugged and difficult and not so far removed from some nineteenth-century recordings. The image "Mrs Hinerauwha Tamaiparea, Parihaka" (October, 1970) depicts her wrapped in a feather cloak, scruffy hat pulled down snugly, her ta moko visible behind the corncob pipe clamped in her mouth. It is a portrait in the academic model of Charles Goldie, with its attention on an exotic other left over from the last century.

Then again, perhaps Allan was not so completely unaware of the risks of racial objectification, or so complicit a voyeuristic visitor. In another photograph – "Mrs Tangi Tito and Ida Carey, Parihaka" (September, 1969) - Allan records the former sitting for a portrait being painted by the latter. The camera is complicit in a scene of identity making that challenges easy categorisation of object and subject. As with a Magritte, we are left to wonder at who the real Mrs Tito is.

Such visual knowingness must be brought to any interpretation of Allan's reflections on

Parihaka. As I briefly discuss his depictions of the buildings, we must keep in mind the question provoked by the portrait of Mrs Tito; just how "real" is the identity in these images? While this paper will specifically address the 1880s, it is instructive to examine Allan's photographs from almost a century later when Parihaka entered into broader national consciousness. The "point-and-click" quality of Allan's images is hard to ignore but there is, nonetheless, a pattern to his interest. Broadly, his architectural subjects fall into two themes that can be conceptualised as ruins and remains.

### **Parihaka as ruins**

Charles Merewether has observed that ruins invariably contain the traces of former worlds, and therefore nostalgia, "but" he writes "living with ruins can also be a reminder of disaster."<sup>2</sup> In Allan's photographs living with an architecture that once existed becomes a *leit motif*. He depicts failed smokestacks, leftover retaining walls and pointless foundations. In one image the remains of a butter-store looks like an ancient headstone.<sup>3</sup> The motif of ruination is the broken chimney, which

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<sup>2</sup> Merewether *Traces of Loss* p 28.

<sup>3</sup> Allan "Raukura house ruins, butter storage, Parihaka."

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<sup>1</sup> Scott *Ask That Mountain* p 8.

features in many of Allan's photographs. These represent disaster, but as Merewether indicates, it is a particular, nostalgic kind of disaster. Here, as elsewhere in the New Zealand rural hinterland, skeletal brick chimneys are symbols of doomed endeavour. The significance of neglect in this association is more profound than one we might find in organised concepts such as demolition or, in contemporary parlance, deconstruction, where the material fabric of the chimney lends itself to utter destruction, or recycling. Unlike these purposeful entropies, the naked chimney is a crude testament to the callousness of progress that cares little if something has a memory, or not. In "Old Bakehouse, Parihaka" (1963) - one of Allan's oldest images from this series - the truncated remnants of the brick flues stand with a forlorn dignity not incomparable to the ruined columns of Classicism. The image is iconic but to see it as monumental requires a precise point in time after which we recognise events that need to be remembered. As a ruin, Parihaka is simply an incomplete fragment of New Zealand history.

### **Parihaka as remains**

Against the stillness of a ruined pā, Allan also provides us with scenes of a remaindered

Parihaka. The visual impact of an "architecture of remains" is achieved in the juxtaposition – through our contemporary eyes at least – of everyday living against a backdrop of dying buildings. In one image eight kuia are leading a greeting in front of a building in the late stages of a terminal decay.<sup>4</sup> Weatherboards are missing, verendah posts have been improvised, and the verendah roof sags worryingly. It is a depiction of a cultural survival in the face of material decline, made all the more jarring by the intrusion in the background of a Volkswagen Kombi. The house, a part of Tohu's marae, is still in use, but, to quote France's first inspector-general of historical monuments, Ludovic Vitet, on this matter; "use is a slow form of vandalism, gradual and imperceptible, which ruins and deteriorates buildings almost as much as does brutal devastation."<sup>5</sup> Use transitions remains into ruins, and with that a conversion of the *now* into the *past* occurs, and we might attempt a distinction between "*what* remains," and "*what remains*."

Treading in the footsteps of colonial

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<sup>4</sup> Allan "Kuia, Tohu's Marae, Parihaka."

<sup>5</sup> Ludovic Vitet quoted, Choay *The Invention of the Historic Monument* p 107.

photographers a century earlier, Allan seems determined to record pictorial evidence of a culture in decline before it is lost for all time. Allan could be interpreted as a very late entry in the archive of documenters "smooth down ... [the] pillow of a dying race."<sup>6</sup> Except that, by 1970 Māori were entering into a period of Renaissance. As in the problematic portrait "Mrs Tangi Tito," Allan's building portrait offer invites ambiguous interpretation. Is this an architecture in its death throes? Or should we read into these sacred buildings a record of age to be understood as an example of dignified, persistent, heroic survival? Moreover, the dateline for Allan's photographs indicates he visited Parihaka many times, and the images themselves suggest a person who was both empathetic towards, and accepted by the people of Parihaka. The ambiguity in his images becomes rhetoric: If Parihaka is a ruin, what was it like before? And if these are remains, then what is really left?

### **Nuku-tewhatewha**

I don't have a direct answer to that but I do have an illustration. Photographs of Parihaka

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<sup>6</sup> Featherston quoted, Buck "The Passing of the Māori" p 362.

in the 1880s show a village composed of small thatched whare interspersed by a smaller number of larger timber buildings following typical colonial examples. It is easy to read this as an example the influence and ambition of wider colonial culture. However, Deidre Brown has argued that it needs to be understood that the appropriation of obvious European settlement patterns and buildings does not necessarily signal a wider embracing of Pākehā values. These buildings, she suggests, were often only façades for distinctly Māori functions.<sup>7</sup>

The only available image of a Parihaka interior is of the Te Niho-o-Te-Ātiawa dining hall and here, Brown observes, we find a version of a Victorian tea house. However, it is possible, and perhaps likely, that Te Niho-o-Te-Ātiawa was photographed precisely because it resembled a familiar model. Brown recalls that Peter Buck described one of the meeting rooms in the sprawling Raukawa complex as being "destitute of furniture, except for the Māori mats that cover the floor."<sup>8</sup> In one of the few black and white

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<sup>7</sup> Brown *Māori Architecture: From Fale to Wharenui and Beyond* p 73.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Buck quoted, Brown *Māori Architecture: From Fale to Wharenui and Beyond* p 77.

prints Allan made he shows the interior of Te Rangikapuia dining room neatly laid out for a paahua commemoration without a single table or chair.<sup>9</sup> Such commentary supports Brown's assertion of a separation between Pākehā form and Māori function operating throughout Parihaka. Perhaps we can extend that assertion further and hypothesise that Parihaka offers an archetype for architectural cross-fertilisation?

Nuku-tewhatewha is the communal bank opened in June 1881. Its existence can be traced directly economic imperatives concerned with limiting Māori debt to Pākehā.<sup>10</sup> At the same time its form is a mixture of traditional and colonial references. In an image accredited to Burton Brothers as May 1886, Nuku-tewhatewha can be termed visually a modest "colonial pataka" standing incongruously against a traditional thatched whare neighbour.<sup>11</sup>

Brown describes it as having a "cross-like plan" and suggests that in the translation of its name as "four elevated platforms" we find a

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<sup>9</sup> Allan "Te Rangikapuia dining room, Parihaka"

<sup>10</sup> Brown *Māori Architecture: From Fale to Wharenui and Beyond* p 72.

<sup>11</sup> Burton Brothers "Te Whiti's Bank, Parihaka"

resonance to the plan geometry. But in the photograph taken by Alfred Burton (1886) the intrusive proximity of the neighbouring whare, and the visible fact of only three finials, suggests a "T" shaped plan. In concurrence, Dick Scott also describes a "T" shaped plan.<sup>12</sup> That said, the scale, shape and elevated height mean that a comparison to traditional pātaka is appropriate.

If we want an example of hybridity (or, more directly a bi-cultural architecture) we can compare Parihaka's communal bank and Whakairo Nuku Tewhatewha, the storehouse built by Wiremu Tako Ngātata (Wī Tako) in 1856 to symbolise his support for a Māori King.<sup>13</sup> There is no obvious *architectural* argument for making this association. Whakairo Nuku Tewhatewha is a large, ornately carved pātaka in which the cultural investment and authority are manifest. Nuku-tewhatewha, Parihaka's bank, is more modest in scale, and in its simplified cottage expression it seems consciously removed from traditional carved practices. And perhaps this was the point – Parihaka didn't need a symbol, it needed a bank. However, the

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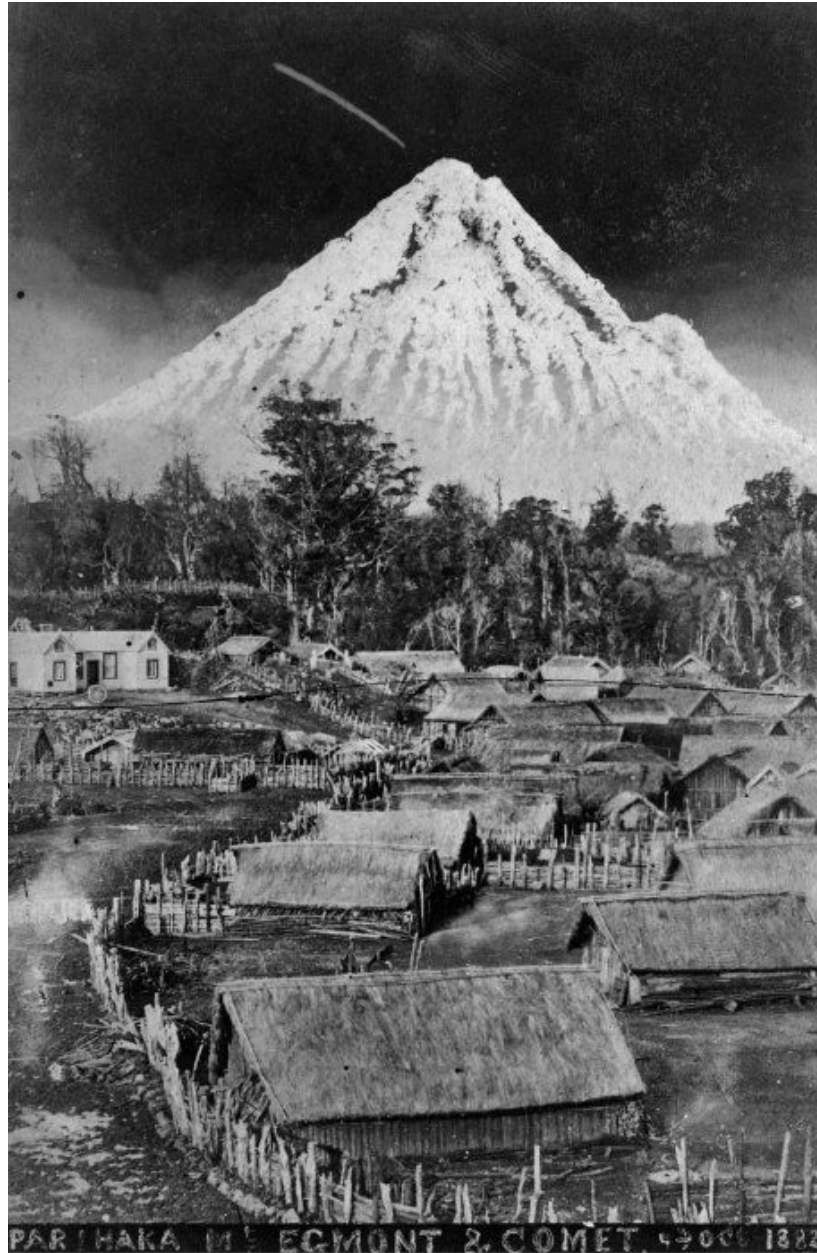
<sup>12</sup> Scott, *Ask That Mountain* p 159.

<sup>13</sup> Cairns "Ngātata, Wiremu Tako" n.p.

implication of the common name evokes the same ambition for Māori sovereignty.

William Andrews Collis accompanied the Parihaka campaign in 1881, and he provides another visual record of the pā on that fateful day. He also returned at least twice and took further photographs, including a tremendous panorama that is perhaps the only unified view of the complete pā complex we have to study. Of his first visit the date is not in question, and photographs suggest the third visit was 1890. But there is confusion surrounding Collis' second visit. The panorama is dated to c1880, but this is too early. The most remarkable aspect of these first two scenes is that the mountain is missing. It may well be due to cloud cover in the earlier, and an exposure issue in the latter (given the quality of the detail in the foreground) but the net effect in both cases is to isolate Parihaka from the omnipotent presence of the mountain. For Collis, it seems, Parihaka was a village without any topographical specificity. In the third image the mountain becomes a dominating compositional element.

That said, a comparison between the first two images is where the most valuable



**Figure 1:** View of a comet in the sky above Mt Egmont and Parihaka, 4 October 1882 Alexander Turnbull Library, ref: ½-003184 (unknown photographer)

information is collected. In the first, from the moment of invasion, the pā is substantially composed of traditionally constructed whare. To the middle left Te Whiti's residence, Miti-mai-te-arero can be seen and, upon closer examination, can be found to still be in a partially-complete form.

Brown has made the point out that the pattern of Parihaka's settlement reflected an awareness of Pākehā town planning and architecture, and this can be clearly seen in Collis' panorama with one significant exception. The most obviously "European" buildings – Miti-mai-te-arero, Rangi Kapuia and Te Niho-o-Te-Ātiawa – all address the centre of the pā (as too would Titokowaru's house "Hinoa" built into the 1890s). However, Nuku-tewhatewha, the diminutive communal bank, differs. In Collis' panorama it can be found buried behind the whare in front of Rangi Kapuia. Here it is apparent that it is indeed a "T"-shaped building. There are two small gable windows visible – not dissimilar to "smoke holes" found in traditional whare – indicating that the porch entry was not orientated to the village but directly toward the mountain. This complexity of this relationship is more apparent in George Clarendon Beale's watercolour depiction

dated to November 1881. Here the stark whiteness of Miti-mai-te-arero and Nuku-tewhatewha leap out, with the former facing inwardly to the pā, and the latter aligned along the axis of the "T" to the mountain. This, perhaps, accounts for the odd plan. It allows for a ridge alignment to the mountain while maintaining a façade alignment to the village. If so then Nuku-tewahtewha should be considered an early organisational hybrid of Māori and Pākehā influences.

84 years after Burton Bros., Rigby Allan photographed Nuku Tewhatewha. In Allan's image there is little left architecturally to suggest the building's significance. Allan encountered a forlorn and neglected shanty. Probably it was an unwitting decision, but he also caught Nuku-tewhatewha from an almost identical line of sight as Burton. This makes for a visual comparison that highlights the similarities and differences. The finials and porch balustrade are gone, the roof is now rusted iron rather than timber shingle, and the door is missing, but it is recognisably the same building. This only serves to emphasise the most striking difference. When Allan encountered Nuku-tewhatewha it was sitting on the ground, and with that any symbolism or association to pātaka – ceremonial or

financial - has been diminished. In 1970 it was just another derelict whare, and in 1975 it was lost for good in a fire,<sup>14</sup> leaving just this small oeuvre of architectural portraits.

#### **"Parihaka Mt Egmont & Comet, 4th October 1882"**

It is no understatement to say that no photograph of Nuku-tewahtewha has captured popular imagination. Indeed, despite the surprising abundance of photographic imagery relating to Parihaka, and widespread interest in it, the image to achieve iconic status (of sorts) from the 1880s is one depicting the village at the foot of a snow-clad Mt. Taranaki. Parihaka occupies the lower half of the composition. Miti-mai-te-arero can be seen to the left but generally the village recorded is one of anonymous thatched whare. The upper half of the composition features the dominating sight of Mt Egmont (as it was known then by Pākehā). Between the two, a boundary of bush separates the horizontal village from the vertical mountain. But the element that sets this photograph apart is the spectacular tail of a comet that appears to be on a collision course with the mountain peak. The

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<sup>14</sup> Scott *Ask That Mountain* p 159.

photograph is prominently titled (in capitals) "PARIHAKA MT EGMONT & COMET. 4TH OCTOBER 1882." As an image it is, according to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, "apocryphal, both legendary and fictional"<sup>15</sup> [Figure 1].

The symbolic significance of this photograph was most insistently endorsed by Ralph Hotere in the painting "Comet over Mount Egmont (Taranaki) and Parihaka" (Tūnui-a-te-ika kei runga o Taranaki me Parihaka).<sup>16</sup> In this visual retelling from 1972 Hotere iterates the key elements of comet, mountain and village in an especially graphic composition where the date and place have moved from caption to compositional element.

However, this is not an image to be trusted. As it happens the dramatic optical verticality of the mountain immediately throws into question any visual authenticity.

By way of model, a photograph of Mt Egmont taken by architect James Walter Chapman-Taylor, in the twentieth century, revealing the height of the mountain required taking in a

vast expanse of foreground.<sup>17</sup> Yet, in this picture of Parihaka the foreground is substantially truncated, which is to the compositional advantage of the depiction of the village, although it demands that the image be manipulated during developing.

If the grotesque height of Egmont is not immediately obvious this probably has something to do with the extent to which colonial depictions have presented the mountain as singularly dominant over the landscape. In paintings by Angus, Heaphy and Fox, Egmont is a staggering, iconic spectacle to be held in awe. The ability of the artist to manipulate optical laws made it so.

In Charles Heaphy's "Mt. Egmont from the Southward" (1840) the mountain is a perfectly symmetrical pointed cone, completely in compositional accord with a small waterfall in the immediate foreground. In "Māori Village with Mount Egmont" (c1880) William Fox eradicates the middle-ground to converge the vertiginous mountain with a scene of ordinary village life.<sup>18</sup>

The first point to consider about "PARIHAKA MT EGMONT & COMET, 4TH OCTOBER 1882" is that it is not a photograph in any modern sense but a part of an earlier colonial picturesque that depicted the New Zealand landscape as a subject for romantic idealism. This is a tradition in which mountains hold a particular significance as objects of glorification. As Thomas Gray wrote in 1765 of the Scottish Highlands, "The mountains are ecstatic ... None but ... God know how to join so much beauty to so much horror."<sup>19</sup>

To complicate things further, this is not one image, but three.

The first version is held by the National Library of New Zealand under the description "View of a comet in the sky above Mt Egmont and Parihaka" and is attributed to Thomas S Muir. Despite the photograph's inscription, the National Library entry cautiously qualifies the date with the flourish of 1870s-1880s.<sup>20</sup> The second version is in the collection of the Hocken Library. It carries a near identical archival entry being described as "Parihaka,

<sup>15</sup> "Parihaka, Mt Egmont and Comet"

<sup>16</sup> "Comet over Mount Egmont (Taranaki) and Parihaka"

<sup>17</sup> Chapman-Taylor "Mount Taranaki"

<sup>18</sup> Fox "Māori Village with Mount Egmont."

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Gray quoted, Buzard "The Grand Tour and After (1660-1840)" p 41.

<sup>20</sup> Muir "View of a comet in the sky above Mt Egmont and Parihaka."

Mount Egmont & comet, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1882." Once again authorship is attributed to Thomas S Muir, and in this case a provenance is attributed to B Bell, 1951.<sup>21</sup> A third is held in the Heritage Collection of Puke Ariki, New Plymouth. It offers little by way of new information. Titled "Parihaka: Mt Egmont and Comet, 4th October. 1882," it is attributed to TS Muir and dated c1880s. The brief image description here notes various whare and "one European building" and adds the caveat that the comet is "presumably added."<sup>22</sup>

This last annotation is a curious one given the reticence of archivists to presume anything, but the qualification is made clearer when the three versions of this image are compared. The three images are not identical but they share a common negative origin. The most obvious differences concern the darkroom treatment of the reproduction. The Turnbull version has a significant tonal contrast, the Hocken example displays a more muted gradation, and the Puke Ariki specimen is in sepia. The effect of this is to lend to the Turnbull image a greater dramatic impact between sky and mountain and comet. Yet, in

<sup>21</sup> "Parihaka, Mount Egmont & comet, 4th October 1882."

<sup>22</sup> "Parihaka: Mt. Egmont and Comet, 4th Oct. 1882."

terms of authenticity, the ordering I have just described should probably be reversed. Close inspection shows that the Puke Ariki version has larger image margins, the Hocken has been marginally cropped (evident in the shortening of the elevation of Miti-mai-te-arero) and the Turnbull image cropped again. This supports a hypothesis that the Puke Ariki image is the earliest of the printings and that the Turnbull and Hocken photographs are reproductions taken might be taken from a negative or a print.<sup>23</sup>

All that makes some sense until one turns to the most arresting element of the composition, the comet. In what I consider the first of the series – the Puke Ariki photograph – the comet is a vivid splash across the dark sky, and it is easy to make graphic analogy to the symbolic white feather adopted by the followers of Te Whiti and Tohu. It appears not so much as a celestial manifestation as a distinctly terrestrial possibility as it heads toward the mountain-top. This effect is reinforced by the contrast of the image that

<sup>23</sup> The archival entry for the Hocken photograph indicates that it is held as a print only. The entry for the Turnbull photograph indicates that it is also held as a negative but this does not indicate that it is the 'original' negative.

gives to the peak and the comet the same degree of white contrast.

In the Hocken image the conversion from sepia to grey-scale has introduced great apparent tonal variation, especially in the texture of the mountain. But more importantly the comet itself has changed shaped. This is not simply a function of a reprinting and should be interpreted as a conscious and determined intervention. From the fat, brush-like flame in the first image the comet has been slimmed down and it takes on a curved inflection. Now the trajectory, while still in a dialogue with the mountain, holds its own course slightly apart from it.

This manipulative distancing of trajectory and mountain is even more apparent in the Turnbull example. In this image the increase in tonal contrast produces a chiaroscuro effect once used by Renaissance painters to achieve a sense of volume in the human body. The stark black and white highlights the detail of the mountain, fleshing it out (as it were) to achieve a more physical and three-dimensional representation. At the same time the comet has been further modified so that it has become an elegant pencil stroke against the thick paint of Egmont. In this photograph



the separation of celestial and terrestrial fields is complete: the comet belongs to a scientific sky, the mountain to an equally quantifiable land.

I will return to explore in detail the significance of this shift in compositional emphasis, but for now I would draw attention to one observation. In the Puke Ariki photograph (the one I consider the most authentic) the flamboyance of the depicted comet makes it significantly more evocative than the other two manifestations. In its proximity, brilliance, and otherworldliness, it is not just a comet but also a heavenly visitor whose presence is an open invitation to interpretation.

Over the three reproductions we have of this image the graphic quality of the comet is refined so that it shifts from extravagant manifestation to a more refined visual spectacle. To appreciate the significance of this evolution it is necessary to review period accounts of the two most important comets of the 1880s.

### 1880 Comet

The photograph I am discussing is ostensibly dated to the comet of 1882, but it is best

understood in the context of comet events in the nineteenth-century. Most notable amongst these is the Great Southern Comet, visible in February 1880.

The *Hawke's Bay Herald* pronounced the remarkable brilliance of the comet, comparing the "feeble head" and "immense train" to another such comet seen in 1688. It is a head, the *Herald* writes, "not worthy [of] such a tail."<sup>24</sup> The *Taranaki Herald* likewise wrote that the tail was visible in all parts of the Colony, and was causing considerable excitement in scientific circles in Auckland.<sup>25</sup> Other commentators found it difficult not to interpret the comet without an air of exaggeration. For example, HRR, writing to the editor of the *West Coast Times*, declared it the largest on record, equal to historic comets the signaled biblical events: "a more gigantic object has never been observed in the firmament before" he writes.<sup>26</sup>

The *Bay of Plenty Times*, in a more moderate tone, called it the largest ever seen in the southern hemisphere, and made some attempt to identify an astrological context. But it is

also observed that the last time such a cosmic occurrence was observed in New Zealand was just before the 1860 Waikato war, "though we have no idea that there is any connection between the two."<sup>27</sup> This was followed by speculation that

[p]ossibly some of Zadkiel's disciples will regard the appearance of this stranger as indicative of a coming European struggle, or at least of the terrible catastrophe which is predicted to overtake us in 1881.<sup>28</sup>

To provide a context for that comment, Zadkiel was the pseudonym of Richard James Morrison, an English astrologist and author of *The Herald of Astrology* (1831), published in subsequent editions as *Zadkiel's Almanac*, in which he made predictions based upon the arrangement of the luminaries.

The seriousness with which Morrison's book was treated can be gleaned by a reference in *Fielding Star* of 1885, where they note that the Almanac specifically mentions a total eclipse in September of that year that will be "invisible here, but visible in New Zealand (North Island),"<sup>29</sup> and will lead to a period of prosperity for New Zealand (meaning, in the

<sup>24</sup> "The comet" (7 February 1880) p 2.

<sup>25</sup> "The Comet" (5 February 1880) p 2.

<sup>26</sup> H.R.R. "The Comet" p 3.

<sup>27</sup> "Comet in the Southern Heavens" p 3.

<sup>28</sup> "Comet in the Southern Heavens" p 3.

<sup>29</sup> "Local & General News" p 2.

interpretation of the *Star*, stable government and Ministry). In 1888, the *New Zealand Times* announced the arrival of the Almanac for 1889 and provided a run through of the predictions, concluding that New Zealand was on "a pretty safe basis"<sup>30</sup> for the next 12 months.

The significance of this is to dispel any impression that the interpretation of the comet was split between enlightened Pākehā and primitive Māori. Indications are that Māori and Pākehā alike were inclined to read calamitous significance into it despite scientific evidence to the contrary. Unfortunately, it does seem to be the case that Pākehā commentators were unable to see past their own superstitions when describing Māori reactions to the comet.

The *Waikato Times*, for example, drew a close association between the appearance of the Great Southern Comet and the pacifist activities at Parihaka. The *Times* describes Māori "puzzling" to discover the "potent" of the comet, and recorded that Māori too saw a momentous association to the comet witnessed at the time Pōtatau Te Wherowhero

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<sup>30</sup> "Zadkiel's Almanac" p 4.

was made king. Moreover, they continue, Māori consider this latest comet to be a foreshadowing of a coming man, who in the words of Te Whiti, would be like "the stone which the builders rejected shall become the head stone of the corner."<sup>31</sup>

In the one few genuinely prescient statements, the *Times* cites an anonymous Māori voice asking the Constabulary to ignore any comet "fever" among the natives of the plains, concluding:

You will not be fought against. Won't you be ashamed of yourselves [sic] when you reach Parihaka fully armed and find all inhabitants pursuing peaceably their usual avocations?<sup>32</sup>

Such commentary provides evidence that a conflict mentality in anticipation of the invasion of Parihaka in November 1881 was in place at least as early as February 1880, and that for Māori and Pākehā alike the presence of the comet provided, if not an omen, then certainly an emblem of imminent instability. A single column in the *Evening Post* of 7th February 1880, chronicles the comet alongside

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<sup>31</sup> "Hawera: Last Night. The Natives and the Comets" p 3.

<sup>32</sup> "Hawera: Last Night. The Natives and the Comets" p 3.

descriptions of Armed Constabulary disembarking at Ōpunake and Titokowaru arriving at Parihaka.<sup>33</sup>

It seems to me that it does not go too far to say that for all people in Taranaki in 1880, the vision of the comet was synonymous with increased militarization, Parihaka, and a sense of inevitability.

### **The Great Comet of 1882.**

The Great Comet of 1882 was first sighted in the skies of the Southern Hemisphere in early September and remained observable through to mid-October when it broke up. It is apparent that the Great Comet of 1882 offered an exceptional visual spectacle. JT Stevenson, writing for *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, described the tail as "grand in the extreme." At its widest it was several times larger than the moon,<sup>34</sup> and at perihelion it was visible during daylight hours. Period accounts agree that no brighter comet had been seen in New Zealand since the Great March Comet of 1843.

When comparing period accounts of the 1880

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<sup>33</sup> "Our Colonial Defenses" p 2.

<sup>34</sup> Stevenson "Observations of the Great Comet (b) 1882, made at Auckland, New Zealand" p 54.

and 1882 comets it is apparent that the latter was viewed in a more moderate tone. What is striking about descriptions of the 1882 comet is a complete lack of subjective emotion. The *Auckland Star* and *Marlborough Express* stated the appearance of the comet in Sydney on the 8th September, both noting its "well-defined nucleus."<sup>35</sup> It was subsequently observed on the 10th in Wellington as displaying a "large head pointed towards the earth."<sup>36</sup> By September 19th large crowds are said to be witnessing it in the streets of Wellington,<sup>37</sup> and it is visible in the afternoon of the 20th September,<sup>38</sup> the same day the *Otago Daily Times* quoted Dr James Hector comparing the comet to the engravings of Donati's comet (Comet Donati, 1856).<sup>39</sup> This comparison is challenged on the 26th September in the *Star* with the assertion that it now *exceeds* Donati's comet in length and splendor.<sup>40</sup> The most striking aspect of this comet was its increased visibility as the month progressed. By October

<sup>35</sup> "Another Comet" *Auckland Star* p 3; "Another Comet" *Marlborough Express* p 2.

<sup>36</sup> "The Comet" (11 September 1882) p 2.

<sup>37</sup> "The Comet" (19 September 1882) p 3.

<sup>38</sup> "The Comet" *Bay of Plenty Times* (20 September 1882) p 2.

<sup>39</sup> "The Comet" *Otago Daily Times* (20 September 1882) p 2.

<sup>40</sup> "The Comet: To the Editor of the Star" p 3.



**Figure 2** "B.N.:The comet as seen in Dunedin at 4.30 on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1882" Alexander Turnbull Library, ref: A-089-015 (artist unknown).

1st it was described as smaller in size but brighter in brilliance,<sup>41</sup> with the *Taranaki Herald* adding that it presented a "magnificent spectacle in the eastern sky."<sup>42</sup> Otherwise the most emotionally-charged account refers to the comet "blazing in the sky at midday" in

<sup>41</sup> "The Comet" (2 October 1882) p 2.

<sup>42</sup> "The Comet" (2 October 1882) p 2.

Princes Street, Dunedin, with half the street watching.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, it is added, if the "Egyptian business had not been over it would have been our duty to expect distressing telegrams from the seat of war."<sup>44</sup> This last reference is not to any domestic

<sup>43</sup> "Passing Notes" p 18.

<sup>44</sup> "Passing Notes" p 18.

conflict but to the outcome of the 1882 Anglo-Egyptian War, and this is telling.

The appearance of a comet in 1880 prompted irrational speculation and hysteria concerning prophesy, war and cosmic foretelling. By comparison a more spectacular comet only two years latter was received as a natural wonder and was placed in the global context of science, politics and even art. Between 1880 and 1882 the cosmological interpretation of a celestial visitor had shifted considerably from astrology to astronomy and it is a reasonable assumption that this reflected the political stabilisation of New Zealand over that same period. In 1880 Pākehā and Māori alike were inclined to interpret a comet in terms of inherent meaningfulness including omens and prophecies. By 1882 Pākehā were secure enough in their colonial conquest that they could understand a comet as a spectacular but otherwise scientific phenomenon, leaving portentous interpretation to Māori alone.

At least, that is, until 1973 when a new phase in visual materialism, initiated by *Ask That Mountain*, led to a desire to locate images of national significance that are no more neutral in their desire to visualize meaningfulness (such as Hotere's example). This is why it is

important to try to make some sense of the intention behind the Parihaka and comet portrait.

### Thomas Muir

While all three images are attributed to TS Muir they offer little more by way of biography. The best we have is an annotation on the Hocken image which identifies Muir as a "photo artist" of New Plymouth. This, however, seems unlikely. I can find no record of a photographer named Thomas Muir operating in Taranaki, but one does stand out further south.

Thomas Mintaro Bailey Muir was born in 1853 in Mintaro, Australia. He is thought to have arrived in Dunedin in the late 1860s, where his uncle, Joseph Allen, was one of Dunedin's best-known photographers.<sup>45</sup> He attended high school there from 1863 to 1866. Soon after he appears to have begun a photographic apprenticeship with the London Portrait Rooms (Dunedin) where his ability brought him to the attention of the nearby firm Burton Brothers. During this period, he developed a parallel interest in astronomy (through JT Thomson's observatory at Caversham) that

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<sup>45</sup> Knight *Burton Brothers* p 20.

led to Muir accompanying the American expedition to Queenstown to record the 1874 Transit of Venus (it is worth mentioning that this was the first of two Transits in the nineteenth-century, the second in 1882). Afterwards he appears to have returned to the London Portrait Rooms until 1877, when Walter Burton left the Burton Brothers partnership, and Alfred Burton invited Muir to join the firm as senior assistant and manager.<sup>46</sup> However Muir is next recorded as managing the Invercargill Telegraph station between 1880-81.<sup>47</sup> When amalgamation of Post and Telegraph offices lead to his resignation he returned to Burton Brothers as a partner. Yet, in 1893, the *Southland Times*, announced that Thomas Muir, *photographer*, and "formally" of Invercargill, had returned after an absence of 14 years. The article notes that Muir had left to pursue the "art of the photographer," and upon his return had staged an exhibition in the foyer of his new premises, of which the writer thought the lighting soft and varied, with "some bold Rembrandtesque effects being conspicuous."<sup>48</sup> In other words, Muir was noted for his use of

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<sup>46</sup> Knight *Burton Brothers* p 20.

<sup>47</sup> Olwyn "[nz] Muir and Moodie - postcard fame - where are they buried?" n.p.

<sup>48</sup> "Luceo Non Uro" p 2.

"Rembrandt lighting," or chiaroscuro in the technical term. We are informed that Mr Muir had, "for a number of years" been a partner in the Dunedin photography firm of Burton Brothers.<sup>49</sup> In 1898 Muir is again back at Burton Brothers as a partner where he was joined by George Moodie to become Muir & Moodie, who would in turn quickly become leaders in the international market for pictorial postcards.

Muir's ability is remarked upon, but it is always with particular regard to his work as a valued studio portrait photographer. It is apparent that in his partnership with Alfred Burton, Muir's role extended to the pastoral care of the business side of the operation. With the financial stability of the firm in Muir's control, it was during this period that Burton made journeys throughout the New Zealand hinterland capturing his two favourite scenic subjects: topographic and Māori. These photographs eventually became defaulted to the firm of Muir & Moodie and became central to their success in the field of vicarious tourism.

That much is known, the rest of what I have to

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<sup>49</sup> "Photography" p 2.

say on this matter is highly speculative. Thomas Muir never visited Parihaka. It is likely that the photographs were taken by Alfred Burton on one of his field trips, while Muir minded the business from Dunedin. However, this does not mean that Muir's name should not be on that "Comet" photograph as its "author." The extent of the visual manipulation of the image makes it very much a product of the dark-arts of the darkroom. Muir had a genuine interest in astronomy and would have seen the comets of 1880 and 1882. Indeed, it is useful to compare the Parihaka comet to a drawing of the 1882 comet seen from Dunedin [Figure 2]. In flamboyance and trajectory, this sketch is a doppelganger for the one found in the Puki Ariki image, later edited to present a more scientific spectacle.

The implications of this hypothesis are significant. Not only is the photograph of Parihaka not an accurate one, the visual manipulation that produced it could have occurred anytime up to the dissolution of the firm of Muir and Moodie in 1915. Furthermore, the motivation for constructing this fabrication may have had nothing to do with historicism or prophecy, and everything to do with commercialising a romantic

interpretation of New Zealand's natural and cosmological uniqueness.

### Conclusion

This interpretation is iconoclastic, but it may not yet be inconsistent with Dick Scott's seminal work. In the early 1970s Parihaka provided a timely specimen of colonial conflict that could simultaneously be studied as academic history while also offering an active reference point for determining future race relations. Parikaha, at this time, was a symbolic figure relevant equally to looking back and looking forward. In most ways *Ask that Mountain* provided a palatable narrative for a broad audience but Scott starts *Ask That Mountain* with a selection of voices.

In one, John Bryce (1903) asks

"with the feet of twentieth century tourists on the very summit of the mountain, we may well hope that the occult and maligned spirits will now enter into necromantic night and trouble the sunshine no more."<sup>50</sup>

In a second the great English philosopher John Stuart Mill expresses his concern, to a Waitōtara block occupier, that it is beyond the ""Englishman under new conditions"" to be

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<sup>50</sup> John Bryce quoted, Scott *Ask That Mountain* p 6.

fair-minded toward "inferior races" on matters of will.<sup>51</sup> And in a third, a contemporary farmer is quoted in his criticism of Te Whiti and Parihaka as being "'grossly over-publicized – today he [Te Whiti] would be head of the biggest advertising agency in the country.'"<sup>52</sup>

Politics and race, publicity and economics, tourism and nationalism, myth and metaphor; Parihaka is a motif for New Zealand society and perhaps it is only fitting that the principle motif of that history – a celestial feather arcing over an iconic mountain – is just as troubled.

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<sup>51</sup> John Stuart Mill quoted, Scott *Ask That Mountain* p 6.

<sup>52</sup> Stronge quoted, Scott. *Ask That Mountain* p 6.

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