

*Cook's Sites. Revisiting History.*

*Reviewed by David Mackay*

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Mark Adams and Nicholas Thomas.

Dunedin: Otago University Press, 1999.

James Cook's voyages cartographically defined the coastal outline of New Zealand. Although many place names have reverted to their original Maori form, Cook's labels are still sprinkled around our shores. The scientists aboard his vessels integrated our flora and fauna into the European scientific classification systems. In an extremely powerful way, the artists and draughtsmen aboard his ships began the process of configuring New Zealand in the European imaginative world and inaugurating our own art historical tradition in a Pakeha sense.

This book memorializes in photographs the colonizing of landscape sites and what Thomas describes as "imperial antiquarianism". Four repositories with Cook artifacts – the Berlin State Library, the Institute for Ethnology Museum in Göttingen, the Pitt Rivers in Oxford and the Herbarium at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew– were visited in the same way as the two physical sites in Dusky and Queen Charlotte Sounds. These very different spatial realms represent "each other's antipodes". The objectives of the book are multiplex, as described in its Introduction, and reach far beyond the visual and written material the two authors have at hand. At its broadest it is an enquiry into cross-cultural history. Faced with the paucity of both physical relics and Maori versions of the encounters, the book wisely settles on the strategy of saying less rather than more and seeks to work at an allusive level in connecting text and visual images.

The photographs in this book formed part of an exhibition at Te Papa Tongarewa in 1999 and they form the strongest part of the work. They attempt to re-imagine the two sites visited by Cook and to draw out the significance of the few relics of the voyage which remain there. The authors do not make clear why these were chosen of all the Cook sites in New Zealand. In their different ways they were certainly places of considerable drama – the one principally of landscape, the other on a human scale; that of the Grass Cove massacre. Cook visited the Dusky Sound only once, in 1776 on his second voyage. He visited Queen Charlotte Sound five times, including three occasions in the great Pacific sweeps of the second voyage. It became a

favourite place of refreshment and refitting; free of the frustrating temptations of the more northerly Pacific Isles yet replete with local provisions, timber and water.

The photos are Tolkienesque in their tone and mood with the effect accentuated by narrow depth of field. In Dusky Sound the landscape is menacing, haunting, primeval. It is an environment which dwarfs humankind and makes no concessions to those seeking to inhabit it. As the text makes clear, the lone Maori family encountered do not seem to be at one with their country but appear as outcasts eking out a sparse existence. Their sparse material culture symbolized the unyielding nature of their land.

Although fish and timber were plentiful the crews of the *Resolution* and *Discovery* too found little nourishment on the land. The photographer has found the axe and chisel marks of their brief habitation, but the impression is that the rain forest quickly mossed over and smothered the evidence of their sojourn: it was a brief interlude in the longer term history of the region. The principal records of their visit travelled with them to Europe.

Queen Charlotte Sound, and in particular Ship Cove, are portrayed in a more open way although the clouds hang broodily over the ridge tops and it appears to be a landscape without shadows. This is perhaps to capture the tension around the Grass Cove incident. That Cove itself features in the books and the reader can see where the boat crew of the *Adventure* met their grisly end.

The photographs are highly evocative, seeking to capture the mood and experience of the European crews. Some of the views recreate the scenes depicted by the artists on Cook's ships such as the William Hodges painting waterfall in Dusky Sound and John Webber's depiction of the beach at Ship Cove.

The encounters with the Museums are modern ones and the authors' visits are parallel discoveries in which the spatial and scientific layout and the atmosphere of the repositories replace landscape, flora and fauna. Culture contact is part of the experience of both. The relics of the voyages are more prolific but the "sites" of their discovery provoke a more subjective reaction in the authors who struggle to relate the historical significance of the journals and artifacts to their modern surroundings. Not surprisingly the particularity of place fails to work the same magic as Dusky and Queen Charlotte Sounds.