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## **Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Mackenzie Basin's transition from wilderness to tourist place.**

**Anna Thompson-Carr**

### **Abstract**

The natural landscapes of New Zealand are a key attraction for domestic and international visitors for a variety of recreation and leisure purposes. This paper explores the interactions between heritage and recreational values for a region in New Zealand known for its sublime landscape (Bell and Lyall 2002). The paper discusses the transient movements and activities of visitors encountering this socio-cultural landscape, often seeking to view the iconic landmark - Aoraki/Mt Cook – part of the Te Wahipounamu South West New Zealand World Heritage area – which is accessed via the Mackenzie Basin. Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park is a wilderness region that has significance not only for local inhabitants but also for travellers sightseeing and recreating in the area. Early inhabitants of the region – Māori from the Kai Tahu iwi (tribe) - visited the Mackenzie Basin's numerous waterways and lakes to gather mahika kai (traditional foods) and continue to have strong associations with the area. Since European settlement in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the Mackenzie landscape has been shaped by human activities, particularly farming, tourism and recreation.

**Keywords:** landscape, experience, tourism, New Zealand

### **Introduction**

Cultural interpretation of history and values for Aoraki/Mt Cook (the mountain) and the surrounding Mackenzie region attempts to convey a sense of place and is a subtle means of educating visitors about what to appreciate in the landscape. Existing tourism operations and media including websites, travel brochures, guidebooks and interpretation direct the liminal experiences, consumption of landscape and tourist performances such as sightseeing and photography or memory making (Steenjacobsen 2001; Bell and Lyall 2002; Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen and Urry 2004). This paper refers to field work involving participant observations of sightseeing and social gatherings of visitors taking photographs at various viewing points on the journey through the Mackenzie to Aoraki Mt Cook. Indeed travelling through the landscape – between the iconic tourist sites – is punctuated by consuming the landscape through such shared activities that enable experiencing the lesser valued places in the region. The non-iconic sites (the scenic

viewpoints and places between destinations) are not just a foreground or frame for viewing the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook – they are also part of a landscape deserving of protection for intrinsic values. Baerenholdt et al. (2004, p. 149) note ‘There is a large range of ‘places of in-between-ness’, of immobility.’ between tourism destinations and they refer to ‘airports, stations cafes and so on’. This ‘so on’ can well include the scenic view points and roadside stops where visitors view landscape and ‘perform’ tourism activities such as socialising, photographing or resting from travels. Indeed whilst the Mackenzie is recognised for outstanding scenic qualities it is only recently - with attempts to establish industrialised, dairy factory farming – that there have been calls to protect the tussock and grassland-scapes typifying high country farms outside the protected areas. Slow tourism projects in the Mackenzie Basin, such as multi day walking and cycle trails that will be part of the Te Araroa (The Long Pathway) and Nga Haerenga (Ocean to the Alps) projects, are under development to encourage recreational activity within the rural landscape – and these activities will be future place makers that influence the liminal nature of visitors’ experiences.

### **The writer’s place in the cultural landscape.**

My association with Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Mackenzie Basin dates back over forty years, first as a visitor, then as a local resident from 1986 to 1995 at Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, and since then as a land owner who has family members permanently living there. This paper is no doubt influenced by my personal reflections on the landscape, my observations of friends, visitors and climbers in the region, my own outdoor attachment to the area and my research projects. In 1986 I moved to the Mackenzie Basin and spent nine years living in the Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, attracted by the climbing and skiing, working for the Department of Conservation (DoC) as a park interpreter, administrator and curator of the alpine archives. I was part-owner operator of a mountain guiding business and the NZ Mountain Guides’ Association secretary/treasurer for several years. My father has lived in Aoraki/Mt Cook Village and Twizel for 20 years (since the town is relatively new, having been founded in 1969, he is regarded by locals as a long-term resident) whilst my eldest

daughter, who also owns land in Twizel, has been a permanent resident of Aoraki/Mt Cook Village from 1989 to 1995 and again since 2006.

Since leaving the area as a permanent resident I have conducted academic research within the Mackenzie, initially examining experiences of guided mountaineering clients in Aoraki Mt Cook National Park. Later, for my PhD, I examined visitors' experiences of the cultural landscape of the Mackenzie, focussing on the Ngāi Tahu and European cultural values for the iconic alpine areas of the region, in particular Aoraki/Mt Cook, and another focus of the tourist gaze – Lake Pukaki<sup>i</sup>. More recently, my research explored perspectives and gathered data about local community members' and visitors' recreational experiences and aspirations for future management of the Ahuriri and Ruataniwha Conservation Parks. Thus this paper is informed by these personal experiences as a researcher, resident, recreationist and visitor.

### **Cultural Landscapes**

The cultural landscape has been defined as a landscape that has 'significant symbolic meaning' for a particular cultural group or groups (e.g. Bourassa 1991; Muir 1999). Research and theoretical literature has explored how cultural landscapes are increasingly valued by indigenous and western societies for providing deep experiences or emotional connections such as 'sense of place' (Relph 1976). The traditional relationship of indigenous peoples to the land often features attachments to landscape features based on spiritual values, mythology, resource use, ancestral ties and historical links (Bourassa 1991; Walker 1992; Goehring 1993; Toren 1995; Morphy 1995; Howitt, Connell and Hirsch 1996; Hinch and Colton 1997; Hinch 1998; Atkins, Simmons and Roberts 1998; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Kearsley, McIntosh and Carr 1999; Russell 2000; Berkes 1993, 2003). Indigenous peoples have been differentiated as 'insiders' within a landscape because of their cultural and intergenerational ties with particular areas. Being an 'insider' suggests cultural values and meanings for physical locations that may or may not be shared with outsiders such as tourists (Relph 1976; O'Regan 1990; Strang 1997; Hinch and Colton 1997; Hinch 1998; Atkins et al. 1998; Muir 1999). In contrast, many traditional

western views suggest separating the natural world, including wilderness and untamed landscapes, from human beings (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Bourassa 1991; Sinclair 1992; Bender 1993; Cosgrove 1993; Coates 1998; Muir 1999). Nevertheless both indigenous and western cultures have been observed to develop levels of symbolic, emotional and ancestral links with the same landscapes (for example Hay 1991; Swaffield 1991). If successive generations have inhabited an area, or individuals seek to connect with nature, a 'sense of place' or 'insideness' for nature and the landscape can occur no matter the cultural background (Tuan 1974; Relph 1976; Naess and Rothenberg 1989; Hay 1991; Swaffield 1991; Prentice 1992; O'Regan 1992; Cosgrove 1993; Bender 1993; Crang 1998; Wall 1999; Muir 1999; Swaffield and Foster 2000; Boyd 2002). Many European countries have a heritage of culturally significant landscapes where visitor appeal for the landscape is intertwined with mythology, history or connecting with nature (Prentice 1992; Prentice and Guerin 1998; Avery 1999).

Visitors' experiences of 'place' within touristified landscapes are often intangible and complex - research can gain insights from observing and identifying visitors' emotional experiences and thought processes surrounding how they experience landscapes but nonetheless most understandings are subjective to the individual and problematic to express. MacCannell's book *The Tourist* suggested tourist experiences had parallels to those of pilgrims on a spiritual quest with his description of the tourist as motivated by the quest for 'reality and authenticity' or meaningful experiences through encountering 'other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles' (MacCannell 1976: 8). MacCannell's argument for the quest for authentic experiences that provided deeper meaning in peoples' lives challenged Boorstin's (1964) book claiming that tourists were seeking meaningless 'pseudo-events', thus escaping the drudgery of domestic routine. Cohen (1979) and Graburn (2001) also describe tourism or visitor experiences as a 'kind of ritual', a secular pilgrimage that is in opposition to the mundane experiences of daily life. Tourism is recognised as an instrumental force that contributes to place making and commodification of the landscape (Meethan 2002; Hollinshead 2007 and 2009).

Many visitors sightsee in a manner that may seem superficial – travelling from one iconic site to another, often within the confines of a vehicle (Urry 1990; Butler 1998; Bell and Lyall 2002). 'Iconic tourist structures ...symbolise the changing character of an area, to provide a memorable image that potential visitors will associate with it' (Maitland and Newman cited in Larsen 2005). Landscapes have been noted as significant tourism icons as a result of destination branding/marketing and established reputation (Butler 1998; Ateljevic and Doorne 2002; Carr 2004; Becken 2004). Through activities such as sightseeing and photography visitors interact with each other and encounter tourism destinations or icons thus 'performing' the place (Baerenholdt et al. 2004). Urry considered landscapes to be prime objects of the tourist gaze, instrumental in shaping tourists' experiences of place (Urry 1990: 45). Urry described the individual's encounter with landscape or the 'Other', as a 'romantic gaze', whereas commercial, mass tourism experiences often resulted in a 'collective gaze' (Urry 1990).

One component of the visitor experience at (or within) a landscape is the 'sense of place' that may arise from the experience (Relph 1976; Violich 1985; Eyles 1985; Urry 1990; Butler 1998). Tuan suggests that 'sense of place' is difficult to define and may also have visual or aesthetic dimensions (Tuan 1974: 235). 'Sense of place' is a complex, intangible relationship that may develop between people and a particular area or landscape that can include feelings and personal associations towards the area (Relph 1976). Relph's 'sense of place' and 'insideness' amongst those who occupy a landscape and form physical and social associations with such a place is reflective of Tuan's identification of place as a 'space' which has emotional or symbolic meanings attached to it by individuals or groups (Tuan 1974). Other studies suggest visitors to cultural landscapes can experience such sense(s) of place. Prentice and Guerin, having conducted a survey of walkers in the iconic Scottish countryside of Ben Lomond, found such experiences were primarily associated with the aesthetic beauty of landscape and physical recreation, however a 'spirit of place' with the beauty and romance of the setting emerged amongst a third of participants (Prentice and Guerin 1998: 189). Prentice (1992) describes the Manx National Glens of Scotland as a 'treasured landscape' frequented by tourists. The Lakes District of

England is a region that can provide visitors with a spiritual fulfilment and emotional experiences (Sharpley and Jepson 2011).

Visitors' experiences can go beyond the superficial surface of a place - the traditional tourist activity of sightseeing scenery or seeking to 'tick off' a 'checklist' (Steenjacobson 2001) of icons - to deeper emotional connections with place(s). Recreational and tourism activities in cultural landscapes may not just be for aesthetic pleasure, but also for reasons of understanding history, pursuing family links, or experiencing legends and myths associated with such areas (Prentice 1992; Steenjacobson 2001; Carr 2004; Larsen 2005). Such complexities of cultural landscapes, which may reflect a diverse heritage of cultural or social values, are significant alongside the power of landscapes to provide visitors and local inhabitants with a sense of awe or joy; and opportunities to experience the power of the sublime or 'sense of place' (Tuan 1974; Relph 1976). Indigenous peoples are thus not unique in their attachments to land and share, with many European or non western cultures, instances of associating landscapes with ancestors, natural resources, legend and myth (Morphy 1995; Atkins et al. 1998; Butler 1998; Prentice 1992; Prentice and Guerin 1998; Avery 1999; Muir 1999).

### **The Mackenzie Basin and Aoraki/Mt Cook – a cultural landscape**

This paper will now focus on Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park and the Mackenzie Basin (or Mackenzie Country<sup>1</sup> as it is otherwise known) - a distinctive and significant region of the high country landscape of New Zealand's South Island (Mackenzie District Council (MDC) 2006, 2007). Located to the east of the Southern Alps the Mackenzie is typified by wide open spaces, hill and mountain ranges, remnant glacial moraines, wetlands, lakes and rivers. A 19<sup>th</sup> C visitor, Sir Julius von Haast, one of the first Europeans to explore the Mackenzie and Mt Cook area, commented on the 'sublimity of the scenery' and this remains a true description for many people travelling through and viewing the area today (Von Haast 1948: 36).

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<sup>1</sup> Note the area is referred to by a number of interchangeable names, the most common being the Mackenzie Basin, Mackenzie Country or the shortened version - Mackenzie.

In the last 150 years of European settlement human changes have transformed this region of glacial remains, mountain ranges and wilderness. Human use of resources of this high country has altered the originally wild tussock landscapes, firstly through the agricultural sector (from the 1870s) followed by tourism and then, in the 1960s, hydroelectricity projects. Remnants of golden tussock land, dry tawny-brown grasslands and big blue skies mean the area has retained a wild feeling with panoramic scenery (Mark 2004). The Mackenzie District Council recognises the 'outstanding natural features of the district' (MDC 2006). Section 2.1 of the Mackenzie District Plan is entitled Landscape Values of the Mackenzie Basin and states:

'The Mackenzie Basin is a special part of New Zealand. The combination of physical environment and human traditions, while in many respects typical of the South Island high country generally, also have qualities of setting, location and tradition which are singular to this basin, and identifiably 'Mackenzie' in character. The Mackenzie Basin is among the group of landscapes most qualified for 'outstanding' status in New Zealand.' (MDC 2007).

The same council document stresses the 'outstanding working landscape' which gives rise to contradictions in respect of landscape management. A perceived lack of both councils' decisiveness over preservation of scenic and environmental qualities has contributed to conflict that has arisen between the agricultural and tourism sectors. Recently parts of the traditional merino sheep farming landscape has been altered radically as properties were free-held with large scale irrigation projects enabling the introduction of dairying (in increasing scale). These controversial changes in the agricultural sector are beginning to impact on tourism experiences of the Mackenzie landscape, such industrialisation concerning tourism providers and natural area managers who suspect the alterations that are occurring will affect visitors' perceptions of the region – and threaten the sublime experiences of the natural landscape.

The Mackenzie is highly regarded as an area of great significance to New Zealand's tourism industry with a recorded 884,500 visitors in 2008 and the agricultural



changes are concerning as visitors to the region are drawn by the majestic scenery of the Mackenzie and the tourist icon of Aoraki/Mt Cook (Becken 2004; Carr 2004, 2006; Ensor and Cossar 2009; Ensor in MacFie 2010; Taylor 2009). Preserving the cultural and heritage landscape values is essential to satisfy the tourist gaze of those with expectations of big skies and golden landscapes (Urry 1990; Hall and Kearsley 2001; Ateljevic and Doorne 2002; Carr 2004; Spaul and Evans 2005; Ensor and Cossar 2009). Visitor activity occurs en-route, within and outside the conservation and national parks of the Mackenzie and at iconic sites, for instance at the eastern end of Lake Pukaki (where visitors view Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Southern Alps) and at Lake Tekapo with the lakeside attractions of The Church of the Good Shepherd and the popular Sheep Dog statue (Carr 2004).

Tourism promotional media such as websites, brochures and travellers' written accounts regularly depict the scenery and describe the enjoyment and fascination international and domestic visitors have with their Mackenzie experiences whilst driving on State Highway 8 from Lake Tekapo past Lake Pukaki and along to the Lindis Pass. Tourism New Zealand, Christchurch & Canterbury Tourism, the Tourism Industry Association and the Mackenzie Tourism and Development Board value the region for the scenery's enhancement of visitors' journeys (Carr 2004). Promotional images often include the panoramic vista of the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook, with the turquoise waters of Lake Pukaki in the foreground, providing visitors with perceptions of wilderness and untouched nature (see figure 1 below).

Recent events in popular culture have also contributed to the Mackenzie visitor experience with areas used as film locations for the 'Lord of the Rings' trilogy being sought out by fans on tours. Studies conducted with visitors to the Mackenzie Basin's Ahuriri and Ruataniwha Conservation Parks from 2005 to 2007 found that key motivations for visitors were the sense of emptiness, open spaces, to experience solitude and scenery (Lovelock, Carr and Sides 2007, 2008).

Plate 1: Aoraki Mt Cook with introduced pine forest.



Source: Author photo

Studies conducted with visitors to Aoraki/Mt Cook in the early 2000s identified key motivations for visiting the national park were, in order of importance, viewing the alpine scenery/sightseeing, specifically to view Aoraki/Mt Cook and climbing or tramping (Carr 2004). Aoraki/Mt Cook remains the draw card for the region – a national mountainscape with international significance as part of the South West New Zealand World Heritage Area that attracts people for various reasons, foremost being the scenery and recreational opportunities. The iconic nature of the mountain was commented upon by Urry (1990) who noted that the tourist gaze ‘...’may be something that can take place more or less instantaneously (seeing/photographing New Zealand’s highest mountain, Mount Cook)...’. This raises the question – can visitors connect with places that are significant to local communities in a meaningful way or will tourism experiences be merely superficial performances in significant

landscapes and places contributing to the further development of 'quaint tourist landscapes' (Bramwell and Lane 1993, p. 76)? For non-tourists the mountain holds a range of deeper, culturally significant, values, meanings and experiences. For New Zealanders the mountain is linked on an emotional level through associations with national identity and thus marketed domestically as a must see destination if one was to connect with one's national heritage in much the same way as the ritual of travelling to the Grand Canyon is a means of reinforcing national identity for North American visitors (O'Regan 1990; Stewart et al. 1998; Neumann 1999).

### **Cultural values for Aoraki/Mt Cook**

The Māori people of New Zealand are renowned for having cultural relationships with the land that hold emotional, social and psychological significance known as *turangawaewae*. *Turangawaewae* is explained by Hakopa (1998) as the 'right of a person to be counted as a member of an iwi or tribe and thus establishes a person's 'sense of belonging' to the land and people that occupy the land'. For Māori connection to land is of extreme cultural significance – the Māori name for land - *whenua* – is also used for the placenta/afterbirth the connotation being Māori are born from the land and will return to the land. Rangi (Sky Father) and Papa (Earth Mother) are, in legend, the father and mother common to all tangata whenua (people of the land) 'whakapapa' or trace their genealogy by explaining links to the land, referring to their mountains, rivers, and so on. According to Davis, O'Regan and Wilson (1990: 9) 'Māori tradition and culture as expressed in place names emphasise the spiritual value of the land and provide the basis of tribal identity and sentiment. They reflect the physical features of the landscape; the gods of creation; the legendary explorers such as Kupe, Tamatea and others'.

In pre-European times Māori of the Waitaha and Ngāi Tahu iwi (tribe) visited the Mackenzie Basin's numerous waterways and lakes to gather mahika kai (traditional foods). Aoraki/Mt Cook is both an atua (God) and tupuna (ancestor) to the people of Ngāi Tahu (the local Māori tribe). The mountain has been officially recognised as a place that is a taonga – a treasure of exceptional spiritual significance - for Ngāi Tahu whose cultural values and links with the land as tangata whenua were affirmed

with the Ngāi Tahu Treaty Settlement Act 1997 through the official renaming of Mt Cook to Aoraki/Mt Cook . A topuni (statutory cloak of iwi values) was placed on the mountain to enhance the mana (power, status) of the iwi and ensure their authority to participate in management decisions (Dawson 1998). Lake Pukaki is one of many lakes and rivers of cultural significance to Ngāi Tahu, the lake's waters having mauri (life force or spirit) as the water enters the lake via the Tasman and Hooker Glaciers as snow/ice melt from Aoraki/Mt Cook - the water is sacred and used for ceremonial purposes.

Like Ngāi Tahu, the local villagers at Aoraki/Mt Cook (and multi-repeat domestic visitors with personal histories entwined with the area such as outdoor recreationists - especially mountaineers) appear to form closer relationships with the mountain by living in and being in the landscape in a longitudinal temporal sense. Living, working, raising families, playing and recreating deepens their experience of the area. Protecting the environment is simplified by the World Heritage and national park status so is not of concern to many locals but despite such protection issues do arise such as the need to preserve natural quiet (Tal 2004; Kjelsberg 2009). The mountain has been a focus for climbers since 1882 when the English Alpine Club encouraged climbers to attempt the first ascent of Aoraki/Mt Cook, which was finally achieved in 1894 (see Du Faur 1915; Pascoe 1958; Haynes 1994). The mountain has numerous challenging ascent and descent routes that attract climbers to the area. Whilst the mountain can be ascended in a day with good weather and conditions it is more usual that climbers will spend several days on the mountain – the most common ascent route being via the Linda Glacier to the High Peak. In 1884 the first Hermitage hotel was built providing accommodation for the first tourists and sightseers to the area. Most locals live in the village because they are employed with the Hermitage Hotel (now in its third building complex in 126 years), Alpine Guides, Southern Alps Guiding, Mt Cook Ski Planes or with the Department of Conservation. Whilst they cannot own property in a national park (rentals or long term leases are available) many have formed emotional attachments to the region, some having lived in the area for lengthy periods of their lives.

### **Visitors' experiences of the Mackenzie**

From the international and domestic visitors' perspectives the Mackenzie landscape is famous for its golden barren scenery - sublime nature – and one of the primary attractions of the Mackenzie Basin is views of the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook from a scenic viewpoint at Lake Pukaki. The mountain is promoted as a world renowned tourism icon, featuring in Tourism New Zealand's 100% Pure brand international marketing program (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott 2003; Becken 2004). Images of Aoraki/Mt Cook are frequently used in place marketing, tourism brochures and itineraries and are thus pivotal for further developing the area's iconic status. Such recurrent marketing over the past 120 years has contributed to reinforcing the image of the Aoraki/Mt Cook area as an adventurous, alpine wonderland. Marketing and the iconic brand of Aoraki/Mt Cook may therefore 'reinforce the sense of place of the destination community' (Williams, Gill and Chura 2004). Aoraki/Mt Cook is iconic and famous not only as the highest mountain in New Zealand, nor just for its scenic qualities, but also in terms of being a distinct and unique place for socio-cultural reasons (Carr 2004; Urry 1990, 2002).

Tourists generally make fleeting visits to the region and do not get to know the mountain in-depth as the majority are day visitors travelling between Christchurch and Queenstown or Wanaka (major southern New Zealand tourist towns). However, as explained earlier, the scenic landscape features heavily in tourism promotion for the Canterbury region and thus visitors are drawn to capturing their experiences of the landscape as they travel through it – usually through stops at scenic viewpoints for photographic opportunities. Thus their experiences could be viewed as lacking in the intensity required to develop an appreciation of place. Through the scenic vantages at marked scenic viewpoints, signage, interpretation, and visual images of Aoraki/Mt Cook in various tourism media the visitors are directed to, focus on the mountain as the object of their attention. The landscape experience on their way to and from viewing Aoraki/Mt Cook is very much one of the 'accelerated sublime', as noted by Bell and Lyall (2001), or 'fleeting place encounters' (Steenjacobson 2001).

From the first sight of the mountain as visitors travel through the Mackenzie Basin its visual splendour is a magnet to visitors. From the eastern end of Lake Pukaki, sixty kilometres drive from the national park, visitors usually have their first view of Aoraki/Mt Cook dominating the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana (plate 2)

Plate 2: Lake Pukaki information kiosk site



Source: Author photo

Interpretation panels relating aspects of the English and Māori values for the lake and mountains are located inside the Lake Pukaki information kiosk. But it is the personal experiences of the surrounding scenery that capture visitors' – their behaviour primarily focusing on photographing themselves with the mountains in the background thus capturing the moment in time. The viewing point is a place where tourists engage in the performance of having their images taken at the site – memories for the future of their being there either alone or with friends; perhaps with



a loved one or family members. Further along the State Highway to Aoraki/Mt Cook are other viewing points, the most visited one being Peter's Lookout, where visitors travelling in private cars, camper vans or on bus tours take opportunities for more photography – again with Aoraki/Mt Cook in the background – thus the visitors continue the visual capture of place – they have been there (plate 3).

Plate 3: We've been "here"(Peter's Lookout)



Source: Author photo

This site is signposted at the roadside and formally identified with the elevated car park area being graded on a hill-side overlooking the turquoise feature of Lake Pukaki. There is neither interpretation, rest-rooms(toilet facilities) nor other services at the site – merely a car park providing a vantage point for visitors to enjoy the surrounding scenery in what can be, at peak times, heavily congested conditions as

buses, cars, cycle tourists and camper-vanners compete for space. (see figure 4 below)

**Figure 4: Scenic viewers at Peter's Lookout**



**Source: Author photo**

Another 15 minutes drive along the state highway to Aoraki/Mt Cook Village is Glentanner Park – a high country sheep station and centre point for rural based tourism. Glentanner is a family-owned business developed by the Ivey family who have a multi-generational relationship to the land. From their high country station they have developed a camping ground, motels, restaurant, cafe and souvenir shop and offer activities such as horse trekking, guided fly fishing and (in conjunction with aviation operators) scenic flights over the alps. Some bus groups and FIT (Free Independent Travellers) stop at Glentanner Park as it is very much a developed rural tourism site but many visitors by-pass the station as they push on towards the



national park itself. As one travels closer to the national park, and Aoraki/Mt Cook Village, it is a common occurrence to pass traffic stopped on the side of the road as people park (illegally sometimes) to take photos of the scenery and sites.

Once in the Aoraki/Mt Cook Village (located within the park and in direct proximity to Aoraki/Mt Cook) visitors are struck by the scale of the mountain and other notable peaks of the Main Divide which dominate the surroundings, looming over the valley floors where human activity occurs. Many visitors however do not leave the confines of the village – their experience is one of sightseeing from the village confines – visiting the museum and visitor centre or dining at one of the three local cafes/restaurants. Such experiences can be seen as superficial in terms of connecting to place though an element of learning may occur. More active visitor experiences in the park include participating in half day and day walks or having a boating/ kayaking experience on one of the glacial lakes. It is estimated that fewer than 2000 of the annual 300,000 visitors to the park participate in climbing or tramping beyond formed tracks. One of the most popular experiences are walks to the Hooker and Tasman valleys, or for the more adventurous an overnight or day trip to Mueller Hut, and these intense experiences enable more immersed, physical connections with the surroundings.

Whilst on one level visitors may be strangers to a landscape and lack familial connections they do share, with others who do have ancestral links to the region, an appreciation of the natural environment and visual scenic qualities of the Mackenzie, the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook (Stewart et al. 1998; Carr 2004; Lovelock et al. 2007, 2008; MacFie 2010). And visitors, with the inclination and the time to seek interpretation or information as part of their journey, can be exposed to, and learn about, place values (Breese 1991; Bramwell and Lane 1993, Carr 2004). An example of such visitor interpretation is the interpretation of contemporary Ngāi Tahu cultural values for Aoraki/Mt Cook. This interpretation can be viewed at tourism attractions and sites within Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park and at Lake Pukaki. At a superficial level, travel guides and brochures mentioning the mountain's cultural significance are numerous the most notable including the New Zealand Rough and

Lonely Planet Guides. At a slightly deeper level there are educational brochures such as 'South Westland New Zealand - Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Area' and the park handbook 'The Story of Mount Cook National Park'. Once in the park more intense interpretation occurs. Despite no Ngāi Tahu iwi members residing permanently within Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park DOC supports 'Ngāi Tahu in interpreting their traditional relationships and cultural values to visitors' (Department of Conservation 2000: 117). Interpretation is provided at the Aoraki/Mt Cook's Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre and Department of Conservation (DoC) visitor centre attract an estimated 250,000-300,000 visitors each summer (Department of Conservation 2000: 204; Mackenzie Tourism and Development Board 2010). The recently redeveloped DoC visitor centre displays on alpine history, geology, climbing, skiing inform the interested visitor seeking educational experiences. Indigenous cultural information is represented by a large scale carving by Māori artist Cliff Whiting that depicts the legend of Aoraki and his brothers. One legend of Aoraki/Mt Cook is linked to the wreck of the Arai-te-Uru canoe at the East Coast location of Moeraki – another is linked to early Ngāi Tahu travellers into the Mackenzie Country:

In a great tussock basin they glimpse a distant mountain towering above the snowy peaks. The son of a chieftain rides on the shoulders of one of the walkers, likewise towering above the rest. His name Aoraki (the South Island version of Aorangi) is thus given to the dominant glistening pyramid - a fortuitous choice since it not only recalls the chief mountain of their ancestral Pacific homelands but also means 'sky cloud' (usually rendered as 'cloud piercer') a lyrical and fitting title for the highest point in a great southern ocean (Dennis and Potton 1987, p. 57).

Thus interpretations and histories of Aoraki/Mt Cook link the mountain to the surrounding landscape providing a continued theme for the narrative accompanying visitors' experiences as they travel to and from the mountain.

Audio visual shows, brochures, books and fact sheets provide further in-depth information about the mountain's cultural, spiritual, historic and traditional values for

visitors but it is being in the landscape – walking, tramping, climbing where visitors have the most stirring experiences and where visitors report their awe of the natural wonders of the region. Thus diverse media are utilised as a contemporary means of conveying *turangawaewae* (the Māori sense of belonging explained earlier in the paper, refer Hakopa, 1998) and also European values for place to visitors. Thus, for many, the cultural values for the region are intrinsically intertwined with the visual scenic landscape and the preservation of such landscape is essential.

In summary, the mountain is the object for the tourist gaze of visitors to the Mackenzie Basin and World Heritage area of Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park (Carr 2004; Urry 1990, 2002). Having one's photo taken with Lake Pukaki and Aoraki/Mt Cook as a scenic landscape within which one sight/site's a personal experience is a must do – it enables memory making or the production of specific tourism experiences. The mountain is a signifier of place – a place maker (Hollinshead 2009). Individuals, tour groups, couples, friends and families participate in taking each other's photographs, alone and together in front of the mountain backdrop. This is not necessarily a negative experience of place – Larsen (2005) suggests the performance of tourism photography is not merely about consuming places but important as a deliberate execution for developing social relationships – 'producing place myths, social roles, and social relationships, such as family life' (Larsen 2005, p. 417).

The act of sightseeing is thus augmented by photographing 'place' – reproducing the images depicted in marketing promotion so that the visitors have their own individually constructed experiences of place on record. Urry (2002) and Jenkins (2003) refer to this activity as participating in the 'hermeneutic circle' as visitors photograph, with themselves framed within the scene, what they have already experienced in place marketing. Steen Jacobsen (2001, p. 108) observes that tourists may collect 'first hand impressions of world heritage sites, national parks, islands, mountains or regions' an activity he calls 'checklist tourism' which occurs when 'place collecting tourists persistently seek out what they perceive as 'blank spots' on their personal travel maps'. Steen Jacobsen does not criticise sightseeing tourists –

he views them as 'rushing phenomenologists' who often experience 'great joy of the initial encounter with a place one has looked forward to seeing or is amazed to 'discover' en route...The joy of the sightseer's first meeting is especially noteworthy when one arrives at an awe-inspiring place or when a dazzling landscape conforms to one's high expectations.' (Steenjacobson 2001, p.109). Thus scenic viewing points provide the stage within the landscape for spontaneously undertaking or deliberately performing the act of photographing experiences (capturing precious memories and reinforcing social relationships). The acts of tourism branding and marketing, whilst highly commercial, result in personal, non-commercial tourism behaviours - but all contribute to the 'place making' of the area, and perpetuate the need for sustainable management of iconic sites such as Aoraki/Mt Cook (Becken 2004). Even such iconic landscapes need protection of the environment and scenery to ensure their special values are conserved for the future.

### **Values under threat - preserving the Mackenzie landscapes**

Naess and Rothenberg (1989; 129) observe that 'humans' gross interference in nature mirrors our economic activity. Protection of what is left of free nature depends largely on the way humans are willing and able to change their ways of production and consumption'. Whilst tourism activity, particularly commercial tourism, has critics other economic activities can be more harmful to treasured environments and landscapes. In the Mackenzie-Aoraki/Mt Cook region intensive dairy farming has threatened the traditional sense of place as agricultural development alters the landscape vistas. The area has become a microcosm of landscape management tensions where the conservation of an environment is challenged by the ambitious demands of economic development. Reduced opportunities for merino grazing on what was leasehold land, but is now within conservation parks, required the local farming gaze to shift from agricultural opportunities gleaned from mountain areas to the potential abundance that could be reaped from the low-lying areas of the Mackenzie, dairying being a viable activity. Locals and visitors are divided about the trend to dairy farming on the basis that the Mackenzie is a harsh environment (with high summer temperatures and freezing winter days) for dairy cows, even if housed (Aspinall 2010; Rae 2010; MacFie 2010). Factory farms would require unsustainable

levels of air-conditioning, heating, lighting, fertiliser applications, water, transportation and other unforeseen energy requirements that are costly and thus unsustainable. Environment Canterbury (ECAN) received over 5200 public submissions against factory farming of dairy cows in the area and by February 2010 the Ministry for the Environment had voiced concern (Rae 2009, p. 17; Bruce 2010, p. 11). Ngāi Tahu and other groups including traditional farming families have called for research on the potential impacts on the environmental, scenic and cultural values for the region (Littlewood 2010 a, b). A strong theme in many of the public submissions was the need to preserve the character of the Mackenzie that is so attractive to tourists, the introduction of dairying practises stirring both emotional and rational public responses calling for research into potential impacts (ibid). Already the views have been compromised for visitors by irrigation gantries and infrastructure associated with dairy farming alongside State Highway 8 between Lake Ruataniwha and Omarama. The view of Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Southern Alps is now partially obscured by a one kilometre length of irrigation gantries and equipment on one of the few local dairy farms. This is not what the international visitor expects! Whilst located in a practical and affordable position, easily accessible from the road for maintenance and operational purposes, this industrial intrusion on the landscape seems to be ill-conceived when taking into account the cultural values for the waterways and mountains and the economic value of the landscape for tourism. This change in landscape use reflects universal threats to nature that have been an increasing trend as global economic values are pursued unsustainably, and such iconic landscapes are threatened (Becken 2004). In his paper 'The Tragedy of the Commons' Garrett Hardin discussed over-population and unceasing human demands for using natural resources and this demand has increased (Hardin 1968). Hardin's, Becken's, Naess' and Rothenberg's papers are relevant to the situation facing the landscape of the Mackenzie where the mainly outsider dairying investors utilise public resources for economic benefits that will invariably result in physical landscape changes and are thus opposed by members of the local community dependent on tourism for their livelihoods.

### **Conclusion - the need to value the in-between**

The journey 'through' the Mackenzie is valued and enjoyed by many visitors as much as the destination of Aoraki/Mt Cook. The iconic views, especially those travelling alongside Lake Pukaki, means the loss of in-between spaces and places that provide the scenic vistas along the way is of real concern to community, tourism and environmental interests. Losing the tawny golden browns of the landscape that were not affected by traditional merino sheep farming as a result of dairy farming will destroy the scenic qualities so attractive to sightseers.

The economic contributions of the landscape's intrinsic qualities are apparent with the sublime vistas attracting and satisfying expectations of domestic and international visitors travelling to and through the area. Slower forms of tourism experiences, countering the vehicle dominated approach, are being developed that enable intimate and physical experiences of the landscape, for example through further interpretation of the region's cultural history. The area has untapped potential for cycle tourism should Nga Haerenga – the Alps to the Oceans trail - be further developed since its recent opening to visitors. This cycle way departs from Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park and continues alongside Lake Pukaki through the Mackenzie Basin, down the Waitaki Valley to the Pacific Ocean. Alongside it the Te Araroa Trail traverses the central South Island sub-alpine and alpine landscapes linking the sites of Lake Tekapo, Pukaki, Twizel and Ohau and catering for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

The Mackenzie is a prime example of a region that would be a strong contender for designation as a national heritage landscape requiring legislative protection and sustainable planning practices to be implemented. It is ironic that a landscape with recognised cultural, national and international significance (including traditional, family owned merino farming and high country sheep stations) should lack planning protection from intrusive industrialisation of agricultural practises that now threaten to compromise the wilderness feeling of the Aoraki/Mt Cook region. Intensive agriculture will not only have severe environmental impacts but could also disrupt tourism and recreational activities if the region loses its naturalness and is unable to

deliver the 100% Pure promise currently experienced within the existing golden and alpine landscapes.

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