

Book Review

'Neath the Mantle of Rangi, by Brian Enting. Seven Seas Publishing Pty Ltd, Wellington, 1977. Price \$15.00.

A characteristic common to nearly all New Zealand bookshops is the attractive stand exhibiting books about this country. The New Zealander, migrant, and visitor all have a wide range of magnificent publications enabling them to envisage all aspects of New Zealand from the comfort of an armchair. Indeed, one would have thought that all facets had been covered, then along comes a book that aims at originality by trying to answer the question, "What was New Zealand like long ago?"

Brian Enting has spent the last ten years preparing his descriptive account, essentially concerned with the natural life of New Zealand before exotics altered the country's appearance. The result is a most attractive balance of photographs and text, a hybrid between the more formal reference book and the light, colourful publication aimed for the coffee table.

The title is explained by an account of the legend of Rangi the sky and Papa the earth mother on the inside front of the dust cover, the design of which sets the tone of the rest of the book. One hundred and forty-eight pages comprise six chapters on the country's origin, the coastal environment, podocarp-hardwood forests, the southern beech forests, swamps to bog forests, concluding with alpine habitats. Each zone is examined by means of photographs and atmospheric and factual text.

The photography is the dominant feature, and many of the reproductions have considerable impact. Four-fifths of them are in colour, and subjects range from wide landscapes to intimate close-ups of constituent species. Fauna and flora are represented in reasonable balance, although there appears to be heavier emphasis on lizards and insects than on birds, and there are some notable omissions — for example tui and tuatara. Care appears to have been taken to cover both North and South Islands in fair proportions, a feature lacking in some comparable publications. The general colour shots of forest interiors are particularly striking but those in monochrome have emerged somewhat dull except for the dramatic view of Mt. Ngauruhoe on page 9. Indeed, why monochrome? Pages such as 116-117, where a monochrome landscape is combined with a large white area, only serve to enhance the colour reproductions. The foreword states that the economics of printing have eliminated hundreds of photographs; perhaps the elimination of monochrome would have improved the book.

The standard of photography is generally very high, with good composition and spectacular use of colour. A few close-ups do fail to use the limited range of focus to advantage and occasionally there is a lack of crispness possibly due to over-enlargement (pages 12-13, 55). One photograph on p. 87 is marred by obvious scratch marks, but

most are very natural and have high visual appeal. The absence of any technical data on the photography (and also the name of the printer) could be frustrating to readers interested in these aspects.

The text is dissected into concise segments sandwiched between the illustrations, giving the reader a simplified ecological description of the zones. However, sometimes the continuity of description is broken by several pages of distracting illustrations, each with its own generous caption. Captions are distinguished from the text by the use of italics, which in many instances fail to highlight Latin names sufficiently. The use of Latin and common names is sometimes confusing also, and a few errors have occurred — *Uncinia* is misspelled on p. 67 and not capitalised on p. 122; *Paryphanta* is misspelled on p. 72. The general effect of this text division enables the consumption of information in small doses, making the book attractive to the casual reader and useful for reference. However, as a reference book it lacks an index and many of the page numbers and the citing of other sources is somewhat half-hearted, although a list of selected references is included at the end.

The modern presentation does not re-create the atmosphere of "New Zealand as it was 100 years ago" but rather a present-day atmosphere of habitats unique to this country, of isolated pockets where exotics are not yet obvious. Words and pictures combine to create imaginative impressions of the selected zones of nature, making it a pleasing (and not too expensive) book for those who appreciate our indigenous wild life, and a delightful souvenir for visitors to these shores.

J. F. L. CHARLTON

A. P. Druce has noted the following botanical errors:

- p. 100, line 2: *Clematis* doesn't climb by means of "tendrils"
- p. 104 *Blechnum fluviatile* (not *B. penna-marina*)
- p. 110 *Astelia fragrans* or *A. grandis* (not *A. nervosa*)
- p. 126 *Pimelea longifolia* (not *Pimelia prostrata* var. *erecta*)
- p. 131 Bristle Tussock — *Notodanthonia Setifolia* (not Red Tussock — *Chionochloa rubra*)
- p. 139 *Dracophyllum strictum* (not *D. pubescens*)
- p. 143 *Euphrasia revoluta* (not *E. cuneata*)

To me the least successful feature of the book was the typography of the captions. Distinguishing Latin names, common names and descriptive notes in a manner which contrasts with the body of the text is a perennially difficult problem which was not solved happily. However, the author deserves a bouquet for the imaginative use of white space, for presenting the Tararuas instead of the Southern Alps and insects and lizards as well as birds, and for magnificent and original close-ups of some uncommon plants. Editor.