

Musing on Maoriland

From “the Britain of the South” to “100% Pure New Zealand”, the way we’ve sold ourselves to the rest of the world has evolved alongside our national identity. With the release of a new book showcasing the art of tourism before the advent of television and colour photography, Richard Wolfe looks at how we became “Kiwis”.



The Tourist Department’s “Wonderland of the Pacific” campaign, 1935 (illustration by Carl Laugesen).

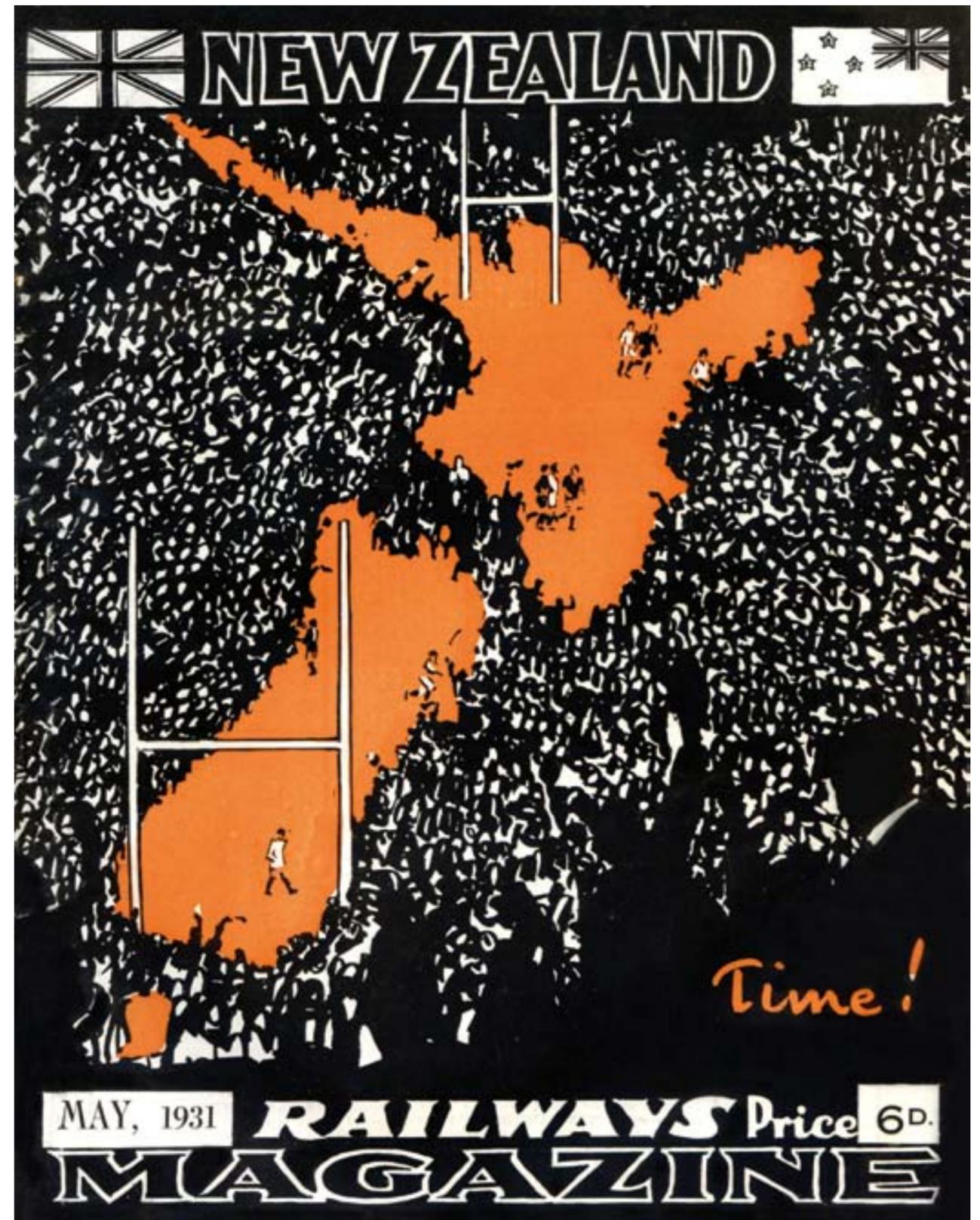
In 1900, *The New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* suggested it was too early to detect any national traits in this country, but in the future citizens would be blessed with “all forms of intellectual ingenuity”.

This ingenuity was apparent as early as the following year, when New Zealand established the world’s first government department to deal with the business of tourism. What the country needed now was a distinctive identity, to promote itself overseas and lure tourists to this corner of the South Pacific. As it would turn out, those publicity efforts also became central to how New Zealanders saw themselves at home.

An early insight was the choice of cable address for the new Department of Tourist and Health Resorts: “Maoriland”. This quaint term had first appeared in the 1860s as an alternative name for the country. To some ears it was preferable to New Zealand, and ranked with other more euphonious names such as Switzerland and Maryland.

Maoriland was a Victorian concept,

RICHARD WOLFE IS A NORTH & SOUTH CONTRIBUTING WRITER.



Railways Magazine transformed New Zealand into a giant rugby ground in 1931 (illustration by Stanley Davis).



Top: The New Zealand Centennial Exhibition certificate of attendance, featuring Britannia's youngest and most distant daughter, Zealanda, 1937. Above: A Tourist Department brochure cover, 1938 (illustration by Melbourne Brindle).

championed by local poets and writers, among them Thomas Bracken in his 1890 publication *Musings in Maoriland*. It conjured up a romantic view of the past, and was an attempt to provide New Zealanders with a history that was uniquely their own.

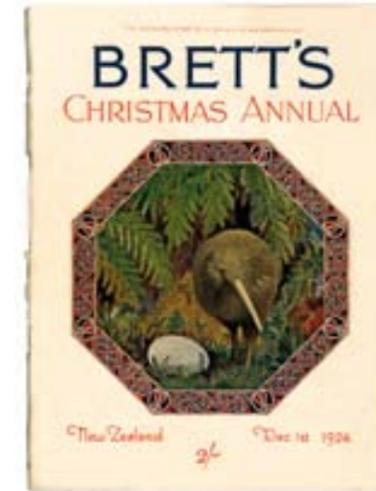
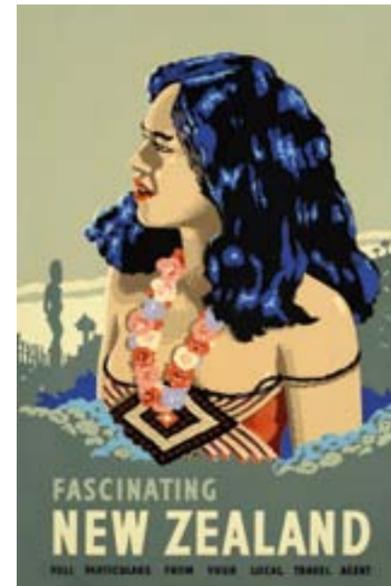
But at the same time it anticipated a growing sense of self-identity. In October 1899, New Zealand had sent the first of 10 contingents of troops to fight alongside Britain in the war in South Africa, surely evidence of its growing maturity and sense of responsibility. And although a loyal member of the Empire, this country opted for independence and declined the invitation to join the Federation of Australia in 1901. Six years later, it graduated from colony to dominion status, a further step along the road to nationhood.

A graphic indication of New Zealand's emerging identity was its first official coat of arms, granted in 1911. This featured another Victorian concept, the female personification known as Zealanda, who was Britannia's youngest and most distant daughter. For her appearance on the arms, Zealanda wore a classical gown and waved the national flag, and was paired with a Maori warrior brandishing a taiaha.

Late 19th-century references to New Zealand as "The Britain of the South" – and even "The Brighter Britain of the South" – reinforced traditional links with "Home". Prime Minister Richard "King Dick" Seddon would popularise the concept of this as "God's Own Country", a distinction surely worthy of a tourist destination which believed it had it all. It was blessed with incomparable scenery, from snow-capped mountains to roaring waterfalls and glow-worm caves, with the additional benefits of invigorating air and sublime climate.

New Zealand now had growing confidence in its attractions, which it claimed were superior to their equivalents overseas. Here were lakes more beautiful than those in Switzerland, sounds grander than the fiords of Norway, and the most remarkable region of thermal activity on earth. With so much on offer in such a relatively small area, this was quite simply "The Pocket Edition of the World".

Further to nature's generous bounty, New Zealand's other point of difference was the life and culture of its original



Left: Tourist Department poster, 1957. Above: Brett's Christmas Annual kiwi cover, featuring our national symbol, 1926.

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settlers. Thomas Donne, first head of the department, was quick to realise the tourism potential of the world of the Maori, centred on Rotorua.

Whereas *Maoriland* had earlier fostered the notion of a dying race, publicity now advised that the Maori population was growing at a faster rate than that of European New Zealanders. But while the Maori were now presented with a more contemporary perspective, the old romantic view lingered with references to such attractions as "Arawa Canoe Maidens".

It was also put about that there was no "Native problem" in these happy isles, but the reality was somewhat different. The official line didn't deter well-known Whakarewarewa-based Guide Rangi from letting it be known that her people were routinely barred from hotels well into the 1950s.

New Zealand was conscious of its youthfulness in terms of European settlement, but by the early 1920s it claimed to have achieved a level of wealth and culture found in older countries. It also adopted a more

playful approach to the business of tourism, promoting itself variously as "The Scenic Playground of the Pacific" and "The Sportsman's Paradise". Our deer stalking, angling and deep-sea fishing were said to be world class, and surrounded by unsurpassed scenery.

The initial emphasis was on hunting and fishing (two of Donne's personal passions), but other early initiatives included guided walks on the Milford track (first offered in 1891) and the development of scenic reserves and National Parks. These natural charms were promoted overseas, but at the same time they appealed to the outdoor lifestyle increasingly regarded as the New Zealand birthright. And in 1939 the department, now renamed Tourist and Publicity, enthused over another national sporting interest, horse racing. New Zealand children were said to be "born with the names of equine heroes in their ears".

By the 1930s, a self-satisfied New Zealand could reflect on its rapid development, which one department publication attributed to the "grit,

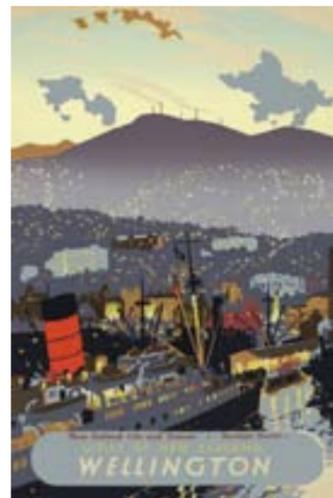
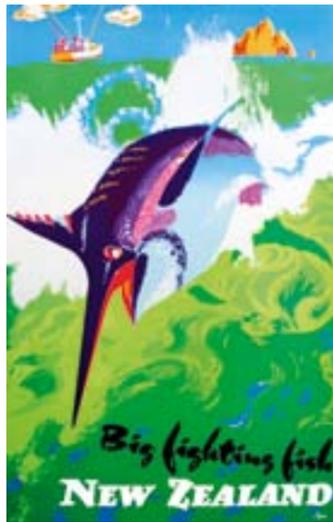
perseverance and faith of the pioneers". There were now claims for a certain national distinctiveness, the product of a happy collusion of heredity (adventurous and stout-hearted Anglo-Celtic stock) and environment (an abundance of fresh air and food).

Another significant milestone in the forging of a national identity was the appearance of a small flightless and nocturnal bird, the kiwi, on the cover of a 1930 tourist booklet. Placed between two other highly recognisable images of this country, a whareniui (meeting house) and a tiki, this bird enjoyed growing popularity and was well on its way to becoming an unofficial national symbol.

While New Zealand vigorously advertised itself overseas, local citizens were urged to "see your own country first". Encouragement came from the top: Prime Minister Gordon Coates, who as Minister of Public Works and of Railways had earlier established this country's road and rail network. In the days before most families owned motorcars, the train was an affordable way to travel, and promoted by extensive advertising campaigns including road- and rail-side hoardings and posters.

Reflecting developments overseas, the 1930s was a golden age of the poster in New Zealand, in the hands of such designers as Leonard Mitchell and Marcus King. Following the election of their first Labour Government in 1935, the shortening of New Zealanders' working week encouraged involvement in the great outdoors, while skiing – now enjoying worldwide popularity – increased their sporting options. But the outbreak of war in September 1939 was a blow to such recreational activities, for those families with cars were now thwarted by petrol rationing. Artists turned their energies to the war effort, but had difficulties of their own with shortages of paper and other materials.

The approach of New Zealand's Centennial in 1940, marking 100 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, was a unique opportunity for a national publicity drive. As part of its "coming-of-age" festivities, the country anticipated being on show to the world, and at the best time of the year for travelling and sporting activities in the Southern Hemisphere. Unfortunately, any hopes of a major influx of overseas tourists were dashed by events in Europe. Nevertheless, large



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numbers of New Zealanders were able to enjoy a range of Centennial events, in Wellington and throughout the country.

In 1898, New Zealand had recognised the publicity potential of postage stamps by dispensing with the usual head of the reigning monarch in favour of pictorial images. Forty-two years on, the special Centennial stamp issue provided an official view of the nation's development, beginning with the arrival of the Maori in 1350.

Other stamps acknowledged links with Britain and important events in local history, but perhaps the design that best symbolised the period under review was that showing Tane Mahuta, the giant kauri from the Waipoua Forest in Northland. This magnificent tree was believed to date from the time of the Roman conquest of Britain, and

New Zealand by sea and air, and a "big fighting fish" promoting the country's appeal as a sporting playground – Tourist Department posters, 1950 to 1955.



A 1948 "lakes district" stamp set designed by Douglas Badcock.

had therefore witnessed New Zealand's conversion from bush and swamp to pastureland and nationhood.

One of the more striking products of the Centennial was the Certificate of Attendance for the main event, the Exhibition in Wellington. Designed by Leonard Mitchell, it showcased a modernised Zealândia within a panorama of national progress. She was flanked by the usual representatives of local flora and fauna, including a centrally placed kiwi. Now increasingly known as "Kiwis" themselves, New Zealanders were happy to be associated with this most peculiar of birds.

The spirit of the "Playground of the Pacific" gained further traction in the second half of the 20th century. Tourism publicity now reflected New Zealand's adoption of an increasingly informal and outdoor lifestyle, made possible by its conducive geography and climate. Maori continued to be a major selling point, and while there was still a dependence

on images of attractive women, they were spared the romantic overtones of the past. With the rapid growth of international air travel, imagery needed to be fresh and vibrant in order to appeal to a broader and younger market.

New Zealand's fledgling tourist industry was established in the face of huge difficulties. Among the many challenges for this risky proposition were this country's isolation from Europe, the state of its roads and a shortage of suitable accommodation – further compounded by two World Wars and a Depression. However, the country managed the transition from Maoriland to the jet-age, and in the process produced a vast amount of attractive and compelling promotional material. What started out as the art of early tourism, targeted abroad, would also quickly become an art of national identity, as New Zealanders absorbed and reinforced the story of their own country. The rest, as they say, is history.



Richard Wolfe contributed two essays to **Selling the Dream: The Art of Early New Zealand Tourism** (Craig Potton Publishing, \$80). The book is available from www.sellingthedream.co.nz with a 10 per cent discount on the retail price by using a reader code of NSSD01.