



Leonard Mitchell, 1935.



Eugene Collett, 1966.

POWER OF THE POSTER

Early New Zealand
tourism posters promised
exotic adventures,
unspoilt natural wonders
— and a new life, writes
Ann Packer.

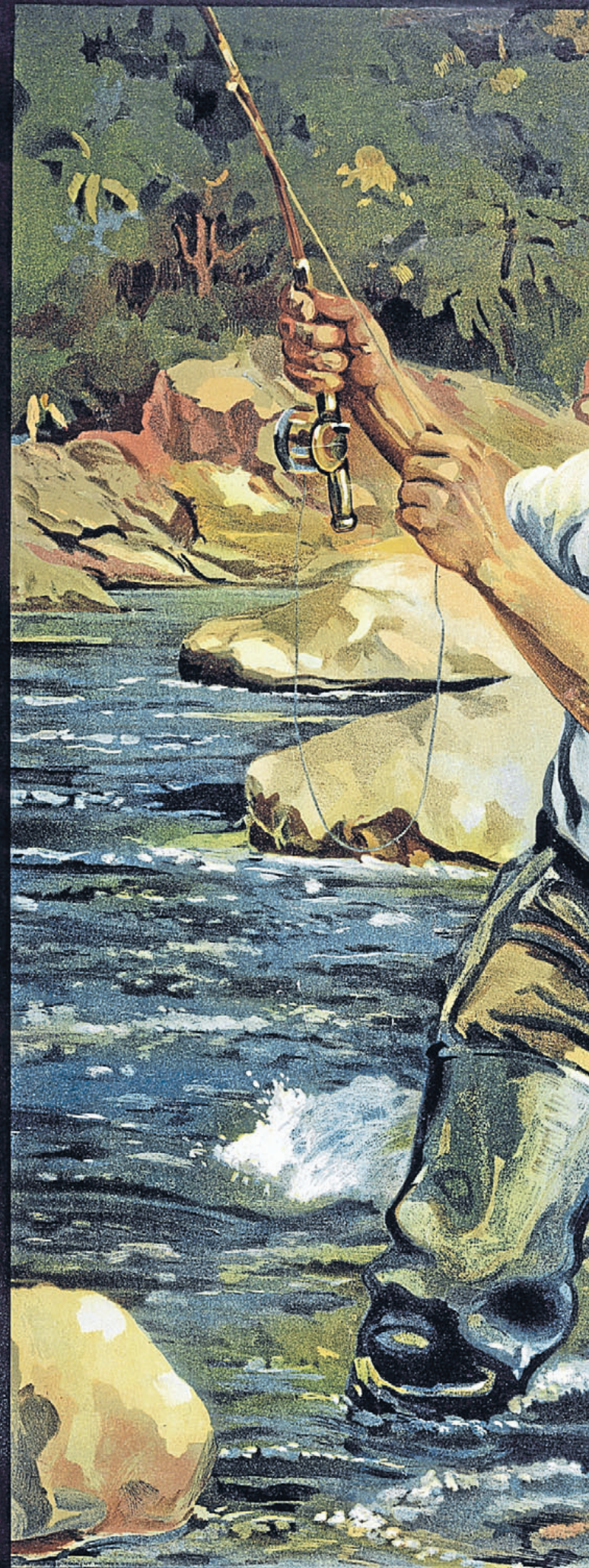
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publication of
*Selling the
Dream.*



It was a trout-fishing poster that did it. The image of an angler in a stream — wader-clad body braced against the current, creel over his shoulder, pipe clenched between his teeth — was what persuaded Jarmila Dykes's father, Frank Oppelt, to choose New Zealand as the place to resettle his family.

Following the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, the former Czech army officer had fled to Germany; his wife, Jarmila, and their 4-year-old child — named after her mother — managed a hazardous escape to join him.

Two years on, the family, like many others displaced by the war in Europe, was offered a new life. New Zealand won out over Canada and Australia when Frank Oppelt happened to see a fly-fishing lithograph, possibly the one designed in 1936 by Maurice Poulton for the New Zealand Government Tourist Department.



FOR THE WORLD
GOV'T TOURIST DEPT
NEW



DS BEST SPORT
ZEALAND



Marcus King, c1950.



Howard Mallitte, c1960.

A copy of that poster is currently on display, along with seven others from Peter Alsop's collection, in Funicular, the Lambton Quay cafe run by Jarmila Jr and her son, Andrew Dykes.

Alsop – co-author with Gary Stewart and Dave Bamford of *Selling the Dream: The Art of Early New Zealand Tourism* – works nearby and is a regular at the cafe, but he learned of the extraordinary coincidence quite by chance, when describing his book project to Dykes over a flat white.

Alsop's personal collection of vintage silk-screened and lithographed New Zealand travel posters was the nucleus for this handsome book on the art of early New Zealand tourism that also includes magazine covers, advertisements and other ephemera. Around 1000 images were gleaned from archives including Te Papa, Alexander Turnbull Library, regional museums, auction houses and private collectors. Alsop says given the chance of such ephemera surviving, it's even more remarkable that people had the foresight to collect such material.

It's not all eye-popping graphics. Black-and-white photographs of ordinary people at work and play introduce subjects as diverse as Big Game Fishing, Forest & Bird and Skiing & Climbing, reminding the reader that New Zealand led the world in adventure tourism. Thermal Wonderland is a tad disturbing – a white-coated attendant is poised to plunge a switch that might just electrocute the man before him, immersed in a tub of water.

◁ Maurice Poulton, 1936

Originally Alsop wanted to exhibit his collection – something he is still working on – but he decided instead on a book about the nexus of tourism and publicity – “not particularly about one or the other, but about how they came together”. Rather than writing the whole text, he and collaborators Stewart, a graphic designer, and Bamford, a tourism consultant, mountaineer and fellow collector, decided to call on a team of specialist essayists.

“It was always going to be a visually appealing book, but with the strength of the essays it has a depth of research credibility,” Alsop says.

Among the many writers, Margaret McClure puts the tourism industry in a historical context, beginning with Prince Alfred's 1870 visit to the Pink and White Terraces; Richard Wolfe assesses how the images helped shape our national identity; and Mark Derby notes that the work of early artists in depicting Maori culture was so all-pervasive that some visitors still expect to find Maori dressed in flax piu piu and feather cloaks.

The book celebrates the work of almost unknown artists such as Marcus King, Leonard Mitchell, Howard Mallitte and Russian emigre Eugene Collett – whose wild flowers poster took 19 screens to produce, according to Miramar-based Gerald Phillips, who hand-cut the stencils. The book also draws on information from Eastbourne artist Alan Collins, former art director and manager of the National Publicity Studio between 1944 and 1986.

An impressive timeline tracks milestones, from the establishment of the first advertising agency (UK, 1786) to 1960, when television and colour

▷



Leonard Mitchell. Image courtesy of Boston Print Library



Howard Mallitte, c1960.



photography arrived to change print-based publicity forever.

New Zealand had its share of firsts – the Department of Tourism and Health Resorts was the first dedicated tourist department in the world, and we were the first country to use natural scenes on postage stamps.

Ironically, it was the Tourist Department that in 1905 imported Tasmanian possums – and in 1953 was asked to publicise the pests' destruction.

Film-maker Fran Walsh notes in her foreword to the book that these posters are as comforting to her as the view out her window in Miramar – where the capital's film industry could be said to have started, with the establishment of Filmcraft's Miramar Film Studios in the mid-1930s, later the Tourist Department design studio's first home.

Using rich colours that speak of a bygone age, the pioneering posters had the power to lure people, including

△ The work of early artists – such as Melbourne Brindle – in depicting Maori culture was so all-pervasive that some visitors still expect to find Maori dressed in flax piu piu and feather cloaks.

refugees, to "the bottom of the world".

"These images of a green, unspoilt and youthful country, far away from the conflicts of the old world, represented the promise of a new life."

Selling the Dream: The Art of Early New Zealand Tourism by Peter Alsop, Gary Stewart and Dave Bamford, Craig Potton, \$79. Available with free postage and 10 per cent discount at sellingthedream.co.nz.

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