

INTO THE NORTH

"I WENT to the top of Mt. Victoria, and looked for a ship to carry a letter to you." So wrote Mary Taylor to her friend Charlotte Bronte from Wellington over a century ago. Mary Taylor managed to see "a little thing with one mast"; these days the North-bound traveller, pausing to look back from the Hutt road at the port, may see over half a hundred ships of all shapes and sizes, and flags of all nations and colours whipping in the Wellington wind.

The capital city has grown up since Mary Taylor's day, grown so big that it has sprawled over most of the surrounding hills and valleys. A picturesque route North from Wellington runs

through one of these valleys, the Hutt, then bears left up the gorge of the Akatarawa.

Beyond the fringes of suburbia and high up above this road the traveller can see the mounded rain forest of the dark Tararua. Closer, the forest is dead; the ridges carrying their mute skeleton army, frozen in gesture at the sun—or fallen and rotting in the encroaching bracken.

Like the West Coast and Milford, the Tararua Mountains have a high rainfall; systematic observations carried out some years ago split the Tararua year into 80 days fine, 80 overcast, and the rest a dead loss—so the traveller knows what to expect.

But still, if unlucky with the weather here, at Waikanae, where the Akatarawa road links with the coast the sun is quite likely to be shining. There are first-class beaches all along this coast, and motor camps at Paraparaumu, Waikanae, Otaki and Foxton Beach.

There is, of course, a more direct route to these beaches. One can leave

the Akatarawa circuit out of the itinerary and turn off the Hutt Road at Ngahauranga Gorge, taking the new motorway from Johnsonville direct to the coast through Plimmerton and Paekakariki.

At Otaki, two things to see are the 110 years old Rangiatea Church, and the monument near by to the great Maori leader Te Rauparaha. Further on, at Bulls, one can head north-east to Tongariro National Park and Lake Taupo, or north-west to Wanganui.

It was about the time of the Norman invasion of England that Kupe landed near the Wanganui River mouth. He didn't stay long, according to legend, but went north-about again to Patea. The first European visitors, however, stayed longer than they had intended, some becoming dried heads in the process. If the story is true, it was poetic justice; for Joe Rowe and his sailor friends were in the dried head trade themselves.

For thirty years (until the late nineteen-twenties) steam-boats ran between Taumarunui and Wanganui, until the condition of the river made constant navigation impossible. At Pipiriki, however, 49 miles along the River Road from Wanganui, launches are still available for trips on the river. There is a guest house here, and many historic Maori War sites in the vicinity.

From Pipiriki one can continue on through Raetihi to the Chateau Tongariro. But let us, like Kupe, follow on North up the coast from Wanganui. After a swim at Opunake (where there is a first-class beach) one can head off to Stratford and a closer look at Mt. Egmont.

This mountain was called Taranaki by the Maoris, Le Pic Mascarin by the ill-fated French navigator Marion du Fresne, and Egmont by Cook, who sighted the mountain two years before du Fresne did. It dominates the surrounding country in a way that the giants of the Southern Alps do not. For hundreds of miles about, and from far out to sea, the giant isolated cone of Egmont attracts the eyes; one is compelled to look, and once looking it is hard to turn away.

The mountain was first ascended in December, 1839, by Dr. Ernest Dieffenbach, naturalist to the New Zealand Company, and James Heberley, a whaler from Tory Channel. Since then, owing to its accessibility, Egmont has

become the most climbed mountain in New Zealand. It also has the highest death-roll; partly because too many people of little experience try to climb it, partly because of the vagaries of Egmont weather.

From Stratford Mountain House (2785 feet) a road climbs up another thousand feet to the Plateau, and from here a wonderful view can be had of the chequered greens of the fertile Taranaki plains, while far away, seventy or eighty miles to the east, the great bulk of Ruapehu rears nine thousand feet and more into the sparkling air.

From Stratford one may turn north-east to Taumarunui, passing on the way through the beautiful Tangarakau Gorge, which displays North Island forest scenery at its best. At Taumarunui the holiday-maker can turn south to the mountains, or east to Tokaanu and the Taupo road.

Tokaanu was once the headquarters of Te Kooti, and until early in the present century was an important port of the inland sea. It is now one of Lake Taupo's fishing centres, and a noted thermal region.

On the slopes of Mount Pihanga, behind Tokaanu, is the "greenstone-hued" crater-lake Roto-Pounamu. This lake is at an altitude of about 3000 feet, set in a forest of pine, totara, rimu, matai, miro, and all the other trees whose varying shades make up the subtle colouration of the New Zealand bush.

The road from Taumarunui to National Park passes at Raurimu one of the oddest and most ingenious engineering achievements in New Zealand, the well-known Raurimu Spiral. This spiral is made up of a complete circle, and two loops, and it has been said that one could spit from the Spiral, straight down the chimneys of Raurimu Station (if one had the energy and the inclination).

Much has been written about Tongariro National Park, and about the mountains which James Cowan called "a marvellous conjunction of snow and fire." In approximately 150,000 acres of park there is plenty to occupy even the most strenuous visitor. There are two motor camps in the vicinity, one about a quarter of a mile above the Chateau (Whakapapa Camp), and Mahuia Camp, four miles from the National Park Junction, and enough diversity of lake, river, bush and mountain for half a lifetime of holidays.

IT'S IN THE PINK...



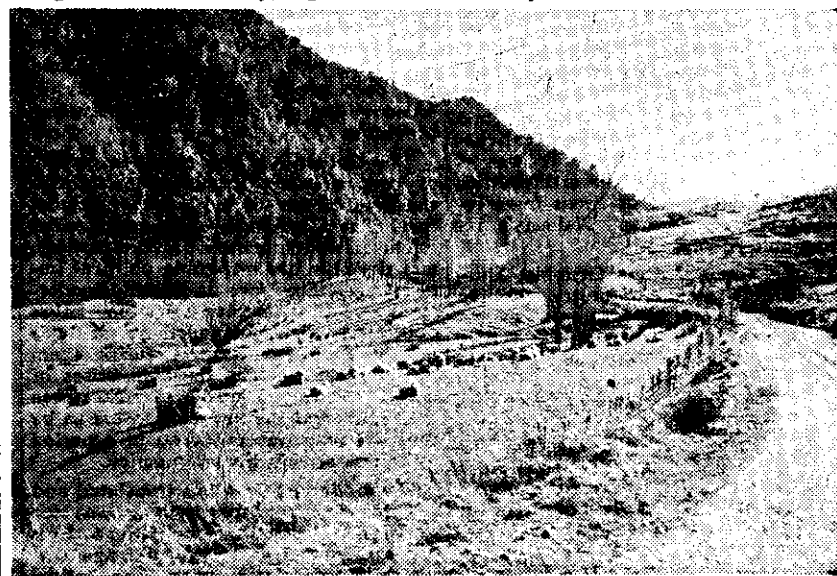
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BUSH AND PASTURE on the River Road, near Pipiriki