

EASTWARD FROM THE INLAND SEA

CONTRASTING landscapes await the traveller who follows us on this trip, as with Tokaanu falling behind we approach New Zealand's largest lake, the inland sea of Taupo. Taupo, with its sanded beaches and mountainous background, is known to fishermen all over the world. Its shores are studded with fishing lodges, motor camps, baches and (in season) tents. Of all the things that can be done there, none, however, is as famed as its fishing. "It's the best place in New Zealand if you want to try for trout as a holiday diversion," an experienced angler told us. "Everything is well organised and the probability of catching fish is stronger here than almost anywhere in the country. The annual take of fish is measured in tons, and a great deal of this is made up of big fish. On the other hand, it's not purely and simply the 'duffer's paradise,' since you can make your fishing as tough as you like. The experienced fisherman, of course, prefers to get away from the crowd—if he can!"

Leaving Taupo for Rotorua, you will pass over the sluice gates controlling the outlet of the Waikato. The river drops steadily through a thousand feet or so as it makes its way to the sea. Much of the time it runs through a narrow gorge, where it is caught by the chain of hydro-electric dams which supply most of the North Island's power. Some of these dams are architecturally impressive, for this is one field of design in which high standards have been achieved. Those with an interest in engineering will appreciate the difficulties inherent in the construction of these dams, for the volcanic country made the finding of firm foundations difficult and the porous rock made for constant seepage.

The volcanic plateau which we are now crossing has, for its size, few people living on it—less than 1 per cent of our total population in fact. For many years it was nothing but tourist country, covered by pine plantations and the scene of a few pioneering efforts by farmers who tried to grow things on the pumice. Today, however, it has sprung into life, for the pumice land is being cultivated, its pine forests are being logged and turned into paper, and hydro dams are still being constructed. Besides sawmillers and foresters, there are dairy farmers, hydro workers, scientists and technicians, as well as the more familiar hotel keepers and tourists.

The roads throughout are well sign-posted, so you should not miss any of the sights—Karapiti blowhole, Huka Falls, the detour to Aratiatia Rapids, Wairakei Geyser Valley or the geothermal steam bores, which, if not wearing their silencers, you can scarcely avoid noticing. Through scrub, fern, manuka and tussock the road passes. The countryside begins to steam, the land loses its solid look and then you are in Rotorua, where all pretence at solidity is gone. Steam hangs over the town, pours from vents in the streets,

from backyard heating contraptions and from the professional geysers above the town at Whaka, which play at set times for an admission fee. Despite the tourist campaign to which New Zealanders acquire strong resistance, Rotorua has a distinctive character which even its own air of impermanence does not destroy. The lakes on which it is set add to the district's interest, and they are worth exploring.

Our way now lies south, and we retrace our steps to the turnover which will take us through the Ureweras to Waikaremoana. After the pine forests, dark and oppressive because of their inflexible regularity, we come to the foothills of the Ureweras, the Maori "Land of Mists." In years gone by this country has befriended hosts of fugitives, and even today there are probably deserters and vagabonds enjoying its shelter. The road climbs into the midst of dense bush, and skirts fresh-looking streams. By now all large settlements are far behind. We traverse high ridges and deep valleys, plunge into sombre bush and emerge on open hillsides to get a new view of the terrain which surrounds us. The wayside houses tend to have a pioneering, rough look. At one of the small refreshment houses you will find mounted on the dining room wall the tusks of a wild pig that had once terrorised the settlement. In the largest tract of flat land, Ruatahuna, there is an accommodation house, and at various points there are excursions into the bush to historic sites—a redoubt or a Maori temple. In the days of Hauhauism bitter struggles took place here, and both Te Kooti and later the prophet Rua chose inaccessible bush for their strongholds.

Near the end of the Urewera country, high, remote and still, lies Waikaremoana. The road winds beside the lake, past waterfalls and on to the Guest House. Near by is the small lake of Waikare-iti, one of the many walks that can be taken. Two small hydro-electric stations are perched on the hillside below the lake, and these were at first thought to be responsible for the alarming way in which the level of the lake began to drop. Later, however, it was found that water was escaping through faults on the rock bottom. Divers went down and plugged them, but leakages still occur and the problem is not fully solved.

After Waikaremoana the country eases off and changes to an open ruggedness. At Wairoa we turn towards Gisborne, passing the chalky mass of the Mahia peninsula which marks the end of Hawke's Bay. If you want to include Napier and Hawke's Bay in the tour, Wairoa is the place to turn off. On the way to Napier lies Tutira, the scene of Guthrie-Smith's heroic struggle to subdue the natural fern and make a sheep station. The small lake of Tutira is now a bird sanctuary.

The road begins to climb over the mountainous barrier that for many years isolated Gisborne from the rest of the country. Not until the early 1940's did the railway get through, and in the old days it was easier to go by sea.



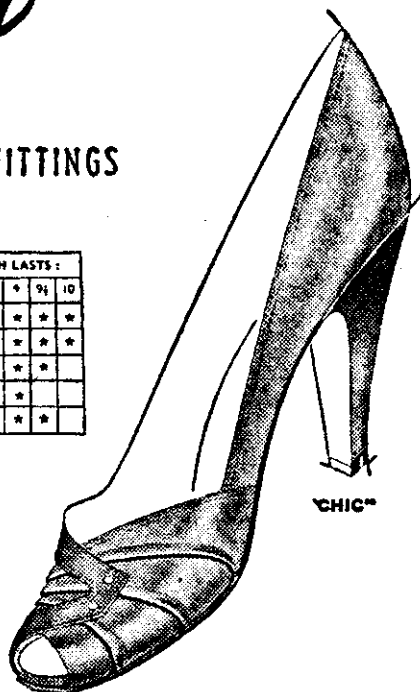
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