

surveyor, the man who always claimed to have been the first to see it, on his second Ruapehu climb in March 1882, did not publish his account until September 1886 some weeks after the less belated but equally secondary sighting of William Cussen's brother Lawrence earlier in the year,²² when checking William's observations of three years earlier. The lake was seen by Messrs G. Beetham and J. P. Maxwell on their first ascent of Ruapehu Peak in March, 1879, although the brief contemporary reports of the climb did not mention it. It was clearly described by the second party to reach the true summit in March 1881 comprising Messrs W. J. Birch, H. R. and A. E. Russell and Mrs. Ethel Birch, the first woman to climb the mountain. Arthur Russell's account of the expedition, of which manuscript copies exist today, was certainly published, probably in the March or April issues of the *Hawke's Bay Herald*, which thanks to earthquake and fire, are no longer in existence.

Kerry-Nicholls learned of the crater lake after the publication of his *Herald* articles and before his departure from New Zealand, probably from Percy Smith who gave him corrected altitudes for some features in his map table. A footnote in the book (p. 249, 1st ed.) to his description of the ice caves states that 'Near to this point, on the summit of the mountain, there is a lake formed by an extinct crater, filled by subterranean springs, and it is likely that the Whangahu may in some way be connected with it.'

Despite the absurdities in his exaggerated description of the river gorge approach to the point where it emerges from the ice barrier his visit has significance. It would be too much to say, 'discovery' for it is now fairly clear that geothermal interaction with snow fall and ice formation tends to breed a recurring cycle of such caves which are successively destroyed in the lahar floods following the collapse of the ice barrier behind them as happened in 1861, 1889, 1895 and, of course, in 1953 as the immediate cause of the Tangiwai disaster. It is clear that Kerry-Nicholls was able to enter the ice caves above the upper fall as others have done since, to describe this spectacular and recurring feature of the crater lake's principal escape route. It is only a pity that the over-statements in the text are matched by the chapter title, 'Second ascent of Ruapehu'. An ascent, as distinct from a climb is only to a recognised summit and the caves are a good 1000 ft below the lake and 1500 ft under its guardian peaks.

Victorian readers, however, could accept a literary style common to the period but if they had spent months or years of their lives within smelling distance of Ngauruhoe could not tolerate Kerry-Nicholls's bland omission of any reference to their own climbs. Most readers would simply infer that he was making the first ascents of the volcanoes. True, he did not make this claim, but