

Over the Mocketap: explorations old and new

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For a number of years the Turnbull Library has been carrying out a programme of systematically photographing all New Zealand material in its collection of paintings, drawings and prints. The growing file of photographic prints not only protects the originals from use, but allows works which may be scattered in different parts of the collection to be conveniently brought together for initial reference work, comparison, or selection for further investigation. In addition, it has meant that the curators have had the opportunity to study some of the more obscure parts of the collection, and to reassess earlier cataloguing, much of which is inadequate for the demands of a fully developed research collection.

In the course of labelling some recently taken photographs of a box of small drawings, I had occasion to look closely at a group of seven undated ink and pencil sketches by an unknown artist showing the Nelson and Marlborough Sounds area, and was struck by the possibility that they could be the work of Charles Heaphy. The handwritten titles were like his hand in some respects, the rendering of people had stylistic similarities, and the manner in which the sketches were numbered was reminiscent of the way Heaphy numbered the material he prepared for the New Zealand Company. Since Heaphy's work is a major feature of the collection, this was an exciting possibility and made a thorough investigation worthwhile.

The original catalogue cards supplied no clues to the provenance, but their very age suggested that the sketches might have been in Alexander Turnbull's own collection, possibly amongst the New Zealand Company material he purchased in London in 1915. The fact that Heaphy was resident in Motueka and in Nelson in the 1840s and was known to have undertaken several exploratory journeys in the area added credence to the theory.

The sketches themselves were all titled in some detail, so that their locations, at least, were specified. They were numbered 1 to 8, apparently in a chronological sequence, but sketch number 2 was missing. The numbering and titles showed that the drawings recorded a journey from the hills above Nelson eastward across heavily bushed ranges to the Pelorus River, on to the Kaituna River