

Bureaucracy v Mythology

AS AN international celebrity, I find myself flying to and from high-level overseas functions a lot – seminars, lectures, exhibition openings and things like that. But I have never ceased to be amazed by the little rituals I have to undergo before I am allowed back into New Zealand.

Take my last trip, for example. Here I was returning from a very interesting fact-finding mission in Germany (see next issue – “How my uncle singlehandedly turned the tide of history”), and I was trying to fill in the immigration form about whether or not you are a Maori, a pakeha, or an “other”. As I pondered the implications of the question, and wondered to myself yet again whether perhaps Maori people had been declared illegal during my absence overseas, the plane landed. Two jokers from Ag and Fish got on and began to spray the cabin with hairspray – not a bad idea if you’re getting off at Wellington, but this was Auckland.

This all got me thinking...

Imagine how much poorer our history and mythology would be if our earliest heroes had had to jump through the same bureaucratic hoops.

For a start, let’s think about Maui and his brothers, out for a spot of fishing. The line tightens, there’s a huge swirl of activity in the water and the fight is on. Finally, exhausted and beaten, Te Ika a Maui lies on the surface of the ocean.

But Maui’s jubilation doesn’t last long. Out from the head of the fish chugs a Royal New Zealand Navy patrol vessel.

“Ahoy there,” calls the captain to a very astonished Maui. “You are fishing illegally inside New Zealand territorial waters and I have orders to impound your vessel and your catch.”

“What’s New Zealand?” asks Maui.

“Don’t get smart with me,” says the naval officer, “that’s New Zealand over there.” And he points to Maui’s fish.

“Not yet it isn’t, e mara. It’s still my fish.”

And immediately we find ourselves confronted by a classic case of different cultural perceptions. As usual, the Maori perception is the loser: the fish is a country, and that’s official. And straight away we have lost one of our most magnificent legends.

Or take Ngatoroirangi, freezing to death on a mountain top, calling to his sisters Kuiwai and Haungaroa in Hawaiki to come to his aid. They rush to his assistance, bring him warmth and incidentally providing Aotearoa with all the thermal activity from Whakaari to Ngauruhoe.

But then along comes a Tongariro National Park ranger who books Ngatoroirangi for contravention of the

National Park regulations about lighting fires. He gives him a stern lecture on the danger of forest fires and asks, “Supposing everybody behaved like you?”

“But they don’t,” replies an outraged tohunga. “In fact, nobody has been up here before. This mountain wouldn’t even be called Tongariro if I hadn’t arrived.”

“I can’t help that. Rules are rules. And besides, you’re not properly dressed for the bush, you’ve advised nobody that you’re here and you’ve got no food. Search and Rescue get fed up with people like you.”

Thus another hero is stripped of his mana, reduced to the same everyday, humdrum size as the rest of us.

And then there’s the Ag and Fish people. For all we know, the first canoes brought more than dogs and rats. They might have brought lions, tigers, unicorns, widebeest, monkeys and all sorts, but weren’t allowed to bring them through Customs.

When our tupuna staggered ashore after their epic voyage across the Pacific, carrying the sacred soil of Hawaiki, imagine the conversation that might have ensued at the barrier.

“What have you got there?”

“Soil from our homeland. It’s very tapu.”

“Sorry, you can’t bring it in. It might have foot and mouth germs from the cattle on Hawaiki.”

“Don’t be silly. There are no cattle on Hawaiki.”

“Proves my point. They probably all died of foot and mouth.”

What do these depressing conjectures teach us? Perhaps the main lesson to be learned is that if the pakeha had been here before us, they would never have let us in. But maybe we all know that anyway.

RETIREMENT?

NEVER HEARD OF IT!

by Pierre Lyndon

When you retire, you are supposed to have a quiet life. Sonny Henare of Pīpiwai doesn’t sit around for life to slip by, in fact – “he is too active” says his wife Mary. Today is Tuesday, and “Uncle Sonny” is heading into his seventy first year, out with a friend “pig hunting”.

Varen Armstrong of Moerewa, a great-nephew, has gone pig hunting with Uncle Sonny before, during school holidays. Says Varen “we go early in the morning and all he takes is a small can of pineapples for the day”. ‘Blackie’ is the old faithful “go anywhere” horse over whom is thrown a western saddle the

writer’s grandfather gave to Uncle Sonny over 20 years ago. Together with dogs, the party would head off into the bush near “Manukorihi” an old Pa, in search of wild pig.

Another great-nephew, policeman Piwa Tipene, is the old man’s usual companion over the years.

Once, Uncle Sonny’s best ever dog, a white Bull Terrier, was killed by an enraged pig. Once, one of the horses was attacked and injured by the tusks of a boar. Uncle Sonny has many such stories to tell of their expeditions. An expert on Genealogy, he is a kaumatua of the Ngatihine tribe. He used to run his bus daily through Matawaia to Kawakawa and Kaiakohe for many years. Always a boxing fan, he was one of those who organised boxing at the marae in the sixties. The manager of the Pīpiwai Rugby Club last year, he was also attributed to have been the oldest rugby player in the world, by a local Whangarei newspaper.

This guy may be into his seventies, but someone has forgotten to tell him that.

CHANGING THE GUARD AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

For 50 or so soldiers from Trentham Camp the 1986 Royal Tour proved to be the highlight of their careers, from a ceremonial point of view anyway.

The men, selected from Base Area Wellington, the 1st Base Supply Battalion and the 1st Base Workshop, mounted a Royal Guard at Government House in Wellington while Her Majesty The Queen was in residence.

Under the able tuition of WO1 Pairere Terewi, who was involved with Royal Guard duties in 1981, special training was conducted in Trentham Camp for a week prior to the visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip to Wellington.

The soldiers carried unloaded rifles with fixed bayonets.

Two Royal Guards were formed and alternated duties at the gates of Government House.

As each Guard started its duty, it was led through the streets around the Basin Reserve by the New Zealand Army Band.

The formal changing the Guard ceremonies took place during the Royal stay in the capital.

Each morning two sentries were mounted on the gates at ‘Reveille’. Daily guard duties ended at 11 p.m. each night or later, depending upon what time the Royal couple arrived back at Government House.

The complete Guard turned out whenever the Queen and Prince Phillip arrived or departed.

Standards of dress and drill were high. In fact they so impressed the Ser-