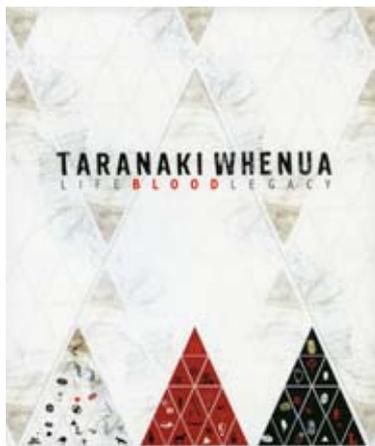


## TARANAKI WHENUA: LIFE, BLOOD, LEGACY



Susette Goldsmith,  
editor  
Puke Ariki  
New Plymouth  
2008  
ISBN 978-0-  
9582829-0-9  
RRP \$50.  
Reviewed by  
**Bridget Wellwood**

### SAY HELLO TO THAT MOUNTAIN...

*Taranaki Whenua: Life, Blood, Legacy* – the book published to accompany the exhibition held at Puke Ariki in 2008 – is far more than an exhibition catalogue. All lovers of New Zealand history will want this one in their libraries. It adds a further dimension to the growing literature available on the Taranaki story and is full of interesting photographs and reproductions of taonga, artworks, maps, archives and collection objects, as well as five important essays.

The exhibition *Taranaki Whenua*, focussed on the land and environment of Taranaki, was part of a five-year public programme underway at Puke Ariki called 'The Common Ground' series. Other Common Ground themes include People, Culture, Economy and the culmination of the series, will be the final exhibition, *War and Peace in Taranaki*, to commemorate the 150th anniversary in 2010 of the outbreak of the First Taranaki War of 1860. Puke Ariki's ambitious public programme is to be widely applauded as a fine example of a museum engaging with its community, providing a public forum for discussion, ideas, opinions and cultural interaction.

The book therefore is an important document of this part of the process and yet it stands alone as an interesting and informative read. *Taranaki Whenua* is a celebration of Taranaki in the hearts and minds of its people. I'm reminded of that proverb that says if you're going to tip your hat to someone, then let it be to the mountain, the star of this book.

## ON AND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

The usual discussion of colonisation, scars on the landscape, survey lines and ploughmen, conflict and confiscation is all here. But there's more depth than one might expect, as the book leads the reader on a journey of discovery around the patchwork blanket that is Taranaki, offering new perspectives on the meaning of landscape and a sense of place. Throughout the publication, beautiful images evoke the mood of the mountain and the wider district, conveying the feeling of the deep connection with the land that Taranaki people have on a spiritual and emotional level. The text examines the different cultural approaches to land tenure, ownership, kaitiakitanga and the tensions and conflict between Maori and the European settlers over this land. This discussion is presented in a fresh and frank way, as an open exchange of ideas. With its intelligent interpretation, *Taranaki Whenua* succeeds in being provocative reading. I've read it from cover to cover, but keep finding myself being drawn back to it, a bit like the magnetism of the mountain that anyone who has lived in Taranaki knows. A good book keeps you thinking long after you have left it on the shelf – this one certainly does.

### RESERVATIONS

I do have a few little criticisms of the book. *Taranaki Whenua* ended abruptly without a conclusion, which left me feeling a bit up in the air. Perhaps there really is not a conclusion to the subject matter but the absence of a fond farewell or some overall impression by the editor, Susette Goldsmith, or a parting statement by the exhibition's conceptual curator Bill Milbank, seemed like a lost opportunity. I was left wanting more.

Also slightly irksome was the production of the book, with some of the pictures spread across both pages, losing the integrity and detail of some auspicious images, disappearing into the spine. A shame the layout is a bit strange in places, as overall the design of the book is snappy and sharp, dotted with pleasantly quirky iconic graphics.

Glossy and packed with fascinating material, *Taranaki Whenua* is excellent value and would make a great gift, especially for Taranaki people who miss their mountain.

**Bridget Wellwood** considers herself a Taranaki girl by adoption, after five years in Patea as Director of the South Taranaki District Museum.