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Aoraki/Mt Cook – cultural icon or tourist “object”

The natural areas of New Zealand, particularly national parks, are a key attraction for domestic and international visitors who venture there for a variety of recreation and leisure purposes. This paper discusses the complex cultural values and timeless quality of an iconic landmark - Aoraki/Mt Cook – which is located within the ever-changing Mackenzie Basin. It explores the various human values for the mountain and the surrounding regional landscape which has become iconic in its own right. The landscape has economic, environmental, scientific and social significance with intangible heritage values and connotations of sacred and sublime experiences of place. The paper considers Aoraki/Mt Cook as a ‘wilderness’ region that is also a focal point not only for local inhabitants but also for travellers sightseeing and recreating in the area. The paper also explores how cultural values for the mountain are interpreted to visitors in an attempt to convey a sense of ‘place’. Finally the Mackenzie Basin is discussed as a special ‘in-between’ place – that should be considered significant in its own right and not just as a ‘foreground’ or ‘frame’ for viewing the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook itself. The Mackenzie has aesthetic scenic qualities that need careful management of activities such as recent attempts to establish industrialised, dairy factory farming (which does not complement more sustainable economic and social development in the region). Sympathetic projects such as the Nga Haerenga (Ocean to the Alps) cycle way are also under development to encourage activity within the landscape – in conflict with the dairying and other activities that impact negatively on the natural resources of the region.¹

Introduction – cultural values for landscape and ‘place’

Aotearoa New Zealand is regarded by many as a ‘young country’ – the last indigenous populated country to be colonised by European cultures. Today most New Zealanders reflect the ‘settler society’ and have mixed ancestry of Māori, western/European (pakeha) ancestry – with strong genealogical ties to England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, China, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy and Denmark. There is not one ecophilosophy but multiple diverse ‘ecophilosophies’ or values

¹ *I hope this paper will provide a case study that sparks discussion amongst conference attendees as to how we value a landscape not just for its iconic features (Aoraki Mt Cook) but on a regional level where the surrounding area is being challenged as it undergoes major human induced transformations that actually alter the essence of the natural wilderness? These are issues facing lovers of nature all over the world.*

for the land stemming from the various 'settlers', new migrants and Māori *iwi* (tribes) who have attachments to specific regions (*rohe*). New Zealand is perceived as an 'outdoor' nation...many families have their traditional recreational patterns and there is a strong ethos of 'going into the outdoors', going bush and participating in outdoor recreation. This is assisted by shared common values such as free access to national parks (legislated in the National Parks Act), a trend to support organics/permaculture and a strong conservation mindset typified by Environmental ngo's, the 'Green' political party, at schools with programmes such as annual outdoor camps and "Enviroschools". Outdoor recreation clubs are common with the Federated Mountain Clubs representing smaller localised tramping and climbing clubs. Over the past two centuries individuals values for nature have at times been influential and shaped the New Zealand mindset of being in the outdoors –environmental activists (such as Craig Potton, Alan Mark, Hugh Wilson, Kaye Baxter, Ngati Tuhwaretoa chief Te HeuHeu – who gifted New Zealand's first national park to the nation in 1887 – recreationists (Sir Edmund Hillary, Graham Dingle –founder of the Outdoor Pursuits Centre - and Sir Peter Blake; scientists (George Gibbs), writers and artists (Brian Turner, Colin McCahon, Hone Tuwhare, Graham Sydney, Gillia Whitehead) have expressed their thoughts and influenced the New Zealand mindset for the outdoors creating a diverse cultural landscape.

The cultural landscape has been defined as a landscape that has 'significant symbolic meaning' for a particular cultural group or groups (e.g. Bourassa 1991; Muir 1999). Much research and theoretical literature has explored how cultural landscapes are increasingly valued by indigenous and western societies for providing deep experiences or emotional connections such as 'sense of place'. The traditional relationship of indigenous peoples to the land often features attachments to landscape features based on spiritual values, mythology, resource use, ancestral ties and historical links (Bourassa 1991; Walker 1992; Goehring 1993; Toren 1995; Morphy 1995; Howitt, Connell and Hirsch 1996; Hinch and Colton 1997; Hinch 1998; Atkins, Simmons and Roberts 1998; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Kearsley, McIntosh and Carr 1999; Russell 2000; Berkes 1993, 2003). Indigenous peoples have been differentiated as "insiders" within a landscape because of their cultural and intergenerational ties with particular areas. Being an 'insider' suggests cultural values, physical locations and unique values and meanings for landscape, that may or may not be shared with 'outsiders' such as tourists (Relph 1976; O'Regan 1990; Strang 1997; Hinch and Colton 1997; Hinch 1998; Atkins *et al.* 1998; Muir 1999). Indigenous peoples in rural or natural areas are frequently perceived as being able to live 'at one with nature', leaving minimal physical trace upon the landscape.

In contrast, many traditional western views suggest separating the natural world, including wilderness and untamed landscapes, from human beings (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Bourassa 1991; Sinclair 1992; Bender 1993; Cosgrove 1993; Coates 1998; Muir 1999). However both indigenous and western cultures have been observed to develop levels of symbolic, emotional and ancestral links with the same landscapes (for example Hay 1991; Swaffield 1991). If successive generations have inhabited an area, or individuals seek to connect with nature, a 'sense of place' or 'insiderness' for nature and the landscape can occur no matter the cultural background (Tuan 1974; Relph 1976; Naess and Rothenberg 1989; Hay 1991; Swaffield 1991; Prentice 1992; O'Regan 1992; Cosgrove 1993; Bender 1993; Crang 1998; Wall 1999; Muir 1999; Swaffield and Foster 2000; Boyd 2002). Many European countries have a heritage of culturally significant landscapes where visitor appeal for the landscape is intertwined with mythology, history or connecting with nature (Prentice 1992; Prentice and Guerin 1998; Avery 1999).

Within much tourism literature however visitors' experiences of 'place' within touristified landscapes are usually intangible - one can gain insights from observing and researching visitors' emotional experiences and thought processes surrounding how they experience landscapes but nonetheless most processes are intangible and subjective to the individual. MacCannell's book 'The Tourist' suggested tourist experiences had parallels to those of pilgrims on a spiritual quest with his description of the tourist as motivated by the quest for "reality and authenticity" or meaningful experiences through encountering "other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles" (MacCannell 1976: 8). MacCannell's argument for the quest for authentic experiences that provided deeper meaning in peoples' lives challenged Boorstin's (1964) book claiming that tourists were seeking meaningless 'pseudo-events', thus escaping the drudgery of domestic routine. Cohen (1979) and Graburn (2001) also describe tourism or visitor experiences as a 'kind of ritual', a secular pilgrimage that is in opposition to the mundane experiences of daily life.

Many visitors sightsee in a manner that may seem superficial – travelling from one icon to another (Urry 1990, Butler 1998). "Iconic tourist structures ...symbolise the changing character of an area, to provide a memorable image that potential visitors will associate with it" (Maitland and Newman cited in Larsen 2010). Landscapes have been noted as significant tourism icons as a result of destination branding/marketing and established reputation (Butler 1998; Ateljevic and Doorne 2002; Carr 2004; Becken 2004). Through activities such as sightseeing visitors often seek to encounter landscape 'icons' to touch on the spirit of place. Urry considered landscape to be prime objects of the

'tourist gaze' instrumental in shaping tourists' experiences of place (Urry 1990: 45). Urry described the individual's encounter with landscape or the "Other", as a "romantic gaze", whereas commercial, mass tourism experiences often resulted in a "collective gaze" (Urry 1990). One component of the visitor experience at (or within) a landscape is the 'sense of place' that may arise from the experience (Relph 1976; Violich 1985; Eyles 1985; Urry 1990; Butler 1998). Tuan suggests that 'sense of place' is difficult to define and may also have visual or aesthetic dimensions (Tuan 1975: 235). 'Sense of place' is a complex, intangible relationship that may develop between people and a particular area or landscape that can include feelings and personal associations towards the area that are referred to as a 'sense of place' (Relph 1976). Relph's notion of 'sense of place' and 'insideness' amongst those who occupy a landscape and form physical and social associations with such a place is reflective of Tuan's identification of place as a 'space' which has emotional or symbolic meanings attached to it by individuals or groups (Tuan 1974). Other studies suggest visitors to cultural landscapes can experience 'place'. Prentice and Guerin, having conducted a survey of walkers in the iconic Scottish countryside of Ben Lomond, found such experiences were primarily associated with the aesthetic beauty of landscape and physical recreation, however a 'spirit of place' with the beauty and romance of the setting emerged amongst a third of participants (Prentice and Guerin 1998: 189). Prentice (1992) describes the Manx National Glens of Scotland as a 'treasured landscape' frequented by tourists. The Lakes District of England is a region that can provide visitors with a spiritual fulfilment and emotional experiences (Sharpley and Jepson 2010).

Thus visitors' experiences can go beyond the superficial surface of a place - the traditional tourist activity of sightseeing scenery or seeking to 'tick off' a "checklist" (Steenjacobson 2001) of icons - to deeper emotional connections with 'place(s)'. Recreational and tourism activities in cultural landscapes may not just be for aesthetic pleasure, but also for reasons of understanding history, pursuing family links, or experiencing legends and myths associated with such areas (Prentice 1992; Larsen 2005; Steenjacobson 2001). Such complexities of cultural landscapes, which may reflect a diverse heritage of cultural or social values, are significant alongside the power of landscapes to provide visitors and local inhabitants with a sense of awe or joy; and opportunities to experience the power of the 'sublime' or 'sense of place' (Tuan 1974, 1977, Relph 1976).

Indigenous peoples are thus not unique in their attachments to land and share, with many European or non western cultures, instances of associating landscapes with ancestors, natural resources, legend and myth (Morphy 1995; Atkins *et al.* 1998; Butler 1998; Prentice 1992; Prentice and Guerin 1998; Avery 1999; Muir 1999).

An introduction - the writer's 'place'

My association with Aoraki Mt Cook and the Mackenzie Basin (the focus of this paper) dates back over forty years, first as a visitor, then as a local resident from 1986 to 1995 at Aoraki Mt Cook National Park, and since then as a land owner who has family members permanently living there. This paper is no doubt influenced by my personal reflections on the landscape, my observations of friends, visitors and climbers in the region, my own outdoor attachment to the area and my research projects. In 1986 I moved to the Mackenzie Basin and spent nine years living in the Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, attracted by the climbing and skiing, working for the Department of Conservation (DoC) as a park interpreter, administrator and curator of the alpine archives. My ex-husband and I ran a mountain guiding business and I assisted the NZ Mountain Guides Association as secretary/treasurer for several years. My father has lived in Mt Cook and Twizel for 20 years (since the town formed in 1969 he is regarded by locals as a long-term resident) whilst my eldest daughter, who also owns land in Twizel, has been a permanent resident of Aoraki Mt Cook from 1989 to 1995 and again since 2006.

Since leaving the area as a permanent resident I have conducted academic research within the Mackenzie, initially examining experiences of guided mountaineering clients in Aoraki Mt Cook National Park. Later, for my PhD, I examined visitors' experiences of the cultural landscape of the Mackenzie, focussing on the Ngāi Tahu and European cultural values for the iconic alpine areas of the region, in particular Aoraki Mt Cook, and another focus of the tourist gaze – Lake Pukakiⁱ. More recently, my research explored perspectives and gathered data about local community members' and visitors' recreational experiences and aspirations for future management of the Ahuriri and Ruataniwha Conservation Parks. I also assist Ngāi Tahu – the local Māori as a director of a soon to be established Māori Rock Art Visitor Centre – Te Ana Whakairo. Thus this paper is informed by these personal experiences as a researcher, resident, recreationist and visitor.

The Mackenzie Basin and Aoraki/Mt Cook

This paper is concerned with Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park and the Mackenzie Basin (or Mackenzie Country² as it is otherwise known) - a distinctive and significant region of the high country landscape of New Zealand's South Island (Mackenzie District Council (MDC) 2006, 2007). Located to the east of the Southern Alps the Mackenzie is typified by wide open spaces, hill and mountain ranges, remnant glacial moraines, wetlands, lakes and rivers. A 19th C visitor, Sir Julius von Haast, one of the first Europeans to explore the Mackenzie and Mt Cook area, commented on the 'sublimity of the scenery' and this remains a true description for many people travelling through and viewing the area today (Von Haast 1948).

In the last 150 years of European settlement human changes have transformed this region of glacial remains, mountain ranges and 'wilderness'. Human use of resources of this 'high country' has altered the originally wild tussock landscapes, firstly through the agricultural sector (from the 1870s) followed by tourism and then, in the 1960s, hydroelectricity projects. Remnants of golden tussock land, dry tawny-brown grasslands and big blue skies mean the area has retained a 'wild' feeling with panoramic scenery (Mark 2004). The Mackenzie District Council recognises the "outstanding natural features of the district" (MDC 2006). Section 2.1 of the Mackenzie District Plan is concerned with 'Landscape Values of the Mackenzie Basin' and states:

"The Mackenzie Basin is a special part of New Zealand. The combination of physical environment and human traditions, while in many respects typical of the South Island high country generally, also have qualities of setting, location and tradition which are singular to this basin, and identifiably 'Mackenzie' in character. The Mackenzie Basin is among the group of landscapes most qualified for 'outstanding' status in New Zealand." (MDC 2007).

The same council document stresses the 'outstanding working landscape' which gives rise to contradictions in respect of landscape management. A perceived lack of both councils' decisiveness over preservation of scenic and environmental qualities has contributed to conflict that has arisen between the agricultural and tourism sectors. Recently parts of the traditional merino sheep farming landscape has been altered radically as properties are freeholded with large scale irrigation projects enabling the introduction of dairying (in increasing scale). These controversial changes in the agricultural sector are beginning to impact on tourism experiences of the Mackenzie landscape, such

² Note the area is referred to by a number of interchangeable names, the most common being the Mackenzie Basin, Mackenzie Country or the shortened version - Mackenzie.

'industrialisation' concerning tourism providers and natural area managers who suspect the alterations that are occurring will affect visitors' perceptions of the region – and threaten the 'sublime' experiences of the natural landscape.

The Mackenzie is highly regarded as an area of great significance to New Zealand's tourism industry with a recorded 884,500 visitors in 2008 and the agricultural changes are concerning as visitors to the region are drawn by the majestic scenery of the Mackenzie and the tourist icon of Aoraki/Mt Cook (Becken 2004; Carr 2004, 2006; Ensor and Cossar 2009; Ensor in MacFie 2010; Taylor 2009).

Preserving the cultural and heritage landscape values is essential to satisfy the 'tourist gaze' and expectations of 'big skies' and golden landscapes (Urry 1990; Hall and Kearsley 2001; Atelejevic and Doorne 2002; Carr 2004; Spaul and Evans 2005; Ensor and Cossar 2009). Visitor activity occurs en-route, within and outside the conservation and national parks of the Mackenzie and at iconic sites, for instance at the eastern end of Lake Pukaki (where visitors view Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Southern Alps) and at Lake Tekapo with the lakeside attractions of The Church of the Good Shepherd and Sheep Dog statue (Carr 2004).

Tourism promotional media such as websites, brochures and travellers' written accounts regularly depict the scenery and describe the enjoyment and fascination international and domestic visitors have with their Mackenzie experiences whilst driving on State Highway 8 from Lake Tekapo past Lake Pukaki and along to the Lindis Pass. Tourism New Zealand, Christchurch & Canterbury Tourism, the Tourism Industry Association and the Mackenzie Tourism and Development Board value the region for the scenery's enhancement of visitors' journeys (Carr 2004). Promotional images often include the panoramic vista of the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook, with the turquoise waters of Lake Pukaki in the foreground, providing visitors' with perceptions of wilderness and untouched nature. Recent events in popular culture have also contributed to the Mackenzie visitor experience with areas used as film locations for the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy being sought out by fans on tours.

Studies conducted with visitors to the Mackenzie Basin's Ahuriri and Ruataniwha Conservation Parks from 2005 to 2007 found that key motivations for visitors were the sense of emptiness, open spaces, to experience solitude and scenery (Lovelock, Carr and Sides 2007, 2008). Studies conducted with visitors to Aoraki/Mt Cook in the early 2000s identified key motivations for visiting the national park were, in order of importance, viewing the alpine scenery/sightseeing, specifically to view Aoraki/Mt Cook (over 28% of visitors) and climbing/tramping (14%) (Carr 2004). Aoraki/Mt Cook remains the 'drawcard' for the region – a national mountainscape with international significance as part of the South West New Zealand World Heritage Area that attracts people for various reasons, foremost

being the scenery and recreational opportunities. The iconic nature of the mountain was commented upon by Urry (1990) who noted that the tourist gaze "...*may be something that can take place more or less instantaneously (seeing/photographing New Zealand's highest mountain, Mount Cook)...*". This raises this question – can visitors connect with places that are significant to local communities in a meaningful way or will tourism experiences be merely superficial 'performances' in significant landscapes and places contributing to the further development of "*quaint tourist landscapes*" (Bramwell and Lane 1993: 76)? For non-tourists the mountain holds a range of deeper culturally significant values, meanings and experiences.

Cultural values for Aoraki/Mt Cook

The Māori people of New Zealand are renowned for having cultural relationships with the land that hold emotional, social and psychological significance known as *turangawaewae*. Turangawaewae is explained by Hakopa (1998) as the '*right of a person to be counted as a member of an iwi or tribe and thus establishes a person's 'sense of belonging' to the land and people that occupy the land*'. For Māori connection to land is of extreme cultural significance – the Māori name for land - *whenua* – is also used for the placenta/afterbirth the connotation being Māori are born from the land and will return to the land. Rangi (Sky father) and Papa (Earth Mother) are, in legend, the 'father and mother common to all '*tangata whenua*' or people of the land – and Maori '*whakapapa*' or trace their genealogy by explaining links to the land – their mountains, rivers, etc. According to Davis, O'Regan and Wilson (1990: 9) "*Māori tradition and culture as expressed in place names emphasise the spiritual value of the land and provide the basis of tribal identity and sentiment. They reflect the physical features of the landscape; the gods of creation; the legendary explorers such as Kupe, Tamatea and others*".

In pre-European times Māori of the Waitaha and Ngāi Tahu *iwi* (tribe) visited the Mackenzie Basin's numerous waterways and lakes to gather *mahika kai* (traditional foods). Aoraki/Mt Cook is both an *atua* (God) and *tupuna* (ancestor) to the people of Ngāi Tahu (the local Māori tribe). The mountain has been officially recognised as a place that is *taonga* – a treasure of exceptional spiritual significance - for Ngāi Tahu whose cultural values and links with the land as *tangata whenua* were affirmed with the *Ngāi Tahu Treaty Settlement Act 1997* with the official renaming of Mt Cook to 'Aoraki/Mt Cook' . A *topuni* (statutory 'cloak' of *iwi* values) was placed on the mountain to enhance the *mana* (power, status) of the *iwi* and ensure their authority to participate in management decisions (Dawson 1998).

Lake Pukaki is one of many lakes and rivers of cultural significance to Ngāi Tahu, the lake's waters having *mauri* (life force or spirit) as the water enters the lake via the Tasman and Hooker Glaciers as snow/ice melt from Aoraki/Mt Cook - the water is sacred and used for ceremonial purposes.

Like Ngāi Tahu, the local villagers at Aoraki/Mt Cook (and multi-repeat domestic visitors with personal histories entwined with the area such as outdoor recreationists - especially mountaineers) appear to form closer relationships with the mountain by 'living in' and 'being in' the landscape in a longitudinal temporal sense. Living, working, raising families, playing and recreating deepens their experience of the area. Protecting the environment is simplified by the World Heritage and national park status so is not of concern to many locals however issues arise such as the need to preserve natural quiet (Tal 2004; Kjelsberg 2009). The mountain has been a focus for climbers since 1882 when the English Alpine Club encouraged climbers to attempt the first ascent of Aoraki/Mt Cook, which was finally achieved in 1894 (see Du Faur 1915; Pascoe 1958; Haynes 1994). The mountain has numerous challenging ascent and descent routes that attract climbers to the area. Whilst the mountain can be ascended in a day with good weather and conditions it is more usual that climbers will spend several days on the mountain – the most common ascent route being via the Linda Glacier to the High peak. In 1884 the first Hermitage hotel was built providing accommodation for the first tourists and sightseers to the area. Most locals live in the village because they are employed with the Hermitage Hotel (now in its third building complex in 126 years), Southern Alps Guiding, Mt Cook Ski Planes or with the Department of Conservation. Whilst they cannot own property in a national park (rentals or long term leases are available) many have formed emotional attachments to the region and have lived in the area all their lives.

Visitors' experience of 'place'

From the international and domestic visitors' perspectives the Mackenzie landscape is famous for its 'golden' barren scenery - sublime nature – and one of the primary attractions of the Mackenzie Basin is views of the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook from a scenic viewpoint at Lake Pukaki. Images of the mountain appear frequently in tourism brochures and itineraries. The mountain is promoted as a world renowned tourism icon, featuring in Tourism New Zealand's 100% Pure brand international marketing program (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott 2003; Becken 2004). Images of Aoraki/Mt Cook are frequently used in place marketing and are thus pivotal for further developing the area's iconic status. Such recurrent marketing over the past 120 years has contributed to reinforcing the image of the Aoraki/Mt Cook area as an adventurous, alpine wonderland. Marketing and the iconic brand of

Aoraki/Mt Cook may therefore 'reinforce the sense of place of the destination community' (Williams, Gill and Chura 2004). Aoraki/Mt Cook is iconic and famous not only as the highest mountain in New Zealand, nor just for its scenic qualities but also in terms of a distinct and unique place - from a tourism branding and social or cultural perspectives.

Tourists generally make fleeting visits to the region and do not get to 'know' the mountain.

From the first sight of the mountain as visitors travel through the Mackenzie Basin its visual splendour is a magnet to visitors. From the eastern end of Lake Pukaki, sixty kilometres drive from the national park, visitors usually have their first view of Aoraki/Mt Cook dominating the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana. Interpretation panels relate the English and Māori significance of the lake and mountains are located inside the Lake Pukaki information kiosk. But it is the personal experiences of the surrounding scenery that captures visitors' – their behaviour primarily focusing on photographing themselves with the mountains in the background thus 'capturing the moment' in time. Further along the State Highway to Aoraki/Mt Cook are other viewing points, such as Peter's Lookout, where visitors travelling in private cars, camper vans or on bus tours take opportunities for more photography – again with Aoraki/Mt Cook in the background – thus the visitors continue the visual capture of place – they have 'been' there.

The mountain is the object for the 'tourist gaze' of visitors to the Mackenzie Basin and World Heritage area of Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park. Having one's photo taken with Lake Pukaki and Aoraki/Mt Cook as a scenic landscape within which one sight/site's a personal experience is a 'must do'. Individuals, tour groups, couples, friends and families participate in taking each other's photographs, alone and together in front of the mountain backdrop. This is not necessarily a negative experience of place – Larsen (2005) suggests the performance of tourism photography is not merely about 'consuming' places but significant as a deliberate execution for developing social relationships – "producing place myths, social roles, and social relationships, such as family life (Larsen 2005; 417).

The act of sightseeing is thus augmented by photographing 'place' – reproducing the images depicted in marketing promotion so that the visitors have their own individually constructed experiences of place on record. Urry (2002) and Jenkins (2003) refer to this activity as participating in

the 'hermeneutic circle' as visitors photograph for themselves what they have already experienced in place marketing. Steenjacobsen (2001, p 108) observes that tourists may collect "first hand impressions of world heritage sites, national parks, islands, mountains or regions" an activity he calls 'checklist tourism' which occurs when 'place collecting tourists persistently seek out what they perceive as 'blank spots' on their personal travel maps". Steenjacobsen does not criticise sightseeing tourists – he views them as 'rushing phenomenologists" who often experience "*great joy of the initial encounter with a place one has looked forward to seeing or is amazed to "discover" en route...The joy of the sightseer's first meeting is especially noteworthy when one arrives at an awe-inspiring place or when a dazzling landscape conforms to one's high expectations.*" (Steenjacobsen 2001, p 109).

Thus scenic viewing points provide the stage within the landscape for spontaneously undertaking or deliberately 'performing' the act of photographing experiences (capturing precious memories and reinforcing social relationships). The acts of tourism branding and marketing which are highly commercial can be counteracted by such non-commercial personal tourism activities - but all contribute to the "place making" of the area, thus perpetuating the iconic status of Aoraki/Mt Cook.

Once in the Aoraki/Mt Cook Village (located within the park and in direct proximity to Aoraki/Mt Cook) visitors are struck by the scale of the mountain and other notable peaks of the 'Main Divide' which dominate the surroundings - their sheer size looming over the Aoraki/Mt Cook Village. Many visitors however do not leave the confines of the Aoraki/Mt Cook village – their experience is one of sightseeing from the village confines – visiting the museum and visitor centre or dining at one of the three local cafes/restaurants. Such experiences can be seen as superficial in terms of connecting to place though an element of learning does occur. More active visitor experiences in the park include participating in half day and day walks or having a boating/ kayaking experience on one of the glacial lakes. It is estimated that fewer than 2000 of the annual 300,000 visitors to the park participate in climbing or tramping beyond formed tracks. One of the most popular experiences are walks to the Hooker and Tasman valleys, or for the more adventurous an overnight or day trip to Mueller Hut, and these intense experiences enable more immersed, physical connections with the surroundings.

One commonality is shared by visitors, Ngāi Tahu, recreationist and local community members alike. Whilst on one level visitors may be strangers to a landscape and lack familial connections I do however think that that visitors and local community members' have shared appreciation of the

natural environment and visual scenic qualities of the Mackenzie, the Southern Alps and Aoraki/Mt Cook itself – succumbing to the power of place.

Visitor learning about place

One way visitors can experience a sense or spirit of place is to have a deeper awareness of the cultural values or ‘special’ nature of the area – and such awareness can occur through the communication of place values to visitors by interpretation (Breese 1991; Bramwell and Lane 1993, Carr 2004). An example of such visitor interpretation is the interpretation of contemporary Ngāi Tahu cultural values for Aoraki/Mt Cook. This interpretation can be viewed at tourism attractions and sites within Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park and at Lake Pukaki. At a superficial level, travel guides and brochures mentioning the mountain’s cultural significance are numerous the most notable including the New Zealand Rough and Lonely Planet Guides. At a slightly deeper level there are educational brochures such as “South Westland New Zealand - Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Area” and the park handbook *The Story of Mount Cook National Park*. Once in the park more intense interpretation occurs. Despite no Ngāi Tahu iwi members residing permanently within Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park DOC supports “Ngāi Tahu in interpreting their traditional relationships and cultural values to visitors” (Department of Conservation 2000: 117). In 1998 DOC and Ngāi Tahu chose interpretation as a tool to educate climbers and visitors about the significance of the mountain and to request visitors did not climb to the highest part of the summit ridge – the high peak. Climbers were requested to remove human and other waste from the mountain (carry out). Interpretation provided at Aoraki/Mt Cook’s Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre and Department of Conservation (DoC) visitor centre attract an estimated 250,000-300,000 visitors each summer (Department of Conservation 2000: 204; Mackenzie Tourism and Development Board 2010). The recently redeveloped DoC visitor centre displays on alpine history, geology, climbing, skiing inform the interested visitor seeking educational experiences. Indigenous cultural information is represented by a large scale carving by Māori artist Cliff Whiting that depicts the legend of Aoraki and his brothers. One legend of Aoraki/Mt Cook is linked to the wreck of the Arai-te-Uru canoe at the East Coast location of Moeraki – another is linked to early Ngāi Tahu travellers into the Mackenzie Country:

In a great tussock basin they glimpse a distant mountain towering above the snowy peaks. The son of a chieftain rides on the shoulders of one of the walkers, likewise towering above the rest. His name Aoraki (the South Island version of Aorangi) is thus given to the dominant glistening pyramid - a fortuitous choice since it not only recalls the chief mountain of their ancestral Pacific homelands but also means “sky

cloud” (usually rendered as “cloud piercer”) a lyrical and fitting title for the highest point in a great southern ocean (Dennis and Potton 1987: 57).

Thus interpretations and histories of Aoraki link the mountain to the surrounding landscape providing a continued theme for the narrative accompanying visitors’ experiences as they travel to the mountain.

Audio visual shows, brochures, books and ‘fact sheets’ provide further in-depth information about the mountain’s cultural, spiritual, historic and traditional values for visitors but it is being in the landscape – walking, tramping, climbing where visitors have the most stirring experiences and where visitors report their awe of the natural wonders of the region. Thus diverse media are utilised as a contemporary means of conveying ‘*turangawaewae*’, the Māori sense of ‘belonging’ (Hakopa, 1998) and also European values for place to visitors.

In research by the author (Carr 2004) interviewed visitors (38%) had a general knowledge of Māori cultural history and understood the significance of the general landscape. 35% of respondents specifically referred to the sacred nature of Aoraki and 31% knew of the mythology/legend of Aoraki. Knowledge of Māori place names for Mt Cook, either Aoraki or Aorangi³, with a variety of English meanings were reported by 16.8% of respondents whilst 8.4% specifically named Ngāi Tahu as the local iwi for the area. Whilst encountering Māori culture was not a main reason for visiting Aoraki/Mt Cook visitors acknowledged that such cultural information would add value to their holiday as an educational experience and improving their personal understanding of another culture. For example one visitor recounted how he “...read of the importance that Aoraki holds for the Ngāi Tahu – giving them strong identity and links to the land”! Another stated “*I came to see the beauty of the mountain primarily. If there were some special Māori connection to the mountain, knowing about that would enhance the pleasure of seeing the beauty*”. Thus for many the cultural values for the region are intrinsically intertwined with the visual scenic landscape. And the preservation of such landscape is essential.

Values under threat - preserving the Mackenzie landscapes

Naess and Rothenberg (1989) observe that “humans’ gross interference in nature mirrors our economic activity. Protection of what is left of free nature depends largely on the way humans are willing and able to change their ways of production and consumption” (ibid p 129). Whilst tourism

³ ‘Aoraki’ is sometimes referred to in the North Island dialect as ‘Aorangi’.

activity, particularly commercial tourism, has critics other economic activities can be more harmful to treasured environments and landscapes. The change of government in New Zealand in 2008 (from Labour led to National) has seen renewed threats to the country's natural resources. A government proposal for mining in national parks was vehemently opposed by the New Zealand public with anti-mining campaigns including the largest protests (all peaceful) in 25 years occurring. In the Mackenzie-Aoraki/Mt Cook region intensive dairy farming has threatened the sense of 'place'. In the past year Environment Canterbury (ECAN) received over 5200 public submissions against factory farming of dairy cows in the area and by February 2010 the Ministry for the Environment had voiced concern (Rae 2009, p17; Bruce 2010, p11). Ngāi Tahu and other groups including traditional farming families have called for research on the potential impacts on the environmental, scenic and cultural values for the region (Littlewood 2010 a, b). A strong theme in many of the public submissions to ECAN was the need to preserve the 'character' of the Mackenzie, the introduction of dairying practises stirring both emotional and rational public responses calling for research into potential impacts (ibid).

This reflects universal threats to nature that have been an increasing trend as global economic values are pursued. In his paper "The Tragedy of the Commons" Garrett Hardin discussed over-population and unceasing human demands for using natural resources and this demand has increased (Hardin 1968). In many ways, Hardin's, Naess' and Rothenberg's papers are relevant to the situation facing the landscape of the Mackenzie where the recent outsider dairying interests want to use 'public' resources for economic benefit resulting in landscape change opposed by the local community as it threatens the 'spirit of place' unique to the Mackenzie. The Mackenzie is thus a microcosm of other regions throughout New Zealand (and possibly other countries) – an example of how the conservation of an environment is challenged by the ambitious demands of economic development. Reduced opportunities for merino grazing on what was leasehold land, but is now within conservation parks, requires the local farming 'gaze' to shift from agricultural opportunities gleaned from mountain areas to the potential abundance that could be reaped from the low-lying areas of the Mackenzie. Some farmers do not support the applications on the basis the Mackenzie is too harsh an environment (with high summer temperatures and freezing winter days) for dairy cows, even if housed (Aspinall 2009, Rae 2010, MacFie 2010). Factory farms would require unsustainable levels of air-conditioning, heating, lighting, fertiliser applications, water, transportation and other unforeseen energy requirements that are costly and thus unsustainable. The physical environment and emotional well-being of farm animals appears secondary to financial returns.

Conclusion - the need to value the in-between 'spaces' for spirit of place

The journey through the Mackenzie is valued as much as the destination 'nodes' such as Aoraki/Mt Cook and the iconic views from Lake Pukaki - the loss of 'in-between' spaces and places that provide the scenic vistas along the way is a real concern to tourism and environmental interests. Already the views have been compromised for visitors by irrigation gantries and infrastructure associated with dairy farming alongside State Highway 8 between Lake Ruataniwha and Omarama. The view of Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Southern Alps is now partially obscured by a one kilometre length of irrigation gantries and equipment on one of the few local dairy farms. This is not what the international visitor expects! Whilst located in a practical and affordable position, easily accessible from the road for maintenance and operational purposes, this industrial intrusion on the landscape seems to be ill-conceived when taking into account the value of the landscape for tourism. Losing the tawny golden browns of the landscape that were not affected by traditional merino sheep farming as a result of dairy farming will destroy the scenic qualities so attractive to sightseers. The economic contributions of the landscape's intrinsic qualities are apparent with the vistas attracting and satisfying expectations of domestic and international visitors travelling to and through the area. The area has untapped potential for cycle tourism should Nga Haerenga – the national cycleway Alps to the Oceans trail is yet to be developed but is already being promoted to visitors. This cycle way will depart from Aoraki/Mt Cook and continue alongside Lake Pukaki through the Mackenzie Basin, down the Waitaki Valley to the Pacific Ocean. Already the national pathway that takes a more alpine route (the Te Araroa trail) traverses between Lake Tekapo, Twizel and Ohau catering for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The Mackenzie is a prime example of a region that would be a strong contender for designation as a national heritage landscape should legislation be developed to protect such places. It is ironic that a landscape with recognised national and international significance (including traditional, family owned merino farming and high country sheep stations) should lack planning protection from intrusive industrialisation for agricultural purposes. For both locals and visitors with a passion for the region industrialised approaches to farming will compromise the wilderness feeling of the Mackenzie. Intensive dairying will not only have severe environmental impacts but could also disrupt tourism and recreational activities if the region loses its naturalness and is unable to deliver the '100% Pure' promise currently experienced within the existing golden and alpine landscapes. The local communities, indeed the people of New Zealand, will be poorer spiritually and physically if the Mackenzie landscape's intrinsic, aesthetic, environmental, cultural and heritage values – the Mackenzie's 'spirit of place' - are not protected.

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