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BACKCOUNTRY

Quarterly bulletin of the Federated Mountain Clubs

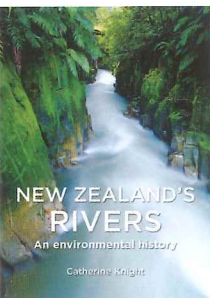
Ruahine Rambling



PLUS: Remarkable Outdoors – Heuristic Traps – Adventure Navigation

New Zealand's Rivers, An Environmental History

By Catherine Knight, Canterbury University Press, 2016. Softcover, 324 pages, \$50. Reviewed by Jamie Stewart, FMC Executive Officer.



Catherine Knight has certainly chosen a topical subject for her second book. The future of our fresh water has people wound up, even if the turbulence, technical terminology and truthiness leaves many lost. *New Zealand's Rivers*,

An Environmental History, far from adding to the noise, is a peaceful eddy to sit back in and contemplate the big picture.

The writing elegantly and convincingly covers the journeys of our rivers, not from headwaters to mouth, but from the discovery of New Zealand by Polynesians, through the arrival of Europeans, until the present day. The major themes you would expect are there: Maori and colonial use of awa, hydroelectricity, irrigation, flood control and conservation. Anecdotes and quirky stories provide plenty of colour.

I found two chapters particularly interesting. The first was about the acclimatisation societies, which have become Fish and Game. As on land, their influence is pervasive and their legacy mixed. Where the interests of anglers and the environment have overlapped, they have achieved much for fresh water. Where these interests diverge, much harm occurred. The ongoing release of exotic (albeit tasty) fish into many waterways reduces native fish populations, but it is the stories around the edges, such as the encouragement of eel control (massacre) and the bounty on shag populations that should remain as cautionary tales. The second chapter that caught me

was the story of the recreational canoeists, or kayakers. It covers early journeys, such as that by Mannering and Dixon down the full length of the Waitaki, and rapids (such as the Whakaheke on the Waikato) that were drowned by hydroelectric development and exist now only in old stories. Knight grasps the intimate relationship of kayakers with rivers. She recounts the story of kayaker Hugh Canard who, at a court hearing, was interrupted by the judge asking, 'Do you mean to say the rapids have names?' Canard replied, 'Even some of the individual rocks have names, your honour'.

The book's production qualities are high, and there is a wonderful and varied selection of images. One to make you stop and shudder is the historical photograph of the Mataura Falls. How something so beautiful could be turned into something so monstrous. The poems, paintings, maps and cartoons are all well chosen too. Overall this is a great, enlightening read, and a book that might inspire you to start keeping notes and collecting stories about your own awa.

Murder on the Maungatapu, a narrative history of the Burgess Gang and their greatest crime

By Wayne Martin, Canterbury University Press, 2016. Softcover, 288 pages, \$45. Reviewed by Shaun Barnett, New Zealand Alpine Club.

Australia may have Ned Kelly, but we have Richard Burgess.

On the Maungatapu Track, near a burbling creek, is a small, gorse-fringed, vandalised and poorly maintained monument. Despite its neglect, the monument serves as a memorial to one of most notorious crimes of 19th Century New Zealand. Here, on the fringes of what is now Mt Richmond Forest Park, four bushrangers known as the

