

I thought
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*Practising Safe Art in front of the Devil's Backbone
2015 Digital Photograph*

**Kei āku āpiti, kei āku huānga kua
kākahuria e te kākahu taratara o
aituā ina tonu nei, he iti tēnei nā te
aroa mā koutou.**

**Ahakoā ngā piki me ngā heke,
e hika, kua eke tonu koe ki te
keokeonga o te maunga.**

Haramai te toki!

Introduction —
I thought I would of climbed
more mountains by now

Kua roa nei te tangata e whakataurite ana i āna mahi angitu ki te kakenga o tētahi maunga ki tōna keokeonga, he tairitenga mō te toa, he wā e tika ana kia puta ake te kīwaha, ‘Haramai te toki’ (Cracked it!).

Kua apaapatia ēnei tūmomo whakaaro rangatiratanga o iwi kē ki ngā ariā whakapononā te mea ko te keokeonga o te maunga te wāhi e tūtaki ai te tangata ki te Atua. Koinei hoki te taumata okioki o te pora o Noa, te wāhi i whakangungua ai a Aperahama, te wāhi hoki i whakahautia ai a Mohi ki ngā Whakahau Tekau.

I te marama o Hui-tanguru i te tau 2015 i waiho e mātou ko tōku tuakana me tana tāne tō mātou motokā i te teihana Erewhon, ka kotahi atu mātou ki te ara ki te takiwā e kīia nei ko *Adams Wilderness* ki te mania kōpaka, ki te *Garden of Eden*. E iwa kiromita te whāroa o te mānia kōpaka, hukarere hoki *Garden of Eden*, e rua mano mita tana tairanga i te whenua. Kei paku kō atu o te wehenga matua o Ngā Tiritiri-o-te-Moana te mānia kōpaka nei e noho ana. E kāpīpiti ana ki te *Garden of Allah*, ā, koinei ētahi o ōna takiwā e whai ake nei: *Eve’s Rib*, *Cain’s Glacier*, *Angel col*, *Devil’s Backbone*, *Great Unknown*.

He mea whakawhanake tēnei whakaaturanga ataata, *I thought I would of climbed more mountains by now*, i ngā whakakitenga e whakaatairangatia ana i tā Hugh MacDonald kiriata *This is New Zealand*, hei whakanano i ngā whakaaro koroniarā, *whakapononoko*, *taioereore* anō hoki mō tō tātou whenua kua roa nei e whakaarohia ana e ngā tāngata o Aotearoa.

‘Me pēhea tātou ka waiata ai i te waiata a Ihowā i te whenua tauhou?’

Ngā Waiata 137:4



Walking toward the Devil's Backbone.
2015 Digital Photograph

Introduction — I thought I would of climbed more mountains by now

Mountain climbing is the oldest metaphor in the book for success, an analogy for conquering, a punch the sky, kind of fuck-yeah triumph.

Layered on top of these colonial notions of domination is the religious rhetoric that settled with it, because it's the mountaintop where men meet God. It's where Noah's ark rests, where Abraham was tested and where Moses received the 10 commandments.

In February 2015 my sister, her partner and I left our car at Erewhon Station and headed towards the Adams Wilderness Area to the Garden of Eden Ice Plateau. A 9 kilometre stretch of gentle rolling snow and ice at an elevation of 2000 metres, the Garden of Eden is just west of the main divide, in the heart of the Southern Alps. It is adjacent to the Garden of Allah and features such names as Eve's Rib, Cain's Glacier, Angel col, the Devil's Backbone and the Great Unknown.

I thought I would of climbed more mountains by now is a moving image work that builds upon the iconic imagery seen in Hugh MacDonald's *This is New Zealand* to question colonial, religious, patriarchal and utopian landscape ideologies implicit in New Zealand.

'How can we sing the Lord's song, in a strange land?'
Psalm 137:4



Film still from *I thought I would of climbed more mountains by now.*
2015 HD Video, 4,50min.

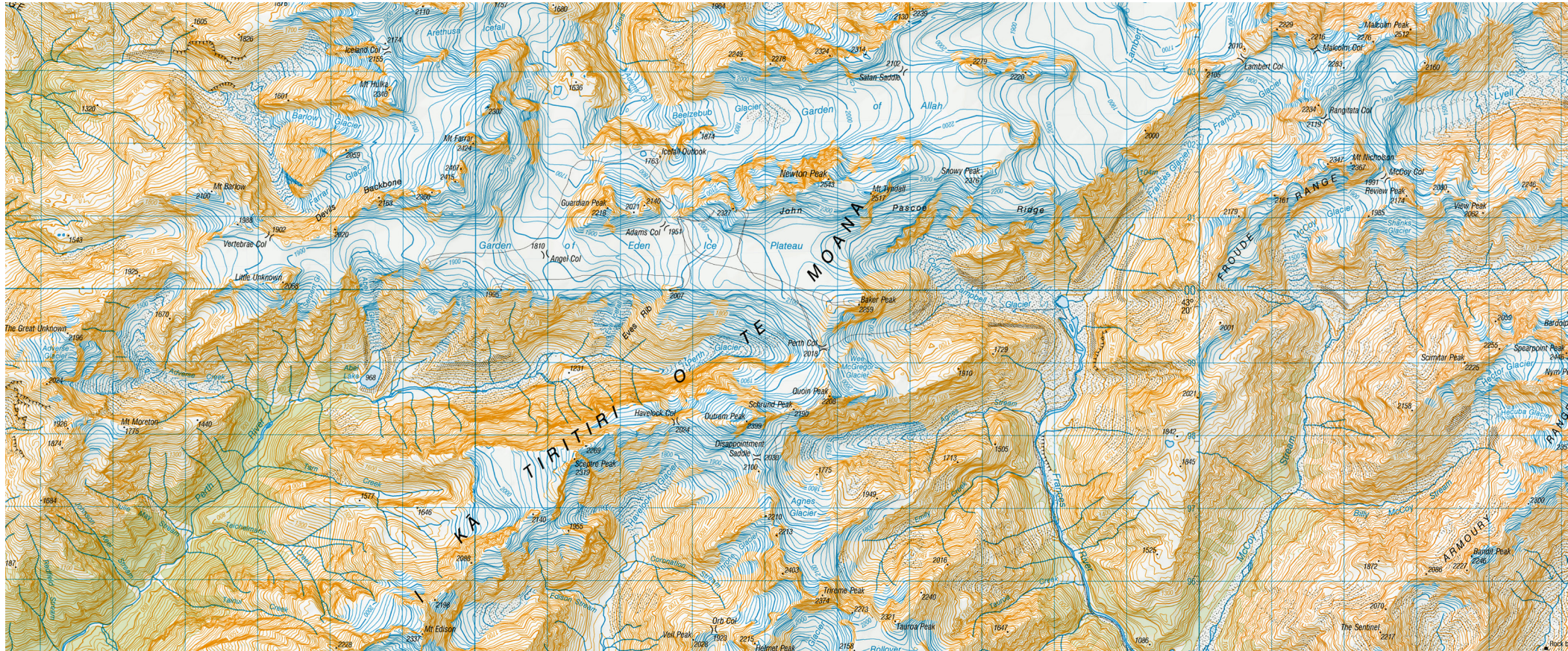
‘Toitū te whenua’

Ask that mountain

When my mum died, I stood on her land. At my back a ravine of native trees cut their way to the river that had claimed her sister 40 years earlier. An electric fence pulsed along the top of the ravine; a barrier between us and the sharp fall, a constant presence keeping us back. My niece, not paying enough attention, paid the price of being shocked in the breast. On mum’s land a house once stood, the house in which her chubby-cheeked self learned to crawl. There are no traces now of the family home or the lives that were. Whatu ngarongaro te tangata, toitū te whenua. *People perish but the land remains.* Her land, her mum’s farm, is leased to an iwi group whose cows graze at green grass and guzzle stagnant water. The day I stood on her land, I wore the mohair cardigan she had knitted for my wedding 7 months earlier. It was a bad choice. Who knew the Orangiponga sun could beat down so hard? The neighbours paid a visit, a nice Pākehā farming family and their pet deer Wendy. One by one, the men in the family made jokes to the women in the family about taking Wendy home for venison burgers.

In Tauranga, a mountain marks the end of an isle and the opening of the harbour. It is Mauao, a lovelorn mountain who was prevented from drowning himself and frozen in place by the dawn sun. Mauao is now the most beloved landmark in the area, his failure to attain the love of Pūwhenua arguably overshadowed now by his importance to the people of the area.

Tūhoe have a word for the depths of emotion felt when missing your land: *matemateaone*, to die for longing of your land. The whenua, the rivers, the trees, your maunga, they have a pull on you and will call you home. Hokia ki nga maunga, kia pūrea koe e ngā hau a Tāwhirimātea. *Return to your mountains so that you may be cleansed in the winds of Tāwhirimātea.* My mum is not from Tūhoe. When she died her sister thought dad would take her home to be buried in Rūātoki, but he knew mum wanted to return to her land. After over 20 years of living in Tauranga and returning very rarely, we took her home. My life has been spent running amok on my Tūhoe marae, knowing my place and the true meaning of belonging, but now I feel *matemateaone* for a new place.



Landscapes have an uncanny ability to put you in your place; mountains can astound and they can humble. Mountains can embrace you and then leave you bereft in their absence:

‘And all the time I was aware of a dreadful feeling of nothingness which was somehow intensified by the city itself – the endless flat straight streets, the sky without a horizon of hills, the distant horizon without sea. I felt as if I and the city were at the bottom of a huge well walled with sky, and who could climb the sky? When people came to their front or back doors to look out, where did they gaze? I felt so lonely without even the hills close by, like human bodies, for comfort.’¹

They can be the menacing presence of James K Baxter’s poem, enticing you in as they crouch like tigers waiting to claim you. They are a constant reminder that though you may have climbed many or few, you will never be a mountain:

‘But O the heart leaps to behold them loom!’²

When mum’s body was in the ground, I dropped down some dirt, a flower and my favourite pair of knitting needles. Embracing one another in sadness and despair, we tightened against the cold whip of the Manawatu wind. It is a permeable wind, unlike the infamous Wellington wind that forces you to shelter from it. This wind is crisp, and it cleansed. It was a calling home to te pito o te whenua where my mum now lies beside her father and another dead sister.

After the nehu we left mum, stopping at the top of the hill to yell, “I’ll come visit you soon mum! We love you!” and began the long drive back to Parewahawaha. We were fed to bursting. As the kirimate we got the finest food, no titi, pāua or whakamara for the others. The wharekai was cleared and cleaned, the kids showered and put to bed. The ubiquitous guitar that is called upon at every whānau gathering was brought out to play the faithful Māori strum: junga-chik, junga-chik. At the hākari we sang into our beers; the kapa haka stars in the family showing off with their lilting haka voices harmonising perfectly. The rest of us howled, flat as, hoping no one could hear us and shame us out for not being able to sing. The songs we sing are oldies, but they are goodies. I don’t know how I know the words;

Ask that mountain

maybe because they’re the same songs that I’ve heard blast out of whānau marae and garages since I was old enough to hear. They’re songs I don’t listen to when I leave my tūrangawaewae for my house in the city. They are songs that are felt more keenly on the land that my tūpuna fought for and held, te whenua i puritia, te whenua i tāwhia. They are songs of love, of redemption, of struggle, of overcoming. Reggae, soul, waiata, golden oldies. Rhythm and Māori. They are songs that remind me of home, of my people, our marae in the shadow of our maunga, by the riverside where we sat down, yeah we wept, when we remembered Zion.

A note on the title: *Ask that Mountain* is a book by Dick Scott and detailed the passive resistance shown by Māori at Parihaka. The history was largely forgotten by non-Māori and the book brought the story back into public consciousness. Mum’s dad was from Taranaki and this book was in our house growing up, but I never read it.

1 Janet Frame, *A State of Siege* (New York: George Brailier, 1980), 212

2 James K Baxter, ‘Letter from the Mountains.’ In *Runes* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1973), 52.

Matariki Williams,

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Matariki grew up in Tauranga Moana, has a Masters
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grows great kids.

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— Bridget,

Ngāti Ranginui, Ngā Te Rangi

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