Editorial

The seven papers in this issue of *Environment and History* are based on presentations to the seventh conference of the Australian Forest History Society, held early in 2007 in Christchurch, New Zealand. The Society has held all previous conferences in different Australian states and territories; Christchurch was its first international venue. The leap across the Tasman Sea recognised the growing participation of New Zealanders in the activities of the Australian Forest History Society, and the strengthening bonds between scholars of forest history in the two countries. The conference was seen as an opportunity to explore some of the many trans-Tasman linkages within the general theme of forest and environmental history.

The histories of New Zealand and Australia, especially its eastern states, are in some ways closely intertwined, yet in others are distinctly different. At the biogeographical level, both land masses were formerly connected, together forming part of the super-continent of Gondwanaland. Their separation took place during a phase of seafloor spreading which created the Tasman Sea, from about 80 until 50 million years ago. Subsequent divergent evolution over tens of millions of years has greatly differentiated the floras of the two countries, yet a Gondwanan legacy is still clearly evident in both.

Much more recently, the prehistoric link between Eastern Australia and New Zealand was reasserted when both places became the sites of British colonisation. This reconnection was arguably at its strongest when for a brief time in 1840 New Zealand was a dependency of New South Wales, administered from Sydney. For much of the remainder of the nineteenth century it was commonly believed, in Australia at least, that New Zealand was destined to become part of a political union with the Australian colonies.

When first established as a British colony in 1788, New South Wales embraced all of the eastern part of the Australian continent, from Torres Strait to the Southern Ocean. It was reduced to its present size by the incremental transfer of parts of its original territory to newly-created colonies: first Van Diemen's Land (1825; later called Tasmania), then Victoria (1851) and finally Queensland (1859). New Zealand participated in 1890 with these and other Australian colonies in a Convention aimed at establishing an Australian Federation, but already there were indications that it would not be joining. The many differences in the historical circumstances and conditions of life would see New Zealand develop a 'different national type' from Australia. Not least among these differences were the contrasting origins of the indigenous peoples on the two sides of the Tasman Sea, and divergent approaches to 'native administration'. Indeed, this point of difference has become more emphatic, and today Maori culture is a major aspect of New Zealand's distinctiveness. Nevertheless, the two countries retain considerable social and cultural similarities.

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Two of the papers in this collection explicitly follow the trans-Tasman theme of the Christchurch conference, whereas the others are more firmly situated on one side or the other of that sea. This difference does not, however, determine the order of presentation. The first two contributions deal with environmental transformations, generally from forest to grass, both in a New Zealand context. In a succinct case study, Vaughan Wood and Eric Pawson trace the rapid transition from forest to grass on Banks Peninsula, South Island, in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The instrument of this change was the locally grown version of a European grass which also contributed to forest transition dynamics elsewhere in New Zealand and to agricultural improvement in many parts of the world, including Europe and Australia. This contribution adds both to the history of deforestation in New Zealand and to agricultural history more widely.

Matthew Hatvany deals with another forest to grass transformation, this time in New Zealand's North Island. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the Hauraki Plains, the largest wetland complex in New Zealand, was almost entirely transformed through the alteration of drainage and the removal of kahikatea, its principal timber tree, into a grass-dominated landscape. Hatvany interprets this transformation through a trans-national approach, tracing the interactions with this forested wetland of four generations of a Canadian immigrant family. In doing so, he challenges common assumptions that New Zealand's colonial settlers were culturally predisposed toward wetland destruction.

Australia, as a major trading partner of New Zealand, played a role in both of these transformations since it was a significant destination for both Akaroa cocksfoot seed and kahikatea timber, the former for creating dairy pasture and the latter for the manufacture of boxes for the export of butter. Brett Stubbs examines the two-way trade in timber that operated across the Tasman Sea, and reveals that in both Australia and New Zealand, timber exports were perceived as a major cause of the depletion of indigenous resources. This motivated efforts towards forest conservation in both places, contributing to the creation of State forest services, staffed by professional foresters, to administer dedicated public forest reserves.

Mike Roche and John Dargavel briefly recount the start of State-controlled forestry in Australia and New Zealand before the First World War as a prelude to their detailed examination of the concurrent but less studied beginnings of formal forestry education in both countries. Their account highlights the difficulties experienced, including Commonwealth-State rivalries in Australia, provincial jealousies in New Zealand, and political differences and personal feuds in both. Strong links between the two countries in forestry education are indicated.

From an early date, afforestation with exotic species was a distinctive response to forest scarcity in Australia and New Zealand. This became a major preoccupation after the trade dislocation of the First World War reinforced the need for timber self-sufficiency. The transformation of 'unproductive' native landscapes into plantations of useful exotic softwood trees, largely the domain of

the new State forest services, was also the basis of experiments in penal reform. Benedict Taylor examines one such experiment, which began in New South Wales in 1913 and was inspired by earlier schemes in New Zealand. Prisoners were set to work to create a pine plantation by reclaiming coastal 'wasteland', and in so doing to reclaim themselves. The history of this largely forgotten scheme reveals some of the relationships with landscape that have become ingrained in ideas about human rehabilitation.

Research into the early history of forestry on both sides of the Tasman Sea has tended to focus on the efforts of the State to conserve indigenous forest resources on public land, but to neglect exotic afforestation, and even more so, to overlook the earlier role of individuals and provincial bodies in tree planting. In another welcome departure from this trend, Paul Star examines some pioneering nineteenth century tree-planting endeavours on the Canterbury Plains – a largely treeless eastern region of New Zealand's South Island. Tree planting there took place for shelterbelt and ornamental purposes, as well as for firewood and timber supply, and preceded by decades the direct involvement of central government in such activities. Star's paper focuses on the activities of a conservation pioneer, Thomas Potts, who experimented with and encouraged tree planting in Canterbury, in addition to advocating the preservation of native forest remnants.

Tree planting was also carried out for health reasons in colonial New Zealand. It was widely believed that plants purified the air and rendered places, especially urban areas, more suitable for human habitation. James Beattie reconnects the vital relationship affirmed by nineteenth-century New Zealand settlers between plants and health, a subject which has received little attention by that country's medical and environmental historians. He describes an anxiety about early landscape alteration, at odds with portrayals of European settlers as arrogant and confident agents of colonisation showing scant respect for the natural physical order. Through this case study, Beattie demonstrates that the plant-health relationship in colonial societies is a promising field for further research, especially in places like Australia which have undergone similarly recent, rapid and widespread environmental change.

This collection of papers explores many of the linkages between the environmental histories of Australia and New Zealand, setting it apart from earlier special issues of this journal which have focused individually on Australia (Volume 4, Number 2, 1998 and Volume 14, Number 2, 2008) and New Zealand (Volume 9, Number 4, 2003). This issue is also distinguished by its particular concern with the history of forests, native and artificial, reflecting the scope of the conference from which it arose.

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