

Bridging the Distance: New Zealand and Germany in Dialogue

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German Scientists in New Zealand Prior to 1900

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Visiting German naturalists made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of scientific knowledge about New Zealand in the period prior to 1900. Their contribution is perhaps most evident in the discipline of geology, but they were also deeply interested in – and often concerned about – New Zealand’s flora, fauna and indigenous people. Well-trained and articulate, these German scientists not only amassed important early collections of zoological, botanical and ethnographic material, they also left a very valuable written record of all that they saw in the course of their respective visits.

This written record is of more than just scientific significance. It is historically significant as well. Arriving first in the late eighteenth century and then at increasingly regular intervals in the later half of the nineteenth, visiting German scientists were also important first-hand eyewitnesses to the European discovery and colonisation of New Zealand. The impressions that they committed to paper thus provide invaluable snapshots, as it were, of a young country and its inhabitants – indigenous and settler alike – which provide us with an insight into the various social, political and environmental changes that were taking place over this time. But even more important than that: The fact that these German naturalists invariably came to New Zealand in the first place either as members of another country’s expedition or by their own means – in other words: their status as nominal “outsiders” in a land that came to be dominated by British immigrants – implies a somewhat nuanced perspective on what was happening, and one that might have differed from the “official” perspective of the colonial project that they observed and sometimes served. This singular perspective is, I think, yet to be fully explored.

Allow me to mention extremely briefly, then, a few of the more important names. The first German scientists to visit New Zealand – indeed, the first Germans of any kind to set foot on New Zealand soil – were **Reinhold and Georg Forster**, a father-and-son team who visited this country three times in 1773 and 1774 as naturalists on Cook's second voyage. New Zealand ornithology began with them, and Georg's famous account of their travels with Cook, a major part of which is devoted to this country, still rates as one of the greatest travelogues ever written. Sixty-five years later, it was the turn of **Ernst Dieffenbach** to visit New Zealand. A political exile from German-speaking Europe, Dieffenbach spent nearly two years exploring New Zealand between 1839 and 1841 as naturalist to the New Zealand Company, the British colonisation society responsible for starting organised European immigration to this country. His two-volume monograph *Travels in New Zealand*, published in 1843 and still cited extensively today, was one of the most important books written about this country in the nineteenth century. So too was the monograph written by the geologist **Ferdinand von Hochstetter** twenty years later. The German-born Hochstetter, who came to New Zealand in late 1858 as a member of the Austrian *Novara*-expedition and then spent nine months exploring various parts of this country, is now regarded as "the father of New Zealand Geology" because of his pioneering geological surveys. His significance to New Zealand science history, however, extends far beyond this. Hochstetter not only encouraged local scientific endeavour while still in New Zealand, he also remained, until his death in 1884, an important scientific contact for the young colony in continental Europe. His most important contact – and pupil – in New Zealand was **Julius Haast**, a native of Bonn who had arrived in New Zealand the day

before he did. After several years as a government geologist and surveyor, Haast became director of the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch in 1868. Until his death in 1887, Haast was not only an important New Zealand link with the scientific metropolises of continental Europe – his correspondence in several languages is enormous and still to be fully evaluated – he also hosted a great many visiting scientists from Europe as well, some of them fellow German-speakers who now have their own place in New Zealand science history today: men such as **Andreas Reischek**, **Otto Finsch**, and **Robert von Lendenfeld**.

I will end my brief survey with the zoologist **Hugo Schauinsland**, the Bremen museum director who visited New Zealand at the turn of 1896 and 1897. Like the many German naturalists who had visited New Zealand before him, Schauinsland also recorded his impressions and collected extensively in the course of his travels up and down this country. Unlike his predecessors, though, Schauinsland's work had been assisted to an unprecedented extent by a flourishing network of German consulates and the expansion of German shipping firms into the region which had been facilitated by Germany's emergence as a colonial power a decade earlier. He was, in other words, a different kind of scientific traveller who belonged to a new and different scientific time, and, as such, he represents an appropriate place at which to conclude this paper.