

The British Kept A'Coming: On the Tourist Trail of the 1863 Invasion of the Waikato

– Peter Hoar, Auckland University of Technology

When New Zealand's troops set off in 1914 to do their bit in the Great War for Civilization, they were nicknamed 'Bill Massey's tourists' after the then Prime Minister William 'Farmer Bill' Massey. This was the first mass OE for New Zealanders with about 100,000 men and women eventually shipping out to Turkey, France and the Middle East. Since the war, they've been followed by a swelling tide of New Zealanders who are tourists in the modern sense. A visit to Gallipoli is a more or less compulsory part of many young New Zealander's OE. The battlefields of France and Belgium are overrun with tour groups from all countries. Battlefield business is booming as never before with the centenary of the war upon us. And many New Zealanders are leading the charge to the coach tours, the souvenir shops, the reconstructed trenches, the bars and the backpacker hostels of the Lowlands. Back here in New Zealand it's impossible to escape the war. The NZ government is spending about \$25 million on mainly Great War centred activities ... lest we forget. Not much chance of that when we're being bombarded with books, articles, dramas, documentaries websites, parades and conferences that are all concerned one way or another with war and memory.

All this concentration on the 100th anniversary of World War One is eclipsing the 150th anniversary of the New Zealand Wars. Andrew Hoskins yesterday referred to the 'saturation commemoration' of the Great War. For the New Zealand wars it's more like 'unsaturated commemoration'. Quite lean in fact but it is there.

The 150th anniversary of the Waikato War is being marked with ceremonies, speeches, ceremonies and battle re-enactments. Along with these a tourist and educational infrastructure has also been developed to encourage people to visit the battlefields, museums and other sites. I want to examine this local battlefield tourism as a way of thinking about the wars and look at some guidebooks.

The Waikato War of 1863-64 was an orchestrated land grab by the state at gun point. On 11 July 1863, Governor George Grey issued an ultimatum to 'the chiefs of Waikato' calling on Māori to pledge allegiance to Queen Victoria or forfeit their lands. Before this message was received, Imperial forces crossed the Mangatāwhiri stream, the dividing line between the Auckland region and the lands under the mana of the Māori King. The Waikato War ended in April 1864 with battle of Ōrākau.

Three and half thousand square kilometres of fertile farm land were confiscated from Māori and sold to settlers under a fig leaf of legality. This was a brutal episode in a series of brutal conflicts.

In the latest edition of the *New Oxford History of New Zealand*, the 3rd published in 2010, Roberto Rabel, the Pro Vice-Chancellor, International at Victoria University, writes that ‘the New Zealand Wars were limited in military scale and geographical scope’. He goes on to point out that the wars were fought *in* New Zealand, not *by* New Zealand and they were ‘located somewhat indistinctly’ within a broad spectrum of armed clashes’ between Imperial & Settler forces and various indigenous peoples. Just one of Queen Victoria’s ‘Little Wars’. I’m not sure they were ‘little wars’ to the people who died in them or lost their homes and land. The wars are central to New Zealand nationhood precisely because they were fought *in* New Zealand and *for* New Zealand. As with the French Revolution, it’s still too early to definitely say what the impacts are. We’re still finding out - it’s a struggle without end.

Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as an imagined political community points at a constant process of re-imagining and re-thinking of the nation and its pasts. It’s something of a cliché to say war is central to the New Zealand national imagination. The hundreds of war memorials across the countryside are testament to that. The travel writer Paul Theroux once wrote of New Zealand:

“This is a wonderful country – or would you call it an archipelago. You see a lot of beards and knee socks. And sweaters. You also see an awful lot of war memorials”

The knee socks aren’t so popular maybe there’s still plenty of memorials - over 900 dedicated to the First World War alone. Anzac Day has become a sacred festival of pomp and sorrow. Some would prefer it to be the national day instead of Waitangi Day. For many the Great War, especially Gallipoli, is seen as the genesis of New Zealand’s national identity. One of the attractive (or comforting) ideas about Anzac day is the equality of sacrifice. Maori, Pakeha, Samoan, Tongan, women, men – all alike died. They are one people as it were.

But Waitangi Day is often framed as a day of division, a day of protest and a day of raising uncomfortable questions about New Zealand’s past. The comforting ‘one people’ narrative is undermined by the New Zealand Wars. The national memory of the wars has never been totally buried but there are periods of what the historian David Green has called ‘collective amnesia’ about the conflicts.

The wars also haven't fitted comfortably into a colonial national story that framed the 19th century colonization as a 'clash of civilizations' where the stronger, more worthy culture inevitably overwhelmed its inferior, more 'primitive' foes. That formerly dominant narrative is discredited and destabilized these days by post-colonial ideas and oppositional voices, new forms of historical epistemologies and the discrediting of master narratives in general. At least in academic circles.

Outside academia, the old zombie colonial narratives are alive and well on many blogs and their comment sections, in books that purport to undermine the Treaty's credibility, and also lurking behind dog whistle politics – a prime example being the infamous Orewa speech by Don Brash in 2004. Thinking about the past will raise too many difficult questions for many people and so the New Zealand wars are ignored. As Debbie McCauley wrote in an article about Gate Pa:

It is an uncomfortable exploration of identity for postcolonial Pākehā, one where they were not necessarily on the side of 'good' as perceived in World War I & II.

Exploring this identity involves looking inward, self examination, finding a sense of place. And place is very important here. The wars that loom in public memory, the ones that are mentioned on Anzac Day all happened somewhere else, in other countries. The wars disrupt the conventional narratives used in New Zealand's war memorialising industry. Honouring the fallen in far flung fields is one thing but it's a bit trickier when they're in the kitchen garden.

Many New Zealanders go to these faraway fields as part of their OE or as specifically chosen destinations. This is Dark Tourism, tourism involving travel to sites historically associated with death and tragedy.

These sites range from the quite camp and jolly ...

SLIDE - London Death and Debauchery

A warm pint and a side order of horrible history

But it also goes to places beyond words.

SLIDE - Death Camps of Europe

Battlefield tourism is a sub-genre of dark tourism. The motivations behind battlefield touring are complex and varied.

SLIDE – Battlefield Tourism - Motives

That last motive is very interesting for New Zealand - connecting with the past or history through being in the place – a bodily, somatic sensation that comes from contact with artefacts or places that are very old.

The English philosopher and radical thinker William Godwin argued for this in his 1809 ‘Essay on Sepulchres’ – he wrote that we can’t really perceive the past unless we’re physically with its remnants. Emotion is at the heart of this historical episteme and it’s an important part of battlefield tourism and museum visiting for many people. And many New Zealanders go to much expense and effort to get to places and be there in the Godwinian sense. After all He Tangata he tangata he tangata but equally important in driving the New Zealand Wars was Te whenua, te whenua, te whenua

But this doesn’t happen so much for the battlefields that are closer to home and I think one useful way of starting to explore the complexities of post-colonial identity in New Zealand is through battlefield tourism because it involves the above motivations and especially the sort of Godwinian emotional response.

But tourism involves infrastructure - cafes, shops, toilets, maps, souvenirs, and guidebooks. Guidebooks play important roles in travel, experience and memory. They mediate experience by selecting and arranging places, sites, and sights of things. They arrange the real and the imagined into coherent wholes that can give structure to experience. Interactions with the present and the past are negotiated through guidebooks such as Baedeker during the 19th century and Lonely Planet in the modern world.

Battlefield tourism guidebooks are a specialised genre and they have their own challenges. Making sense of the complicated and confusing sets of events we call battles is no easy task. Nationalist and partisan leanings have to, ideally, be set aside and the tone kept as neutral as possible.

Most battlefield guides are written in the style of traditional military history which deals with abstractions such as divisions, regiments, flanks, objectives and so on. The narrative voice used is usually impersonal and dry. The guides to New Zealand's battlefields are like this but like any text, they are anything but clear.

The first text I want to look at wasn't intended to be a travel guide at all.

SLIDE - Cowan

James Cowan's 2 volume *The New Zealand War*, published in 1922/23 is a huge shambling book with little overall structure. It's the official history of the wars and Cowan was determined to get everything that happened into his book, seemingly down to the last fist fight. Chris Hilliard has written about Cowan's use of oral and eyewitness sources which were sometimes preferred over text. Cowan is giving equal credibility to Maori accounts which no other Pakeha writer of the time was doing. Hilliard points out that both Maori and Pakeha are actors in the Cowan's tragicomedy of violence followed by reconciliation. The message behind Cowan's book is that New Zealanders are one people. Which seems odd when he's just written 2 great volumes about Maori and Pakeha doing their best to kill each other. But the struggle itself was the point. He wrote at the end of his first chapter:

The wars ended with a strong mutual respect, tinged with real affection, which would never have existed but for this ordeal by battle.

One reason Cowan's book is still a useful guide is that he visited the battlefields, often with veterans who had fought there, and wrote vivid descriptions of the sites. A lot has happened to the battlefields since Cowan saw them and his descriptions, along with the maps and pictures can give an idea of what the terrain was like. Here's part of how he described the site of Rangiriri:

SLIDE – Cowan description

Westward of the railway is the still, sedge-bordered Lake Kopuwera, now a bird sanctuary, alive with wild duck and swans and wading-birds. This lagoon extends to the eastern base of a ridge marked by a dark plantation of pines: that is the spot where the Maoris of Waikato built their redoubt and dug out their rifle-pits and trenches to resist General Cameron. (The New Zealand Wars, vol.1, p.326, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cow01NewZ-c35.html>)

Here is the photograph he used in his book of the site.

SLIDE – Rangiriri desolate

And here is how it looks today. As you can see, the landscape is much altered.

SLIDE – Rangiriri modern

Cowan's book was written at the same time as the official histories of World War One and like them it's intended to record and memorialise the armed conflict. Modern guides have different purposes.

SLIDE – Ritchie cover

The next guide to look at is Neville Ritchie's *The Waikato War of 1863-64*, published in 2001. Dr Neville Ritchie, an archaeologist, has written this guidebook with input from Waikato kaumatua, Buddy Te Whare and Tui Adams who commented on the text 'from a Maori perspective'. It shares that with Cowan's book but has quite different intentions. It begins with a background to the origins of the war and then works its way through 23 different sites running from North to South beginning at Pokeno. For each site Ritchie describes the events that occurred there and also the site itself noting points of interest and how to gain access to the sites. Illustrations and maps are used effectively to add to the text. The tone of the writing and the overall approach is neutral and reports the facts. The North to South orientation of the tour follows the path of the colonial troops and the chronology of the war.

This is about things rather than people. It's a physical geography of the various sites and doesn't examine the cultural or social aspects of the wars. Ritchie is concerned about the physical remains of the war and he calls attention to the destruction of many sites by urban spread and farming.

He writes:

It is important to protect and interpret battlefields and sites that influenced the course of our history, and to raise awareness of the importance of preserving them for future generations.

As a document supported by the Department of Conservation and available as a download from DOC's website, the emphasis on 'conserving' and 'preserving' the sites is the underlying point of the guide. A notable feature of the modern Rangiriri battlefield is the Waikato Expressway which runs right through the middle of the site.

SLIDE – Rangiriri aerial view

This is the old Great South Road which was built as part of the campaign. It was the main supply line for General Cameron's troops and it pointed straight to the heart of the Kingtanga. The way it bisects the battlefield is like an insult. And it reflects how little respect has been paid in the past to the conservation of such important historical sites.

Ritchie has an epilogue on the last page of his book where he writes:

SLIDE – Ritchie epilogue

He goes on to describe the Tainui compensation;

It is hoped that the grievances of the past are finally settled and that the European and Maori people in the Waikato can live together in peace and harmony.

Many battlefield guides will mention in general terms the horror and suffering of war but this text is explicitly laying responsibility for the conflict with the settler society and going beyond the 'one people' idea to express biculturalism. The emphasis on conservation reflects views held in the wider culture at the time it was published.

The last guide I'll mention here is a guideapp/website rather than a guidebook.

SLIDE – App/website grabs

The *Waikato War Driving Tour* has been produced by Wellington based firm Locales who specialise in making 'visitor experiences'. The firm has created a guide to the Waikato War commissioned by New Zealand Historic Places Trust, now called **Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga**, and developed in conjunction with Nga Muka, the local hapu, and with Tourism Hamilton Waikato.

SLIDE- Locales waikato war page

The design follows the North South axis again but starts further north than most at Highwic in Epsom. The guide then goes from one location to another down to Pirongia. The website offers some illustrations the map and some text. There's also a 77 page PDF education kit developed for secondary school students that look thorough and comprehensive.

I do have one problem with the navigation here – if I click on the 'About' button – I want to know more about this website –

SLIDE – Waikato tourism

(that picture is called ‘Cows in the Mist’ – I chose it because, well, cows)

I get taken to the digital epicentre of Waikato tourism. It’s quite hard to find the Waikato War section once it’s been left. But this makes the context for this guide very clear - it’s all about tourism and battlefield tourism is a profitable business. It’s not that money is being charged to see the sites or visit the museums. The battlefields are a drawcard that will attract tourists who will then spend money on food, accommodation etc.

SLIDE – App features

The App that can be downloaded on to a phone is a multimedia battlefield guide. As with the spoken guides found in museums and art galleries, there are recorded commentaries that describe the events that happened at a site and any other notable features. None of this material is in Te Reo. These are also available as text and there are illustrations and a map. The guide outlines the settlement of Auckland by Maori and the origins of the war in Pakeha settler land hunger. It concludes with the effects of the war for the people of Waikato, their loss of land and the 1995 settlement. This guide places the war in a wider cultural context than the previous two. It presents a Maori perspective on the war. In one obvious way, the script is voiced by a young Maori male.

PLAY SOUND (30 seconds)

But more importantly it places Maori concerns and actions at the centre of the narrative.

The information is designed to be understood as widely as possible – tourists from outside New Zealand would find this useful as would the many New Zealand citizens who know little or nothing about the wars. The app itself has no advertising and it’s sober, serious presentation is appropriate for its content.

And it brings the voice to the place in a literal sense. In the end I think that's what's important if the New Zealand Wars are ever going to be faced up to and fruitfully incorporated as a central part of the national imaginary. With Cowan's we had plenty of voices but the land was more of backdrop for the players. The Ritchie guide is more concerned with the land itself as an object of conservation, something worthy of preservation as an object of empirical analysis. The app and the ethos of battlefield tourism, for me, connects physical presence and voice in a way that makes its users auditors of history as well as witnesses. This takes us close to Godwin's idea about the past, the present and the sense of presence as a connection.

I think this way of connecting modern people with these past events is a powerful way to start understanding what went on then and what that means for the way we live now.

Thank you.