WONDERS OF NEW ZEALAND

A Tour Among Volcanoes, Geysers and Boiling Springs

BELIEVED BY ENCHANTING SCENES

Nature in Her Angry and Tempestuous Mood as Well as in Her Most Blandeous and Placid Moments.

Correspondence Deseret News.

PALMERSTON, New Zealand, Feb. 18, 1893.—Tourists from all parts of the world are attracted to the "Wonderland of New Zealand."

The Hot lakes district is celebrated for its beautiful scenery, and the marvellous healing virtues of its innumerable hot springs. A line of volcanic activity extends from the central part of the North island from the active volcano, Mount Tongariro, to White island in the north, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles. Maori tradition, in various ways, explains the cause. The most popular story informs us that certain ancient rangatiras, or chiefs, were suddenly changed into mountains, whose snowy caps frown them, and held them captives. One of their descendants, a goddess of Hawaiki, left her turbulent home across the Pacific, and traveled under the seas with a burning fire-brand, with which to rescue her noted ancestors. At White Island she came to the surface and found that her destination was not yet reached, but the scene of her appearance from that time has been an active volcano. Her line of underground travel, through the Bay of Plenty district, is marked by the boiling springs, steam holes, and volcanoes. Mount Tongariro was reached and the famous chieftain was released from his frozen fetters, but since then the mount has been continually aflame, and is still an active volcano often sending forth immense quantities of rock, lava, etc. Islands, mountains and massive rocks are pointed out by the Maoris and described as their transformed ancestors, many of them being ancient goddesses.

The annual conference at Te Puke was held near the historic scenes, and Elders Keisem, Meikle and Goodard decided to take a night seeing tour through the district. The little company started out well equipped. Blankets, clothing and provisions were loaded upon a pack-horse, and as the Elders mounted their faithful nags and jogged along the road passers-by would have some difficulty in determining their character. The roads were very dusty, and, after a few hours' journeying, the travelers would pass for indigent tourists, cattle buyers, sheep-shearers or miners prospecting for new finds, but few would imagine that they were ministers of the Gospel.

After a ride of twenty miles they reached the Maori Pa at Kuraku, where a cordial welcome was extended to the "Pakehas." On learning the character of their visitors, the Maoris desired to learn something of Mormonism, and an interesting conversation ensued. It was therefore past midnight before they sought repose in their blankets, which were spread on the floor of the whare, about fifteen Maoris sleeping in the same room.

The following morning a visit was paid to Tikitere, a mile and a half distant, where thick mud volcanoes and boiling springs may be seen on every hand in full or activity. Dense clouds of sulphurous smoke canopied the little valley, and the dull thud of the puna and ngawhas could be heard all along the road. The puna are geysers continually active, while the Ngawhas or inactive pulas, intermittently send forth columns of steam. The only dwelling in the vicinity of Tikitere is a Maori whare, where a family resides for the purpose of collecting fees and guiding visitors. Near the whare are two immense boiling lakes, separated by a narrow neck of land about three feet wide. Standing upon the natural bridge, the spectators are completely enveloped in the sulphurous clouds of steam, the repulsive odor of which is almost suffocating. A gust of wind occasionally waits aside the dense clouds of vapor, so that the terrible boiling cauldrons can be distinctly seen. The mighty forces of nature appeared threaten the visitors with immediate destruction, and their place of observation was appropriately named "The Gates of Hades."

Carefully traversing this treacherous region, a large yawning pit is reached, where a seething mass of black mud is dashed and tossed against the sides with perfect fury. It is almost terrifying to gaze into the hideous depths of this great mud geyser, termed the "Inferno." Sulphurous springs, mud craters and hot water falls are very numerous in the vicinity, and steam may be seen issuing from every hill side.

The sulphurous fumes in the air rendered a prolonged stay undesirable, and it was quite a relief to emerge into a purer atmosphere.

The beautiful and famous lakes of Rotoiti and Rotorua were next visited, and near the south shore of the last named lake tourists find an agreeable resting place at the little town of Ohinemutu, noted for its numerous mineral springs and healing waters. Commodious hotels have been erected for the accommodation of visitors and invalids, allof which contain wonderful natural baths, renowned for their curative properties. Physicians are in charge of these, and the town is like an immense hospital, with hundreds of invalids moving around upon their crutches.

About two miles distant is a Maori pa, situated in the midst of an interesting group of geysers. Some of these force volumes of steam thirty and fourty feet high, while others send forth columns of water to a height of one hundred feet. Hundreds of these boiling springs may be seen in the vicinity, and they are attended by a variety of unearthly noises and evil odors.

From the adjacent hills a good view is obtained of the whole district. Scarcely a ripple could be seen on the clear, placid lakes, and it was difficult to imagine that such a peaceful scene had ever been disturbed by bloody battles, causing waters near the shores of the lake to be dyed with blood. The friendly and peaceable Maoris who so kindly entertained the Elders, are the descendants of a warlike tribe of Ara wae sons so dreaded by their neighbors.

The scene of the great volcanic explosion in the year 1886 was next visited. Results of the News may remember the story flashed across the wires from this centre of death and destruction. The inhabitants of the district have become so accustomed to steaming agaweas and noses rising the air with sulphurous odors, earthtremors, subterranean rumblings and the breaking out in different places of boiling springs, all of which they regard as the sandy valve of the country, that they are not disturbed by slight earthquake shocks. At the base of the great volcanic, Tarawera mountain towered 2000 feet above the beautiful lake at its base, and the wonderful pink and white terrace, which nature had been engaged centuries in forming, were in the vicinity. On the night of Wednesday, June 10th, 1886, the whole of New Zealand was aroused by terrible earthquake shocks, which were also felt in Australia. Tarawera, which for at least five centuries had been dormant, suddenly burst forth and the flames illuminated the surrounding country. Immense rocks and large quantities of dust and ashes were thrown out. Craters opened in Lake Rotomahana, and enormous volumes of heavy mud spread destruction on every hand. The loss of life amongst the Maoris was very great, and a number of their populous villages were buried in lava, ashes and mud.

The story of this terrible catastrophe is now evidenced by the gaunt, burnt trunks of trees, and blighted forests on the mountain sides, eight miles distant, and the tremendous deposits of mud and ashes in the valleys below. Deep gulches have now been washed out by the heavy rains, and sensationally the ruins of a Maori house may be seen, partly buried in the ravine, leaning side of blue mud, broken by deep gulches, are now spread over the site of the once beautiful lake of Rotomahana.

From an eminence called the Ashfields, the Elders obtained a good view of Tarawera and its surroundings. The mountain was cleft in two by the terrific explosion, and the craters are plainly visible. A new growth of ferns, grasses and shrubs now relieve this desolate scene, for nature is doing her utmost to hide all trace of the catastrophe.

As the Elders neared the scene of the eruption, the rugged condition of the country compelled them to dismount, and, leaving their horses, the journey was continued on foot. Steep inclines were climbed by grasping tussocks of grass growing out of the fissures and after leaping across several chasms of unknown depth, a deep gully was entered, and it came infinitely far some distance. A stream of cold water trickled the travelers to quench their thirst, but imagine their surprise, after following the stream a few feet, to discover the water steaming and boiling. It was necessary to examine the ground carefully before stepping upon it, as boiling springs were steaming in every direction, and scalding vapor issued from fissures and holes in the ground. What appeared to have been an immense crater is now a boiling lake of clear water.

Mount Tarawera still looms up with threatening significance. The rift dividing the mountain is still hot and steaming, and the rocks in the vicinity are too hot to handle. Such a scene of fearful desolation will be long remembered by all who are privileged to view it, and the visitor turns from its contemplation conscious of his own insignificance and realizing still more the mighty forces of nature controlled by the Creator.

Waiwakaihi was the next point of interest, with its numerous geysers and beautiful springs, but as heavy black and volcanoes commenced to gather overhead, the horses were urged forward, in the hope of gaining a place of shelter before the gathering storm broke. A heavy thunderstorm, however, burst upon the travelers just as they caught sight of Rotorua in the distance. The horses were spurred onward, but the heavy rain caused their rivers to arrive in a wet condition. The horses were turned out and possession was taken of the house, the owner of which was absent. The Book of Mormon and other church works convinced the Elders that the owner was a member of the church, so they rested contentedly till morning. The storm having passed over, the journey was continued.

On reaching the Waikato river, the natives on the opposite bank were signalled. A Maori crossed over in a small waka, and the little party shuddered at the thought of returning with him in such a small boat, as the Waikato is a swift, treacherous and turbulent stream. The waka (a small canoe hewn out of the trunk of a tree) was about two feet wide and fifteen feet long. One passenger was taken at a time, and the native with great dexterity paddled safely across. The little craft was propelled with a single oar, or paddle, and, after watching the skilful manipulation of it, all misgivings vanished.

Orakeikorako is an exclusively Maori settlement, pleasantly situated on the banks of the river. Most of the inhabitants are Lutheran saints, and every attention was paid to the visitors. Natives and pakehas are very numerous in the vicinity, and the boiling pools are used for laundry and cooking purposes. Some of these hot springs are huge cauldrons, while others are just large enough for a egg boiler. The stream, issuing from the fissures, is utilized in various ways.

After a short stroll, the Elders met their Maori hostess with a sack of potatoes. Learning that she was taking them to cook, they accompanied her. The potatoes were rinsed in a stream of cold water, and then placed in a steaming cavity in the side of the hill. Covering them with a sack, they were left to cook in a natural steam oven.

The famous Aliens cave, situated near the village, is a very interesting and unique sight. After crossing the river again, it was reached by climbing the hillsides. On reaching the entrance the tall fern were brushed aside, and the first glimpse of the enchanting scene was almost captivating. Descending rude steps, a perfect fairies grotto was entered, which certainly baffles description. The cave is 120 feet long, 84 feet high and 42 feet wide. The incrustations on every side shone various hues, and, as the sun shines from above, a beautiful picture is formed. The stalactites glisten in the sunlight, and the tropical vegetation and native ferns are reflected in a pool of water in the bottom, forming an appropriate background. The visitors could readily imagine it the scene of Rip Van Winkle's exploits with the goblins in the famous Catskills.

When ready to continue the journey, the Maoris caused the horses to swim the river. After passing Waikato, a valley with innumerable attractions, the Huka falls were visited, which are said to be the finest in the Southern Hemisphere. At this point the Waikato river is forced through a narrow course, and the foaming, boiling torrent rushes between two precipitous rocky walls, finally tumbling over a steep precipice, covering the fine spray to the like semblance of steam. This is a favorite resort of tourists, and is about six miles from Lake Taupo, a fine sheet of water about 30 miles in circumference. Several Maori villages are located upon its shores, and many Maori legends connect it with the ancient history of the natives. The famous mountain scenery near the lake and includes the active volcano, Tongariro, and the snow-covered Ruapehu. A family of Saints, residing at the base of Tongariro, hospitably entertained the Elders during their stay. The volcanic mountain is continually emitting dense volumes of steam and sulphurous smoke, and to lose feet above sea level. Ruapehu, with its snow-crowned summit, is 9,175 feet high and is very similar to many of the Wasatch peaks.

Climbing Mount Tongariro is no easy task. For many years it was considered an impossible feat, but of late years has often been visited. Utah boys are not easily discouraged, so the task was undertaken. Horses were tied until it was no longer safe to ride them, and the venturesome travelers then secured staffs, and, pleasing the animals, continued their journey. An immense extinct volcano about a mile and a half wide was crossed with difficulty. The bottom was very jagged and had the appearance of boiling lava which had suddenly cooled, leaving huge waves of rock. The precipitous sides of the mountain are difficult to climb, as the loose ashes prevent a firm footing. Every few minutes a rest was necessary, and as the summit was neared, a rest was required every few steps. The sulphurous smoke convulsed the sweetrick travelers, and bit the crater from them. However, a good view was obtained of the active crater later. The whole summit of the mountain, at one time, had evidently been an immense crater, six hundred feet across. Several smaller craters may now be seen within this but only one is active, and that is about seventy-five feet across. Dense volumes of sulphurous gases are belched forth, and at times hot rocks are hurled forth with greater force.

From the summit an extensive view is obtained of the surrounding country. Mount Egmont, nearly 100 miles distant, is clearly discernible in the west, and the faint outline of the ocean north and east can be seen, while the romantic and rugged scenery of New Zealand's "Wonderland" is in the foreground.

At the foot of Tongariro the Elders separable to seek their respective fields of labor and to continue their efforts to spread the Gospel of Christ.

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