

Prehistoric Maori Fortifications in the North Island of New Zealand. By Aileen Fox. Longman Paul, Auckland, 1976. 74 pp. N.Z. price: \$4.50, paperback.

PROFESSIONAL archaeological techniques were first applied in New Zealand by Jack Golson some twenty years ago. Despite the considerable amount of careful excavation and systematic survey that has been carried out since then, much of the information and many of the wider problems revealed by this work remain unknown outside the world of the active practitioners. To some extent, the fault lies with them: field reports — if written up at all — remain mostly in an interim form, intelligible only to the initiated. Even academic articles are few and far between. Discussion (often very provocative) and knowledge of New Zealand prehistory is mostly passed on in the form of 'oral tradition'. Aileen Fox's little book on the Maori fortifications therefore fills a conspicuous gap: it is a lucid introductory survey of the dominant prehistoric sites in the land. Based on both field work and historical documentation, it indicates what can be done. One hopes that this beginning will soon be expanded upon by others.

Lady Fox had a year at her disposal in which to tackle some of the published primary material of early New Zealand history. She also carried out her own excavations at Te Awanga pa at Hawke's Bay. The result is a functional analysis of the pa structures, both as defence systems and as residential units. The evidence — archaeological and descriptive — reveals a high degree of community organization and recognizable group leadership. The early nineteenth-century visitors had no difficulties in identifying the major chiefs of the communities which they visited, even though commentators like Augustus Earle (1827–28) also added that each free man considered himself equal with another and was independent in his own family. The construction of the pa often reveal internal residential divisions demarcated by palisades and sometimes separate food storage systems, both suggestive of distinctive *whanau* groupings within the larger community which had co-operated to build the pa. A hierarchical social structure is certainly suggested, however challengeable by skill the position of the higher chiefs may well have been.

Aileen Fox adds an unusual dimension to her discussion by drawing on her considerable knowledge of the Celtic Iron Age hill forts of England. The comparison is primarily useful in revealing differences: Maori fortifications evolved locally (unlike the Celtic) and therefore give indications of the indigenous conventions developed in warfare. Many pa are defensible only from a frontal attack, presumably the traditional 'norm' of action. However, in Taranaki and parts of the west coast other styles of fortification designed to cope with an enveloping attack are also to be found. These, the 'ring-ditch' pa, imply the growth of more sophisticated war techniques and, presumably, leadership in some areas. A high degree of uniformity of house types in the Maori pa is another contrasting aspect with the Celtic communities. Similarities of house style were due to the absence of contact with other cultures, unlike the Celts. The physical location of the Maori pa, when systematically analyzed, reveals their function: the defence of the primary economic resources of the local communities. The coastal and riverine distribution pattern of the pa is very conspicuous. Warfare in Maori society over access to the valued sources of food — water, and good kumara crop land in particular — engendered, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the local development of fortress building, the consequence of population pressure on the more desirable and accessible

resources. By the end of the eighteenth century some four to five thousand pa had been built in the North Island. Not all of these were then occupied. Archaeological excavations have revealed the practice of abandoning pa and the rebuilding of new sites, often close to the older ones. Military defeat and the diminution of power associated with the old site, and perhaps the former leadership, is presumably the explanation for this recurring practice.

The book pretends to be no more than a beginning and it serves this purpose well. The text and illustrations ably support and illuminate each other. It is marred somewhat, however, by carelessness with quotations (several of which are rough paraphrases, in actuality), inaccuracies with some of the bibliographic references, and on one occasion (p. 47) a place name: Motiti island is the correct form. Some tidying up from the oral form in which these chapters were first presented (as the 1974 Macmillan Brown lectures at Auckland University) it seems should have been observed more carefully. But *Prehistoric Maori Fortifications* makes available to a wider audience some of the ideas and problems of the current state of archaeological research on the major military, residential, and economic unit of Maori society.

JUDITH BINNEY

University of Auckland

Ernest Dieffenbach — Rebel and Humanist. By Gerda Elizabeth Bell. The Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1976. 165 pp. N.Z. price: \$10.75.

Dieffenbach's *Travels in New Zealand* has long been recognized as a most perceptive commentary on the New Zealand scene in the early 1840s. In this short biography Dr Bell sets the author in his European context, thus giving an added breadth and value to his observations on New Zealand. But the man himself she has not been able to bring to life. Partly this is due to her rather awkward style, which at times reads more like draft notes than a finished narrative, but it is partly also the fault of her subject. Ernest Dieffenbach gave little of himself away, even in letters to his family — if one may judge from the translation of a couple published in 'a rather obscure place; the *Intelligenzblatt für die Provinz Oberhessen im allgemeinen, den Kreis Frieberg und die angrenzenden Bezirke im besonderen*', Friedberg, November 1840.

As the above-quoted source note indicates, Dr Bell's research into Dieffenbach's European background has been exhaustive and a considerable amount of information has been unearthed about this young German political refugee who became the New Zealand Company's naturalist. Yet the main conclusion to be drawn from all the new material is that Dieffenbach's New Zealand mission was the high point of his career. This biography, in consequence, will chiefly interest New Zealand readers, for whom rather more searching and checking of the New Zealand content of the book would have been an advantage. One wonders, too, whether an article by Dieffenbach, published in a German periodical in 1846 and described by Dr Bell as 'a short and provocative history of the rise and fall of the New Zealand Company' might not have been worth a translation in full, as an appendix.

R. M. ROSS

University of Auckland