

Wings of the Nation: A History of the New Zealand National Airways Corporation, 1947–1978. By Peter Aimer. The Bush Press, Takapuna, 2000, 288 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 0-908608-86-1.

SPANZ: South Pacific Airlines of New Zealand and their DC-3 Viewmasters. By Richard Waugh and Peter Layne. Richard J. Waugh/Project SPANZ Committee, Auckland, 2000. NZ price: \$45.95. ISBN 0-473-07183-5.

IN A COUNTRY consisting of long, narrow and mountainous islands, aviation would be expected to play an essential role in communication, and these two books are valuable contributions to aviation history. NAC was established as a state monopoly by the Labour government in 1947 for excellent reasons, above all that a comprehensive network would mean a slow start to profitability and that private enterprise would be virtually certain to cherry-pick the lucrative trunk routes, leaving provincial connections to languish. NAC was thus an instrument of national development, and Peter Aimer's lucid, engaging and well-written account shows why it was that working for the state corporation was regarded as a matter of pride by staff.

High initial costs made NAC vulnerable to National Party privatization rhetoric, and Aimer carefully traces the reconciliation of the Holland cabinet to this prototypical state-owned enterprise. Not least was the fact that provincial conservatives quickly came to depend on air connections, but the advantages of air were also demonstrated during the waterfront lockout in 1951; 'perhaps the watersiders were unwittingly the saviours of NAC' (p.58).

Aimer knows his aircraft. NAC inherited a range of types and the variation in provincial airfield quality meant further diversity was necessary. For all that, the legendary DC-3 came to dominate through the 1950s and was pre-eminent in the development of civil aviation in New Zealand, as elsewhere. NAC retired its last DC-3 in 1974, by which time the Vickers Viscount had served as the transitional aircraft between the DC-3 and the Boeing 737. NAC executives had to fight extremely hard to secure the Boeing, for there was a sustained political campaign in favour of the British-built BAC 1-11. Aimer's account of the manoeuvring is meticulous, and the ultimate vindication is that the 737 is still in production. Similar political concerns intruded in the airline's fight to secure the elegant Fokker Friendship.

Aimer gives an excellent account of NAC's relationship with other operators, which were given free rein as long as NAC's position was maintained and safety standards were met. The longest relationship was with Mt Cook Airlines, with NAC willing to sell surplus DC-3 aircraft to the smaller airline. As the 1970s began, Mt Cook began to play Air New Zealand and NAC off against each other. The situation was resolved by mutual shareholdings in the mid-1970s, but the Muldoon government, with its centre of gravity in Auckland, was all too willing to listen to Air New Zealand's arguments that it should take the domestic carrier over.

One of these smaller airlines is the subject of Richard Waugh and Peter Layne's book. South Pacific Airlines was initiated by two NAC captains who sought to give tourists frequent and convenient connections with scenic resorts. There was considerable support among provincial investors although a substantial shareholding by Ansett was critical in the airline's launch in 1960, using DC-3 aircraft modified with large windows.

This is a work of considerable detail on both aircraft and company structure, copiously and attractively illustrated and thoroughly researched; at the same time it is animated by a considerable anti-NAC animus. In fact the Air Services Licensing Authority was sympathetic and cut SPANZ a fair bit of slack. Episodes which the authors characterize as exemplifying SPANZ's can-do attitude might seem to other readers as demonstrating a lack of due concern for safety.

SPANZ's real problem was exactly that which has bedevilled other operators of a second national airline. It simply does not pay. SPANZ lost £30,000 in its first year, laid half the staff off, got a government loan, lost £80,000 in 1962, £40,000 in 1963, and £78,000 in 1964. By 1965 it owed the government £85,000 and then expected the government to underwrite or guarantee £600,000 for new aircraft, or else give a subsidy of £60,000 pa. When the company went into receivership in November 1965 its total loss was £382,086, of which £225,000 was unsecured. The constant pleas for government assistance cause a sceptic to suggest that SPANZ merely wished to socialize the risks and privatize the profits. There is a telling point buried in a sidebar (p.106): Mt Cook was able to capitalize on its sole New Zealand owned status compared to SPANZ's tie-up with Ansett; 'how differently it might have been if SPANZ and Mount Cook had co-operated in a joint effort to develop the fledgling tourist industry'. Indeed.

JIM MCALOON

Lincoln University

Nature, Culture and History: The 'Knowing' of Oceania. By K.R. Howe. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2000. 121 pp. US price: \$17.95. ISBN 0-8248-2329-X.

'TELL ME WHERE is fancy bred/In the heart or in the head?' Glossing 'fancy' as 'knowledge', the question raised in Shakespeare's couplet raises large philosophical issues. It points to the ineluctable tension between Idealism and Positivism. It also pertains to whatever it is that constitutes, or what might be accepted as, or what may pass for 'History'. How far, if at all, does the purported object of knowledge have an essence and/or an existence independent of that conferred by someone who chooses to observe it or to comment on it? Is it (following Berkeley) that being is only in the eye of the beholder, or (following Kant) that the historian converts the noumena of human activity into phenomena that are merely vague reflections of more substantial but intrinsically unknowable realities? Such issues, central to the classical discussion of 'the problem of knowledge', provide the context within which Kerry Howe sets an erudite, balanced and wide-ranging discussion of Pacific history.

A short book, but one repaying (indeed, requiring) several close readings, *Nature, Culture and History* is a *tour de force*. It is a lightly reworked version of the Macmillan Brown lectures that Howe gave at Massey University in 1997. The title indicates the themes of the three lectures/chapters. They analyse and trace the development of the main explanatory concepts and processes that have been used by Europeans to fathom the pasts of the Pacific.

In the first chapter Howe considers the ways in which the Pacific, especially Polynesia, has been formatted and formulated to suit changing European pre-conceptions and requirements. The earliest and most enduring characterization of it has been that of an earthly paradise. That is a notion with deep roots in Western cultural memory and one which had come to be associated with islands at least since the time of Columbus. That is, well before the navigators encountered — and romanticized — Tahiti in the late eighteenth century. But in the nineteenth century nature, that is, the primal state of things, commonly began to be seen as less benign. The islanders needed to be converted to Christianity, and lotus-eating white men were likely to 'go native'. The father of anthropology, Malinowski, even borrowed the words of Conrad's Kurtz to express his impatience with his hosts: 'exterminate the brutes'. Then, during the twentieth century, the Pacific steadily became re-romanticized, ultimately becoming a tourist 'paradise'.

Conversely, in the second chapter Howe explores the idea that 'culture' or human contrivance is conditional upon underlying 'nature'. J.R. Forster, the naturalist on Cook's