

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The claim has wide implications. Forests and freshwater fisheries were harvested by hapu in year-round succession. Schools of migrating eels and lampreys passed through massive weirs built to withstand river floods. Rats following ridge-line tracks fell into pit-fall traps. Birds were snared as they flocked to crops of ripe berries. Edible ferns were husbanded by rotational gathering. Thus, in 1840, hapu had a body of knowledge and skills that enabled them to celebrate life with the surplus abundance they harvested from the indigenous forests and fisheries. With colonisation, resources that hapu had valued for their particular natural abundance were not reserved; forested lands were confiscated, cleared, and replanted in pasture grasses; timber on Maori land was cut illegally; forests were fragmented and died back; wetlands were drained; introduced animals destroyed forest regeneration and preyed on wildlife; introduced fish occupied the territory of native fish; introduced plants occupied the habitats of indigenous plants; milling, mining, forestry, and factory effluents poisoned waterways; acclimatisation societies ran campaigns of extermination against native wildlife. In large part, the economy introduced by settlers burnt, destroyed, and replaced the indigenous flora and fauna.

The loss of whenua through confiscations, denial of promised reserves, miscalculation of boundaries, debtor sales, and willing participation in a global economy, has been researched as a loss of agricultural soils, settlements, and burial grounds. But the loss of whenua is much greater than this. It is also a loss of forests and fisheries which were husbanded by Maori as an independent, self-sustaining, debt-free economy; as the source of festivals, wealth, and curative medicines; as the inspiration of trapping techniques, technical vocabulary, songs, and narratives; as the realm of ancestors and spiritual wellbeing. Through loss of flora and fauna the hapu lost a self-sustaining economic base and its harvestable abundance, trapping techniques and knowledge-base; with legislation against healers went loss of medical practices and loss of wellbeing; with disparagement of Maori classification of the flora and fauna went exclusion of much Maori knowledge from research and development funding, from schools of biological and physical sciences, and from resource management policy.

Maori are striving to participate in the national economy and to modify it so that it sustains the wellbeing of the indigenous people; and at the same time to repossess and restore some part of their whenua. Through this claim Maori are seeking to regain the prosperous duality of skills and resources they had achieved in 1840.

