

Alpine Landscapes in New Zealand and Europe

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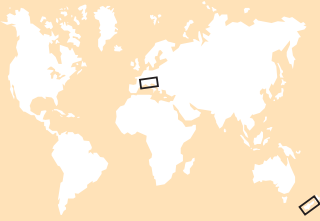
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Two Variations on One Mountain Theme

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Based on inventories of similarities and differences, a comparative approach to high mountains can yield surprising insights that highlight which aspects are unique in both cases and make “old things look new.” Insights are determined by the parameters of comparison. In this issue, the raw geographical elements of both high mountain areas have been the points of departure of the articles in the Development as well as the Research sections. Both highland areas cover more than 100,000 km², a daunting area

for comparative research. As a result, the authors often relied on case studies, choosing representative or especially interesting examples to illustrate general hypotheses. Even if the terms Alps and alpine have a European origin, the Old World does not necessarily set the standard of a comparative approach. Findings in the Southern Hemisphere complement findings in the Northern Hemisphere and vice versa; often the results of research show that nothing can be taken for granted.

A comparative overview

As the articles in this issue were slowly coming together, we realized that much more could be compared in the 2 alpine regions. One aspect in particular remains to be presented: the indigenous view of Ka Tiritiri o te Moana (the Maori name for the Southern Alps). The importance of the 1997 Ngai Tahu Settlement is briefly evoked in the articles by Swaffield and Hughey as well as by Booth and Cullen. The basic parameters of comparison are presented in the table below.

Each article points out physical similarities between both alpine environments. But there are major differences in all aspects covered in this issue: the emergence of both mountain chains in geological time and their geomorphological transformation (Fitzsimmons and Veit),

weather and climate patterns (Sturman and Wanner), and hydrological phenomena (Weingartner and Pearson). The greatest differences of all can be found in the whole set of human characteristics, including the early history and discovery (Pawson and Egli), and in the evolution of forests (Holland and Germann).

Development and management of high country in the affluent societies found in these alpine areas are controlled by diverse approaches (Swaffield and Hughey, Wyder), involving an economic focus on recreation and tourism management (Booth and Cullen), which is currently being reconsidered in the light of global climate change (Elsasser and Messerli). This has led to rather different human landscapes in similar physical settings (Jeanneret).

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François Jeanneret is a lecturer at the French-language Teacher Training College at the University of Berne. His teaching areas are physical and regional geography, landscape geography and geoecology. He took up the idea of comparative landscape geography in alpine areas in the early 1970s and is the author of a number of publications in this field.

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	Ka Tiritiri o te Moana/ Southern Alps of NZ	European Alps (7 countries)	Similarities and differences
Latitude	41°–46° S	44°–46° N	Comparable but in opposite hemispheres
Situation	Insular (South Pacific Ocean)	Continental (crowded European continent)	Very obvious physical differences
Area	110,000 km ²	180,000 km ²	Fairly similar
Highest peaks	3754 m (Aorangi/Mount Cook)	4808 m (Mont Blanc)	More similar than might be expected despite the altitudinal difference of 1000 m
Population	0.1 million	12 million	Major difference; source of difficulty in comparing development issues

FIGURES 1A AND B
Geographical overview of the
European Alps and the
Southern Alps of New Zealand.
(Maps by Andreas Brodbeck)

