

EKKELAND GOETZE

Short report on the Maori project and the trip to Aotearoa

I arrived in Auckland at the end of March 1996. At first I tried to renew the contacts I had made from Germany in order to establish relations with the Maori as quickly as possible. This proved very quickly to be unrealistic. Appointments were cancelled, planned contacts came to nothing. My participation in the Maori Arts festival in Napier which had determined the timing of my trip was impossible because it was cancelled, something I only learned after my arrival. A bad dose of the flu during my first week in Wellington prevented me from doing anything; I was quite desperate.

After one and half weeks I set off for the South Island in a rental car in the hope that Rangi Tinirau, a Maori living at Franz Josef Glacier (he was an Ariki - the first born of a chiefly family) would be able to help me.

I wanted to take the route over the passes of the Southern Alps in order to obtain at the end a geographically representative image of the island. Taking the Lewis and the Arthur's pass I reached the West Coast. At Franz Josef Glacier, New Zealand's longest glacier which originates in Mt. Cook (Aorangi), the highest mountain in Aotearoa, I was able to meet Rangi. He was enthusiastic about my terragraphics and the Maori project. He explained to me the significance of the mountain passes which were the ancient paths of the Maori to collect Pounamu (greenstone or jade). This stone is only found in one small area of the West Coast and served to make tools, jewelry and weapons. He himself, an 'immigrant' from the North Island without rights to this area, arranged a meeting with the Bruce Bay people, the local Maori. They gave me permission for EARTHgathering but did not provide me with any additional information or stories which might have led me to special places of the Maori. A discussion arose on different aspects of my project from the point of view of a Maori group. In the following days a journalist from Northern Germany was brought in to over-come the language barrier. He remained sceptical about my work and strongly advised me to give up the project or to change my plans.

The unique landscape alone kept my spirits up. I only wanted now to complete the Greenstone path project with EARTH from Harper's pass, and then try my luck in the North Island. Harper's pass is the shortest route to the West Coast and had been used by the Maori for centuries. Today a walking track leads across the pass. The rivers which were running high at the end of summer made crossings impossible so that I had to approach the pass from two sides. The bad condition of my feet forced me to abandon the crossing two hours short of the pass and I was lucky to get out of the isolated area safely. This point in the network of Pounamu tracks is missing.

Chance or good fortune decided that the research of a man from Berlin whom I met in the last hut of the track and who has been living on this side of the earth for the past 30 years produced astounding results: the EARTH samples gathered during the first days in the South Island fitted perfectly to this path. With 26 EARTH samples the South Island part 'TE ARA POUNAMU' (The Pathway to Greenstone) of the Maori project was complete.

With the benefit of the experience gathered in the South Island, I redefined the project. Nelson Wattie translated the new plan and provided me with large number of copies. Sylvia Kaa, a German linguist, who is married to a Maori, gave me after initial scepticism valuable tips and the advice to be careful. With a load of paper and printing equipment I left Wellington for the north.

Once again chance decided that that in Ashhurst I should meet John Bevan Ford, a well known Maori artist. He was so rapt with my Terragraphics and enthused about my project that we simply ignored the language problem and became involved in an intense conversation. I was able to correct and expand my book knowledge. Via him and his art I was able to gain access to the meaning, complexity and depth of Maori art which is so intimately connected with Maori mythology and philosophy. Two days later, after consultation with his Kaumatua (elder), we went together to the Manawatu river, collected EARTH and he told me several stories about this place, more than I had ever hoped for.

With a packet of contact addresses I continued north.

In Rotorua, the geothermally and unfortunately touristically most active area of Aotearoa, I met Christian Kirchof, who was studying at the local Polytechnic. He told his tutors about my concept and showed them some examples of my work. I was asked to hold a lecture at the art department. On the day of the event Christian, who was supposed to translate, was not to be found anywhere so that I had to 'perform' the lecture in English with the help of slides. The resonance was overwhelming and had consequences: the Polytech organized and paid for a trip in a four-wheel-drive vehicle to Mt. Tarawera, a volcano that had erupted one hundred and ten years ago with frightful results. I also obtained the requisite permission to gather EARTH. Tina Wirihana made with me in her class for flax-weaving flax paper for my projected book. Emily Rangitiaria Schuster, the head of the New Zealand Maori Arts and Crafts Institute, gave me permission to gather EARTH in the thermal area of Whakarewarewa and accompanied me. Fortunately, the idea was born to bind my book RUAUMOKO in the Polytechnic with a cover made of woven flax. This is planned for the coming year. In the meantime I have received confirmation that Hone Tuwhare, a well known and important Maori poet, will provide poems for the book. An exhibition in the Rotorua museum is under discussion.

Now overjoyed I travelled via the Coromandel peninsula and Auckland northwards to the Bay of Islands. There Peter Kraus, a German resident in New Zealand, generously provided me with accommodation and a huge garage in spectacular surroundings. I set up a temporary printing work-shop and began with the printing.

I then went to Dargaville on the West Coast of the North Island, where Colleen Ulrich and Manos Nathan, two Maori artists, who had heard about my work from John Bevan Smith, were expecting me. We immediately established a good rapport. Manos, who is active in the land rights movement, had no time over the next few days, so we immediately set off to the Waipoua forest. Here, where there are 2000 year-old Kauri trees with a circumference of more than 25 meters, we gathered EARTH together. The third part of the Aotearoa project, KOKOWAI, the sacred red of the Maori, was now reality.

The final part of the journey led me to Cape Reinga, where the souls of the Maori descend into the sea down a Pohutukawa tree on their way to Hawaiki, their mythical island of origin.

52 EARTH samples were collected altogether. All terragraphics have been printed in the size 39 x 39 or 27 x 27 cm and in an edition of 5 or 3 copies respectively. The No. 1/x was given back to the Maori tribe where the samples had been collected.

Munich, June 1996

In 1997 I returned to Aotearoa for a second time. On the East and West coasts of WAIPOUNAMU, as the Ngai Tahu call their land, the South Island of New Zealand, I collected MAUKOROA. This is the name given there to the sacred red EARTH. With this addition the work KOKOWAI now consists of ten parts and represents the North and South island.

In Rotorua I set up an exhibition of my Aotearoa project. With the help of Tina Wirihana I completed the RUAUMOKO book. She wove with her people the flax cover in the form of a Maori cloak. Copy No.1 of the book I presented to the TE ARAWA on the opening of the exhibition in the Rotorua Museum of Art and History.

Munich, July 1997