This is a landmark publication in New Zealand’s developing historiography of ethnicity among the Pacific nation’s settler population. Drawing on a seven-year research project underwritten by the Royal Society of New Zealand’s Marsden Fund, the book is a multi-authored account of its major findings. This heavyweight research component marks the work off from most previous attempts to investigate the ethnic dimensions of New Zealand’s history, with only Donald Harman Akenson’s trailblazing investigation of the Irish group *Half the World From Home* (Wellington: V.U.P., 1990) as a point of comparison. That work set out to explore the Irish dimension of New Zealand settlement, and stimulated a tranche of articles, books and conference papers on the same trail. This book is something of a delayed counterblast, restating the significance of the Scots while critiquing James Belich’s assertion that New Zealand constitutes “the neo-Scotland” among New World societies (*Paradise Reforged*, Auckland: Penguin, 2001, p. 221).

It is thus surprising how little use is made of the recent work on New Zealand’s Irish group for comparative purposes. Though key texts are listed in the extensive bibliography, one searches the footnotes in vain for any reference to Akenson’s data or to case studies of Irish experiences, such as Lyndon Fraser’s fine-grained analyses of Irish ethnic identity formation in Christchurch or on the West Coast. Perhaps the lines of enquiry simply have not matched up sufficiently. Comparison is instead made to the Scottish element in other diasporic destinations, reflecting the fruits of collaboration with Aberdeen’s Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies in particular, and wistfully awaiting “fuller investigation of the English migrants” to enable comparison with New Zealand’s dominant settler group (p. 256). Arguably, however, the Irish provide a closer match to the Scots in terms of
population numbers, and their contrasting experiences in the colony seem at least as worthy of comparative interest.

This is true at least in every part of the country other than the Irish concentration on the South Island’s West Coast and the Scots’ preponderance in Otago and Southland. Herein lies another surprise in this study: its determination to knock down the straw man of Otago (and Southland) as an overwhelmingly Scottish zone of settlement. This is foreshadowed in the introduction with the statement that “the Scots were never as dominant in the south as has been frequently suggested” (p. 14). Chapter 3 sheets the ‘suggestion’ back to the two most popular general histories of New Zealand by Keith Sinclair (*A History of New Zealand*, rev. ed. Auckland: Penguin, 2000) and Michael King (*The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Auckland: Penguin, 2003) and argues that “the perception that New Zealand’s Scots ‘all went to Dunedin’ persists,” although neither King, Sinclair nor any other historian makes any such claim (p. 56). The detailed and very useful analysis of the distribution of the Scottish-born that follows merely confirms “Scots’ continued predisposition to live in the lower South Island into the early twentieth century” (p. 66).

The same determination to look beyond Otago is evident in Tanja Bueltman’s analysis of Scottish associational culture in New Zealand (Chapter 7). The weight of her evidence, however, is strongly tilted southwards. She stretches the bounds of geography somewhat in claiming evidence for the popularity of Caledonian Games in centres “spread throughout New Zealand” on the basis of games celebrated “in Invercargill, Dunedin, Oamaru, Timaru and Wellington” in 1878-9 (p. 183). The first three are south of the Waitaki River—the traditional border of the southern Scottish zone—and Timaru is just north of it. Evidence from Dunedin and Otago likewise dominates Brad Patterson’s examination of Scottish cultural transfers in “Hearth and Home” (chapter 8) and “Piety, Leisure and Discourse” (chapter 9). He, at least, is prepared to describe the southern zone unashamedly as “New Zealand’s Scottish heartland” (p. 218).

The overwhelming impression from this study of the Scots in New Zealand is that things are much as we imagined they would be – including the central importance of Otago and Southland as the ‘Scottish heartland’. Jim McAloon’s excellent examination of
the Scots in New Zealand’s economic life (chapter 4) is typical in the way that “if it has reinforced some stereotypes and weakened others, it has also provided a more solid foundation for what has often been unquantifiably asserted” (p. 107). This is perhaps the great virtue of the work, which, if a little underwhelming in terms of new insights or surprising conclusions, provides a solid foundation for further work on both the Scots and other ethnic groups in New Zealand society.

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