

# A Kiwi story told in our own words



Dianne Bardsley

## WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

**T**HE summer holiday feature articles provided by newspapers and other periodicals give us an opportunity to reflect on the distinctiveness and creativity of our New Zealand variety of English as well as reflecting on our national habits and pre-occupations at the close of one year and the beginning of another.

Some features, in providing us with vicarious experiences in out-of-the-way holiday spots, also remind us of the distinctive regional vocabulary within New Zealand.

*The Dominion Post* dealt with our appetite to follow the lives of others with the series *A Summer's Day in the Life of*. On January 3, we find a new usage from the working world of Cook Strait ferry stewards in the acronym "wono" — the crew member who walks on to the ship at the beginning of each day and walks off it again in the evening, rather than serving a week-on, week-off roster and living on board ship.

On December 29, *The Dominion Post's* Lester Thorley uses several piscatorial terms, including "fisho" for fisher, and the names of indigenous fish that would be foreign to fishes beyond our waters.

Heien Bahr on January 2 gives the history of the tree known as the Greytown gum and in the *They Said it column* of the same issue, Bill Manhire is cited as saying, "New Zealand's best words are there on the racing page; much of the nation's most strenuous creative endeavour has gone into the task of naming horses."

Over the page, on *A Summer's Day in the Life of a Te Papa greeter*, we learn, to our surprise perhaps, that among the 80 hosts at Te Papa, there are 25 different languages spoken.

In *The Sunday Star-Times* (December 30), Roy Colbert describes his holiday experiences in the traditional family crib, with the traditional long drop, and John McCrystal (*The Dominion Post*, January 1) also uses the term "crib" in his travel article on Southland's Riverton, where we encounter the term "bush saw". John also familiarises us with the Southland surfing location known as "The Portledge".

It's no bach or crib that Jane Tolerton inhabits, running a unique Wellington Booklovers Bed and Breakfast in which she tells us in one of a series of articles, "Tourists fall on locals with glee, They like to hear their accents, and find out about pronunciation".

(*The Dominion Post*, December 26).

The West Coast seems to have its share of visiting columnists during the holiday period. Hugh Creasy (*The Dominion Post*, January 5) in his description of the range of scenery of the coast refers to hakihi country, land that is semi-swamp formed by an imperious subsoil iron pan. Joanne Black in *The Listener* of January 12 describes her holiday in the West Coast's historic Charleston, using terms such as "pattit" and "Coaster", and reminds us that the term "Coaster" has a specific self-initiated connotation of separate-

ness. "Pattit" is a term borrowed in colonial times for indigenous tussock grasses, and its name is not widely known to North Islanders.

We have had more time to scan the family notices, noting the increasing use of "cuzzy"/"cuzzie", "cuzzy bro" and "whangai", which are distinctive to our shores and indicate changing cultural scripts in the announcement of births, deaths and marriages.

One hundred years earlier, we would have read of the death of a relict (widow) who could possibly have "died on the 29th December ultimo", and we would be invited to "respectfully follow the remains to the cemetery". Not so, today.

*New Zealand Geographic* January-February 2008 includes letters and articles that contain the unmistakably New Zealand locution names of "Duck Creek", "Mutton Flat", "Windy Ridge", "Freshwater River", "Sinbad Gully", "Codfish Island" (Whenua Hou) and a description of New Zealand.

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land as a "moa's ark". A book reviewer describes herself as a "mainlander", a term with a specific meaning to New Zealanders, and reminds us that the kea and the rock wren are the only birds that now inhabit the alpine zone of the Southern Alps.

Last, but not least, we also read about two Kiwi institutions — tramping and the inevitable accompaniment of scroggin in a review (*Sunday Star-Times*, December 2) of a new handbook entitled *Don't Forget Your Scroggin*.

Given that we don't always have the time to appreciate the distinctiveness of our language variety, we must be grateful that our papers and periodicals have included local material for recreational summer reading.

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