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Karen M. Morin, Bucknell University
R. Longhurst
L. Johnston

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(Troubling) spaces of mountains and men: New Zealand’s Mount Cook and Hermitage Lodge

Karen M. Morin,1 Robyn Longhurst2 & Lynda Johnston3
1Department of Geography, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837, USA; 2Department of Geography, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand; 3Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, Drummond Street, Edinburgh EH8 9XP, UK

In this paper we trace one pervasive expression of hegemonic New Zealand national identity that developed around the sport of mountaineering from the 1880s, culminating in Sir Edmund Hillary’s historic first climb of Mount Everest in 1953. The image of the masculine mountaineering hero, developed on and around New Zealand’s highest peak, Mount Cook, is, however, inherently unstable, and we focus on two sites of potential disruption. First, we examine the experiences of white mountaineering women on Mount Cook. These women both embraced the masculinist identity of hero and destabilized it. Women’s mountaineering points to the active and complex construction (rather than simple reproduction) of imperialisms, nationalisms and masculinities. Second, we examine the role played by the Hermitage Lodge situated at the base of Mount Cook. Narratives about mountaineering too often ignore the huts, lodges, the places of staying behind. The roles performed by women (and some men) who never had the opportunity and/or the desire to climb but instead ‘kept the home fires burning’ and supported the efforts of others can be examined as a way of productively challenging the entrenchment of national identity around the masculine mountaineering hero.

Key words: New Zealand, mountaineering, gender, nationalism

Introduction

‘Sport is a central fact of New Zealand life’ (Fougeré 1989: 110). As Crawford states, sport forges national pride and is often considered ‘the most valued form of cultural achievement’ in the country (Crawford 1987: 161; see also MacClancy 1996). A similar argument is made in the New Zealand Official 1996 Year Book (1996: 269):

Sport, fitness and leisure have played an important part in creating and shaping New Zealand’s national image, both at home and abroad, and contribute much to the lifestyle New Zealanders enjoy. In New Zealand there is the potential for everyone to partici-
part in some form of sport or leisure activity and it is government policy to promote access to it for all New Zealanders.

The image of the adventurous 'kiwi' has long served an important function in the development of a national sense of self. New Zealand's reputation as a country devoted to sport, especially adventure sport, has historic ties to the transplantation of the British explorer tradition in the colony and the 'cultural values of the pioneer settlement' (Bell 1996; Crawford 1987: 161; Phillips 1997). Tourism development and adventure sports have become closely linked in New Zealand, owing to, among others, the spectacular natural landscape and efforts on the part of government and commerce to articulate and exploit it as an appropriate place for participatory, outdoor 'green' activities (Cloke and Perkins 1998; Watson 1993).

In this paper we examine one particular adventure sport, mountaineering, from the 1880s to 1953. From the 1880s onwards a number of 'rugged pioneers' began to explore New Zealand's peaks for recreational purposes. The image of the rugged pioneer crystallized in 1953, when New Zealand beekeeper Edmund Hillary and Nepalese Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, as part of a British climbing team, succeeded in completing the first ascent of the earth's tallest mountain, Mount Everest. Both Hillary and Tenzing became overnight heroes and international celebrities, and Queen Elizabeth II shortly thereafter knighted Hillary (along with other members of the team, excluding Tenzing) for the achievement.

The Everest climb created an upsurge in national pride a home in New Zealand that has remained to the present. One 1996 survey found that Hillary embodied the 'spirit of New Zealand' more than any other individual, and almost five decades later, the Everest climb continues to make national headlines. Moreover, it is not just in New Zealand that Hillary's heroic achievement in mountaineering continues to come into play. At the time of this writing Hillary was also making headlines in Glasgow as he travelled there promoting his book, View from the Summit (1999). A poster produced by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society advertising Hillary's upcoming address proclaimed him as 'one of the 20th century's greatest heroes'.

Hillary's victorious climb managed to crystallize one particular twentieth-century image of the New Zealand archetypal national hero, one which started to take shape as early as the 1880s and which continues to be restaged via association with other national victories and firsts. The New Zealand America's Cup (yacht race) victory in 1995, for instance, was frequently referred to as 'another Everest' by news commentators and politicians (e.g. New Zealand Herald 1995). Hillary-ism permeates a number of political-economic and cultural segments of contemporary life. In 1992, Hillary's portrait replaced Britain's Queen on the five dollar note; the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre of New Zealand is now the largest provider of outdoor education in the country; and, among other institutions named after him (such as the Hillary Commission, see note 1), a recent proposal has been advanced to change the name of the Waikato Polytechnic in Hamilton to the Sir Edmund Hillary Institute of Technology.

Edmund Hillary is only one man, but he has come to represent a much larger hegemonic (national) identity in New Zealand tied to the sport of mountaineering. In this paper we deconstruct the more than half-century long process by which mountaineering assumed this position, and point out the complexities and contradictions inherent in it. To do this we first discuss the relationship between mountaineering and masculinity in New Zealand.
Zealand, arguing that discourses of manly sport, especially mountaineer-as-hero but also ‘rugby bloke’, are important sites of national identity formation. Following this theoretical statement, we examine the primary location where the discourse of mountaineer-as-hero has been produced; that is, around and on New Zealand’s high mountain peaks, and especially its highest (12,349 foot) peak, Mount Cook, located in the ‘Southern Alps’ of the South Island.¹

In the second half of the paper we problematize the stability or endurance of certain kinds of masculinities enacted on Mount Cook. First, we examine some of the ways in which women have entered the national imaginary by participating in mountaineering on Mount Cook. Mountaineering women both embraced the masculinist position of hero as well as destabilized it. Documenting the experiences of women mountaineers such as Freda du Faur, the first woman to reach the summit of Cook (in 1910), is an important intervention into the ways in which women negotiate national identity and belongingness.

The inherent instability and contradictory nature of the nationalistic and masculinist mountaineering discourse become even more clear when one considers a space that often remains invisible at Mount Cook; that is, the Hermitage Lodge at the base of the mountain and the people who worked there. Our mapping of the Hermitage further disrupts the discourse of mountaineer as national hero, illustrating that adventure occupies an ambivalent position between home and away (after Phillips 1997: 89). Narratives about mountaineering (e.g. Monteath 1997) too often ignore the places at the bottom of mountain peaks—the huts, lodges, the base camps and other places of waiting for a break in the weather or of staying behind. Such places are often coded as places of comparative comfort, home and inactivity, and as such, they—and the people associated with them—are identified with femininity and otherness.

Yet places at the bottom of mountains are vital to the success and achievements associated with reaching the top of peaks. We focus on the Hermitage Lodge because it was the principal and earliest guesthouse to be built in the Mount Cook region (erected in 1884), still remaining popular today. Like the narratives of women mountaineers, the Hermitage, materially and discursively, both reasserts and disrupts the national appropriation of the masculine mountaineering hero. Understanding all the spaces of mountaineering—the peaks as well as the lodges and huts—in the popular imagination and experience provides challenging insights into the construction of New Zealand national identity.

Mountaineering’s masculinity

Sport and its representations are situated within a set of intersecting gender, race and class relations in New Zealand. National identity constructed and articulated through sport often bears the markers of hegemonic masculinity (after Connell 1995). Working from a Gramscian notion of hegemony, Connell argues that not only are multiple masculinities present in any given space-time, but that certain of them become dominant and exalted over others (1995: 76–81). In turn, this hegemonic subjectivity becomes implicated in an ideological process of forming what Benedict Anderson (1983) has famously called ‘imagined communities’, which claim to represent an entire polity but which actually represent only a small minority. Drawing on the work of Blaut (1986) and Zelinsky (1986), Berg and Kearns (1996: 100) explain the connection between New Zealand’s hegemonic masculinity and nationalism this
way: ‘Nationalism results from a complex configuration of emotions, beliefs, and attitudes rooted in the perception of singular cultural attributes, myths, and traditions, leading to a belief in a “national community”.’

Phillips (1996), in one of the first comprehensive attempts to discuss New Zealand’s hegemonic masculinity, describes an historically strong societal prescription for men to be practical, tough and unemotional, to play rugby, drink beer, and be loyal providers to wives and children. Similar to processes that took place in England, Wales and South Africa (see Nauright and Chandler 1996), rugby historically fulfilled two important desires for New Zealand men. First, it fulfilled the desire ‘to preserve muscular virtues of the frontier against a feared urban decadence’, and second it fulfilled the desire to ‘discipline that masculine spirit and contain it within respectable boundaries’ (Phillips 1996: 70). By 1905, rugby had become recognised as the finest training of Anglo-Saxon manhood, the fulfillment of its English public school origins. It had become a ritualised activity in which boys could learn physical courage and heroism, engage in violent combat, and yet the violence was kept within bounds—it could be stopped at the blow of a whistle. (Phillips 1980: 231, see also Phillips 1984)

Others have also foregrounded the Pakeha (white European) ‘kiwi bloke’ and his attraction to the sport of rugby as embodying New Zealand’s hegemonic masculinity in the twentieth century (e.g. see Law, Campbell and Dolan 1999). Hansen (2000: 327) argues, though, that by the mid-twentieth century, a new, more ‘civilized’ model of the kiwi bloke emerged, which heroes like Edmund Hillary embodied: he was ‘tough, resourceful, and self-confident on the mountain and... quiet, modest and well-behaved off it’. Phillips (1996: 264–265) concurs: ‘rugby was not the only sporting triumph of Kiwi manhood’.

[Edmund] Hillary was [also] the perfect expression of New Zealand’s superior Anglo-Saxon manhood. He was tall, immensely strong, fiercely determined, with a long bony face—the picture of colonial honesty... when [the Everest climb] was all over, he remained modest and plain speaking—just an ordinary bloke.

To Hansen (2000: 326–327), the same terms that had previously described New Zealand men returning from war or rugby tours were now applied to mountaineers. Hillary and the archetypal mountaineer that he came to represent thus came to play a significant role in the construction of national identity in New Zealand, suggesting that multiple masculine hegemonies can serve this end simultaneously. Like rugby, mountaineering allowed men to display their physical strength, endurance and bravery, but in a way that was not considered bestial or displaying ‘lairdrkinism’ (behavior which is associated with ‘hoodlums’ and ‘hooligans’).

From the early twentieth century mountaineering was considered a sport that could build ‘character’ in men; it built inner strength and self-discipline, while also keeping men from becoming effeminate and soft as a result of urban living. Mountaineering was and is widely considered to be a ‘high performance’ sport requiring a highly disciplined mind and body—mountaineers are youthful, determined, and in control of a fit, lithe and muscular body. This is especially the case when mountaineering is carried out in the Mount Cook region, known to pose many psychological and technical challenges, even in comparison to the Swiss Alps (Bonington 1996).

Ian Harris (1995: 23) discusses the masculinist values associated with mountaineering. Ma-
cho bravado is constantly valorized in discourses surrounding mountaineering where daring is one of the 'key messages of masculinity—men are adventurous and daring. They take risks and have adventures'. Part of mountaineering's masculinist tradition is the 'conquest' of mountain summits and competitiveness in terms of the high social value placed on first ascents. Aligned with most histories and historical geographies of adventure and exploration, narratives of mountaineering focus on new routes, first ascents and the glories of reaching the summit (Atiken 1988; Mazel 1994; Monteath 1997; Pascoe 1958). Men, and sometimes women—who can also inhabit a hegemonic masculine subject position (see Berg and Kearns 1996)—recount stories of physical hardship and endurance, of 'piercing the clouds' (Haynes 1994) and overcoming the challenges presented by the almighty peaks. One notorious story that circulated after the Everest climb described the different ways in which Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay 'conquered' the summit. As Hansen (1999: 229) tells it,

On the summit Tensing buried an offering to the gods in the snow and thanked the mountain in prayer: 'I am grateful, Chomolungma'. Hillary took photographs, urinated onto the peak and told another climber, 'We knocked the bastard off'.

Both men's and women's mountaineering in New Zealand also follows a highly racialized discourse of mountaineering as a white adventure sport, and thus a white nationalism emerges from it. Several contradictions are at play within New Zealand's 'racial' narratives. National identity claims have been made by European colonizing settlers (Pakeha) in an attempt to seek cultural and political independence from the old roots of the British Empire (Jaber 1998). New Zealand has also formally taken a bicultural turn, however, and is shaped by the interpretations of the Treaty of Waitangi. Biculturalism recognizes the legitimacy of two peoples: colonizing Pakeha and colonized indigenous Maori (Spoonley 1995). Cultural expressions of nationalism link these groups through difference—Pakeha/Maori—rather than similarity. Not only has mountaineering been crucial in the creation of a gendered nationhood, it has also been crucial in the paradoxical formation of a 'postcolonial' Pakeha (white) nation, which both colludes with, and resists, colonialism of the 'Motherland' (Britain).

In no better way is this demonstrated perhaps than in the masculinist and imperialist naming of Mount Cook itself. The mountain is aptly named, in the colonial context, after the famous voyager James Cook, who discovered New Zealand for Britain in 1769. In Maori lore the mountain is named after a legendary navigator, Aorangi, but the name is not used often by Pakeha New Zealanders (see Haynes 1994: 6; also Wilson 1968: 20–27). We use the term 'Mount Cook' to highlight the colonial relations inherent in the sport of mountaineering. Use of the term Aorangi would suggest a far greater recognition of Maori social, economic and political rights than is now the case.6

A number of historians of mountaineering have discussed relationships among Edmund Hillary’s Everest climb and New Zealand nationalism, imperialism and masculinity (Hansen 1997, 1999; Haynes 1994; Langton 1996; Monteath 1997). According to Peter Hansen, for instance, after Everest Hillary 'became an icon of a new national identity in New Zealand' (1999: 211, 229; see also Hansen 1997). Hillary climbed the Himalayan mountain as part of a British team, thus connecting mountaineering with the imperial drama of Britain in South Asia.6 Along with Hansen, Graham Langton (1996: 251–254)
argues that Hillary's climb of Mount Everest not only carried 'imperial tutelage' between Britain and New Zealand and marked New Zealand's entry into world climbing, but also identified mountain climbing with New Zealand's 'developing sense of nationality', and in particular, a 'national manhood'.

Hillary's climb was, and continues to be, claimed as a major victory for all New Zealanders—a nation of sporting enthusiasts—who can aspire to, and bathe in the glory of, his success. It is, however, a particular kind of identity that was (and continues to be) (re)created through mountaineering stories such as Hillary's. References to a sporting nation which assume notions of democracy and universality—'potential for everyone to participate', 'all New Zealanders' (cf. New Zealand Official 1996 Year Book 1996: 269)—believe the gendered (and racialized) history of this construction of national identity. This subject position is not available to everybody. Many women and men, whether by choice or through more pernicious forms of exclusion (the disabled, elderly, lower socio-economic groups) are unable or unwilling to belong to the nation through these narratives of mountains and men.

Anne McClintock (1995: 352) argues that 'all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous'. Typically, nationalist narratives have 'sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope' (Enloe 1989: 44), as do those, we argue, of Mount Cook. Feminist cultural geography critiques of discursive formations of national imaginaries and identities demonstrate the ways in which constructions of nationalism become sites of cultural and political contestation (Jackson and Penrose 1993). While based on assumptions of homogeneity and a sense of oneness with other members of the community, nationalisms are always gendered, racialized, and sexualized in various and powerful ways (Bhabha 1990; McClintock 1995) that work to include some and exclude others, although not in any straightforward way.

This is not to suggest that women have been excluded from this tradition and site of national identity formation. As our discussion below demonstrates, many women mountaineers have both connected with and disrupted the links between mountaineering and nation. And yet, a far more complex issue arises than simply who can or cannot belong to nation identity through mountaineering. Many women participated in national identity formation through other roles that scripted them as feminine, care-taking support to mountaineering conquests. Within discourses of nationalism, women are often configured within the hierarchy of the family trope, especially as biological or social reproducers of nation (McClintock 1995; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). Especially in its emphasis on women's maternal, care-taking role, the latter is important in New Zealand's narrative of nation and mountaineering; as we discuss later, a metaphoric depiction of gender hierarchy as natural and familiar consistently appears in stories of mountaineering at Mount Cook as well as at the Hermitage Lodge (see also Bale and Philo 1998; Birrell and Cole 1994; Hargreaves 1994). Thus our discussion of New Zealand mountaineering must necessarily bring into relief the important function the Hermitage played as Mount Cook's 'other'. We focus attention, therefore, not just on Mount Cook (above) but also on the Hermitage (below).

**New (Ze)land of men and glory**

From the 1860s, surveyors, scientists, miners and other colonials explored the Mount Cook
region, searched for routes and resources, and named the peaks. But it was visits to the glaciers that first initiated alpine sport and tourism in the region. Using Langton’s definition of mountaineering as ‘an attempt to reach a mountain summit’ (1996: 20), the history of Mount Cook as a recreational site begins in 1882, with an attempted (but uncompleted) climb by an Irish clergyman, and the building of the first Hermitage in 1884. Competition to reach the summit of Mount Cook and discover new routes to it flourished among a small, elite group of mountaineers. The early climbers, who were white, mostly ‘genteel’ British travellers, not settlers to the new colony, stimulated strong (counter) waves of patriotism in New Zealand. ‘New Zealanders [were] determined to beat the “foreigners” to climb the major peaks’, asserts McCormack Ross (1989: 8), and the public applauded them when they did so.

The story of the first completed ascent of Mount Cook reads like a competition of manly, national interests and as such expresses the earliest association between a masculine mountaineering identity and nationalism. In 1894 E.A. Fitzgerald, an American living in England, arrived in New Zealand, intent on becoming the first to reach Cook’s summit. However, three New Zealanders who worked as labourers at the Hermitage at the time, George Graham, Jack Clark and Tom Fyfe, quickly responded. As Langton (1996: 114) argues, these men’s expectations ‘embodyed the germ of what might be termed a ... possessive nationalism, a belief that local climbers were worthy of the ultimate physical conquest ... and that they should reap the benefits of the previous pioneering’. The three made the historical first climb to the summit on Christmas Day 1894, before Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald became ‘so disgusted’ that he left New Zealand without even attempting the climb, though Mattias Zurbriggen, his distinguished Swiss-Italian guide who did not have an imperial pride to suffer, stayed on to make the second ascent of the peak in 1895 (Pascoe 1958: 19; Riley 1967: 103).

Helped along by the success of Graham, Clark and Fyfe’s first climb, the first two decades of the twentieth century became the heyday of the ‘guided mountaineer’, modelled after European guided climbing (Langton 1996: 172–203). Young working-class men became the guides/experts on Mount Cook; their labour supported the climbs of a wealthy international class of mountaineering tourists (Riley 1967: 106–107). Guides spoke the same language and broadly shared the same background, if not the same social class, as their clients (unlike other places where class differences were reinforced by linguistic, ethnic, religious or racial differences; see Hansen 1999 and Ortner 1999).”

The building of the Hermitage aided in the guided climbing system that became the norm from 1900 to 1920, especially as it was employees of the Hermitage who enacted the first climbing ‘conquest’ of Mount Cook. With these men as role models, a new emphasis on self-reliant, guideless climbing defined mountaineering on Mount Cook in the inter-war years. Since guideless climbing was much less expensive, many younger and less affluent climbers took up the sport during this period. Despite such new egalitarianism, independence from guides also meant that the physical demands of, for instance, the carrying of heavy packs, led to an emphasis on a male physical culture and ‘male mateship’ on the mountain. Langton (1996: 271) argues that it was during the inter-war years that mountaineering became ‘a national sport’, dominated as it was by a ‘strong, independent, pioneering male’ who was a New Zealander, mountaineering in his own country. Visits by overseas climbers
dropped considerably during the period, largely
due to two wars in Europe.

By 1949, editors of the New Zealand Alpine Journal announced that the ‘second phase’ of mountaineering in New Zealand was at an end, ‘with the last of the first ascents of any significance’ completed (June 1949: 6). This phase of New Zealand mountaineering focused on unclimbed ridges and new routes, since few major peaks remained unclimbed. Edmund Hillary himself completed ascents of Mount Cook in the late 1940s (Langton 1996: 290; Wilson 1968: 235). Following Hillary’s success on Mount Everest, New Zealand’s Minister of Defense praised it as the outcome of his training on New Zealand’s mountains in the South Island (Hansen 2000: 326).

It was during the post-war phase of increasingly expert, ‘home-grown’ climbing that the Himalayas became the new focus. Elite male climbers such as Hillary emerged from the male physical culture of mountaineering in the inter-war years, and overseas climbs such as those in the Himalayas came to be seen as an extension of the type of mountaineering accomplished on Mount Cook, only on a larger scale (Langton 1996: 250–251, 284–291). Sherry Ortner (1989: 162) describes the 1950s and 1960s as a period when ‘unabashed competitiveness’ became ‘almost the sole reason’ for engaging in Himalayan mountaineering, with Hillary one of the key speakers for the ‘authorized machismo’ that it entailed. The post-war geopolitical context, as well as technological advances in the sport, also enabled mountaineers to extend themselves beyond national borders to (re)assert their hegemony in mountaineering.¹ But what might be termed the ‘feminization’ or domestication of Mount Cook and other mountain peaks also stimulated this move beyond national borders in New Zealand, as we argue below. New Zealand male climbers sought new frontiers the same year that Mount Cook National Park was established and the first group of women, unaided by men, achieved the summit of Cook (1953). The Everest climb ultimately (re)asserted male dominance in the sport, (re)asserted New Zealand’s imperial ties with Britain, and perhaps more than anything else marked and stabilized the inclusion of a particular type of male mountaineering hero in New Zealand.

Women with a(l)titude

The masculinist and hegemonic stories surrounding Mount Cook, of new routes and first ascents, contain several sites of instability and disruption inherent in the process of national identity formation. Several theses have tracked the history of women’s mountaineering in New Zealand, most notably Lynch (1985) and McCormack Ross (1989).¹² Probably the most acclaimed of the women mountaineers in the nineteenth century was Forrestina Ross, the first woman awarded entrance into the New Zealand Alpine Club, in 1892, based on a number of glacial and mountain expeditions (Lynch 1985: 43–46; McCormack Ross 1989: 8–10). While Ross compiled a notable mountaineering record, she is also remembered as having played the part of domestic support on many mountain expeditions with her husband and others. Scott (1943: 24) notes that at the time, ‘woman’s place was in the camp, where she cooked large meals, mended large holes, and listened to large tales of daring and danger. Excursions suitable to their supposed powers would occasionally be made’. Ross (1990) often stayed behind at camp, depicting herself as equally at home climbing glaciers as washing up at camp. Her multiple roles indicate early evidence of women’s ambivalent positioning within mountaineering and nation.
Mc McCormack Ross (1989: 34–55) portrays such early visitors to the Mount Cook region as 'lady mountaineers', women whose higher social class enabled the leisure time and financial support needed for mountaineering. Like their male counterparts, these women employed mountain guides to perform the heavy manual labour. Since colonial New Zealand was primarily comprised of people from the working classes, with little time, inclination or money for recreational climbing, most mountaineers came from overseas, or were from the tiny wealthy class of New Zealand immigrants who owned large sheep stations, or were wives, sisters and daughters of scientists and surveyors (Lynch 1985: 16; McCormack Ross 1989: 15).

Class benefits, changing infrastructure in the Mount Cook region and a number of ideological/social changes all combined to encourage women's participation in mountaineering in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Male guides helped make climbing 'safe' for women, although strong opposition surfaced toward unmarried women (such as Freda du Faur) climbing alone with men. Women's exclusion from the tents and rock bivouacs on Mount Cook were alleviated to some degree by 1900, when the government sponsored the building of two huts which contained segregated sleeping quarters for women and men. Other material constraints that limited women's access to mountaineering also slowly changed. Certainly the extra weight, bulkiness and length of long dresses limited women's access to the sport (Lynch 1985: 39–43). Scott (1943: 24) comments that, due to the clothing, even the 'the mildest excursions must have used an immense amount of energy', though many women adopted more suitable sporting outfits despite convention.

The 'lady mountaineers' helped create new spaces where women might feel 'at home' in the mountains (Morin 1999), challenging the many institutional frameworks that encouraged women to think of themselves as fragile and weak (Crawford 1987: 172; see also Vicinus 1972 and Callaway 1987). Advice against elite western women engaging in unladylike, strenuous and/or dangerous sports such as mountaineering has a long historical legacy. Ultimately, the early women mountaineers helped pave the way for what has been termed the 'golden age' of women's mountaineering in New Zealand, the decade of 1910–1920 (Scott 1943: 25), reproducing, albeit ambivalently, the masculinist normative structure of heroic firsts.

Undoubtedly, Freda du Faur's first woman's climb of Mount Cook counts as the most famous achievement of the period. Du Faur (see Figure 1) was not only the first woman to climb Mount Cook, but she and her guides reached the summit faster than anyone had to date.

Her book, The Conquest of Mount Cook and Other Climbs (1915), has become a classic in New Zealand mountaineering literature. Much of du Faur's Conquest describes her love of the mountains, and the moral disapprobation of her peers at the Hermitage. When she was about to climb Mount Sealy alone with a male guide, she reported that, 'one old lady implored me with tears in her eyes not to "spoil my life for so small a thing as climbing a mountain"' (1915: 36). Du Faur wrote of 'worshipping' the beauty of New Zealand's 'snow-clad Alps', and of being filled with a passionate longing to touch those shining snows, to climb to their height of silence and solitude, and to feel at one with the mighty forces (1915: 27). Du Faur's passionate longing turned to ambivalence once she reached Cook's summit, though:

'The guides] sent me on alone the length of the rope. I gained the summit and waited for them, feeling very little, very lonely, and much inclined to cry. They caught my hands and shook them, their eyes glowing with pleasure and pride, and with an effort...
Figure 1  Freda du Faur after her climb of Mount Cook (photograph by G.E. Mannering, from Wilson 1968: 128).
I swallowed the lump in my throat and laughed instead. Then we all began talking at once... we had beaten any previous record by two hours, and I was a mere woman! (1915: 104)

Du Faur’s rhetorical humility atop the mountain summit—her inclination to cry—contrasts greatly with the more heroic, masculinist statements of men such as Edmund Hillary. Du Faur ‘conquered’ Mount Cook, but her ambivalence in doing so reveals her partial and contradictory position as heroic mountaineer. Our intention is not to accept uncritically a naturalized or essentialized sexual division between men and women mountain climbers in terms of how they might have expressed conquest of mountain peaks (Tenzing’s ‘humility’ on Everest comes to mind). Yet it is worth noting that due to elite white women’s limited social and spatial access to mountaineering at the time, much of what du Faur wrote might best be framed as an attempt to maintain an ‘appropriate’ genteel-class feminine voice as she transgressed the boundaries of a man’s world. Du Faur, like many other ‘new women’ of the early twentieth century, might further be understood as expressing the sense of personal empowerment (‘conquest of self’) she gained through rugged physical exercise and the overcoming of fear (Morin 1999). Du Faur’s experiences on Mount Cook might also be understood through the lens of her lesbianism, as consummating a sexual-erotic relationship with the mountain, or at the very least expressing an emotional attachment to it (see, for instance, Winter 1989). While it is not our intention to develop these themes in detail here, it seems clear that gender and class relations produced du Faur as an ambivalent climber; her attempts to be the first women atop Mount Cook coincides with a masculinist tradition that celebrates firsts, yet she challenges the masculinism of that tradition as well.

New Zealand’s masculinist mountaineering identity was destabilized by women such as du Faur, as well as by men such as her guide, Peter Graham, who were willing to climb with women. And yet the line between compliance and subversion is a fine one. As an Australian, du Faur’s achievement heightened nationalistic tensions between Australia and New Zealand. Her achievements on Mount Cook drew reproach from many New Zealanders who had hoped that the first woman to climb it would be a New Zealander. One newspaper article lamented that the New Zealander Ada Julius was not the first; as a ‘significant lady mountaineer’ she might have ‘managed it quite easily’ (quoted in McCormack Ross 1989: 40). As one referee for this article pointed out, Du Faur’s statements about her love and passion for New Zealand’s mountains seem to embrace a more inclusive Antipodean identity rather than a nationalist or imperialist one more characteristic of mountaineering men, however.

Alongside similar changes in men’s mountaineering, a significant shift occurred in the social make-up of Mount Cook women climbers during the inter-war years. As already noted, prior to the 1930s, mountaineering in New Zealand was primarily a sport for the wealthy (even though the guides who popularized the sport were Hermitage labourers). Similar to the egalitarianism that emerged in men’s climbing—and again, with the climbing clubs playing a major educative role—a new ‘independent woman mountaineer’ emerged in the late 1920s and 1930s (McCormack Ross 1989: 56–73). Several of the women labourers at the Hermitage and elsewhere became the first ‘girl guides’ on Mount Cook, employed by the Mount Cook Company to take holiday-makers on short glacial and other expeditions. Many of these guides subsidized their own climbing through their work at the Hermitage, helped along by the new equipment hire services that further enabled the less affluent to take up mountaineering. The first ‘man-less’ tall-
woman) mountain climbing party in the region formed around this type of social network.12

Women became mountain guides in New Zealand 40 years before women in other countries, and women were admitted to the New Zealand Alpine Club from its inception.13 These facts suggest that women, rather than being excluded from a New Zealand national identity constructed through mountaineering, were instead incorporated into it. Indeed, from the 1880s demands were made for women and girls’ participation in institutionalized forms of recreation (Crawford 1987: 166). However, a particular type of macho bravado is constantly valorized in the discourses surrounding mountaineering, which ultimately works to exclude most women from ‘nation’.

To take one example, a new vocabulary accompanied the women climbers who appeared on the Mount Cook scene during the inter-war years. ‘An easy day for a lady’ or a ‘hen cackle’ emerged as terms to describe straightforward climbs.14 Langton (1996: 267–268) argues that this terminology had the effect of reducing women’s participation to an inferior, rather than rival, position vis-à-vis the men; otherwise, the sport could not have maintained its aura as an especially ‘dangerous’ or ‘manly’ recreation. That is, one way that women’s sporting prowess was undermined was simply in trivializing their achievements. If a woman succeeded in climbing a particular mountain route, then the perceived difficulty of that route was reduced and the mountain itself became ‘feminized’. Once women entered spaces from which they were previously excluded, the mountain’s power to ‘test’ manliness was undermined and even damaged, and men therefore needed to attempt more difficult and dangerous routes on the mountain, as well as reach farther afield (internationally, to Nepal, for instance) to test and confirm their manliness and (re)assert their hegemony in the sport.

During the period of the second European war, when many of New Zealand’s mountaineering men served in the armed forces, women and older men kept the sport functioning at home. Women’s increased leadership roles within the mountaineering clubs signified one important change during the period. Several mountaineering women ‘stand-outs’ appeared on the scene by the 1940s. Janee Ashurst, for instance, first ascended Mount Cook in 1938, and the gendered politics of her experience deserves attention. Ashurst was provided a useless ‘lady’s axe’ for this climb, which her guide’s biographer described as a ‘ridiculous toothpick’ to help make her feel ‘part of things’ (McCormack Ross 1989: 106). Such clear attempts to underscore women’s role as follower not leader were further intensified by Ashurst’s demotion to cook at the Hermitage once the men returned from the war.

By 1953, 27 women had reached the summit of Mount Cook.15 Women’s sustained presence on mountains, especially on ‘tough mountains’ such as Mount Cook, challenged the notion that climbing prowess was naturally masculine. ‘Women with altitude’ have both embraced the masculinist position of hero as well as destabilized the masculinism of the mountaineering tradition. The narratives of the women mountaineers speak to the ambiguity of their positions within a New Zealand nationhood based on heroic conquests. However, the circumscribed boundaries set by social relations as they are lived in and through bodies are fluid and porous. Some men never left the Hermitage in the pursuit of conquering mountain peaks. And at the same time that some women were highly successful mountaineers, most stayed below the mountain, in the nurturing environment of the Hermitage.
'In contrast to the white world': the Hermitage Lodge

Four days amongst the eternal glitter of snow and ice makes one thoroughly appreciate a return to the valley. The soft greens, browns, and yellows of the well-known track from Ball hut took on a special beauty and restfulness in contrast to the white world amongst which we had been living. We reached the Hermitage... (du Faur 1915: 190)

The hegemony of mountaineering men and the national identity they forged is necessarily troubled and destabilized by the domestic geographies that enabled heroic conquests. In this section, we shift focus from 'the eternal glitter of snow and ice' to the 'soft greens, browns, and yellows' of the Hooker Valley where the Hermitage is located. The Hermitage has played an important, but so far largely unexamined, role in (de)constructing a New Zealand national identity based on mountaineering. The people who stayed and worked in this hotel often enabled others to achieve climbing firsts, the latter whose stories are already well documented in climbing journals, (auto)biographies and critical works (e.g. Haynes 1994; Hillary 1999; Langton 1996; Riley 1967). Here we wish to extend that commentary by including those who remained behind at the Hermitage 'keeping the home fires burning'. We examine some of the discursive contrasts between mountain spaces, which were often coded as hard and stressful, and lodging spaces such as the Hermitage, coded as soft and restful. The Hermitage functioned as an important symbolic and material space for climbers. It was predominantly a 'feminine' (maternal) space that offered food, warmth and safety to climbers, although it also included elements that celebrated hegemonic masculinity (heroic guides such as Tom Fyfe worked there, for instance).

Since 1884 the Hermitage has been the focal point in the Mount Cook National Park. Lynch (1983) explains that it was not the only accommodation in the region in the early 1900s, but it was certainly one of the most significant for many climbers, skiers, trampers and tourists. The Hermitage was the earliest guesthouse to be built, and it offered relative comfort to climbers and non-climbing tourists. As such the Hermitage stands first as a type of tribute to British leisure class relations.16

Piecing together stories about the Hermitage is a challenging task. Many books focus on alpine climbing and the ascent of peaks in the Mount Cook region but few recount stories about life at the Hermitage either as a visitor or as a staff member. The Hermitage remains as a place at the base of the mountains that surround it. It is dwarfed, almost made invisible by the landscape that circumvents it (Figure 2). Nevertheless, it is possible, through newspaper articles (mainly published locally in The Timaru Herald), advertisements, anecdotes, sketches, and photographs in climbing journals and books, to glimpse at least something of the Hermitage, the social life that it housed, and its role in support of mountaineering and nationalism.

Information on the Hermitage often appears as 'traces' in the literature on mountaineering. Many of the references are single lines pertaining to the architectural history of the hotel, or to leaving/returning to the Hermitage before/after a climbing expedition. For example, in Haynes' Piercing the Clouds (1994), a 193-page book documenting Fyfe's climbing career, the Hermitage is mentioned 56 times. At no point in the book is the Hermitage the subject of sustained reflection but the numerous passing references arrest to its importance in the imaginary and material lives of climbers. The Hermitage is perhaps best regarded as an 'absent
presence’ (Shilling 1993) in mountaineering discourse.17

Traces of the Hermitage in the literature on mountaineering often (re)present the hotel as a luxurious, warm and feminine space. In these traces the Hermitage functions as the binary opposite of the mountains, which are (re)presented as hard, cold, sparse and masculine. Discourses of mountaineering position both the spaces of mountaineering (mountain summits and lodges) as well as human actors (climbers and non-climbers) in opposition to one another. Identities based on service and/or frailty and lack of endurance and perseverance (those who remain below) are contrasted against, and devalued in relation to, identities based on courage, endurance, perseverance and heroism (those who climb). As was consistent with gender relations in the 1890s (and still, to some degree today), women often remained at the base of mountains—in the valleys, in camps or in hotels such as the Hermitage—awaiting the safe return of their men (Morin 1999). Throughout the decades under discussion here, women were most commonly regarded as caretakers and nurturers who were expected to support and work in the pursuit of mountaineering, but not to be climbers in their own right. As a matter of normative practice, most women have tended to remain below. Thus it is in their maternal, care-taking roles within the Hermitage that most women have entered New Zealand’s narrative of nation and mountaineering (after McClintock 1995; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989).

The domestic nature of the Hermitage in many ways serves (both materially and discursively) as the binary opposite of the alien, wild and deathly spaces of Mount Cook. It becomes a ‘home away from home’ for climbers and non-climbers alike (see Phillips 1997: 90). For instance, an advertisement for the first Hermitage states that, ‘Special attention has been paid to the comfort and accommodation for
Ladies.’ Those promoting the hotel recognised that male climbers were often accompanied by their wives, sisters, and/or other female relatives and friends who remained behind in the lodgings.

The discourse of the Hermitage as a place offering comfort applied not just to ‘ladies’ remaining below but more broadly to all tourists and climbers. Although the first Hermitage was small, ‘the rooms [were] well arranged and proportioned, the dining room being especially roomy’ (The Timaru Herald 1895, cited in The Hermitage Mount Cook Centennial 1884–1984 1984). Even in the earliest days the Hermitage was represented as not only comfortable, but also as homely, safe, friendly, warm and snug. Haynes (1994: 64) describes the guide-climbers Fyfe and Graham setting out one evening in June 1894: ‘Well fed, they left the snugness of the Hermitage in the dark and moved quickly over the track…’ Discourses of homeliness, safety, friendliness and warmth are even more evident in climbers’ accounts of returning to the Hermitage after an expedition. In 1893, after an unsuccessful attempt on another mountain in the Southern Alps, a party of four men returned to the Hermitage ‘where they enjoyed hot baths’ (Haynes 1994: 44). Members of another party were ‘only too glad to turn into a comfortable bed’ (Haynes 1994: 125). Freda du Faur (1915: 110) explained that on returning to the Hermitage after her successful ascent of Mount Cook, ‘a real bed proved so alluring after two nights of solid rock… I stayed there until eleven next morning and made up my arrears of sleep’.

We cannot assume, though, that these discourses of comfort and warmth functioned in exactly the same ways for women as for men. As we have already pointed out, du Faur experienced problems both leaving and returning to the Hermitage before/after climbing expeditions. She reported that, ‘As I was a girl, travelling alone, the women in the house apparently considered themselves more or less responsible for my actions’ (1915: 33). ‘Hermitage society’ disdained her setting out ‘clad in climbing costume’. Du Faur often left the Hermitage in a ‘proper skirt’ but discarded it as soon as she was out of sight. Nor was ‘Hermitage society’ keen on her risking her moral reputation by even considering climbing alone with a single male guide. Returning to the Hermitage after an expedition was equally problematic for du Faur. The women at the Hermitage were horrified by her mountain suntan, seeing only ‘a devastating influence on the complexion’ (1915: 43). After successfully traversing Mount Cook, du Faur explained that, ‘we arrived at the Hermitage at 4.30 p.m. and were greeted with cheers from the assembled household’. She was concerned, however, about people’s reactions to her swollen, sunburnt lips:

I still had a handkerchief over the lower portion of my face, which apparently caused some consternation. One imaginative tourist set the theory going that I had all my teeth knocked out by a falling stone. I managed to mumble a decided denial to this theory, and escaped to try what hot water foments would do for me. (1915: 206)

On one hand, these excerpts illustrate the ways in which the Hermitage provided a (feminine) space of comfort for both men and women who had taken on the hegemonic subjectivity of heroic mountaineer. Yet on the other hand, the Hermitage appears as a space that produces both masculinities and femininities, some of which are compatible with New Zealand nation-building practices, and some that are not. In contrast to du Faur’s experiences at the Hermitage, Edmund Hillary (1999: 45–46) wrote of his experiences there in 1939:
I checked into the Hermitage Hotel... As I sat in the lounge that evening... the sound of voices hushed and I looked up to see two young men coming into the room. They were fit and tanned and looked very competent. I could hear a whisper going round the room: ‘They’ve just climbed Mount Cook’. And soon they were the centre of an admiring group and the pretty girls fluttered around them like moths drawn to a flame. I retreated to the corner of the lounge, filled with an immense sense of futility at the dull nature of my existence. These chaps were really getting some excitement out of life. Tomorrow I must climb something!

As women experienced limited access to other types of mountaineering accommodation, the building of the Hermitage itself, in the first instance, should be considered an important aid to their sporting achievements. But the social space of the Hermitage connected gender and nation in a number of ways, including as it did both heroic women mountaineers and ‘pretty girls flutter[ing]’ around men who less ambivalently embodied the hegemonic ideal of heroic mountaineer. Hillary’s description of the Hermitage lounge could not speak any more clearly to his desire to embody that ideal (nor, for that matter, to the heteronormativity of the mountain-climbing narration of nation). Ultimately it seems clear that the domestic mountain space of the Hermitage was situated, in many ways, in an ambivalent relationship to the hegemonic masculinized national identity surrounding mountaineering.

Workers at the Hermitage provide another potential site for ‘troubling’ a national identity based on mountaineering’s hegemonic masculinity. In books about climbing and in advertisements for the Hermitage, the lodge is represented as a place of abundant fine food and wine for returning climbers. An advertisement for the first Hermitage states: ‘The best beer, wine, and spirits are kept’ (The Hermitage Mount Cook Centennial 1884–1984 1984: inside front cover). An early advertisement for the second Hermitage extends the discourse of the best beverages to also include warmth, homeliness, friendliness, fun and good service:

Imagine a spacious, luxurious country home, with every modern convenience, beautifully warmed by a special system of central heating: a home where a happy, exuberant house-party is waiting to welcome you—a home set down in the sun-filled splendour of the Southern Alps. Imagine big, crackling log fires, food fit for a king, music, dancing, wines, laughter: warm cozy bedrooms looking out on a world of enchantment: servants who work to the Golden Rule. (The Hermitage Mount Cook Centennial 1884–1984 1984: 13)

In this advertisement the hotel figures as a ‘luxurious country home’, and photographs of the building’s interior support the claim and perhaps even suggest a nostalgia for Britain and its ideal English Tudor style of architecture. Such ‘homes’, however, required a great deal of maintaining and servicing. The advertisement impresses that the upper-class tourist/climber can look forward to ‘food fit for a king’ and to being treated with the utmost courtesy and respect by servants, whose servitude is represented as being more about Christian mutual respect than class exploitation. The managers, servants, maids and guides met the desires of the wealthy. Du Faur (1915: 110) claims: ‘I strolled out to dinner immaculate in my prettiest frock’. For a number of working-class men and women, however, the Hermitage was a not a place for wearing one’s ‘prettiest frock’ (or one’s dinner jacket). It was a place of work.

Narratives about the Hermitage are not just about venturing out to climb mountain peaks and returning to home comforts. They are also about maintaining the buildings and nearby
tracks, supplying and preparing food, servicing the dining room, refurbishing bedrooms, making beds, cleaning basins and bathrooms, preparing and lighting fires, and so on. Narratives of such work, which are themselves of course highly gendered, are even more difficult to locate than those advertising or discussing the Hermitage as a place of comfort. While mountain guides have told their stories of accompanying visitors on expeditions, limited documentary evidence is available about the lives of those who rarely left the hotel but instead were immersed in domestic chores. These stories function as ‘other’ to the tales of traverses and ascents of summits. As already noted, a number of Hermitage staff worked in order to subsidize their climbing expenses, men such as Tom Fyfe, as well as the girl guides. Betsy Blunden was forced to ‘play hostess’ in the Hermitage after a day on the mountain (see note 12), and Junee Ashurst was demoted to the job of cook after the war, the chief guide claiming that it was not socially acceptable for women to be guides (McCormack Ross 1989: 22). ‘Invisible’ women’s labour often made it possible for men to climb. The female climber M.B. Scott (1943: 28) appears aware of this in explaining:

I cannot close without speaking of all those women who have lived among the mountains but have never climbed, who had had none of the fun of the game, but who have made it possible for so many of us; I mean the women of the back country, who have dried us out, mended us, washed for us, cooked, baked and brewed tea for us, and listened with a friendly interest in our stories.

Like the women mountaineers, the women who stayed below Mount Cook both resisted and reinforced a particular kind of masculinist national identity that emerged in the spaces of Mount Cook. On the one hand, they assisted the heroics of the mountaineering men (and sometimes women) by attending to their bodily and psychological needs. By creating the Hermitage as a discursive and material site of home and hearth these women (and some men) who stayed behind helped shape the construction of a national identity. On the other hand, those who stayed below were also excluded from a nationalism that rested on heroic conquests.

Conclusion

Examining the adventure sport of mountaineering has enabled us to further our understanding of the complex and ambiguous constructions of nationhood in New Zealand in relation to gender, imperialism and social class. Mount Cook and the Hermitage Lodge have proven to be useful sites for examining the entrenchment of a hegemonic masculinist New Zealand national identity constructed around heroic mountaineering.

In many ways mountaineering women who climbed peaks created modalities of nationalism similar to men’s, although they were never able to embrace fully the imperialist and masculinist position that men were. ‘Women with altitude’ had the potential to feminize mountains and hence reduce the status accorded to male climbers. If women could climb, then the mountain lost its status as a dangerous and powerful space in which New Zealand masculinities could be tested. Yet women mountaineers also furthered discourses of honorary manhood, in that they were complicit with masculinist notions of exploration and first ascents.

A further paradox in this narrative lies in the spaces below the mountain peaks—in the Hermitage. Thus our discussion of New Zealand mountaineering must necessarily bring into re-
lie the important function the Hermitage played as Mount Cook’s domestic other. The heroic tradition of mountaineering on Mount Cook and the invention of national identity around it did not simply and only include the mountain peak and the events that took place at ‘peak’ moments. It also included the domestic roles performed by women (and some men) who never had the opportunity and/or the desire to climb but instead supported the efforts of others.

In the valley below the summit of Mount Cook, the Hermitage has historically been represented through discourses of comfort, warmth, and, as we have argued, femininity. The Hermitage existed in the imaginations of climbers as a safe and friendly place to which one returned after climbing Mount Cook, its homeliness acting as the discursive contrast to the dangerous, threatening space of Mount Cook. We have highlighted the important role of the Hermitage in order to unravel the complex ways in which national identity, mountaineering, and domesticity intersect and depend on one another. We have attempted to trace the role of the Hermitage as it has largely been excluded from the New Zealand national imaginary. This exclusion marginalized all those ‘others’ (below) who did not climb Mount Cook. The Hermitage, however, was a crucial factor in the construction of a hegemonic and heroic New Zealand national identity; and since our mountaineering counter-narrative recognizes the enabling processes (the ‘others’ below), it shifts and challenges the cultural values associated with that identity.

Edmund Hillary’s first ascent of Mount Everest valorized the practice of mountaineering as a crucial factor in the formation of a heroic and masculinized New Zealand national identity. Hillary’s climb was heralded as a major sporting achievement and one to which ‘all’ New Zealanders could aspire. The sport of mountaineering, and its representations, are situated within gender politics in New Zealand and are also predicated on notions of (post)colonialism. Phillips (1997: 89) suggests that ‘[l]abels such as masculinist and imperialist, sometimes applied to adventure, are too static to capture this fluidity, in which masculinities and imperialisms are in constant states of flux’. Understanding this fluidity may make it possible to map new kinds of masculinities—kinds that allow for ‘otherness’—and for the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, mountain peaks and lodges, adventure and domesticity, colonizer and colonized, to be productively blurred.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 The Hillary Commission, the sporting association that dominates policy and funding in New Zealand, conducted the survey. Results can be found at <www.hillarysport.org.nz>. In May 1999, when we began this project, Hillary announced in a front-page news story that he had, in fact, reached Everest’s summit before Norgay (Waikato Times 1999), putting to rest the previous assertion that the two reached it ‘almost together’. That same week a great deal of publicity surrounded the discovery of the body of the British climber George Mallory near the top of Everest, by a US team specifically out searching for it—and of course any further evidence related to this ever-important ‘first’ in the world of mountain climbing. Mallory’s body, still in good condition due to the freezing temperatures, raised new questions about whether he and his partner made it to the top of Everest 29 years before
Hillary, in 1924, but no cameras were found to provide conclusive evidence either way (Bouington 1999: 7).

2. Over 170,000 acres of the region became Mount Cook National Park in 1953, which contains nearly all of New Zealand’s mountain peaks over 10,000 feet, including Mount Cook, and 140 peaks over 7,000 feet. The park also contains several large valley glaciers, including the popular Tasman Glacier.

3. Or Aoraki, the two words being regional variations of the same name.

4. For similar reasons, in this essay we have not used the term Austrian—the Maori term for what is commonly known as New Zealand. Over the last decade, especially since 1987 when the Maori Language Act was passed, making Maori an official language, the term ‘Aoraki’ has been used increasingly by various individuals and groups, although European colonial rule still exists in New Zealand. Clearly the naming of place is a contentious process (see Berg and Keans 1996).

Furthermore, attempts to explain Maori exclusion from historical participation in mountaineering tend to centre on the taboo (prohibition) of Maori entering the sacred spaces of some mountains. This is based on an assumption that there were no ‘practical’ reasons and ‘little purpose’ for Maori to climb mountains. That is, they travelled in mountain areas only for reasons such as refuge or trade, the conquest of mountains for its own sake having little or no meaning for them (Langton 1996: 22–23, 41). Yet it is worth noting that for the period under discussion here, the author of one prominent history of women’s climbing in New Zealand published in The New Zealand Alpine Journal (Scott 1943: 22) begins with a Maori woman of legend, Ruareka, ‘who guided her tribal enemies over the mountains’. Scott explicitly excludes any potential for Maori women’s historical climb on the sport, writing that Ruareka, the country’s first woman mountaineer, ‘sadly misused her talents as a bush-woman and climber’ to betray her tribe, and thus became the ‘one blot on our escagelon’ of women’s mountain climbing.

5. Several competing national claims to Everest were made at the time. Because both Hillary and Norgay refused to say which of them actually stepped on to the summit first, both Nepal (Norgay’s birthplace) and India (his adopted homeland) assumed it to be Norgay and so claimed the national first. Indeed, the Nepalese claimed Norgay pulled Hillary by rope up the mountain (Hansen 2000: 311; Upshall 1997). That makes at least four countries claiming this particular first as their own: Britain, New Zealand, Nepal and India. In Hansen’s (2000: 309) terms, this means that no one nation has been able to co-opt the history of Everest as its own ‘master narrative’.

As Langton (1996: 36–62) argues, British alpine mountaineering in such ‘faraway’ places was an expression of British imperialist expansion, but was also tied to ‘muscular Christianity’, the cult of athleticism of the emerging middle class, and romantic admiration for the beauty of mountain landscapes.

Guides carried all the necessary gear, cut all the steps through the snow and ice, cooked meals, and provided the necessary expert skills. Guides fees were expensive, and only the wealthy could afford not only their fees, but also costs of equipment, travel and accommodation, as well as the months of leisure time required for mountaineering. During these two decades, 21 ascents were made of Mount Cook, including Freda du Faur’s historic 1910 climb (see Wilson 1968: 232–240 for details).

The global geopolitics of the time contributed to such successes in high-altitude mountaineering. Himalayan mountaineering, for instance, especially on the south side of Mount Everest in Nepal, only became a possibility when Nepal opened its border. In addition, post-war technological advancements, in mountaineering gear (boots, ropes, sleeping bags, etc.) and cartographic resources, also made Everest a possibility. We would like to thank an anonymous referee for these points.

Lynch (1983) outlines women’s mountaineering in the Victorian era, 1837–1903, focusing largely on social constraints to women’s movement to mountain terrain, while McCormack Ross (1989) outlines women’s climbing records through to 1933, providing specific details on individual mountaineers and their accomplishments and challenges. Like many men, a small number of white colonial women initially visited the region to explore the glaciers (Riley 1967; McCormack Ross 1989). Details on the Von Ledenfolds (a husband and wife climbing team) can be found in Scott (1943: 23–24), while details on the Englishwoman Constance Barnhass, who went ‘where no woman went before’, can be found in Barnhass (1904) and McCallum (1991: 30). Arken (1988: 11–32) provides a useful introductory chapter on women’s famous firsts in the mountain climbing world more generally (see also Mazel 1994).

du Faur became equally famous for other climbs, especially her participation in the first ‘Gröden Traverse’ of Cook’s three (distinct) summits, New Zealand’s ‘humblest mile’, three years later (Arken 1988: 23–27).
Between 1909 and 1913 du Faur made a total of 23 climbs in the New Zealand Alps (listed in Scott 1943: 25).

11 The second woman to climb Mount Cook was another Australian, Annie Lindon of Melbourne, in 1912. The first New Zealand woman to reach the summit was Muriel Graham (wife of the guide Peter Graham), in 1915. A series of notable Mount Cook climbs followed, by 59-year-old Jane Thompson of Greymouth (New Zealand), in 1916, and Beatrice Holdsworth and Margaret Lorimer in 1918. During the Depression years, eight more women climbed Mount Cook, including a number of affluent women from overseas.

12 This group of women ascended Mount Sefton in 1934. Betty Blunden became the 'first girl guide' from 1928 to 1931. But Blunden's employer required her to play 'Hermitage hostess' in the evening dress after dinner—'a role she was not at ease with' (Langston 1996: 267).

13 Though they had been admitted as members from the formation of the New Zealand Alpine Club, other clubs, such as the Canterbury Mountaineering Club (CMC), did not admit women until much later—1977 in the case of the CMC. The masochism of the CMC illustrates the exclusionary tactics of some mountaineers. This Club had a long history of strong opposition to women's membership, emphasizing the bonds between 'men, the mountains, rivers, valleys, and huts they loved'. One commentator declared that the CMC was 'a man's club ... and if strangers think it's quite the thing to push in with their women and girlfriends, we don't' (as quoted in McCormack Ross 1989: 19; emphasis added to highlight the way in which difference was constructed around those men who chose to climb with women and those who did not).

14 Leslie Stephen coined this phrase in Playground of Europe (1909).

15 For example, Mavis Davison led the culminating event of the post-war period, the all-woman ascent of Mount Cook in January 1933 (Urquhart 1953: 42–43). In addition to Davison, the party included Doris Urquhart and Sheila MacMurray. These women achieved a 'double first'—it was both an all-woman climb, and it was also the first time any woman had climbed Mount Cook without a guide.

16 The Hermitage has undergone a number of changes over the years. The first Hermitage accommodated only 11 guests, and was built of cob (straw and clay). It has been rebuilt three times and repeatedly refurbished. In 1914 the second Hermitage was built after the first was damaged beyond repair by a flood. In 1922 'an additional 22 rooms were added and handbasins were put in the bedrooms and the dining room was extended' (The Hermitage Mount Cook Centennial 1884–1984 1984: 16). In 1951 and then again in 1956 extensive renovations and refurbishments were carried out. In 1957–1958 the third Hermitage was built, the second gutted by fire. Today the Hermitage offers 104 rooms and an extensive array of other facilities (a number of web sites describe them, including <www.anastravel.com/newzealand/hermitage>),

Sometimes a whole book chapter is devoted to the Hermitage (see, e.g., du Faur's chapter on 'The Hermitage Flood'), but this is unusual. In 1984 The Timaru Herald published a booklet commemorating the Hermitage's Centennial (The Hermitage Mount Cook Centennial 1884–1984), but this is the exception.

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Abstract translations

[Troubler l’espace des montagnes et des hommes: Mont Cook et chalet Hermitage en Nouvelle-Zélande]

Les auteurs retrace dans ce travail une expression dominante de l’identité nationale hégémonique Nouvelle-Zélandaise associée à l’alpinisme depuis les années 1880, et ayant atteint son point le plus fort lors de l’ascension historique du Mont Everest par Sir Edmund Hillary en 1953. L’image hérosique de l’alpiniste masculin, formée autour du plus haut sommet de la Nouvelle-Zélande, le Mont Cook, est toutefois instable à la base et nous mettons en relief deux sites potentiels de perturbation. Premièrement, nous examinons les expériences de deux femmes alpinistes blanches sur le Mont Cook. Ces femmes ont adopté l’identité masculine hérosique tout en la déstabilisant. L’alpinisme féminin démontre la construction active et complexe (plutôt que la simple reproduction) des impérialismes, nationalismes, et masculinismes. Deuxièmement, nous examinons le rôle du Chalet Hermitage situé à la base du Mont Cook. Les récits d’alpinisme ignorent trop souvent les huttes, chalet, endroits où l’on reste en arrière. Les rôles joués par les femmes (et certains hommes) qui n’ont jamais eu l’opportunité et/ou le désir de grimper mais se sont plutôt faites ‘gardiennes du feu’ et ont supporté les efforts des autres peuvent être examinées comme une façon de questionner le renforcement de l’identité nationale autour du héros alpiniste masculin.


Espacios (perturbadores) de montañas y hombres: el Monte Cook y la casa Ermita de Nueva Zelanda

En este papel examinamos una expresión dominante de la identidad nacional hegemónica de Nueva Zelanda que surgió en torno al alpinismo en los años 80 del siglo diezinueve y que culminó en la primera et histórica escalada del Monte Everest por el Señor Edmund Hillary en 1953. La imagen del héroe de alpinismo varón que se desarrollaba sobre y en torno a la cima más alta de Nueva Zelanda, el Monte Cook, es, no obstante, intrínsecamente instable y, por lo tanto, centramos la atención en dos puntos de posible trastorno. Primero, examinamos las experiencias de mujeres alpinistas de raza blanca.
sobre ‘Mount Cook’. Estas mujeres abrazaban la identidad masculina del héroe tanto como la desestabilizaban. El alpinismo feminista señala la activa y compleja construcción (más que la simple reproducción) de los imperialismos, nacionalismos y las masculinidades. Segundo, examinamos el papel jugado por la Casa Ermita situada al pie del Monte Cook. Los relatos sobre el alpinismo demanadas veces ignoran los refugios y las casas de montaña, los lugares de quedarse. El papel jugado por las mujeres (y algunos hombres) que nunca tenían la oportunidad ni/o el deseo de escalar y que se quedaban en casa y apoyaban los esfuerzos de los demás puede ser examinado como manera de desafiar productivamente el afianzamiento de la identidad nacional en torno al héroe de alpinismo masculino.

Palabras claves: Nueva Zelanda, alpinismo, género, nacionalismo.