

NZ NON-FICTION

Odes to the islands

From the Polynesian navigators to the subantarctic wilds and the South Island's pinot paradise.

by CHRISTOPHER MOORE

The first Europeans to sail into the Pacific Ocean's vast expanses confronted an intoxicating new world filled with the exotic, dangerous and seductive. However, for the Polynesians they met, the islands, atolls and reefs were already a *tūrangawaewae*, their place in the world. In **Pathway of the Birds** (Bate-man, \$49.99), Andrew Crowe surveys the Polynesian voyages and settlement across the world's largest ocean. From Hawaii to Aotearoa-New Zealand, the extraordinary achievements of the Polynesian navigators still represent a potent story of human ingenuity and resilience. Crowe's book is not the first on the subject, nor will it be the last, but it is still a highly readable and lucid account of the early Polynesians' epic saga. Illustrated with photographs and maps, his account of the Pacific's cultural, ecological and navigational settlement will appeal to both the general reader and the specialist. With new details emerging all the time, this is a fascinating – and continuing – story.

In **Trial of Strength** (Exisle Publishing, \$39.99), Shona Riddell explores an equally absorbing story in a very different place.

Bounty, Antipodes, Campbell, Auckland, Macquarie and The Snares can simply be names on the map or ones mentioned in weather forecasts; enigmatic, anonymous dots scattered amongst the tumultuous waters of the roaring forties and furious fifties. But they are places with a unique history and environment. With a great-great-grandmother born on one of the subantarctic islands, Riddell's fascination with the region is tangible. Somehow, life endures, often richly so, in environments that might seem implacably hostile to intrusion by the outside world. Her richly illustrated book is a lively study of the ecological and human history of these wild but unquestionably fascinating places. Riddell has a gift of revealing the

personalities who arrived – willingly or otherwise – on these remote shores to find refuge, temporary homes or places of enduring fascination.

Much closer to home comes **The Vineyards of Central Otago** (Penguin Random House, \$55), a handsomely produced story of the region's wines and viticulture industry by Viv Milsom and Mike Wilkinson. Milsom's knowledgeable text is enhanced by Wilkinson's photographs throughout this flavoursome journey across 21 of the region's vineyards. If this book were a wine, it would be a full-bodied pinot, carrying a bouquet of sun-warmed schist and thyme-covered hills. The palate might be spicy, the colour evocative. No stranger to the region's wine-growing history, Milsom decants a very human story of stubborn determination to make the region one of the world's premier producers of pinot noir. It's a convivial account

of how a group of individuals defeated the naysayers, the environment and the occasional setback to achieve their ambitions, and written with obvious affection for the place, the people and, naturally, the wine. ■

