

# PROCEDING THE FUTURE MOUNTAIN AND VOLCANOSCAPE Creativity to Prosperity

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## PROCEEDING THE FUTURE MOUNTAIN AND VOLCANOSCAPE: CREATIVITY TO PROSPERITY

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### UNDER THE MOUNTAIN – HOW A VOLCANIC PEAK HAS INFLUENCED THE CULTURE, ECOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE HISTORY OF TARANAKI, NEW ZEALAND

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### **Abstract**

Mount Taranaki/Egmont occupies a central place in the history and culture of Taranaki people – Maori and European. The mystical qualities of the volcanic mountain have influenced the culture, ecology and landscape history of the area and illustrate that cultural landscapes are often predominantly associative (having powerful spiritual, artistic or cultural associations with a natural element) and broad-reaching in their manifestation within a diversity of cultures.

Our human need for a sense of identity and belonging is strongly linked to landscape and place. As Taylor notes [1] 'Landscape therefore is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing: we see it with our eye but interpret it with our mind and ascribe values to landscape for intangible – spiritual – reasons'.

The mountain itself and the circular ring of protected forest surrounding the mountain—which forms the Egmont National park is a strong example of an associative cultural landscape that embodies both tangible and intangible values. The circle of fertile ring-plain contains and protects the original forest of the mountain which was one of the earliest of New Zealand's ecological reserves to be protected and surveyed off from settlement.

This circle frames the wilderness of indigenous native forest within the taming grid of a farming culture. The heritage of New Zealand surveying, settlement and forest destruction is poignantly captured in this physical landscape feature and its mystery and symbolism is illustrated in the spiritual beliefs, artistic history and economic products of the inhabitants that live under it.

To the indigenous people of Taranaki - Maori, the mountain (Te Maunga) has deeply cultural and spiritual significance. To Mana Whenua (those with geneological and local tribal authority over the land) the mountain is part of the landscape and an ancestor, it is a reference point and the names and physical features have particular significance as symbols of the people that provide meaning, order and stability.

European settlers arrived in the region in 1841 and profound cultural and landscape change resulted. Throughout this time, the mountain appears in imagery and marketing for the area and the conical peak with an idyllic farming scene in the foreground has featured as a regional and national icon represented in art, advertising and symbolism.

This paper explores the Maori and European connections to Mount Taranaki as a case study of an associative cultural landscape that has shaped the social and landscape history of an entire region and that continues to influence the future of this special volcanic landscape.

Keywords: art, cultural landscape, ecology, geology, indigenous

### 1. Introduction

Taranaki, located on the west coast of North Island of New Zealand is one of New Zealand's major volcanic regions and the last 20 million years has seen a series of dramatic volcanic eruptions. The area's youngest volcano is Mount Taranaki/ Egmont which stands 2518 metres high, and dominates the region's landscape and is New Zealand's tallest volcano.

The mountain brings many benefits to the region. As well as providing a major tourist attraction, it is responsible for influencing Taranaki's climate, by bringing high rainfall, mild temperatures and deflecting winds. With the earlier volcanoes it has also produced the region's fertile ashy soils and coastal sands rich in iron.

Although there have been no rumblings on the mountain for more than 250 years, it is still an active volcano, and could erupt at any time. All who live in Taranaki's shadow are aware of the potential hazards associated with the dormant peak.

Legends handed down through the generations tell stories of how the landscape came to be. They talk of the journey of the mountain across the land, representative of the dramatic volcanic activity that formed the landscape of the region.

As Taylor [2] highlights, a common theme underpinning the concept of the ideology of landscape itself as the setting for everything we do is that of the landscape is the repository of intangible values and human meanings that nurture our very existence.

In the case of the Taranaki region, this influence is manifest within a layered collage of physical and spiritual connections representative of the interrelationship between the people of Taranaki, natural processes and their sense of identity. In considering the history of Taranaki the historian Ron Lambert [3] comments that there is one overriding influence which affects all within its perimeter. "This is the mystical quality of Taranaki, the volcanic peak of the province, which binds the area and its people together as a single entity. The Maori inhabitants have always acknowledged their reverence to Taranaki; pakeha acceptance is less certain but is nevertheless ever-present. There are few such features to dominate the skyline of other occupied areas in New Zealand, or which have such an elusive but magnetic influence on their population".



Figure 1. Egmont (photo authors)

### 2. An Associative Cultural Landscape

Mount Taranaki/Egmont with its strong spiritual, artistic and cultural values is an example of the UNESCO defined 'associative' cultural landscape [4], where it is these elements rather than just material evidence that form the predominant associations with the natural element.

The concept of a cultural landscape as it relates to the Taranaki region and its mountain influence is a powerful symbol of a living cultural landscape "in a material sense seen as landscape or environment as it has been modified by humans, and in an immaterial or spiritual sense as landscape or environment with which humans with their practices, beliefs and emotions have special bonds" Arntzen [5]. The landscape itself (the geological phenomenon of the volcanic cone, in this example has influenced the character and

values of the people who have shaped the landscape and who continue to live in the shadow of the mountain.

As identified by UNESCO, the associative cultural landscape category has particular relevance to the Asia-Pacific region where the link between the physical and spiritual aspects of landscape is so important. This is especially so in this case study, given the oral history and unique landscape relationships and cultural practices of the indigenous peoples of New Zealand (Maori).

Associative cultural landscapes as defined by UNESCO [6]; "may be large or small contiguous or non-contiguous areas and itineraries, routes or other linear landscapes - these may be physical entities or mental images embedded in a people's spirituality, cultural tradition and practice. The attributes of associative cultural landscapes include the intangible, such as the acoustic, the kinetic and the olfactory, as well as the visual".

### 2. Method

Assessment of associative cultural landscapes involves the identification of both tangible and intangible elements. It essentially involves the identification and documentation of the sense of identity that those who live within a cultural landscape (both past and present) have with that place. The geographer Relph has summarized this within the diagram that shows these interrelated aspects – those of physical features (the mountain), observable activities and functions (the ritual and social history linked to the mountain) and meaning or symbols (art and symbolism of the mountain form).

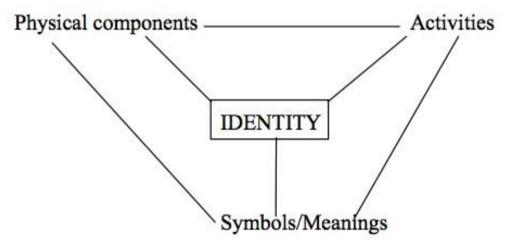


Figure 2. Diagrammatic Representation of Relphs Interrelated Sense of Identity [7]

This diagram illustrates that "We can see therefore that both tangible physical identity and intangible identity related to the distinctiveness of our lived-in world and human experiences are inextricably interwoven with place meaning and significance for people and the symbols, images, and meanings associated with places/landscapes" [8].

The mountain in this case study represents and important symbolic meaning and sense of identity, an experience in which one feels connected to the place, people involved, and memories that occurred in that environment. These connections are made up of environmental influences on our five senses, memories of personal and cultural experiences which might make a place special and objects and cultural mythologies that define and form our linkage to that place.

This paper documents and discusses the evidence for the interrelated components that make up the powerful sense of identity the people of Taranaki have with their mountain and how it has shaped the social and landscape history of an entire region and how it continues to influence the future of this special volcanic landscape

### 3. Discussion

### 3.1 Physical Components

Mount Taranaki/Egmont is what geologists call a composite cone or stratovolcano and its isosocelean geological form is part of the power of its iconic status as a symbol. The mountains thick, tacky lava is

known as andesite and is produced from the active Australian - Pacific plate boundary beneath New Zealand. Because of the alternate layers of ash and lava, the steep-sided cone shape is very unstable. Stratovolcanoes are surrounded by gently sloping ring plains formed of rock and ash carried down by debris avalanches (mudflows or lahars) and white-hot pyroclastic flows. For Taranaki the ring plain is both geologic in form but this geology is also reflected in the cultural mapping of its protected area of forest undertaken by the first European surveyors.

Around 15 million years ago, a series of underwater volcanoes were active off the coast of northern Taranaki and the Waikato. The line of eruptive centres then moved progressively to the south over the next million or so years. Kaitake, Pouakai, Egmont and Fanthams Peak formed stratovolcanoes of lava (andesite) and ash with surrounding deposits of mud and rock.

The Egmont volcano last erupted only 250 years ago, and is almost certain to erupt again in the future.

Geologically, Mount Taranaki consists of two eruptive centres, known as Egmont Volcano and Fanthams Peak (Panitahi). Recent studies have shown that activity at the Egmont Volcano began some time before 125,000 years ago – building a cone and ring-plain about the same size as the present one.

The slopes of Egmont Volcano have collapsed many times in at least five massive debris avalanches (lahars) which buried the surrounding landscape. One of the biggest of these occurred around 20,000 years ago when the cone collapsed and slid westward in a massive debris avalanche (lahar) that flowed several kilometres beyond the present coastline. This enormous lahar – known as the Pungarehu Formation – covers more than 250 square kilometres and is, in places, up to 20 metres deep. The mudflow is now seen as the thousands of small hills inland of Cape Egmont and forms yet another classic landscape feature of the region.

Since that event 20,000 years ago, several smaller volcanic cones have successively formed and then collapsed. As a result of these collapses, debris deposits have built up the Egmont ringplain. Around AD1500, several extremely hot clouds of ash (pyroclastic flows) erupted from the crater to devastate many hectares of forest on the mountain's slopes.

About 150 years later, in AD1650, a pumice shower buried a Maori campsite near Stratford Mountain House. The last known eruption – known as the Tahurangi Ash – was around AD1755. Although there has been no volcanic activity on Mount Taranaki since then, it is no dead giant, but simply sleeping. The mountain is continually eroding, and slips from the upper slopes can destroy large areas of vegetation.

Lahars – mud or debris flows – have built up the Taranaki ringplain over the last 500,000 years. These lahars may not have always been caused by volcanic eruptions. The avalanches of water, ash and rock are sometimes triggered by earthquakes as well.

Since 1881 the area comprised within a circle 9.6km in diameter around the summit of the mountain has been protected, first as a forest reserve and later (1900) as a national park. This 'ring plain' as it is known contains over 29,000 ha of native forest. The vegetation which mantles the mountain consists of a diverse range of habitat types.

The mountain also demonstrates the classic mountain to sea scenario, with more than fifty streams and rivers originating in the rocky slopes of the mountain and which flow down and out through the ring plain. These rivers in themselves form a strong history within the local culture with some of the most famous walkways used by local people following these drainage channels which all find their origins in the mountain.

The altitudinal zonation of vegetation is the most obvious habitat pattern demonstrated within on the mountain. With increasing altitude, climatic conditions gradually deteriorate and the composition, growth form and stature of the vegetation reflect this.

The sub-alpine and alpine zones (from 1000 metres above sea level) consist mainly of scrub, especially leatherleaf (*Brachyglottis*) and turpentine scrub (*Dracophyllum*). The alpine zone includes red tussock grasslands, herbfields, and, at its upper limit, moss fields. It is a zone of extreme temperatures and very high rainfall – often more than eight metres per year.

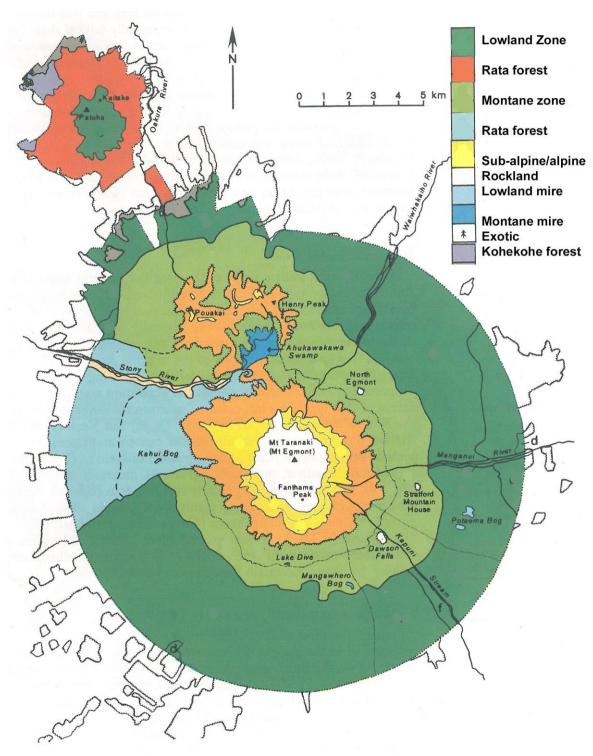


Figure 3. Vegetation/Habitat Zones (adapted from Clarkson [9])

The montane zone (from 500 - 1000 metres above sea level) is found only on Mount Taranaki and in the Pouakai Range. It extends up to about 1000 metres above sea level. Kamahi (*Weinmannia*), Hall's totara (*Podocarpus*) and rata (*Metrosideros*) dominate the forest. Kaikawaka (*Libocedrus*) can also be found at higher altitudes

The lowland zone (150metres up to 500 metres above sea level) is characterised by tawa (*Beilschmiedia*) forest. Kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus*) and pukatea (*Laurelia*) forests are also found mainly on the swampy flats. Rimu (*Dacrydium*) appears here and extends into the lower reaches of the mountains. Kamahi

The Taranaki region was once one of the most densely- forested areas of New Zealand. The arrival of Māori about AD 1200 saw the beginning of the clearing of the forest. Over several hundred years they partially cleared the bush for several kilometres inland of the coast and tiny clearings in the interior.

It was the arrival of Pākehā settlers in the 1840s that began the near-complete devastation of Taranaki's ringplain forests as well as a great deal of that on the gentler topographies of the inland hill country. Today the region has only 30% of its former bush-clad land remaining.



Figure 4. Alpine Herbfield Vegetation Zone

### 3.2 Activities

For more than 800 years humans have modified the landscape of the Taranaki region and this modification has at its heart the influence of the centrally located mountain feature.

The mountain was used by Maori well before European settlement and an earth oven found beneath the layers of volcanic ash on the mountain was one of the first clues to the identification of recent volcanic eruption activity. For Maori the mountain was a home, where food was gathered and cultivated and villages and fortifications (pa) built and lived in. "Across the entire Taranaki landscape there is a myriad of archaeological sites that are the remnants of various activities that people engaged in. Pa fortifications, storage pits, gardens, shell midden rubbish dumps and terraces". [10]

"Mount Taranaki and the ring-plain also provided very fertile volcanic soils for gardening as well as an orographic rainfall pattern that ensured more than adequate supplies of fresh water" [11].

It is thought that some remnant large karaka trees (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) and mountain flax (*Phormium cookianum*) are evidence of Maori deliberately planting and manipulating the vegetation framework for food and weaving. Clarkson [12]

As Ken Taylor [13] highlights much of the memory associated with sense of place and identity is linked to loss, pain and social fracture (rather than pleasure). This is certainly the case for Taranaki where much of the landscape memory of the Maori is inextricably linked to a period of conflict and distress. "Taranaki lives with the legacy of the conflict and confiscations of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Recent endeavours to resolve

these problems have seen some progress but many dilemmas linger. Today, land and politics remain as tightly interwoven as ever" [14].

Taranaki was a region of war from the mid 1800's due to the confiscation of land by European's from the local Maori tribes and their subsequent disrespect of agreements over return of land and towards their culture and way of life. Over 500,000 ha of land was confiscated from Maori during the European settlement and to this day only half of the land has been paid for the Government and only 1/5<sup>th</sup> returned to Maori. The mountain however and its ring-plain of forest has not been returned and was instead vested immediately as a national park. Te Miringa Hohaia talks of local Maori still grieving for the loss of their spiritual foundation and how they wish to have the mountain returned in a partnership with the governing conservation department that currently administers the national park.

The contrasting views between Maori and Europeans to the cultural landscape and the European ignorance of intangible values were emphasized during this time of conflict. As illustrated in this quote from William Fox (the second premier of New Zealand who was pivotal in the land confiscation decision-making); "Maories (sic) have no more eye for the picturesque, the sublime or the beautiful than the beasts that perish and I doubt that any man whose eye is not educated has." [15]. In the view of the Europeans of the time, there was no place for indigenous peoples within the landscape and in particular no place for them in those areas set aside as natural reserves. The concept of a living cultural landscape was lost on those early European settlers of this land.

The mountain remained as a prominent symbol within the teachings and psycle of Maori during these years of war. Parihaka was a stronghold for the Maori resistance and the resistance leaders often referred to the mountain in their teachings. "Ask that mountain" being a response to a question put to one of these leaders [16].

Between 1850 and 1950 most of the original forest of the Taranaki ringplain and much of that of the inland valleys was cleared for pastoral farming. The legacy of fertile soil from successive volcanic eruptions has created one of the most important dairy farming regions in New Zealand and one of the most productive and efficient in the world. From the first days of Pakeha settlement, many farmers kept one or two dairy cows for supplying milk, butter and cheese to their immediate family. The invention of refrigerated shipping in the 1880s saw Taranaki's dairy industry became firmly established. Since then, dairy farming has formed the basis of Taranaki's economy and has made a major contribution to the region's social structure.

Amalgamation and automation has seen the small farms and factories of the 1920s and 30s replaced by larger farms and massive milk processing plants. Fonterra, which handles most of Taranaki's milk, is one of the world's largest dairy companies.

There are now around 2000 dairy farms in Taranaki. Cow numbers have increased steadily over the past 20 years to nearly half-a-million (500,000) with another 100,000 young or replacement stock grazing on runoffs. This intensification of farming has increased the potential for pollution of surface and ground water by cow dung, urine, agricultural chemical residues and artificial fertilizers. At the same time, farming practises are being adapted to lessen the impact the changes.

### 3.3 Symbols/Meanings

Mount Taranaki/Egmont occupies a central place in the history and culture of Taranaki people – Maori and Pakeha. The following provides a short overview of the key symbolic relationships people have had and continue to have with the mountain.

### **Maori Meanings and Symbols**

Taranaki maunga (mountain) is fundamental to the beliefs and traditions of local iwi and has been for hundreds of years. The eight iwi who live in the region, Ngati Tama, Ngati Mutunga, Ngati Maru, Te Atiawa, Taranaki, Ngaruahine, Ngati Ruanui and Ngarauru, all have traditional links to the mountain and it has a central place in their histories and foundation narratives.

Maori have a complex relationship with the land which blurs the boundaries between people, the natural environment, gods, ancestors and the spirit world. This relationship was difficult for European settlers to understand and this was likely to be at the core of much of the disrespect shown to Maori



Figure 5. Paepae Carving - 'the Mountain Always in Mind'

Wahi tapu (sacred places) of the Maori are often associated with significant historical event or place of activity. In contrast to European connections to landscape (often focused on the visual), Maori felt no need to visually represent their relationship as it was embodied within their identity and is embedded within Maori art. In the case of Mount Taranaki/Egmont it is thought to manifest as the peaked heads of carved figures. Picture 5 illustrates an entry threshold (paepae). "If these figures are not a representation of the mountain in the Western pictorial sense, they are a reinforcement of the significance that Taranaki has for its people: that the mountain, as it were, is always in mind." [17]

The following quote from Moko Mead [18] portrays the symbolic and ancestral importance of the mountain to local Iwi.

"A mountain is part of the landscape, it is a reference point. Together with other named features of the land – rivers, lakes, blocks of land, promontories, holes in the ground, fishing grounds, trees, burial places, and islands – they form a cultural grid over the land which provides meaning, order, and stability to human existence. Without the fixed grid of named features we would be total strangers on the land – lost souls with nowhere to attach ourselves"

### **European Meanings and Symbols**

Within a few months of the first European settlers arriving in 1841, the mountain's cone appears in lithographs made for the New Zealand Company. This was the first "tourist" marketing for the area. Such images were intended to entice British emigrants here. Associated with the marketing of the new land for settlement, was the systematic (and very western) surveying of the landscape into compartments and blocks to be bought and sold. One of the first surveys was linked to the mountain and has subsequently become in itself a strong symbol.

The survey work emphasized the geological form of the mountain by marking a 9.6km radius (almost a perfect circle) around the Mountain. In those early days, this symbolic enclosing ring would not have been visible or have any relevance. However, the subsequent extensive forest clearance outside of this protected surveyed circle and transformation of the land into farms and hedge lined fields (paddocks) meant that the definition of this surveyed mark become apparent through the contrast between the forest and the grazed farm land. Now a poignant and powerful symbol of a lost landscape (lush and biodiverse native forest), which once covered the entire region.

After settlement and as regions and commercial enterprises developed logos in the mid-nineteenth century, Taranaki and its industries often became identified by an image of the mountain. The mountain first appears as a logo in 1863 when New Plymouth's newspaper, the Taranaki Herald, adopted it as its masthead for five years. From that time, it featured in sporting and social club emblems, beer and aerated water labels, commercial letterheads, local authority arms and school crests.

Associated Latin mottoes usually exhort the wearer or viewer to "peaks" of scholastic or sporting attainment. Many dairy factories in the region also used the ice-bound cone of the mountain for identifying their butter wrappers or cheese crates. Today, many local companies continue to include the mountain in their logo.

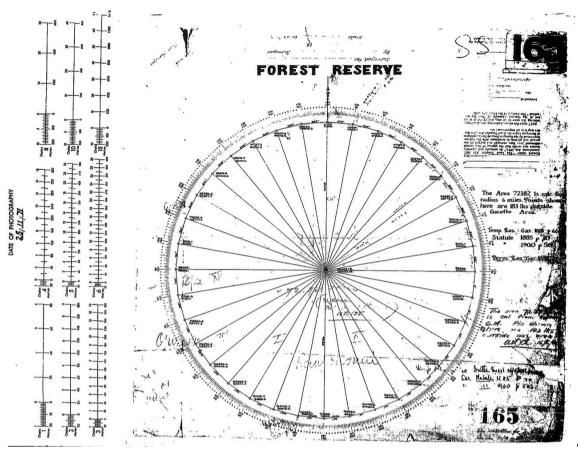


Figure 6. 1881 Survey Plan of Taranaki's Circular Forest Reserve (source: LINZ Survey Office Plan 165)

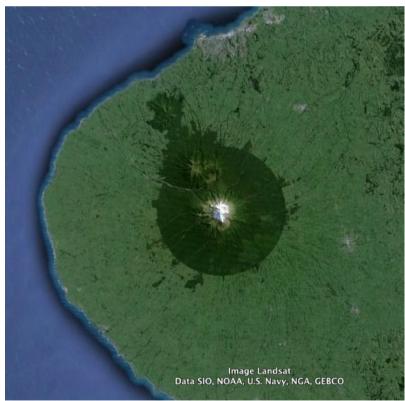


Figure 7. The Forested Ring-plain Contrasts with the Grazed Farmland (source google earth)



Figure 8. Butter Packaging with Mountain Image, Petrol Sign & Beer Bottle Label

It was not just in Taranaki that the mountain was adopted. The conical peak, often with an idyllic farming scene in the foreground, became a national icon as well. As well as in publicity material marketing the country, Mount Taranaki/Egmont could be found on a wide variety of nationally available brands including biscuit and tea tins, cheese segments, tobacco packets, stamps and even a bank note.

Despite the presence of Taranaki's distinctive mountain on the packet, most of these products were manufactured outside the region. The recent creation of national and international marketing companies and corporations has seen images of the mountain disappear from local dairy products, though both Kiwi Co-operative and Ferndale Dairies kept images of Mount Taranaki/Egmont on their products into the 1980s.

Thanks to the amalgamation of a large part of the dairy industry, products produced with milk and cream from Taranaki farms look no different to those produced in other parts of the country.

Mount Taranaki/Egmont can be viewed from 360 degrees. You can often tell the geographical location of a logo by how the mountain is depicted. The logos of communities in Hawera, Stratford, New Plymouth and the coast all have a different version of the peak's profile and the position of Fanthams Peak.

Generations of local residents have painted, sculpted, photographed the mountain and rendered images of it to distinguish their businesses, products, souvenirs, sports teams, clubs and many other interests. The mountain remains one of the most painted landmarks in any history of New Zealand landscape painting.

### 4. Conclusion

The sense of identity of the people of Taranaki is inextricably linked to the landscape, and in particular, to a landscape feature that seems to influence every aspect of the region, from its climate, social history and ecology to its art, symbolism and mythology.

Living under the shadow of the mountain has impacted on both past and present culture within the region and presents a case study of the interwoven components of identity and how this becomes an analysis tool for understanding the myriad layers of an associative cultural landscape.

The layers of contrasting values, and different understandings of the land, particularly between Maori and European, illustrate the complexity of analyzing and understanding associative cultural landscapes and highlight the need to explore both tangible and intangible evidence within such landscapes.

The case study of Mount Taranaki/Egmont illustrates the importance of understanding the place of identity within the intangible components that make us an associative cultural landscape and how this has shaped the social and landscape history of an entire region and continues to influence the future of this special volcanic landscape.

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