

A guide to bobs, sprats and dinkum Kiwi for the Yanks

New Zealanders in 1942 had firm, if romantic, ideas about Americans and the United States. Most of the thousands of marines who landed at Auckland and Wellington in that year, however, probably had only the haziest idea where they were. An American cartoon of the time showed President Roosevelt's dog sniffing at the bottom of the globe and saying, 'Oh so that is where New Zealand is'. It was known variously as a suburb of Sydney, an island off Australia and a south sea island populated by savages.

To establish the country's real identity, the New Zealand Government published a 36-page guide to place, tastes and traditions called *Meet New Zealand*. It was chatty, frank and informative and only sometimes defensive. During the American 'invasion' more than 50 000 copies were distributed to US servicemen. On almost every page it tried to keep the road toll down by reminding the visitors that traffic travelled on the left. The anonymous author called on the help of one of the country's distinctive birds:

This is the Kea

His notions are quee-ah

But 'keep to the left' is his constant injunction,

'You guys, if you want to continue to function.'

On the New Zealand economy, the booklet frankly canvassed the problems an agricultural-exporting country faced in developing an industrial capacity.

'That means we would import fewer manufactured goods', it said. 'That would mean cutting down our export markets. The problem of economic readjustment, particularly after the war, is what is giving us a headache.' It is not known what the First Division US Marines made of that economic dilemma.

About the welfare state, *Meet New Zealand* was equally disarming: 'Critics have prophesied disaster. There has been no difficulty in making payments so far; the future of the (Social Security) fund depends on the buoyancy of national wealth. So no more world wars please', it said.

On the subject of the dominion's railways, the guide was touchy. 'Yes', it said, 'we know, we know. We've said it all ourselves. But how could you build a broad-gauge railroad in a country like ours? It was hard enough to get over some of those hills at all.' Improvements were on the way, though, and 'we've even begun air conditioning'.

New Zealand currency was carefully explained, a difficulty compounded by most of the coins having more than one name. A half-crown was two shillings and sixpence. It was also called half a dollar but a US dollar was worth 6s 1d in New Zealand. A florin or 'two bob' was two shillings. A 'bob' was a shilling. A 'sprat' was sixpence and a 'thrippence' was threepence. The political message was clear: 'We don't belong to

England, we don't pay taxes to England. Winston Churchill doesn't tell us what to do, and Parliament in England doesn't pass laws for us.

'We're not a British colony though that's the way we started out; we're a Dominion and a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. If the constitutional position seems to you hard to understand, remember that sometimes we find it hard to understand ourselves. Even the lawyers.'

As a guide to communication, *Meet New Zealand* published a compact glossary of terms in common use. Some must have seemed bizarre to the American ear, and their official definitions only 'added to the fun'.

The terms included:

Aussie: Australian (noun or adjective).

Argue the toss: argue, dispute.

Biscuit: cookie, cracker.

Chemist's shop: drugstore (but you don't get candy or drinks there).

Cobber: friend.

Cocky: farmer, generally on a small farm.

Cow-cocky: dairy farmer.

Corker: very good.

Cow: may just mean cow, but may also mean an unpleasant man, woman or situation. These things may also be called, progressively, a **fair cow**, and a **fair adjectival cow**.

Crook: ill, bad. **To feel crook,** to feel ill. **A crook boss,** a bad employer. **Crook,** to go: to give vent to anger. Also fly off the handle, hit the roof.

Dig, Digger: Australian or New Zealand soldier.

Dinkum: true, genuine. **The dinkum oil,** the real truth.

Fair treat: denotes emphasis—e.g., the boss went crook a fair treat.

Graft, or hard graft: hard work.

Jake, Jakealoo: good, okay.

Knock up: to get anyone out of bed at a late hour.

Nark: unpleasant person. **Fair nark:** a very unpleasant person. **To nark:** to spoil—e.g., now you've gone and narked the whole show!

Pommie: English person.

Possie, Pozzie: position.

Scone: baking-powder biscuit.

Screw: salary, wage.

Sheep station: big sheep farm, ranch.

Sheila, skirt: girl.

Shout: buy something for someone (often a drink).

Skite: boast, brag (verb), boaster (noun).

Squatter: farmer, generally sheep-farmer on a big scale.

Too right: certainly, sure.

Up the pole: ruined, made a mess of.

Wowser: spoil-sport, temperance advocate, puritanical person.