

A cultural approach: Hastings district

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THE HASTINGS DISTRICT LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT represents an example of a cultural approach to landscape assessment. The study definitions, method and outcomes emphasise the social and cultural basis of landscape values. The study is also notable for the way in which popular representations of landscape (eg postcards) are used to highlight the iconic quality of particular landscape features and settings.

The study focuses on two aspects of district plan preparation under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA91): the protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development under s 6(b), and the protection and enhancement of amenity values under s 7. The study identifies potential adverse effects on landscape features considered to be outstanding or of special character, and concludes with a discussion of generic landscape management issues for the district.

Definitions

KEY WORDS

Assessment

Definitions

Landscape

Outstanding

Landscape is defined as 'the relationship between natural; and human landscape patterns, human experience and perception of these patterns, and meanings associated with them'. This draws directly on an Environment Court decision that recognised landscape as more than the purely visual, but also as the physical, the perceptual and the way people experience landscape (Decision N W 114/94). 'Outstanding' is considered to be 'conspicuous, eminent, superior, excellent, distinguished, prominent, remarkable or striking' within the district context. The study also uses the RMA91 definition of 'amenity values' – 'those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people's appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes' – in its identification of landscape as areas of special character.

Method

The study has three parts:

- Part A is an overlay assessment of the district's landscapes in terms of four parameters – natural patterns, human patterns, perceptual qualities (of legibility and mental maps) and landscape meanings;
- Part B identifies outstanding landscapes and special character areas, and includes an assessment and ranking matrix; and
- Part C discusses the potential effects of change on landscape quality.

Part A, the overlay assessment, incorporates an analysis of landform units, landform elements and ecological districts as a basis for assessing the significance of natural landscape. It interprets the human landscape with reference to distinctive phases and areas of settlement and land use. Perception and experience of landscape are assessed according to the legibility of key features, combined with an assessment of the edges, routes, nodes and landmarks that structure people's mental maps of the district. This was based on expert assessment in the

CASE STUDIES

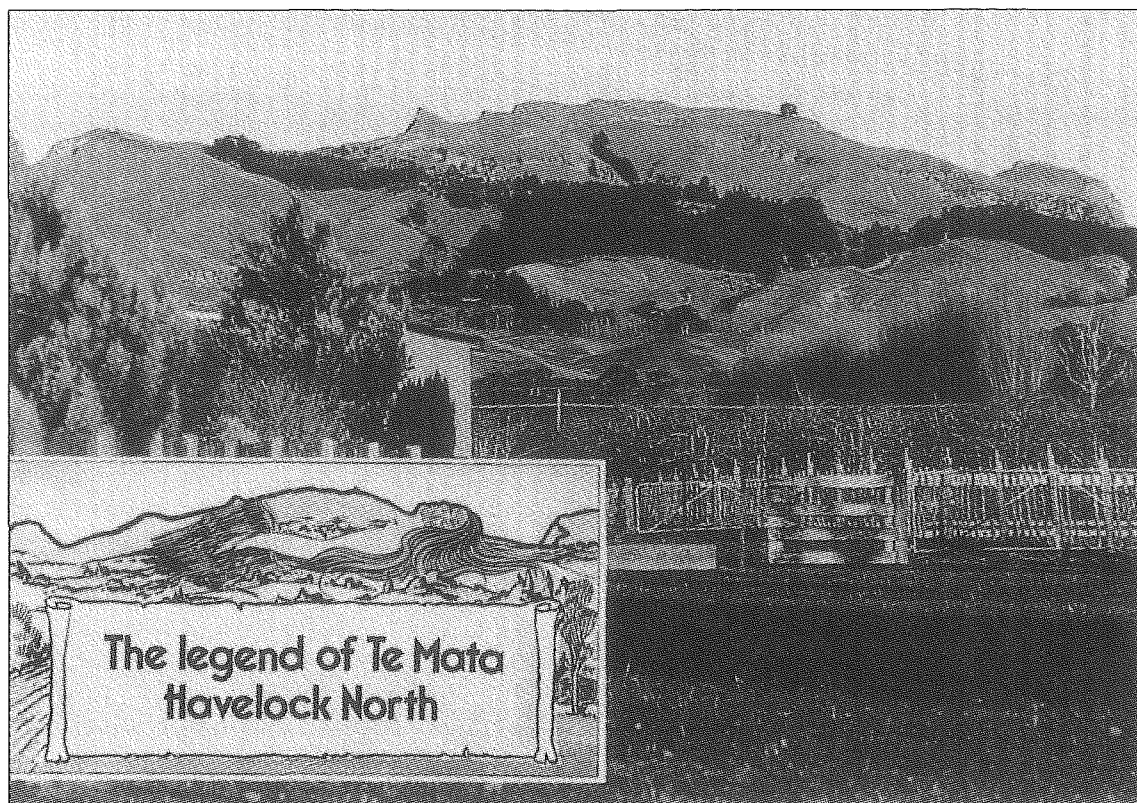


Figure 1: Postcards demonstrate Te Mata Peak's significance to the community, including the adoption of Māori legend relating to the landform.

field and analysis of popular representations of landscape, for example tourist guides, postcards and posters. Finally, the assessment analyses landscape meaning with regard to Māori placenames and whakapapa, and public representations of regional identity in commerce and fine art.

Part B of the study, which specifies outstanding landscapes or those of special character, follows two processes: an initial identification of features based on the Part A analysis, and a more systematic ranking of landform units using the different dimensions of the overlay assessment. Each area classified as outstanding or special is then spatially delineated, its significance interpreted and potential adverse effects identified.

Part C, landscape issues, discusses five activities with the potential to compromise landscape quality. They are building, earthworks, rural subdivision, forestry plantations and peri-urban development. Finally, the study recommends that Hastings District Council develop rules to protect outstanding landscapes. Rules were subsequently drafted by consultant planners Woodward Clyde Ltd. Other special landscape areas are identified in the plan but not specifically protected by rules.

Discussion

There are several methodological aspects of this study that warrant comment. First, identifying outstanding and special landscapes through the analysis of public representations of landscape extends the earlier use made of painting and poetry in the Canterbury Regional Study (Lucas Associates 1993) into analysis of

sources, such as postcards and guides, and emphasises the cultural interpretation of 'outstanding' landscape.

Second, the process is reflexive, rather than linear – the landscapes likely to be of outstanding status are identified early and their status explored and challenged through subsequent analysis. This differs from the more conventional approach, which starts with a comprehensive survey of landscape character and then narrows down the selection of outstanding landscapes through the systematic application of particular evaluation criteria.

Third, the study recommends a very focused management approach in which a limited number of tightly defined landscapes are designated as outstanding and then protected through resource management rules. These designated landscapes are complemented by a wider range of settings identified as having special character but whose management is entirely entrusted to the stewardship of owners. This contrasts with the approach favoured by some other consultants in which extensive areas are recognised as warranting 'outstanding' status, but in which emphasis is placed on the active promotion of management guidelines, rather than regulation.

REFERENCES

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