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HOLDINGS IN THE HISTORY OF
NEW ZEALAND SCIENCE: A REVIEW

What Cook has added to the mass of our knowledge is such that it will strike deep roots and long have the most decisive influence on the activity of men.

George Forster, 1787¹

Cook's major legacy to the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand was European settlement and science: his discoveries came near the beginning of a new awakening in the European scientific consciousness and his spheres of exploration had the novelty, scope and expertise to arouse, stimulate and further new ideas on the origins of man and nature. The Pacific therefore was and remained a repository of modern European science, and our civilizations there, indigenous and colonial, drew on and contributed in fundamental ways to the development of European science.

In 1859, the year of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Arthur Saunders Thomson, surgeon to the 58th Regiment in New Zealand (1847-58), an expert Maori ethnologist, meteorologist, zoologist and respectable statistician, noted in his *The Story of New Zealand*—undoubtedly up to then the best general review of scientific research in New Zealand to appear since Dieffenbach's *Travels* (1843)—that

New Zealand presents one of the best proofs in the world that every portion of the earth has its own peculiar forms of animal and vegetable life . . . [and is] an admirable geological school.²

Sixty years later, at the first New Zealand Science Congress in Christchurch in 1919, Leonard Cockayne, a world figure in botanical ecology, remarked that a 'history of New Zealand science itself in its various branches [would] form the basis for future advances'³ and, seven years later, in a Legislative Council debate on the Health Report on the future of scientific and industrial research in the Dominion, George Malcolm Thomson, the country's best informed scientific politician, confidently asserted that 'the immense amount of research carried out in New Zealand had been probably for its population more than in any other part of the Empire'.⁴

With such a respectable legacy of scientific research, experimentation, teaching and the application of science and its methods to the human experience and natural environments in New Zealand it is, perhaps, time for historians to consider introducing this field of intellectual, social