



Charles Heaphy. Crater of White Terrace. Watercolour, 39.4 x 60.3cm. Alexander Turnbull Library

ones, are being broken down. It has been the custom to allow no-one to visit Rotomahana unless in the native boat or accompanied by a native guide; but our local artist, Mr Charles Blomfield, who has been negotiating for some weeks past with the principal chiefs of Rotomahana, has at length obtained their consent to allow him to go there alone. He intends to take a boat, and camp on the shores of Rotomahana for some weeks, and thoroughly explore the district. Instead of trusting to a few rapid sketches as hitherto, he intends to take a number of canvases and paint direct from nature, thus getting a much more truthful representation of the many strange and beautiful sights in this wonderland of the antipodes. Mr Blomfield expects to exhibit some of these pictures at the forthcoming exhibition of the Society of Arts in April.⁶

Blomfield spent six weeks that summer at Rotomahana in the company of his eight-year-old daughter. Mary amazed tourists by frolicking in the steaming landscape, as her father painstakingly worked up a series of twelve canvases.

Blomfield documented the trip in an invaluable series of letters to his wife, in which he reveals his method of working on the same picture on various days, as atmospheric and/or geothermal conditions recurred.⁷ He mentions initial troubles with a Te Arika chief he calls 'Thompson the Thundercloud', and describes the arrival of photographer George Valentine with associate George Chapman in January 1885. At first he suspects them of having 'jumped our claim, and I believe pitched their tent in the very place I cleared for ours'.⁸ That evening Blomfield visited the photographers and reported Valentine (whom he calls Ballantyne) as saying 'another wet day would be enough for him'.⁹ Instead the weather cleared,