

# How true to nature is Eugene von Guérard's *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, Middle Island, New Zealand?*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article investigates Eugene von Guérard's claim that his *Lake Wakatipu* painting (1877–79) was 'as true to nature as far as possible' by examining the extent to which its features are faithful to the view at the site; to the geography, geomorphology, geology, ecology and botany of the location; and to the conditions experienced on the day of his visit. Critical to this fidelity analysis is determining the location from which the artist sketched the views on which the painting is based. His moving vantage point resulted in some features being portrayed from different perspectives. This raises some geographical fidelity issues, although the painting was not intended to be a composite work per se. Despite heightening peaks and steepening slopes for compositional purposes, the work exhibits a high degree of fidelity to many aspects of the landscape and to the natural history of the Wakatipu Basin, particularly when compared with historical photographs in the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Von Guérard's limited familiarity with the geology and flora of the region did, however, result in a few inaccuracies. The article includes a discussion of the historical fidelity of the painting relating to pounamu (greenstone) sourced in the surrounding mountains, and concludes with the affirmation the artist received from the scientist Julius von Haast.

**KEYWORDS:** Fidelity, true to nature, Lake Wakatipu, Eugene von Guérard, colonial landscape painting, artistic licence, natural history, digital elevation model, historical photographs.

## Introduction

The painting *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, Middle Island, New Zealand, 1877–79* (Fig. 1) has achieved iconic status in New Zealand, with its image gracing the covers of art history publications, travel guides and general history books. It illustrates a dramatic view of 'untouched nature' from the shore of a turquoise lake in a stunning alpine

setting. At first glance, the picture appears to be 'true to nature', particularly for those familiar with the head of Lake Wakatipu. However, difficulties encountered in locating a spot along the shoreline where the view matches that of the painting suggest the work is not necessarily as faithful as is often assumed. This insight led to a comprehensive investigation of the fidelity to nature of the composition.



Fig. 1 *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, Middle Island, New Zealand, 1877–79*, oil on canvas, 991 × 1765 mm. Artist Eugene von Guérard (purchased 1971. MacKervie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki).

The work was painted by the Austrian-born, academically trained landscape artist Eugene von Guérard (1811–1901), who arrived in Victoria, Australia, in 1852 in search of gold. A year of mining resulted in gold sufficient only to fashion rings for his forthcoming wedding to his fiancée Louise Arnz, who was then aboard a ship bound for the colony. According to the postscript of his goldfield journal, von Guérard recommenced his ‘career as a landscape painter’, in which he ‘achieved considerable success’ (von Guérard n.d.: 42).<sup>1</sup> During the 1850s and 1860s, von Guérard became the leading landscapist in Victoria, producing many oil paintings of wilderness and pastoral scenes based on drawings he made during excursions into the southeastern Australia hinterland. In 1870, he was appointed curator and painting master at the National Gallery of Victoria, posts he occupied until his return to Europe in 1882. These demanding roles precluded further major artistic excursions, although von Guérard managed to fit in two month-long trips during his summer holidays, one to Tasmania in 1875 and another to New Zealand in 1876.

In 1879, von Guérard completed two major paintings of New Zealand scenery. Some commentators consider them to be ‘outstanding works’ and the ‘zenith’ of his artistic output (Bonyhady 1985: 81; Eagle & Jones 1994: 56). These large, identically sized works, depicting Milford Sound/Piopiotahi in Fiordland and Lake Wakatipu in Otago, were

undertaken over a period of three years and were intended to be companion pieces. They were the ‘most widely exhibited New Zealand paintings of the nineteenth century’, being highly praised in Melbourne, Sydney, London and Paris (Blackley 1990: 41; Bade 1993: 106). Despite this, they remained unsold until 1881, when the merchant Frederick Dalgety (1817–94) purchased both for his growing collection of von Guérard paintings (Bruce 1980: 90).

### ‘True to nature’

Referring specifically to these two paintings, von Guérard wrote to his friend the geologist Julius von Haast (1822–87), director of Canterbury Museum, in 1879 that his aim was ‘to be as true to nature as far as possible’ (von Guérard to von Haast, 29 December 1879). Furthermore, he was ‘convinced that a thoroughly executed artwork requires a deeper understanding of nature’.<sup>2</sup> Despite these intentions, the artist was anxious to know whether the geologist considered the paintings to be as faithful to nature as was feasible, a question revisited in the postscript to this paper. The leading Melbourne art critic James Smith was, however, in no doubt about the Wakatipu painting at least, when he wrote that those ‘who have visited the lake will recognise the conscientious fidelity [to nature]’ of the work (Smith 1877: 7).

The overall objective of my research into von Guérard's Antipodean paintings is to resolve the vexed issue of what being 'true to nature' meant to the artist by analysing what he did in practice. This issue was not 'properly addressed' in the retrospective exhibition *Eugene von Guérard: Nature revealed* at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2011,<sup>3</sup> nor has it been adequately explored in earlier and more recent publications. My research involved surveying the ways in which a large number of the artist's works are faithful to the view at the sites, and the natural history of the locations where he made the field drawings on which he based the landscape paintings.<sup>4</sup>

*Lake Wakatipu* proved to be an ideal case study, as it is one of the few paintings for which von Guérard declared his principal objective. In addition, numerous early photographs of the Lake Wakatipu district taken by Alfred Burton (c. 1834–1914) in the same or following decade as the artist's visit exist in the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Some of the images taken on Burton's pioneering 'photographic expeditions', using both a mobile darkroom van and a tent (Whybrew 2010: 44–46), permit an assessment of the fidelity to nature of features illustrated in the Milford and Wakatipu paintings by comparing them, a situation that is true for only a handful of other paintings from von Guérard's studio.

Six months prior to von Guérard's 1876 visit, Burton spent seven weeks photographing the Lake Wakatipu region, accumulating about 125 images, many of the lake itself (Whybrew 2010: 124, 341). Some images were probably displayed in the Burton Brothers studio in Dunedin, or sold

as prints or postcards there or in Queenstown. Intriguingly, inside the front cover of the pocket-sized sketchbook in which von Guérard made more than 200 drawings of New Zealand scenery, the artist chronologically listed expenses associated with the trip, including three related to photographs (von Guérard 1876a).<sup>5</sup> As the artist was a self-confessed 'great admirer of photography' (von Guérard 1870) and appreciated the usefulness of photographs as records for landscape painters, he may have purchased prints or postcards relating to scenes he intended to paint. Whether he used any of those photographs when painting elements of *Lake Wakatipu* is a question explored in the conclusion to this paper.

## The visit to New Zealand

Von Guérard visited New Zealand once, late in his Antipodean sojourn. On 20 January 1876, he departed from Melbourne on the barque-rigged steamship the SS *Otago*, with Louise and their 19-year old daughter, Victoria, for a tour around the South (Middle) Island, which included a brief stopover in Wellington. Such sailing excursions could be dangerous, as seen when the ship was wrecked later that year (Fig. 2).<sup>6</sup> The tour comprised visits to Milford Sound/Piopirotahi, Invercargill, Lake Wakatipu, Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, Nelson, Greymouth and finally Hokitika, where at last they saw Aoraki/Mt Cook (Pullin 2018: 162–65, [316]). By 20 February, the family was back home in Melbourne.



Fig. 2 *Wreck of the SS Otago at Chasland's Mistake*. Photographers Nicholas & Hoff (Hocken Collection). The shipwreck occurred in December 1876, nine months after von Guérard's trip.



Fig. 3 Top: Panorama of Milford Sound/Piopirotahi assembled from three sketches made on 24 January 1876 in the album *Views in New Zealand, 1876*. Artist Eugene von Guérard (Alexander Turnbull Library, left, E-342-f-004; middle, E-342-f-003; right, E-342-f-005). Bottom: *Milford Sound, with Pembroke Peak and Bowen Falls, 1877–79*, oil on canvas, 992 × 1760 mm. Artist Eugene von Guérard (Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Arriving at Milford Sound/Piopirotahi early in the morning on 24 January, and after being rowed to the shore of Freshwater Basin, von Guérard soon established the best vantage point and spent most of the day making a large, highly detailed pencil drawing of the scene, in a panorama that stretched across three sheets, measuring 300 × 980 mm. in total and encompassing a field of view of about 145° (Fig. 3, top).<sup>7</sup> That large sketch forms the basis of his major painting of the fiord (Fig. 3, bottom).<sup>8</sup>

The SS *Otago* then sailed around the coast of Fiordland to Invercargill, where the von Guérards disembarked and travelled by train and coach to the southern end of Lake Wakatipu at Kingston. On 28 January, the family travelled

by paddle steamer to Queenstown (Fig. 6), where they stayed for several nights at Eichardt's 'Family' Hotel and enjoyed the views around the lake during the daytime.<sup>9</sup>

Wakatipu is a very deep, 80 km-long dogleg-shaped lake. It fills a large valley, U-shaped in cross section, which was originally sculpted by 'glacial advances over the last two million years' in a southerly direction that terminated at the moraines south of Kingston about 18,000 years ago (Simpson & Teele 2017: 7). The glacier has since retreated to the upper slopes of peaks such as Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi, north of the head of the lake (Fig. 4), while leaving moraines at various locations as far as the furthest reach of the glacier at the southern end of the current lake.



Fig. 4 Google Earth view of Lake Wakatipu.



Fig. 5 [Head of the lake, 29 January 1876], folio 111 in 'Sketchbook XXXVIII' (von Guérard 1876a). Artist Eugene von Guérard (State Library of New South Wales 825444).

On 29 January, the family went on a one-day excursion aboard a paddle steamer to the head of the lake, disembarking briefly at Kinloch. On the way, the artist sketched the view on which the Lake Wakatipu painting is primarily based. In contrast to the large Milford drawing, this time he completed the sketch on two facing pages in his pocket-sized sketchbook, which measured approximately 100 × 300 mm. in total (Fig. 5). The sketch has a few annotations, which are mostly colour notes, and some code numbers along the bottom that refer to more detailed sketches of particular features, found on preceding and following pages.

### Finding the vantage point

Before the fidelity of the view in the Lake Wakatipu painting can be evaluated, it is first necessary to establish where the artist would have been located when he made the double-page drawing in his sketchbook (Fig. 5). The family travelled to the head of the lake on a one-day tourist excursion aboard the SS *Antrim* (Fig. 6). As the sketch includes no land in the foreground, it is reasonable to conclude that it was made from the deck of the moving vessel. The SS *Antrim* travelled at a cruising speed of about 6 knots, which meant that the



Fig. 6 Left: [Paddle steamer on Lake Wakatipu, 28 Jan. 1876], f. 93, 'Sketchbook XXXVIII' (von Guérard 1876a). Artist Eugene von Guérard (State Library of New South Wales). Right: Pigeon Island, Lake Wakatipu, 1886. Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa C.016728). The ship is the SS *Antrim* and the peaks of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi can be seen in the left half of the photograph.

artist's vantage point could have shifted by up to 1 km in just under six minutes (Travelling Reporter 1878: 4).<sup>10</sup> Assuming that von Guérard outlined the scene quickly and then filled in the details as the ship moved forward, his changing perspective could have resulted in some features shifting on the two pages relative to others.

As it was not possible to take a cruise to the head of the lake during a 2017 visit, I drove to Kinloch on the sealed road running alongside the eastern shore of the lake. At Bennetts Bluff lookout, a similar view came into sight (Fig. 7, bottom). Although the skyline is close to that recorded in the sketch, the right middle-ground promontory, referred to here as '25 Mile Point', reaches

much further into the lake relative to the position of the background mountains than in the drawing (top), which implies that von Guérard sketched from out on the lake.<sup>11</sup>

As the left peak of the mountain named 'Earnslaw' on the sketch sits directly in line above the tip of 25 Mile Point, the 'plumb bob' method establishes a sight line (Fig. 7, top, vertical dashed red line), which can then be projected onto a topographic map (Fig. 8).<sup>12</sup> According to the digital topographic map I used,<sup>13</sup> the left (west) 2820 m-high peak of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi is located at geographical coordinates 44°37'31.8"S, 168°23'40.9"E, while the tip of 25 Mile Point is located at 44°59'30.9"S, 168°25'49.8"E.

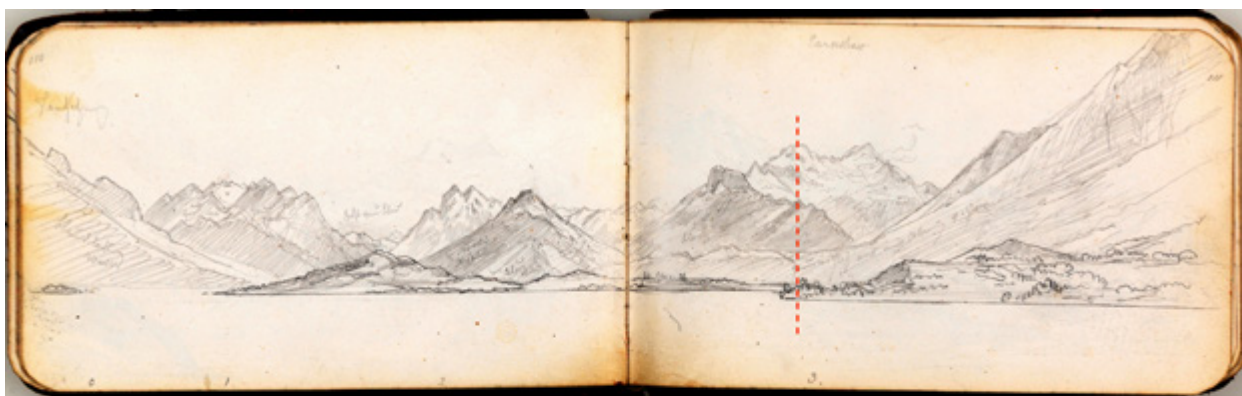


Fig. 7 Top: [Head of the lake]. The vertical dashed line represents a 'plumb bob' sight line that can be projected onto a topographic map (Fig. 8). Bottom: View from Bennetts Bluff lookout, 28 April 2017, 11.23 am. Photographer George Hook.

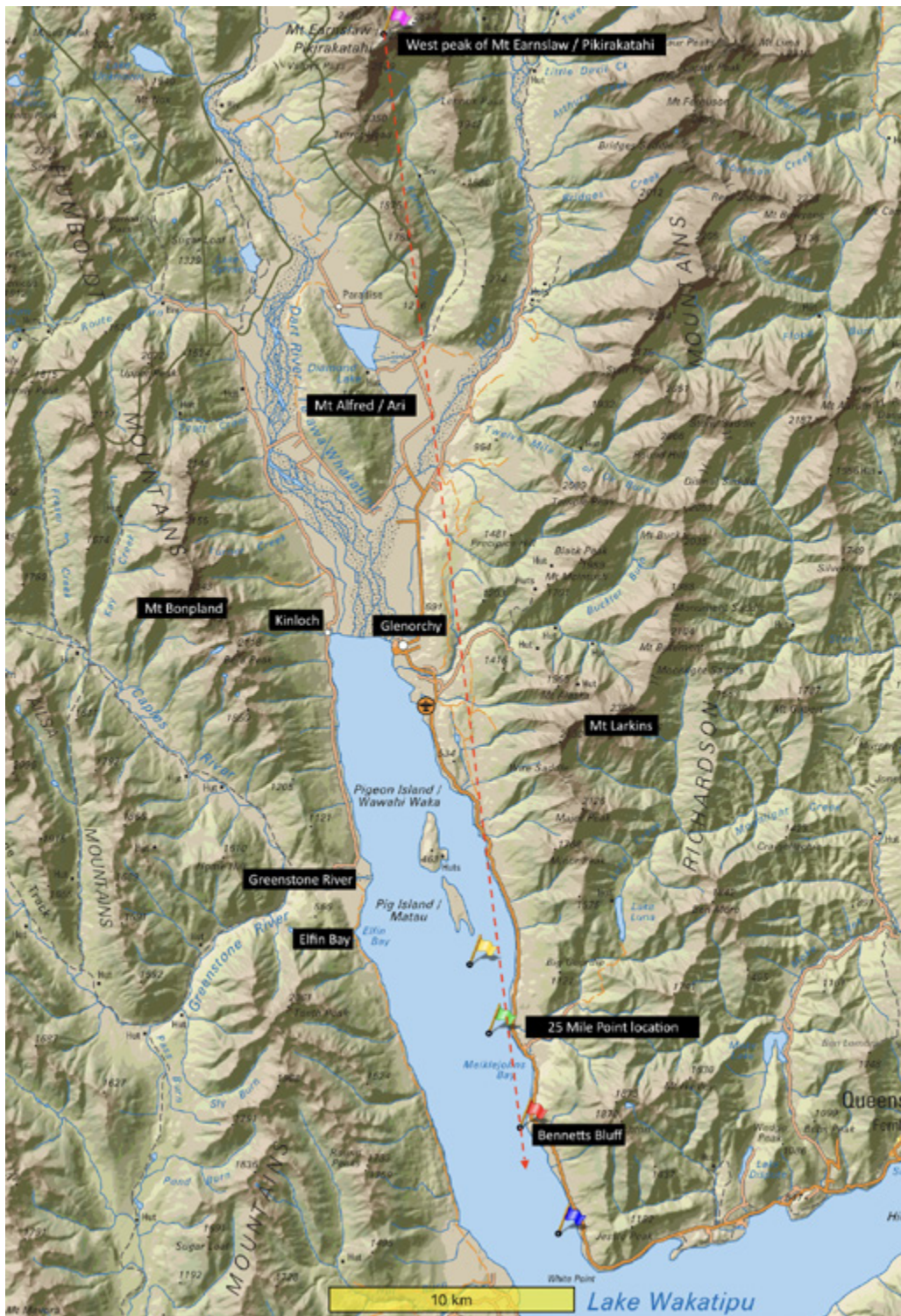


Fig. 8 NZ Topo250 South Island map supplied by Memory-Map (detail). Black labels added. The dashed red line is the plumb bob sight line derived from von Guérard's panoramic sketch (Fig. 7, top), projected onto the topographic map of the district. The red flag indicates the approximate vantage point of that sketch; the blue flag, that of the Humboldt Mountains sketch (Fig. 15, bottom); the green flag, that of the sketched details of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi (Fig. 13, top right); and the yellow flag, that of the Pig Island/Mātau depiction on the principal field drawing (Fig. 5; see 'Topographical fidelity' section below).

The digital application PeakFinder, which generates a virtual outline or ‘digital elevation model’ of the topography of the landscape surrounding any site, was then used on an iPad to determine the approximate location of the admittedly mobile vantage point from which the artist sketched the panorama of the head of Lake Wakatipu.<sup>14</sup> Although the application is designed primarily for field use by tourists and trampers, enabling them to identify surrounding peaks, it is also possible to go virtually to any set of geographical coordinates to see the ‘topography’ that would be visible from that location.<sup>15</sup> The PeakFinder application was used to move the ‘virtual observer’ back and forth along this sight line, within the confines of the lake, until all the peaks in the sketched view (Fig. 9) came into sight, and the close and far peaks had the same relative heights. The closest match occurred at the geographical coordinates 45°01'38"S and 168°26'04"E (Fig. 9, top).<sup>16</sup> The PeakFinder view in the illustration is scaled so that Mt Alfred/Ari and the highest

peak of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi (2830 m) align exactly (vertical red lines) with those features in the sketch, and the whole of the sketched scene is captured in the PeakFinder view. Features that do not quite align are indicated by blue lines. The features on the right page of the sketch are only slightly out of alignment, while those on the left page are significantly out of alignment, but inconsistently so. The fact that Black Peak (circled in blue) just appears in the gap between the right flank of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi and the left flank of Mt Larkins is a strong indicator that the virtual locus of the PeakFinder view is very close to von Guérard’s mobile vantage point. The misalignments on the left page of the sketch suggest that either that part of the skyline was drawn shortly after the counterpart on the right page when the ship’s position had changed, or more likely, given that those features are inconsistently misaligned, the artist found it difficult to get the proportions right on his mobile vantage point.

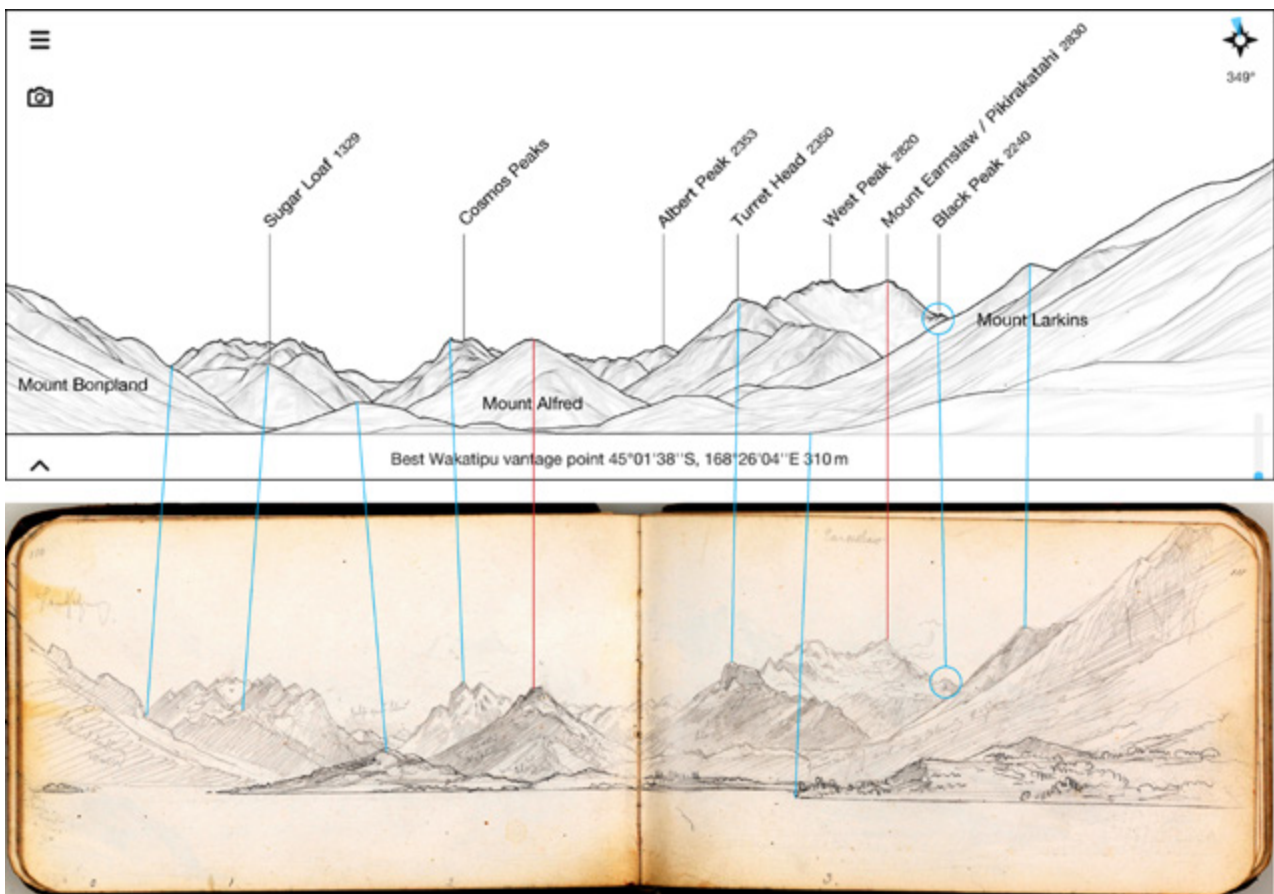


Fig. 9 Top: PeakFinder view. Bottom: [Head of the lake]. Comparing features in the sketch with the PeakFinder view. The vertical red lines to the most prominent landscape features are used to scale the PeakFinder view so that it matches the sketched view, and the blue lines indicate the alignment of other significant features.

## How true to nature is the work?

With the vantage point of the principal field sketch on which von Guérard based *Lake Wakatipu* established, it is now possible to evaluate the extent to which his painting is actually 'true to nature as far as possible'. In order to systematically analyse his fidelity to the view at the site and the natural history of the location, a wide range of different features of the painting are considered. These

include the topography of the landscape, the elevation of summits, the framing of the scene, the scale of features, the geomorphology of landforms, the nature of the perspective taken, the details of the foreground, the geology of exposed rock, the flora and fauna illustrated, the ecological patterns, the geographical orientation and illumination of the scene, the cloud formations and hydrological features. As fidelity to nature often intersects with the issue of fidelity to history when the historical period illustrated in an artwork is open

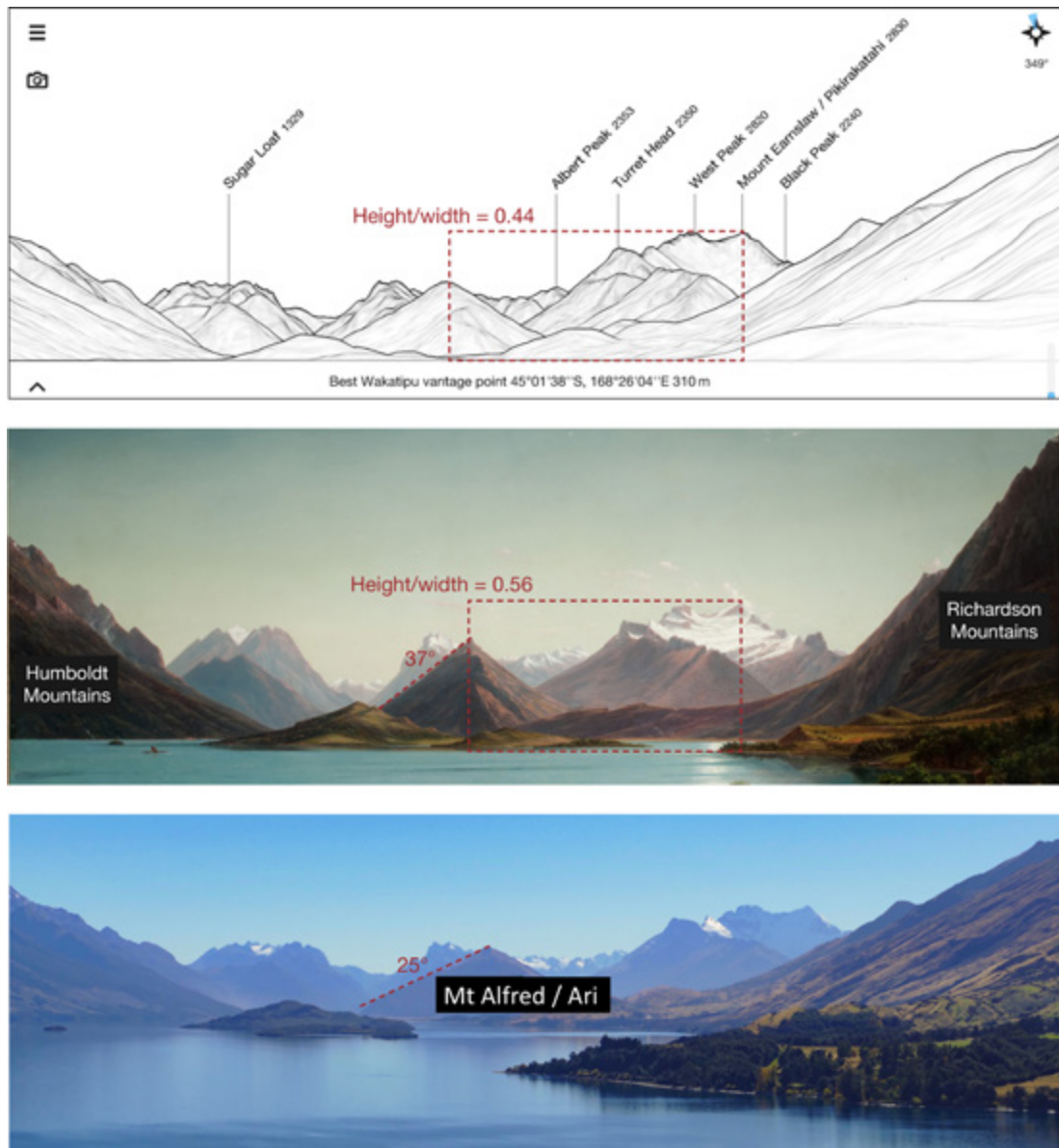


Fig. 10 Top: Northerly PeakFinder view from 45°01'38"S, 168°26'04"E. Middle: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Bottom: Panoramic photograph of the head of the lake. Photographer George Hook. Comparison of the topography illustrated in the painting with the PeakFinder view from close to the vantage point of the sketch, and with a modern photograph from Bennetts Bluff lookout, about 600 m northeast of the PeakFinder locus. The dashed red rectangle is used to compare the heights of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi in different views, and the dashed red line to compare the slope angle of Mt Alfred/Ari.

to question, this additional aspect is briefly explored. Finally, the paper answers the question of how true to nature is *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, Middle Island, New Zealand*.

### Topographical fidelity

When the painted landscape is compared with the PeakFinder view at a locus close to the vantage point of the panoramic sketch and a photograph taken from Bennetts Bluff Lookout, which is about 600 m in a northeast direction from the PeakFinder locus, it is clear that von Guérard has accurately rendered the general topography of major features of the landscape – and remarkably so, given his moving vantage point (Fig. 10). The overall shape and positioning of peaks and background features are accurately rendered and well located relative to one another, which indicates that von Guérard was indeed concerned with topographical accuracy in this scene, as art historian Ruth Pullin asserted (Pullin 2009: 12).

Despite the general topographic accuracy of the background landscape, there is a puzzling discrepancy in

the middle ground relating to the two islands. Although the larger and higher Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka is correctly positioned relative to the background peaks when compared with the PeakFinder view from close to the vantage of the field sketch (Fig. 11), the much lower Pig Island/Mātau has migrated a significant distance to the right. As von Guérard has faithfully painted the position of Pig Island/Mātau relative to Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka and Mt Alfred/Ari, as illustrated in the sketch, it must be concluded that the location of Pig Island/Mātau was incorrectly sketched in the panoramic drawing. This was because the features of the two islands looked to be part of a single island from his vantage point off Bennetts Bluff, but as the steamer headed further north, it would have become apparent to the travelling artist that there were indeed two islands. He would then have sketched in a clearer outline of the smaller island, but by then the perspective had changed significantly as the ship had moved on in a northwest direction towards Kinloch, thus generating a view of Pig Island/Mātau from further to the west, which would have shifted the island to the right in the sketch.<sup>17</sup>

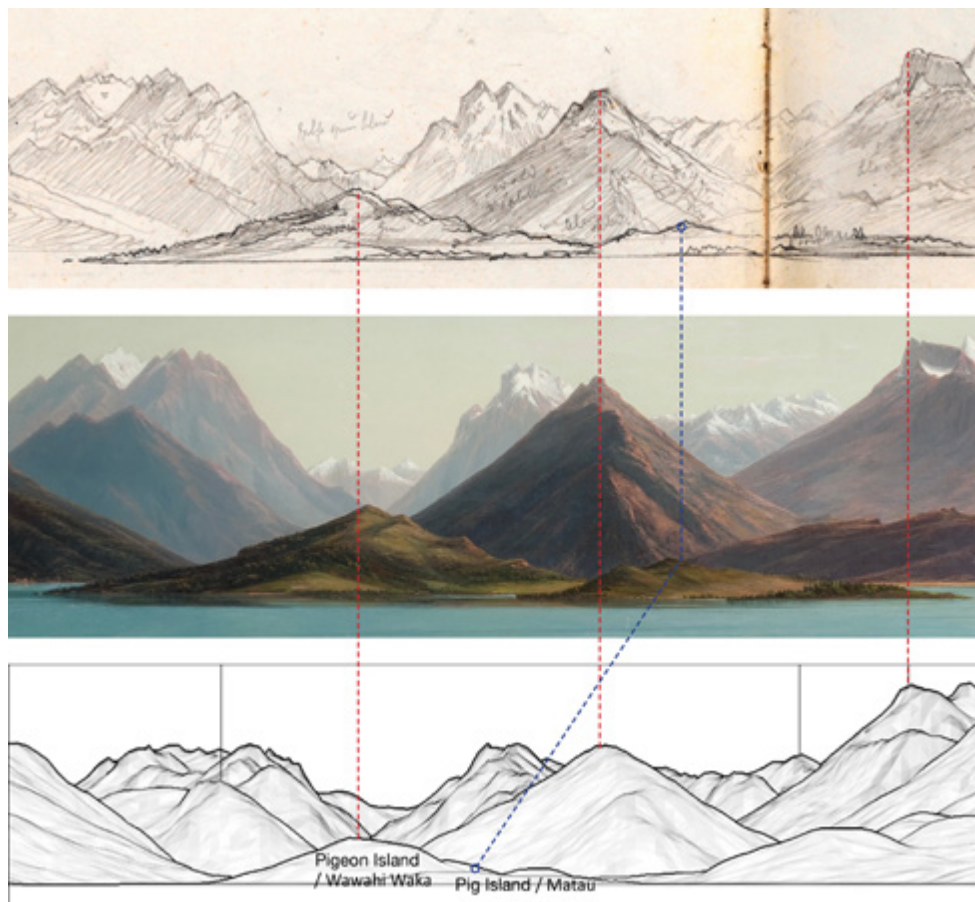


Fig. 11 Top: [Head of the lake] (detail). Middle: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Bottom: PeakFinder view from close to the vantage point of the panoramic field sketch (detail).

### Elevational fidelity

Von Guérard typically exaggerates the heights of peaks and hills in his Australian landscapes for dramatic effect.<sup>18</sup> Despite the much higher elevations of the mountains he encountered in New Zealand compared to those in Australia, the artist still resorted to amplifying the peaks in this painting and in *Milford Sound*. When the height/width ratio of a clearly defined rectangular section of the painting and that of the equivalent area of the PeakFinder view are compared (Fig. 10, top and middle, dashed red rectangles), it is apparent that Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi has been increased in height by a factor of approximately 1.27 (0.56/0.44).<sup>19</sup> The vertical exaggeration is particularly apparent in the steepness of the conical Mt Alfred/Ari, whose slope angle has been increased by a factor of 1.48 (37°/25°) when the painting is compared with the photographed view from Bennetts Bluff lookout (Fig. 10, middle and bottom, dashed red line).<sup>20</sup> The possible reasons for this heightening of summits are discussed below.

### Framing fidelity

Von Guérard often used or introduced a framing element or coulisse in his landscapes to create a more visually unified scene by linking the foregrounds and backgrounds, and to guide the viewer's eye towards the key focus of interest. Usually, the coulisse is in the form of a tall tree or sometimes a substantial rock formation. In the *Lake Wakatipu* painting, however, the artist adopted a significantly different approach to framing the scene. The more distant mountain ranges and peaks are framed within the steep mountain slopes on either side of the middle ground, which contribute to the creation of pictorial depth in the work, making the far peaks appear further away. The flanks of Mt Bonpland in the Humboldt Mountains on the far left and Mt Larkins on the far right have been dramatically steepened and the uppermost reaches of each have been heightened, as is clearly evident when the painting is compared with either the photographed or PeakFinder views (Fig. 10).<sup>21</sup> These modifications have created a wide U-shaped curve, with steeply sloping sides, that frames the far-distant view in

the upper half of the painting beyond the lake. The artist deliberately sought to evoke a visual reference to the typical U-shaped cross section of an unflooded glacial valley, thus communicating to more knowledgeable viewers the geological history of the Wakatipu Basin and confirming his 'deeper understanding of nature' that his 'thoroughly executed artwork' required. In contrast, Pullin asserts it is 'abstract rhythmic geometry of the composition', based on von Guérard's 'topographically accurate portrayal of the peaks', that implies the 'geological history of the landscape while simultaneously recording its present form' (Pullin 2009: 13). She does not, however, acknowledge the contribution of slope steepening and summit heightening to the abstract geometry of the design.

### Scaling fidelity

Von Guérard often included human figures or human-built structures to provide a sense of the scale of features in the natural landscape. Although there are human figures in both of his iconic New Zealand landscape paintings, waterborne vessels are the primary elements he used to give a sense of the relative size of the mountains – a waka on Lake Wakatipu and a steamship in Milford Sound/Piopiotahi (Fig. 12). While the vessel in the Milford painting is identifiable as miniaturised twin-funnelled, three-masted SS *Otago* (cf. Fig. 3), the waka in the Wakatipu painting is not based on anything the artist observed on the lake. The Māori population in western Otago was nearly non-existent by the time settlers entered the territory in the 1850s, perhaps due to the impact of war parties from the North Island drastically reducing the Ngāi Tahu population (Cunningham 2005: 17). Indeed, Māori had ceased expeditions crossing the lake in large waka after the 1830s (see 'Historical fidelity' section).

In the painting of the fiord, the steamship appears to be much smaller than the modern tour boat visible in a photograph taken near Bowen Falls (Fig. 12), which contributes to monumentalising the natural features visible in the scene. Judged by its distance from the viewer, the size of the waka with six crew in the Lake Wakatipu painting (Fig. 1) appears to be somewhat diminished compared with

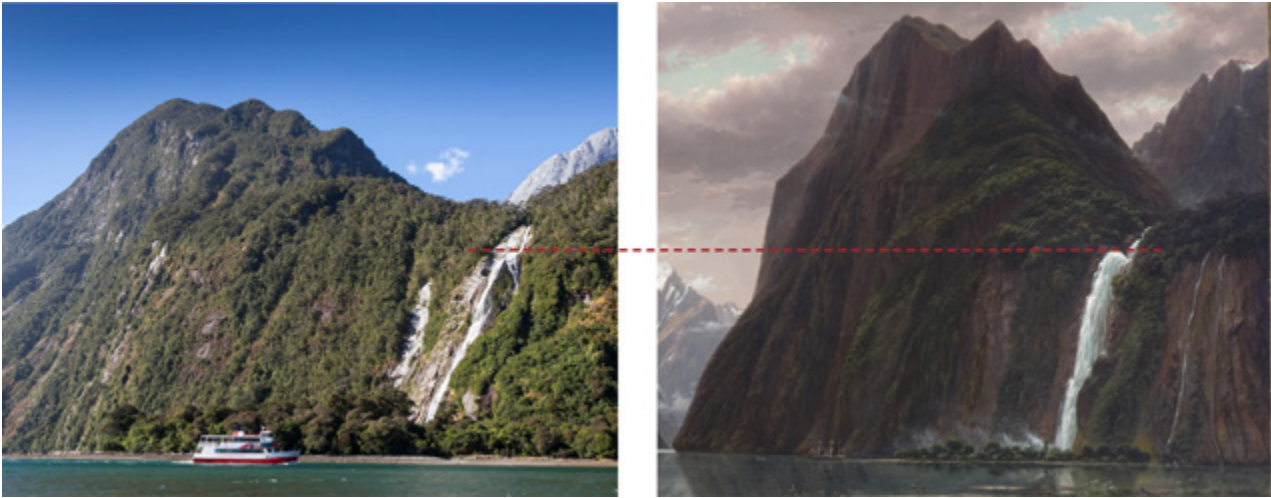


Fig. 12 Left: Tour boat passing near Bowen Falls, 2013. Photographer Ron Erwin (agefotostock). Right: *Milford Sound* (detail). The dashed red line indicates the top of Bowen Falls where the water arcs over the lip.

the size of the juvenile cabbage trees on the foreground promontory, but not to the extent that it has an impact on the apparent size of more distant features in the artwork.

### Geomorphological fidelity

The details of some peaks and slopes in the painting are not based solely on those sketched in the double-page panorama. Rather, they are also based on four other sketches, whose existence is indicated by the code numbers 0, 1, 2 and 3 along the bottom of the sketch (Fig. 5). Sketch 0 is a small section of a double-page panorama of the Humboldt Mountains (Fig. 15, bottom) on the western side of the head of the lake (Fig. 8), and sketches 1, 2 and 3 are three small sketches on the same page of the sketchbook (Fig. 13, top right). Number 1 is of Minos and Poseidon Peaks and Mt Nox; 2 is of Cosmos Peaks; and 3 is of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi. When von Guérard's two sketched and one painted views of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi with its glacier are compared with a historical photograph of the peak (Fig. 13), the artist's intention of accurately portraying important landforms is immediately obvious. He would

have been particularly concerned to faithfully portray the Earnslaw Glacier, given his interest in glaciers in general and the expertise in glaciology and knowledge of the South Island glaciers of his friend von Haast (Burrows 2005: 44–73).<sup>22</sup> Although features of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi have been heightened in the painting, the extent of the glacier is accurately illustrated when compared with the early monochrome photograph by Burton (Fig. 13, bottom left), taken only 10 years after von Guérard's visit.<sup>23</sup> Some aspects of the Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi sketch (Fig. 13, top right), particularly the details of the snow-free, flat-topped rocky peak on the right (eastern) flank of the mountain (dashed red rectangle), are not visible from the location near Bennetts Bluff (Fig. 8, red flag), where von Guérard sketched the head of the lake panorama. Indeed, as noted previously, he would not have had the time to make a detailed sketch at that location as well. The PeakFinder application was used to establish that the detailed sketch of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi would have been made as the paddle steamer passed by 25 Mile Point (Fig. 8, green flag), when the rocky peak would have come into view.

It is possible to make a more detailed comparison of



Fig. 13 Top left: [Head of the lake] (right page). Top right: [Sketched details of features labelled 1, 2 and 3 on the panorama], folio 113 in 'Sketchbook XXXVIII' (von Guérard 1876a). Artist Eugene von Guérard (State Library of New South Wales). Bottom right: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail), the dashed red rectangle encloses a significant rocky peak. Bottom left: *Mount Earnslaw, from Pigeon Island* (detail), 1886. Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa C.018199).

another landform featured in the painting with a historical photograph of the same feature, albeit from a different vantage point. Queenstown photographer William Hart (1845–1926) took the early double-plate, panoramic photograph of 25 Mile Point (Fig. 14, top) sometime between 1876 and 1885 from a hill just south of where Twenty Five Mile Creek enters Lake Wakatipu. At first glance it appears that the flat surfaces at different heights are artificial structures, but in fact they are lakeshore terraces formed over geological time when the surface of the lake was at significantly different elevations (Kober 1999).<sup>24</sup> While the angularity and flatness of the multiple terraces would have been readily visible from the paddle steamer

as it passed by, von Guérard either chose to ignore those details or failed to notice them, as the same feature in the painting has been softened and rounded to show a broad hollow with a gentle slope leading to the small hills behind. If he had reproduced those geometrical terrace structures, they would have detracted from his intended view of an 'untouched' (Bade 1993: 106) or even 'primordial' (Comstock 1967: 116) New Zealand landscape, as they could have been interpreted as the work of settlers. However, as the field sketch (Fig. 13, top left) also lacks any detail of the terracing, it is more likely that the artist was distracted by the scenery ahead as the SS *Antrim* steamed past, and failed to notice the terraces.



Fig. 14 Top: *Head of Lake Wakatipu, N.Z., from 25 Mile [Point] (detail)*, c. 1876–85. Photographer William Hart (Te Papa PA.000178). Bottom: *Lake Wakatipu (detail, showing 25 Mile Point)*.

### Perspectival fidelity

When a section of the far left of the painting (Fig. 15, top right, dashed red rectangle) is compared with the far left of the field drawing of the head of the lake (Fig. 15, top left), it is clear that not all painted features are based on detail recorded in von Guérard’s panoramic sketch, particularly the two pyramidal lower peaks. Those features are based on details illustrated in a sketch of the Humboldt Mountains (Fig. 15, bottom), made earlier that day. This is confirmed by the ‘0’ code found at the bottom of the far-left section of the panorama and of the far-right section of the earlier sketch. In this instance, the PeakFinder application indicated that the

Humboldt Mountains sketch was made from a point further south of where von Guérard made the panoramic head of the lake sketch (Fig. 8, blue flag). The heavily shaded far-right promontory in the earlier sketch (Fig. 15, bottom) is actually Bennetts Bluff. The slope on the far left of the painting has been extended upwards to better frame the more distant peaks between the flanks of the Humboldt Mountains on the left and those of the Richardson Mountains on the right (Fig. 10, middle).

The *Lake Wakatipu* painting is not, therefore, strictly faithful to the view from any single location. In reality, it is a ‘multiple viewpoint perspective’ work (Rapp 2008: 702), constructed out of views from four different vantage points

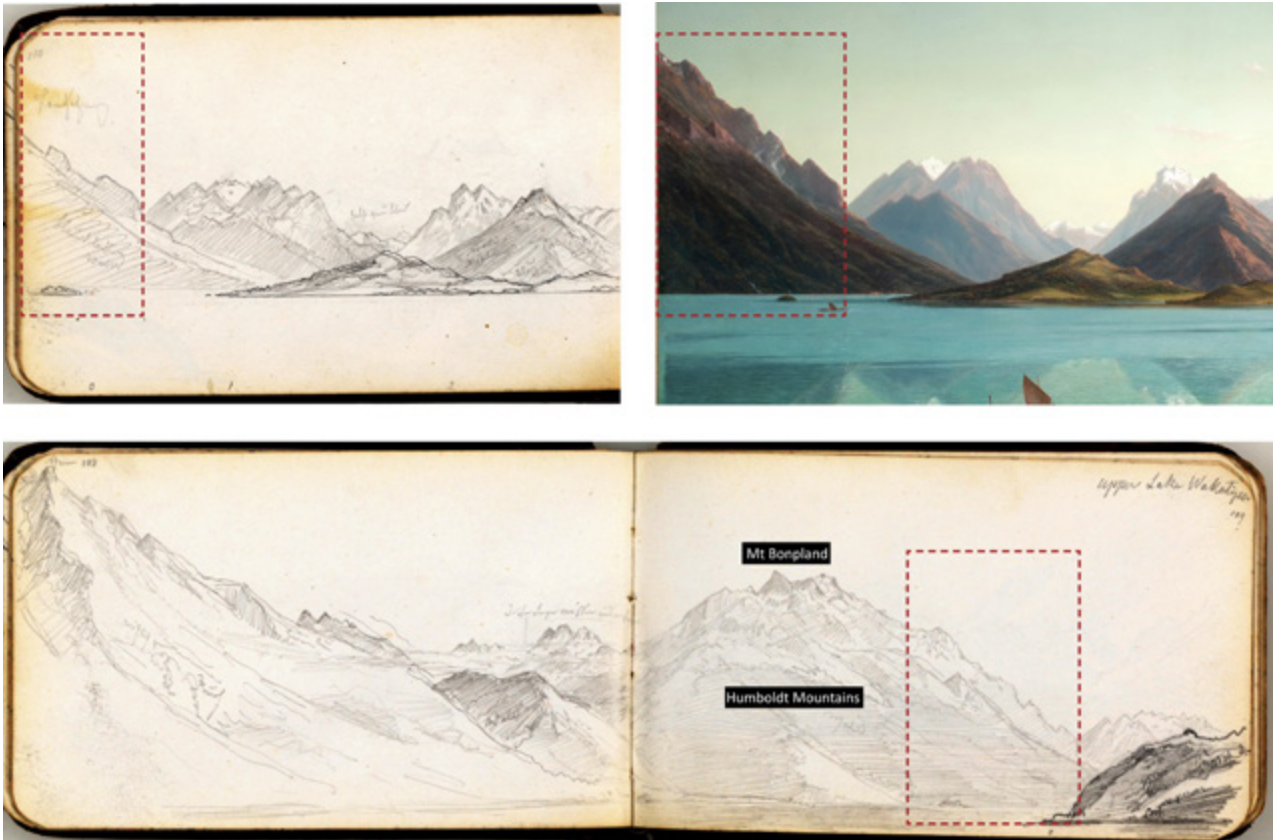


Fig. 15 Top left: [Head of the lake] (left page). Top right: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Bottom: [View of the Humboldt Mountains with Bennetts Bluff on the far right] (detail), folio 109 in 'Sketchbook XXVIII' (von Guérard 1876a). Artist Eugene von Guérard (State Library of New South Wales).

(Fig. 8, blue, red, green and yellow flags). As such, von Guérard was not seeking to break new artistic ground; rather, his painting was the inevitable consequence of his changing vantage point as the steamship headed north, and his ability to capture certain features of the scene in detail only from different spots.

### Foreground fidelity

Given that the main field sketch on which the painting is based was made from out on the lake, the entire foreground sweep of land in the painting up to the middle of the right side is invented (Fig. 16, middle).<sup>25</sup> The general topography

of that foreground is not based on any other sketch that von Guérard made in his two sketchbooks with New Zealand images,<sup>26</sup> although the rocky promontory is typical of the location (cf. Fig. 16, bottom). Even though the foreground topography and shoreline are invented, some of the botanical details are thought to be based on other sketches he made in the district (Jane Davidson-Ladd *in* Pullin 2011: 262). The artist may also have relied to some extent on his visual memory of views along the eastern shoreline from the deck of the SS *Antrim*, given that he first displayed the painting just over a year after his visit and details of the shore might still have been fresh in his mind during the intervening time.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 16 Top: [Head of the lake]. Middle: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). The land-based features within the dashed-red-line trapezium represent the invented foreground. Bottom: *Queenstown, from 3 Mile Point*, 1886. Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa C.016694).

### Geological fidelity

The bedrock of the Wakatipu Basin, which contains the lake, is schist, a metamorphic rock produced in this case when sandstone (greywacke) and mudstone were subjected to high pressure and temperature over millions of years deep in the Earth's crust, before being uplifted during the last 25 million years in a 'crustal mountain-building phase' called the Kaikoura Orogeny (Thomas 2015). This phase resulted from the ongoing collision of the Australian and Pacific crustal plates along the Alpine Fault. The schist that has been forced to the surface has a foliated structure that makes it possible to discern the degree to which it has been tilted (Fig. 17, right). The schist around Lake Wakatipu is often quarried and used as a building stone (Fig. 17, left). Fresh schist is shiny and mostly grey in colour, although there are also orange-brown and yellow-creamy schists.<sup>28</sup> Schist around Lake Wakatipu is frequently exposed in rock outcrops, and given von Guérard's interest in geology, it is reasonable to assume he would have observed and handled this rock.

Small grey schistose rocks are identifiable in a photograph (Fig. 18) taken from the foreshore not far from where the artist made the principal field sketch aboard the SS *Antrim*. However, the section of the painting that portrays small loose pebbles at the water's edge (Fig. 18, top left inset) is not distinct enough to make any identification of rock type possible, and they appear to be a pale brown colour rather than grey. In fairness to von Guérard, it should be mentioned that the steamer would not have come close enough to the eastern shore for him to have observed the details of the pebbles.



Fig. 17 Top: *Lake Wakatipu NZ, from Princes Point, 1878–80*. Photographer William Hart (Te Papa C.016661). The foliated (layered) structure of the roadside schist slabs can be clearly seen. Bottom: Wakatipu schist outcrop, near Kingston. Photographer Geoff Marshall (Alamy stock photos). The  $\sim 20^\circ$  dip of the foliated schist is apparent.



Fig. 18 Main image: View of the head of Lake Wakatipu from a beach just north of 25 Mile Point, 2017. Photographer George Hook. Insets: all *Lake Wakatipu* (details). Bottom: Foreground of painting. Top left: enlarged view of pebbles along shoreline. Top right: enlarged view of rock exposure that shows dipping sedimentary bedding.

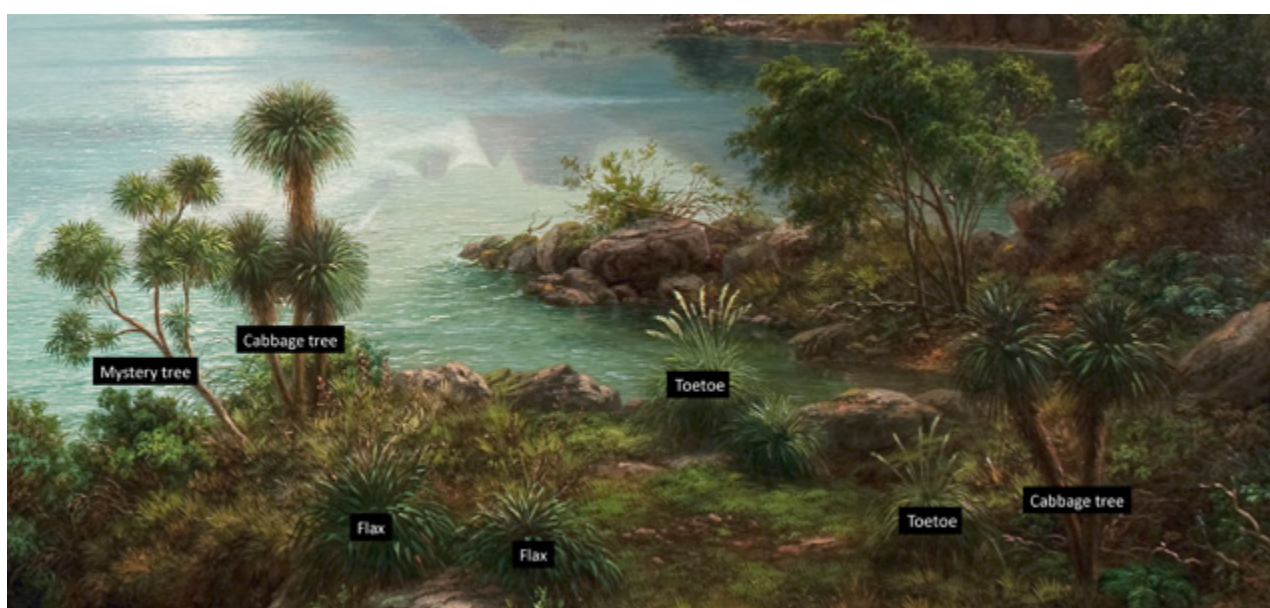


Fig. 19 *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Note the mystery tree on the far left.

The rock exposures in the foreground of the painting (Fig. 18, top right inset) have been identified as sedimentary bedding, dipping shallowly westward at about 20°,<sup>29</sup> rather than the schist exposures that are found near Bennetts Bluff.<sup>30</sup> Either deliberately or inadvertently, von Guérard illustrated sedimentary bedding, but there is none along the shoreline of the northern arm of Lake Wakatipu. There is one sedimentary outcrop with exposed sandstone and limestone on Lake Wakatipu, but it is an exposure that dips at 53° near Bobs Cove on the northern shore of the transverse leg of the lake. The artist would, however, have committed a geological infidelity if he intended to illustrate sedimentary bedding on an imaginary shoreline along the northern arm of the lake.

### Botanical fidelity

According to one art historian, the foreground of the painting was ‘a warm home to tropical plants’ (Eagle & Jones 1994: 56).<sup>31</sup> Von Guérard took particular care to illustrate some of

the unusual botanical species found growing around the lake (Fig. 19), which revealed his commitment to ‘botanical specificity and diversity’ in his paintings (Pullin 2009:12). These included cabbage trees, small flax bushes and tall tussock grass plants known as toetoe.

### Flax

The artist made two drawings in his pocket-sized sketchbook of flax bushes that he observed around the shores of Lake Wakatipu. One shows the impressive size that flax or harakeke (*Phormium tenax*) grows to (Fig. 20, bottom right) – the tips of the inflorescences can reach a height of 5 m. The other sketch (Fig. 20, top left) shows a couple of specimens of the much smaller species, mountain flax or wharariki (*Phormium colensoi*), in the foreground. Both species grow naturally around the shores of Lake Wakatipu (Simpson & Teele 2017: 32). Given their diminutive size, the flax plants with inflorescences illustrated in the painting (Fig. 20, top right) would be mountain flax.



Fig. 20 Top left: Kingston Lake Wakatipu, folio 15 in ‘Sketchbook XXXVIII’ (von Guérard 1876a). Artist Eugene von Guérard (State Library of New South Wales). Top right: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Bottom right: N.Z. Flax, Wakatipu, folio 88 in ‘Sketchbook XXXVIII’. Bottom left: *Head of Lake Wakatipu from Glenorchy* (detail). Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa O.026400).

**Toetoe**

There are five tall tussock grass species called toetoe found in New Zealand, all belonging to the genus *Austroderia*. Von Guérard was quite taken with this native plant, as he included examples with their creamy-yellow inflorescences in both of his major New Zealand works (Fig. 21), but there is no sketch of toetoe in his extant sketchbooks.

A New Zealand Department of Conservation botanist had no hesitation in identifying the tussock plants in the Wakatipu painting as belonging to the species *Austroderia richardii*, which is a South Island species found along the edges of wet places, such as lakes up to the subalpine zone.<sup>32</sup> The identification was made partly on the basis of the appearance of the plants, particularly of the flowering stalks, and partly on the basis of the known distribution of different toetoe species.

**Cabbage trees**

Cabbage trees (tī kōuka) grow throughout New Zealand. The main species is *Cordyline australis*, which has juvenile and adult forms. The juvenile form consists of a solitary trunk with a bunch of long spiky leaves at the top. Von Guérard sketched a couple of juveniles when he first reached the lake at Kingston (Fig. 20, top left), but in the painting they appear to grow in clumps or exist as multi-trunked trees (Fig. 22, left and right). An 1870s monochrome photograph taken



Fig. 21 Top: toetoe in *Milford Sound* (detail). Bottom: toetoe in *Lake Wakatipu* (detail).



Fig. 22 Left and right: *Lake Wakatipu* (details). Centre: *Cabbage Tree Grove, Halfway Bay, Lake Wakatipu*. Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa O.000871).

at Halfway Bay by Burton confirms that multi-trunk trees did exist along the shoreline of Lake Wakatipu, which von Guérard would have seen on the steamer trip from Kingston to Queenstown, as he mentions that bay by name in his notes in the back of 'Sketchbook XXXVIII' (von Guérard 1876a). According to Philip Simpson, the expert on New Zealand cabbage trees, multi-trunk trees can be induced by cutting, drought, cold or fire (Simpson 2000: 93–96).

### Mystery tree

There is one rather elegant tree in the foreground of the painting (Fig. 23, middle) that has a puzzling growth form. The spiky tufts of leaves look like those of a cabbage tree, but the pattern of branching does not resemble its equal forking growth habit (Fig. 23, right). Simpson commented that von Guérard portrays 'a mature cabbage tree of the same species [as the juveniles]. He reduced its size to fit it in, and made it more accessible to the viewer by slanting it, and giving it a branching pattern to create a form that looks like a normal, i.e. dicotyledonous, tree.'<sup>33</sup> This botanical infidelity occurred despite the artist having made a detailed drawing of a mature cabbages tree later in the trip, near Upper Hutt (Fig. 23, left). While

Simpson's latter claim may be true, von Guérard was concerned to ensure the form of the tree contributed to the picturesqueness of the scene.

### Ecological fidelity

The slopes of the Humboldt Mountains on the western side the lake (Fig. 24, top right) could have provided an ideal opportunity to assess the ecological fidelity of one of von Guérard's works, given that community zonation is apparent in an 1888 photograph by Burton (Fig. 24, top left).<sup>34</sup> The changing environmental conditions with increasing altitude result in a progression from the lighter-coloured beech forest, dominated by silver beech (*Lophozonia menziesii*) near the shoreline, eventually giving way to the darker vegetation of mountain beech (*Fuscospora diffortoides*). At the upper end of the tolerance range of mountain beech, stunted dwarf trees form the bushline, which gives way to snow tussock (*Chionochloa* spp.), interspersed with bare rock (Simpson & Teele 2017: 7).<sup>35</sup> The artist largely based his image of the flanks of the Humboldt Mountains on part of the sketch (Fig. 24, bottom) that he completed before the SS *Antrim* reached the location where he made the panoramic sketch



Fig. 23 Left: *Near Upper Hutt*, folio 177 in 'Sketchbook XXXVIII' (von Guérard 1876a). Artist Eugene von Guérard (State Library of New South Wales). Middle: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Right: *Half-way Bay Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa C.016732).



Fig. 24 Top left: *Humboldt Range – Head of Lake Wakatipu*, 1888. Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa C.016742). Top right: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). Bottom: [View of the Humboldt Mountains with Bennetts Bluff in the foreground], f. 109, ‘Sketchbook XXXVIII’ (von Guérard 1876a).

on which most of the painting is based. Although von Guérard clearly sketched the forested area and the bushline, he did not use pencil shading to record the tonal transition from silver beech to mountain beech within the forested area. On the far left of the painting (Fig. 24, top right), he clearly shows the forest commencing on the shoreline and advancing up the slope to what might be a distinct bushline just beneath the pair of bare, triangular rock faces, but unfortunately he does not distinguish between the different types of beech forest.

Another element of the painting that shows the distribution of vegetation in a distinctive way is Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka, whose details are based entirely on the main field sketch (Fig. 5). I was unable to locate any early photographs of the island from the south, but I did discover an 1866 sketch of it (Fig. 25) by von Guérard’s compatriot the Russian-born Swiss artist Nicholas Chevalier (1828–1902) in

the Te Papa collection.<sup>36</sup> Although Chevalier’s view of the island is from the west and von Guérard’s from the south, the distribution of forest on the western lower slopes, with non-forest vegetation above, is very similar in both works. Assuming that Chevalier’s sketch is accurate, this confirms the veracity of von Guérard’s ecological detail.<sup>37</sup>

### Orientation and illumination fidelity

The on-the-water distance between Queenstown and Kinloch is about 45 km. When the SS *Antrim* took tourists to the head of the lake, it cruised at around 6 knots, which meant it traversed about 11 km each hour (Travelling Reporter 1878: 4). The journey would therefore have taken about four hours and, allowing for an hour’s stopover at Kinloch for lunch, the round trip would have taken about nine hours in total. The paddle steamer must have departed from the



Fig. 25 Main image: *The larger island, Wakatipu*, 1866, pencil on paper, 100 × 170 mm. Artist Nicholas Chevalier (Te Papa 1912-0044-50/A). Inset: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail).

Queenstown wharf early on the morning of 29 January, which meant that it would have been around mid-morning when von Guérard sketched the head of the lake panorama just off Bennetts Bluff (Fig. 8, red flag). As the principal sight line of his sketched field of view is  $\sim 350^\circ$  (Fig. 9, top), he was therefore looking in a north-northwest direction. The mid-morning sun would have been shining from high in the northeast. The sunlit and shadowed areas of the main sketch (Fig. 5), particularly on Mt Alfred/Ari, indicating that the sun was high on the right side (i.e. in the northeast), accord with expected illumination at the time he made the sketch. The northern orientation and mid-morning timing of the scene he observed are faithfully reproduced in the painting (Fig. 1), particularly in the illuminated and shadowed areas on the two islands, Mt Alfred and 25 Mile Point. The intense illumination of the southward-facing Earnslaw Glacier is another indicator that von Guérard has virtually positioned

the sun relatively high in the summer sky, as it would have been when he sketched the view of the head of the lake from the SS *Antrim*.

### Meteorological fidelity

The panoramic field sketch (Fig. 5) on which the painting is primarily based shows a near cloudless sky, except for a small wispy cloud just to the right of the summit of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi (Fig. 26, left, red circle). The sunny weather is reproduced in the painting (Fig. 26, right), with the Earnslaw cloud now drifting in a westerly direction, along with a few other very small, slightly pinkish clouds above and beyond the West Peak of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi, as well as high in the sky and just above a rocky outcrop on the flank of Mt Larkins.

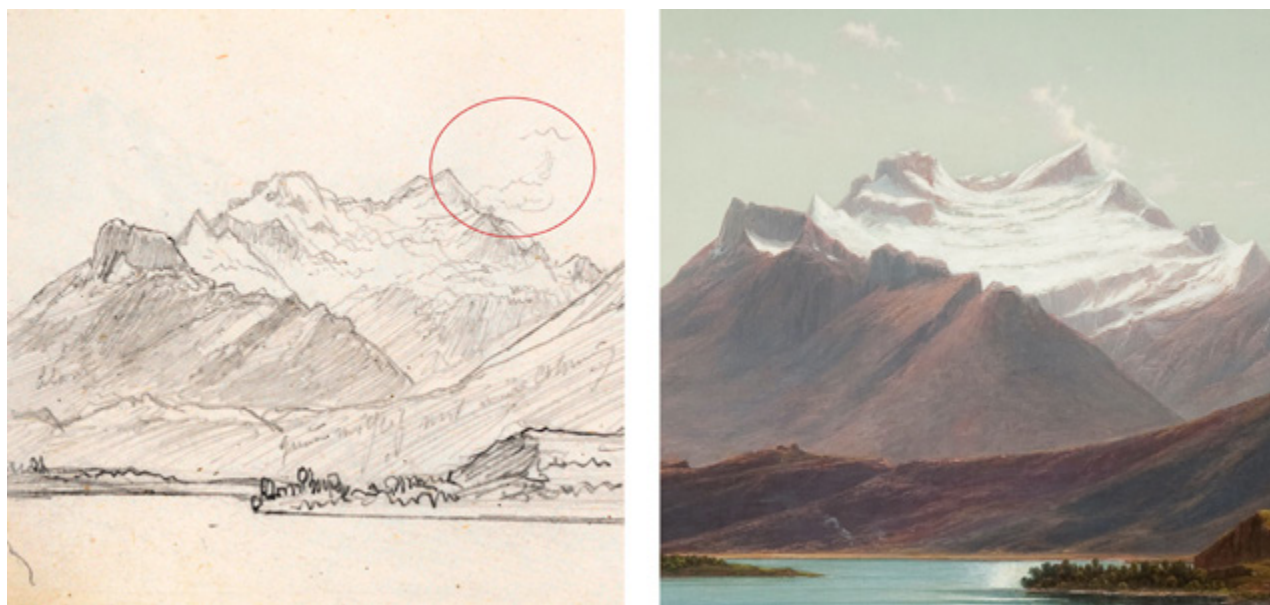


Fig. 26 Left: [Head of the lake] (detail). Right: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail). The red circle indicates the position of the cloud and a possible bird in flight.



Fig. 27 Left: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail, showing 25 Mile Point). Right: *Humboldt Range, from 25 Mile Point* (detail). Photographer Alfred Burton (Te Papa C.016713).

### Zoological fidelity

On his panoramic sketch (Fig. 5), von Guérard added a squiggle that typically suggests the flight of a bird, just above the small cloud to the right of the highest peak of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi (Fig. 26, left), but no birds are clearly shown in the painting, which is atypical of his practice. Lacking familiarity with the flight shape and colours of any large, identifiable New Zealand native bird, he omitted them altogether. There is no sign of any animals in the highly detailed foreground, nor any indication of sheep or cattle on 25 Mile Point or Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka and Pig

Island/Mātau. As the latter locations were all parts of pastoral runs at the time of von Guérard's visit, there would have been some stock present, but as the artist had a different time period in mind (see below), he chose to exclude them.<sup>38</sup>

### Hydrological fidelity

The level of water in the lake in the painting (Fig. 1) is similar to that shown in contemporaneous photographs, exemplified in particular by one of the shoreline of 25 Mile Point (Fig. 27) – although note that the background of the painting detail in Fig. 27 is Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi and

that of the photograph is the Humboldt Mountains. The beach at the tip of the promontory appears to be more extensive in the photograph, but von Guérard was much further away when he sketched his panorama, so the beach would have been significantly foreshortened.

### Colour of the lake

The colour of the painted lake appears to be significantly different from the plain 'blue' noted by a famous contemporaneous writer (Trollope 1875: 48) and that recorded in numerous colour photographs taken on sunny days, accessible on the Internet. Von Guérard's foreground lake water is turquoise (Fig. 28, top), while in my photograph it is shades of azure (Fig. 28, middle).<sup>39</sup> The artist wrote to von Haast on 29 December 1879, telling him that during his New Zealand excursion, 'I scarcely had enough time to outline what was required with pencil in rapid sketches and could not consider any coloured sketches and therefore your praise is all the more pleasing to me, because I could only put my trust in my memory as regards colour' (Darragh & Pullin 2018: 33). Either the artist's memory failed him on this occasion, or the lake took on a slight turquoise tint as the steamer headed northwards – as choppy bodies of water do when the sun is in a certain position. It must be acknowledged, though, that the foreground of the painting is an intense turquoise colour. Disconcertingly, the artist coloured the lake a pale blue colour in a smaller version of the *Lake Wakatipu* painting (Fig. 28, bottom).

There are two large turquoise lakes in New Zealand, Tekapo and Pukaki – on sunny days at least. The colour is due to the presence of a suspension of very fine particles called rock or glacial flour, which is formed by the grinding action of a glacier on the bedrock beneath or beside the river of ice. The very small particles become suspended in the meltwater coming from beneath the glacier, giving the water a milky appearance. When the meltwater flows into a glacial lake, the suspension reflects light in a certain way, which can make the lake water appear turquoise on a bright, sunny day. Lake Wakatipu is a very large lake with a huge volume of water, and normally there is insufficient rock flour entering the lake from the glacier-fed Rees and Dart/Te Awa Whakatipu rivers to maintain a concentration of suspended particles that would make the colour of the

lake turquoise on sunny days. However, it is possible for a massive landslip, such as the one that occurred on the slopes of Te Koroka (see 'Fidelity to history' section) in the headwaters of the Dart River/Te Awa Whakatipu in 2014, to release enough extra rock flour to temporarily change the lake's colour ('Phenomenal colour change for famous New Zealand lake' 2014). Von Guérard may have been at Lake Wakatipu shortly after such an event occurred, but I have no corroborating evidence for this.



Fig. 28 Top: *Lake Wakatipu*. Middle: Head of the lake, 2017. Photographer George Hook. Bottom: *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, New Zealand, 1877*, oil on canvas, 370 × 650 mm. Artist Eugene von Guérard (present location unknown. Image courtesy of Sotheby's Australia).

### Reflections in the lake

There is another ‘hydrological’ anomaly in the painting. The reflection of the distant peaks in the middle of the lake is relatively sharp (Fig. 28, top), but as the water has small ripples, the image should be much more diffuse – as in the modern photograph (Fig. 28, middle), despite the relative stillness of the lake’s surface on the day the image was taken. According to the laws of reflection, a sharp image will be formed only by a flat – or in this case, still – reflecting surface, and rippling water does not qualify as such. Von Guérard resorted to artistic licence, as rippled water is more aesthetically pleasing than a large area of uniform colour representing the still water required for well-defined reflections.

### Historical fidelity

Although the focus of this article is fidelity to nature, sometimes that issue intersects with the question of fidelity to history, particularly if von Guérard was not intending to portray a contemporaneous landscape. This has implications for what he chose to include or exclude in a painting (see ‘Scaling fidelity’, ‘Ecological fidelity’ and ‘Zoological fidelity’ sections). The painting shows a large waka with a sail attached crossing the lake (Fig. 29, right), as compared to the schooner he included in one of the smaller versions of the same scene (Fig. 29, left). In 1876, the artist would not have observed a waka, with or without a sail, during his visit as none crossed the lake at the time. According to Ngāi Tahu kaumātua Michael Skerrett, such excursions had ceased nearly four decades earlier (‘Carving out Queenstown’s history’ 2016).

Up to the early decades of the nineteenth century, the dominant South Island tribe, Ngāi Tahu, had regularly visited the Wakatipu Basin to quarry pounamu. The highly prized greenstone was used for making tools, jewellery and weapons, and is found in only a few isolated sites in the South Island, which explains why the island is also known as Te Wai Pounamu (literally, ‘The Waters of Pounamu’). The Humboldt Mountains are one of the few sources of the highly prized, pale inanga pounamu (Fig. 30, right), which was traded throughout New Zealand in pre-contact times (McIntyre 2007: 14–19). Te Koroka, which forms part of Cosmos Peaks (Fig. 9, left), is the tapu site where inanga pounamu was mined by Ngāi Tahu for several centuries before the arrival of Europeans. As stated by Skerrett, one of the ‘last recorded missions’ to quarry pounamu at Te Koroka and transport it south to the coast occurred in the



Fig. 29 Left: *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, New Zealand* (detail). Right: *Lake Wakatipu* (detail).

1830s and involved a party of about 40 Māori (‘Carving out Queenstown’s history’ 2016). Mining appears to have ceased after the 1830s, possibly due to the consequences of inter-tribal warfare, which had a major impact on Ngāi Tahu. The site was rediscovered in the late 1970s (Beck et al. 2010: 72–75).

On his steamer trip, von Guérard may have been told that a river valley on the western side of Lake Wakatipu was the ancient source of the revered pounamu (Knudson 1968: 39–40), which may account for his inclusion of two waka sailing across the lake. From the position of the wind-filled sail relative to the mast, the closer waka appears to be sailing westward toward the mouth of the Greenstone River (Fig. 8), whose headwaters were, at the time, wrongly thought to be the major source of Wakatipu pounamu. In pre-contact times, Ngāi Tahu transported pounamu across the lake from its head to the start of an established trail at the ‘foot’ of the lake, and from there to the southern lands where they lived on a more permanent basis. They crossed the lake on waka carved from tōtara (*Podocarpus totara*) growing near the lake shore or on Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka and Pig Island/Mātau, (Knudson 1968: 39–40; McIntyre 2007: 19). The conjecture about von Guérard’s waka destination is supported by visual evidence in another Lake Wakatipu painting by the artist, entitled *Mount Earnslaw vom Wakatipu See Neu Seeland* (1887), which appears to show a Māori man transporting a heavy load down to a creek entering the western side of Lake Wakatipu.<sup>40</sup>

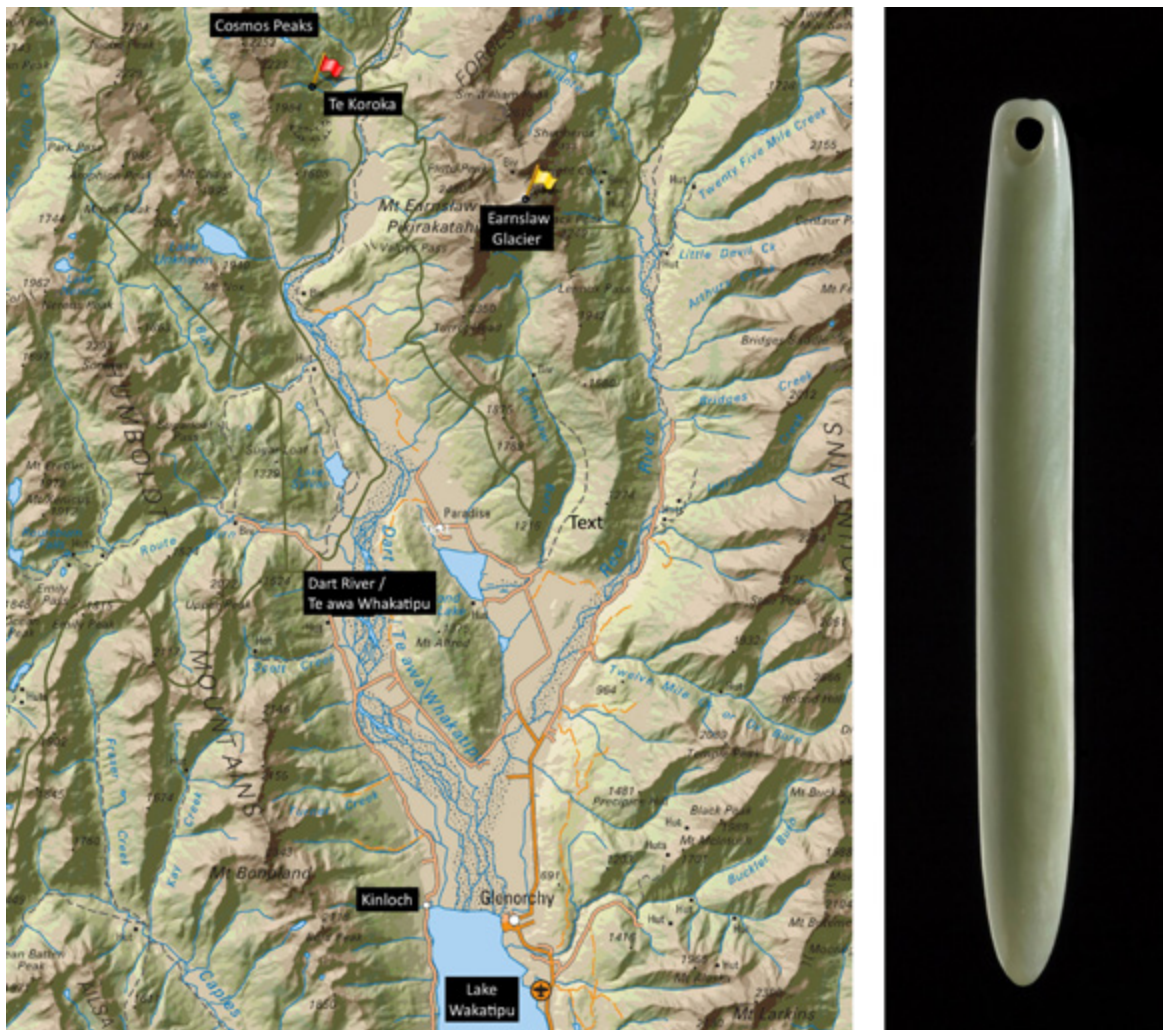


Fig. 30 Left: Map showing the location of the Te Koroka pounamu quarry relative to Cosmos Peaks, Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi and the head of Lake Wakatipu (NZ Topo250 South Island map, Memory-Map). Right: Kuru (ear pendant), 1500–1850, inanga pounamu, 11 mm. (width) × 88 mm. (length) × 7 mm. (depth). Maker unknown (Te Papa ME000614). The source of the pounamu has tentatively been identified as Te Koroka.

Despite an uncharacteristic ethnographic error in placing the taurapa (sternpost) of waka at the front of the craft in the *Lake Wakatipu* painting (Fig. 29, right), it is clear that von Guérard intended to portray a pre-contact scene of ‘idyllic peacefulness’ (Bruce et al. 1982: 50–51), in which Māori are accessing and transporting resources from the Wakatipu Basin.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the conjecture around the historical setting chosen by von Guérard is reinforced by the fact that all traces of the activities of runholders and timber millers, as well as small settlements and wharfs along the foreshore of the northern arm of the lake, have been omitted from the painting.

## Conclusion

This case study has identified the extent to which different aspects of von Guérard’s 1877–79 *Lake Wakatipu* painting are ‘true to nature’ in terms of fidelity to the view that the artist observed from the deck of the SS *Antrim* as it steamed northward past Bennetts Bluff on the morning of 29 January 1876, and to the natural history of the Wakatipu Basin. Some features are accurately reproduced, a few have been modified to some extent, and others have been introduced or even invented.

With regard to the geography of the surrounding landscape, the painting accurately reproduces the topography of the more distant mountain peaks and ranges, rendering them readily identifiable, although summits are elevated, resulting in steeper slopes. The topography of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi is based on a drawing sketched from a closer vantage point, which brings into the picture surrounding features that would not have been visible from the principal vantage point. While the topography of closer landmarks, such as the two islands, is accurately rendered, Pig Island/Mātau was drawn from an even closer vantage point, which resulted in its location relative to the peaks behind it being shifted eastward. While the latter issues are a consequence of von Guérard's shifting viewpoint, he did not intend to create a multiple-perspective or composite work like some of his other paintings (Hook 2017); rather, they were inevitable consequences of sketching from a moving vantage point.

The size of distant features has not been monumentalised, despite the waka staffage seeming rather small for the vessel's distance from the shore. To some extent, the immature cabbage trees provide a compensating scale to judge the size of more distant features. While no invented coulisse has been included in this painting, the framing of the head of the lake by the two adjacent ranges has been emphasised by extending and steepening the slopes.

The shapes of most landforms at the location have been faithfully reproduced, particularly the U-shaped glacial basin apparent beyond the head of the lake, the Earnslaw Glacier and the glacially sculpted Mt Alfred/Ari. However, the naturally formed river terraces of 25 Mile Point are absent. The distinctive tilted schistose rock of the Wakatipu Basin is not illustrated at all, while the rock exposure depicted in the foreground resembles shallowly dipping sedimentary rock, which is not present in this location.

While the foreground is invented rather than based on any sketch, the rocky promontory itself is typical of the location. Many of the foreground plants are identifiable species endemic to the location, despite the miniaturisation and inappropriate branching of the mature cabbage tree. The accuracy of the lake-edge forestation of the Humboldt Mountains and the distribution of bush on Pigeon Island/Wāwahi Waka are confirmed by photographic sources.

In the case of the more transient aspects of the scene, the illumination of the painting accords with what von Guérard observed and sketched mid-morning on 29 January. While the lake level around 25 Mile Point in the painting

is consistent with that visible in a contemporaneous photograph, the relative sharpness of the reflections in the lake is inconsistent with the choppiness of the water, although we have no way of knowing how still the lake was on the day. The veracity of the unusual turquoise colour of the normally azure lake has neither been confirmed nor disproved, but that coloration is possible. Finally, the rather sparse clouds around Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi resemble those recorded in the field drawing and have been identified as being fractostratus.<sup>42</sup>

The above summary is mostly consistent with the concept of selective fidelity to nature that von Guérard practised in his Antipodean landscapes.<sup>43</sup> Features such as the topography in the middle ground and background, and the geomorphology, geology, ecology and botany of the site are faithfully reproduced, as are the pattern of illumination and cloud formations observed on the day. However, there are other features that the artist freely modified or invented for compositional reasons, such as the foreground slopes, rocks, plants, fauna and staffage, in addition to which he heightened summits and steepened slopes. The departures in this painting from the selective fidelity von Guérard typically practised can mostly be accounted for by the problems caused by his mobile vantage point, and by his lack of familiarity with the schistose bedrock and the growth forms of cabbage trees, which is understandable given the short time he was at the location. Taking these circumstances into account, it is reasonable to conclude that *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, Middle Island, New Zealand* is very largely faithful to the view from the artist's vantage point(s) and to the natural history of the Wakatipu Basin. Indeed, von Guérard achieved his aim of being 'as true to nature as far as possible' (von Guérard to von Haast, 29 December 1879), allowing for the limitations of his visit, which may have prevented him from fully acquiring that 'deeper understanding of nature' he sought.<sup>44</sup>

As to the question of whether von Guérard made any use of Burton's photographs of the Lake Wakatipu region, there are no elements in the painting that are not based on features recorded in the artist's drawings, other than the foreground topography and rocks. Given von Guérard's propensity for inventing or modifying the foregrounds of paintings, those foreground aspects of the Lake Wakatipu painting are likely also a product of his artistic imagination. None of the foreshore photographs by Burton in the Te Papa collection bear any resemblance to von Guérard's painted foreshore.

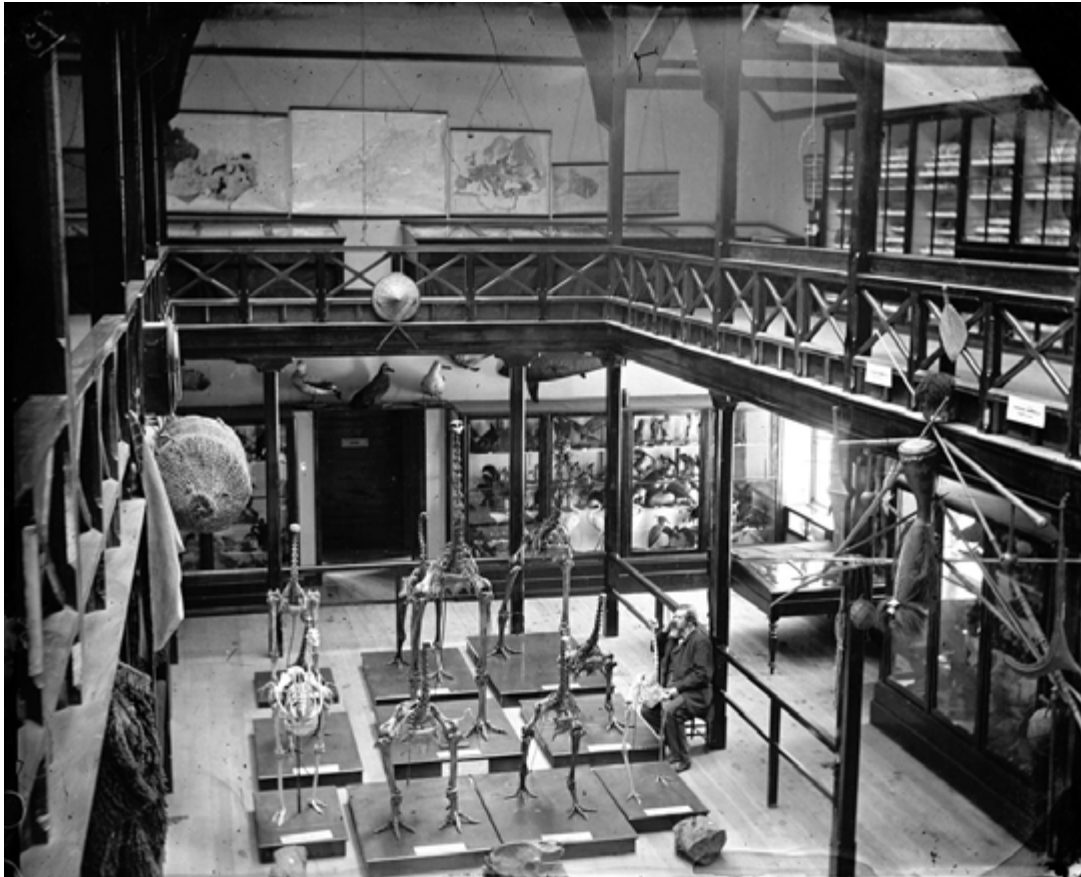


Fig. 31 Sir Julius von Haast in the Mountfort Gallery. Photographer unknown (Canterbury Museum, 1944 78 66).

## Postscript

Von Guérard was eager to know whether von Haast (Fig. 31) believed the Milford and Wakatipu paintings were true to nature, particularly since he felt the geologist knew ‘nature there in the smallest detail’.<sup>45</sup> Given that glaciology was von Haast’s foremost area of expertise, it is highly likely the artist was seeking von Haast’s opinion on how well he had portrayed the geology and geomorphology of the mountains, glaciers, fiord and glacial lake. Even though there is no record of von Haast visiting either Milford Sound/Piopiotahi or Lake Wakatipu, he was very familiar with the large glacial lakes of South Canterbury (Tekapo, Pukaki and ōhau), and had spent time at Lake Wānaka in North Otago, which exists in a similar geomorphological and geological environment (Burrows 2005: 58–60). While von Haast’s letter commenting on the two artworks has not survived, the geologist’s assessment must have been in the affirmative, as the artist replied, ‘your kind opinion was a real ray of sunshine for me’. Von Guérard went on to write,

‘Your satisfaction is worth more to me than all the praise I previously received’ (Darragh & Pullin 2018: 33). This must have been very gratifying for the artist, given that the painting had already been highly praised in Australia and New Zealand, as well as in Europe.

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## Notes

- 1 Although the text of the journal was penned by von Guérard, the modest postscript would have been written by his daughter Victoria Blunt after his death.
- 2 Letter from von Guérard to Julius von Haast, 27 April 1881, quoted in Darragh & Pullin (2018: 48).
- 3 Humphrey Clegg, Curator of Australian Art, National Gallery of Victoria, pers. comm., 9 April 2015.
- 4 The Wakatipu painting is one of the case studies I undertook as part of my doctoral research into the issue of fidelity to nature in the Antipodean oeuvre of von Guérard. This also includes a quantitative survey of a large number of his landscapes, comparing them with the views of natural scenery at the sites where he sketched the field drawings on which the paintings are based.
- 5 The photographic items on the list were confirmed by Susanne Haring, pers. comm., 4 February 2021.
- 6 The 60 passengers and 40 crew escaped on lifeboats after the ship ran aground in fog at Makati (Chaslans Mistake) on the southern coast of the South Island.
- 7 The size of the field of view was established using a protractor on the topographic map.
- 8 Milford Sound/Piopiotahi is actually a fiord, formed when the sea flooded a narrow U-shaped valley sculpted by a glacier, rather than a sound, which is formed when the sea floods a V-shaped river valley.
- 9 The hotel is specifically named in the back of the artist's 'Sketchbook XXXVIII' (von Guérard 1876a). The hotel is still functioning and is now known as Eichardt's Private Hotel.
- 10 The SS *Antrim* took three hours to travel 35 km (22 miles) from Kingston to Queenstown, which gives a cruising speed of about 6 knots, although it was rated at 8 knots.
- 11 The promontory has no official geographic name, but it was known as 25 Mile Point in earlier times.
- 12 The plumb bob method is described in Keir (2017: 2).
- 13 NZ Topo50 SI (South Island), supplied by Memory-Map.
- 14 The PeakFinder application is based on elevation data collected by the American Space Shuttle missions, which used radar to scan nearly the entire land surface of the planet.
- 15 The use of this technique to locate the vantage point of landscape paintings is discussed in greater depth in Hook (2018).
- 16 The accuracy of PeakFinder's digital views of the topography can be confirmed by using the application at the site and enabling 'Camera' mode. The digital outline can then be seen to closely match the camera image of the peaks visible on the mobile phone or tablet screen.
- 17 It appears that the original outline of Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka and Pig Island/Mātau has been modified with a darker pencil on the field drawing (Fig. 5).
- 18 In a survey (yet to be published) of a large number of Antipodean landscape paintings by von Guérard, I found that 67 (65%) of 103 paintings had significantly heightened main summits when compared with the photographed view from the vantage point of the field sketch on which each painting was based.
- 19 The rectangle height is measured from the base of Pig Island/Mātau to the highest peak of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi, and the width is measured from a vertical line through the summit of Mt Alfred/Aru to a vertical line drawn through the summit of Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi.
- 20 The conical shape of Mt Alfred/Ari was the result of a glacier grinding its way past the schist peak on either side during the Ōtira Glaciation 75,000 to 14,000 years ago.
- 21 Mt Bonpland was named after Aimé Bonpland (1753–1858), the French botanist who accompanied the German explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) on his expedition in South America in 1799–1804, by James McKerrow (1834–1919), when he was the district and geodetical surveyor of Otago.
- 22 Pullin argues that von Guérard's interest in glaciers was also influenced by the dictum of German physiologist and painter Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869), that artists ought to paint 'geognostic' landscapes that convey Earth's geological history (Pullin 2009: 13).
- 23 As Burton's vantage point was closer to the glacier, less of its lower portion is visible than in von Guérard's detailed sketch.

- 24 Florian Kober has also stated that the terraces were most likely formed by changes in the lake level rather than local glacial effects (pers. comm., 6 August 2019).
- 25 The two smaller versions of the same scene have different foreground features. *Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw* (1878, oil on canvas, 370mm. × 650 mm.) is most similar, with only a few bushes looking different. In contrast, *Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, New Zealand* (1877, oil on board, 347 × 621 mm.) has significantly different foreground features (both in private collections).
- 26 'Sketchbook XXXVIII', 20 January to 20 February 1876, and 'Sketchbook XXXIX', 1877–82, reference code 824683, State Library of New South Wales.
- 27 Although the painting is dated 1877–79 in the bottom left corner, a magazine report states that it was on display as early as March 1877 in the Victorian Academy of Arts exhibition ('Fine arts' 1877: 7). The 1879 part of the date on the painting may indicate the year in which von Guérard finished making any further modifications to the work.
- 28 Geologist Stephen Carey, pers. comm., 5 May 2017.
- 29 Stephen Carey, pers. comm., 7 August 2019 and 4 March 2021.
- 30 The foliated schistose rocks near Bennetts Bluff have a layered appearance and also dips westward, but at about 30° (Turnbull 2000).
- 31 The tropical plants reference relates to the cabbage tree species *Cordyline australis*, rather than New Zealand's only palm tree, the nikau (*Rhopalostylis sapida*). Given von Guérard's interest in unusual plant forms, the absence of any sketches of a nikau in his New Zealand sketchbook indicates that he never came close to one.
- 32 Peter de Lange, pers. comm. with Neville Walsh, 5 May 2017.
- 33 Philip Simpson, pers. comm., 9 May 2017.
- 34 Community zonation refers to the distribution of different species into zones across a landscape, often in response to an environmental gradient, such as increasing altitude.
- 35 Peter de Lange, pers. comm., 1 August 2019. De Lange also noted that 'much of the same vegetation occurs in the general area still'.
- 36 Chevalier may well have been influential in inspiring von Guérard to visit Lake Wakatipu (Pullin 2018: 164).
- 37 The absence of forest on the upper slopes of Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka was either due to fire clearance of bush by Māori in pre-contact times (Darby et al. 2003: 126–27), or by the runholder who farmed the islands as part of his station.
- 38 Although von Guérard depicts a pre-contact scene, he was not tempted to include any giant moa that inhabited Central Otago (Darby et al. 2003: 120–21), which became extinct in the fifteenth century, about two centuries after the arrival of Māori. Von Haast had acquired a large collection of moa skeletons, some of which were on display in the Mountfort Gallery at Canterbury Museum (Fig. 31) when von Guérard visited in 1876. In a letter to the geologist, the artist described his amazement on seeing the 'formidable regiment of moa skeletons' (Darragh & Pullin 2018: 33). Archaeological digs in the Wakatipu Basin have revealed the presence of a seasonal Māori settlement where moa cooking occurred on the Dart River/Te Awa Whakatipu near the head of the lake (Anderson & Ritchie 1981: 9).
- 39 The varnish applied to oil paintings yellows with age, which can result in an originally blue sky looking a 'kind of green' (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research 1999). Although the sky in *Lake Wakatipu* does have a yellowish tinge just above the horizon and a greenish tinge up near the frame due to aged varnish, it is unlikely that the bright turquoise colour of the lake water is solely due to ageing rather than deliberate colour choice.
- 40 Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain an image of the painting at a resolution sufficient to be reproduced here, as it is in an unknown collection.
- 41 Von Guérard's waka motif is based on an inaccurate drawing he copied from a book by the English explorer and naturalist George French Angas (1822–86)(Angas 1847: plate XLII). This error was spotted by the late art historian Roger Blackley of the Victoria University of Wellington.
- 42 The clouds were identified by Australian meteorologist Rowland Beardsell, pers. comm., 2 November 2020.
- 43 This concept emerged out of my survey of the fidelity to nature of more than 120 Antipodean landscape paintings by von Guérard as part of my doctoral research.
- 44 Letter from von Guérard to Julius von Haast, 27 April 1881, quoted in Darragh & Pullin (2018: 48).

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