

‘Swamps which might doubtless easily be drained.’ By Geoff Park.
[Essay 12] **‘Geoff Park, Theatre Country. Essays on Landscape and Whenua.’ 2006**



Photographs of Northland.¹

“Maori labours digging a drainage ditch in the Kaitaia wetlands, Northland (North Island). Despite many Maori opposing the draining of wetlands, many Maori participated in draining operations employed as labourers by the Department of Public Works. Such work was one of the few waged-jobs available for Maori in rural areas, with economic necessity seeing Maori choose to partake in such schemes even if they objected to such practices.”

¹ Source: Northwood Brothers: Photographs of Northland. Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref: 1/1-10653-G, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.]

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Maori-labours-digging-a-drainage-ditch-in-the-Kaitaia-wetlands-Northland-North-Island_fig5_298915024

Swamp, peatland, bog, or wetland, the landscape British colonialists labelled 'Wasteland.' *'Swamps Which Might Doubtless Easily Be Drained.'* an essay by Geoff Park explores the trauma of Aotearoa's Wetland due to the British attempt to cultivate farmland. An imperial landscape. As a reader, you are revealed to the happenings of the past through a lens of empathy. Park doesn't rate one people group over another – Māori and Pakeha. Rather, Park's care is for the land. To tell the story of the Wetland and the loss of life in its disregard.

A great deal of research into the writings of early colonialists and prior settlers in New Zealand. Park shares the perspectives of Cook and his crew. Looking over the swamp that dominated much of inland Aotearoa, Cook saw no life. Māori seemed to have no holding of the land. However, Cook could not have been more wrong. Through Park's research of Māori representatives from the late 1800's we discover to late the role of the wetland to the Māori folk. The Tangatawhenua hid throughout the wetland through secret pathways and passages. Wetland was the most fruitful part of the landscape as it was food, medicine, and a resource. Māori held a high regard for lowland swamps in the traditional Māori landscape.

Today we see how farmland is a huge part of Northland, New Zealand. Many of my friend's families farm out in Whitford and Clevedon. Traveling through the roads you will reach an opening from the trees and hilly areas. The opening looks out over a huge flat area with the Bombay hills far rising



Clevedon flooding

in the distance. This site is the definition of ecological imperialism. This stretch of farmland with mass flooding whenever the rains come would have been a part of the Haruki swamp before the British drained and processed the land to create wealth for their kingdom. Visiting in the early morning Fog smothers the land. But as soon as it lifts a sight of the fenced land plot and old Non-native trees peaks are revealed.

George Park expressed how ecologists are asked to reveal history as well as point to a redeemable future for the land. His faith in wetland restoration for inland New Zealand is doubtful. Park expresses, "The ecological effect of swamp drainage in New Zealand was as though a major organ like the heart had been ruptured and removed." Wetlands are a treasure that we have lost along with many of the other aspects of our beloved land. We are now left to do our part to preserve the little swamp we have left.