

## Ministry of Culture and Heritage: Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand

In February 2005, two and a half years after the project began, the first part of Te Ara: the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, was launched by the Prime Minister, Helen Clark. Te Ara is the first born-digital national encyclopedia in the world. It contains over 300,000 words in the main text and over 200,000 words in captions to non-text digital resources. These resources include over 2,500 photos, maps, graphs, cartoons, and sound files, and some 60 moving image clips. The theme launched this year, 'The New Zealanders' is the first of ten themes which will follow over the next eight years.

### Te Ara's innovations

#### *Layering for audiences*

Te Ara means 'the pathway'. As a national encyclopedia Te Ara has to provide pathways for many different people with diverse needs. Te Ara is path-breaking in the way that it serves these distinct audiences. The audiences addressed are:

- Younger users and speakers of English as a second language. Primary school age children will want to use Te Ara. So for every entry there is a 'short story' - a succinct (200-300 words) summary of the entry written in lively user-friendly language.
- Secondary school pupils and the New Zealand newspaper-reader audience. The main entry is aimed at people with a reading age of about 15. This means there is no difficult or technical language, and the text is presented in a way that will work well on the web. Sentences are short and clear. Pages are no more than 500 words. They are broken up with headings and guides for the skim-reader. There are 'topic boxes' - small insets of quirky information - to add colour and variety to the story and the page.
- The visualiser. Reading text is not easy on the web, and many people prefer to look at pictures rather than read blocks of text. So Te Ara developed the idea of an 'image and media trail'. By clicking on the tab at the top of the page, users can move on to this trail.
- Māori. Te Ara will be of value in ngā kura kaupapa, Māori language schools. So all entries with extensive Māori content are available in te reo Māori. A simple button at the top of the page allows the user to switch from one language to the next.
- International visitors. The web is international, and Te Ara was seen as an important way of telling people overseas about New Zealand and attracting foreign tourists. However it was also important to retain the New Zealand character of Te Ara. The solution was to provide a clickable glossary so that if users find a word which is in Māori (e.g 'hui') they can click on that word and be given immediately a definition.
- Scholars: Finally Te Ara has to serve the scholarly community by providing up to date reliable knowledge and allowing scholars to go further. So where direct quotations are used, a click will bring up the full reference. At the end of the entry there are suggestions for further sources. In addition a tab at the top of each page links users to the relevant biographies from the online *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.

#### *Innovative content*

The content of Te Ara is innovative in several respects.

- The first theme, 'The New Zealanders' provides an introduction to the peoples of New Zealand. It is a way of introducing everyone in this country to everyone else.
- One part looks at all the different tribes of the country and the story of how Polynesian peoples came to New Zealand. This is the first time that a full introduction to the tribes of New Zealand has been brought together in one place. The entries have been prepared in most cases by kaumatua or kuia from each iwi.
- Another part looks at all those peoples who have arrived in New Zealand since 1800 and the story of their voyage to this place. Again this is the first time that all the histories of all the peoples of New Zealand have been collected together. Most have been written by

members of the respective immigrant group. The aim is to ensure that all people in New Zealand can find something about their ancestors; and there is also a major entry on the development of the New Zealanders as a people.

#### *The 'instant encyclopedia'*

Since the full encyclopedia will appear in stages over the next eight years, Te Ara has attempted to satisfy people's need for information now about everything in New Zealand in two ways:

- New Zealand in brief: There are eight succinct overview essays on the major elements of New Zealand life from history and government to the natural environment and creative life.
- 1966 Encyclopaedia of New Zealand: The complete 1966 *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* edited by A H McLintock has been digitised and is presented as part of the site. This is still an outstanding work, although it is very much the product of its age. In the long term it will provide an interesting 'time-warp' - so that users can click from the latest information on a subject to the 1966 ideas.

#### *The 'New Zealanders' encyclopedia'*

Te Ara has also set out to involve ordinary New Zealanders in the preparation of their national encyclopedia. The community has been asked for their stories on particular subjects. For example in 2004 people were invited to send in stories on their voyage, or their ancestor's voyage, to New Zealand. 250 replies were received and 27 of these stories have been posted on the site attached to the entry on 'The Voyage Out'. In March 2005 New Zealanders were invited to send in stories about interesting things they have found on the beach. These stories will be published with Te Ara's next thematic release: Earth, Sea and Sky.

#### *International recognition*

The Encyclopedia of New Zealand project has been recognised internationally for its significance. Articles about the project have appeared in the European online journal *DigicultInfo*, and in the UK periodical *Cultural Geographies*. In Australia two conferences have been organised around the Encyclopedia of New Zealand project - at Newcastle in May 2004 and in Sydney in December 2004.