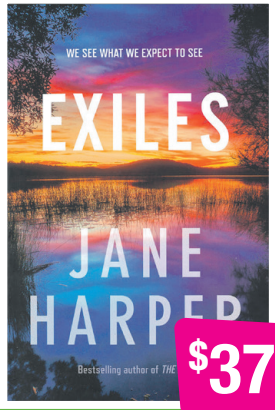
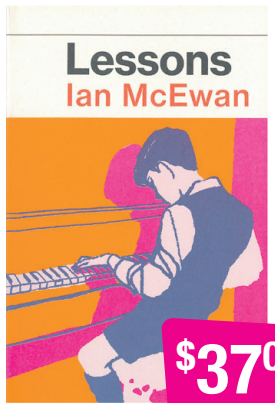


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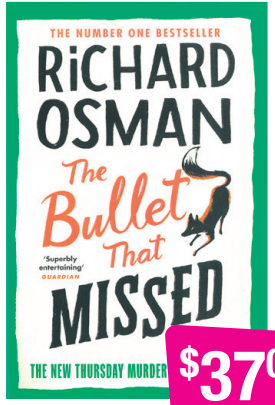
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Scotland and Ireland...  
He laid it on the colonel's desk, where it immediately coiled up again, like a serpent protecting itself..."

**Bushline**  
A memoir  
By Robbie Burton  
(\$39.99, Potton & Burton)



If you love the outdoors, you are bound to have flicked through a book of New Zealand landscape photography published by non-fiction publishers Potton & Burton. If you are interested in politics or journalism, you might own a book written by Nicky Hager; P&B has published all seven of his books, including *Dirty Politics*, one of the fastest selling books in New Zealand publishing history. Now one of the largest independent book publishers in the country, Craig Potton Publishing was founded by a landscape photographer who wanted a high-quality quality vehicle for his photography. In 2015 the company became Potton & Burton to recognise the role of co-owner Robbie Burton, the author of this very readable life story.

Burton is a keen tramper, and the book contains plenty of yarns from his South Island expeditions. But a large chunk of his life has been bound up in one of New Zealand's most interesting independent book publishers.

In 1990 Burton describes being plucked by Potton from his job in council community arts to a managing editor's role at Potton's publishing house. "It was a step into the void," writes Burton, who arrived with little more than a bit of 'basic paste-up' experience and (reading between the lines) spectacular networking skills.

"Furthermore, not only did I have no real business experience, but I was also unsure about the world of commerce – I still had a strong counter-culture-fueled suspicion of business and was not convinced a working life that demanded a focus on making a profit was morally robust."

For Potton, Burton proved an inspired hire.

For many readers, the most interesting of these publishing anecdotes won't be Burton's voyages through the demands of photographic colour correction but the hair-raising experience of publishing a book by Nicky Hager. These required intense secrecy at every stage of their production, and a blitzkrieg approach to distribution, to outwit anyone attempting to stop publication – a disaster for any publisher.



Nicky Hager speaking to journalists outside the book launch of *Dirty Politics* in Wellington in 2014. Photo Wikimedia

Subjects of a book by Hager will be powerful, well-funded and cranky. The fallout from *Seeds of Distrust* in 2002 was typical – the author was called a 'sanctimonious little creep' by Prime Minister Helen Clark. If this was water off a duck's back for Hager (Burton doesn't say), it was a low point for the ever-diplomatic Burton, though he is justifiably proud of publishing Hager's books.

"It says everything about Nicky's extraordinary dedication and research skills, quite apart from his courage, that despite the endless vitriol from his detractors, we have never ended up in court over one of his books – the passage of time has always revealed the accuracy of his work."

Hager's courage was shared by his publisher.

*Bushline* is only partly a book about publishing, fascinating though that story is. This is the life story of a tramping nut who grew up in Nelson, nurtured, not only by a widowed solo mother of rare qualities, and a close band of siblings, but by the mountains of the Kahurangi National Park. It's a roller-coaster ride of epic excursions, an unhappy marriage, a trip to Antarctica, a passionate love affair, a publishing career filled with

risk and reward, the books that worked, and the books that didn't.

A tramp down the Landsborough Valley is typically well described. "By the afternoon the river was in full, deafening flood, with car-sized boulders being rolled downstream by the torrent. In the evening the rain eventually stopped. We found a small rock bivvy that was marked on the map and crawled in under it like wounded animals. I woke in the night with a hungry mouse sitting on my cheek – I was so tired I hardly cared."

An unusual, absorbing memoir of a bookish life spent in wild places, or in dreaming about them. •



Jenny Nicholls is a columnist for *Stuff*, and writes reviews for *The Listener*. While art director of *North & South* creating covers and layouts, she wrote over 70 science columns – plus many book and film reviews. [designandtype.org](http://designandtype.org)



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