

Resilience under fire

A CANOE BEFORE THE WIND

Vitale Lafaale
HarperCollins

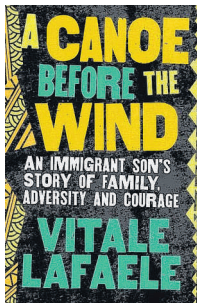
By JESSIE NEILSON

A Canoe Before the Wind is the inspiring story of Samoan immigrant Vitale Lafaale who rose to become an Armed Offenders Squad commander, and then the first Pasifika police district commander in New Zealand.

He worked variously in domestic violence, gangs and drug manufacturing in West Auckland. He worked in dignitary protection and witness protection, Operation Park (to catch a serial rapist), and police reporting on a political initiative to smooth socio-economic and ethnic disparities. Usually he was of the minority. Lafaale dedicates his account to all those who move to New Zealand in search of brighter opportunities.

Lafaale was born in Samoa in 1960, emigrating to New Zealand as a pre-schooler, where his parents worked multiple jobs to survive. His childhood memories are those of family drudgery and scant resources, worsened by his father's death. In this memoir he takes us through his formative years, deep within a Pasifika framework of respect for elders and hard work, with a dedication to family and the church. Though his father did not live to see his son shine, the elder's influence has always been there.

From the outset, Lafaale was acutely aware of the background of colonialism, given Samoa's legacy. Therefore, when he and his family came to New Zealand, they knew of the forces against them. He grew up during the Dawn Raids and Muldoon eras, a time of economic downturn and borders closing to "outsiders". Rather than dishearten him, it made him resilient. It was this experience, including the school bullying as the only Samoan child in his class, which helped him get into the



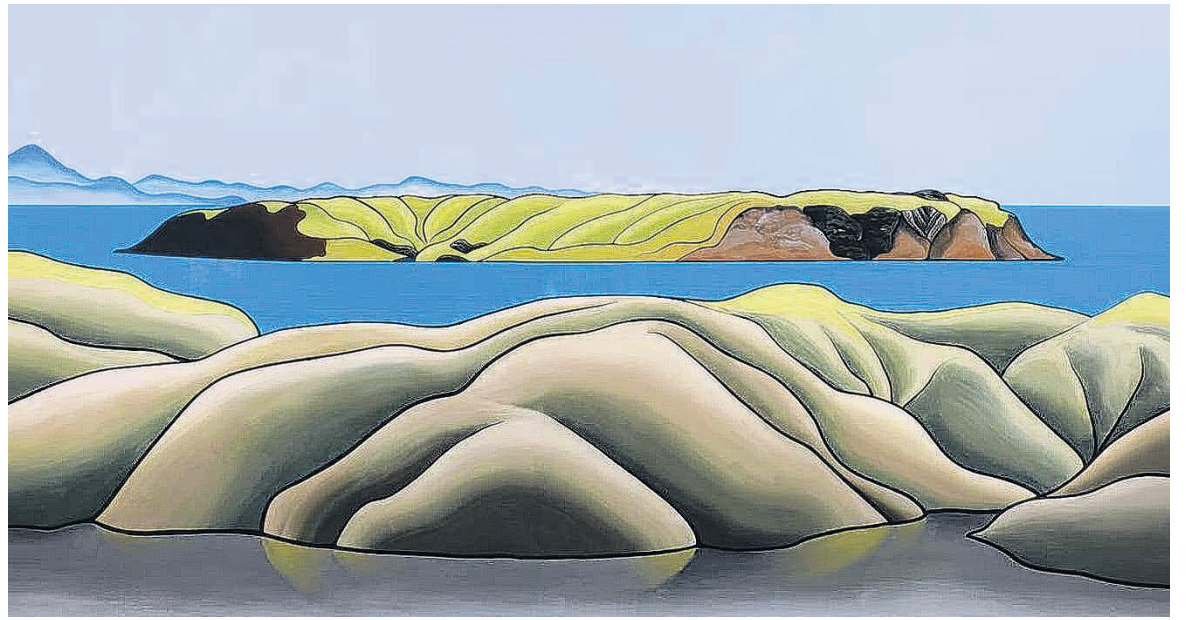
police force on the fifth attempt. It meant he survived the brutal physical and psychological training and interrogation for the territorial force — so rigorous he became at peace with the idea of dying. He was one of only four out of the original 300 who made it through. He describes these years in great detail, for they consumed him.

Lafaale balances his progression within career and family with his emotional states at the time. This is viewed in the context of his wider family and cultural and spiritual beliefs. Unlike the Pakeha nuclear family, for example, any actions reflected on his wider Samoan family and home village.

Therefore, if as a famished teenager he accepted food, this would bring shame to his family. He also charts his lifelong partnership with a Pakeha woman, Annette, her steadfast support, and their raising of three children. For his family, major issues include retaining his language and culture (his father embraced traditional fa'a Samoa, while his mother spoke English), service to others, hard work, honour and faith.

Lafaale's family is his pride, and he passes down his ambition, while remaining humble. This is a deeply moving account of perseverance against harsh conditions and the guiding principles of his culture. The memoir includes many photos of family, friends, and colleagues, proving that it takes a community to bring about the added factor of happiness within success.

Jessie Neilson is a University of Otago library assistant



A painting by Auckland artist Don Binney.

PHOTO: ODT FILES

Treasure trove of artist's talent

DON BINNEY: FLIGHT PATH

Gregory O'Brien
Auckland University Press

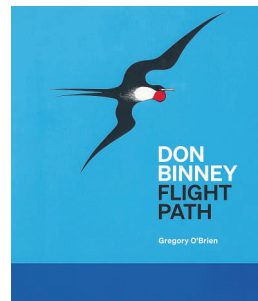
By PETER STUPPLES

This superbly documented and illustrated study of the work of Auckland artist Don Binney is a worthy tribute to his indefatigable creative spirit and legacy.

Gregory O'Brien has not only written contextual commentaries to a wide range of Binney's work, but has also read his voluminous memoirs, field notes and diaries, and generously included in his compass the five completed novels (only one of which was published) and the many literary excursions of a man never short of words.

Binney came to prominence on the New Zealand art scene early in his career, having his first solo exhibition at the Ikon Gallery in Auckland in 1963, when he was but 23.

The reviewer in the *New Zealand Herald* enthusiastically described those visual virtues that would become Binney's hallmark throughout his career: "[the] ordering of precise forms and a boldness of colour almost to the point of flamboyance. But rhythms are insistent and seductive, carrying the image beyond the purely visual."



Ten years later, that early exuberance was sharply, tragically, checked, when access to his beloved source of inspiration at Te Henga, Bethell's Beach, became inaccessible to him, partly from his own intransigence, and, at the same time, critics seemed to turn indifferent to the tendency to his work — belonging to an earlier era, becoming somewhat formulaic. These events left him with a depleted sense of himself.

"His sense of personal worth and 'relevance' was at least partly reinstated" by his 20 years of teaching at Elam, and by his turn to writing.

However, he never gave up making images, many inspired by fresh experiences and sources: the galleries of Europe, the art of Central and South America, and his long love of the Pacific.

O'Brien thoroughly examines the adjectives, often meant as

derogatory, used to describe Binney's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as "regional", "real", even "The Regional Real", but, manages to rescue the artist from his mauling critics by pointing out his long embrace of Māori spiritual values, his deep knowledge of Medieval European Christian writers, the poetry of the British Romantics, the writing of Octavio Paz and his lifelong Anglican faith, as well as, what Binney himself described as his "primal sympathy" to his subject matter.

In his later life, Binney turned back to drawing, particularly to the softer textures of coloured pencils, that gave his landscapes a tonal richness, often absent from his more populist bird images. Binney wrote: "I see nothing inappropriate in offering a prayer for pure air, clean water and growing life in this and the coming century, hence the act of drawing", a sentiment best illustrated by *Well I Never Did*, a late coloured pencil drawing of 2009.

This book is well designed, beautifully produced, well written, precisely documented. Indeed, a treasure.

Peter Stupples, now living in Wellington, used to teach at the University of Otago

Everything you need to know before hitting the walking tracks

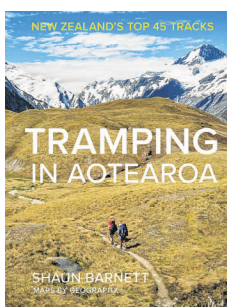
TRAMPING IN AOTEAROA

Shaun Barnett
Potton & Burton

By DAVID BARNES

A revised and expanded (and renamed) version of the best-selling *Tramping in New Zealand*, first published in 2006, this book is mostly aimed at trampers of modest experience.

It is also a useful introduction for trampers looking for trips outside their home ranges. Comprehensively covering the country from Cape Reinga to Rakiura, it describes 45 multi-day walks. These include eight of the



nine Great Walks, the Department of Conservation's premier tracks. Many of the other tracks are ones that can easily be seen as the next step for someone who has tackled some Great Walks. In Otago, these include the Greenstone, three

spectacular subalpine pass crossings. Less well-known routes include Central Whirinaki Hut in the Bay of Plenty and Goat Pass Hut in Arthur's Pass National Park, part of the Coast to Coast route. The seven newly added tracks include the West Coast's Papanoa Track (the latest Great Walk) and Old Ghost Road, that have been built since the book's last edition.

Shaun Barnett, the doyen of New Zealand backcountry writers, skilfully provides the detail needed in a useful guidebook while still painting a picture that should make the reader know why a trip should be on their hit list. There is enough information here that, with

the addition of a topographic map, most people could successfully find their way around the route. Many are steeped in history and this is well described, as are landscape features and key aspects of the local flora and fauna. Beyond being just a prosaic how-to, it is a great book to leave around the house to provoke daydreams of future trips.

The introductory chapter begins with a brief background of New Zealand's tramping culture. It then provides useful information on topics from safety and equipment to hut etiquette. The sections on weather, water and conservation are probably particularly useful for the target market.

The book is beautifully illustrated, mostly with the author's own photographs. A combination of a larger format and what appears to be improved reproduction makes the photography more of a highlight than in the earlier iterations. A standout feature of the first edition was the oblique panorama maps created by Wellington company Geographx. These have now become almost ubiquitous in tramping books, and have been retained in this latest version.

The back cover blurb says: "if you were to have only one New Zealand tramping guide, this is the one to have". I would agree.