Ngā Mōteatea: An Introduction / He Kupu Arataki
written by Jane McRae, an honorary research fellow in the Department of Māori Studies and translated into Māori by Hēni Jacob (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Porou) has been published by Auckland University Press in time to celebrate Māori Language Week 2011, Te wiki o te Reo Māori.

The songs of Māori tradition are a living art form and an abundant source of knowledge about tribal history and culture. From the 1920s, Sir Āpirana Ngata began collecting and annotating these songs – a massive undertaking that, with the help of translators Pei Te Hurinui Jones and later Hirini Moko Mead, became the treasured four-volume Ngā Mōteatea.

Auckland’s landscape and the recurrence of significant volcanic cones acknowledge this history.

Not surprisingly, Siddell was born in Auckland (Grey Lynn) and schooled at Mount Albert Grammar, where he was good at art but finished school when he was 16 and spent ten years as a tradesman. He also became a keen trapper and mountaineer, which might explain the mountain views and panoramic views that are often a feature of his paintings, even if only glimpsed through a window. As he recalls in his book, it was through the Auckland Tramping Club that he met his future wife, Sylvia, after rescuing her in the Coromandel Ranges.

In the 1960s he attended a short course at Auckland Teachers College and also began painting again, influenced by W.A. Sutton’s iconic depictions of Canterbury. Sylvia also painted and introduced him to the work of Rita Angus, Colin McCahon, Toss Woollaston and Dan Binney. A long and distinguished career followed and he was awarded the Queen’s Service Order (QSO) for services to art in 1990, and then made a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (DCNZM) in 2008 (Sylvia became an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2002).

An exhibition of Sir Peter Siddell’s paintings is currently on show at Lopdell House in Titirangi until 21 August.