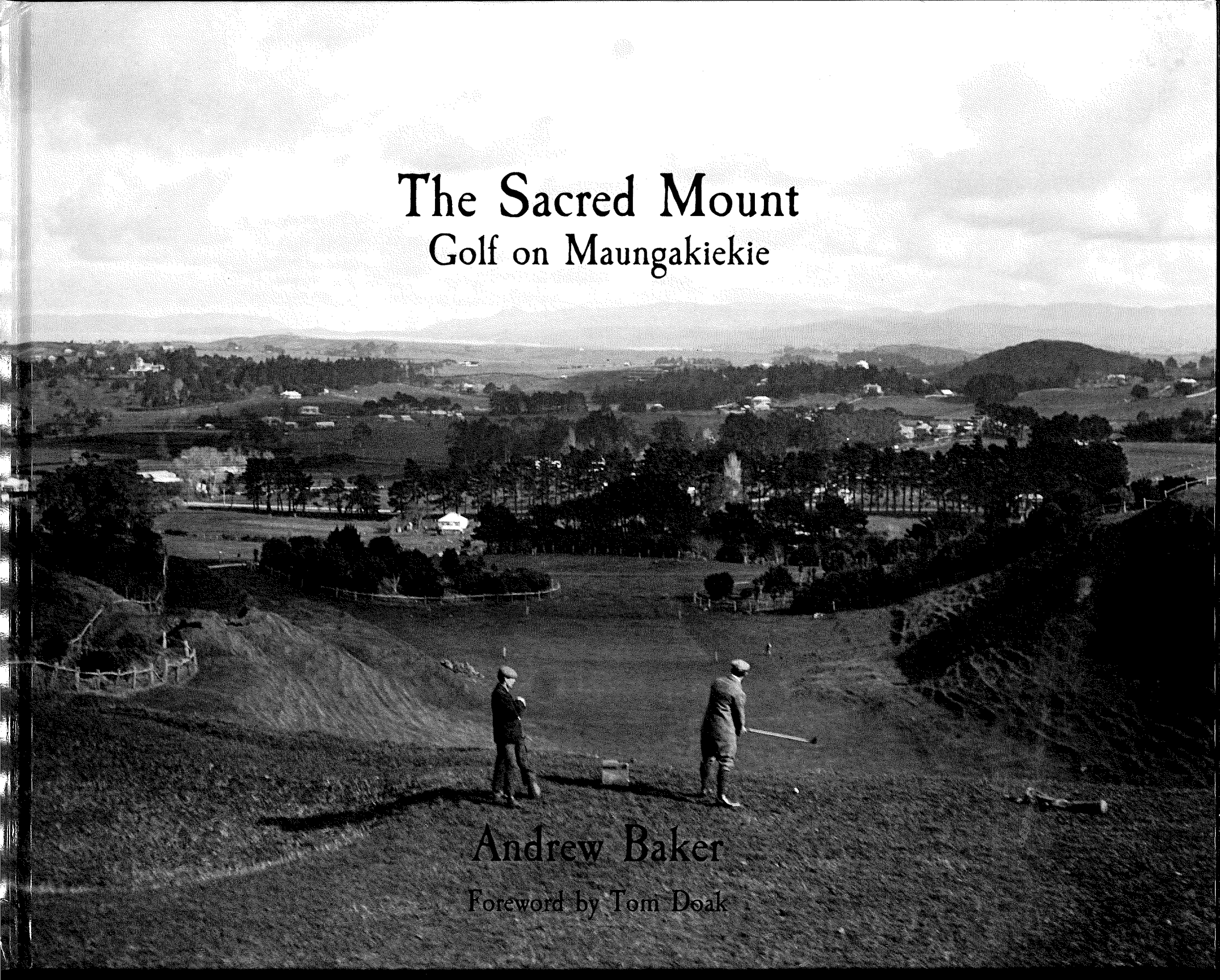
The Sacred Mount

Golf on Maungakiekie



Andrew Baker

Foreword by Tom Doak

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In ancient Rome, it was believed that every important place had a guardian spirit, to which the locals made ceremonial sacrifices each year. They called it the *genius loci*.

In modern architecture and landscape architecture, a fundamental principle is to capture the *genius loci* – the spirit of the place – in the design of a building or garden. The design should incorporate the features and spirit of the place so well that it feels as though it couldn't exist anywhere else.

In the world of golf courses, such designs are rare. Many designers see the course more as a field for fair competition, than as an exploration of the property; they become ever more bound by precedents and conventions as to what is 'fair'. And if the golf is part of a bigger development, the best views on the property are often reserved for other purposes, not for golf. The reason that so many of the great modern courses are in remote locations, such as Bandon Dunes or Cape Kidnappers, is because the remote location has preserved the *genius loci* from being previously captured by other uses.

Back in the early days of golf, when earthmoving was limited by actual horse-power and manual labour, the *genius loci* was much more present in the work. St Andrews and North Berwick start and end right in town. Westward Ho! starts at the edge of town across flat paddocks, stretching out for a couple of long holes to play along the beach, and then coming back along the Great Sea Rushes. Royal Dornoch found its *genius loci* not in Old Tom Morris's original routing, but just after the Second World War, when in lengthening the course, George Duncan took the seventh and eighth holes up on top of the bluff that stretches away from town, to overlook the rest of the course, and then play back down onto the linksland again.

And in 1901, with all of a country to choose from, the founders of Auckland Golf Club in New Zealand chose One Tree Hill as their base, and routed a golf course that played right up onto the hill, and back down, in most dramatic fashion. Their *genius loci* was the *genius loci* of Auckland itself.

I was thrilled to hear from Andrew Baker that he was writing this book, and to see all of the photographs he has compiled for it. Seeing the old photos of the course made the hair stand up on my arms. I can say from experience that it is not an easy task to capture such beauty in prose, when a picture is worth 1000 words. But Mr Baker's book does give a much better sense for the original design of the course, and for the series of events that led to the course receding, as the demand for the land as a public park weighed on the lessor, and the club(s) reluctantly moved away to create 'better' courses in the suburbs.

If only we could go back and play it! I suspect one day we will do so on a simulator, but a simulator can never capture the *genius loci*. As one says about a great concert, 'You had to be there.'