



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

---

A NOTE CONCERNING THE SUBMISSION OF WOOD SAMPLES  
FOR IDENTIFICATION.

---

J. Maddern Harris

From the point of view of a botanist, the most satisfactory sample is one consisting of sound fresh timber, but this is likely to be rare in archaeological contexts. It would appear that many samples consist of charcoal, and in this case the most diagnostic are straight grained pieces of stem wood. Generally, an adequate size would be 2 ins. along the grain by  $\frac{1}{4}$ " square.

It should be understood that a clean fractured surface has to be obtained for identification - hence the preference for straight grained material. Stem wood is favoured, because it often happens in an intense burn of standing bush that most of the aerial material is destroyed, and roots covered by smouldering duff remain as charcoal. We do not know a great deal about the wood anatomy of roots, but it is often sufficiently different from the wood of the stem to make positive identification doubtful.

It is difficult to identify softwoods specifically from anything but fresh wood samples, because the fine detail used diagnostically is destroyed in burning. Hardwoods (i.e. broadleaved species) are easier to identify, but we are not familiar with all the minor scrub species, so that frequently we can only suggest that a sample looks like "a Coprosma" or "a rata" without being more specific.

Facilities for examination of wood samples at the Forest Research Institute are unfortunately very limited at the moment, being barely adequate for our own pressing requirements. We are, therefore, forced to restrict outside work to the identification of samples of "considerable importance", e.g. material accepted for 14C dating et cetera.

---ooOoo---

1. Mr. J. Maddern Harris is Principal Scientific Officer at the Forest Research Institute, New Zealand Forest Service, Whakarewarewa, Rotorua.