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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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A REVIEW OF THE N.Z.A.A. SITE RECORDING SCHEME

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This paper will survey the present state of the scheme in the light of its original aims, and suggest ways in which it might be improved.

1. The Aims of the Scheme

The scheme aims to provide a national framework for the recording of prehistoric sites in a simple but systematic way. The scheme was designed to encourage contributions by non-specialists as well as experts.

Whatever criticisms may be levelled at the scheme, it is still widely accepted that site recording has a vital part to play in New Zealand archaeology. As long as this remains so, the desirability of a national scheme is clear.

2. The Progress of the Scheme

Cumulative increase in sites recorded over the past six years:

1966	3,086
1967	3,350
1968	3,938
1969	4,401
1970	4,680
1971	4,964

Numbers of sites recorded in individual regions at 29 April 1971 are set out in the Central Filekeeper's Annual Report to the A.G.M. Progress has been very uneven, and some areas have remained inactive while others have made steady progress. The development of the scheme has been deficient in the following ways:

- (1) A slow rate of recording.
- (2) Uneven progress between regions, with important areas still hardly recorded at all.
- (3) The persistence of low-standard recording.

3. Use made of the scheme

The founders of the scheme saw it primarily as an aid to research, providing data on site distribution and site types which could be referred to and analysed. The scheme is doing this to some extent, but its usefulness is limited as long as relatively few sites are recorded.

The scheme has developed in an unforeseen way as a vital tool in site protection. Information is given to planning authorities on sites requiring protection, and is also used in assessing national priorities and policies on site preservation. Advances recently made in this field would have been impossible had it not been for the scheme. However, important though this aspect is, it should remain secondary to the main one of research.

4. The Present State of the Scheme

The disturbing aspects are:

- (1) Insufficient activity in most areas.
- (2) Lack of any recording in some key areas.
- (3) A lapse of recording in some areas formerly active.

There is a surprisingly small number of active recorders, perhaps fewer than 20. Standards of recording vary considerably. While high in some cases, in others they have not advanced beyond a rudimentary stage. The latter suffice for some purposes but limit the overall usefulness of the scheme.

An increasing amount of recording is taking place outside the scheme under the auspices of Universities and Training Colleges. This is a disturbing trend. The scheme will be greatly weakened if it is not supported by those in the best position to ensure its viability.

5. Reasons and Possible Solutions for Present Difficulties

The organisation of the scheme needs to be reviewed. In particular, is the envelope system satisfactory? Should some form of card index system be introduced? Furthermore, some recording areas are too large and should be divided. Procedures and methods are considered generally sound but some improvements may be possible. Some new site categories may also be needed. It is not, however, considered that any of these matters are basic causes of weakness.

The main problems are considered to be:

(1) Recording outside the scheme.

Often this occurs as part of major research projects, where a separate recording system has been set up and a considerable amount of work would be involved in transferring the records to the Site Recording Scheme. Once the project is completed this step is not seen as important in view of the work and cost involved.

Possible solutions.

Recording should be regarded as an essential part of research programmes. Initial recording should be within framework of scheme. Provision of funds specifically for preparation and typing of site records.

(2) Inactive Areas.

These are considered to be often due to a feeling of isolation on the part of potential recorders.

Possible Solutions.

More assistance to recorders. The Handbook is a start.

New filing areas formed by subdividing existing areas may assist. This approach needs to be used with caution, as it has not always worked in the past.

Smaller sub-districts under the control of regional filekeepers.