



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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/>.

Public Archaeology at the Grass-Roots Level: Capturing the Knowledge

David Wilton

Introduction and Background

The impetus for this article was the 2018 NZAA/AAA conference at the University of Auckland. Neville Ritchie, Richard Wilkins and myself offered a paper on the Eureka gold mining settlement, in the foothills behind Thames (now recorded as T12/1441). The session we chose was Archaeology: telling our story, on which the conference program provided the following guidance:

The theme for a recent international conference on the Public Communication of Science and Technology was ‘Science, Stories and Society’. ... The drive to involve the public in not only sharing results, but actually conducting the research, has been shown to have great impact on future research processes and community values. However, it also presents a number of challenges to the researcher. Is the new wave of ‘participatory science’ feasible in Archaeology?

After a well-attended NZ Archaeology Week this year, this session is an opportunity to share our experiences, successes and challenges, and to discuss how we can increase engagement with public audiences, by:

Involving local communities in conducting the research itself, as well as sharing the outcomes with different audiences ...

We suggest this session includes time for a panel/round-table discussion with the speakers.

Our paper noted the following aspects of public archaeology involved in the Eureka project:

- Project initiation was by means of a query by a member of the public (Richard Wilkins trying to find his Ross ancestors’ dwelling at Eureka).
- Assistance was obtained (serendipitously) by means of an extensive track network throughout the Eureka area, established by the local mountain-bike club, which greatly simplified searching in heavy regrowth bush.

- Research findings were communicated to the public, by means of a www article (<https://thetreasury.org.nz/eureka/wilton.htm>) and a public field trip.
- A large portion of the field archaeology (finding and recording features and sites) was completed by myself (a ‘member of the public’), with professional guidance from Neville Ritchie.

Other papers in the session highlighted important aspects of public archaeology that were well worth discussing in greater depth. We looked forward to the planned panel discussion, but unfortunately it couldn’t be fitted in.

This article is an attempt to enlarge on the public archaeology themes of our NZAA/AAA paper; especially that of the public as archaeologists. It highlights my interaction with two, what I would term ‘grass-roots,’ public archaeologists in the Thames - Coromandel area over about 15 years. These two individuals are Merv Grafton, who specialises in gold mining sites, and Ron Standfield, who is virtually a mirror-image of Merv, but in the kauri logging field. I hope purists will forgive the informal style I use – I’d describe it as ‘panel discussion’ rather than formal academic.

Public Archaeology and Archaeology by the Public

The following are views of the nature of ‘public archaeology’ (in Moshenska 2017: 1-3):

- ... any area of archaeological activity that interacted or had the potential to interact with the public – the vast majority of whom, for a variety of reasons, know little about archaeology as an academic subject (Schadla- Hall 1999: 147).
- ... it studies the processes and outcomes whereby the discipline of archaeology becomes part of a wider public culture, where contestation and dissonance are inevitable. In being about ethics and identity, therefore, public archaeology is inevitably about negotiation and conflict over meaning (Merriman 2004: 5).
- Within this definition of public archaeology, we can include a multitude of things: local communities campaigning to protect local heritage sites, archaeologists and producers collaborating to create television documentaries, metal detector users bringing their finds for identification and recording at local museums, archaeological heritage sites researching their visitor demographics, students

studying the depiction of prehistoric women in comic books, and plenty more.

Moshenska (2017: 6) offers the following typology of public archaeology. He notes that the categories often overlap (as is permissible in a typology) and that there are possibly other categories or variants:

- **Archaeologists Working With the Public.** Community archaeology and heritage projects run by museums, universities or commercial units.
- **Archaeology by the Public.** Local archaeological societies, metal detector clubs, amateur interest groups, independent scholars.
- **Public Sector Archaeology.** Heritage resource management work carried out on behalf of national, regional or local government.
- **Archaeological Education.** Formal and informal learning about archaeology and the ancient world in schools, museums, on-line and out in the world.
- **Open Archaeology.** Archaeological work that is made publicly accessible through viewing platforms, webcams, guides or interpretation materials.
- **Popular Archaeology.** Television shows, museum exhibitions, books, magazines and web sites about archaeology and the ancient world.
- **Academic Public Archaeology.** The study of archaeology in its economic, social, cultural, legal and ethical contexts.

The field work of Merv Grafton and Ron Standfield would come under the category of *archaeology by the public*; but I'm quite sure that neither would have ever realised that they deserved such an exalted role, nor even the title archaeologist, without my feedback. (For example, I've passed them copies of site records and articles I've written, which mention their input.) In my early work with Tongariro Natural History Society in the early 2000s, we thought we were searching for historic sites (within Tongariro National Park) and didn't realise it was called 'archaeology' until we made contact with Tony Walton and learned about such things as CINZAS and the Site Recording System (then paper-based).

In the cases of Merv and Ron, the work they are doing is probably at what I would call the 'grass roots' level of archaeology by the public. I have met many trampers, hunters etc in the field who, when told what I was looking for, gave me information about similar sites or features they had seen. Merv and

Ron could be viewed merely as casual observers of the man-made environment. However, the systematic and long-term way they have gone about their hobbies over many decades, means they have gained considerable knowledge of sites and features within their (industrial and geographic) areas of interest. They deserve the term ‘public archaeologist’ despite their rudimentary recording skills.

Data, Information and Knowledge

As well as Merv and Ron, I’ve worked with other amateur archaeologists over about 15 years. As amateurs, our roles are limited to above-ground work; i.e. finding, visual surveying, and recording of sites. At least 3-4 colleagues (in addition to Merv and Ron) have developed skills equivalent to my own and are quite capable of preparing and submitting site records to ArchSite. However, I’ve found that many just aren’t interested in recording (i.e. writing up the sites they find) and/or don’t have the literary or information technology skills to do so (for example, recording waypoints, or manipulating digital images). Merv and Ron both fall into the non-recorders category, as will be outlined below.

Many of these amateurs develop extensive knowledge of the sites they find and explore, but there is a problem if they have no way of passing on that knowledge without having to take interested parties to the site to see for themselves. Merv and Ron don’t use GPS and their map-reading skills are basic, to say the least. *Data* is usually defined as raw facts, or observations of the environment. Information is data that has been put into context to make it meaningful to a user (e.g. O’Brien 2010).

Knowledge is defined as follows:

- Knowledge adds value to information and can be defined as ‘a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual framework and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluation and incorporates new experiences and information’ ... (e.g. O’Brien 2010).

Knowledge has two components:

- Explicit (‘know-what’): can easily be shared or copied or communicated in a formal systematic language (e.g. formal education, writing a book).
- Tacit (‘know-how’): embedded in practice and experience and is hard to communicate or share with others.

In the cases of Merv and Ron, not only is their tacit knowledge ‘hard to communicate,’ but so is even fairly basic explicit knowledge, such ‘as site

locations. In practice, I've found it necessary to go into the field with them and re-find sites, so I can take GPS waypoints and photos for recording purposes. As a result, I've probably only been to a dozen or so sites with them, whereas they have knowledge of dozens (or possibly hundreds) more sites, built up over decades of exploring the Hauraki - Coromandel area. Some of these are significant sites, mainly industrial, as will be outlined below.

Field Work with Merv Grafton and Ron Standfield – ‘Accidental’ Public Archaeologists

I can't remember when I first met Merv Grafton, but the first record I have of working with him is 2007, when we visited Raileys Battery in the Waitawheta gorge, between Paeroa and Waihi. Merv had been taking family holidays in the region for several decades, and he and his wife moved to Waiomu, on the Thames Coast, when he retired. At the time of writing, he is 82, and still undertaking field work. He is also actively engaged in heritage organisations, such as the Bella St Pumphouse Society in Thames.

Raileys Battery (T13/298) is an important industrial site, as it was the first recorded place in NZ where the cyanide extraction process was used for gold. We reached the site through Merv's knowledge, and the GPS waypoint I recorded was some 800m away from the grid reference given in the site record in the paper-based SRS. I later found from Nev Ritchie, the original site recorder, that the approximate location had been pointed out to him from the track on the far side of the Waitawheta River, and he hadn't actually been to the Raileys site. I corrected the location in an update. If someone had used the recorded grid reference to find the site, they would almost certainly have missed it, due to the rugged nature of the Waitawheta gorge in that area.

Other sites I've visited and recorded with Merv include two battery sites at Lucky Hit Creek (T12/1368 and T12/1369) and the Waiokaraka reservoir (recorded as part of the Thames water race, T12/643). Merv's method of recording sites is by video camera, with a commentary he narrates as he is filming. By about 2010, he had well over 30 three-hour VHS tapes of sites he had been to. Knowing that VHS video was a dying medium, I undertook to get these all copied to DVD, and they are now held at The Treasury in Thames. An excerpt from one DVD, on Welcome Jack battery, was sent to Peter Petchey while he was researching his PhD thesis. This saved the effort and expense of looking for the battery in the Coromandel Ranges himself, so the video information recorded by Merv does have value!



Figure 1: Merv Grafton at Raileys Battery in 2007 (T13/298)

I also can't remember exactly when I met Ron Standfield, but I did run into him a few times in and around the Kauaeranga Valley, before we first went site recording together. Like Merv, he took family holidays in Thames, but stayed resident in Tauranga after he retired, and camped in the Kauaeranga

Wilton – Public Archaeology

in a camper van for most of each summer. A couple of years ago, when enquiring about his whereabouts at the DoC Kauaeranga Visitors Centre, I was told he was no longer able to drive, due to medical reasons. I believe he is now 87 (extrapolating from the NZ Herald article mentioned below).

The first recording trip we did together was in 2013, after Ron had come into The Treasury to advise that he had found the site of Wainora Cottage (residence of the Ron Hawkins family, a Kauri Timber Company contractor). We visited and recorded that site, then I showed him a couple I had found in the same area, and we worked together over a couple of summers - mainly Ron showing me what he had found, and me recording the features and sites. The cottage was recorded as T12/1420 and other features around the Booms Flat area were recorded as updates to T12/1303 (main Kauaeranga tramway). Of interest was a log-hauling canal, thought to be only the second industrial canal recorded in NZ (the first being at Kopuku coal mine, near Maramarua). Another feature of interest was some full-size piles on the true left bank of the main booms (Figure 2) - the only complete pile remnants I have seen out of about five sets of booms I've recorded. This work was also described in an article in AINZ Vol. 57 (2014).

Ron has gained some fame as 'Kauri Dundee' and was featured in an article in the NZ Herald of 27th February 2014: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11210473 Like Merv Grafton, Ron has his own idiosyncratic method of 'recording' - he cuts strips of white plastic tape and leaves them hanging in trees in the places he visits (much to the annoyance of DoC staff). He also marked an old hauler site at Booms Flat with his own sign (Figure 3).



Figure 2: Ron Standfield alongside remains of piles of the Main Booms at Booms Flat, Kauaeranga Valley.



Figure 3: Ron Standfield's sign at a hauler site, Booms Flat. White tape can also be seen hanging on trees - another method he uses to mark sites.

Late-breaking Developments

Recently, there have been positive developments in both Merv's and Ron's site recording. Merv has teamed up with Dave Lee, a Kauaeranga Valley resident. They, and a small group, are visiting Thames water race sites on private land in the lower Kauaeranga Valley, which I had missed when originally recording the race circa 2008 (mainly because I didn't know any of the landowners). Dave was keen to use a GPS to record locations, but didn't have one, so I loaned him my old Garmin Etrex, and the team is now well under way. I've been to a couple of sites with them, to ensure they can use the GPS, and results are good, thus far. I noted that Merv is still making video recordings of the trips!

One stretch of race they've found includes a tunnel portal, iron fluming constructed on a timber trestle (which has rotted away, leaving the fluming lying on the ground), and an in-ground channel - all three main methods of race construction - within a few hundred metres (Figure 4). I shall consolidate the data they produce and add updates to ArchSite as appropriate.



Figure 4: Tunnel portal on Thames water race (June 2019). Merv Grafton in striped shirt, with video camera around his neck.

In a late-late-breaking development (as this paper was nearing completion), Dave Lee has provided historical and archaeological evidence that a branch race was constructed from the Hihi stream. I was aware of preliminary discussions about this in PapersPast articles, but had discounted it as actually being built, as the Hihi-Kauaeranga junction is downstream from the main race intake. This certainly adds to our knowledge of the Thames water race, and reinforces the value of archaeology by members of the public (with suitable training and guidance).

Ron Standfield, now ‘retired’ from field work, has produced a Blog which records his Kauaeranga Valley work:

<https://kauridundee.wordpress.com/about/>

He must have acquired a GPS towards the end of his time in the Kauaeranga, as some of his Blog posts include GPS data. He has even produced a hand-drawn map with detailed GPS waypoints. It appears he has recorded a GPS track and listed the individual waypoints sequentially (Figure 5). I hope he continues adding posts to the Blog.

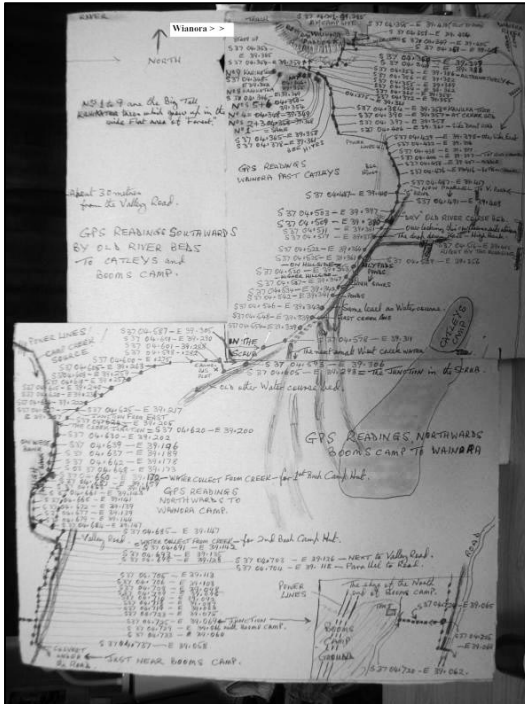


Figure 5: Ron Standfield's map of Wainora Stream - Booms Flat area, with GPS track points listed sequentially.

The Way Ahead?

I hope that this article will contribute something to the discussion of public archaeology: particularly the role of members of the public as archaeologists (limited to finding and recording sites). The two individuals featured in the article - Merv and Ron - who I have worked with over many years, have developed extensive knowledge of mining and kauri logging sites that they have found and explored. Unfortunately, their rudimentary recording methods means that a lot of their knowledge will pass with them.

In the 'information age' people venturing into the Great Outdoors, such as trampers, hunters, or mountain bikers, tend to have digital cameras and GPS receivers (or at least Smart Phones with those capabilities). They therefore have the tools to gather data on archaeological sites that they find, and require only a bit of interest and encouragement to convert the data to information, and, ultimately, knowledge - that is, produce meaningful site records. These people have the potential to become the new breed of public archaeologists; particularly away from the urban environment.

Acknowledgements

I salute Merv Grafton and Ron Standfield for their contribution to Hauraki - Coromandel industrial archaeology over many decades. Thanks also to Ashleigh Fox and Samantha Lagos, conveners of the NZAA/AAA paper session described above, whose thoughtful narrative led (somewhat belatedly) to this paper.

References

- Moshenska, G. (2017) *Key Concepts in Public Archaeology*, UCL Press, London.
- O'Brien, J. (2010) *Management Information Systems: Managing Information Technology in the Internetworked Enterprise (tenth edition)*, Irwin McGraw-Hill, New York.