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ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE BAY OF PLENTY—THE EARLY YEARS

Ken Moore
Kawerau

Site recording in the Bay of Plenty commenced about 1958, often in a private capacity, and with little exception fieldwork in those early years was confined to field recording. Pioneers then were people such as Jack Golson, along with Don Stafford and Ces Watt of Rotorua. Over at Whakatane were Frank Davis and Doric Mabon, and for Tauranga, P. Crighton and P. Mortensen. Little did they know that in the years ahead the dominating factor would be the sheer volume of sites recorded and available to record. By 1962 the Site Recording Scheme was well under way via the reasonably simple and rewarding task of fieldwork. As it has eventuated, this aspect of archaeology, field survey, has been the key, given the huge volume of sites and the need to record before so many disappeared due to forestry, farming and lack of interest.

My interest had commenced in 1960, and in March 1962 Doric Mabon, Alan Pullar and myself, along with Archaeological Group of the Whakatane and District Historical Society, carried on with site survey. Tauranga and Rotorua continued to make contributions and Trevor Hosking at Taupo likewise with excavation. Years later Perry Fletcher at Taupo made significant contributions in field site recordings. It was in 1961, and also 1965, that important archaeological investigations were carried out on the farms of C. Spence and W. Moore at Thornton near Whakatane.

Experience showed us that property owners and farmers, having given approval to survey their land, often came up with the comments such as, “you won’t find anything”, or, “I’ll be surprised if you see anything.” This meant that unless it is a very obvious site people would not recognise a feature if they fell over it... or in it.

Site survey recording in the Bay of Plenty was always ongoing in the 1960s through to the 1980s. From time to time in the earlier years some small interest was shown by a local authority. County Councils were happy to receive a list of pa and other sites to include in their planning, but that’s as far as it ever went. Their lack of forward and practical interest was noticeable. Site preservation was in its infancy and valuable sites were being destroyed.

By September 1963 some 53 sites had been recorded, and at this time I became the filekeeper for the Bay of Plenty. In March 1964 a new figure of 170 emerged. A breakdown of this 170 showed that they were mainly pa sites with defensive earthworks, mostly the ridge type. Pits were found to be mainly confined to the coastal strip except for Kawerau. Site recording was also taking place at Ongare and Kauri Points in the Western Bay.

In the mid-1960s the late Alan Pullar, soil scientist, made a valiant attempt to find a Kaharoa ash mantle covering an archaeological site, but it was not to be and has remained that way ever since.

The June 1968 *NZAA Newsletter* showed sites recorded for the Bay of Plenty had moved up to 248: early days yet. Excavations by Wilfred Shawcross took place at Ongare Point (2nd season). Then in 1970 site recording had gained momentum and for the Bay of Plenty this meant a total of 605. Representation continued to be made to the local authorities for recognition and preservation of sites, namely the Whakatane County Council and the Borough Council—always pleased to receive the information but this did not altogether stop the destruction of sites.

Then in 1970 came the publication of the valuable handbook on Site Recording by John Daniels, of special value to beginners looking for assistance in their fieldwork—I found the manual of much help. Also in this year Dave White took up the challenge of site recording and soon got up to 50 sites, committing them to survey forms. He was dismayed at the number of sites partially destroyed by farm operations.

So, by 1972 the Bay topped the New Zealand districts for the highest number of sites recorded, being 1140. It did not stay that way for long. Of the 1140, 60% were fortified pa with the headland and ridge type predominating (the ring ditch type of pa never became a feature).

Increasingly by 1974 site preservation became more important than ever. Usually the emphasis was more towards the most historic and important sites, e.g., Mauao—Mt Maunganui (remember the gondola episode?), Toi's Pa, Fort Colville, the huge Otamarakau pa site, Te Parihari gunfighters pa site at Ohope, etc. At that time efforts towards site preservation came from myself on behalf of NZAA, the NZ Historic Places Trust and the Whakatane and District Historical Society. Also involved were the Department of Lands and Survey and local bodies. I found that one had to build up a case for protecting each individual site, and it was not enough to say we will preserve this site, etc. It became frustrating for official wheels turned ever so slowly when it came to bringing down a management plan and actually preserving a site.

In May 1975 there burst on the scene a site of major significance to New Zealand—the Kohika swamp pa site west of Whakatane. In time it was to reveal,

following intensive excavation, a wealth of material of how people lived at that time. The site still exists and it remains a significant place of cultural and historical importance.

The year of 1976 showed that with patient and methodical field surveying the Bay of Plenty could yield remarkable results. This was in the form of considerable density of sites often very close together, e.g., the Kawerau area and the cliff top above the Matata Straight. Also for the Bay there is a consistent close relationship of occupation sites with harbours, lakes, the sea and the rivers.

By 1980–81 the Kawerau–Onepu area was involved in what could be termed intensive field surveys of an extremely large number of small sites over a fairly large area. I refer to the pit and terrace type feature (kumara cultivation). Simply hundreds of sites were recorded over grassed low hill country. Excavations by Ian Lawlor and teams show occupation of this hill country and the flats to about AD 1529 (the Kawerau–Maruka investigations, 1981–82).

From this point on large scale forestry planting was to influence life in the Bay, and this certainly included site survey etc. Some forestry companies and contractors were helpful and some were not.

From about 1980 onwards site recorders, individuals and pairs took over field surveying, often surveying areas that I had already covered. I had more or less retired after 20 years in the field, but had enjoyed every minute of it and felt that a worthwhile contribution had been made. The follow on was extensive overseas travel and family matters, but today, in 2003, it is pleasing to note that the Bay of Plenty total for sites recorded stands at 8061 making it still third place with only Auckland and Northland in front.