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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE NORTH : A WEEKEND SEMINAR

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Introduction

Over the weekend 13 - 15 July this year a group of about 30 people met to discuss archaeology in Northland and to try to formulate plans for future action. Most of those present had recent experience of fieldwork in the area. Discussion was oriented towards research interests and the problems of site protection and management. For the purpose of the seminar, Northland was defined as that part of the North Island to the north of the Whangaparaoa Peninsula.

The seminar was based on about 20 short papers which examined several small sub-regions within Northland as well as giving a general summary and review of archaeological research to date. Discussion arising from these papers took place in small groups and in open session. Resources available during the weekend included a variety of maps, showing topography, geology, soil types, pa distribution, early exploration routes and the location of recent site surveys.

The weekend was organised by Richard Cassels, John Coster and Gabrielle Johnston.

Papers presented

A number of general papers reviewing the progress of Northland archaeology and defining some of the present and future problems were presented. Stan Bartlett, Bob Lawn and Janet Davidson discussed past research, beginning with early individual contributions and progressing through the development of organised site-recording in the 1960's to the efflorescence of larger scale site surveys initiated by the Historic Places Trust in the mid-1970's. In her summary and review of research, Davidson concentrated on theoretical contributions and the results of excavation. Only about twelve excavations have been carried out and these have not resulted in the elucidation of a regional prehistoric sequence, but a limited number of Archaic settlements are known (the best-documented being Wilfred Shawcross's Mount Camel site) and there is evidence for development through to a late northern aspect of Classic Maori culture. Garry Law noted the existence of an 'Archaic gap' on the east coast between Doubtless Bay and Motutapu Island and pointed out the

need for further research on the apparent absence of early settlement in this zone.

Geoff Irwin, in discussing the theoretical importance of Northland in New Zealand prehistory, suggested that the apparent climatic advantages of the North may not have been as important as might be assumed, considering the results of pollen analysis studies from Hawkes Bay and the Bay of Plenty, in both of which very early forest clearance is suggested. He noted the need for more research into environmental changes in Northland, and called as well for a more rigorous approach to site surveying, laying emphasis on controlled sampling, the elimination or definition of methodological biases and the production of quantitative data which can be used in comparative studies.

Richard Cassels, speaking about the 'Stage 3 Project', in which a group of Auckland University undergraduates collated a variety of data relevant to archaeology in Northland, noted that although over 40 site surveys have been undertaken in the North, relatively little is known about the archaeology of the region. Nonetheless, major differences can be seen in the types and proportions of sites recorded in different parts of Northland.

To conclude the general topics, Violet Newman, discussing the Maori viewpoint, pointed out that prehistoric land tenure, population movements and genealogical affinity are matters of considerable importance to the Maori people. The potential contribution of archaeological research needs to be made known by direct communication with, and involvement of, Maori communities.

Fourteen papers describing the results of recent fieldwork were presented at the seminar. The main themes to arise were:

1. Some site surveys show low site densities in certain environmental zones, particularly on former Kauri gumlands. Such information helps to establish the limits of prehistoric settlement. On this topic, Garry Law raised the question of whether or not the gumlands were in fact unutilised by the Maori or if their present barren state and apparent lack of prehistoric sites was primarily induced by recent burning and gumdigging.
2. The role of communication routes and trade networks in establishing settlement patterns has yet to be fully explored by field survey, but initial results from the Okahukura Peninsula and the Hoteo River (Kaipara) suggest that the availability of waterways was a major factor in determining the extent of prehistoric occupation.

3. The offshore islands to the east of Northland were intensively occupied in prehistoric times and offer substantial advantages for study as isolated units, partly because the state of preservation of sites on them is frequently very good.
4. The lack of any workable systems of paa classification was generally agreed upon and alternative terminologies and typologies were briefly discussed. The existence of intuitively discernible 'regional repertoires' of paa styles was pointed out by a number of speakers and the need for a standard system of description as well as a classificatory scheme was acknowledged. Anne Leahy enumerated some of the characteristics of musket-fighting paa, identification of which could aid the isolation and description of prehistoric types.

Discussion

Following the presentation of papers, discussion was initiated by a panel of Roger Green, Janet Davidson and Stan Bartlett. The major topics are briefly summarised below.

Area projects. The seminar agreed that significant research results would best come about from intensive, problem-oriented studies of a single area or region, preferably one with a variety of resource zones, soil types, ecosystems and topographical features which might be reflected in prehistoric settlement patterns. Ideally, such a project would be largescale, carried out over a period of years, and would involve research in the physical and natural sciences as well as in archaeology, ethnology and historical studies.

Suggested stimuli to such a project included the possible appointment of a regional Historic Places Trust archaeologist and the establishment of a research unit based on the University of Auckland's Department of Anthropology. Extensive land development will undoubtedly act as a further stimulus.

Site recording. The analysis of 'raw' site survey data is beginning to come about and is seen most clearly at seminars like this one. A closer examination is necessary of the biases (often unstated) inherent in field survey strategies and of the effect these might have on the information produced. For example, the influence of erosion, silt or sand deposition, ploughing, grazing, afforestation, swamp drainage or urban development is seldom specifically considered, but may have considerably altered the apparent frequency or proportion of sites recorded in any area.

Sufficient site survey information is becoming available that, in many areas, a little more recording would provide detailed coverage of

large or significant areas. Recording aimed at 'filling in the gaps' could in some cases be undertaken as a project peripheral to work necessitated by land development such as exotic afforestation. An example of one such on-going project is the Whangarei site recording group under the leadership of Patsy Deverall. A group of young people are being employed by the Whangarei City Council under the Government's temporary employment scheme, to map major sites in the Whangarei area. They have produced many detailed plans of a high standard and also undertake documentary research, site survey and assessment of threatened sites.

Most site-recording in Northland has concentrated on the coast, leaving its relationship with the hinterland relatively unexplored. A few surveys have provided data confirming the absence or scarcity of prehistoric settlement in particular areas and these 'holes' in site distribution could be extrapolated to form a predictive model whereby large areas could be eliminated as fruitful places for survey. Gumlands, with their poor soils, high or steep land, areas at present or formerly in heavy bush, and swamps are obvious areas which should be tested. The surveying of strategic transects through a variety of zones is one means of gathering the required data without overly extensive work.

The increased number of site survey reports appearing recently has underlined the degree of localised archaeological variation within Northland. Extension of previous fieldwork, combined with the study of artefacts, traditions and ethnographic accounts will clarify and add detail to the sub-regional patterns which are beginning to emerge.

Small-scale and individual research. It was agreed at the seminar that, in addition to field-recording, many small-scale, but necessarily long-term, studies could usefully be undertaken by students or amateurs living in Northland. Among such contributions, the most important was felt to be the recording and study of localised artefacts in private and small museum collections. Library and documentary research, including the recording of local knowledge, especially that of older Maoris, would also be very valuable.

Public education and involvement. It is unfortunate that the recent employment of students and professionals to record archaeological sites has apparently resulted in less involvement of local amateurs.

It was recognised that academics and professionals have an obligation to inform the public of the progress and results of their work especially while fieldwork is going on, since publication in academic journals (or even in the Newsletter) will fail to reach most potentially interested people. Local interest groups, news media and schools can all be utilised, and consideration was given to organising regional

archaeological seminars, aimed at the general public, in different parts of Northland.

Site protection and management. The problems of site management are sufficiently complex to warrant discussion in another seminar. It was felt that archaeologists must be prepared to work with planners and developers and to aid in the preparation of legally acceptable plans of threatened or outstanding sites.

The importance of Crown Land in enabling the management of large areas as 'archaeological precincts' rather than of a few isolated sites, is not recognised as clearly as it might be. Such areas as the Te Pahi Farm Park and the Bay of Islands Maritime and Historical Park are ideal for the deliberate preservation of a wide range of sites in a relatively undisturbed context.

The advantages of a long-term area project in providing detailed data on which to base management criteria are considerable. The establishment of such a project in an area threatened by rapid land development could be one way of coping with the need for site assessment surveys and rescue excavations.

Recommendations and conclusions.

The following major recommendations on future archaeological priorities in Northland arose from the seminar:

1. That a group consisting of Stan Bartlett, Richard Cassels and John Coster be set up to coordinate future archaeological work in the North and to 'keep the ball rolling' in the wake of the seminar.
2. That the New Zealand Historic Places Trust should give high priority to the appointment of a regional archaeologist in Northland.
3. That the Department of Lands and Survey be encouraged to employ an archaeologist to formulate an archaeological site management policy and give practical advice on day-to-day problems of site protection. This applies particularly to the Bay of Islands Maritime and Historical Park.
4. Two areas in Northland stand out as most suitable for, and in need of, longer term coordinated archaeological work: the Bay of Islands, inland to Lake Omapere, including the Ohaeawai area, and the Ahipara Bay - Kaitaia - Doubtless Bay region.

Several factors favour activity in the Bay of Islands - Lake Omapere region:

Pressures of land development and the current revision of the District Scheme.

The existence of large areas of Crown Land, providing opportunities for site management, public education and research.

The need for information about areas of inland settlement, including (i) the effects of the presence of good agricultural soils and overland communication routes on site distribution, and (ii) the environmental limits to prehistoric settlement in the inland area.

The availability of a rich historical record.

5. Other areas with high priority for site-recording include:

Completion of a site survey transect from Mount Camel, through Houhora, to Ninety Mile Beach.

Further transects across Northland, to investigate the limits of site distribution, e.g. Dargaville to Whangarei, and Kaipara (Hotoe River) to the east coast (Mangawhai/Pakiri).

Completion and analysis of the South Kaipara Head surveys. Whangarei and environs.

The east coast of the Far North (Great Exhibition Bay to Doubtless Bay).

6. There is a major need to assess and improve the effectiveness of our current site-recording procedures. Ways of doing this include: Production of basic quantitative data such as numbers, type, density, size and geographical location of sites (and the individual features which comprise them), accompanied by a clear statement of site-recording methods and any other factors which might affect their description and interpretation.

Comparison and discussion of survey results (as at this seminar) and survey method (as at seminars organised by Garry Law in Auckland and Dunedin last year).

Excavation of 'problem features' encountered in surveys, for example, 'pit' depressions, terraces, slope and swamp 'drains', gundigging remains, cropmarks.

Development of a standard system for describing paa types, based on plane-table mapping of selected sites.

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