



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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 ARTIFACT RECORDING BY LOCAL GROUPS

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INTRODUCTION:

The artifact record form is not yet in general use throughout the country, and is not yet fulfilling either of the two functions for which it was designed:

1. To assist archaeologists in cataloguing objects found during excavations, and museums in keeping a detailed record of the origins of items in their collections.
2. To enable a record to be made of artifacts in private collections.

We are concerned here with the second function.

It would be of great value to researchers to have local files of artifacts such as there are of sites. They would then be able to discover quickly what artifacts were available for study in a particular area. Perhaps more importantly, information about a collection (especially the precise locality of each artifact) need not then be lost if the collection changed hands. Not all collectors would be willing to have their collections recorded, but probably a great many, in some areas at least, would be glad of it, particularly if the work were done for them.

Local files of artifact record forms would best be kept by either the local file keeper (if willing to take this extra burden) or the local museum.

Interested members of local groups could then work together on artifact recording, as they do on site recording. In groups of two or three, or more if the collector has no objection, they could record private collections in their area. It is possible with experience to record artifacts surprisingly quickly and accurately. Practice is a prerequisite.

On the artifact record form generally, and on many specific problems, see Newsletter v.4 no.3 pp.3-21 Je 1961.

EQUIPMENT:

Artifact record forms
 Foolscap or larger sheets of paper
 Carbon paper if desired (See later under Public Relations)
 Pencils
 Rubber
 A ruler marked in centimetres
 A piece of wire (See later under Drawing the Artifact)
 Map(s) if practicable (See later under The Form)

WHAT TO RECORD:

Some collectors, such as those who are antagonistic to systematic archaeology, or in some cases those who publish articles on their own collections, are best not approached at all. The group must use its discretion. When a collector is approached, he should be told what is involved; that a group of people will be visiting him to study his collection and record what he can tell them about it, and that a permanent record will be available then to archaeologists on what he has. In this connection, it would probably be wise to restrict access to artifact files to bona fide researchers. Collectors may balk at the possibility of being approached by large numbers of people interested in their collections.

Some less expert collectors have items which are not artifacts, or only very dubiously man made. These can be omitted. If time is limited preference should be given to those articles which can be most precisely localised. One of the major objects of recording an artifact is to secure the knowledge of where it came from, because once this is lost the artifact is of much less value for scientific research. It is particularly important in the case of an elderly collector, though hardly tactful to tell him so.

It is sometimes maintained that it is no use recording an artifact which is not known to have come from a specific site. This is an extreme view which few people who have used artifact collections for research purposes would agree with. Artifacts localised only to a certain district can be very helpful.

THE FORM:

File number: This is dealt with by J.R.S. Daniels elsewhere in this issue.

Repository: The name and address of the possessor of the artifact.

Finder, Date found: These may not be known. If information is only approximate, say so. (This applies throughout).

Publication reference: If any

Artifact class: As, fish hook, etc. is sufficiently specific

Item number: The number of the artifact within the collection. If the collection is not already numbered, you should assign each artifact a number, starting from "1". If the collector agrees, write the number in pencil on artifacts of stone or bone. This method of marking is fairly permanent, but the marks can be removed at any time with a rubber. Tell the collector this.

New item number, Change in repository, Date of change: For later use if the artifact changes hands, or the collector changes his address.

Location of site: Much detail under general can be omitted if a grid reference can be given. To this end, if you know that a collector has many items from one area, it is a good idea to take the appropriate inch-to-the-mile map with you. A site number can be given if the find-spot has been recorded for the Site Recording Scheme.

Position on site: Unless the artifact was found in a controlled excavation it will probably not be possible to say more than, e.g. "surface find", "found in a rabbit burrow", "ploughed up", etc. An artifact was "in position" if it was found where it was originally depos-

ited, such as if it was sticking out of the side of an eroding midden. An artifact is not "in position" if it has been disturbed, such as if it was found lying on the surface of a field. If it was, say, ploughed up, it will probably be "uncertain" whether it was in position.

If it was found in a controlled excavation, that is one carried out under archaeological conditions so that the exact position of each find is recorded, the stratigraphic reference (the layer it was in) and the site grid reference (the square it was in) can be given.

Context: What was found with it. Instead of describing other artifacts, references should be given to the appropriate artifact record forms if possible.

It may be possible to cover Structures and Ecological by reference to site record forms, but if a form does not exist for the site, as full a description as can be extracted from the collector should be given.

DESCRIBING THE ARTIFACT:

The only types of Maori artifact for which detailed methods of description have been worked out, are adzes and fish hooks. For the most recent systems of terminology, see J. Davidson on adzes, and C.D. Smart on fish hooks. (Newsletter v.4 no.3, Je 1961). With other artifacts, the recorder must do his best to give a clear description, but there are no standardised terms.

A note on terminology. The primary requirement in a system of descriptive terms is clarity. It is with this in view that existing terminologies have been devised. They should also be comprehensive, that is cover every possible feature, and consistent. But above all they must be comprehensible. A long word is not necessarily more "scientific" than a short one, in fact if its meaning is less clear it is less scientific. If you prefer other terms to the given ones, by all means use them, provided the meaning is clear.

Material: Do not try to be more specific than your knowledge allows. If you are not absolutely certain what kind of stone an adze is made of, simply say "stone".

Condition: A few of the possibilities are; complete or broken (specify part missing), completed or unfinished (beware of jumping to conclusions - for instance an adze that is not completely polished may in fact be finished), weathered, water-worn, stained with red ochre.

Information on features requested: Whatever general information seems necessary. Plenty of measurements should be given in millimetres. The metric system is used by most research workers, and it is to aid their work that this form has mainly been devised. If practicable weigh the artifact also.

DRAWING THE ARTIFACT:

An adequate drawing can be worth pages of description, and save a great deal of time. Drawings of the artifact from every angle (within reason) should be given. First, simply draw round it. If it is too big for the back of the form, use a larger sheet of paper. Then fill in detail as best you can. Artistic merit is not important. What matters is that the research worker should be able to get a clear general idea of what the artifact looks like.

There are certain conventions for representing various types of surface on a stone artifact:

- polished - leave blank
- bruised - dots
- flaked - indicate the edge of the flake, and if you have the time and the inclination, shade it to show where the bulb of percussion is.

Any good archaeological publication containing line drawings of stone artifacts will provide examples of these conventions.

Cross-sections should be given, and the points at which they were taken marked on the outline drawing. One comparatively easy way to take a cross-section of an artifact such as an adze, is to fit a piece of loose wire round the artifact, then slip it off and draw round it.

Photographing the artifact, especially if it is particularly interesting or difficult to draw is a good idea if time, equipment and skill allow. Do not forget to include a scale in the picture. But a photograph is not a substitute for measurements and drawings; it is a supplement to them.

PUBLIC RELATIONS:

The collector should be commended and thanked for allowing his collection to be recorded. Try to make him feel that it is worthwhile. He may be grateful and impressed if you give him carbon copies of the forms describing his artifacts, but this is not always practicable. By the time you have finished racking his failing memory for details of just where he found his various items, he may be impressed by the necessity of recording each as it is obtained. If so, leave him some blank forms, and tell him how to put numbers on his future acquisitions - pencil direct on stone lasts better than a sticking plaster label. In most museums black or white ink is used, painted over with clear varnish (clear nail polish is suitable). If he is not interested in filling out record forms, try to persuade him at least, to write on each item, in pencil, where it was found.