



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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BOOK REVIEWS

Barry Brailsford, Greenstone Trails. Wellington, Reed, 1984. 192 pp., many illustrations, bibliography, index. \$19.95.

There is a proven demand for books dealing with New Zealand's heritage, and a frequent call from both archaeologists and laymen for more popular books on aspects of New Zealand archaeology. Barry Brailsford has responded to that challenge with the production of two substantial books in the past three years - The Tattooed Land (1981), and now, Greenstone Trails: The Maori Search for Pounamu.

As the title implies, in Greenstone Trails, Brailsford argues that the continuing use of specific routes by the South Island Maoris was largely motivated by the demand for greenstone. In support of this proposition he draws extensively on historic accounts, particularly the diaries of early West Coast explorers whom he quotes at length (most have been previously published but are now out of print). He also describes known or recorded campsites (including some interesting recently discovered ones) and Maori travelling equipment. The outcome is a well constructed and illustrated documentary of the use of particular alpine routes by the South Island Maoris.

However, to my mind, "Maori Trails of the South Island" would be a more fitting title for the text for his case with regard to the trails' primary usage as "greenstone trails" is often laboured and unconvincing. Using the same sources, for at least 50% of the trails one could argue that their use was as much for food quest/exploration, seeking refuge, revenge raids or seasonal food gathering, as for obtaining greenstone. The "greenstone quest" argument is founded on an over-reliance on observations made during the historic era. During this period obtaining greenstone was undoubtedly important for many groups of New Zealand Maoris; consequently its quest is often cited in early travellers' accounts. The distribution of early sites and non-greenstone artefacts in the South Island suggests that most of the trails must have been in use for other purposes long before greenstone came into vogue.

Brailsford, perhaps wisely has steered clear of the problems of greenstone sourcing and even artefact distribution evidence, but nevertheless it is a considerable body of evidence to ignore when one is arguing for the use of particular routes as "greenstone trails". Further consultation with those working in this area might have been

constructive, e.g. recent "discoveries" suggest the South Westland greenstone field may have been considerably more important as a source of Maori greenstone than ethnographic and historic records would suggest.

Overall, the book nicely brings together knowledge of the South Island Maori trails as recorded in the nineteenth century. The greenstone quest arguments are often less convincing but will undoubtedly increase demand for the book. It is liberally laced with interesting and excellent quality photographs, an essential ingredient for popular books these days. To this end the book should have considerable popular appeal. Readers may even be inspired to tramp the old trails.

Neville Ritchie

Graham Connah (ed.), Australian Field Archaeology - A Guide to Techniques. Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1983. 182 pp., index.

This book is a collection of 19 articles by 21 authors, covering a wide range of techniques useful in recording and analysing archaeological field remains. The articles tell what to do from first discovery of a site through to the writing of a report. It is not a site recording handbook like that published by the New Zealand Archaeological Association: it is much more comprehensive. There are articles on plane surveying techniques, special photographic techniques (terrestrial photogrammetry, making scale drawings from photographs, aerial photography), magnetic surveying, recording prehistoric art, geo-archaeology (interpreting the geological context of archaeological sites), stone tools (how to recognise and collect them), midden analysis, dating (radiocarbon and thermoluminescence), making illustrations, and report writing. Two articles of direct concern to Australian archaeologists but which New Zealand archaeologists will find interesting to compare with the New Zealand situation, deal with legislation and contact with Aboriginal communities.

The techniques described are a mixture of sophistication and "do-it-yourself". Few field archaeologists will have ready access to phototheodolites and stereoplotters but the usefulness of photogrammetry and its application to archaeology is well-described in a succinct article by J.M. Beaton of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. On the other hand, the useful "do-it-yourself" gadget which uses two mirrors, one half-silvered, for drawing small finds (described by John Clegg) should be fairly easily made or acquired by archaeologists.

A guide for the collection and submission of samples for radiocarbon dating (by Henry Polach, Jack Golson and John Head) lists the minimum and desirable amounts of different materials to be collected for radiocarbon dating and is generally applicable to New Zealand conditions. A useful measure for the desirable amount of good quality charcoal is enough to cover the palm of one hand. They might also have added, for good quality shell, a well-heaped double handful. The article recommends that samples are best submitted to the laboratory in their natural moist state, packed in polythene bags. I understand, however, that unless a sample is to be processed immediately it should be thoroughly air-dried to avoid bacterial growth which can feed off the polythene and contaminate the sample with old carbon.

The article on surveying techniques (by Douglas Hobbs), covers a wider range of methods and equipment than the chapter in the N.Z.A.A. site recording handbook and is well worth reading by anyone contemplating making larger more detailed maps of sites than required for routine site recording. It covers chain surveys, levelling and plane tabling and is useful for its discussion of principles. However, some of the equipment described is somewhat archaic. The plane table equipment generally available to New Zealand archaeologists is more up to date and easier to use.

The book contains some interesting insights into the difficulties faced by Australian archaeologists. After reading Sharon Sullivan's statement, that the only topographic maps which currently exist for large areas of Australia are at a scale of 1:250,000, New Zealand archaeologists will no doubt be thankful for the excellent topographic map and aerial photograph coverage which is available here.

I found this book very interesting and worthwhile reading. Many of the techniques will have application in this country and I can fully recommend the book.

Bruce McFadgen

 Arthur Cotterell, The First Emperor of China. London, Macmillan, 1981. 208 pp., bibliography, index. \$19.95

In China, established interpretations of the country's history are accepted at face value by the bulk of the population. How, then, do the Chinese, established as an ethnic and national entity for millennia, see themselves?

Art styles and scholarly instincts gravitate towards the past, although there are astonishing changes in aesthetic taste and technology. These build on the traditional, e.g. the conservative over-elaborate intricacy of bronze-ware, but usually add to the range as in the stunning changes in the ceramic arts.

Entering a Chinese museum, one is struck both by the quality of the material on display, and the banality of the interpretations placed on them. Everything is seen in terms of a class struggle, and may provide a stumbling block unless you enter with your own frame of reference. For the Chinese archaeologist these populist interpretations are clearly an enormous asset. The dirt-turning classes, the peasantry and city labourers - and China has a labour-intensive economy - are a key element in archaeological exploration. Finds are reported apparently honestly and quickly (although there is a black market), and the provincial museum authorities, each the equivalent of one of our national museums, have the capacity to respond.

Arthur Cotterell was fortunate to be a guest of the People's Republic. His wife translates Chinese, and provided the English version of historical documents in this book. The emperor, Ch'in Shih-huang-ti was the first man to unify the area of present-day China.

The standard of, and effort put into excavations of only part of his monument are impressive. This book is only partly about the entombed warriors, but for archaeological adventurers it will be the most detailed, accessible and readable account for some time. The warriors, which are so well known, are not of course the tomb of the Emperor, which is a large artificial mound some 2 km to the west of pits 1, 2 and 3 which contain the life-sized terracotta figures. Pit 1 contains the massed warriors; it is roofed like an aircraft hangar, open to the public, and is about one third to one half excavated. Pits 2 and 3 have been partly excavated to establish their nature and were then back-filled. They comprise a mobile chariot force, and a command unit respectively. All the pits were raided for arms and partially destroyed during the collapse of the Ch'in empire, which was of about 15 years' duration.

Cotterell devotes the first 50 pages to the tomb. The balance of part one is an account of Wei Valley archaeology, in the period 300-200 B.C. when the Ch'in state (one of many in China) grew to an empire. Part two is a rendering of key historical documents of the period, and the understanding they provide of Ch'in Shi'huang-ti's rise to power as

emperor in 221 B.C. Part three deals with the workings of the Ch'in Empire. Ch'in Shi-huang-ti became emperor in 221 B.C. and died in 210 B.C.; his son lasted until 207 B.C. The Ch'in Empire must have been a highly strung animal, and it collapsed into bitter fighting between factions. This led to the founding of the Han Empire in 202 B.C., with a return to a looser feudal structure. The Han Dynasty was more stable and takes a larger place in our understanding of Chinese history than does Ch'in.

For the Chinese, the Ch'in discoveries are very important, not solely because of the immense antiquarian value of the material, or because these are striking markers of the ranking that archaeologists are now so interested in - quite the reverse indeed. Ch'in is their first model of Mao Tse Tung, the modern unifier of China. Ch'in made many mistakes, they will say, and suffered a fatal revolt of the peasant classes. But in a society the size of China, the virtues of unity cannot be underestimated, and Ch'in is used to reinforce that.

Kevin Jones

Helen Leach, 1,000 Years of Gardening in New Zealand.
Wellington, Reed, 1984. 157 pp., bibliography, index.
\$24.95.

After best-sellers on The Cook's Garden and on bread making, Helen Leach has for her third book drawn on her professional experience as one of New Zealand's leading archaeologists. A major part of this book is based on her own research into the history and practice of Polynesian horticulture in these islands.

But the book has a wider scope than that. It looks at two very different gardening traditions which were brought to New Zealand: the Polynesian and the European. One came from tropical islands where year round horticulture was practised, and one from a temperate land of the northern hemisphere where very different plants were in common use. The author traces the origins of these gardening traditions to mainland south-east Asia and the western Pacific as early as 7000 B.C., and to south-west Asia (including Turkey, Syria and Iraq) where vegetable production first appears in the archaeological record between three and four thousand B.C. The plants and techniques changed and developed as people took them out into the Pacific or northward into Europe from the respective centres of earliest domestication.

When the ancestors of the Maoris first came to New Zealand they brought with them their food plants - taro, kumara, yam and gourd. The most interesting sections of this book tell the story of how these tropical plants were adapted to our temperate climate. The author writes:

"Looking back from the twentieth century, we can see that with the help of some sound horticultural techniques such as soil lightening, mulching, wind-break screens and raised planting beds, coupled with ingenious storage devices and a great deal of faith, the Maori gardeners of the pre-European period turned potential disaster into a qualified success."

Many centuries later another people, mostly from the British Isles, brought an entirely different suite of plants and gardening techniques. Coming from another temperate land, these introductions were generally more suited to the New Zealand situation. Maoris were quick to adopt the white potato, maize, watermelon and other plants from among the new introductions. Helen Leach discusses the successes and difficulties encountered by Europeans in establishing their favourite vegetables and fruit trees 12,000 miles from home.

1,000 Years of Gardening in New Zealand breaks new ground. For the first time archaeology contributes a major part of a book examining an aspect of New Zealand history. Polynesian and European experience are both examined in showing us the origins of the gardens and garden plants we now enjoy. The book has a singular merit in that it focusses on adaptations to this country, and that it is about us.

Nancy Tichborne's colour reconstructions and black and white drawings are generally accurate and informative. The text is easy to read in the large two-column format, although I confess I was not always sure just how easy the language and style would be for general readers. Nor are there any concessions in explaining, for example, what radiocarbon dates actually mean.

Nonetheless, what more interesting topics are there than archaeology and gardening! Helen Leach has struck a rich and fascinating vein with this book and can only be congratulated on a major achievement. The book demonstrates how important archaeology is if we in New Zealand are to properly address ourselves to our history.

Nigel Prickett

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