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FIRST SETTLEMENT DATE AND EARLY RATS: AN OPINION POLL

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The 2002 conference at Russell being eight years after a previous survey on the date of first settlement of New Zealand, I thought it again time to ask the cream of New Zealand archaeology on their views of the matter. Earlier surveys were carried out by Tony Walton at the 1988 Auckland conference and 1994 Whangarei conference, and are reported in *Archaeology in New Zealand* (Walton 1988, 1994). This time I added a question on early rats – 'Yes' or 'No'.

The poll was carried out without any prior conference discussion, or even warning for most respondents. Questions were framed in a way that did not hint at the results or trend of earlier polls. I was careful to indicate no preference on the matter of early rats. While there may have been brief discussions among those sitting together, responses were gathered as quickly as possible to try and ensure that people gave their own views. Fiftythree respondents gave a first settlement date, of whom all but two had a view on the question of early rats.

Date of first settlement

First settlement dates ranged from 57 BC to 1402 AD, the earlier date being very much an outlier, with no others prior to the 8th century AD. The mean for all respondents is 1081 AD – or 1103 AD if we exclude the BC date. Popular dates are 1200 (eight respondents), 1150 (five), and 1300, 1100 and 1000 AD each of which had four supporters. The median of the 53 responses is 1150 AD.

Figure 1 compares the 2002 survey with those of 1994 and 1988. In the 1988 poll 80% of respondents went for a date between 700 and 1100 AD, and 15% for an earlier date. There were marked peaks for 9th century (25%) and 11th century settlement (22%), with the next most popular being the 8th century at 17%. The poll organiser commented: '...the results need to be considered in the light of suggestions of very early settlement, and in this respect the poll

indicates a broad consensus that New Zealand was settled late' (Walton 1988:79).

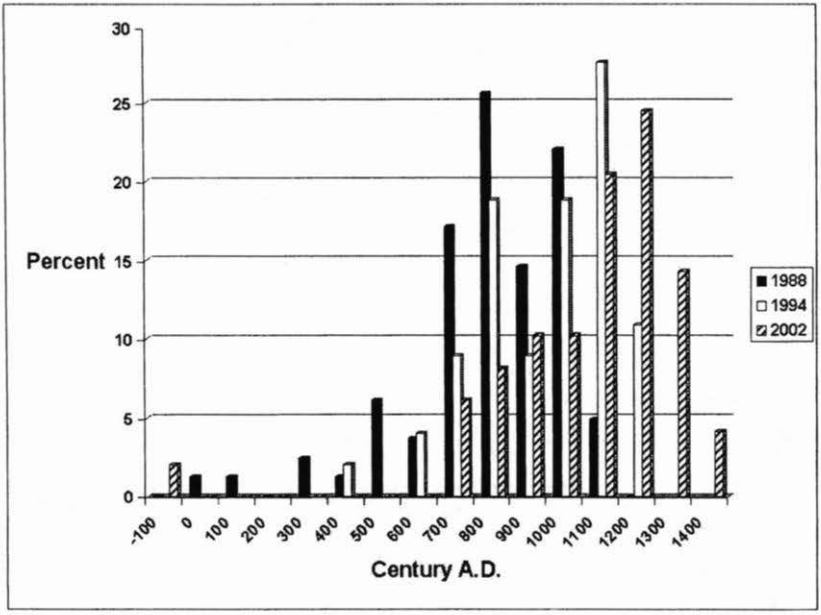

Figure 1. Results of the 1988, 1994 and 2002 polls on the date of first settlement.

With 57% of respondents going for the 9th century or earlier, 'late', clearly, is relative. The context here was a 1987 paper by Doug Sutton, who argued for a settlement date, '...between 0 and A.D. 500' (Sutton 1987: 135). Sutton was inspired by Pam Chester's (1986) Bay of Islands pollen results and Kirch's (1986) 'Rethinking East Polynesian prehistory' paper in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*. He argued that archaeologists' thinking was '...very conservative', and that we should look to the results of soil science and palynology regarding the date of first settlement (Sutton 1987: 150).

The 1994 poll (Walton 1994) showed a big shift in opinion, three years after publication of Anderson's (1991) *Antiquity* paper, which reviewed New Zealand radiocarbon dates. There was still support for the 9th and 11th centuries, but the 12th century was now the popular choice, climbing from 5% to 28% of the sample. The 13th century grew from nil support in 1988 to 11% in 1994.

In the 2002 poll there is a further shift to a more recent settlement date. The popular centuries are now the 13th, at 25%, followed by the 12th century at 21%, and the 14th at 13%. Another significant change is that while earlier results were all over the place, in 2002 for the first time there is a clear preference giving a nice uni-modal curve. From median settlement date figures of 800 AD in 1988, 1000 AD in 1994 and 1150 in 2002, Garry Law has come up with Figure 2 – to indicate a worrying trend for those of us who make a living by archaeology.

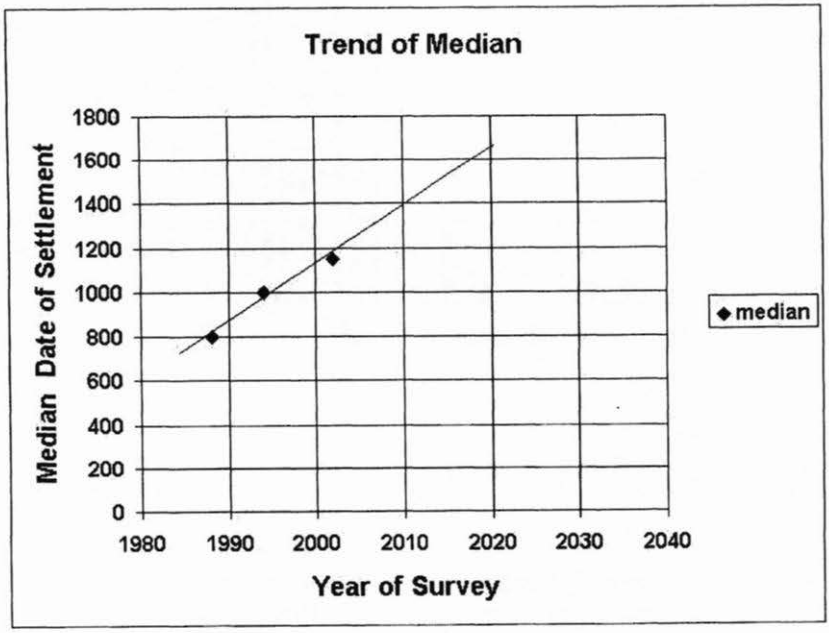

Figure 2. Trend of median in the 1988, 1994 and 2002 polls on the date of first settlement.

Early rats?

The second question, 'Early rats – yes or no?', concerns the suggestion that kiore (Pacific rats) first arrived in New Zealand as much as 2000 years ago, brought here by people who did not stay on to settle. The debate depends on radiocarbon dating evidence and on a range of issues concerning archaeological and historic context and environmental impact. Conference-goers gave a majority for early rats, 27 to 24.

The average settlement date for those who voted yes to early rats is 1016 AD, or 1057 AD without the BC date. Those who do not go along with early rats have an average settlement date of 1153 AD. The two people who did not respond regarding early rats gave settlement dates at 950 and 1250 AD.

Figure 3 compares 'Yeses' and 'Nos' on the question of early rats to respondents' first settlement dates. 'Nos' are strongly represented in the 12th and 13th centuries; the uni-modal distribution of the overall result depends entirely on this group. 'Yeses', on the other hand, are very undecided. Ten of 12 respondents who put first settlement in the 8th-10th century go along with early rats, as does the 1st century BC wild card. But the 14th century also is popular with the group, and there is good support for every century from the 8th to the 14th. It would appear that at least some of those who voted 'Yes' to early rats have been left behind in the recent development of thinking on settlement date.

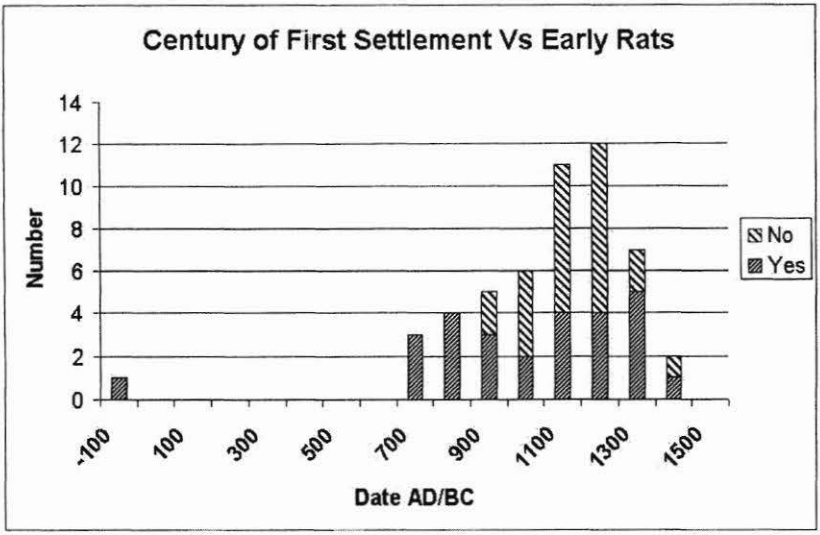

Figure 3. The relation of 'Yeses' and 'Nos' on the question of early rats to poll respondents' first settlement dates.

Discussion

The three polls show a big shift in opinion towards a later settlement date. What is unclear is whether the movement has any further to go. Statistically, this would be achieved by reluctant converts catching up to what is now becoming

orthodox opinion, that is, for first settlement in the 12th or 13th century. But archaeology can come up with surprises, and there may yet be some in store on this issue. The fate of the old consensus for first settlement in the 9th or 10th century shows what can happen even to confidently held views.

Regarding early rats, some archaeologists I have spoken to were surprised at the poll result, since they understood most colleagues to be sceptical. Two years ago in a newspaper article in a Christchurch *Press* special millennium issue, Janet Davidson (2000) commented that there appeared to be a split between biologists and archaeologists, the former accepting the early dates and the latter being reluctant. Clearly, however, some archaeologists at Russell voted 'Yes' to early rats. I have not asked their views of the natural scientists who were present and took part. The poll result suggests the issue is still very much open to debate.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Garry Law who discussed statistical matters and produced the diagrams.

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