



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## **FOLLOWING H.D. SKINNER**

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My involvement with the New Zealand Archaeological Association began after I returned from studying and teaching in Europe and England in 1958. I took up a teaching post at Waimamaku District High School, later to be Waiotemarama District High School, in the Hokianga. A study fellowship enabled me to attend full time at Auckland University College. There I set about completing a degree in anthropology with French university qualifications being taken into account.

I had visited and worked on sites in France and England, and so was very interested in the University of Auckland Archaeological Society and the newly set up New Zealand Archaeological Association. The charismatic figure of Jack Golson meant that I soon became part of the Golson Gang and joined in the Motutapu excavations, the Kauri Point dig, and the South Kaipara site survey. Rudi Sunde, Jim McKinlay, Joan Young, Les Groube, Eleanor Crosby, Robert Brown, Janet Davidson, Garry Law, Bob Cater and the Fulbright students including Roger Green and Susan Bulmer are some I remember. Wilf Shawcross came to join Jack Golson in lecturing and undertook the excavation of the swamp repository at Kauri Point, while Golson excavated the pa. Shawcross later assisted Roger Green in the rescue dig on Mt Roskill and shocked some of the trowel trained people by directing a front end loader while it took a slice out of the hill to establish the overall stratigraphy. Les Groube on that site had the dubious pleasure of excavating a latrine situated in the corner between the inner and outer palisades.

The 1960 conference of the Association was to be held in Wellington and during discussion I offered to drive my large Vauxhall 25 to Wellington. I awaited the call to start the overnight drive but finally went into university from my home in Manurewa only to find that Jack Golson, Peter O'Connor of the English Department, Keith Sinclair and Theo Roy had repaired from the Kiwi to make a night of it. About two o'clock in the morning we were finally ready to go. Jack Golson and Les Groube put their cases between the front and back seats, climbed into their sleeping bags, stretched out and did not wake up until we reached Johnsonville. Bob Brown and I took turns driving. Just near Turangi

we had a puncture and changed the wheel but our passengers did not wake up. At Johnsonville Jack woke up and stared to sort his slides for a lecture he was giving at three o'clock, we drove in at two thirty, having stopped to have a meal. I don't remember much of the conference but eventually Bob and I drove back to Auckland.

I became assistant ethnologist at Otago Museum with Peter Gathercole as ethnologist. Peter relinquished his museum position to concentrate on developing the Anthropology Department at Otago University. Dr H.D. Skinner had been the lecturer in the university and director of the museum. In 1928 he had become the first lecturer in anthropology, which in his case was largely archaeology. His students for his one year course included Peter Buck, Roger Duff and Tom Davis. He took his students to excavate at Murdering Beach which was the first scientific excavation with stratigraphic control and careful records.

When Skinner retired Peter Gathercole took over the university post while I became the ethnologist at Otago Museum. As a experienced archaeologist Peter undertook the excavation of Huriawa Pa at Karitane. What was, at first, a puzzling find was a rectangular pit . It was empty except for a domed structure in clay standing in the centre. At one side leading uphill was a channel which ended in the upper side of the pit. There was no sign of the pit being flooded or containing water. It was decided to excavate the centre dome. Inside was a scoop fireplace full of charcoal, beneath it again there was another scoop fire and the remains of an earlier dome. East Coast traditions, and at least one manuscript, describe the structure and use of the ahi komau, an everlasting fire, set when a group left a pa to go to fishing or birding stations, which could be broken open on return to obtain embers for fires. The resulting structure would have had all characteristics exhibited by the one excavated at Huriawa. Gathercole carefully bagged all the charcoal in the unbroken dome. The Chemical Engineering Department of the University later confirmed that the charcoal came from wood which had burned at a very slow combustion rate. The amount of charcoal present would have lasted up to two months.

Another, less important, but nevertheless interesting find, was made by Les Groube on a later dig with the Otago Archaeological Society on the same pa. It was a dried basking shark. It was sealed in the layer in which it was found and was perfectly dry and odourless. After being exposed for an hour or so, it was a different story though and the shark started to smell very strongly. The sun drying of fish is still used to preserve eels at Birdlings Flat in Canterbury.

Many archaeological sites in Otago and Southland had suffered from the attention of fossickers seeking artefacts for their own collections or for sale. Gold mining had given the method, find the "mark", the gold bearing layer, then

follow it by creating a vertical face. No records were kept. This technique of the vertical face was still current and used by Roger Duff in excavating at Wairau Bar. A notable student of Skinner who evolved a true stratigraphic method was Les Lockerbie who excavated at Papatowai and Pounawea in the Catlins, in South Otago. His work provided a model of scientific care and recording.

In 1963 I followed up Charles Haines and Skinner's reports of greenstone working and village sites by site surveying Lake Wakatipu and doing test excavations at Haines' village site. No greenstone was found but clearing the surface revealed half paved house floors joined by paved pathways. A cut through a mound indicated that the site had been occupied more than once. A radiocarbon date was measured at about 400 years ago. The only site I know of with comparable structures was that excavated by Ron Scarlett at Karamea.

In 1962, following an invitation by Skinner to present a paper in his stead at the NZAA conference in Christchurch, I prepared and presented a paper



*Figure 58. David Simmons preparing dendroglyphs for photography with kerosine, Chatham Islands, 1962. BP publicity photo.*

on Moriori material culture. This was followed by taking an expedition to the Chathams to do site surveys and more especially to record the dendroglyph sites. Christina Jefferson had spent many years drawing dendroglyphs. We now hoped to make a detailed photographic record of the carvings and their archaeological surroundings. Rhys Richards, who had just completed a thesis on Chathams Islands historical geography, Bob Brown of Auckland, Maureen O'Rourke and Colin Dennison of Otago were the other members.

At that time I smoked a pipe and one late night at Hapupu hut I went to the toilet and forgot it was a long drop and dropped the match down the hole. There was a hell of an explosion and I had difficulty sitting for a few days.

Another event was bogging the tractor I was driving on the way to Waitangi West, then having to walk about fifteen kilometres to borrow another to pull it out. Only later I was told about the road grader taken over the same track which sank out of site in the "clears", the peat swamp.

"Nosy" Evans, poking around Lake Hauroko in Fiordland in 1967, came across a semi-mummified burial in a cave on Mary Island. It was reported to Southland Museum. The Murihiku Tribal Committee asked me to record but not remove the burial. The burial was that of a female who had been trussed up and placed on an upright bier made from the poles of her house covered in king fern. The dating of the wood with the Hauroko cloak is seventeenth century. It was decided to place a grille in front of the burial to minimize disturbance. A more solid glass barrier has now been placed in front of this. The lady is identified by her direct descendants as Te Maiairea Te Riri Wairua Puru, of Kati Mamoe a lady of very high rank indeed, which helps to explain why she was not later taken to the coast.

In 1965 Jan Hjarno, a Danish archaeologist, directed and excavation undertaken by the Otago Archaeological Society at Shag River Mouth. The site had been dug over by an entrepreneur hoping to make a fortune by grinding up moa bones from the site. He took a whole train load to Dunedin only to find they were too dry to use as fertiliser. Some of the bones were dumped and still turn up under sub-divisions established on some of the old landfills around Dunedin. Hjarno found some intact areas left by the bone search and the later fossickers but most was thoroughly disturbed. Many artefacts and fragments as well as worked bone were found. Jan then went on to study the fish hook culture of the Otago sites.

In 1968 I moved back to Auckland War Memorial Museum to become ethnologist and later Assistant Director.