



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



This document is made available by The New Zealand
Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

As the matter of radiocarbon dates has been brought up in a letter to the Editor of your Newsletter by Garry Law, it would seem appropriate to make some comments.

As the compiler of the N.Z. date lists, I am faced with some often insuperable difficulties in compiling data to an informative standard. In an effort to overcome this, the N.Z. Laboratory is preparing a form, now being printed, that shows quite clearly (in a manner easy to fill in) the kind of data required to provide a proper entry in a date list. It should also help collectors with problems that may become apparent after the date has been done. This form is designed to suit stratigraphers, whether archaeologists or geologists, and can be filed in either an archaeologist's central numbering system or a geologist's numbering system. It is closely similar to the suggested form distributed at the N.Z. Radiocarbon Users Conference 1971.

There is a rather important matter that all archaeologists can help with: this is that no N.Z. number will be reported to a collector until the full details of significance and stratigraphic setting have been sent to me. Immediately I receive this statement, after the date has been reported, a N.Z. number will be sent to the collector. In future the 'R' number, which only refers to a sample and not a date, will be used for internal lab reference only.

Very often several samples have been collected from a single site, but the data supplied with a sample doesn't properly tie these together. This is probably most easily shown by use of a diagrammatic column, which shows not only the sampled horizon but also the intervening horizons whether with occupation material or not. Thicknesses of all intervals should be given.

Some collectors don't give a reason for requiring a date and I am often left with the impression that perhaps this was only an isolated occupation layer without any significant artifactual material; it may only indicate that a Maori camped on this site and cooked something in an oven. Remember that the data you supply is considered to be confidential to the collector until either he has published it or else a date list is published. In any case the collector will always have ample time to publish his data before the date list appears.

It is obvious that a sample that dates an associated collection of artifacts of unusual kind, the development of a change of culture in the broader sense, or more importantly a sequence showing cultural change should be taken much more seriously than a single sample without an associated significance.

The time span of N.Z. archaeology is small, only some 1,000 years or so, therefore the nature of the material used to date an event becomes of vital importance. Along the coast and larger rivers I would presume that the wood used by the Maori would be largely driftwood, much of it from larger trees of an age that could be very substantial in terms of the event to be dated, and give the kind of spread shown by Dr Rafter in his paper delivered to the 8th International Radiocarbon Conference, page H61, where charcoal was systematically older, and sometimes very much older than shell and moa bone collagen. Occasionally some of this wood could be reworked subfossil wood giving an age of about 8,000 years as was shown by a recent date.

Although we cannot yet give secular variations for shells in the marine environment, these are certainly short lived organisms and should, with a few exceptions, give systematically more reliable and directly comparable results.

A last appeal: would any of you who have not yet received N.Z. numbers for your dates please let me have brief but detailed statements of stratigraphy and relationships of associated samples and their significance.

The significance should be a real statement rather than "gives information on....." The information itself should be given at all stages. A N.Z. number will then be reported to you. Thank you, Garry Law.

Yours faithfully,

T.L. Grant-Taylor,
N.Z. Geological Survey.

P.S. The new forms, see example overleaf, are now being printed. When they come to hand I shall be sending blocks to major institutional users (Universities and Museums). Further supplies will be obtainable from me.

T.L.G.T.

Because of lack of space the more important reverse side of form is reproduced. The face side provides for locality nature of sample etc.

Ed.

STATEMENT OF STRATIGRAPHY

ASSOCIATED FOSSIL, ARTIFACTS etc.

STRATIGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Section showing relationship of sampled horizon to other beds and samples

diagram

lithology



SIGNIFICANCE OF SAMPLE *(must be supplied and may be used in Date List)*

METHOD OF PREPARATION OF SAMPLE *(sorted for charcoal, roots removed etc.)*

REPOSITORY OF DUPLICATE SAMPLE
