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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Brenda Sewell's (1983) paper in the last issue is a salutary reminder to young site recorders (myself, in this case) of the need to use objective descriptions wherever possible in archaeological field recording. Daniels *et al.* (1979:19) warn against using imprecise terms such as *occupation*, *settlement* and *kainga*. The unwarranted use of more precise terms can, however, as Sewell has demonstrated, be equally misleading.

Pit constitutes one such case. The term may be used to ascribe a particular function and imply a particular form to features which, on the surface, are only visible as depressions and which, if mapped accurately, turn out to be oval or irregular in form rather than, as often shown on sketch maps, square or rectangular. As Sewell has demonstrated, presumed rectangular pits may really be terraces, natural depressions or firescoops. Conversely, I have myself recorded a supposed *rua* which, when excavated, turned out to be a rectangular pit (see Olsen 1980).

There are a few minor errors in Sewell's paper which I should perhaps correct. The field survey during which the Awana pa T8/8 was re-recorded (Coster & Johnston 1975) was undertaken, and the report written, for the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, not the Department of Lands & Survey, as Sewell states (p.222). The original of Sewell's Figure 2 was traced from an aerial photograph, without any correction for distortion. It is not derived from a ground survey as the caption indicates (though Figure 3 is). The scale of Figure 2, as reduced for publication, is not 1:3960 as stated, but is indicated approximately by the 200 m scale shown on the plan. After re-reading Sewell's paper, I am left wondering why the excavation she describes was undertaken. It would have been useful to have had some explanation of the reasons behind the exercise (other than *At the request of the Ngati Wa*), in order to be assured that the excavation had some serious purpose and was not merely gratuitous.

John Coster

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