



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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 Editor,

I welcome the contribution by Roger Green (*Archaeology in New Zealand*, 38(1): 48-55) on the history of the use of aerial photography by New Zealand archaeologists. It covers in detail the use made of aerial photographs in site recording and settlement pattern studies from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. This was not the purpose of my brief discussion in the opening chapter of *Ngā Tohuwhenua mai Te Rangi: A New Zealand Archaeology in Aerial Photographs*. My monograph is not a treatise about aerial photography in New Zealand archaeology but a general account of New Zealand field archaeology demonstrated by aerial photographs. It is not ungenerous (nor uncritical) in recognising the contributions of many archaeologists to that study.

The opening chapter of the monograph sketches out the development of aerial photography, mentioning the English work (particularly that of O.G.S. Crawford) dating from the post-World War I period. Selective reference is also made to New Zealand, where the use of aerial photographs underpinned much site recording in the period referred to by Roger Green, and assisted the great boom in site recording sponsored by the Historic Places Trust at a later period. However, the technique has offered little to the development of theory or explanation in archaeology because it had little or no impact in the formal published record. (By and large, like Roger, I do regard the site recording scheme as a kind of publication, although many do not.) Unfortunately, I did not mention the first edition of the *Site Recording Handbook* in my book, and indeed this and the early conference proceedings published in the *New Zealand Science Review* in 1958 should have been given considerable weight. However, I did refer to Golson's paper on field archaeology in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* of 1957 which, as Groube has recently noted, will come to be increasingly recognised as the key paper promoting archaeological fieldwork in New Zealand.

Omission of a reference to the handbook explains my puzzlement about where Les Groube's interest in aerial photography was developed and refined, but nevertheless I stressed the positive influence he had on his Otago students. There are many more references in my book which balance the picture. The technical innovation and influence of the Palliser Bay work can be traced indirectly to Les Groube through the Bay of Islands 'direct historical' programme, although it would be unwise to underestimate the methodological innovation of the principals of that programme.

Blake-Palmer's published work, excellent of its kind, clearly has chronological priority in Polynesian studies (and is uncited in the 1959 handbook). He was New Zealand Archaeological Association president 1963-65 and had an informal influence at that time and before. He must also have

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

influenced Colin Smart whose work is a prominent case where field initiatives were never carried through to final publication. Happily, his original aerial photographs and other records have recently come back to New Zealand and are available for study at the Wanganui Regional Museum.

I do not make particularly strong claims about the influence of Hawke's Bay either as a landscape or through its archaeological personalities ('seems to have led'). However, Roger's remarks are inadvertently ungracious to J.D.H. Buchanan, who lived in Hawke's Bay and was co-founder of the site recording scheme, and fail to recognise the significance of the New Zealand Aerial Mapping Ltd. contribution from the late 1930s onwards. Mr Piet Van Asch C.B.E., founder of the company, says that the late Mr Buchanan was an assiduous visitor to his offices as the Hawke's Bay region was flown in the 1940s and 50s. I could have added by way of reinforcement Aileen Lady Fox's attraction to that region, and her interest in aerial photography.

Further detailed reference to the experience of aerial photography explored by Roger were not warranted in my monograph. Generally, these sources are cryptic in their references to aerial photography, e.g., few aerial photograph serial numbers are cited. Many of these studies were too briefly reported to be of more than incidental value. Ken Gorbey, as director of the Waikato Museum of Art and History, must have had a hand in the Waikato aerial survey of 1980, but again that is too little published.

Implied in my book is a distinction between the use of aerial photographs as background knowledge (where developments in archaeology would parallel many other disciplines) and work where they are upfront, treated as a primary medium of expression and leading to new knowledge. I noted that, with the exception of Alastair Buist's 1964 North Taranaki monograph, even the published works were 'not strong attempts to use aerial photographs as a source of new knowledge' but used them more in the nature of illustration. Roger Green has and transferred it to apply to other work which I did not comment on. I am made to offer that work, such as the Puhinui research, a gratuitous insult. In fact, they are simply not referred to; and even then, as I have just noted, reservations can be entered about their impact. He likewise carries my comments on specific photogrammetric projects over to imply insult to other projects which I did not discuss, given their marginal publication, the lack of clear reference to methodology, and the continuing inadequacy of attempts at archaeological photogrammetry.

The focus of my book is not the use of aerial photographs in field survey, as Roger implies it should be. Nor is it a 'rigorous systematisation of knowledge', to quote my concluding remarks, where I return to the difficulties posed for archaeology by a revisionist historiography. Curiously, there is no work to my knowledge being carried out anywhere in New Zealand archaeology

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

today which involves original interpretation and methodology applied to aerial photographs, perhaps because the primary photographic material is so readily interpreted with intuition and a little experience. Aerial photographs as a medium, because of their expressive and illustrative power, continue to occupy an ambiguous position in archaeology.

P.S. I don't want to write a separate letter, so I will just mention that Alastair Buist in his review (in the same issue) expresses a concern about the apparent non-use of New Zealand Archaeological Association site recording numbers. I certainly wanted to advocate the significance of the scheme at this rather testing time in its history. Most (but not all) site numbers are in the general index after the site name. I did not want to introduce this material in the captions where it would be stumbling block to a general reader. Nor was a separate index by site number warranted since most readers will go from the site photograph caption to the site number in the index.

Kevin Jones