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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

In twenty years as a member of NZAA, notwithstanding lapses caused by my forgetting to pay the annual subscription, I have never written a Letter to the Editor. But now I will.

The topic of my letter is John Coster's letter to you commenting on Brenda Sewell's paper in the last issue of 'Archaeology in New Zealand'. My attention was caught by the last sentence of the letter. John Coster writes,

'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 Ngati Wai) in order to be assured that the excavation had some serious purpose and was not merely gratuitous.'

A couple of points occur to me. First, in the ten or so years I have known Brenda Sewell nothing she has done in her archaeology could be described as either 'mere' or 'gratuitous'. Readers will remember her Cross Creek work in this regard, and the East Tamaki River work and her recent efforts at R11/229 and R11/1800, both with Russell Foster. Second, if Ngati Wai, or any other iwi, request a dig, that is not an insignificant occurrence, nor could any positive response to such a request be rationally described as 'merely gratuitous'. Better phrased, such a response would be seen as appropriate, generous and proper. Perhaps the air is getting a bit rarefied up on the Auckland Domain... or is this just very shallow breathing?

Doug Sutton