



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## LETTERS

Dear Editor

Philip Temple's recently published account of the Wakefield family, *A Sort of Conscience: the Wakefields* (Auckland University Press, 2002), includes an interesting reference, on page 400, to the 1840s issue of whether people were or were not contemporary with moa. This was New Zealand's first archaeological controversy. For an account of the issue and its resolution see Atholl Anderson's, *Prodigious Birds* (Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 97–100).

Temple writes that on 12 August 1847, William Wakefield, who was the Wellington representative of the family, sent to J.R. Gowan, at the Natural History Museum, London, "... a mixed collection of moa bones, both large and small, commenting accurately, 'I can only account for the admixture by supposing that the natives formerly killed and ate the flesh of these birds indiscriminately at their pahs... which have been time out of mind near the mouths of rivers...'" This was five years before Walter Mantell was satisfied from the evidence at Awamoa, North Otago that people had indeed killed and eaten moa. A search of early newspapers, letters, etc. may reveal other intelligent observations on the issue.

Nigel Prickett