



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION VIEW.

D.R. Simmons (Keeper of Anthropology,
Otago Museum).

Important agents of salvage archaeology in most overseas countries are the museums. Museum personnel, who are especially concerned with the collection, preservation and recording of sites and vestiges of the past, are in an ideal position to undertake salvage work, which in itself is merely another form of collection and preservation of information and which may or may not have any relevance to the particular problems being investigated at the time.

In New Zealand museums have not played a prominent part in salvage archaeology. There are two principal reasons for this. Firstly, until this year there were no full-time archaeologists employed by museums. Ethnologists whose activities would normally include salvage work usually find themselves completely occupied with other duties.

The second, and most important reason is money. Most New Zealand museums are inefficient shoe-string affairs without sufficient backing to employ the necessary staff, or to pay full field expenses. Salvage archaeology, if it is to be undertaken adequately, demands a good knowledge of an area and the factors likely to affect its prehistoric sites. The museums can supply this knowledge if their personnel can spend time in the field, and in the laboratory processing finds.

The position then is quite simple. Museums, which should be taking a leading part in salvage work, are hampered by lack of finance and personnel. Within the limits imposed a certain amount of salvage work has been carried out by Museums and interested bodies, (the Upper Waitaki project for instance), but if the Museums are to operate efficiently, far more finance is needed.

The prehistoric and historic remains in this country belong to the people. It is almost a truism to say the past is the property of the future. We of the present have no right to obliterate what is not ours. As such it should be

preserved by national effort, not by a series of unco-ordinated local projects. The pakeha part of New Zealand has little in the way of history or tradition of which it can be proud, but there is a growing awareness of the value of prehistory, of the past of the Polynesian peoples, which can serve to illuminate the present and future of New Zealand, as European prehistory can serve to fix the roots of the European population.

As a project of national importance, salvage archaeology needs to be supported by national sources. The Museums cannot finance the work fully from local funds, but with the aid of, say, a pound for pound subsidy, could undertake a reasonably efficient job. If a fund were set up by each main museum, and doubled by the Government, then local benefactors, business houses and others would more readily support the project in cash or kind if they could see results being achieved.

General co-ordination could be given if a full-time first-class professional archaeologist were appointed to the National Historic Places Trust or Ministry of Works, the bodies who would probably administer the subsidy system. Such a person could work closely with the planning authorities to decide salvage programmes. On the local scene, with money available for investigation the Museum, by close co-operation with local authorities, can keep an eye on most major developments. Individual members of the public, once they become aware of the importance of prehistoric materials and sites, are usually extremely helpful. A little public indignation usually goes a long way to discourage thoughtless destruction and treasure-hunting.

In emphasising the role of the museum, one must not forget the local archaeological society who usually provide the labour force - a dedicated, unpaid group who are prepared to sacrifice their own time and hard-won cash in the furtherance of knowledge. It is the practice overseas to employ paid labour on excavations. Lack of labour when needed can be a fatal bar to salvaging a site. With sufficient funds, a nuclear paid force could be recruited for extremely urgent work, while more long term projects could still be handled by a volunteer group. But even willing workers should not be out of pocket. If they are prepared to give up time, then it is fair enough that camp or travelling expenses be met from the salvage funds.

The Museum has a vital role to play in salvage archaeology, a role which it can play only if it is regarded financially as a responsible public institution.

By co-operation at national and local level, much could be saved which would otherwise be wantonly destroyed.

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RESOLUTIONS OF THE EXTENDED GENERAL MEETING

At the conclusion of the meeting the following resolutions were moved:

1. This meeting endorses the view that development of salvage archaeology programmes be a main concern of the New Zealand Archaeological Association in the immediate future:
 - (a) by planning of survey and excavation programmes which anticipate developments that are likely to modify the landscape and threaten archaeological sites
 - (b) by seeking to encourage public institutions to employ full-time archaeologists capable of carrying out salvage archaeology programmes
 - (c) by promoting educational activities which will inform the public of the necessity for action and the means to achieve these aims.

2. This meeting recognizes from a review of present legislation that clear gaps exist in protective legislation available for prehistoric and proto-historic sites. It therefore charges the New Zealand Archaeological Association's Council with the following tasks:
 - (a) a careful review of these gaps in order to assess where immediate protection is most needed
 - (b) a further inquiry into how existing legislation might better be mobilized and implemented
 - (c) action on the offer of the Department of Lands to comment on the review they are now making of the Reserves and Domains Act 1953