



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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NEWS

GARRY LAW

Usually reliable sources inform us that two Bills are to be introduced to the House this session; one to amend the Historic Places Trust Act to increase the scope of the Trust and allow it to operate more extensively, and with some powers, in the archaeological field. The second bill will alter and strengthen the Historic Articles Act. It may well be that these bills will be sent to a select committee of the House where NZAA will make submissions which we hope will mostly be in support. However NZAA is by parliamentary standards a pretty small cheese. We will need support from other bodies and from individuals in making written submissions and submissions in person. A subcommittee of NZAA has been set up to co-ordinate efforts in this direction. What is needed urgently is a contact list of bodies likely to be sympathetic, be they historical societies, Maori groups, Museum Friends groups, or Environmentalist groups. Any NZAA member who can offer or make suggestions should communicate with the Secretary.

When the legislation appears the committee will circulate it together with a condensed version and suggest areas in which different groups may wish to comment. Preparing this material is going to take some effort and the help of volunteers later in the year could be invaluable.

While we now appear to be close to achieving the desired state of some effective legislation, its passing will not instantly change the situation in this country. On a Government level, legislation is only effective if backed by staff and funds. Both can, and have been, withheld in the past on other legislation. This situation is akin to a recent Auckland experience with an environmental impact report on some threatened destruction to a prehistoric site. This process involved making value judgements of the characteristics to be altered. It was apparent that the value attached to the completeness, of what in this case is a major field monument, was small.

Effective site protection and responsible treatment of artifacts depends as much on having a sympathetic and informed public as it does on legislation, important though the latter is.

At the time of writing it is not clear what is to happen to the proposed Maori Affairs Act amendments which deal with artifacts. NZAA was asked to comment on the proposals and recently did so. While we welcomed the initiative in this direction there were several points at which we felt the proposals were not in our interest, or the national interest. We suggested that the proposed powers of the Maori Land Court to decide the ownership and direct the holding of Maori artifacts would be more appropriate to Maori heirlooms, rather than all artifacts; and further that injunctions through the court to prevent fossicking of sites were likely to prove unwieldy and slow, and be unlikely to stop this destructive activity. On the proposal that all artifacts be declared prima facie the property of the Maori people of New Zealand, we suggested this was in conflict with the State's ultimate responsibility to guard our heritage, and that we suspected the proposal would prove divisive.

NZAA has written to the Minister of Lands expressing concern over the continuing piecemeal destruction on Auckland's volcanic cones despite their status as reserves and suggesting that some long term planning is required for these reserves if any coherent evidence of these spectacular sites is to survive.

The Journal of the Polynesian Society is an anthropological journal of a respectable age. Few can boast to have reached volume 83 which the J.P.S. will publish this year. Many members of NZAA are not doubt members of the Society but some may not know the first rate material this journal publishes in our field. The subscription rate is very reasonable for the quality of the journal. Membership application forms can be had from the Secretary of the society, P.O. Box 10323, The Terrace Wellington 1.

Steven Bagley, an Otago graduate, has been appointed director of the Nelson Museum.

Janet Davidson has been reappointed by Council as the Association's representative on the Historic Places Trust.

A project to be embarked on by the Government historians is the preparation of an historical atlas. In Britain an admirable series of maps covering different periods have been published and are available individually. In New Zealand fortified sites are a readily distinguishable class of site which published on a large scale map would be a valuable addition to the published information and well worth doing, whether as part of an atlas or as a publication in its own right. Rock sources could be similarly treated.

The file keepers meeting which followed the last Council meeting discussed the proposal by the Lands and Survey Department to gradually replace the NZMS 1 inch to the mile maps on which the site record scheme is based, by a series with a new cut-up at a larger scale of 1 to 50,000. A note will appear in the Newsletter later this year describing the new maps. The record scheme will need considerable adaptation to adjust to the new maps. At the meeting there was some disagreement as to the best way to facilitate this. In particular, opinion was divided as to whether to retain the present site numbers. A final decision is not required for some years yet. In the interim a new version of the site record form is to be produced with a blank block at the top in which the new map name, number and grid reference can be inserted at a later date.

The Historic Places Trust, in conjunction with the district file keepers, is to prepare a nationwide schedule of sites; both those of obvious importance and selected representative sites which with our present state of knowledge we are unable to assess, with the aim of using the list to further site protection. The intention at present is not to gain some special protection for these sites as a block, but rather to use it in pressing for the establishment of reserves, administration of existing reserves and Crown Land, protection under district planning schemes and to give weight to claims of the value of sites when threatened by public or private works. In conjunction with this list, NZHPT is to prepare a list of sites which have at present some degree of recognised statutory protection and to assess the effectiveness of the same. This is more of a stocktaking exercise than the previous list.