



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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N.Z.A.A. CONFERENCE AT TURANGI 1970 - A MISREPRESENTATION

Peter Bellwood

At the end of the N.Z.A.A. conference at Turangi I said a few words about public attitudes towards the prehistoric past in New Zealand. I feel that some of those in attendance may have misunderstood me on a certain matter, and I was misquoted in the "New Zealand Herald" of 2 June. This article quoted me as saying that the feelings of the Maori people should be taken into account when sites were chosen for salvage and preservation, and also that many Maoris looked upon archaeologists as grave robbers and despoilers of their ancestral heritage and that the archaeologists must improve their image.

While there may be some truth in the above statements, I am bound to state that I did not make them. The point I made at the conference did not concern the professional archaeologist but, rather, the individual who ransacks archaeological sites for bones or artefacts of monetary value. Such people, and I feel obliged to point out that they are mostly pakehas, clearly have no respect whatever for the prehistoric antiquities of New Zealand or their makers, and I suggested that the situation might be improved if the Maori people were to make very clear to the public of New Zealand as a whole any strong dislike that they may feel concerning activities of this sort.

Therefore my statement concerned the general public of New Zealand, especially those who engage in the utterly pointless and totally selfish activity known as "fossicking". I did not imply that archaeologists themselves "must improve their image" for, by the patient effort of many members of this group, it is being improved all the time.