



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## NZAA MEMORIES

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I was inspired to become an archaeologist by H. G. Wells' *A Short History of the World* which I read just before I turned eight. Cave-men and fossils were highly romantic topics. Indeed it was almost inevitable that I should become an archaeologist—who else had the privilege of growing up (Standard 1–5, 1947–1951) almost inside the Moa Bone Point Cave at Redcliffs, Christchurch.

I remember that the deposits inside the cave were periodically turned over, often I suppose by fossickers, but also by locals wanting shell to grind up for chook feed. However, when the new Sports Pavilion was put in on the lip of the sand bank opposite the cave, it seems that shell was revealed. Someone must have been called in to examine this shell and this was my first sight of an excavation laid out in squares. I suppose this was some time in late 1950 or early 1951, but I have never found out who this pioneer excavator was, though in hindsight it would seem likely that Roger Duff had a hand in the process.

After my father's teaching profession took him to Wellington, and when I grew old enough to have a holiday job, I was lucky to be taken on at the Dominion Museum as a vacation assistant. My first task was to register the Bollons Collection fish hooks.

The next summer Janet Davidson and I were both assistants in the Ethnology department. Sue Davis was the assistant curator of Ethnology at that time and an enthusiastic member of the newly formed NZAA. Both Janet and I requested membership forms from Sue on the same day. I remember my first issue of the newsletter arriving, Volume 3, No 1. (But I also proudly still have a reprinted copy of the first 2 volumes, and a complete set of all NZAA Newsletters and Archaeology in New Zealand).

After Sue Davis left to return to a job at Saffron Walden in the UK Colin Smart became assistant curator of Ethnology. His excavation at Waitotara was my first hands-on excavation. Tarata Pa was on a narrow hill top high above the Waitotara River. The first few days we all crawled slowly in a zig-zag up the least steep hill side, but after a while we climbed directly up the steepest part, to the loudly expressed distress of any visitors. I spent two weeks there, wearing a set of blouses (T-shirts were not available then) that all had had different necklines, and one day Janet pointed out that if my back was a pit, she could trace several



*Figure 21. Colin Smart, hurrying out of the way, and Michael Hitching holding the pole photographing the 2 burial pits, Tarata Pa, 1961. Box brownie photo Eleanor Crosby.*

different kinds of fill marked by different intensities of brown skin. I also remember that some weeks later a huge layer of dead skin came off my knees from all that kneeling down.

It was at Waitotara where I became enamoured of blow-up rubber mattresses, as at first I had to place my sleeping bag directly on a groundsheet. Early mornings were also enlivened by a cow with its head through the fence pulling grass about 2 inches from my ears—it's amazing what you get used to.

One memory of Kauri Point, I think at Easter 1961, is Pat and Rude Sunde singing songs around a roaring bonfire, with Dave Simmons chanting a haka in the nearby darkness. I also remember Les Groube making a particularly

precise job of working out where the several prehistoric re-excavations of one of the surrounding ditches had been placed.

In 1962 the NZAA had a fabulous pre-conference trip around the cave paintings of the South Canterbury area. The days were marvellous, but I will never forget just how cold a shearing shed can be on a frosty night with the wind howling up through the gaps between the floor boards. The conference was equally enthralling, so much so that I completely forgot it was my 21st birthday until much later, even though I received a Pentax Single Lens Reflex camera as a 21st birthday present. The next summer I proudly used this camera at Bruce McFadgen's Foxton excavation. Some of the photographs were OK, but one was absolutely unrecognisable—the camera saw all the grass roots that my archaeological eye dismissed.

In all, over four years of school and university vacations I worked for 48 weeks in various departments of the Dominion Museum. After this I took a job as Curator of Anthropology at the Queensland Museum, then went to Canberra, first as Jack Golson's research assistant in the former Department of Prehistory of the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, then as a PhD scholar. To complete the picture, after my PhD I was Curator of Anthropology at the Museums & Art Galleries of the Northern Territory (during Cyclone Tracey, which rather upset things). I then returned to Canberra, married, had 2 kids, moved with his job to the Gold Coast and set up shop as a consulting archaeologist, where I have been ever since.

In 1997 I began a project to publish my MA Thesis on Maori fishing gear, a project that had been in my head since I registered the Bollons Collection years before in the old Dominion Museum. This re-working of a classification is still on going because I have found it necessary to attempt a rethink of how classification works. This has been a part-time concern, but I have now reached the stage where I need to find the time to re-read all the original sources, to scan in all my original drawings so that a new set of measurements can be produced, and in general to apply my new ideas to Maori fishing. I will keep you posted!