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OF ROCK ART AND ROGER— SOME REMINISCENCES

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It began when I went to a parent-teacher evening around the middle of 1966. I found myself in conversation with an acquaintance, one Sally Burrage, and somehow that conversation got around to the subject of archaeology. The upshot of this was that the next Saturday morning I fronted up at Canterbury Museum to join the ranks of volunteers in a group Sally referred to casually as “Cee-em-ay-ess”, which proved to be the Canterbury Museum Archaeological Society.

In a large untidy room a number of people were already at work sorting shells, cleaning artefacts, writing up forms, putting dots on maps and indulging in a variety of other somewhat esoteric, archaeologically related activities. First up, I was taken to meet an imposing personage, with six-inch eyebrows and a portentous manner, who was introduced—in what were clearly capital letters—as THE DIRECTOR, DR ROGER DUFF—all that was missing was a fanfare of trumpets! Almost as an afterthought I also exchanged greetings with a tall young man who looked about eighteen, and who turned out to be the museum’s archaeologist, Michael Trotter.

And that’s how my almost forty-year association with New Zealand archaeology, and the New Zealand Archaeological Association, which I joined shortly after, began. It was an exciting time to get involved. As a profession, scientific archaeology was still pretty much in its infancy in New Zealand, the first archaeologists proper had not long been appointed to some of the major museums, and lots of things seemed to be going on. CMAS, besides assisting at the museum, also provided the labour for excavations and, at the time I joined, Michael Trotter was asking for volunteers to carry other fieldwork as well, mostly surveying for rock art sites.

I had no trouble deciding that that sounded like me, I couldn’t wait to get going. I was duly allotted the Weka Pass limestone country as my patch and given some essential instruction in recording by Michael. I clearly remember the first time I trundled out Penelope, my trusty 1949 Morris Minor lowlight, and headed for the hills—pure magic. So began six years of surveying for Maori rock drawings in a number of areas of the South Island, but it is the Weka Pass



Figure 53. Roger Duff at Bromley, Avon–Heathcote Estuary Christchurch, September 1960. Photo David Harrowfield.

survey I remember the best. Those were halcyon days (well, most of the time), the landowners were wonderfully co-operative, the country was beautiful and (at least in my memory) the weather was always fine (I wish I could still move across the country with the ease I did then!) And along with all this came the marvellous sense of rediscovering and being involved with something very special.

But it wasn't all plain sailing. As I reported into the museum regularly, depositing tracings and filling out NZAA site records, I couldn't help but be aware that independence of thought and action by CMAS members was not something encouraged by Roger Duff. "Papa Roger" liked to keep society members (including his archaeologist) firmly under his control. Publicly he exuded a sort of benign paternalism, but only until someone became a bit independent. It could be very uncomfortable being on the receiving end of Roger's disapproval, and it seemed that the more successful my survey work was, so the

more I incurred that disapproval. For a brilliant man, Roger was amazingly insecure about anything he saw as competition. What made it worse was that the work had the approval of NZAA—Roger would have preferred to be completely in control there too.

Eventually I really put my foot in it, for the first, but certainly not the last, time. I had been invited to accompany Michael and two VIP museum visitors up to Weka Pass—they wanted to see some rock drawings and the Pyramid Valley moa swamp (at that time Michael had not actually seen most of the new sites himself). As I arrived at the museum on the day, Roger was chatting to the visitors about his own work in the area. I was duly introduced, and by way of making pleasantries told them that only the previous week I had located the best new site so far; a wonderful, untouched complex of drawings in Pyramid Valley itself! I hoped that they would be excited to know that they would be the very first visitors to see it. There was a somewhat embarrassed silence. Roger's eyebrows assumed glower mode, he visibly swelled with fury, and I stood there wondering what the heck I'd done. It transpired that Roger had just finished explaining that there weren't any drawings on the limestone at Pyramid Valley itself—he and his team had searched thoroughly while working there.

Oooops!!

Finishing up in North Canterbury with some fifty new sites recorded, Michael was able to find me plenty more areas to survey before I started to get withdrawal symptoms. There were almost untouched areas like Castle Hill in inland Canterbury and some isolated limestone areas in more northern Canterbury and Marlborough, as well as an ongoing joint project with Michael relocating South Canterbury rock art sites; many of these had not been revisited since they had been first recorded decades previously by Theo Schoon, Tony Fomison and, inevitably, Roger Duff. (Oh dear! In trouble again! The great man had already SPOKEN on the significance of these sites. Who were we to presume that further work need be done?)

There are several things I need to acknowledge at this point. The first is the field assistance I received on many occasions, especially in the Weka Pass area, from my young-teen family. Active, indefatigable, with the sharpest of eyes, they quartered the hills like a team of enthusiastic sheepdogs, missing nothing. The NZAA's rock art records owe a lot to the kids.

Far more important was the ongoing support and encouragement to continue with this work that I received, not only from Michael, but also from the Association and the NZHPT. Names like Jim McKinlay and John Daniels stand out among those who lent their support. It wasn't easy to fly in the face of Roger's truly formidable disapproval—one of his favourite ploys was a periodic threat to fire his archaeologist for continuing his involvement the rock art work. We lived dangerously!

I could continue to enlarge on the further, and even more serious, clashes with Roger over the succeeding years, but in hindsight the really important thing to record is that in the end archaeology was the winner, and not just because of work done and sites recorded. When I look back now it's not the immediate problems, mind-boggling though they were for both Michael and me at the time, that stand out. Far more vivid is the enduring memory of all those dedicated, archaeological-type people who were then a part of NZAA; people who stood up, spoke out, and supported our efforts. Archaeology for them was not just a quest for personal kudos, but a mission to record and protect sites, with NZAA as the unifying force. Personal achievement at that period, it seems to me, was to a great extent secondary to a passion for ensuring that New Zealand archaeology was not just about the past, but equally about the future. Getting those rock art sites recorded was a part of ensuring that future.

Over the last thirty-something years I have been involved with many different aspects of New Zealand archaeology, most of them in Canterbury and Marlborough. I have enjoyed every minute of that time. Now as I approach my use-by date, at least as far as most active fieldwork is concerned, I can look back reflectively and know that from none of it did I get quite the same sense of satisfaction as I did from the Weka Pass survey. A bit of a challenge adds a little spice, and as challenges go 'Papa Roger' was definitely in a class all of his own. Those formidable eyebrows will always remain an enduring and ineradicable part of my archaeological memories.