



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## PITS, PAS AND MOA BONES

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It was probably in the summer of 1957, possibly 1958. I have no idea what movie was showing at the local theatre in Manhasset, New York. That's not important anyway. The main thing is that it was then and there that I saw this travelogue about a beautiful place called New Zealand. I swore an oath to myself that one day I would go there. But first I had to go to varsity.

It was probably early in 1964 that I attended an informational meeting on overseas fellowships for college graduates—the top choice being, of course, a Rhodes Fellowship or Marshall Scholarship for graduate studies in Great Britain. Also discussed were Fulbright Fellowships. The man running the discussion said they were good scholarships, too. You could get a Fulbright to go to all sorts of exotic and not so exotic places. Why you could even get one to go all the way to New Zealand! He made it sound like nobody in their right mind would want to go that far. How wrong he was. At least about one person sitting in the room.

After four long years of varsity work, I wanted to take a break before going on to graduate school. Yet getting a Fulbright was not a sure thing, so I applied as well for admission to the University of Pennsylvania's graduate programme in Anthropology. In the 1960s their programme was rated one of the best in the country. It is still a fine choice.

It was a good thing I had diversified my options because I didn't get a Fulbright to New Zealand. Evidently Mr E.G. Budge, who ran the US/New Zealand Fulbright programme, had had enough of anthropologists for awhile. He had found that they took their fellowships too seriously. They didn't get out and about enough to mix with New Zealanders or speak often enough to Rotary Clubs. Too much scholarship, not enough fellowship.

Admittedly, Mr Budge was probably right to think so. Just look at who had then recently been anthropology's "Fulbrighters" to New Zealand: Roger C. Green, Stuart D. Scott, and Susan Bulmer. Serious folk; not party people.

So I was passed over in favor of someone more sociable, a geologist. Fortunately for me, I did receive funding from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Science Foundation for graduate work. With no chance of getting time-off from my studies, I accepted an offer of admission to the University

of Pennsylvania, set about finding a student flat in Philadelphia, and spent the summer at home on Long Island preparing for re-entry into the rough waters of academia at the postgraduate level.

Then suddenly late in August just before I was about to leave for Philadelphia, the winds of fortune blowing from the south shifted. I got a letter at home from the United States Department of State. The geologist who had won out over me for a Fulbright had decided not to go after all. So I was suddenly being presented with a chance to be in two different places at the same time on opposite sides of the earth.

Thankfully, both the University of Pennsylvania and the National Science Foundation were willing to let me mix and match my fellowships. After a semester in the graduate programme at Penn I took a leave of absence from there for a year and promptly took a boat for Hawai‘i, Fiji and the Port of Auckland early in the New Year 1965.

Back when I was still an undergraduate I had sat in on a course at Harvard on the Pacific Islands taught by a famous name in the field who managed to make even Tahiti sound boring. During my first semester at Penn, in marked contrast, I was fortunate enough to be able to take another course on the Pacific, this time one taught by the remarkable Bill Davenport. Not only was Davenport a master at making Pacific anthropology come alive but he was also a deeply supportive person. He seemed as pleased as I was delighted that I was going to New Zealand. He urged me to write my major paper for his course on the archaeology of New Zealand.

I quickly found that the library at the University Museum in Philadelphia wasn't nearly as remarkable as the library at the Peabody Museum at Harvard, but it was a superb collection, nonetheless. It did not take long for me to discover that not much had been written about New Zealand's prehistory. Fortunately, however, I did learn that a national archaeology society had been established a decade earlier. The library at Penn had a complete run of its small but informative publication called the *New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter*. Like a hungry man eager for a meal I quickly got down to reading about what the NZAA had been doing halfway round the world.

I still have the course paper I wrote for Bill Davenport in December 1964. It is titled "Pits, *Pas* and *Moa* Bones." Reading once more something that you wrote forty years before is a tad morbid. Simultaneously one feels that time has both stopped and flashed by—something Einstein might understand, but something that the average human soul can't quite grasp. In any case, it is clear to me now, as it was then, that without the many published pages of the *NZAA Newsletter*, I wouldn't have had a research paper worth writing, much less grading. As I said on the first page of my paper, systematic information,

well documented and well illustrated, was found to be very difficult to come across in published references. Except for a rare few books and major reports, most of the literature was discovered to consist of ‘preliminary reports,’ summaries, and narrative descriptions found on the pages of *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* and the *New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter*.

Several pages further on, however, I added that the editors of the latter “are struggling to raise funds to publish full-scale site reports independent of the *Newsletter*.” Nevertheless, I observed that “the pages of the *Newsletter* are filled with articles describing excavation techniques, survey methods, survey forms, data processing, and the like . . . Since it can really be said that archaeology as it is practiced elsewhere in the world only recently ‘diffused’ to New Zealand, this great emphasis on techniques and organization is very understandable. Unfortunately, the result of both circumstance and this technological emphasis has been that ‘hard archaeological facts’ have not kept up with the increase in survey data and popular zeal.”

One article published in the *Newsletter* in 1962 particularly impressed me. It was written by Roger C. Green and Wilfred Shawcross, and was titled “The Cultural Sequence of the Auckland Province” (vol. 5, pages 210-220). I was so taken with what Green and Shawcross had to say that I decided to make a special pilgrimage back to Harvard early in January 1965 to read Green’s recently accepted PhD dissertation (after arriving in New Zealand, I belatedly learned that his dissertation had already been published there—jointly by the Auckland Archaeological Society and the New Zealand archaeological Association in 1963—as *A Review of the Prehistoric Sequence in the Auckland Province*).

In those days what is now the Tozzer Anthropology Library at Harvard was not housed in its own building on Divinity Avenue but instead occupied a suite of rooms in a corner of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology just inside the front door. Bound typescript copies of Harvard dissertations in anthropology were kept in wall cabinets in the library’s reading room. Each cabinet had two glass doors. Each pair of doors, when shut, closed tight against a narrow wooden mullion at the centerline of the cabinet. I don’t think the doors were normally kept locked, but they might have been.

After greeting the library staff once again after my several months of absence from the Cambridge scene I slipped quietly into the reading room to find the dissertation I had traveled 310 miles from Philadelphia to read. You can imagine how dumbfounded I was when I discovered that it wasn’t where it should have been. In fact, it wasn’t in any of the wall cabinets, in or out of alphabetical order. It simply wasn’t anywhere to be seen.

Deflated, I went back into the front room of the library and asked the Head Librarian, Margaret Currier, for help. I suspect Currier thought I had just lost my bearings since my graduation from Harvard six months previously. She went into the reading room with me to locate the missing tome.

Her confidence quickly faded. She, too, discovered that the Peabody's official bound copy of Green's dissertation had evidently vanished into thin air.

In desperation, she opened the glass doors of the cabinet where it should have been sitting, and started pulling out some of the immensely thick bound volumes, hoping perhaps that Green's own original contribution to higher learning had somehow become lodged behind its scholarly companions in the cabinet—which was unlikely, given that the depth of these wall cabinets wasn't much greater than the regulation width of each officially bound 8½ x 11 inch typescript.

Finally Currier pulled a massive manuscript off the shelf from just to the right of the cabinet's narrow central mullion. When she did so, a slender volume fell to the right from its hiding place behind the mullion. We both looked at one another, slightly bemused. Here was the very work I was after, one that was as slim as a mathematics dissertation and a far cry in its third dimension from the many data-rich PhD dissertations in anthropology that occupied the remaining footage on the cabinet's several shelves.

We all know that good things may come in small packages. I remember being immensely disappointed at the time that Green's story of the Maori and their settlement of New Zealand added up to so little. But I believed then, and continue to believe, that science progresses best when scientists move in two directions at once—"from the bottom up" turning data into good ideas, and "from the top down" using well-crafted ideas to direct their basic research. So while there was evidently little evidence to back up Green's fascinating reconstruction of Maori prehistory, my enthusiasm for what he was trying to do—which I had already voiced in my student paper for Bill Davenport—survived intact:

... in stressing archaeological, geological, climatological, etc. data, Green's approach helps to bring the problems of New Zealand archaeology down to earth: it deals with what we do and do not know.... It is this writer's personal opinion that Green's method of attack is the best thing that has happened to New Zealand prehistory.