



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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POSITIVE SITE PROTECTION -
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NORTH ISLAND

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During the last decade, great changes have taken place in the attitude of New Zealanders to their archaeological sites. Thanks to the infusion of Government monies and the legal obligations of the Historic Places Trust to compile a Register of Archaeological Sites, there has been an enormous increase in field survey. A knowledge of the whereabouts of sites and their variety has increased tenfold; for example in Hawke's Bay, the sites registered with the Filekeeper have increased from 50 to over 500, and in Auckland over 6000 have been recorded.

In the early days, the archaeology committee of the Trust had a policy of concentrating fieldwork in certain areas, putting in student teams in successive years; in this way, South Kaipara, the greater part of the Coromandel coasts and central Hawke's Bay were effectively completed. Of course there remains some blanks to be filled in, more minor sites to be recorded, more discoveries to be made, but in these and many other areas I suspect, the majority of sites are known, albeit rather superficially. This is really a tremendous achievement; it represents the first stage in site protection. Information is now available in each region through the Association's Filekeepers as well as from the central agency of the Trust in Wellington which maintains a computer record. It is now up to the archaeologists to utilise this great mass of material for research into settlement patterns, to establish regional site types and their development and to select key sites for excavation in different parts of the country. It is also imperative to ensure that the best of the sites are preserved and made intelligible to the general public. In this article, the role of archaeologists in site management and display will be considered and some promising methods and recent achievements will be discussed.

Sites in public ownership are the principal concern; these are readily accessible and the owners, the Commissioners of Crown Lands (Lands and Survey) and the local government bodies, have the financial resources and the manpower to carry out improvements. Under the Reserves Act of 1977, local authorities

were obliged to classify and to produce a management plan for their reserves, in which the major archaeological sites are situated. These are classified as Historic, Scenic, Scientific, Nature or Recreational Reserves for management purposes. In an Historic Reserve the primary purpose is that "the structures, objects and sites shall be maintained to illustrate with integrity, the history of New Zealand". In all other categories any archaeological features are to be "managed and protected to the extent compatible with the defined primary purpose of the Reserve". All are subject to the protection of the Historic Places Act of 1980. Obviously it is preferable that archaeological sites are classified as Historic Reserves.

There are advertised opportunities for the public to criticise the draft management plans and offer suggestions but it is far better if consultation with archaeologists takes place from the beginning. In Auckland this has happened, where Susan Bulmer is active as the first regional archaeologist of the Historic Places Trust and consequently the Management Plans for One Tree Hill, Mount St. John and Mt Eden prepared by the Borough Councils are excellent and mark a real advance. Good relations between archaeologists and local authorities - usually in the person of the Planning Officer or the Borough Engineer - are not built in a day. In Auckland, and no doubt elsewhere, there is a long history of collaboration through Janet Davidson and her successors at the Museum. A prompt response and a business-like approach are needed; confrontation and public protest should be the last resort.

When archaeologists are asked for advice on archaeological site management, what shall they say? Sites which are in public ownership should be visible as well as accessible; grass is the best cover and to maintain it, it must be either cut or grazed. Modern machinery has made grass-cutting a real possibility. The rangers of Lands and Survey have recently started to do this at Ruapekapeka, the elaborate early 19th century Maori military fortification in Northland, with very satisfactory results. In general, sheep are the answer, supplemented by young cattle from time to time to check the coarse grass. Cattle on their own do serious damage in wet weather which will be followed by rapid erosion in the summer. But like King Canute, we know that the forces of nature cannot be halted and it must be realised that the profiles of earthworks will soften and erode with time and that details will be lost.

Coming from a temperate island where earthworks up to 5000 years old are still a feature of the English landscape, I am not unduly worried for New Zealand.

Human damage is another matter and that must be prevented. Fossicking, fortunately, has declined - a real tribute to the effects of legislation and education. People now accept that excavation is an occupation reserved for archaeologists. In some reserves, the motorbike is the chief villain, bouncing in and out of pits and over banks and scarps, with riders oblivious to warning notices. On One Tree Hill, these have been stopped by wire fencing which also serves to divide the immense pa into sizeable paddocks, making the grazing more manageable; public access is by gates and styles. Scars formed on the steep scoria slopes by scrambling visitors are also a problem, which was solved by covering them with a flight of wooden steps.

As well as repair, sites may need improvement, for instance, Kororipo pa at Kerikeri - with its connection with Hongi Hika - was smothered in undergrowth; now Lands and Survey, acting on archaeological advice, have cleared it and revealed the full extent of the terracing on the headland. Similarly, on Musick Point on the Tamaki River, the overgrown defences and terraces of the headland pa have been cleared and the site is now intelligible to visitors. The best example of such positive action is Ngahuha pa, Smith's Road, near Pakaraka in the Bay of Islands. This is an exceptionally elaborate ring-ditch pa with stone-faced scarps up to 4 m high, sited between two volcanic craters. It is in private hands and the previous owner was refused permission in 1974 by the local authority to quarry scoria; he then planted it in pine trees just before the Historic Places Amendment Act of 1975 came into force. The pines grew incredibly fast and in five years had obliterated the dramatic outline of the fortifications. A new owner, Dr Milsom, was open to my persuasion and last November, a team from Auckland University led by Richard Cassels, with the assistance of two foresters, cut and cleared the site. The Regional Committee of the Historic Places Trust provided the necessary finance. There is still more to do in tidying up the site by Ngahuha has come back as a feature of the landscape.

A strong element in site protection is informed public opinion. To create this, it is necessary that archaeological sites in public ownership are explained to visitors by means

of notice boards or plaques, by information centres as well as by guidebooks and leaflets. Site signs were the brain child of Janet Davidson and were first tried out on Mount Wellington in Auckland in 1974. The method favoured is to have an introductory sign placed at the entry to give the visitor a general idea of the character of the site and its history, and then a number of small signs explaining individual features on which they are placed, which will be noticed as the visitor walks around. All signs must be as brief as possible and require very careful wording. This, for instance, is the introductory sign set up on Mount Hobson, Remuera, in Auckland.

"Mount Hobson, Remuera

This ancient Maori fortress is built on the breached crater of an extinct volcano; it is one of the many terraced pa belonging to the Waiohua people on the Auckland isthmus. The hill was named after Captain Hobson, R.N., the first Governor of New Zealand, A.D.1840-42: the meaning of Remuera, the Maori name is lost. Parts of the site were destroyed when a reservoir and a quarry was made.

The hill has been terraced on all sides to make flat areas for Maori houses and stores. The summit was probably defended by palisades, with a citadel (tihi) on the highest part, where the chief lived. Kumara (sweet potato) was grown nearby and stored in pits in the pa.

The original terraced citadel has been replaced by a small pa, defended at either end by a transverse ditch and bank. This may have been built by Te Taou people who occupied the Auckland area after the defeat of the Waiohua in the mid-18th century."

The Lands and Survey Department have been experimenting with metal pictorial signs produced by a special photographic process in their Nelson centre. Portraits of the protagonists at Ruapekapeka in 1843 have been set up on the site as well as reproductions of contemporary sketches of the battle. On Motu-ihe and Brown's Island in the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park, plans of the pa and reconstruction of the pits and houses have been produced in this way and will shortly be set up at each site to show visitors the meaning of the bumps in the ground (Fig. 1).

The following texts are examples used for small signs at various sites:

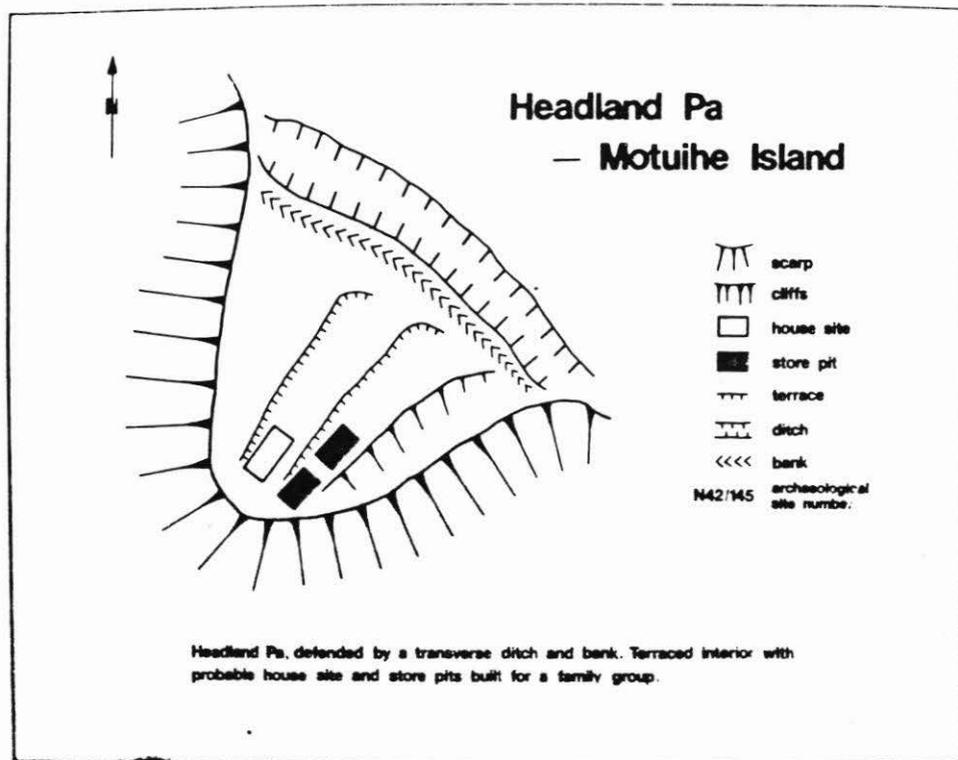


FIGURE 1. Sign on Motuihe Island, Hauraki Gulf.

"Maori storage pit for kumara (sweet potato). These were covered with a pitched roof with a ridge-pole supported on timber uprights and had a small door at one end. Terraces dug into the hillside on which Maori houses and storage pits were built. Some were probably defended by palisades."

Like labels in a museum, site signs are a method of visual education related to an object, and whether consciously or subconsciously, their message gets across to many visitors.

People are often anxious to see a full-scale reconstruction of a site; but without a very extensive excavation, the archaeologist cannot provide enough evidence for this to be done, and it would be a costly proceeding both to build and to maintain a replica of a pa or settlement. Rewa's village at Kerikeri was one attempt, though it was not related to an actual site. It had its good points but also some obvious mistakes which consultation with an archaeologist could have avoided.

Archaeologists should be involved in these new developments as well as in the preparation of the Management Plans by the authorities. The approach initially may have to come from the archaeologists offering assistance and positive advice rather than criticism as a start. A great deal of patience and persistence will be needed; it is usually about two years before a suggestion is actually carried out. Eventually the authorities should have either a panel of recognised consultants or else a permanent archaeology officer on their staff. In these and other ways we can increase the already large and growing interest in archaeology among the general public, and make it better informed. We may even increase the membership of our New Zealand Archaeological Association, the independent national organisation concerned, as well as ensuring that when the preservation of an important site is at risk, there will be outside support.