



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS - 1981-82

The principal activities of the Association during the past twelve months have already been outlined in individual reports and by way of the Newsletter. It has been a fairly uneventful year, but one in which there has been growing concern - almost alarm - at the continued high rate of site destruction. Throughout the country archaeological sites are being destroyed by both natural erosion processes and by small and large-scale development in land utilisation.

Very little effort has ever been made to stop or slow down the erosion of sites. Usually the process is either so slow that it is barely noticed, or so rapid that urgent salvage archaeology - at high cost - is the only resort, or the site is gone before any useful work can be done. Ideally, important sites in positions of threat should be monitored, if not physically protected, but the lack of personnel and financial resources mean that work of this nature is rarely done.

Many archaeological sites are being damaged by small-scale development work - a farmer bringing a little bit more land into production, or bulldozing an access track. Farmers are usually aware of the presence of archaeological features - they have a pretty good knowledge of the land that is their livelihood - and most know, too, that there is some sort of legislation concerning site protection. But the thought of having to advise some bureaucracy in Wellington, and to obtain permission from it to carry out farm work on their own land is ludicrous, not to say insulting, to most farmers.

Having come from a farming background myself, and still having relatives in the business, I can understand this attitude. Nothing can be gained from throwing the Historic Places Act at the average farmer. The only way to prevent this sort of destruction is for a face-to-face approach to gain co-operation. Once gained, and the importance of a site explained, a landowner will often protect sites on his property with fierce pride. In Canterbury at least, a number of farmers have established historic reserves or placed National Heritage Covenants over sites for their continued protection. But it takes time to visit farmers and to talk to them - a letter is of little use and can in fact have quite the wrong effect - yet none of us have the time to do this work adequately, so that this most effective means of site protection is rarely used.

At the opposite end of the scale are the "think big" projects of the Government. These are deemed to be too important to our

economy to be altered for the sake of a few archaeological sites, but money can usually be found to have them properly recorded and investigated.

In between these two extremes are multitudinous problems brought about by the landowner who wants to level some archaeological features to provide himself with an attractive building site, the mining company that wants to work over large areas of land, or the kiwi-fruit growers who pour thousands of dollars into modifying the landscape to suit their horticultural activities. Often archaeologists are placed at a disadvantage in not knowing beforehand whether any sites exist on the areas concerned, but even when they are known to be present there can still be major difficulties. Let me give a couple of examples.

In Kaikoura recently a parcel of land was sub-divided into four sections, three of which were sold for development. These covered one of the most important and earliest sites in southern Marlborough. The Kaikoura County has a district scheme in which important archaeological sites are supposedly listed, but because of the almost total reliance on volunteers to provide the information it was not done adequately, and neither the County nor the purchasers were aware of the site beneath their feet. I should hastily add that the Association has no members in the Kaikoura district.

On Ellesmere Spit the sand dunes are being mined for a special grade of sand required by a Christchurch industry. The dunes are covered with archaeological sites which are being destroyed as mining progresses. But there is no-one available in Canterbury to even keep a watch on what the mining company is doing, let alone record sites, discuss the matter with the company, the Historic Places Trust, or the Lands and Survey Department who own the dunes.

I could give a dozen examples in my own area where sites are being destroyed simply because there is no-one available to do anything about it, and I am sure that similar destruction is occurring throughout New Zealand.

As we all know, archaeological sites are protected under the Historic Places Act 1980, and in theory a person can be fined \$25,000 or more for destroying a site. But the point I am trying to make is that there are simply not enough archaeologists around the country to make the Act effective. With car running costs what they are, and the increasing demands upon our time, we cannot depend entirely on volunteers to do the work of site protection. Members of this Association, more than anyone else, must be vitally concerned at protecting sites.

I suspect that after the Historic Places Amendment Act was passed in 1975 most of us sat back in the belief that there would be a dramatic decline in site destruction. This has simply not happened. Archaeological sites are being destroyed at an alarming rate. Throughout the year your Council has written to the Minister of Internal Affairs urging that more money be made available to help make the Act more effective. Not only have we had a noticeable lack of success, but the Minister has even overturned, without explanation, two decisions of the Trust to disallow site modification.

I think the time has come for us to try a lot harder to get effective protection for archaeological sites. We must get people established throughout the country - perhaps regional offices of the Trust - who can keep an eye on the local scene, be deeply involved in public relations work, to talk to landowners and developers, and to reduce in what ever way possible the rapid rate of site destruction. Efforts will of course be continued by the Association, but I hope that individual members might also talk to their Members of Parliament and that we might seek the assistance of other bodies, such as the Royal Society, with which we are associated, either collectively or individually.

Michael Trotter

6 June 1982