



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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REPORT ABSTRACT

Opito and Otama Archaeological Survey, 1972. A report prepared for the New Zealand Lottery Board of Control by Angela Calder.

60 pp. 2 appendices. Bibliography. 6 figures. 6 plates. Site Distribution Map.

Prehistorians have been investigating archaeological sites in the Opito/Otama area of the Coromandel Peninsula for over 30 years. Many sites have been excavated within the last two decades and many short papers have been published on the research conducted. This concentration of interest is a result of the great variety, density, and richness of sites in this area. Initially interest was largely research-orientated but more recently the emphasis has been on salvage operations. The 1972 Opito/Otama site survey, sponsored by the New Zealand Lottery Board of Control, stemmed from the latter concern. It was aimed at assessing the area with a view to making recommendations about the needs for preservation and salvage of sites which might be affected by coastal developments.

The survey was superficial and concentrated on site location and surface descriptions rather than on detailed examinations such as plane-table surveys and excavations. Seventy sites were located, indicating a range of activities from early prehistoric times through to the proto-historic period. Activities relating to agriculture (pits), settlement (terraces), defence works (*pa*), cooking and food consumption (middens, *karaka* trees), burials, cannibalism (midden/burial), quarrying, and industrial sites (working floors), were recorded. Each located site was rated on a scale of importance; (1) representing sites considered to be the most important, through to (5), sites rated as least important. This scale is relative and arbitrary but follows that used for similar surveys in Northland.

Two important conclusions were drawn from the results. The first was that for a small financial outlay a survey of this nature provides for a substantial contribution to knowledge. For example, the survey resulted in a 94% increase in sites recorded for the area. The second conclusion was that damage to sites is a result of a number of different agents which include erosion, beach front subdivisions, fossicking, farming activities, archaeology, and poorly planned developments by government and local bodies.

Several recommendations were made concerning the preservation and salvage of archaeological information. Briefly summarised these are as follows:

- (1) Archaeological excavations can be more profitably conducted when preceded by areal site surveys
- (2) Erosion can be controlled in some cases and the Department of Agriculture should be consulted on such matters
- (3) The New Zealand Archaeological Association should give consideration to improving communications with farming communities
- (4) Education is the only effective means of combating fossicking, but legislation would inhibit such activities and provide some controls for site management
- (5) Many beach front settlements in New Zealand are not well planned; the New Zealand Archaeological Association could offer its services to developers and local and government bodies, through a medium such as the Town and Country Planning Authority, to act in a consultative capacity in the earliest stages of planning
- (6) Archaeologists who have conducted fieldwork within the Opito/Otama area should be encouraged to complete their fieldwork, and excavations reports, if they have not already done so.

N.B. This abstract is not intended for quotation or reference: persons wishing to do so should refer to the detailed evidence within the report.

Editor's Note:

The Opito Report is a private publication and not for sale. Copies have been circulated to interested people and Government Departments. The N.Z.A.A. has a copy as have archaeologists in the four main centres. Those contemplating similar reports should examine a copy as an example of lay-out, presentation and illustration which leaves little to be desired.

A.G.B.