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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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RESCUE EXCAVATIONS IN THE BAY OF ISLANDS.

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Although outside the major areas of public works and urban expansion the Bay of Islands, once the centre of European influence, is not immune from the problem of the destruction of prehistoric sites. Particularly effective are the growing numbers of holiday houses perched on promontories around the Bay. Because these same promontories had also been selected by the prehistoric Maori the low level of recent human interference is producing a relatively high casualty rate in prehistoric sites.

The Bay of Islands offers particularly vital evidence for prehistory because of the valuable documentation available from the earliest years of European contact. Some of the finest records of prehistoric peoples anywhere in the world come from the early explorers' descriptions of this Bay. The records of French explorer Marion du Fresne are particularly rewarding, including the only known map of a fortification before the sweeping post-gun modifications, and valuable maps showing the position of occupation sites around the southern Bay of Islands in 1772.

The examination of the field evidence from this area in the light of the French records was clearly an important project, made more so by the gradual destruction of many of the sites recorded by the French. The site of 'Paeroa village', which French Marines attacked and destroyed in 1772 in reprisal for the killing of Marion du Fresne had the added attraction of a fine detailed map showing location of houses, pālisades and other structures. The gradual destruction of this site by tree roots following plantings by the owner, Sir William Goodfellow, was a tragedy for New Zealand prehistory. A rescue excavation led by L.M. Groube of Otago University and sponsored by several institutions attempted to recover some of the evidence which this site contained. This brief paper surveys the scope of the organisation and support given for this project and some of the preliminary results.

Organisation.

Although the rescue excavation in 1964-65 was the largest yet attempted on any single site in New Zealand it was impossible to complete the project or produce definitive results. The scale of the operation on such a large site required considerable financial support. This came from grants from a number of institutions, to whom those concerned with our prehistory must be forever indebted. Without their support this site would have been destroyed without any attempt to exploit the enormous potential of the unique records available. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust granted 250 pounds, the University Grants Committee 250 pounds, Otago Museum 50 pounds and Auckland Museum 100 pounds. Private donations totalling over 50 pounds were received before and during the excavations and a small booklet (Groube: 1964) describing the work was sold to visitors on the site and realised a further 150 pounds. The amount was augmented by volunteer labour from over 60 people during the course of the 2½ months excavations, with up to 35 people working on the site at any one time. A particularly vital sacrifice was made by seven students who lost all their summer vacation earnings to work on the site for the entire period... the value of their combined loss of income was a subsidy to the project amounting to more than the research grants received from institutions. The realistic economics of this excavation, including money received, alternative income lost by participation, donations, sale of booklet and private travel costs must be well over 1,800 pounds for the 10 weeks excavations. This cost, although inflated by the extra travel problems associated with working on an off-shore island, will be similar for many such projects. What is important is that voluntary support, labour and donations amount to more in value than grants received, a pattern which throws an enormous load on the few who are willing to sacrifice so much to preserve some of our unique prehistoric past from permanent oblivion.

Preliminary results.

Paeroa Village: Excavations on this site proved exacting and difficult to interpret. A short report of the first season's work is given in the N.Z. Historic Places Trust Newsletter, (Groube: 1965) so that only brief mention of these results need be made here. Post 1772 reoccupation of the site, with a general lowering of the platform and terrace surfaces, realignment of the

scarp faces and the building of a second defensive ditch left very little of the original site undisturbed. Nevertheless, the character of occupation on the site is clear and the artefacts recovered give us our first glimpse of the introduction of European materials into Maori technology. The greatest interpretative problem, however, concerned the character of the houses described by the French in 1772, the identification and description of which was one of the main tasks of the 1964-65 season. The forest of post-holes, mainly in lines or series, small rectangular drains and so on, suggesting small, structurally unimpressive huts, could not be interpreted without some ambiguity. It proved impossible, within the limited area excavated, to identify a total undisturbed house. Because of this, the emphasis of this season's work was on discovering an undisturbed house floor, as a basis for reinterpreting the post-hole pattern on Paeroa.

Te Kuri's Village: The focus of this search for undisturbed house remains was shifted during excavations in May this year to the mainland, opposite Moturua Island. The reason for this shift was determined by the previous season's discoveries.

It was apparent that fortifications were re-used after the French visit. In fact, if the historical records for the area are reliable, warfare increased in the early part of the following century. This would make it likely that any advantageous promontory or existing site would be re-occupied and the crucial 1772 evidence destroyed. The difficulties of interpretation of the rich structural evidence experienced on Paeroa would be very likely to be repeated on the majority of pa in the area.

For this reason it was essential to locate a site with the important house remains outside the obvious fortification sites. The obvious contender was "Te Kuri's Village", a straggling collection of houses adjoining Te Kuri's pa on the mainland opposite Paeroa village. The French maps were admirably consistent in locating this so-called 'village' and the area chosen for excavation in May cannot have been too far from the area marked by the French cartographers.

Field survey failed to reveal any obvious signs of house structures - small, well-grassed lynchets which could well be natural in origin were the only signs. Along the southern slopes of the area marked by the French, however, occasional surface scatter of shell-fish debris confirmed occupation. The area in which the houses could occur was very large and it was not possible to test the area thoroughly in the May excavations. If the weather had been more favourable it is possible that a house would have been located as the evidence of stratigraphy suggested and as had been predicted, that the area was not reoccupied, and the activity which did take place in the area was brief - presumably the 1772 occupation. The excavations in May, however, revealed small rectangular pits of identical structure to those from earlier levels on Paeroa village, a thin scatter of obsidian and other flakes, rare midden debris, and occasional stray post-holes. The excavations confirmed that the area selected, as the maps suggested, was too far to the West of "Te Kuri's village" and was presumably a minor storage complex associated with the houses as yet undiscovered. The task of systematically examining the ridge top where the French claim these houses occurred will be time-consuming, but there is no doubt that when the houses are located they will be extremely easy to identify and excavate as post-holes must be very obvious in the heavy graywacke sub-stratum.

Moturua Island Gardens: As it was clear that the latest use of Paeroa village had been for cultivation (thus further destroying the surviving evidence of the French massacre) interest was focussed on nearby agricultural drains which could confirm the character of this agricultural activity. As expected, the artificial soil associated with the drain complexes was identical to the soils covering much of the Paeroa site and associated with post-1840 agriculture.

During the course of this work, however, it was discovered that the Maori agriculture drains were cut into an earlier, buried, artificial soil, very different in texture and content from the more recent kumara soils. Preliminary investigations disclosed an extensive and deep artificial soil, part way up a slope, which was buried by subsequent erosion. It was apparent from

the formation of a deep natural soil horizon on top of this eroded clay that a considerable time-gap separated the two artificial garden soils. This observation was confirmed by the radio-carbon date derived from fine flakes of charcoal distributed evenly in the artificial soil. This date of 800 ± 90 A.D. would suggest that these two bays on Moturua Island encompass the total prehistoric sequence in New Zealand from 800 to 1772 A.D.

Furthermore, the presence of irregular excavated holes at the base of the lower artificial soil would suggest taro, not kumara cultivation, a significant conclusion, if confirmed, in assessing the importance of agriculture in the early occupation of New Zealand.

Clearly this artificial soil, accidentally dug into by the Maoris in digging kumara-garden drains, and accidentally re-discovered by the Otago University expedition in the 1964-65 season, is one of the most important archaeological sites in New Zealand. Further work must enlarge the small area so far uncovered, and confirm the early date.

Future Operations: As the discovery of the taro-garden illustrates, the results of archaeological operations cannot always be predicted, and future work must concentrate on three major lines of research which are not all purely salvage in character.

1. Further field-work on the mainland site of Te Kuri's village must eventually discover the houses seen by the French. This work, involving test excavations along 10 or 11 acres of ridge-top must take some time. When the elusive house forms have been located and fully excavated it will be possible to re-interpret the post-hole and drain complexes on Paeroa village. As the identification of the house, as the minimal communal unit, is the most important problem in New Zealand prehistory today, this aspect of the research must proceed with some urgency.
2. Some specific stratigraphic problems arising from the 1964-65 excavations on Paeroa, especially in determining the pattern of re-alignment of the scarp faces, must be solved before the trees planted on the site destroy all the evidence. The present interpretation of the prehistory of Paeroa pa, although satisfactory, requires detailed confirmation in certain areas. This work, however, should follow the

successful identification of house-forms on Te Kuri's village as the interpretation of post-hole patterns on Paeroa is crucial in working out the stratigraphic succession.

3. Of vital importance, also, is the taro-garden site. Not only is this site the only known example of stratified agricultural activity in New Zealand, but the early dates suggests that current interpretations of the early settlement of New Zealand must be reviewed. This site, therefore, has significance not only for New Zealand prehistory but for East Polynesian settlement history. The confirmation of the date of the taro soil is clearly an urgent requirement.

Future research, therefore, should be in two stages:

- I. Further work on Te Kuri's village and the Taro-garden.
- II. Re-examination of some of the stratigraphic problems on Paeroa with the added interpretative weight of the investigation on Te Kuri's village.

Conclusions.

The dilemma for the archaeologist working against time in rescue excavations is that the significance of much of the evidence recovered from sites under immediate threat can only be assessed by further work on sites which are not threatened. Archaeological research in New Zealand for the last 7 or 8 years has been involved mainly with rescue excavations, with little support and often total lack of co-operation from responsible public bodies. This has led to the situation where few of the problems raised by excavations on threatened sites have yet been solved, nor will they be solved until money is available for non-rescue research as well. The high cost-structure of excavations on the large and complex sites in New Zealand is prohibitive to any but well-endowed research institutions, few of which have shown any interest in New Zealand prehistory. The situation is rapidly developing where the programme of research in N.Z. prehistory is being crippled by the failure to follow up the problems and issues developing out of salvage operations. Thus the work in the Bay of Islands, initiated by the requirements of rescue has entered a phase of pure research to realise the interpretative significance of the evidence recovered. How this second phase of activity is going to be financed is impossible to predict. It is apparent that archaeological research is too esoteric for New Zealanders, an attitude which underlies the whole problem of salvage archaeology in this country.

REFERENCES:

- Groube, L.M. 1964. Archaeology in the Bay of Islands, 1964-65. Anthropology Department, University of Otago. (Cyclostyled).
- -- 1965. 'Excavations on Paeroa Village, Bay of Islands', Historic Places Trust Newsletter No. 9, June 1965.

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Other Papers

Dr. Buist discussed the problem of individual research workers in salvage operations in Taranaki, Mr. Hosking provided important insights on techniques he had developed in connection with the Tongariro Site survey that will hopefully serve as a model in future projects of a similar nature, and Dr. Green demonstrated how working with a local body at the planning stage can lead to mutually beneficial results in the preservation of an archaeological site. Mr. Herewini presented the Maori viewpoint, particularly with respect to burials and burial grounds and Dr. Metge commented on his talk. Finally Mr. Wilson presented the NZHPT's position, noting that the Trust co-operated in the matter of recording and marking sites, but at present must define that part of the pre-historic heritage for which they could take direct responsibility very narrowly to those sites with historic associations. However, in respect to salvage archaeology the Trust was willing to provide as complete support as was possible. Again this forced recognition that in New Zealand the State has yet to become a full legal Guardian of the Past.

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Highway Salvage Archaeology

New Mexico State Highway
Department.

A 50 minute, 16 mm colour film dealing with sites about to be destroyed by new road construction and the problems that arise in their salvage by archaeologists was shown.