



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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BONES FOR THE NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGIST

R. J. Scarlett, Canterbury Museum Trust Board, 1972

Following the original publication of the Handbook to Field Recording, the Archaeological Association discussed publishing handbooks on more specific subjects, the first to be one on techniques of excavation, another on soils and another on bones. After ten years, the present volume heads the field. Although it has been published by the Canterbury Museum, Ron Scarlett can be congratulated on carrying the baby for the Association. Michael Trotter was the midwife who weathered the travails of the author and delivered the product, although he has omitted any mention of this in the preface.

The Handbook is clearly set out and, although it contains no photographs, the line drawings are clean and to the point. The introduction gives a rapid and useful outline of the problems of excavation and preservation of bones. A brief essay on osteology leads straight into the description of bones arranged in haphazard Orders to include all those that have been found in archaeological setting, from reptile to birds and mammals. The comments and asides are surprisingly well disciplined and relieve the sternness of the catalogue of measurements. Apart from a small essay and a summary classification, moas are dealt with only by line drawings, the author referring quite properly to the monographs of Archey and Oliver for greater detail. A useful bibliography provides references to other detailed work.

The Handbook, then, covers the range of bones likely to be found in archaeological sites in New Zealand and therefore fulfils its purpose. It is perhaps necessary to pass on a word of general warning: no person can become an expert osteologist by reading a book or treatise. Training is necessary; and this can be obtained only through the handling of bones together with a stock of comparative material, as the author makes clear. The Handbook is an easier reference than Oliver's Birds, but the scope for the archaeologist is really limited to confirming a suspicion that a particular bone is likely to be such and such: the definitive identification must rest with the expert. This is not to condemn the book or the earnest amateur, but simply to state an obvious fact. It is possible that the amateur, having studied the text and the illustrations, will not be as daunted by bones as he was when in complete ignorance, and he may be inspired to examine comparative material. If this is so, the Handbook will have achieved its purpose, and the labour of the author will have been rewarded by more than a glad cry.

A.G.B.