



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## REVIEWS

Louise Furey. *Oruarangi The Archaeology and Material Culture of a Hauraki Pa*. Auckland Institute and Museum Bulletin No. 17. 1996 ix + 222 pages. Price \$20.00 + \$5.00 pack & post.

*Oruarangi: the archaeology and material culture of a Hauraki pa* is the latest Bulletin of the Auckland Institute and Museum. For those with a knowledge of New Zealand archaeology the site of Oruarangi will be familiar. It was largely the assemblage from this site that Golson used to help define his "Classic Phase of Maori Material Culture" in 1959. More recently another author, Simon Best, has written that Oruarangi is regarded as the 'Classic's classic' site.

Oruarangi is a swamp pa on the Waihou River and when it was occupied was on the Whakarewa or eastern channel of the river which flowed around Tuitahi Island. In its final form Oruarangi covered 23,000 m<sup>2</sup> and was elevated about a metre above the surrounding land. It appears that three phases of construction took place, the first after (re-calibrated) 1500 AD.

Traditional history and Land Court records provide some information on the people who lived on the site. It appears that the site was visited by several European explorers, beginning with Cook, before it was abandoned in the early years of the nineteenth century.

This book is the culmination of a project which began with the compilation of a descriptive catalogue of the staggering 3,264 known artefacts from the swamp pa of Oruarangi (and the neighbouring pa, Paterangi). The bulk of these were collected over a period of months in 1932 and 1933. Later, in 1949, Pat Murdock dug intermittently on both sites until about 1970. It is suggested that up to another 1,000 artefacts may have been recovered but at present these are not able to be located. The major institutional repositories are the Auckland and Otago Museums. This assemblage, according to the author, is the largest and most wide-ranging collection for any site in New Zealand.

Before the present work, records of some elements of the collection had been published. Most notable were those of Vic Fisher, former Ethnologist at the Auckland Museum. Although his work was useful in identifying processes by which artefacts were made and the materials used, the articles were selective and did not cover the full range of objects from the site.

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This book is not simply a published version of the catalogue. It begins with a well structured and well researched examination of the site, an archaeological and traditional history, the processes of how the artefacts were collected and the key players involved. This is followed by a series of chapters which examine and discuss the various types of artefact under the headings of personal ornaments, miscellaneous bone and shell items, fishing gear, adzes and chisels, musical instruments, weapons, miscellaneous stone items, faunal material, wood and fibre, and finally, European items. The concluding chapter rounds the work off and flags future research directions.

This book is an important watershed for a number of reasons: first, it demonstrates what can be done with a large, provenanced, single site collection, which although retrieved using non-systematic techniques, can with careful study provide an enormous amount of data on the types of technology employed and range of artefact forms. Secondly, access to the magnificent assemblage of Oruarangi in the form of the well-drawn and photographed items will allow other researchers to use the work for comparative study. Thirdly, it provides an interesting commentary on the collecting techniques and attitudes of a group of 'curio-hunters' as well as those of some of our museums.

The chapter which deals with the curio-hunting period (the author has deliberately not used the more judgemental term of fossicker) was particularly fascinating. The intrigue of the events which took place reads almost like a black comedy. Sites were regarded by the curio-hunters as similar to goldmines and terminology such as 'prospecting' and 'digging-rights' appear to have been readily used. The thrill of the chase is ever present. One collector went to the extreme of digging in the known urupa part of the site to secure artefacts after unsuccessfully petitioning the Minister of Maori Affairs for permission. This same collector is even known to have dug illicitly, on another site, at night using a carbide lamp! An appendix which has biographic details on the collectors is a useful adjunct to this chapter.

Both the Auckland and Otago Museums saw the artefact-rich site as an opportunity to increase their respective holdings. This led to some resentment that Otago was poaching and an agreement was made that Auckland was to have first pick from what David Teviotdale recovered. Teviotdale got around this by deliberately not washing his more desirable finds!

There are many points of interest in the book. I found the chapter dealing with musical instruments especially interesting. Such artefacts are extremely rare in archaeological deposits, but in the case of Oruarangi we have four types (putatara, putorino, koauau and nguru) represented. From a technological point of view all of the various stages of manufacturing a nguru

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are to be found providing a unique insight. However, what I found even more surprising was the presence of two nguru made from clay, one of which was baked. Another nguru has utilised the bowl of a clay pipe. Evidence of such experimentation and adaptation is to be found with other artefact types as well.

While the book is essentially concerned with the material culture of Oruarangi, the author has used her knowledge of other Hauraki sites, some of which have been systematically excavated, such as Raupa, to provide a comparison. This is obviously essential if the Oruarangi material is to be placed into some sort of context.

I sympathise with the author when she expresses frustration at the "inadequacy of the historic records to describe processes of technology or provide names of objects". For those who work with Maori material culture this is an annoying impediment.

Regionalism undoubtedly exists within Maori material culture. However it is still only crudely defined and will so until further studies such as this are completed. While the chronological component will be difficult to control there may be parallels from controlled excavations within the vicinity to assist.

For those who work with Maori material culture, or have an interest in it, this book is essential. It is well designed with brilliant illustrations, which, when coupled with the clear descriptive text provides an excellent reference source and is an excellent price. I hope that the author's call for further studies and publications of this nature; for example from such sites as Murdering Beach, Panau or Wairau Bar, do not go unheeded. Only then can we hope to begin to understand the technologies and materials used, and in turn regional variation and its implications. I for one will keep this book close to hand.

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**Geoff Park. *Ngā Uruora. The Groves of Life. Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape.* Wellington, Victoria University Press. 1995. 376 pages, illus.**

Ngā Uruora is a unique and deeply personal book. It is about the ancient and once vast lowland forests of New Zealand's coastal plains. As the author explains in the introduction, he began writing the book when he realised just how vital a part of our ecological jigsaw the lowland forests had once been. He wanted to find out just what had survived and why, in fact, *anything* had

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survived. The labour was long; at least ten years from the beginning of serious work on the book to its publication.

Geoff Park is an ecologist, but his book is infused with a deep sense of history. One could say that he is forging an historical ecology, in a kind of parallel to the historical anthropology of scholars such as Marshall Sahlins. The book's time scale is vast. It ranges back to an almost unimaginable time many millions of years ago, when podocarps already flourished, but the birds which are now an essential part of their ecosystems had not yet appeared on the face of the earth. Facts like this make the reader wonder whether perhaps after all the podocarps may survive into an unimaginable future. Most of the book, however, is about the more familiar time scale of human history in this country, both Māori and pākeha.

The first two chapters are concerned with the beginning of European encounters with the lowlands and their people. One deals with the Hauraki Plains and the other with the Hutt Valley - both areas completely transformed since the coming of Europeans. Then follow four case studies, examining some small, special places, where remnants of coastal forest have survived, in some cases by accident and against all odds, to give a tiny glimpse of what once existed. These places are Mōkau in North Taranaki, Papaitonga in Horowhenua, and two on the west coast of the South Island: Whanganui Inlet, and the Nikau Scenic Reserve near Punakaiki.

Maori history and archaeological evidence are woven into the discussion of all of these areas but two are particularly familiar to archaeologists. Oruarangi looms large in the discussion of the Hauraki Plains; Papaitonga is less well known but is significant in the archaeology of Horowhenua. Running through the book is a thesis that archaeologists should consider seriously. Park avoids or ignores the long running controversy about whether, other things being equal, prehistoric New Zealanders would prefer to be big game hunters or gardeners, although he indicates his distaste for a view of Māori as destroyers of large birds and forests. He stresses the richness and value of the lowland forests as a preferred environment for Māori occupation, and the probability that Māori would have settled these places very early and then actively sought to conserve them. He goes so far as to suggest that there should be evidence of considerably earlier occupation in the Hauraki Plains than has yet been documented. At present the archaeological evidence does not seem to support this view but it should be seriously considered. It strikes at the heart of the debate about several issues in North Island archaeology. Was cleared land for agriculture more valuable than forested land with abundant plant and bird resources? Did people hedge their bets, clearing some land and conserving some forest? Or did the lowland forests that survived till the coming of Europeans do so because they really were too difficult to clear with the technology available?

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The archaeological issues, fascinating though they may be for archaeologists, are a relatively small part of a complex book. It is an important book which deserves to be read by anyone interested in the history of our landscape and its future. The tortuous post-European history of these special places is fascinating. The challenge for conservation as stated by the author is something we all should consider. Some readers may find the book too personal, too discursive, too idiosyncratic; some may feel that the author's passionate advocacy of a pre-human landscape and one minimally affected by human presence results in a failure to find anything at all of value in a more obviously modified environment - whether the modification was by horticultural Māori or dairy farming Europeans. But however one responds, there is a great deal to ponder on.

For a scholarly book, by a reputable press, there are some surprising slips. Typos include misplaced hyphens, words repeated, Ra'itea for Ra'iātea, and aerial for areal in a direct quote from Golson; the Church Missionary Society is confused with the London Missionary Society, James Hector is described as a botanist. There are also some unproven assertions and opinions - Kupe was an explorer from Rarotonga; the people of Mōkau were "ritualised hunter-gatherers"; when people began settling the west coast the country was "considerably warmer than today"; every last piece of pounamu came from the west coast. And as one who knew the late Pat Murdoch I was a little saddened to see him made the scapegoat for 100 years of fossicking at Oruarangi.

The design, by the author's son, is very attractive, although some of the black and white photographs and their captions are too small. There is a stunning central section of 24 colour plates.

Janet Davidson