



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## REVIEWS

**Thornley, Louise and Andrew Waa, 2009. Increasing public engagement with historic heritage: a social marketing approach. *Science for Conservation* 294. Department of Conservation, Wellington. 57 p. ISSN 1173–2946, ISBN 978–0–478–14591–5. (PDF, 447K <http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/science-and-technical/sfc294entire.pdf>)**

*John Coster*

The central issue that this new publication from the Department of Conservation addresses is a perceived undervaluing of historic heritage by the New Zealand public. The solution proposed appears to be based on the premise that an appropriate marketing campaign will persuade more New Zealanders to visit historic sites, or at least to access them indirectly through publications and other means. It proposes a social marketing approach, defined as “the application of commercial marketing techniques to influence voluntary behavioural change for the improvement of personal and societal welfare”, what some on the cynical right might refer to as “social engineering”.

There is merit in the approach. The authors promote a “model for increasing engagement with historic heritage” which uses geographical communities as a starting point for encouraging an awareness of cultural heritage sites. Unfortunately, they conduct the discussion almost entirely within the context of the Department of Conservation (DoC) as a historic heritage management agency. Given that the Department manages only a small proportion, if any, of the heritage of most communities, it is difficult to understand why more attention is not given to the role of other agencies such as local authorities, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, ICOMOS, NZAA and district historical societies.

The authors also seem to be a little confused about the role of the Department. Their opening line describes the “overarching purpose” of DoC as being to “increase the value that New Zealanders attribute to conservation”. Admittedly, sections 6 (b) and (c) of the Conservation Act 1987 require the Department to advocate for and promote the benefits of the conservation of natural and historic resources, while the Department’s General Policy, section 7 (DoC 2005), requires it to develop effective working relationships with people and organisations to protect natural resources and historical and cultural heritage, and to advocate their protection on and off conservation lands. But

neither the Act nor the Policy imply that advocacy, let alone increasing ‘value’ is the Department’s overriding concern.

That quibble aside, this is a useful publication, in that it provides some groundwork for future debate and action on advocacy for historic heritage. Its three main sections comprise a review of literature on public attitudes to historic heritage, in Australia and North America as well as New Zealand (s. 3); development of a model for increasing public engagement with heritage (s. 4); and a proposal for setting up and implementing a generalised social marketing intervention programme on behalf of heritage values (s.5).

Section 3, the literature review, is the most useful for the heritage professional. It provides an up-to-date summary of research on social attitudes to, and perceptions of, heritage and its ‘value’. There are some omissions. For example, although one section is titled “Maori perspectives on historic heritage”, it discusses these “perspectives” only in the light of DoC and ICOMOS publications, without any direct reference to Maori sources.

Another area of concern is an inherent confusion in the discussion of public perceptions of heritage, through a failure to make distinctions between, for example, natural and cultural, tangible and intangible or personal and public heritage. Some aspects of the authors’ analyses are simply too broad to be useful.

Section 3 also tends to view the concept of ‘value’ in terms of ‘economic’ or ‘personal’ value, rather than exploring the implications of ‘intrinsic value’ as emphasised in the Conservation Act and General Policy. Elsewhere in the same section though, a useful distinction is made between *use* values (income, residence, recreation, social, aesthetic) and *non-use* values (future use, identity, uniqueness, legacy etc.). The *social capital* role of historic heritage is also recognised, through its contribution to social stability and cohesion in embodying the values implied by perceptions of aesthetic, spiritual, symbolic and historic significance.

One interesting aside noted in the report is that, although the Department’s management strategy for historic heritage includes identification of twenty or so *ICON* sites, “developed to provide a *wow* visitor experience that is recommended to friends and family as a *must do*”, one survey cited reveals that “almost half of the DoC staff surveyed did not include historic heritage within DoC’s activities”. In view of recent historic heritage staff losses in the Department, this is scarcely surprising, though no less a cause for concern.

It is a pity perhaps that Thornley and Waa do not cite case studies to illustrate their proposals for encouraging people to engage with historic heritage. One such, which fits nicely with a table in section 4, showing how people may engage with historic heritage, might be the recent conservation and resiting of

the Martha Mine pumphouse to a more prominent position in Waihi (Howells 2006). Since its repositioning, the pumphouse has become recognised as a local landmark and visitor attraction. Indeed, given New Zealanders' propensity for moving historic objects away from their original locations and placing them in museums or historic villages, it may be that the most effective way to increase the public's engagement with historic sites would simply be to move them.

This publication is the latest in a series of 15 or more of general interest to heritage management practitioners which have been published by the Department of Conservation over the last ten years. In its present form, it is probably more useful as a basis for debate than as a prescription for action. Nonetheless, it remains a relevant contribution.

### References

- Department of Conservation, 2005. *Conservation General Policy*. Department of Conservation, Wellington. <http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/about-doc/role/policies-and-plans/conservation-general-policy.pdf>
- Howells, Shelly, 2006. Move it or Lose it. *Heritage New Zealand* 101:8-11. [http://www.historic.org.nz/magazinefeatures/2006Winter/2006\\_Winter\\_MoveorLoseit.htm](http://www.historic.org.nz/magazinefeatures/2006Winter/2006_Winter_MoveorLoseit.htm)