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REVIEWS

David Veart, 2011. *Digging up the Past; archaeology for the young and curious*. Auckland, Auckland University Press. 105 pp. Recommended retail price \$39.99.

This book is aimed at children of eight or more years and describes how archaeology tells of the past through particular New Zealand sites, excavations and research. It is the ideal present for young family members who want to know more about some of our big archaeological stories and who ask the all-important question – ‘yes, but how do you know?’

Stories covered are the Motutapu Island footprints in Rangitoto ash, the time and nature of early Pacific voyages including discovery of New Zealand, Wairau Bar moa-hunters, Māori food plants, stone tools, kurī, pā, urban archaeology, kauri milling, Chinese gold-miners of Central Otago, aircraft (or not) in Auckland’s North Head tunnels and the heroic age of Antarctic exploration. Each story also serves to introduce something of particular problems encountered and methodologies employed. So the author tells of experimental archaeology and radiocarbon dating (Pacific voyaging), learning from landscapes (pā) and from excavation (Wairau Bar), wet wood conservation (urban archaeology) and other topics.

Excavation is illustrated using 2009 work at Wairau Bar, with the headings ‘look around’ (studying the site before any digging), ‘squares’, ‘tools’, ‘finds’, ‘features’, ‘little flags’ (this about marking finds), ‘looking carefully’ (relating to stratigraphy), ‘drawing plans’, ‘surveying’, ‘laptop archaeology’ (making the record) and ‘safely stored’ (the excavation archive). Later in the book readers are led through their own excavation of the family rubbish container, with ‘midden analysis’ and ‘stratigraphy’ as the guiding principles. ‘Occam’s razor’ is brought into play in a discussion of how we might approach some of the ideas of alternative archaeology.

The book is illustrated in full colour throughout, with pictures of recent work at Antarctic huts, Torpedo Bay and North Head (both in Devonport, Auckland), Wairau Bar, Otumotai (Tauranga) and Dunedin and Wellington, plus historical photographs and drawings.

The Mason’s Bay canoe prow is discussed on p. 68 but we are not told there is a picture on the front cover. In discussing moa bone one-piece fish-hooks, ‘tabs’ are described as “...the pieces removed from the middle of the curved hook” (p. 23). I thought these were cores or waste. A tab or blank is the

piece of bone shaped to the hook form before the 'core' is removed by drilling and the hook then filed to shape.

These are minor grizzles. This is an excellent book for young readers, linking some of our own important stories to 'how we know', and including some of the interesting technical stuff.

Nigel Prickett