



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## ROGER DUFF: ANTHROPOLOGIST, EDUCATIONALIST, ARCHAEOLOGIST

Gowan Duff and Robin Duff  
Christchurch

### **Gowan Duff:**

#### *Wairau Bar 1944–46*

My first memories of Dad and archaeology began when I saw him at work at his desk at our home in Lansdowne Valley. He was carefully measuring some moa bone reels and stone adzes with ruler and callipers and drawing them in pencil on a sheet of drawing paper. He had an office in the old stone museum building built by Sir Julius von Haast, which looked out on a courtyard to the carpenter's shop. There he did more writing and recording of artefacts found at Wairau Bar near Blenheim. At Wairau he worked with Jim Eyles who had first discovered the burials, and some "curios" as they used to be called in those days, while "fossicking" around the Perano family property. Wairau was an important find from an archaeological perspective, as Dad was quick to see, and the artefacts of the material culture found on that site later led him to important conclusions about the people who had lived there.

In 1946 Robin and I spent part of the Christmas Holidays with Dad at Wairau Bar as guests of the Perano family. Dad and Jim did more digging and recording of the area where signs of earlier habitation were found. I remember him using a trowel and paintbrush as well as a shovel, and saw a grid of fishing lines stretched above the area that they were excavating. He made notes of things as they were found and took some photographs. Charcoal obtained from the site was sent off to the DSIR in Hutt Valley, where Dr Rafter was doing some pioneer work in radiocarbon dating. This enabled more accurate dating of the site they were investigating.

#### *Education*

Dad was a gifted scholar, becoming dux at Wharenui Primary School and later at Christchurch Boys High School. The headmaster at Wharenui at the time was Jeff Alley, father of Rewi Alley. Dad started Christchurch Boys High

School in the new school in Straven Road in 1926, the year of its move from what is now the Arts Centre in Rolleston Avenue. He went on to Canterbury College, then a college of the University of New Zealand, gaining a BA and was awarded top New Zealand Scholar at the same time as he was working as a junior reporter on his father's North Canterbury Gazette. He paid a student to teach him the Maori language, and commenced a lifelong interest in Polynesian anthropology. As there was then no opportunity to study anthropology or archaeology in New Zealand he went on to complete an MA in education with his thesis on the Tuahiwi people.

His first job after graduation was as a cadet in the administration service in Apia, Western Samoa, in 1936 and 1937. Returning to New Zealand in 1938 he commenced work for the Canterbury Museum under Dr R.A. Falla's directorship with the title of ethnologist. During the war Falla was often away on patrol duty with the navy, and Roger carried out the role of acting director.

### *England 1947–48*

He gained a British Council Scholarship in 1947 which enabled him to study anthropology under Professor Raymond Firth at London University. After a short time, however, he changed his course when he realised that the focus was not sufficiently relevant to South Pacific anthropology. He spent time studying the collection at the home of Mr W.O. Oldman of Clapham, South London. This important collection had miraculously survived some very near misses from German World War II bombing raids. He was influential in persuading Oldman to sell his collection to the New Zealand Government, and fortunate that this collection was then shared amongst the four major museums. Some of the most valuable pieces in that collection were Pacific Polynesian and New Zealand Maori artefacts collected by Captain James Cook's expeditions to the South Seas. That was a classic time of enlightened scientific enquiry sponsored by the Royal Society and carefully recorded by Joseph Banks, James Cook, Anders Sparrman and others. The material cultural artefacts, which had been brought back by members of the ship's company, were important because they represented the pre-European contact exemplars.

His studies in England gave him the time and space to think through and begin the writing of his ideas of what he had seen at Wairau Bar. His Pyramid Valley Moa bone excavations, and the ideas from other published work, led him to the idea of the Wairau Bar discoveries representing an early period of settlement prior to Classical Maori culture. This was to be his most important publication and in 1949 after his return he published *The Moa Hunter Period of Maori Culture* as Canterbury Museum Bulletin No 1. He was awarded a DSc for this work, graduating in 1951.

### *Pyramid Valley Moa Swamp 1951*

Ongoing excavations of moa skeletons were ably assisted by Jim Eyles and Ron Scarlet and allowed better identification of a wide range of moa and eagle species of the pre-human era.

### *Philippines 1953*

In 1953 Roger travelled to the Philippines and visited the headhunters in their village high in the hills in Luzon. He studied the language, noted some words similar to Maori and found some similarities in adzes.

### *Moa Bone Point Cave 1951–55*

This was a continuation, on a more scientific basis, of the earlier excavations carried out by “navvies with shovels” of von Haast’s time. Many Friends of the Museum helped with the excavations, and later their enthusiasm led them to museum or related careers.

### *Claverley, Ngati Mamoe Pa 1955*

Dr Robert E (Bob) Bell, eminent American archaeologist from University of Oklahoma, came to New Zealand with his family to work on some Ngati Mamoe sites in North Canterbury. Bell brought a modern scientific approach to excavation technique, which Dad was pleased to learn. The expedition camped on the lawn of the Bary family at Claverley, with volunteers including some surveying and Training College students.

Ex-army cook Greg was in charge of the provisions and the meals. He went out on a row-boat to collect crayfish pots, but the boat became swamped by the following sea. It was about then that we discovered that Greg was a non-swimmer! Dad who could have helped was oblivious in the water with mask and snorkel while Greg slowly sank. Fortunately, he was saved by the decisive actions of student, David Crocket. The lobster Newberg that Greg prepared from the days catch that evening was memorable as a result of his earlier adventures.

### **Robin Duff :** *The Volunteers*

Canterbury Museum, as with other regional museums which rely upon local body rates for their funding, has always had a tight budget. In the 1950s there was only a minuscule amount available for archaeological work (mainly of an emergency recovery nature) and never sufficient to fund anything which could be called a scientific expedition. However, Dad had big ideas for his beloved museum, and was not going to be limited by a lack of money. Whether it

was in a public meeting or in a single person contact he had a certain charisma, which charmed the recipients to the extent that many became enthusiastic volunteers for decades thereafter. Since his death in 1978 a number of people have said to me that the thing that impressed them when they first met was that he was genuinely interested in them, and although a public figure in Christchurch society of the time he made them feel at ease, was not the slightest concerned if they had no relevant academic qualifications, and just appreciated their interest in archaeology. Although they contributed hugely there was also a reverse benefit as it was often their introduction to scientific method, including systematic recording, small-scale surveying and technical photography.

Some large expeditions of the era included Claverley (referred to previously), further work at Wairau Bar (Blenheim), investigations of hilltop pits at Peketa near Goose Bay (Kaikoura) and Moa Bone Point Cave at Redcliffs (Christchurch).

Museum staff or other professionals alone could have successfully completed none of these expeditions. The work of volunteers, supervised by staff, enabled these significant projects to be carried out despite a tiny budget.

Dad involved local residents wherever possible, showing them around the site while wearing his trademark black beret, drill shirt and shorts. If this dig was a follow-up to a previous dig in the evening a slide projector and screen would be rigged in a nearby hall or house to show what had been done before.

Among those 'volunteered' were we three sons. For instance, while other youths of our age group were playing sport or just mucking about on a Saturday, during the several months that work at Moa Bone Point Cave continued we slogged away from (I think) 9 until 4 every weekend. In most places the material in the cave had been so disturbed that there was no stratigraphic significance, so the main aim was to recover any artefacts from a one-metre face of dry dust. We had no dust masks, so coughed up dirt as a result, and the face of the trench could easily have slumped and smothered someone using a trowel at its base. Looking back on it, I realise that by today's standards OSH would have been horrified!

However, although we were expected to work, it was by no means an imposition. School holidays were frequently spent on expeditions to interesting places, where camping was a necessity. At Wairau the only access was across the tidal Opawa River by dinghy, powered by an unreliable five horsepower outboard motor. Life jackets were unknown! About a dozen of us camped in the former Perano homestead, where I had previously stayed as a small child. Cooking was on Primus stoves, and lighting was by Tilley lantern. To us it was great fun, and Dad was in his element.

Above all else we met some very fine people, many of whom became lifelong friends. The volunteers were an interesting lot. Some of them subsequently became museum professionals: others became prominent in quite different fields. To pick out just a few: David Harrowfield as a writer and publisher of Antarctic books; Baden Norris as an Antarctic historian and now Lyttelton Museum curator; Owen Wilkes as a peace activist; and the late Tony Fomison as an avant-garde artist.

### *New Zealand Cultural Delegation to China 1956*

It was on this trip that he met up with Rewi Alley, studied some aspects of prehistory relevant to his Pacific studies. He also made arrangements to bring some of Rewi's Chinese ceramic collection back to be displayed in the Canterbury Museum.

### *Waitara Swamp 1959–60*

At the invitation of Rigby Allan, Roger came to Taranaki to help excavate some wonderful examples of early pre-European Ati-awa lintels which had been found in the Waitara swamp.

### *SEATO Fellowship 1961–62: stone adzes of South East Asia*

Following an extensive trip to many Museums of South East Asia he was able to write a report on the adze typology, which helped reinforce his views on the SE Asian origin of Polynesian People.

### *Rarotonga 1964: marae excavation*

Ian and I travelled with Roger by ship to Rarotonga and helped with photography and recording of archaeological finds.

### *CBE Award: November 1977*

I was privileged to attend Dad's award of the CBE in 1977 just short of a year prior to his death in October 1978. His funeral at the Canterbury Museum, Rehua Marae and Christchurch Cathedral indicated the wide range of his friends and his interests.

## **A Salutation**

The family of the late Roger Duff salute the NZ Archaeological Association in this its 50th Jubilee year and wishes all delegates a most enjoyable conference.