



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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ROTORUA - BAY OF PLENTY by J. Golson and D.M. Stafford

The organisation of the field recording scheme has brought into archaeological activity a number of Rotorua and Whakatane people, in the main members of the Historical Section of the Royal Society, Rotorua Branch, and the Whakatane Historical Society. Their combined knowledge of archaeological sites over a wide territory from the coast inland to Taupo is already leading to the compilation of an impressive record.

The area is of course a vital one for New Zealand archaeology, for many of the explicit traditions of migration to this country have the Bay of Plenty as the landfall, while traditional information about the course of settlement, the names of sites and the incidents connected with them is abundant.

At the same time it is an area of volcanic activity, with at least two ash showers within the period of settlement. The later of these, from the Tarawera eruption, falls of course outside the period of direct archaeological interest. The earlier, the so-called Kaharoa shower, however, dated 1000-1200 A.D. by radiocarbon, is potentially of tremendous importance for the archaeologist, since the area it covers coincides with the area of greatest traditional interest, from Tauranga to Whakatane. There exists the possibility, therefore, of discovering early sites of settlement below Kaharoa ash, whose date will provide the latest possible date for the occupation of the sites in question.

Considerations of this sort carried great weight when the Council of the Archaeological Association began to plan its fourth annual conference, devoted in terms of the resolution passed at the third conference at Wanganui, to archaeological method, techniques and ethics. Obviously the site chosen for the demonstration excavation it was hoped to stage must possess a number of qualities: nearness to some centre where Association members were active: variety of surface features to illustrate various methods of archaeological attack: space: and if possible an archaeological problem of importance.

The old Arawa pa of Pakotore, suggested by Mr D.M. Stafford of Rotorua and adopted as the site of the Association's May activities, possesses all these advantages. It is just over twenty miles from Rotorua, dissected by the main road which leads to Te Puke. It stands high above the Kaituna River looking out to Maketu, the traditional landing place of the Arawa canoe. It is traditionally an early pa of the Arawa people moving inland from the coast to the Lakes district of Rotorua. Many incidents in its career are

traditionally recorded. Its ditch and bank fortifications enclose a large flat area with pits visible here and there. The main road through the pa has exposed in its banks shells, charcoal and post-holes. The two owners of the site, Mr G. Williams and Mr V. Matthews are keen at the prospect of archaeological examination.

It possesses two outstanding qualities :-

(1) It lies in the area of Kaharoa ash and excavation there should reveal whether occupation of the site was pre- as well as post-Kaharoa. The indications are most strong that there is pre-Kaharoa activity. In the road-cutting a posthole is exposed, apparently filled with and sealed in by Kaharoa ash. Mr Colin Vucetich, who before his move to Christchurch was with the Soil Bureau in Rotorua, has very kindly analysed a soil sample from the posthole and has found nothing that would rule out the idea that the posthole dates from before the Kaharoa eruption. The possibility that the Association dig will reveal an early horizon in the Bay of Plenty area and one perhaps from the beginning associated with defended hill top settlement is most exciting. Luckily we shall have specialist assistance on the site for the interpretation of the volcanic evidences which are going to be so important. Mr Jim Healy, volcanologist from Rotorua and a member of the Association, will certainly be there, while it is possible that Mr Allan Pullar of Soil Bureau, Gisborne, who has worked closely with Mr Vucetich on the ash showers of the Bay of Plenty, will also be present.

(2) The second advantage is that holding the Conference in the Rotorua district enables the Association to introduce its work to the Maori people, whose history of course it is which the Association's work is helping to elucidate. Consequently, every effort is being made to gain the interest and goodwill of the Maori communities from Rotorua to Whakatane and from Matata to Taupo.

The local organisation is working well. The local secretary is Mr Don Stafford of Rotorua and other active members are Mr Jim Healy, Mr Pat Burstall and Mr Cecil Watt. In Whakatane, there are Mr Frank Davis and Mr Doric Mabon. The Whakatane group has conducted a plane table survey of the site. From Auckland, Mr and Mrs Wallace Ambrose and Mr Jack Golson have been Council representatives on the local committee.
