



NEW ZEALAND  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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SARAH'S GULLY AND ELSEWHERE

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[Editorial note. Reminiscences of the 'prehistoric' period of New Zealand archaeology are interesting - and I think important, as they tell part of the story of why and how we have arrived at where we are today in our subject. For some time I have been harassing Ron Scarlett regarding his memories of the early days. These reminiscences should be put alongside those of Bob Jolly which were published in the March 1983 Newsletter (Vol.26 No.1) and Ron's own account of work at Heaphy River (Vol 25 No.3). The following account arrived over a period of time in three separate parts. I have left them more or less as I received them. The photographs come from the Anthropology Department archives, University of Auckland.]

My first meeting with Jack Golson was when he called at Canterbury Museum soon after his arrival in New Zealand. I realised then that he had charisma, but did not know that he would become one of my best friends.

The second meeting was in Auckland, when I attended the first A.G.M. of the infant New Zealand Archaeological Association in 1956. I joined the Association at that gathering. Jack rebuked me for ignoring his invitation to become a foundation member. When I replied that I had not received one, he said, "You must have: I posted it myself". Next day, he apologised. He had found it, unposted, in his private midden on his desk. (Incidentally years later, when I visited the Australian National University in Canberra, I found Jack's marvellous secretary insisted on a tidy desk. Lord knows how she succeeded, but she did.)

I remarked to Jack the first morning of the conference, that I would have to find somewhere to stay, as the room where I had spent the first night, at the Salvation Army Hostel was no longer vacant, and he replied, "Stay with with." Next morning, at his Grafton Road flat, he produced a couple of pieces of bone, and asked, "What are these?" I told him, "A tarso-metatarsus of Euryapteryx curtus, and a moa-bone fish hook." Jack grinned and said, "Do you know what you've done?" "Yes, I've identified two pieces of bone." "You've given me a site to excavate. Come and help me do it."

That site was Sarah's Gully. I was already an experienced excavator of moa and other sub-fossil birds, and had read a good deal on archaeology. Jack taught me my practical

archaeology. Others, such as Les Lockerbie in Otago had been doing excellent work before Jack reached New Zealand, but Jack's enthusiasm, and training built the Auckland University Archaeological Society into a team which really got things going in northern New Zealand. I named the team "Golson's Gang" and was in hot water for doing so.

I have, since those days, excavated in many places in New Zealand, and also in Australia, New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and a little in Canada, but, interesting and exciting as many of these 'digs' were, to me they had not the almost magical quality of the early times at Sarah's Gully and Opito. Part of it may be the campfire sing-songs, with Pat and Rudy Sunde and Sue Hirsch (later Sue Bulmer) with their guitars and songs from most parts of the world. We really did have an extensive repertoire - learning from each other - and there was a great fellowship among us. Jack was a fine leader, by example rather than by command.

This is not an account of the digs, but a few of the stories that do not get into excavation reports.

The first season, Jack Golson, Peter Gordon and I landed from the "Lady Jocelyn" late in the day and set up our tent at Sarah's Gully. We were the advance party - the rear of the gang arrived later, coming by road and walking from Otama. Next morning we woke to heavy rain, and with one carrot and a bar of chocolate between us for breakfast. It was far too wet to light a fire and so Jack and I donned shorts and parkas, and set out over the hill to Mahinapua Bay (the northern end - Opito Bay is the southern end, but locally the whole crescent is called Opito) in search of provisions from Skipper and Joyce Chapman, on whose land we were camped. Wet through, we arrived at the farmhouse, were given a great welcome, hot drinks, food and a loaf of bread to take back to camp. Such memories are not easily forgotten.

The Golson stories are legion, and most of them true. A few of them I record here.

We had dug a square rubbish pit at our camp at Sarah's Gully down to impervious clay. Heavy rain had filled it, and cabbage leaves floated on the water. It was some distance from our camp fire. One evening, after tea, Jack was haranguing us - I think on Chinese Communes, which were of great interest to us - most of the 'Gang' were more or less left wing - gesticulating and walking backwards. To our horror, and mirth, one leg, dressed in his best white cricket ducks, disappeared amidst the cabbage leaves. (Jack was a cricket enthusiast, and would talk for hours about the splash of ball on willow,

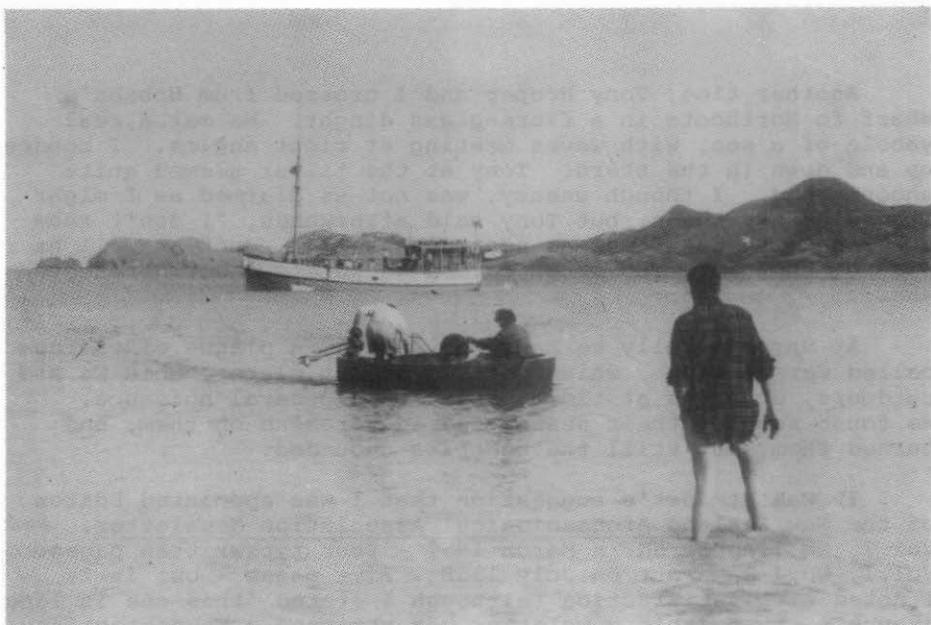
etc., etc.). Those cricket ducks were the only really respectable nether garments he had in camp that season.

On another occasion, as we broke camp for the year, Skipper Chapman had taken most of our gear over the hill on the sledge behind his tractor, and we loaded it onto Skipper's truck to tramp out to Whitianga. Jack had stayed behind to do some last minute section drawing, and was to bring a few remaining items when he came over, in sack saddle-bags on Skipper's quiet old farm hack. Bob Brown, who had stayed for awhile, then walked out the other way to Otama Beach around the headland, loaded with gear. Jack, from a mining village before he went to Cambridge, knew nothing of horses. Bob had told him this quiet old nag was a fierce beast, liable to kick and bolt at any opportunity. Bob had also omitted to place his foot against the horse's belly when tightening the girth - I doubt if his knowledge of horses was great either.

Time went by. No Jack appeared. Skipper was fuming at the delay. I filled in time by beach combing, and found a nice 'mataa' - blubber knife, very similar to the Chatham Island examples, washing about in the surf. Finally, Skipper set off on his other, more spirited horse, in search of the missing Jack. He said later that he did not know whether to cry, laugh, or curse at the sight he met. He saw Jack carrying the saddle-bags and contents, and leading the horse. It transpired that soon after Jack had set off for Opito, leading the horse, he heard a noise, looked round, and found one bag was on top of the horse, the other below its belly. Remembering that it was a "very fierce, excitable horse", he spent some time going cautiously along one side of the beast, behind it, and then to the other side to adjust the bags. Soon after, the bags were again above and below.

When they reached the beach, Skipper mounted Jack on the horse, and they galloped along to where we were waiting.

One memorable morning, when I was staying with Jack Golson and Bill Geddes at Northcote we believed we had to be at Hobson's Wharf on the opposite side of the harbour to catch the "Lady Jocelyn" at 8 a.m. to go to Opito. Jack and I got up early and managed to get Jack's old bomb (his truck) started, and set off for a trip right around the harbour. It was a lovely morning with a great sunrise. We reached Hobson's Wharf on time, (there were no ferries running early enough), then we found that the appointed time was 8 p.m., so Jack and I went to the old Anthropology Department to do some work. That was the day I first met Jenny King. (Today's students do not know how lucky they are, with the modern department, instead of the old building.) Jack and I slept in it many a time, when we worked too late to return to Northcote.



*Figure 1. Landing from the 'Lady Jocelyn', Opito Bay.*



*Figure 2. Sarah's Gully. Jack Golson at left, Lawrie Birks right.*

Another time, Tony Hooper and I crossed from Hobson's Wharf to Northcote in a fibre-glass dinghy. We met a real yabble of a sea, with waves meeting at right angles. I bounced up and down in the stern. Tony at the tiller seemed quite unconcerned. I though uneasy, was not as alarmed as I might otherwise have been, but Tony said afterwards, "I don't know how Ron felt, but I was as scared as hell." Just as well he did not show it. The water calmed as we drew near Northcote Wharf.

At Sarah's Gully we had, one season, a plague of the so-called German wasps, which settled on our plates, when we ate outdoors, stung us at times, and were a general nuisance. We found some of their nests, poured kerosene on them, and burned them, but still the beasties abounded.

It was at Jack's suggestion that I was appointed Editor of the New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter. Vol.1, No.1 appeared in March 1957 - four typewritten pages. Vol.1, No.4 came out on July 1958 - five pages - but in it I noted with satisfaction (although I stated "this one is long enough"), that "this newsletter has attained a respectability beyond that which we expected of it so early. A copy of each issue is now filed in the General Assembly Library. A copy also goes to the library of the University of Canterbury.

More important, however, it is being exchanged with the newsletter of a parallel organisation, the Geological Society of New Zealand."

The Newsletter has come a long way since those early days, when I wrote it all. For many years it has been a reputable scientific journal, and I expect it will continue to be so.

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Cricket is a noble and very enjoyable game, but as a player I must be one of the world's worst. In my younger days, I was one of a team from Umere, on one side of the Karamea River, which played, at Arapito, the team from that side. I made two runs in the first innings, and was clean bowled second ball in the second innings.

Nevertheless, I have scored one triumph. At Sarah's Gully there was no "murmur of bees in the immemorial elms" (only those blasted wasps) but there was a flat strip of ground above the beach, between our camp and the dig. One Sunday off, I had been elsewhere, and returned to find most of the others playing cricket - wickets at one end only, as we had insufficient players for two teams. I went down the beach and fielded for

a little while, then came up to the bowling end. Rudy Sunde had been batting for half an hour or more. I don't know what his score was, but he was smiting mightily, so it was probably fairly high. I said "let's have a go". My first ball was a deliberate wide off his stump. That was ignored. The next was closer, and Rudy smote that one. The third ball I sent for his middle stump, and flattened it. Strategy! Mislead the enemy into thinking you are a hopeless goof, and give him an unpleasant surprise. Mind you, knowing Rudy's capacity, I was a little surprised that my ruse worked.

There was a lovely seventeen year old lass named Wendy, who worked for an Auckland veterinarian. She had had a few nasty experiences of being accosted in the street, so had learned some karate and similar methods, and some of the lads went - or so they said, in fear and trembling of her - she practiced on us if we were willing - but Skipper Chapman's bull neck was too much for her.

Skipper was one of the best - a generous, big-hearted man who would do almost anything for a friend. He was a powerful swimmer. Rumour had it that when stationed as a Home Guard on Little Mercury during World War II, he would occasionally go A.W.O.L.: swim to the mainland for a visit, and swim back. He produced magnificent hangi, and was a marvellous trainer of sheep dogs. I have seen him on one ridge controlling dogs half a mile away with a whistle that I could not hear, but the dog could. He could have made a lot of money selling his dogs, but no dog-lover like Skipper wishes to do that.

From the dunes at Opito I added a skeleton to Canterbury Museum's osteological collection, a Boxer-Labrador cross that Skipper had put down, because it was very lame. When I extricated the skeleton from the Mesembryanthemum which covered it, I found one of the worst cases of disease (probably osteoarthritis) that I have ever seen in long experience with bones. One femur was so diseased that it had not articulated into the acetabulum. No wonder the poor dog was lame. In our Museum collections is the pelvis of a spotted shag from Chatham Island, in which the posterior portion, from the acetabula is bent almost at right angles. It is from an adult bird, but I am still puzzled as to how it survived. I do not think it can ever have flown.

One hot day at Sarah's Gully I was about to take our canvas water-bucket, a gift from Professor and Mrs Piddington, up to the camp to refill it and someone suggested, "put some Greggs orange juice in it. You don't have to boil it", so I went to the stores, found a small bottle of concentrated juice, and tipped the contents into the water. Later, reading the



*Figure 3. Sarah's Gully, looking eastwards to site and pa.*



*Figure 4. Sarah's Gully. Looking towards Cross Creek site.*

label, I found it should have been boiled. I drank a big mugful of the mixture, and liked it, some of the others drank it, and were sick, others tried it and refused any more. The effect on me was different. I felt grand, but a bit later I wandered away into the dunes, and was there for quite a while, but I felt gloriously fit. Next morning, when I retrieved the canvas bucket, the contents had leaked out. The inside had been coated with arsenate of lead - water proof, but not proof against the orange concentrate which had eaten it from the canvas. Later, when I told Roger Duff, he said "Arsenic! Good God, you'll drink anything." Not quite an accurate statement. I abominate gin and coca-cola, and don't care for N.Z. vodka, although I liked some genuine Russian vodka Roger Duff once gave me.

The Christmas Eve before we went on that dig, Jack Golson, Bill Geddes and I stayed up till the morning proof-reading the next issue of the Journal of the Polynesian Society, at Bill's house near the Northcote Wharf. It was then Christmas morning of course. Jack and Bill went to bed. I decided it was not worthwhile, and caught up with some reading. About 6 a.m. there was a knock on the door, and an unshaven character in shorts enquired for the other two. I said, "look they've only been in bed for two hours. Could you come back later". I received a queer look, and the bloke tootled off. I thought he was some chap from nearby, but when I informed Bill and Jack about 8 a.m. they were horrified. The caller was a friend of theirs who lived miles away. We were supposed to spend Christmas Day with him and his wife. Eventually we arrived, all was explained, and I was forgiven. We had a good time, and arrived home around 7 p.m.

Then the other two remembered - "Gosh! we were supposed to be at Piddington's at six". We arrived about eight in the evening. By that time our host and hostess were slightly oiled. The Professor threw his arm around my shoulder and said, "Oh, Ro-on" and I replied, "yes, Eth" (for the benefit of the young fry, Ron Glum was a gormless character in a funny and popular radio serial, and Eth was his girl-friend). After a little of that routine, Mrs Piddington sang more verses, by far, of "Three old maids were locked in the lavatory", than I had heard before, or have since. It was a memorable evening. I've forgotten what time we got home. Anyway, that was when we acquired the canvas water-bucket.

Daylight trips to the Coromandel in the "Lady Jocelyn".  
 - the third or fourth ship of that name, I've forgotten now  
 - were enjoyable. Sometimes porpoises played round the bows. On one trip, besides "Golsons Gang", there were two bright young things of seventeen or so, who were going camping at Whitianga. Their equipment? A tent and a billy. They had

not been camping before. When I asked them how they expected to get on, I was told, "there are sure to be boys there. They'll help us." The confidence of youth! One of the kids implored me to jitterbug on the deck with her. About five minutes was enough for me. I suggested she get her friend to partner her.

On one night trip Skipper Carey had taken aboard a load of empty cream cans, so we had the choice of sitting on the bottoms of the cans or in several inches of water on the deck between the cans. It seemed a long night, but sailing down the harbour to Whitianga in the early morning as Kupe and Cook had done before us, was a memorable experience. From Whitianga, that trip we went by truck to the dig.

Only once did Skipper Carey sail into Sarah's Gully, where we had a hectic time unloading out gear and stores by dinghy. He did not like that part of the coast. All other times we disembarked at Mahinapua Bay, and brought our gear over the hill.

I arose early one morning to go over the hill to greet Roger Green and his bride Kaye when the "Lady Jocelyn" put them ashore about day break - just after they landed we had a glorious sunrise, which Roger photographed then I led them back to Sarah's Gully by the shortest route. I did not learn until later that Kaye had a horror of even small heights. Brave girl. She did not murmur.

Just before one trip, I spent from Friday afternoon until about one p.m. on Monday collating the current Newsletter and the first edition of the site recording handbook, with the pages spread all over the desks in the anthropology lecture room in the old building. I had a four-hour break on Sunday afternoon, when Jenny King took Jack and me to her home, and hospitable Bob King, her father, regaled us with Danish and German beer. I volunteered for the job which had to be done, before we went to the Coromandel, and everyone else was too busy. I had no sleep, but I could go without it if necessary in those days.

Soon after I had completed the job, on the Monday, Jack who had been down to Hobson's Wharf, arrived. I have not at any time seen him so worried. He looked haggard. The skipper, who had undertaken to transport us and our gear as usual had reneged. He had found a more profitable cargo. We arrived at our destination, eventually, by truck, but it was a worrying time. A verse from one of our Kauri Point songs expressed our feelings.

Just you wait, Skipper Carey,  
 Just you wait!  
 When the bottom's out of butter  
 We will see you in the gutter!  
 Just you wait Skipper Carey,  
 Just you wait!

It is easy to recognise that "Pygmalion" had been showing about that time. Another verse labelled me:

Just you wait, Ron Scarlett,  
 Just you wait!  
 If you don't stop acting coarse  
 We'll cut out your tomato sauce.  
 Just you wait Ron Scarlett,  
 Just you wait!

Among the stores, that dig, was a big plastic can of tomato sauce. It became empty, and we had to order more. Popular rumour had it that I had consumed the lot. Now, I admit to a fondness for tomato sauce, but various other people were certainly not adverse to it either!

The day before we left for the first Kauri Point dig I found a number of oranges at the Department, which had been discarded as over-ripe. It seemed a wicked waste of good oranges, so I consumed them. Consequently, I spent most of the night in the smallest room in the building. I was O.K. next morning, though feeling a trifle weak.

That trip, we took a couple of old doors with us. Mounted on legs, they made good outdoor tables, in front of our tents. I was on cook duty, with a nice lass, one afternoon, so when we had finished our chores, we sat on one of the tables to rest. Suddenly an arm went around my waist, and I received a big hug. Life has its moments!

One evening, at Kauri Point, the radio broadcast a storm warning, so we hurriedly dug drains around the tents, which were on the opposite side of the creek from the pa. Whereupon we found we were sited on a grass-covered shell midden. That explained why we had found the place so dry after some previous rain.

Rain also revealed something else. I had been excavating a pit, and had scraped down the surrounding surface, to the satisfaction of Jack and Wal Ambrose. It all appeared just plain consolidated sand. Four days rain, and a different story. There was a neat, shallow drain around the top of the pit. It had been invisible on the sun-baked surface. In another

part of the Kauri Point pa Jenny King and I had trowelled and scraped, trowelled and scraped, until we thought we had reached the "natural". However, Jenny, bless her, had second thoughts, and found the real "natural" an inch or two below where we had left off. That material, when sun-hardened, can be very deceptive. I shall always regret that I was not at the second season at Kauri Point, when Wilf Shawcross and company excavated the fine series of combs from the swamp.

Returning to Sarah's Gully - on the strip where we had our cricket pitch was an object, largely buried, which could have been a canoe, bottom up, or a smooth log. Disliking unsolved mysteries, I nagged at Jack until he permitted me to excavate it. It was a log. I was digging underneath it, and pulled out a stone 'artefact'. It was well-made, and had me rather excited, until I noticed a file-mark, which the manufacturer had not smoothed away sufficiently. Another time, at Skippers Ridge little plastic tiki from Weetbix packets, kept appearing where I was trowelling, nearly every time I left the site. I must have thrown seven or eight into the creek. But someone had a good supply.

At the southern end of our 'fish-hook floor' was a large flax bush. We wished to leave it there, if possible, it did come out, later - but digging under the roots, we kept on finding fishhook pieces. Then one of the lads produced an adze - He had had it up his sleeve, I think. Jack said "Let's have a look" but the 'finder' held up in the air, and he and Jack danced around, Jack, puzzled, trying to see it, and the other avoiding him. Finally, Jack was permitted to examine it. It was a recent product by a skilful workman, one of our mates. At a little distance, it appeared to be a genuine old adze.

For one early Sarah's Gully dig, I bought a khaki shirt, cut off the sleeves to above the elbow, and from one sleeve made a large pocket, with a buttoned flap made from the cuff. Into this went camera, notebook and pencil, line-level, tape, etc.

We had a spate of alliteration at that dig. I referred to Robin, truthfully, as "A lithe and lissom long-limbed lovely" and she retaliated with, "Predatory Pot-hunter with the pregnant pocket". This probably referred to my habit of, early in the morning, or after work, prowling along looking for sites - blown out midden, etc. When later, we excavated Skipper's Ridge, we had just got camp set up when we were greeted with four days of heavy rain. Some of the others moped in camp, cursing the weather - understandably as it prevented us starting excavation - but I put on shorts and parka and looked for things. It paid off. My motto, a necessary one on the West Coast,

and some other parts of New Zealand, was, "Never let the weather beat you!"

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Digs sometimes produce versifiers. The following ditty (I cannot give the tune, as I do not write music) was produced by Rudy Sunde, on, I think, the second year of excavation at Sarah's Gully.

1. Here we all are on another expedition,  
another expedition to to Sarah's Gully.  
Dig up those Moa bones, dig,  
and shovel, and trowel, and dig!
2. Jack's let his hair down and taken off his singlet  
My, what a pearly white skin he's got!  
Dig up those moa bones, etc.
3. Peter's gone to see old Skipper Chapman.  
He wants to buy six sheep for the hangi.  
Dig up those moa bones, etc.
4. Tony's gone fishing while Robin does cooking;,  
Robin does the cooking and worries over Tony.  
Dig up those moa bones, etc.
5. Our John Parry thinks he's God!  
He feeds the camp on one rock cod.  
Dig up those moa bones, etc.
6. Tony's fishing can't compare  
He expects the camp to live on air.  
Dig up those moa bones, etc.
7. Ron likes potatoes, he licks the pot.  
In two pairs of underpants he's pretty hot.  
Dig up those moa bones, etc.
8. Jenny is a cleanly wight.  
She baths in a billy every night.  
Dig up those moa bones, etc.

A gloss to the verses. In verse 2: Jack, of course, is Jack Golson. One day he dared the sun by stripping to the waist - I think he became a little sunburnt.

Verse 3: We made a hangi, using the same stones as the Moa Hunters at Sarah's Gully had about 800 years before. It gave some of us a great sense of empathy with those old timers. Peter Gordon was tohunga for the oven. Someone told Jack that for a hangi to be successful, some had to be burnt slightly. Jack put his big toe on a hot oven stone, then ran yowling to the tide.

Verse 4: Tony Hooper. Robin (should it be Robyn?) is the lass who later married him.

Verse 7: Moths, I found, had ruined my bathing trunks, so at the dig I did as the verse states.

Verse 8: Jenny King had a billy of hot water every evening for ablutions in her tent.

One year there was a big earthquake in South America, followed by a tsunami which covered our beach and splashed up on part of the excavations. In intervals between digs I had been watching, from a little distance, a pair of banded dotterels which had a nest on the beach near cross creek midden. I knew their eggs were close to hatching before the tidal wave came, and was afraid the eggs would be ruined, and the parents, perhaps, drowned. It was a great relief when, shortly afterwards, I saw the birds, and two new chicks, running about the beach. The hatching was just in time.

The same tsunami left a nice warm pool where our creek entered the sea in front of the site of Sarah's old whare. One afternoon, when the girls were all in camp, I stripped off and had a dip in the pool. Someone saw me, and called the girls who flocked to the top of the rise below our tents, but they were too far off to see much. It gave rise to more verse.

The strangest deep sea creature  
washed upon our beach.  
Twas only Ron with nothing on,  
and beyond the power of speech!

The last line is grossly inaccurate. The girls were a fine lot, but they were not above surrounding the men's tent, pulling up the pegs, simultaneously, and collapsing it on us.

Arthur Black, the finder of the Horowhenua pendant (which is now in the National Museum) ran a motel at Whitianga, and occasionally visited us. He was a good chap, and a good friend, but we suspected, not entirely divorced from his old "fossicking" habits.

One afternoon, Jack looked up and exclaimed, "Oh God! Here's Arthur coming. Ron, take him away somewhere, quickly." So I went to meet him. First I tried, without much success, to interest him in the site of Sarah's old abode. There was an untouched section of dunes between our current excavation and Cross Creek midden. Arthur said, "Let's have a look at that. I don't think Jack intends to dig there." I replied that I thought Jack would, later, but Arthur began trowelling

away, so I kept him company. We found a fish-hook working floor, a few complete one-piece hooks, pieces of moa tibio-tarsus flattened for working, cores, tabs, broken fish-hooks - not all at once, of course, but that is what the site later yielded.

Arthur and I excavated a few pieces, then I looked up and saw some of the others approaching to investigate our activities. Jokingly I yelled "to hell with science! We're finding fishhooks!" A mistake - they pretended to take me seriously, and I was reminded of it for some time afterwards. Later, a little beyond the 'floor' I excavated a lovely hoanga - a flat slab of sandstone, well used, particularly on one surface, and with sides and ends trimmed carefully to make an oblong - obviously the implement of a craftsman who took pride in his work. I admired it and the former owner.

There were a number of mostly oval, stones on the beach which showed use as polishing or rubbing stones, some with slight, others with fairly extensive wear, and at least two pieces of whale skull with a number of drill holes. The holes did not seem to make much sense, but perhaps the bones were practice pieces. There are numerous traps for young players, stretched chain (or metric equivalent) tapes are one such.

Two people had laid out a line of squares on the first terrace above the beach, at Sarah's Gully. One side of the line was correct, but what began as an error of half an inch on the other side of the first square progressed until the last square was four inches out.

Bill Hartree and I found a similar error in the layout of a square which we were allotted on a pa site (Pakatore) which was partially excavated at the Rotorua conference (our fourth). Our square was near one end of the site, and proved to be an ash-dump. We dug through nicely layered wood-ash deposits, while elsewhere others were finding post-holes, etc. Nonetheless, it was experience. About sixty people participated for two days (preparatory work, square laying, some turfing, etc. had been done and before most of us arrived), and local members intended to continue later. But I do not recall seeing an excavation report on this Arawa site.