



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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SITE DESTRUCTION AND SALVAGE ON THE AUCKLAND ISTHMUS

H.J.R. Brown (Auckland Society).

As Auckland has grown so has the demand for land for housing developments, construction works and motorways. The population is now 515,000 (Yearbook: 1965). Over the last century progress has been accompanied by an acceleration in the obliteration of pre-European settlement evidence in the Isthmus. Small sites, those of transitory settlement near fishing grounds, cultivation areas and workshops, have been easily destroyed. Because of their very size the large sites are more difficult to erase, and today provide almost the only remaining examples of prehistoric settlement in the area. In 1961 57% of the area of all the hill pa remained, compared with only 4% for the other types of settlement. Five years later another 1% of the hill pa has gone to provide road metal, building material and filling for construction work: not a large amount, perhaps, but every decrease in the size and number of sites makes reconstruction of prehistoric Auckland more difficult.

More of the hill pa have survived largely because of their bulk. One of them, however, now lies under fifty miles of rail track, while another is being removed to a similar destination. Yet another has recently helped in the formation of our sewerage treatment works, and much of a larger site lies under our airport. There seem to be neither photographs nor sketches of some of the sites that were still standing in the 1920s. Judge Fenton, of the

Maori Land Court, pointed out in 1879 (Fenton: 1879), the uniqueness of Maori sites and occupation of the Auckland district. In 1928 attempts were made to preserve some sites for their scenic and geological value, and again in 1957 a further plea for preservation of sites included their archaeological importance. The only real examination of all local sites was undertaken in 1961 by the University of Auckland Archaeological Society. (Brown: Newsletter, Vols 4 & 5). This led first to the Society's scheduling of sites, and then to the scheduling scheme adopted by this Association, and the principles of salvage and protection of sites now recognized by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Despite the publicity our efforts have received, most people still think that sites are valuable not as part of their cultural heritage, but rather as public amenities and as a source of building materials. It is because of this prevalent attitude that salvage archaeology must rescue what records remain in these sites before they are all destroyed.

Within eighteen months' of Mr. Jack Golson's arrival at Auckland University the University Archaeological Society had been formed, there had been a summer excavation at Great Mercury Island, and the first rescue dig had started. It was reported in 1956 that contractors at Taylor's Hill (believed to have been the famous Taurere Pa), who were levelling part of the site for filling, had found non-European burials. The Society's excavation showed a complex pattern of pits and terraces, and a few burials, as well as valuable artefactual material - argillite adzes, made from material found north of Raglan Harbour, small greenstone adzes, bone needles, a tattooing chisel, bone fish-hooks. A paua lure, and shell midden up to six feet thick, a line of ash suggested that the palisades might have been burnt at some stage of the Pa's history. This first small salvage excavation was important in the experience it gave of this type of site, and also in the growth of public awareness of the work and aims of the Society.

In April 1961, officers of the Auckland City Council informed us of their proposed construction of a reservoir on Mt. Roskill. The Society received permission to excavate from the Domain Board, the Mt Roskill Borough Council, who promised their co-operation and were, in fact, very helpful. A team of trained excavators worked full-time at the site, financed by a generous personal donation by the borough Mayor, for six weeks, while Society members

spent weekends helping. The area investigated was chosen because of surface pairs of pits, but beneath the surface a highly complex series of pits was discovered and the excavation was extended in an attempt to relate the pits to other features. The importance of the excavation lay in the types and sequences of pits uncovered, but excavation of comparable material is necessary to establish this. Although maps and aerial photographs of the site were given us before the reservoir was built, we did not realize the extent of the damage the construction was to cause. For instance, the local regional committee of the Historic Places Trust insisted that all visible parts of the reservoir be covered in soil and grassed to minimize disfiguration. Accordingly, much of the soil dug from the dam site was dumped nearby, to be used in covering the reservoir, and that not needed was dumped further down the hill, concealing archaeological features. It is no consolation to realize that some features were destroyed altogether: the roadway to the new spoil dump was very carefully bulldozed along a series of terraces.

The Mt Roskill site taught us some important facts:

1. Contractors are tied to a deadline for completing their contract.
2. Local authorities, contractors and residents can become interested if the aims and work of the archaeologists are explained to them.
3. The area we were permitted to excavate encompassed that area only most directly involved in the building of the reservoir.
4. The time available was not long enough for a thorough examination of what turned out to be highly complex sub-surface features.

(Shawcross: Newsletter, Vol 5).

The Auckland Star of May 27, 1960, devoted a full page to the University Archaeological Society's efforts on Mt Wellington, under the sympathetic headline, 'Bulldozers Beat Archaeologists'. The article began:

'Auckland archaeologists have lost a race against time on Mt Wellington and this week watched a bulldozer destroying their painstaking excavations ... They could not help glaring. For, though the Auckland University Archaeological Society appreciates the City Council's plan to build a ten million gallon, 242,000 pound reservoir there, its members feel that another three or four weeks' grace would have given them the necessary time to complete their work.'

The article continued with a description of the features excavated, at times by lantern light, and of the shock felt by the excavators at discovering that a road had been bulldozed in the wrong place, thus obliterating hours of precious work, before full records had even been taken.

What led to this newspaper report? Reports of the proposed new reservoir to supply the Eastern suburbs were first seen in the newspaper accounts early in 1960. This was of concern to the Society, because of the good preservation of this imposing and important hill pa. The National Historic Places Trust granted the necessary money to finance full-time excavators on the site, and nearly eighty volunteers helped in their spare time. Day to day supervision was in the hands of L.M. Groube, under the general supervision of Jack Golson.

Some very large pits were uncovered, some as long as 21 feet and 8 feet deep, and many had an extensive burnt layer toward the bottom of the fill. There was evidence of quite extensive modification of the site, particularly in the building up of terraces into which the pits were dug. Very few artefacts were found in view of the enormous activity that had taken place on the site prehistorically and during archaeological work. There were two broken stone drill points, a simple bone pendant, a broken bone needle, a broken adze and the tip of a bird spear, and these were from at least four periods of occupation. Radio carbon dating showed that the built up material into which the pits had been dug was deposited about 1430 A.D., the earliest non-traditional date for the occupation of volcanic cones in the Auckland Area. (Golson, Groube: Newsletter, Vols. 3 & 4). A great deal about the building of a local hill pa was learned from this excavation. As with Mt Roskill, the building of a larger access road to the new reservoir would have resulted in the destruction of many important archaeological features.

On the 29th January 1964, the New Zealand Herald reported that the Mt Wellington Borough Council planned to transform the 40 acre peak, 440 feet above sea level, into a popular summit drive, rivalling Mt Eden and One Tree Hill. The plan called for a road to the summit and parking for 150 cars within two years, while later development, 40 feet below the summit, would include a tea kiosk with accommodation for 750 people. The Archaeological

Society received official notification from the Department of Lands and Survey in July, and comments on the proposal were sent them by F.W. Shawcross. Among other things he pointed out that:

1. The site appeared to have been chosen because it was thought to be bare of prehistoric earthworks. Fieldwork revealed, however, that this was one of the most intensively occupied areas in the later period of occupation, and could also have been occupied earlier.
2. It seemed most likely that the proposed access road would follow terraces.
3. The single lane road to give access to the car park was planned to lie inside the crater rim. The excavation and filling needed would be much greater than the plans showed, and this applied also to the car park. In fact, it seemed that there was insufficient theoretical civil engineering.

With a Golden Kiwi Grant (given the University of Auckland for South Pacific Research) fifteen paid excavators worked on the mountain for a week in mid November 1965. The aim of excavation was to cover as large an area as possible. because the earlier Mt Wellington excavation had given by depth, an idea of the length of occupation. Some of the evidence included shallow pits, signs of levelling the top of the crater rim and an apparent preference for living on lower terraces, rather than the crater rim. Little evidence of timber palisading was found.

More than six months later the bulldozers have not moved into the mountain. Latest newspaper reports suggest that much of the summit may be bulldozed away to make a large quarry safe for children, and that the western and south-western slopes will be converted into a large all-weather artificial ski-slope.

Conclusions:

Destruction of sites is proceeding at an unmanageable rate for the large local society. There is an urgent need for full-time salvage personnel.

We need more warning of the impending destruction of sites. It is essential also that construction projects be halted long enough for a thorough archaeological examination to be made of them. Finance must be readily available for such work.

The Archaeological Society must, however, adopt a realistic attitude. Contractors work to a deadline, and the public may need urgently the services to be constructed. The contractors must know, though, that they have a duty to the public of today and tomorrow to allow for as much information to be gleaned from sites as possible.

Experience has shown that it is very important to examine all plans of proposed works to find out where destruction not allowed for is, in fact, going to take place. Opposition to proposed schemes should be sensible, and not just an excuse for excavation on a rich or famous site.

Finally, it is most important to convince the public of the value of our work, to arouse their curiosity and sympathy by good public relations, and so to reduce this problem to more manageable proportions.

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