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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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SITE RECORDING IN THE AUCKLAND PROVINCE, 1975-6

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The Auckland Province is a large one; it extends from the northern boundary of Rodney County through Auckland to Franklin County and the lower Waikato River on the south; on the west coast it includes the South Kaipara and the Manukau harbours, and on the east it includes the greater part of the Coromandel and of the Hauraki Plains fringing the Thames Estuary. It includes many areas of high risk near Auckland and on the Coromandel, where sub-division and 'development' perpetually menace archaeological sites; certainly the Province is no sinecure for a Filekeeper. From 1958 until 1975 recording had been patchy and partial, often concentrating on 'pulling out the plums', the pa sites; nevertheless, at the end of 1974, 1585 sites were in the files. By May 1976 that total had been practically doubled, 3080 sites with over 200 more to come from some leisurely recorders.

The advance has come about by a judicious investment in site recording by the Historic Places Trust, starting with a pilot scheme with three recorders in 1975 and a full one with 15 recorders in 1976. These have been supplemented by two surveys financed by the Hamilton office of Lands and Survey, at Port Jackson and Waikawau farm parks in the Coromandel, which added 131 sites. The Auckland Regional Authority financed surveys in four of their regional parks, Awhitu, Tawharanui, Waharau and Shakespear, aided by an Environmental Award from Mobil Oil: these added 64 sites. The Auckland Office of the Forestry Service sponsored surveys in Tairua Forest in the Coromandel and in Woodhill Forest, South Kaipara, adding 115 sites in 1975-6. In all, 642 sites were recorded in 1975, 853 in 1976, with over 200 forms not yet received.

This is the occasion where tribute must be paid to Janet Davidson, who made the original contacts with the Government Departments and with the Regional Authority, and who had succeeded in convincing these Bodies of the necessity of paying some attention to the archaeological sites on their properties. She had already completed a comprehensive list of sites for the A.R.A. before she took up her Rhodes Fellowship at Oxford in 1974.

The work has been a joint operation by undergraduate members of Auckland and Otago Universities and by local members of the NZAA; here at any rate, the division between amateurs and professionals is not recognised: they are all 'site recorders'. It has all gone very smoothly, with co-operation from the Maori communities and from all land-owners except one.

The records sent in have been of a high standard with full descriptions and adequate sketch plans. In some cases these have replaced previous record forms in which the only information provided was a grid reference and the comment 'seen from the car'. A one-day training school for recorders was held at Auckland Museum in November 1975, at which the problems connected with the various categories of sites were discussed, under the guidance of Roger Green, G. Irwin, R. Cassels, Agnes Sullivan, J. Coster, Gabrielle Johnson, S. Best, J. McKinlay and the File-keeper. It was accompanied by an exhibit of site record forms, sketch plans, maps and air photographs.

Since so much of the region's coastline is threatened, the overall strategy has been 'an advance all along the line'. Recording has taken place in the Warkworth area, including the Taketu peninsula, on the west coast of Thames, South Manukau heads, on Waiheke and Great Barrier Island, as well as in several areas on the Coromandel. A major effort has been made towards completing the survey of South Kaipara begun in 1959 by Les Groube, which has proved very rewarding; it is hoped to complete it in 1976-7.

Site recording, however, is a means to an end; it is the first stage, the essential stock-taking. What comes next? There are two lines to be followed. First, conservation: this involves site selection: archaeologists cannot expect to preserve everything. The Town and Country Planning Act has made provision for archaeological sites to be registered and protected in District Schemes, and the Historic Places Amendment Act of 1976 has strengthened this proviso. Accordingly, Local Authorities in the Auckland Province have been notified of outstanding sites in their areas, 150 in Rodney County, 55 in Franklin, 12 in Manukau City, 13 on Great Barrier, 21 in Coromandel, 3 in Hauraki Plans, and supplementary lists will be provided from time to time. This has involved the File-keeper in making value judgements. In general they include all the pa which are reasonably well preserved and the larger pit groups: these sites are intelligible to a visitor from the general public and to the land-owner. A few of the smaller open settlements have been listed; these comprise the farms or hamlets with two to four pits and one or two house terraces which are typical of some districts. All middens, working-floors and burial places have been excluded since they can so easily be fossicked if they are publicised.

The Authorities have also been asked to provide some Site Display, for sites in public ownership, in parks or reserves. This is needed to draw people's attention to the place and to explain it to them by means of notice-boards and site signs. This approach was pioneered in Auckland by Roger Green at Castor Bay and by Janet Davidson at Mount Wellington in co-operation with the Borough Councils. It has been followed up in Auckland by signs on Mount Eden and One Tree Hill, and by the A.R.A. with a notice-board at the pa at Omana Reserve near Maraetai. It is hoped to have archaeological sites featured on 'trails' in Tawharanui regional park. Leaflets and guide books can similarly be used to explain a site; an excellent example is the Lands and Survey leaflet for Whitianga Rock pa in the Coromandel, visited by Cook and Banks in 1769. All these things help in the conservation of sites by making visitors aware of the interest inherent in the remains of the past. Archaeologists must be ready to co-operate with the Authorities in writing or checking the texts.

The second line which needs to be followed is Research. The 3,000 sites in the Auckland file are a valuable archive, as yet unworked. The sites have only been listed and are not indexed or divided into categories. The distribution maps compiled by the recorders are related only to the limited areas in which they have worked. It should now be possible to analyse and plot detailed settlement patterns in a region like the South Kaipara or in parts of the Coromandel. The relationship of small open settlements - the hamlets and homesteads - to the fortified sites - the pa - would repay study. Regional types of fortification, which may reflect a tribal area, need clarification and analysis. Field survey, of course, has its limitations. It is only too easy to assume that all the sites visible today co-existed in the past. Excavation then is needed to provide a chronology and to space out the sites in time. But until the results of the field survey in a region have been analysed and the problems made plain, the selection of a site for excavation can only be haphazard and unrelated to what we need to know.