ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND

Some News From the Site Recording Scheme and ArchSite

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We have just launched a major project to address the backlog of pending sites within ArchSite. As of April 26th this year there were about 3400 pending sites but this figure has already started to drop. We would like to say a big thank you to those who have already responded to requests for information. Your assistance has made a huge difference in tackling these sites.

As part of this exercise we have noticed some recurring issues and will be releasing a comprehensive user guide soon that will provide a step by step process for using ArchSite. Here is an excerpt from the guide that provides some useful advice for filling in the Description field when either updating a record or creating a new site.

From the Central Filekeeper's perspective, when reviewing/approving a record it is often hard to tell whether there will be further site record updates submitted further down the track (e.g. as part of authority work), which may elaborate more on the site. If recording a site during an archaeological assessment, it is useful to provide context to this effect, and reference the report's title, particularly if an archaeological authority is ultimately not pursued (and so the record is not further updated).

Given the time delay between the initial site record (e.g. created during the assessment phase, or interim reporting period) and the final report, it is important that as much information as possible is included in the initial site record submission, including photos/sketch plans. This is important not only for the review and approval process (i.e., when double-checking that the site hasn't already been captured as part of another record) but also for other people accessing information in the interim (for research or cultural resource management purposes). In many cases, information will already exist in assessments and reports that are being prepared for clients, and so the relevant data can be easily pasted across into ArchSite.

Every site update needs to include an entry in the Description field, as the automated 'date-stamp' not only includes the submitter name details, but also captures the grid coordinates for that entry, thereby enabling changes to the coordinates to be viewed and tracked over time.

Please avoid abbreviations or note-form text where possible. A wide range of people access the information in ArchSite, and so details need to be as clear as possible. Often edit users will be able to paste across existing blocks of text from their archaeological assessment or interim/final reports.

Important information to include:

If you are amending grid coordinates only, please make a note as to what this amendment is based on e.g., "Grid coordinates amended (approximate only), based on 1984 sketch plan attached to record". There needs to be a robust reason to amend location data in the absence of a field visit confirming the physical archaeological evidence.

If your update is solely based on amending site type, features, ethnicity, or time period information, based on previously submitted details, make a note to this effect (the Central Filekeeper currently has limited ability to see what information has been amended in a 'pending' update entry).

All 'features' selected should also be described in sufficient detail within the Description field. If previously recorded site features were not seen during the recent field visit, it is useful to make a note to this effect and possible reasons why e.g. vegetation cover.

If the site is subject to an Heritage New Zealand authority, include the authority number.

Include titles of relevant reports (assessments, archaeological authority reports) wherever possible.

If a site extent polygon has been drawn on-screen, note what this is based on e.g. "Site extent polygon drawn on-screen is based on archaeological features observed during March 2014 site visit, in addition to the sketch plan drawn in 1979. Note – approximate only". It is important to include this 'context/disclaimer' as external users of the spatial data can assume that if a site extent has been provided, that it is the definitive/exact extent of the site.

Clearly articulate what archaeological evidence was observed during the site visit, and what information has been derived from historical sources.

If recording a new site based purely on historical sources, remember to include observations around what has happened to the physical land form/area in question over time, and the likelihood of surviving archaeological evidence. This level of detail may or may not be known, however including statements to this effect (which are often already outlined in assessment reports etc) are extremely useful.

If an archaeological authority has been issued against a particular site number but the project works haven't affected the area in question, remember to update the record as it relates to the site as a whole i.e. amend the coordinates if they are incorrect or are 'rounded' CINZAS coordinates. Update the 'features' field (so that search results can be improved upon). If you have visited the site as part of your original assessment/survey work, include some text relating to the current state/condition of the site, don't just enter "no archaeological evidence encountered/site not affected" (as it relates to the specific authority-related earthworks).

Please remember to upload images as part of the update or new record. It has been interesting to note how few field plans and sketches are being uploaded these days. It is something that we are all guilty of – we do a quick sketch in the field and then decide that it is not worth scanning and adding to the site record. These are such an important record of the site and could be extremely valuable to someone visiting it in the future. A good example of this is some recent work in South Taranaki where pa sites are being revisited. Many of them have plans from the time they were recorded and it has been possible to easily document the loss of features through erosion, development and farming activities.

Images can be uploaded as jpg, tif, png or pdf files. If you are having trouble uploading them the first thing to do is to check the file size. Any files over 5 mb are unlikely to load. Please do not add Word files as these are not compatible with the system and will show as an error in the detailed report.

Please do not hesitate to contact either the Central Filekeeper (nmolloy@doc.govt.nz) or the ArchSite Administrator (admin@archsite.org.nz) if you have any questions about using ArchSite or if you need a pending site approved.