



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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SOURCES OF RECORDED INFORMATION FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS

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(Abridged version of paper read at New Zealand Archaeology Ass. General Meeting, June, 1963.)

As members and societies become more interested in the archaeological totality of a district, so it becomes increasingly important to search recorded information in an effort to obtain as much data as is possible. For despoliation surveys a careful check of the written record is important. Not until this has been accomplished and correlated with field work can accurate facts and figures be obtained to substantiate any claims which are made. Whatever the sources, all the information must be checked in the field to find direct or substantiating evidence for the existence of the site. Checking sites is usually relatively easy - finding references to sites is usually the more formidable task.

The following analysis of sources of information is by no means exhaustive. It should be realised that the references we require may be from very early sources, or in newspapers being printed now. In some instances information is very meagre and often a repetition of something published earlier - it is possible to see mistakes perpetuated by continual quoting and re quoting, often without acknowledgement, of information which was in the first instance greatly disputed, but in other instances the information gained may be virtually complete.

Eight broad categories may be defined:-

1. Local Histories:

For most districts there exist local histories of some form. Some give information which appears accurate and authoritative. The majority of local histories, however, tend to dismiss the pre-European scene in a few paragraphs. Whether the information appears right or wrong the relative facts should be recorded, with source and date, so that later assessment may be easier, and thus obviating the necessity for subsequent searching. Biographies of local inhabitants sometimes assist by drawing attention to an occurrence in relatively recent years that may have considerable archaeological significance.

2. Official Publications:

Two principal sources in this category are Fenton's "Judgments in the Native Land Court 1866 - 1879" and Turton's "Maori Deeds of Land Purchases" complete with the volume of maps which accompanies the Deeds. These official documents like others of a similar nature are the result of deliberations of well-educated officials after hearing a considerable amount of evidence and are therefore worthy of careful consideration.

3. Official Manuscripts:

These are many and varied. They are held in Government Departments in various centres or in Wellington, and are sometimes available as microfilm copies. Reports and surveys by early surveyors and other Government officials of the early days of settlement are often useful in providing place-names, swamp areas, portages, "native tracks", etc. In some instances the Minute Books and Correspondence Files of the Maori Land Court which contain the evidence submitted to the presiding Judge may prove extremely useful. Where the information is thought to exist and prove useful a written request for access to them, and a personal visit to the local Maori Land Court Judge stating the immediate and ultimate purpose of the request, may result in a wealth of information being made available.

4. Published Accounts by Early Discoverers, Missionaries, Settlers, etc:

Here again a great range of material may be found. Some contain detailed accounts, complete with plans and sketches of pa, while others contain nothing. Population estimates given by some early travellers may prove very useful, while reminiscences may provide such facts as burial grounds, agricultural 'gods', working floors and the like.

5. Journals and Periodicals:

These generally need systematic searching as indexes are either incomplete or the reference is too small to be noted. Sometimes a general article will be illustrated by a specific example from the survey area. e.g. In an article entitled "Ancient Maori Drains" there appeared this quotation ".....cartloads of agricultural implements were taken away from the drained swamp, and used as firewood".

6. Newspapers:

Newspapers form an extremely valuable source of information. If relevant information is cut out and pasted on to card or into a scrap book it forms an invaluable source for later reference. Many public libraries file this material and an investigation of a library's vertical file may prove useful. Some newspapers will allow access to their own cutting files, but generally it is advisable to approach a Senior Reporter for permission with the assurance of a story when the initial task is completed. Such co-operation returns dividends in the form of extra information being supplied by the public after a story appears. There is also increased public sympathy and awareness of our objectives.

7. Manuscripts, Typescripts, Photographs, etc:

These unpublished reports, theses, letters, watercolours, addresses to societies by early local Maori authorities, diaries of early settlers and information held by early pioneer families are often extremely revealing. Most are held in Museums, Universities, Libraries, Government Departments and local Trusts. It may be possible to borrow microfilm copies from the

repository, and view them easily in the comfort of one's lounge if a slide projector with a film strip attachment is available. Microfilm copies of original material held overseas, particularly the Mitchell Library Sydney, are sometimes available from New Zealand Libraries and may also be useful.

8. Maps:

Maps are often overlooked in the search for information. Published and unpublished maps, old and new, may yield place names, "Positions of Native Strongholds", settlement sites and the like. Some may be the product of an earlier researcher's work, hydrographic, topographic or geological in purpose but archaeological by accident, or manuscript maps in a Government Department supporting an early land purchase.

There is no single best source for archaeological records from the past. Time and systematic searching are essential. The task is slow but rewarding. It is, however, a task which must be undertaken so that research workers of today and the future may comprehend the past as much as possible before engaging in field archaeology. This knowledge allows a more critical and authoritative assessment of the situation.
