



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## TAPE AND TROWEL TALES

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Archaeology has been so woven into my life, like a bidebid in sheep's wool, that it's difficult to disentangle significant moments. I was nine years old when my grandfather gave me newspaper articles on the opening of Tutankhamun's Tomb. I thought, "I'll go to Egypt and draw more finds, and become an archaeologist." On a picnic my father took us to Pauatahanui by motorbike and sidecar, and mentioned that this was a fort. Hurrah: I raced about, turning over stones, looking for swords. After all, European archaeology was what it was all about!

I grew up, and in 1951 went to Victoria University. Denise Dettman was lecturer in Greek History: she told me, "Learn Greek, and you can come with me to excavate." She was married to a national, so was permitted. My excitement was short lived: years with French and Latin, yes, but Greek was too tough. So history, still European, had to suffice. Archaeology? In New Zealand?

Married with three children, and living on the East Coast (Gisborne). I met Māori people for the first time. Both my husband and I found we had a great affinity with them, and I began to read, where I could, about their ancestors. From Dunedin Elizabeth Hinds (nee Shaw) was appointed Curator of the Gisborne Museum. I met this newcomer, a true bluestocking, fired up on New Zealand archaeology. She proposed forming a group: we did so, and I was away—a true amateur. Here it all was, and I had not seen it! This was my drive for the next 30 years—to make sure no New Zealander was ever as ignorant as I had been. Elizabeth did some amazing introductory work, and soon we had a group all site recording and finally involved in an excavation. Sadly, I had to shift cities before the final work and reports were done, but found out from the Curator of Napier Museum, Jim Munro, that with only 57 sites recorded in Hawke's Bay there was plenty of work for me.

My next encounter was the crucial one. Jim Munro invited Jim McKinlay, the first fulltime archaeologist employed by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, and a top man in his field, to give a public lecture. I was in the front row, amazed at the slides he showed, and his clear exposition of New Zealand's prehistory. There was a good crowd there, but none as excited as myself. Of

course I stayed behind afterwards and found out about the New Zealand Archaeological Association, that amateurs as well as professionals were welcome.

From then on I was hooked. The back issues of the *NZAA Newsletter* were in the library, and when Lady Aileen Fox, English archaeologist, was noted in 1973 as being about to excavate a site in Hawke's Bay I wrote to offer my services as a volunteer, and was accepted. So began probably the most influential, instructive, maddening friendship over the next two decades. She was in retirement (Ha!) in New Zealand, and helped to make NZAA the small but dynamic body of people it is on this, the Association's 50th anniversary.

I was Hawke's Bay Regional filekeeper from 1975–1990, and I left for Coromandel in good heart, with over 1000 sites recorded to the care of a dear friend, Elizabeth Pishief, the new custodian of NZAA work.

Over the past thirty years there have been a myriad of characters whose contact with, or membership of, NZAA has made it such a challenging group to be part of. On Aileen Fox's two seasons' digs at Tiromoana Pa, I met Janet Davidson, first woman President of NZAA. Also Gentleman Doug Pick, who had "ladies on a pedestal", kept us all in fruit, and at the big season's end party gave every "lady" a tiny wood and metal trowel as a memento. He was a man



*Figure 38. Aileen Fox "silent upon a peak ...", on the rim of a kumara pit, Hawke's Bay, 1979. Photo Mary Jeal.*

who never seemed tired: “Sleep fast” he said, and rose at 3 am each morning! Also John Coster and Gaby Johnson (Silversmith and Beauty). From those two seasons, in which my entire family and friends got involved, I met people whose friendship I’ve found so valuable.

The 1970s was a time when NZAA seemed to have been at its peak: everyone promoted archaeology from the point of site recording and preservation; bottle collectors and those with metal detectors on redoubts were seen as vandals; and legislation was being used to deter senseless destruction and fossicking. My profile as NZAA filekeeper, like the other 13 of us throughout New Zealand, was high, with local councils, water boards, roading contractors, even the Electricity Department, aware of potential sites, and any site finds were promptly rung through (to this filekeeper anyway). The Forest Service, the Lands and Survey Department, via Ash Cunningham, Quentin Roberts and Elwyn Griffiths; along with private landowners like Gary Williams (where Aileen and I had several adventures) and Bill Shaw all helped; and from the van Asch family of Aerial Mapping, Hastings, we received a gift of the first NZAA recruitment poster.

I gave slide illustrated talks to dozens of clubs and organisations I thought needed educating. The DSIR and the NZHPT were my allies, support and resource people. Dr Rafter for DSIR, and Mr Chapman Taylor (I fenced with his son and daughter, did that influence him?). I liked to think it was my passion for the subject that drew people in to help. Before long our small group of site recorders—in the earliest days Neville Ritchie, Jenny Cave, Glennis Millan and David Nevin—had recorded in many parts of Hawke’s Bay only previously blanks on the map. Sue Menzies stayed with me one summer and horrified my two daughters by asking why we had so many knickers on the line? She didn’t wear any; such a saving she said.

In my teaching years at Colenso High School, and with the enthusiastic help from the headmaster, David Goldsmith, I did a small unit on New Zealand archaeology, and the need to record what was on the land, and I wrote to anyone I thought could or would help to promote the aims of the NZAA. Taking people on field trips forced me to form a small but dedicated group so the work could be expanded. My husband, also often my assistant recorder and driver, introduced a handsome young Maori, Robert Hunter, to photography, and before long he was combining his swiftly developed site recording skills (taught to our group at a weekend school which the NZ Historic Places Trust set up) with photography. Over the next few years Robert, with his horse Lucky and small dog Precious, recorded hundreds of sites on the coastal areas of Hawke’s Bay, filling yet more empty areas.

The most important task of NZAA seems to be the need to enthuse, intrigue and excite potential archaeologist of all persuasions, preferably from junior school

years on upwards into the disciplines and its specialised areas. Many marvels are still to be found in New Zealand—remember, early passions don't diminish.

John Holder, Nigel Hadfield, the special but late Bob Hauraki, described by the then Commissioner of Crown Lands, as “Whiter than a white man AND he played for the Bay!” How times and attitudes have changed. I've had loads of involvement with the great pa of Otatara and the kaitiaki people at it's foot on the Waiohiki Marae, who got a crash course on active participation and promotion of their treasures.

Kevin Jones, still with the diminished Science Section of DOC, has come and gone in my life. Along with Mike Hurst we scratched in the sand at my family's old beach paradise of Whangara, site of my first discovery on the island of Paikea.

I've lived long and worked in many different areas, but none have given me as much satisfaction as being part of NZAA. My journey through prehistory proved addictive, and as age enfeebles those far off pā or set of fish traps are only to be admired, not tramped to. Memories of many more of the exceptional people and places are recalled and entertain in the wee small hours when sleep eludes.