



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## TARANAKI ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE 1960S

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I became seriously involved in Taranaki archaeology in the mid 1960s. It is with some reservations that I record my impressions of archaeology in Taranaki in that decade, chiefly because the main participants could have far better described the events/proceedings than I. In Taranaki it was a period of almost pioneering atmosphere, following a century of archaeological inactivity (other than Best's 1920s work) that followed the recording of moa hunting sites at Ohawe by Taylor, Mantell and Grey in the 19th century.

The late 1950s–early 1960s saw a resurgence of archaeological interest, with recording and research initiated largely by Alastair Buist. In south Taranaki moa hunting sites at Ohawe, Rangatapu, Kaupokonui and Hawera were investigated by Tess Canavan, Dave Robinson and Alastair. This somewhat balanced the South Island moa hunter bias prevailing in the early 20th century. A walk around the Kaupokonui site with Alastair almost had him waxing lyrical, if that was possible. The Kaupokonui oven display at the Taranaki museum was of immense interest to the public.

Alastair and Dave also undertook extensive field recording in north Taranaki with the investigation at Kumara Kaimo and culminating in Alastair's important *Archaeology in North Taranaki* publication in 1964. This work looked at spatial settlement patterns as well as site typology. Also in north Taranaki the Waitara swamp search led by Roger Duff of Canterbury Museum with Rigby Allan of the Taranaki Museum resulted in extensive reporting in the local newspapers. Coinciding with this upsurge in local archaeological interest was the publication of *Maori Life in Old Taranaki* in 1965 by the late John Houston, a well-known south Taranaki historian and former lawyer.

The press articles and published material provided a wealth of readily available new information for the general public on site types, history and locations. It was not unusual to see members of the public with one or other of the publications in hand at archaeological sites handy to the road or beach. Of

particular appeal at this time was the Taranaki Museum exhibition “No Sort of Iron”, of Pacific material culture derived from the Cook expeditions.

Although there were a number of dedicated avocational archaeologists in Taranaki no local group was formed to further their interests, we rather worked as a loose association. A Taranaki Museum archaeological club was active in the early 60s assisting with the Waitara swamp search. The Patea Historical Society under the chairmanship of Livingston Baker of Whenuakura was the most active association, with regular organised field visits (and speakers) to archaeological sites in the south Taranaki–Waitotara area. Alastair was a speaker/guide on more than one occasion. On Livingston Baker’s farm was the eroding dune site documented by Richard Cassells in 1974. Alastair and I had inspected this site about 1968 and examined the wooden material and sinkers collected by Livingston. The range of wooden material was staggering and suggested canoe building/repairs. A number of canoe construction sites, with semi-finished canoes, were also recorded in the bush of inland Taranaki.

The advent of a new era in Taranaki archaeology resulted in archaeologist Ken Gorbey appointed to record sites along the route of the new Kapuni natural gas line in 1968. The extensive site recording that had taken place in north and south Taranaki assisted in this work. Subsequently Ken and Bruce McFadgen investigated a number of affected sites, particularly Pukearuhe and Mokau. Ken’s Taranaki association was continued with his appointment to the Taranaki Museum as assistant director. He was instrumental in a two-week summer archaeology school being held at Waitara about 1970 (based at Manukorihi Marae). Although organised by Victoria University, Wilf Shawcross from Auckland University ran the course and excavation. A large shell midden site by the coast was investigated. Familiar names on the course were Bob and Betty Lawn, Ken Moore and Judith Binney. I was fortunate to be sponsored by the Taranaki Museum to attend the field school.

My particular field of research interest at this time was in the hill-country east of Stratford. Up to that time an apparent archaeological desert, traditionally shunned; no Maori were supposed to live along the line between Mounts Taranaki and Ruapehu. Alastair and later Ken Gorbey were ever ready to discuss issues and offer suggestions and advice. It is with fond memories that I recall field trips with them and the Patea Historical Society in the 1960s. Hooning across paddocks in Alastair’s Jaguar was an experience in itself. Many members will not be aware that Alastair’s father (also a GP) had an active interest in Maori history. When inspecting local farmers’ collections of artefacts in the Hawera-Manaia area, a close examination would often reveal a pencilled local name place. I learnt from Alastair that his father had been responsible for this practice, using knowledge gathered from the original finder. In some cases these artefacts

were into the second or third generation of owners and all original knowledge had been lost.

I also distinctly remember in the late 60s the Bell Block Redoubt site being bulldozed to build the Bell Block Hotel, without any consideration for historical values. Some of the local boys considered the construction site a veritable treasure island for after school activities. The hotel subsequently went belly up and is now a retirement village / rest home.

By the time of Richard Cassells' investigation at Kaupokonui and Whenuakura in 1974–75 I was traipsing the hills of the south Manukau with fieldbook and maps.