



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## THE GROUBE GUMBOOT AWARD

John Coster  
Auckland

The following after-dinner speech was delivered at the New Zealand Archaeological Association's 1997 Annual Conference at Te Poho o Rawiri marae, Gisborne:

I'd like to talk for a few minutes about Les Groube.

Les became prominent in New Zealand archaeology in the late 1950s and early '60s, a period when it was dominated by Gs - Gathercole, Golson, Green and Groube, all seminal figures in the development of modern archaeology in this country.

Les is known to have appeared at Jack Golson's excavations on Motutapu as early as 1956. Four years later he had published, in the *N.Z.A.A. Newsletter*, the results of site surveys at Mount Wellington and, with Roger Green, the South Kaipara Head. At Auckland University he was awarded Senior Prize in Anthropology and completed his MA, under Golson, in 1964. He lectured at Otago University for a couple of years, before returning to Auckland in 1966 (University of Auckland, 1965:534, 540; 1967).

Any student of New Zealand archaeology becomes aware of his contribution to the field - I still have his lecture notes *The Background to New Zealand Prehistory*, all 29 typed pages of them.

He published *Settlement Patterns in New Zealand Prehistory*, based on his MA Thesis, in 1965. *Rescue Excavations in the Bay of Islands* - I'm not sure what or who was being rescued, but the phrase has a fine ring to it - came out in 1966 and *Models in Prehistory* in 1967, the year after he began

lecturing at Auckland University.

*Research in New Zealand Prehistory since 1956* was published a year later and Les then moved on, in 1969, to the Australian National University and later to the University of Papua New Guinea. *The Origin & Development of Earthwork Fortifications in the Pacific* appeared in 1970, *Tonga, Lapita Pottery and Polynesian Origins* in 1971 and then there was a sudden shift to the old world in 1982 with *The Archaeology of Rural Dorset*.



Figure 1. John Thompson and Les Groube (right) at the Waioneke excavations, 1969. Photograph: New Zealand Magazines Archives.

More recently, Les, who now lives in France, has made sporadic reappearances, both in person, notably at Doug Sutton's Pouerua excavations in the mid-80s, and with papers such as *Dig Up Those Moa Bones*, *Dig* in the 1993 Golson festschrift and with an extraordinarily algebraic paper on *The Geometry of the Dead* in last year's festschrift for Roger Green.

I first met Les in Dunedin, not in the Anthropology Department, but at Rosalie and Patric Carey's Globe Theatre, which still exists and which was for several years in the forefront of theatrical development in New Zealand. There, in 1966, Les and I appeared in N F Simpson's play *One Way Pendulum*.

Les played a character called Kirby Groomkirby who, dressed entirely in black, spent his spare time attempting, unsuccessfully, to teach a chorus of speak-your-weight weighing machines to sing the Hallelujah Chorus and who, at the end of the play's first act, uttered the memorable line "You might have stopped me stone dead in the middle of an orgasm"!

I played a much less interesting character, Stan, the boyfriend, described in the script as a sensible, well-balanced, good-natured and unpretentious young man, whose lines tended not to have quite the same punch.

I moved from Otago to Auckland University in 1967 and was very pleased, during enrolment week, to see a familiar and enthusiastic face outside the Anthropology Department. I attended Les' Stage One lectures in Anthropology and remember clearly his dark, bearded and hairy figure hunched over the desk at the front of the Lower Lecture Theatre as he pronounced "Evolution is not a theory, it's a fact", meanwhile fixing with gleaming eyes two quivering nuns in the second row.

Stage Two tutorials with Les were always a pleasure, and occasionally they would move, almost imperceptibly, and, as it were, of their own volition, from the front room of the old Anthropology Department building in Symonds St to the back bar of the now-demolished Kiwi Hotel, and continue there for rather longer than their timetabled duration.

I learnt to excavate with Les, Jim McKinlay, Peter Bellwood and Wilfred Shawcross on the South Kaipara peninsula pa of Otakanini and Waioneke, the latter being Les' last excavation before he left New Zealand for the wider Pacific.

At the conclusion of the Waioneke excavations (McKinlay 1971, Moir 1969) in January 1969, Les gave me, among other items, a pair of black lace-up gumboots of the type then (and still) much favoured by farmers, deer-cullers and archaeologists such as Nigel Prickett, Robert Brassey and Ken Phillips. These boots have accompanied me, over the last quarter century, in a variety of archaeological endeavours but are now near the end of their useful existence.

I am loath to see such historic items discarded and have decided, therefore, after long and close consultation with the Council and senior members of the Association, to present the boots, in a suitably mounted form and having undertaken appropriate conservation measures, to the New Zealand Archaeological Association.

I have suggested to Council that these valuable relics be presented each year at the Annual General Meeting to an individual or group who has contributed, either during the preceding year, or at any other time, to the practise or development of archaeology in New Zealand.



*Figure 2. The Groube Gumboot Award. Photograph: Rick McGovern-Wilson.*

The award is to be known as *The Groube Gumboot Award for Outstanding Archaeological Endeavour*. Its recipient will be decided each year by the Association's Council. Naturally, I have left it to Council to decide the terms and criteria on which the award will be based, but my own inclination is that they should be kept as broad as possible and not be taken too seriously.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you the Groube Gumboot Award.

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