



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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# **THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND; POSSIBLE REASONS AND CONSEQUENCES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In New Zealand, archaeology is an important source of data that has been of relevance to Treaty of Waitangi claims as well as other disputes concerning the ownership of land, development of properties, and issues concerning indigenous rights. In New Zealand then, it would seem that the use of, and the data concerning archaeology, would be of importance to all people regardless of race, socio economic background or ideology. However, from casual observation it would seem that people in New Zealand generally do not know much about archaeology, let alone its use or possible consequences.

Last year I was able to attend the New Zealand Archaeological Association conference in Whangarei. As the conference wore on it seemed as though the information being delivered was directed and discussed as though the archaeological fraternity were the only people that the information had relevance to. Moreover, that archaeological information was only produced in order to further the scientific or research oriented goals of the archaeologist. Admittedly it does seem axiomatic that an archaeology conference should be discussing scientific and methodological goals and problems, however, this seemed to be greatly at the expense of discussing what archaeology was achieving in New Zealand. There was in fact some group discussion about archaeology in a more general context but this resulted in some hotly debated topics such as indigenous involvement in archaeology and aspects of cultural resource management. There had in fact been allocated a slot in the programme to discuss archaeology and the public, but this was shelved due to a lack of time.

Attending this conference prompted me to investigate just what happens to archaeological information in New Zealand and hence what sort of understanding New Zealanders have of archaeology. In order to do this I decided to undertake a random survey of the public to ascertain what sort of level of understanding people have of archaeology.

## **ASSUMPTIONS AND IDEAS LEADING TO THE RESEARCH**

In order to find out how archaeological information is used and also to try and provide answers for the level of archaeological understanding, I decided to gather data from institutions that either used archaeological information or could

potentially use archaeological information.

Before I go on to outline the methodology and results of the public survey, I would initially like to outline the assumptions and ideas that I had leading up to this research.

1. That archaeological information is controlled by the institutions in New Zealand that produce it. This in turn creates a situation of information easily accessible inside the institution and not easily accessible to people outside the institution.

Two things contribute to this;

- a. The nature of archaeological work being predominantly research oriented.
- b. Politics and funding associated with these institutions.

2. That very little, if any, archaeological information is applied in primary and secondary education.

3. That the public perception of archaeology is biased by eurocentric notions.

4. That the perception of conservation at public and institutional level is biased on the assumption that in terms of conservation, nature transcends culture.

5. That archaeologists and the information they produce are not considered to be particularly valid by the Maori community.

6. That the study of archaeology is not perceived to be a genuine career and is interpreted through the popular lense of the media and romantic ideology.

7. Due to the above, archaeology and the information it creates is not widely disseminated or sought after outside of academic or institutional level.

The ideas outlined above, coupled with conversations and interviews with various institutions, provided an outline for questions I used in a questionnaire to assess the public understanding of archaeology.

## **THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The questions are outlined as follows;

1. What is your understanding or impression of archaeology? And in what context do you perceive archaeology - i.e. local, overseas, global?
2. Do you consider archaeology to be of much importance?
3. Do you know of any work of archaeologists in New Zealand?

4. Do you know who archaeologists work for in New Zealand?
5. Do you consider archaeology to be a valid career like other jobs?
6. Do you know of any archaeological sites in Auckland?
7. Do you consider natural conservation to be more important than cultural conservation?

Some of these questions need to be clarified and explained before we can go on to discuss the results of the questionnaire.

**Question one** regarding a person's understanding or impression of archaeology, is designed to gauge what sort of mental picture people have of archaeology, and to try and understand what sort of images and material go into making up this impression. It is important to understand what sort of context people associate to their understanding of archaeology if we want to be able to clarify the forces that make up this perception.

**Question two** is designed solely to gauge how important archaeology is to the public. This response tells us whether or not archaeology has support or is deemed to be important by the public at large.

**Question three** has a direct bearing on the extent of the public understanding of archaeology. It also tells us much about how far reaching is the work of either academic or institutional archaeologists.

**Question four**, in similar fashion to question three, is trying to establish the extent of knowledge about archaeology in New Zealand, particularly regarding knowledge about who produces archaeological information in this country.

**Question five** is designed to gauge whether or not people regard archaeology as a genuine occupation, and also to reveal whether people perceive archaeology as more than just being an adventure or hobby as depicted at times in the media or in popular cinema genre.

**Question six** is a very straight forward question that reveals the extent of knowledge of not only archaeological sites in the Auckland area, but also knowledge of the cultural heritage of the local area.

**Question seven** is designed to gauge public attitudes towards conservation. This question not only tells us about public perception of conservation, but also gives an insight into how people value natural and cultural entities. This can have particular relevance regarding the value and importance people place on land and resources (e.g. the preservation of archaeological sites as opposed to re-forestation on Motutapu Island).

## METHOD

The data listed below is the product of three days of interviewing people via the telephone using the questionnaire. The method used to obtain telephone numbers is as follows; In order to gain a random sample of telephone numbers, the number of pages per each letter of the alphabet was divided into the total number of pages of telephone numbers in the Auckland area. Each letter of the alphabet was then assigned a percentage of the total of pages of telephone numbers in the phone book. This percentage per letter was then applied to the number of responses required for the sample of 100 (e.g. letter "B" represented 8% of the total number of telephone numbers and therefore was allocated 8 responses). At the beginning of each letter the procedure would be to go to the fourth page and then to the fourth number, if there was no response you would then go to the next fourth number and so on until a response was forthcoming. Once a response was gained you would go to the next fourth page and repeat the procedure again. Instances where there were less than four pages were only allocated one response and in this case it was only necessary to go to the first page.

This method was chosen to provide a stratified sample of all the telephone numbers in the Auckland area, as well as making sure that the telephone numbers chosen were randomly selected.

## QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

**QUESTION ONE;** This question regarding a person's understanding / impression of archaeology, and in what context they understood it received an incredibly varied response. Of those surveyed, **81%** perceived archaeology in an overseas context only, **5%** equated archaeology to a local context only, and **10%** considered archaeology in terms of local and overseas. **4% of those surveyed did not know what archaeology was!**

The immediate impressions people had of archaeology provided much variety (please note that the following statistics add up to more than 100% as people's impressions sometimes had more than one idea).

Regarding impressions of archaeology;

|     |                       |
|-----|-----------------------|
| 35% | thought of Digging.   |
| 11% | Bones                 |
| 24% | Ruins                 |
| 1%  | Animals               |
| 4%  | Dinosaurs             |
| 13% | Ancient civilisations |
| 5%  | Monkeys or evolution  |
| 5%  | Rocks                 |
| 7%  | Relics and artefact   |
| 4%  | Indiana Jones         |

- 1% The Bible
- 10% Egypt
- 4% Did not know what archaeology was.

Although the responses of the people interviewed represents quite a variety, we can see a definite pattern emerging of the most common responses, i.e. Digging, Bones, Ruins, Ancient Civilisations, and Egypt. These responses correspond with the 81% of answers that perceived archaeology in an overseas context.

**QUESTION TWO;** This question concerning how important people considered archaeology to be gave a very clear pattern. **80%** saw archaeology to be of considerable importance, while **20%** deemed archaeology to be of little or no importance. This statistic will be shown to be important when compared to other figures presently.

**QUESTION THREE;** This question regarding informants' knowledge of the work of archaeologists in New Zealand produced conclusive results. In the sample, **95%** of respondents knew nothing of the work done by archaeologists in this country, **5%** did know something of the work of archaeologists in New Zealand. However, positive responses to this question were of a very limited nature. The informants had never read any work published by an archaeologist, and further to this, did not know the name of any archaeologist in New Zealand. These responses consisted of vague ideas of the work done at the Casino site in Auckland (Historic site that was excavated at the beginning of 1994 prior to the commencement of the construction of the casino and sky tower), the possible Moa sightings in the South Island, and the removal of the old prison in downtown Auckland.

**QUESTION FOUR;** This question, asking informants if they knew who archaeologists worked for in New Zealand, provided conclusive statistics. Results showed **94%** of those interviewed did not know who archaeologists worked for. Regarding the **6%** who responded positively to this question, answers, as in the previous question, were of an extremely limited nature. These answers consisted of the Government, D.S.I.R, and Auckland University.

**QUESTION FIVE;** Responses to this question concerning how valid informants thought archaeology to be as a career, indicated a slightly less extreme result, but nonetheless reasonably conclusive in terms of opinion. Of those interviewed, **81%** considered archaeology to be as valid a career as any other job, whereas **19%** did not consider archaeology to be a valid career. Several of the positive responses considered archaeology to be a valid career **only** if the economic climate could sustain it, or if there were sufficient job opportunities.

**QUESTION SIX;** Of all the questions proposed, this question regarding the knowledge of archaeological sites in Auckland provided the most conclusively direct evidence about informants' knowledge of archaeology in the Auckland

region. Results showed that **93%** of those interviewed did not know of any archaeological sites in Auckland. Of the **7%** who did know of some archaeological sites in Auckland, the responses were again limited. Mount Eden (cited once), One Tree Hill (cited twice) and Mount Wellington (cited once) were the only Maori sites mentioned. The other areas mentioned were the Casino site, the old prison torn down in Queen Street, and the Auckland Museum. A criticism here could be that the nature of this question could be seen to be slightly misleading. However, many of the informants asked what sites there were in Auckland, and when told of the various sites on volcanic cones etc. were still unaware that these were areas of archaeological significance.

**QUESTION SEVEN;** The last question of the survey regarding attitudes towards natural and cultural conservation had a less dramatic but slightly anticipated result. Of those surveyed, **60%** considered natural conservation to be of paramount importance, **15%** considered cultural conservation to be of more importance, and **25%** considered both natural and cultural conservation to be of equal importance. Several people did not understand the meaning of cultural conservation, but this was carefully explained in a way that did not bias the answer of the informant.

What does all this tell us about the extent of the public knowledge and attitudes concerning archaeology? If we consider these survey results as an indication of public understanding, we can reach several conclusions. Firstly, the public perception of archaeology is not particularly concerned with or aware of the local context. The public perception is predominantly focused on archaeology as an entity primarily expressed overseas, particularly in places that have a well known history or monumental architecture that is easily recognised and associated with the sensational or popular reading genre.

Secondly, due to the above, archaeology is popular and in general terms highly regarded as being of considerable importance. This is further emphasised by the idea that archaeology is regarded as a reasonably valid career, although this idea could well have more to do with the nature of archaeological data being epistemological (i.e. it creates its own body of knowledge that is regarded at large to be valid or scientific) as opposed to the value that is placed on it in every day terms.

Thirdly, although archaeology is regarded as important in general terms, in a local context it clearly does not have much value or presence. This is attested to by the figures that show people know virtually nothing of the work of archaeologists, have very little idea who they work for, and have little or no idea about any archaeological sites in the Auckland region. Further to this, a predominantly 'eurocentric' bias may contribute to this perception of archaeology.

Fourthly and possibly a contributing factor to this local perception of archaeology is the predominant view of conservation as pertaining primarily to

nature. The idea of cultural conservation is foreign to most people, and attitudes harboured by this may be unhelpful in terms of the preservation of archaeologically and culturally significant landscapes.

## THE USE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INFORMATION

Now that the data from the questionnaire has been presented, we can go on to outline the way in which institutions produce, use, or potentially use archaeological information. In this context, an insight into the Historic Places Trust, Department of Conservation, New Zealand Archaeological Association, Auckland Museum, Auckland University Anthropology Department, and the Department of Education will provide us with information that may go some way to explaining attitudes towards archaeology. Further to this, an insight into indigenous attitudes towards archaeology may shed further light on the current levels of public understanding.

**The Historic Places Trust** was established in the 1950s and was primarily designed to deal with the preservation of historic buildings. In 1975 an amendment was passed that expanded the act to include the statutory protection and preservation of archaeological sites. As a result of this, the Historic Places Trust formed its own archaeological team to deal with these matters. In 1987 most of the archaeologists working for the trust went to work for the Department of Conservation (Science and Research Division) and from this point onward DOC would provide archaeological services for the trust outside of DOC estates (Gumbley. W, *Historic Places Trust*: pers comm). More recently DOC has adopted a policy of working mostly on its own estate.

During the last two years the Historic Places Trust has been entirely separate from DOC (although DOC still does some archaeological work for the Trust) and have their own archaeological resource management team based in Wellington (one archaeologist). However, the work done by the Trust still remains predominantly oriented towards the restoration and protection of historic buildings. Out of a total budget of approximately \$5,000,000 only \$40,000 (excluding salaries) is earmarked for work concerning archaeological sites. This small proportion of the total budget is supposed to cover any work pertaining to archaeological sites including costs involved in cases regarding infringements of the Historic Places Act (Gumbley. W, *Historic Places Trust*: pers comm).

Funding for the Historic Places Trust comes from three areas; membership (HPT has over 25,000 paid up members), the Government (one third of budget via DOC goes towards statutory requirements of the Act), and the rest of the budget comes from grants on a year to year basis from the Lottery Board. The Lottery Board also gives lump sum grants for particular projects. These are usually historic building restorations such as the restoration of Pompalier House in recent years which cost upward of \$800,000.

It is unclear why the Historic Places Trust spends such a large proportion

of its money and time on "historic" buildings, and the reason why is not the purpose of this discourse, however, this seems to be at the expense of "archaeological" sites even when the Historic Places Act (1993) states that its purpose is to "promote the identification, protection, preservation, and conservation of the historical and cultural heritage of New Zealand" and further to this, "take account of material of cultural heritage value and involve the least possible alteration and loss of it" (*Historic Places Act 1993, section 4 part 2[b][iii]*). Given the current rate of the destruction of archaeological sites it is unclear whether this is being achieved.

Archaeological teaching and research takes place at both Otago and Auckland. In the **Auckland University Anthropology Department**, archaeology takes its place alongside the other subdisciplines of anthropology, and has no less than eight archaeologists engaged in either full time lecturing or research. Archaeology papers are quite popular at stage one level with approximately 600 students taking the stage one introductory paper which gives a wide ranging approach to the discipline. Numbers of students taking archaeology papers diminishes at higher levels of study and the Anthropology Department takes 30 students per year to go on to masters degrees (this includes social anthropology, biological anthropology and linguistics). The Anthropology Department research is published in journals, books, and various other publications. Being an academic institution, much of the information is directed towards an academic audience or to people who are affiliated to a particular journal or publication (e.g. NZAA journals), hence the published information produced at university level is not generally read by the wider public audience. However, the university does have some input into producing material that receives a wider audience. A good example of this is a recent documentary regarding Polynesian prehistory which the Anthropology Department had some input ( G. Irwin: pers comm).

The university also has some input into political decisions. Archaeological data can provide crucial information that can have a bearing on Treaty of Waitangi issues, providing important data for indigenous rights and land claims. Moreover, archaeological information can provide data that gives people more informed ideas about race and gender. The university sphere to a certain extent does not provide much data that is digested by the general public and hence most people do not read articles about the current goings on in New Zealand archaeology. This is to be expected from an institution which is primarily oriented towards research, and whose funding is already limited by the current government stance towards education.

**The Department of Conservation** is another institution that has a responsibility to conserve and maintain archaeological sites and culturally significant areas. It is responsible for the conservation of archaeological sites primarily on DOC estates. The official view of DOC is that it does not employ archaeologists but rather employs 'Historic Resource Managers'. The total number of staff involved in 'historic resources' throughout the whole country is

23.8 (18 of these are archaeologists) or alternatively 1.8% of a total DOC staff of 1320. This is a reduction from 28 'historic resource' staff in 1989 (Aiden Challis, DOC: pers comm).

The funding for 'historic resources' reads in similar fashion. Percentages of conservancy budgets spent on 'historic resources' for the 1993/94 financial year ranged from 0.5% (Tongariro/Taupo) to 14% (Auckland). As an example, Auckland had a total conservation budget of approximately \$7.3 million with \$1,053,422 designated to 'historic resources'. Of the total DOC budget for the whole country only 2.5% is earmarked for 'historic resource' use. Considering that DOC is primarily funded from the government this gives some insight into the value the government places on archaeological resources (Aiden Challis, DOC: pers comm). As these figures clearly show, 'historic resource' management is not a high priority with DOC, as they allocate 97.5% of their funding for natural resource management. This has a direct relationship to the amount of work that is done to conserve archaeological sites; additionally this affects the amount of protection that can be offered to significant cultural areas in the face of rapid modern day development.

**The New Zealand Archaeological Association** is an independent body that is involved in archaeology throughout New Zealand. Originally more of an enthusiasts group, the NZAA is now primarily made up of professionals from the field of archaeology. As mentioned above, the Association meets yearly at a conference to discuss new developments in archaeology, but its most important feature is its Site Recording Scheme. The Site Recording Scheme, started in 1958, contains more than 47,000 items of field evidence, including maps, aerial photographs and site reports, and is maintained by DOC in Wellington. This record provides much of the information for archaeological work in New Zealand and is frequently updated by regional file keepers.

The NZAA is reliant upon membership fees and grants in order to produce occasional monographs and regular journals - *Archaeology in New Zealand* and *The New Zealand Journal of Archaeology*. Due to the limited funds, the NZAA does not sponsor any archaeological work or research, but occasionally undertakes excavations with the help of volunteer members. Unfortunately, even though the association has members from archaeology circles around the country, it has until now done little in the way of lobbying the government or the Department of Conservation in order to gain more recognition or funding for the protection of archaeological sites. As mentioned above, much time and effort goes into recording new sites and discussing new archaeological techniques and methodology.

If archaeology is to be more widely recognised and if sites and culturally significant areas are to be preserved in New Zealand, then **Education** at all levels is vital in order to achieve this. As already shown in the questionnaire results, public education regarding archaeological matters is minimal. Most secondary schools have little or no archaeology as part of their social studies

curriculum (some schools include a small part of pre-history at third form level), even though the curriculum framework clearly gives space for the implementation of archaeological data into the syllabus e.g. 'They (the students) will examine the ways in which people from different cultures, times, and places meet their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs... An emphasis will be placed on learning about New Zealand society. This will include an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, and of New Zealand's bicultural heritage and multicultural society' (Ministry of Education 1993:14).

Part of the reason why archaeology is not particularly utilised at secondary school level lies in the hands of teachers themselves. The curriculum for Social Studies at secondary school level is developed at the Curriculum Advisory which is staffed by teachers who give advice on the curriculum to be implemented. The actual writing of social studies curriculum is contracted out, but is underpinned by the guidelines in the curriculum framework. A policy advisory board of six people write the specifications through their interpretation of the curriculum framework which provides the basis for social studies programmes at secondary school level. In the end the curriculum is still only a guide to what the students should learn, and inevitably it comes down to what the teacher in the school wants to, or is able to teach (Cubit, S, Curriculum Advisory: pers comm). There is provision for the implementation of archaeological information into social studies, but this requires teachers who first of all have an interest, and secondly have the skills and resources to do so.

One such institution that has the necessary skills and resources, **The Auckland Museum**, has a programme directed at students from pre-school to third and fourth form level. The programme is a hands on classroom situation at the museum which encompasses all aspects of the museum including a considerable amount on archaeology. Sometimes as many as four classes of 35-40 students a day are able to ponder over the large number of trays of artefacts which are used in these classes. Many of the artefacts are used to show craft technology, subsistence uses and warfare. The education unit, run by teachers, effectively uses the substantial amount of resources that the museum has to good effect, and schools that are out of the area are able to borrow educational trays to be used in their own classroom situations (Johnston, W, Auckland Institute and Museum School Service: pers comm).

This programme at the museum is a good example of how archaeology can be well implemented into current social studies curriculum, although the Auckland area is an outstanding case which is fortunate to have such a valuable resource as the museum close at hand. Unfortunately, this is the only example of resources such as a museum being used to extend students' knowledge of pre-history, and is currently under threat due to the Ministry of Education wanting to cut funding levels.

Apart from the education service, the Auckland Museum is involved in archaeology in different ways. An archaeologist employed primarily as a curator

maintains and produces displays around the museum as well as responding to any archaeological enquiries the public may have. The museum is not really involved in sponsoring archaeological research, as like many other institutions it has to channel its funding towards the maintenance and production of old and new displays (Prickett. N, Auckland Institute and Museum: pers comm).

**Indigenous attitudes** towards archaeology are very important in terms of archaeological research. Because a large proportion of the archaeology done in New Zealand concerns Maori cultural heritage, a good rapport and understanding of the needs of the *Tangata Whenua* regarding consent for research, and respect for *Tapu* areas is vitally important in order to ensure future access to research Maori pre-history.

But, as Addis (1987) points out, there is no one straightforward consensus among Maori people on archaeological matters, and opinions may differ, from considering all Maori sites to be strictly *tapu*, to considering archaeology to be an important element of Treaty of Waitangi claims. Some of the negative attitudes towards archaeology may have resulted from the nature of early archaeological work in this country, which was often oblivious to the fact that the indigenous population of New Zealand was still very much alive and still ascribing significance to sites that archaeologists were studying. Further to this archaeologists frequently conducted excavations in *tapu* areas; removing artefacts and sometimes bones without the consent of the local tribe (Addis 1987 :60).

Another important dimension regarding Maori attitudes towards archaeology is the different philosophical approaches taken regarding archaeological sites. Whereas archaeologists may consider all sites to be a potential source of cultural information, Maori people may consider these sites to be highly *tapu*. Further to this there may be varying opinion amongst Maori as to the significance of a site, i.e. Maori may choose to associate or disassociate themselves with a site depending on the events that took place there, and whether or not those events had tribal significance (Addis 1987:63).

Understanding Maori attitudes towards archaeology is very important in terms of the future of archaeology in this country and the way it and other institutions produce and use archaeology in New Zealand does have a bearing on the perception people have of archaeology.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the information gathered from various institutions it seems that archaeology and cultural resources are both undervalued and henceforth grossly underfunded. The information produced is not widely disseminated and reaches a limited audience. Archaeological information could be better utilised in schools as shown by the example of the Auckland Museum. Finally, conflicting attitudes between archaeologists and indigenous people can provide widely varying

interpretations and attitudes towards archaeology which may invariably devalue the final result of research.

A summary of available data has shown how archaeology in New Zealand faces many hurdles in gaining support. If archaeology is to gain the recognition that it deserves, and to increase its profile in the community, there needs to be a greater level of awareness amongst the wider community. As McManamon (1991) points out, 'better public understanding about archaeology will lead to more preservation of sites and data, less looting and vandalism, greater support for the curation of archaeological collections and records, and a demand for yet more archaeological interpretation and participation by the public' (McManamon 1991: 121).

In the United States, the 'Society for American Archaeology' sees public education as one of its foremost tasks and has instituted programmes designed to foster awareness. A series of educational activities aimed at both formal and informal education have been set up to do this (McManamon 1991:122). Also in the United States was a publication 'Archaeology and Education' that dealt with issues regarding archaeology and education. The future funding of this publication was discussed at an international conference in Britain in October 1994 where the topic was 'Heritage, education and archaeology' (Bulmer, S :pers comm).

So what does all this mean for archaeology in New Zealand? If archaeology in New Zealand is to grow and provide more opportunities for archaeology, then it needs to actively lobby institutions and the government for more funding to protect archaeological sites, rather than the current amount of lip service that is proffered. If there was a greater awareness of how important archaeological information, archaeological sites and cultural areas were, both by the public and private sector, then archaeology could look forward to a more prosperous future. Unfortunately, the way in which institutions produce and use archaeological information, coupled with the present political and economic circumstances, leaves archaeology in a situation where the current misunderstanding of archaeology in New Zealand continues to be perpetuated. Consequently archaeology gets less funding, recognition, and is faced with the increasing destruction of archaeological sites, hence the destruction of its own data base.

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