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THE SOUTHERN HUNTERS PROJECT, 1978–1992

ATHOLL ANDERSON
RSPAS, AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Until recently I had not had an opportunity to read *Change Through Time* (an unfortunately tautologous title) edited by Louise Furey and Simon Holdaway. Now that I have read it, I would like to congratulate the editors and contributors on a splendidly thoughtful contribution to New Zealand's archaeology. However, there is a historical detail that I should like to correct. Simon Holdaway's paper on theory asserts repeatedly that my Southern Hunters Project had its origins in Helen Leach's research on South Island ethnoarchaeology. It did not. It was, in fact, modelled theoretically upon my MA (1973) interests in optimal foraging theory in the context of an economic prehistory which I learnt initially from Charles Higham, and methodologically upon my PhD (1977) research on 'northern hunters', viz., the regional economic prehistory and ethnography of northern Sweden in regard to which, as in southern New Zealand, I hypothesized the consequences of early anthropogenic faunal depletion. I am surprised that this was unknown to Holdaway and his informants, but in the circumstances the following summary of the Southern Hunters Project, written initially in 2003 as a requested contribution to the NZAA 50th anniversary proceedings, might be useful.

The Southern Hunters Project

About 1964, as a geography student at Canterbury University, I went to see Roger Duff to ask him what he thought about something I had been reading in one of Roy Chapman Andrews' racy accounts of palaeontological expeditions to Mongolia in the 1920s. It was a reference to stone tools found in the Gobi Desert that were thought to bear some resemblance to artefacts in the Pacific Islands. Dr Duff proceeded to demonstrate, with engaging enthusiasm and various archaeological props, what was, in effect, Skinner's hypothesis of north Pacific origins for some elements of Polynesian material culture, especially in the South Island. This experience sparked my interest in New Zealand's archaeology, taken up initially in my Geography MA (1966). In

1969 at Lake Pukaki, with Michael Trotter and Beverley McCulloch, I undertook my first approved excavation of a moa-hunting site, at Bolton's Gully. So, even had I not been a South Islander by sentiment and descent, it was almost inevitable that I would take up the traditional southern research interests when I was offered a position in Anthropology at Otago University in 1978.

My perspectives on them were arranged as *The Southern Hunters Project*. This differed from other archaeological projects of recent times in New Zealand in several ways. It had substantial ethnohistorical interests that extended beyond the usual quarrying of ethnographic data. The archaeological approach was also different. Rather than a short series of intensive field-seasons followed by extended laboratory analysis and eventual publication of a monograph, the common Oceanic method for expeditionary research in places where previous archaeology had been scarce (exemplified notably in New Zealand by *The Palliser Bay Project*), *Southern Hunters* took a site-by-site approach over a relatively long period. Distributing fieldwork, analysis and publication over 15 years seemed better suited to a project that was geographically extensive but which focussed on a relatively narrow range of issues, because it allowed the opportunity to continually refine objectives. It also suited working in a region of longstanding research activity.

Southern Hunters was only the latest in a line of investigations of South Island moa-hunting sites which went back through the work of Allingham, Gathercole, Knight, Simmons, Lockerbie, Teviotdale and Skinner, to Haast, Hutton, Booth, Murison and Mantell, the last of whom had opened the batting in 1852 at Awamoia, near Oamaru. The research tradition remained active at the end of the 1970s, notably at Canterbury Museum under Michael Trotter. In Otago, Jill Hamel was running a project on the Catlins sites, Helen Leach was investigating the southern blade tradition, Ian Smith the prehistory of sealing, and Barry Fankhauser was about to begin research on *Cordyline* exploitation. Late Holocene vegetation history and climate were coming under renewed investigation by Matt McGlone.

Those projects covered some of the topics and districts which might otherwise have been incorporated in *Southern Hunters* and left me free to pursue a cluster of related topics centred upon palaeoeconomics below the horticultural line, as the project title emphasised. This was, however, not merely through the elimination of alternatives. With a background in geographical perspectives on spatial analysis, systems theory and biogeography, I had taken immediately to the new economic and systemic approaches in prehistory which were introduced to New Zealand by Charles Higham. Those interests continued in the Palliser Bay Project, under Foss and Helen Leach, to which I brought some propositions about subsistence strategies that had

been developed in evolutionary ecology, and in other directions at Cambridge, where my research applied a competition model to the palaeoeconomics of northern Sweden.

Foremost amongst the Southern Hunters topics, and first explored, was moa-hunting. Earlier work had focussed, in general, upon the material culture of moa-hunters, notably in Roger Duff's *The Moa-hunter Period of Maori Culture*. In contrast, *Southern Hunters* emphasized the nature, scale and implications of moa-hunting with research on the ecological distribution and abundance of moa taxa in the landscape, the settlement patterns of moa-hunting behaviour, moa-hunting relative to other economic activities, and the mechanisms, timing and consequences of moa decline and extinction. There were excavations in numerous moa-hunting sites: Waitaki Mouth, Waianakarua, Hawksburn, Waikaia, Dart Bridge, Otokia, Warrington, Coal Creek, Minzionburn, Nenthorn, Shag River and Papatowai, most of them in collaboration with colleagues, mainly Ian Smith, Brian Allingham, and Neville Ritchie, and with senior students such as Brian Kooyman, Rick McGovern-Wilson, Chris Jacomb, Michael Till, Karl Gillies and Tom Higham. This period of research is largely summarised in *Prodigious Birds: Moas and Moa-hunting in Prehistoric New Zealand* (Cambridge, 1989). Its main conclusions were that moa-hunting was a relatively brief, focussed and spectacularly profligate activity that fuelled extensive biotic change, rapid population growth and the development of a mobile settlement pattern centred upon transitory villages.

A second theme of the project was the nature, organization and integration of other activities during the moa-hunting era and their general florescence following it. This included research on fishing and shellfishing at Long Beach, Purakanui, Mapoutahi, Ross's Rocks, Aramoana and elsewhere; on forest fowling at Lee Island, Lake Te Anau (*Beech Forest Hunters*, NZAA Monograph, 1991), and on muttonbirding in southern New Zealand generally. Beyond subsistence economics, there was research in some of the regionally-distinctive artefact types, including wooden bowls, and most especially rock art with the inception of the *South Island Maori Rock Art Project* in 1990, which I directed until leaving Otago in 1993.

These interests overlapped congenially with investigation of the historical record of southern Maori, the third main theme of *The Southern Hunters Project*. Within the extensive records of Boulton, Shortland, Mantell, Chapman and Beattie, amongst others, lies a wealth of information about southern Maori. It illuminates, in particular, the social organisation, economics and population distribution of late prehistoric Maori, and to some extent of earlier people—indeed much of the basic organisational structure of southern Maori seems to have persisted largely unaltered from the earli-

est times—and it provides one of the better records of the social transition into the European era. These matters were taken up variously in: *Te Puoho's Last Raid* (Otago Heritage Books, 1986), *Race Against Time* (Hocken Library, 1991), *Traditional Lifeways of the Southern Maori* (Otago University Press, 1994) and *The Welcome of Strangers* (Otago University Press, 1998).

The Southern Hunters Project was productive in various ways, not least in publications, about 140 overall. More importantly, it re-drew attention to some of the basic issues of New Zealand's prehistory and ethnohistory, such as the variety, distribution and abundance of moa, the timing and nature of initial colonisation, anthropogenesis in biotic change, the mechanisms of megafaunal extinction, the origins of socio-economic mobility, the development of traditional land tenure and the course and consequences of Maori-Pakeha intermarriage. It also prompted research in the osteometry of moas by Brian Kooyman, and of Maori dogs by Geoffrey Clark, in small bird exploitation by Rick McGovern-Wilson, in optimal foraging behaviour by Lisa Nagaoka, in seasonality and other chronometric issues by Tom Higham, in Pleasant River by Ian Smith, and on the southern islands by Gerard O'Regan and me.

Still, I regret that *Southern Hunters* never concluded in the way in which I had envisaged it. This was by going beyond its recognized relevance to the megafaunal extinctions debate to take up explicitly some of the other issues in world archaeology to which it was also pertinent at the time, such as the characterisation of 'affluent foragers' which dealt perforce almost exclusively with northern hemisphere cases, or the adaptational implications of instantaneous devolution from a horticultural to a foraging society and then back again to agriculture at the advent of pigs and potatoes. Those were opportunities missed, only in part by my moving to Australia, to demonstrate that New Zealand's archaeology and ethnohistory could illuminate issues of substantial international significance. They remain for the next major project on southern hunters which, in the wider sense, is an archaeological research tradition now more than 150 years old.