



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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WAIRARAPA DISTRICT

by K. R. Cairns

In view of the various developments taking place with regard to the past history of Wairarapa, and the system being used to obtain an overall view of the district, a short note on the progress made, the methods followed, and the area covered, may be of interest to members in other parts of the country. The overall view is of major value, in fact, is an essential pre-requisite to the understanding of the district.

The importance of the geographical location of this district should be emphasised, being near the intersection of the North and South Islands would influence all travelling parties on the east coast. As a centre for dispersal, a continual flow through or past the district could be expected, indeed traditional references for voyages to the South Island from the Wairarapa district are numerous. The historical background is significant, in as much as the association with various canoes, which essentially were the main means of transport and communication, will be associated with the coastal and river sites.

In the Wairarapa district we find 50 or more hapus are descended from Aotea, Takitimu, Kurahaupo, etc., etc., some of these hapu had their origin outside of Wairarapa district and migrated into this district, as a body, this is precisely where traditional evidence is of most value as the link in Whakapapa is the sole answer. Archaeology cannot link these internal migrations, but can only supplement them. The archaeologist has to equip himself with a thorough (historical) grounding to enable him to apply his discipline to the ultimate benefit of the history of the district.

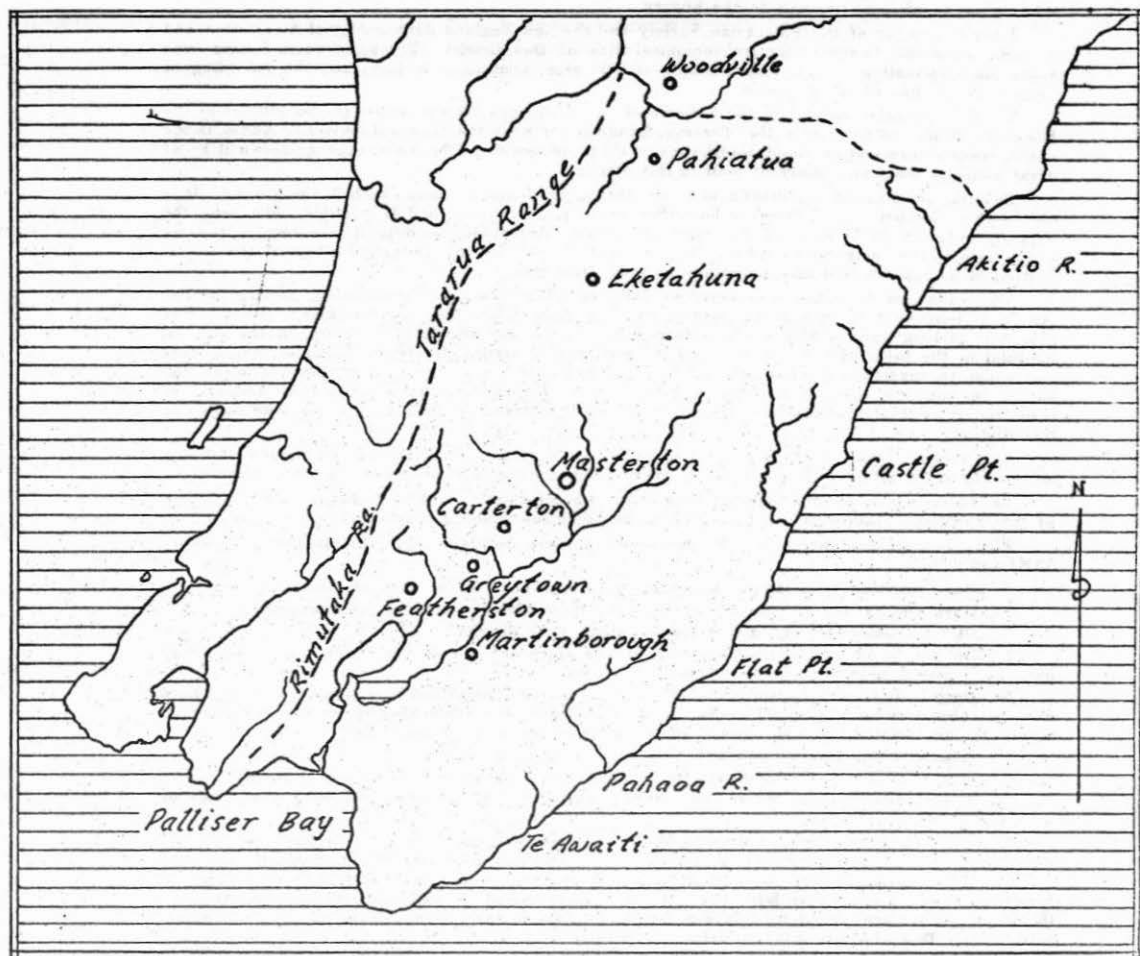
A good classical education in traditional knowledge, forms a sound base. It would be difficult to embark upon the study of any area in New Zealand, (bearing in mind the close interdependence of traditions and archaeology), and pay no attention to the considerable evidence which is available from the many specialists in traditions. The study of tribal history, presents, in spite of general unity, some local variations, it is therefore a special field of research which cannot be neglected by the archaeologist.

The area under investigation is a large one, and numerous people are assisting in many ways, the writer intends at some future date to publish a history of this area. The evidence is being gathered from the following sources: Mythological, Traditional, Geological, Ethnological, and Archaeological.

A grant of £70 from the Maori Purposes Fund Board is being used to examine and translate articles printed and written in Maori language relating to the Wairarapa district.

A grant of £75 from the Trust Lands Trust, a local body, for a complete survey of the farmers of the Wairarapa district, requesting information on archaeological deposits on their property, (the survey now under way), covers the area delineated in Fig. 1.

A survey of the Wairarapa farming community is now under way. This will enable a more accurate picture of Maori sites to be formed, and establish the potentialities of various areas in the district. Some sites will prove valuable indicators to points on known Maori tracks. This experiment may be of interest to other members.



The survey, in the form of individually addressed letters, seeks information on a number of simple points readily understood by the average person. Sites ploughed 50 years ago, or more, can be recorded and eventually investigated. Property owners are advised of the extent of the survey area, as some farmers seem to have a natural reticence on matters pertaining to their own property, if they consider that only their immediate vicinity is being investigated. Every farmer within the dotted line Fig. 1 will receive a letter. This survey is, to the writer's knowledge, the first complete coverage of any large area in New Zealand, this will, if followed by good field work have a profound influence on future work. When adequate data is available an attempt to subdivide the district into various hapu and subtribe boundaries, will be made. The response of the farming community should prove interesting.

The letter hereunder is being forwarded to all farmers in the Wairarapa district. The technicalities in the letter are mentioned to discourage farmers from idle fossicking. The questions are couched in non-technical terms, yet are designated to extract as much information as possible. The significant feature of this type of survey may inspire others to adopt the method.

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you for information to be used in a scientific survey of the Wairarapa district relating archaeological deposits to the history.

I am a member of the Polynesian Society and the New Zealand Archaeological Association, and as such, feel a duty to record the archaeological sites of this district. For some years I have been gathering information on the Maori people of this area, traditional history, and the recording of former living sites of these people.

I will be circularising all of the farmers of the Wairarapa district within the boundaries of the Rimutaka Range to the south, the Tararua Range to the west, the Manawatu River to Akitio, to the north, seeking information about Maori sites on their properties. The knowledge gained will be of great value to the wider study of man in this district.

Cultural remains of prehistoric man are frequently found at some depth in the ground. It is obviously of importance to discover how they came to be buried, and if possible, how long the deposits covering them required for their formation. Archaeological deposits are documents from which information may be obtained. The natural as well as the cultural history of the site is written in its deposits and may sometimes be read from them.

Maori sites are frequently uncovered by farmers when ploughing, bulldozing, cutting drains, etc., it is important to record the position of these sites before they are forgotten. If a site was ploughed as long ago as fifty years, a farmer may retain the site in his memory, or the cultural material in the form of stone tools may have survived, if accurately recorded at this stage, that site could be investigated even fifty or one hundred years from now. It is possible using the precise instruments, tools, technology, and techniques of modern archaeology to trace culture patterns, living habits, burial customs, and anthropological features of the Maori people who settled in this district.

Any minor detail about Maoris of this district is vitally important as one small detail may be the key to an infinitely larger issue — every single cooking site, or stone tool is important.

This survey is impossible without your help; the information will be included in "The History of the Wairarapa Maoris" which I have been compiling for some six years or more.

There is more evidence below the ground than there is above and this is precisely where YOU can help?

1. Have previous owners, or employees, ever mentioned Maori sites on your property?
2. Have you or any of your family seen any trace of Maori sites on your property?
3. Do you know of any Maori stories about your district?
4. Do you know the original meaning of any place names near your property — these may have been passed onto your family by local Maoris?
5. Do you have any knowledge of Maori sites on your neighbour's property. You may have new neighbours who would not know of previous finds, any information on any site in Wairarapa would be appreciated, do not assume that I already know about your site?
6. Have you any pits, of unknown origin, on your property?
7. Any shell heaps (midden material), burnt stone (oven stones), charcoal deposits, etc.?
8. Stone walls, burials, Maori forts or pa's, caves, etc., stone outcrops which show traces of quarrying, etc.?
9. Have any stone tools, or wooden Maori artifacts been found near or on your property? I would like to take measurements of these articles and this can be done at your home, if necessary.
10. If Maori sites have already disappeared from your property please advise, as any information is better noted than left. If a site has been ploughed we still request the information as the disturbed surface would be only 6-8 inches. Surface features being destroyed does not necessarily mean that the site has no value, as precise excavations by skilled archaeologists are sometimes necessary to a depth of 10-12 feet in New Zealand.
11. Do you know of any Maori sites which may be destroyed in the future, either by ploughing, roading, building, or vandalism, if so perhaps they could be investigated before destruction takes its toll and they are lost forever?
12. Could you refer this matter to your farm employees, and their families, perhaps they have noticed something and failed to mention the matter to you, perhaps they have been employed on the farm for many years, and can recall points of value?

This survey will be the basis for a study which may take 50 years or more to complete, so the importance of your information cannot be of anything but inestimable value.

Any site considered TAPU should still be recorded, and this information would be treated as strictly confidential, and recorded on the New Zealand Archaeological Association special form reserved for Secret sites.

I would be grateful if you could supply answers to any of the above questions, or alternatively, just put a mark or write "yes" alongside those questions which apply.

This work is of utmost importance if we are to reconstruct the history of this district, and therefore your assistance would be greatly appreciated, could you assist by advising me of any sites — by telephoning, writing, completing the answers to the above questions, or by calling on me.

To my thanks I add the thanks of future generations, for without your help this knowledge will be lost.

Yours faithfully,

K. R. CAIRNS.