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WE'RE STILL WORKING ON IT, ROGER

LOUISE FUREY AND BRENDA SEWELL

In 2004 Roger published an article in *Digging into History*, the anniversary issue of *Archaeology in New Zealand* celebrating 50 years of the New Zealand Archaeological Association. The paper was entitled “Where’s the map, Roger?” and included reference to the making of the contour map of Sarah’s Gully and the layout of excavation squares. From Jack Golson’s field notes and photographs, Roger drew a map showing the excavations and many years later he had the opportunity of ensuring the original multi-sheet contour map was joined together and redrawn.

Roger didn’t excavate any of the sites at Opito, but in the absence of formal records about what was uncovered in all the archaeological activity in the area, he wrote the much quoted 1963 paper “Summary of Sites at Opito, Sarah’s Gully and Great Mercury Island”. For a number of the sites, this paper is still the only published reference to what was found. Many of the site records of the excavated sites were written by him, giving a locale which would otherwise be unknown, particularly for those sites which were enthusiastically excavated by artefact collectors around the periphery of the controlled excavations. Roger had published, too, on the association between horticulture and early settlement at the Sarah’s Gully settlement site and Skippers Ridge at Opito (Green 1972a), relegating Roger Duff’s theories of later migrants bringing kumara to the realm of historical mythology. In the same year he published another paper drawing attention to further evidence from the sites to support his argument for early horticulture, namely the radiocarbon dates and interpretation of pit phases on Sarah’s Gully Pa excavated by Laurie and Helen Birks, and the chronological correlation to the Sarah’s Gully settlement site storage pits through the loose sand layer which blanketed both sites. It was typical of Roger that a project was never laid to rest, ever. New developments and new ideas meant a subject was always worth re-examination.

In addition to being able to review and reanalyse data, Roger had an excellent memory and a willingness to share his enthusiasm and experience in archaeology with other people and pass it down to archaeologists several

professional generations behind him. This is how our visit to Sarah's Gully in November 2005 came about.

Every archaeologist in New Zealand knows of the Opito area and there are few who haven't visited. Some of us have had the opportunity to work there. Sarah's Gully in particular is part of the mythology of New Zealand archaeology. When excavations were underway at the Sarah's Gully settlement site between 1956 and 1959, Ron Scarlett surface collected bird bones from Cross Creek, unimaginatively so named because it was across the creek from the settlement site. After Golson's excavations, Sarah's Gully reverted to a quiet place for many years although periodically visited by archaeologists curious to see what the place looked like. In 1982 the end of the Cross Creek dune was deflating, exposing cultural material, shell midden and animal bones. Roger initially took some persuading that the site would be a good project for a masters thesis (Sewell 1984), but eventually agreed then enthusiastically imparted advice on how to proceed. At Easter the same year a group of us were camped on the Sewell's section at Opito, bravely enduring very cold wind, rain and hail to map, surface collect and test pit the site. Apart from the archaeology that proved to be far more exciting than any of us had imagined, the most memorable things were the bonfire on the beach at Sarah's Gully where we would frequently huddle to warm up and mentally prepare ourselves for more wet-sieving in the creek; and the good food provided by the specially-designated male hunters and gatherers. This role was taken very seriously and each evening a seafood banquet was presented which included crayfish, smoked fish, fish and mussels. A bonfire was lit and dinner was eaten sitting on the grass around the fire. A lasting memory is of Roger reclining, rather like a Roman emperor, and breaking open and sucking out the flesh of every crayfish leg that he could get his hands on.

Roger at first found the Cross Creek site unimpressive but as excavation progressed his enthusiasm was boundless – 'I always knew something extraordinary would be found' he exclaimed as three cultural layers separated by sterile white sand were uncovered.

There was a second field season in the May holidays, where, despite the reputation of the weather in the earlier season, archaeologists were lining up to come along. Roger was there again to provide a guiding hand. He was always able to cut through the detail to see the big picture and give the ever ready advice and encouragement.

In recent years, Roger's thoughts turned again to the Coromandel, and to Sarah's Gully in particular, so sure that Māori settlement of New Zealand occurred prior to the Kaharoa eruption, and that this would be a place to look. This interest was piqued by the tight dating of the Kaharoa tephra (Hogg et

al. 2003) and the on-going debate about when the kiore rat arrived in New Zealand.

Roger in his enthusiasm to investigate new avenues for tightening the dating of the multi-layered Cross Creek site and its relationship to the date of Polynesian settlement threw out his fishing line via the regularly used phone with the phrase “Have you thought about...?”, waited until we took the bait then reeled us in, enlisting Fiona Petchey also to do the dating interpretation. What started as a simple project of dating the lowest occupation layer of Cross Creek (Furey et al. 2008) expanded in other directions, including research into the validity of dates from the Sarah’s Gully settlement site, detection of erroneous dating results from that site and redating duplicate samples. The second part of the Sarah’s Gully research hasn’t been finished yet, despite Roger’s keenness and gentle reminders (via the ever useful phone). Roger’s definition of finished was ‘published’.



Figure 1. Jack Golson and Roger Green, Opito 2006.

Jack Golson attended the November 2006 Auckland conference of the World Archaeological Congress, and was invited to Opito afterwards. We made a party of it, with Valerie and Roger also invited (Figure 1). Although it was only two days, it was memorable for having two of our senior, founding

archaeologists at Opito revisiting sites. Sitting in a trailer, towed along the beach by a tractor, Roger and Jack pointed out N40/3, Les's Rua, the location of the Dentalium Workshop, Fisher's Midden, and so on. Their joint memories were amazing as they bounced events and ideas off each other. It was a lesson in physical and theoretical archaeology to those listening. Then it was a bumpy 4-wheel drive trip to Sarah's Gully to view the settlement site that has been so severely altered since the 1950s by erosion and farming practises. Again, Sarah's Midden, and the different parts of the settlement site were relocated. It was a pleasure to share their memories of the area. Although physically weakened and unable to climb hills, Roger's mind had no such impediments. That day he was wearing his familiar fieldwork hat, surely the same one he wore at the Cross Creek excavations over 25 years ago.

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