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**STRATEGIES FOR  
NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGY**

by

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This paper describes a strategic plan for archaeology in the Department of Conservation and commends its approach for use by the Department and the Historic Places Trust. It describes a method of identifying priorities nationally and within each of the Department's 14 conservancies, while accepting they must be subject to periodic revision and change. It also accepts the limitations of assessing the significance of an archaeological site without excavation.

The plan establishes a cycle that starts with an outline documentation (synthesis) of a conservancy's cultural heritage, describing its prehistory, history, and the changing ways of life experienced by its peoples. The synthesis identifies obvious gaps in the explanation of that heritage and any substantially conflicting evidence. It is used to identify work programmes of research, management and public interpretation that respond to particular needs and opportunities in a conservancy. In combination, the syntheses and work programmes lead to a better understanding of the relative significance of archaeological sites in terms of their historical, ethnic, scientific, and educational and other public values. They also provide a sound basis for comparison between conservancies and for identifying national priorities and opportunities for interconservancy research and development.

As research leads to a better understanding of the cultural heritage, the cycle is repeated, allowing progressive revision and of the documentation and planning. In this way, archaeological programmes can be seen to reflect and be driven by the character and state of understanding of the conservancy's human past and the needs of society, today and in the future.

**1. BACKGROUND**

Archaeological planning strategies throughout the world falter on the feasibility of assessing an archaeological site's significance without scientific investigation. The present generation of thought from discussion by Moratto and Kelly, who with Schiffer and others in 1978 considered site significance in terms of historical, scientific, ethnic and public significance. But even analysed in this way, it has normally been concluded that too many unknowns remain for acceptable resolution.

"Ranking cultural properties, as a response to developers' needs, is a planning device basically incompatible with archaeological ideals. We are asked to generate simple models (ranked lists) from complex realities (diverse cultural resources) for the ultimate purpose of destroying some resources and preserving others."

(Moratto and Kelly 1978).

Expression of difficulty does not, however, remove the problem. If no choices are made, then important sites are lost by default. As there can never be sufficient skilled personnel, time and finance for the tasks involved, it is essential to undertake careful planning. The purpose of this paper is to consider how such planning can be undertaken and implemented.

In New Zealand, The Department of Conservation, New Zealand Historic Places Trust and the New Zealand Archaeological Association work together to service the needs of public archaeology. Public archaeology is considered here as that which is either funded by Government through the Department of Conservation, or by the Historic Places Trust, or is undertaken as a result of decisions made by the Trust under the delegated authority of the Minister of Conservation. It is therefore publically funded archaeology.

## **2. THE PROBLEM:**

The primary objective of public archaeology is to preserve New Zealand's cultural heritage. Its goals are thereby to:

- (a) study and record appropriate sites before they are destroyed;
- (b) regulate the unnecessary destruction of archaeological sites;
- (c) preserve representative and particular examples of those sites;
- (d) investigate and explain the significance of archaeological sites and heritage that they represent.

The priorities for archaeological research and advice needed by the Department and the Trust rarely coincide, and so call for different deployment of resources. The Department's needs primarily relate to the management, understanding and interpretation of archaeological sites on the public estate vested in its care. Research and advice are required for all parts of that estate: to identify, study and explain its historic resources. They are also required to identify management needs, which may from time to time be incompatible with others, such as the protection of endangered plants or animals. This requirement demands a capacity to respond to significant needs in any part of the country. By contrast, the Trust's needs are those of an independent statutory body with a responsibility for regulating unnecessary site damage ensuring the recovery of significant information from sites that can no longer be preserved. Its responsibilities are also spread throughout the country but cover all classes of land, regardless of tenure. Its priorities for resource allocation generally reflect an assessment of where most sites are most at risk. These sites are predominantly in the warmer and more fertile northern half of the North Island.

While the Trust's identification of the 'most vulnerable areas' is a valid methodology, it addresses only part of the problem. It identifies areas in greatest need of evaluation but not necessarily identify priorities within those areas. It indicates areas where the "last chances" will be presented for site survey or investigation but does not in itself indicate the area's archaeological character, potential or other needs. A complementary analysis is therefore required to identify and accord priorities to those broader needs. It is at this point that the controversial requirement for assessment of site significance without excavation reappears.

### 3. THE QUESTION OF SIGNIFICANCE:

For the purpose of this exercise, the significance of an archaeological site is expressed in terms of its potential contribution to the preservation, understanding and appreciation of New Zealand's cultural heritage. The most frequently used categories for assessment are those described by Morano and Kelly (1978). Adapting their considerations to New Zealand's requirements:

An archaeological site, or other historic place, can have

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**, from its association with a specific individual, event or aspect of history;

**SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE**, from its potential to establish reliable facts and generalisations about the past;

**MAORI OR OTHER ETHNIC SIGNIFICANCE**, from its religious, mythological, spiritual, or other symbolic significance for a discrete group of people; and

**EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER PUBLIC SIGNIFICANCE**, from its potential for enhancing the public's understanding and appreciation of the past, or from its landscape, recreational and other intrinsic values.

While normally applied to the assessment of individual sites, all of these descriptions imply an understanding of the events, processes or questions that sites may represent, illustrate or answer. Viewed in that way, they allow the question of significance to be considered from a broader perspective.

### 4. TOWARDS A SOLUTION:

In the discussion that follows, it is assumed to be impracticable and misleading to attempt a "one time" assessment of a site's known or potential significance as these values change over time and as knowledge increases. Within that limitation, however, the definitions of types of significance indicate what is needed to plan a strategy for archaeological resource management.

The consideration of site significance has to be set in the context of an understanding of New Zealand's cultural heritage, arising from 1000 years of settlement and development by the Maori and latterly by many other, principally European, ethnic groups. The approach used here acknowledges that the cultural heritage is a community's knowledge of its human histories, their associated lifestyles and processes and the resource of sites associated with them. Although the Department and the Trust are charged to manage the cultural resource of historic places, the process of cultural resource management can be effective only when based on an understanding of the heritage of which it is a part.

Although it is normal to publish inventories of the resource as currently recorded, the synthesis of other knowledge is commonly deferred until a certain amount of research has been undertaken. The reason for such prudence is obvious. It could be misleading and may be difficult to modify in the public mind. Its publication, without further research, is justified here as an essential first step in a cyclical process of strategic planning. Provided that its limitations as an imperfect and evolving state of knowledge are made clear, it provides a planning base and launching point for each new phase of discovery.

The first step must therefore be to summarise what is known of the cultural heritage within prescribed geographical areas. For the purpose of this exercise, it is logical to adopt the Department's 14 conservancies as discrete management areas. Although they have little relevance to earlier land use or current iwi relationships, they provide a practical structure by which the needs of the Department and its servicing of the Historic Places Trust are applied. These units can later be subdivided or amalgamated to consider either a more specific evaluation or a national overview. The resulting planning cycle can be as follows:

### **THE PLANNING CYCLE**

#### 1) PREPARATION:

DESCRIBE the conservancy's cultural heritage as currently understood, as a synthesis

#### 2) PLANNING:

##### IDENTIFY NEEDS

- obvious gaps in the cultural synthesis and site survey coverage
- questions that arise from the cultural synthesis as presented
- conflicting evidence from existing research
- sites that merit long term preservation
- conflicting land management, including conservation, values
- consideration of sites that are inappropriate for investigation or public presentation because of their particular ethnic significance.

##### DEFINE RESEARCH PLAN

- research appropriate to the identified needs
- locations or types of site that could answer the research questions

##### ADVISE ON MANAGEMENT NEEDS

- of sites generally, and of sites with recognised 'significance'

##### IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES

- sites that could be presented to the public to illustrate, or be recognised as monuments to, aspects of the cultural heritage

#### 3) IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

IMPLEMENT as a 5 year strategy through research and management business plans,

EVALUATE progress annually, or earlier if warranted, and continue or repeat the cycle.

## **5. DESCRIBING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The synthesis of a conservancy's cultural heritage will serve to model our state of understanding of the past. It therefore needs to be both chronological, showing a sequence of events developments over time, and thematic, documenting the processes and activities that contributed to them. The synthesis has to be based on existing knowledge, must indicate obvious gaps in knowledge and conflicting evidence and may indicate further sources of information. It can be applied to any period or cultural division of the heritage.

**SCHEMA FOR AN INITIAL SYNTHESIS:**

- 1: Environmental opportunities and constraints:  
(geology, soils, climate, vegetation etc).
- 2: Principal events and periods of occupation:  
(a) field evidence, (b) archival evidence. \*
- 3: Principal economies, land uses and other themes  
(a) field evidence, (b) archival evidence. \*
- 4: Gaps in evidence and contradictions in interpretation.
- 5: Other factors that shaped the conservancy's human past.
- 6: Bibliography, sources studied and locations of archives.
- 7: Relevant museum collections representative of the material culture
- 8: Institutions and individuals with expertise relevant to the research and management needs.

Note: \* including oral traditions where appropriate

**6. EMERGENT INDICATORS FOR A WORK PROGRAMME:**

The documented synthesis provides a means of identifying needs and opportunities for research and management programmes. It does so by identifying such crucial questions as:

General:

1: Do any aspects of the synthesis suggest a special character of the conservancy's human past or significant differences across the area described?

Research:

1: What are the obvious gaps in the cultural synthesis? Is it likely that they could be filled? If so, how can they be addressed in the research plan?

2: Does the available evidence indicate significant contradictions in interpretation? If so, is their resolution feasible and necessary at this stage?

3: Are there topics that require research

- (a) in anticipation of future management requirements, or
- (b) if particular opportunities arise (eg widespread storm damage)?

4: Does the synthesis indicate particular concentrations of activity? If so, are they recognised in the surviving physical (archaeological) record? Is there an indication of particular areas that require archaeological survey?

Management:

1: What sites are associated with the principal events or processes described in the cultural synthesis? What are their management requirements? Is there a case for the long term preservation of individual, or groups, of sites as a

- (a) monument to a past event or activity;
- (b) site that is sacred to a part of the community;
- (c) means for public interpretation of that part of the cultural synthesis;
- (d) representative examples of key, typical or unusual types of site; or
- (e) samples of representative types of site.

2: What management steps should be taken to resolve land use conflicts?

## **7. DEFINING RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES**

The questions that emerge from a synthesis of the cultural heritage might be answered from scientific investigation of archaeological sites, the geomorphological and environmental context in which they are found, or from archival research, including that of traditional histories. A complete knowledge relies on a fully integrated study but, in most cases, archaeologists have to select the techniques which could most economically provide the required information.

Studies, for instance, of earliest Polynesian settlement may rely totally on excavation and other scientific deductions, while those of more recent times may be better answered from archival research. The relative effectiveness would depend on the availability of the required information and of access to the financial or other resources needed for their study. The Historic Places Act has, since 1976, given a weighting to archaeological excavation, by its provisions for cost recovery. This has been responsible for considerable advances in our understanding of New Zealand human past but not have led to the most efficient research strategies.

## **8. REGULATION OF SITE DESTRUCTION:**

The first priorities for public archaeology are to study and evaluate archaeological sites for preservation, or for research to improve the public understanding, of New Zealand's cultural heritage. But New Zealand's future also depends on an ability to use land wisely to support its population. Archaeological sites must be destroyed in this process and the Historic Places Act provides a mechanism by which this can be done while regulating avoidable damage. It does so by providing any archaeological site with the same initial protection, making its damage unlawful without the prior written authority of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. It also allows the Trust, at the time a site is under threat, to confirm the protection or authorise the damage subject to such conditions it sees fit. One of those conditions can be that the Trust recovers from the applicant the cost of a scientific investigation of the site, to recover information before it too is destroyed. This mechanism allows our cultural heritage to be preserved, either as undamaged archaeological sites or as knowledge gained from their destruction.

The Act's nonselective provisions have contributed greatly to public archaeology but archaeologists are unable to ensure their application to every known site. Neither could every site likely to contain useful information be investigated, even if all costs were recovered. Archaeologists have, nevertheless, been reluctant to recommend any mechanism by which groups of "less important" sites could be automatically released from initial protection. Their reasons have principally related to the problems of assessing a site's scientific significance without destructive investigation. A summary of these problems follows in section 9.

Despite these valid reasons for deferring an assessment until a site is under immediate threat, there is a management need to make assessments in advance of conflict. This is a requirement which is met informally by archaeologists. Their approach needs now to be formalised in order to acknowledge the reasoned basis of their action. This is particularly important when archaeological recommendations are in conflict with those of other agencies.

Many sites can be protected when a land owner appreciates their significance and accommodate some restrictions to possible land uses. This protection can be made binding on future land owners if the current owner is willing to enter into a heritage covenant with the Historic Places Trust. The covenant is made known to future owners by noting the Certificate of Title. Unless a land owner already values the cultural significance of an archaeological site, its long term protection requires careful justification. This normally involves an assessment of its overall significance when compared with others, either in the same locality or in a larger geographical area.



## 9. GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING SITE SIGNIFICANCE:

Given the existence of an interim synthesis of a conservancy's cultural heritage, assessment of site significance can begin. This aspect poses the greatest problem because of the large number of sites involved but, with co-ordinated input at local and national levels, and acceptance that the assessment is open-ended, the task is feasible. It is also desirable because credibility of significance assessment is greatest when made in advance of conflict.

The non-commercial values of an archaeological site can be considered under the headings described below. A site or group of sites may have any combination of these values, none of which can be considered more important than another for evaluating resources management requirements.

### 9.1 Historical significance:-

Historical significance, as described here, can relate to a specific individual, event or aspect of any period. It is not confined to sites of New Zealand's later, "historical", period. Applying a useful elaboration from British Columbia (Germann 1987), sites with historical significance are generally associated with events that made an important contribution to the Country's, or region's development. Historically important sites may also reflect or commemorate the area's historical socioeconomic character.

#### Summary

An assessment of a site's historical significance should state how the site relates to a specific individual, event or aspect of New Zealand's cultural heritage.

### 9.2 Scientific significance:-

The potential of a site to establish reliable facts and generalisations about the past is the most difficult component of its assessment because the scientific evidence is mostly contained below ground and cannot normally be assessed without some destructive investigation. It also follows that the solution of some questions will give rise to completely new ones. Within those constraints, and following the Historic Places Act's (Section 2) of an archaeological site, a scientific assessment should be based on the degree to which a site might add to our knowledge of "the exploration, occupation, settlement or development of New Zealand". Because the object of this assessment is to guide the design of research and management programmes, it must allow an appraisal of relative significance of different sites and so would normally indicate whether the site(s) offer a rare opportunity, or one of many, to answer the research questions. The assessment must be perspicacious. Any site might arguably allow some reliable facts and generalisations about the past to be established. In this context, the scientific significance must also relate to the assessed significance of the questions that are to be addressed. In planning terms, there is a need to identify those sites, by location, type, topographical or other environmental association, which are likely to contain the needed to answer stated research questions. Such an approach would allow significance to be assessed in terms of a research plan, which would be reviewed regularly in order to incorporate changes in knowledge and different research questions.

This methodology ignores the fact that unexpected information will be contained in many sites. The "unknown" factor has previously been a barrier to sites being formally disregarded without at least monitoring their destruction. But, given the pressures of limited resources for investigation, this omission can be addressed by occasional, and possibly intuitive, sampling.

Finally, it would follow that a site that had contributed greatly to our understanding of the past, through extensive excavation, may attained a significance.

Summary:

An assessment of scientific significance should consider the site's potential to establish reliable facts and generalisations about New Zealand' cultural heritage.

### **9.3 Maori or other ethnic significance:-**

The religious, mythological, spiritual or other symbolic significance of a site or place for a discrete group of people may not always be obvious or appreciated by the wider community. This is particularly applicable to unmarked Maori burial sites. The greatest difficulty of identifying ethnic significance may be in locating the people whose values are to be considered. While many will be local residents, others may live some distance away. Assessment of ethnic significance is a particularly sensitive matter when attempted by people external to the affected group. Conversely, the extent to which ethnic significance can be taken into account when society has conflicting requirements for a resource is weakened when external or measurable assessment cannot be made. Identification of ethnic significance therefore has to be made by the people to whom a site has such significance and evaluated by others, who are appropriately qualified to do so. This is the process used in the Historic places Act for the declaration of Maori traditional sites. In the present consideration, however, ethnic significance includes, but is not confined to, Maori values.

Summary

An assessment of Maori or other ethnic significance should be made by the people, or their descendants, to whom the site is related. No specific parameters are given for this evaluation but its acceptance will greatest when made in advance of conflict.

### **9.4 Educational and other public significance:-**

The potential of a site to enhance the public's understanding and appreciation of the past can normally be realised only when the site is accessible. In most cases, the site would need to be on public land or land with previously negotiated rights of public access. It would normally require recognisably preserved surface or exposed features but its application would be inappropriate to many ethnic sites. In this sense, the expression of educational significance emphasises the need to develop educational programmes, which present and explain specific sites, activities or events which may have a particular significance to aspects of New Zealand's cultural heritage. Public significance also includes the site's landscape, recreational and other intrinsic values.

Summary:

An assessment of public significance of a site should be made in terms of its suitability for illustrating a component of the locality's cultural heritage.

### 9.5 Sample significance:-

Each of the categories described above relates to the assessed significance of archaeological sites. In order to manage the resource of archaeological sites for future generations, it is also necessary to reserve samples of today's archaeological landscape. Those sites may be on public or private land. The sites contained would not necessarily be assessed as significant under the foregoing criteria. Their significance would be measured either in terms of being representative of aspects of today's archaeological landscape or of being an unusual site type in that area.

#### Summary

A group of sites have significance if it is representative of today's archaeological landscape or of unusual form within the conservancy.

## 10. ASSESSMENT LIMITATIONS

Assessments of archaeological site significance must not be perceived as immutable. Although the limitations of incomplete evidence and changing external values should be well known to people who make the assessments, they can easily be overlooked in inflexible planning systems. It is therefore essential to ensure that a clear statement of the limitations accompanies an assessment.

Care must be taken in the manner in which assessments are expressed. While multiple assessments that conclude great significance within each indicate the need for more careful management planning, they do not necessarily imply a greater justification for long term preservation of sites that rank highly within a single category. Attempts have been made to overcome this problem by applying numerical weightings to defined components of an assessment (Groube and Bowden 1982, 5-8). Their approach is rejected here as being untenable because of the subjective difference between the values expressed. There is, for example, no basis on which the Maori or other ethnic values can always be given a greater or lesser weighting than the scientific value.

Assessments should be used critically for determining needs of cultural resource management. For instance, if the scientific assessment described above were applied in this form to the Trust's regulatory task, it is likely to indicate that few individual sites are uniquely qualified to answer the stated research questions. If no other factors were taken into account, this assessment would lead the Trust to impose the condition of a scientific investigation only to the last perceived opportunity to recover the required information. This would clearly place too much weight on the scientific assessment which, if incorrect, would deny any future opportunity to address the research question.

It must therefore be concluded that significance evaluation must be undertaken and applied with great caution, having due regard to its limitations and the necessity to allow future revision. If used wisely, it is an invaluable tool for archaeological resource management but if misapplied, its consequent actions could be inappropriate, and impossible to reverse.

## 11. REFERENCES

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**APPENDIX I**

The Department of Conservation's archaeological responsibilities have been defined in its Corporate Plan and stem from the requirements of the Conservation Act 1987 and the Historic Places Act 1980. Its current (21 December 1988) corporate objective relating to historic resources, which includes archaeological operations, is reproduced below:

**CORPORATE 1.4:**

To identify and conserve historic resources and to provide, where culturally and environmentally appropriate, for their appreciation and enjoyment by the public.

**SCOPE:**

- Managing historic resources on the land administered by the department, including research, restoration, maintenance, interpretation and operation.
- Co-operating with and providing services to the New Zealand Historic Places Trust to assist it in carrying out shared responsibilities for historic resources.
- Survey, identification and assessment of historic resources and advocacy of their protection together with public education.
- Processing and implementing protective measures, in co-operation with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, including protection notices, heritage covenants registration in district schemes.
- Marking historic sites and publishing material on them.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of legislation and other means of protecting historic resources, and reviewing these as required.