



New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga  
Archaeological Guidelines Series

# Writing Archaeological Assessments



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*Cover photos left to right:*  
Shell midden, Ōmaha Coast, Northland. *Photo, NZHPT*  
Pleasant River mouth. *Photo, Jo Wylie 2005*

# 1. Introduction

These guidelines have been prepared by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) to assist the archaeological community with the preparation of archaeological assessments. They are not prescriptive, but are intended to convey the NZHPT's view on appropriate standards. The guidelines have been developed within the current framework of best practice for archaeological and heritage management in New Zealand, as espoused in international ICOMOS charters, national legislation, government heritage policy and codes of ethics for archaeological practice in New Zealand. They also draw upon existing working practices as determined by a review of recent assessments provided with applications for archaeological authorities under the *Historic Places Act 1993* (HPA).

Archaeological assessments are usually commissioned in response to projects or developments where archaeological sites may be affected. They are best commissioned early during the planning stages, to ensure that sites can be avoided and protected or adverse effects minimised and that the relevant legislation is complied with. These assessments may then form part of the information requirements for applications for archaeological authorities required under the HPA, or contribute to AEEs (Assessment of Environmental Effects) required for resource consent applications made under the *Resource Management Act 1991* (RMA).

The guidelines follow a suggested layout, which may be adapted at the author's discretion. The guidelines also include a checklist of information and matters to be addressed that should be provided in all reports of archaeological assessments submitted as part of authority applications. The checklists are located at the end of each section.

It is recognised that assessments produced following these guidelines will vary in length and complexity depending on the scale of the project or development under consideration. For small projects some sections, for example, Project Outline and Environmental Setting, may be included within the introductory section. All matters in the checklist however should be addressed, if only by a statement explaining why the matter is not relevant in the particular case.

The guidelines focus on the requirements of the HPA, but where relevant the guidance may be applicable to assessments required under the RMA. The HPA and RMA are effects-based and require consideration of methods to avoid or mitigate adverse effects. It is recognised that planning expertise may be required for the assessment of effects in relation to district plan rules or regional resource statements.

## 2. Guideline

### 2.1. Executive Summary

An executive summary, containing key points and findings, may provide a useful summary for long and complex assessments.

### 2.2. Introduction

The introduction should set out the background and purposes for the assessment, commission details and the location of the area of land under consideration, including the legal description. A map showing the boundaries of the assessment should support the description of the location.

The introduction may include a summary of the physical environment and the project or proposed development, or this may appear elsewhere in the body of the report, depending on the scale of the project. The date and author of any survey or development plans referred to in the assessment should be noted.

#### Checklist

- Commission details (contracting organisation or individual and authors of report).
- Project outline / proposed development, or separate section if large scale.
- Purpose of assessment
- Description of location
- Map of location, showing boundaries of project /archaeological assessment.

### 2.3. Statutory Requirements

This section should outline any legislation relevant to the assessment. An example of appropriate wording is provided below.

There are two main pieces of legislation in New Zealand that control work affecting archaeological sites. These are the Historic Places Act 1993 (HPA) and the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

The NZ Historic Places Trust administers the HPA. The HPA contains a consent (authority) process for any work affecting archaeological sites, where an archaeological site is defined as:

Any place in New Zealand that

- a. Either –
  - i) was associated with human activity that occurred before 1900; or
  - ii) is the site of the wreck of any vessel where that wreck occurred before 1900; and

- b. Is or may be able through investigation by archaeological methods to provide evidence relating to the history of New Zealand (HPA section 2).

Any person who intends carrying out work that may damage, modify or destroy an archaeological site, or to investigate a site using invasive archaeological techniques, must first obtain an authority from the Historic Places Trust. The process applies to sites on land of all tenure including public, private and designated land. The HPA contains penalties for unauthorised site damage or destruction.

The archaeological authority process applies to all sites that fit the HPA definition, regardless of whether:

- ▶ The site is recorded in the NZ Archaeological Association Site Recording Scheme or registered by the Trust,
- ▶ The site only becomes known about as a result of ground disturbance, and/ or
- ▶ The activity is permitted under a district or regional plan, or a resource or building consent has been granted.

The NZ Historic Places Trust also maintains a Register of Historic Places, Historic Areas, Wahi Tapu and Wahi Tapu Areas. The Register can include archaeological sites. The purpose of the Register is to inform members of the public about such places and to assist with their protection under the Resource Management Act (1991).

If the assessment is being provided for RMA purposes the following summary may be useful.

The RMA requires City, District and Regional Councils to manage the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way that provides for the wellbeing of today's communities while safeguarding the options of future generations. The protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development is identified as a matter of national importance (section 6f).

Historic heritage is defined as those natural and physical resources that contribute to an understanding and appreciation of New Zealand's history and cultures, derived from archaeological, architectural, cultural, historic, scientific, or technological qualities.

Historic heritage includes:

- ▶ historic sites, structures, places, and areas
- ▶ archaeological sites;
- ▶ sites of significance to Maori, including wahi tapu;
- ▶ surroundings associated with the natural and physical resources (RMA section 2).

These categories are not mutually exclusive and some archaeological sites may include above ground structures or may also be places that are of significance to Maori.

Where resource consent is required for any activity the assessment of effects is required to address cultural and historic heritage matters (RMA 4th Schedule and the district plan assessment criteria [if appropriate]).

The assessment should state the heritage places under consideration, for example, is it restricted to archaeological sites as defined in the HPA, or a wider range of historic heritage features. What is the timeframe for places under consideration, for example, pre-World War II?

#### Checklist

- Summary of relevant legislation
- Definition of places considered in assessment

## 2.4. Methodology

This section should document the methods and techniques used to obtain information during the course of the assessment. Possible documentary sources of information include: land titles, early maps and surveyors records, local histories, theses, other published and archival resources, aerial photography, local authority heritage lists, NZHPT Register and the New Zealand Archaeological Site Recording Scheme.

The discussion of field techniques should specify the methods used. For example, were transects walked at specified intervals, along ridgelines or randomly? Remember that invasive techniques such as test pitting in the area of known archaeological features will require an authority from NZHPT.

#### Checklist

- Information sources consulted
- Field techniques

## 2.5. Physical Environment or Setting

This section should consider the broad physical context of the area/ place being assessed and may include relevant elements such as geology, topography, climate and vegetation in rural settings, and streetscape and curtilage in urban settings. The elements should be considered in terms of their relationship to the human history of the area and to the purposes of the assessment.

Substantive changes in the environment during the time of human settlement that have affected occupation and land use patterns should be addressed. The present day environment may also have implications for the field techniques used. For example, dense vegetation cover will make ground-based field survey difficult and less effective.

#### Checklist

- Environmental factors relevant to assessment, e.g. geology, topography, climate, vegetation.
- Urban setting.
- Current land use if implications for assessment.

## 2.6. Historical Background

This section should provide a general overview of the human history of the area. The scope will depend on the nature of the area and the project. This section should place the assessment within the context of what is known about the history of the area, therefore establishing a framework for the kinds of archaeological sites that may be present in the project/ development area.

Even if no archaeological research has taken place in the area, a broad history should still be presented. In urban environments, the history section may draw on land titles and survey plans and archival information from sources such as council rating records. In rural settings, the history may include accounts of Maori settlement and use from sources such as tribal histories and Maori Land Court records, followed by a discussion of European settlement and major industries such as pastoralism, forestry or mining.

The majority of historical research for urban sites should be carried out as part of the assessment, not during the exercise of any authority or at the completion of on-site work. Historical information can greatly assist with the decision making process and the setting of appropriate conditions.

### Checklist

- Overview of the history of area

## 2.7. Previous Archaeological Work

This section should consider what previous archaeological work has been carried out in the project/ development area. The history of previous archaeological survey should be outlined and implications for the current project considered. For example, what were the purposes of past surveys, were the sites recorded on an ad hoc basis or was the area subject to systematic survey? Would the survey techniques have resulted in the identification of most of the sites, or if the survey was based on aerial photography, just large earthwork sites?

This section should include a list or table of any sites recorded in the NZAA Site Recording Scheme (NZAA SRS) in the area and a map showing the recorded sites in relation to the project/ development area. Copies of Site Record Forms should be included in an appendix.

Any archaeological investigations of sites in the project area should be identified and the results summarised.

Any previous archaeological authorities granted in the project/ development area and the effects of any work undertaken on sites as a result should be identified. This information is available from the appropriate NZHPT Regional Archaeologist. The results of any archaeological work carried out as a condition of the authority should also be noted, particularly if they are relevant to the current assessment, for example, radiocarbon dates and analysis of material recovered from sites.

### Checklist

- Site recording history.
- List of recorded sites (to include NZAA Site Record Number, site type, date recorded, date of last visit) with copies of Site Record Forms in appendix.
- Map of recorded sites in relation to project area.
- Results of any archaeological investigations.
- Any archaeological authorities granted and outcomes?

## 2.8. Other techniques

This section describes the outcomes of the information-gathering phase of the assessment. Any constraints on fieldwork or other methods of inquiry should be noted. The use of photographs and drawings is encouraged, as is the use of tables for conveying large amounts of information. All archaeological sites in the project area, whether already recorded or newly discovered, should be shown on a map.

This section should state if any previously recorded sites were relocated, and the possible reasons if they were not. Updated records for these sites should be submitted to the NZAA SRS and included in an appendix.

This section should describe any newly discovered sites, in accordance with the NZAA Site Recording Handbook. Newly discovered sites should be recorded in the NZAA SRS and site record forms included in an appendix. Site numbers for newly recorded sites should be included in the assessment.

This section should also note if any sites are on the NZ Historic Places Trust Register of Historic Places, Areas, Wahi Tapu and Wahi Tapu Areas, and if relevant, in any RMA planning documents.

The extent of the visible features of any sites encountered should be stated, along with their condition at time of field survey, including evidence of any historical damage if visible or other notable features. The results of any other fieldwork, such as test pitting, should also be described.

This section should conclude with a consideration of any issues arising from the fieldwork and research carried out for the assessment. Do the results provide a comprehensive coverage of the area? Is there potential for unrecorded sites to be present? Explanations for the absence of sites should be considered.

This section should also consider any sites in the project area in a wider context, both from a geographical and research perspective. How do the sites fit in with the current archaeological knowledge of the area? What is their potential to contribute new or important information to areas of current research interest<sup>1</sup> ?

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of current research themes, see Furey, L. and Holdaway, S. 2004. *Change through Time, 50 Years of New Zealand Archaeology*. New Zealand Archaeological Association Monograph 26.

### Checklist

- State any constraints on fieldwork.
- Whether the recorded sites were relocated, and if so updates to NZAA SRS.
- Whether any new sites were located, and if so NZAA SRS site record numbers and forms.
- Whether there are any registered and/ or scheduled places in the project area.
- Outcomes of research, potential for unrecorded sites?
- Consideration of sites in wider geographical context.
- Consideration of sites in terms of current research themes or questions.
- Map of any archaeological sites in the project area.

## 2.9. Archaeological and Other Values

This section should consider the archaeological values, and any other relevant values, of the archaeological sites or groups of sites identified during the research phase. Other relevant values could include historical, technological, architectural and cultural. Statements as to the importance or otherwise of sites should be justified with reference to evidence collected during the research phase of the assessment and current archaeological and historic heritage knowledge.

Archaeological values relate to the potential of a place to provide evidence of the history of New Zealand<sup>2</sup>. This potential is framed within the existing body of archaeological knowledge, and current research questions and hypotheses about New Zealand's past. An understanding of the overall archaeological resource is therefore required.

The following matters should be taken into account when assessing archaeological value<sup>3</sup>: The values section may summarise information from elsewhere in the assessment, e.g. condition, and consider the following range of factors as a whole, to determine the archaeological values of the site(s).

- ▶ The **condition** of the site(s).
- ▶ Is the site(s) **unusual, rare or unique**, or notable in any other way in comparison to other sites of its kind?
- ▶ Does the site(s) possess **contextual value**? Context or group value arises when the site is part of a group of sites which taken together as a whole, contribute to the wider values of the group or archaeological, historic or cultural landscape. There are potentially two aspects to the assessment of contextual values; firstly the relationship between features within a site, and secondly, the wider context of the surroundings

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2 Gumbley, W. 1995. 'Guidelines for the provision of archaeological information and assessment for authority applications under section 11 or 12 of the Historic Places Act 1993'. *Archaeology in New Zealand* 38(2):100-105. p. 104; Walton, T. 2002. Assessing archaeological value. *Archaeology in New Zealand* 45(3):220-236. p. 221.

3 NZHPT Archaeological Authority Application Form, p. 13.

or setting of the site. For example, a cluster of Maori occupation sites around a river mouth, or a goldmining complex.

- ▶ **Information potential.** What current research questions or areas of interest could be addressed with information from the site(s)? Archaeological evaluations should take into account current national and international research interests, not just those of the author.
- ▶ **Amenity value** (e.g. educational, visual, landscape). Does the site(s) have potential for public interpretation and education?
- ▶ Does the site(s) have any special **cultural associations** for any particular communities or groups, e.g. Maori, European, Chinese.

The HPA requires an assessment of Maori values as part of authority applications. Generally, the NZHPT prefers that such an assessment be provided by tangata whenua. In some instances documentary or verbal information regarding Maori values may be available to the author and incorporated into an archaeological assessment, however, this is not a requirement. If known, any groups associated with the site(s) may be noted in the Cultural Associations section (see matters to be considered above).

#### Checklist

- Statement of archaeological and any other relevant values, with supporting evidence.

## 2.10. Assessment of Effects

The assessment of effects section should identify the direct effects of the project/development proposal, as described in the Introduction or Project Outline sections of the assessment, on the archaeological and other relevant values of the site(s). The Ministry for the Environment has prepared a basic guide for preparing assessments of environmental effects that includes discussion on the nature of environmental effects<sup>4</sup>.

Effects on the values of the sites should be explicitly considered, not just effects on the physical features of the site. It is important to be aware that the recovery of information is a method of mitigating the loss of archaeological information, not for the loss of the site itself. Site destruction, although preceded by archaeological investigation, will result in the destruction of any contextual, educational or landscape values the site may have possessed. Conversely, planting trees on a site may not greatly affect surface features, but has the potential to disturb stratigraphy, hence affecting the future condition and information potential of the site. It may also reduce visibility, hence affecting interpretative and landscape values.

Any effects on other relevant values identified in the assessment should also be considered.

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<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/rma/aee-guide-augo6/aee-guide-augo6.pdf>

Matters to be considered include:

- ▶ How much of the site(s) will be affected, and to what degree, and what effects this will have on the values of the site(s).
- ▶ Whether the proposed work may increase the risk of damage to the site(s) in future. For example, change from farming to residential use may make sites vulnerable to increased pedestrian and vehicular activity.
- ▶ Whether a re-design may avoid adverse effects on the site(s). It is recognised that detailed evaluation of alternatives may be beyond the scope of the archaeological assessment, however, some consideration of alternatives should be considered where possible.
- ▶ Possible methods to protect sites, and avoid, minimise or mitigate adverse effects should be discussed. These will form the basis of any recommendations in the final section.

Appropriate methods may include:

- ▶ Specifying sites to be avoided by earthworks.
- ▶ Specifying methods of protecting sites from accidental damage during works, such as no vehicle crossings, taping, signage, fencing.
- ▶ Specifying methods of protection for the long term, e.g. site burial.
- ▶ Mitigation for information loss, including recording, analysis and reporting by an archaeologist prior to or during earthworks.
- ▶ Archaeological investigation of significant archaeological sites, if likely to be damaged or destroyed. In this case, a research strategy may be appended to the assessment, to establish the research aims of the investigation for the NZHPT and to set out the costs for the client.
- ▶ Briefing of contractors by an archaeologist before works commence.
- ▶ Accidental discovery protocol for contractors to follow, if sites are discovered unexpectedly.
- ▶ Legal protection for significant sites, such as covenants or consent notices.
- ▶ Public display of historic artefacts in new buildings on site.

#### Checklist

- Identification of actual and potential effects on values of site.
- Consideration of alternatives.
- Methods to protect sites, or avoid, minimise or mitigate adverse effects.

## 2.11. Conclusion & Recommendations

This section should summarise the key findings of the assessment: what sites are present and the likelihood of unrecorded sites, their values and the effects of the proposal on those values. Recommendations regarding compliance with relevant legislation and to avoid, minimise or mitigate adverse effects should be provided as a list at the end of this section.

Where sites have been positively identified, or are known to exist, the requirements of the HPA should be stated. Alternatively, the client may be advised to seek clarification from the NZHPT where there is some ambiguity of results. The recommendation should specify under which section of the HPA the application should be made: section 11, 12 or 18. NZHPT archaeologists can provide guidance about which section would be most appropriate in particular cases.

Where an authority is required, the recommendations are likely to form the basis of discussions between the client and NZHPT about site protection and what is appropriate given the values of any affected site(s). The final decision maker is the NZHPT, however the views of the consultant archaeologist are an important source of information. The assessment should provide the opinion of the author, as an independent expert, as to the most appropriate course of action. “Sitting on the fence” is unhelpful for both the client and NZHPT. Recommendations should be well considered and specific to the proposal, not simply repeated from other authority conditions.

#### Checklist

- Summary of key findings.
- Is an authority required? If so, under what section of the HPA?
- Recommended methods to avoid, minimise or mitigate adverse effects on archaeological site(s).

## 2.12. References

See Section 3 Style guides.

## 2.13. Appendices

Copies of all SRFs

## 3. Style Guides and Standards

### 3.1. References

The Harvard system is the recommended style for references. References should be cited in the text and listed at the end of the assessment in alphabetical order.

#### Checklist

- Are all references cited in the text present in the Bibliography?
- Are all references complete and in the same style?

### 3.2. Map and Plan Standards

#### Checklist

- Title
- Date
- Author
- North
- Scale
- Legend
- Legibility if reproduced

Many assessments are provided as copies of the original, often in black and white. Symbology on maps should be able to be reproduced in black and white with no loss of information. For example, it can be difficult to differentiate between red, blue and green lines or dots in a black and white photocopy. The use of different styles of dotted lines and symbols can overcome this problem.

## 4. Further Reading

Gumbley, W. 1995. 'Guidelines for the provision of archaeological information and assessment for authority applications under section 11 or 12 of the Historic Places Act 1993'. *Archaeology in New Zealand* 38(2): 100-105.

Ministry for the Environment. 1999. *A guide to preparing a basic assessment of environmental effects*. <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/rma/basic-ae-prep-guide-mar99.pdf>

NZ Historic Places Trust. 2004. *Heritage Management Guidelines for Resource Management Practitioners*. [http://www.historic.org.nz/publications/HM\\_guidelines.html](http://www.historic.org.nz/publications/HM_guidelines.html)

Walton, T. 1999. *Assessing the archaeological values of historic places: procedures, methods and field techniques*. Science and Research Internal Report No. 167, Department of Conservation.

Walton, T. 2002. 'Assessing archaeological value'. *Archaeology in New Zealand* 45(3): 220-236.