

Discovering the past

When gardening, landscaping or renovating about the house, sometimes Maori artifacts can be accidentally unearthed. Recently we were contacted by a resident of Te Puke regarding a stone adze found while tending his vegetable patch.

Tauranga Heritage Collection on average receives a call per month about such finds, or enquiries regarding objects that were found some years back and have been passed down through the generations. The main basis of these enquiries is usually about gaining information on what to do, so we thought it appropriate to explain this process.

If this happens to you, your first step would be to record as much information as possible about where you found the item, including a sketch map showing depth and specific location on your property. Take a photograph if you can. Keep this information with the artifact – it adds to the research value of the item.

The next step is to make contact with your local museum as the Protected Objects Act, means you are legally obliged to notify the Ministry for Culture and Heritage of your find. Museum staff will give the Ministry the necessary information, which is recorded and a copy forwarded to Te Papa Tongarewa (National Museum). The artifact is entered on the National register and given a unique number. The museum is then asked to write the number on the artifact.

The Ministry must consult with the finder, local museum and tangata whenua about where the artifact was found. Then the Ministry decides who should be given custody of the artifact. The actual or traditional owners of the artifact are, at any time, able to apply to the Maori Land Court for ownership. Returned artifacts may not be sold and they are given special registration numbers to help identify and protect them.

If the person who found the object is awarded custodianship then they must be registered as a collector. All artifacts that have been found after 1 April 1976 are processed using this method.



Stone adze recently found in Te Puke



Otumoetai controlled archaeological dig 2006