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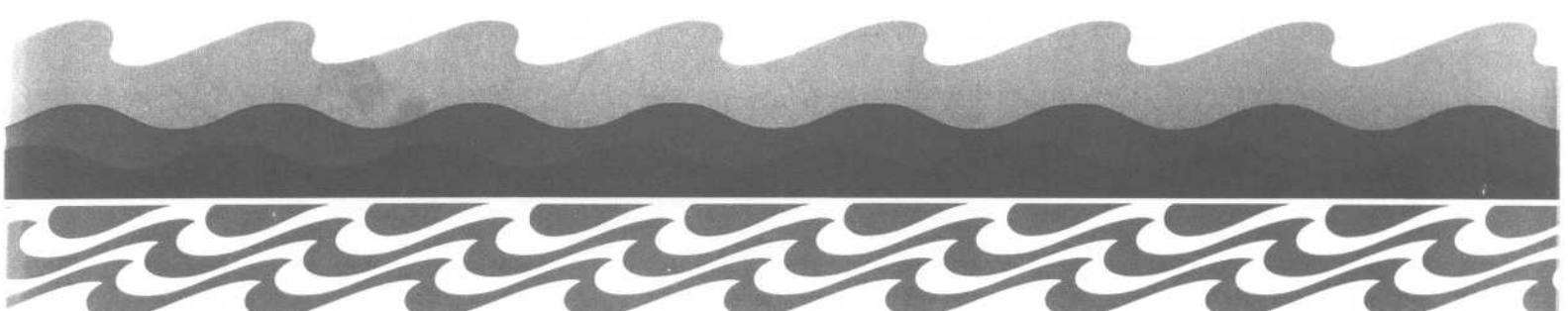
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**CIVIL WAR SITES IN THE UNITED STATES: MANAGEMENT LESSONS  
FOR NEW ZEALAND**

(Short Answers in Conservation Science)

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## **CIVIL WAR SITES IN THE UNITED STATES: MANAGEMENT LESSONS FOR NEW ZEALAND**

Edited Interview with Kevin Jones by Don Carson, Radio New Zealand, 13.8.94

*Department of Conservation Archaeologist, Kevin Jones, is back from the United States and a visit to sites of the period of the Civil War. Kevin says the reason for going was that New Zealand also has a large number of old fortification earthworks, and there are lessons to be learned from management practice in the United States.*

KEVIN: There are about 5,000 pre-European fortifications in New Zealand, and then from the period of the New Zealand Wars there are Maori and European fortifications - about 300 or 400 of them. Many of these are in parks or reserves and the question is how do we look after them so that they serve a purpose in modern society?

Historic places serve a number of purposes in society. The first is an educative one: they will help people to understand the past. Second is a commemorative one: the place might be a battle site with many dead in it and people like to go and remember what happened in the past and remember their ancestors and the people who fell there. The third one, and it's not really one that I want to push too much because I am an archaeologist, is the research function. These places are useful to do research in, to tell us something about the past.

DON: So you dig up and you find artefacts basically?

KEVIN: Not on battlefields, I'm thinking of different kinds of archaeological sites.

DON: Such as?

KEVIN: An example is the places where people settled first when they came to a country. There would be very many things about their lifestyle that we don't understand: what they ate, what kind of houses they made as they adapted to that new environment, and we don't understand that particularly well from their records. In the United States, in the Chesapeake Bay vicinity, where early English settlers came to the Americas, the written records are quite thin.

DON: What happens to a battlefield and the archaeological site immediately after, say the Civil War in the United States, 130 years ago.

KEVIN: When the battlefield is left it's a horrible place. The very earliest photographs of battlefields are from the American Civil War. Rather horrifying images come through from that very early photography. The War Department gets the battlefields often in country that has been expropriated from the original people who owned it - in this case the American southern plantation owners. It goes into the Union War Department and they try to stabilise it in some form. First of all they try and make it impossible to mount a counter-attack through the same trenches, which may

involve levelling them and rebuilding them on the defensive side for the successful force.

DON: So in the Civil War in the United States the battlefield is razed immediately after the battle. What happens then, what's the time-scale before somebody comes along and says we ought to preserve this as part of our national history?

KEVIN: They tend to get left and they would grow a light forest - "old fields", in the United States terminology. Then as the soldiers grow older their communities talk to them and they want to find out what they did in the war. When it's happening it's a matter of news; in twenty and thirty years time it's mythology and eventually people come back to the battlefield with those distinguished soldiers. So people from Illinois come to Mississippi or Georgia to find out what their grandfathers or their father did. They are very large battlefields, too: at Cold Harbour in Virginia, the battle lines cover about 15 km, which is of First World War proportions.

DON: So the old men come back to remember?

KEVIN: The old men come back to the battlefield to remember. They are followed by a train of their children who want to put up a memorial. All the public battlefields are now very heavily memorialised. At Chickamauga which is in the north-west of Georgia there are 600 monuments in a 600 ha battlefield park. These are monuments as big as the biggest monuments that you'd find in a cemetery. At the same time people are thinking about how to use the original earthwork fortifications in such a way that they become memorials in their own right. People see the actual trenches in which their father fought or their grandfathers fought. In the 1920s and 1930s the American battlefields were taken from the War Department and placed under the administration of the National Park Service. It was in the midst of the Depression and under the New Deal there was a lot of work done by architects and archaeologists and labourers to try and stabilise these battlefield parks. They create them in an image which both reflected the action that went on but also served as a memorial to those who died.

DON: So if somebody decides that it's much better, rather than just to have the area overgrown and people fossick around trying to find musket balls or something, to actually create something there, that must surely be a dilemma as to whether they actually can reconstruct that battlefield - put canons in and build stockades and so forth as it once was.

KEVIN: It is a dilemma because firstly, as soon as you do that by digging the foundations for the modern stockade, you are ruining the archaeological structures that are there. Secondly, you introduce a problem with the maintenance of the structure that you've put there. The battlefield as it was constructed was not designed to last a long time - maybe six weeks, maybe six months, maybe three years. Of course it could be refurbished and destroyed and refurbished over that small period of time but if you put in a reconstruction then you are expecting to get a return on your "capital investment", and you have to realise that that is going to cost you a lot of money at the start or maintenance in the long term. At the same time you have destroyed the original structure.

DON: But it's something that people, tourists would come to. They can see what it was like when the battle of Vicksburg took place or whatever.

KEVIN: I think that a tourist has to come with an informed imagination to a place of high national significance, especially one that is ingrained in the national consciousness. One of the impressions that I took away from the United States was that the Federal Government through the National Park Service was a major funder of reconstructions to create tourist facilities. Often this was aimed at areas with a relatively poor economic infrastructure like Mississippi or North Dakota. There, the Federal Government saw fit to vote money to reconstruct stockades and other kinds of structures on the original archaeological sites.

DON: So they had very little to do with preserving the past and much more to preserve the community?

KEVIN: Yes, by supplying a key element in the tourism infrastructure. The other major proponents of these kinds of reconstructions are the professional body of interpreters in the National Park Service. I say professional, advisedly, since they are very skilled historians and they are very skilled at bringing the past to life for a modern visitor. I visited several places where interpretation was going on. All the National Park Service people do this and they are very skilled at it.

DON: What's the matter though with recreating a famous site somewhere else, somewhere nearby, where you're not disturbing the archaeology so people can see the reconstruction, then they can go to the real place or vice versa?

KEVIN: That's what, by and large, the park historians, archaeologists and historical architects would prefer, but the opposing lobby says that this is not "genuine". They don't see it as the genuine kind of reconstruction.

DON: So you create something artificial on the right place and that becomes genuine because it's located in the right area.

KEVIN: You're raising a rather difficult kind of ethical problem when you state it in that way and I don't think there's any simple solution to it. The National Park Service has guidelines on how this should be done and currently as I understand it they will reconstruct if the reconstruction puts back a missing element into a landscape that is essential for understanding, and for which there is good data on which to base the reconstruction. That also applies to the elements of a built structure.

DON: The soldiers, too?

KEVIN: Oh no, this is just archaeological or built structures. Of course in the United States there is a very strong interest in battlefield re-enactment and military enactments and so on. The only place that I saw this was in Virginia at a Confederate fortification defending the James River. There were a group of Confederate re-enactors staying the night on this fortification and I stayed the evening with them and I had the meal with them which consisted of steak and corn and hard tack. One was a student of

archaeology at the University of North Carolina. Another was a member of the drug squad in Newport News and they all knew their ammunitions, they knew the history, they knew about Gallipoli and we had a good talk. They were quite sophisticated characters and they do a good job for the National Park Service, I think - obviously they maintain security which is quite an issue on the parks in poorer urban areas.

DON: They weren't intending to recreate the issue of seceding from the Union were they?

KEVIN: No they weren't. They weren't armed in an active sense although you see in this particular case because it was a river they had a reconstructed mine. People would ask if it worked! There are many elements of modern technology which are uniquely invented in the American Civil War and the first electronically detonated submerged mines, they were called torpedoes, were constructed in the Civil War and were used to quite good effect, destroying ironclad steamships and what-have-you.

DON: The ironclads were first used in warfare there?

KEVIN: That's correct. Yes, so the origins of the modern battleship are there but there are so many other elements of modern technology, modern munitions that were invented in the American Civil War rifled canon, breach-loading rifles, rapid-fire rifles, large mortars - all of them mass-produced for the first time.

DON: What is ghosting?

KEVIN: Ghosting is a solution which is introduced to where you don't really know the nature of the building that was on a particular place or the cost of the building would be too great. If you take the very earliest English settlements and for that matter the Native American settlements, the archaeologists can give you the plan of the foundations of the building so you know roughly the proportions that it occupied on the ground, but you have no idea of the elevation, the side view of it. This was case for a house in Philadelphia, "Benjamin Franklin's good house". The foundations were known but not the structure on top. The decision made as part of the American Bicentennial, 1776-1976, was to excavate the house. They found a privy and the underground cellars and the general outline of it, but they were not sure as to what the building looked like on top. It was decided simply to put up a steel frame which indicated the general outline of the house and the general nature of the elevations that might have been there. You had a feel for how big the house was but there was no detailing. Of course it is a lot cheaper to maintain, you just have to paint a bit of steel work. And people now move through it in great numbers treating it as a courtyard in the wider interpretative complex.

DON: Why is there all that fuss about the appropriate vegetation? Why can't you just have a well-mown lawn with nice gravel paths?

KEVIN: They cost money to maintain and they don't necessarily stabilise the surface very well. If you put cattle on grassland to maintain the grass surface, then they paw the surface and break it down so that you lose those beautiful contours of the ditches

and the trenches that we are primarily interested in seeing preserved. So grassland has its virtues and it's generally preferred but you have to find an economic way of maintaining it as a grassland because it will always go back to a shrubland.

If you leave the battlefield alone, it eventually goes to a forest and this is what happens to many of these battlefields in the United States. When you have a forest there are certain things that you may wish to do with it. You may wish to leave the forest alone and let it grow as a forest. That means that you can't see underneath it so readily. If you want to see the structures that are underneath it then you have to start clearing away some of the shrubs below the canopy of the forest. That introduces a problem then when the canopy or the trees die or the canopy gets destroyed by wind, how are you going to replace it? As soon as that light gets in you have a very large growth of shrubs and weeds on the forest floor which again introduces another big problem in maintenance. Now we have exactly those same problems in New Zealand - the American solutions to that were interesting.

DON: Which was?

KEVIN: You do it very selectively. You introduce certain plants that you think are going to make good ground cover and this will compete with particularly offensive weeds of the forest floor such as some rampant vines or creepers. However, you don't do that if it risks a satisfactory ground cover on the site. You allow for the replacement of the forest in long term so you make sure that there are always saplings in amongst your cleared forest that will come through and replace that forest eventually. I might say that that is particularly something that I saw in the east. I don't think that understanding was widespread in some other places in the United States where they clear the forest underneath and they didn't have a conception of what would happen in the long term.

DON: The New Zealand attitude though seems to be that every two or three years you send in the mowers and slash it all back down?

KEVIN: No, I think we are a little bit more sophisticated than that. When you mow earthworks you scalp them, you tend to cut off the convex surfaces. Over time quite serious damage accumulates which is not readily recognised because it is so gradual. Then people of course walk in a fairly undisciplined way unless they are guided either by signs or by particular trails through the earthworks.

Of course, we don't have that many earthworks that are developed this way. The most prominent earthworks are the volcanic cones in Auckland which are very large Maori earthworks in their own right. What we would recommend, and this is something that I think was pretty clear from the American experience, was that you have to evaluate these landscapes as to what are the important elements that you want to maintain in an exposed form, the grass terraces, the ditches and banks. You want to retain both views when you are on the place and you want to retain the views from a distance as a city landscape, or a rural landscape. So you make that evaluation, and then you say, well what's the best way of maintaining grass on those places that we want to keep open? Are there places that we can allow the forest to grow or a shrubland to grow because

we don't really need to see it? Now, we prefer not to allow forest to grow because that's entering the fine archaeological layers, those little time capsules under the ground, and the roots are destroying those underground layers so we prefer by and large that trees weren't growing from new on archaeological sites. But if you have an existing forest then it would be foolish to suggest that the forest should be cut down on top of the site.

DON: In New Zealand, how likely is that such earthworks from the equivalent period, the land wars of the 1860s, will also assume great historical significance and that there will be debate and argument over their preservation or their exploitation?

KEVIN: Yes, there are significant earthworks in New Zealand but it seems to me that we try to expunge them - particularly in the Waikato where very large earthworks were created over many, many miles by Maori. That is probably also a result of dairying; you can't really satisfactorily put dairy cows on a landscape that has been dominated by very long trenches that cows can fall into. So pretty generally those earthworks that are on private land were filled in and by the 1940s you can just see the faintest trace of them in the very earliest aerial photographs and very little else. What tends to survive are the isolated forts that were built by the Armed Constabulary or some isolated fortifications built by Maori in the eastern Bay of Plenty and the Urewera and Taranaki and so on.

DON: Some of these were quite sophisticated were they not? Because they had developed a technology that was going to counter the canons and the muskets.

KEVIN: That's quite correct. Maori were constructing fortifications against musket fire from the 1820s, and by 1845 and the first battles with Europeans in the Bay of Islands, the fortifications that they constructed were quite sophisticated as to how they resisted the impact of solid cannon ball and rocket fire and canister or exploding shells overhead.

DON: And that technology in my understanding was also applied overseas?

KEVIN: I think this is probably better described as convergent evolution. The same technological forces are at work. The American Civil War was going on at the same time as in New Zealand and the effectiveness of rifle trenches as a form of defence became obvious. At Cold Harbour, or Gettysburg, 6,000 men die in a day so the efficacy of rapid firing of rifle at long range becomes very clear in the American Civil War and those are probably the lessons that are brought through to the First World War. Not successfully learnt, I guess, because what happened then is that both sides built rifle trenches and neither succeeds in mounting armed attack by human beings ...

DON: Stalemate.

KEVIN: Yes, stalemate. Until you have armoured tanks and air power ...

DON: Away we go again.



KEVIN: Away we go again, but that's not something I want to dwell on. I wouldn't like to be seen as the historian wanting to preserve these things because they relish the images of that time. I'm not - we have more serious intent when we try to preserve the earthworks of the past.

DON: That being?

KEVIN: It's educative, commemorative, and it's also a subject of research, but fortifications can be a focus of grievance, too, when the Crown owns earthworks that are Maori earthworks, or even European earthworks. Depending on which side you feel you support in the modern era, you can take different messages out of them I don't think that we've really learnt an easy accommodation of that issue in our management of earthworks in New Zealand.

*Further readings on this topic*

Kevin L. Jones. 1994. *Archaeological Site Stabilisation and Reconstruction in the United States. Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship Report 1993.* (Science and Research Series 145).

Kevin L. Jones and Philip G. Simpson. *Archaeological Site Stabilisation and Vegetation Management. Case Studies I and II.* (Science and Research Series, forthcoming).