



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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Pumice was abundant throughout the deposit and particular concentrations were noted on top of the cultural series at the base of the section and on top of the lowest layer in this series. At this date, however, Dr Wellman's interest in pumice was not known and beyond noting its occurrence nothing further was done.

By the following season, however, (1958-59), the group was aware of Dr Wellman's work and interested in the implications of his "black" pumice hypothesis (discussed by Roger Green in this Newsletter). In view of the common occurrence of pumice in the Opito deposits, it was decided to cut a small section adjacent to the 1957-58 site with the specific purpose of collecting pumice at all levels of the section. The test section thus excavated was taken down into the underlying beach deposits and was subsequently extended in scope. Pumice was found at all levels, but material that could be described as "black", or even "grey", as opposed to "white" did not appear below a certain level in the sequence, stratigraphically the upper half of the sand layers dividing the two main cultural horizons at the base of the deposits. From this point up, however, "black" pumice occurred freely with white pumice.

A small excavation was simultaneously conducted at a sand-hill site further west along Opito Bay, where moa bone was again found in considerable quantity.

A NEW SITE AT OPITO by R.H. Parker

During the last few days of the Auckland University Archaeological Society's dig in the Mercury Bay area last summer, a small party was detached to test a new site in the western part of Opito Bay. The site is a ridge rising abruptly from the small flood plain of the Otama Stream and lying immediately to the south of the fore dunes.

It was among these dunes that, during the season of 1957-58, the Society carried out a three-day "rescue" dig on a Moa-hunter working floor.

The testing of the new site was undertaken partly from the consideration that any occupation there might be related to that of the "fish hook" floor and partly in response to the insistence of the owner of the property, Mr R.A. Chapman, who had noted as characteristic of the ridge its unusually vigorous growth of grass, which he attributed to deep disturbance of the soil, and its striking greenness, which he attributed to the presence of large quantities of decayed shell in the markedly acid soil.

The time available was restricted to the equivalent of three full working days and in this time, with the labour available, it was not possible to do more than carry two 12 ft. squares down to the "natural". A base line was laid out across the ridge near its eastern extremity in a region where the surface showed irregularities which it was thought might indicate underlying disturbance. In fact, these irregularities were found to have little relation to the underlying structures. The two squares were laid off to the east of the base line at its northern and southern ends. The soil conditions predicted by Mr Chapman were completely fulfilled.

A provisional stratigraphy for the site was established on the basis of evidence from these squares. At the moment it is possible to distinguish two distinct and separate phases of occupation, with some indication that an intermediate phase may be present at least on part of the site. The evidence available suggests that the occupation of at least one of the phases extends over several acres.

In the lowest level two large rectangular pits of a hitherto unrecorded type were partially excavated and half sections across the fill were cut and recorded at right angles to the long axis of the pits. The pits were 3-4 feet in depth and about six feet in width. The total length in each case is probably not less than 10-12 feet. In both pits there is a shallow oval depression near the northern wall which, in each case, shows traces of firing. In the northern pit a short "buttress" extends into the pit from the western wall. There is no corresponding "buttress" against the opposite wall, and since the top of the "buttress" is several inches lower than the edge of the pit and its upper surface seems to be compacted as if by treading, it seems possible that it is some form of stepped entrance rather than a true buttress. The greater part is, however, still buried in the baulk and its true nature cannot be determined at present.

In the level immediately above this, the course of a shallow drain was traced for several feet. This drain, in part of its course, cuts across the fill of the northern pit and its stratigraphical position as later than at least some phases of the first occupation seems secure. This is confirmed by a disturbance, cut from the same layer, which is either the corner of a later pit or a very large post hole cut into the fill of the large northern pit.

Waste flakes and/or fragments of worked stone were recovered from all occupations layers and a rectangular stone knife of good quality was found in the lower part of the fill of the northern pit. Traces of wood in a very bad state of preservation were on

the floor of the northern pit.

The potential of the site seems to lie chiefly in :-

- (1) the existence of structures of an unusual type in a stratigraphical context;
- (2) the fact that the site is yielding artefacts in close, though not in clear primary, association with the structures;
- (3) the reasonable probability that the occupation of the site was prolonged and that the lowest level of occupation will prove to be early in date. This is suggested by two factors: the pits are filled to their tops with spoil and over the whole site a sand blanket with well-developed soil profile similar to that at Sarah's Gully obliterates all subsoil disturbance;
- (4) the possibility that under local soil conditions wooden objects may be at least partially preserved.

The Society plans to continue its testing of the site during the May Vacation.

A SURVEY OF SITES ALONG THE COROMANDEL COAST by Roger Green

Introduction:

While the problems of North Island archaeology are many, they all start with a basic necessity: that is, the location of sites capable of yielding the necessary information. The most successful solution to this problem is the survey of a region which previous archaeological research indicates should contain sites with the needed information. My intention is to show that intensive work in a restricted region selected for its potential can yield valuable results. As such, this is a plea for other members of the association to undertake similar projects, making their results available through the newly instituted site recording program.

The sites discussed below are numbered, described and will be filed in accordance with the association's recording scheme. Thus, the details of each site and its location are available to all members for the purposes of legitimate research. Location here, however, is given only with respect to major harbours, beaches, or nearby settlements. One site, N 44/2, has subsequently been investigated more fully, and a detailed report on that will be forthcoming.

The Survey:

Archaeological research pointed to the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula as one region likely to contain sites in the