



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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Pacific research by Auckland members has continued with Dr Green, Miss J. Davidson, Miss E. Shaw, and Mr and Mrs L. Birks excavating in Samoa, Tonga Nuku Oro, and Fiji. While this work was being conducted, Mr Shawcross and Mr Terrell were engaged in less idyllic surroundings - the swamp pa of the Hauraki Plains.

In closing the Auckland group would like to thank Miss M. Nicholls and Mr L. Groube who in the 1964-65 season invited members to their excavations at Ruarangi and Moturua.

A NOTE ON THE HOUHORA EXCAVATIONS

Wilfred Shawcross and Noel Roe

The following is a brief note on the excavations, carried out during the 1965/66 season, of an important, early, coastal camp site, located at the foot of Mount Camel, in the district of Houhora, Northland. (National Site recording scheme number N6/4).

The site is located on a terrace formed of gravel and in part former sand dune, whose surface is several metres above the present sea level, and it was while the gravel was being dug for road metal that its archaeological character was discovered.

Mr Harold Blucher, a keen local amateur archaeologist identified the prehistoric nature and age of the site, which was then inspected by members of the Mangonui Archaeological Society, including Messrs D. Vincent and W. Mabbitt, and it was Mr Mabbitt who informed the Department of Anthropology at Auckland about the urgent need for a rescue excavation, before the gravel-digging might entirely destroy the site.

Messrs John Terrell and Karel Peters of the Anthropology Department carried out a reconnaissance and test excavation in August 1965, during which they made a plane table survey and excavated two squares, obtaining evidence for some depth (by New Zealand standards) of cultural deposits and excavating sample collections of faunal material, including Moa, dolphins, seal and fish and artefacts including adzes, flakes and drills and evidence for the manufacturing on the spot of large numbers of one-piece fish hooks, made from moa bone. As a result of their report on this investigation it was decided to carry out a full-scale excavation, to be directed by the authors of this note.

The main period of excavation ran between November 28, 1965 and January 15, 1966, during which the numbers of workers ranged between about five and fifteen at any one time. During this same period some thirty 3 metre squares were excavated, a number being taken down to a depth of 1.25 metres.

The site excavated is the northernmost of those which are related to Wairau Bar. Its assemblage bears a close general resemblance to that of the latter site, excepting in the absence of burials and moa egg shells and the relatively lower importance of adzes. On the other hand, the line fishing economy appears to have been far more important. However, with the technical development of Archaeology it has also been possible to obtain a far better plan of the settlement than was previously possible and it is now also possible to make a much more thorough and meaningful study of the faunal remains.

The excavation was initially made possible through the transfer of Auckland University South Pacific Research Programme funds from another project of F. W. Shawcross. It was also very generously supported by the Auckland War Memorial Museum and particular thanks must be expressed to the Director, Mr G. Turbott, and to the Museum Council. We also wish to thank the owner of the site, Mr W. Wagener, and his brother, Mr B. Wagener, and their families and the many other residents of Houhora, for all the ways in which they have helped us. Without all of this assistance it would have been impossible to have carried out our work at so great a distance from Auckland.

CONSOLIDATED ASH FROM NORTH OTAGO ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Michael M. Trotter,
Canterbury Museum

Thirty years ago a large block of porous calcareous rock was found in the Moa-hunter site near the mouth of the Waitaki River in North Otago (S128/1) and for some years it aroused considerable interest and speculation. Even today the "Waitaki Mystery Stone" is widely considered to have had some esoteric significance.

Teviotdale (1939: 172) in his account of excavations at the site, relates that it had become the subject of several letters and articles in the Dunedin newspaper the "Evening Star", ending in a story that the local Maoris reburied the stone at night, doing the work with stone tools as it was extremely tapu. In actual fact, Teviotdale had reburied the thirty hundredweight stone himself in what proved to be a vain attempt to prevent weathering and damage by cultivation and curio hunters. A long anonymous and rather imaginative article in the "Star" (1937) describes the Stone as a block of sandstone brought from afar for the purpose of nullifying a bad spell placed upon a high ranking chief. According to the writer this ceremonial stone was placed upon a ritual fire which contained as sacrificial offerings the representation of a moa egg and some food.

Generally however, the stone is considered to be ash produced by continuously burning or frequently relit fires (e.g. Teviotdale 1939: 170-171) which because of its considerable age has become consolidated, but a number of analyses have failed to prove this and results have been rather inconclusive.

Although it was the find at Waitaki River Mouth that attracted attention, "consolidated ash" is by no means unique to this site. Julius von Haast in 1871