



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON AN ASSOCIATED GROUP OF  
DENDROGLYPHS IN THE CHATHAM ISLANDS

D. Simmons

One of the groups of carvings mapped during the N. Z. Historic Places Trust and Otago Museum expedition to the Chatham Islands is situated in the mile-long patch of bush at Taia (CI. 2 E) on the East Coast of the Whanga lagoon. Taia A is one of four groups contained in this strip of bush which lies between the high coastal sand dunes and the marshy edge of the lagoon.

Food and geological sources utilized by people living within the bush or camping on the dunes (CI. 18 E) indicate that movement occurred down from the North coast (CI. 38 E) and across the lagoon by the ford from the Moreroa area to Taia. Dolomitic limestone for adzes as well as normal hard limestone was carried across to Taia from the Western shore of the lagoon (CI 92). Limburgitic basalt for adzes and cooking stones was brought from the Northern area, probably from the quarries at Mt Maunganui (CI. 82-84 N. W.) or Ouirā (CI. 71 W). Slaty (carbonaceous) schist for knives was brought also from the Okawa bed (CI. 38 E) or Matarakau (CI. 28 N), probably the former. Schist for clubs came from any of the schist formations along the North-East coast. A rather coarse-grained graywacke sample could have come from the North-East coast schist beds but graywacke formations have been reported from the Sisters, a group of off-shore islands. All artefacts found, schist clubs, adzes, and mataa, in this area indicate a fairly late age for occupation. Faunal remains recovered from within the bush include pua, which occurs ten miles away on the north-east coast at the slaty schist source (C.I. 38 E). Within the area of Taia A there are two scatters of locally derived shell, mainly pipi or tuatua (*Amphidesma* sp.).

Occupation on the mile of high dunes immediately to seaward (C.I. 8E) is almost continuous with rarely more than seven yards separating middens, which are single period, averaging twenty feet in diameter and varying in thickness from six inches to one foot. These middens usually contain chert mataa and flakes and the remains of seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*), small whales and birds. Extinct bird forms are represented, including the swan (*Chenopsis sumnerensis*), coot (*Halophalaris palaeolimnas chathamensis*), and Diefenbach's rail (*Nesolimnas dieffenbachi*). Bush birds once common in the area, but now restricted to the southern part of the island, include the Chatham Is. pigeon (*Hemiphaga Novaeseelandiae Chathamensis*), and the bush hawk (*Falco Novaeseelandiae*). Other species of bird include waterfowl, the grey duck (*Anas castorea chlorotis*), the Paradise duck (*Tadorna variegata*) and many sea birds, among which the commonest are the seasonal (summer visiting) Southern Blue penguin (*Eudyptula minor minor*), the Southern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomophora sandfordi*), which nest on the Sisters, and the Southern Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix chathamensis*). Other living species present are the Chatham Island Mollymawk (*Thalassarche cauta eremita*), Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*), Pitt Is. Shag (*Phalacrocorax stictocorax punctatus featherstoni*), Chatham Is. Allied Shearwater (*Puffinus*

assimilis elegans), Chatham's Shag (*Phalacrocorax (leucorho) carunculatus*), Onslow's, Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) White-faced Storm Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina maoriana*), other Petrels, and the Great Crested Penguin (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus sclateri*). One of the two examples of extinct swan recorded from the dunes came from the bottom layer of the only two layer site in the dunes, where it was associated with Southern Blue penguin, fish and shell (*Amphidesma* sp.).

Except for one small flaking floor for basalt, a small schist working area, and an eroded deposit where fossil whale bone was being prepared for fishhooks, the only signs of industrial activity on the dune sites consist of chert nodules, used as cores for flake knives and mataa, and these artefacts themselves. The chert is probably derived from the limestone formations on the west shore of the lagoon. Oven stones are of basalt or schist, again from the northern part of the island.

The area of bush in which the carving groves are situated is a mile long and varying in width from 400 yards to about sixty. It is triangular in shape, with the widest part to the North bordering Lake Mainui, where there are a row of shell heaps (CI. 6 E). The Western shore of the lake is peat covered in pig fern, the eastern edge is dune. To the North of the lake is another small spit of bush about fifty yards wide which separates Lake Mainui from Lake Kairae, which is itself separated from the more northerly Lake Kainagarahu by a similar spit of bush. The dunes which form the eastern edge of Taia Bush, Lake Mainui and the areas to the North continue along the shore of Hanson Bay for a further ten miles. To the south of Taia, there is an extremely narrow band of peat marsh between lagoon and dunes. The dunes continue south for four miles until they are broken by the opening of the lagoon, but resume for a further five miles in a similar narrow belt to the south. The opening of the lagoon was blocked periodically in former years by sand and was no barrier to movement. The opening is now kept clear by bulldozing. Middens extend along all the dune areas though they are closer together immediately to the seaward of bush or former bush areas. Gaps of up to a hundred yards are to be noted between middens in the dunes south of Taia or bordering the lakes. Taia is one of the more remote parts of the island, and is difficult of access except when the lagoon is closed.

The Taia bush is composed mainly of Karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigata*), Matipo (*Myrsine chathamica*), Ake Ake (*Olearia traversii*), and some Karamu (*Coprosma chathamica*) and a few other species of shrubs. Undergrowth generally is lacking within the bush, partially due to the browsing of semi-wild cattle and sheep. The area is owned by Mr Sundry Hough, a prominent member of the local community, who was of great assistance to the expedition.

Taia A, the group of carvings reported here, is one of four groups within this area of bush. A possible date within the last two hundred and fifty years for some of the carvings is indicated from excavation of areas and shell heaps associated with one of these groups (CI. 4 E).

Estimates for the possible life of Karaka trees range from 800 to 250 years.

Taia A Carvings (See Plates - II and III)

Within a 100 yard square, 58 possible carvings were recorded. Of these 16 can now be assigned to natural causes. Included in the remaining 42 are 10 of complete incised single or double human figures, 7 of heads only, 7 of partial human figures, 3 of incised vertical lines, 7 indeterminate marks, 2 of composite "scenes", 7 relief or "hole in bark" or "silhouette" carvings. Some of these latter may have either contained relief designs or resulted from carving too deeply. In only one case was a relief carving found intact on the Chathams, but Dendroglyph 320 in Taia A Group had the relief portion newly detached. Rot had set in at the top and bottom "necks" which joined the relief to its surrounding bark.

Preliminary analysis of the carvings at Taia A suggests that the group is divisible into three sections overlapped by two scatters of shell. This pattern also suggests that different individuals are represented in the various human figure carvings. A tentative analysis of all the carvings recorded on Chatham Island indicated that there are about twelve stylistic variations of human figure carving which reoccur in all areas, and many others which occur once and are not repeated. There are certainly styles of carving which seem peculiar to a particular artist or area. The style of carving illustrated in Denro, No. 305 appears peculiar to Taia, while Dendro. No. 311b is similar to many at Hapupu or Makeroa. The portrayal of ribs is a peculiar feature of Moriori art. This has led many people to interpret these figures as corpses. Dr Skinner drew attention to the emaciated appearance of the only wooden figure in the round, preserved from the Chathams. This figure, which is now in Auckland Museum, he likened to the emaciated "ancestral ghost" figures of Easter Island. At Taia A figures are portrayed with no ribs, two ribs, six ribs or seven ribs. In one instance, two figures are portrayed on the same side of a tree (324) while another (348) appears to represent the remains of what Jefferson has called "scenes".

Perhaps the most obscure carvings are the outline carvings such as 351 in which a "diving bird" is outlined by cutting away the bark. At Taia B, a very good example of this technique was recorded which appears to represent a shag in a sitting position. The technique used in most of the carvings represented here is what can be called "poker work", - this is, the bark has been gouged out to a depth of about half an inch, the wound darkened slightly by natural means, or, as seems very possible, having a darkening agent such as peat mud rubbed in to produce a dark brown line on the paler trunk.

Most of the carvings when found, were obliterated by an inch-thick growth of moss, which we found was best removed without damage to the bark, by the careful use of a wire brush. At Taia A, the first carving was located. The area was investigated, and it was found that other carvings were present. A hundred yard square was laid out, and every tree within it cleaned down. All carved trees were numbered with paint above the carving. Two members of the party then proceeded to plot them on the plane table while the other recorded and photographed. Once the square was completed, the immediate vicinity was searched. A further group

was located 700 feet north, another 300 feet west, and treated in the same way. Luckily, Taia A is reasonably intact, and so is capable of yielding a distribution pattern. Many other groups are no longer complete, and it is doubtful whether it will be possible to recover more than a record of the carvings themselves.

In the accompanying map, the direction the carving is facing is indicated by an arrow, or if more than one carving is present on a tree, by an arrow for each. The sketches on the map are as accurate as the scale permits. At a later date photographs of all the carvings will be published.

Acknowledgements:

Geological identification:

Dr W. Watters - Geological Survey

Bone identification:

Mr R. Scarlett - Canterbury Museum

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C. Jefferson

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Polyn. Soc. Mem. No. 31

Editor's Note:

Erratum: In Vol 7, no. 2 of the NEWSLETTER (1964) Simmon's paper "Chatham Island Archaeological Survey" was obscured by an incorrect page sequence. The correct sequence is:- Page 52 continued on page 56

" 57 " " " 55  
" 55 " " " 58

Page numbers should be reordered:- 51, 52, 53, 56, 57, 55, 54, 58, 59 etc., so that each group of sites designated by a letter follow in sequence.

Also the following was omitted from the bibliography:- Jefferson, C. 1956. Dendroglyphs of the Chatham Islands. Moriori Designs on Karaka Trees. Poly. Soc. Mem. 31.

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### AN OUTLINE OF KABARA PREHISTORY

Colin D. Smart

The Lau islands form the eastern fringe of Fiji. Included are many small islands spreading north-south over an area of 44,000 square miles almost halfway between the main Fiji islands (Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and the Tonga group). Kabara, the administrative seat of five smaller islands, three of which are now uninhabited, is one of the principal and largest southern Lau islands. Direct contact with the rest of Fiji remains infrequent, but smaller boats and a number of canoes continue to travel throughout the islands of southern Lau, maintaining a cultural similarity which has probably existed for several centuries.

Kabara is a small oval island about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles long and 4 miles across (see map). The bulk of the island is a raised limestone block rimmed by cliffs 150-250 feet high. Immediately within the cliffs the limestone falls away to an undulating surface around 100 feet above sea level. On the west side of the island the volcanic hill Delaioloi breaks through the edge of the limestone to rise 450 feet. Along the perimeter of the raised interior are sandy coastal flats sometimes extending to 1,000 feet from the base of the cliffs but usually forming narrow, ribbon-like beaches awash at high tide. On the larger coastal flats are located the present day villages of Naikelayaga, Tokalau, Lomati and Udu and the remains of the former village of Qaliquali destroyed by a tidal wave in 1938.

The limestone interior of the island is covered by a heavy growth of forest. Several forest trees were previously of great economic value, but within recent years copra production has induced the Kabarans to clear increasing areas of the forest for their coconut plantations. Small, peripheral areas of soil on the limestone interior, and the entire surface of the volcanic hill, are intensively gardened. The need for suitable gardening land is also causing inroads into the forested interior while even the sandy coastal flats are pressed into service though they produce sometimes inferior crops of the staple tubers.



320



305



311 b

324



348

351





308

314



329



311 a

322



353



326



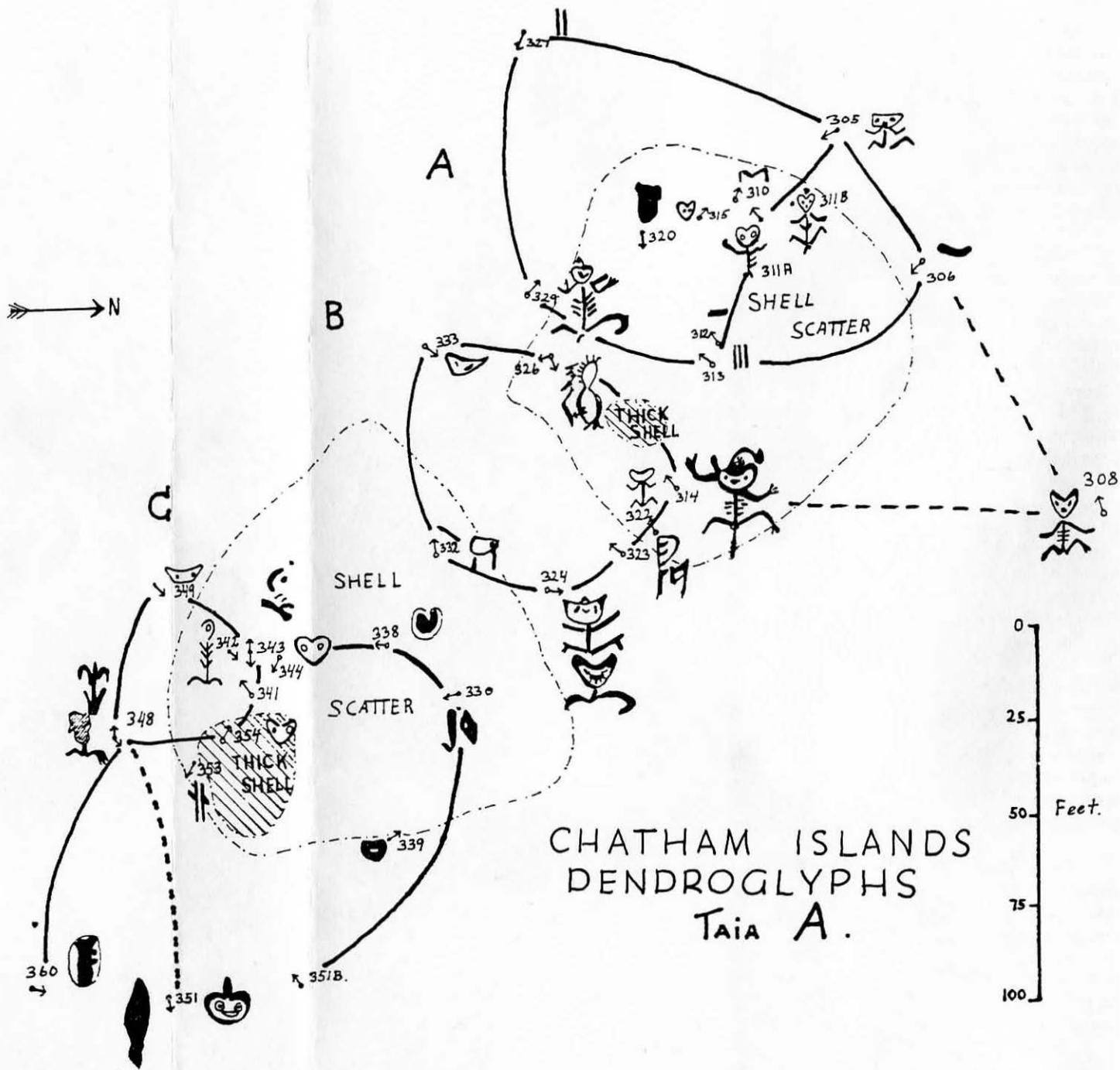
360



351



D. SIMMONS.



CHATHAM ISLANDS  
DENDROGLYPHS  
Taia A.