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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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A RADIOCARBON DATE FROM SKIPPER'S RIDGE (N40/7), OPITO,
COROMANDEL PENINSULA

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A radiocarbon date has been received for Skipper's Ridge.

The charcoal sample was collected from the base of the Layer IV fill of a large buttress pit in squares D7-E6. At the time of collection the charcoal was thought possibly to be part of a post or roof member of the pit's superstructure. However, it has been identified by Mr P. Smith, Auckland, as Panax sp. (five-finger), too badly fissured through intense heat for species determination.

The result is given by the Institute of Nuclear Sciences as follows.

NZ 1740

$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ wrt PDB $-24.6^{\circ}/\text{oo}$

A^{14}C wrt 0.95 Oxalic Acid $-99 \pm 6^{\circ}/\text{oo}$

Percentage modern: $90.1 \pm 0.6\%$

^{14}C age (old $T_{1/2}$ uncorrected for secular effects)
 807 ± 57 yr B.P.

The laboratory advises (R.C. McGill, pers. comm.) that the best age is probably that based on the new half life, corrected for secular effects. This result is 780^{+60}_{-50} yr B.P.

Skipper's Ridge was partially excavated in 1959 and 1960 (Parker 1959, 1960). This site, also known as N40/7, has more recently been designated Skipper's Ridge I, and should be distinguished from Skipper's Ridge II, (N40/73) excavated and described by Bellwood (1969). Parker identified three main occupations, with important structural remains. In particular, the association in both Layer IV (level 1) and Layer III (level 3) of large rectangular pits with smaller pits of different type, was fundamental to the argument in the early 1960s about the functions of pits as dwellings or as storage pits.

Even more important, however, was the correlation by both Parker (1960, 1962) and Green (1963:51) of occupation at Skipper's Ridge with that of the nearby Opito Beach Midden (N40/3).

In 1960, Parker expressed the belief that the earliest occupation at Skipper's Ridge could not date much later than

A.D. 1300 and might be considerably earlier. In 1962, he suggested the correlation of Layer IV at Skipper's Ridge with layer 4c at Opito Beach and the earliest working floor levels at Sarah's Gully (N40/9); and Layer III at Skipper's Ridge with layer 4a at Opito Beach, and the pits and later working floor levels at Sarah's Gully.

The radiocarbon result appears to support Parker's interpretation, showing the Layer IV features at Skipper's Ridge to be as early as any dated evidence of occupation at either Opito or Sarah's Gully.

Although a single radiocarbon date from a site should not be accepted without reservation, this particular result can be considered in relation to the interpretation by the original excavator, which predicted an age of this order; the obsidian hydration rim studies (Green 1964: fig.1); and the similar result for Phase I of the Sarah's Gully Pa (N40/10) (Birks and Birks 1970). It should also be noted that identification of the charcoal has ruled out the possibility of its derivation from a large tree of advanced age.

Under these circumstances, the date from Skipper's Ridge can be accepted. It suggests that elaborate pits of both large rectangular and rua types were contemporary with or earlier than the beach middens at Sarah's Gully and Opito on which Golson's definition of the Archaic Phase in the North Island was largely based (1959:44-45).

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