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A REVIEW OF COROMANDEL PENINSULA EXCAVATION LITERATURE

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During the late 1950s and 1960s there was much archaeological interest in the Coromandel Peninsula. This initially stemmed from Jack Golson's investigations of the 'Archaic Phase' of Maori culture and his desire to find type sites from which he could analyse the artefacts and so define the material culture. This work culminated in a paper defining North Island cultural phases and aspects and illustrating the differences between Archaic and Classic Maori (Golson, 1959a).

A number of sites have been excavated (see Fig. 1). The Coromandel Peninsula was chosen as a suitable area for research because of the high frequency of artefacts found of the 'moa hunter' type (Golson, 1959b:13). Activity was initially concentrated on the Kuaotunu Peninsula, at Sarah's Gully and Opito, although investigations were also carried out elsewhere on the Coromandel Peninsula and on Great Barrier Island. There has, however, been a heavy bias placed on investigating sites and recovering material of the early period of settlement. This has generally led to a neglect of sites of the later period. The archaeological picture built up of the Coromandel indicates settlement from the 13th century through to the post-contact period. It was from the Kuaotunu sites that evidence was first produced for the Archaic being associated with storage pits, and by inference, agriculture. Previously it had been assumed (Duff, 1956) that Archaic culture did not possess agriculture or domesticated plants.

A range of site types has been investigated on the Coromandel Peninsula, Great Mercury and Great Barrier Islands. Some of these sites have not had excavation reports prepared, others are only reported briefly. For a more detailed summary of the sites investigated at Opito and Sarah's Gully see Green (1963).

The sites

N30/3 Pa at Harataonga, Great Barrier Island (Law, 1972,1975; Morwood, 1974). A pit with associated defensive ditch and bank on a ridge end. A generalised site for food storage, defence, cooking and industrial activities although the activities are not contemporary.

N30/4 'Eastern Midden', Harataonga, Great Barrier Island (Law, 1972,1975; Morwood, 1974). A beachfront midden with structural features, dated to the 17th century.

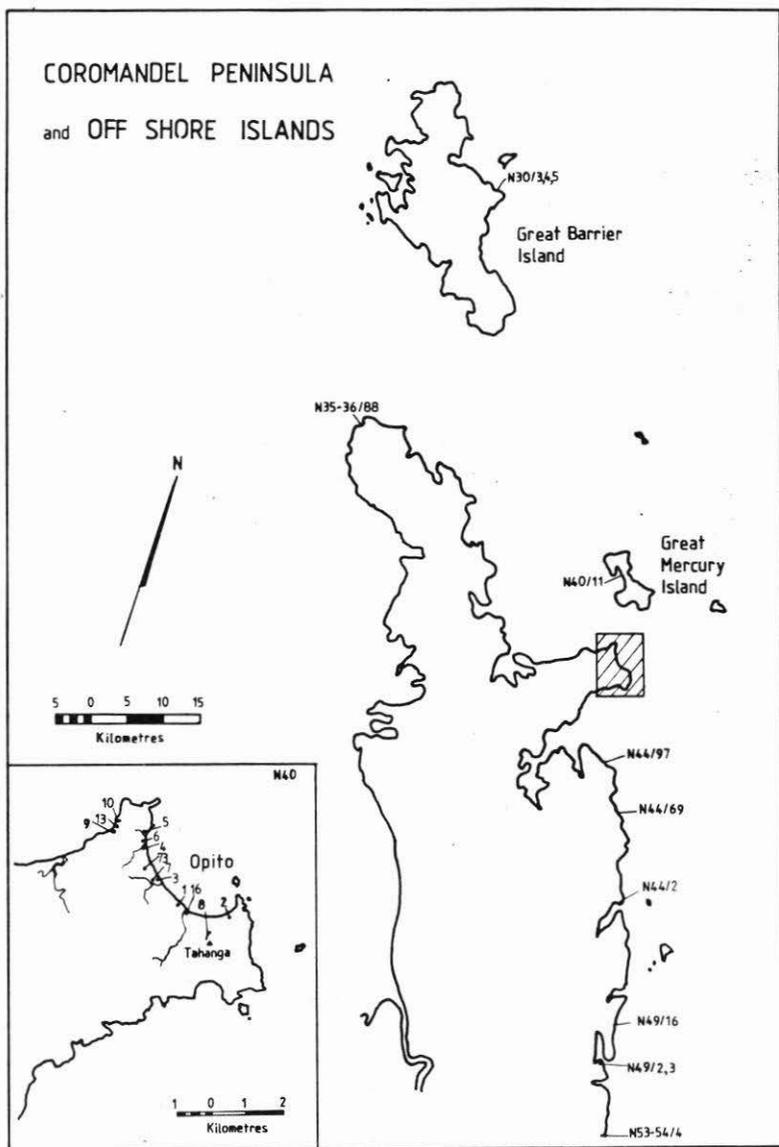


FIGURE 1. Coromandel Peninsula showing sites.

- N30/5 'Western Midden', Harataonga, Great Barrier Island (Law, 1972,1975; Morwood, 1974). An eroding single occupation Archaic beachfront midden, adjacent to N30/4.
- N40/3 Opito Site (Boileau, 1980; Golson, 1959 a and b; Green, 1963; Scarlett, 1962; Trower, 1962). A later midden, overlying stratified Archaic deposits containing a number of portable artefacts and extinct fauna.
- N40/7 Skippers Ridge I (Davidson, 1974,1975,1976; Davidson and Green, 1975; Golson, 1959b; Green, 1963; Parker, 1959,1960,1962). This site is on the ridge behind N40/3. It has four levels of occupation consisting of storage pits and is dated to the Archaic period. Shellfish remains are also present.
- N40/9 Sarah's Gully Settlement (Golson, 1959 a and b; Golson and Gathercole, 1962; Green 1963,1972a). A marine terrace with stratified deposit containing bone of extinct fauna, dog, seal, portable artefacts and shell. Structural features include a sunken structure and drains on the marine terrace. The ridge above also has evidence of pits and series of postholes.
- N40/10 Pa at Sarah's Gully (Birks, 1960; Birks and Birks, 1970, 1973; Golson, 1959b; Green, 1963,1972a). A small headland pa with three phases of occupation, the first being an open undefended settlement consisting of pits placed into the Archaic phase. Later occupation reflects cooking, storage and defence activities.
- N40/13 Sarah's Midden (Birks, 1960; Green,1963,1972a). A small stratified midden of the Archaic phase containing moa bone, overlain by a midden containing European artefacts. The early levels are possibly related to N40/10.
- N40/73 Skippers Ridge II (Bellwood, 1969). This is an open settlement up-ridge from Skippers Ridge I. A single occupation of pit storage, stone and wood working with a structure interpreted as a white potato clamp. Radiocarbon dated to the 18th century.
- N40/11 Stingray Point Pa, Great Mercury Island (Golson, 1955; Green, 1963). A terrace on this site was excavated revealing two pits, one of which had been deliberately infilled and possible palisade posts erected.
- N44/2 Tairua (Davidson, 1964a and b; Green, 1967; Jones, 1973; Rowland, 1975,1977a and b; Smart and Green, 1962; Smith, 1978; Yaldwyn, 1959). This is interpreted as a seasonal camp of the Archaic period exploiting moa, seal and other fauna. Differentiated activity areas are evident. The Archaic material is overlain by a later midden consisting of concentrated shell midden.
- N44/69 Hot Water Beach (Leahy, 1971,1974). A beach front midden with four layers of occupation demonstrating an Archaic sequence from the 13th century through to approximately A.D. 1500.
- N44/97 Hahei (Edson, 1979; Edson and Brown, 1977). A working floor and Archaic burial with grave goods.

- N49/2 Whangamata Wharf Midden (Allo, 1972). An Archaic midden overlain by a post-contact midden. Dog and seal is important in the lower level. No structures were recovered.
- N49/3 Cabana Lodge Site, Whangamata (Jolly, 1978a). Although close, it is not known if this is part of the site dug by Allo. Artefacts and flakes of Archaic origin were recovered.
- N49/3 Whangamata (Shawcross, 1964). This is a flaking floor near the beach and may belong to a later period than the sites investigated by Allo and Jolly.
- N49/16 Whitipirorua (Jolly, 1978b). An Archaic dune front site containing apparent activity areas.
- N53-54/4 Whiritoa (Crosby, 1963, 1977; Foreman and Jolly, 1965). An Archaic site containing moa bone and artefacts.

In addition, a number of sites have been investigated in some manner although not reported on in detail: N40/1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 16, 17, 74 at Opito, and N40/164 and an unnumbered site on Great Mercury Island.

Dating

The majority of sites excavated have occupation in the lower levels relating to the Archaic period, the exceptions being N30/3, 4 and N40/73. Some sites have not been radiocarbon dated because of their obvious relationship with European material, in others the age of the lower levels has been inferred by association with Loiseles pumice or the presence of moa bone. A summary of radiocarbon dates is provided in Table 1.

While the stratigraphy of some sites is unknown, others suggest a single occupation, while yet others indicate re-occupation through time. Re-use of the site may have occurred over a short time period such as in Levels I - III of Skippers Ridge I (Davidson, 1976), or over a longer period in the case of Hot Water Beach, Harataonga Pa, or the pa at Sarah's Gully. Tairua on the other hand demonstrates a clear dichotomy between an Archaic and a later midden. Rowland (1977a) argues that Tairua perhaps exhibits a change between a winter Archaic encampment and a later summer one. This dichotomy is even more pronounced at the Whangamata Wharf Midden (N49/2) and N40/13 with post-contact middens overlying Archaic deposits which contain moa bone. Skippers Ridge II, N30/5, N30/4 and N44/97 appear to have been single occupations. In some instances site function has changed through time, particularly Sarah's Gully Pa and Harataonga Pa with undefended storage sites being replaced by defended sites.

Site	Sample No.	Age B.P.	Occupation Level	Material
Harataonga, Great Barrier Island				
N30/3	NZ1893	441 ± 55		charcoal
N30/4	NZ1891	216 ± 55		charcoal
	NZ1892	247 ± 55		charcoal
Kuaotunu Peninsula				
N40/3	NZ354	640 ± 50		
N40/7	NZ1740	807 ± 57		charcoal
N40/9	NZ356	less than 200		charcoal
	NZ357	590 ± 50		charcoal
	NZ355	600 ± 50		charcoal
	NZ359	650 ± 50		charcoal
	NZ358	810 ± 50		wood
N40/10	NZ1080	703 ± 46	Phase I	charcoal
	NZ1082	388 ± 49	Phase II	charcoal
	NZ1 1	335 ± 48	Phase III	charcoal
	NZ698	260 ± 51	Phase III	shell
	NZ699	292 ± 41	Phase III	shell
N40/16	NZ1992	180 ± 60		charcoal
	NZ1993	190 ± 60		charcoal
N40/73	NZ R2148/1	less than 132 BP		
	NZ R2148/2	less than 213 BP		
Tairua				
N44/2	NZ1876	250 ± 70	Layer 6	marine shell
	NZ1875	570 ± 60	Layer 2	marine shell
	NZ594	878 ± 49	Layer 2	charcoal
	NZ595	443 ± 40	Layer 2	charcoal
Hot Water Beach				
N44/69	NZ1169	421 ± 40	Layer 4	charcoal
	NZ1170	484 ± 79	Layer 4	soil/charcoal
	NZ1171	117 ± 77	Layer 4	grease
	NZ1296	453 ± 40	Layer 4	shell
	NZ1298	modern	Layer 4	fishbone
	NZ1299	325 ± 78	Layer 4	fishbone carbonate
Hahei				
N44/97	NZ4345	760 ± 50		charcoal
Port Jackson				
N35-36/88	NZ4883	658 ± 59		bone

TABLE 1. Radiocarbon dates from the Coromandel Peninsula and Great Barrier Island.

All dates are uncorrected, and refer to the old half life. Sources are Bellwood, 1969; Birks and Birks, 1970; Davidson, 1974; Edson, 1979; Law, 1974, pers. comm.; Leahy, 1974; Millener, pers. comm.

Economy

The Archaic middens are all very similar in type, easily recognisable by the artefacts or the nature of the midden. In contrast to later middens, the early sites contain little shell but more bone material. Some early sites, situated close to abundant shellfish resources, have ignored these in preference to other forms of protein. For example, Whangamata Wharf (N49/2) is adjacent to an estuary rich in pipi and cockle which were little utilised, the flesh from birds, seals and dog being preferred in the early period. It does not always follow, however, that sites with a high concentration of shell may not also be early but of the shell present in early sites, rocky shore species predominate, later sites have a higher proportion of mudflat and sandy shore species.

Within the bone material extinct birds include several species of moa plus forest birds (see Davidson, 1979a, for a breakdown of species per site). Moa obviously contributed to the diet of the inhabitants although the extent varies from site to site. In addition moa bone was used as a raw material for industrial purposes. Possible sub-fossil moa bone has been recovered from Layer 4 at Hot Water Beach (Leahy, 1974:64), indicating that fresh bone for manufacturing activities could have been less easily available.

While seal is present in all the middens reported, it is abundant at Sarah's Gully (Golson, 1959b), Tairua (Smart and Green, 1962; Smith, 1978) and Whangamata Wharf (Allo, 1972). Dog has been recovered from all excavated sites and figures prominently at Whangamata Wharf (Allo, 1972), N30/5 (Law, 1972) and Sarah's Gully (Green, 1963).

Davidson (1979a) gives a more comprehensive summary of the faunal remains from the Archaic sites so it is sufficient to say here that wide variety of resources were exploited, both adjacent to the sites and some distance away. Fishbone was present in all excavated sites, snapper predominating, although the number of individuals represented in each case was small. The importance of fishing was attested by fishhook manufacturing activities present in all sites.

Artefacts

Portable artefacts recovered from Archaic sites represent a wide range of activities including the manufacture of fishing gear, adze manufacture and maintenance, and the use of personal

ornaments. In addition, the presence in sites of large numbers of stone flakes with use damage indicates they are not only the waste material of adze manufacture. Flake industries and utilisation of flakes have not yet been fully studied although Allo (1972:65) inferred that the large number of obsidian flakes found at Whangamata Wharf were used for butchering dogs or skin preparation. Bellwood (1969:217) studied the basalt flakes from N40/73 and concluded they were used for wood and flax working while an examination of the basalt flakes from Skippers Ridge I showed no use wear, indicating they were the result of adze manufacture (Bellwood, 1969:211).

Morwood (1974) after analysing obsidian assemblages from the three Harataonga sites concluded that the sites were the scene of differing activities, not surprising given the difference in site type and site contents. The edge wear damage to obsidian from the pa, N30/3, indicated light woodworking and light usage while three specimens showed signs of hafting: two for butchering and one for woodworking (Morwood, 1974:93-95). The damage to flakes from N30/4 and N30/5, however, was consistent with the sites having been used for food preparation.

Basalt from Tahanga (N40/8) at Opito is present in quantity in most of the Archaic sites, in the form of completed adzes, roughouts and flakes. The exception is Whangamata Wharf which had few basalt flakes but a large number of obsidian flakes (Allo, 1972:67). At N30/5, Harataonga, Tahanga basalt is the dominant stone material (Law, 1972:91), although there is reputed to be a basalt quarry on Great Barrier Island (Spring-Rice, 1962).

The dependence on one basalt source in the early period is similar to the distribution of obsidian types in the early sites where Mayor Island obsidian is the most common, even when there is a source in the local area. At N30/5 there was a ratio of 8:1 Mayor Island obsidian flakes to non-Mayor Island obsidian although there was a source at Te Ahumata, several kilometres from the site. The situation was reversed in later sites where the local obsidians tended to be more common, although some Mayor Island obsidian was still being used. Other obsidian sources in the region are Whitianga, Whangamata and Great Barrier Island.

The presence of basalt and obsidian in all these sites suggest that there was free movement of people to the source to obtain their stone supplies or, alternatively, there was an efficient trading network in operation. While the evidence from some sites suggests preformed roughouts were taken to the site and finished (for example, Hot Water Beach), Whiritoa produced

a very large number of basalt flakes and roughouts and it would appear large cores were taken to the site and made into a variety of adze forms (Moore, 1976:84).

Moore (1976:89) argues that, through time, Tahanga basalt continued to be important in sites close to the source while sites further away utilised local materials. This could be the result of a breakdown in trading networks or, with the increase in the effect of territoriality, general access to the raw material was restricted.

Coromandel Archaic sites, while not on the scale of Wairau Bar, collectively display the range of activities and material culture assigned to the early period. Generally speaking the sites are small in size, the exception perhaps being Whangamata where the wharf midden (N49/2) and Cabana Lodge (N49/3) may be one site. This however is non-testable as the intervening area has been disturbed by roadmaking.

Settlement pattern

Wairau Bar has been reported (Groube, 1964:63) as displaying a fully settled village layout with houses separated from the cooking area and the possibility of storage pits on the ridge behind the site. Certainly, in the Archaic sites of the Coromandel, cooking appears from the evidence to be separated from the living areas, but this can only be concluded by the absence of evidence to the contrary.

The argument for differing components of the settlement system, similar to Wairau Bar, is reinforced by evidence from Skippers Ridge I and Sarah's Gully where storage pits have been assigned to the Archaic period by radiocarbon dates, or by stratigraphic association, as in N40/9. In each case there are good grounds to associate the open settlement pit complexes with the Archaic middens nearby (Green, 1970, 1972a and b). Associations can be made of N40/9 in the pits on the marine terrace and on the ridge above, as can undefended Phase I pits on the pa at Sarah's Gully with the Archaic midden on the beach below (N40/13), and Skippers Ridge I with the artefact rich midden, N40/3. Of the sites investigated, Skippers Ridge I had the most potential for finding dwellings with the storage pits in Levels I-III arranged around an open space (Davidson, 1975). In the portion of the site excavated, however, no evidence of habitation was found, although the pit-house controversy raged at the time. It was speculated by some that further excavation around the open

space might reveal the required living structures, but unfortunately the site has since been destroyed by sub-division. The presence of the open space being due to chance was discounted by the repeated and complex rebuilding of pits around the space in Levels I-III. Davidson (1976:5) has suggested Levels I-III were laid down in close succession and thus all three occupations attest to Archaic storage. Level IV, the latest occupation of the site is assumed to be later because it does not conform to the established pattern.

Thus it appears there is firm evidence for food storage and agriculture in the 13th century. Bellwood's (1969) reservations about assigning Skippers Ridge I to the Archaic period on the basis of similarity of bin-shaped pits at Skippers I with bin pits at Skippers II dated to the 18th century can be discounted by a radiocarbon date for the 12th century. There is no reason to suppose that an efficient style of storage pit cannot continue to be used over a period of time.

With the different levels and rebuilding at Skippers I, the presence of storage and stratified middens on the dunes close to the site suggests a fairly permanent population at Opito. The material from Sarah's Gully, N40/9, shows a similar pattern (Green, 1972a and b). Unfortunately none of the other sites have comparable evidence of permanency, although structural evidence may be present in the unexcavated area of the sites.

Law (1972:104) interpreted N30/5 as, "a generalised occupation site, where many different activities were carried out", although no structures were found in the area excavated. At Hot Water Beach no structural evidence was recovered from Layers 5 and 6 but Layer 4 contained a number of hangi and postholes. Leahy (1974:74) plausibly interpreted these as windbreaks or cooking shelters. Again no living structures were recovered.

Tairua also had a number of different activities represented, including the presence of postholes and cooking areas which lead Smart and Green (1962) to infer the site was not a temporary camp. However Rowland (1977a:145) countered this on the basis of seasonal indicators and limited occupational evidence suggesting that, "occupation at Tairua could be considered to have been brief."

Seasonality is suggested from several of the sites. Rowland (1977a) concluded Tairua was a winter camp from an examination of the faunal remains and growth rings in shellfish.

Faunal evidence also suggests Harataonga, N30/5, was likely to have been occupied in winter or spring although there is no evidence to suggest it wasn't occupied in any other season (Law, 1972:103). Similarly, Hot Water Beach is most likely to have been occupied in spring and summer (Leahy, 1974:63), although again, other seasons cannot be discounted. Whiritoa is the only other site for which there is evidence of seasonality: Crosby (1977:33) suggested a late spring and summer occupation.

Generally the evidence from the Archaic sites suggests specialised activity areas where cooking sections are separated from habitation and storage areas. This specialisation is further refined with activities separated spatially in the midden. This is particularly evident at Tairua with a large areal excavation uncovering postholes towards the rear of the dune, midden containing flake material in another section of the site, while a complex of ovens and an adjacent butchering area is situated elsewhere (Jones, 1973:147). At N40/10, the undefended Phase I has evidence only of storage pits, while Phases II and III, later in time, have evidence for storage, cooking and defence. Similarly, Skippers Ridge I does not have the faunal remains or bone working industry present on other sites of the same age. Davidson (1975:40) concluded that this, "implies segregation of activities at a relatively early date, and shows that absence of what have hitherto been regarded as diagnostic Archaic features need not preclude a site from being early."

Many 'Classic period' sites of the Coromandel Peninsula do not exhibit traits considered typical of it. The period is represented on the peninsula by N30/3, 4, N40/10, 11, 73 and the upper middens at N44/2 and N49/2. In the case of the defended sites, N30/3, N40/10 and N40/11, a non-defended phase precedes the building of fortifications. At N30/3 it is thought the construction of the pit occurred prior to the formation of the ditch and bank although it is difficult to discount association on stratigraphic grounds (Law, 1972:116). However the evidence does point to the pit being infilled, used for cooking and dumping of waste, and the ditch and bank constructed, with the area inside the defences subsequently being used for habitation. Similarly at N40/11, Stingray Point Pa, two pits constructed on a terrace underwent several periods of rebuilding before one pit was deliberately infilled and a possible palisade post erected (Golson, 1955; Green, 1963:69).

At Sarah's Gully Pa Phase II occupation is characterised by shallow rectangular pits while Phase III sees the construction of the defences and utilisation of the defensible area for hangi pits and oven debris (Birks, 1960). Radiocarbon dates place Phase III in the 17th or early 18th century based on charcoal from the bank.

The pit at N30/3 has a date of A.D. 1420 (Law, 1975:50), and while the construction of the ditch and bank is not dated it is thought to be later in time than the 15th century.

The upper midden (Layer 6) at Tairua is similar to other middens of a later age and is much younger than the Archaic deposit beneath it, being dated to 1690 ± 70 A.D. The site illustrates a change in resource exploitation, with meat from birds and mammals providing the bulk of the diet in the early level, although rocky shore species predominate in the shellfish species present, contrasting with the upper midden which displays a shift in emphasis to mudflat shellfish species with little bone present.

Again, at Whangamata Wharf the composition of Midden A differs from Midden B in that the post-contact Midden A consists almost entirely of estuarine shellfish (Allo, 1972).

In contrast to the artefact rich middens of the Archaic, there are few portable artefacts recovered from the later sites excavated. However, two nearby sites, outside the Coromandel, have produced rich collections, namely Oruarangi on the Hauraki Plains, and Kauri Point on the Tauranga Harbour where an assemblage of wooden combs was recovered.

Summary

To summarise, the full range of prehistory is not well represented in excavations on the Coromandel Peninsula as there was a bias towards investigating the early period of settlement. Sites range in age from the 12th century for Skippers Ridge I through to the 19th century. There are a number of dates now for the 13th century, namely N30/5, N40/10, N44/69, N44/97, while it is thought Tairua fits into the sequence near this time (Rowland, 1977b; Davidson, 1979a). The early sites show a culture well adapted to New Zealand conditions. The Archaic period continues into the 16th century at Hot Water Beach by which time there are few diagnostic artefacts although moa are still present (Leahy, 1974:75).

Other regions by this time have changed their economy and associated material culture. It appears that moa existed to a later date on the Coromandel Peninsula than it did in some other places, notably the South Island (Davidson, 1979b:235).

The earliest evidence for agriculture comes from Skippers Ridge I dated to the 12th century where bin and rectangular shaped storage pits were uncovered. These pit styles were also found at Phase I of N40/10, dated to the 13th century, and at N40/9 which also appears to be early. Evidence for these pit styles continuing to be used through time comes from N40/73, dated to the 19th century.

Defensive works at N40/10 date to the 17th century, while the pa at Harataonga post-dates the 15th century.

Midden sites identified as early all contain bone and little shellfish remains while later sites are the reverse. This does not mean, however, that sites with concentrated deposits of shell may not also be early. If there are Archaic shell middens they will be difficult to recognise as Archaic without closer investigation.

None of the sites mentioned could be called a permanent village. Some degree of sedentism is implied by the presence of storage pits and, by inference, horticulture. However, some sites suggest short term occupation, such as Tairua or N30/5, while Whiritoa has been interpreted as a seasonal camp re-occupied several times (Crosby, 1977:33).

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