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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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A ROCK SHELTER SITE IN NORTH OTAGO

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In the several localities where archaeological surveys have been made in South Canterbury and North Otago, it would appear that a very large proportion of the rock formations which could have afforded shelter have been used for temporary prehistoric occupation. Surveys in the area have been made mainly by G.B. Stevenson (1948), R.S. Duff (1945-6), Ambrose and Davis (1958, 1959, 1960), A. Fomison (1959 - 1961, 1962), and G. Peterson (1962). Principally from information obtained in the field by these workers some 200 shelter sites in Canterbury and 43 in North Otago have been added to the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site records during the past few months. Important factors accounting for their concentration in this part of the country are the numbers of rock outcrops of materials (principally limestone) prone to weathering, and valleys or gorges where previously higher river levels have caused horizontal erosion of rock faces, thus forming shelters for camping and often providing suitable conditions for the preservation of occupational evidence in the floor or drawings on the walls or ceiling. Besides the shelters used for habitation are others, containing drawings, but by reason of their size, shape or floor slope, would not have been suitable even for temporary occupation.

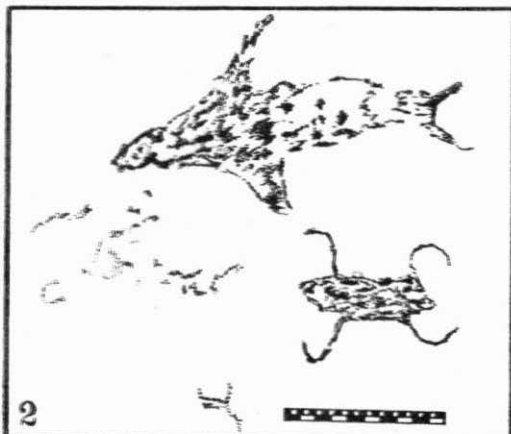
Many occupational shelters are found along obvious or traditional routeways from the coast to the interior, but their presence in a locality cannot by itself signify a recognized route; rather their distribution appears to be largely haphazard conditioned by the factors mentioned above. Where a shelter suitable for temporary habitation and of easy access in this area is found to contain no sign of occupation, the investigator must first ensure that the evidence has not been removed by natural or human agencies before assuming that it has never been used for that purpose.

A considerable proportion have been utilised by pakeha for habitation, stock shelter, or storage, in some cases being modified for these purposes. Published, archaeological, and present-day evidence of this use is available. The quarrying of limestone near Enfield, Weston, and Totara for agricultural and building purposes is known to have destroyed several occupational shelters including a large cave at Te Ana Raki, Enfield, which was used by both Maoris and Europeans, in a locality where there are a number of small shelters containing evidence of early occupation.

The remnant of one small shelter (S.136/10; grid reference 472609) partly destroyed by a nearby limeworks at Totara, which was recently inspected by David Harrowfield, typifies the present-day condition of a large number of these sites. It comprises an overhanging slab of limestone about five feet above ground level at its highest point forming a west-facing shelter large enough to

accommodate two or three people lying down. Except where it is disturbed by curio hunters the floor has a three inch layer of liney soil containing a small amount of humus, overlying a four inch layer of shell, bone, charcoal, and burnt stones, in a matrix of the overlying material.

No excavating was done - this not being considered advisable except as part of a general area investigation unless the site is seriously threatened - but there is evidence of curio hunters disturbance and wall markings of European origin. Shells of Catseye (*Lunella*), Fresh-water Mussel (*Hyridella*), and Rock Mussel (*Mytilus*), and pieces of Mac leg bone (probably *Euryapteryx*) were visible. The latter is not necessarily from a bird used for food, although this and other now extinct species were living in the area when a nearby shelter at Ototara Glen (S.136/2: see Trotter 1965) was occupied in the fifteenth century.



There are drawings in black pigment in the shelter, but some are in very poor condition due to weathering while others may have been obliterated by recent European markings. An area of approximately two square yards (which included all recognizably pre-European markings) was traced on polythene sheeting with chinagraph pencils and is reproduced here - the reduction is photographic, no attempt being made to interpret or retouch the outlines. (The scale is in centimetres and inches.) In Fig. 2 are two recognizable, though flaked, subjects, but the two forms in Fig. 1 could lend themselves to a variety of interpretations. In this respect they are typical of a large number of the drawings found in these shelters, where the style of the artwork, deterioration since drawing, or both, have resulted in them now being indecipherable.

Measures have been taken, particularly by the National Historic Places Trust, to give some protection to a few rock shelters in Canterbury and North Otago, but there remains a great deal of survey and recording work to be done in this area and more important sites will have to be protected from vandalism, stock damage, and weathering if the rate of deterioration of archaeological evidence and artwork they contain is to be checked.

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- |               |             |   |
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