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ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE FOR THE AGE OF SETTLEMENTS

AT SARAH'S GULLY, COROMANDEL PENINSULA

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INTRODUCTION

In preparing an article on "Moahunters, Agriculture, and Changing Analogies in New Zealand Prehistory" (Green 1972), I had occasion to re-examine Golson's case for the contemporaneity of the pit complex portion of Site N.40/9 on the hillock behind and the radiocarbon dated 12th to 14th century midden with Archaic artifacts on the immediately adjacent marine terrace overlooking the beach (Fig. 1). Two lines of evidence which would have materially strengthened the argument developed there were inadvertently neglected. Both depend on the recently published radiocarbon dates for the Sarah's Gully pa, N.40/10 (Birks 1970), unlisted in the contents for that issue and therefore not included in the index which covers volumes 1-13. This note is intended to draw attention to and interpret those dates as well as acknowledge my failure to include them in the discussion of this question. Others, beside myself, may also not be aware of their importance to the argument that adjacent but spacially separated activity complexes of the Archaic, which are difficult to relate because of their quite different cultural content and function, may nevertheless belong to the same cultural phase and aspect in the Coromandel area.

THE ADDITIONAL DATA

The Birks' (1960) report of N.40/10 describes a three-phase occupation of the site, the last of which is connected with a partially complete ditch and bank defensive system. At that period the interior of the small (54.8 by 18.3 m.) pa presents evidence that it functioned as a habitation site where extensive cooking in ovens took place, especially in the more level central portion. As well as charcoal and oven stone from this activity, shell, fishbone and numerous flakes of obsidian attest to other domestic functions concerned with food preparation and consumption carried on within the defences. Some of the postholes, the Birks have plausibly interpreted as wind screens for ovens where alignments occurred on the exposed and windy seaward side of the site, but many others fell into no recognisable pattern, though indicative of some form of surface structure. This situation, found

on other pa like Kauri Point (N.53-54/6) or Ongari Point (N.53-54/10) suggests that at least some of these postholes belong to above ground dwellings (Shawcross 1964: 96; 1966: 68-70).

An irregularly shaped pit on the slope to the sea, filled with midden assigned to this phase, contained a complete utilitarian adze of a generalised type and barbed bone point of a composite fishhook. A radiocarbon date for this phase yielded a result of A.D. 1615 \pm 48, which is in keeping with its Maori cultural assignment (Green 1963: 67).

While not mentioned in the Birks' report, a comment by Golsen in his very brief description of the initial excavations on N.40/10 is important, as he would have been concerned with just such evidence because of its significance for N.40/9.

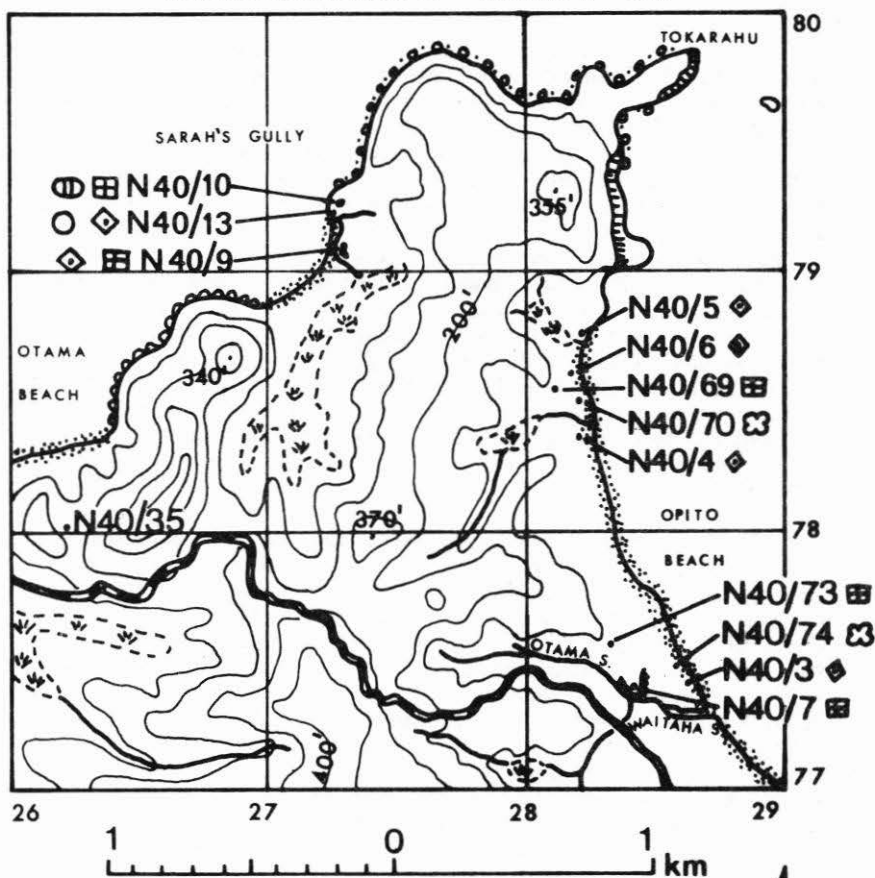
"The later stage was evidenced by the quantities of obsidian and haangi stones in the blown sand layer which mantled the site. The earlier stage consisted in a number of pits dug into the subsoil and filled completely by natural or human agency before the sand mantling began."

(1959: 16).

Thus my statement (1972: 30) that the wind blown layer of sand mantling the pit and posthole portion of N.40/9 did not also occur on N.40/10 is in error. It does occur on the pa, where it can be securely dated at two standard deviations to somewhere in the 16th or 17th century. It is another indication that pit features mantled by sand in Sarah's Gully are likely to be of 16th century or earlier age.

Support for this interpretation is provided by dates for the two underlying undefended pit complex phases at N.40/10, some pits of which have already been noted as being typologically related to some of those mantled by the sand at N.40/9 (Green 1963: 67). One of a number of east-west oriented shallow rectangular pits, each with a central alignment of three postholes and others along the sides was radiocarbon dated as A.D. 1562 \pm 49. In combination with the above date for Phase III, this suggests a firm 16th century date for the Phase II undefended pit complex where few activities other than storage are in evidence. Phase I consisted of two large deep and four smaller bell-shaped underground pits, one of which has been radiocarbon dated to A.D. 1247 \pm 46. Probably associated with this phase are two other pits, narrow in plan, straight sided, and of gravelike appearance. This early age for these underground pits would seem to provide further support for an interpretation which assigns the underground storage pits of the earliest occupation level

COROMANDEL SHEET 40



- ⊖ PA
- ▨ PIT COMPLEX
- ⊞ SHELL DUMP BEACH MIDDEN
- ◇ ARCHAIC BEACH MIDDEN
- EUROPEAN CONTACT BEACH

GRID NORTH

at N.40/7 on Skipper's Ridge, Opito, to the 14th century. The argument that such pits cannot be of this age would no longer seem valid.

The nearest associated midden to the undefended pit complexes of N.40/10 is situated on a low lying terrace between the pa headland and the sea near a point where the stream in the adjacent ravine enters a tidal pool (Fig. 1). Here an upper layer was encountered containing post-European contact materials which some have associated with an oral tradition of Sarah, the last Maori inhabitant of the bay. The lower layer possessed ovens with moa bones and Archaic portable artifacts (Birks 1960). On the basis of position and age, a conjunction between the pits of Phase I on the headland above and the midden below can be advanced. More important is the obvious implication of a 13th century pit complex on the headland as old as the 13th and 14th century multi-layered Archaic midden across the creek on the marine terrace of N.40/9. It certainly lends credence to the 12th century date for the remnants of a pit in that midden and to the notion that Archaic portable artifact assemblages are to be equated in some way with pit complexes in this bay.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above data, the argument developed in Green (1972) for a long term pattern of undefended pit complexes on low ridges immediately behind Archaic and Classic Phase beach middens at Opito and Sarah's Gully is considerably strengthened. The earliest set would consist of the Phase I pits at N.40/10 dated to the 13th century which are probably to be associated with the Archaic midden of N.40/13. Another set would be the layer IV pit complex of N.40/7 which is probably to be associated with the layer 4C midden at N.40/3 at Opito dated to the early 14th century. In each instance large underground storage pits are part of the pit complex, along with type D buttress pits (Shawcross 1966: 66) in the case of N.40/7 and small grave-shaped pits in the case of N.40/10. The next set at Opito would consist of the shallow rectangular and small bin pit complex of N.40/7, layer III, and the layer 4A beach midden at N.40/3. A very similar pit complex at Sarah's Gully fairly securely associated with a beachfront midden of similar age would be N.40/9 dating to the late 14th century A.D. On the evidence of N.40/10 a rather similar set of shallow rectangular pits from Phase II can also be identified for the 16th century in that bay, though no associated beach midden can be nominated at present. At Skipper's Ridge II, N.40/73, a pit complex of a type similar to these others has been dated to the 18th century. In this instance it is difficult to nominate which of several late and unrecorded middens on the beachfront should be selected.

as of approximately the same age, though doubtless one of them would furnish the missing component.

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