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An Archaeological Survey of Catlins Lake and Estuary, Southland

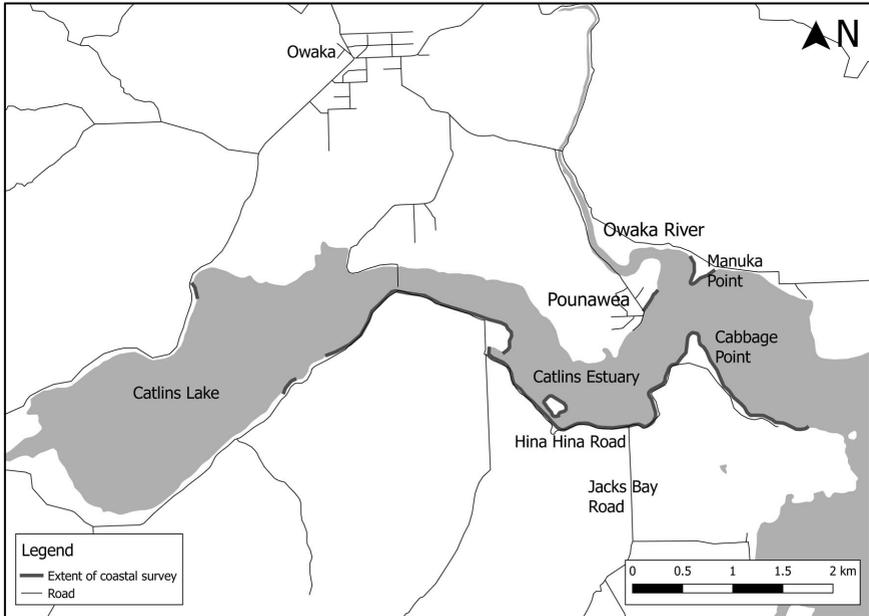
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Introduction

This report pertains to an archaeological survey of the Catlins Lake and estuary that took place in May 2018, funded in part by a grant from the New Zealand Archaeological Association Walton Fund. The intent of the survey was to update the existing archaeological site records for the area, most of which had not been reassessed since the area was first surveyed in the 1970s, and to record any hitherto unrecorded archaeological sites around the lake and estuary. It was limited in scope and the following report is intended as a brief overview of the current state of visible archaeology in the area, rather than an in-depth discussion or interpretation of that archaeology. The project confirmed the continued existence of Māori and Pākehā archaeology in this part of Murihiku and the Catlins and highlighted a number of (largely well-known) issues regarding the erosion and ongoing monitoring of archaeological sites in coastal and estuarine environments. It also reaffirmed some of the difficulties involved in revisiting and relocating sites after the passage of decades.

The Pounawaea/Catlins River estuary lies a short distance southeast of Ōwaka in the Catlins, Southland (Figure 1). Kuramea/Catlins Lake, is the upper section of the estuary, the lower part of which is also fed by the Ōwaka River. In 2018, there were approximately 31 recorded archaeological sites around the shores of the estuary, most of them related to the Māori occupation of the area. As a resource-rich estuary, the area was a significant location of early settlement, with two notable early Māori sites: H47/1, known as the ‘Pounawea’ site, at Mānuka Point where the Ōwaka River meets the larger estuary, and H47/2, known as the ‘Hinahina’ site, on a terrace above the estuary on the opposite shore. These sites were excavated in the 1950s by Les Lockerbie, but the published results of these excavations were limited. Further excavations in the 1970s at the Pounawea site discovered a range of faunal and artefact material that informed archaeological understanding of Māori occupation of the coasts of southern New Zealand (Hamel 2001; Lockerbie 1959). The area also has a significant history in the development of Māori and Pākehā industries of sealing, whaling, sawmilling, and farming (Tyrrell 1989).



*Figure 1. Extent of 2018 coastal survey.
(Image: LINZ Data Service, 2019; QGIS, 2019)*

The majority of archaeological sites in the area were initially recorded in January and February 1977 by Jill Hamel, F.J. Teal, P.S. Croad, and J.J. Aitken. The area was not included in the site recording scheme update project, and none have been updated since the initial recording forty years ago. As with many areas of New Zealand, particularly those in rural areas or with limited or early archaeological surveys, the initial site recording largely excluded Pākehā sites, with the exception of industrial structures (like tramways, jetties) and a pilot station. There are also records of archaeological material, such as the find locations of waka held at the Ōwaka Museum, that are missing from the site recording scheme.

As a rural area with little in the way of development, no local archaeologist, and somewhat isolated locations, it is also likely that archaeological sites have been modified or destroyed without the awareness of local rūnanga, the archaeological community or Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga. Any ongoing monitoring of these sites relies heavily on volunteer survey from the local and/or archaeological community.

2018 Archaeological Survey

The 2018 survey was carried out between 15 and 17 May 2018 by Jessie Garland and Tristan Wadsworth and aimed to find as many of the sites recorded during the 1970s as possible within the short timeframe. The survey was limited to publicly accessible land and was consequently focused on the southern shore of the Catlins Lake and Estuary, where the majority of the recorded sites are located. The Pounaweia site at Manuka Point (H47/1) was also included. Attempts were made to conduct the survey during low tide, but due to the limited time frame, this was not always possible. Aerial photographs were also used provide a brief assessment of landscape change and erosion in the area over time, an approach that has been successfully demonstrated in similar environments elsewhere in Otago in recent years (Hil 2018).

Despite the length of time between surveys, several of the features recorded in 1977 could be relocated with a reasonable degree of certainty in 2018, particularly on the southern shore of the estuary to the west of Cabbage Point (Figure 1; Table 1). Though there were slight variations in descriptions of size, the features remained similar in appearance, perhaps indicating that erosion or other disturbance has been minimal over the intervening years, or that the hidden portions of the site exposed by erosion are similar to those that have already been exposed.

The relocation of other sites proved difficult. In some cases, visible archaeological material could not be definitively correlated with existing site records, due to the use of landmarks that no longer exist or references to local knowledge that has been lost (i.e. to houses or landowners that are no longer present). In such instances, observed archaeological features were recorded as new sites, as this was considered preferable to incorrectly associating them with existing records. Several other recorded sites could not be relocated at all in 2018. While coastal erosion is likely to be responsible for some of this, the growth of vegetation or placement of additional rock armour along the shore in the decades since the initial site recording has also obscured areas with recorded archaeological features. In these cases, it is unclear whether those features still exist behind or underneath these obstructions.

It is interesting to note that, except for Manuka Point (H47/1) and one oven feature (H47/48), little obvious evidence of erosion – such as sections of bank collapse or eroded archaeological material in the estuary – was observed around the features in 2018. This may indicate that erosion in these areas was limited, or that evidence has been removed by tidal action. However, the expansion of rock

armour around the shores of the estuary and lake in the decades since the initial site recording is also a factor. It is not clear exactly when this was added: video footage of the area from the late 1940s and early 1950s shows rocks shoring up the bank in some areas, particularly near the Hina Hina Road bridge, but the banks of the estuary to the east of the Jack's Bay intersection (where much of the archaeological material is recorded) remained bare (McIntyre, C., via Garland, M. pers. comm. 02/2019). The armour is still not continuous around the entire estuary and lake shore and this may be affecting both the visibility and the survival of sites in those sections of shoreline that remain unarmoured, partially by armoured areas redirecting tidal action into surrounding areas without. For example, large portions of an oven feature (H47/48) found in one such section were visible on the beach in front of the exposed scarp, suggesting recent erosion (Figure 2).



Figure 2. An eroding oven feature (H47/48) (Image: J. Garland).

Results

Fourteen existing sites were updated, and six new archaeological sites were recorded as a result of the survey, shown in *Table 1* and Figure 3.

Garland & Wadsworth – Catlins Lake Survey

Table 1. Sites recorded and updated as a result of 2018 survey.

Site	Site type	Description	Results of 2018 survey
H46/29	Findspot	Pounamu mere findspot	Not located
H47/1	Occupation site	‘Pounaweā’ site. Village site located on sand spit at Manuka Point	Not located. Site most likely destroyed in entirety.
H47/2	Midden	‘Hinahina’ site. Midden deflating from an eroding dune slope.	Relocated. Remains in similar condition to 1970s.
H47/8	Midden	Midden at estuary edge, possibly associated with H47/9.	Not definitively located during survey. Ass. material may be recorded as part of H47/9.
H47/9	Midden	Midden at estuary edge, possibly associated with H47/8.	Relocated. Remains in similar condition to 1970s.
H47/10	Midden	Possible European midden, 1 on estuary edge.	Poss. relocated: cultural layer, no clear faunal or artefact material. Poss. ass. with H47/52.
H47/11	Midden	Midden at estuary edge.	Unable to relocate site. Possibly destroyed by coastal erosion.
H47/12	Midden	Midden at estuary edge.	No located. Poss. destroyed by coastal erosion.
H47/19	Midden	On shore of Catlins Lake.	Not located
H47/21	Midden	On shore of Catlins Lake.	Not located
H47/22	Midden	On shore of Catlins Lake.	Not located
H47/23	Midden	On shore of Catlins Lake.	Not located. Poss. ass. with newly recorded H47/50.
H47/24	Midden	On shore of Catlins Lake.	Not located. Poss. ass. with newly recorded H47/50.
H47/25	Midden	On shore of Catlins Lake.	Relocated during 2018 survey.
H47/47	Jetty	19 th century jetty on west side of Catlins Lake.	New site recorded 2018
H47/48	Oven	Eroding oven feature on south side of Catlins Estuary, south of Yacht Club point.	New site recorded 2018
H47/49	Midden	Possible midden at outlet of Mill Creek.	New site recorded 2018
H47/50	Midden	One of several midden sites recorded on shore of Catlins Lake.	New site recorded 2018, Poss. ass. with H47/23 and H47/24.
H47/51	Midden/occupation layer	European midden/occupation layer	New site recorded 2018 poss. ass. with H47/52.
H47/52	19 th century homestead	Miller family homestead site, built ca. 1880s.	New site recorded 2018

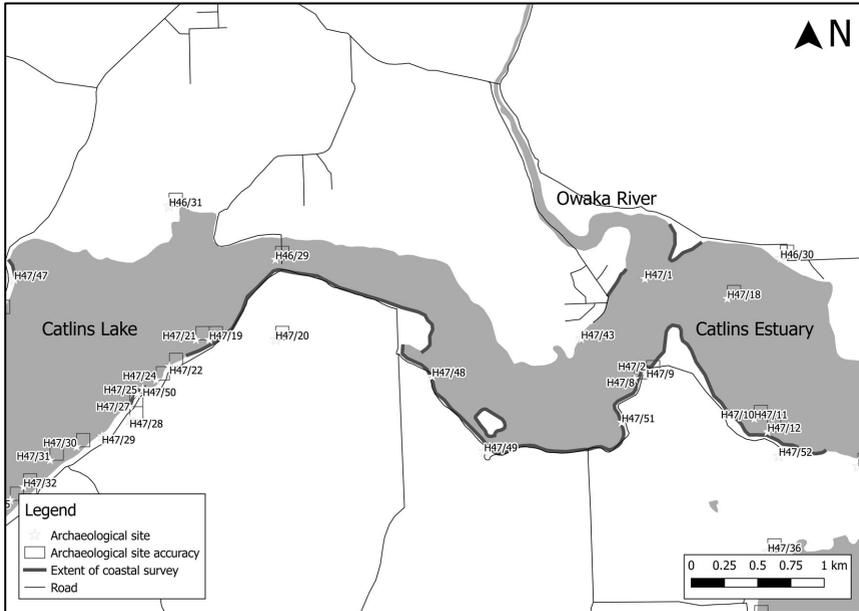


Figure 3. Recorded archaeological sites within and near the survey area (ArchSite, 2019; LINZ Data Service, 2019; QGIS, 2019).

Midden and oven sites

The majority of archaeological features recorded during the survey were layers of midden exposed in beach scarps along the estuary and lake (Table 1, Figure 4). The full extents of these features are not known, but most are expected to extend considerably inland. Many are relatively close together, and the exposed portions, although recorded as separate features or sites, may be just the visible parts of single features or sites. Some of the sites could be recorded in greater detail than in the 1970s, and in at least one example (H47/9), the exposed midden layers showed differential deposition of shellfish species and concentrations of specific species (Figure 5). This may suggest individual deposits/dumps from a kete or basket, with nested shell units also observed (c.f. Witter 2013). In general, the middens were typical of such features in New Zealand estuarine environments; dominated by pipi, cockle, and mudsnail. Mussel and pupu/cats eye were also observed, but little bone, and no artefact material was present. However, it must be noted that survey observations rarely represent the full variety of faunal or artefact assemblages that would be revealed by analysis of samples.



Figure 4. Midden feature (H47/9) exposed in scarp (J. Garland).



*Figure 5. Concentration of mudsnails (H47/9) (J. Garland).
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The identification of likely oven features, along with the presence of fire-cracked rock in H47/9 and H47/25, somewhat expands the range of recorded archaeological features in the area. The oven site (H47/48) was found between two areas of rock armour to the west of the Jack's Bay intersection and east of the Yacht Club. The feature contained large charcoal fragments and heavily eroded, powdery bird bone, as well as cobbles of the local bedrock, similar to sandstone in appearance.

Manuka Point

The original site record referred to the site (Pounaweia) as being on a small peninsula (Manuka Point) on the north bank of the Catlins River at its intersection with the Owaka River. The triangular sand spit on which the site was located was approximately 650 m long in 1865 (LINZ, 1865). The site was excavated by Les Lockerbie in 1957, who described parts of it being submerged by high tide, and video footage from the late 1940s and early 1950s also shows a significant portion of the point underwater (Lockerbie 1959; McIntyre, C., via M. Garland, pers. comm. 02/2019). By 1979, at least 150 m of the point had been eroded and the site was described as a flat sandy islet 22 m long, 3-4 m wide and separated from the remainder of the point by a tidal causeway, caused by the movement of the main flow of the Owaka River. The site was then low-lying, sometimes submerged during high tide (Hamel, 1979). By 1995, only a thin sandspit remained (Crown SN9457 1995).

As of May 2018, Manuka Point now only extends approximately 200 m southwest from the edge of Newhaven Road and the main channel of the Owaka River has entirely cut through the long narrow point, which is no longer present. An artificial rocky bank has been formed toward the middle of what was originally the sand spit and may have been placed to prevent erosion. No archaeological material was observed around the remnant edge of the point, or in the former location of the sand spit, the majority of which is now inundated even at low tide. Further ongoing erosion of the northeast portion of the point is also visible.

Pākehā sites

Three previously unrecorded sites associated with Pākehā occupation were identified during the 2018 survey (H47/47, H47/51 and H47/52). Prior to this, recorded Pākehā sites were limited to a probable European midden (H47/10), remnants of the historic tramway (H47/16) at the west end of the Catlins Lake and the pilot station (H47/46), located above the Hina Hina heads. Unfortunately,

neither of these sites could be revisited in 2018 due to unsuitable tides (tramway) and inaccessible land (pilot station). However, remnants of a historic jetty, visible on an 1887 survey plan, could be seen above the water at the western end of the lake, near to the recorded location of the tramway, and were recorded as H47/47.

Faint remnants of the European midden recorded in 1977 (H47/10) were found in 2018 in the scarp below the site of H47/52, a 19th century homestead first built and occupied by Peter and Agnes Miller in the 1880s. The Millers, and their descendants, resided on and farmed the land east of the Jacks Bay intersection with Hina Hina Road until the late 1980s, to the extent that the Hina Hina headland was referred to as Miller's Point in late 19th century accounts of the area (*Otago Witness* 12/08/1887: 18; 24/03/1892: 3). The original weatherboard villa from the 1880s remained standing, albeit in a derelict state, until 2006, when it was demolished (Figure 6). However, satellite photography of the site, which shows a large pile of house debris in the original location, and observations from the track below, including the existence of large macrocarpa trees, suggests that little to no site-clearance has occurred since.



Figure 6. 1880s Miller homestead in 2005, prior to demolition (J. Garland).

Another probable colonial era midden and/or cultural layer (H47/51) identified in the scarp of the road around to the southwest of the homestead may also be associated with the Miller's occupation of the land. The history of European occupation in the area is vague at present, but the feature may be related to earlier domestic occupation or land clearance (M. Garland and M. McEwan, Milller family descendants, pers. comm. [email] 14/11/2018).

It is almost certain that other unrecorded Pākehā sites exist in the area, the recording of which would require extensive historical research and involvement with the local community. Details of the Miller family homestead, including its location, could only be gathered during this survey due to one of the authors having family connections to the area: this serves to illustrate again how invaluable local knowledge can be to archaeological enquiries, particularly in rural or isolated areas.

Conclusion

Although limited in extent, this survey has identified that the Catlins Lake and estuary remains rich in Māori and Pākehā archaeology, despite the loss of significant sites like Manuka Point over the last half a century. It is an understudied landscape, particularly in recent decades, and the 2018 survey has served to highlight some of the ways in which that absence of archaeological work has impacted site and feature records for the area. The land itself is dynamic, as is common with estuarine and lake environments, and the discovery of previously unrecorded sites, along with the disappearance of others, speaks to the effects of erosion on the archaeology along the shoreline. The relative lack of recorded Pākehā sites, particularly domestic ones, in the vicinity also highlights the ways in which professional developments in archaeology – such as the growing recognition of historical archaeology in recent decades – have had little impact on the recorded archaeological landscape. While this is likely a reflection of the lack of site updates in the area since the 1970s and 1980s, it is also symptomatic of the relative dearth of recorded domestic Pākehā archaeology outside of urban centres or significant colonial landscapes in New Zealand.

More work is required. Ideally, future surveys of the area will continue to monitor the exposed archaeology around the lake and estuary shore, but will also incorporate local rūnanga and settler knowledge of the area, past and present, including information regarding archaeological material found prior to or outside of the 1975 legislation. There may be a need for salvage excavation in some areas, but while it is clear that archaeological material is eroding out of the shore, the rate and extent of this erosion remains poorly understood. Given more regular

monitoring and survey, however, which we hope to do, some of these questions may be answered and the archaeological potential of the landscape more clearly identified.

Acknowledgements

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