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AN ASSEMBLAGE FROM RINGARINGA, STEWART ISLAND

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ABSTRACT

Ringaringa is the name given to a sandy beach, a headland and isthmus near the entrance to Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island. The area investigated is the isthmus: Map reference NZMS.219, 200400. A series of sondages and a small excavation indicate that there is preserved in this place discrete areas with a range of stratified cultural material associated with industrial activity, and diffuse areas of midden.

The excavation is interesting particularly because of the finding of moa egg shell in the occupation layers, the segregative nature of the occupation site, and the sondage evidence of a similar discrete site within a short distance of it.

INTRODUCTION

Three weeks of careful sampling and limited excavation of the cultural layers at Ringaringa, with the co-operation of the owner of the land and the Stewart Island Museum, during January 1970, has provided a factual record. In view of the paucity of published Stewart Island archaeological reports, and the at present almost untackled problem of the contemporaneousness of moas and man on the Island, it is felt that this account of Ringaringa can usefully be presented.

AIMS

A midden, mostly of mussel shell, varying from one to three feet thick, is exposed in the eroded bank behind the site of a former boatshed on a small beach on the east side of the Ringaringa isthmus. The initial aim was to put down sondages systematically to ascertain the extent, depths, and nature of this cultural layer. When the process revealed

areas of quite different character, the aim became more precise and it was desired to define and distinguish these areas by means of minimal excavation.

A considerable portion of the isthmus has formerly been spade dug for vegetable gardens; sondages showed that only peripheral areas remained undisturbed. In an area which sondages indicated to be undisturbed midden, a metre square was opened and little other than mussel shells and a few fish bones were found, and further excavation was not considered justified.

Attention was turned to where sondages indicated isolated sites characterized by industrial artefacts and the almost complete absence of mussel shells. Two such sites were indicated; it sufficed, therefore, that excavation be limited to one. Moa egg shell had, however, been turned up in the sondages in both of these discrete areas, and a further aim was that of ascertaining if moa bone also was present and of recording and identifying the associated assemblage.

ENVIRONMENT

Ringaringa isthmus is about 100 metres across between two sandy beaches facing east on to Foveaux Strait and west on to Paterson Inlet, and is fairly level for about 200 metres north and south at an elevation of about six metres above high water. To the south-east there is a sandspit which, at low water, is cut by only a narrow channel from Native Island. In the broader view, Ringaringa is on the north-east coast of Stewart Island which has an area of approximately 650 square miles and is separated by a minimum width of 15 miles from the South Island. Almost all of the Island is forested, which is attributed to the rainfall, the mild winter season, and the porous soil.

METHODS

Sondages were made with a spade at ten metre intervals. Of the level part of the isthmus approximately 70% was found to have been dug for gardens causing disturbance to the bottom of the cultural layer; approximately 10% was archaeologically sterile, and another 10% was excluded from sondaging on account of European and contact period Maori burials. The remaining 10% was found to contain undisturbed middens and occupation floors.

The blade width of the spade used was eight inches, and the sondages were made by lifting an eight-inch square turf and continuing down to

rock or hard impacted sand. The depths of layers were everywhere measured and contents examined and recorded. A square metre in an area of undisturbed midden was excavated and the deposit of mussel shells and fish bones sifted. One artefact was found. A square metre in an area where the sondages showed industrial occupation was conventionally excavated; balks were left, and the metre square excavations extended until the soil became sterile of any cultural material or black staining. The area thus excavated was eight metres, parallel to the low cliff, by four metres, terminating about two metres from the cliff edge. Both of these excavations were on the west side of the isthmus, overlooking the Inlet.

DESCRIPTION OF EXCAVATIONS

1. Midden Area

One metre square opened.
Top soil removed, approximately 20 cm.
Sandy shell midden deposit approximately 50 cm. thick.
Clean sand down to hard dark sand at depth of 1 m.

2. Industrial Occupation Area

8 x 4 metres opened.
An impacted cultural floor and a cultural layer with a maximum thickness of 30 cm. extending over a roughly oval area 7.5 m. x 3.5 m. of black sand, with oven stones, faunal remains and artefacts.
Seal of clean sand, approximately 30 cm. thick.
A lower impacted cultural floor and cultural layer with a maximum thickness of 15 cm. extending over a roughly circular area of 3 m. diam. Less black than the higher layer, containing oven stones, faunal remains and artefacts.
Clean hard dark sand at a depth, at centre of excavation, of approximately 1 m.

No disturbance, such as would be caused by ovens or posts, was found in the seal of clean sand separating the two cultural layers or anywhere in the natural.

Lying on the upper cultural layer at its southern end was a pavement formed of flat stones covering an area two metres by 50 cm.

FAUNAL REMAINS

Midden Area

Aves	Puffinus griseus
Mollusca	Alcithoe swainsonii Amphidesma australis Halitotis iris Lunella smaragda, operculum only Maoricolpus roseus Mytilus edulis aotenuus
Pisces	Unidentified small fish bones

Industrial Occupation Area

Upper Layer	Aves	Phalacrocorax chalconotus Puffinus griseus Puffinus tenuirostris Moa egg shell
	Mammalia	Arctocephalus forsteri Canis familiaris Linne (rami of mandibles only) Mirounga leonina
	Mollusca	Alcithoe swainsonii Amphidesma australis Amphidesma foisterianam Buccinulum littorinoides, or lineum Cellana ornata Cellana strigilis redimiculum Halitotis iris Lepsithias sp. Lunella smaragda Maoricolpus roseus Mytilus edulis aotenuus Paphirus largellierte Strathiolaria papulosa gigas
	Pisces	Pseudolabrus pittensis (lower pharyngeal dental processes) Thyrsites atua Unidentified large and small fish bones

Industrial Occupation Area

Lower Layer	Aves	Phalacrocorax chalconotus Puffinus griseus Moa egg shell
	Mammalia	Arctocephalus forsteri Canis familiaris Linne Mirounga leonina
	Mollusca	Alcithoe swainsonii Amphidesma australis Amphidesma foisterianam Buccinulum littorinoides, or lineum Halitotis iris Lunella smaragda Maoricolpus roseus Mytilus edulis aotenuus Paphirus largellierte Pecten novozelandiae rakuriae
	Pisces	Thyrsites atua

ARTEFACTS

Midden Area

Bone	Fish-hook, circular one-piece, Type D2 Hjarno Classification (Hjarno 1967)
Charcoal	Manuka only identified

Industrial Occupation Area

Upper Layer	Bone	Awls	(Mostly made from the distal end and shaft of humeri of Puffinus griseus)
		Fish-hooks	Points of composite lure hooks Hjarno Classification Type A.1 variants a and c Type C.1b variant b
			U-shape one-piece hooks, Type D.1
			One-piece hooks with lower point barb Type D.4b

		Tabs	(Possibly arctocephalus forsteri)
		Worked bone	(Large seal)
	Stone	Adzes	Greywacke (quadrangular with tang)
		Awls	Quartzite
		Drill points	Argillite Greenstone Obsidian Quartz crystal Quartzite
		Hammer stone	Diorite
		Knives	Argillite Chert Quartz crystal
		Lure	Serpentine
		Polishers	Chlorite 2 phyllite Sandstone, muddy Sandstone, baked, haematitic Schist
		Scrapers	Argillite (Riverton) Argillite (not Riverton) Chert Mica schist Quartz crystal Sandstone, fine
		Sinkers	Diorite (single groove)
	Industrial Occupation Area		
Lower Layer	Bone	Awls	(Humeri of Puffinus griseus)
		Fish-hooks	U-shaped one-piece hooks, Type D.1
		Worked bone	Two sections of partly worked shaft of human humerus, massive Polynesian.

Stone	Drill points	Argillite Quartz crystal
	Knives	Argillite Obsidian Quartz crystal
	Scrapers	Argillite Chert Quartz crystal

TECHNIQUES

Adzes show hammer dressing and polishing, and flake production by striking directly from the core is much in evidence. Bone is sawn, drilled and abraded. One centre-bit type awl was found with a half-drilled bone tab, the tool matching the marks; while two round stones of equal weight, not grooved, found in the same layer could have been the fly wheel stones of a drilling-stock.

COMMENT

Some general observations may help to define the site. The artefacts found in the industrial occupation area are either well used or broken - the manufacturing tools broken after use, the fish-hooks before completion. Six dog mandibles were found without other dog bones; the moa egg shell fragments were found in both layers and in the other similar industrial area but not a single piece of moa bone. There was much fragmentary quartz, quartz crystal and granular stone throughout the layers which, in view of the number of drill points found, may have been used in association with grinding and boring. The knives are mostly small, some show ingenious utilization of the faces and angles of quartz crystals, and the successful use of a Levalloisian technique to strike off flakes as long as 6 cm. Some triangular section quartz tools found broken may have been as long as 15 cm. However, none of the knives are comparable to those usually found in association with moa remains (Knight, 1965) such as the long flake knives which have been reported found with moa remains on Stewart Island (Benham, 1909).

The variety of shell species found sparsely distributed in what has been designated an industrial occupation area, although a fairly common finding on early occupation sites where evidence of moa eating is absent, is in marked contrast to the sampled deposit in the adjacent midden area which is typical of the monotony of many late South Island shell tips.

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