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AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY OF MAORI ROCK-SHELTER ART
 IN SOUTH CANTERBURY

by Tony Fomison

The survey encompassed the open downlands of South Canterbury, which lie sandwiched between inland ranges and a thin strip of coastal plain. Here limestone outcrops as rows of bluffs which line the sides of narrow valleys dissecting the downland, and the shelters in which the drawings were recorded, occur along the foot of the bluffs - normally as shallow, earth-floored undercuts, occasionally as rock-floored ledges, but seldom as proper caves.

Previous Fieldwork:

From the days of such versatile men as Von Haast, leading New Zealand scientists have been attracted to the rock drawings in Canterbury. Their usual procedure was a conducted tour of the few drawings then known, followed by a description of the visit in some report or article ①, ②, ③,

④
 A spiritualist from Kansas U.S.A. arrived on the scene in 1916 and typified an overseas prejudice that we have no regard for our rock drawings, by commencing to chisel them out for removal to "Safety." His activities were eventually curtailed and export of the cut blocks prevented - they are now in the Otago Museum. By carrying out a week's fieldwork for the South Canterbury Historical Society in 1945, Dr. R. Puff has continued the association of the Canterbury Museum with local rock drawings which was begun by Haast and Speight. In his cyclostyled report he reiterated Speight's pleas for protection and suggested that the drawings be copied. This was commenced the following year when the dutch artist Theo Schoon was engaged by the Internal Affairs Department to make copies, which in accordance with existent methods were based on outline tracings, and painted in oils on cardboard. Although Schoon considerably increased the number of known shelters, he is to be held responsible for widespread retouching and restoration in greasy crayon. Local enthusiasts have been, and still are, numerous: Frank Huddleston ⑤, W.W. Smith ⑥, G.A. Hornsey; Gordon Griffiths; J. Irvine; and R.A. Evans. But the best known of these workers is undoubtedly Mr. Hugh McCully of Timaru.

Trust Survey:

The decision to make local rock drawings the aim of a project to commemorate South Canterbury's Centennial was made at a meeting of the South Canterbury Regional Committee of the National Historic Places Trust in 1959.

It was decided that before a programme of fencing and surface treatment could be commenced, more information about the general locality and condition of the shelters was required. Much of the past fieldwork had been done by private researchers who in their concern with the proving of personal theories had largely failed to adequately pinpoint and describe the sites for later fieldwork. My job, therefore, took the form of a preliminary survey, its aim to visit all known drawings in South Canterbury (excluding Benmore) in order to:-

- (a) Make satisfactory map plottings
- (b) List those requiring fencing and surface treatment
- (c) List those suitable for signposting

The difference between this survey and the Benmore one ⑦ will be obvious. No copying or excavation formed an official part of the South Canterbury project.

Initially, the scope of the survey was restricted to the recording of known shelters, for which the main aids to relocation were Schoon's painted copies and fieldbooks belonging to Dr. Duff. But accidental discoveries of unrecorded shelters decided me to search the limestone country irrespective of previous records, and the survey developed into a full exploration of the district. As each shelter was located it received a field number under which the extent and condition of its drawings were noted in detail. Shelters in those districts for which NZMS 1 maps had been issued, were pin-pointed by grid references.

In a total of nine weeks exploration from August 1959 to February 1961 185 shelters with drawings were recorded. Some areas were not finished, and a few of those recorded by Schoon were not relocated. However these were few in number and not impressive examples: they can be readily added to those listed by the survey as they come to light. Many isolated shelters, and several whole series, were new to the records. Several artifacts were picked up in some shelters - flakes of obsidian, limestone, flint and quartzite; an adze; fragment of stone file. They were deposited with the South Canterbury Historical Museum, Timaru. Numbered shelters were listed with relevant details in three interim reports presented to the South Canterbury Regional Committee during the course of the survey.

The Drawings:

Drawings were found on the roofs and back walls of habitable shelters, on the floors of high ledges, in crevices, and on the surfaces of isolated rocks. A discussion of chronology and style must necessarily await more detailed investigation and in the following notes I confine myself to other aspects.

Subject Matter:

The general nature of rock-shelter art has already been treated in Annual Reports of the National Historic Places Trust. (8) The majority of South Canterbury's rock drawings appeared as stylised representations of a selected range of subjects, represented rather as formal symbols with a strong tendency towards symmetrically balanced limbs and paired terminals - no attempt being made at close imitation. Recognisable subjects covered the range of animal life in Maori times: water birds, ground birds, and birds of prey; fish; dog; lizards and insects. But most prevalent motif was the human figure, frequently shown in groups; in the possession of clubs and spears; in the company of dogs, or in proximity to canoe forms.

These human forms were usually so highly stylised that it was obvious no specific action was portrayed, and the degree of naturalism of one scene in which two men are poleing a flax raft (mokihi) was exceptional. Often motifs combined the features of different subjects to form fanciful hybrids and monsters. The latter, possibly the "taniwha" of mythology, were based on the convention used in the drawings for the fish or the lizard, to which were added the head or limbs of other animal forms. Though they showed little similarity with late (Classic) Maori wood carving art, affinities of the man, dog, fish, bird and reptile symbols to those occurring elsewhere in Oceania seemed to establish an exclusively Polynesian origin. Apart from the predominance of the human form and the spiral in both the rock drawings and Maori wood carving, affinities with the Classic Maori arts were most marked in the technically more allied mediums of tattoo, rafter, and "taniko" pattern. The subtle interplay of negative and positive so characteristic of the spirals in Maori body tattoo and rafter decoration occurred frequently on the rock shelter walls, and the triangular designs typical of taniko weaving were also recorded. (See also Duff, (9))

By their subject matter the drawings gave little indication of age, and barely outlined the period of Maori occupation archaeologically defined for New Zealand. At Craigmore on the Pareora River a series of drawings executed in red outline infilled with black included among the subjects three well drawn "Moas". (10) At the other end of the time scale a number of Maori signatures, sentences, and stylis^d copies of Colonial buildings, recorded European contact in the Opihi area. Written in the unmistakable Roman capitals taught by early missionaries, the signatures appeared to post-date any drawing with which they were associated. Typical signatures were those of WIRA; PIWA; H.R.E.; WIREMU; TAKAUMU; and ENERIATA. With the exception of a name in yellow, all post-European subjects were black.

Techniques:

Colours in the drawing were black; red - which varied from light orange to crimson -; and, least frequently, pale yellow. "Red ochre paint," "Kokowai and fish oil," "Weka oil and charcoal," and "charcoal stick" (12) are some of the current theories about pigment, yet it must be remembered that in New Zealand no attempts have been made to prove such theories by experiment, (13) and that no reliable traditions on the subject were ever recorded.

In South Canterbury, all of the black and yellow work and the majority of the red, appeared to have been applied in a drawing technique. Most of the subjects were composed of thin strokes, which were not solid, but appeared only where the colouring matter had caught on the tiny irregularities at the limestone surface - all consistent with a technique of applying dry colour in stick or lump form. The occurrence of yellow drawing is confined to limestone shelters, and my own experiments suggest that it was simply a piece of limestone picked up and applied raw to the weathered and darker limestone wall.

The methods of drawing can be described as monochrome (one applied colour); bi-chrome (two applied colours); and polychrome (more than two). In monochrome, black was prevalent, yellow rare. Yellow or red infill outlined with black were the usual bichrome combinations. In most of the few instances where black was outlined by red or yellow, the outlining colours appeared as subsequent retouching around drawings which were originally monochrome. There was only one example of polychrome drawing in which the three colours all seemed part of the original concept.

Most interesting techniques were some instances of burnished and incised drawing. They were found in adjacent shelters and could well have been the work of one hand.

The deterioration of black pigment which Ambrose and Davis recorded for the grey wacke shelter at Shepherd's Creek, Benmore, (14) was also present in South Canterbury, here on limestone. This phenomenon, in which an originally black colour has turned grey-white, appearing as a light stain on the darker rock surface, has been interpreted as a result of the bruising technique that was widespread in the making of stone adzes. (9)(12). But in examples I saw the surface had not been broken in any way, and the drawings were clearly composed of drawn lines - and bruising is not a drawing technique. In the Waitaki, settlement of this question had been made difficult because most of the faded drawings were mistakenly retouched by scraping, long prior to the National Historic Places Trust's work there - But none of these in South Canterbury had been drawn over, and there was an instance where the entire colour change from black to grey and so on to white, was discernible in the one drawing.

Requirements for the Future:

Research.

As elsewhere in New Zealand, the rock drawings are rarely documented by tribal tradition. Local historians such as Canon Stack (1) and Roberts (11) seemed to consider the association of the drawings with the earliest tribes as merely an admission by their informants that they knew nothing about the drawings, and Stevenson was probably close to the truth when he attributed the dearth of traditional information to the decimation of local communities by war and epidemic in the initial years of European

contact. 11. The South Canterbury drawings, then, like their older counterparts of European archaeology, are entirely unaccompanied by oral explanation, and our understanding of them can only be built up by future current research. The specific problems on which future work will concentrate have been already outlined by Ambrose and Davis 14 - age and cultural context of the drawings; and their purpose and significance. Opinion on significance has in the past been rather drastically divided as to whether the drawings had intense religious meaning, 15 or whether they merely "represented the time-filling scribbles of storm-stayed travellers", 9 and has been frequently based on considerations quite outside the field of archaeology. But research must first be directed to the archaeological assembling of data from the evidence of the drawings themselves, before the contributions of other branches of anthropology, etc., can be fully appreciated. Detailed inventories should be compiled on the distribution, relationship and sequence of drawing styles, of subject matter and of techniques.

Excavation must obviously play an important part in archaeological investigation - particularly in relating the drawings to our present picture of New Zealand's pre-history.

Much photography has been done in South Canterbury and it was suggested as advisable to assess the coverage and quality of photography to date before continuing work of this kind. Photographs have been taken by such professionals and local amateurs as A. Hamilton, (1897), Elmore, (1917); McCully; J.T. Salmon, (1939); W.A. Taylor, (1945); T. Schoon, (1946-7); I. Patterson, (1954); Langwood Studios, Timaru, (1959) and R.A. Evans, (1960). Of these Schoon's survey has been the most comprehensive.

The considerable body of outline tracings accumulated by various investigators has been shown by Ambrose and Davis' work in the Upper Waitaki to be quite unreliable as a basis for research 14. The new method of tracing with crayon on polythene reproduces the very nature of a drawing on rock, and as every line of colour can be recorded by the crayon, the method is exact. 8 14. Before polythene was on the market, tracings were done on semi-opaque "tracing-paper" through which only the basic outlines of the subject could be recorded; as the outlines of most drawings are indistinct, distortion and subjective interpretation resulted.

Schoon's painted boards constitute the other main body of copies. They are based on outline-tracings and have the same disadvantages. Moreover the National Historic Places Trust survey soon made it clear that Schoon copied only a portion of the drawings he discovered. Also, differences were continually noticed between his boards and the rock wall originals. In fact the painted copies would be regarded more correctly as an artist's interpretations than as objective copies.

To summarise, then, the directions which future fieldwork in South Canterbury should take - photographic recording has been considerable but needs to be co-ordinated and documented. Past tracings are of limited value and tracing on polythene should replace and extend them in the future. Archaeological excavation has been nil but must obviously take a leading part in any intensive research.

Preservation.

Although none of the drawings are to suffer the official destruction of those at Benmore, damage in other forms was evident. Generally the limestone shelters were more accessible than the Upper Waitaki ones, and casual vandalism was widespread. The attraction of bare rock perhaps, or the precedent established by the Maori drawings themselves, has encouraged the carving and writing of initials, names, sentences, etc., in shelters near to roads - in some cases covering Maori work.

But paradoxically it has been the efforts of various devotees to record and preserve the drawings, which has done most of the damage caused by human agency. In two cases drawings had been cut bodily from the rock (by Elmore in 1917) and the operation had defaced drawings for a distance in all directions. Outlining with white crayon had been a favourite method of clarifying the drawings for photography, and was present in many shelters. Retouching was the most widespread evil, in one case in black ink, all the others in grease crayon.

The main potential danger was found to be flaking of the rock surface. This natural process of weathering has been accelerated in many shelters by the rubbing of farm stock and the continual presence of such animals has also mired shelter walls. Occasionally, south facing shelters were recorded with macrocarpa trees screening the front and giving rise to mossy surface deposits.

In my interim reports to the local Committee of the National Historic Places Trust, surface treatment and fencing were strongly recommended. A list of those shelters requiring priority for fencing was submitted last year, and already three fences have been erected.

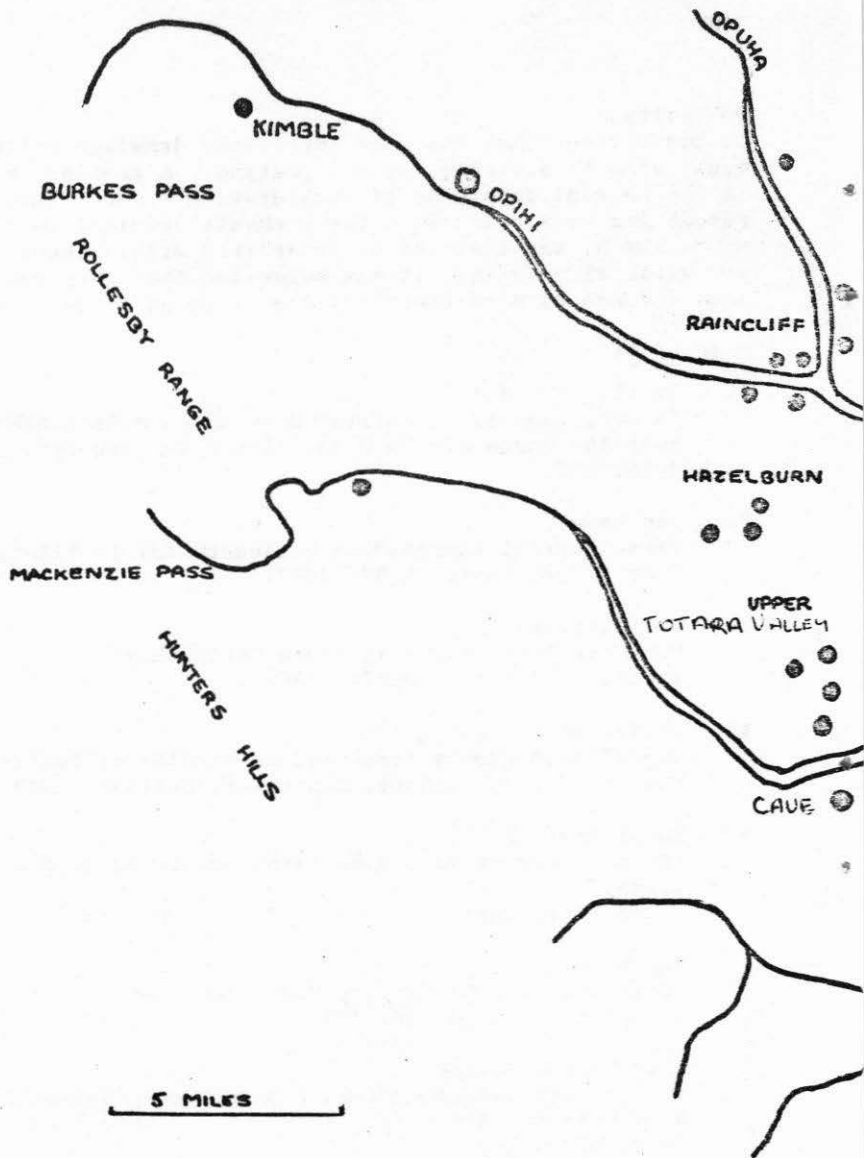
In the past, sodium silicate has been named a suitable preventive for surface flaking. (16). According to the experience of the Canterbury Stone Company, however, this tends to form a crust which peels readily, and that Company advised the use of an improved version known technically as Siliconate, and used for the treatment of building-limestone under the trade name of "Aqualux". Trial applications have accordingly been made by the South Canterbury Regional Committee on selected areas of shelter wall.

Publicity.

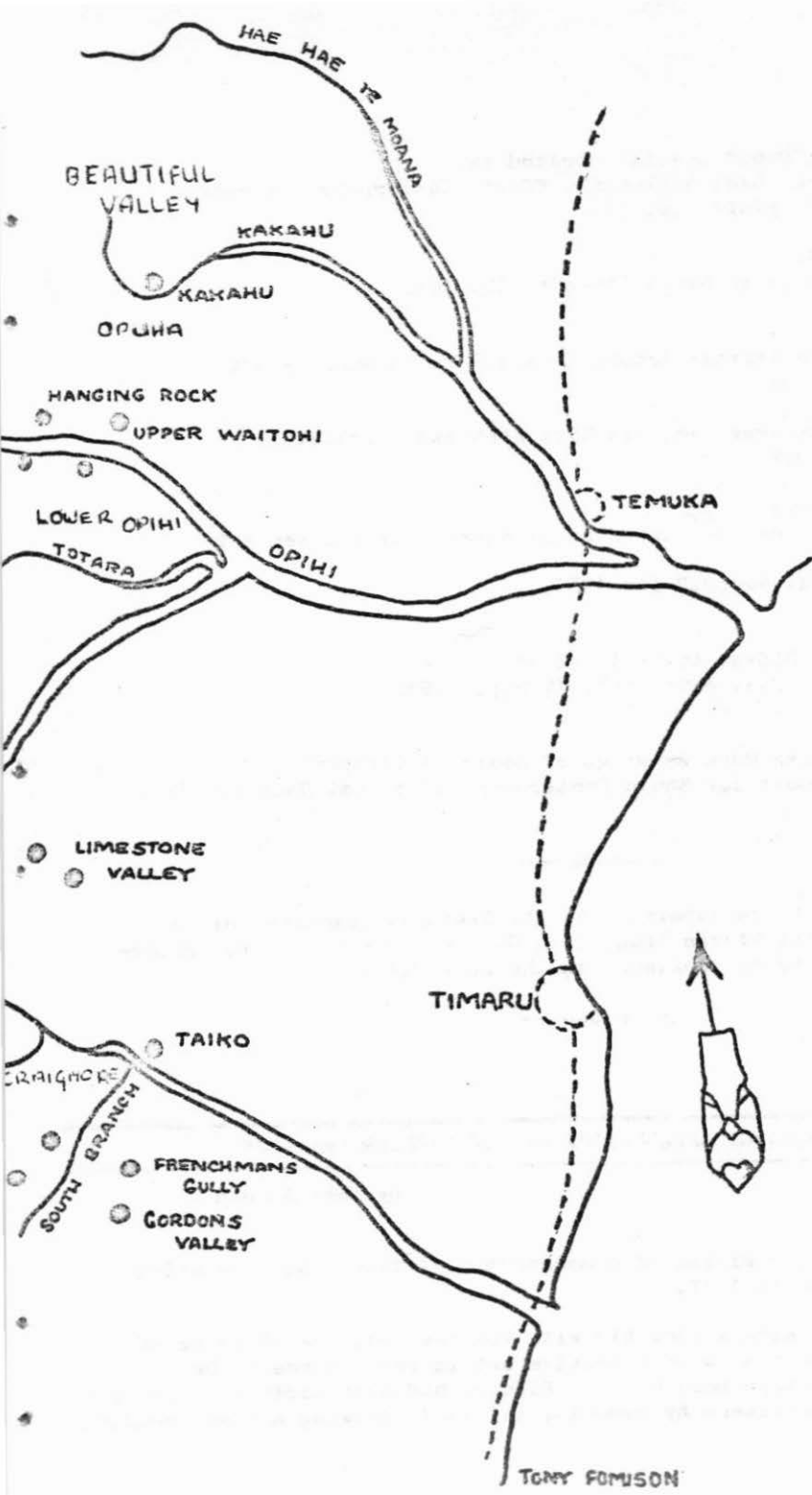
It was obvious that the more impressive drawings which required fencing would also be suitable for signposting. A problem in this connection is the present faintness of much drawing - and I have not recommended retouching as a solution. The rockwall original is our primary source, so to speak, and must not be interfered with. Where drawings are faded yet worth signposting, it was suggested that they could be clarified by the presence of a painted reconstruction on a board fixed in the shelter.

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Editor's Note:

The above report was submitted to the Regional Committee of The National Historic Places Trust in 1960. Mr. Fomison is to prepare a final report to be published in the near future.

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AN EARLY EXPLORATION OF N.Z.SHELTER DRAWINGS

by Theo Schoon

Editor's Note:

The following is a digest of a manuscript of Theo Schoon relating to his fieldwork in 1947.

Theo Schoon was struck forcibly with the possible significance of what appeared to him to be primitive art in the records of Dr. Ellmore in the Otago Museum. Dr. Ellmore had much earlier recovered specimens from shelters by removing the whole drawing and surrounding