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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF THE ARCHAIC PHASE OF
OCCUPATION IN SOUTH TARANAKI

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Statement:

To date some 160 sites in South Taranaki have been recorded. The majority of these are fortified sites and have been recorded as surface features. Only five sites have been investigated more fully, and four of these are coastal middens. In addition, a survey had been made of what appear to artifacts associated with the Archaic phase. This has been done simply to give some sort of picture however superficial, rudimentary and misleading it may be, of the probable extent of Archaic occupation. This paper is concerned with presenting the unequivocal evidence of Archaic occupation as revealed by excavation.

Artifact Survey:

First, to dispose of the matter, let me say that the survey of artifacts in museums and private collections has revealed that there are a great number which, from archaeological provenance elsewhere in the country, may be placed in the Archaic phase. These have been found in various places from the Patea River in the south to the Mokau River in the north indicating widespread occupation of the whole Province of Taranaki.

Tradition:

S.P. Smith (1910:23) records tradition of tangata whenua, or people of the land, being met by the members of the Fleet - both the Tokomaru and the Actea canoes - specific mention being made of these original occupants at Urenui, Waitara, Cape Egmont and at Patea. Whakapapa often start with a tangata whenua. To quote Professor Fortes, 'myths and legends counterfeit history; they do not document it.' (Fortes 1945:26)

Description of the Area:

Geologically, South Taranaki lies on a tertiary strata, the most obvious evidence of which is the soft grey mudstone of Pleistocene marine sediment known locally as papa. This lies at the base of 100 - 200 ft. high cliffs which line the South Taranaki Bight. At intervals there are cuts in this strata and the larger rivers enter the sea between these cuts. Over the papa lies a thick deposit of laharal agglomerate and on top of this a thinner layer of volcanic soil derived from Mount Egmont. (G.C. Shaw 1959:15). The area is undulating, cut here and there by deep river valleys. The pre-European vegetation probably extended as far as the coast but Maori fires brought about the replacement of the forest by scrub. (Holloway 1959:23) Rimu and rata were an important part of this pre-European mixed rain-forest, and may have grown for 6000 years. The last interglacial flora appears to have been of the same type. Wet places of the cleared forest grew kaikihitea, flax and sedge. The coast is today eroding fast - some 3 chains in 80 years. The wind blown beach sand deposited on the tops of the cliffs follows this retreat and, under certain conditions, have preserved parts of the early forest and the occupation areas intact. (Grant-Taylor 1962)

The majority of sites are located in the areas of replaced forests whilst the inland country which was still afforested at European contact has very few sites. Three of the rivers, the Patea, Waingongoro and Kaupokonui, have wide valleys opening through the Pleistocene cuts, and in two of these valleys Archaic sites have been found. Investigations at Patea are still incomplete, though it is likely that this area will too prove fruitful. Apart from these, sites are not particularly plentiful along the coast itself .. sand-dunes stretch from Patea to Hawera no doubt covering signs of early occupation. The first site I shall discuss lies in these dunes, three of the others are about the mouths of two rivers and the last in dunes, north of New Plymouth. All these sites are coastal.

Description of Sites:

Let me say at the outset that four of the sites I shall describe have midden in which moa-bones are to be found. In the present state of my knowledge it has been the presence of moa-bones which has drawn my attention to the sites - therefore they are selected. I don't consider that this selection is anything but subjective.

The first site, N129/104, is on the top of the coastal cliffs directly south of the town of Hawera. The site has been subject to a series of excavations by Mr. Dave Robinson of Hawera. Wind erosion has exposed the volcanic soil beneath the dunes. In this exposed place, on the soil, are scattered the remains of an extensive site, the presence of which is indicated by quantities of obsidian knives and flakes, argillite, heat cracked stones, ovens and in situ moa-bones. Owing to the crumbly nature of the bone it has not been possible to do more than determine the generic origin of the bone which has been seen in situ by Ron Scarlett. The area was apparently covered by water for a considerable period of time before finally being sealed beneath the shifting dunes. (Robinson 1961)

The second site, N129/77, which has been investigated more fully, is Ohawe - at the mouth of the Waingongoro River. This site has already been the subject of two papers, (Buist 1960; Buist and Yaldwyn 1960) but if I may briefly summarise:- The Rev. Taylor first found moa-bones at Ohawe in 1843. W. B. Mantell carried out a more extensive investigation and the bones he found were sent to the British Museum for positive identification and description. From a letter written by Mantell and preserved in the Alexander Turnbull Library it would appear that our finds were in the vicinity of his excavations, although the two to three chains of erosion which has occurred since then probably destroyed a greater part of his midden area. The area of our excavation was covered by up to ten feet of dune sand.

The possibility that the site was of more than passing interest was the excavation, in January, 1960, of an oven containing a complete pachyornis mappini leg. This proved conclusively that the moa and man were contemporaneous, a state not clear from the investigations of the nineteenth century. Excavations inland from the oven revealed a midden layer of up to eight inches thick, sealed by 24 ins. of blown river sand and then a varying seal of dune sand. In this heavily ash-charcoal stained layer were obsidian flakes and knives, chert flakes, a broken needle of moa-bone, heat fractured stones, moa egg-shell, bird bones, tuatara bones, rat bones, and a quantity of moa-bones.

Beneath this layer, in one isolated area, was a further oven containing the tarsometatarsus of an aptornis otidiformis. Altogether in an area thirty-two feet by twelve feet, sixty-seven moa bones were found. These were from eight separate identifiable species of moa, and all were found in a clearly midden context. The species were:-

1. *Pachyornis mappini* and *septentrionalis*
2. *Dinornis giganteus* and *struthoides*
3. *Euryapteryx tanae*, *geranoides* and *curtis*
4. *Anomalopteryx didiformis*

Of the other extinct birds, Mr. Ron Scarlett has identified:-

1. *Aptornis otidiformis* *wen* (Giant Rail)
2. *Notornis mantelli* (Takeha)
3. *Falaeorax moriorum* (Forbes) (Extinct Crow)
4. *Heteralocha acutirostris* (Gould) (Huias)
5. *Euryax finschi* (Finsch's Duck)
6. *Gallirallus minor* (Lt.ext.wood-hen)

The only other extinct bird recorded by Lydekker from Mantell's collection, the extinct eagle - *harpagornis assimilis* - has not yet been found.

The changing ecological setting is indicated by the presence of large numbers of forest birds in the midden. The kaka, kiwi, weka, Kakapo, saddle-back, tui, north island pigeon, parakeet, north island kokako, north island thrush, as well as grey and brown teal, mollymawk, little blue penguin, seals and sea-lions have all been found in the same midden, or in the layer above it.

We have not to date received a carbon dating on this (or any other) Taranaki site.

The other site, N129/78, on the banks of the Waingongoro River is known as the Te Rangatapu site and has been excavated by Mrs. Canavan (Canavan 1960). The pattern of the midden was repeated here except that it lay on a hard conglomerate of gravel and dirt. The site is of added interest as it contained two circular fire-pits filled with charcoal. Moa bones from this midden have been identified by Mr. Ron Scarlett as:-

1. *Pachyornis mappini*
2. *Dinornis giganteus*
3. *Euryapteryx exilis*, *geranoides* and *curtis*.

There was also a bone from the little grey kiwi. There was a complete absence of other extinct bird bones, but kiwi, kaka, tui, little blue penguin, Petrel, kuri and the jaws of two sea-lions were found. The only artifacts apart from obsidian flakes and a few pieces of worked pumice were two portions of one-piece fish-hooks made of moa bone. (Canavan 1962).

The fourth site, N128/3, is situated at the mouth of the Kaupokonui River some eight miles along the coast west of the Waingongoro River. Attention was first drawn to it by the discovery of quantities of argillite and obsidian flakes scattered about groups of large stones which formed working floors. Further west lay groups of ovens in which were two identifiable *pachyornis mappini* leg bones, together with kuri bones, bird bones, shell and dentalium shell. Near

the working area were two well-marked enclosures which had obviously been cleared of surface stones which had been heaped to form ridges enclosing areas some thirty to fifty feet square. Within one of these enclosures a small pit has been excavated. It is five feet by four feet and twelve inches deep at the edge falling to eighteen inches deep at the centre. There is a clearly defined narrow entrance two feet wide and four feet long with two steps. Post-holes line the edge and there is a single large flat stone in the middle with either a post-hole or a round drain beside it. A survey indicates that there are a number of such pits within the enclosure. Nearer the river there is a rectangular pit, fifteen feet by five foot six inches and three feet deep. There is a clearly defined entrance on the north side with steps down to the floor lined with large flat stones. Two post-holes were found in the centre line of the floor, but none along the edges. A small stone hearth lay in the centre opposite the entrance. This is clearly a different type of pit, and the relationship between the two has yet to be established, though my guess would be that this pit is of a much later period than the first, which resembles a small bin-pit.

This site, containing as it does all aspects of occupation from midden to pits, will I feel provide a major break-through in our conceptions of the Archaic Phase. The site is of some five acres in area and has recently been uncovered by the erosion of the enveloping sand-dunes. It lies on a coarse 'loess' which was not, for some reason, engulfed in lahars. The material in which the pits are cut appears to be wind blown sand from which most of the crystals apart from quartz have been removed. Horizons of stones on top and at intervals through the sand sequence appear river laid. The upper part of the sand is yellow and the lower parts grey - the change in colouring being due to weathering. (Grant-Taylor '62)

The last site, N108/50, is in coastal dunes north of New Plymouth. Surface finds of fragmented argillite, obsidian and pieces of moa-bone duplicate the finds on the other sites.

It would perhaps complete the picture in my part of the symposium to mention other areas of interest in the west coast of the North Island, in so far as they are accessible to review. First the area about Waverley-Waitotara as surveyed by Colin Smart is likely to prove of great importance. He has found two distinct patterns of differing occupations; the fortified pa sites in the upland country and groups, even masses, of pits along the inner side of the coastal dunes. A survey of artifacts from both areas has revealed a preponderance of Archaic Phase material from the coastal area. This indicates the possibilities. (Smart 1962)

Secondly, Horowhenua : as recorded by L.G. Adkin this area is also likely, on more systematic investigation, to reveal matters of importance. It has been the site of many Archaic Phase artifact finds, but little more can be said of it on the evidence as presented. (Adkin 1948:79)

Thirdly, definite evidence of sea-hunting activities come from excavations at Makara, Wellington (Yaldwyn 1959). Here also were found dinornis, anomalopteryx and pachyornis mappini in primary association with ovens and middens.

Other Sites:

Apart from field recording of field monuments and the explorations already outlined, only one other pa site, at Urenui, has been fully excavated in Taranaki. This excavation will be dealt with by Mr. Ham Parker. One of the first finds on this site at Urenui was a small hearth, six inches below the surface. This was found to be associated with early European contact. It would perhaps be apposite to conclude my contribution to this symposium by mentioning the excavation of an early European contact house-floor at Waimate Pa (N129/102) in South Taranaki. This excavation will be the subject of a more complete description in the Newsletter, but I think it would be fitting to complete the chronology from our earliest middens containing extinct bird sub-fossils, through the Urenui material, which can be loosely fitted into that ill-defined gap between Archaic and Classic Phases, to the end of the sequence at Waimate. This pa was destroyed by British Naval action in 1834 and has remained unoccupied since. (See Newsletter Vol. V No. 3 1962)

Briefly, the house-floor, ten feet eight inches and eight feet nine inches wide, was lined with slab post-holes - seven along the length and four at each end. Wood was still present in some of these and two slabs lay across the floor itself. There was a well marked entrance ten inches wide with drains on either side, and a twelve inch square hearth opposite the entrance. The floor was almost concrete hard for half an inch or so, made firm with sand pressed into the soft volcanic natural base. There were also the remains of an outer wall. Artifacts found on the floor and in the post-holes gave sad indication of the European contact. Many pieces of amorphous iron (presumably shrapnel) a single ceramic bead, a copper-fish-hook, gun-flint and a piece of green bottle glass. The only Maori item was a well-made net sinker. This concluding description will perhaps provide us with an index of expectations in the datum line from the earliest bin-pits to the period of European contact.

In conclusion, may I emphasize that this paper has presented only very little evidence of cultural successions: all I have been able to do is to present both ends of the scale. This is simply because very little work has been done in this area. The paper has then of necessity been factual and I do not feel competent to draw any but the most tentative conclusions from this rather scanty assemblage of facts.

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