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ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE AROUND LAKE MANAPOURI

P. J. F. Coutts

INTRODUCTION

At the present time Lake Manapouri and, to a lesser extent, Lake Te Anau have been receiving considerable attention in the national news media. As most New Zealand readers will be aware, it is planned to increase the level of Lake Manapouri, and objections raised by many naturalist, scientific and tourist organisations throughout the country have led to a Commission of Enquiry being set up to investigate the implications.

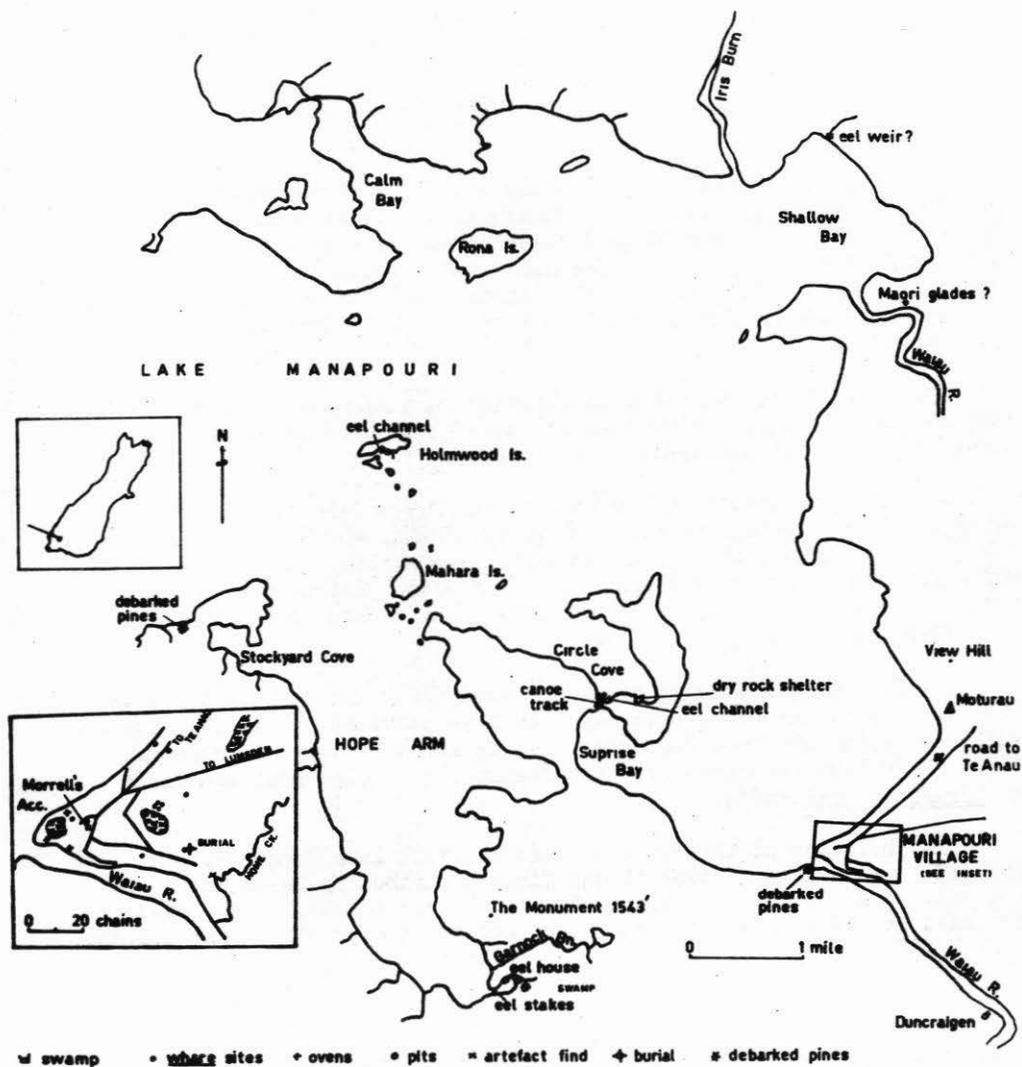
From the archaeological point of view, the margins of Lakes Manapouri and Te Anau are unknown and have never been subjected to detailed field reconnaissance (Coutts 1969).

According to traditional evidence, the Lakes were reached from Southland by following the Waiau or Oreti Rivers, whence expeditions were made to Milford Sound (for bowenite), to Martin's Bay via the Eglinton and Hollyford Valleys, via the Mararoa, Greenstone and Hollyford Rivers, and to Wakatipu via the Mararoa and Greenstone Rivers (for nephrite)*

Besides being a staging area for expeditions to the West Coast and the hinterland, the Lakes area may well have provided prehistoric hunter-gatherers with such food resources as eels and a variety of avifauna. These could have been preserved and transported to the southern coast on koraki or moki rafts.

The character of the flora and fauna around Lake Manapouri has changed to some extent since it was first described by Europeans. On the eastern shoreline Manuka and, to a much less extent, beech, have intruded at the expense of fern. The forest undergrowth on the islands

*Hamilton 1952; Park 1922: 6-7; Tuckett in Beattie 1947: 24; Monro in Hocken 1898: 253; Thomson in Taylor 1959: 840.



Location of Archaeological sites around Lake Manapouri

and on the eastern shores of the Lake have been thinned by browsing deer. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, ferrets and weasels had reached the area and preyed on the birdlife (O.W. 21.1.1892: 33). Numerous kiwis, kakapos, wekas, red teal, blue ducks, paradise ducks, shags and gulls frequented the Lake region. In addition eels were plentiful and cabbage trees grew along the lake edge (O.W. 21.1.1892: 33; O.W. 7.1.1892: 35). The swamps would have provided the prehistoric inhabitants with a variety of plants. Flax is still abundant.

Prehistoric occupation may well have concentrated on low-lying areas around the shores of the lake so that if the lake level is raised many archaeological sites will be lost. It is imperative that some field-work be carried out around the lake in the near future to ascertain precisely what will disappear if the lake level is raised.

Lake Te Anau cannot be divorced from attempts to study the prehistory of the Lake Manapouri area (Coutts 1969). It, too, was a rich food resource zone. Nairn and Stephens reached the shores of Lake Te Anau in January 1852. Nairn described the western shores of the lake as high, snow-capped alps, cloaked in dense forests contrasting with the eastern shores which consisted of undulating plains covered with manuka scrub, high fern and flax (Beattie 1947: 29). Today the flora is much the same around the perimeter of the lake, except in the region immediately around the township of Te Anau, where much of the country has been ploughed and sown with grass. The terraces sloping away from the lake are in the main covered with fern and flax.

It is certain that the dearth of bird life around Lake Te Anau today does not represent the situation as it was a century ago; stoats and weasels have effectively eliminated most of the avi-fauna, although sportsmen have also contributed to their diminishing numbers. In the 1890's there were still plenty of kiwis, wekas, kakas, kokakas and kakapos to be found on the western side of the lake (O.W. 7.1.1892: 35) and eels were abundant in the lake itself.

The author has conducted superficial field surveys around Lakes Manapouri and Te Anau and some initial observations on the field survey of Lake Te Anau have already been published (Coutts 1969). In the present paper, attention will be focussed on the Manapouri area.

Most of the sites described below will be drowned if the lake is raised to the proposed new level.

METHODS

The problems of finding sites in this area, even with the aid of historical records and traditional data, remain formidable. A dense canopy of vegetation covers the region around the lake itself right down to the water's edge. Although the undergrowth is not particularly thick, the depth of rotting vegetation covering the forest floor is frequently enough to have erased all traces of former occupation. Those areas which do not support forest vegetation and which appear open are more often covered with dense tree-fern and manuka, making it impossible to observe the ground features. East of the lake, the land has been cleared and ploughed in many places with the result that much archaeological evidence has been destroyed already.

According to Burton Morrell, an old identity of the district, a number of whare sites were formerly located in the vicinity of Lake Manapouri. He based his identification of these sites on the following criteria. Maori material was found more easily after the fern had been burnt off, when sunken rectangular areas, with earth rims, could be clearly detected. Again, after a heavy rain, he noted similar rectangular areas carrying water which was slow to drain away. He suggests that these areas were whare floors, compacted by use and by the addition of ash and other refuse. In general they were rectangular in plan, eight feet long by six feet wide and sunk into the ground about six inches. His third criterion was the presence of a group of three stones, frequently found in unexpected contexts. He followed Brunner, suggesting that the three stones were used to support a charcoal container comprising a cylindrical piece of bark. This feature, he supposed, was housed inside a whare. While these criteria may not suffice for the field archaeologist, they are nevertheless based on sound reasoning and the results of Morrell's observations over the past half-century cannot be dismissed. For this reason and additionally because Morrell's memory is now the only record of many former archaeological sites in the Manapouri area, the author has chosen to set down most of the data supplied to him by Morrell.

A jet boat was used to examine sites on the western shores of the lake.

SURVEY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE REGION OF LAKE MANAPOURI

Garnock Burn

Beattie (1949: 73) claims that whare sites, earth ovens and stripped totara trees were found in this area. A "Maori" face was said to have

been carved on a birch tree, but Morrell (1969) claims that this dendroglyph was executed by a European of his acquaintance. Morrell also claimed that there were several large circular pits further up the Garnock Burn, surmising that they had been formed when cabbage tree roots had been dug out. None of these sites is evident today.

In former times a creek, containing eel weirs, was supposed to have run from the Monument into Hope Arm (Beattie 1949: 74). Other weirs were said to have been located in the vicinity. The present small stream at the base of the Monument may be the one referred to.

A few hundred yards to the south of the Garnock Burn there is a narrow opening off Hope Arm leading to "The Lagoon". The distance between the Lagoon and Hope Arm is about 50 yards. Around the turn of the century one could still see a row of closely packed vertical sticks of manuka, four to six inches in diameter, across the outlet of the lagoon (Morrell 1969). To the north-east of the exit, there was an oblong "eel house" visible when the level of the lake was down. Again this structure comprised a series of manuka sticks each about three inches in diameter, and set vertically nine inches to 12 inches apart. Each stick was cut once on each side and then pushed into the soft clay bottom of the lagoon. This structure was about one metre wide by two and a half metres long. The upper portions of the sticks had long since disappeared but the lower sections were still very fresh looking. Morrell gave some of these sticks to Dr Skinner who deposited them in the Otago Museum.

A small stream drains a nearby swamp and empties itself into the lagoon. Approximately 200 yards upstream from the point at which the stream merges into the lagoon, on the left bank, there is situated a very dry flat area suitable for a camp site. There are one or two rectangular areas on this flat which Morrell claims were whare sites. Unfortunately, the author was unable to confirm Morrell's suggestion, though a number of stones foreign to the area, were found in this vicinity. Sectioning of the rectangular areas did not reveal any difference in soil colour or compaction, and there was no evidence of ovens or open hearth fireplaces.

Adjacent to and south-east of this area in the swamps, a fine example of a debarked red pine was located. The outer bark was stripped from a rectangular section of the tree approximately five feet by 12 inches in area. A section of the lower bark was then removed from the lower half of the working area - approximately 2 ft 11 ins by 12 inches. Adze marks appear in horizontal rows on the upper, middle and lower parts of the linking area and it is clear that the upper parts

of inner bark was being prepared for removal. The adze used for this task appears to have had a cutting edge four centimetres wide.

Holmwood Island

Following Beattie (1949: 74) it was confirmed that there once had been an eeling channel there. A massive channel has been cut from the eastern side of the island through to the middle of the south side. It was impossible to ascertain the actual dimensions of the channel at the time of the author's visit as the lake was well up. However, at the south end, the trench varied from four to five feet in width, and could be followed for at least 30 yards before it disappeared into the bush on the island. The sides of the trench were noticeably tapered. The depth of the channel could not be ascertained accurately, but must exceed three feet. There appears to be a drop in the level of the trench from the bush line. At the present time water fills the entire channel from one side of the island to the other, but the southern extremity of the channel is at least 10 to 15 feet below present water level, compared with the eastern extremity which is only a few feet below the surface. When the lake resumes its normal level, part of the channel will certainly be dry. The distinctive topography of the channel requires further investigation.

The Bay across isthmus from Stockyard Creek

Two examples of de-barked red pines were found in the vicinity of a bay near Stockyard Creek. In one case three roughly rectangular slabs of outer bark of the tree had been removed. Two had been removed from the same area. In this case the dimensions of the upper bark slab were approximately 25 centimetres wide by 40 centimetres long, and of the lower section, 25 to 50 centimetres wide and 35 centimetres long. The adze chops were still clearly visible in the tree in horizontal lines indicating where the bark had been cut away. It appears that the bark was cut horizontally and the slabs simply pulled away. The width of the adze blade was estimated to be between six and seven centimetres. Another large slab of bark, again approximately rectangular in shape, 40 centimetres wide and 130 centimetres long, had been taken off by the same method on the other side of the tree. Again, the adze marks were clearly visible and the width of the blade appeared to be the same.

A few yards away, another red pine exhibited evidence of an attempt to remove some bark. A rectangular section, 25 centimetres by 50 centimetres, had been prepared for removal with two lines of horizontal cuts. However, the bark had not been removed. The cuts were made with a very blunt instrument, an adze of width about seven centimetres.

Shallow Bay

In 1892 Quinton Mackinnon showed a tourist named Richardson (O.W. 21.1.1892: 33) a "Maori glade" in the vicinity of Shallow Bay with remains of an old Maori settlement. Today it is not clear where the Maori glade was located. However, White (1893: 91) following another source, suggests that the glade was situated near the shore of the lake and sheltered by a belt of scrub. It comprised a little lagoon and an open grassed area upon which were located "earth ovens".

Elsewhere in the Bay, where "The Creek" joined the lake, a causeway had been built to contain the stream and one could still see the Maori 'eel-nets' stakes (Beattie 1955: 15; O.W. 21.1.1892: 33).

A rapid reconnaissance of the area revealed no positive evidence of former Maori occupation. Following upstream from the mouth of the Waiiau, there are a number of backwater areas opening off the main stream. Striking inward from these a number of so-called "glades" were found which fitted the description above. In one of these a large circular pit approximately 10 feet in diameter was discovered. The rim bordering the pit was still quite distinct. When the pit was tested, no hearth or oven stones were found and it seems unlikely that this pit was an oven. However, it may be a cabbage tree pit. It is possible that the "earth ovens" referred to above may have had similar structures, accounting for the name given to them.

Since there is only one major creek running into Shallow Bay, the eel weir must have been placed there. Unfortunately the lake was too high at the time of the reconnaissance to allow adequate examination of this area.

Surprise Bay - Circle Cove

A large stone adze was found at Surprise Cove (Beattie 1955: 15) earlier this century. There is a narrow low isthmus between Circle Cove and Surprise Bay and in this place it is no more than about 50 yards wide. According to Beattie (ibid) the lower part of the isthmus has been deepened, so as to have enabled Maoris to carry or slide their canoes from one bay to the next. There were also supposed to have been barked Totara in the area.

An examination of this region confirmed that a natural hollow existed between the two bodies of water and that it could have been deepened. Certainly it would have been a very easy task to transfer a canoe from

one side to the other. No de-barked Totara were observed. A few yards to the north of the hollow a large, possibly artificial, heap of stones was found.

To the west of the southern end of the track a rectangular, flat dry area (6' x 8') could be discerned. It appeared to have been hewn out of the hillside. One test pit revealed a single fragment of fresh water mussel.

At the southern end of Circle Cove and adjacent to the exit of the track across the isthmus there is a small island. An eel channel had been cut around the island. It could be seen from the surface of the lake. It was about three feet wide and at least two feet deep. The sides slope inwards. The eel channel could be traced for at least 50 yards.

Exit of the Waiau River from Lake Manapouri

On the west bank of the Waiau River there are several trees that may have been de-barked. All are black birch. None of these trees shows adze marks, as the exposed wood was rotten in all cases. One of the trees had a large area of outer bark removed prior to the removal of the inner bark. A section two metres long and thirty centimetres wide has been removed. The new bark has grown some distance over the exposed inner wood.

Other trees have had a similar area of bark absent, whether removed by Maori or other means. The stripped bark starts about the height of a man above the ground and continues to the base of the tree. It is possible that deer may have been responsible for stripping some of these trees and without the revealing evidence of adze marks it is impossible to attribute the de-barking to Maori activity.

Morrell has found several greenstone implements on this side of the river.

View Hill

Ovens were said to have been situated between View Hill and Lake Manapouri (Beattie 1949: 73) which have been destroyed by flooding.

Duncraigen

According to the Morrell brothers (personal communication) a number of ovens were formerly located along the river on the station of Duncraigen.

They also observed occasional ovens on the ridge behind the river about a mile inland. They described one oven as being of exceptional size - circular in shape, about 12 feet in diameter and three feet deep with no oven or hearth stones. A circular pit with a diameter of circa four feet, was adjacent to the large hollow. The former is associated with burnt stones. If the large pit was a cabbage tree excavation, the smaller one may well have been an oven for cooking the roots.

Burton Morrell collected many artefacts from Duncraigen, some of which are still in his possession.

Paddock Hill

Beattie (1949: 73) claimed that a chisel had been picked up in the vicinity of the hill.

Circle Cove

In the south-east corner of the cove a dry rock shelter was located. It has a shallow covering of loose sand in which is located at least one fireplace.

North Arm

According to Guy Morrell, a man called Fowler picked up a roughed out adze at the mouth of the Freeman River.

Village Site

Mrs W. Cameron, the widow of William Cameron, who was one of the first Europeans to visit Lake Manapouri, recalls that there was a Kiaka called Moturau situated about a mile north of the outlet of Lake Manapouri, near a little stream (Cowan 1905: 91). It was supposed to have been occupied within 40 years of the date of Cameron's visit. Maoris were said to have camped there during fishing and birding excursions.

The area referred to by Cameron is now called "The Gutter". It is covered by dense vegetation, including scabweed, moss, tutu and fern, making observation difficult. Test pits revealed nothing of archaeological significance.

Morrell claims there were several whare sites between Moturau and Manapouri. These are shown on the map, but in all cases the sites were

overgrown and proper examination was impossible. Morrell made his observations after burn-offs. On one such area Morrell found a number of adzes.

The Manapouri Township area (see map)

Morrell discovered evidence of former Maori occupation in the immediate vicinity of the Accommodation House. For example, behind the house he dug up a greenstone chisel and along the periphery of the river bank towards the mouth he found several ovens. In a walk through the area he pointed out several locations which he claimed were former whare sites. Certainly there is no obvious evidence to support his observations now. However, testing of one of his oven sites was successful. The ovens or hearth fires were about two feet in diameter.

The area surrounding the Accommodation House was once covered in fern which has gradually disappeared and has been recolonised by beech forest. There is a small swamp behind Morrell's house, and it was around the swamp, where the fern had been burnt off, that Morrell observed several whare sites and ovens. Several adzes were found in the swamp after a draining ditch had been dug through it.

From the east of the Accommodation House to Home Creek the land has been cleared, ploughed and developed. However, Morrell claims that abundant evidence of Maori occupation was formerly to be found in this region. He pointed out what he considers were formerly whare sites, and other areas where he had found adzes and flake material. In one place a bulldozer uncovered a burial. Morrell and his son proceeded to excavate the skeleton which they photographed in various stages of excavation. It was a crouched burial, head pointing to the north-east, body in a sitting position. It was covered by approximately 18 inches of top soil and the burial site was marked by stone. The photographs and bones are still extant.

Freestone Station

Beattie (1949: 73) claims that a paddle was found on the Freestone Station. However, Morrell claims that it was a patu and not a paddle. It was found beneath a scarp on the northern end of the Freestone range just off the main road. Morrell also observed several ovens on the eastern foothills of the range, but these have now been ploughed under. There was also an oven near a swamp again just off the main road on the northern side of the range. Part of the swamp is still there but the oven has been bulldozed over.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the survey were not very encouraging. It appears that the evidence in what appear to be the most important areas of occupation - those around the outlet of the Waiau and along the eastern shores of the lake - has been destroyed. However, one must make the point that site reconnaissance in this type of terrain is not practicable with a small team or a limited budget and time schedule. Large numbers of people are required with ample funds. It is almost certain that new sites will come to light if detailed reconnaissance is undertaken.

The survey has revealed the widespread presence of sites in this area; canoes must have been made and used locally to reach the offshore islands. The size of the eel weirs suggests considerable social organisation; and the de-barked trees point to the manufacture of bark bags for preserving birds and eels. These facts are enough to indicate the potential importance of the area to the prehistoric inhabitants of Southland.

The Manapouri-Te Anau areas continued to be visited in the early protohistoric period, and memories of the area were still extant amongst the Maori in the 1850's. It is notable that as late as 1852, when Nairn and Stephens (in Beattie 1947: 27) made their historic journey to Lake Te Anau, the natives accompanying them were still familiar with the route to the area and the practice of making rafts for the return journey. They even tried unsuccessfully to persuade Nairn and Stephens to make the journey down the Waiau on them.

According to White (1893: 515), the Manapouri and Te Anau areas had not been visited by Maoris after about 1849. Local tradition recalls that one of the last trips down the Waiau with greenstone was made about 1838-1839 (O.W. March 4, 1903: 12). At that time about 20 rafts were involved and women and children were present in this party. If one assumes that at least two persons were required to guide each raft down the river, at least 40 Maoris took part in this expedition.

White (1893: 573) was told by Donald Hankinson of the remains of an old village on the south side of the Upukerora River at the junction of Lake Te Anau. A fire had passed over it but traces of the village could still be seen in 1893 (Cowan 1905: 90). By this time W. S. Mitchell had ploughed up three or four acres of the site searching for relics. There were the remains of charred posts and uprights of several whares. Battens and thatch from the roofs lay on the ground. Artefacts found included the remains of a canoe, a small iron adze, chisels, spike nails

levelled on one edge only and knives fitted with handles (White 1893: 574). Knife blades had been fashioned - possibly from hoop iron - by filing the metal down. They had been sharpened to a flat, four side apex at the proximal end. This had subsequently been fitted into a hole in handles suitable for this purpose. The distal end of the knives was rounded, like that of a dinner knife. White (*ibid*) further suggested that there seemed to be a particular spot for working stone implements, where we found numerous scales of a peculiar light greenstone, clouded, as it were, with a glassy look. However, this, he claims, was not the "genuine greenstone" because it was brittle and inclined to fall into useless flakes.

None of the references is very specific as to the location of the village site. Beattie (1949: 81) was told that it was one and a half miles up the Upukeroa River and that the village comprised seven whares including a chief's whare and a communal whare about twice the size of the others. According to Burton Morrell (personal comm.), the village was situated about a hundred yards due south of the present bridge over the Upukerora, complementing to some extent Beattie's information.

Extensive examination of the region on the ground and cursory aerial reconnaissance failed to reveal any trace of the village site. The area referred to has been ploughed and sown.

It is clear, then, that both Lakes Manapouri and Te Anau warrant more detailed field work and, in view of the impending danger to archaeological sites if the levels of the lakes are raised, the need is urgent.

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