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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AT ARAMOANA, OTAGO HARBOUR

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Aramoana lies at the western entrance to Otago Harbour; the flat land between the salt marshes and the hills has been selected as the site of a planned aluminium smelter (Fig. 1). This area was surveyed for archaeological sites in November 1980. The survey consisted of an examination of all the surface accompanied by systematic test-pitting at 25 m intervals west of the road and 50 m intervals east of it (N.Z.H.P.T. permit 1980/35). The principle results were as follows (see Anderson, 1980, for details).

Te Waiparapara or Taiaroa's Island (S164/228)

Herd's map of 1826 shows no settlement at Aramoana, but people were observed living there in 1837 (McLintock, 1951:14) and in March 1840 Dumont D'Urville recorded a few huts on the sand dunes (Wright, 1955:17). The settlement is shown on the maps of Tuckett (1844), Barnicoat and Davison (1845) and Kettle (1846), amongst others, and Watkins stayed a night at it in 1843. Te Waiparapara is thought to have been one of the villages of Kaikoreare (Kaikaorere/Kaikoarare or possibly Kaikoariari), a Canterbury chieftain who came south with his people after the disaster at Kaiapoi. From the 1840s up until the 1880s, at which time it was claimed by H.K. Taiaroa, the area comprised a small group of islands.

We observed no surface evidence of the site but it is known that middens are exposed there from time to time and artefacts, such as fish hooks and bird spear points have been picked up nearby. According to Dave Simmons some of the middens in this area contain moa bone, which indicates a considerable antiquity of settlement.

Quarry Point

This site was first recorded in May 1862 by Peter Thomson and his son Murray ('Pakeha', 1866; Thomson, 1934; Eccles, 1944). Murray Thomson (1934) says,

"...we came across the old Maori camp, easily recognised by the usual heap of shells, bones, etc. We noted also a few fireplaces and some burnt stumps of what had once been corner posts of deserted whares. Here again the Maoris showed their usual good judgement in choosing a place beautiful as well as sheltered. It faced the rising sun, was sheltered from the southern winds by the high cliffs at the back, and flax and firewood were handy."

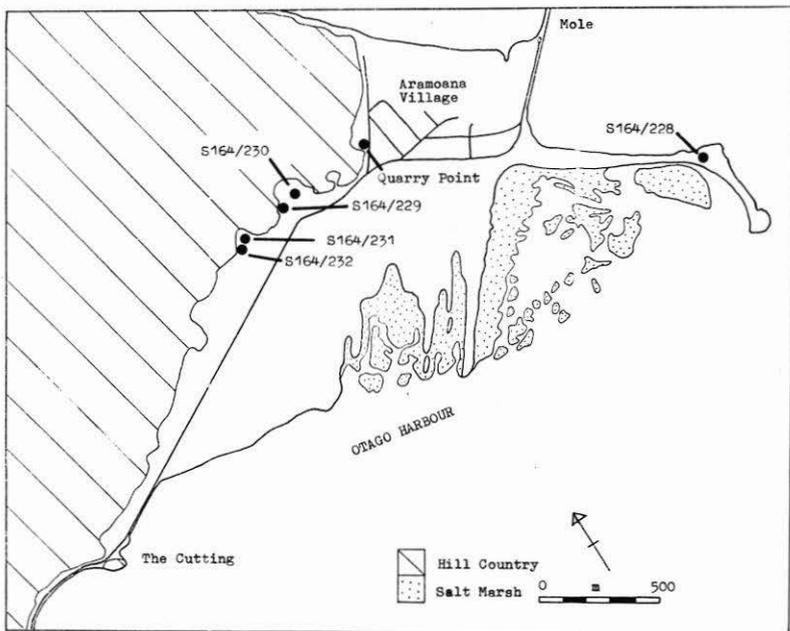


FIGURE 1. Aramoana, showing location of sites.

Further details clearly indicate that the site lay immediately north of a spur projecting eastward from Quarry Point for some 50 m (see MacKenzie map, 1881) which was subsequently removed during the early quarrying associated with the construction of the mole. On the southern side of the spur was a large cavern which was connected to a cave on the southern side of Quarry Point by an underground passage (MacKenzie map, 1881; A.T.L., 1877). Shells, burnt wood and old dry flax leaves were observed in the cavern by the Thomsons.

According to the Thomsons this was a settlement site of Kaikoreare, known as 'Big Fellow' to the early whalers. After he was drowned in 1852 his people are believed to have abandoned Aramoana and to have taken up residence at Otakou (Pybus, 1954).

The spur and the area of the cavern were blasted away by the Harbour Board whilst constructing the mole (Eccles, 1944) and rock fill to a

depth of about 2 m has been spread over most of the area in which the site once stood as well as eastward through part of the area now occupied by Aramoana village. Test pits in several small areas where the fill was absent revealed no cultural remains.

The Cutting

East of the road, immediately north of the Cutting, there was once a small stretch of sand dunes. On the Barnicoat and Davison map (1845) four marks of a kind which they have elsewhere used to depict Maori villages are shown on this area. In approximately the same locality middens of shell and bone were observed many years ago and burials have come to light there and nearby. The area has now been almost completely eroded away and test pits on the remaining portion revealed no cultural remains.

Burial Cave (S164/229)

A low cave at this point was uncovered by mechanical excavation of the sand against the cliff face in April 1929. Two skulls and a number of other bones were found at the cave entrance and another skull some 10 m away against the base of the cliff. At least some of the material was handed in to the Otago Museum and it has been identified as the remains of about six individuals. It is presently held in the Anatomy Department, Medical School.

Since the area was subsequently quarried the cave may no longer exist, although some people recall that it was walled up and avoided during the quarrying operations. We could find no surface evidence, but the sand is banked up several metres deep against the cliff face and may still cover the cave entrance.

S164/230

A single layer (0.25 m thick) of black sand, charcoal and burnt stone extending over an area 30 m x 30 m was located at 0.5 m depth in this area. Although bottle glass and iron were found on the surface of it, the site is located at a place in which ovens, shell midden and nephrite flakes were formerly observed.

S164/231

A site similar in stratigraphy and extent to S164/230, this one also contained mussel and cockle shell, barracouta, Diomedea sp. and dog bone as well as several large flakes of silcrete and chalcedony.

S164/232

Here there is a surface layer (0.35 m thick) of heavily blackened sand extending over an area of 20 m x 10 m. In it are cockle shells and barracouta bone. Fragments of iron hoops, an iron spike and the base of a 'black' bottle which had been retouched to form a side scraper were recovered.

Conclusions

Few archaeological sites are known at Aramoana and those which remain are located in areas which may not be disturbed in the course of industrial development. Of them S164/231 and S164/232 which may be, respectively, a prehistoric site and a protohistoric site are the most important of those found last year. On the other hand Aramoana is geomorphologically similar to other harbour and river entrances along the east coast of the South Island and it is quite likely that any extensive earthmoving out on the sand dunes would uncover important evidence of Archaic occupation.

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