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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF MOTUMUKA (LADY ALICE ISLAND)

Rudy and Pat Sunde

The authors were fortunate in being invited to join a small party of scientists from the Plant Diseases Division, DSIR, on a brief visit to Motumuka. This report is an account of the archaeological sites discovered during the two days spent on the island.

The Chicken Islands are a small group of islands lying some eight to ten miles south-east of the Whangarei Heads. The group is comprised of three larger islands, Motumuka (sometimes referred to as Lady Alice Island), Whatupuke and Coppermine Island plus a number of other smaller islands. Motumuka is about one mile long by one-half mile wide and is the westernmost of the three larger islands, which are orientated in an approximate east-west direction. Like Whatupuke and Coppermine, Motumuka is a very rugged island (the highest point is about 500 feet above sea level), covered in very dense secondary bush and scrubby growth, which all goes to make the discovery of archaeological sites very much a hit or miss affair. The bush is generally very difficult to penetrate and visibility is restricted to a few yards. Motumuka differs from Whatupuke and Coppermine in that it does have a permanent fresh water supply and it also has at least two very good landing sites.

Our camp was situated at one of these landings, South Cove, and, in actual fact, our tents were pitched on the lower of a series of eight prehistoric Maori terraces. These terraces are on the western side of a small stream running out to the bay and are 40-50 feet long by approximately 12 feet wide. A test pit was dug on the lowest of these terraces and this revealed a very black soil layer 18 inches deep. Scattered through this 18 inches of black soil were stone fragments, charcoal, whole and broken shells and segments of fish vertebrae. This depth of man-made soil would indicate occupation over a fairly lengthy period. There was found on the surface of this terrace (and elsewhere on the island) the occasional flake of obsidian - one flake being of a light grey/green obsidian. On the ridge above these terraces we discovered a ditch across a spur. This ditch was 20 feet long, 10 feet wide and 4 feet deep.

On the eastern side of the stream referred to above, there is another series of seven or eight terraces running up the side of the ridge. These

terraces face the north-west and are of similar size to the ones on the opposite hillside. Lack of a spade prevented our digging a test pit - trowels were of no practical value in attempting to cut through the mass of roots which threaded through the soil.

Another stream enters South Cove some 200 yards further to the east of the one originally described. While it had running water during our visit (October 1971), we feel it would probably dry up during the summer months. Nevertheless, on the eastern banks of this stream, there is to be found a further series of eight or nine terraces, also facing a north-westerly direction. It was not possible to take accurate measurements, but we have the impression that these terraces are somewhat larger than the ones previously described. And, once again, it was not possible to explore through the medium of a test pit, the depth or composition of the soils on these terraces. We did not see any evidence of stonework or stone-facings on any of the terraces we examined on the island.

The western summit of the island is marked by a trig station. Fifty yards to the west of the trig there are three shallow pits, in line, end to end. The dimensions of these pits are: 12 feet long, 3 feet wide and 8-12 inches deep. These were the only pits we came across.

Following is a list of the various shellfish, remains of which were concentrated on or below the terraces, but were also found scattered over the island.

Amphidesma australe

Chione stutchburyi

Cookia sulcata

Haliotis iris

Haustrum haustorium

Lunella smaragda

Neothais scalaris

Nerita melanotragus

Paphirus largillierti

We also found one specimen of the rather large shellfish, Charonia capax. Unfortunately, the tip of it was broken so no accurate measure can be taken, but we estimate it would have been 200 mm. long.

Due to lack of time and the nature of the island and its bush cover, we were not able to examine the whole island. Our explorations merely extended some 400-500 yards, both east and west of our camp at South Cove. Perhaps one-quarter (or less) of the island was examined by us, and it would be a profitable excursion for someone to survey the remainder. A useful item of equipment for anyone planning a trip there, would be ear-muffs! Penguins, mutton-birds and other assorted bird life, kept us awake on the two nights we spent there.

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