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ARCHAEOLOGY IN FIORDLAND, NEW ZEALAND

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present paper is to describe briefly the results of a number of excavations carried out in Dusky Sound and Chalky Inlets, between October 1968 and January 1969 (refer Fig. 1). The paper anticipates more detailed excavation reports to be published at a later date.

Field work was undertaken in these regions firstly because relatively little is known of Maori activities there, and secondly because it is virtually only through archaeological studies that one can obtain information on the early contact phase between Maori and European for this region. Some of the earliest contact between Southland Maoris and Europeans probably took place in Fiordland, yet practically nothing is known about the impact of this process.

In the course of fieldwork in Fiordland, three rock shelters and an oven or storage pit were excavated at Dusky Sound, and nine caves were excavated at Chalky Inlet.

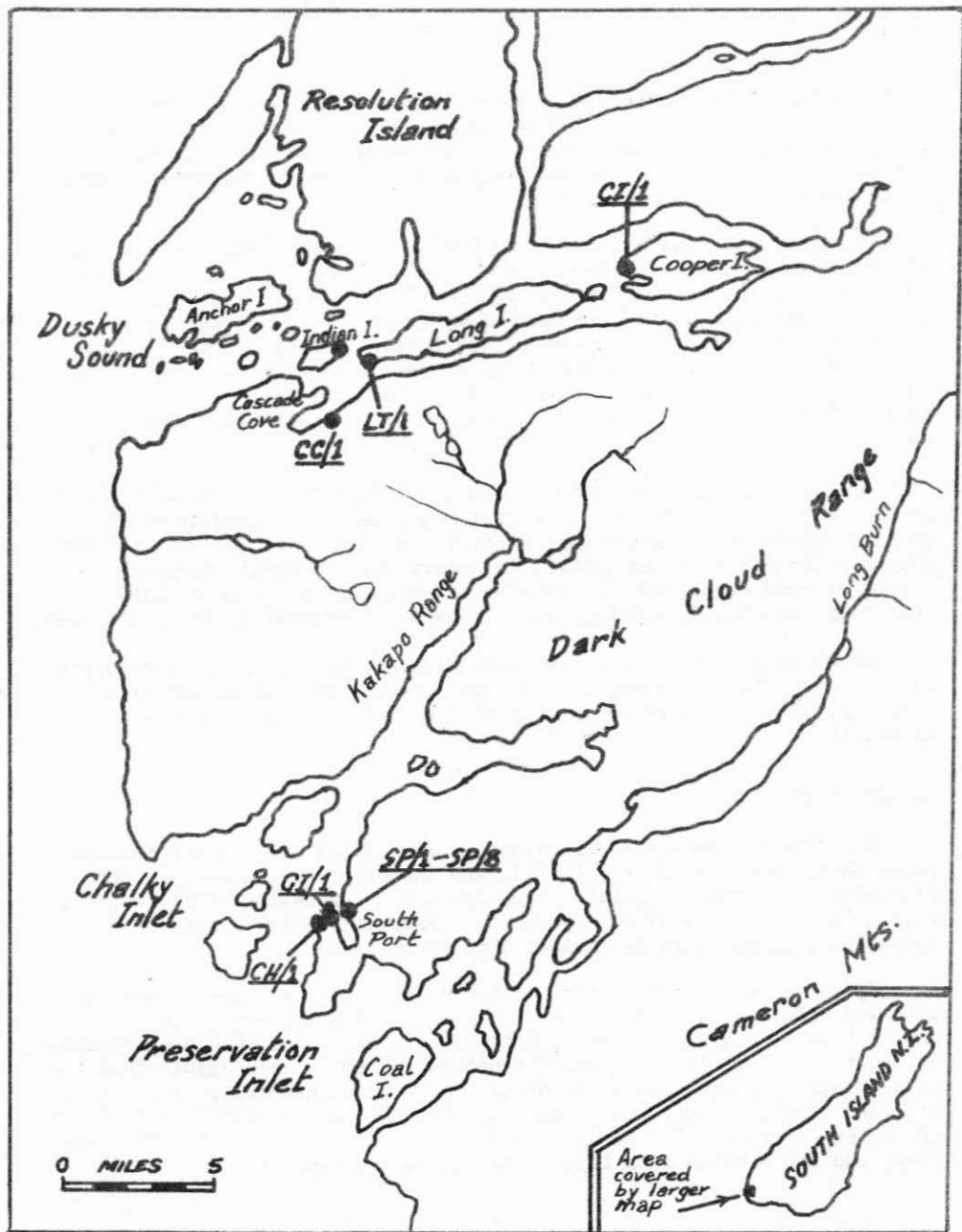
FIORDLAND

In contrast with the east coast of the South Island, Fiordland is characterized by immense inlets, often black with rain squalls and turbulent through gale force winds, steep mountains rising sheer out of the sea, a high precipitation and dense vegetation in the low-lying coastal areas. These environmental factors combine to make it difficult to locate both prehistoric and protohistoric sites.

At first sight one might expect the area to provide a large food supply. Thus, Cook, while at Dusky Sound in 1773, noted its abundant resources and described the numerous fish and bird species to be found there. The availability of the species, however, is restricted seasonally.

DUSKY SOUND

Despite the fact that two of the three excavated rock shelters had been fossicked, valuable information was still obtained from these sites.



Overall, the Dusky excavations yielded little in the way of artefactual evidence. A number of one and two-piece fishhooks made in bone, shell and wood, a few adze fragments and a bone needles are the principal finds. All these artefacts have parallels with Maori cultural materials of the late 18th Century.

A useful collection of faunal material was recovered. Preliminary study indicates that the inhabitants lived on a diet of shell fish, bird, seal, polynesian dog and rat, and fish. Thousands of fish scales have survived, and when these have been examined in detail, it should be possible to determine the season of occupation. Many of the bird and fish species found in the middens are seasonal, and from a study of the habits of their modern counterparts, it has already been possible to establish that the Maoris were in Dusky Sound at least from November to June.

At Long Island, a hut site, complete with post holes and a built-up punga floor, was excavated. The post holes had been dug with a sharp pointed implement. In the same area, the occupants of the site had dug around a large rock in an attempt to remove it. Several sharpened pieces of wood were found in the adjacent midden, and it seems likely that they are digging sticks, possibly used for excavating the post holes.

Dusky is so remote, the environment so harsh, and the food resources so unreliable that anything but sporadic prehistoric occupation seems unlikely. This hypothesis is supported by the evidence obtained by excavation.

CHALKY INLET

One site was excavated on Garden Island (G.I.), one on the mainland coast south of Garden Island (C.H.), and the others along the northern coastline of Southport (S.P.). The first cave excavated (SP/1) was the most interesting site at Chalky Inlet. Excavations in this cave suggested that it could be divided into three areas.

Firstly, there is the front of the cave, which had been used as an oven and refuse area. The rocky floor just below the drip line is undercut to form a small cave. A number of large rocks had been stacked in front of it, partly blocking the entrance, and it is probable that the cave itself had been used as an oven. Several burnt shell, oven stone, and concentrated midden layers were excavated in and immediately in front of the small cave. The floor of the cave rises sharply behind the oven area, and the various oven layers thin out and disappear.

A small pit was discovered in the oven area. It cut through several layers including the concentrated midden. The hole was spherically shaped for three-quarters of its depth. Some object of this shape had once been placed on the floor of the cave and the concentrated midden had built up around it, mirroring its shape. As the refuse built up, it became necessary to surround the object with large flat stones to permit continued access. The 'pit' was also supplied with a lid of flat stones. The purpose of this pit has yet to be determined.

The second part of the cave may be termed the living area. It formed most of the remainder of the cave. Pungas, small stones, tree-fern, flax and other organic material had been brought into the cave and used to build up rough areas and, in general, make the interior of the cave comfortable. It is probable that the Maori occupants slept and worked there. Thousands of woodchips and many implements were recovered from this area.

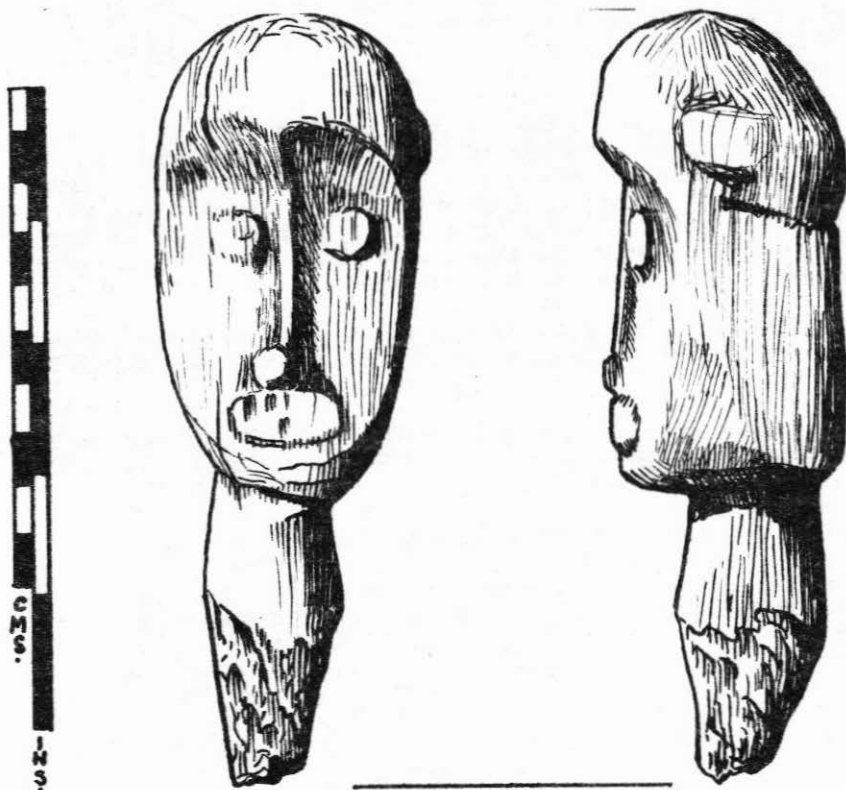
Finally, there is a secondary refuse dump behind the living area, where refuse from meals eaten in the rear of the living area was deposited.

A piece of pottery, an iron nail, a gun flint and portion of the handle of a patu were the only finds in the oven area. The living area yielded a whalebone patu, a whalebone patu flick, portion of a wooden comb, part of an adze, a chisel, a fish-hook point, one or two shanks, several wooden implements, hundreds of pieces of felt, yards of string of various plaits, Maori textiles, feathers, human and dog dung, skin, dog and seal fur, leather, wadding for muskets, whalebone and metal buttons, a musket ball, pieces of an iron axe, European textiles, a large piece of lead, wood, clay pipes and pottery. Pieces of a red earthenware pot that had been glazed on the inside were found all over the cave, on the surface, buried in the living area floor, and in the oven area layers. Some of the pieces of pottery still have food (?) adhering to them. The finding of European pottery naturally suggested that the pit described above may have housed such a pot, accounting for its spherical shape. Some pieces of chinaware were also recovered.

All artefacts found were similar to those being used at European contact. There was no convincing evidence of an earlier phase at this site. A lower layer of burnt trees, sticks, and charcoal was found, but no evidence was forthcoming to show that this layer was associated with human activity.

The other eight caves excavated at Chalky follow the pattern outlined above. All artefactual material found was similar to that in

current use at European contact. Finds included adzes, chisels, wooden and bone, one and two-piece fishhooks, stone sinkers, wooden barracouta hook shanks and hooks, bone needles, a bone comb, a wooden chisel handle with provision for two chisel blades of different sizes,



pieces of cut paua, rope, snoods, pieces of fishing net and feathers. One of the most fascinating finds was a small carved wooden head (Fig. 2) about three inches tall, with only one ear. It bears some similarity to finds from the Pyramid Hill and Summer Caves. All the caves with one exception produced evidence of woodworking activities.

Large slivers of whalebone were found in the CH/1 cave and these had almost certainly been taken from a massive whalebone jaw located in a nearby creek.

Four of the nine caves produced evidence of contact between the Maori and Europeans. European textiles, glass beads, a portion of a musket barrel, pieces of broken bottles, buttons, clay pipes, pieces of wood of European origin, iron and copper spike nails were amongst the European items found.

Preliminary examination of the contents of the middens from the various caves suggests that the Maoris living there were strongly dependent on the sea for their food. Shell fish, particularly paua and kina, fish and crayfish formed the staple items of their diet. They also ate seal, polynesian dog and rat, and some birds. It is hoped that an examination of the human dung found in the caves may shed light on the vegetable component of their diet.

Little can be said at the present moment about the numbers of Maoris living at Chalky, how long they stayed in the area, or even of the phase one is dealing with. The archaeological evidence suggests that the area has had no long history of settlement, and that one is probably dealing with an early phase of the contact era. Further, one might surmise that the Maoris came to the area soon after the first Europeans arrived in the region.

The first whaling station in Southland was established in 1829, in nearby Cuttle Cove in Preservation Inlet, but sealers and whalers had been coming to the area long before this date. Unfortunately, little is known of the history of their activities, much less about Maori-European relations in the area during that period. The sealers and whalers were generally illiterate and few placed their experiences on record. Thus, it is probably only through archaeology that this important chapter in New Zealand history will be elucidated. It is to be hoped that a fuller examination of the Chalky Inlet material may lead to a better understanding of what happened in this period.

CONCLUSION

The Chalky sites should provide a unique opportunity to examine aspects of the history of European contact in this area, as well as the economic and cultural activities of the indigenous inhabitants. These sites are quite distinct from those examined in the Dusky area. The latter produced no evidence of contact, and it is suggested the area was visited only spasmodically.

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