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ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FYFFE HISTORIC AREA

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Summer Wine Initiatives
Tuahiwi, North Canterbury

Introduction

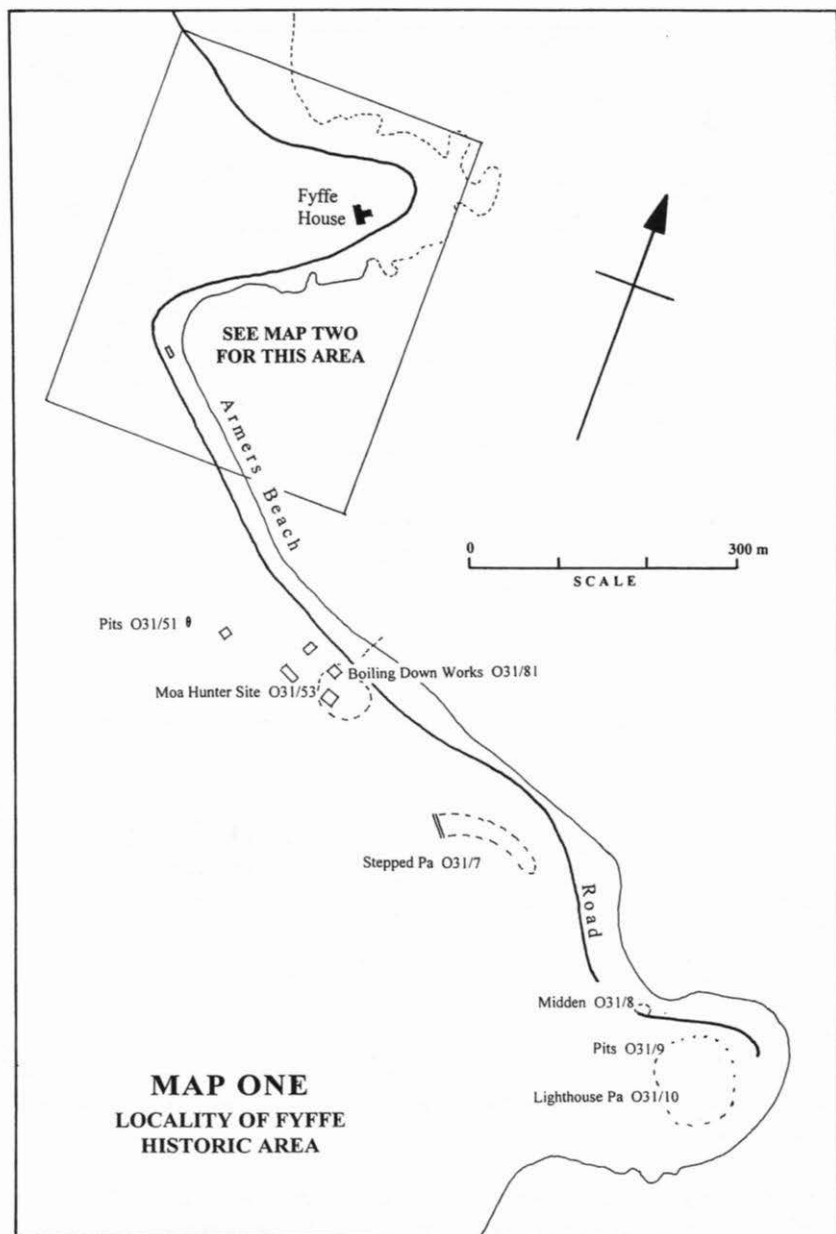
Between 1980 and 1990 we spent a great deal of our archaeological field time in Kaikoura, especially in the area around the Fyffe moa-hunter site (O31/30), where we carried out salvage excavations (prior to a large part of it being subdivided for housing) between 1982 and 1987.

During this period we located many other sites of archaeological and historic significance in the general vicinity of Fyffe House, a number of them relating to the early whaling station of which Fyffe House is a part.

The variety and abundance of sites within what was a relatively small area was impressive – collectively they represented a microcosm of New Zealand human history from its earliest period up until, and into, the twentieth century. As a result of our work, in 1991 we put forward a proposal to the New Zealand Historic Places Trust that the area be set up as a Fyffe Historic Precinct, a proposal which was accompanied by a description of all sites we knew of, illustrated in colour. (Copies were sent to other appropriate authorities as well.)

Our proposal was acknowledged with enthusiasm, but we heard nothing further over the next few years.

In 1993 we printed off some copies of a slightly revised and updated version of our proposal, for a Summer School of Archaeology that we were running in Kaikoura; in the meantime we had located still more sites in the area, and continued to do so up until 1994.



Map 1. Locality map – to the best of our knowledge the south-easternmost sites on this plan are not included in the Fyffe Historic Area.

commented and were delighted to read in the July issue of *Heritage Advocate* that the proposal had been approved and the area registered.

Because our original submission received only limited distribution – it was never officially ‘published’ – we hereby give a brief description of the sites in the Area (though we’re not quite sure where the final official boundary is); the following list is in approximate north to south order.

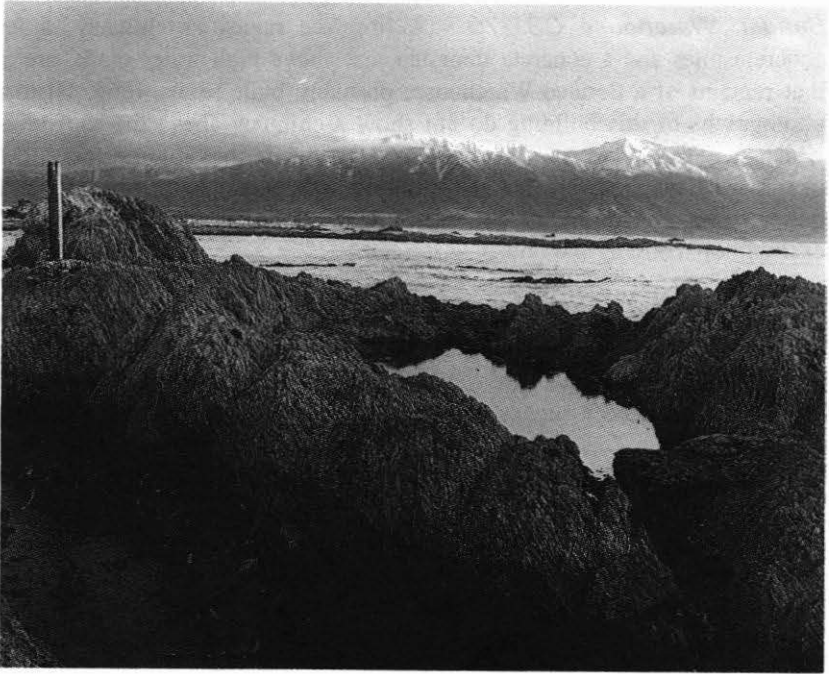


Figure 1. Sea water bath (O31/79), with "The Post" standing on the left.

The Sites

Sea Water Bath O31/79 – Following up a reference in typescript notes made by Jock Sherrard (held in the Kaikoura Museum) of an interview with Alex Goodall (a former occupant of Fyffe House) about 1952, we were able to identify a 30 foot long tidal rock pool deepened by the construction of

concrete walls or 'dams' at each end as a sea bath (Fig. 1). Apparently it was made about the time the Pier Hotel was built by Goodall's father in 1885. There is now very little left of the northern wall and the southern one is somewhat broken – presumably they were both higher when the bath was in use. A distinctive feature of the site is a post, known locally as "The Post", set into a high point in the rocks on the landward side of the pool. This is probably a remnant of a walkway that is known to have been constructed between the pool and the shore and which was swept away in the first major storm subsequent to its construction.

Bonded Warehouse O31/70 – A fireplace minus its chimney, a few concrete piles and a concrete doorstep just above high water mark, are all that remains of a Bonded Warehouse, probably built before 1869. Historic photographs of this building do not show a chimney above the roof level, which suggests it was truncated at some stage while the building was still in use. Local legend has it that the building was deliberately burnt down to destroy evidence of fraudulent record keeping – undoubtedly a practical example of 'cooking the books'.

Sea Wall O31/69 – Remains of old concrete sea wall can be seen below the present high tide level running from the Bonded Warehouse to the Old Wharf. George Fyffe recorded the building of such a wall in his diary in the 1850s, and it has been suggested that it may be the oldest surviving concrete structure in New Zealand. Presumably it was built to protect the foreshore from sea erosion, but because it was not maintained, the shoreline is now some metres on its landward side.

Pier Hotel O31/71 – Concrete foundations at original site of Pier Hotel, constructed in 1885 by J. W. Goodall, then owner of Fyffe House. The hotel was moved in 1909 when a new wharf was built closer to the township.

Loading Ramp O31/68 – During Beverley's excavations at the Fyffe Site a limestone knob with an artificially steepened face on its western side was identified as a loading ramp. A surfaced (cart-width) track, now buried under later soils, led from the almost vertical side in the direction of the Kaikoura township, where it petered out beneath modern housing. Its use as a ramp for loading farm stock into carts was subsequently confirmed from historical sources, wing fences being used on its gently sloping side to guide stock in the desired direction.

Wharf Shed O31/72 – There is a raised concrete slab floor on either side of the northern end of a short tramline that used to run out onto the Old Wharf. Up until about 1990 a pair of tramway wheels lay nearby.

Fyffe's Site O31/30 – This is *the* Fyffe moa-hunter site, which includes the locality where the first recorded moa hunter burial, complete with the world's largest moa egg, was found in 1857 (Trotter and McCulloch 1993a). A small excavation was carried out by the Canterbury Museum in January 1973 (Trotter 1980) but did not reveal the extent or importance of the site at that time, although radiocarbon dates indicated that it was one of the earliest sites of occupation in the country. In 1980 Beverley McCulloch learned that the land was being subdivided and sold for housing, and being unable to prevent or even delay the development until further investigations were undertaken, directed teams of volunteers on areas not yet built on at various times during the next five years. Bev's work showed that the site had had a series of occupations – moa hunters, gardeners, whalers – and this has been summarized by Trotter and McCulloch (1989,1997).

Although no definitive account of this investigation has yet been published (yes, we do intend to get on to it!), the site has been the subject of two separate little controversies. In 1987 Bruce McFadgen maintained that garden walls on the site were not artificial structures but natural beach ridges (McFadgen 1987), apparently not being aware that unquestionably 'placed' stones occurred at the base of the walls or that there was evidence of gardening within them, nor explaining how at least one 'ridge' had formed at right angles to another which it touched and was part of. And the following year, Graeme Caughley suggested, largely on the basis of the early radiocarbon date for the Fyffe site, that the Polynesian settlement of New Zealand may well have started from Kaikoura Peninsula (Caughley 1988), even although stone materials from the bottom levels indicated that the earliest occupants of Fyffe's had already a good knowledge of sources in the upper part of the South Island as well as the North. Needless to say, we agree with neither premise.

Garden Fence – Part of a row of very old wooden posts marks the lower end of a household garden that was in use into the middle of this century. The row used to extend further to the west before subdivision for housing.

Fyffe House – Fyffe House is today the focal point of the Fyffe Historic Area, although in reality it is just one of the many historic features in the

area. Its eastern wing was built some time before 1852, probably about the mid 1840s – see "Fyffes Revisited" (Trotter and McCulloch 1993a). Its history is well known and described in the New Zealand Historic Places Trust publication *Tohorā* (Harris 1994).

(Immediately eastward of the House is a midden (not separately recorded) of butchered cattle and sheep bones – mostly the former. The butchering pattern suggests to us that the meat may have been prepared for preserving rather than immediate consumption.)

Formed Road O31/84 – A cart-width roadway runs from the inland side of the present road (Fyffe Quay) opposite the Old Wharf, up the bank, and then along the mudstone outcrop at the rear of Fyffe House (see Map 2). It can be seen most clearly where it has been cut into the bank, and was almost certainly used for taking goods from the wharf to George Fyffe's upstairs store (now part of Fyffe House). Details of the store are given in "Fyffe's Revisited" (Trotter and McCulloch 1993). This road can be seen in some historic photographs.

Whale Bone Posts – Historic reports indicate that whale bones were commonly used for fence posts in the vicinity of the Waiopuka Whaling Station, but only three complete posts are still standing. The remains of others can be seen in several places (e.g. Figure 2).

Old Wharf – The 'Old Wharf', on Fyffe Quay behind Fyffe House, was completed in 1881, replacing the original jetty which was erected in 1863. (Kaikoura was gazetted as a port of entry in 1869.) With the completion of the 'New Wharf' in 1909 the Old Wharf continued to be used by local fishermen.

Beacon Hill – Beacon Hill was so named because of a tall marker post that used to be erected near the top of it as a guide to local shipping – it shows clearly in historic photographs. The base of the marker post, about a metre high, was still present near the seaward end of the top of the hill of that name at the time we were working in the area – though it should not be confused with a nearby corner fence post.

Graves O31/78 – An early European grave on the hillside above the road is marked by one surviving shaped and morticed wooden post and another in damaged condition; erosion due to road-works is severely endangering this

grave. Broken whale bone posts and soil discolouration in the adjacent eroding bank suggest that there is at least one other grave here; there is a rose bush of a very early variety growing nearby. Surveyor Joseph Ward's field book (Ward 1863) notes two graves in this vicinity. (In the early 1970s road works further to the west revealed human bones, presumably from another grave). All these probably date from the time that Waiopuka whaling station was in operation.



Figure 2. Post hole with remnants of a whale bone gatepost alongside Fyffe Quay. Its opposite number, still standing, can be seen behind the wooden fence.

Waiopuka Whaling Station O31/77 – The Waiopuka Whaling Station could be described as the *raison d'être* for the Fyffe Historic Area. It was established by Robert Fyfe in 1842. A plan and perspective sketch of it as it appeared in 1852 appear in "Fyffe's Revisited" (Trotter and McCulloch 1993) and it is described in *Kaikoura – a History of the District* (Sherrard 1966,

especially Chapter 3). Today, archaeological evidence of the station comprises whole and broken whale bones, pieces of clay pipe, crockery etc. which are occasionally exposed when heavy seas wash away the sand at the northern end of Armers Beach, both above and below normal low tide levels. As well, some flattened areas, placed stones etc. on the flat land between the present road and hills at the back of the beach to the west (inland from the Waiopuka Woolshed) may relate to the Station.

Fresh-water Spring O31/73 – Fresh water seeps through the mudstone into three tidal pools at the northern end of Armers Beach, and one of these has been modified by a low concrete wall to increase its capacity. It drains completely of sea water at low tide and a substantial quantity of fresh water can be collected. According to local knowledge it relates to the Waiopuka Whaling Station.

Waiopuka Woolshed O31/64 – In 1993 we uncovered a series of large whale vertebrae, with limestone pebbles between them, which had been set in the ground as the foundation for the floor of a building. Associated artifacts and historical records led to our interpretation of this as the probable site of a woolshed used by George Fyffe in the 1860s and referred to in his diary. A full account of the investigation has been published (Trotter and McCulloch 1993b).

Waiopuka Moa Hunter Site O31/80 – A year after our investigation of the Waiopuka Woolshed (above) we returned to search for evidence of associated sheep yards – we had hoped to find remains of whale bone posts. That search was not successful but we did locate Maori occupational material – often mixed with but slightly deeper than European midden – lying from 15 centimetres beneath the surface. This included a human burial in folded ('crouch') position with a broken moa egg at its chest (very similar descriptions of the burial and egg positions were recorded for the famous 1857 burial). the remains were passed over to Te Runanga o Maru-kai-tatea of Kaikoura for reburial.

Fence Line (northern) O31/83 – Remains of six iron posts (mostly T section) and four rectangular post holes (c.40 x 30 centimetres) occur between high and low water levels marking the line of a fence that extended at approximate right angles to the shore. This is probably not as old as the southern fence line, O31/82.

Slipway remains – Between the two fence lines on Armers Beach, are the remains of a boat slipway, probably dating from the first half of the twentieth century.

Fence Line (southern) O31/82 – Remains of thirteen wooden posts and two post holes mark the line of a fence at right angles to the shore. Most of the holes for the posts have been dug into mudstone. It was probably one of the fences marked on 1850s and 1860s plans of the area, erected to facilitate early landing of sheep or to keep stock away from whalers' gardens (or alternatively for the 1889 Boiling Down Works).

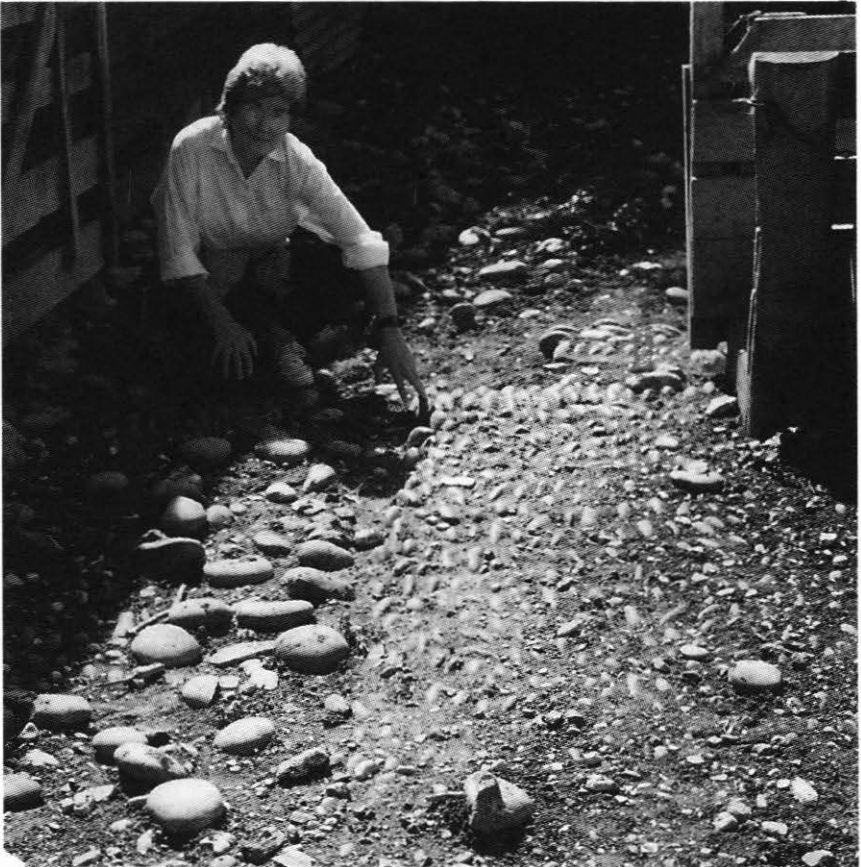


Figure 3. Paving of laid greywacke cobbles at the site of the Boiling Down Works, O31/81.

Pits on Hilltop O31/29 – In 1959 Tony Fomison described this site as follows: "The features are in a hillside situation, scattering the slope from the terrace top down towards the creek. Listing them from the top: at least four isolated platform terraces; a row of three pits, probably raised-rim but badly eroded, following the contour; and a second row of three such pits, even more badly eroded. Bulldozing in 1969 revealed midden material and human bones when hillside edge sectioned." Currently the site appears as eight or nine pits near the top of a hill overlooking the Waiopuka area; presumably the midden and human bones were found when a farm track was made to the west of the pits. (A new record was made out for this pit site in error in 1980 (O31/62)).

Pit Site (hillside) O31/51 – Three shallow pits on an isolated terrace about half way up the hillside. An excavation made of one of them during Barry Brailsford's Southern Earthworks Project (1972-79) provided little evidence as to its purpose.

Boiling Down Works O31/81 – The most visible feature of the site is actually a very early shed, which corresponds in dimensions to one described historically as the slaughterhouse of Gooch's boiling down works or the Kaikoura Tallow and Soap Company (Sherrard 1966: 178), although this has been modified by the present owner. Of an archaeological nature are the remains of seven supports for a refuse disposal tramway on the beach, and two sections of regularly-laid greywacke cobbles in the landowner's stockyards (Fig. 3).

Moa Hunter Site O31/53 – When the land-owner, Melville Syme, dug a post hole during modifications to his sheep yards in 1972, he recovered a large adze head of Duff's type 1A (almost invariably associated with moa hunter occupation). A subsequent partial investigation of the site by Murray Efford the following year revealed a rich midden deposit with some artifacts (Efford 1974).

Map Two, accompanying this report, also shows another four sites, but these are, to the best of our knowledge, outside the Historic Area.

Acknowledgements

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