



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

COASTAL SITES IN OTAGO: A Survey of Destruction over One Hundred Years.

D.R. Simmons (Otago Museum).

It is almost impossible to grasp the significance of site distribution in any region without at least a vague understanding of the prehistoric geography and demography.

For instance:

Central Otago from about 1350 A.D. has been a barren area with little in the way of food resources. Bleak and cold in winter, hot in summer, it is in effect a wide plateau slashed by flat bottomed river valleys. Greenstone of the West Olivine Range and Dart Valley drew men into this region from about 1200 A.D. onwards, men who wore moa-skin garments and made tapa cloth. Predictably, most of this site evidence is overnight camps found along access routes to the greenstone quarries. By contrast with the inland region the coast was well populated, probably by a canoe-borne people, as most of the earlier evidence is clustered about river-mouths and sand spits which are also likely areas for nesting or driving moa. The hey-day of moa-hunting from about 1200 - 1500 was probably also the period of greatest population, as about two thirds of all the sites belong in this period. The decline of the moa produced the same sort of site pattern as that in the goldfields today, with a few surviving settlements among the traces of hundreds. Intermediate sites are generally much smaller than those preceding them. The population, existing mainly on sea resources with the occasional foray into Central Otago to hunt the surviving Moa, was declining during this period. Comparatively few sites remain from the 1400 to 1780 A.D. period, and each of them probably incorporates a restricted regional aspect of the general culture. The late Classic Maori and European Maori of post-1750 was a cultural invader from further north. He bore a culture which quickly became orientated to a potato growing and trading economy. The three or four pa sites were occupied briefly, but settlement quickly concentrated around Otago Harbour in open villages of a more or less permanent character. The population increased generally but the less accessible areas tended to be deserted. Shortland, in 1844, recorded a fairly reliable census which included 1957 Maori, 350 European and 150 mixed people living south of Banks Peninsula. No more than a handful of these were

living away from Otago Harbour, Foveaux Strait and other trading or whaling stations.

Early sites in Otago are often rich in artefacts. Most of them, situated as they are on river mouths or sandspits, have been subject to erosion and fossicking.

Intermediate sites contain the remains of many shell-fish and fish and are often found near good fishing or shell-fishing areas, still visited by present day fishermen. Erosion has not been as serious as fossicking in destroying these sites. Late sites fall into two main groups:

- (a) Pa and terrace sites.
- (b) Village sites.

The former usually contain little in the way of artefacts, so except for natural slumping or run-off have been little disturbed unless greenstone has been found on them. The village sites such as Murdering Beach, contain a large amount of greenstone. From 1860 onwards they were dug by out-of-work goldminers purely for the market value of the artefacts, and then later and even today by a series of treasure-hunting collectors. The richness of Otago sites has become so well-known that regular expeditions are organized every summer by fossickers, from the North Island or further north in the South Island. Like the archaeologists in the area, they are finding that their predecessors have been very efficient.

What then is the position regarding site destruction? If we take the coastal strip, i.e. within a quarter mile of the Otago beaches, we can list the agencies at work on the larger sites. Most of the sites listed are early, some intermediate in date and a few late, but to list sites according to period raises many problems, too great to solve here. Not the least of these is the terminology and the determination of phase, aspect or regional sub-culture. For example, one early industry (the making of one-piece moa-bone hooks) employs two techniques, pecking and drilling. Waitaki to Clutha (North Otago) uses drilling almost exclusively, Clutha to Mataura (South Otago) pecking and drilling equally, Southland almost entirely pecking. Similar distributions can be plotted for other cultural items.

Destruction of Sites

South Otago (Mataura to Kaikorai)

<u>Nature of Disturbance:</u>	<u>No. of sites:</u>	<u>Sites of Reasonably large dimensions:</u>
Mostly Natural erosion	11	5
Natural erosion assisted by human agency	29	16
Mostly human	14	13
Undisturbed	1	1
	<u>55</u>	<u>35</u>

Many of these sites are now only scatterings of rubble.

- A. In the majority of these sites little can be done. Among these sites
 - a. a few are naturally protected, e.g. Papatowai by trees,
 - b. a few by remoteness,
 - c. if undisturbed will remain in their present state, but if disturbed will rapidly disappear.
- B. Salvage in these coastal areas involves
 - a. need, i.e. special selection,
 - b. careful excavation,
 - c. completion.

On Otago Peninsula a similar list of sites is:

<u>Nature of Disturbance:</u>	<u>No. of sites:</u>	<u>Reasonably large sites:</u>
Natural erosion	10	1
Natural erosion assisted by human agency	9	5
Human agency (including 5 agricultural)	13	6
Undisturbed	5	2
	<u>37</u>	<u>14</u>

A complete site survey has been carried out on the Peninsula so that if all sites, large, small, protohistoric and historic are included a different picture results.

Natural erosion	30
Natural & human	4
Agricultural	10
Human	8
Undisturbed	148
	<u>200</u> + 60 umu-ti.

This last indicates the amount of information to be obtained from a detailed survey, though the figures are weighted by late sites. About two thirds of the sites are small middens on beaches, each midden being taken separately, whereas in the general survey beaches of less than a quarter of a mile long have been treated as units.

The Northern area from Dunedin to the Waitaki gives a similar picture to the preceding areas.

<u>Nature of Disturbance:</u>	<u>No. of sites:</u>	<u>Large sites;</u>
Natural erosion	4	1
Natural plus human	11	7
Agricultural	5	3
Human	5	3
Undisturbed	1	0
	<u>26</u>	<u>14</u>

Total Otago sites.

<u>Nature of Disturbance:</u>	<u>No. of sites:</u>	<u>Large sites:</u>
Natural erosion	25	7

	119	
Natural plus human	49	28
Agricultural	5	5
Human agency	32	23
<u>Total disturbed sites</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>63</u>
Undisturbed	7	3
<u>Total</u>	<u>118</u>	<u>66</u>
Percentage fossicked	28	

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank Les Lockerbie, Hardwicke Knight and Michael Trotter for information on Otago sites.

—0—

RECORDING AND RESCUE WORK IN CANTERBURY AND NORTH OTAGO

Michael M. Trotter, Canterbury Museum

The increase in public works during the last ten years, a period in which systematic archaeology became well established in New Zealand, has resulted in much recording and salvage work of prehistoric sites. In Canterbury and North Otago major works have been the construction of hydro-electric power dams and Benmore and Aviemore with resultant formation of lakes in the upper Waitaki River valley.

A number of sites were known in this area: several were located by musterers and shepherds of the large sheep stations on either side of the river. In 1947 G.B. Stevenson of Oamaru published descriptions of two areas of rock drawings, and it was locally known that there were more in the vicinity. Even at this time the drawings in sheltered overhangs of the upper Waitaki region (like those of other areas) had been subject to