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Codfish Island/Whenua Hou – A Decade On

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Introduction

Codfish Island/Whenua Hou lies three kilometres off the northwest coast of Stewart Island/Rakiura, and is the largest of the western islands. It is mostly bounded by rocky cliffs with boulder beaches and few good landings (Figure 1). There are two sandy bays on Whenua Hou: Roderiques Anchorage is small and steep sided, while Sealers Bay is more than a kilometre in length and lies at the mouth of the larger of the two north facing valleys that extend back into the island's interior. The favourable nature of the physical landscape in and around Sealers Bay is reflected in the archaeological record (Figure 2).

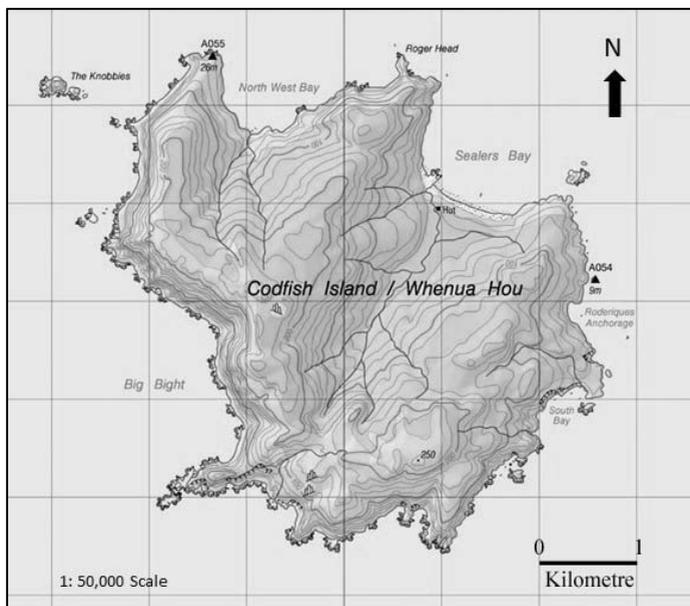


Figure 1. Codfish Island/Whenua Hou (NZTopo50 CH08).

Tucker & Fischer – Codfish Island

The New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) Site Recording Scheme (SRS) contains seven complete archaeological site records from Whenua Hou:

- D48/5 Historic Sealing Base in Sealers Bay
- D48/21 Midden/Oven/Urupā Sealers Bay 2
- D48/23 Burial (Sensitive file – not held within ArchSite)
- D48/30 Midden Sealers Bay 3
- D48/31 Midden/Oven Sealers Bay 4
- D48/32 Shipwreck Debris Penguin Bay 1
- D48/33 Still Penguin Bay 2

and one incomplete record:

- D48/22 Artefact Finds (Incomplete file – not held within ArchSite)

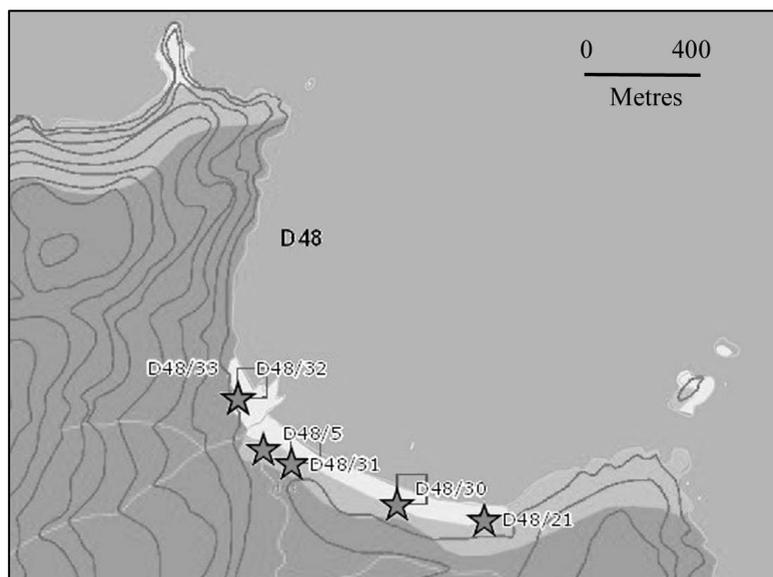


Figure 2. ArchSite location data for Whenua Hou (September 2017). Note the absence of location marker for D48/33.

These records were created using data from historical documents, accidental discoveries, and an archaeological research programme of survey and excavation in 2007 (Smith and Anderson 2007, 2009). Site records identify both pre-contact Māori and post-colonial sites, reflecting early indigenous habitation and later settlement by a Māori-Pākehā residential sealing community unique in New Zealand's history (Smith 2002: 29).

In September 2017, a research programme studying the colony of South Georgian Diving Petrels (*Pelecanoides georgicus*; SGDP) (Fischer *et al.* 2017a, 2017b, 2018a and 2018b) on Whenua Hou required the installation of nest boxes along the dune face at Sealers Bay, where archaeological sites D48/21 and D48/30 are located. The locations for nest boxes had been determined in consultation with Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) to minimise the likelihood of archaeological disturbance and an archaeological authority was not required for box installation. However, given the cultural sensitivity of the area involved, archaeological monitoring was undertaken. Additionally, due to the island's remote location and restricted access, it was agreed that (where possible) all known archaeological sites would be relocated and their condition monitored. The report generated (Tucker 2017) served a dual purpose: both to update the SRS, which was last modified in 2007, and to contribute to the monitoring programme recommended in the Conservation Plan drafted for the management of the Whenua Hou Nature Reserve (Egerton 2016). This article presents a summary of the island's cultural history and outlines the current condition of the sites visited.

Historical Context

The earliest human occupation of Whenua Hou has been dated between the late thirteenth and early fifteenth centuries AD. Archaeological evidence for this initial phase of occupation suggests that the island was inhabited discontinuously (Smith and Anderson 2009: 16-17). Oral tradition records that in later centuries the island formed part of the traditional seasonal route used by birding parties travelling to harvest Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*) on the Tītī Islands around Rakiura (Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 198: Schedule 108). Originally named Kanawera, in honour of prominent Ngāti Mamoe chief Te Wera in historical documents, the island is referred to by various titles, including Fenouacho, Pegasus Island, Passage Island, Puke Hou and (most commonly) Codfish Island (Egerton 2016: 4; Howard 1940: 62). The name Whenua Hou refers to the more recent history of settlement on the island. Periodic occupation of the island by European sealing crews can be confirmed from 1808-1809 (Smith 2002: 46) and present-day descendants identify the island as a place of Māori residence at the time of the arrival of the sealers (Middleton 2007: 13; Anderson 2014: 160).

Several Ngāi Tahu chiefs are credited with the renaming of the island as Whenua Hou (“New Land”) and its nomination as a place where sealers could safely settle with their Maori partners (Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998: Schedule 108; Howard 1940: 64; Anderson 1991: 5; Middleton 2007: 12; Spinks 2007: 14). This nomination resulted in the formation of the first permanent European settlement in southern New Zealand and the first record of children of Māori-Pākehā descent

in the region (Anderson 1991:5). The settlement at Whenua Hou has been described as “a sailor’s boarding house in the south” and a “mariner’s retreat” (Howard 1940: 65-66). It had a fluctuating population depending on passing sea traffic and local births and deaths. McNab (1904) notes that around 100 sealers could be recorded as having been resident on the island at some stage, although the number of Pākeha men at any one time was remembered as between 15 and 20 (Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser, 25 March 1881: Volume V, Issue 490). When George Selwyn, the first Anglican Bishop of New Zealand, visited the island in 1844, his census recorded a small community consisting of several Māori families and unattached adults, as well as a proportionally greater number of Māori-Pākeha households (Howard 1940: 378-379, 381).

The Whenua Hou settlement was deserted by as early as 1846 (Howard 1940: 66; Anderson 1998: 183; Middleton 2007: 35). The decline of sealing and the growth of other industries elsewhere encouraged families to disperse to communities across Rakiura and the lower South Island. However, the distilling of liquor on Whenua Hou and subsequent distribution to locations around Rakiura continued into the late 1800s (Smith 1933: 9). In 1864, Whenua Hou was included with Rakiura and the Tītī Islands in the land purchase concluded between the Crown and Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Mamoe (Walrond 2015). Whenua Hou was gazetted under the Scenery Preservation Act as the Codfish Island Scenic Reserve in 1915 (Howard 1940: 320; Middleton 2007: 43) and in the late 1960s public access to the island was restricted by permit. The island was designated as a Nature Reserve in 1986, managed from 1987 by the newly created Department of Conservation (Middleton 2007: 56-57).

In 1998, the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act delivered the Waitangi Tribunal findings on Ngāi Tahu’s claim against the Crown for grievances regarding the purchase of South Island lands. Claims of wrongful purchase and access restrictions regarding Whenua Hou were addressed in the designation of the island as a Statutory Acknowledgement Area (Ngāi Tahu Statutory Acknowledgements 1999). The name of the island was officially changed from Codfish Island to Codfish Island (Whenua Hou) and the name of the reserve was changed from Codfish Island Nature Reserve to Whenua Hou Nature Reserve. The Whenua Hou Committee was also established as a subcommittee of the Southland Conservancy Board in recognition of mana whenua and to ensure consultation on island management (Middleton 2007: 59).

Many contemporary Ngāi Tahu trace their whakapapa to the island, which is “an extremely important tūrangawaewae to Ngāi Tahu, spiritually, culturally and physically” (Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998: Schedule 108). Members of the settlement at Whenua Hou formed a significant portion of the mixed-race

population in Foveaux Strait/Te Ara-a-Kiwa and together with smaller groups in East Otago “transformed the nature of southern Maori descent and experience in the nineteenth century” (Anderson 2014: 161; see Wanhalla 2009: 52-55). They also contributed notably to the preservation of Maori knowledge. For example, Tiori Mahure (George Mahura Newton), the son of a couple from Whenua Hou (George Newton and Wharetutu) provided HERRIS Beattie with valuable information for his “Traditional Lifeways of the Southern Maori” (Anderson 2009: 24).

The importance of these founders of an extensive network of Māori–Pākeha families in southern New Zealand cannot be overstated (Anderson 1990; Anderson 2014: 161). In memory of the Māori women through whom so many individuals now connect to the island, a pou whenua named Hine Kete was placed at Sealers Bay in the late 1990s. The gradual deterioration of Hine Kete prompted the carving of three new pou by James York (Ngāi Tahu). On 2 September 2017 Hine Kete was buried and the new pou whenua Te Pou Nehere, Te Pou Haumi and Te Pou Hou, were erected (Railton 2017) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The recently installed pou whenua, situated within D48/5, September 2017. Sealers Bay Creek is in the foreground and its junction with Hydro Creek is at the top right of the image (Brooke Tucker).

Given the cultural significance of Whenua Hou and the relatively undisturbed nature of archaeological deposits on the island, research projects require careful planning. The Department of Conservation has identified “heritage significance zones” and “threat zones” within which there is the potential to negatively impact heritage values on Whenua Hou (Egerton 2016). The archaeological fieldwork undertaken in September 2017 monitored research within these zones and assessed the condition of previously recorded archaeological sites.

Archaeological Monitoring 2017

The installation of nest boxes for SGDPs was monitored from 16 to 19 September 2017. Based on observations during the process and the nature of the surrounding dune areas, it was determined that the invasive stage of the SGDP study took place in sterile soil and had no effect on archaeological deposits (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Nest boxes installed September 2017 in relation to D48/21 and D48/30 (Brooke Tucker).

NZAA site record update.

Between 16-20 September 2017 the other recorded sites in Sealers Bay and Penguin Bay (D48/5, D48/31, D48/32 and D48/33) were also relocated and their condition monitored. D48/5 and D48/32 were photographed in a series of images taken to compare directly with baseline monitoring images from the Conservation Plan for the island (Egerton 2016). The remaining recorded archaeological site (D48/23), located on the southern side of the island, was not visited because of constraints on access and time. Results of the site survey are summarised here.

D48/21 Midden/Oven/Urupā Sealers Bay 2 and D48/30 Midden Sealers Bay 3

Undertaking dune work in conjunction with the SGDP study facilitated the examination of the eastern end of Sealers Bay in a non-intrusive manner. Monitoring of burrows along the length of the dune face meant that blowouts and eroding dune caps were inspected several times. No evidence of cultural material was visible. After fieldwork had been completed, the original black and white photographs of D48/21 were located. These were scanned and uploaded to ArchSite to be included in the site record form with the existing photocopied images. While D48/21 and D48/30 could be relocated, no evidence of cultural material was observed. It is possible that archaeological deposits have been eroded or reburied by dune movement since site record forms were last updated in 2007.

D48/31 Midden/Oven Sealers Bay 4

Apart from walking tracks and access areas around the huts and facilities this area was almost completely covered in vegetation. Smith and Anderson (2007, 2009) had previously recorded eroding midden in the bank above the track to the creek, but in 2017 there was no evidence of any cultural material in this vicinity. A single fishbone and a small fragment of shell were observed in dark grey sandy soil outside the west-facing window of the hut kitchen.

D48/5 Historic Sealing Base in Sealers Bay

The coastal perimeter of the entire site is exposed to gradual erosion by Sealers Creek, Hydro Creek and the tide (Figure 5). Since last visited by Egerton in 2010 (Egerton 2016) the eastern bank of Hydro Creek has been undercut and discrete archaeological deposits of charcoal stained sand, midden and stone are visible under the lip of the bank (Figure 6). The cultural material lies approximately 600 mm below ground surface in stained brown sand, capped by clean pale coloured sand, which in turn is covered by a layer of grey sand below the topsoil. These exposed deposits reinforce the results of previous augur survey (Smith and Anderson 2007, Figure 5) which revealed cultural material in samples from the vicinity and are significant given the proximity to the house floor excavated by Smith and Anderson (2007, 2009).



Figure 5. The effects of erosion at the base of the headland, Area 3, D48/5 (Brooke Tucker).



Figure 6. Archaeological material in the eastern bank of Hydro Creek mouth, Area 1, D48/5. Scale is 20 cm intervals (Johannes Fischer).

D48/32 Shipwreck Debris Penguin Bay 1

Historic artefacts were identified during inspections of the beach at Penguin Bay. A shaped stone (Figure 7) similar to a piece photographed in Smith and Anderson (2007: 16, Figure 17, pieces of a try pot) was found on the boulder bank on the eastern side of the bay. A metal bracket (Figure 8) was located at the back of the boulder bank on the high tide line, on the western side of the creek that enters the bay. Several metal containers were located about ten metres inland of the beach (Figure 9). These are milk or cream cans similar to those used throughout New Zealand up until the 1950s (Stringleman and Scrimgeour 2008). Historically there was some variation in can design and the Whenua Hou containers are similar in appearance to those in an undated photo in Spellerberg (2011: 10) described as “very early designs.”

Penguin Bay was photographed to compare directly with the baseline monitoring image taken in 2010 (Egerton 2016). The beach itself appeared unchanged, although the shipwreck debris recorded in 2007 was no longer present.

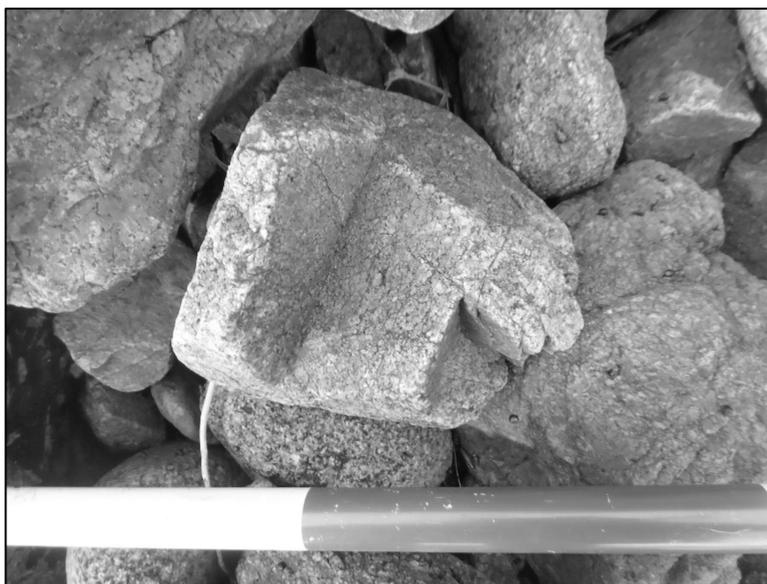


Figure 7. Shaped stone at site D48/32 (Brooke Tucker).



Figure 8. Metal bracket at site D48/32 (Brooke Tucker).



Figure 9. Metal containers behind the boulder bank on the eastern side of Penguin Bay, at site D48/32 (Ursula Ellenberg).

D48/33 Still Penguin Bay 2

The site record described a “heap of bricks, along with some metal objects including barrel bands” on the cliff top above the western end of Penguin Bay, “adjacent to and easily visible from” the Mephistopheles track. Egerton (2016: Section 2.6.5) further described the area as a flat ponga platform. Although the bricks have been linked to those described by Wilson (1959: 73) as a trying-out station in the bush above Sealers Cove, the site record noted that Elaine Hamilton (Rakiura Museum) subsequently identified the bricks above Penguin Bay as the remnants of a still. The site record for D48/33 connects the feature to the rum-running described by Smith (1933: 9). It is possible that the bricks mentioned by Wilson (1959) were part of another feature at the western end of Sealers Bay.

In September 2017, the headland and ponga platform were identified, but the previously recorded bricks and metal objects were not. Eventually a small cluster of moss covered bricks was found (Figure 10). These were orange clay bricks, rectangular in shape, without distinguishing features or manufacturing marks. The location data for these bricks was slightly different from that on the site record form and it is possible that other historic artefacts are present on the headland.



Figure 10. Brick feature D48/33 (Brooke Tucker).

Conclusions

Field work undertaken in mid-September 2017 enabled the supervision of the installation of SGDP nest boxes in the Sealers Bay dune face and the monitoring of the condition of known archaeological sites in Sealers and Penguin Bay. Archaeological site records have been updated with the information contained in Tucker (2017).

Comparing the current condition of the archaeological sites on Whenua Hou with previous studies highlights the need for regular monitoring. While D48/31, D48/32 and D48/33 seemed relatively secure, environmental factors such as storms or flooding have had dramatic impacts upon the island's cultural values in the past. D48/21 and D48/30 have been affected by dune activity, and D48/5 has been impacted by stream flow and tidal erosion. Management processes currently in place for heritage values would benefit from repeated low impact archaeological assessments. Additionally, the discovery of previously unidentified artefacts (D48/32) suggests the importance of extending monitoring surveys beyond the discrete locations of known sites.

Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to the National Geographic Society, the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, the Encounter Foundation, Forest and Bird, and The Royal Society of New Zealand for supporting this study. We thank the Whenua Hou Committee and the Department of Conservation *Te Papa Atawhai* for granting access to Whenua Hou and Heritage New Zealand Pohere Taonga for providing support and equipment. We are also grateful for Graeme Taylor's assistance in the field. Finally, we thank Rachael Egerton, Nicola Molloy and Rick McGovern-Wilson for supplying unpublished information used in this article.

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