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Cultural despatches from an East-Northland Late-period/Early Historical-period Coastal Site

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Introduction

Taemaro Bay (34.9417 °S; 173.5771 °E) is a NNE-facing cove of two sand bays and one shingle on the open coast 6 km northeast of Mangonui Township (Figure 1). Finds of artefacts on the surface of archaeological site O04/67, mainly from the early 1960s, form part of the Booth Whānau Collection housed today in Te Kōngahu Museum of Waitangi in the Bay of Islands. The Māori items appear to have characteristics of the Late Period (1650-1800; Smith 2013), although we have no associated radiocarbon datings; other cultural material is from early in the Historical Period (post-1800).



Figure 1. Location of Taemaro Bay, including Site O04/67 (indicated).

The Site Record Form for the Taemaro midden (N7/86; O04/67), first registered in September 1976 by John Coster and Gabrielle Johnston, noted ‘Midden is exposed behind the beach over an area of 200 x 30m. The most dominant feature is the presence of large quantities of fire-fractured stone.’ (Coster & Johnston 1976). Taxa present included a wide variety of both open-coast and estuarine shellfish, and fish (and some dog) bone was scattered through the midden. The archaeologists also documented water-worn and sand-blasted glass, as well as the point of a square-shanked copper nail. When archaeologist James Robinson later visited the site, in July 1996, there was no visible evidence of the midden, largely

as a result of sand-cover and vegetation (Robinson 1996). No other middens have been reported in this east-coast region (Robinson 2007: 34).

James Robinson (1996) went on to explain: ‘The 5 pa located on the headlands around Taemaro Bay (...); the remnant taro recorded on the other side of Taemaro Bay (...); and the large food storage pits found on the nearby ridges (...), strongly suggest that the bay was an important settlement around which taro and kumara were grown by Maori in pre-European times. Cultivation appears to have continued into the historic period with early land plans showing gardens behind the beaches and around Omata and Taemaro Streams in 1863 (...) and in 1895 (...).’ In line with this, the Waitangi Tribunal Report (1997: 296) provides the account Peter Pangari had received from his forebear: ‘... Parata and Kahukuraariki [ancestors of Ngati Kahu, Te Parata having come from Hawaiki on the waka Maimaru] settled in Taemaro Bay, and there were masses of people living within the vicinity of the Bay, around the Omata and over to Whakaangi and Waiaua. He [Peter’s tupuna] talked of ... fishing grounds (toka) ranging from near the shoreline to far out to sea where the hapuka[u] were caught, each yielding a different species of fish.’

Recorded European settlement in the region apparently began in 1831 (Robinson 2007: 10), and in November 1839 the two blocks taking in Taemaro (Taemaro and Waimaori) were purchased by land speculators (Waitangi Tribunal Report 1997: 82-83). (This is not to say, however, that Europeans who had established relationships with local Māori had not already lived at Taemaro). In 1865 this and other nearby lands were purchased by the Crown, some near Taemaro becoming a ‘Native Reserve’ (Robinson 2007: 12, 14, vii).

Taemaro – like several bays nearby – was a shore-whaling station that operated with open boats for parts of the 19th century (Dawbin 1956: 153, 157, although it is unclear whether Dawbin was referring to the neighbouring Whangarino [Temahani] Bay whaling station O04/451 with at least one try-pot, first reported by Leigh Johnson in 1988, or a station at Okauau, in the eastern part of Taemaro Bay [Feature 13 in Robinson 2007: xviii]). In any event, ‘both shore and ship based whaling declined after the 1860s with the last whale captured in the area being the prize of the Taemaro Maori in 1904...’ (Robinson 2007: 15).

In this contribution we characterise the archaeological items with signs of working - or which were unusual or human-related – collected on the dune surface; this included shell and bone, but not necessarily all the stone flakes.

Physical and Biogeographic Setting

High-spots near the shore reach 150 m, but there is extensive cultivatable ground backing Taemaro Bay associated with the streams, particularly Omata and Taemaro. The inner part of the cove is protected from the full impact of ocean swells, so would have been amenable to waka use.

Taemaro lies within the Northeast Biogeographic Region (DOC 2005), and the Late- to Historical-period open-shore fish and shellfish, marine mammal, and seabird communities would have been essentially the same as those of today and as summarised by MacDiarmid et al. (2009). The one fish species noticeably absent inshore today – but which would have almost certainly been common through into the 20th Century in even shallow waters - is the hapuku *Polyprion oxygeneios*, a species largely banished today to deep seas (> 100 m) through fishing pressure (<http://www.nabis.govt.nz/>). Otherwise, everything from leatherjackets *Parika scaber*, to the ubiquitous snapper *Pagrus auratus*, to various tunas and sharks would have been available. Also locally available would have been shellfish, particularly the paua *Haliotis iris* and *H. australis*, and Cook's turban *Cookia sulcata* and various whelks. Rock lobsters, crabs and other crustacea are also likely to have featured in the local diet.

Overview of Collection

There are 119 items listed in our collection catalogue: Maori-related (and almost certainly Late-period) articles dominate, but there is early Historical-period material as well.

Māori-era Material

Many items are of stone - mainly raw-tools (e.g., hammerstones), but also some made-tools (adzes and chisels). Fishing items of shell and bone are also prominent. The other bone material includes one part kuri skull (Polynesian dog, *Canis familiaris*, characterised by its marked sagittal crest; Bay-Petersen 1979: 167), together with one dog mandible and many unworked canine and other dog teeth that are presumed to be from kuri.

Fishing Gear

Fishhook components are mainly of Cook's turban, but also of paua and bone, and all are without barbs. (There are no obvious sinkers, but Item #62T45 may be a pumice float.) The descriptions of the fishhooks that follow refer, necessarily,

almost exclusively to entire, or nearly-so, articles. These, together with the many broken parts, lack any sign of what might be taken as ornamentation.

For items of Cook's turban, there are complete (or near-complete) points and shanks for two-piece fishhooks, all of those undamaged-enough to tell being lapped rather than butted; all but one shank are apparently clockwise in handedness (Law 1984: 6-10) (Figure 2). There are no intact one-piece hooks, but there are several presumed-blanks for them, including Item #62T51 (about 20-mm OD and 5-mm ID, the hole formed by deep filing of the outer curved surface of the shell; left column in Figure 2). Only one point (#62T54, middle column in Figure 2) appears essentially complete, with three simple notches for binding to the shank and consistent with Base-type BbA of Law (1984: 9). (Also, at least #62T83 could be Base-type Bae, which lacks notches altogether.) There are two essentially complete shanks (#62T90 and #62T?, 21-25-mm long, and clockwise), each with one notch for line attachment and two notches for point-attachment. They are equivalent to a #1-sized steel hook of today, and both would have been far too small for use with the points above.

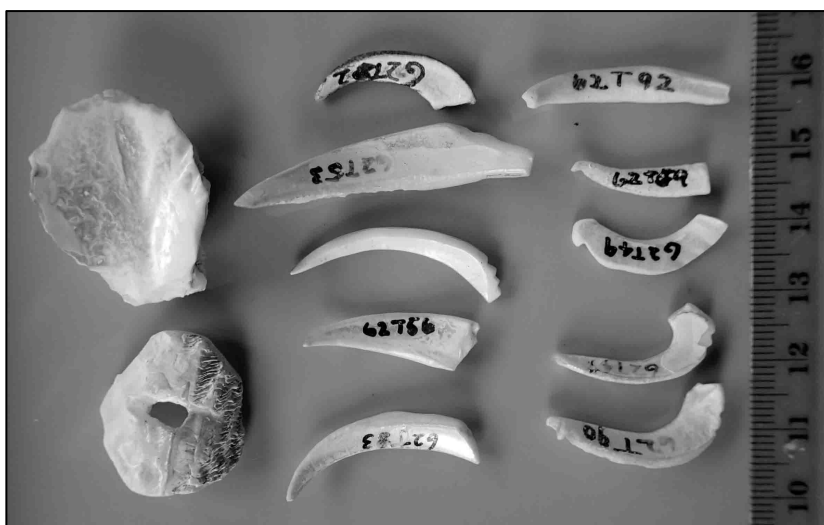


Figure 2. Cook's turban fishhook material. Left column: blanks – possibly for one-piece hooks, the lower showing fierce transverse filing to create the central hole. Middle column: fishhook points (although some could be broken one-piece hooks), #62T54 located centrally. Right column: fishhook shanks (although some could be broken one-piece hooks), the lower two apparently complete.

The four paua fishhook points, 28-44-mm long (although the smallest [#62T91] is incomplete), are also for lapped attachment (Figure 3). All are clockwise in handedness. Two have lashing marks consisting of up to three grooves on each of two sides; in Item #62T48, the three grooves are on only one side. No shanks suitable for these points were found (probably because they were of wood that did not survive), but there is one smaller (presumed) shank (#62T62?, not shown). A further (broken) large and heavy shank (#62T48) is possibly from the aperture of the gastropod *Charonia lampas*.



Figure 3. Paua fishhook points.

The bone and bone-related material includes one intact point (#62T55, 35-mm long, simple and straight, with two notches for attachment to the shank, and probably of kuri), and two dogfish spines (#62T69 and 62T105 almost certainly from the northern spiny dogfish *Squalus griffini*) which are possibly to have been used as fishhook points (e.g., Allen 2014: 31).

Other Cultural Material

The raw-tools in stone include what are taken to be 15 hammerstones; at least 10 burnishers/scrapers/cutters, some well-worn on their working edge, and several of slate-like material; eight files and two part-hoanga; and five pieces of obsidian (all

but one from Kaeo, the exception [#62T112] being from Mayor Island; McAlister 2017).

The made-tools of stone include seven adzes or adze-pieces (none clearly old in style), and two broken nephrite chisels. To stand out is the butt-end of what appears to be a large but broken tree-felling adze (#62T?, 145-mm long and up to 118-mm across, and up to 48-mm thick).

European-Derived Material

This includes broken glass (our catalogue records on page 62 ‘many pieces on beach surface’, echoed later by Coster & Johnston 1976) – none embossed, most of them dark-olive green and weatherworn; broken parts of tobacco clay pipes; two metal items; and several pig *Sus scrofa* teeth (including canines from young animals), some still embedded in bone and appearing no less old than the dog bone. ‘...the bottle glass fragments were apparently flaked to be used like obsidian, which suggests that this activity happened very early in the historic period before the traditional way of life changed between 1790 and 1820.’ (Robinson 2007: 38).

There are about a dozen clay-pipe pieces, most of them broken stem parts and derived from at least four individual pipes. There is little embossing among them, the most significant being on part-stem #62T114 which is almost certainly labelled, in raised relief, ‘T.W. & Co’ on one side, and ‘EDIN’ on the other (Figure 4). (Apparently Thomas White and Co. produced pipes in Edinburgh between 1823 and 1876: <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au>; Goodwin 1989: 73.) The only other embossing is ‘C^o’ in raised relief on the thicker end of a broken stem (#62T40, and possibly also Thomas White and Co.), and an indeterminate circular imprint 7-mm in diameter on a bowl fragment (#62T87).

The brass button (#62T97) is 17-mm across, has four stitching holes, and its back-mark reads ‘S.W. Silver & Co. Cornhill London’ (Figure 4). This company has been listed (<http://www.gracesguide.co.uk>) as clothiers who manufactured at Cornhill from 1823 to at least the early 1850s. There is one possible slate pencil – worn down, and waisted as if for tying (Figure 4). The gun (musket?) butt-plate (#62T85) is apparently of cast brass, 108 x 45 mm, in largest dimension, and is without engraving (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Part of clay-pipe stem labelled 'T.W. & Co.' and 'EDIN'; brass button by S.W. Silver & Co.; and shaped slate pencil.



Figure 5. Gun butt-plate of brass.

Discussion

This contribution characterises surface artefacts from Taemaro archaeological site O04/67. The assemblage suggests this was much more than a midden; instead, we contend, it was a Late-period living and working site primarily concerned with tool manufacture, mainly inshore fishing, and possibly wood-carving - later to be occupied by one or more people with European (particularly United Kingdom) connection. The presence of substantial quantities of mud snails *Amphibola crenata* and cockles *Austrovenus stutchburyi* in the midden (Coster & Johnston 1976) means there was ongoing contact between this open-coast site and others estuarine (presumably Mangonui Harbour); the predominance of Kaeo obsidian (sourced 30 km to the southeast) points to other local journeying and trade.

We argue the surface cultural material of the Taemaro site is not earlier than 1650 because 1) there is no moa or marine-mammal material, and 2) of the style of fishhooks. (This is not to say, however, that there are not earlier cultural layers deeper in the sand, possibly going back to the earliest Polynesian arrivals as suggested by Peter Pangari's evidence given earlier; the piece of Mayor Island obsidian may be associated with early voyaging).

Fishing items form a significant part of the collection, but many are incomplete; it is important to record that these part-fishhooks do not suggest any technologies different to those represented by the material we have featured. As Māori society evolved there were increasing levels of ornamentation among fishhooks (Davidson 1984: 63), yet there appears to be no decoration among ours. The impression is that this was a utilitarian site with high rates of fishhook manufacture, use and turnover; as well as being a place with significant amounts of stone- and perhaps wood-working.

Standout fishing items from Taemaro include what we take to be two very small shanks (#62T90 and #62T?; Figure 2) for two-piece fishhooks; they represent extreme specialisation in terms of construction, maintenance (e.g., replacement of broken points), and use. (We doubt – but cannot rule out – that these are broken one-piece fishhooks, the paired notches being for bait-lashing). In contrast, most of the fishhook points are potentially large, although the precise form and dimensions of whole fishhooks derived from the points in our collection is unclear. (Indeed, museum specimens show that the sizes of points or shanks are not necessarily indicative of the size of the complete hooks; Davidson 1984: 68).

Sinkers are typically sparse in collections (Davidson 1984: 71), but their complete absence at Taemaro is consistent with widespread use of floating baits. (We agree, however, that absence of an item from our collection is not necessarily the same

thing as their complete absence from the site. And of course unmodified stones, or stones contained in bags, may have been used to take baited hooks to the seafloor.) This possibly, at the same time, argues more for shore-casting than waka-fishing in the immediate locality: fishing from the shore inevitably involves frequent hook-ups with kelp and rock edges that is reduced by constantly attended floating baits. The dogfish spines offer the only strong evidence from our collection for seaward sorties having been made by the people of this bay (or by others nearby): although the northern spiny dogfish can occasionally be taken as shallow as 15 m (<http://www.nabis.govt.nz/>), they are most commonly much deeper (100-500 m; McMillan et al. 2011: 64, and for Taemaro at least 10 km offshore).

‘From North Cape to the Bay of Plenty, snapper was the main catch of fishermen of all periods’ (Davidson 1984: 138) a point borne out too by the material in middens and living-sites within the greater Hauraki Gulf (Smith 2013: 17; Allen 2014: 23). But leatherjackets, in particular, were also sometimes important in the north through into historical times (e.g., Sewell 1988: 10; Allen 2014: 23). We conclude that the small Cook’s turban fishhooks were probably used mostly for little fish such as leatherjackets and small individuals of larger fish, while the larger Cook’s turban, pua and bone points were for fish as large as small sharks and small rays. The hooks have a strong bias towards clockwise handedness, standardised handedness perhaps ensuring spare points were consistent in handedness with the shanks being used (Law 1984).

The high frequency of hammerstones, and of what appear to be scrapers/burnishers/cutters, is less-easy to explain - given the site’s location on a sand dune close to the shore. The hammerstones – mostly to be used in one hand - would normally be associated with the making of stone tools, yet only two objects (#62T7 and #62T8, both possibly adze components) were obvious stone tools in the making. Furthermore, stone flakings were not common in our observations or, apparently, those of Coster & Johnston (1976). Scrapers may have been used for such things as muka-extraction from the flax that almost certainly would have flourished in the area; or to burnish and face wood and shell objects.

The European-sourced artefacts bring an interesting cultural overlay to Taemaro. ‘The musket may be a relic from a (...) date when it is traditionally recorded that the tangata whenua of Waiua and Taemaro were defeated by a war party from Whatuwhiwhi, possibly around 1820s-1830s...’ (Robinson 2007: 38). At least some of the items have a firm early- to mid-19th Century United-Kingdom provenance – but, of course, we can never know if they had, in fact, been deposited on the beach much later, or be certain that Europeans had ever lived there. We suggest the early Historical-period cultural material is associated with

European(s) who took up with local Māori; they in turn were possibly connected with early whaling, as was the case at Waiaua, 30 km to the southeast (Hayes 2004: 147).

Conclusions

Artefacts associated with the surface of a deflated dune (Midden O04/67) near Omata Stream in Taemaro Bay, on the open east coast between Mangonui and Whangaroa, appear to be connected with the Late- and early Historical-periods. Of the Late-period material, half is of stone and to do with facing and working stone and wood items, and a quarter is of shell and bone and associated with fishing. Accordingly, we argue O04/67 was much more than a midden; rather it was a working site where stone tools such as scrapers and hammerstones were used and where fishhooks were made and used. A small portion of the archaeological material is European in origin, datable items deriving from the early- to mid-1800s. The collection is significant because of 1) the two very small Cook's turban shanks, components of what appear to be among the tiniest two-piece fishhooks reported in this country; and 2) the site being one of few dune-surfaces documented in northeast Northland where a vibrant Late-period Māori living surface also contains early Historical-period cultural material.

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