NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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DASHING ROCKS, TIMARU

A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON EXCAVATIONS - SITE S111/1

G.M. Mason and Owen Wilkes

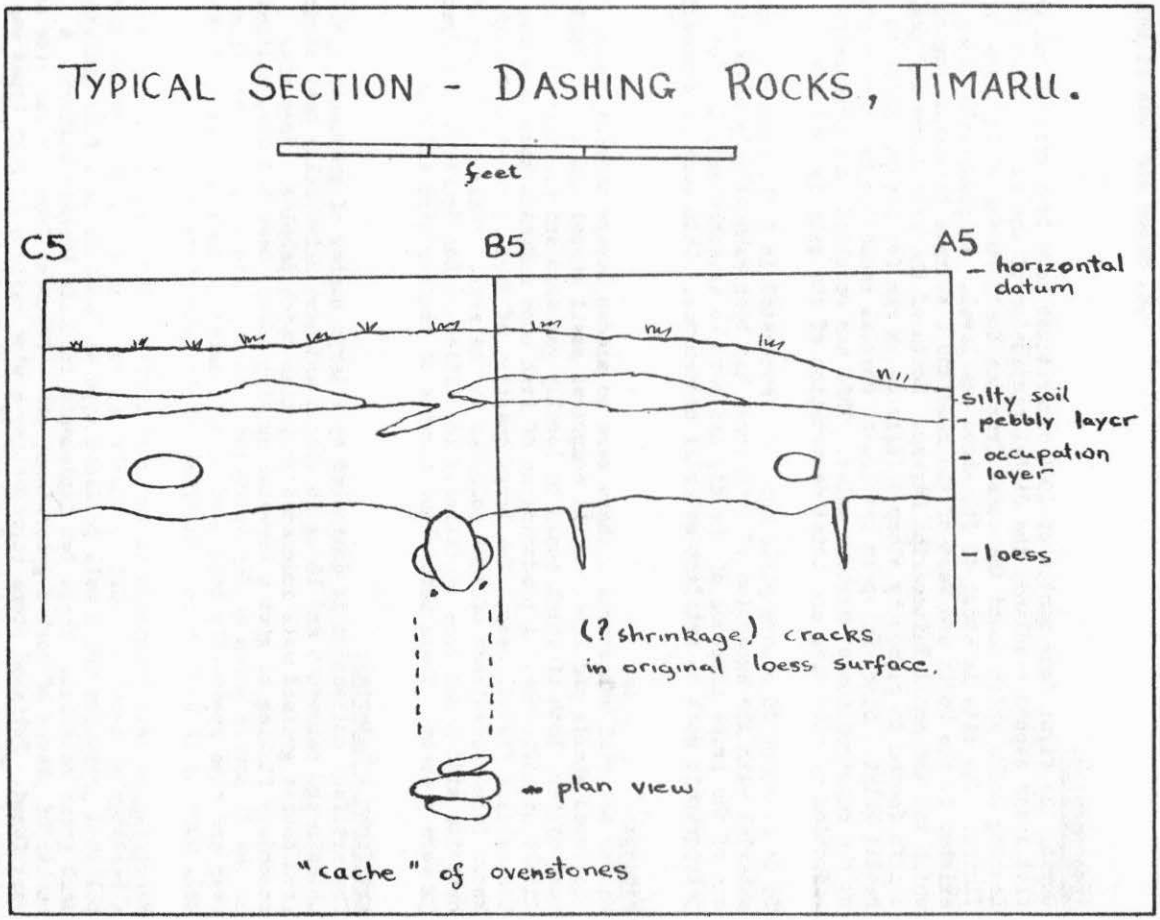
INTRODUCTION:
During the first four months of 1963 excavations have been carried out on a flat loess capped headland, the distal projection of the cliffs known as Dashing Rocks which bound the coast from the Northern end of Caroline Bay, Timaru. The site is about 40 ft. above sea level. In pre-pakeha times there existed to the North and West of the headland a shingle bar-bound lagoon into which ran the small Taitarakihi Stream. South of the site loess and basalt cliffs footed in places by steep shingle beach ran for several miles to Patiti Point. Since European settlement coastal recession has been hastened by the construction of harbour moles. This has resulted in considerable reduction of site area and total destruction of the site is imminent.

To date, about 45 square yards have been excavated in 3 ft. squares. Rock material with the exception of ovenstones has been exhaustively collected as one of the prime purposes of the dig has been to assemble material for petrographic work on artifact material provenance. This work is proceeding.

Midden:
Midden material was sparse - there were no midden layers present, only scattered shells and bone. Shell comprised small mussel and very occasional rock oyster, both of which could be locally gathered and are therefore of little significance. A predominance of fish bone suggests that this was basically a fishing camp. The large quantity of seal is consistent with the known former existence of seal colonies in the area. Small quantities of definite midden moa bone tentatively identified by Ron Scarlett as Euryapteryx were present. There were minor amounts of smaller bird and dog.

Artifactual Material:
The artifact collection is dominated by a large number of greywacke spalls which range between 5 and 15 cm in length and have universally been struck from coarse grained well indurated greywacke beach pebbles. Some show secondary flaking to give a serrated cutting edge. Over 200 were collected in the 45 square yards so far excavated. In the main they show no signs of wear and have apparently been used on soft material such as flesh. A few are well worn as if used on hard material, as in greenstone cutting.

Recognisable adze fragments in terms of Duff's (1956) classification include a rectangular sectioned adze (probably 1A) rendered in hammer dressed and polished greywacke and a well polished type 4A rendered in a fine grained dark green material. These two implements indicate Archaic culture. A number of pieces of worked greenstone, one a fragment from a 6 cm. wide adze, were found. Polished stone representing a wide variety of rock types was collected. Large quantities of silite ("quartzite") flint, chalcedony, obsidian, etc., were recorded and are currently being studied in thin section. Bone artifacts comprised uncompleted fish hooks and an awl.


TYPICAL SECTION - DASHING ROCKS, TIMARU.
feet
C5
B5
A5
horizontal datum
silty soil
pebbly layer
occupation layer
loess
(? shrinkage) cracks in original loess surface.
plan view
"cache" of ovenstones

Stratigraphy:
The stratigraphy of the site is simple. The occupation layer rests on a virtually unweathered surface of loess. When this surface is scraped clean, a polygonal pattern of melanised material is visible. In section (see diagram) this shows as melanised intrusions wedging out sharply 5 - 7 ins. below the occupation layer. General form suggests this feature is a set of infilled shrinkage cracks as is developed in drying mud, but a more likely explanation is afforded by examination of an adjacent, lower, bare loess surface which is being eroded by spray from breaking waves. This shows a dendritic network of miniature gullies of very similar pattern.

The occupation layer is 6 - 9 ins. thick, generally of only moderately melanised material - largely modified loess. It shows few irregularities, only one oven hollow has so far been found, although there are large number s of ovenstones. A few large waterworn greywacke boulders were possibly used as anvils.

A curious feature was a number of intrusions into the underlying (and otherwise undisturbed) loess of small burnt and unburnt greywacke boulders, generally 3 - 4 at a time, set with long axes vertical and in contact with each other. The fill of these intrusions was indistinguishable from the surrounding loess except for occasional charcoal lumps. A similar structure has been noted at the Heaphy River excavations by one of the Authors (Wilkes). Another puzzling structure comprised a number of small unburnt rounded beach boulders ca. 15 cm. long, arranged in a ring around a 24 cm. long club-shaped greywacke slab. The structure appears to have been deliberately made, but its purpose and significance is yet obscure.

The occupation layer is overlain by pebbly silt, silt and soil, the total depth of overburden being generally about 6 in. The pebbles can only have reached their present position by being thrown up by violent waves - the Authors have witnessed adequate waves. Topography and the irregular nature of the pebble deposit make stream deposition very unlikely, while the likelihood of wave placement is strengthened by the resemblance of the pebbles to pebbles below present high tide mark. Their incoming at this level in the section may be due to coastal recession having brought the cliffs near enough for waves to break onto the site. Possibly the increased exposure to rough seas was responsible for the termination of the site.

Comparisons and Conclusion:
The only previously published excavation in South Canterbury is that reported by Griffiths (1941) and carried out at Normanby, about 7 miles to the South, on a flatland site adjacent to a lagoon and the beach. An Archaic artifact assemblage and small quantities of moa eggshell and bone were collected. The most notable point of agreement with Dashing Rocks is in the quantity of greywacke spalls (classified by Griffiths as "beachstone" choppers, scrapers, cutters, etc.) 280 of which are listed, as well as "many" fish knives, another greywacke spall form. All Griffiths' illustrated spalls could be matched by an equivalent from Dashing Rocks.

From the Rakaia Mouth moa-hunter camp, Haast (1872 p. 82) mentions large numbers of greywacke spalls.

In conclusion, the following points may be made about the Dashing Rocks site.

(a) Artifacts for which stylistic generalisations are possible show Archaic characteristics.

(b) Midden remains show that the moa played at least a small part in the site economy.

(c) Greenstone was utilized to some extent.

(d) Greywacke spalls, are present in large numbers, and are probably characteristic of South Canterbury Archaic sites.

(e) Occupation was probably initiated on a relatively bare loess surface, was of no great duration and (if the lack of postholes etc., is anything to go by) was non-permanent, and terminated when exposure to rough seas became too great.

Further excavation to confirm these points is contemplated.

References:

Griffiths, G.D. 1941 An old Maori Camp Near Timaru. J.Poly.Soc.50 p.211

Haast, Sir Julius von 1872 Moas and Moahunters. Trans. N.Z.Inst. 4 p.66

Postscript:

A very similar assemblage of flaked material from Milford Lagoon, at the mouth of the Opihi River about 12 miles North on the Canterbury Plains Coast, is also being subjected to petrographic study.

TUMBLEDOWN BAY - A BANKS PENINSULA MOA-HUNTER SITE S94/30

G.M. Mason and Owen Wilkes

INTRODUCTION:

Tumbledown Bay was first visited in 1961 by one of the Authors (Mason) for geological reasons and a collection was incidentally made from an area of deflated sand dunes of a number of flakes some of which were polished. This prompted a search through unpublished literature which revealed that in the past many collectors had found it worth their while to visit the Bay. Almost none of their material is now available. Early 1963 saw a visit by the Authors to describe the locality and collect surface material for petrographic purposes. This is part of a co-ordinated attempt to determine the petrography of rock materials from Canterbury sites.