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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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EXCAVATIONS AT TAKAHANGA PA, KAIKOURA:

A PRELIMINARY REPORT

Michael M. Trotter and
Beverley McCulloch
Canterbury Museum

During February 1980 we made an investigation of part of Takahanga Pa, Kaikoura (S49/13), at the request of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. The site is of considerable importance to the local Maori community, featuring in their traditional history, and is where they wish to erect buildings for a modern marae. Both archaeologically and from the point of view of establishing a co-operative and sympathetic working relationship with the Ngai Tahu people, this work can be considered to have been an unqualified success.

We had four experienced assistants with us (all of whom gave their time free), and we used a local labour force of up to fifteen Maori volunteers. Twenty-one 2m squares were excavated, the main archaeological evidence revealed being the remains of a relatively large house complete with porch, doorway, central fireplace and external ditches, and with an adjacent cooking area (Cover). This house had had several periods of occupation and reconstruction in the late prehistoric and into the European contact eras.

Artefactual material associated with the building included several small greenstone pieces (pendants and chisels), numerous flakes of flint, and considerable evidence of the use of red pigment. Some early European bottle-glass, slate pencils and metal were also present. The porch had at one stage been used as a small flint-flaking floor. Faunal material was scarce, due to the acidity of the soil, but one piece of human bone caused much interest amongst the volunteer helpers, many of whom would like to have believed that it was evidence of cannibalism.

The earthworks, which still surround the pa, were examined in detail, and an internal cross-wall was found to have had a defended gateway. These features were mapped by surveyors from the Department of Lands and Survey, Blenheim, at our request.

During the investigation a highly successful 'open day' was held, many Kaikoura residents visiting the site and showing great interest in what was being done. As well, four visits were made by school groups, the local Lions Club was addressed, and the Kaikoura Star carried progress articles on the investigation. Our feeling is that all these exercises in public relations were worthwhile and as much in the interests of archaeology and site protection as the actual excavation itself.

We cannot stress too strongly the very high standard of work achieved by the local Maori volunteers, all of whom quickly developed an extraordinary skill in excavating, and showed tremendous enthusiasm for the job. As a result of this we worked a twelve-hour day for most of the time and the one planned 'day off' was cancelled for want of support. Tremendous hospitality was also shown by the Maori community who supplied free accommodation for our assistants, meals for the whole team on the site, and tools and equipment as requested.

We believe that this Maori co-operation was the most important thing to emerge from the investigation; at a time when racial friction seems to be causing not a little trouble to archaeologists in New Zealand, the local Ngai Tahu people have offered their services to work with us again at any time in the future - they took a great (indeed personal) interest in uncovering the history of their ancestors.

Material and data recovered from the investigation will be processed over the next few months and a full report will be compiled.