



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/>.

EXCAVATIONS AT WATTLE BAY, MANUKAU SOUTH HEAD

by W. Ambrose

For one weekend in November the Archaeological Society made an exploratory excavation in the vicinity of Wattle Bay, Awhitu Peninsula, on the South Head of the Manukau Harbour. Mr. Jolly had previously drawn the Society's attention to the collection of artefacts gathered from the locality by the farm owners, Mr. and Mrs. Bramley. Reference may be made to Mr. Jolly's note in Vol.3 no. 2 of the Newsletter, p.38; where a site producing moabone and a varied collection of Archaic adzes was described.

The main object of the excavation was to establish at this site a stratigraphic sequence at the place that seemed to exhibit the greatest concentration of cultural remains and to relate the material, excavated in an orderly manner, to that which had been accumulated from the random finds of Mr. and Mrs. Bramley. In this way it was hoped to show what associations of material we might reasonably infer from the undifferentiated Bramley collection.

The site (NZMS.1. sheet N47 & Part N46 (Pukekohe) O95371 N26) is at the base of a steeply rising consolidated Pleistocene to Recent dune formation, now being actively eroded by shore-line scouring, slumping and rain-wash. The strata containing evidence of human activity were actually buried by an overburden of loose sand up to 12 feet deep in places. Since the culturally modified deposits were relatively horizontal, the depth of overburden increased landward. We were obliged therefore to confine our activities to a narrow strip fronting the beach. The bay provides the first large beach within the harbour entrance and with a steep shore profile could easily provide a suitable landing for sea-craft. The opposite side of the harbour at Huia, was in pre-European times covered with heavy forest.

During the excavation there was no difficulty in identifying the cultural levels for they showed as a group of darker bands extending laterally for several chains, sandwiched between the lighter coloured natural sand basement and the overlying dune. In excavating the overlying loose sand it was obvious that the whole of the ten to twelve foot overburden had at no level seen human occupation. The stratigraphy showed as jumbled discontinuous lenses dipping steeply toward the shore. There were however many fragments of charcoal and obsidian and a small vesicular stone abraded in honing. All this material is seen as derived from higher up the slope and to have been secondarily deposited. It would be overlain and incorporated in the process of down-slope sand movement. No diagnostic artefacts were included in these naturally deposited intrastratigraphic cultural remains.

The interface between the dune and the underlying deposits defined an undulating, slightly off-level surface representing the last preserved evidence of human occupation at the site. The only evidence of any structural remains was in the form of two shallow post holes. The excavated area, gridded for recording, measuring 30ft. along the beach front and 8ft. back, displayed a sparse scattering of cultural evidence at this topmost level. The varied material included the badly preserved bones of an individual animal, possibly dog. In a confined 18" square sixty crop stones were found, while in other parts many chert and obsidian flakes, drill points, an adze roughout, a fishhook blank and a nicely polished chisel were recovered.

Between the upper and lower habitation layers was a discontinuous layer of relatively sterile sand, probably representing incipient dune formation.

The lowermost layer was typified by rich carbonaceous deposits and rested with a sharp division on a sterile natural substratum at a horizon only a couple of feet above high spring tide level. A fragment of polished adze, part of a sandstone file, several stone flakes and a drill point were all that was recovered from this layer.

Due to the paucity of evidence we were unable to delineate a clear local stratigraphic column fully described by artefactual material duplicating the Bramley collection. The associations we had hoped to demonstrate were only circumstantially proven. The chance of having C14 dates for these earliest signs of human activity on what must once have been the best canoe landing place near the Manukau Harbour entrance, as well as the evidence for association with the Bramley collection, does however make our brief excursion to the Awhitu Peninsula well worthwhile. Comparisons of the date of earliest settlement at Manukau with the eastern side of the Tamaki Isthmus, namely Motutapu (1) of about 1200A.D., would help verify the persistence or otherwise of Archaic traditions for the whole of the region. Carbon dates for Manukau are still awaited.

The hospitality shown by Mr. and Mrs. Bramley was typical of the spirit of co-operation the Archaeological Society has met with from farmers on all its excavations. Mr. and Mrs. Bramley housed the entire party of about twenty people for the weekend. The Society is deeply grateful for their generosity.

Reference

(1) Golson J. and Brothers R.N. 'Excavations at Motutapu' New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter Vol.2. No.2. 5-8.
