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EXTENSIVE MAORI WORKSHOP SITE
AT KAPOWAIKUA (SPIRITS BAY)

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Kaitaia.

Abstract

Floods in the middle of January 1976 swept away thousands of tonnes of sand at the well-known workshop site in the mouth of the Waitenoni Stream at Kapowairua (Spirits Bay) in the Far North, exposing over 100 previously unrecorded Maori grinding stones or hoanga. Of exceptional interest was the discovery of an aberrant water-worn stone which, it is suggested, was the "Mauri" of the site.

The assemblage of a score of excellently grooved and dished stones along the north bank of the stream has long been of interest. Though it was suggested that slips on the landward side covered some more grindstones, it was not realised that the sand hid many more in the bed of the stream.

On January 15, abnormally heavy rain flooded the Lands and Survey Department's camping ground further up the valley, many holiday-makers quickly finding themselves knee-deep in water. The flood rushed seawards, scouring out the stream mouth to bedrock, and cutting its way through the sand which had long ponded it.

Soon after the blow-out, Mr Viv. Gregory of Pukepoto near Kaitaia and his daughter, Mrs Enid Johnson of Takahiwai, struggled through the stream with difficulty on their return from North Cape, and Mr Gregory, who is perhaps the chief authority on the history and traditions of the Far North, and also on important sites, realised that he was scrambling over dozens of hoanga.

Two days later he went north again with the author of this account and Mr and Mrs Mike Bearsley, the Kaitaia divers who found one of the Surville anchors now nearing the end of their conservation treatment in Kaitaia.

Bearsley dived among the stones at high tide but, when the water fell as the tide ebbed, the workshop was fully revealed.

WIDE VARIETY

It was then seen that a variety of worked stones was represented. Some of the boulders had flattened tops; others were deeply grooved (in some cases it could be seen that use had initially been made of natural grooves) and there were four deeply dished stones, one of them with an indentation ground on its upper surface to hold sand or water.

Almost all the stones were rounded boulders, mostly too heavy for a man to lift. According to the Geological Survey map, they are igneous conglomerates and marine sandstones, and they vary in texture from extremely smooth to a rough open surface resembling a petrified sponge.

The one exception in shape to these smooth oval stones was a stone a metre tall with a surface of deep grooves and flanges which are obviously natural, though giving the impression of deliberate working. From its position in one of the main clusters of stone, and because of its unusual appearance, Gregory and Vincent suggested simultaneously that it was the mauri or stone to give mana to the site. The stone has now been removed for safe keeping by the Lands and Survey Department's ranger of the Te Paki Farm Settlement, Mr Hec Crene, and it will probably be erected securely near the spot where it was found.

ACCURATE COUNT

A day later Gregory and Bearsley returned to the site and gridded it with a cord to make an accurate count. Over a stretch of 100 metres they recorded 122 well worked stones and about 50 more showing slighter rubbing. By that time at least 40 others had already been hidden by sand brought in by the tide. By the end of January many more had been covered, but most of those still exposed are considered likely to remain on view.

Stones from this workshop have in past years found their way into museums and private collections. A barrier prevents vehicles being driven from the camping ground to the beach, and the area will be kept under the supervision of rangers and others, and it is hoped that this will protect the stones.

It is tempting to believe that this was the major site for manufacturing stone and bone tools and weapons at least for the area from Te Kao northwards.

Another good workshop is known to exist below sand on Tom Bowling Bay near Kerr Point, but nothing of the extent of the Kapowairua site has been revealed elsewhere.

It had every requisite for the Neolithic tool maker with a wide variety of stones, several grades of sand, and abundant water on a sunny, sheltered spot close to a settlement.

Middle-aged residents speak of another excellent site which formerly existed on the boulder beach at Mt Camel on Houhora Harbour, close to the spot where the Auckland War Memorial Museum-University of Auckland excavated the Moa Hunter camp site, but this was destroyed a generation ago when the area was first quarried for road metal.

It is known that the Waitenoni Stream ran unobstructed to the sea in 1772, though the lower reaches were backed up by the tide and the water was brackish. This was noted in their journals by officers of Mario du Fesne's expedition who landed there, but in the ensuing year the bush which clothed the area has been burnt off and replaced by scrub, and erosion and sand encroachment have reduced the stream flow.

REFERENCES

N.Z. Geological Survey Map, North Cape. 1st edition. Sheet 1.

Du Clesmeur's Journal, page 449, McNab's Historical Records of New Zealand, Vol. II.

Roux's Journal, McNab, page 361.