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FOUR TARANAKI STONE SCULPTURES

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This article sets out to examine four stone sculptures which are held in private collections in Taranaki. Three are held by Mrs W.M. Allan, Pihama, South Taranaki, while the fourth is held by Mr P.V. Brophy, Warea. These will be described giving details of their provenance, their form, and a discussion on their possible significance.

Papaka sculptures

The three stone sculptures in Plate 1 were all found a number of years ago by the late Mr W.M. Allan on a flat inland of the pa, Papaka (N128/1) at the mouth of the Punehu River (see Fig. 1). Papaka is a large pa which originally had the Punehu River flowing along the eastern and northern sides. During the 1930s a tunnel was constructed at the southern end which resulted in the river flowing straight into the sea. This tunnel subsequently collapsed and the river now flows through a large gap. The western side of the pa is collapsing into the Tasman Sea. Papaka is mentioned in Maori tradition concerning the area (Smith, 1910:207-208).

The sculpture illustrated at the left in Plate 1 is made from an andesite rock obtained either from the river or beach. It is triangular in shape and measures 23 x 15 cm with the apex being 7 cm across, and is 10 cm thick. The sculpture takes the form of a face with pronounced eyes and mouth. Both of these features have been ground. Below the mouth two more slanted grooves exist. A nose has been lightly pecked in as well as a circular depression at the top corner of each eye. A difficult area of pecking exists on the left hand side adjacent to the eye and mouth. Around the base of the 'chin' a small groove has been pecked.

The sculpture shown in the centre of Plate 1 is, like the first, also made from an andesite rock obtained either from the river or beach. It is oblong in shape and measures 34 x 19 cm and is 16 cm thick. Again a face is represented with the eyes, nose and mouth being clearly depicted. Two pecked grooves sweep above each eye and down the side of the rock opposite each eye. The natural indentation to the right of the mouth has been used to enhance the overall design.

The third Papaka sculpture (right, Plate 1) is made from softer rock than that of the other two sculptures. It is elliptical in shape and measures 34 x 23 cm and is 9 cm thick. The detail on this sculpture is difficult to interpret as it appears to have suffered damage in the past. Extensive use has been made of pecking over the entire surface and a crude face (eyes and mouth) may be made out on the top corner. The other grooves are difficult to interpret. On the reverse side the rock has been used as a hoanga which may account for some of the wear on the carved side.

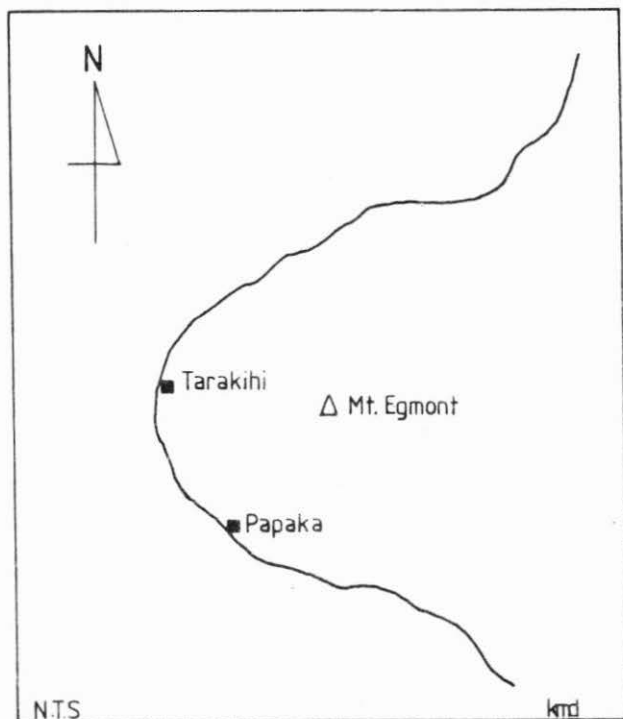


FIGURE 1. Location map.

### Tarakihi sculpture

Approximately ten years ago while walking over the pa, Tarakihi (N118/79), a local farmer, Mr Scott O'Sullivan, found a stone sculpture (Plate 2) which he later gave to Mr P.V. Brophy. Tarakihi is a large pa (see Prickett, 1983:306) on the south bank of the Teikaparua River. Also on this pa is a petroglyph consisting of one double spiral (Day, 1980:114).

As with the other sculptures this one is made from an andesite rock obtained either from the river or beach. It is oval and measures 34 x 17 cm and is 13 cm thick. Two crescentic eyes have been pecked out and a groove has been pecked around the middle below the eyes. This groove extends around three sides. Just below and between the eyes a nose has been pecked out. Below the groove and slightly to the right the area has been used as a hoanga. On the reverse side a dish-like depression exists having resulted from it also being used as a hoanga.

### Discussion

Perhaps the most obvious question which arises when one is looking at these sculptures is what was their purpose? On two of them we know that one of their functions was to act as hoanga. However, I suggest that in all four cases they were used as an agricultural god or garden marker. The possibility that these sculptures were associated with other activities should not be ruled out. For example when the proximity of both sites to the sea is taken into account they could have been used in some ritual associated with fishing.

Near where the three Papaka sculptures were recovered the late Mr W.M. Allan has observed, particularly during droughts, rectangular areas in the paddock. These probably represent former garden areas. For the Warea area we have two early accounts of garden areas and the use of stone boundaries. The first is an observation from the German missionary Riemenschneider who was in the district from 1846 to 1860. He states,

"The expansive tracts of land which evidently have been under cultivation especially around every old pah and of which the stone land marks which every individual marks off the boundary of his own plot of ground remain everywhere to be found in their original place." (Day, ms:17).

Unfortunately Riemenschneider does not mention if any of these were carved. Smith (1910:113) states that in 1853 while in the Warea district he noticed garden areas marked off with flat boulders set on edge running in straight lines. He also does not mention whether any of these were carved.

Both localities were occupied and used after European contact and settlement. Pieces of slate, slate pencils, and trade beads have been found on Papaka (Allan coll.) while the area around Tarakihi was occupied up until the beginning of World War 1. It can be suggested, therefore, that these stone sculptures were manufactured and used after European contact. On stylistic grounds, with the exception of Papaka sculpture number 3, this seems to be a plausible conclusion.

It is interesting to note that on all four of these sculptures only the face is depicted. Why only the face? It is well known that the head was considered sacred and that anything to do with it was tapu. This suggests that whatever the function of these sculptures the fact that they depicted a head, possibly of an ancestor, was all that was required for them to be effective, the rest of the body not being important. The Taranaki Museum also has four sculptures in its collection which only depict the head. It is only with more research into these types of sculpture will we be able to say with more certainty what their true function and significance was.

#### Acknowledgements

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#### References

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TARANAKI STONE SCULPTURES Plate 1. Papaka sculptures.



TARANAKI STONE SCULPTURES Plate 2. Tarakihi sculpture.