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FURTHER EXCAVATIONS AT SITE N40/2, OPITO BAY

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On Sunday, 28 November 1971, an inspection of the eastern half of the Opito foreshore was made. This revealed that during the preceding year the public had done much damage to the remaining beach middens. Owing to the increasing interest in artefacts, fostered by TV items about their monetary value, it is not expected that much will remain after this summer. Salvage of the sites thus becomes an urgent necessity. The authors regret abstaining from digging in recent years, since they both hold that amateur work properly recorded is better than none in the face of the obliteration of these workshops.

In view of these considerations, the authors decided to carry out a further excavation at Site N40/2. Earlier investigations of this site have been described by Jolly and Green (1962) and Murdock and Jolly (1967). Items of particular interest previously recovered were fish-hooks made of Cookia sulcata shell. Jolly and Legg found several two-piece hooks and two one-piece hooks of this material by sieving the disturbed deposit in the area known as the tractor track in 1966 and later, and the excavation by Murdock and Jolly (1967) produced several more.

The excavation described here took place on 8, 9, and 10 December 1971. A ten foot square was set out close to the previous square excavated by the authors, and a little to the west of it. To do justice to such a square at least four people should be employed. However, since the project was strictly a salvage one, the authors did the best they could under the circumstances. The deposit was trowelled, and part of it sieved through a sieve with quarter-inch mesh.

It was soon revealed that about one-third of the ten foot square had previously been roughly dug by an unknown person. The remainder of the area appeared undisturbed.

The stratigraphy was as follows:

Layer 1, consisted of grass roots, rubble and loose discoloured sand. It was 18 inches thick in places.

Layer 2, was similar in some respects, but more consolidated.

Layer 3, contained the 120 stone remainder of a hangi. As at least a third of the square had been pre-dug, the contents of the 'hole' were really secondary fill and of a uniform brownish colour.

Layer 4, was charcoal and stained sand averaging about one foot thick and contained the notable finds and a shallow pit.

The previous diggers in this area created a hole which fortunately did not destroy all of the large hangi, and did not disturb much of Layer 4. Excavation in sand is difficult at any time, and such a large area of secondary fill made it especially necessary to be careful. Fortunately the colour of layer four was a good deal darker than 1, 2, and 3. I feel that much more wood was used by early settlers, both for cooking and for warmth than was possible by later people. Also it must be appreciated that almost four feet of wind blown dune had built up over Layer 4, with plenty of evidence of living at say two feet above Layer 4. Owing to the fact that such a dune is not flat, much material could drift into 1 and 2 from surrounding areas.

A considerable amount of bone was found, including moa bone, many other bird bones and a quantity of dog bone. There was relatively little fish bone. The majority of the bone was in Layer 4 (see Table 2).

Two large pieces of moa bone were found on top of Layer 3, but it would be impossible to vouch for their being in situ. The fish bone found was predominantly snapper, but at least three other species are represented by individual bones (J. M. Davidson, pers. comm.). Shell included a number of rocky shore species, including mussel and paua. A small representative selection of species present was collected, and remaining shell stockpiled.

The variety and quantity of the bone material is very good evidence of early occupation. Such things as moa skull and ribs did not arrive by accident, and could scarcely be part of fossil bone collections. The polished adze found (4A) is indubitably Archaic. In good weather the adjacent islands could easily be reached by food seeking expeditions, and the numerous mutton bird bones are evidence of this. A Tuatara would be a delicacy to take home to an elderly relative. The whole Kuaotuna peninsula was heavily wooded once, and would provide bush birds, which are rare now as farming and gold seeking have completely changed the whole area, and fires have caused much erosion.

Charcoal was plentiful in Layer 4, and a really good sample was collected for testing. Kokowai was plentifully scattered in small fragments, and several of the largest pieces were kept.

There was much evidence of adze making, particularly in Layer 4. Some 42 broken roughouts were found, nine small and one large unbroken roughouts, two partly polished adzes, and one very well made finished adze of type 4A in Duff's (1956) classification. The very large quantity of stone flakes could not be transported from the site and were stockpiled.

Obsidian was not plentiful. Both grey and green flakes occurred throughout the deposit, although green flakes were more numerous. A small number of chert flakes was found.

Items of fishing gear and tools for their manufacture were also found (see Table 1). Of particular interest were composite hook points in Cookia sulcata, and a broken one-piece hook of the same material apparently waiting for use.

The excavation confirmed the result of the previous excavation, suggesting that N40/2 was a site at which a number of activities took place, including cooking and dumping of food remains, manufacture and use of adzes, and manufacture of other items such as fish-hooks and needles. Although the bulk of the material recovered relates to adze manufacture, the other activities are clearly indicated. The association of shell hooks, both one-piece and two-piece, with an Archaic assemblage on the Coromandel Peninsula is confirmed.

The full importance of the Tahanga adze quarry to the whole Opito area has not been considered by many. It has been the reason for much use of foreshore areas over a long period. The existence of what are believed to be Maori drains in swamp ground near the bluff, would seem to indicate semi-permanent settlement at least, and agriculture supposing that they are Maori, and indeed fairly ancient. Nevertheless such an extensive beach with its good fishing and bird areas was responsible for quite heavy settlement by "Moa-hunter" standards, and accounts for the sort of material unearthed by Golson's party at the woolshed creek salvage dig (N40/5), at Fisher's midden (N40/4) and elsewhere.

We are indebted as before to Mr O. Calder, and very much indebted to Miss Davidson for organising bone identification with the pre-eminent and tireless bone authority, and also for much patient editing.

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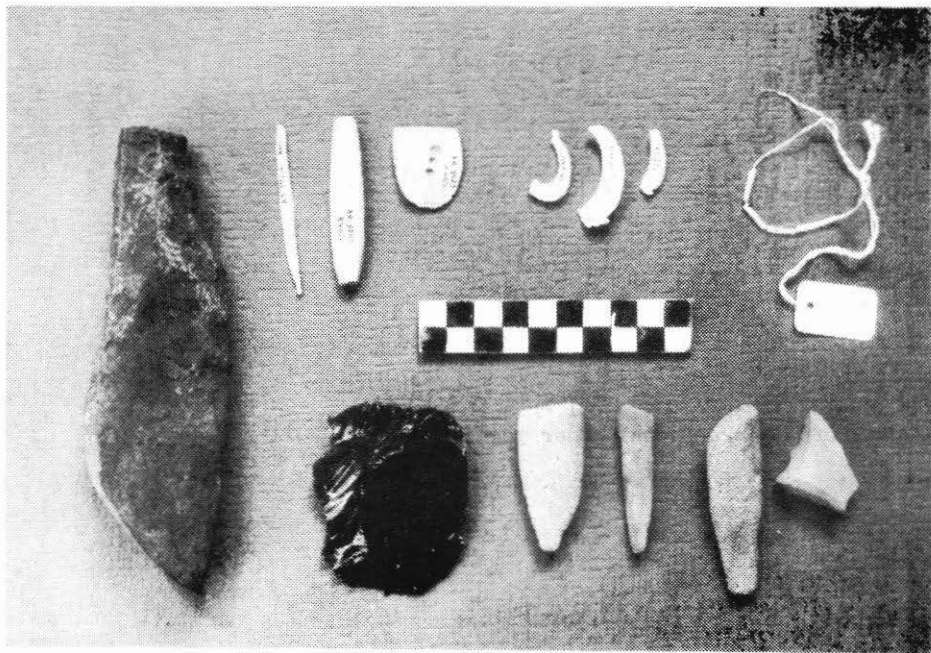


Plate 1. Artifacts from N40/2.

TABLE 1. PRINCIPAL FINDS

Artefact List

- 1 complete adze of Duff's Type 4A. 16.3 cm long, 3.5 cm wide, 4.5 cm thick, width of cutting edge 1.5 cm.
- 3 pieces of broken adzes.
- 2 small adze roughouts, partly ground
- 1 large roughout, 17 x 7 cm
- 1 very small roughout
- 9 small roughouts
- 42 pieces of roughouts
- Basalt flakes (only a selection of 24 flakes retained)
- 58 green pieces of obsidian and 29 grey, many showing signs of use or retouch
- 1 chert drill point
- 1 chert core
- 15 chert flakes
- 6 hammer stones
- 3 stone files
- 1 kokowai stained stone
- 1 broken one-piece hook in *Cookia sulcata*
- 2 points of composite hooks in *Cookia sulcata*
- 4 worked pieces of *Cookia sulcata*, hook blanks
- 1 unfinished bone lure shank
- 1 partly drilled bone tab
- 4 Dentalium segments
- 1 sliver of bone, possibly needle blank

Other items collected

- 3 pieces of kokowai
- 2 pieces of Kauri gum
- 1 charcoal sample from Layer 4
- 1 charcoal sample from Layer 3
- Small samples of sand and shell from the deposit
- Specimens of unworked stone other than basalt

TABLE 2. BONE DETERMINATIONS

(Communicated by R. J. Scarlett)

DOG Canis familiaris Linne

Posterior fragment of cranium; right ramus of a mandible; anterior portion of right ramus of a mandible; fragment of right maxilla; posterior portion right zygomatic arch; distal part left humerus; fragment immature right humerus; right radius; part right ulna; proximal part left ulna; 2 fragments left os innominatum; acetabular fragment of right os innominatum; right os innominatum; 3 vertebrae; 9 rib fragments; shaft right femur; shaft fragment of femur (? left); proximal half immature femur; head of immature left femur; distal end and shaft of left tibia; 2 right calcanea; 9 whole and 5 fragmentary metacarpals and metatarsals; 1 phalanx; undetermined fragments

CETACEAN

Probably Arctocephalus forsteri (Lesson): final phalanx of digit; 2 phalanges; 1 metatarsal; 1 right humerus; 1 rib fragment seal, not Seal, not determined: 1 left scaphoid; 1 hand or foot bone

Cetacean, not determined: 1 intervertebral plate; 1 undetermined fragment

RAT Rattus exulans (Peale)

1 left femur; 1 right humerus; several bird bones are rat-gnawed

TUATARA Sphenodon punctatus (Gray)

1 right humerus

MOA

? Dinornis sp. 1 left tibio-tarsus shaft fragment

Euryapteryx exilis Hutton: 1 skull; 1 left femur; 1 left and part 1 right tibio-tarsus, probably a pair; 1 proximal and 1 distal fragment left tibio-tarsus, probably one bone; 1 proximal half left femur and 1 shaft fragment of tibio-tarsus from top of Layer 3

Euryapteryx geranoides (Owen): 1 proximal fragment, left tibio-tarsus

Euryapteryx curtus (Owen): 1 thoracic vertebra

Euryapteryx sp. 1 first phalanx outer right toe; 1 first phalanx middle right toe; 1 sternal rib; 2 rib fragments; 1 shaft fragment left tibio-tarsus; 2 distal ends of fibulae; 1 proximal end of left fibula; a number of vertebra, limb and pelvis fragments

OTHER BIRDS

Albatross, Diomedea exulans or D. epomophora: upper shaft left tibio-tarsus

Black shag, Phalacrocorax carbo novaehollandiae Stephens, 1826: left coracoid; right coracoid; left humerus; right ulna; acetabular region of pelvis

Little shag, Kawaupaka, P. melanoleucos brevisrostris Gould, 1837: left tibio-tarsus

Northern Blue Penguin, Eudyptula minor ssp.: left humerus; proximal end and shaft left femur; shaft right femur; distal fragment right femur

Caspian tern, Hydroprogne caspia (Callas, 1770): 2 first phalanges (right and left index digits)

Fluttering shearwater, Puffinus gavia (Forster, 1884): distal end and part shaft right tibio-tarsus

Flesh-footed shearwater, Puffinus carneipes hullianus (Mathews 1912): 2 anterior premaxillae; 7 fragments of at least 3 mandibles; 2 and 3 part right, 3 left femora; 4 and 10 part right, 1 and 14 part left tibio-tarsi; 5 and 5 part right, 6 and 5 part left tarso-metatarsi; 7 phalanges; 8 fragments of sacra; 26 part right, 1 and 24 part left humeri; 3 part right, 1 part left ulnae; proximal and distal ends right radius; 3 part right, 3 part left carpo-metacarp; 3 left, 1 right scapulae; 6 and 2 part right, 9 left coracoids; 2 anterior sternum fragments (a minimum of 26 individuals)

Tui, Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae (Gmelin, 1788): right ulna; distal end and part shaft of right humerus

N.I. Kaka, Nestor meridionalis septentrionalis (Lorenz, 1896): distal end and shaft right ulna; worn left ulna; part shaft left tibio-tarsus; distal end left tibio-tarsus; right palatine

Kakapo, Strigops habroptilus (Gray, 1845): proximal end and part shaft of right humerus

Yellow-crowned parakeet, Cyanoramphus auriceps auriceps (Kuhl, 1820): left humerus

N.I. Kokako, Callaeas cinerea wilsoni (Bonaparte, 1851): left femur; distal end right tibio-tarsus

Little spotted kiwi, Apteryx oweni (Gould, 1847): proximal end of right femur

N.Z. Pigeon, Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae (Gmelin, 1789): part shaft right tibio-tarsus

Unknown (similar to but smaller than owlet-nightjar): tarso-metatarsus

Undetermined fragments