



NEW ZEALAND  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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HAND-FORGED IRON TRADE AXE

Alan Taylor

Practical minded, Samuel Marsden believed that the first missionaries to New Zealand should advance Christianity among the Maori with the cross in one hand and an axe in the other (Sinclair, 1959). Consequently, 'hardy mechanics' such as carpenters, rope-makers and blacksmiths were among the founders of early mission stations in the Bay of Islands.

Initially unsuccessful in the conversion of Maori, Anglican missionaries were forced to trade in muskets, powder and axes to maintain friendship and close contact with tribes in the vicinity of church settlements; the largest being, in the 1820s, Kerikeri, sited close to the Ngapuhi stronghold, Kororipa-Hongi Hika's pa where, recently, a hand-forged iron trade axe was recovered from an exposed talus shell midden.

Eroded as a result of sea immersion and exposure, the axe (Fig. 1) is of an unrecorded missionary manufactured type; its form clearly defined and closely reflecting the design of imported middle 19th Century European trade axes.

Much in demand by Maori of the period, imported trade axes and (probably) the missionary made tomahawks were generally used by potential native converts as weapons; particularly during the inter-tribal wars of the 1820s.

Named patiti and kaukauroa (short and long hafted axe respectively), the missionary tomahawk illustrated is extremely crude compared with early imported machine-made trade axes.

REFERENCE

Sinclair, Keith          1959    A History of New Zealand.    Penguin Books, London.

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