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HAPPY SUMMER FISHING / TE IKA HARI RAUMATI – HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND'S SUMMER PUBLIC OUTREACH PROJECT

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Introduction

For the past two summer holidays, Heritage New Zealand Northland Area Office staff have taken primary school-aged children out fishing for a few hours using an archaeological stone fish trap (P05/1022). This project was designed in late 2012 as a community-based outreach project which encompassed both Māori cultural values and archaeology. The stone fish trap was chosen as a safe, fun and effective way to engage all members of the community in our cultural heritage, especially children and families.



Figure 1: Location of the stone fish trap P05/1022, Quinces Landing, Kerikeri Inlet, Northland, as marked by arrow (ArchSite).

Project Aim

The driving force behind this initiative was to demonstrate that history and archaeology are not just about dusty old relics that belong in a museum with a “DO NOT TOUCH” sign. Archaeological sites like the fish trap can be used and enjoyed today. The project was targeted at children between the ages of 5 to 12 years in an attempt to showcase that heritage can be fun by providing a hands-on experience into how local people lived in the past and hopefully planting some seeds for a future generation of heritage protection advocates.

The outreach project was run as a free public event in summer 2013 and 2014 and was funded by Heritage New Zealand. On average, 40 people attended each day, with children accompanied by family members. Most participants were local to the area, but several were overseas tourists on holiday in the Bay of Islands. Despite the outreach project being advertised in a low technology way through advertisement in the local papers and flyers on community notice boards, a high response was expected. People were consequently asked to book a place with Heritage New Zealand due to limited spaces available.

Archaeology

ArchSite records indicate that stone fish traps in Kerikeri have only been sporadically recorded since the late 1970s as development along the Kerikeri Inlet has increased. It is likely that more fish traps exist within the silted up estuarine channels of the inlet. There were probably also wooden or stake versions of the fish traps which have long since decayed, leaving no trace. A very brief perusal of the archaeological literature suggests that limited research has been undertaken on stone fish traps, either at a regional or national level, looking at aspects such as how the traps functioned or the species of fish that were targeted.

The stone fish trap that was used for the project is one of eight recorded in the local area along the southern side of the Kerikeri Inlet, the others being P05/151, P05/987, P05/876, P05/988, P05/161, P05/169 and P05/867 (Figure 1). Originally built by local Māori before the arrival of European settlers, the stone trap was designed as a dry stone wall enclosure to trap fish within the estuary for easy food collection. The stone wall encircling the trap is approximately 1.5 m in surviving height and 0.6 m wide. The trap makes use of the existing stone resource and environment by being placed at the narrow end of an estuarine inlet (Figure 2).

The opening is located in the front wall of the fish trap and is approximately 1 m in width. On a high tide the estuary would be full of fish (parore), which would have come in to feed amongst the mangroves. Before the tide changed the narrow opening within the stone wall would be blocked up with stakes and brushwood to form a water permeable barrier (Figure 3). This allowed the water to drain away on the outgoing tide, leaving the fish trapped behind it in the shallow pools amongst the mangroves (Figure 4). The fish could then be collected, either by hand, spear, or with a small net (Figures 5-6).

Once enough fish had been collected, Heritage New Zealand staff demonstrated



Figure 2: The stone fish trap P05/1022, Quinces Landing, Kerikeri Inlet, Northland, as marked by boxed area

how Māori made and used obsidian as blades and tools for food processing. Bill Edwards of Heritage New Zealand made some obsidian flakes and let the children gut and descale the fish with the blades, ready for cooking on a fire for a shared lunch (Figures 7-8).

Māori Cultural Values

A special and key aspect to the outreach project was engaging with the public in relation to Māori cultural values and tikanga, matters which they can often have little understanding of. As part of this year's outreach project the hau kāinga (local resident Māori of the area) were specially invited to the event to talk about their own and whanau experiences of using the stone fish trap (Figure 9).

This provided a real and tangible link between the past and the present for the children participating as it was important and interesting for them to hear how people like themselves had used the trap. It also provided the link between traditional Māori cultural values and archaeology by providing real faces and people to the past. Since the outreach project was held, local Māori families are now reusing the fish trap after a generation or so of abandonment.



Figure 3: Setting the fish trap at high tide, Bill Edwards and Brooke Jamieson, Heritage New Zealand. Photo: Heritage New Zealand.



Figure 4: Looking at the blocked up entrance of the fish trap at low tide. Photo: Heritage New Zealand.



Figure 5: Children armed with spears and buckets ready to collect the trapped fish. Photo: Heritage New Zealand.



Figure 6: Caught fish - a mixture of mullet and parore. Photo: Heritage New Zealand.



Figure 7: Bill Edwards demonstrating obsidian knapping to make blades to gut and clean the fish. Photo: Heritage New Zealand.



Figure 8: Kai time! Photo: Heritage New Zealand.



Figure 9: Photograph showing Esther Horton, Ian Mitchell and Rose Strongman, direct descendants of Arthur Edmonds second son of stone mason John Edmonds and tangata whenua of the area speaking about their memories using the fish trap on 14 January 2014. Photo: Heritage New Zealand.

Project Outcomes

This outreach project produced some great outcomes with regards to public awareness and appreciation for archaeology, cultural sites, and heritage more broadly. On a local level it reached the local community for whom the project was targeted at, and it met the project aim of providing a family-orientated, free and hands-on experience for children. As the project received wider media coverage on Māori Television, TV3 News and the ITM Fishing Show, a nationwide audience was also engaged who may not have previously been interested in heritage.

Conclusion

Part of Heritage New Zealand's role is the promotion and protection of heritage for New Zealanders, and engaging with the public is an important part of this. The fish trap outreach project reached a new, family-focused audience and proved a fun and informative way to show the local community the heritage in their 'own back yard'.