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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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INVESTIGATIONS OF OTOKITOKI,
BANKS PENINSULA

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INTRODUCTION

One of the pas involved in South Island Maori history as recorded by W. A. Taylor in his *Lore and History of the South Island Maori* (1950) was a place called Otokitoki near Evans Pass on Banks Peninsula. According to Taylor (1950:57):

".....overlooking Fern Bay can easily be seen the ramparts of an old Ngai Tahu pa called Otokitoki (place of the axes). This pa derived its water supply from a spring on the slopes of a hill on its western side. The spring still functions and benefits European cattle. From Otokitoki pa can be seen practically the whole of Pegasus Bay to the north, and the coastline south towards the Long Look Point (Panau). This, together with its proximity to the harbour (Lyttelton), would account for its situation. About half-a-mile west of Otokitoki near Evans Pass can be seen an outpost trench, no doubt to check an assault from the west or by way of Sumner. Otokitoki was claimed for the Ngai Tahu Tribe by Te Koromata and others at the sitting of the Native Land Court before Judge F. D. Fenton at Christchurch on April 28th, 1868 (unsuccessfully because a plan was not furnished as required by the Court).

In another part of the book (opposite page 24 in my copy), Taylor gives a photograph of Otokitoki with Fern Bay and other features of Lyttelton Harbour in the background.

The site was recorded in the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site record files by A. Fomison in 1961 as site S84/2; the "outpost trench" became a musket earthworks, S84/3 having no apparent connection with site S84/2.

In the summer of 1969-70 the Canterbury Museum Archaeological Society excavated a series of 13 1.5 metre squares across the site in preparation for a more extensive investigation planned to obtain evidence of the culture of the builders of the earthworks and to date the period of construction. In the event, data obtained from these initial excavated squares proved sufficient for the required purposes and no further excavations were undertaken. All the field work was done under my direction.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

Using a theodolite, data for a contour plan of the site were obtained prior to its disturbance by excavation. As can be seen in Figure 1, the site comprises a low earthen wall forming a roughly square enclosure 21 metres across on a south-facing slope which has a dip of nearly 5°. An opening in the down-hill side suggests a gateway between one and two metres wide.

Excavations were made at this gateway, through the wall itself, and in the interior (see plan).

There was practically no occupational material in the interior of the enclosure except in or close to the wall; most of that found related to the construction of the wall rather than to any subsequent occupation or use of the site. In the cross section the wall was found to have been constructed by collecting together loose pieces of weathered andesite (that naturally lie on the surface in this area) and then heaping soil over them. The soil was mostly obtained from a shallow ditch that had been dug around the outside of the wall.

Pieces of broken 19th Century glass bottles occurred in the wall, some at its base, probably due to such discarded material being placed in the wall along with the stones and soil during its construction. Alternatively, the bottles could have been broken in that position, but in the limited extent of the excavations there was no indication that this was the case.

Rusted remains of square-sectioned hand-made iron nails of two sizes were found in and near the wall and at the gateway opening. The larger (mostly at the gateway) were about 66 millimetres long and tapered longitudinally from about four millimetres square (Figure 3); the smaller were 35 millimetres long and at least 3 by 1.5 millimetres in section

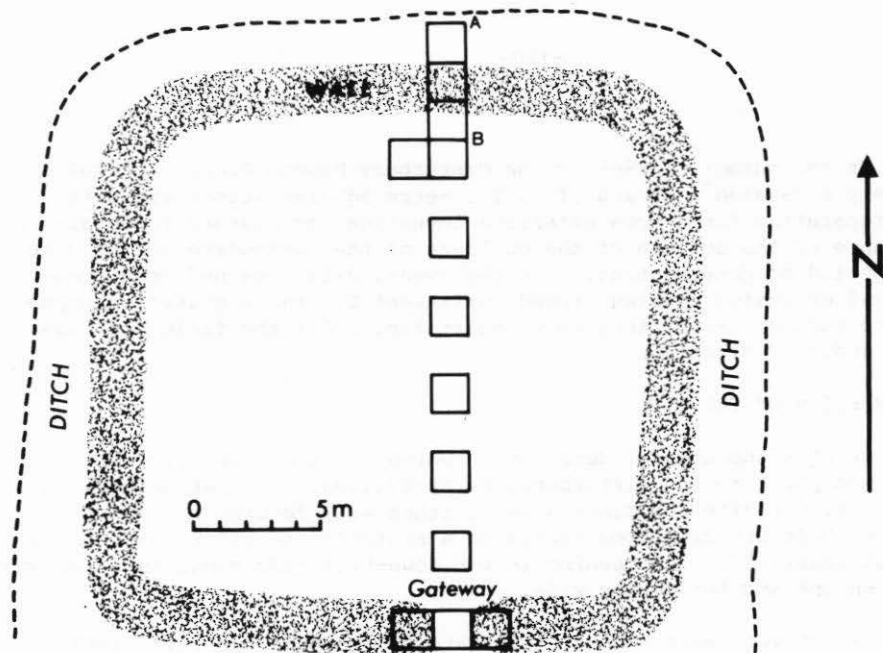


Figure 1. Plan of "Otokitoki"

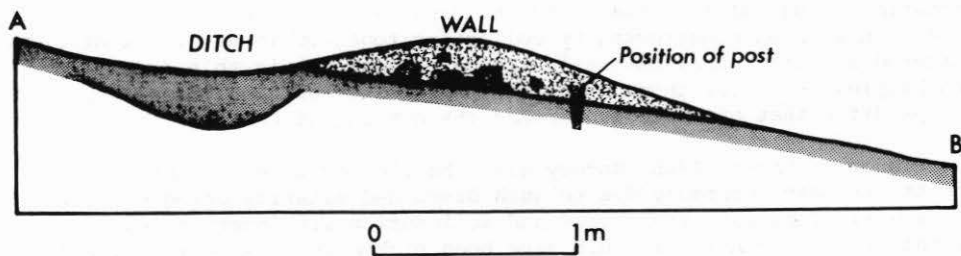


Figure 2. Section through ditch and wall.

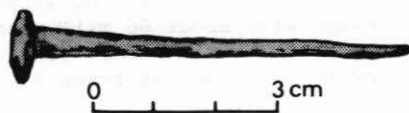


Figure 3. Iron nail found at gateway

At the gateway small particles of wood were interpreted as the remains of wooden boards or beams lying across the opening. These were associated with patches of rusted nail iron.

The present width of the wall is likely to be greater than when it was first constructed and it is doubtless much lower, due to various natural soil moving processes and stock trampling. In the excavated cross section a decayed butt of an upright post was found near the inside edge of the wall.

CONCLUSIONS

In its main physical features the site approximates the early European sheep folds that were built in Canterbury last century. The detailed archaeological evidence points to its being a construction of early New Zealand European age and origin,* and there is nothing to suggest that it was made for human defence or that it was designed or constructed by Maoris.

It is considered, therefore, that the site was a European sheep fold and that its supposed Maori association has no basis of fact.

DISCUSSION

I am aware that earthworks of this nature are sometimes considered to be exclosures, such as pa sites, if the ditch is outside the wall, but are enclosures, such as stock pens, if the ditch is inside - the ditch in each case increasing the effective height of the wall. In fact, an enclosure with a ditch inside the wall would not be very suitable as a sheep fold because it would inhibit free movement of stock and could easily lead to smothering.

In Otago a number of stock retaining walls that I have seen (they doubtless also occur elsewhere) had post and rail and/or wire fences and gorse hedges on them. While I doubt if the Canterbury sheep folds had hedges on them (there is no evidence of gorse in most areas where they occur) it seems likely that they were surmounted by fences; the single post butt found supports this suggestion. Remains of wood and nails in the vicinity of the opening probably indicate a gate.

*Should this be termed "The Archaic Phase of New Zealand Western European Culture?"

It would be interesting to know how many other supposed Maori sites are actually European constructions. Certainly a number of the stone walls which abound in this part of Banks Peninsula have, quite without foundation, been considered to be of Maori origin, and earthen walls elsewhere have been identified as Maori earthworks. Often there is a strong feeling amongst long resident families that they are of pre-European construction.

On a nearby hill-top, Mount Pleasant, the writer James Cowan believed there was the site of a Ngati Mamoe pa called Tauhinu-Korokio. According to him the pa was conquered by one Te Rangi Whakaputa of the Ngai Tahu and the area subsequently used for gardening (Cowan, 1954: 61-63). In another publication he gave the date of conquest as the end of the 17th Century (Cowan, 1914: 37), and in both he stated that the place was considered to be tapu. W. A. Taylor (1950: 58) added that posts of the pa's stockades were still visible to European settlers in the 1850s.

An extensive search of the area (which was accurately identified from Cowan's notes) by members of the Canterbury Museum Archaeological Society this year revealed some natural slump terracing and a large enclosure of early European stone walls, but no prehistoric evidence at all.

The European sites are certainly worthy of record, and indeed their confusion with prehistoric sites indicates how little is known of them and the need for more research into this aspect of our history.

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