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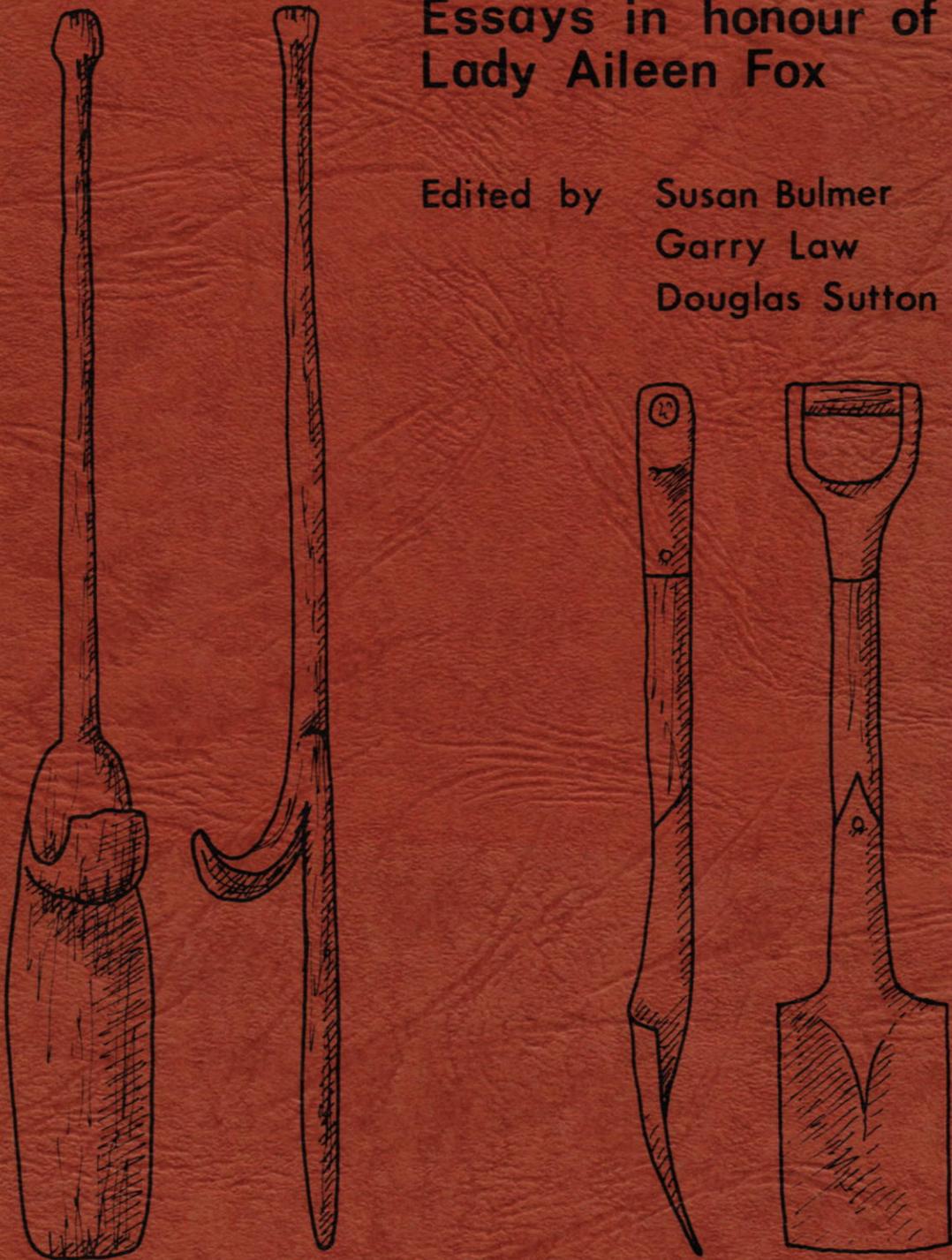
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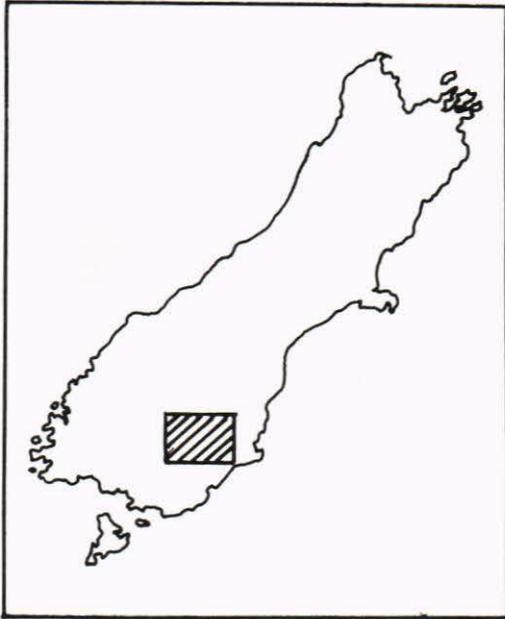
# A LOT OF SPADEWORK TO BE DONE

Essays in honour of  
Lady Aileen Fox

Edited by Susan Bulmer  
Garry Law  
Douglas Sutton



# MAORI BOWLS FROM CENTRAL OTAGO



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## Introduction

From rockshelters and crevices, and occasionally swamps, in the barren hills of central Otago numerous artefacts of wood, fibre and other perishable materials have been recovered during the last 100 years (Davis 1892, Hamilton 1896, Rowley 1966, Skinner 1952, 1974, Simmons 1968). Amongst them are wooden bowls. These have been found mainly in the eastern hill country of central Otago, especially along the southern flanks of the Strath Taieri (Figure 1), although several were recovered from as far west as the Clutha valley. In Table 1 is a list of the discoveries. It should be noted, that with the exception of the Glenavon bowls, the locations shown in Figure 1 and recorded on the NZAA Site Record Forms are only approximate.

## The Central Otago Bowls

Six of the bowls are held in the Otago Museum. Their provenance, form and material, and the inferred methods of their

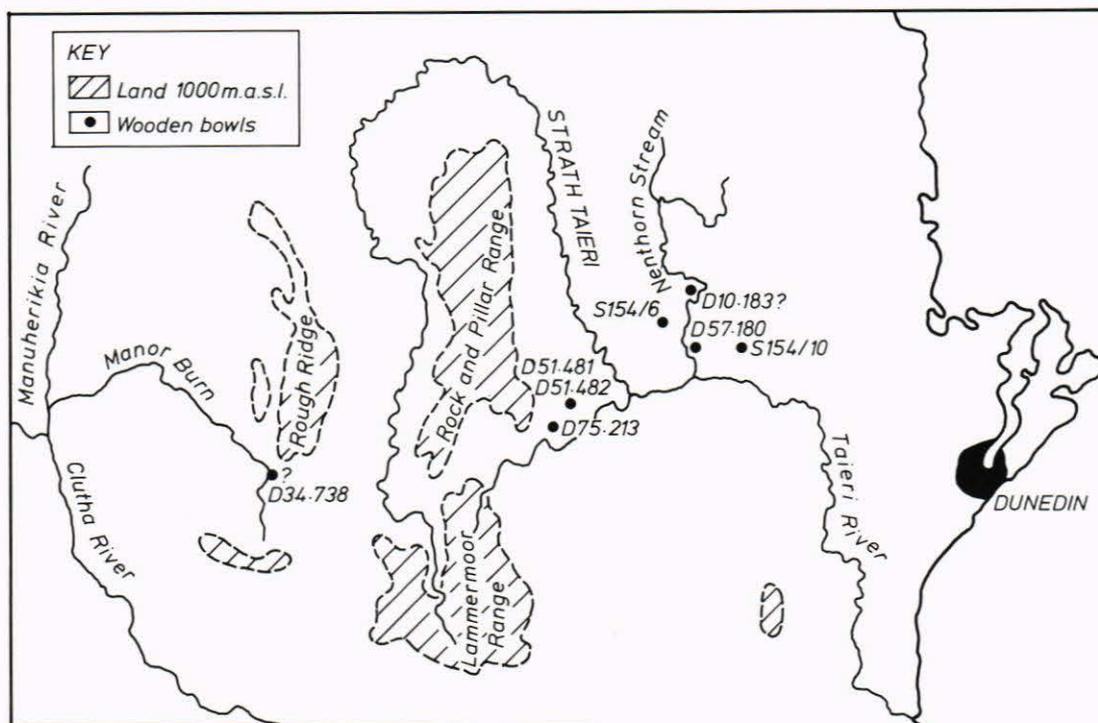


Fig.1 Part of Central Otago showing localities mentioned in the text and the approximate locations of the bowls described here.



Plate 3 Carved head on D57.180.

with eyes in relief. The head is damaged at the chin.

Material: heart kowhai (Sophora microphylla)

Maximum dimensions: Length 308 mm Width 157 mm Height 117 mm  
Plate 2 (middle).

D75.213: This large bowl is accessioned to 'Rock and Pillar Range'. It is boat-shaped and has been manufactured by the use of straight-edged adzes having a bite of 2.0 - 2.6 cm and was subsequently smoothed but apparently not scraped. The lenticular base is slightly curved longitudinally and merges into keels at each end. The interior has a flat, longitudinally curved bottom which rises to the rim at each end. Since the projection at one end is damaged it is not possible to tell whether it had a channel cut into it.

Material: Podocarp wood, probably totara (Podocarpus totara or P. hallii)

Maximum dimensions: Length 636 mm Width 211 mm Height 171 mm  
Plate 2 (lower).

#### Age, Materials and Manufacture

It is impossible to tell how old these bowls are. The head carved on D57.180 (Plate 3) is reminiscent of some eastern Polynesian styles which might suggest a fairly early age but the other artefacts from central Otago rockshelters have stylistic associations, where it is possible to tell, indicative of the approximate period A.D. 1500-1800 (see Simmons (1968) on the cloaks, and Hamilton (1896) records flute blanks and abundant red ochre at Puketoi). The fact that most of the bowls are fashioned in kowhai might also be an indication of a fairly late date. There had been quite extensive podocarp forest in the Rock and Pillars district during the early Maori period (about A.D. 1000-1500) but it was destroyed by fire

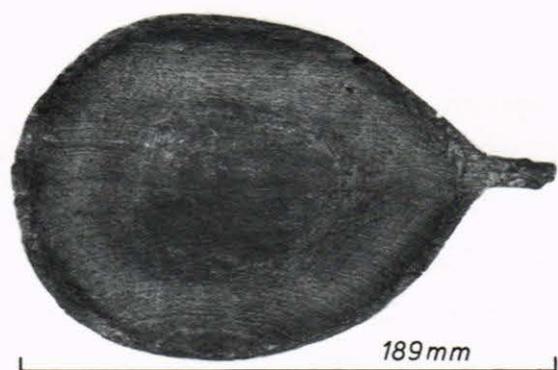


Plate 1 Top to bottom: D.10.183, D34.738, D51.481.



Plate 2 Top to bottom: D51.482, D57.180, D75.213.

manufacture are described below.

D10.183: This was found in a cave near Nenthorn by E. Jepson in 1890 and lay in association with a firestick, a human skull and another wooden bowl (D10.182) which can no longer be located. It formed part of Dr Hocken's collection. It is a small ovoid bowl with a flat base and a slightly rounded bottom.<sup>1</sup> At one end there is a 2.8 cm long roughly-shaped projection flush with the rim. The bowl appears to have been shaped by an adze or gouge having a slightly curved edge and a 'bite' of about 1 cm wide. The bowl was subsequently scraped inside and out.

Material: heart kowhai (Sophora microphylla)

Maximum dimensions: Length 189 mm Width 119 mm Height 52 mm

Plate 1 (upper)

D34.738: Found in a peat-bog at the head of the Manor Burn on Ida Valley Station, this bowl was presented to the Otago Museum by a Mr. Stronach in February 1890. It is a modified trough in form and construction having a flat base and bottom and a 2.5 cm long vertical projection below the rim at one end. The other end is shaped to a 'keel'. This bowl has been cut with an implement of slightly curved edge having a bite of 1.3 cm. There is no smoothing or scraping evident. A nail hole has been punched through the base near the keeled end.

Material: Hall's totara (Podocarpus hallii)

Maximum dimensions: Length 300mm Width 147 mm Height 82 mm.

Plate 1 (middle).

D51.481: This is one of two bowls found together under piled stones in a rockshelter at Glenavon in November 1951 (Skinner 1952). It is a well formed oval bowl with slightly incurved rims, a flat bottom

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<sup>1</sup> The outside bottom is here called the base, the interior, the bottom.

and a base slightly curved longitudinally. There is a keel at each end terminating in a drilled knob at one end and a wide-mouthed spout at the other. This bowl appears to have been cut with straight-edged implements having bites from 2.0 - 3.5 cm, and it has been scraped inside and out. Parallel scoring from the latter process indicates that the face of the scraper was 1.2 cm wide. Towards one end a piece of the rim had broken out and been fixed in place by drilling and lashing. Some fine fibres remain in one of the five drill holes and there are also three trial drill marks.

Material: heart kowhai (Sophora microphylla)

Maximum dimensions: Length 281 mm Width 142 mm Height 134 mm

Plate 1 (lower).

D51.482: This is the other bowl from Glenavon. It has an irregular shape which seems to follow the grain of the timber (apparently a knot). The bowl has been roughly adzed at both ends and the outside subsequently chiselled diagonally across the grain by an implement with a curved edge and a bite of 1.3 cm. The inside is heavily scored by the use of a scraper with a face of 1 cm wide and the rim has been roughly adzed flat.

Material: heart kowhai (Sophora microphylla)

Maximum dimensions: Length 202 mm Width 132 mm Height 83 mm.

Plate 2 (upper).

D57.180: This bowl was found at Mount Stoker by D. Leishman about 1880 and was purchased from his niece for £20.00 from the Colquoun Fund. It is a handsome oval bowl having a keel at each end, a rounded base and bottom and slightly incurved rims. It has been adzed, scraped and then well smoothed inside and out. At one end are two small knobs, probably the remains of a larger drilled knob (c.f. D51.481). At the other end is a double neck on which is set a head

leaving only a scatter of fossil logs (Anderson 1982). By the time early European settlers reached this district kowhai, broadleaf (Griselina littoralis) and, very rarely, Hall's totara (Podocarpus hallii), were virtually the only tree species growing (Thompson 1949).

All the bowls have been manufactured with the long axis lying along the grain of the timber. So far as it is possible to tell they are shaped using small adzes with straight to slightly curved cutting edges, but one (D81.482), had also been partly finished with a gouge. The implements were mostly directed diagonally across the grain and the bowls with curved inside faces were then scraped. D57.180, D51.481 and D75.213 were finished by smoothing with pumice or something similar. The remaining tool employed, on D51.481 and D57.180 was a small drill. Small adzes, gouges, drill points and scrapers are quite common on central Otago sites and some of them at the Archaic site at Hawksburn had certainly been used in the manufacture or maintenance of wooden artefacts (Carty 1981), but it must be said that none of these implements appear amongst the rockshelter remains from eastern central Otago.

#### Morphology and Function

The form and function of wooden bowls is not a subject which has been extensively investigated in New Zealand. Stevenson (1939) examined all the bowls in the Auckland Institute and Museum, and others from elsewhere in New Zealand, but not from Otago. His arrangement of them into a broad typology of five 'series' has formed the basis for subsequent brief descriptions (e.g. Hiroa 1950).

None of the central Otago bowls fit Stevenson's typology. Only D10.183 is similar to a beaker in his 'smaller utensils' category, and D34.738 bears a family resemblance to his 'series 1',

the 'trough-like bowls' except that one end of this specimen has been keeled and pointed.

As a group the central Otago bowls have little in common. The only feature which stands out, and which may be a regional trait, is the keel. Three bowls (D57.180, D51.481 and D57.213) have this feature at each end and, on D57.180, it is continued onto the carved face. D10.183 and D34.738 have a keel at the pointed end and a low ridge has been left untrimmed at one end of D51.482.

It is difficult to tell what the central Otago bowls were used for. Skinner (1952:133) thought that D51.481 and D34.738 were probably used to pour fat in the process of preserving birds, a view more generally expressed of bowls with spouts by Hiroa (1950: 110). Hamilton (1900:405) figures a hemispherical bowl with a spout which was used for this purpose and a bowl with a hole drilled through the forward edge rather than a spout (which was evidently another form of this utensil) was recovered from Monck's Cave (Skinner 1924). Historical evidence from the South Island (e.g. Best 1942:177) confirms the use of wooden bowls in the cooking and preserving of weka (Gallirallus sp.), and there may be some significance in the fact that the central Otago bowls were found mainly around the flanks of the ranges bordering on the Strath Taieri, an area of historically important weka hunting (note also the similar bowl from Ashburton county (Smith 1900), another weka-hunting district).

However, given the variation in the form of the bowls and the fact that central Otago was also a source of other resources which would have required these utensils: the preparation of dyes, fern root, tutu (Coriaria sp.) juice and taramea (Aciphylla sp.) gum (Stevenson 1947, Hiroa 1950), it would be unwise to assume that the preservation of birds was the only function of these bowls.

### Conclusions

The six wooden bowls from central Otago which have been described and illustrated here were manufactured mainly in heart kowhai by the use of small adzes, gouges, scrapers and smoothers. The forms produced are all different and none fit the typology for wooden bowls from elsewhere in New Zealand which was devised by Stevenson (1939). Their one distinctive feature, and it may be a regional trait, is the existence of a keel at either or both ends. These bowls are probably from a late period (post A.D. 1500) and, although other functions cannot be ruled out, may have been used in the process of preserving birds.

### Acknowledgements

My thanks to Otago Museum for allowing me to examine the bowls and consult their records, and to Rod Wallace who identified the woods and Martin Fisher who provided the illustrations.

TABLE 1: Wooden bowls reported from Central Otago

<u>N.Z.A.A.</u> <u>S.R.F. No.</u>	<u>Locality</u>	<u>Otago Museum</u> <u>Accession No.</u>	<u>Reference</u>
S154/2	Rock and Pillar	D75.213	S.R.F./Accession card
S154/6	Nenthorn Stream	-	S.R.F.
S154/8	Hummock Runs Road	?D10.183	S.R.F./Accession card
S154/10	Ross Stream	-	S.R.F.
S154/20	Mount Stoker	D57.180	S.R.F./Accession card
S154/21	Glenavon	D51.481	Skinner 1952
	Glenavon	D51.482	Skinner 1952
-	Manorburn	D34.738	Accession card
-	Bald Hill Flat	-	Beattie 1954
-	Roaring Meg Creek	D14.47	Accession card
-	Nenthorn	D10.182	Accession card
-	Mount Bengier	-	Skinner 1952

- Notes:
1. S154/6 and S154/10 bowls may be those referred to as being in private hands by Skinner (1952:133 footnote). Otherwise there were two further bowls at Nenthorn.
  2. D10.182 and D14.47 can no longer be located in Otago Museum.
  3. S154/8 records a "...small wooden bowl with notched rim". This probably refers to D10.183 which has a rough rim.

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