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## MOA-HUNTER SITES IN THE UPPER AHURIRI VALLEY

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During January 1990 a site survey of the upper Ahuriri River, above Omarama, was carried out by the authors and Angela Boocock. This area was chosen because very little archaeological evidence has been found, to date, of the prehistoric use of the upper Waitaki catchment area. Fieldwork carried out prior to the construction of the Aviemore and Benmore dams located a number of sites (principally rockshelters) in the gorge areas of the Waitaki and lower Ahuriri rivers which are now under the waters of Lake Benmore (Ambrose 1970; Trotter 1970). The only sites known from the open country above the gorge were some ovens at Boltons gully, at Lake Pukaki, and the silcrete quarry at Grays Hills (Fig. 1). It was assumed that this lack of sites was more a reflection of the amount of field work carried out in the area rather than the actual density of sites. It was, therefore, hoped that the survey would confirm the presence of other sites in the area and give some indication of their nature.

Because of the large survey area, limited time available and likelihood that any sites would be small and scattered, it was decided to interview the landowners whose properties bordered the Ahuriri River and then concentrate on those areas which were identified as potentially having sites present (Fig. 2a, 2b).

Prior to this survey the only sites recorded in the NZAA site records from this area were two findspots. S116/1 was a porcellanite core found in the vicinity of the Tara Hills Research Station, but no information on the circumstances of the discovery or a description of the core was recorded. The second site (S116/2) was located on the Killermont Station and consisted of surface collected silcrete blades that had been handed in to the Otago Museum and described as being near some ovens, but no first-hand description of the site was recorded. This second site was relocated during the survey and is described below; the first site was not relocated.

Most runholders, in general, were unaware of any sites being present in the valley despite most being familiar with the appearance of ovens. Almost all knew of its use as a route, primarily via the Lindis Pass, to the western lakes (Wanaka and Hawea) and the West Coast (see Bristow and others 1990). Some had also heard of the occasional adze being picked up.

Mike and Jane Thomas of Killermont station were able to direct us to two sites. The first was the previously mentioned S116/2, the second an unrecorded group of ovens on the edge of a terrace above the Ahuriri River (described below). In subsequent discussions with other landowners this second site was sometimes mentioned as the only site present in the area. The Thomases also mentioned the presence of ovens on the lower river terrace near the farm house, but these have vanished in the past few years as a result of periodic floods. Further surveying in the general area of these sites revealed no others.

A brief foot survey was carried out in the Ahuriri valley above the start of the Lindis Pass. This was concentrated around the junctions of the Avon Burn and the east branch of the Ahuriri River and also included Ribbonwood Creek, a tributary of the east branch. This area was chosen because it was at the lower

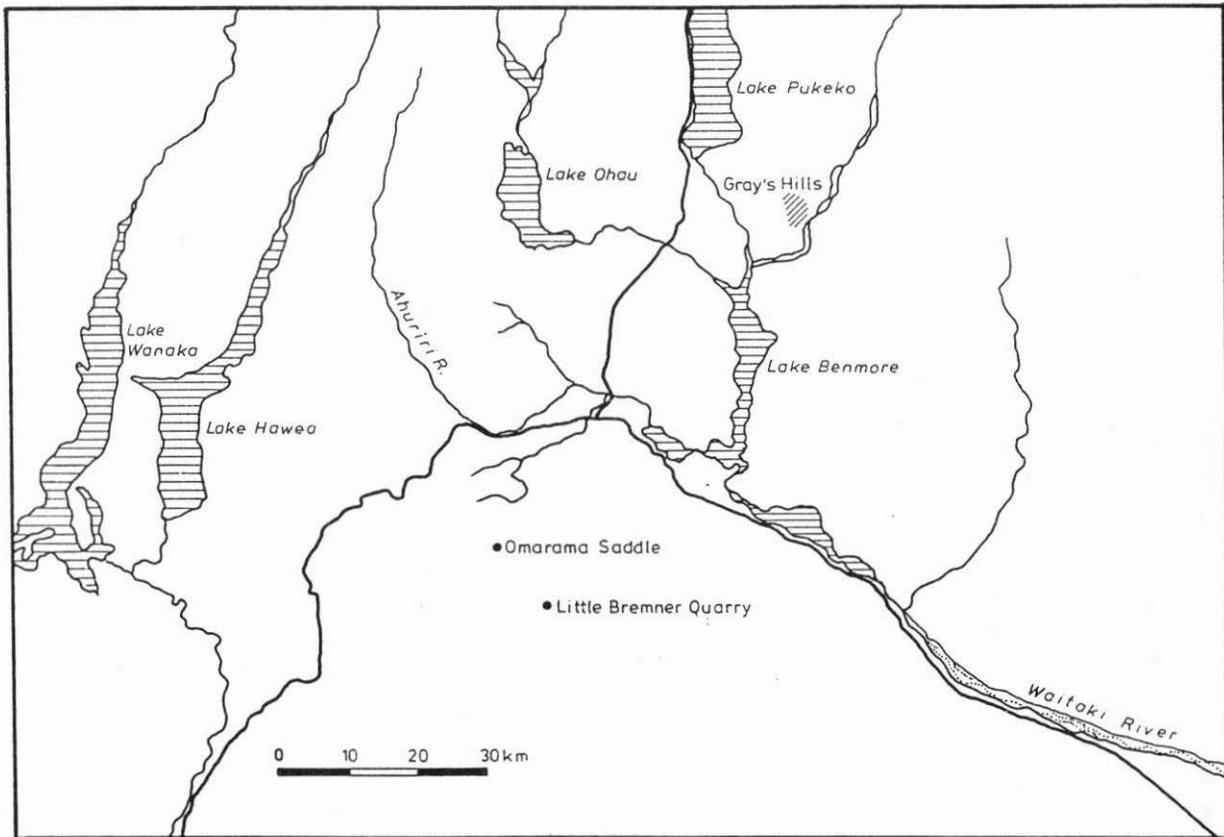


Fig. 1. Location map of the present study area in the southern Mackenzie country.

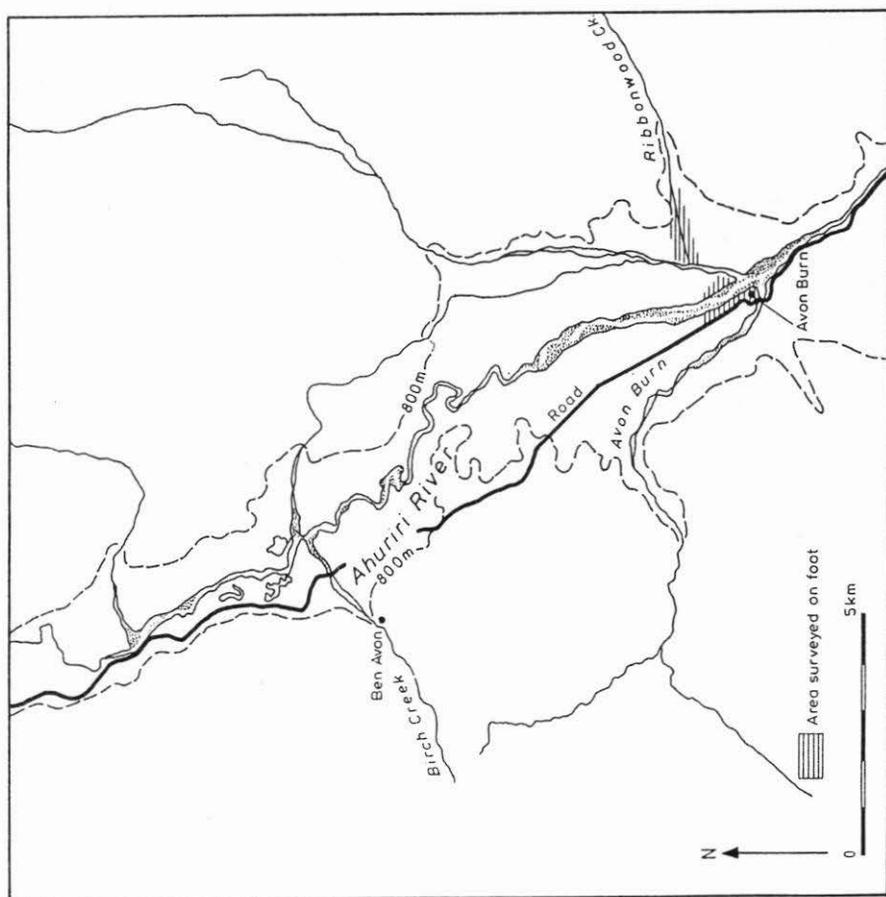


Fig. 2a. Areas surveyed along the Ahuriri River in the present study.

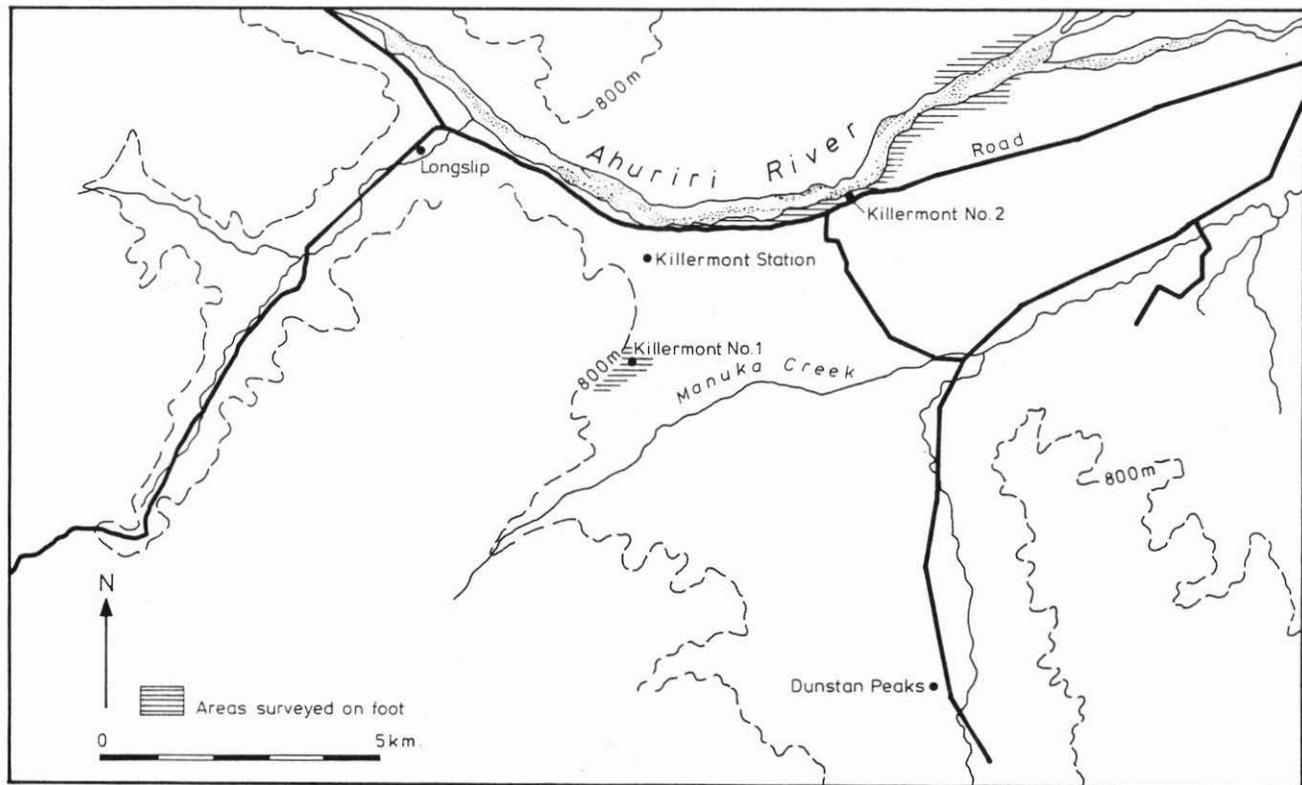


Fig. 2b. Areas surveyed along the Ahuriri River in the present study.

end of the large area of alluvial flats through which the Ahuriri flows, before it reaches the short gorge which separates this area from the start of the Lindis Pass and the river flats above Omarama township, and it was assumed that the tributary streams would have provided good access to both alluvial flats and the surrounding hillsides for moa-hunting parties. This part of the survey located a single small site at the junction of the Avon Burn with the Ahuriri River. A previous investigation of the Quail Burn and the upper east branch of the Ahuriri had revealed no sites (A. Anderson, pers. comm.), although adzes were said to have been found in this area.

## SITE DESCRIPTIONS

### (a) S116/2, Killermont No.1 (H39/565254)

This site was originally recorded from several silcrete blades that were handed to the Otago Museum by the Thomases and is located approximately 2 km south of the homestead. It is difficult to determine the original size or nature of the site as it has been cultivated a number of times in the past. Originally it appears that there were several ovens along the bank of what is now a seasonal stream. Most of these have been filled in and only one is now clearly visible (approximately 2.5 m wide by 0.4 m deep with some fire cracked rocks visible in the bottom). The silcrete blades were surface collected from a flat, cultivated paddock approximately 100-200 m northeast of the ovens, but as the paddock was under an oat crop at the time of survey it was not possible to determine whether other artefacts, midden or oven remains were present.

### (b) S116/26, Killermont No.2 (H39/593283)

This site is located on the edge of the high river terrace approximately 3.5 km east of the Killermont homestead. The bulk of the site occurs as a narrow strip approximately 160 m long by 25 m wide bounded on one side by a steep drop into the flood bed of the Ahuriri River and by State Highway 8 on the other (Fig. 3). Originally it may have been larger, but road construction and erosion of the terrace by the river have probably removed or destroyed part of the site. The presence of a few flakes of porcellanite approximately 150 m further west (upstream), and a possible oven located about 200 m south, across the highway, suggest that the site may well have been much larger than indicated above.

The site can be broken into two main areas. The first area is separated from the second by being located on a slightly elevated part of the main terrace and is about 70 m long by 20 m wide. The artefactual evidence consists of numerous small flakes of silcrete (with occasional blade fragments) and porcellanite (mainly grey and orange in colour), the nearest source of which is the Little Bremner quarry in the upper Manuherikia valley (see Fig. 1). Also present, but in much smaller numbers, are chert, fire-cracked rocks, pieces of ground slate, individual flakes from a basalt and a greywacke adze and a single small piece of ground red slate. This material is densest towards the western end and decreases as one moves downstream. There is no evidence of subsurface remains in the exposed section along the terrace edge.

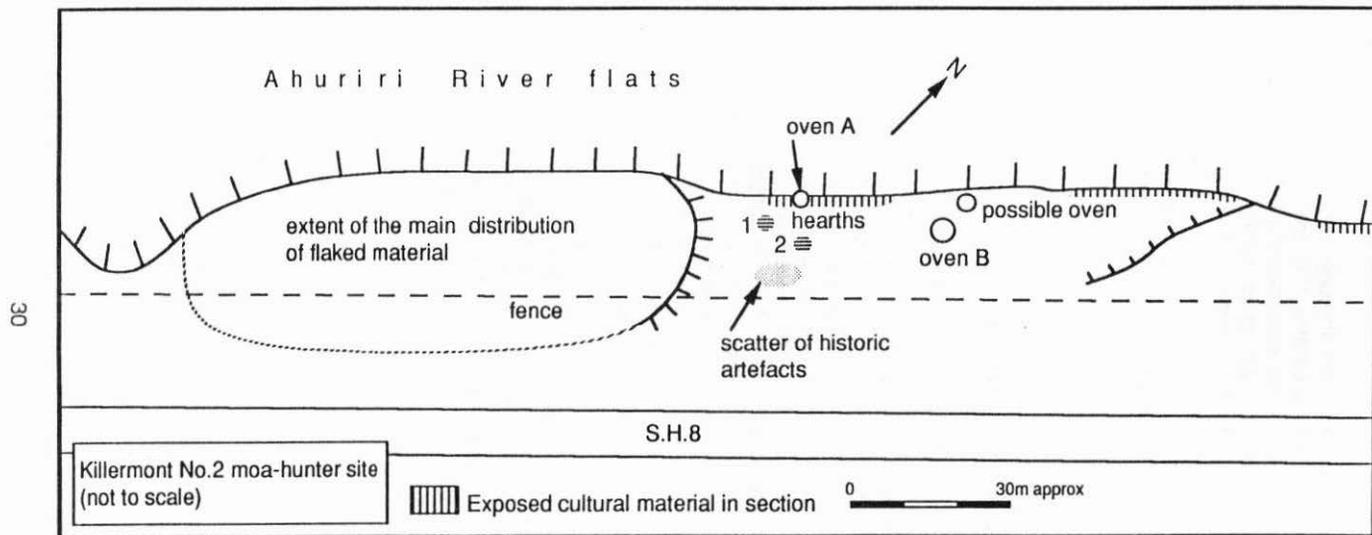


Fig. 3. Killermont No. 2 moa-hunter site.

The second part of the site is located immediately adjacent to the first. It occupies all of a slight dip in the main terrace and extends a little further downstream - a total distance of approximately 90 m. Both surface and subsurface features are evident in this area. The surface features consist of a raised-rim oven 3 m in diameter and 0.6 m deep and a smaller depression 0.5 m wide, which may also be an oven, in close association (Fig. 3). Also present are two roughly circular arrangements of stones approximately 1 m in diameter which may be hearths. The presence of four tin matchboxes marked 'R. Bell and Company Ltd.', which date to post 1895 (Bedford 1985: 54-5), and a number of other rusted tins in a scatter 5 m east of the hearths, attest to historical activities also occurring in this vicinity. Some stone flakes do occur in this area but in far fewer numbers than in the first area, although this may be a bias due to the longer grass in this part of the site.

Exposed along the terrace edge are four separate areas of oven debris and one definite oven. These consist of fire-cracked rock and charcoal with fragmentary bone to an approximate depth of 0.3 m. One area had a distinct lens of gizzard stones present near the bottom of the oven material, while a second area contained the distal end of a right moa tibiotarsus. Two small test holes were dug using a trowel (one in a possible hearth), which revealed stone flakes and fire-cracked rock in a grey-brown soil to a depth of 0.2 m. In the hole dug in the hearth this grey-brown layer was underlain by a yellow-brown layer at a depth of 0.2-0.25 m.

#### (c) S108/1 Avon Burn (S108/438431)

This small site (approximately 20 m by 10 m) was located on the low river terrace just upstream from the junction of the Avon Burn and the Ahuriri River. Artefactual material consisted of about a dozen small silcrete flakes and one large flake of grey to black flint/chert-like material. This was largely exposed on the surface, although one flake was found in the spoil from a rabbit scrape which indicates that further material may be present below the surface. This flake material was associated with moa gizzard stones (white quartz), red slate and schist (although these last two may be present naturally). A small area of gizzard stones was also present a short distance from the area of flakes. While the soil in the area of the site is quite dark, there was no sign of charcoal or oven stones, so this soil colouration may be due to modern activity associated with a nearby musterers' hut.

## DISCUSSION

It is difficult to interpret the functions of these three sites solely on the basis of surface evidence. There is certainly an obvious difference between the Avon Burn site and the two Killermont sites. The small size and lack of ovens or any depth of cultural material indicate that it is probably a brief camp site where a small hunting party processed one or two moa killed in the vicinity prior to their removal elsewhere. The evidence from the Killermont No. 2 site - ovens, adzes, slate knives, depth of deposit - suggests that this is not the result of a single brief occupation but a longer term or repeated occupation. It may,

therefore, represent a base or hunting camp (Anderson 1982: 66-7), a central site for the exploitation of the upper Ahuriri valley. The presence of ovens and silcrete blades at the Killermont No. 1 site suggests that it is, again, not the result of a single transitory occupation, but because of the heavily disturbed nature of the site it is impossible, at this stage, to determine whether it is really one large site or two smaller ones.

The location of two new sites in addition to the first-hand recording of a previously known site during a brief survey indicates that prehistoric sites are probably not uncommon in the upper Waitaki catchment area. However, site detection by landowners is dependent on the presence of obvious surface features such as ovens which, on the basis of our own observations and those of knowledgeable landowners, are infrequent in this area. In addition it appears that the preservation of moa bone is poor in this area. Chapman (1884: 174) recorded that moa bone was not at all plentiful in the MacKenzie country and when found tended to be very weathered and to break up on being touched. This is corroborated by the landowners, who were unaware of any moa bones being found locally. Therefore in the absence of detailed site surveys most of these sites will remain undetected because, like the Avon Burn site, they are represented by a thin scatter of flakes and perhaps some gizzard stones.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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