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MOTUHORA ISLAND, BAY OF PLENTY

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A brief archaeological assessment of Motuhora Island off Whakatane in the Bay of Plenty was carried out 16-19 December 1985 as part of a study of the island for the production of a management plan by the Wildlife Service, Rotorua (Figs 1 and 2).

History

A Tuhoe tradition states that

"Motuhora (Whale Island) and Whakaari originated as peaks in the great Huiarau Range near Waikaremoana. Jealous of each other, these mountains rushed headlong towards the ocean, leaving behind them the tracks which now form respectively, the valley of the Whakatane, and the valley of the Tauranga or Te Waimana. Whakaari taking the latter route outstripped Motuhora and so occupied the commanding position on which it stands today."

(Sladden, 1953)

Another similar tradition relates how the two mountains in the Huiarau Range became tired of the wind and rain and could see the warm Bay of Plenty water. Whakaari came down the Waimana River and Motuhora came down the Whakatane River. They met at Taneatua to cook a meal but while Motuhora was collecting more wood for the fire, Whakaari left and headed towards the coast. Motuhora grabbed a burning log from the fire and chased Whakaari. Just before daylight Motuhora threw the log onto Whakaari where it still burns today (D. White, pers. comm, 1985).

In 1769 Cook described Motuhora Island as

"...a pretty high Island bearing west from us and at 5 saw more Islands and Rocks to the westward of it; ...At 7 was close under the first Island from whence a large double canoe full of people came off to us, this was the first double canoe we had seen in this country. They stayed about the ship until dark then left us, but not before they had thrown a few stones. They told us the name of the Island which was Mowtohara..."

(Cook 1968:139)

The island is the traditional homeland of the Ngati Awa people and was reluctantly sold to Hans Tapsell in recognition

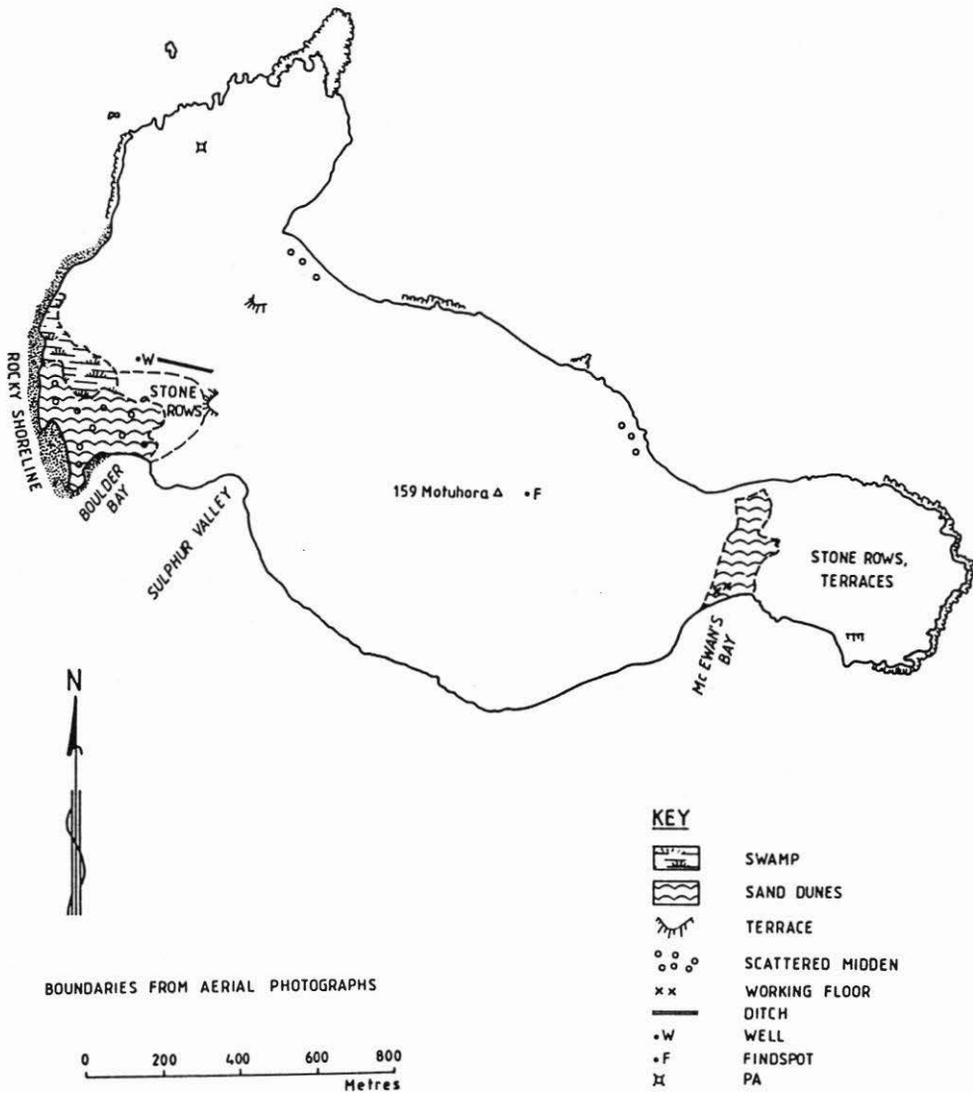


FIGURE 1. Archaeological features of Motuhora (Whale Island).

of his help to the tribe. In about "...1879 Ngati-Awa presented Tuhoë with some European goods, cooking pots, tobacco, pipes etc being a portion of a lot of things received by them from Hans Tapsell as payment for Mou-tohora, or Whale Island" (Best 1925:390).

The island passed through many owners and lessees before it was acquired by the Wildlife Service as a Wildlife Refuge in May 1984. In 1840 Mr Gilbert Mair, having obtained the permission of the Maori owners to establish a whaling station on the island, dispatched a ship from Auckland loaded with all the necessary equipment to catch and process whales. After a few months and no news of the venture Mr Mair journeyed to the Bay of Plenty to learn that no whale had been sighted and his employees were having a wonderful holiday.

In September 1876 Whale Island was leased to two Aucklanders who had a sulphur refinery. However, they only took one consignment of raw sulphur from Whale Island to Auckland for purification in 1878.

Stone quarrying also played a major role in the history of Whale Island. Stone was needed to stabilise the channel and banks of the Whakatane River. About 1915 a house was erected on the flat land at Boulder Bay and jetties built at both Boulder Bay and McEwans Bay. Quarries were opened up adjacent to each jetty and tram lines laid for the carriage of rock from quarry to jetty. Also at this time an attempt was also made to farm the island with the introduction of cows, a flock of sheep, pigs, fowls and several horses. Remains of these historical activities are still visible today on the island (P. Moore, pers. comm. 1986).

Archaeological features recorded

Pa. One pa site exists on the island and has been recorded by Hayward (1971). It is naturally defended by steep slopes on the west, north and east and both southern ridges leading to the site have been artificially defended by ditches and scarps. Hayward noted, "Shallow square holes, probably formed by the rotting of wooden posts arranged at the corners of rectangles on the terraces, bear witness to past building sites" (Hayward 1971:77).

The defended area of the pa consists of a group of large terraces, up to four metres deep and 25 m in length. Some of these are revetted with dacite lava stones (Fig.3) probably quarried from a trench cut through rock higher up the ridge. Some walls have collapsed and loose stones are scattered down the slope. Some terraces still have the remains of narrow ramps leading from one level to the next.

Storage pits were located on the site, two of which had a raised rim and one which had been filled in. Small terraces close to the defensive ditches and on top of the hill appear to have been lookout areas from where one can get a view of the mainland and surrounding coastal waters. The site is presently in pohutukawa forest with a group of karaka trees and cabbage trees associated with it.

Terraces. On a small spur at the northern end of Camp Gully were two flattened terraces. These terraces command a view of the mainland, Motuhora hill, the pa site and Camp Gully. Lower down Camp Gully, towards the dunes, is one large terrace. This is directly above the horticultural area and has a clear view of that area and the sand-dunes and coast.

Oven remains and middens. Middens containing shell remains, fish bone and obsidian flakes occur frequently over the island.

The area of sand-dunes below Camp Gully and at McEwan's Bay are scattered with the remains of ovens and middens. Shellfish remains present in the Camp Gully midden include paua, mussel, Cook's turban, limpet, pipi, tuatua and black nerita. Obsidian was scattered throughout the middens. No bone was located.

McEwan's Bay middens covered a much smaller area and contained paua, catseye, Cook's turban, black nerita and pipi remains. Associated with these middens is an obsidian working floor.

At the top of Camp Gully a midden is eroding down the northern face which has been described by Hayward (1971). No obsidian was located during this visit but all other shellfish remains are still visible. The remains of a leatherjacket fish was also located. Witter (1969) notes that if the leatherjacket appears in middens in great quantities it is probable they were caught in traps, although small numbers can be speared or caught by hand. Other small scatterings of midden were located on the north coast of the island down the eastern side of Motuhora hill.

Working floors. Both areas of sand-dunes on the island were briefly surveyed. At Camp Gully the dunes were scattered with the remains of oven debris with obsidian flakes interspersed amongst them. Very few remains of specialist tool making material were found scattered amongst this oven material. The obsidian is probably from Mayor Island and a piece of cream-coloured chert is probably local (P. Moore, pers. comm, 1986). It is not good quality chert and is unlikely to have been transported from the mainland.

Amongst the dunes at McEwan's Bay an obsidian working floor was located. This obsidian is almost certainly from



Figure 2. Motuhora Island.



Figure 3. Stone walls of pa, Motuhora Island.

Mayor Island. There was also a piece of jasper possibly from the mainland and a flake of local brown limonite (P. Moore, pers. comm, 1986).

Stone rows. An area of stone rows and stone heaps was located behind the beach dunes at the base of the slope above McEwan's Bay. This cultivation area is marked on an early survey plan dated 1867. Today they are almost obscured under regenerating kanuka and appear to run in lines towards the coast. These rows however have not been intensively surveyed or mapped.

There are numerous terraces and stone retaining walls on the hillsides behind Boulder Bay which has recently been surveyed by Moore and Hayward (B. Hayward, pers. comm, 1986). Horticulture was probably an important activity on the island. This horticultural area at Camp Bay would have been frost free and hence suitable for the planting of early kumara crops. Similar stone rows have been investigated at Palliser Bay and conclusively show them to be garden boundaries (H. Leach 1979) although it has also been argued that they could have been propagation beds for kumara (McFadgen 1980). Stone mounds have also been associated with gourd cultivation (F. Leach, 1979).

Water resources - stone-lined 'well' and ditch. Water is a major limiting factor on the island. Although there is no running water a small spring by the swamp has been stone-lined and utilised. With the water runoff from the gullies, this would help ensure a constant water supply but during a very dry summer it may have been necessary to bring water over from the mainland.

Until recently a ditch ran parallel to the coast across the flats at Camp Gully. With the water problem on the island it is suggested that this ditch was possibly used for water catchment purposes. It has recently been dug out and then filled in, so that any information which may have been gained from this unusual feature has now been destroyed. The ditch apparently began at the base of the ridge and ran across the flats stopping close to the 'well'. It was up to 1 m deep at its deepest and was not stone lined. On a visit to the island some years ago, Murray Imber, Wildlife Service, Wellington, located a pit measuring 1 x 2 x 2 m deep close to the ditch. The position of the pit makes it unlikely to be for food storage purposes as it occasionally filled with water. This pit was not located on the recent visit but may have been used for water storage to help combat any water shortage on the island.

Discussion

A variety of archaeological features were located during this brief survey of Motuhora Island. Due to lack of time

little of the island was intensively surveyed, and Motuhora Hill and the eastern end only visited briefly.

However a recent eight day survey of archaeological features on the island has been carried out by Hayward and Moore with the Offshore Island Research Group. No sites were located on the main hill but a greenstone adze has been found there previously (D. White, pers. comm., 1985). During their survey of the bracken free portion of the eastern section of the island stone heaps, stone rows and stone retaining walls were recorded. Only one stone-walled terrace was recorded previously. These stone alignments probably extend under the bracken fern, an area which is presently too dense to survey. Moore also documented the historical sites on the island including the remains of hut sites behind Boulder Bay and beside McEwan's Bay.

This archaeological evidence suggests that Motuhora Island was home to a small self sufficient community with fresh water as the limiting factor. Fish and shellfish would have been plentiful and could always have been dried and stored. A small swamp on the island would have supplied a variety of food resources. Indirect horticultural evidence suggests that cultivation of kumara, gourds and possibly taro may have been carried out at Camp Gully and on the eastern end of the island. The annual migration of petrels to Motuhora Island would ensure a constant food source and a valuable trade item for the people. Traditional evidence suggests that mutton birds were preserved in fat and stored in gourds or kelp bags. Water and foraging expeditions to the mainland, 11 km distant, were also probably quite regular.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Corry Regnier, the Wildlife Service (Rotorua) and Lands and Survey Department (Gisborne) for an opportunity to investigate the archaeology of the island and T. Jones, P. Moore, B. Hayward and D. White for valuable discussion.

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