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NO ONE LIVES THERE ANYMORE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AND HISTORIC SITES IN THE AUCKLAND ISLANDS

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The sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands straddle the 50th parallel, some 360 km south of Stewart Island. They are administered by the Department of Lands and Survey as nature reserves and are periodically visited by scientific parties from New Zealand, as well as landings from passing yachts, fishing boats and other vessels.

The group consists of six main islands. The largest, Auckland Island, is some 60 km long and 6 to 25 km wide (Fig.1). The central ridge varies between 300 and 600 m above sea level. Deep finger bays penetrating the east coast are similar to those of Banks Peninsula. Rata forest constitutes the predominant coastal vegetation on the main island, with tussock on the tops. The environment of the southernmost island, Adams, is reputed to be one of the most pristine in the world, and the Lands and Survey Department is keen to keep it that way.

In 1985 I was approached by the Lands and Survey Department and asked if I would be a member of the next official Auckland Islands Expedition. The department was concerned about aspects of the long term management of the historic sites on the islands and wanted advice on a suitable location for a future base station which did not conflict with historic values. The party was transported by HMNZS Waikato and was on the islands 30 January - 3 February 1986.

The 1986 Auckland Islands Expedition consisted of 17 people involved in various scientific studies, including the capture of wild goats, and study of plants, insects, soils, and yellow-eyed penguins on Enderby Island. Three members of the group, Dave Bamford and Bob Willis (Lands and Survey ranger) and myself, formed a "reserves management group".

Five days on the islands only allowed inspection and assessment of the main concentrations of historic sites centred around Port Ross on the main island (where four days were spent) and Enderby Island (see Fig.1). Fieldwork was hampered by persistent wet weather.

Previous work

I was not the first archaeologist to set foot on the islands. Bruce McFadgen was there studying Holocene sand

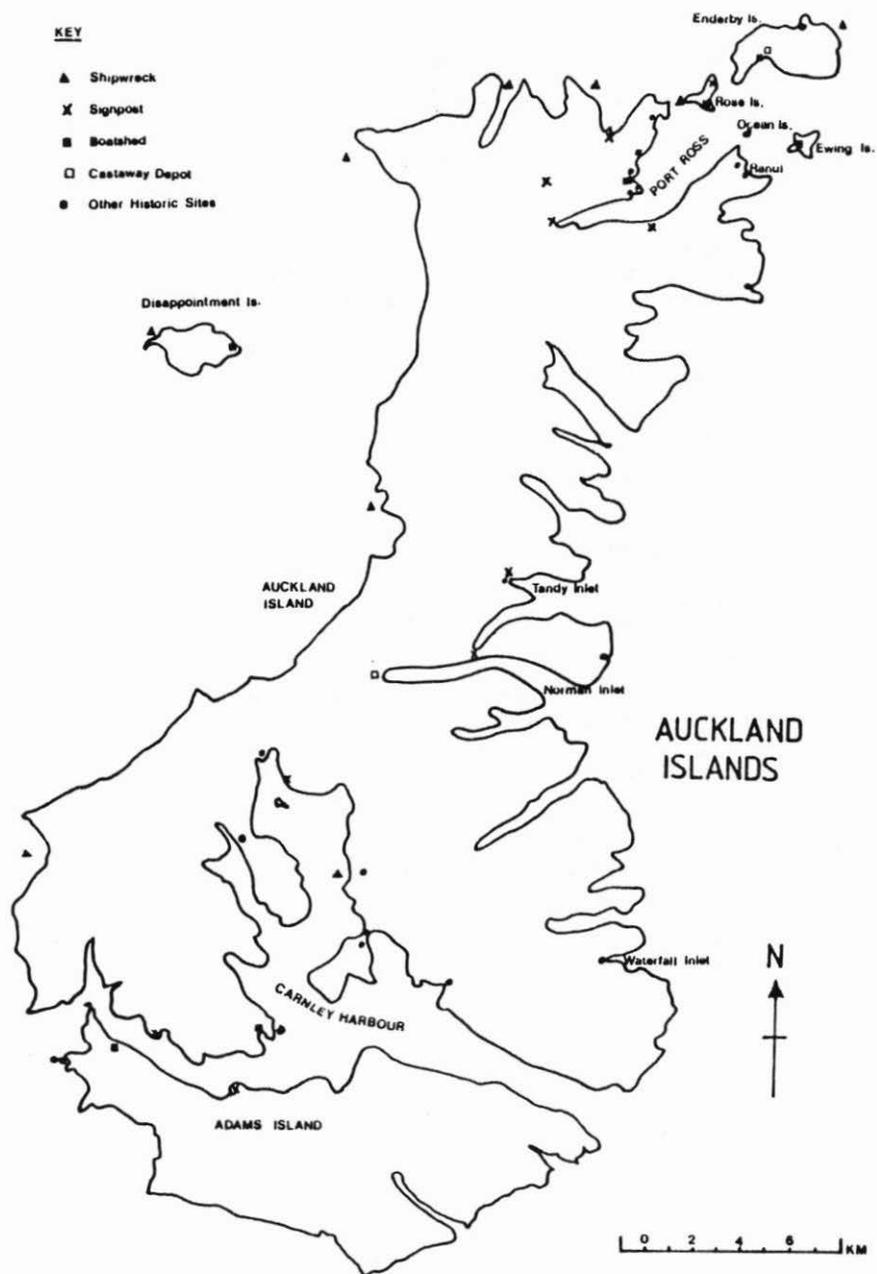


Figure 1. Auckland Islands.

dunes in 1981, and in 1982 Mike Hurst carried out the only archaeological survey work undertaken thus far. His report, "Erebus Cove, Port Ross, Archaeological Site Survey", documents virtually all the known historic sites located on the shores and islands around Port Ross - twenty sites in total including the shortlived colonial settlement. No records were entered into the site recording scheme. In addition several earlier expedition report writers have commented on the historic resources on the islands, particularly the standing structures (e.g. Thorpe 1975; Newton 1980; Aplin 1982).

Succinct essays on the many heroic castaway parties who spent varying periods on the islands last century, and the main historical events have been published by Dingwall (1980, 1981) who drew on first-hand contemporary sources and the detailed history of the islands by McLaren (1948). Falla (1971) provided a summary of the establishment and demise of the shortlived Enderby settlement.

Resume of the main historical events and their locations

Like many small isolated island groups in the lower latitudes, the Auckland's have had their share of drama and heroic human endeavour which has given them some renown.

The islands were discovered by chance in 1806 when the crew of the British whaling vessel Ocean, under the command of Captain Abraham Bristow, sighted several rugged islands which he named the "Lord Aucklande Groupe" after a British peer who was a friend of Bristow's family. Although no landing was made, Bristow returned the following year in the Sarah and charted the islands for the first time. He also released pigs on the islands as food for castaways, thereby unwittingly beginning the process of human modification of the natural environment.

Following discovery the islands became a popular sealing ground until the fur seals were virtually exterminated in the early 1830s. Naval expeditions made the next significant contacts. In March 1840, Wilke's United States Exploring Expedition arrived, followed later the same month by the French admiral Dumont D'Urville in the corvettes Astrolabe and Zelee. In November 1940 the British Antarctic Expedition led by Sir James Clark Ross visited in HMS Erebus and HMS Terror. These expeditions marked the beginning of scientific study of the islands' natural history. The British party was also instrumental in accelerating the rate of human modification of the natural environment of the islands. They liberated rabbits on Enderby Island, and also released pigs (augmenting those left by Bristow which were apparently thriving), and hens.

They also planted vegetables and berry fruits and set alight a large area of scrub and forest on the west side of Port Ross, apparently to facilitate access to higher ground (Dingwall, 1981:9).

The majority of the archaeological/historic sites on the Auckland Islands are located around Port Ross, a large well-sheltered harbour. Historically, this area has been the most favoured for settlement, the main concentration of activity being centred around Erebus Cove. Here a short-lived British colonial settlement, Hardwicke (also known as the Enderby settlement after Charles Enderby, its governor) was established by the Southern Whale Fishery Company on New Years Day 1850 (Fig.2). By the end of 1852 the settlement had been abandoned, the colonists disenchanted by the absence of whales, the isolation, the lack of arable soils, and the rigours of the climate. Within a decade little visible evidence remained, partly because most of the buildings the settlers established were demolished and removed (some to Riverton in Southland).

There are few descriptions of what the settlement was like. An 1852 visitor (Malone 1854) noted one large house for the governor, a zinc-covered store, a building for unmarried colonists, and about 25 other houses. At that time the population comprised 36 men, 22 women and 34 children, but the settlement apparently had a population of 200-300 during its brief heyday in 1851. The Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, holds a watercolour of the settlement. This valuable pictorial record by an unknown artist is believed to date from the early 1850s.

The Enderby settlers were surprised when they arrived to find the Port Ross area already occupied. A thriving Maori community was already established, its members (originally from Taranaki) having arrived from the Chatham Islands in the Hannah in 1842-43. In 1852 the Maori population consisted of 20 men, 17 women and 10 children (Dingwall 1981:10). But by this time (early 1852) the principals of the British Company had recognised the failure of the colonial settlement and made preparations for winding up the venture. Most of the buildings were dismantled, the remaining settlers boarded the company's ships and departed, 5 August 1852. The Maoris had been more successful, reputedly cultivating flax for their domestic requirements and ably sustaining themselves by sealing and fowling (Falla 1971:615). It was their skills at gardening and hunting that enabled the hapless British colony to survive as long as it did. But after the departure of the British pioneers there was little incentive for the Maoris to remain either, their late source of income and employment



Figure 2. Cemetery at Hardwicke settlement site, Erebus Cove.



Figure 3. Mass grave of 15 victims of wreck of the "Derry Castle", Enderby Island.

having been removed. The last Maori left in 1856, leaving the Auckland Islands essentially without permanent residents since that time (Falla 1971).

While the British colonists were residents of a planned commercial settlement, the sojourn of the next group of island residents was an enforced and involuntary one resulting from shipwrecks. Beginning with the grounding of the Grafton in Carnley Harbour in 1864, the islands witnessed over the following fifty years a dramatic series of at least nine wrecks. More than 100 lives were lost either at the scene of the wrecks, or later from the effects of exposure or starvation. Sites associated with these wrecks include "The Epigwaitt" (a North American Indian word meaning "dwelling by the water") - the castaway home of the Grafton survivors in Carnley Harbour; the remains of the hut established by survivors from the Invercauld (1865) on Enderby Island; the wreck site, and mass grave of the victims of the Derry Castle wreck (1887), also on Enderby (Fig.3); and perhaps the most famous and elusive of all - the wreck of the General Grant (1866), which drifted into the cliffs along the west coast of the main island when she was becalmed in very uncharacteristic weather conditions.

The crew of the Grafton was stranded for twenty months in one of the most remote parts of the islands. Using debris from the wreck and the few resources provided by nature, they constructed a hut ("The Epigwaitt") replete with thatched roof, a substantial fireplace and chimney. (The survivors of the Dundonald on treeless Disappointment Island had to make do for five months in rudimentary grass huts.) Lime for mortar was made from crushed seashells. Tools, nails and spikes were manufactured in an improvised blacksmith's forge; the bellows being fashioned from seal skin. The lonely days at Epigwaitt were spent gathering fuel, hunting seals and birds for food, and making clothes (from sealskins), utensils and tools. They were not to be rescued until three of the castaways had sailed a rebuilt lifeboat 360 km to Stewart Island without the aid of a compass or chart.

In 1867 the Superintendent of Southland Province, J.P. Taylor, concerned at the deprivations suffered by the shipwreck victims on the Auckland Islands, instructed the captain of the brig Amherst to leave copies of a map and provisions for castaways at various locations around the islands. Three depots were established at Erebus Cove, the head of Saddle Hill Inlet, and at Musgrave's hut site in Carnley Harbour. The Amherst's crew also erected a spar on Beacon Point (Erebus Cove) to serve as a ship's beacon, and rescued the survivors of the General Grant. Also during this period (in 1874), a German Expedition used Terror Cove (adjacent to Erebus Cove) as a base for observations of the Transit of Venus (Fig.4)

and the crew of HMS Victoria inscribed their names into a rata tree on the old Hardwicke settlement site. The inscribed tree stump still survives, now covered by a small A-frame shelter erected in 1972-73.

From the late 1870s permanent depots were established at Erebus Cove, Norman Inlet and Camp Cove. Each consisted of a substantial hut and supplies to sustain twenty persons. In addition boats (housed in boat sheds) were positioned at various locations around the islands, and some forty finger posts were erected to direct castaways to the provisions. These depots proved invaluable for the survival of several shipwrecked crews. They were regularly serviced by the New Zealand government until 1927.

Despite the failure of the Enderby settlement and the horrific tales of hardship related by the survivors of the shipwrecks there were further attempts at permanent settlement on the islands - this time for stock grazing purposes. The islands were divided into four pastoral runs which were put up for auction in 1894-1895. By 1900 G.S. Fleming had obtained the lease of all four runs and established three buildings in the Musgrave Arm of Carnley Harbour. The 2000 sheep he landed soon perished, and Fleming forfeited his lease in 1910. A run of 160,000 acres (72,000 ha) was then leased to the Moffet family (excluding Adams Island which had been declared a Flora and Fauna Reserve). When this lease expired in 1934 the whole island group was reserved for the preservation of native flora and fauna. Today, about 40 cattle remain on Enderby Island as a legacy of this farming era (Dingwall 1981:13).

During the Second World War the New Zealand Government, alarmed by reports that the subantarctic islands were being visited by enemy ships, established coastwatching stations at several locations, including two on the Auckland Islands - at Ranui Cove and Musgrave Peninsula. The small parties established at these bases, in addition to their military duties, undertook meteorological observations and investigated the biology and geology of the islands. Also during this period, A.W. Eden, a Ministry of Works surveyor, was commissioned to make a complete survey of the island group. His map, which required 18 months of arduous fieldwork in difficult conditions, remains the most accurate chart of the islands. Since World War Two, the islands have only been periodically inhabited by parties undertaking scientific research.

Discussion

With regard to the selection of a location for a scientific base station/ranger station, I spent the majority of my time inspecting possible base station sites in Port Ross, concen-



Figure 4. Brick footings of 1874 German 'Transit of Venus' observatory, Terror Cove.



Figure 5. Stella hut.

trating on the coves along the western shore, and the established base locations at Ranui Cove and Sandy Bay, Enderby Island. Particular attention was paid to the Erebus Cove area which had been recommended by Newton (1980), Aplin (1982) and others as the most suitable site for a scientific station.

After seeing the area the scientists' preference for Erebus Cove is readily understandable, but as I have stated in my report the Cove is an unacceptable location for a base station because it would destroy the historical integrity and cultural deposits associated with the major historic site on the island - the remains of the Enderby settlement. Although standing structures are limited to two post-Enderby buildings, the ground behind the cove is virtually a continuous archaeological site, and includes numerous building platforms, cobbled pathways and historic features such as the "Victoria Tree", the "Amherst spar", and the cemetery. The establishment of a base station at this location would severely impact cultural deposits which potentially contain a wealth of information about the way of life of the pioneers associated with what was arguably Britain's most shortlived attempt at colonisation; destroy the tranquillity and historic integrity of the site; and considerably increase the likelihood of the undesirable spread of Olearia lyallii to other parts of the islands.

After assessing other alternative locations, I recommended that Deas Cove, where we had our camp, more than adequately fulfilled the base camp requirements recommended by earlier expedition leaders, and there is no conflict in terms of historic site conservation.

The second objective of my part in the expedition was to comment on aspects of historic site management so that this information can be incorporated into the first phase of an historic site conservation plan for the islands. Four documents, produced by Lands and Survey staff, are pertinent to this discussion - "Outlying Island Reserves: General Policy for Management of Historic and Archaeological Features" (L.&S. Dept 1985a), the "Auckland Islands Nature Reserve: Draft Management Plan" (L.&S. Dept 1985b), "Contents of the Erebus Cove Museum, Auckland Islands" (Dingwall 1985), and "Historic Building Sites, Auckland Islands" (L.&S. Dept, 1986). The last mentioned is a compilation report documenting the condition of various historic structures on the islands as reported in previous expedition records.

Significance of the archaeological/historic resource

The sites in the Auckland Islands are important historical monuments in their own right. Of the 52 recorded, several have considerable potential for archaeological research and interpretation, and can be expected to provide information on how

the castaways and Maori and Pakeha settlers sustained themselves and survived in the uncompromising environment of the islands, how they co-related, what assistance they had from imported or salvaged items of European material culture, and possibly changes in the flora and fauna of the islands brought about by human settlement.

The Enderby settlement is particularly important because of its limited time span. The site represents a time capsule, which can be opened by archaeologists at some future date to provide insights into the establishment, maintenance and demise of this shortlived British colony, its interaction with the established Maori community, and the impact of both groups on the natural environment of the Port Ross area.

Shortage of time precluded investigation of the flax groves - the so-called Maori sites around Port Ross. These sites, on which there is little surface evidence, warrant proper investigation, particularly on whether flax was introduced by the Maoris or was already present.

Another useful study would involve an investigation as to what became of the prefabricated Enderby settlement buildings. They were dismantled and removed from the site for re-use or sale. Some are believed to have been taken to Riverton. If so, do any of them still survive? Prefabricated ('kitset') buildings were used extensively last century in colonial settlements around the world. They constitute one of the most under-researched aspects of colonial architecture in New Zealand.

Site management

The cost of site management in locations such as the sub-antarctic islands has to be balanced against their relatively low visitation and threat of damage compared with that of mainland sites. Although the outlying islands are reserved first and foremost for the conservation of biological values, the Department of Lands and Survey, as managers, have developed a set of laudable and practical policies for protecting historic sites and relics on the islands (as outlined in L. & S. Dept, 1985a).

Interpretative potential and relics

Several sites have considerable interpretative potential, particularly those which still retain structural evidence and are in reasonably accessible locations.

Most visitors (mainly scientists, naval personnel and other ship's crews), are aware of the location of the main historic

sites on Auckland Island and visit them during their stays. While there is little evidence of fossicking for personal gain by these people, a steady stream of artefacts has been removed from sites (often by scientists) over the years and deposited in the National Museum, and since the 1972-73 expedition in the so-called Erebus Cove 'museum' - the former castaway boatshed in the cove, in the belief that it is the best way to preserve them. While these people have acted in good faith, they have often failed to appreciate or are unaware that many of the artefacts in question have limited value for display or other purposes once removed from their all-important context. As stated in the "Outlying Reserves Historic Sites Policy" document, "the shifting of antiquities and relics or their removal from an historic or archaeological site alters their historic and scientific value, interpretation potential and visitor appeal". I believe that there must be real and justifiable reasons for relocating artefacts from sites beyond merely increasing their accessibility to visitors, and have recommended that a sign should be erected in the Erebus Cove museum to discourage further additions (particularly non-wooden artefacts) to this rather motley assemblage.

However, the museum exists now, and the onus is on Lands and Survey to preserve its contents by ensuring the structure is reasonably weather and sea-mammal proof. There is no doubt that the museum is another point of interest for visitors to the cove. Security of the artefacts in the totally insecure building does not seem to be a problem thus far, probably because there are few artefacts of types which are commonly collected such as bottles. I checked off the artefacts present against a list made two years earlier. Everything recorded then was present in January 1986. Two artefacts are particularly noteworthy, the Derry Castle punt and the original headboard from the mass grave associated with the same shipwreck; these should be removed to a mainland museum for conservation and safekeeping if Lands and Survey is not prepared to maintain the museum building.

In-situ structures

Wooden structural components present a particular problem in the damp environment of the islands. The Land and Survey Department (1986) has formulated a practical management policy in this regard, namely, to "Allow abandoned buildings, and in-situ relics and antiquities of lesser significance to age and decay naturally but as far as possible (short of restoration or reconstruction) retard or reverse the rate of deterioration where this is caused by humans or wildlife in a manner compatible with the primary purpose of the reserve." While in an ideal world it might be desirable to do more to conserve particular structures, in view of the limited resources, the department's

policy is a sensible and pragmatic response to the situation.

But there are exceptions to every rule. An arguable case in point concerns the "Stella hut", a small A-framed castaway hut-depot erected by Captain McKenzie of the Marine Department vessel S.S. Stella in May 1880 (Fig.5). It replaced an earlier depot which was destroyed by fire. The wooden framed and shingle-roofed building is located in the bush about 200 m behind Sandy Bay on Enderby Island. This unpretentious but visually interesting structure is the oldest and most complete of the few surviving castaway depot buildings in the islands. Even without interpretation, its setting, construction, and accessibility generates considerable visitor interest. The hut appears to be in imminent danger of collapsing, its survival is almost certainly being attributable to repairs (including closing the entrance against sealions) carried out by members of the 1972 expedition.

In the case of the "Stella hut" I favour maintenance in its present natural setting, if need be by the construction of an open-sided protective shelter, site drainage, and fencing to keep the sealions out. This maintains the historic integrity of the site and retains the structure for visitor appreciation and interpretation. The latter is particularly important on Enderby Island, the island, which if any are opened up for short term non-scientific visitation (particularly tourist ventures such as Antarctic cruises) is the most likely candidate (along with the Hardwicke site). A decision on the maintenance or relocation of the Stella hut is needed urgently.

Auckland Island relics in mainland museums and collections

Over the years a large number of artefacts are known to have been removed to the mainland from the Auckland (and other sub-Antarctic) islands. The piecemeal removal of artefacts from sites is generally an undesirable practice as it alters the scientific and historical values of a site and effects interpretation potential and visitor appeal.

Many of the artefacts in question, are documented in earlier expedition reports and are reported to have been taken for safekeeping, conservation or display purposes, while others are known to have been souvenired or removed by other visitors to the islands. While the artefacts held in private ownership (and the information associated with them) are the more likely to be lost, disposed of or deteriorate, placing artefacts in a museum does not automatically guarantee their preservation. New Zealand museums are already over-committed in handling the preservation, storage and display of antiquities and relics, especially wooden ones taken from damp or wet environments.

Given this situation, it is desirable that a national register or inventory be compiled of the artefacts which have been removed from the Auckland Islands. Such a register would facilitate future research, enable conservation needs and priorities to be determined, and be an invaluable tool for interpretation purposes.

Conclusions

In many ways the archaeological/historic sites resulting from 180 years of human activity in the Auckland Islands represent a microcosm of New Zealand's history beginning with their accidental discovery, then going through the phases of sealing and whaling, followed by 'Maori contact' and the short-lived attempts at colonial settlement and pastoral farming. Threaded through this pattern are a number of sites which reflect the sub-antarctic location of the islands and the events of the day, notably the visits by scientific and exploratory expeditions, the numerous wrecks of sailing ships and their castaways and the sites associated with World War Two coast-watching. Sites resulting from these activities have considerable archaeological research potential, and add an important historical dimension to the islands, and are of special interest to most visitors.

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