



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



This document is made available by The New Zealand  
Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

OPITO AND OTAMA SITES REVISITED

Brenda Sewell  
 Department of Conservation  
 Auckland

It is 27 years since Green's summaries of sites at Opito, Sarah's Gully and Great Mercury Island were published (Green 1963:57-69). Although the enormous flurry of archaeological interest in the Kuaotunu Peninsula (Fig. 1) waned after the mid 1960s, surveys and several "rescue" excavations have taken place since then. It is now appropriate to update the record concerning this most important area particularly because so many of the sites originally recorded have been destroyed or are under new threat.

Ribbon development along the beachfront over the past 10 years has resulted in up to half of the foreshore and adjacent coastal strip being substantially modified. Many sites in this area have disappeared and the possibility of two further housing subdivisions will put additional stress on the remaining sites. There is also a marked increase in trail bike use along this stretch of coast and despite concerted efforts by residents and holiday makers to protect the foredunes, considerable damage has occurred. Finally, the application for a gold prospecting licence over much of Skipper Chapman's farm is a real cause for concern. If such a licence is granted there is a possibility that many sites on Skipper's farm will be destroyed or damaged.

Table 1 gives a resume of each of the excavated sites in chronological order, the location of which is indicated on Fig. 2. The sites are referred to by their metric site number but their NZMS1 site numbers and their names are also shown in Table 1.

Archaeological work since 1963

A number of surveys, excavations and reports on the Tahanga Basalt Quarry have been carried out since Green's 1963 summary.

## Surveys:

Buist (1965) carried out the first systematic archaeological survey on the Kuaotunu Peninsula. The sites he recorded supplemented the information already held in the NZ Archaeological Association files as sites were then (and still are) recorded singly as and when found. Calder's 1972 survey of the sites at Opito and Otama presented an up-to-date account of all the recorded sites as at that date.

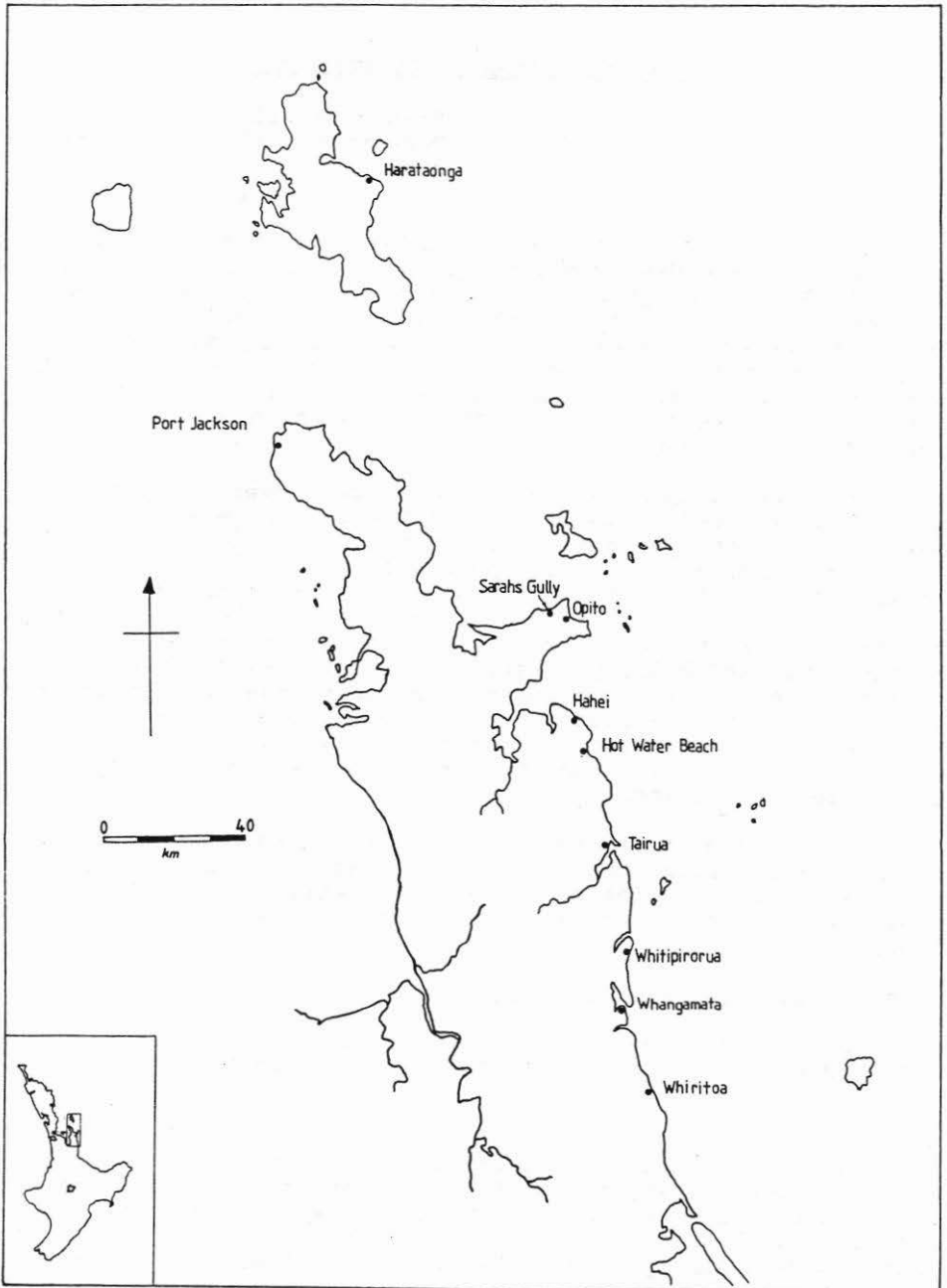


Figure 1. Location map.

## Excavations:

Six excavations have been undertaken on the Kuaotunu Peninsula since 1962. Two burials (T10/170 and 174) were excavated during the course of roadworks (Calder and Calder 1977:39-40, Houghton 1977:45-56). Another burial of unknown provenance was excavated many years ago and examined by Olsen (1980) in 1980. Bellwood excavated at Skipper's Ridge II (T10/226) (Bellwood 1969:198-221), while Bob Jolly and friends continued to excavate at the Pohutukawa Flaking Floor (T10/160) (Jolly and Murdock 1973:66-72, Murdock and Jolly 1967:157-166) and I excavated part of the Cross Creek site (T10/399) for my M.A. Thesis (Sewell 1984). Furey restored a ditch and bank on an inland pa (T10/684) as a result of accidental bulldozing by the NZ Forest Service (Furey 1984:221-231).

## Tahanga Quarry:

The presence of an important basalt source - the Tahanga quarry which provided the raw material for adzes - has resulted in the survey of the hill itself and petrological work being carried out. Shaw (1963) initially described the quarry and two flaking floors. A further six flaking floors were recorded and discussed by Moore (1975, 1976 and 1982) who has also described some of the tools in this material (Moore 1977, Moore and others 1979). Experimental work on some of the adze types has been carried out by Best (1975, 1977).

References

- Bellwood, P. 1969. Excavation at Skipper's Ridge, Opito Bay, Coromandel Peninsula, North Island of New Zealand. Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania 4 (3):198-221.
- Best, S. 1975. Adzes, rocks and men. Unpublished MA Research Essay. University of Auckland.
- 1977. The Maori adze, an explanation for change. Jnl Polyn. Soc. 86 (3):307-337.
- Birks, L. 1960. Pa at Sarah's Gully, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 3 (2):16-20.
- Birks, L. and others 1970. Radiocarbon dates for a pa site at Sarah's Gully, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 13 (2):63.
- 1973. Additional dates for Sarah's Gully pa site. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 16 (2):73.

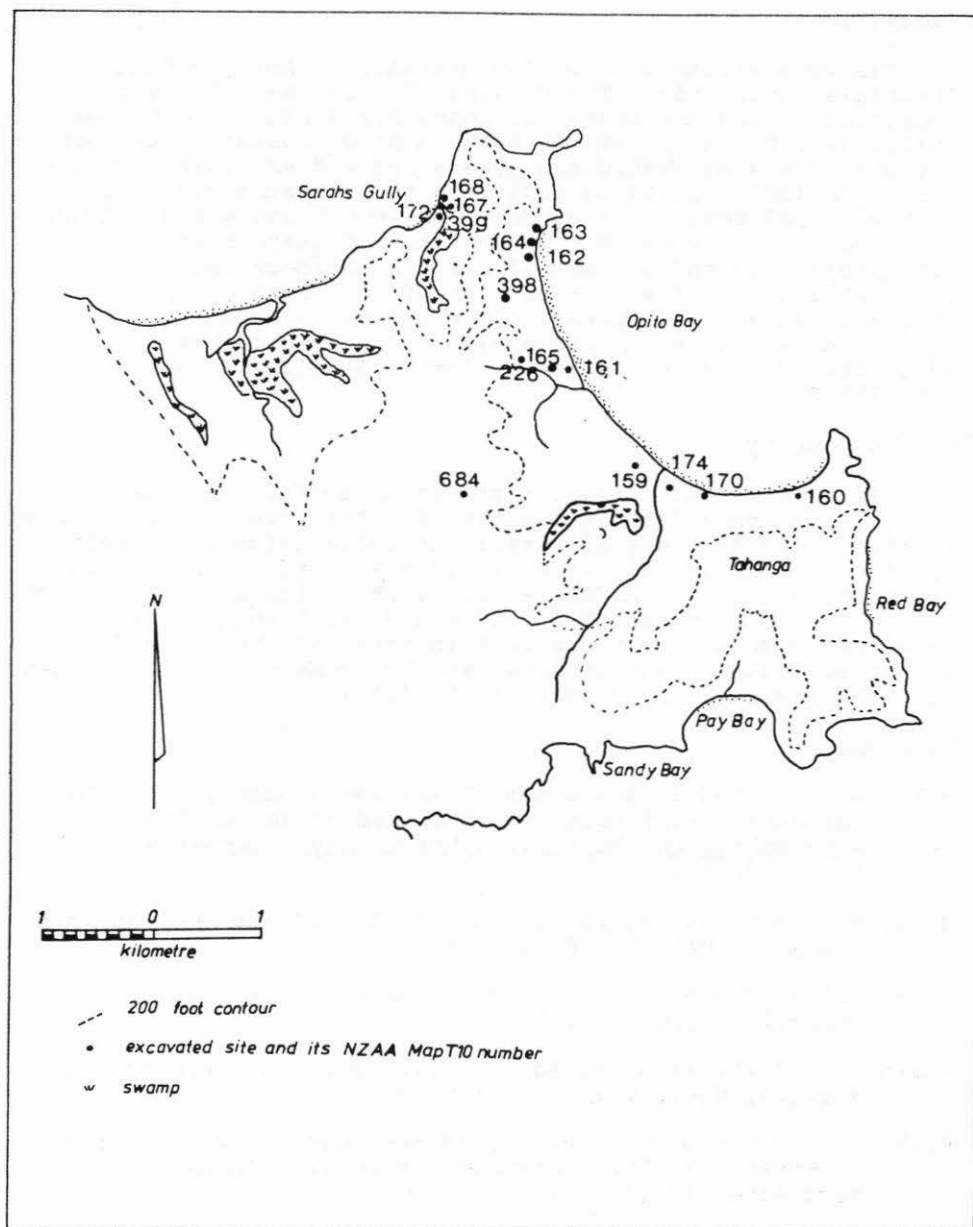


Figure 2. Location of excavated sites at Opito and Sarah's Gully.

- Boileau, J. 1980. The artefact assemblage from the Opito Beach Midden, N40/3, Coromandel Peninsula. Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus. 17:65-95.
- Buist, A.G. 1965. Site recording, Kuaotunu Point, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 8 (4):130-147.
- Calder, A. 1972. Opito & Otama Archaeological Survey. Private Printing.
- Calder, A. & J. 1977. A headache or a pain in the neck? A smallscale salvage excavation of a midden/burial at Opito Bay, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 20 (1):39-40.
- Davidson, J.M. 1964. The physical analysis of refuse in New Zealand archaeological sites. Unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland.
- 1974. A radiocarbon date from Skipper's Ridge (N40/7), Opito, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 17 (1):50-52.
- 1975. The excavation of Skipper's Ridge, (N40/7), Opito, Coromandel Peninsula, in 1959 and 1960. Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus. 12:1-42.
- 1976. Additional evidence from the excavations at Skipper's Ridge, (N40/7) Opito, Coromandel Peninsula. Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus. 13:1-7.
- 1979. Archaic middens of the Coromandel Region: A review. In Anderson, A. (ed.), Birds of a Feather: 183-202. New Zealand Archaeological Association Monograph 11.
- 1986. The poor man's rei puta: a shell pendant from Sarah's Gully. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 29 (4):227-238.
- Davidson, J. and R.C. Green 1975. A locality map for Skipper's Ridge (N40/7), Opito. Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus. 12:43-46.
- Fisher, V.F. 1936. Ethnologist's report. Annual report of the Auckland Institute and Museum 1935-6:18-19.
- Furey, L. 1984. The restoration of N40/586, Opito. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 27 (4):221-231.
- Golsen, J. and P.W. Gathercole 1962. The last decade in New Zealand archaeology. Antiquity 36:168-174, 271-278.

- Golson, J. 1959a. Excavations on the Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 2:13-18.
- 1959b. Culture change in prehistoric New Zealand. In Freeman, J.D. and Geddes, W.R. (eds) Anthropology in the South Seas. New Plymouth, Avery.
- Green, R.C. 1963. Summaries of sites at Opito, Sarah's Gully and Great Mercury Island. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 6 (1):57-69.
- 1964. Sources, ages and exploitation of New Zealand obsidian, an interim report. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 7 (3):134-143.
- 1972a. Moa-hunters, agriculture and changing analogies in New Zealand prehistory. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 15 (1):16-39.
- 1972b. Additional evidence for the age of settlements at Sarah's Gully, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 15 (3):89-93.
- Houghton, P. 1977. Human skeletal material from excavations in Eastern Coromandel. Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus. 14:45-56.
- Jolly, R. and R.C. Green 1962. Beach middens on the Coromandel Coast. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 5 (1):41-42.
- Jolly, R.G.W. and C.J. Murdock 1973. Further excavations at site N40/2, Opito Bay. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 16 (2):66-72.
- Moore, P.R. 1975. Preliminary investigation of the Tahanga Basalt, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 18 (1):32-36.
- 1976. The Tahanga Basalt: an important stone resource in North Island prehistory. Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus. 13:77-93.
- 1977. A study of the Whakatane Museum adze collection. Historical Review 25 (1):1-8.
- 1982. The prehistoric stone quarries and workshops of Tahanga, Coromandel Peninsula. Historical Review 30 (1):32-42.
- Moore, P.R., Keyes, I.W. and D.W. Orchiston 1979. New records and an analysis of the side-hafted adze from New Zealand. N.Z. Jnl of Archaeology 1:53-84.

- Murdock, D.J. and R.G.W. Jolly 1967. An excavation at Opito Bay. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 10 (4):157-166.
- Olsen, C. 1980. A human burial from Opito, Mercury Bay, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 23 (3):173-177.
- Parker, R.H. 1959. A new site at Opito. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 2 (2):18-20.
- 1960. Reconnaissance at Skipper's Ridge. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 3 (2):39-40.
- 1962. Aspect and phase on Skipper's Ridge (Opito) and Kumara Kaiamo (Urenui). N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 5 (4):222-232.
- Rowland, M. 1976. *Cellana denticulata* in middens on the Coromandel Peninsula: possibilities for a temporal horizon. Jnl Royal Soc. of N.Z. 6 (1):1-15.
- Scarlett, R.J. 1958. A dentalium shell necklace 'workshop'. Jnl Polyn. Soc. 67(1):75.
- 1962. Interim list of moa species identified from North Island archaeological sites. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 5 (4):246.
- 1974. Moa and man in New Zealand. Notornis 21:1-12.
- Sewell, B. 1984. The Cross Creek site (N40/260) Coromandel Peninsula. Unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland.
- 1986. Radiocarbon dates from the Cross Creek site (N40/260), Sarah's Gully, Coromandel Peninsula. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 29 (4):228-229.
- 1988. The fishhook assemblage from the Cross Creek site (N40/260 T10/399), Sarah's Gully, Coromandel Peninsula, New Zealand. N.Z. Jnl of Archaeology 10:5-17.
- Shaw, E. 1963. Maori Quarry, Tahanga Hill, Opito. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 6 (1):34-36.
- Smith, I.W.G. 1981. Prehistoric mammalian fauna from the Coromandel Peninsula. Rec. Auck. Inst. Mus. 18:107-125.



- Sutton, D.G. n.d. Report on prehistoric human remains from Opito, Coromandel Peninsula, New Zealand. Unpublished report.
- Trotter, M. 1977. Moa-hunter research since 1956. In Duff, R. The Moa-hunter Period of Maori Culture: 348-75. Government Printer, Wellington.
- Trower, D. 1962. Opito Beach: two sites. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter 5 (1):43-46.
- Wellman, H.W. 1962. Holocene of the North Island of N.Z.: a coastal reconnaissance. Trans. Royal Soc. of N.Z. (Geology) 1 (5):29-99.

TABLE 1

Site	Fisher's midden T10/162 (N40/4)
Excavator	Fisher
Date	1936
Stratigraphy	One occupation layer beneath 2-3' of sand.
Economy	Not recorded.
Artefacts	One-piece moa bone fishhooks and evidence of manufacture. Archaic Tahanga basalt preforms.
References	Fisher 1936:18-19, Green 1963:58.
Present Condition	Unable to relocate due to new dune formation.

---

Site	Sarah's Gully Settlement T10/167 (N40/9)
Excavator	Golson
Date	Summer 1956-7, 1957-8, and 1958-9.
Stratigraphy	<u>Areas A &amp; B</u> : 10 layers. Layers 1-4: 590±50 BP and one date less than 200 BP. Ovens and moa bone present. Layer 5: Structure with sunken floor and postholes. 810±50 BP from wood (Date likely to be too old as sample was heartwood.) Layers 6-10: 610±50 BP. <u>Area C</u> : 5 layers. Layers 3-4 shell midden. <u>Area D</u> : 4 layers. 600±50 BP.
Economy	<u>Areas A &amp; B</u> . Layers 1-4: mud flat shellfish - mainly cockle and amphibola. Layers 6-10: Dog, fur seal, moa, whale, mussell, <i>Cellana denticulata</i> and <i>C. radians</i> . <u>Area C</u> . Primarily rocky shore shellfish.
Artefacts	<u>Areas A &amp; B</u> : Manufacture of one piece moa bone fishhooks. Layer 5 and Layers 6-10: Some moa bone. <u>Area C</u> : Some moa bone. <u>Area D</u> : Moa bone one piece fishhooks, adzes of Duff's 4A type. Necklace units of <i>Dentalium namun</i> and bird bone. Paua shell pendant.
References	Davidson 1979:183-202, 1986:224-227, Golson 1959a:13-16, 1959b:45, Golson and Gathercole 1962:172, Green 1963:65-6, 1972a:30, 1972b:89-93, Houghton 1977, Rowland 1976, Scarlett 1962:246, 1974:1-12, Smith 1981, Trotter in Duff 1977:372-73.
Present Condition	Much of the seaward side of Areas A, B, and C eroded by wave action. Settlement area on low ridge is in grass although the building of a small bach close to Area C has caused some disturbance. Area D completely eroded away.

---

Site Dentallium shell "workshop" T10/163 (N40/5)  
 Excavator Scarlett  
 Date Summer 1956-7  
 Stratigraphy -  
 Economy Some moa bone.  
 Artefacts Hundreds of dentalium tubes in course of manufacture.  
 References Scarlett 1958:75, Green 1963.  
 Present Condition Working floor (basalt, obsidian and other stone flakes).

---

Site Arthur Black's midden T10/164 (N40/6)  
 Excavator  
 Date Summer 1956-7  
 Stratigraphy Not recorded.  
 Economy Dog, furseal, whale.  
 Artefacts Manufacture of moa bone fishhooks.  
 References Golson 1959a:18, Scarlett 1962:246, Smith 1981:107-125.  
 Present Condition On opposite side of Creek to Fisher's midden. Now severely damaged by cattle.

---

Site Skipper's Midden or Opito Beach Midden T10/161 (N40/3)  
 Excavator Golson and Jolly & Trower  
 Date Summer 1957-8, Summer 1958-9, May 1959, 1962  
 Stratigraphy 4 layers: 1 Recent sand, 2-3 Late occupation, 4 Early occupation, 640±50 BP.  
 Economy Layer 4 only: large quantity of moa bone (3 species), dog, rat, birds (forest and sea). Rocky shore shellfish. Furseal, cetacea, elephant seal. Jolly and Trower found dog, rat, bird and fish.  
 Artefacts 230 one-piece moa bone fishhooks and fragments. Tubes of bone and *Dentalium*. Adzes and roughouts. Files, grindstones and drillpoints. Jolly and Trower found evidence for manufacture of moa bone fishhooks.  
 References Golson 1959a:17-8, 1959b:44-5, Trower 1962:43-6, Green 1963:59-60, 1964, Rowland 1976, Davidson 1979:183-202, Boileau 1980:65-95, Smith 1981:107-125.  
 Present Condition Erosion and housing have obliterated all signs of this site.

---

Site Skipper's Ridge T10/165 (N40/7)  
 Excavator Parker  
 Date January 1959, May 1959, summer 1959-60  
 Stratigraphy 4 occupations, the earliest 3 close in time. Earliest occupation 807±57 BP. A substantial and well planned settlement.  
 Economy Little known. Reference to tuatua and wide range of shellfish. Dog and elephant seal. Presence of storage pits suggests agriculture.  
 Artefacts Mainly basalt flakes. 27 adze roughouts. Wood, kokowai, and Kauri gum. 2 possible shell artefacts.  
 References Parker 1959:18-20, 1960:39-40, 1962:222-32, Green 1963:59-60, 1964, Davidson 1964, 1974:50-2, 1975:1-42, 1976:1-7, Davidson and Green 1975:43-6, Rowland 1976, Smith 1981:107-125.  
 Present Condition Destroyed by housing.

---

Site Les's Rua T10/398 (N40/259)  
 Excavator Groube  
 Date May 1959  
 Stratigraphy -  
 Economy -  
 Artefacts -  
 References Davidson 1975:4.  
 Present Condition This and another rua close by were destroyed by farming activities.

---

Site Sarah's Gully Pa T10/168 (N40/10)  
 Excavator Golson, and L & H Birks  
 Date January 1959 and 1959-60  
 Stratigraphy 3 periods of occupation. (1) Bell-shaped pits 703±46 BP. (2) Shallow rectangular pits 388±59 BP. (3) Defensive ditches and banks 292±41 BP.  
 Economy Majority of shells and fishbones came from Period 3. Smith records dog and whale.  
 Artefacts 1 barbed point of a composite hook. 1 adze and stone flake from Period 3.  
 References Golson 1959a:16-7, Birks 1960:16-20, Birks & Birks 1970:63, 1973:73, Green 1963:66-7, 1972a:16-39, 1972b:89-93, Smith 1981:107-125.  
 Present Condition In pasture. Some damage from farm track widening.

---

Site Sarah's Gully Pa Midden T10/172 (N40/13)  
 Excavator L & H Birks  
 Date 1960  
 Stratigraphy 2 periods of occupation. Upper -  
 post-European contact. Lower - ovens with  
 worked and unworked moa bone.  
 Economy Unknown apart from mammal. Smith records  
 dog, fur seal, sealion.  
 Artefacts -  
 References Birks 1960:20, Davidson 1979:183-202, Green  
 1963:67-69, Smith 1981:107-125.  
 Present Condition Unable to relocate. Either covered in grass  
 or eroded away.

---

Site T10/174 (N40/16)  
 Excavator A & J Calder and R.G. Law  
 Date 1972  
 Stratigraphy Calder found 2 occupation layers with human  
 remains in lower layer.  
 Economy -  
 Artefacts Adze roughouts, worked chert and pumice,  
 pieces of shell fishhooks and many basalt  
 flakes.  
 References Calder and Calder 1977:39-40, Green  
 1963:62-63, Houghton 1977.  
 Present Condition Site almost destroyed by roading but midden  
 layer still visible in section in parts.  
 N.B. This site was erroneously called the Wellman  
 site. Wellman's site is T10/170 (N40/12).

---

Site Curry & Moore Gate Midden T10/159 (N40/1)  
 Excavator Green and Jolly & Trower  
 Date 1962  
 Stratigraphy 2 distinct middens separated by a small  
 gully.  
 Economy Upper midden only: Wide range of shellfish.  
 Fragments of fishbone.  
 Artefacts Upper midden - 1 adze, piece moa bone,  
 fishhook, obsidian, hammerstones and over  
 700 basalt flakes.  
 References Green 1963:62, Jolly & Green 1962:41-2,  
 Rowland 1976, Trower 1962:43-46.  
 Present Condition Upper midden still eroding slightly. Lower  
 midden washed away by high tides.

---

Site Pohutukawa Flaking Floor/Parker's Midden  
T10/160 (N40/2)

Excavator Jolly & Green and Jolly & Murdoch

Date 1961, 1971

Stratigraphy 1 cultural layer. In 1977 a storm caused waves to wash the front of the dune leaving a vertical wall of sand 2.5 m high and the occupation layer was visible for at least 200 m at a depth of 1-1.5 m from the top of the dune.

Economy Forest and sea birds - 26 shearwater. A few pieces of moa bone.

Artefacts Evidence of adze manufacture. Worked pumice, sinker, *Dentalium* units, *Cookia sulcata* shell fishhooks. Bone needles. Worked scallops shell.

References Davidson 1979:183-202, Green 1963:63, Jolly & Green 1962:41-3, Jolly & Murdoch 1967:157-166, Scarlett 1974:1-12.

Present Condition Site has suffered erosion, stock trampling, some bulldozing and fossickers. Prograding dune is protecting site from sea.

---

Site First Pohutukawa Midden/Burial and Wellman Site Section 27 T10/170 (N40/12)

Excavator Wellman, and Jolly, Murdock & Shaw, and Law

Date 1961, 1962, and 1972

Stratigraphy 1 cultural layer.

Economy -

Artefacts Adze roughouts, shell fishhooks, greenstone pendant, flakes.

References Green 1963:63, Houghton 1977, Shaw 1963:34-36, Sutton n.d., Wellman 1962.

Present Condition Almost totally destroyed by roading and levelling of dune for car parking.

---

Site Skipper's Ridge II T10/226 (N40/73)

Excavator Bellwood

Date 1967

Stratigraphy Pit complex (rectangular and circular). 1 occupation producing C-14 dates of 132 BP and 213 BP.

Economy No food wastes (bone or shell) were recovered.

Artefacts Evidence of stone tool manufacture - flakes, roughouts, etc. Worked obsidian.

References Bellwood 1969:198-221.

Present Condition Grazed.

---

Site Cross Creek Site T10/399 (N40/260)  
 Excavator Sewell  
 Date 1983  
 Stratigraphy 5 occupation layers separated by sterile sand. 1: surface midden, fires and firescoops. 3: discrete areas for cooking and tool manufacture. 504±36 BP. 5: Similar cooking and industrial areas, 2 pits. 544±54 BP. 7: Similar site layout, 1 pit. 693±30 BP. 9: 1 firescoop.  
 Economy 1: Wide range of shellfish, primarily rocky shore. Dog, rat, sea birds. 3: wide range of shellfish and fish. Few birds. 5: similar range of fish and shellfish. 7: similar range of fish and shellfish. Emphasis on *Cellana denticulata*. Dog, rat, fur seal, sealion and elephant seal. Forest birds, moa. 9: few shellfish. Rat, sealion. Sea and forest birds. Moa.  
 Artefacts 1: evidence for adze manufacture - roughouts and flakes. 3: adze manufacture and manufacture of *Cookia sulcata* shell fishhooks. 5: adze manufacture. Fishhooks of shell and ivory. Dog, rat, seal, sealion, sea birds. 7: adze manufacture and remaking. Moa bone fishhooks. Bird bone necklace units.  
 References Sewell 1984, 1986, 1988, Smith 1981.  
 Present Condition Site severely damaged by stock and wind.

---

Site Inland Pa T10/684 (N40/586)  
 Excavator Furey  
 Date 1984  
 Stratigraphy Single occupation. Excavation to restore pa following accidental bulldozing.  
 Economy No food remains present.  
 Artefacts Nil.  
 References Furey 1984:221-231.  
 Present Condition Restoration work holding up well - some soil loss on the bank and some erosion of ditch sides. Site in forested area.

---