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PIG BAY EXCAVATION, MOTUTAPU ISLAND, 1959: REMINISCENCES OF MY FIRST DIG, QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND

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Having paid the cost of board at 10 shilling a day and purchased our boat ticket we boarded a Blue Boat ferry for the hour's trip to Islington Bay, Rangitoto Island, near Auckland.

The excavation tents and gear had been loaded earlier. We were met at the Islington Bay wharf by the farmer and the gear was transferred onto the truck which drove off to Pig Bay, on the north side of the island, leaving most of us to walk over the hills to the site.

On our arrival we unloaded the equipment and stores and carried them over the creek to the low dunes behind the beach. The tents were erected on the rough grass by those who knew how to do those things. The first tent to go up was the 12 x 10 foot elderly equipment tent and then the four 9 x 9 foot tents with no floors, two for women and two for men. One student spent an hour scouring the back hills to find enough bracken and manuka brush to make an "off ground" mattress for his sleeping bag. The rest of us sorted out the gear and organised the food supplies. These consisted of the basic stores which required little preservation of food: potatoes, carrots, cabbage, tinned peas, bread, weet-bix, tinned sardines, luncheon sausage, cheese, large tins of peaches and fruit salad, tea and biscuits. We supplied our own plate, mug and eating utensils.

A fireplace was erected consisting of a long pole with one end stuck into the sand and the upper end resting on two cross-pieces. Firewood was collected, a fire lit and billies filled with water set to boil. The vegetables were prepared and put into the billies which were arranged hanging down the long pole. The sausages were a problem as Marie McMahan, who had ridden over on the truck, sat on the parcel in the front seat and squashed them flat. These were eventually fried as a mass rather than individually. Pudding was tinned peaches with tea to

follow. I don't recall that much washing up was done, just everything reused. The stream was quite a way away and it was dark by then.

Pig Bay had been first excavated over the Easter period of that year as a training dig by Jack Golson, the archaeologist from the University of Auckland, and this Queen's Birthday weekend was to finalise the work. Some World War II home guard people who were interested in Maori artefacts and archaeology had fossicked the area when digging trenches and foundations for a coastal camp in the 1940s. Several adzes and flakes were recovered and these were later brought to Jack's attention by Jack Diamond.

The original excavation squares from the Easter dig had not been filled in. These were tidied up and the beginners were issued with trowels, some coal shovels and buckets and given instructions on the basics of excavating. The site consisted of compacted black sand so excavating was not difficult but we were left to muddle around on the less interesting areas. Occasionally we found a flake which was very rewarding.

On Saturday and Sunday nights we had a bonfire on the beach. Although coolish the weekend was fine. Someone had a guitar and the time was spent singing, chatting about the dig and discussing what little was known in those days about NZ archaeology and the various theories of that time, such as the work of Roger Duff, Elsdon Best, Leslie Adkin, Percy Smith and others. Topics of the moment were the Moriori, Mōa Hunters, the Fleet and Classic Maori.

Monday was spent cleaning up the squares, some filling in, packing up the equipment and carrying it over to the truck. Monday breakfast was chaotic. There was nothing to eat as the food had been whittled down by a number of hungry students who had raided the stores. Those on breakfast could find little to prepare. The rubbish bags were raided to gather up the soggy rice from the night before and it was mixed with the remains of several tins of sardines and a couple of full ones. Final breakfast consisted of cold rice mixed with sardines, for those who were desperate, and tea.

The truck eventually set off to meet the 3:30 pm Blue Boat and we walked back over the hills to Islington Bay.