NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

I would like to record my gratitude to Mr and Mrs F. Chamberlin and family of Motunau Bay, for their kindness, and interest in the work, to Mr E. Chamberlin for permission to visit sites on his land and to record artefacts in his possession, and to Molly Nicholls and Anne Leahy, but for whom this field recording would not have taken place.

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON WHIRITOA

by Eleanor Crosby

Site N53/4 on Whiritoa Beach has been excavated by R. Jolly over the last few years. Most of the digging was concentrated in one small area and the very careful collections he has made are now being studied at the Anthropology Department of the University of Auckland.

The site is a midden at the north end of the beach (see N.Z. 1:33600 Series, Paeroa map, grid ref. 387088). It is on a strip of sand-dunes running approximately east/west from the beach to a tidal creek behind. The total area of the site was formerly about four acres, but an area of almost one acre, in a large blow-out on the coastal edge, was destroyed years ago by fossickers. The site covers about 52 square yards and is situated on the top of a sand-hill, about 75 yards from the creek. This area is about to be destroyed by sand quarrying.

STRATIGRAPHY

While an incomplete record has been made of the layers, the probable sequence of occupation may be reconstructed on the basis of the stratigraphy shown in two three foot six inch test squares. (Fig. 1) Layer 7 is a fine, clean sand on which was deposited a thin layer (6) of yellow clay-like material. Overlying this is a grey soil (layer 5), samples of which Mr D. Kear of the Soil Survey branch of D.S.I.R., has taken for further analysis. This soil was about two inches thick. Through these two layers and into the sand pit-like depressions were cut which are probably fire pits. As a result only a small portion of the soil and clay layers are left. In these pits, whose size and shape are unrecorded, is a fill, (layer 4), of a dense, black, sandy charcoal, containing a few 'basaltic' flakes, some much cracked cooking stones, and quantities of granular charcoal. Above this is a layer (3) of dirty sand about 10" thick, (with a charcoal admixture which looks as if it could have been caused by worm activity). Most of the cultural material comes from layer 3. Layer 2 is another black deposit containing cooking stone and flakes of obsidian and

basalt. It seems that the site was not quickly covered by sand once it was abandoned, since there are a number of sandblasted flakes of 'basalt' and obsidian in the collection; and all the flakes which I collected from the top two inches of layer 2 in a three foot six inch test pit were sandblasted sufficiently to cause them to change colour, though not enough to polish them. Above the three cultural layers (layers 3, 4 and 5) there is a layer of sterile sand (layer 1) which is nearly two feet thick and has a number of thin, horizontal black bands in four main groups.

DIET

The diet of the inhabitants is at present being calculated from a complete sample of sieved material from one four foot square. Most of the shells are Amphidesma australe (pipi) and Amphibola crenata (mud snail) and do not appear to differ in size from the present populations in the area, in fact the few valves of A. subtriangulatum present seem to be smaller, if anything. Of the rest of the shells only one Lunella smaragda (cat's eye) and one Neothais scalaris (a rock shell) are out-size. Fish, mainly snapper, and some small bird bones occur, but not in large numbers. Moa bone is present, mainly in form suitable for fish-hook manufacture and must have been very rare, if indeed the bone is fresh at all.

ARTEFACTUAL MATERIAL

Fish-hook tabs, cores and broken pieces are quite numerous. These are generally in moa bone. The majority of the hooks are one piece, although there are a few 'barracuda' barbs, some two piece hooks, and a few one piece hooks in Cookia sulcata (Cooks turban). The stone files are of two kinds, a) the long narrow type, usually in coarse grained sandstone, (file 'blanks' of this material also occur) and b) wide flat files of fine, grained yellow sandstone, perhaps used (along the narrow edge) as 'saws'. Large numbers of drill points of various siliceous rocks also occur along with a few in 'basaltic' rock. Obsidians from two provinces were found; one from the Great Barrier/Coromandel Coast, and the other from Mayor Is. That from Mayor Is., which is only 20 miles from Whiritoa, has been divided into two groups, clear and cloudy, since there seems to be some difference in the way it flakes and in the percentage of flakes which have been used. However, about half of the total number of pieces bear usage fractures. Very few of these could be classed as formal 'tools'. There are a great many waste flakes and several rough-outs in a grey, fine grained rock. It comes from a quarry at Opito, but opinions have differed on whether it was a low grade argillite, a greywacke or a basalt. It has been proved to be the latter by a petrological thin-section. All of the rough-outs are small and have approximately rectangular cross-sections, but there is a cache of four adzes previously reported in the Newsletter (Green 1958:24). Three of these adzes (see plate 1) are in 'basalt' and one in a lighter grey stone (the example of type 5). These were found byR.G.W.Jolly just south of the excavation. Other artefacts include

a broken bird spear point in bone and a small minnow shank in stone. (The additional artefacts later referred to are in the collection of Mr Errol Willis of Titirangi.)

DATING

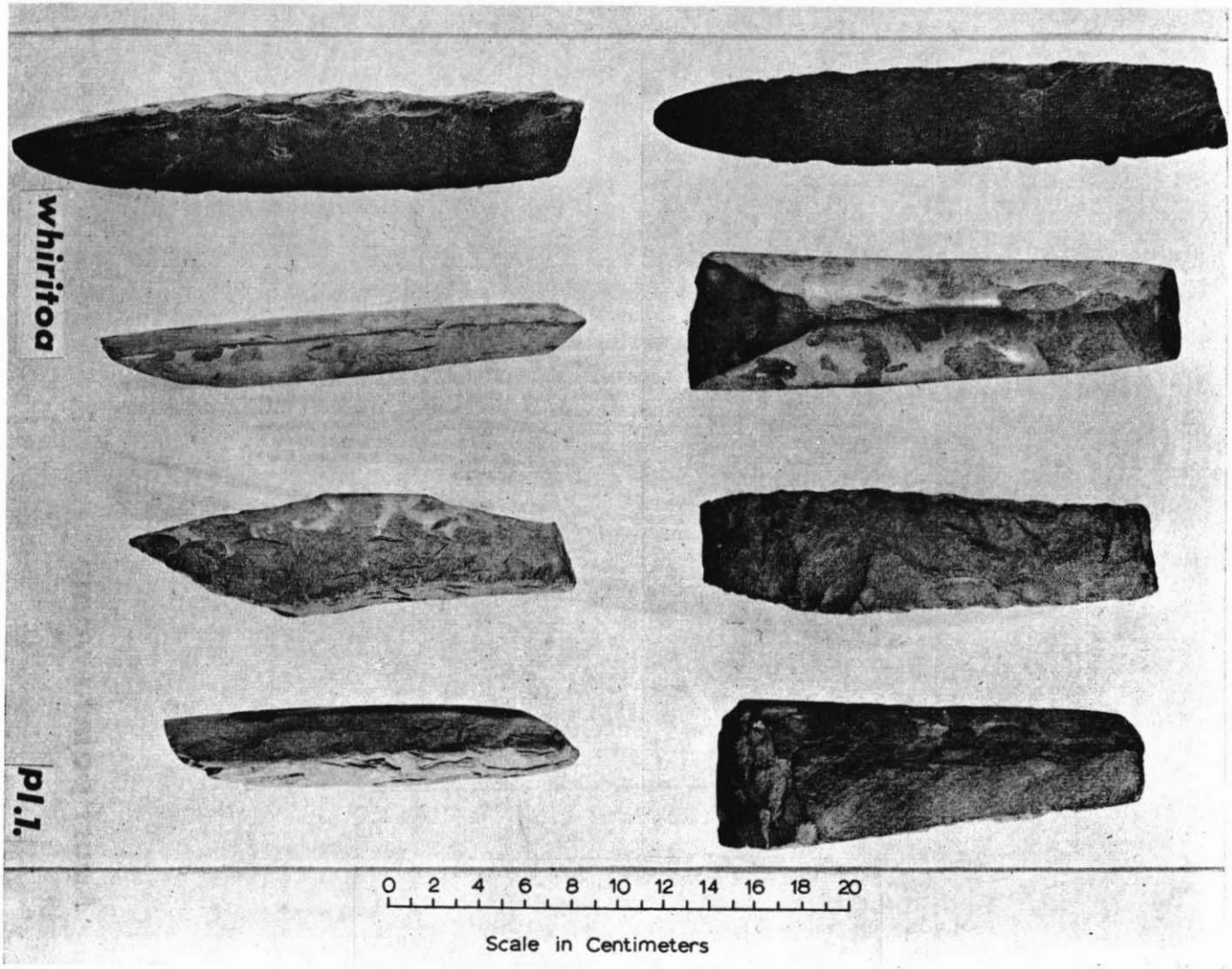
The chronological position of this midden is as yet undetermined, though a detailed attempt will later by made to establish its position within the Coromandel sequence. However, some general comments may be offered here. The Whiritoa midden is composed of shellfish of mainly mud-flat inhabiting species, with only a few examples of rocky- or sandy-shore types, and hangi stones, flakes, and all the features of a working floor, in a very black and quite compact matrix. A classic Maori midden lacks the artefactual material and the large amount of charcoal, but on the other hand a predominance of rocky shore shellfish on this coast is regarded as being early. As far as the artefacts are concerned there is the cache of 'archaic' type adzes, and at least two other 'side-hafted' adzes and several 'hogbacks' belonging to private collectors; a fair number of moa bone tabs; and one stone and pieces of three bone minnow shanks. Opposed to this we may single out six bone bird spear points, a large number of small (? 2B size and shape) adze rough-outs: three small greenstone chisels (nephrite, and found at the top of the layer); and obsidian from a source other than Mayor Is. The material from all of the cultural layers has been treated as one assemblage, but may be several. It is known that the artefacts came mainly from layer 3 and that towards the beach there was only one cultural layer, about a foot thick. The clustering of many types may be indicative, however, of a period of change (cf. Spaulding 1960: 453), and the time span need not be great. It seems closest to the Sarah's Gully midden in composition and may thus fit into Green's Experimental Phase and may or may not survive during the Village Maori Phase. (The closest pa is over three quarters of a mile away at the other end of the beach.)

In conclusion, it may be added that the beach has several middens of obviously varying dates, all of which have been dug over. Finally I must record my thanks to Mr Errol Willis who has allowed me to use his very considerable collection from the north end of the beach for comparative purposes, to Mr W. Hammond of Thornton's Bay, Thames, for his ready offer of information, and especially to Mr R.G.W. Jolly, the excavator who has salvaged these materials, and who spent a week-end showing me the site.

References.

Green, R.G. 1958 "A Survey of Sites Along the Coromandel Coast" N.Z.A.A. Newsletter, vol. 2 no. 2 pp 20-25.

Spaulding, A. 1960 "The Dimensions of Archaeology" in Dale & Carniero (eds) Essays in the Science of Culture, Crowell, New York, 1960. pp 437-456.


whiritoa
Pl. I.
0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20
Scale in Centimeters

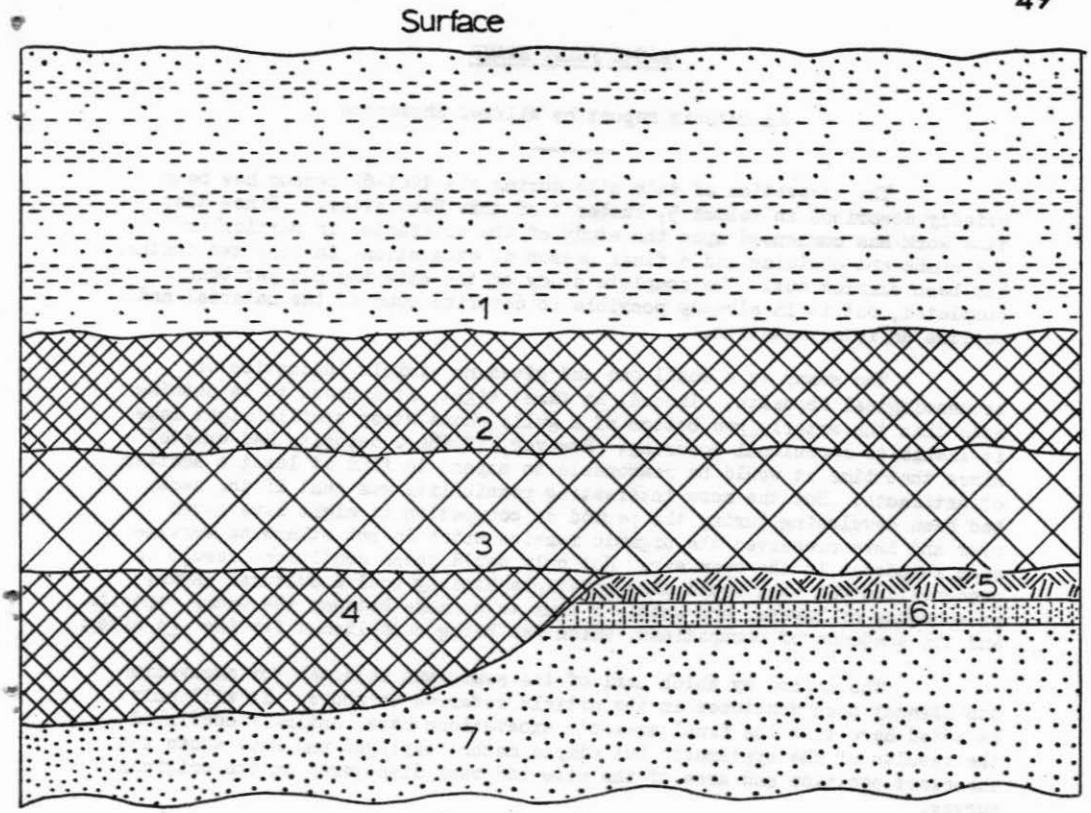


fig 1.

N-S Section, Whiritoa

sand

clay

soil

black occ. layer

sandy occ. layer

Scale 1" to 1'