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QUARTZITE AND WHALES IN GOLDEN BAY

Jack Walls

In the recent NZ 1990 publication of the NZ Geographic Board, *Place Names of the Ancestors, a Maori Oral History Atlas*, Tipene O'Regan recounts a version of the Poutini story. This story links stone sources valuable to the Maori starting at Tuhua (Mayor Island) and ending at Arahura. On the way stops are made at Tahanga, Whangamata, Rangitoto (D'Urville Island), Whangamo (Nelson), Onetahua (Farewell Spit), Pahua (near Punakaiki) and Takiwai (Milford Sound). These are the sources of rocks which are, in order: obsidian, basalt, obsidian, metasomatised argillite, ditto, ?, chert, bowenite, nephrite. The question mark hangs over Farewell Spit. Tipene O'Regan states that 'Farewell Spit is where "floater" stones from the Nelson Mineral Belt are washed up' and speculates that this refers to 'argillite'.

Farewell Spit (see Fig. 1) has been formed by sand from Westland rivers brought up the coast by the prevailing southwesterly winds and currents. There is no contrary current of the same strength from the east and it is difficult to see how a heavy rock such as metasomatised argillite could be transported by this means. As Farewell Spit is a stopping point in other versions of this story some important resource must be involved. Kathy Prickett has suggested that pitch, associated with coal measures at Puponga, and used as chewing gum, could be the 'floaters' (pers. comm.). Simon Walls thinks that whale bone could have been the resource as this area is renowned for whale strandings (pers. comm.). My own contribution to the discussion is that the rock is quartzite which is found on adjacent coasts and which in fact forms part of the base of the Spit.

Quartzite boulders up to 50 cm across are a component of the Pakawau Series conglomerates and are exposed on many kilometres of beach near the Spit. Gravel layers containing quartzite, eroded from cliffs to the west, occur under sands of the Spit up to 2 km from its base and have been worked. Large cores of quartzite are to be found on the inner Spit beach about 6 km from the base lying on tidal flats.

Quartzite flakes and cores in company with large pieces of marine mammal bone found in a Puponga Inlet site alongside archaic argillite artefacts indicate an early use. On the inner beaches near Puponga quartzite flaking is common and it is here that the recent stranding of over 300 whales took place. Such strandings are now almost an annual event and no doubt have been so since the building up of Farewell Spit. Large quartzite flakes suitable as flensing knives may be seen along this coast. Boulders were flaked *in situ* and the best quality stone is evident in well reduced cores. So the coincidence of stranded whales and an excellent knife source may have given rise to the 'floater' stones part of the Poutini story.

While cherts and obsidians from distant sources, obtained by gift exchange, are present here in occupation sites and no doubt were used for specialist purposes, the general all-purpose knife and scraper was made of quartzite. Tools of a range of sizes from 5 cm to 15 cm across were frequently raw primary flakes. Others have serrated edges produced by secondary working. The material is too hard and glassy to do anything else with. However, I have seen two

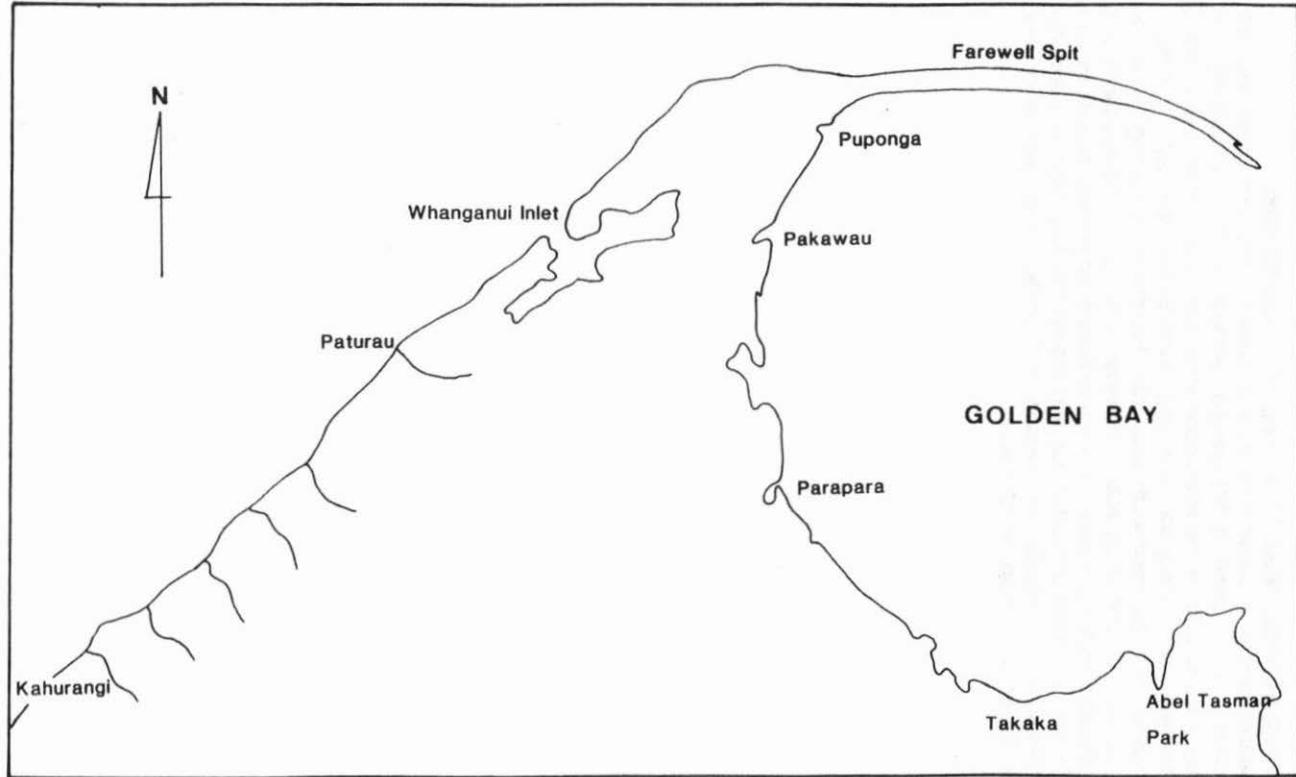


Fig. 1. Location of places mentioned in the text.

quartzite roughout adzes about 12 cm long from separate sites.

Quartzite ranges in colour from black to creamy white with green and pink less common. Some stone is fine-grained, sometimes showing banding. In Golden Bay it appears to be the all-purpose knife and scraper from and including sites on Farewell Spit to Parapara. It is also found as the main cutter at sites in the Whanganui Inlet and rivermouth sites from Paturau to Kahurangi, where its possible use was for cutting up seals. However, while giving the appearance of being an excellent material, it does not seem to have been popular outside its own range. On the east coast of Golden Bay and around the Abel Tasman coast into Nelson, metasomatised argillite from Nelson or D'Urville Island quarries or river sources is the common material for knives.