NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

SITE SURVEY OF TUHUA OR MAYOR ISLAND

Hans G. Pos

Introduction:

Mayor Island is an extinct volcano situated 23 miles north of Tauranga Harbour. It covers 3154 acres, and has a coastline of 11 miles. The highest point on the island is Opuahau, 1274 feet above sea level. The crater has a circumference of five miles, and in the bottom are 2 lakes, Aroarotamahine, and Te Paritu. The cliffs of Mayor Island are steep, and the terrain is rugged. It is thickly covered in bush, the principal trees being Pohutukawa, Rewarewa and Kanuka, with dense undergrowth. Only a few tracks provide access to the southern part of the island.

The main feature of Mayor Island is its obsidian. Big seams can be seen in Cathedral Bay, and big outcrops are scattered all along the coastline, and on the crater wall, although not all this obsidian is of high quality. Some localities with high grade flaking obsidian are described below.

Mayor island obsidian plays an important role in New Zealand archaeology. Green writes:

> "Mayor Island obsidian seems to be found in nearly every early site known in New Zealand regardless of its location, suggesting an early exploration and a primacy for settlement in the Bay of Plenty Region" (Green 1963:45).

Fortunately, access to Mayor Island is not easy. There are no animals except pigs, and human visitors are not numerous. Destruction of sites is remote. The island stands as a monument of Maori History, and holds great potential for the archaeologist. Fortunately the Maori owners are aware of their heritage, as was demonstrated to the Tauranga Big Game Fishing Club, when they sought permission to construct an airstrip on the island. The proposal met with great opposition from the Mayor Island Trust Board, who did not want any of the old sites to be destroyed.

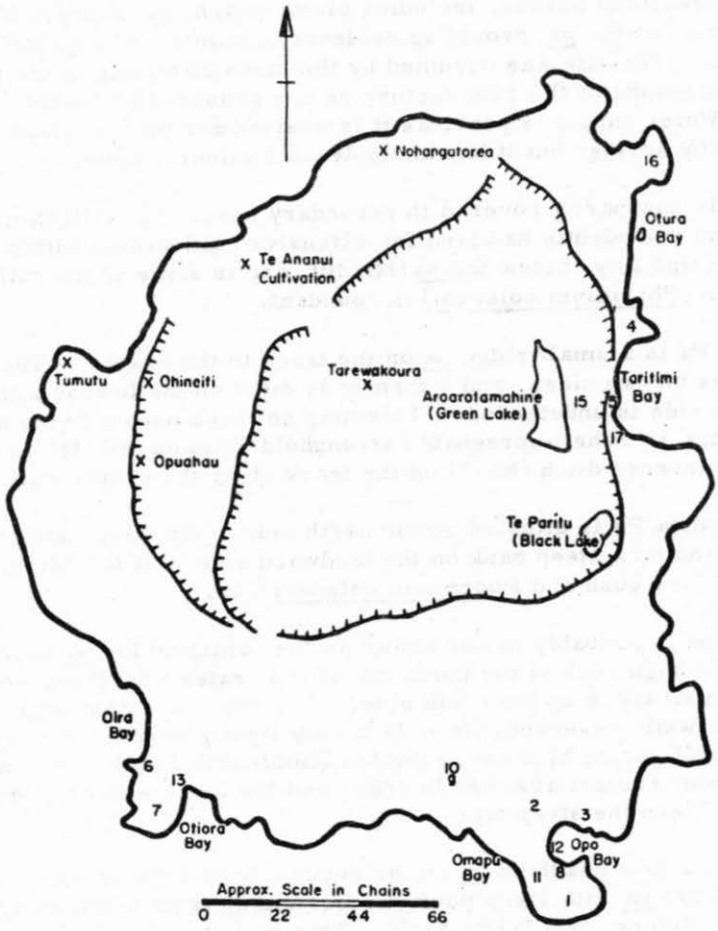
Many hilltops and ridges on Mayor Island are fortified, but finding and recording of these sites is hindered by the terrain. It is fortunate therefore that a wealth of information can be drawn from the 1884 Survey Report of Goldsmith (Goldsmith 1884). Many pa sites are shown on his map with Maori names supplied to him by the last permanent inhabitants of the island.

While sites are difficult to see, the plentiful growth of Phormium colensoi flax highly valued by the Maori for making fishing lines, is a useful indicator of many sites.

Twenty two sites have now been recorded, but hills and ridges in the north of the island need more thorough investigation. It should be mentioned here, that some pa sites previously reported (Pos 1961:48) were taken from the Goldsmith map. Further investigations have shown that some of these sites are not pa. Others have not yet been verified in the field.

TUHUA

MAYOR ISLAND



The following list includes all sites so far recorded, with the exception of one site of dubious antiquity, and several tapu sites, whose exact whereabouts are not disclosed. As Mayor Island is not covered by the inch to the mile series of maps, the sites have been included in the site recording scheme under the designation M.I. /- instead of the usual N 54/-.

Living Sites and Fortifications:

MI/1. Pa-nui, a large pa, is situated on a headland between Opo, or south east Bay, and Omapu Bay, on the south east side of the island. The pa is protected on three sides by vertical cliffs 100' high. On the fourth side, a deep trench cuts across the narrowest strip of land between the two bays. Inside the pa is an extensive area of land sloping gently to the east. Many pits are still visible on the surface. Fruit trees and bushes, including plum, peach, raspberry, blackberry, grapevine and fig grow on the pa, providing evidence of extensive cultivation in post-European times. The site was occupied by the last inhabitants of the island, and Goldsmith's photographs of the 19th century pa are preserved with his report (Goldsmith 1884). Water supply is poor, as it is everywhere on the island. Water is available in a nearby spring, but it has an unpleasant mineral taste.

Although the pa is now partly covered in secondary bush, it is still the clearest site on the island, and it evidently had land for extensive cultivations within the pa. Karaka trees grow in Opo Bay, below the pa (MI/20), and in some of the valleys not far from the pa. Flax (Phormium colensoi) is abundant.

MI/2. Okotore Pa is a small ridge pa on the track to the crater. There are steep natural defenses on two sides, and a tranverse ditch on the lowest point of the site. The fourth side is undefended. This may not have been a living site, but a defense on the track to the impregnable stronghold Taumou (MI/4), as there is another isolated tranverse ditch (MI/7) on the track along the crater wall.

MI/3. Tikitikinahoa Pa is situated on the north side of Opo Bay, and is protected by the sea and by a steep bank on the landward side. It is heavily overgrown with secondary bush and Phormium colensoi flax.

MI/4. Taumou pa is probably better known as the "untakeable" pa in Maori history. Situated on a high rock at the north end of the crater wall it has vertical sides with only one small track up the south side. The interior is not large, but is terraced with some well preserved pits. It is only lightly covered by secondary bush. There is a small spring high above the sea (Goldsmith 1884). It was this pa that the well known chief Tautari attacked in 1829, and his force was crushed by large boulders hurled down the steep track.

MI/6. Te Ruamata is a headland pa on the south side of Oira or north west Bay. It is a strong little pa with steep pumice sides rising from large obsidian rocks. The landward defence is a large ditch. This pa is tapu (sacred).

MI/7. Whatepu pa is a very big headland pa, heavily overgrown with bush. It cannot have been easily defended, for it is protected on the landward side by a ditch of some length.

MI/9. Arakaeara pa is a ridge pa similar to Okotore (MI/2). It has a transverse ditch and bank at either end.

MI/15. This is an unnamed pit site with surrounding ditch, situated in the crater near Lake Aroarotamahine, in an area now heavily covered by pine trees. The site consists of a pit around which a narrow ditch has been cut, with an intervening bank. If the pit served as a dwelling the roof probably overhung the bank, directing run-off water into the ditch.

MI/16. Paretoa pa (sp. Paretao on Goldsmith map) is a headland pa defended by a single big ditch,which does not extend completely from cliff to cliff. A small area has been left on the south end of the ditch, possibly for entrance. It is very difficult to get to this site, which has a source of very high grade obsidian. There is dense bush on the site, in which mapau (Suttonia australis) dominates. Fine Phormium colensoi flax is also present.

MI/17. A single transverse ditch on the crater rim with a very high bank on the Taumou side. This ditch was probably a rear defence of Taumou (see MI/2)

Rua (Subterranean pits)

MI/10. This rua, which has partly collapsed, is situated outside Arakaeara Pa (MI/9)

MI/13. Three rua are situated in the defensive ditch of Whatepu pa (MI/7). They are dug into the north wall of the ditch and are bell shaped. Their radius is approximately four to six feet.

Middens:

Only two middens have been found so far. One, MI/11, was almost destroyed when a track was bulldozed to Omapu Bay.

MI/8. This site is situated below Panui on the Opo Bay side and has never been disturbed. Surface collection, indicating the material to be expected included: fish bone and fish scales, birdbone, mostly sea birds, boar's tusk, quantities of charcoal and fractured stones, many obsidian flakes, a piece of pumice probably used as a rubber, a broken paua shell piece of a kahawai lure, broken sea eggs, and shells.

The following shells were collected: Nerita melanotragus, 90% of the midden, Cellana sp. present in fair quantity, Lunella smaragda, a few very large shells, Haliotis iris, a few complete shells and many fragments, Cookia sulcata a few. These shells are all available at Mayor Island. One cockle shell and one mussell were found, which are not available near Mayor Island today.

MI/11. As this site is almost entirely destroyed not much material is lying about. Shells were mostly the same as MI/8, except for one pipi shell, not now found at Mayor Island.

Tapu Tree

MI/12. This pohutukawa tree, which is considered tapu, grows on the south side of Opo Bay. It is fenced off, but during a storm in 1963 the fence and a smoke house standing above the site were washed away, while the tree was unharmed.

Obsidian:

As was mentioned in the introduction, obsidian can be found anywhere on the island, but the Mayor Island obsidian recovered from excavations on the mainland is nearly always of very high flaking quality. Only three places have so far been identified which yield this very high quality obsidian. Only one, a real quarry, has been given a site number.

MI/5. This is a true quarry, where flake quality obsidian has been obtained by tunnelling into the obsidian seam for a distance of about six feet. The site is on the wall of the crater hundreds of feet above sea level. Many chips of obsidian are lying about the site.

Another very high grade obsidian source is located below Paretoa pa (MI/16) on the seaward side. Flakes of this obsidian held to the light have a clear slightly greenish colour. Many tons of obsidian could be removed from this source without noticeably depleting it.

The third source of high grade obsidian can be found on the north side of Oira or north west Bay. This obsidian has a fairly black pitchstone appearance and a high gloss.

Summary:

Three points can be made to indicate the importance of Mayor Island and its value to the archaeologist.

1. Mayor Island is important in the study of obsidian sources and distribution; three important sources of high quality obsidian have so far been located on the island.

2. Because of the importance of Mayor Island obsidian throughout New Zealand prehistory, Mayor Island must always have played an important role. Some sites on the island should reflect this importance.

3. Because of the traditional importance of the island, Maori traditions and historical records can be used to date the last occupations of some undisturbed pa on the island very exactly.

References:

Goldsmith, E. C. 1884 "Mayor Island" Original survey report. Ms in archives of Lands and Survey Department, Hamilton.

Green, Roger, 1963 "A Review of the Prehistoric Sequence in the Auckland Province" Auckland Archaeological Society Monograph 1.

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EXCAVATIONS AT OTOTARA GLEN, NORTH OTAGO

Michael M. Trotter

During his exploration and survey of North Otago in 1848, Walter Mantell and his party camped at the southern end of the Totara Terrace limestone outcrop in a hollow which he called Ototara Glen (Mantell 1848). An overhanging rock at this place is locallv referred to as "Mantell's Cave" though it is barely a cave and there is no definite evidence that it was used by his party. It is about one and a half miles from the coast and quarter of a mile from a fresh water creek. In recent years sheep sheltering beneath the overhang disturbed the ground revealing shell, bone and burnt stone, but curio hunters attracted to the area were discouraged by the paucity of finely finished artifacts. In private and museum collections there are perhaps a dozen artifacts labelled as being from "Mantell's Cave", but having spoken with the collectors I cannot accept most of them as definitely being from this particular site. In 1961 Messrs G. and J.B. Ballantyne invited me to investigate the site which is on the latter's property, and on odd days during 1962 and 1963 I directed excavations by members of the North Otago Scientific and Historical Society here.

Many signs of temporary occupation have been found at various places along the Totara Terrace including a limestone cave containing drawings and occupational material which was destroyed during lime making operations a few years ago. The Ototara Glen site covered an area of about 40 by 30 feet situated east of the limestone shelter (see plan). Close to the rock (Square C.7) was a single oven depression, and occupational material - shell and bone midden generally distributed in a black earth matrix - was at its greatest concentration here, thinning out away from the shelter. Near the rock too was the greatest disturbance of the deposit, caused by sheep, curio hunters, and rats, but this did not cover more than about fifty square feet and affected mostly the upper six inches.

The site was divided into five-foot squares related to a permanent iron peg set in concrete at the north east corner of Square D.2, and it was intended to