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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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SOME NOTES ON THE WESTERN WELLINGTON COOK STRAIT COAST
1888 - 1913

Peter Beckett

This is a severely edited version by John Daniels, of typewritten notes given to him by Win Mumford in 1960. The notes were either written or dictated by Peter Beckett, but it is not known when.

The purpose of this paper is to record signs of native occupation, as noted in the western Cook Strait area from the mid-eighties of last century when the writer as a child first lived at Island Bay. The finding of an adze when a schoolboy started many years of collecting and of exploring the coast and hinterland of that district. Some historical notes gathered throughout the years have also been set down. Much has been recorded of the district to the east. Here it is proposed to cover that part of the coast from Houghton Bay to Cape Terawhiti.

ISLAND BAY AND HOUGHTON BAY (HAEWAI):

The eastern headland of Island Bay is the termination of the range (Ranga a Hiwi) extending from Pt. Jerningham and Mt Victoria thence to Mt Albert and Southerland's Hill, the forward and lower slopes of which form the eastern headland of Island Bay, falling steeply to the coast. On the other cliff head the Ngati Tara built a stockade named Uruhau (place of the winds), which together with the pa Wai Hirere at Pt Jerningham and Akatarewa on the crest of the ridge south of Mt Victoria formed a screen of outposts covering the approach to Whetu-Kairangi, the Ngati Tara stronghold on Miramar. A Muaupoko raiding party, as a prelude to an attack on Whetu-Kairangi, is said to have surrounded Uruhau, but were beaten off. Some fighting took place on the beach below, and a very old skull, much battered, was picked up here in a small quarry in 1895. Two Muaupoko chiefs were killed in this encounter and their bodies were cremated at Haewai. The site of Uruhau was inspected in 1900. No trace of the stockade could be found. A short deep trench on a point which afforded a wider view of the coast, was the only remaining part of the defences. This trench covered the head of a faintly discernable zig-zag track up the cliff face. Excavation of the trench yielded only ashes and charcoal.

Houghton Bay did not appear to be a place of residence, no middens or other signs of habitation being noted. The coast is rocky, the shingle beach continually pounded by waves. Caves existed on the western side. A Maori informant told the writer in 1895 that these were old burial caves. The one facing east was for many years the home of the "Hermit of Island Bay". One, on the south of the rocky bluff, appeared to have been filled almost to its roof, and could only be explored by crawling for about fifteen feet.

ISLAND BAY (PAEKAWAKAWA):

The broad Island Bay valley was called Paekawakawa. It had a swampy

floor with a wide meandering water course which at times carried quite a large volume of water. The water shed was the southern part of Newtown and Vogelmorn, and the early settlers had confined and straightened this flow in the lower part of the valley. The wide flat, now built up, was an extensive swamp with a lagoon on its eastern side. No Maori dwelling sites were noted in the valley, but a large pa (evidently stockaded as there were no signs of a ditch) was noted on an outstanding hill overlooking Island Bay and Wellington on the Town Belt just south of the summit of Vogelmorn Road. There is no record of this pa. The hills were well grassed when examined. Several whare sites, a well, and midden refuse were noted on the hollow west of the crest. A large flat adze was unearthed on the western side of Wakefield Park, and a large ko was recovered from the swamp in the same area. A gravelly flat, east of lower Derwent Street was reported to be an ancient kumara garden. The stream cut through a flat of fine gravel to within two hundred yards of the sea just west of the centre of the bay, then turned sharply east behind a low spit to enter the sea on that side of the bay close to the rocks. It was later taken straight to the sea through a concrete culvert. The writer remembers finding on a sandy spit the remains of many bleached skeletons, a reminder of one of Te Rauparaha's many treacherous acts. After their defeat by him, the local inhabitants scattered to hideouts in the neighbouring hills, while a few took refuge on Tapu te Ranga islet. Te Rauparaha contacted those scattered over the land and offered them refuge and safe conduct to Tapu te Ranga if they assembled on the sandspit. This the unsuspecting people did, only to be slaughtered. The island is small and rocky with a small hill about sixty feet high near its centre. The hill was levelled near the top as if to form a lookout. The remains of four posts were seen. A small well of brackish water existed on the rocky flat south of the hill. In a shingle flat on the eastern side, several sunken hut sites could be seen, and the remains of a rubble wall could be traced at the foot of the high ground facing the bay. Here an adze of dark stone and part of a stone patu were found. Goats and rabbits had been introduced and had destroyed most of the vegetation, causing much talus to cover the foot of the slopes.

The midden on the western side of the beach occupied the mouth of a small gully which emptied a tiny stream on the beach. The midden covered about half an acre on the south side of this. Having a loose sandy surface it was easy to inspect and yielded many artifacts until it was built over. From this place to Ohiro Bay the foreshore is very rocky. Signs of occupation were noted but running stone had covered what would have been the most favoured sites for fishing villages at the base of the cliffs.

OHIRO BAY AND VALLEY:

The middens on the shore of the bay were not built over until years after those at Island Bay and could be inspected until 1913 when the writer moved away from the district. A large midden occupied the eastern side of the bay on the gravelly flat where many artifacts were found. On the eastern side a small midden uncovered by sand carriers was rich in shell carving tools. On the western side a small talus midden existed. Greenstone had been worked at this site, several fragments of this stone being recovered. The parts of two fish hooks of unusual design and apparently

great age, were also uncovered at the foot of the slope. A small gully leading east, now Severn St, connecting with Island Bay, showed signs that kumara were grown here as there was much gravel in some parts of the soil.

The Happy Valley stream drained a large area of land, including the western hills reaching as far north as Brooklyn, the main flow joining the central valley about one mile from the bay and extending nearly two miles towards the Karori watershed. The country on the left is very rugged and carried dense bush when first explored by the writer. In later years a metal quarry was worked on the right hand side of this branch about half a mile from its junction. Here, half a blade of a greenstone mere was unearthed. Nearly half a mile from the beach a small stream flowed in from the northeast, and on the grassed hillside of this gully, a finely finished small greenstone adze was found. Between 1880 and 1890, Messrs T & M Bird erected a large amount of fencing for the Happy Valley estate on the larger western branch mentioned above. While splitting posts in the bush they found an almost complete canoe at a place about two miles from the sea. This was cut up for fencing material. The writer saw some of this material in 1904 still showing the adzing and curve of the old canoe.

On the right hand side of the old Brooklyn stream, about half a mile below the present suburb a small stream came in from the east. Here the Ati Awa had a small hamlet. On the steep ridge on the other side of the valley, known to the early settlers as Fern Ridge, were their terraced gardens. Midden refuse was noted at this hamlet site in 1905.

BEYOND OHIRO BAY:

Passing the western head of Ohiro Bay, the run-round or Papanui is reached. Here a great rock abuts the sea, and was difficult to pass at high tide, many minor mishaps having befallen travellers at this place. Near this rock a stream flows from a narrow steep sided gully going back into the hills. Just beyond the run-round a hanging gully spills a tiny stream over the cliff face. In dry weather this is only a trickle, but in rains the flow often ploughs a channel through the beach shingle. After one such flow a slab of partly polished greenstone was found.

The beach from here is rough shingle until Fly Rock, so named because of the many kelp flies which cling to its outward facing slope, is reached. Trampers must pass between this rock (isolated and about twelve feet high) and the sea. The track from here becomes firmer, being back from the shore. In the 1890's the hillside had a covering of stunted scrub, the haunt of the weka. Small ngaio and other trees grew close under the hill and the remains of old Maori fishing camps sheltered under these. Posts of a few whares still stood, and there was a good well containing clear water. By 1900 the scrub on the hill had been destroyed and scree slides had covered all these sites.

The Red Rocks are remarkable not only for the varying shades of red, but also for the other colours. An attempt was made at one time to exploit their stone but it did not prove suitable for marketing. Copper was also prospected for but this metal was not found in payable quantities.

Between Red Rocks and Sinclair Head is a rough and exposed bay with a stream, Waipapa, of fair size, the water of which only flows to the sea in times of flood. Otherwise it sinks into the shingle near its exit from the hills. The stream is turned sharply to the left by a low rock ridge near its mouth. On the seaward side of this was an old rock shelter where, in 1895, several very crude implements were found in a few minutes search. On the next visit a year later the site had been covered by a deep layer of shingle deposited by a flood. The Ngati Tara are said to have granted the refugee Ngati Mamoe the lands between the Ohiro and Karori Streams, extending inland to Karori. They built a pa on the western headland of the Red Rocks bay. This place must have been only a stockade; no traces of other defences were found by the writer. There were slight signs of occupation about a small stream above the karaka trees. This stream was used in the war years as a source of supply for the fort built on the headland.

On turning Sinclair Head a much shattered cliff face rises over 600ft. This was once covered by light bush, which the owners of the Happy Valley estate employed one Munroe to clear, resulting in the hillside falling away in running stone and becoming one of the most difficult and dangerous on the coast. Further on, some karaka trees grew at the end of a small bay. Then there is a rather scattered group of rocks. An informant who knew the coast early told the writer that the Maoris collected a stone at this point which was the only one in the district suitable for implement making. It is like grey flint, is flat and branched like some forms of that stone, and is found only in small pieces. It is called sea-foam.

Long Beach extends nearly a mile, a hard tramp over yielding shingle. A stream enters the beach near its western end. Flowing from the north it is turned to the west by a narrow gorge, the lower part of which is impassable. A razor-backed ridge flanks the southern side with a steep cliff face on the opposite bank. On this ridge and in a small curve of the gorge the Ngati Mamoe built a pa. The position was of great natural strength, although of limited size. The approach to the ridge was narrow and easy to defend, and the gateway and its approach could be plainly traced in 1900. On the south the ridge fell steeply to the beach, and up this face could be traced the remaining signs of a track. Near the end of the spur, butts of stockade posts, still in position were bedded in solid rock. This site could only have accommodated a small number of people, and could have been used only as a refuge.

At the mouth of the Karori Stream there was a large flat midden on the western bank. This had evidently been used for a long time, and many interesting items were recovered here. This site was doubtless an important centre, as the stream and its tributaries gave access to a wide stretch of the hinterland. No important middens or sites were noted on Tongue Point. Wai-Riki Stream has middens on both banks, which yielded many small adze types. Mr Elsdon Best informed the writer, in conversation, that a tapu rock, said to be very beautiful, was visible at certain times at the mouth of the stream. As shingle piles up at the stream's mouth in heavy weather, a small lagoon is formed which bursts through in times of flood, exposing the rock in the channel. At no time has the writer ever seen it. The late Mr McMenaman informed the writer that he had seen it several times and did not consider it in any way striking. The

Ngati Awa had a hamlet at this stream behind a little knoll which stands at the mouth of the stream gully. These people left the coast in 1860 returning to their former homes to take part in the wars.

A large and interesting midden existed on the western bank of the Oterongo Stream. The coast round Cape Terawhiti is impassable. The writer with a party attempting to make this journey was prevented from doing so by the high cliffs rising sheer from the sea. Thus ended the writer's exploration of the Cook Strait coast.

KARAKA TREES:

Doubtless owing to their food value to the Maori, these trees were grown at any suitable spots along the coast. By 1890 only two groves remained. In Red Rocks bay, west of the stream, there was a bush covering about a quarter of an acre. These trees were of large size and were past their full vigour. Many were dying. Some of the trunks were about twenty four inches in diameter, their smooth bark bearing many names and dates back to the late fifties and sixties. Talus from the cliff was slowly building up round their trunks. Another bush west of Sinclair Head was being overwhelmed by running stone, and all the trunks were battered by rocks falling from the cliff above. A few trees also grew on the razor-backed hill within the site of the Ngati Mamoe pa at Long Beach. The largest bush grew about half a mile along the ridge north of Red Rocks. There, in a basin at the head of a gully falling westward to the Red Rocks stream, was an area of about fifteen acres of dense growth of trees. They were a mass of gold fruit - a sight never to be forgotten.

THE SITE RECORDING SCHEME

J.R.S. Daniels

This article has been written as a result of the Association's Annual General Meeting at Queen's Birthday weekend when site recording figured prominently in the discussions. A number of questions were asked about the scheme and I hope to answer most of them here.

It is now four years since Win Mumford's article, "Field Recording Scheme" was published. (Newsletter v.2 no.4 pp.7-12). In this article she gave an historical survey of the scheme and an outline of its organisation. Since that time the organisation has not changed and appears to work satisfactorily. In 1960 the Association adopted a new set of forms and a different filing system. The old foolscap forms were replaced by the present quarto type which are now so well known to field workers. They allow more flexibility in recording and more space for site description and other information not provided for in the specific categories of the Site Reference form. All the recorded material from each site - forms, maps and photographs - is now filed in an envelope instead of loose as previously. This preserves the forms much better, whereas deterioration in the old