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THE CARGILL'S CLIFF CHEVRONED AMULETS

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During the 1880s a pair of asymmetrical chevroned amulets (Fig. 1 and Plate) were found in the vicinity of Cargill's Cliff, south Dunedin (Fig. 2). Shortly afterwards the two parts went into separate private collections. The left side (b in Fig. 1) was acquired by Augustus Hamilton probably sometime during 1896-1899 when he was Registrar at the University of Otago (Neich, pers. comm.). Hamilton later gave it to the Dominion Museum in Wellington who exchanged it to the Otago Museum in 1943. Although noted by Skinner (1974:81-82) as having once been in the possession of the late Hilary Collier, the whereabouts of the other member of the pair was unknown until 1982 when it was deposited in the Otago Museum.

Recent correspondence from Mrs Bettina Hamilton (who is the sister of Hilary Collier and mother of the depositor - no relation

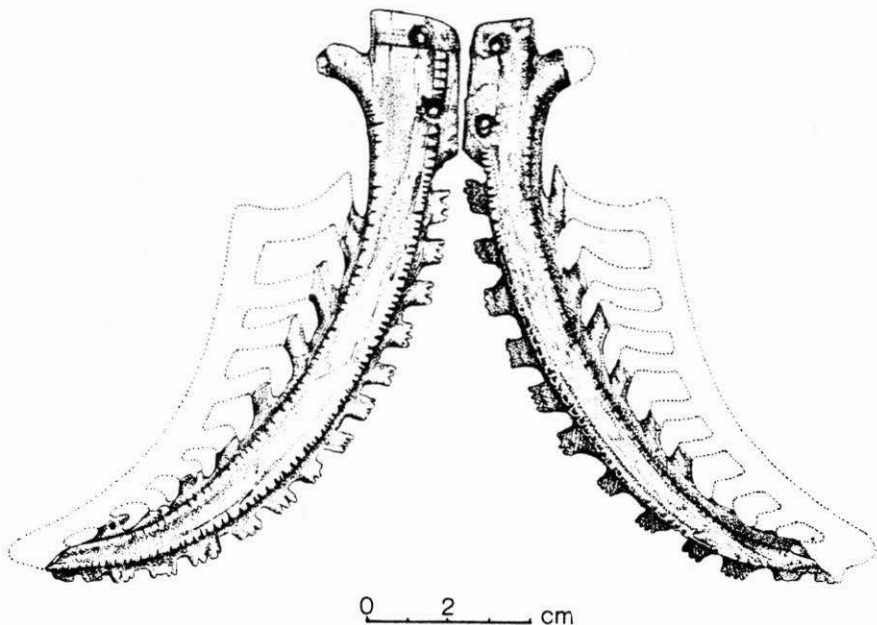


FIGURE 1. The Cargill's Cliff chevroned amulets.

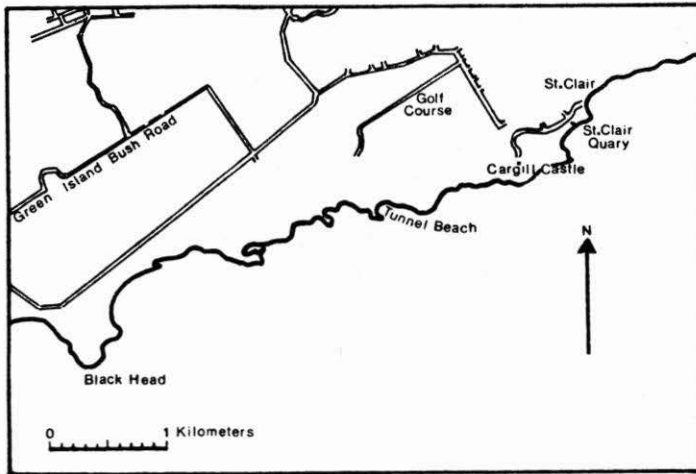


FIGURE 2. Location map.

to Augustus Hamilton) documents the history of this amulet and makes some interesting comments on the formation of the Collier collection of artefacts. Since this collection is, in many ways, typical of those made in Otago in the early 1900s Mrs Hamilton's letter is worth quoting at length:

"This amulet is part of a collection of Maori artefacts made by my brother and I, our interest having been aroused or rather stimulated when I was invited by the Miss de Beers to join a party excavating at Murdering Beach under Harry Skinner. Our collection was got together mainly by fossicking on the middens at Kaikais, Long Beach and Little Papanui. But a few things were given to us, for example, two greenstone chisels... which were ploughed up on land which he (Murray Thompson) farmed at Murdering Beach; and this much more important amulet.

This was given us by friends, dairy farmers along the cliffs above our home at St. Clair. The McLarens were early settlers and built their home, Kenmure, on the land now part of the St Clair golf links. The amulet was found exposed after a small landslide on the steep hillside just beyond the almost perpendicular volcanic rock over-

lying the sandstone of the cliffs between Cargill's Castle and Tunnel Beach by, I think Duncan McLaren.... It was given us by his sister Nellie."

When the amulets were first described Skinner (1934) stated that they were found "in a cleft in the cliffs that extend south from St Clair". However in the later revision of this work he says that they were ploughed up near the cliff top at Green Island Bush (Skinner, 1974:81). The source of the 1934 statement is not known; the later one has been taken from Dr T.M. Hocken's annotation (date unknown but prior to 1910) of a drawing of the pair made by Mrs Hocken (n.d.). Neither of the amulets, however, was ever in the possession of Dr Hocken and it is likely that he was mistaken in the provenance.

Augustus Hamilton (n.d.) records that the amulets were found in a grave, which is certainly not inconsistent with a landslide or a rock cleft. Cliff burial was a common practice in coastal Otago. Skeletal material representing five individuals was found just north of Cargill's Castle at the St Clair basalt quarry in February 1922 (Dennison, pers. comm.) and reports of other eroding burials along the coast are common. The association of the amulets with a burial might well be expected. Two of the three tongue-shaped chevroned amulets that have been found in Otago, those from a rock cleft at Outram (Monheimer and Skinner, 1956) and Hooper's Inlet (Skinner, 1974:78), were associated with burials, as was a pair of asymmetrical chevroned amulets found at Wickcliffe Bay (*ibid*:82). It is not known if the only other asymmetrical chevroned amulet found in Otago, a single amulet from Little Papanui, was derived from a burial.

There is no record of any other cultural material having been found with the amulets. Nor is there any artefactual or faunal material in the Otago Museum's collections from the area between the St Clair quarry and Tunnel Beach. The only site recorded is an oven. It is, therefore, most likely that the amulets were found exposed by a landslide in a cliff top burial just south of Cargill's Castle.

The archaic features of the amulet pair and their relationship to other types have been discussed by Skinner (1934, 1943). The right side member was not available to Skinner for study, however, and neither were fully described.

They are both carved from ivory and on each the two ridges on the obverse side have been decorated with a series of notches

or serrations. The left member is extensively burnt and both the distal tip and the lateral projection on the proximal end are broken. The internal edge of the obverse side of the proximal end has also broken off and this, as well as the damage caused by burning, has removed any evidence of cord marks. The left piece is 161 mm in length and has twelve serrated triangles and eight chevrons. The lower (distal) five had been removed prior to burning. Only the uppermost was intact when found and it has since broken off. The right member, which is 164 mm in length, is also broken at the distal end. It has fifteen serrated triangles and eight chevrons, the distal four of which were broken off before the others. The lower three chevrons have minute perforations but only the distal one is intact. The shape of this chevron and the placement of the perforation are reminiscent of the human faces on the pair from Wickcliffe Bay (see Skinner, 1974:82).

Asymmetrical chevroned amulets are extremely rare and important archaic artefacts. Only four pairs and one single example are known to have been found. All are now on display in public museums in New Zealand. None of these were obtained from stratigraphically controlled excavations and very few details of their provenances are available. The recent return to Otago of one of the Cargill's Cliff pair has enabled its recent history to be documented and the pre-European context of the pair to be reappraised.

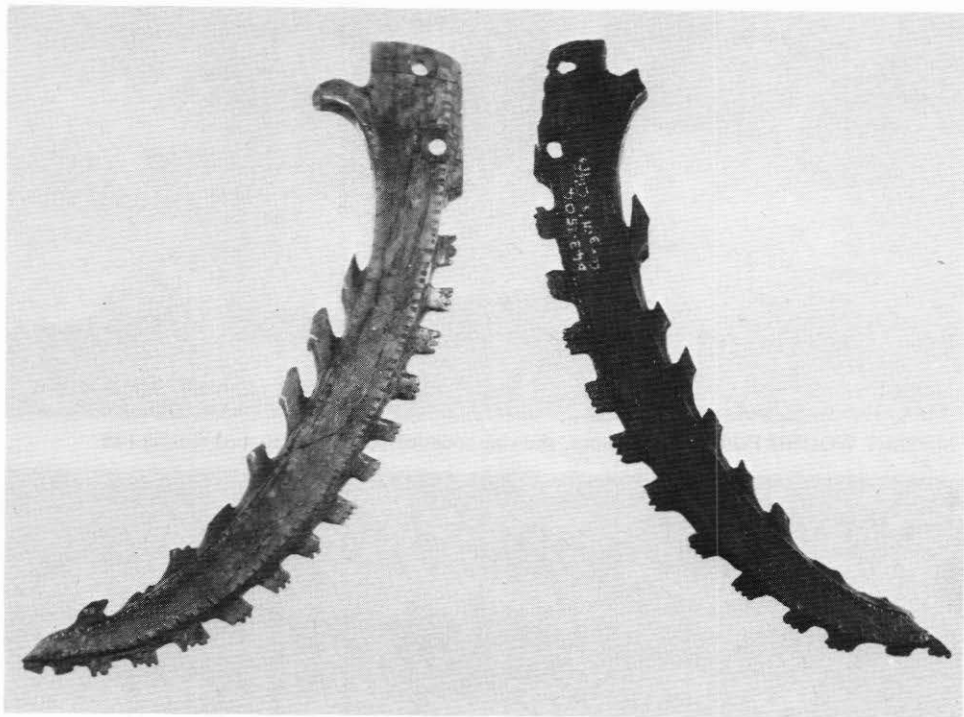
Acknowledgements

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CARGILL'S CLIFF ANULET. The two parts together again.