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THE EAST OR CABANA LODGE SITE, WHANGAMATA

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New Zealand's earliest settlers seldom missed areas that were close to marine food supplies and were pleasant places for year-round occupation. The southern foreshore of Whangamata Harbour on the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula is a most notable place of this kind and there is much evidence of occupation for about a mile from the entrance. Many late shell middens exist along the western side of the harbour as well.

Pat Murdock and I explored this foreshore in 1962 and found flakes and bone material. This led to Wilfred Shawcross conducting an excavation on the foreshore in 1963 (Shawcross, 1964). I was aware of the existence of the wharf site, later excavated by Jan Allo (1972), as much bone material exposed by the wind had been taken by me to the Auckland University Anthropology Department. Because of my interest, a neighbour, Mr Morton, told me at the beginning of the Easter Holiday 1968 that a Mr East had been giving artefactual pieces to friends including Mr Morton who had two hook pieces.

On enquiry I found that Mr and Mrs East were the new proprietors of the Cabana Lodge which was situated just across the road from the Shawcross excavation. I discovered that they had made an enormous hole in the front lawn with the intention of forming a rose bed. This hole was the source of the artefacts I had seen and heard of. The Easts proved to be very friendly and agreed to my enlarging the hole to 10 ft square dimensions and trowelling in proper style. The excavation took place on three successive days in April, 1968.

Due to the activities of miners, fishermen and later permanent residents, the top layer (1) was badly mixed. It was still very rich artefactually. Only an odd post had disturbed layer 2. It is probable that the original top of the site would have been at least half a metre above the top of the lawn.

Each layer was approximately 15 cm in thickness. There was slight difference in colour. Layer 1 was sand darkened by ash and by gardening. Layers 2, 3 and 4 were grey rather than black and were well compacted.

One has to realise that the site was a more or less consolidated dune, although this is perhaps hard to appreciate when a wide tar-sealed road separates the Shawcross site from this. It would indeed be hard to estimate the amount of artefactual material swept away by the road makers. The three lure shanks in bone in layer 1 and the three recovered by Mr East and the fact that a good lure hook was unearthed by the Shawcross party gives some idea of the material swept away.

The wharf site had two cultural deposits, the lower layer containing

few artefacts but bones of dog, moa and other extinct birds, and an upper nineteenth century shell midden containing both Maori and European artefacts. Some traces of European occupation were also present on the surface of the Cabana Lodge site, but the bulk of the cultural deposit contained Archaic artefacts and can be considered approximately contemporary with the lower layer at the wharf site. Both areas and the site of the Shawcross excavation are recorded as one extensive occupation area, N49/2, in the New Zealand Archaeological Association files.

Although some roughouts were found at the Cabana Lodge and some flakes, these were not as numerous as could have been expected. In other words the site was probably the fish hook and lure manufactory for the area. A large number of flakes had been revealed by Mr East while making one roadway about 10 metres from this site. Most of them helped to surface the roadway.

The flakes are of the usual Opito basalt. Most of the obsidian appears to be of Mayor Island origin, although some Coromandel is probably also present. The rivers including the Wentworth within say 10 miles of the site contain plenty of jasper and quartz material. One wonders how far this was traded. A drill made from an argillite adze fragment is of interest. No one seems to know the source of the file material, hard sandstone of various grades of roughness. This also would be good trading material. There is plenty of pumice along the main beach and in places in the harbour.

A seal tooth appears in layer 3, but only one dog tooth which I considered odd in view of the amazing plenty of dog remains in the Wharf site (Allo 1972).

### Conclusion

I know of no better situated site of this kind. It is not easy to estimate the size of the moa hunter portion of the area but I should imagine at least 500 metres by 100. The Cabana Lodge portion was extremely rich. One Opito site is the only other place I know of on the Coromandel Peninsula where so many artefacts were present per cubic metre.

The middens mentioned on the western side of the harbour are on the fringes of at least 100 acres of good land suitable for kumara. The moa hunter was not very interested in gardening but the later Maori was. Although of course the Maori was glad of the marine resources he sensibly lived near his gardens. There are two pa about a mile distant, not very large ones, but the Maori middens suggest a large population.

I am much indebted to Mr and Mrs East and their son for assistance and hospitality to a hardworking enthusiast. The material from the Cabana Lodge excavation was placed on deposit at the Auckland Museum by Mr and Mrs East.

References

- Allo, Jan      1972      The Whangamata Wharf Site (N49/2): Excavations on a  
Coromandel Coastal Midden. Rec. Auckland Inst. Mus.  
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- Shawcross,    1964      Stone Flake Industries in New Zealand, J. Polynes.Soc.  
Wilfred      73 (1): 7-25.

Table 1. Summary of finds from Cabana Lodge Whangamata.

6	lure shanks
1	lure point
19	hook pieces
7	hook tabs
1	bone needle
1	imitation whale tooth necklace unit
13	adzes, roughouts and adze fragments
13	drill points
2	hammer stones
7	files
	flakes of obsidian, chert and basalt
	bone especially bird and moa
	assorted European material including nails and slate