



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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THE GREAT HARBOUR OF TARA. by G.L. Adkin.

The view may perhaps reasonably be held that, as a preliminary to archaeological research within any area or district, the cataloguing of the traditional place-names and the accurate plotting of oldtime sites with indications of their principal features (or by conventional signs), is a task of first priority. One may go further and suggest that without such a comprehensive preliminary survey of any area, the work of the archaeologist may fail to achieve its full value and meaning. This could particularly apply to the New Zealand region where culture deviation from its sole link - distant Oceania and its border lands - leaves only local native customs and traditional lore as a guide to pertinent interpretation of the material revealed by systematic excavation.

It was something of these considerations that led to the compilation of a revision of the recorded but widely dispersed place-names and the olden sites of Wellington Harbour and environs, and a deciding factor was the availability now of suitably accurate and detailed topographic maps. The recently published volume bearing the title, The Great Harbour of Tara, by G. Leslie Adkin (Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., 1959), had for its objective the bringing together into systematic order all the recorded Polynesian place-names of South-western Wellington, and the placing of them in their correct positions on the adequate modern map. Previously no such map was available and many places of former occupation or other human use could not be exactly sited. With the aid of an adequate map, reconnaissance of the territory enabled, in many cases, sufficient traces of bygone sites to be found to allow them to be precisely plotted. This involved some places the position of which required amendment and, in addition, included spots never before plotted, as well as a few newly recorded names preserved principally on obscure tattered early manuscript maps and plans.

A lengthy list of bygone inhabitants, recorded by the early writers, reveal different customs and cultural characters, that archaeology is now tending to confirm or elucidate, while reciprocally, tradition has provided useful clues in assessing and correctly interpreting the evidence revealed by the spade. A helpful point that has emerged is that the version of the traditional record received by the earlier European enquiries appears nearer

actuality, as shown by the archaeological evidence, than do some subsequent versions that have been modified and embellished under the influence of pakeha-introduced doctrines and ideas.

The succession of peoples that have been in occupation of the Te Whanga-nui-a-Tara territory have all contributed to the place-nomenclature. Since Polynesian place-names embody much history of bygone inhabitants as well as preserving the names of many notable people from among them, the value of place-names and of the sites with which such names were associated, cannot be other than an aid in the assessment of data obtained by archaeological investigation. Conversely, where and to the extent that the archaeology confirms or fits in with tradition, such tradition may confidently be accepted, at least on a tentative basis, as having sound foundation on fact, to the mutual benefit of both studies. Some scepticism may have been felt as to the ability of a non-literate people such as the Polynesians in their primitive state, to preserve with accuracy and hand down knowledge of the events and names of persons of hundreds of years earlier. The Polynesians had a highly organized, practised, and rigid system of memorized oral transmission, from generation to generation, of racial and tribal events and the names of personages (with protracted genealogies) from very remote times. It is suggested that through much of the period of Pacific occupation and continuing into the occupation of Aotearoa (New Zealand), successive migrations of incomers and conquerors espoused residues of captured women who transmitted their own particular knowledge, period by period, to their progeny, and by this means the older names, of places and events, were in some measure preserved for posterity.

The publication under notice will serve to emphasize the value of a knowledge of local geology and geomorphology in clarifying and in some cases explaining the significance of archaeological positions and functions. There is at least one archaeological site (nameless and therefore not referred to in this book) in the Wellington Harbour area which, on a casual and uninformed assessment, could never have been used (on its apparent face value) for human occupation, as it is at the present time at high-tide level and was below sea-level prior to the uplift and earthquake of 1855. A summing up of the site from the geomorphological angle, however shows that certain coastal changes (other than the uplift) have occurred at this place, and that the cooking ovens and midden heaps of the site are indeed in situ and that this scene of former activity was once undoubtedly a snug, dry, and favourable spot of

food preparation over a considerable period.

AN ARCHAIC TYPE OF MAORI HEI-TIKI FROM THE WAIRARAPA EAST COAST

by T. Barrow.

Illus. Plate 1.

Map ref. Pahaoa N.166 (271129)

Mr. R.H. Broughton of Masterton recently placed on deposit with the Dominion Museum a small tiki which he discovered (April, 1957) imbedded in surface sand on the floor of a wind-eroded hollow in dune about a mile south of Honeycomb Rock lighthouse, and approximately 400 yards from the shoreline. The front and back views of this tiki (Plate 1) indicate that the specimen is remarkable in both form and material.

First reference to Mr. Broughton's discovery appeared in a Wellington newspaper (Evening Post, 6/5/57) under the caption "Baby tiki proves a puzzle - Unique find on the Wairarapa coast." The report also suggested that the material might be tropical clam (tridacna) but I was unable to reconcile this with the photograph appearing with the article which showed unusual but clearly Maori workmanship. As I was overseas at the time of the discovery it was not possible to investigate the find immediately, but soon after my return to New Zealand Mr. Broughton visited the Dominion Museum with the tiki, deposited in in the collection, and kindly invited me to visit the site of the discovery. In March, 1959, with Mr. Keith Cairns I visited Mr. Broughton at Glenburn, when it was possible to travel in company south, to the location defined above. Apart from the benefit of general observations in the region, it was possible to establish the existence of fragments of human bone where the tiki was discovered, which confirmed beyond reasonable doubt, that the artifact was in primary association with a burial.

With reference to the material of manufacture, this was positively identified by Dr. F.K. Dell of the Dominion Museum as large dog cockle (Glycymeris laticostata). The Bollens Collection yielded two simple ornaments from Cape Maria van Diemen cut from the same type of shell and revealing the "grain" visible on the tiki. This "grain" is due to the pronounced radial ribs of the large dog cockle which give rise to regular wavy striations which remain clearly