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THE LOST PA OF KAIKOURA

Michael Trotter and Beverley McCulloch
Summer Wine Initiatives
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In 1959 Tony Fomison – who was later to achieve fame as an artist of some renown – commenced a site survey of the Kaikoura area. This was not long after the commencement of the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site recording scheme (Daniels 1970) and although a number of others had noted the presence of archaeological sites in the area (e.g. Elvy 1948, Sherrard 1948, Duff 1938-59), to a large extent Tony was breaking in new ground. He had a particular interest in pa sites and carried out some analysis of the features and types present in comparison to those known elsewhere, especially in the North Island (e.g. Fomison 1959). All the Kaikoura pas that he located were on distinct topographical features: ridges, spurs, terraces etc.

Tony had come across a reference to a pa situated a short distance south of Kaikoura (possibly that of Elvy 1948: 74) and there was also local tradition that it was located near the golf course, which is also south of Kaikoura.

However, an exhaustive search of the foothills and bluffs in this area failed to reveal any sign of earthworks, and he was so convinced that there was no such pa that he later filled in a site record, number S49/22 (in the imperial system of that time), indicating that it did not exist *“to save other researchers wasting their time in trying to locate it.”*

This then was the situation until 1986; over twenty pa sites had been recorded in the district (mostly by Tony Fomison), the greatest concentration of any area in the South Island – and there was one site, referred to by Elvy and known traditionally, but which could not be found on the ground. In that year we were working with a team of volunteers on the Fyffe Moa Hunter site in Kaikoura (Trotter and McCulloch 1989: 19-21), a project in which we were

being assisted by the Kaikoura Historical Society. One of the features of the site was garden walls – about which there was considerable discussion. Just before lunch one day, the secretary of the local Society, Wilson MacKenzie, asked (rather diffidently) about the possibility of such garden walls occurring on his son's property near Elms Creek, south of Kaikoura. There were, he said, some wall-like structures on the property which he did not believe were natural in origin.

A lunch time visit was suggested, and we duly set off – although privately we did not have any great expectation of locating a new site in such a well-surveyed area. (O us of little faith!). Robert Louis Stevenson maintained that *“to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive”* – a maxim that had served us in good stead through several decades of being taken out to view possible sites (tree-dimple pits, sheep-raddle rock drawings, dead-cow moas etc.) but this time what greeted us on arrival was beyond our wildest expectations.

Standing on the verge of State Highway 1, a piece of road over which we (not to mention Elvy, Fomison, Duff, Sherrard and probably umpteen other observant(?) archaeologists) had driven countless times, Wilson pointed to a long and horribly obvious “wall”, now sporting a ‘palisade’ of mature gum trees, running off at right angles from the road (Figure 1).

Stunned into silence we turned and looked on the other side of the highway, and yes, clearly lining up, albeit cunningly disguised as an apparent sandhill, was the wall's continuation, the whole thing having been cut in half by road construction.

Ten minutes of inspection later, and a few questions which elicited the fact that “masses” of artefacts had been dug up in the past when the land on the opposite side of the road had been utilized as a market garden, and we were quite certain of an almost unbelievable fact. Wilson's possible “garden walls” were undeniably defensive earthworks. We were, without doubt, standing on Tony's non-existent pa.

And so uttering cries of “Eureka” (a reaction which we believe Wilson found suitably gratifying) we returned to our dig at Fyffe's.

It was not until 1990 that we found time to return to the site to survey and record it. We used Tony's original site record number (S49/22) now metricated

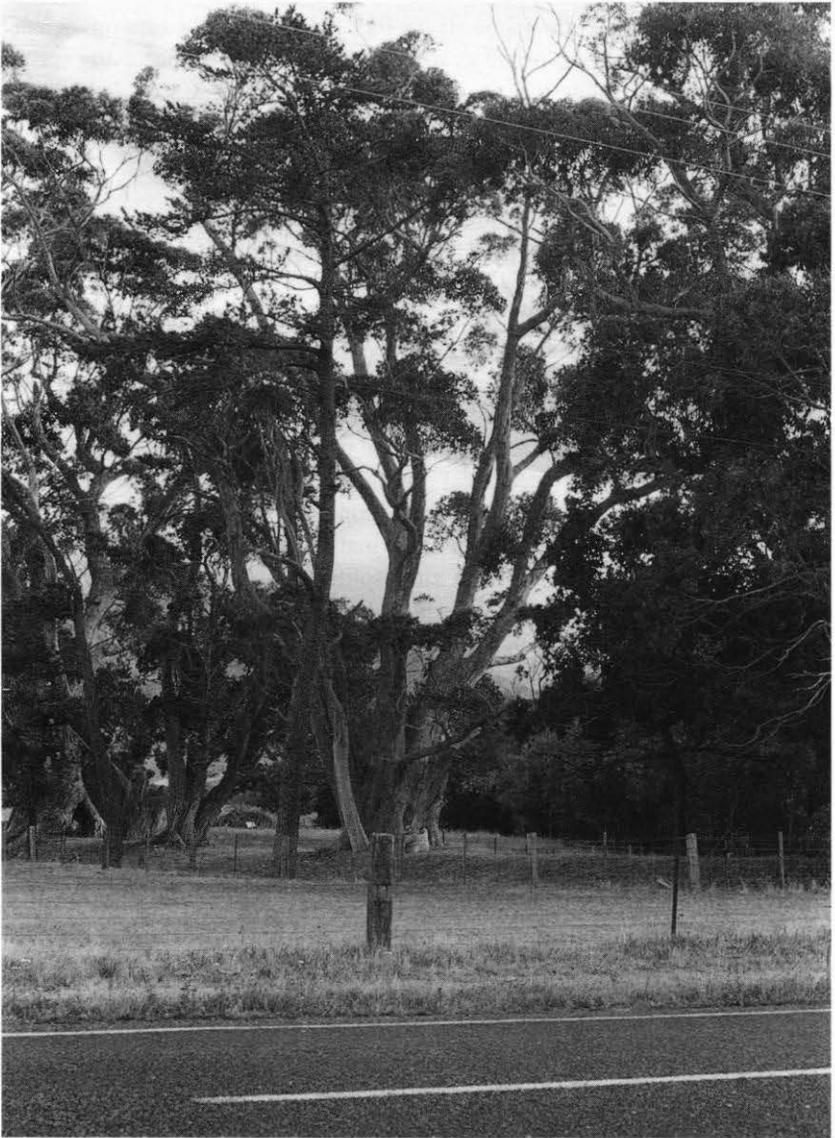


Figure 1. Trees have been planted on the defensive wall of the Elms Pa but it is still clearly visible from the main road.

to O31/14. We also retained his original comment on the updated form as a wee piece of history. The name 'Elms Pa', used originally for convenience, has stuck; it seems appropriate as we have been unable to locate any specific Maori name for either the pa or the area, and Elms Creek (which runs alongside Elms Cottage) does form part of its boundary, while the site lies on land which was originally part of G. H. Bullen's historic run, "The Elms".

Here then is the first published formal description of the lost pa of Kaikoura:

The Elms Pa (O31/14, grid reference O31/606 650) lies on State Highway 1 some five kilometres south-west of Kaikoura. It is bounded by ditch and wall earthworks on its south-west side and by a meander of Elms Creek elsewhere (see Fig. 2). It would have covered about one and a half hectares, depending on where the stream was at the time of occupation. Burnt stones, heat stained soil and occasional artefacts are visible on surface, with numerous artefacts having been found on part of the site when it was cultivated a few years ago (cultivation marks can still be seen). The State Highway runs right through the site, splitting its defensive wall in two. Trees have been planted on the wall on the western side of the road, and a portion of the eastern side next to the road has been dug away. It is the only flat-land pa known to occur in the Kaikoura area.

It is perhaps understandable why Tony Fomison didn't find the pa. He had to rely on others for transport while he was in Kaikoura – travelling in someone else's car may not always have been conducive to site seeing – and besides, he expected it to be on higher ground, as are all the other pa sites in the Kaikoura district. He may also have been misled by Elvy's comment that the pa was adjacent to "Maori Leap Bluff", and like Elvy assumed the pa also was on the bluff. (However, the "Maori Leap" tradition has also been associated with other pas in the Kaikoura area, including Pariwhakatau (Sherrard 1966).)

But it is harder to explain why no-one else from the archaeological fraternity noticed it. Roger Duff, for instance, recorded an occupational site that was reported by a keen local amateur archaeologist just a couple of hundred metres south of the defensive wall in 1966 (O31/38). And we travelled along the main road that runs right through the site scores of times without recognizing it.

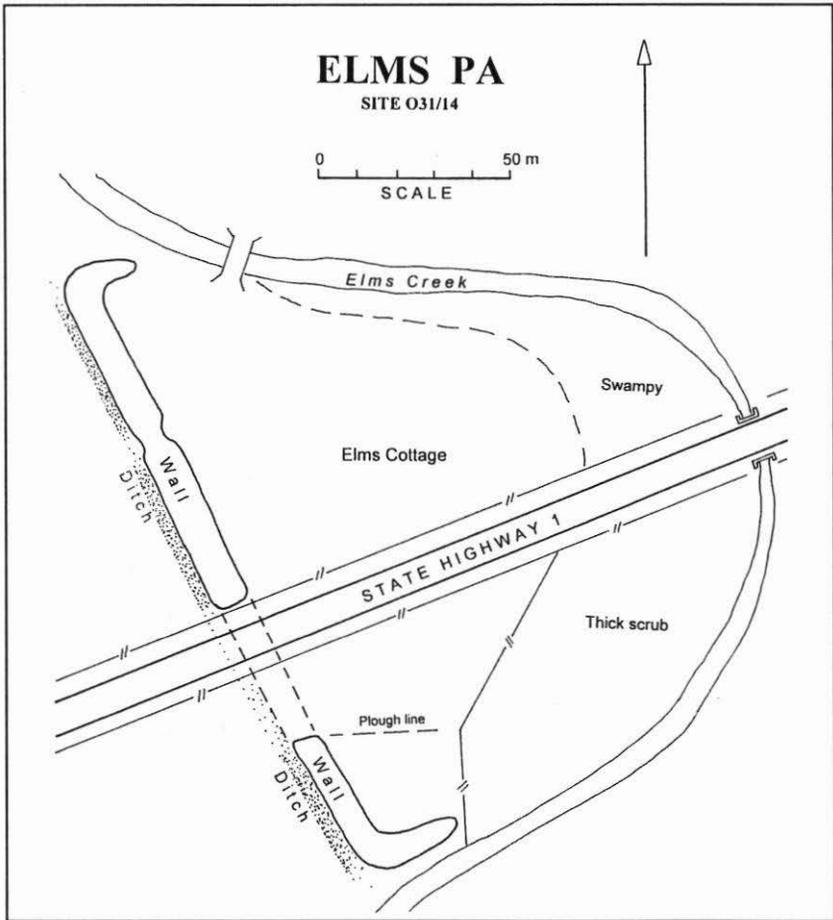


Figure 2. Plan of the Elms Pa (O31/14), south of Kaikoura.

It may have been the gum tree/sandhill disguise that drew one's eyes from the obvious. We believe, however, that it was simply that no-one was looking for something that was right underneath their noses – that's *our* excuse anyway.

Lost it may have been – non-existent it surely wasn't – but indubitably it is clearly visible on either side of State Highway 1, even at 100 kilometres an hour.

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