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TWO MORE FISH TRAPS FROM BANKS PENINSULA, CANTERBURY

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Two years ago, in this publication, we described an intertidal structure adjacent to Onawe Pa, in Akaroa Harbour, Banks Peninsula, Canterbury, which we tentatively identified as a Maori fish trap (Trotter and McCulloch 1998). We have no reason to revise this identification, although until recently it was the only structure of this particular type with which we were familiar.

Gary Law (1982: 52) pictured a trap of a slightly different type, from Coromandel, and Kevin Jones (1994: 73) cited both this and the one from Onawe as examples of fish traps – but noted that others were known. We have not been able to locate any published descriptions of any of these others, but a recent CINZAS listing from the site records shows, without giving details, that nineteen sites described as fish traps have been recorded from the northern half of the North Island and three from the South Island – one record from Nelson and two from Canterbury. Of these latter, one is the Onawe trap (N36/127). The second (M36/127) is one that we recorded from Quail Island in Lyttelton Harbour last year, and for which we here give a first published description, along with another Quail Island example that we found only recently. A possible fourth Canterbury example (not located on the ground – or in the water) shows as a sub-circular structure on early aerial photographs taken in 1941 and 1962 situated alongside the eastern shoreline of adjacent King Billy Island.

Quail Island (Kawa-kawa or Otamahua), which lies near the head of Lyttelton Harbour (Figure 1), is about 1.5 kilometres long with an area of about 80 hectares, much of it more than 50 metres above sea level. It is entirely composed of volcanic rocks, basalt and rhyolite. Tiny King Billy Island has

a length of less than 120 metres and is composed of a sedimentary rock known as Charteris Bay Sandstone.

From Walkers Beach on the south side of Quail Island, mudflats stretch some 500 metres, around smaller King Billy Island, to the Banks Peninsula mainland at Moepuku Point. At low tide these are uncovered and can be walked across without difficulty. Between 1851 and 1975 when the island became a recreation reserve, most access to Quail Island for farm livestock was across these flats.

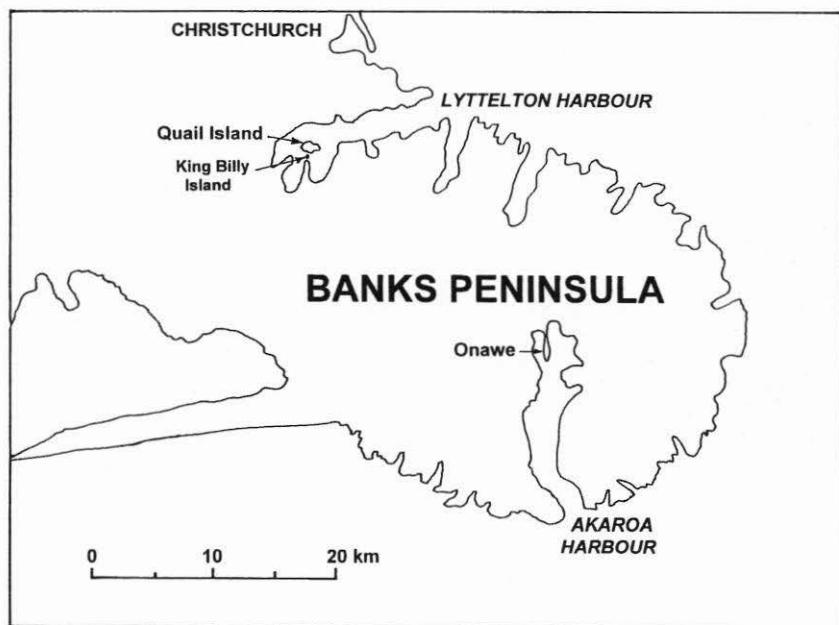


Figure 1. Locality map showing locations of Quail Island and King Billy Island.

One of the fish traps is at the western end of Walkers Beach (site M36/127), and is of the same type as that described from Onawe, although much smaller. It has been built of pieces of basalt rock which lie naturally along the island's coast, having eroded from the beach bank. The shape of the trap can be described as roughly oval – the longest diameter being at right angles to the beach – but with a flat side against the shoreline (see Figure 2). However, scattering of the rocks, both through tidal action and from people walking over

them, makes it difficult to be exactly sure of its original shape. Its shortest diameter is about 13 metres across, and the curved outer side is some 25 metres from the shore bank, giving it an area of around 300 square metres (as compared to the Onawe trap's 2150 square metres). Most of the rocks used to build the wall are no more than 60 centimetres across.



Figure 2. Photograph of the fish trap M36/127 at Quail Island, Lyttelton Harbour.

Seventy metres to the south west, and about 20 metres out from the beach bank, the second fish trap (site M36/138) is much better preserved, being largely covered by the mud and only a few of the uppermost rocks being visible at low tide (Figure 3). Like the first, it was built of pieces of basalt rock from the shore. It was necessary to feel for the rocks beneath the mud to get any idea of its size or shape (Figure 4). This fish trap is of an oval shape, similar to that pictured by Gary Law, but set on mudflats rather than on a rocky shore. Its longest diameter is 17.5 metres giving it an area of only half that of the first. Clearly the level of the mud has risen, or the rocks have sunk into it, since this trap was operational – probably a bit of both. This rise in the level of sedimentation since European use of the Harbour and its surrounds quite

probably accounts for our failure to locate the possible trap off King Billy Island which could now be completely buried.



Figure 3. Detail of part of the stone wall of fish trap M36/138, largely covered by mud.

The Banks Peninsula Harbours, Akaroa and Lyttelton, present the ideal conditions for the construction of such fish traps with the juxtaposition of tidal mudflats yielding ample food for shallow water, bottom feeding fish species, and abundant shoreline rock, occurring naturally in easily-handled pieces, available for fish trap construction.

There is, however, one slightly puzzling aspect to the presence of these two traps at Quail Island. Even relatively small structures such as these would require considerable labour to construct and maintain, and it might be assumed that this could only be justified were they to be used on a regular basis. This in turn suggests that they would be built in close proximity to some permanent or at least semi- or seasonally-permanent site of occupation – as is the case at Onawe. But there is little archaeological, and no recorded traditional evidence of any such occupation of Quail Island, King Billy Island or the Moepuku peninsula. The only archaeological sites of Maori origin located (other than the fish traps) have been beach middens and a small rock shelter near a fresh-water spring. The upoko of the local runanga, Ngati Wheke, knew of the island as occasionally visited for its food resources in pre-European times, including the collecting of birds' eggs from nesting sites in the cliffs, rather than a place of permanent occupation (Bill Gillies, personal communication, 2000). Peter Jackson in his book *Quail Island - A Link with the Past*, suggests that "It is thought that because of the shortage of freshwater and firewood, Otamahua [Quail Island] was never permanently settled by the Maori people." (Jackson 1990: 14).

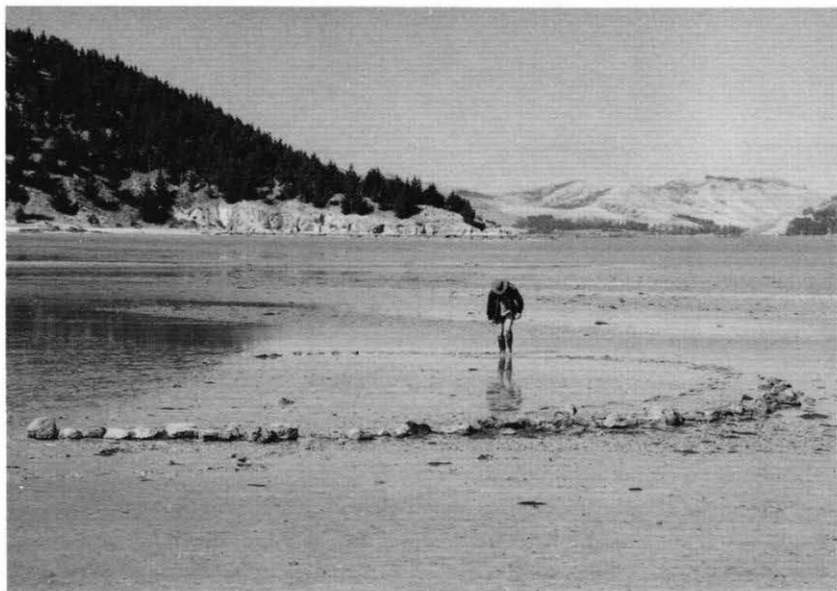


Figure 4. Ian Hill of the Department of Conservation locates the far wall of fish trap M36/138.

On the other hand there have been a number of isolated finds of stone artifacts on Quail Island over the years, mostly adze-heads of a relatively late type, although a reported finding of greenstone "chips" (Jackson 1990: 16) could suggest an earlier period occupation.

As Quail Island has been quite intensively utilized by Europeans since 1851, it is quite likely that any evidence of Maori occupation of a more permanent nature has been obliterated or obscured, or even destroyed by coastal erosion.

Acknowledgements

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