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TWO UNRECORDED EPA FROM WAITARA, NORTH TARANAKI

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On Monday 11 July, 1983, while a Waitara man was working at his small plant nursery adjacent to Ngati-Maru Road his two sons uncovered an epa [T.M. A83.184] from the swampy margins of a small stream near the rear of the property (G.R. N109/821986). After retrieving the carving, the family returned home and contacted Taranaki Museum. The epa was taken to the Museum and placed in a quaternary ammonia solution (Bioquot 400) and a condition report and treatment proposal formulated. The panel was cleaned and treated with a progressive concentration of poly ethylene glycol (P.E.G.) 4000 in solution.

A site inspection revealed that the panel was apparently lying at an angle, and not flat; there was no evidence of supports, or a platform onto which the panel may have rested. A section of the lower right hand side was broken away and much of the surface decoration had been removed by erosion. No trace of the missing section could be found suggesting the panel may quite possibly have moved from its original location. Extensive cattle trampling around the margin of the stream may have caused the damage.

A single, broad (160 mm) female figure carved in a relatively low relief, but stylistically typical of North Taranaki, dominates the panel. Evidence of three holes for attachment on either side remain, a fourth was probably present on the section now missing from the left hand side. Although eroded, surface decoration is present on the limbs, lips and eyebrows. The patterns able to be distinguished include double spirals at shoulder and hip, with *ritorito* (clusters of flared crescent shaped grooves) and *hae-hae* (sequences of parallel grooved lines) on lower limbs, lips and eyebrows. The background decoration is the interlinked *matakupenga* (fishing net) pattern.

The most conspicuous feature of the panel is a deliberately cut, 70 millimetres by 90 millimetres, square hole placed in the centre of the panel between the head, chest, arm and neck of the figure. There is evidence of reshaping on the neck and body of the figure to accommodate the perforation. The only other Taranaki epa recorded with this feature is the extreme left hand specimen of a set of five comprising the rear wall of a pataka from Motunui (Prickett 1983:318). The function of such apertures is not known.



Figure 1. Two Waitara epa. Measurements given are height outer edge, height inner edge, breadth.

A83.184 (left) - 595 x 965 x 295 mm

A83.185 (right) - 954 x 1215 x 290 mm

Figure 2. Detail of epa A83.184 - see cover.

Two other *epa* [T.M. A83.185, A77.332] have been found in the general vicinity, although only one [A77.332] has yet appeared in published literature (Houston 1959:141-142). The remaining *epa*, recovered from the swamp sometime in the 1950s, has some remarkable similarities with the most recently located panel.

The surface of the earlier *epa* is also badly eroded, apparently by water flow in the swamp, although several events during the first twenty years after recovery have also taken their toll. The panel was removed from Waitara to a woolshed on a farm at Waitaanga, East Taranaki, and sometime during this period it was split in two longitudinally and treated with immersion in linseed oil. In 1978 the panel came to Taranaki Museum on loan.

The extreme left hand side of the panel has been broken away and in several places the rear surface has eroded completely through in the deeply carved areas of the design. All surface decoration detail has disappeared completely through erosion.

Two broad (145 mm) arguably female figures in the North Taranaki style carved in low relief appear on the panel. The larger upper figure dominates the panel and is linked to the lower figure, which has a similar sized head but a compressed body. This general layout of figures in low relief is also similar to the *epa* (A77.332) reported by Houston (1959:141-2). However the latter belongs on the opposite side of a *pataka* and has different dimensions (1000 x 260 mm).

When placed side by side the two recorded *epa* appear to be closely structurally matched, their combined profile suggesting strongly that they belong to the same *pataka* wall. The opposed rows of holes for joining or attachment are not exactly matched, but rather have a range of variation similar to the deliberate tolerance evident on the set of five Motunui *epa*. It appears that the lashing holes on the margins of *epa* were primarily for attachment to *pataka* rather than to opposing panels.

Conclusions

The very close similarities between the two previously unrecorded *epa* found in the same vicinity suggests that they form a matched pair from an end wall of the same *pataka*. The third *epa* recorded by Houston has close stylistic and design similarities but appears not to belong to the same structure.

Acknowledgement

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References

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