

KAIKOURA ARCHAEOLOGY

BEVERLEY McCULLOCH

New Zealand Archaeological Association
Canterbury Museum, Rolleston Avenue,
Christchurch 1, New Zealand.

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews archaeological work which has been carried out recently at several early Maori sites.

Keywords: archaeology, Kaikoura, prehistory.

Kaikoura and its surrounding district has a large number of archaeological sites of Polynesian origin (Fig.1), indicating that in prehistoric times it was as popular a place for people to live and visit as it is today. This was undoubtedly due to its mild climate and abundance of natural resources, particularly those of sea and forest. Because of this, quite a lot of archaeological work has been done in the area; almost all of it carried out in the last 25 years. Although much of New Zealand's early archaeology, dating from last century, was carried out in the South Island, Kaikoura, surprisingly, escaped the attention of earlier investigators, although sites in the area range from one of the earliest places of human occupation known in New Zealand through to those still in use at the time of European contact and including some of the South Island's largest pa.

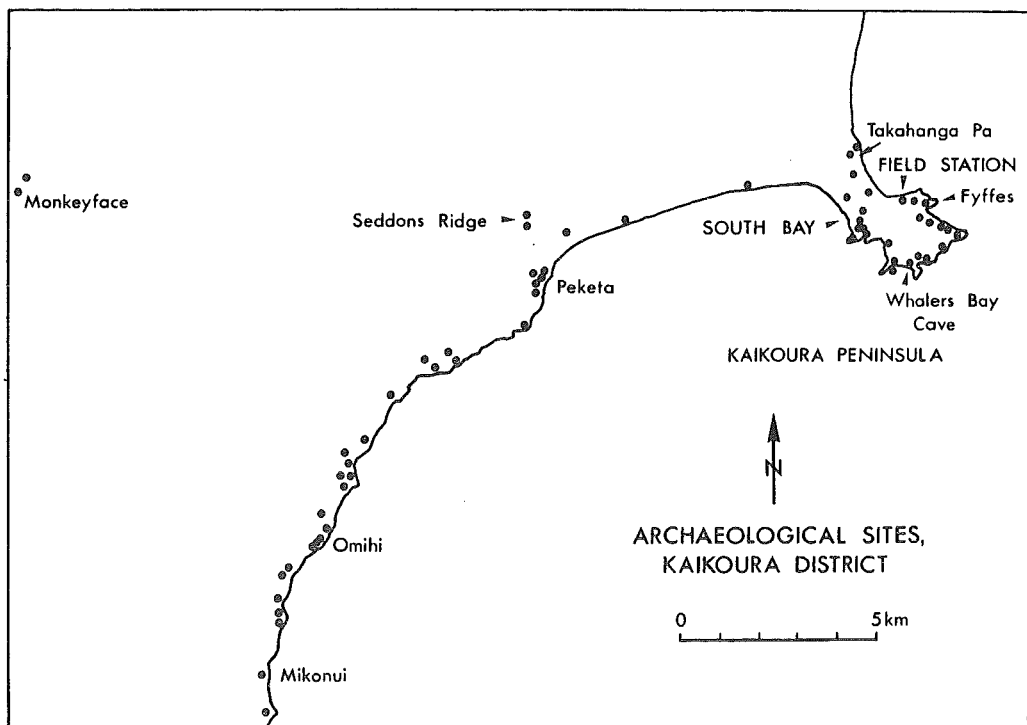


Fig. 1 Location of known archaeological sites at Kaikoura.

Of course very few of the expeditions of investigation in the Kaikoura area have been based on the Edward Percival Field Station, and in fact, the University of Canterbury does not have a department devoted to the study of Prehistory. However it seems particularly appropriate that some of the most recent archaeological work in the district has been done from the Field Station, as modern archaeology is truly a science, drawing on the expertise of all those disciplines such as zoology, botany, geology, geography, ecology etc., for the study of which the Field Station exists. It is as much a study and reconstruction of the environment in which prehistoric man lived as it is of prehistoric man himself.

The first work, in the 1960s, was carried out by the Canterbury Museum Archaeological Society, at the instigation, and under the direction, of the late Dr Roger Duff. It included a site survey of Kaikoura Peninsula by Anthony Fomison who filed comprehensive records of sites with the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site recording scheme as well as publishing the results in its Newsletter (Fomison 1959). It also included excavations at Peketa Pa above the Kahutara River, Goose Bay, several sites at South Bay, and a salvage operation at Whalers Bay Cave. A brief account of the earliest work at South Bay has been published by Fomison (1963) and field records and material recovered from the other sites are held at Canterbury Museum.

Other work in the 1960's was carried out by Michael Trotter, at that time archaeologist at Canterbury Museum. This included excavations at Omihi and Seddons Ridge (Trotter 1972) as well as the recording of prehistoric rock drawings at Monkey Face (above the inland road to Waiau), this latter while working with Beverley McCulloch (Trotter & McCulloch 1971).

The 1970's saw the first excavation at the Fyffe moa hunter' site under the direction of Michael Trotter (Trotter 1980), who also carried out further work on Peketa Pa and supervised an archaeological excavation on a site adjacent to the road immediately below Takahanga Pa (Trotter 1974). Michael Trotter also supervised Barry Brailsford's major site surveying and recording work in the Kaikoura area (Brailsford 1981). The work on the lower Takahanga site was followed up with further excavations for the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, carried out by Steve Edson (1976).

Probably the most significant archaeological work to be done in the Kaikoura area has been that done in the 1980's on the Fyffe moa hunter site and at Takahanga Pa - these being the sites of the earliest and latest known prehistoric human occupation in Kaikoura. Much of this has been done from the Edward Percival Field Station. Subsequent to the 1973 investigation at Fyffe's (which established the very early occupation date for the site - possibly a thousand years before present) the land on which the site occurs, and which had hitherto been little disturbed, was subdivided and sold for building sections. As a result of this it became necessary to carry out urgent and ongoing salvage excavations over a period of several years in order to recover as much information as possible before the site was destroyed. The work done, under the supervision of Beverley McCulloch in 1982, 83, 84, and 85 (and subsequently), will eventually yield important information on the Kaikoura environment at the time of first human arrival.

The work will involve the identification of very large quantities of bird bones - both extinct and extant species - most of them not found in the Kaikoura area today and many of which were not found there when the first European settlers arrived. Fish, reptile and marine mammal bones, when analysed, will add to the picture, as will the shellfish, some species of which are not found around the Kaikoura Peninsula today. (Any animal species, the remains of which are found in quantity on an archaeological site must give rise to the supposition that it originally occurred naturally in the area.)

Other work to arise from the Fyffe investigations will include an attempt to grow kumaras within a presumed prehistoric garden area, identification of charcoal fragments, sourcing of stone-tool materials, further radiocarbon dating, and (although incidental to the archaeology) the analysis of a biogenic beach sand which lies immediately beneath the first occupation level, and which is quite unlike any sand found around the Kaikoura beaches today.

The work on Fyffe's, which will take some years to complete and write up, should make a significant contribution to our knowledge of the early prehistory of the Kaikoura area. The site is situated only a few minutes walk from the Field Station (with the Pier Hotel conveniently in between!) and the volunteers who have worked there are all most appreciative of the Station's accommodation and the generosity of the University of Canterbury in allowing the use of its facilities.

The work done at Takahanga Pa in 1980 and '82 was important at a national as well as local level. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust required that some archaeological investigation be done on this very large pa before it would allow the building of the marae to go ahead. The first excavation in 1980, of a house site and postholes, was carried out by the members of the Maori community themselves, under the direction of Beverley McCulloch and Michael Trotter. The results of this highly successful operation were first published in popular form for the marae community and other interested people in the Kaikoura area (McCulloch & Trotter 1981). Subsequently, further excavations were made on the pa in 1982, the work directed by Beverley McCulloch, again using a team of local volunteers. This time a defended gateway and a section of the once palisaded walls were investigated at the request of the Maori people. Again, the dig was a great success, serving to confirm the historical reports that the pa had been attacked and burnt by musket wielding Ngati Toa under the command of Te Rauparaha. Both investigations have now been fully published (McCulloch & Trotter 1984).

In writing this paper, I have tried to give a brief account of the main archaeological investigations which have been carried out in the Kaikoura district. Several points arise from this. The account does not include the very many day trips and visits which have been made over the years by individuals, such as Sally Burrage's recording of the kumara garden walls at Mikonui and my own and Michael Trotter's trips to various pa and other sites, as well as our conducted tours for various groups. I am conscious too, that I have defined the boundaries of the Kaikoura district very arbitrarily. Extensive work has been done at Clarence Bridge (Trotter & McCulloch 1979) and at Pari Whatatau pa, Claverley (Duff 1961), but I am not sure if these places really qualify as being in the Kaikoura district.

Although I have mentioned a number of sites, it should be made clear that they probably represent less than 10% of the sites in the area - as I said at the beginning, Kaikoura was a popular place to live in prehistoric times.

Finally, I must comment, that with the wealth of prehistoric sites which exist in Kaikoura, it seems to me most ironical that the one site which is publicised and signposted, is the so-called Nga Niho pa on the top of the Peninsula. Not only is this site definitely misnamed (and by misinformed Europeans at that!) but aspects of the pa itself are of doubtful authenticity; some of it is known to have been constructed with European machinery!

We are fortunate that all archaeological sites in New Zealand are now protected by the law - even if - as in the case of Fyffe's - that protection is not always given. Nevertheless, the people of places like Kaikoura, should be grateful that there is now some likelihood that at least the principal sites in their area - which are after all part of their cultural heritage - will probably now be preserved for the appreciation of future generations.

LITERATURE CITED

- BRAILS福德, B., 1981. The Tattooed Land. Reeds, Wellington.
- DUFF, R.S., 1961. Excavations of house-pits at Pari Whakatau Pa, Claverley, Marlborough. Records of the Canterbury Museum 7: 269-302.
- EDSON, S., 1976. The Takahanga Post Office Site, S49/13. An interim report to the Archaeology Committee, New Zealand Historic Places Trust, Wellington.
- FOMISON, T., 1959. Site Survey of the Kaikoura Peninsula. New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter 3: 4-15.
- FOMISON, T., 1963. Excavations at South Bay, Kaikoura. Site S49/43. New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter 6: 116-124.
- MCCULLOCH, B. and M.M. TROTTER, 1981. Takahanga 1980 Canterbury Museum, Christchurch. 29 pp.

- McCULLOCH, G., and M.M. TROTTER. Investigations at Takahanga Pa, Kaikoura, 1980, 1982. Records of the Canterbury Museum 9(10): 387-421.
- TROTTER, M.M., 1972. Pits at Seddons Ridge, Kaikoura. New Zealand Archaeological Association Newsletter 15: 94-99
- TROTTER, M.M., 1974. Archaeological Investigations at Takahanga Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.
- TROTTER, M.M., 1980. Archaeological Investigations at Avoca Point, Kaikoura. Records of the Canterbury Museum 9(4): 277-88.
- TROTTER, M.M. and B.A. McCULLOCH, 1971. Prehistoric Rock Art of New Zealand. Reeds, Wellington 87 pp. (Second edition 1981 Longman Paul)
- TROTTER, M.M. and B. McCULLOCH, 1979. Prehistory at Clarence Bridge. Kaikoura Coastal Reserves Board.