

Tiwai Peninsula

preliminary cultural significance report

Photo credit: New Zealand's Aluminium Smelter (NZAS)



Murihiku
Regeneration

January 2021

Appendix A

Southland Museum
Annual Report
1967-68

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1. Archaeological Site at Tiwai Peninsula

The discovery of an early Maori "workshop" site at Tiwai Point by the Staff of the Southland Museum on 3 May 1968 is possibly one of the most important made in the long search of Maori prehistory, which could throw new light on Polynesian settlement of New Zealand.

The evidence, at this stage of investigation, is of a very early culture of the Moa hunting period of occupation.

The 600 artifacts recovered from the surface and exposed by the elements, were collected by the Southland Museum Staff in the three visits made to the site. The bulk of these artifacts are adze and adze making tools and a few other wood or bone working tools, all of stone.

Indications are that the site is a large adze making workshop, producing tools in large quantities, the bulk of the adze found are in the rough-shaping stage, indicating a well organized, highly skilled, workshop on the site of the raw material - (a type of argillite).

The isolation of the site has protected it from interference by man and, with a little disturbance from introduced animals, such as rabbits, sheep, and cattle, the surface is virtually as it was abandoned at least 200 years ago.

The large collections of finished adze in the Southland Museum, collected over many years, can, in many instances, be traced by the stone and type of adze to this site, though we do not have a single artifact in the hundreds we have from all parts of the province that we know was found at Tiwai. The area has been known to the Museum for many years by repute, to be a place where - "there are plenty of adze over there".

The only finished artifact from Tiwai in the Museum is a granite hammerstone, found when we paid our first visit to the site, five years ago, when the Smelter was proposed to be sited there. We found a little evidence of a "workshop" site but did not regard it of any great importance as the peninsula is of such a bleak appearance, hardly fit for a habitation area. With the recent Smelter interests accelerated, we decided to revisit the area and do a more extensive search and the site, now being archaeologically investigated, was found.

It was of such an extent and importance, we immediately contacted Otago Museum and University and, once again, received their welcome assistance in a well organised team of trained workers, under the capable and efficient supervision of Mr Stuart Park.

The artifacts we found present a much clearer picture of the activities of the early Polynesian people, in particular their method of manufacture of these tools and the skills required to complete them. The addition of the 600 artifacts increases the value of the already large and priceless collection of finished adze in our Museum and shall play an important part in the research workers' knowledge of Maori prehistory.