

# Tiwai Peninsula

preliminary cultural significance report

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



**Murihiku**  
**Regeneration**

January 2021

## Appendix F - 1969 – Tiwai Point – A Preliminary Report by G. S. Park

# Tiwai: Preliminary Report.



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On the second Sunday of my stay we were taken to the top of Bluff Hill. It was a beautiful, calm, sunny day, and the view was magnificent. Tiwai Point lay before us, a great flat sprawling brown mass. The air was so clear that even the green tops of our tents, almost hidden in the scrub, could be seen.

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TIWAI POINT - A PRELIMINARY REPORT

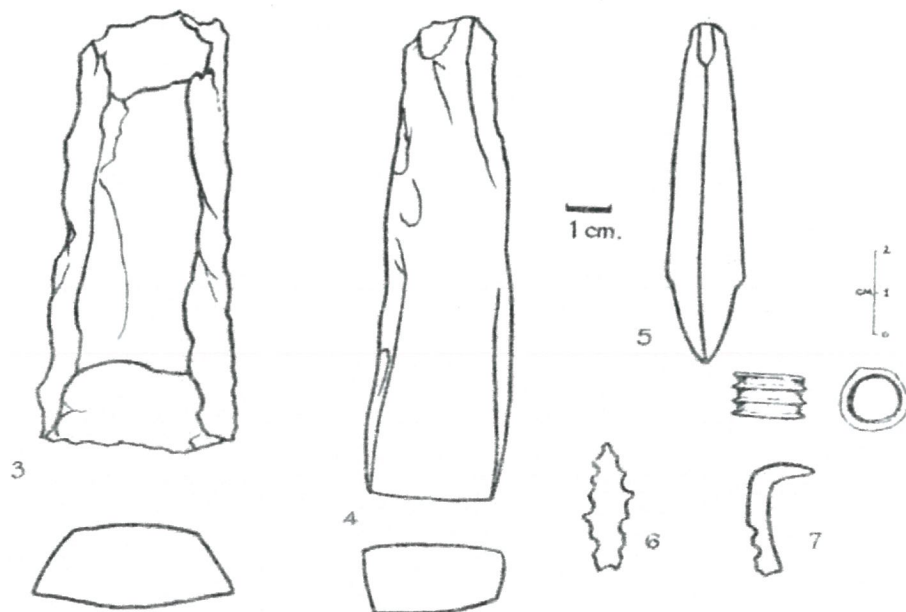
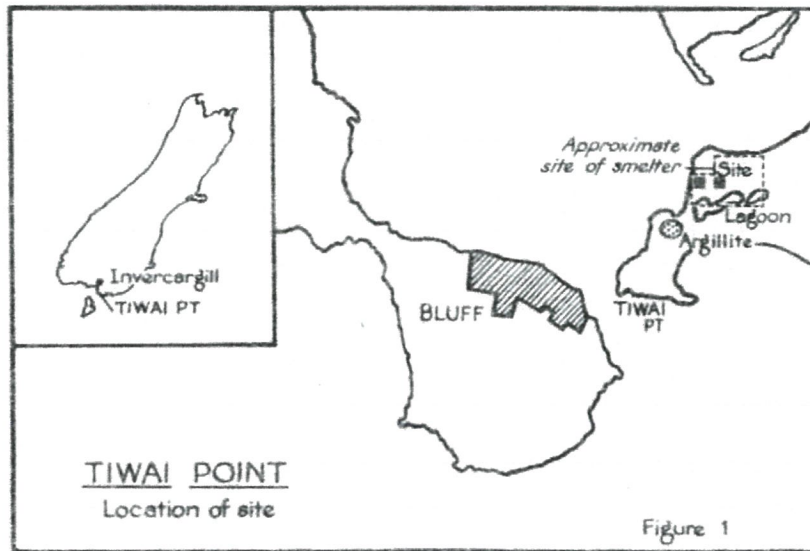
G. S. Park,  
Otago Museum.

Tiwai Point is situated at the end of a long, sandy tussock and scrub covered peninsula, which stretches for eight miles between Awarua Bay and Foveaux Straits (Fig. 1). A channel some half a mile wide separates it from Bluff. The peninsula is comprised mostly of marine gravels and sand, but at the point there are a number of volcanic and metamorphic rock outcrops which are related to the Bluff series. Amongst these are several seams of fine grained black argillite, and a low hill of grey-green, coarser argillite.

Tiwai Point is the site chosen for the Comalco Aluminium Smelter. Several people with archaeological interests have surveyed the peninsula since this became known in 1961, but failed to find any stratified deposits beyond a few eroded ovens.

In April 1968, however, it became obvious that there was an extensive area of stone working, and possible habitation. Southland Museum requested that the Otago Anthropological Society should undertake excavations on its behalf. These excavations lasted nine weeks, in three "seasons" in May, August, and November/December 1968.

The area chosen for excavation was a flat, relatively sheltered area situated between the Awarua Bay and the swampy freshwater lagoon, adjacent to the hill of argillite, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the point itself.



Over the three "seasons", two main areas were dug, as well as a number of smaller ones.

Area B was an area of some 115 square metres, which proved to be an almost discrete working area. Besides a posthole and a number of scoop hearths, the most noticeable feature was the evidence for the deliberate heating of argillite rocks. One large oven, in particular, was filled with charcoal, and big angular pieces of rock. There was no sign of food remains, or of the typical round, water-worn hangi stones we had expected. No explanation is offered for this at present, but it is hoped that some experimentation may produce an answer.

The second area, X, was situated 80 metres East towards the lagoon. This area of some 150 square metres was the more rewarding of the two, and more time was devoted to it. It was discovered when a test pit was put down to try to explain the presence of an exotic boulder of granite. Just beneath the turf was a thick layer of flake material. When a larger area was turfed, several discrete working floors were revealed, with a very high concentration of flake material. This area also contained one posthole and an oven.

The importance of Area X was its direct association with a dense if shallow midden deposit. The density of this material made excavations very slow, with the result that only a small area of midden was excavated, in a line of one metre pits.

Two sub-rectangular depressions were excavated in the belief that they might have been pits, but they proved to be natural sand hollows. An eroded oven on the sea shore was also excavated, as was an associated small eroding midden. The oven was filled with pieces of argillite and charcoal, but no faunal material. The midden seemed to have a different composition from that in Area X.

Only one cultural layer was distinguished, though study may reveal evidence for horizontal stratigraphy.

A very wide range of rock has been worked on the site. Besides the various local argillites, there were: orthoquartzite, chalcedony, fossil wood, obsidian, rock crystal, granite, porcellinite, norite, and sandstone. A number of pieces of mica were also found: it is believed that mica occurs geologically with the rock crystal, and was carried to the site inside a core. Serpentine, coal, quartz, pumice, and a possible nephrite were also present.

Very few artefacts were found. The only finished adze was small, quadrangular, with slight grip reduction (Fig. 4). Several small finished chisels and a number of polished flakes attested to the polishing of artefacts on the site. Most of the adzes found were flake-adzes, often with very little secondary work. Some even showed weathered cortex on one side (Fig. 3). A small shank for a minnow lure,

without the perforation for attachment of the line, a notched but unserrated Hjarno type C5a composite bait hook, and two drilled centres of one-piece fish-hooks (Figs. 5-7) suggest a wide variety of fishing tackle. Three small broken pendants and a serpentine cloak pin (?) and a worked Dentalium shell were the only ornaments found.

The midden material has not been identified completely, but field identification suggested the presence of the following species in the Area X midden:

Shell: Cockle, pipi, cats-eye, paua, and oyster.

Bone: Moa, seal, dog, rat, sea birds, bush birds, and fish.

The presence of bush birds is surprising in an area where there is no bush today. Many moa vertebrae and foot bones were found, which Skinner has used as a criterion signifying moa-hunting in the vicinity.

The eroded midden on the Awarua Bay side produced almost entirely pipi shell and fish bones, and one moa vertebra. This is markedly different from the predominantly cockle midden of Area X.

By comparison of the midden material with Lockerbie's Pounawea sequence, a date in the 16th Century is suggested, but Tiwai is quite a long way from Pounawea, so this must be very tentative.

A great deal of work remains to be done on the material recovered. From the flake material, it is hoped to learn much about the stone technology of the Maori and, in particular, about adze technology. Geological identification of the rocks used will suggest possible trade routes. Various staff members and students of the Otago University Anthropology Department and the Canterbury Museum will study the faunal material, the results of which study will give us much information about the local economy and environmental conditions. Dates for the habitation will be obtained by the radiocarbon and obsidian dating processes.

Acknowledgments: Shortly after the importance of the site was realized, a public appeal was launched by Southland Museum. This received a magnificent response, including gifts of \$250 each from Comalco, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, and the Maori Purposes Fund Board. To all who contributed we owe grateful thanks. Southland Harbour Board provided transport and accommodation for all three seasons. Southland Museum Trust Board and its staff gave the Society every co-operation. Mr and Mrs J. McFarlane of E. R. Garden Limited readily offered help and technical information. We received assistance from the Dominion, Canterbury, Southland and Otago Museums, and from a large number of individuals, who enthusiastically dug in (almost) all weathers. Finally, I wish to thank Drs Higham and Skinner for their comments, and Miss McHugh for the drawings.