

# Motukawanui Island Scenic Reserve

Historic Heritage Assessment

Bay of Islands Area Office



Melina Goddard 2011



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Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

Motukawanui Island Scenic Reserve Historic Heritage Assessment

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Cover image: Papatara Bay taken facing north (DoC).

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Image: *Wai-iti Bay facing north (DoC).*





Figure 1: Location of Motukawanui in the Whangaroa region, Northland New Zealand.



# Map of Recorded Archaeological Sites on Motukawanui Island (ARCHSITE)

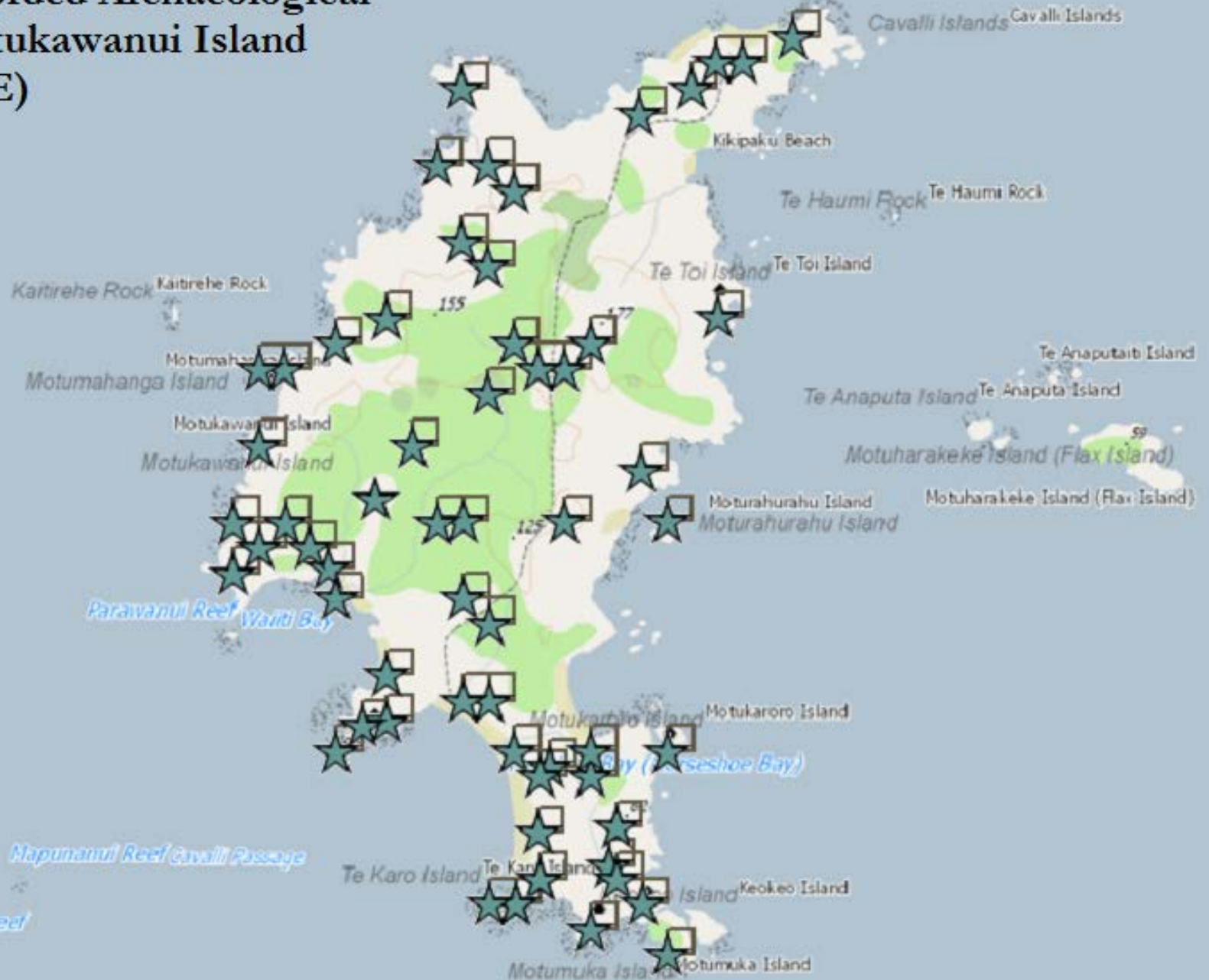


Figure 2: Archaeological sites as recorded in ARCHSITE.

## Site Overview

Motukawanui is the largest island of the Cavalli group located off Northland's east coast, 3km north-east of Matauri Bay and 16km east of the entrance to Whangaroa Harbour (fig 1). The chain consists of numerous sea stacks and about a dozen small islands, the second largest Motukawaiti at 35ha. The Cavalli Islands have long been a focus for Maori settlement and this is represented by high number of recorded archaeological sites. Motukawanui has 55 recorded archaeological sites and the remnants of early European farming in the 1940's (fig 2). The most tangible of these farming remains is the old hut located on Papatara Bay. The island represents a complete archaeological landscape that is a rare remnant of continuous Maori occupation from early settlement through to European contact and later farming. Today the island is managed as a scenic reserve in one of the most stunning and historically significant coastlines in New Zealand.

Land status: *Scenic Reserve*.

Administered by: *The Department of Conservation, Bay of Islands Area Office under the Reserves Act 1977.*

Access by: *Private boat.*

Visitor numbers: *to accommodation hut: from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012=789*

Heritage status: *Protected under the Historic Places Act 1993, the Conservation Act 1987, the Reserves Act 1977 and comes under the ICOMOS charter as a place of cultural heritage value.*

Site area: *354ha*

Functional location number: *DN-61-200-2053*

## History Description

Polynesians arrived in New Zealand some 700-800 years ago, and over the centuries their Maori descendants intensively settled Northland's east coast. The area between the Whangaroa Harbour and the Bay of Islands supported a considerable Maori population and this is reflected in the large number of recorded archaeological sites in the area.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to European arrival the Maori inhabitants exploited the Cavalli Islands' rich and diverse range of economic resources. The island environment would have been similar in many respects to that of their Polynesian homeland. It offered a warm climate with plentiful fishing grounds in relatively sheltered waters, and bays where canoes could be safely beached. A variety of shellfish would have been available on the sandy beaches and along the rocky coast. Kumara, taros, yams and gourds would have been cultivated and bracken root would also have been a large part of the diet. Polynesian taro was planted on the stream flats and on Motukawanui Island evidence of these still remain.

Reportedly Maori also exploited the extensive grey petrel colonies on most of the islands in the group; these were and still are seasonally harvested as mutton-birds.<sup>2</sup>

Geologically the landscape of this coastline and islands is made up of greywacke, of the Waipapa series. It comprises folded marine sedimentary rocks, which formed in the late Palaeozoic and early Mesozoic era. These rocks are exposed in the sheer cliffs, which ring the Whangaroa coastline. The greywacke formation has weathered to soft sandstone, which varies from a greyish orange to a reddish orange colour with cores of white altered sandstone. This in turn has broken down to a strongly leached yellow brown earth of low natural nutrient. The depth varies from 0.5m to 1m deep, or more, when soil has accumulated as hill wash on the lower slopes and in the valleys. Originally the whole area would have been covered with a mixed podocarp forest including kauri.<sup>3</sup> Today, on Motukawanui there is a mix of long grass (kikuyu), ti tree scrub, flax, cabbage trees, pohutakawa and sodoms apple.<sup>4</sup> The northern end of Papatara Bay has mixed exotics planted by the early European farmers of the island. These include a pear tree, grapevines, feijoa, peaches, plums and figs.

Initial European contact provides a source on information of Maori in the late 1700's when Ngati Rehia is said to have had control of the east coast south of Whangaroa.<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant James Cook visited the islands on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1769 aboard the Endeavour. He reportedly "*lay for two hours without wind*" off Motukawanui and during this time several canoes came up to the ship where they traded fish. This was trevally and Cook named the islands the "Cavalles" (today Cavallis) after the fish. The people who canoed out to him were described as being:

*"Stout, well made men, having all of them their hair, which was black, combed up and tied upon the crown of their heads, and their hair stuck with white feathers"*.

The encounter ended when some of the canoes began to pelt the ship with stones and did not desist even with the firing of two musket balls. After more shots they finally retired and the Endeavour left the Cavallis on a northwest wind.

Chief Patuone recalled in 1833 that as a boy he remembered Cook's visit to the Cavallis. The canoe he was on was commanded by his father Tapua:

*"I saw Cook's vessel. To meet it went the people in four large canoes... the canoes were paddled to the vessel, the chiefs went on board and my father received presents of garments"*.<sup>6</sup>

A map that includes Motukawanui was produced in 1793 by two Maori men Tuki and Huru (fig 3). This occurred as a result of Governor Phillip King kidnapping the two from a canoe near Motukawanui. They were taken to Norfolk Island by the Royal supply ship *Daedalus* with the intention of acquiring Maori knowledge of how to work and dress flax so it could be taught to prisoners and then sold.<sup>7</sup>

The map was first drawn on the floor and then on paper. The writing was probably added by either Governor King or one of his assistants. The map roughly illustrates the area from Doubtless Bay to the Cavalli Islands, it also shows the spirit road that leads to Cape Reinga.

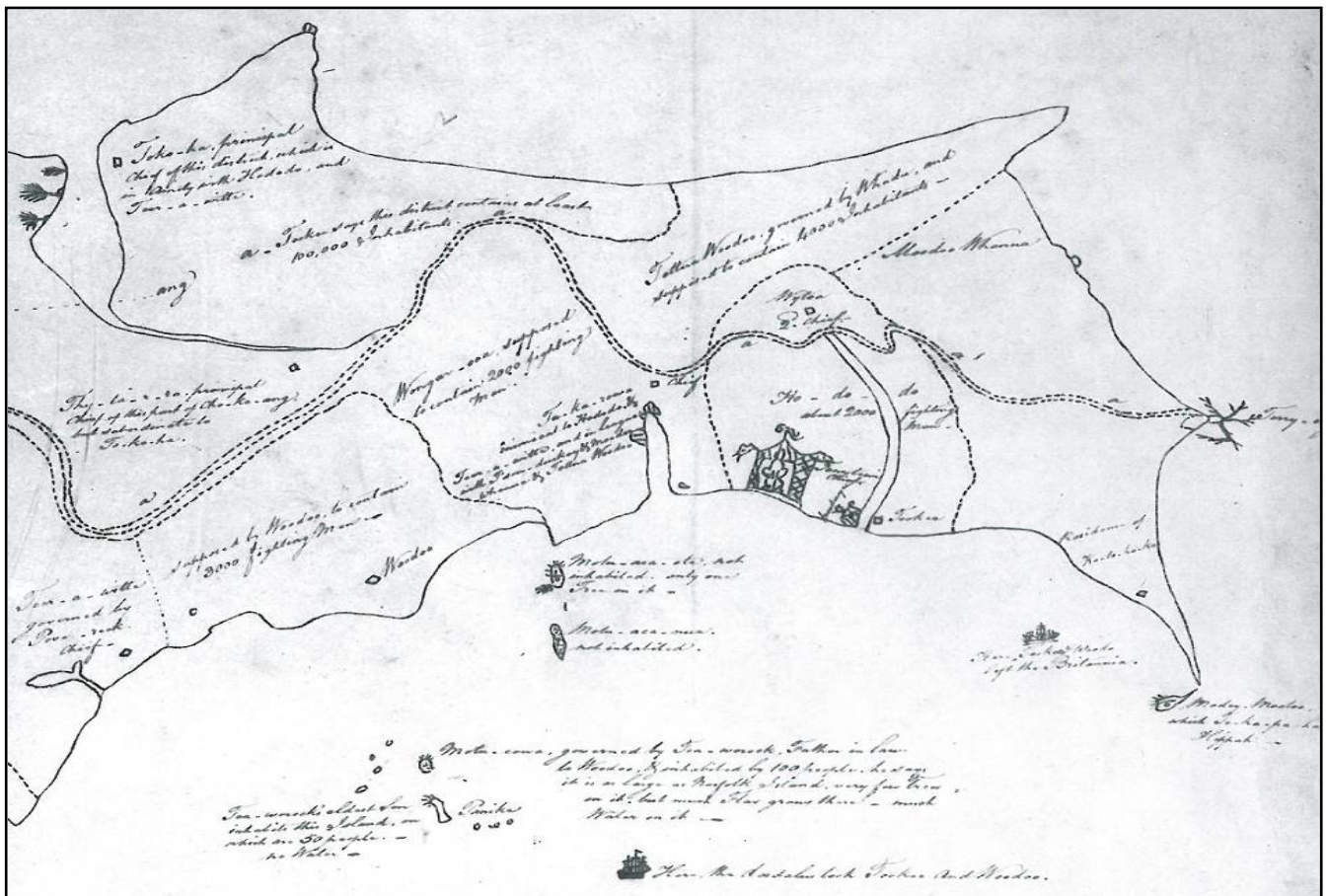


Figure 3: The first Maori map drawn in 1793 by Tuki and Huri for Governor King (Sale 1987:38).

Motukawanui or Motukawa (the latter is probably the island's correct original name)<sup>8</sup> is drawn and described on the map (bottom centre) as:

*“Motucowa governed by Tea-worock, father in law of Woodoo and inhabited by 100 people; he described it as the size of Norfolk Island, very few trees on it, but much flax grows there and much water on it”.*<sup>9</sup>

Twenty-one years later, in 1814, the Reverend Samuel Marsden went ashore on Motukawanui and climbed to its highest point. His companion and chronicler J.L. Nicholas recorded that:

*“The highest part of the island commanded such a magnificent prospect as never in the course of my life beheld”.*<sup>10</sup>

Nicholas goes on to describe the mainland as seen from Motukawanui:

*“Which stretching away to the right presented a straight line of coast... exhibiting a variety of beautiful bays and harbours and surmounted in the background with a range of hills which displayed enclosures covered with the finest verdure and forest glittering with variegated foliage...”.*<sup>11</sup>

Nicholas' somewhat lyrical description is easily understood once the views from Motukawanui are experienced.

With the introduction of guns into Maori society many of the off shore islands were vulnerable to attack and Cochrane suggests that the Maori population left the islands in



the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and relocated close to Northland's coast but the seafood and mutton bird resources continued to be exploited from the mainland.<sup>12</sup>

In the late 1800s forest areas on the island began to be cleared to allow for farming. As a result pasture and soil fertility deteriorated and erosion increased with grazing and regular firing of the scrub.<sup>13</sup>

In 1912 the Maori Land Court declared Motukawanui as freehold land.<sup>14</sup> In 1918 the island was sold to absentee owner George Nelson Shephard Hows.<sup>15</sup> Animal carrying capacity was reportedly low and erosion was serious.<sup>16</sup>

George MacDonald purchased the island off the Hows in 1954, and was the first known European to reside on the island with his family. He discontinued the practice of burn-offs and allowed reversion to manuka on the steeper slopes, he also drained swamps and started using fertilizers. The island now had a higher animal carrying capacity and erosion was reduced.<sup>17</sup> The current hut was probably built during the MacDonald's occupation of the island, (and it is comprised of three small buildings, brought to the island c. 1945-47, which may have been army surplus from WWII). The MacDonald's had left by 1953.

In 1954 it was sold to another absentee owner Herbert George Rix and was then farmed for him by Janet White, an English woman, who was a lone shepherd living in the hut for several years. Her time on the island is recorded in her book *"The Sheep Stell"* which provides a rare insight into a pioneering career choice for a woman of her time.<sup>18</sup>

In 1967 the island was sold to Mr John Schwager and John Hemphill. The island was then lightly stocked with cattle by the caretaker/leaseholder Mr Jack Burdett.<sup>19</sup>

By 1973 Motukawanui was abandoned and the remains of the small hut on the northern end of Papatara Bay is a reminder of the island's former residents.

The crown purchased the island in 1974 through the Lands and Survey Department as a Recreation Reserve under the Reserves and Domains Act 1953. The hut thereafter was used as accommodation for field staff and the public until 2004 when a new accommodation hut was built in Wai-iti Bay.

The island was brought under the control of the Bay of Islands Maritime Park Board in 1978, in 1981 it was classified as a reserve for scenic purposes and in 1987 the Department of Conservation assumed control of the island.

## Fabric Description

Fifty-five archaeological sites have been identified on Motukawanui under the New Zealand Archaeological Association site recording scheme. These were recorded during surveys carried out in 1967,<sup>20</sup> 1978,<sup>21</sup> and 2004.<sup>22</sup> The remains represent built Maori heritage from former occupation of the island. They include fortified pa sites which are on hilltops and headlands, terraces for habitation, storage pits for food storage, middens, the remains of past meals and slope lines indicating past gardening activities.

The largest scale survey was undertaken by Hayward et al in 1978. It encompassed all the Cavalli Islands as part of an offshore islands research trip to study aspects of the islands' ecology and prehistory.<sup>23</sup> Seventy sites were recorded overall, the thoroughness of the survey varied from island to island depending largely upon the vegetation and the report noted that "undoubtedly additional sites have yet to be located".<sup>24</sup> The survey found that because Motukawanui had not been grazed for four years the long grass and ti tree scrub made surveying extremely difficult. Many sites were covered with long grass and Sodom apple and this prevented both accurate determinations of many features and preparation of the plans. Overall the preservation of the ground features was poor and nowhere was pits, ditches or terraces well-defined. This was largely due to modification of the islands over the last 100 years or so. Hayward considered that trampling by cattle during its farmed years was mostly responsible for the extensive damage to the sites on Motukawanui.<sup>25</sup>

The island has only 3 recorded pa sites which are located on the southern end of the island (fig 4&5). Pa sites were used as places as refuge and were also symbols of prestige and mana for the governing tribe. Pa design is influenced by the landscape and social and political factors of the time, and there is generally no specific regional style. Of the pa on the island the largest and most impressive is P04/39 located on the south eastern headland. This pa and the features that define it can be identified from the mainland and is a well known feature of the landscape.



**Figure 4: Pa site P04/39 image taken facing southeast (DoC).**

At Motukawanui the terraces are the most dominant feature of the sites, either as sites themselves or within other site types. Terraces were dug into slopes to create a flat surface for many purposes including huts, storage, cooking, gardening and defence.

Storage pits are well represented at Motukawanui and are often dug into terraces. They were used for storage of kumara and other root crops over the winter months and their distribution mirrors that of gardening activity. Pits were usually covered with a pitched



thatched roof with supporting beams. In addition above ground storage structures or pataka were common in Northland.



**Figure 5: Pa site P04/ located on the headland between Wai-iti and Papatara Bays (DoC)**

There are 4 midden sites recorded on the island. These food refuse sites are found along the beach banks where shellfish would have been eaten, or processed and taken to other living areas. The most frequent species of shellfish in these middens are cockle, pipi and tuatua.

An early midden is recorded on the end of Papatara Bay (P04/179). The contents have been recorded at 4 separate locations and consist of charcoal, shell, fish bone, hangi stones, dog bone and obsidian flakes;<sup>26</sup> cats eye, limpet, scallop, charcoal, fishbone, and fire-cracked rocks.<sup>27</sup> This midden has been monitored over time and much of it has been eroded by wind, sea and cattle. These factors threaten many archaeological sites in New Zealand. They also highlight the need for an island wide survey and register updates of the sites' state of preservation.

Early midden sites have also been recorded on other islands in the Cavalli group,<sup>28</sup> and indicate the first occupation of these islands by Polynesian settlers which later developed into the uniquely Maori society of the mid to later phases of pre-European history.

Evidence for gardening is represented by slope lines. These are shallow parallel trenches running down a slope. Presumably they provided better drainage with increased solar penetration and elevation above cold valley bottoms. They may also have acted as plot boundaries.<sup>29</sup> In addition, given the islands' European farming history there may be the remains of later gardening.

The most tangible aspect of the islands farming history is the hut located on the northern end of Papatara Bay. It is a small timber building constructed in the 1930s-1940s and is in a state of disrepair and decay. During and after the MacDonald family period of farming more buildings were constructed that ran out to the middle of the bay, however the hut is all that remains today although it is probable that the presence of subsurface material from the other buildings still exist (fig 6&7).

Over time, additions and alterations have been made to the structure of the hut resulting in a variety of styles, materials and spaces. It consists of three single storey forms that are joined together. There is a large fireplace located centrally between the main living area and the kitchen and two small bedrooms are located off these two areas. The kitchen and dining room is fitted with a sink, pantry and coal range with a wet back flued into a second chimney that is across from the main chimney. Off the kitchen is a lean-to porch and there is another bedroom which was a later addition on the beach side. The building is constructed of timber with board and batten cladding and the roof is a mix of corrugated iron and asbestos.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 6: The hut which still stands today on the northernmost end of Papatara Bay, and the smaller buildings and wool shed (large building) which are no longer present (MacDonald family album DoC).**





**Figure 7: The back of the hut as it stands today on the northern end of Papatarā Bay (DoC).**

Some of the original furniture is still located within the building,<sup>31</sup> and the shelves still contain shells that were placed there by previous owners. The building, although run down and unlivable, still has value as a representation of Motukawanui's early European farming history and the building is brought to life in Janet White's account of her life here.

In 1993, during a site inspection by archaeologist James Robinson, it was noted that in the immediate vicinity of the hut there were water troughs, a barge mooring wire, a single cylinder wool shed engine, and a variety of introduced fruit trees.<sup>32</sup> The restoration of the building is not likely to occur in the near future. Today it is deemed to be unsafe and hazardous for people to enter. Preservation of the hut is not only important as part the island's history but could be of visitor interest. There are many fruit trees and other exotics that have been planted around the vicinity of the building; these should be preserved.



**Figure 8: The old hut from the front as it stands today on the northern end of Papatara Bay (DoC).**

The hut represents the stories of people who lived here for a time and also a part of the continual use of this landscape from early Maori times until its European farming years. The island is an example of the damage that stock and other forms of erosion that can affect rare and important archaeological landscapes.

## Cultural Connections

Motukawanui Island and its sites contain the memories and stories are culturally connected that are culturally significant to the people of Whakarara, Ngati Kahu ti Whangaroa, and the Europeans who once owned and farmed the island.

## National Context

Individually the sites within the reserve are not rare and are well represented in the Northland archaeological record. As a whole, however, the reserve contains a complete archaeological landscape, of which few still survive on the mainland:

*“Intensified land development and subdivision are changing the rural and urban terrain so rapidly that only remnants of the landscapes relating to the 500 years of Maori settlement and the subsequent 100 years of joint Maori and colonial settlement will survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century”.*<sup>33</sup>



Motukawanui Island Scenic Reserve is considered to be one of these “remnants” and its effective management, including iwi involvement, is central to ensure future preservation.

The island is an environmental and cultural unit and is relatively undisturbed compared with many areas of a similar size on the mainland. The fact that such a large archaeological landscape still exists is significant in itself. It is also important as an intrinsic part of a wider region described in some of the earliest accounts of Maori and European contact.

## Historic significance

Motukawanui holds significance for local iwi and hapu who may wish to add some of their own oral history to this assessment in the future. It is also important within the context of visits by James Cook and later, Samuel Marsden,<sup>34</sup> and in its inclusion on the early map by Tuki and Huru. This, in itself emphasizes its Maori significance.

In addition it is a part of the area from the Bay of Islands to Whangaroa, one of the first regions to be settled, and described in detail, by Europeans. Its association with an early ‘feminist’ farmer is also of interest.

## Fabric significance

The significance of the fabric elements that make up this complete landscape was assessed based upon their condition, rarity, diversity, the archaeological context they are located within and potential research and amenity values.<sup>35</sup>

In previous surveys the overall condition of sites has been recorded as damaged, mainly by cattle and burn off practices when the island was farmed. This has caused sites to be ill-defined and eroded. Additionally some sites are not visible due to vegetation cover, namely grass and sodom apple. The erosion of the early midden (P04/179) on the southern aspect of Papatara Bay<sup>36</sup> is also a great loss to New Zealand’s early Maori history and is an example of our rapidly vanishing coastal sites. There are, however, sites on the island that are still in excellent condition and are impressive representations of their type, for example the pa sites P04/39 and P04/52. As a comparison these are considered to be highly significant within the islands archaeological context.

The site types that are represented on the island are not rare and are well represented within Northland. However as an island archaeological landscape which represents continued Maori occupation up to the end of European settlement it is rare and is one of the last “remnants” that will survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> The diversity of features on the island is high and the landscape holds great potential for further research.

## Cultural significance

Motukawanui Island is culturally significant to Whakarara, Ngati Kahu ti Whangaroa, and it is also important to the families of the people who lived and farmed here.

## Management chronology

- 1974: The land was purchased by the Department of Lands and Survey and all stock was removed.
- 1978: Archaeological survey by Hayward et al.
- 1987: The Department of Conservation took over management of the island.
- 1993 26<sup>th</sup> July: Significance assessment of the farmers' hut on Papatara Bay.
- 1994: The hut was found to be deteriorating rapidly and following an engineering report it was closed to the public.
- 2001: Salmond and Reed architects described and evaluated the old hut.
- 2002: Archaeological inspection of four locations for the newly proposed accommodation hut on Motukawanui Island by archaeologist James Robinson. Site decided upon was a Wai-iti Bay.
- 2005: Visit to the island by Janet White and a cleanup of the hut carried out by Volunteers.
- 2005: The senior management team of DoC visited the island to consider its management options (outcomes listed in HHA-01-02-04-02).

## Management documentation

DoC management file numbers: Historic Asset Management:

*HHA-01-02-04-01 NLB-1 31/12/1978 Northland - Bay of Islands Area Office - **Motukawanui** - Archaeological Site Records HHA-01-02-04-01 NLB-2 31/12/1978 - 31/12/1978  
HHA-01-02-04-01 NLB-3 31/12/1978 HHA-01-02-04-02 NLB-1 20/02/1977  
Northland - Bay of Islands Area Office - **Motukawanui** - Historic Research and Background HHA-01-02-04-02 NLB-2 10/07/2002 HHA-01-02-04-03 NLB-1 10/04/2002 - 12/11/2002  
Northland - Bay of Islands Area Office - **Motukawanui** - Research and Assessments HHA-01-02-04-04 NLB-1 29/05/2004 Northland - Bay of Islands Area Office - **Motukawanui** - Revegetation HHA-01-02-04-05 NLB-1 01/07/2010 Northland - Bay of Islands Area Office - **Motukawanui** - Maps and Photographs*

Heritage Assessment: yes, docdm 822691

Baseline Inspection: For hut: Assessment by Salmond Reed architects report for Department of Conservation 2001. *HHA-01-02-04-02*.

Baseline inspection for island: Hayward. B., et al, 1979, Archaeological sites on the Cavalli Islands, Northern New Zealand. The Journal of the University of Auckland Field Club. *Tane* 25.

## Management Recommendations

- If and when the homestead is demolished iwi and the former caretakers i.e the MacDonalds and the Whites should be notified in advance.
- Further research should be carried out on the island's farming history, namely the MacDonalds time there and any records associated with this. Oral traditions of the island should be sought from the appropriate iwi representatives. This knowledge would add significantly to the values of the island. MacDonald, White contact information: HHA 01-02-04-02.
- If the hut is pulled down an interpretation panel illustrating the former hut and some of its history could be displayed and/or certain parts of the hut could be kept and preserved.
- Location of the wool shed engine and ensuring its preservation for possible interpretation.
- Further research is still viable at midden P04/179 as it may extend behind the back beach. A rescue excavation should be carried out.
- Photographs reportedly exist from 1900 of the southern part of Papatara Bay which show a small village of Maori huts located on a terrace (held by Auckland Institute and Museum Library).



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### Further reading/images

A painting is located in the Northlander No.16 "Endeavour" Captain Cook's ship at the Cavalli Islands, 1769.

(Whangaroa and Bay of Islands) Lee, J., 1983. *I Have Named it the Bay of Islands*. Hodder & Stoughton. For the wider history of Motukawanui Island

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> ARCHSITE [www.archsite.org.nz](http://www.archsite.org.nz)

<sup>2</sup> Hayward, B et al 1979: 160

<sup>3</sup> Fox, E 1975:2

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*: Hayward, B: 159

<sup>5</sup> Sale, V 1987:30 (opinions do differ however on which iwi had control e.g refer Jack Lee 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Salmond, A 1991: 32

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*: Sale, V: 32

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, J pers comm with Marara George 2002 (DoC files)

<sup>9</sup> *op cit.*:Sale:37

<sup>10</sup> *op cit.*:Sale:31

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas, J.L 1817: vol I,II

<sup>12</sup> Cochrane, G.R 1954

<sup>13</sup> Dickson 1973: 8-9

<sup>14</sup> NP225/1

<sup>15</sup> NP225/1

<sup>16</sup> *Op.cit.*:Dickson:8-9

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> White, J :1991

<sup>19</sup> *Op.cit.*: Dickson:8-9

<sup>20</sup> Devonshire, Archsite site record form

<sup>21</sup> *Op.cit.*: Hayward, B:157

<sup>22</sup> Burgess, S 2004 DoC files

<sup>23</sup> *Op cit.*:Hayward:157

<sup>24</sup> *Op cit.*: Hayward:159

<sup>25</sup> *Op.cit.*:Hayward:160

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Burgess,S 2004 site record form Archsite

<sup>28</sup> *Op.cit.*:Hayward:157

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<sup>29</sup> Furey, L 2006

<sup>30</sup> Salmond and Reed 2001:3

<sup>31</sup> Janet White pers comm. DoC files

<sup>32</sup> Robinson 1993 DoC files

<sup>33</sup> Allen, H 2010:157

<sup>34</sup> Jack Lee 1987 for further reading: *I have Named it the Bay of Islands*

<sup>35</sup> Archaeological Guidelines Series No. 2, 2006:8

<sup>36</sup> A.Blanshard pers comm

<sup>37</sup> *Op.cit.*: Allen. H