

Hampden Beach, looking northwest, with the Big Kuri Creek at the far end.

Hampden Beach Revisited

Michael Trotter 24 April 2020

A new look at archaeological sites on Hampden Beach, North Otago

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[Illustrations in this report have been compressed to facilitate electronic transmission.]



CANTERBURY MAPS

Introduction

Hampden is a township on the North Otago coast some twenty-six kilometres south of Oamaru (thirty by road) and about four kilometres north of Moeraki (see the above topographical map). There is archaeological evidence of human occupation going back about 600 years at one place on the beach, and evidence pre-European other of occupation has been recorded elsewhere on the beach and further inland. European settlement of the Hampden locality commenced in the 1850s, though it was generally referred to a Kuri Bush, Kuri, or Moeraki - the survey of the township and sale of sections did not commence until 1860¹.

The main beach – the part most frequented by visitors, picnickers, and campers – is that part which occurs between the mouths of the Little Kuri Creek and the Big Kuri Creek as marked on the aerial mapping image on the right.



¹ Otago Witness 1860b; Reid 1861.

During the 1950s anecdotal records of accidentally discovered evidence of pre-European occupation at Hampden were collected from some local residents (Trotter 1951-55, 1955-58, 1959-65, 1959); by the end of the decade thirteen such finds had been recorded. For the most part these were recollections of stone adze-heads that had been found near the beach or in the village, descriptions of the material and the exact locations were often vague. As well as these, one recounter said that her father often ploughed up "greenstone and moa bones" near the beach, and another that "several Maori chisels, some of which got broken" were ploughed up in the paddock between the two swamps behind the beach.

Archaeological Site J42/209



Further information came from field observations. Erosion of a beach bank caused by a storm with high seas in 1957 revealed an occupational deposit near the southern end of the main beach. (The above photograph shows the area in 2020 with a considerable amount of rock placed along the beach bank to inhibit further erosion.)

This site comprised an occupational deposit of blackened earth nearly 23 centimetres thick, lying on a mixture of clay and gravel, and overlaid with about 25 centimetres of wind-deposited beach sand. The exposed portion contained firestones – that is, greywacke river stones that had been stained and broken by heat, as in a cooking fire or 'oven' – and the tibia of a small moa, which had recently been broken, was projecting from the bank. There were also two hand-held artefacts, a flaked stone knife and a hammerstone (photograph below).²

In 1963 there was more erosion and another moa bone, this time part of a tarsometatarsus, was found projecting from the bank.³

Two years later an archaeological site record (number S146/16) covering the whole of Hampden Beach was made in the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site recording scheme, which was and still is responsible for site records for the whole of the country. That record has now been renumbered and divided into four separate sites – including this one as J42/209 – on the nation-wide archaeological site database, ArchSite.



5 cm

² Trotter 1955-58: 243.

³ Trotter 1959-65: 56.



(At that time the bank where the occupational deposit was exposed was close to a bathing shed, which was a single building containing four or five in-line units for changing before and after swimming. This and a second bathing shed nearly 450 metres further south, just north of an unformed extension of Stafford Street, existed until at least the 1960s. The latter part of the beach was not much frequented in the middle of the twentieth century but was possibly more popular when the sheds were built, probably early in the twentieth century. Both bathing sheds are visible and indicated by arrows in the 1960 aerial mapping photograph on the left.)

Returning to site J42/109, in 2020 the effect of further erosion was evident – the pointed piece of land beneath the upper arrow in the 1960 photograph was now reduced to a slight rounded projection – and there was no surface sign of the bathing shed. The photograph below shows the deposit of firestones in the blackened matrix and there were also slight indications of darkened soil for five metres to the left. The post and disturbance to the right of the metre-long scale are of twentieth century origin, possibly relate to the bathing shed that used to be here.





Aerial mapping photograph showing locations of recorded archaeological sites at Hampden Beach in 2020. Earlier aerial photographs show a pond directly north of the ploughed paddock, and swampy ground in the low-lying area adjacent to site J42/209.

Archaeological Site J42/210



10 cm

Behind the central part of the main Hampden Beach there is a small area of flat land, about oneand-a-half hectares in size, on which are public toilets, tennis courts, and a skateboard area, with most of the remainder currently being used for grazing sheep – see the aerial photograph on the previous

page. In the past much of this area had been ploughed and cultivated – parallel lines of differential grass growth show on aerial photographs under some conditions. Anecdotal reports refer to moa bones and artefacts being ploughed up here⁴ (it is less likely that the flat area behind site J42/209 was ploughed in the past as it was swampy until drained in the 1940s) – the adzehead on the right being one of those ploughed up – but no archaeological evidence was visible of the surface here when inspected in the 1950s.

However, on inspection in 2020 several artefacts were found in a small patch of bare ground (photograph below) beneath macrocarpa trees, at the point indicated by the arrow in the above photograph.





These artefacts are figured on the right. From the left on top is an adze-head preform of slightly schistose greywacke; a well-made flake knife of Central Otago⁵ porcellanite; and a small waste flake of argillite with one of black chert beneath it. Along the bottom are two flakes of orthoquartzite (silcrete) from inland Otago; a well-made knife of chalcedony, and there is a small waste flake in the centre. The chalcedony is probably from Moeraki.⁶

On the basis of these finds and the 1950s anecdotal reports, this site has the potential of being of considerable importance if further occupational material remains in the ploughed paddock area or in the vicinity of J42/211. No earthworks should be undertaken in here without prior archaeological assessment.



Archaeological Site J42/211

In 1958 sparse scattered shell midden was visible on the surface amongst pine trees growing alongside the camping ground at Hampden Beach.⁷ Amongst the midden was the piece of sandstone grindstone in this photograph, approximately nine centimetres square in size. The top

and the right side have been flattened by use as a grindstone – the X lines scratched on it are probably the result of mechanical ground preparation for planting the trees. The artefact was later placed in the Canterbury Museum.

Shortly after the observation the Hampden Borough Council (on whose land the trees were growing) had the trees cut down and bulldozed a quantity of surface soil into an adjacent swamp to prepare the ground for a car park, doubtless taking archaeological evidence with it.

In 2020 there was no sign of any early archaeological material in bare patches of ground in this area, though it is possible that remnants of the site still occur beneath the surface here and in the adjacent camping ground.



⁵ Suggested source locations are from hand specimen comparison only.

⁶ Four of these artefacts have been registered with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

⁷ Trotter 1955-58: 335.

Archaeological Site J42/31



ETROLENS/ LINZ 1353/24 1960

In the 1950s it had been noted that a dark layer of occupational material could be seen in the left bank of the Big Kuri Creek, and it was clear that more of this site extended beneath a small plantation of pine trees that grew there. (The 1960 aerial photograph on the left shows the trees on both sides of the Big Kuri creek with the locations of both J42/211 sites and J42/31 marked.)

Having seen the destruction of archaeological evidence when a similar plot of trees was harvested on the opposite side of the creek (site J42/211) it was arranged for a small investigative

excavation to be made beneath the trees on this site (J42/31) before similar damage was inflicted on it.

On 29 May 1965 a group of volunteers from North Otago Scientific and Historical Society, based in Oamaru, excavated four and a half five-foot (equals approximately 1.5 metres) squares, laid out as shown in the adjacent 1965 plan.⁸ Each square was identified by a letter-number combination – for example the lowest on the plan was referred to as square H5.





A datum peg was set in concrete at square H8 (beneath the theodolite in this photograph) so that it would be possible to return to the site in future years and work out where the excavation took place. (In the event when revisiting the site in 2020 it was found that the peg and concrete block no longer existed.)

⁸ From Trotter 1967a.



In general, the occupational deposit – that is, the material left behind by the people who had lived here – was covered by up to twenty centimetres of gravely soil, and the deposit itself was up to twenty-three centimetres thick. It was distinguishable from the natural river gravel by being stained with charcoal and other organic refuse, and it contained mainly burnt stones and broken moa bones with a few artefacts. The above diagrams show the stratigraphy on the northern sides of two of the five-foot squares excavated, with the occupational deposit shaded.

Over 750 whole and broken pieces of bones of at least three individual *Euryapteryx curtus*⁹ moas were recovered, including a neck with a skull, quadrates, vertebrae and tracheal rings in approximate anatomical position crossing between squares C9 and D8. This would have been discarded at the time of butchering, and suggested that the supply of meat – and hence moas – was plentiful at the time. Most of the bones showed considerable breakage – in the case of leg bones this may have been to select pieces for the manufacture of fish-hooks, pendants and other objects, but pelves had also been broken up, though this bone is unlikely to have been of much use.



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Skulls	3
Quadrates	2
Tracheal rings	18
Vertebrae	45
Ribs	9
Pelves	9
Sterna	2
Femora	6
Tibiotarsi	7
Fibulae	8
Tarsometatarsi	3
Toes	32
Claws	14
Total identified	158

This bone material included four pieces of worked moa bone, one being the shaped blank for a one-piece fish-hook, which was found in three pieces and would have been about six centimetres high – the illustration on the left has been taken from a sketch in the 1967 report. There were also six pieces of bone from a penguin species and three of dog, both of which species were used for food.

Mollusc shells were few (photograph on the right) and all but the operculum of a catseye (Lunella smaragda) in the centre were broken or fragmentary. With the exception of a turret shell (Maoricolpus roseus) near the top centre in the photograph on the right, they appear to come from food species – catseyes, oysters (neither of which occur on Hampden Beach) and an unidentified bivalve. Turret shells were sometimes used for ornamental purposes such as necklaces, a small hole being drilled near the opening for suspension,¹¹ (which is where the Hampden shell is broken).



⁹Species nomenclature as per Bunce et al 2009.

¹⁰ Trotter 1967a.

¹¹ See for example Trotter 1975: 203.



twelve flakes of orthoquartzite (silcrete) and seven of chalcedony were obtained from the excavation. Most of the smaller ones (which were between 15 and 40 millimetres in their longest dimension) appeared to be waste flakes from the production of larger cutting implements, and the best of these are figured above. The size of one on the left is typical of some found in moa-hunter sites, and that in the centre has had a lot of retouching to produce the desired shape. There was also a hammer stone that may well have been used in their production.

One interesting artefact was a lump of baked clay. This particular piece was rather shapeless, but pieces found on other Otago sites have clearly been shaped, and other pieces have been found on sites throughout New Zealand, though their purpose is not known.¹²

Radiocarbon dates that were obtained for the site in 1967^{13} and which have been recalibrated in 2020 unfortunately have a rather large plus-or-minus range – the results are given below. The diagram on the left is for moa bone collagen from square D8, and that on the right from the lens of burnt (or heat stained) moa bone in F7 – and the likely time of occupation is a little under 600 years ago, somewhere in the early fifteenth century AD.



¹² Trotter 2012.

¹³ Trotter 1967b: 140.



As the above 2020 photograph of the site shows, it is very different today from the pine plantation covered area of the 1950s and 60s. Back then there was some occupational evidence – sometimes sparse – between the points A and B, a distance of at least fifty metres, and the occupational deposit could be seen as a layer in the eroding creek bank to the right of A, where there is now redeposited soil. (The area where the excavations were carried out was a little to the right of A.)

When the trees were harvested some years ago the ground appears to have been windrowed and a lot of topsoil bulldozed off the surface taking most of the site with it. In 2020 there were some stumps, piles of waste branches and roots, with the ground covered with grass and weeds, plus some wilding pines. The scraped up soil had probably been pushed over the edge of the bank to be washed away by the Big Kuri when in flood. All that could be found on inspection was some disturbed occupational material in the eroding bank near point A - photograph below with a metre long scale.





As late as 1978 the occupational layer had been still visible in the bank when it was described as a 10–15 centimetres thick layer of blackened soil with charcoal, many burnt and broken stones, small lenses of moa, bird and fish bone midden, a few flakes of basalt, and concentrations of ashy soil exposed for 20 metres along the face of a low scarp.¹⁴ (No fish bones or flakes of basalt were observed here in 1965.)

A final note on the 2020 field observations at Hampden Beach – at a point 37 metres northwest of point A of the J42/31 site there was a solitary valve of a kahitua shell (the southern tuatua, *Paphies*

donacina) embedded in a sloping bank (marked 'Shell' on the map on page 5). The size of the kahitua makes it an excellent food species, but it is not impossible that it got into the bank by natural means – possibly dropped by a seagull and become covered by slumping of the soil.

Discussion

Archaeological evidence of pre-European occupation on Hampden Beach has been located in four separate locations, and these have been recorded on ArchSite (modified extract on right). All these sites have suffered damage to a greater or lesser extent, and three, if not all, of them are likely to have been occupied at least five to six hundred years ago.

Site J42/209 near the southern end of main beach has been eroded by wave action considerably since it was first revealed by earlier erosion, but there is a reasonable likelihood that the occupational deposit continues further into the bank. The moa bones found there are likely to be the result of hunting, and more information could doubtless be obtained from excavation.

Site J42/210 in a central position behind the beach has suffered from ploughing and associated cultivation as well as the construction of amenities.



Artefacts described in this report (pages 6-7) and the previously reported finding of moa bones point to early occupation. This is likely to have been a large site, possibly even about a hectare in area, and there is the potential for it to contain invaluable archaeological evidence. All archaeological sites are protected by legislation – currently the *Heritage New Zealand Act* of 2014 – but it must be stressed that any proposed works that would disturb the ground here, such as construction, cultivation or tree-felling, need to be done under archaeological supervision.

Very little can be deduced about site J42/211 and it may well be completely destroyed though there is the possibility for occupational material to occur beneath the present surface.

¹⁴ Smith 1978.

The limited excavation that was carried out on site J42/31 on the left bank of the Big Kuri indicated that it was an early site where butchering of moas was carried out, as well as at least one penguin and one dog. Other activities appear to have included the manufacture of at least one fishhook, the preparation of shell(s) for personal ornamentation, and the cooking of food. It is possible that shellfish for consumption was brought here from some distance away. It is extremely unfortunate that this site has been virtually destroyed. Currently proposed tree-planting and track formation here will avoid the small area remaining in order to prevent further damage.

GPS co-ordinates

Global Positioning System co-ordinates for Hampden Beach sites (New Zealand Transverse Mercator projection).

Site J42/31	1429548 x 4978777
Site J42/209	1429563 x 4978544
Site J42/210	1429514 x 4978643
Site J42/211	1429462 x 4978767
Kahitua shell	1429511 x 4978829
Bathing Shed	1429463 x 4978545
Bathing Shed	1429520 x 4978115

Co-ordinates are for central locations of existing sites as recorded in February 2020, or as calculated from aerial photos for bathing sheds.

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The Name "Kuri"

Throughout this report the names of the two streams that flow onto Hampden Beach are referred to as the Big Kuri and Little Kuri respectively, though neither of these names appears on the current official topographical maps.¹⁵

Since at least 1861 the two streams at Hampden have been known as the Big Kuri and Little Kuri¹⁶ but in 1985 they were officially changed to "Kurinui" and Kuriiti,¹⁷ reference being given to publications by W. H. S. Roberts and G. B. Stevenson. (The proposal to assign the names had been made the previous year.¹⁸) Both of these cited sources actually spelled the name as Kuri-nui and Kuri-iti (with a hyphen between the two words), and while Roberts is generally considered to have

been knowledgeable on Maori place names, Stevenson is best known for his book on North Otago,¹⁹ and very likely got his information on the Kuri from Roberts, whom he acknowledges in respect to the Little Kuri.

Roberts had written in the North Otago Times in 1896 that "the big Kuri's proper name is Kokomoko, or Kokomako, most likely the latter, as it was the name of the Bell bird."²⁰ A few days later, however, Frederick Chapman, a well-regarded authority on Maori place names responded: "Kuri is the correct name of the Big Kuri and Little Kuri; it is not uncommon to find two creeks with the same name-it is the name of the block. There is some confusion about Kokomako given by Mr Roberts."²¹

In early days the place was known as "The Kuri" (dog). The Maori name of the Big Kurl, as long as it ran among the hills, was Koko-muka (the name of a species of veronica shrub); but from the end of the bush to its mouth it was "Kuri-nui" (Big Kuri). In some old maps it was misspelt Kaka-mokau. Little Kuri runs through the borough from the south-west. Its proper Maori name is Kuri-iti-mara ("the dog's little cultivation"). The first surveyors named the Little Kuri the Ouse River.

Southland Times, 28 June 1913, page 8

Some other names given by Mr Roberts are new to me. It Rua-moa is genuine it is interesting, as I only know two genuine names in this island containing the word moa, i.e., Oraumoa near Blenheim, and Ohine-te-moa, Waikoualti beach. Kuri is the correct name of the Big Kuri and Little Kuri; it is not uncommon to find two creeks with the same name-it is the name of the block. There is some confusion about Kokomako given by Mr Roberts. Te-awa-kokomuka is Rotten Creck, while K katumauka is the name of two creeks which come out together on the Hampden beach on the way to Moeraki.

Chapman, Frederick, 1896. "North Otago Nomenclature" (Letter to the Editor) *North Otago Times*, 9 March 1896, page 1

Roberts, in subsequent published correspondence, thanked Chapman for the information,²² and by 1908 had changed his opinion (this time in the Oamaru Mail and later in the Southland Times, as on the left) to "In early days the name of the place was "The Kuri" (dog). The Maori name of the Big Kuri, as long as it ran among the hills, was Kokomuka (the name of a species of veronica shrub); but from the end of the bush to its mouth it was "Kuri-nui" (Big Kuri)."²³

One of the earliest records of the name was made by explorer and surveyor Frederick Tuckett who in 1844 followed the course of the "Kauri" for some miles inland when walking northwards from Moeraki, and later his Maori guide referred to "the little & big Kaui²⁴ – the unusual spelling of Kuri may be attributed to Tuckett's defective hearing which he mentioned at the time, though this spelling has also been used elsewhere²⁵ (example below).

- ¹⁸ New Zealand Gazette 1984.
- ¹⁹ Stevenson 1947.
- ²⁰ Roberts 1896a.
- ²¹ Chapman 1896.
- ²² Roberts 1896b.
- ²³ Roberts 1908; 1913; also reprinted in book form.
- ²⁴ Franklin 2005: 37, 39.

At Moeraki Beach, gold of a very fine description is found in the sands of the seashore, mixed with iron-sand and fragmentary gems. Washing operations are now carried on opposite the town of Hampden, between the Big Kauri and Little Kauri streams. But the entire beach, as far as Shag Point, appears to consist of similar deposits. Gold, at the rate of 100 ounces to the ton, has been obtained from the clean-washed sand, and it would seem that if science and capital were brought to bear, a magnificent yield would be the result.

Otago Daily Times, 23 September 1862, page 6

¹⁵ The last topographical map to show Big and Little Kuri was probably the 1978 edition of NZMS1, S146 Moeraki.

¹⁶ Otago Witness 1861a, 1961b.

¹⁷ New Zealand Gazetteer 2020.

²⁵ For example, Otago Daily Times 1862.

A few years later in 1848 Walter Mantell while in the process of establishing reserves for the Kāi Tahu, had his surveyor Alfred Wills set aside a reserve of ten acres to provide timber for those

at Moeraki, which he referred to in his diary as the "Kuri reserve", at the Kuri bush.²⁶ (The following year in an official report he advised the Governor of New Zealand (Sir George Grey) of the above but this time referred to it "a wood called Te Kuri".²⁷

In an 1853 letter to the Governor, Walter Mantell, now Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago, urged the provision of allotments at Onekakara (Moeraki) and "Kuri Grove". He suggested that the first step would be to lay down a road from Onekakara to "the little Kuri

KURI BUSH, MOERAKI. ACCOMMODATION HOUSE.

J S. YOUNG begs respectfully to inform TRAVELLERS that he has opened the above HOUSE, which will be found to afford comfortable Accommodation to all who may favour him with their patronage.

Good Stabling, Oats, and Hay.

Otago Witness, 13 August 1859, page 2

(Winterbourne) across the Reserve to the fittest spot on the Big Kuri (Glyndebourne) for a bridge..." He also suggested that because the name Kuri occurred elsewhere in the Province that English names should be conferred,²⁸ presumably those he had given in parenthesis. The reply suggested choosing names distinguished in British history.

Hampden is marked on an 1856 map of the Province of Otago²⁹ and the name Hampden was

Oamaru is the first of a series of towns which will arise on our Northern seaboard : Hampden, on the Kuri, will next be open ; then Moeraki and Waikouaiti. Otago Witness, 10 November 1860, page 4 being used locally around the same,³⁰ though Kuri Bush was also in use for the locality.³¹ An editorial in the *Otago Witness* in 1860 referred, rather picturesquely, to "Hampden, on the Kuri" (extract on the left), and sections in the Township of Hampden were advertised for sale later that year.³²

From 1861 Big Kuri was in common use (though one government report in 1871 rendered as the "Great Kuri"), but to revert to Maori sources two twentieth century publications are worth noting:

In *Lore and History of the South Island Maori* W. A. Taylor wrote "Te Kuri is the wellknown stream at Hampden."³³ Taylor obtained much of his information by interviewing elderly Maori on cycling trips about the South Island, visiting and photographing historic sites.

Herries Beattie, a highly respected authority on Maori place names and allied matters who obtained information directly from informants in the early decades of the twentieth century, referred in his book *Maori Place-names of Otago* to a map of the South Island on which "best-informed elders" wrote place names including "Te Kuri" for the "well-known creek at Hampden".³⁴ This was without doubt the large size but small-scale "Taiaroa Map" reproduced in Beattie's posthumously published book *Traditional Lifeways of the Southern Maori*³⁵ on which TE KURI has been written a short distance north of the Moeraki headland. In the same publication Beattie refered to one of his informants pointing out Hampden as Te Kuri.³⁶

In summary, Roberts' accounts appear to be somewhat confused and are not confirmed from other sources; Stevenson's information probably came from Roberts. All other available accounts from a variety of sources indicate that Te Kuri was the pre-European name of the locality now

²⁹ Maling 1999.

- ³¹ Otago Witness 1859.
- ³² Otago Witness 1860a, 1860b.
- ³³ Taylor 1950: 102.

known as Hampden and/or the creeks that flow through it. It is suggested here that it is likely that the addition of 'Big' and 'Little' (initially sometimes without capitalisation) to 'Kuri' occurred around the time that Europeans first came into the area in order to differentiate between the two Kuri creeks. The supposition that Kurinui and Kuriiti were the original Maori names for these streams is not supported by the historical records, and cannot be justified on those grounds.

²⁶ Mantell 1848.

²⁷ Mantell 1849.

²⁸ Mantell 1853.

³⁰ Otago Witness 1857.

³⁴ Beattie 1944: 7.

³⁵ Beattie 2009.

³⁶ Beattie 2009: 576.

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