

4) June 2008: a European skull found in Hokianga, sent to Auckland University, found to be over 300 years old and handed back to local iwi. Despite requests from Noel, no DNA testing was carried out. (see newspaper report below)

5) The female skull found on the banks of the Ruamahanga River in the Wairarapa was dated at around 300 years old and proved to be European – impossible, according to our history books. This skull is now in a museum in the Wairarapa, but when a TV crew tried to film it, they were told iwi permission was needed. This was refused.

6) October 2008, removal of 12 skeletons and skulls at Bland Bay at Hikurangi, which were identified in 1968 of European origin, handed over to Maori, put in plastic bags, thrown into a hole and poked down by sticks—shown on 60 minutes TV3. (The documentary was on cannibalism. Ethnicity of the skeletons was never raised.)

7) Recently, an earthmoving contractor uncovered 120 skeletons buried in the foetal position at a new housing site in the Bay of Islands. He contacted archaeologists in Auckland who said to go to the police. They asked him to show the site to a local Maori, who said the remains were not Maori. The contractor was told to bulldoze the whole site and cover it up.

The list of shame goes on

8) Further to this list of shame is the story of the Waitaha people of the South Island, who turned down Waitangi settlement money, saying such an acceptance would “extinguish customary rights and aboriginal title of our people,” as they are a “separate tribe” who were there long before Ngai Tahu. Tribal history recounted to respected archaeologist Barry Brailsford by Waitaha elders adds 1000 years to documented New Zealand history and takes settlement by the early people back to the time of Christ. In 1944, Chatham Island Moriori claimed

they were one of three different types of people making up Waitaha. They were over 1.8m tall, peaceful and skilled gardeners. A Waitaha wooden statue found in the Kaipara is now on display in the Dargaville Museum. It came from an ancient Waitaha village discovered in Kaipara sand dunes in the early 1990s. Oral history states that these people were chased out of the Kaipara around 1700 by the warrior tribes and settled in the South Island at a place they named Punakiki, after their village in the Kaipara. The only other known style of this carving around the Pacific rim is found on the Sepic River in New Guinea and is carved in stone. The carving (pictured) was identified by a local kaumatua as being of the Waitaha people who lived in the Kaipara. Very knowledgeable about the early people, he drew what the missing part of the carving’s head would have looked like, including a wrapping around the top of the head. The statue was ‘welcomed’ in a special ceremony, honouring Waitaha. *Note: Four fingers and thumb on the carving. Traditional Maori carvings have only three.*



9) Then there is the saga of the Wairau Bar, called “The most important ancient remains in New Zealand.” On 14th April, 2009 the Canterbury Museum handed over the remains of 53 ancient individuals to the Rangitane iwi, a small South Island Maori tribe, for reburial. Rangitane claim that these remains were stolen from them, as they come from the Wairau Bar, near Blenheim in Marlborough. The remains were reburied on 16th April in the shingle of the Wairau Bar. It was a deeply emotional event for Rangitane, as their tupuna were returned. But the numbers do not stack up because more people were buried that day than were originally dug up. 44 people were dug up and 53 were reburied.

SKULL ON THE BEACH

Where did it come from? And is that hole from a bullet?

by Saskia Konynenburg

A human skull unearthed in a small Northland township and pierced by what looks like a bullet hole had police fearing a murder.

The discovery was made by 24-year-old Jelene Leaf near Opotoni, Hokianga. She spotted a pair of dogs playing on a walkway with what she thought was a ball three hours later, she realised the “ball” was in fact a human skull.

It was only when she took a closer look that she became excited and took it to a Rawene policeman’s home.

“When I saw the bullet hole I wondered what had happened,” she said.

Police searched the Snake Gully area and immediately sent the skull for forensic testing.

Kaikōhe police Detective Sergeant Rhys Johnston said he was relieved to find out the skull, found last Thursday, dated back to the pre-European era and not some recent sinister event.

“We had to take it seriously as

SKULLDUGGERY? The worn teeth and fused bones mean it is definitely the skull of an adult, 30 to 40 years old, and probably male.

It could have been a homicide. The skull had a round hole in the side of it which looked like a bullet hole. Not that I’ve seen very many bullet holes in skulls,” Mr Johnston admitted.

Police have been liaising with the local hapū, and John Klarich of Ngati Korokoro said they were waiting to find out the age and gender of the deceased before the skull was handed back in an official ceremony.

“It is obviously part of a full skeleton and our next responsibility will be to locate the remains and lay them to rest. It’s very unusual for remains to be found in this area, so we’ll be able to learn more about the history from this discovery,” he said.

Mr Klarich said, from his experience of dealing with historic remains, the skull did not look Maori.

“There are usually lots of Maori characteristics, such as the jaw bone and how it is hinged. I wish they could reconstruct the skull so we could see what the person would have looked like,” he said.

Mr Klarich was unsure whether the skull had been dislodged during recent erosion of the bank below the roadside or had been washed in from the harbour.

There is no known burial ground nearby, but the area saw conflict in the 19th century.

The skull is being examined by

Auckland Hospital forensic pathologist Jane Vuletic, who also gave evidence in the recent trial of Chris Kahui, whose twin sons received fatal head injuries.

Dr Vuletic said the worn teeth and fused bones meant the skull was definitely that of an adult, 30 to 40 years old, and probably male.

The wear patterns on the teeth indicate a pre-European diet high in vegetable matter. As for the damage to the skull, it occurred many years after death.

“I can imagine it could be mistaken for a bullet hole, but it’s definitely not. If the damage had happened when the person was still alive the bone would have fractured in a different way,” she said.

What’s more, in 1975, Professor Philip Houghton examined the remains of nine Wairau Bar individuals and pointed out that two had square jaws, not the rounded or rocker jaws of people of Polynesian descent. They were clearly not Polynesian. The eminent professor had no reason to lie. Many of the Wairau Bar people were unusually buried on their stomachs, face down or head to the side, with their stone adze or implements placed or thrown on top of them. Crossed moa bones were buried nearby. The area contains massive stone lined pits and kilometres of canals linking the Wairau lagoons – inviting much conjecture about the nature of these early settlers. But the 3 week time limit placed on the recent dig precluded extended investigation (one could say that 10 years would not be long enough).