

Y UNDER SIEGE PART IV

MAORI CATACOMBS. THE CAVES AT ONE-TREE HILL

Star, 12 June 1907

The recently opened cave at One-tree Hill adds one more link to the chain of interest encircling this celebrated spot (says the "Auckland Herald" of Saturday, June 8). Maungakiekie, as One-tree Hill was named by the Maoris, was a great Maori stronghold, dominating the fair fat lands of "Tamaki of a hundred lovers."

The heavy deposits of shells indicating great feasts, the kapa Maoris, or cooking ovens, and many features of the volcanic cave show that at one time it must have been a comparatively thickly populated place; but the cave just opened demonstrates pretty clearly that shell-fish was not the only animal food eaten at Maungakiekie, for here, in this one cave, is to be seen a great pile of human bones, skulls, thigh bones, ribs, arm bones, shoulder blades, and vertebrae, all mixed up indiscriminately, just shot down in one great conical heap, as though the cave had been used as a dumping ground from time to time as required. Many of the skulls are broken, not parted at the natural division - and some of the limb bones have been broken, as if to extract the marrow. A merely cursory glance at this ghastly heap is insufficient for unscientific persons to be able to say with certainty whether the bones had been stripped of their flesh before being put in the cave, or whether whole bodies had been dropped down into its funnel-shaped mouth into darkness and oblivion; but it is not improbable that these bones belonged to Maori victims taken in battle and slaughtered for culinary purposes. Most of the bones are extremely friable, powdering at the touch, be it ever so slight. Beneath those on the surface is a compact mass of yellowish-grown earthy matter, to which the bones have crumbled under the influence of the damp and age. Kneaded in the palm of the hand, small pieces of bone become plastic like clay.

Mr C. Bagley, chairman of the One-tree Hill

Domain Board, who has been instrumental in bringing these hidden things to light is of the opinion that the bones of thousands of people must have been deposited in this cave...

On Friday afternoon, Professor A. P. W. Thomas of the University College, spent some time in the cave, when, apart from its historical and anthropological interest, possesses features appealing to geological students. Mr T. F. Cheeseman, curator of the Auckland Museum, also visited the cave. Dr Scott, who was particularly interested from an osteological point of view, was also there, along with some other gentlemen. Dr Scott critically examined the skulls, and found in many of them teeth in excellent condition, but in most cases, the molars were much worn down. No children's skulls were found, but some were of men comparatively young, say, from forty to fifty. Some of the limb and other bones showed that their owners, when in the flesh, were above normal stature, three or four inches over six feet.

There are three chambers in the cave. The entrance is very narrow, and of bottle-neck shape, which fact is mentioned for the information of persons with some amplitude of figure. Then there comes a fairly spacious oval chamber, of say, 10ft to 20ft in length; next a chamber approached by a wide ledge, which slopes to a round hole, about 3ft 6in in diameter, leading to a low-ceiled chamber, in which it is only possible to squat down on the haunches. This is in reality a volcanic blister or burst bubble, for the rock is, of course, all lava. Here it may have eddied, as it flowed from Maungakiekie when the hill was active. The ring of the floor in the lower chamber would seem to indicate yet other vacancies beneath; but at present this is the limit of exploration.

Mr Bagley says it is more than likely that there are other similar caves at One-tree Hill, and the surface indications support his view. Human bones have been found in the locality of the rock masses, where the cave under notice is situated, and

some of the bones were calcined.

The One-tree Hill Domain Board will keep the newly-discovered cave closed for the present; but it is intended to tap it, if possible, by a tunnel from the level, near No. 3 hole of the golf links, about two chains from the cave mouth. The depth of the cave from the surface of the ground to the lower chamber is about 60ft.

Ancient Maori Fortress Star

Widely reported by provincial newspapers, including the Poverty Bay Herald, 4 June 1907

Auckland Thursday

A party of Aucklanders yesterday explored the caves of Cornwall Park, which was originally the fortress of the great chief Kiwi Tamaki. Tons upon tons of bones formed a deposit of human debris four feet high. So long had the bones been there they had assumed the semblance of white earth. There are other caves which will be explored at a future time.

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Recent road formation works (in Cornwall Park) at the top of the hill disclosed the skeleton of what must have been a chief of considerable standing. The remains were found in a sitting position, quite close to the trig station. It is reasonable to suppose that this burial dates back a very long way, before Maungakiekie was converted into the main part of the isthmus, because it is not the Maori custom to inter their dead within a fortress, as it rendered the place tapu. Several gentlemen yesterday afternoon visited two of the caves, one of which was a veritable catacomb as far as deposits of human bones were



This ancient stone working tool was found in Waipoua Forest