

MORE TALES FROM

KAHURANGI STORIES



NORTHWEST NELSON

GERARD HINDMARSH

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CHAPTER 1

ANAWEKA WAKA

THE DISCOVERY IN EARLY JANUARY 2012 of a 6.08-metre-long adzed-timber hull section from an obviously ancient and complex composite waka (canoe) on the Kahurangi coast was a significant find that was reported nationally. Eventually, news of the discovery spread globally, such were the age and unique features of the piece. It was identified as being no less than part of one of only two known voyaging canoes in existence, dating back to the early occupation of Polynesia, a time when ongoing maritime exploration and inter-island travel were the norm. In comparison, European mariners at that time were still only guessing when it came to navigating the open ocean.

Partially exposed after a major storm event, the complete hull section was dug out of an eroded sand dune behind a natural log jam of driftwood at the mouth of a small freshwater seep some 200 metres north of the Anaweka Estuary. The story of the discovery of the Anaweka waka by a naturally curious boy should not be forgotten. Waitapu Engineering co-boss Tony Nicholls of Takaka had used the Christmas break to take his family, including 12-year old-grandson Flynn, down to camp at the mouth of the Paturau River.

With the tide going out, the family party headed by 4WD vehicle down the gravelled road that leads from Paturau to Anatori and on to the bouldery

Turimawivi River. They crossed this at the rough ford, before heading out around a driftwood-studded dune to access the hard surface of the outer beach and a clear 3-kilometre run south to the big, broad, open-mouthed estuary of the Anaweka River. Here, they planned to have a picnic and then head back to Paturau in the late afternoon, before the incoming tide would reclaim the beach and make the return impossible.

Ever since the mid-1930s, this long stretch of hard sand running down to Kahurangi Point has been used for vehicular access by the likes of tractors, trucks and all manner of off-road vehicles. This tradition of driving along the beach began when deliveries of the big acetylene bottles needed to power the Kahurangi Lighthouse beacon by surfboat ceased. These surfboats were rowed in from one of the two government supply boats, the *SS Tutanekai* and *SS Hinemoa*, both of which had long-serving and dedicated commanders: Captain Collin Post and Captain John Bollons, respectively. Offloading at Kahurangi was a treacherous business, and was reviewed after one surfboat overturned and its crew nearly drowned. When the surfboat deliveries were halted, surplus Second World War United States Army vehicles from the Pacific theatre were deployed to transport the acetylene bottles and supplies. These were Dodge command cars, purchased by Rex Thompson and Claude Wilkens of Collingwood Motors, who had the monthly delivery contract.

Just before the Anaweka is reached, the driftwood that edges the seaside dunes gives way to a more indented coastline of sea-worn sandstone. Here, the Nicholls family stopped their vehicle, getting out to explore the little coves for any flotsam and jetsam that may have washed up. Running ahead of the others as youngsters do, Flynn disappeared behind a big jam of driftwood. Within a minute he was back, excitedly calling the others to come and look.

Tony knew that the unusual item protruding from the washed-out watercourse was something important as soon as he saw it. A shaped slab of dark timber stuck nearly half a metre out of the sand. It was around 100 millimetres thick, and along its edges at regular intervals were fairly identical holes, each big enough to stick a couple of fingers through. 'It had to be some sort of old canoe,' was Tony's first thought, as reported in the local paper. At first the family dug with their hands, but the slab wouldn't budge, so Tony got out the shovel he keeps in his vehicle in case he ever gets stuck in the sand. The family used this to dig and dig around the slab, but it still refused to budge. At that point Tony returned to Anatori and borrowed a tractor and trailer,

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A forest of giant rata existed around the Anaweka Estuary right up until the 1950s, and was some of the last bush to be cleared for farming along this section of coast. Early Māori made the inlet home, planting sizeable taro and kūmara plots around its more sheltered and sunny recesses. The Anaweka waka was found 300 metres up the coast from the estuary's northern headland (upper centre). Photo: Alex Fishwick

on which he hastily threw an old mattress before heading back off down the beach to fetch his prize. Finally, three hours after coming across the timber, the family pulled it out of the eroded bank of sand, placed it on the mattress and securely tied it on.

I saw the remarkable hull piece the very day Nicholls towed it back to Takaka, parking up around the back of his big engineering workshop off Motupipi Street. I had been tipped off by someone who had spotted it just an hour before, and thought I might be interested – just the small-town grapevine! When I rolled up, the hull section was still securely tied with ropes to the mattress atop the trailer and had not been unloaded. I still recall how it wowed me from the moment I saw it, its smooth-adzed and shapely length protruding over both ends of the trailer. There was no mistaking its uniqueness. Skilfully shaped from a single timber, the fully intact hull



component featured what could only be lashing holes around its edges. Closer inspection revealed something unique: towards one end, the life-sized (around 60 centimetres across) carved relief of a swimming turtle, simple, elegant and beautifully executed. Extending from its tail was a flowing ridge, suggesting its wake through the water. I walked all around the trailer taking photos, before inspecting the far rougher underside and what was obviously the interior of the craft. I counted four transverse raised ribs, along with a straight longitudinal stringer along its entire inside length.

That day, I didn't appreciate that I had witnessed a remarkable piece of boat-building technology far beyond the realm of my experience. At the time, I was doing the odd bit of reporting for the *Golden Bay Weekly*, and my article on the waka section and the photographs that accompanied it in the following issue, distributed on 6 January 2012, was the very first virtually anyone had heard about the exciting find. Local iwi (tribes) and a couple of resident archaeologists expressed surprise that they hadn't been informed earlier. And I received an email from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH) suggesting that my article should have mentioned the legal obligations of reporting such a find under the Protected Objects Act 1975. My writing philosophy has always been, if it happened, then report the facts. I have never seen it as my job to preach the morality of a situation in the guise of so-called education.

In defence of Nicholls (who incidentally also rang me to complain that I had taken the published photos on his property without his permission and then used them, again without his permission), he had let the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) know what he'd brought home fairly soon after the discovery. In some ways, Nicholls could be excused for feeling some sort of ownership of the hull strake. His forebears were among the first European settlers to take up land at Sandhill Creek, just north of the Anatori River, and beachcombing along the Kahurangi Coast had long been a Nicholls family tradition.

With all relevant government staff on holiday, the wheels of bureaucracy

An unbelievable find! The Nicholls family of Takaka were out on a 4WD beach picnic in early January 2012 when 12-year-old Flynn came across an unusual piece of wood protruding from an eroded bank of sand. The whole family excitedly got involved, digging out the 6.04-metre-long waka section and taking it back to Takaka. It would be identified as one of only two known voyaging canoes dating back to the early occupation of Polynesia. Photo: Sharon Nicholls

were relatively slow to activate, but Nicholls' tenure of holding onto his prize was short-lived – less than a week in fact. By the end of the Christmas break, everything had swung into action. Dilys Johns, conservation archaeologist with the University of Auckland, had been sailing on the Waitemata Harbour when she received a call from MCH asking her to make a visit to the South Island to inspect the new find.

Johns, a senior research fellow specialising in the study and conservation of waterlogged and 'at risk' taonga (artefacts), travelled down to team up in Takaka with Chris Hill, a representative of Manawhenua ki Mohua, the umbrella group representing local iwi. Together, they visited Nicholls at his workshop, where they found the strake laid on a pallet at the back of the property.

Commented Johns, 'I thought it was going to be just another project, but when I saw the find... it took my breath away. I had never seen something so large and complex come out of a site.'

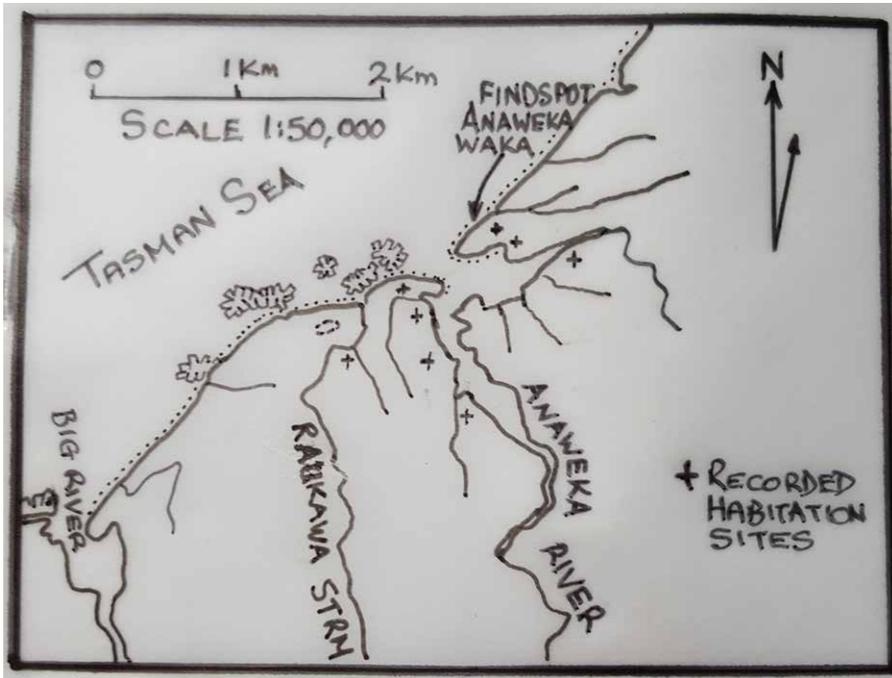
For around six days, the hull section had lain on the trailer and then the pallet. It was drying out, and fast. Some urgency to secure it was needed because, as it had been dug out of the ground and hadn't been kept wet, there was a risk it would crack as it dried out. Nicholls had little option. 'I just went with the flow and they seemed to want to take it away,' he told the *Motueka–Golden Bay News*.

The section wasn't taken far – just a few kilometres down the road in fact. Nicholls delivered it himself into iwi hands at Tarakohe, where it was locked up in one of the former buildings used by the now defunct Golden Bay Cement Company. It would stay there for the next three years, where it could be examined and kept immersed in a chemical solution of polyethylene glycol, which would remove all the chlorides from the timber. Eventually, at the end of the preservation process, a controlled dry-out over months would produce a curatable taonga ready for exhibiting.

Ironically, Nicholls – the person who found the strake and then gave it up – was commissioned to make the specially designed tank needed for its immersion and preservation. He was the co-owner of Takaka's only engineering shop after all.

Tests subsequently conducted on what was soon dubbed the 'Anaweka waka' were comprehensive and thorough. It took around 2½ years for three internationally recognised canoe and conservation experts – Dilys Johns, Geoffrey Irwin and Yun Sung – to publish a paper on the important find in

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Anaweka Estuary, showing the spot where the Anaweka waka was found, along with recorded pre-European habitation and artefact sites around the inlet.

the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (PNAS). It is titled 'An Early Sophisticated East Polynesian Voyaging Canoe Discovered on New Zealand's Coast'. The paper was edited by Patrick Kirch, director of the Oceanic Archaeology Laboratory at the University of California in Berkeley, whose specialist interest is in the origins and diversification of people and cultures throughout the Pacific.

One of the very first tests conducted on the Anaweka waka established that it had been adzed from a single slab of New Zealand mataī (*Prumnopitys taxifolia*), while the caulking remains found in four of the lashing holes turned out to be pounded bark of tōtara (*Podocarpus totara*). Radiocarbon dating carried out by three separate laboratories – two in New Zealand and one in the United States – all came in with results of ad 1226–80 for the hull timber, and 40 or so years later for the oldest caulking material. It was normal procedure for composite canoes to be completely relashed every 20 years or so, often before a major ocean voyage or in a staggered fashion as

required. Older caulking would be added to, providing a kind of snapshot of the boat's maintenance programme. The PNAS authors concluded from the latest caulking and repair dates that the last likely voyage of this waka would have been in around ad 1400.

Putting this into a global perspective, the Anaweka waka was made in Aotearoa around the same time that, on the opposite side of the world, the ornate Chartres Cathedral was being constructed in France. Who was more sophisticated one may ask, the Polynesian Māori, who had already mastered complex oceanic travel, or the Europeans, who could build elaborate towering churches yet were unable to sail beyond the horizon for fear of getting lost, or worse, dropping off the edge of the world?

Almost certainly, the Anaweka waka was actively used around the exposed open sea coast off the South Island, where it could hardly have operated without a sail. As the hull section was made of mataī, it could only have been built in New Zealand, or at a possible stretch it could have been a replacement piece created for a voyaging canoe made in the islands and sailed out much earlier. After all, mataī is a highly durable timber that would deteriorate at a far slower rate than tropical timbers like breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*), which was often used to build boats in east Polynesia. The location, size and sophistication of the find strongly suggest the hull piece was definitely part of a large ocean-going sailing canoe. But the obvious question is: exactly what type of canoe was it part of?

Earlier forms of composite ocean-voyaging canoes, like the one the Anaweka component was obviously from, were the only ones known to have reached New Zealand from east Polynesia. Māori oral traditions state that both double and single outrigger canoes originally came to Aotearoa. Sailing was the primary power mode for these ancient voyaging canoes, the distances obviously far too great to travel by paddling alone.

Having poured over all the possibilities, experts think that the Anaweka waka piece fitted in as one of the upright hull sides near the rear of a big double canoe lashed across with a deck and a shelter from the sun and rain. The vessel had a low bow and raised stern, and an inverted triangular sail set forward just like the historical canoes of the Society and Southern Cook islands. In Tahiti, these canoes were called tipairua and were often an impressive 20 metres in length. The PNAS paper likens the Anaweka find to a single piece of a jigsaw puzzle, or an attempt to reconstruct a new animal from a single bone.

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The Anaweke waka section tied tight atop a mattress on Tony Nicholls' trailer, just after he arrived back in Takaka. The family's find was soon requisitioned by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage under the Protected Objects Act 1975. Photo: Gerard Hindmarsh

According to Herb Kawainui Kane in his book *Voyagers* (1991), tipairua typically bore romantic names, two remembered ones translating to *Rainbow* and *Wait for the West Wind*. On some islands their sails evolved locally to be rimmed with pliable wood strips, which were a great improvement on the triangular oceanic sail the Anaweke waka probably sported. In 1769, during the first Pacific voyage of English explorer Captain James Cook, naturalist Joseph Banks explained the improvement: 'With these sails their canoes go at a very good rate, and lie very near the wind, probably on account of their sail being bordered with wood.'

Luckily, a comprehensive historical and well-distributed literature exists on the development of Pacific oceanic canoe designs. More general 'archaic' forms developed into 'classical' designs particular to each island group, adapted to local winds and seas, and local timber resources. So it is possible to speculate fairly accurately which group of islands a particular canoe came from, or where its design originated.



A remarkable feature of the Anaweke waka is the carved relief of a sea turtle, significant to Polynesians an animal associated with long migrations across open ocean. Relatively rare in Māoridom, turtle motifs are common in the Society Islands, where they were often carved onto the exterior of canoes to help guide mariners on their journeys.

Photo: Sharon Nicholls

Importantly, the design technology and era of the Anaweke hull piece correlates with those of the only other large voyaging canoe ever found. This was excavated in 1978 from a coastal swamp on Huahine, one of the Leeward Islands group (Îles Sous-le-Vent) in the Society Islands, by Yosihiko Sinoto from the Bishop Museum of Hawai'i. His find caused an archaeological sensation, as it was regarded as the last remaining east Polynesian voyaging canoe left in existence, dating back at least 800 years to the early occupation of the region. The finding of the Anaweke waka on the Kahurangi coast in early 2012 now makes that world tally two. The open-ocean distance between the two finds is 4,221 kilometres.

In February 2017, my ongoing interest in the Anaweke waka took me to Huahine (pronounced 'wahine' and like the Māori word wahine, also meaning 'woman'). Clustered together with Raiatea and Taha'a, Huahine rises out of the sea as one of the lushest islands in all Polynesia. It's about 16 kilometres

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The remains of a voyaging canoe, dubbed the Huahine canoe, being excavated in 1978 from a coastal swamp on the island of Huahine in the Society Islands. The Anaweke waka and the Huahine canoe are near identical in their construction and are of a similar age.

Photo: Maitai Lapita Village Hotel Museum

long by 13 kilometres wide, and is actually two islands – Huahine Nui in the north and Huahine Iti in the south. These are joined by a sand spit that is exposed at low tide, and by the modern addition of a narrow, 200 metre-long road bridge for the convenience of motorists today.

Tahitians call Huahine ‘the wild island’, a reference to its verdant tropical jungle, which on its lower reaches is peppered with coconut and vanilla plantations. Planes from Tahiti (192 kilometres away) arrive three times a day, en route to Raiatea and Bora Bora, dropping off locals, a few tourists and surfies, who come to experience some of the best breaks French Polynesia can offer. The flight in over the turquoise lagoon takes your breath away.

Huahine (current population 6,300) has always stood out on its own. The last island in French Polynesia to resist annexation by France, it’s still full of islanders who exhibit a fierce pride and independence. Tahitians have a saying about the people of Huahine: ‘Obstinacy is their diversion’.

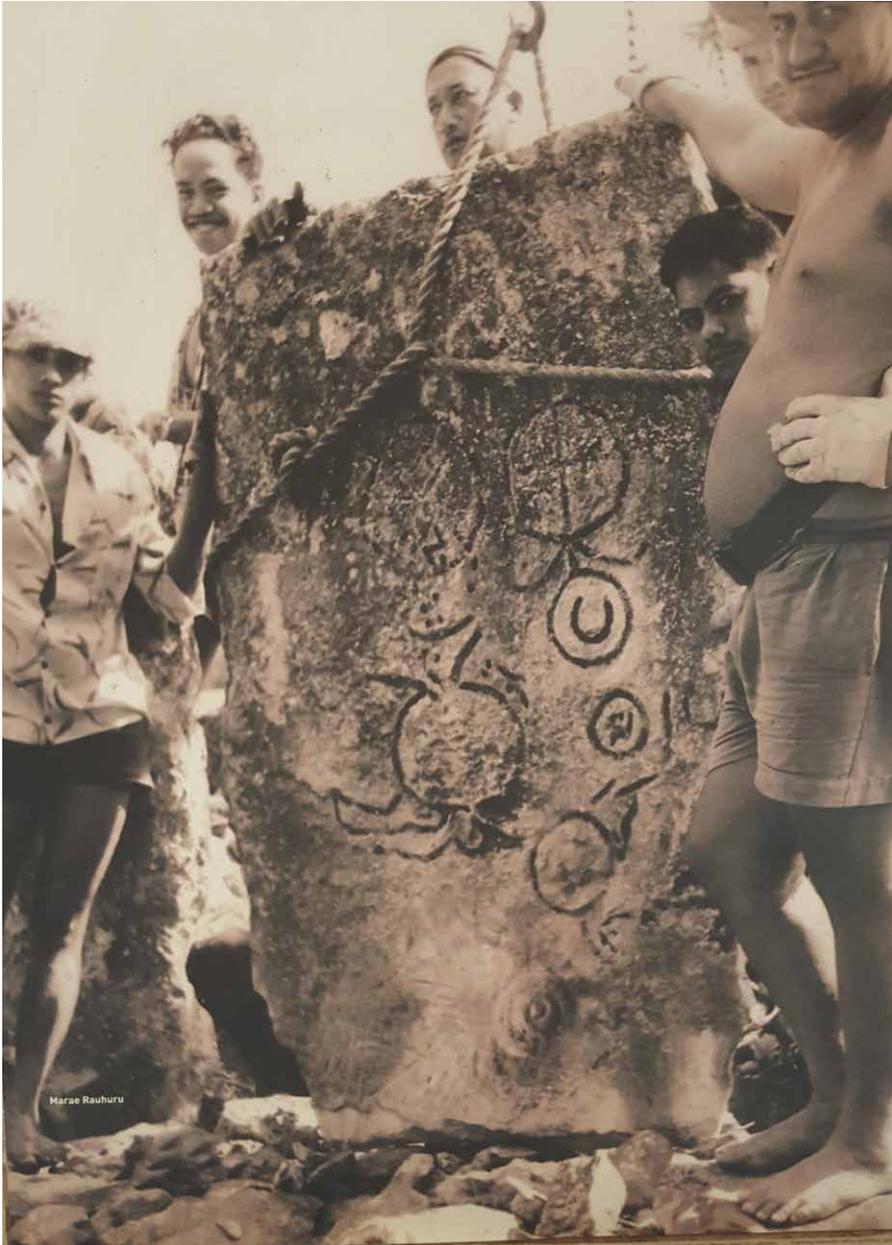
The vestiges of Huahine's prestigious past and rich culture were first investigated by archaeologist Kenneth Emory of Honolulu's Bishop Museum in the 1920s. He uncovered habitation sites, feasting and council platforms, temples and funerary sites, stone-tool workshops, agricultural terraces, stone fish traps, fortified sites and petrograph (rock art) sites. It can take weeks just to visit the hundreds of ceremonial marae sites. Emory's work was superseded by that of Sinoto in the 1970s, and was then followed up by New Zealand archaeologist Mark Eddowes, who in 2003 conducted an island-wide survey to document more than 200 of the most important sites.

The Huahine canoe was found during the excavation of an ornamental pond as part of the construction of the original Hotel Bali Hai at Vaito'otia-Fa'ahia in Huahine Nui. Part-owner of the current hotel on the site (the Maitai Lapita Village Hotel) is ex-Californian native Peter Owen, now a long-time island resident and renowned potter. He bought the 3-hectare site after the Bali Hai was demolished following severe damage in a cyclone. Peter took me around his hotel museum, which he set up in consultation with Eddowes, and explained how the canoe was found:

During construction work for the buildings of the original Hotel Bali Hai on this site, they were dredging out an area of swampy ground to make some ornamental ponds. Suddenly, the workers began digging up exceptional finds, all totally preserved in the waterlogged anaerobic conditions. Dr Sinoto was working on the island at the time. He was immediately called in and meticulously conducted the subsequent excavation over two years, which came up with hundreds and hundreds of artefacts.

In addition to a stone war club, near identical to mere (flat weapons) made later in Aotearoa, one of the early finds included a half-finished canoe baler and a 3 metre-long steering paddle, plus a number of other, partially carved paddles. Then the archaeological team uncovered a mast and, later, sections of a big canoe, which was soon dubbed the 'Huahine canoe'. A feature of the dig was the exceptional condition of many of the artefacts as they were dug up, all preserved in the thick, airless mud. One necklace was totally intact, its woven coconut fibre as good as the day it was made. Some of the artefacts now reside in the Museum of Tahiti and the Islands, others were taken to the Bishop Museum in Hawai'i and some were reburied in accordance with local wishes.

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The sea turtle on the Anaweke waka matches exactly the petroglyph of a sea turtle found on a block at Marae Rauhuru on Huahine in the Society Islands, and being removed here by archaeologists from Honolulu's Bernice P. Bishop Museum in 1924.

Photo: Fare Potee museum, Huahine

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