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Archaeology

Oparara Arches, West Coast

An archaeological assessment

Report prepared for Department of Conservation

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Reviewed by: Kirska Webb

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Project Details

Archaeological Site No.	N/A
Site location	Oparara Basin, West Coast
Client	Department of Conservation
Client Contact	Aideen Larkin
Report Authors	Tristan Wadsworth (archaeology), Lydia Mearns (history)
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1 Introduction

The Department of Conservation (DOC) are proposing a series of works to improve access and facilities for the Oparara Arches, within the Kahurangi National Park, West Coast (Figure 1 and Figure 2). These works include the improvement of McCallums Mill Road, the construction of a new toilet block and equipment station, and the construction of a cantilevered viewing platform over the Oparara Mirror Tarn. This assessment was by the Department of Conservation to determine if the proposed works will affect an archaeological site. This assessment has been prepared in accordance with Heritage New Zealand guidelines on writing archaeological assessments (NZHPT 2006).

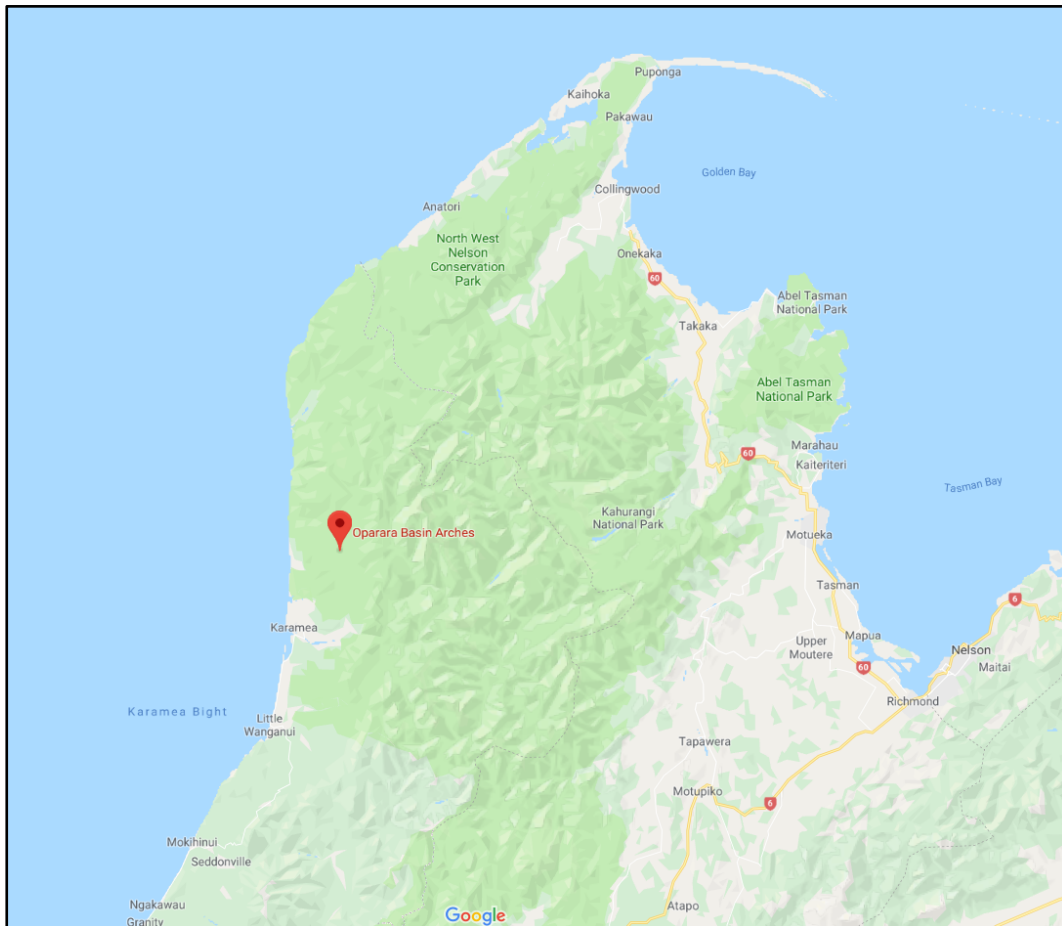


Figure 1. Oparara Basin Arches, West Coast (red pin). Image: Google Maps, 2019.

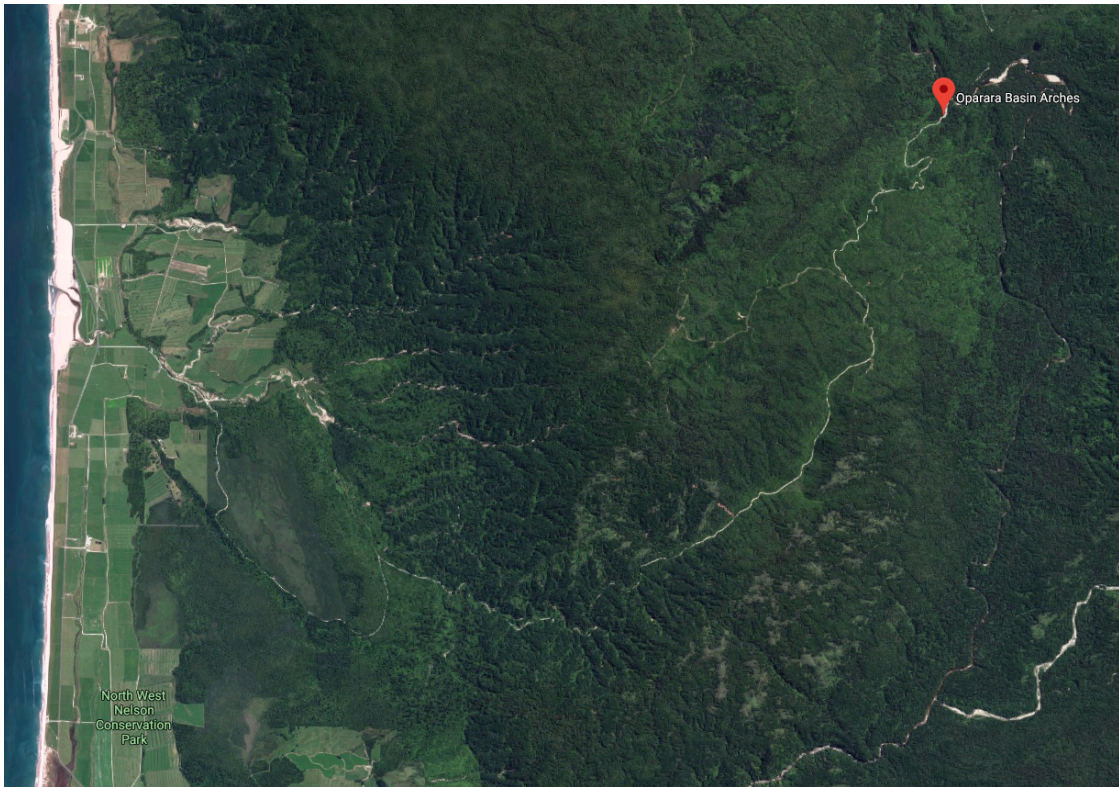


Figure 2. Oparara Basin Arches, West Coast (red pin). Image: Google Earth, 2019.

1.1 Project Outline

The proposed works include the improvement of McCallums Mill Road, the construction of a new toilet block and equipment station, and the construction of a cantilevered viewing platform over Mirror Tarn. The first 16 km of the road from the turnoff of Karamea-Kohaihai Road is to be improved, including widening, cutting drains, installation of new culverts and rock armouring, formation of passing bays, and cutting and filling portions of the road to improve gradients and corners. The current culverts were installed in the 20th century as part of the formation of the forestry road and many were simply formed by felling trees across the stream crossings to form the structural support for overlying fill.

The combination toilet block/monitoring station is to be installed on the east side of the track near the start of the track to the Box Canyon and Crazy Paving Caves. These will include the clearance of an area of approximately 4 m of regenerating vegetation, and excavation for new foundations.

The cantilevered viewing platform at Mirror Tarn will likely require excavation for the viewing platform foundation and cantilever weight.

Other works that are to take place as part of the upgrade include installation of signage or fencing, and some track works, which largely won't include excavation, and will involve raising the track level up 200 mm to get it above the flood level.

2 Methodology

In order to assess the potential archaeological resources of the project area, UOA conducted documentary research, examined records of previously recorded sites within the vicinity of the project area.

UOA consulted numerous sources of documentary evidence in order to determine the historical context of the project area. The results of the documentary research are provided below. The sources utilised in this research include:

- ArchSite
- historic maps and plans
- Ngāi Tahu's digital atlas (<http://www.kahurumanu.co.nz/atlas>)
- W.A. Taylor's *Lore and History of the South Island Maori*
- 19th century newspapers available through the PapersPast website
- reports completed, and in preparation, on archaeological work carried out in the vicinity of the project footprint
- local histories

A site visit was conducted by Tristan Wadsworth on 4 June 2019.

3 Historical Background and Previous Archaeology

3.1 Māori History

Traditional accounts relate that the first human settlers in Te Wai Pounamu (the South Island) were Waitaha, descendants of the explorer Rākaihautū who arrived in the waka Uruao. They were followed by Ngāti Mamoe, who migrated from Te Ika a Maui (the North Island) to the South Island around the late 16th/early 17th centuries. The relationship between Waitaha and Ngāti Mamoe was complicated, with periods of peace and intermarriage as well as conflict, but Ngāti Mamoe gradually came to establish mana whenua through both means over much of the South Island. In the early to mid-17th century another North Island group, Ngāi Tahu, migrated to the South Island. As with their predecessors, Ngāi Tahu came to establish mana whenua over most of the South Island through both conflict and intermarriage, with Ngāti Waewae a hapū of Ngāi Tahu claiming ownership of much of the West Coast. They also came to be known as Poutini Ngāi Tahu. (Anderson, 1998; Tau and Anderson, 2008).

The main Māori settlements on the West Coast were located between the Māwheranui (Grey River) and Hokitika River, where the main pounamu (greenstone) gathering areas were located. However, trade and travel routes were also established across the Southern Alps, with the Kaiapoi pā in north Canterbury being one of the major trading centres for pounamu (Nathan, 2016). The Te Tai Poutini coastal pathway was also used as a traditional travel route by local Māori and it extended along much of the West Coast's coastline from Golden Bay to the Mātakitaki River (Ka Haru Manu, 2019). The Karara Taramea River, "meaning sweet-scented taramea", was also used as a traditional travel route and resource by local Māori. The aromatic taramean speargrass which grew along the banks of the river near its entrance to the sea was gathered and heated to extract the resin, and then mixed with bird fat to create fragrant sachets of oil to be used as a fragrance and for trading (Ka Haru Manu, 2019).

Between 1831 and 1832 a Ngāti Rārua tride, led by Niho and Takere, invaded the West Coast from the north. They defeated Poutini Ngāi Tahu, and remained in occupation, controlling the main pounamu gathering sites. When Ngāti Rārua withdrew in 1837, the Poutini Ngāi Tahu again in control of the whole region (Nathan, 2016).

Following the purchase of the Karamea area from local Māori by the Crown in 1860 as part of the Arahura Purchase (see below for more details) a 500 acre Māori reserve was established adjoining the Kara Taramea River. This reserve was later reduced in size, and was not vested with the Māori trustee until the 1920s (Ka Haru Manu, 2019; Taylor, 1952: 196).

Archaeological investigations provide some of the best evidence of the extent of Māori settlement on the West Coast. While there are no recorded Māori archaeological sites located within the area of inquiry, there are number of Māori archaeological sites in the greater Karamea area which include cave camp sites and burials, cliff burials, a village site, middens, ovens, and adze find spots, though these are all located significantly nearer the coast line and/or river banks than the area of proposed works (ArchSite, 2019: L26/1, L26/2, L26/3, L26/4, L26/5, L26/7, L26/8, L26/10, L27/1, L27/2, L27/3, L27/4).

3.2 Pākehā History

The West Coast's reputation as a mountainous, densely forested area, with a high rainfall, initially made it unattractive as a place for settlement by European colonists. Therefore, while much of the east coast of the South Island had been explored by the mid-1840s, it was not until 1846 that surveyors Thomas Brunner and Major Charles Heaphy, along with their Māori guide Kehu, made the first extensive exploration and mapping exercise of the West Coast. Their aim was to determine the region's viability as a location for settlement, and during their three-year expedition they mapped the coastline from Golden Bay to the Paringa River and traversed multiple valleys. However, their impressions of the West Coast were not favourable as a place for settlement, and as a consequence there was little European interest in the West Coast for almost a decade (Nathan, 2016; New Zealand Mines Department, 1887).

Following a shortage of agricultural land in Canterbury and Nelson in the latter 1850s, a renewed interest in the West Coast was soon cultivated. The government employed James MacKay in 1859 to negotiate with the local Māori, Poutini Ngāi Tahu, to purchase the land along the West Coast. The resulting Arahura Deed was signed on 21 May 1860, which saw all of what would come to be known as the Westland Province, (apart from small areas reserved for local Māori) purchased by the Crown for £300 (Nathan, 2016). A map of the Arahura block drawn by MacKay in 1859 (but based on the earlier surveys of Brunner and Heaphy) shows the various rivers recorded along the coastline adjoining the area of inquiry, but little detail of the inland area has been recorded at this time (Figure 3). The name Karamea came to be used for the area, a contraction of the Māori name Kakara-taramea.



Figure 3. Detail from James MacKay's map of the Arahura Block, indicating the area of inquiry circled in red. Image: MacKay, 1859.

During an exploration of the West Coast region in November 1859, surveyor John Rochford found a small amount of gold in several places on the West Coast, and this led to a number of prospectors exploring parts of the region over the proceeding few years. But it was not until mid-1864 when large quantities of alluvial gold were discovered near Hokitika, that the West Coast saw an influx of miners and traders (Nathan, 2016). The resulting population increase of the 1860s gold rush led to the establishment of the County of Westland (later the Westland Province) in 1867 (May, 1962). Unfortunately, little gold was found in the Karamea area in 1860s, and so it remained largely uninhabited, despite having a navigable port at the mouth of the Karamea River (Nathan, 2016).

It was not until the early 1870s the Nelson Provincial Council took advantage of a government-funded scheme to formally develop the Karamea area. With the arrival of a number of English immigrants along with a small group from the Shetland Islands in 1874, a small settlement was soon established on the banks of the Karamea River. Agriculture developed as settlement's primary industry, but the lack of roading infrastructure to connect the fledging township with broader markets meant it initially remained at subsistence level. It was not until the opening of the first cooperative butter factory in 1911 and the opening of the road to Westport in 1916 that dairy industry began to expand. When the Karamea River port silted up following the 1929 Murchison earthquake the only access to the area was then by road (Karamea Information Centre, 2019; Nathan, 2016).

Farming however was not the only industry to develop in the Karamea. Although the area was initially overlooked as a mining site during the 1860s gold rush, during the latter nineteenth century mining began to develop along the “rich gold-bearing rivers” and waterways (May, 1962; *Otago Daily Times* 21/7/1900: 10). Archaeological evidence of the Fenian goldfield is recorded along the Ōpārara River in the form of a miners track and sluicing claim (ArchSite, 2019: L27/6 and L27/7). Coal was also a fairly abundant resource in the area, however it was mostly worked for local consumption and does not appear to have expanded into a large scale export operation (New Zealand Mines Department, 1906).

Timber and flax milling also developed in the Karamea area in the late 19th century, and by 1909 there were at least five sawmilling companies occupying large areas of Crown forest land in Ōpārara for sawmilling purposes (*New Zealand Mail* 15/8/1906: 53; Plunket, 1909). A survey plan of the Ōpārara Survey District in 1918 shows the land along the coast line subdivided into smaller land holdings, while much of the inland area around the Ōpārara Basin Arches divided into larger Crown owned forest blocks which were set aside for timber milling purposes (Figure 4). The company sawmills were constructed close to the main transport routes on the coast line, but as the logging areas developed further away from their sawmills, it became necessary to build private access tracks/roads into the undulating forest. McCallum’s Mill Road for example, was initially surveyed as a private mill track connecting McCallum’s mill (located about a kilometer from the coast) to his distant logging claims in the Ōpārara Basin (Plunket, 1909). However, during the during the twentieth century the maintenance costs and extensions of the road escalated, and after changes of ownership and a belated attempt at reforestation, McCallum’s former sawmill went bankrupt. Some small-scale logging continued in parts of the forest until it was banned in 2002 (Department of Conservation, 2011).



Figure 4. Detail from 1918 survey plan of the Ōpārara Survey District, showing the land around the Ōpārara Basin Arches (indicated with red pin) as being surveyed into large crown owned forest blocks set aside for timber milling purposes. Image: Wilmot, 1918.

Parts of the Ōpārara forest were gazetted as provision state forest from the 1920s, and was administered by the New Zealand Forest Services (LINZ, 1969). However, a long-fought campaign by lobbying conservation groups culminated in the establishment of the Kahurangi National Park in 1996, which ensured the protection and enhancement of 452,002 hectares (making it New Zealand’s second largest national park) of land in the

area (Department of Conservation, 2011). Many of the former milling tracks have been upgraded into a network of hiking and bike tracks through the Ōpārara valley, which provide access to the many spectacular complex of arches and caverns, and cave formations located in the Ōpārara Basin (Nathan, 2016).

There are no recorded archaeological sites in the vicinity of the proposed works.

4 Site Visit

A site visit was undertaken by Tristan Wadsworth of Underground Overground Archaeology, accompanied by Malcolm Hansen of DOC. The locations of the proposed works and the nearby area was inspected for the possibility of archaeological material. None of the caves show any indication of occupation by Māori, or by Pākehā prior to 1900. No archaeological material was observed during the site visit.



Figure 5. Proposed toilet block location.



Figure 6. Proposed toilet block location.



Figure 7. Location of the Mirror Tarn cantilever viewing platform location.

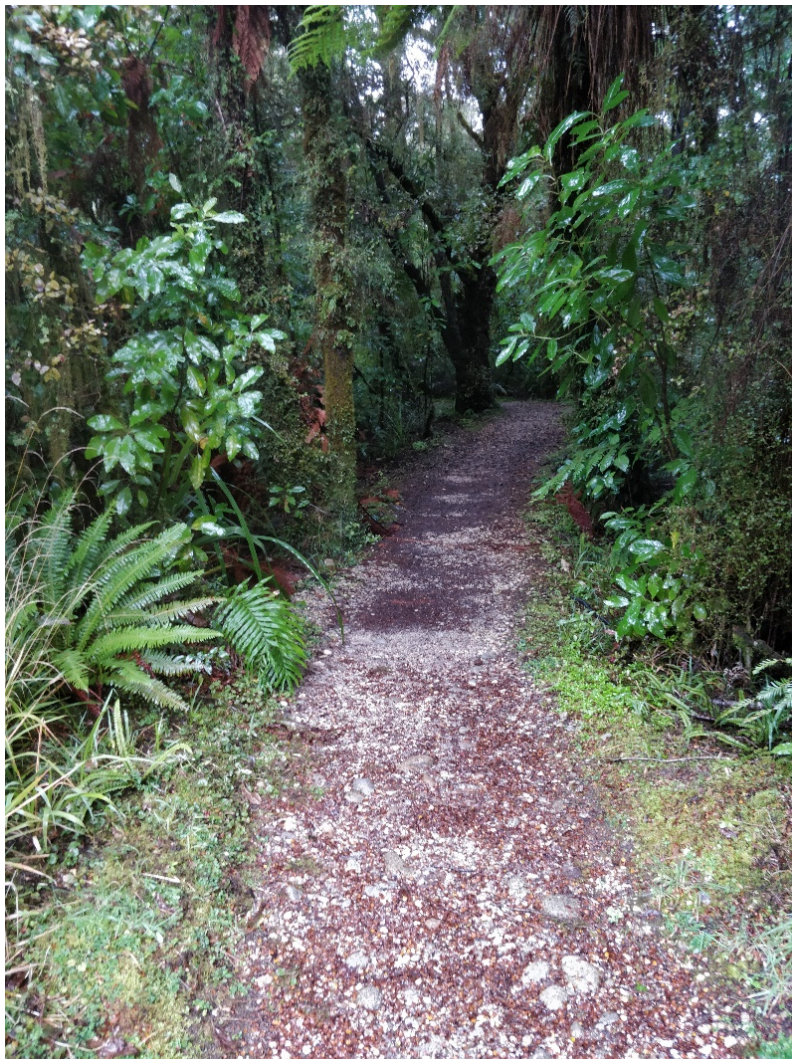


Figure 8. Oparara Arches track.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

No evidence was found to suggest that the inland Oparara area was occupied prior to the 20th century. There are no recorded archaeological sites in the area of works, and there is no indication that archaeological material would be encountered during the proposed works.

As such, the following recommendations are made:

- The Department of Conservation need not apply for an archaeological authority for the proposed works, which can proceed under an accidental discovery protocol.
- If archaeological material is encountered during the proposed works, works should cease immediately within a 5 m radius, and an archaeologist should be contacted for advice on how to proceed.

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