



Whangamumu Whaling Station Bay of Islands

Historic Heritage Assessment

Melina Goddard, Department of Conservation, Bay of Islands Area Office

2010



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Whangamumu Whaling Station, Bay of Islands, Bay of Islands: Historic Heritage
Assessment

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Cover image: Whangamumu Harbour facing east as seen from the Whangamumu
track. (A. Blanshard).

Peer-reviewed by Andrew Blanshard, Joan Maingay

Publication information

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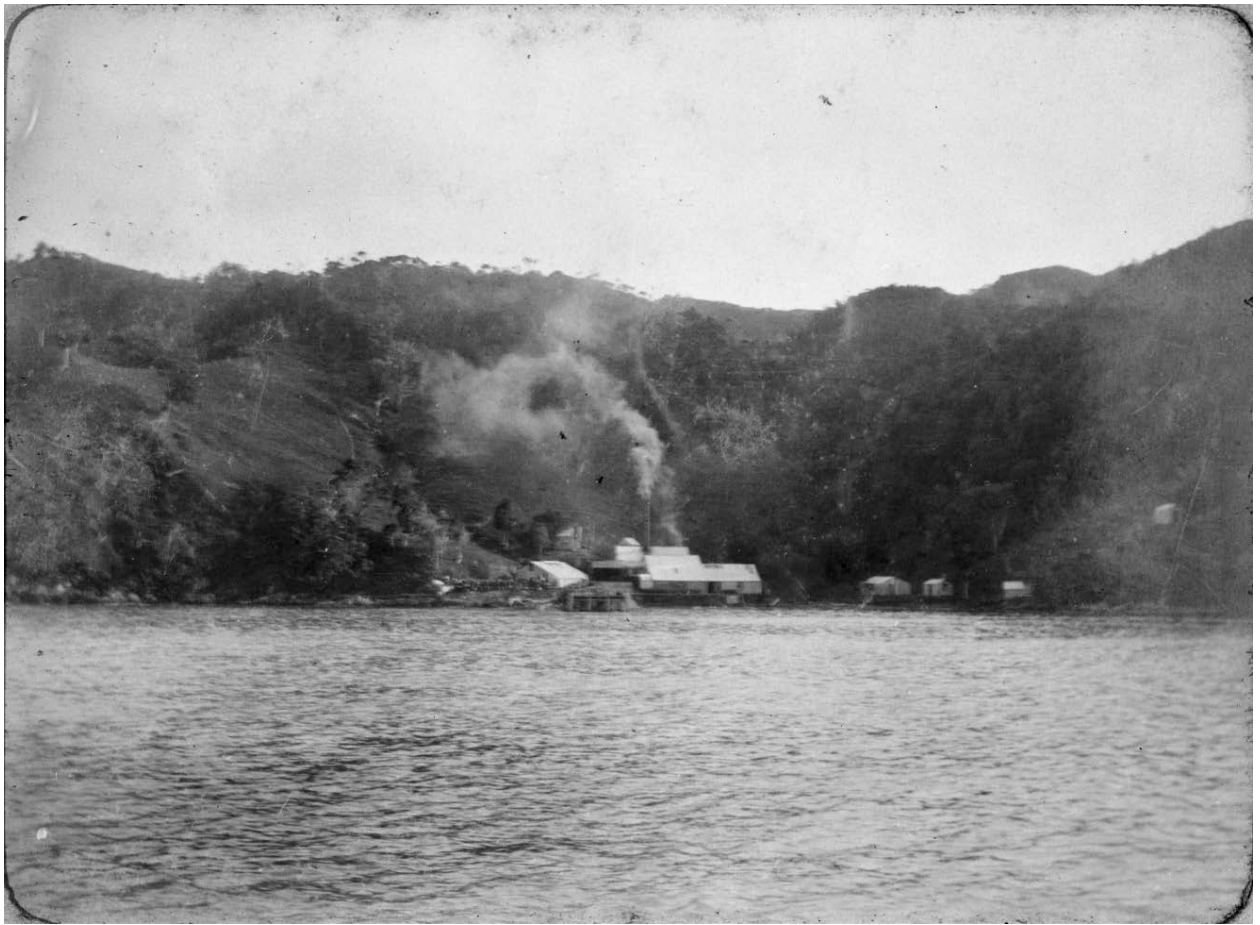


Figure 1: Whangamumu whaling station, Bay of Islands, c. 1910. (Photographer unidentified (G P Hall Collection. Alexander Turnbull Library).



Figure 2: Whangamumu whaling station as seen today 2009. (A. Blanshard DOC Bay of Islands).

SITE OVERVIEW

*“Whangamumu where the whaling station is situated, is a curious little circular harbour, shut in by innumerable rocks and reefs, and as it lies well under the base of Cape Brett is well sheltered from the north east winds. It is an out of the way place, of course, but as it is the only place in the world where whales are caught in nets, it has a reputation of its own”.*¹

Whangamumu, located on the eastern side of the Rakaumangmanga Peninsula (see appendix 1, 2) is well known for its whaling history. The harbour is also notable for its prehistoric sites, forty having been recorded within the reserve. There are two large pa on the ridgeline south of the harbour and pits, terraces, midden and cultivations line the ridges and valleys.

- The whaling station is located in the Whangamumu Scenic Reserve (see appendix 3)
- Administered by Bay of Islands Area Office, Kerikeri
- Access by track from Rawhiti Road/ Private boat
- Visitor numbers not known
- Actively managed site number 48
- The Whangamumu Scenic Reserve is 254.2994 hectares; the whaling station 2 hectares
- Functional location number- DN-61-200-1025

2. HISTORY DESCRIPTION

Whaling from Whangamumu reportedly began in 1844 with John Johnson and Andrew Gibson. The exact location of the operations and its successes if any are unknown.² The better known whaling history of Whangamumu began in 1893 when the Cook brothers George, William and Herbert shifted whaling operations from Outu Bay, on the Rakaumangamanga Peninsula to Whangamumu Harbour. The station was the only one in the world that caught whales with nets, and it was Northland's longest running and most successful station.³ In 1910 it was transformed into an extensive factory under the name of *Messrs Jagger and Cook* (fig 1). Due to a decline in the value of whale oil the station was eventually abandoned by 1940. Today the physical remains at Whangamumu represent the last factory based whaling station in Northland (fig 2).

The net used by the Whangamumu whalers was patented by the Cooks and D.H Ross of Auckland on 6th of July 1892.⁴ George Cook described the origins of netting whales in the following way:

*“It was recognised that a five knot boat has not much chance of catching a six knot whale, so a plan was thought of to handicap the brutes. It took the form of a net, and the following season it was put into practice”.*⁵

Numerous experiments were undertaken before a solid technique was developed. Factors were the placement of the net, the materials of the net and its structure. Mr E.W Cook gave the following memoirs about the Whangamumu base his cousin founded:

*“My cousin brought piles of flax and directed that a net be made, there were two whales when it was initially tried. The first steered clear but the second was caught. It struggled and fought but was killed in the end. It completely wrecked the net. Rope nets were tried next but it was not until wire mesh was used that the process was judged to be satisfactory”.*⁶

The wire mesh was made into sections; each section was ten fathoms square (a depth of 18 metres). When a whale became entangled it broke away only one section leaving the others intact. Twenty gallon kegs were used for buoys although eventually drogues of flat square pieces of wood were used.⁷ The aim was to slow the whale down so it could be lanced more effectively (fig 3). Once this was achieved, it was towed back to the shore station.⁸

The net was set in different places to begin with and attached between rocks where whales were seen to pass. Later, ‘Net Rock’ was the usual place for setting the net. The rocks used were said to have ring bolts sunken into them which the net was attached to.⁹

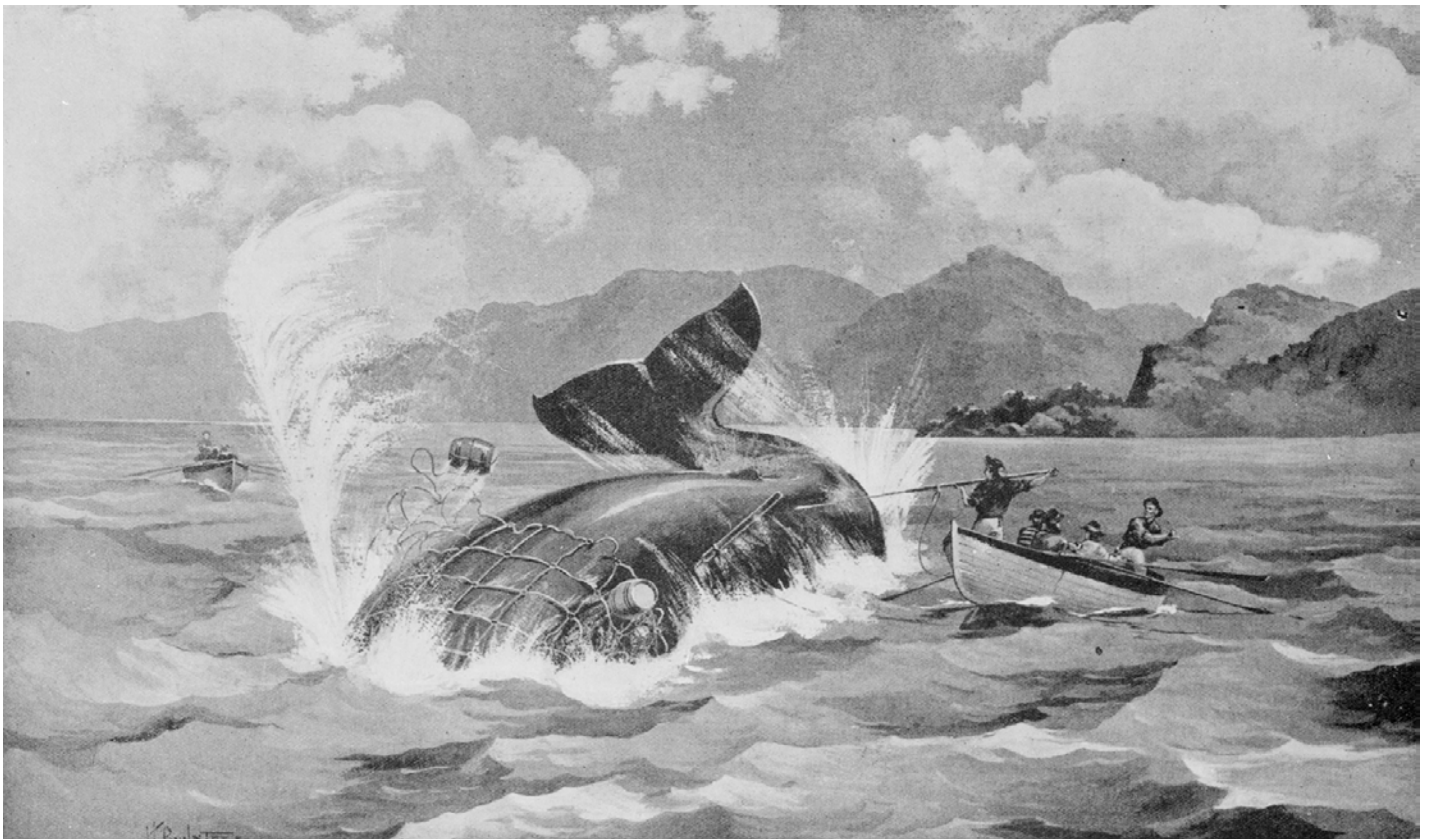


Figure 3: Whangamumu whalers capturing a whale with the aid of a net 1903. (Steadman and Martin, Weekly News, Auckland War Memorial Museum).

In 1895, at Whangamumu, Cook's Whaling Company Limited was formed. The company at this stage owned 10 acres of freehold land, upon which there was reportedly a jetty and try-works.¹⁰

By 1899 about twenty local men of Maori or part Maori descent were working, and in some cases living, at Whangamumu. A typical day consisted of the whalers rising at 5am, eating breakfast and then setting off from the jetty. The nets would be coiled up in the boats with the men and they were taken out to the spot and set. A lookout would be on the cliffs and would shout "*blow!*" when a whale was sighted.¹¹ A Whangamumu whaler in 1975 recalls that:

*"It was a hard life and the rewards not great...we got a pound a week and four biscuits...dog biscuits we called them....and a drink of water a day. But there were days in which we were only to glad too have a job".*¹²

During the late 1800's at Whangamumu sixteen to twenty whales was a fair season's catch, each whale being worth £100. By 1901 the number of whales caught began to increase with the purchase of a steam launch, Waiwiri.¹³ Whangamumu was well known for using every part of the whale as described in the Auckland weekly news, 1901:

*"A whale roughly speaking is worth about £100 that is, strips are cut off and hoisted to the wharf, to whence it is conveyed to the vats in the boiling down shed, to be converted into oil. Every portion which will yield oil is treated; bones and refuse is turned into manure by the latest manure making machinery, so that there is little or no waste."*¹⁴

In 1910 Whangamumu moved to factory whaling and the station was extensively rebuilt and had its name changed to Messrs Jagger and Cook. That same year the Hananui was purchased, and the netting method was abandoned.¹⁵ This steam powered boat had a harpoon fitted to it and substantially increased the whale catch rate (see appendix 4). The harpoon concept, which had been invented by a Norwegian whaler in 1860,¹⁶ had a bomb fitted to it which exploded on impact resulting in instantaneous death.¹⁷ With the arrival of the Hananui the annual catch maintained an average of about fifty whales a season.¹⁸ The largest number of whales processed at Whangamumu in one year was seventy four in 1925.¹⁹

The gradual decline of the station began in the 1930's. The depression had affected the market price for oil and the station could not dispose of its previous years catch.²⁰ As a result the station was closed for the season in 1931 to 1932. It reopened the following year and a new whaleboat specially built in Auckland for Herbert Cook was used to make a motion picture of "whaling in the olden days".²¹ The re-opening was temporary, as the next report from the station is that whaling is "due to recommence in the course of the next week or two". However there is no record of any catches in that or the following year and the Hananui was sold to Bluff interests for freighting oysters.²²

The final episode of the station came in 1940 when the old base was repaired and re-opened. Herbert Cook who had managed the station died and the business was

bought by Harry King, Jim Whitelaw and George Hansen. The industry never picked up as was expected by the new owners. The whaling station was finally closed down and abandoned when the *Niagara* sank and left a crude oil slip in the vicinity of Whangamumu causing the humpbacks to avoid their old route.²³

3. FABRIC DESCRIPTION

Today the physical remains at Whangamumu represent the 20th century factory that was established by Messrs Jagger and Cook. The physical remains consist of concrete, steel, metal and iron structural elements that offer the potential for interpretation of the day-to-day processes and workings that took place at the station.

Archaeological surveys throughout New Zealand of whaling stations have been numerous,²⁴ and have resulted in extensive records of the remains of whaling sites in New Zealand.²⁵ The remains of the whaling station at Whangamumu were mapped by the Department of Lands and Survey in the 1980's (see appendix 5), and in 1994 by James Robinson and Joan Maingay. In 2006 Andrew Blanshard updated the site record form for the station and it was given the New Zealand Archaeological Association metric site number of Q05/1337. An earlier map exists of the station which provides operational descriptions of the individual elements. The date of this map and its author are unknown.

Nationally, the remains provide an excellent example of a shore based whaling factory during the 20th century. After the station was finally abandoned it remained derelict. In 1942 a fire burnt the wooden buildings leaving the concrete and metal remains.

The most visible of the remains are six large concrete vats, known as the steam vats. These were located inside the factory when it was operational and were used to cook the meat and bones of the whale. The concrete slipway, located on the beach, was the main ramp for winching the whales up to the factory floor. There is concrete foundation pads present throughout most of the site that represent a variety of activities. For example, where the blubber of the whale was placed before mincing and possibly the location of the try-works in use before the factory was built.

The metal remains consist of a steel boiler and digester that are still located in their original positions. The steel boiler supplied the power to the station for heat and to winch the whales up. It was made in the period 1880-95 in Auckland and remains in its original installation (fig 4). It is an under-fired multi-tube type boiler and is supported on formed cradles of brick and concrete at each end and at two equally spaced intervals directly under the formed seams of the boiler.²⁶ The steel digester was a pressure cooker that extracted precious oil from the whale blubber. These items are in a severely rusted unstable condition. Iron rail tracks, the power winch, and piping are scattered throughout the site. Pipes acted to transport whale oil to holding tanks, heating and as outlet pipes for waste. House terraces can be found on the slopes overlooking the station in addition to brick chimneys associated with the houses.



Figure 4: The steel boiler at Whangamumu that powered factory operations, (A. Blanshard 2009).

4. CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

The Cook brothers were related to Chief Tamiti Waka Nene through their grandfather William Cook, who was married to Tiraha, a Kapotai woman and Nene's cousin. William Cook established a boat building business on the Waikare Inlet and worked here until his death in 1874. He and Tiraha, have many hundreds of descendants at the Bay and throughout New Zealand.²⁷ Whangamumu whaling station was primarily staffed by local people from Te Rawhiti whose descendants still have close ties with the site.²⁸

5. NATIONAL CONTEXT

Whaling began in New Zealand in the early 19th century and it continued to the end of the twentieth century. Throughout this time whaling developed from oceanic whaling to shore based factories. In many places the first European settlers were whalers and shore stations were the first European settlements.²⁹

Whale oil was in high demand for lighting and heating in a time when mineral oil and fossil fuels were unknown. By 1809 there were twelve British whaling ships operating off the coast of New Zealand. Oceanic whaling was a consistently dangerous vocation and men would be at sea for months and years at a time. These ships visited the Bay of Islands, using it as a base for provisions, rest and recreation. The most frequented place in New Zealand was Kororareka, which provided whalers with plentiful fresh food supplies, wood, chandlery, ship repairs, refitting and a place to take a break from everyday work.³⁰

In comparison to ocean whaling shore stations were an economic commodity as they were inexpensive to set up and run. Shore stations were run in connection with a trading ship, which would bring in supplies and take oil and baleen to the Sydney market at the end of the season.³¹ Early shore whaling focused on right whales and the first shore whaling station set up in New Zealand was that of Captain John Guard in 1827 at the Tory channel (Te Awaite), and the second in 1829 was at Preservation Inlet. Early in the 19th century the whaling industry peaked and was New Zealand's major commercial industry in terms of value generated and men employed.³² The decline of the industry was rapid and by the middle of the 19th century New Zealand whaling stations were largely abandoned for lack of right whales.³³

The industry was restored in the beginning of the 20th century when factory whaling began; the focus was now upon humpback and sperm whales. Foremost was the operation at the Tory channel, where the Perano family whaled from 1909 to 1964, New Zealand's longest continuously operating whaling station.³⁴ In the north were Whangamumu, Whangaparapara on Great Barrier Island and Moturua Island. Whangamumu whaling station and the Tory channel station in Kaikoura were the only stations to have developed from early shore whaling stations using mainly manpower and try-pots to sophisticated industrial shore stations with steam power and machinery.³⁵

The following excerpt is from a report from the 'secretary for marine' in 1910 that summarises the Whangamumu whaling station in its wider context:

*"The whaling stations in New Zealand are at Whangamumu, Tory channel, Kaikoura and Campbell Island. Humpback whales are caught at Whangamumu, and all their products are utilised. Last year sixteen whales were taken (at Whangamumu), which produced 80 tons of oil, 20 tons of manure and 10 tons of bone dust. Right and humpbacked whales are taken at Tory channel from which the oil and the whale bone are the only parts utilised. No more than two or three whales are usually obtained from this station. At Kaikoura a few right whales are usually taken during the season, of which the oil and the whalebone are the only portions utilised"*³⁶

By 1910 Whangamumu and the Tory channel whaling stations were the largest operations remaining in New Zealand, both using power-driven whale chaser boats, the first of these at Whangamumu.³⁷

6. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The New Zealand shore whaling industry had a major role in the cultural contact between Maori and European. This process of early contact is an integral part of the country's early history.³⁸ Within this context Whangamumu is an example of one of the countries earliest and most economically successful whaling stations. The station was known for its innovative ideas being the only station in the world that used nets to catch whales, one of the few stations that utilised all parts of the

whale carcass and one of the few which developed from an early shore station to a factory.

7. FABRIC SIGNIFICANCE

The fabric of Whangamumu represents the only substantial physical remains of an industrial whaling station in Northland and offers the potential for further extensive public interpretation of whaling operations.

8. CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The whaling station is of great local significance as it was primarily staffed by local people from the Rawhiti community, and the descendants of these people still have close ties to the site. Whaling stations are some of the earliest European industrial sites in New Zealand and contain information on European settlement of the country.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Vegetation removal in conjunction with structural stabilisation. Several locations are being severely damaged by unchecked vegetation growth. Some of the trees are sizeable and need specialist skills for removal. The work also needs to be done carefully so that the concrete and masonry already damaged by the growth are not further damaged by the trees' removal.
- Following vegetation removal stabilisation and repair work can be completed on masonry and concrete structures.
- There are two boilers on site, one a larger power boiler which dates from 1880-1895, arguably the most distinct part of the site. The boiler must be re-piled, and rust on the iron stabilised. The second boiler is a smaller digester type, and needs to be replaced onto a plinth in its correct position on site.
- A drain needs to be re-established to stop further deterioration of several concrete water vats which are filling with water and rubbish.

MANAGEMENT HISTORY

- Officially closed in 1940.
- Destroyed by fire in 1942 leaving the concrete and metal remains that are visible today.
- Late 1940's land was used for farming.
- 1979 the land was purchased by the crown and gazetted as a scenic reserve
- Interpretation cairn placed at site in the 1980's.
- 1983 a report was compiled regarding "Management Concerns" for Whangamumu Whaling Station. Main concerns were vegetation growth which was undermining structures, namely the steel boiler and brick encasement and graffiti on the concrete vats.
- 1994 the station mapped by James Robinson and Joan Maingay.
- 2001 Salmond and Reed architects report.
- 2006 NZAA site record form for the station created by Blanshard.
- 2008 Department of Conservation Whangamumu rubbish and graffiti clean up.
- 2009-2010 historic heritage bid.
- 2009 department of Conservation vegetation removal.
- Ongoing track maintenance.
- 2010 plans for a track reroute through the site and interpretation panels to be placed at various interpretive points throughout the site.
- 2011 track rerouted through site in conjunction with new interpretation panels

MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTATION

- DOCDM 565061
- Current DOC management file numbers *HHA-01-02-26, PAR-01-03-82*
- Heritage assessment *yes*
- Baseline inspection: *Salmond and Reed Architects 2001 report*

SOURCES

(Including background reading)

Primary

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- Cawthorn, M. 2000. Maori, "Whales and Whaling": An Ongoing Relationship. Conservation Advisory Science Notes No. 308, Department of Conservation, Wellington.

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Auckland Museum, Auckland.

Jacomb, C. 1998. Shore whaling sites of Banks Peninsula: An archaeological survey.
Edited by Lawrence, S and Staniforth, M in *The archaeology of whaling in southern Australia and New Zealand*, 68-75. Australasian society for historical archaeology, and Australian institute for maritime archaeology, special publication 10.

Newspapers and periodicals

The Auckland weekly news

26th July 1901 pg 5

25th June 1903 pg 12

Northland regional magazine

No.14 April 1961 pg 23

Russell Museum collection

“Veteran whaler” c.1934. Record # 53

Historic Northland 19th November 1991 pg 53. Record # 99/1385:

Russell library record 1977 pg 8. Record # 98/612

Russell Museum, “Modern whale hunting” Record # 98/458

Film archives

New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington, New Zealand

“Whaling at Whangamumu, North Auckland” Carlton Films

Departmental files

Department of Conservation files

Anderson, S. 1983. Whangamumu management concerns.

Photographic collections

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington New Zealand

The Ross collection

“Whaling shed and carcass at Whangamumu” photographer unknown F-69176-1/2
G P Hall collection

“Whangamumu whaling station Bay of Islands” c.1910 photographer unknown F-69268-1/2

“The ship Hananui II at the wharf and a whale on the slip at Whangamumu”
c.1910 photographer unknown F-69217-1/2

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Auckland War Memorial Museum

“Whalers, Mr C Cooke and Co's harpooners and boatmen, Whangamumu”. 26th July 1901. Weekly News. Auckland War Memorial Museum. Record # 44992.

“Capturing a whale with the aid of a net at Messers. H.F Cook and Co's”. 25th June 1903. photographed by Steadman and Martin, Weekly News. Auckland War Memorial Museum. Record # 45000.

Russell Museum, Russell, New Zealand

“The Hananui II in the Bay of Islands” Northlander magazine. 99/1310

Drummond Te Wake collection

“Whangamumu whaling station workers” c. 1910. Russell Museum 03/66

Maps

Location of Whangamumu whaling station remains in the Bay of Islands.

MapToaster topographic maps

Location of the whaling station in the Whangamumu harbour. *Quantum GIS topographic maps*

The location of the whaling station within the DOC Scenic Reserve. *Quantum GIS aerials*

EVALUATION OF SOURCES

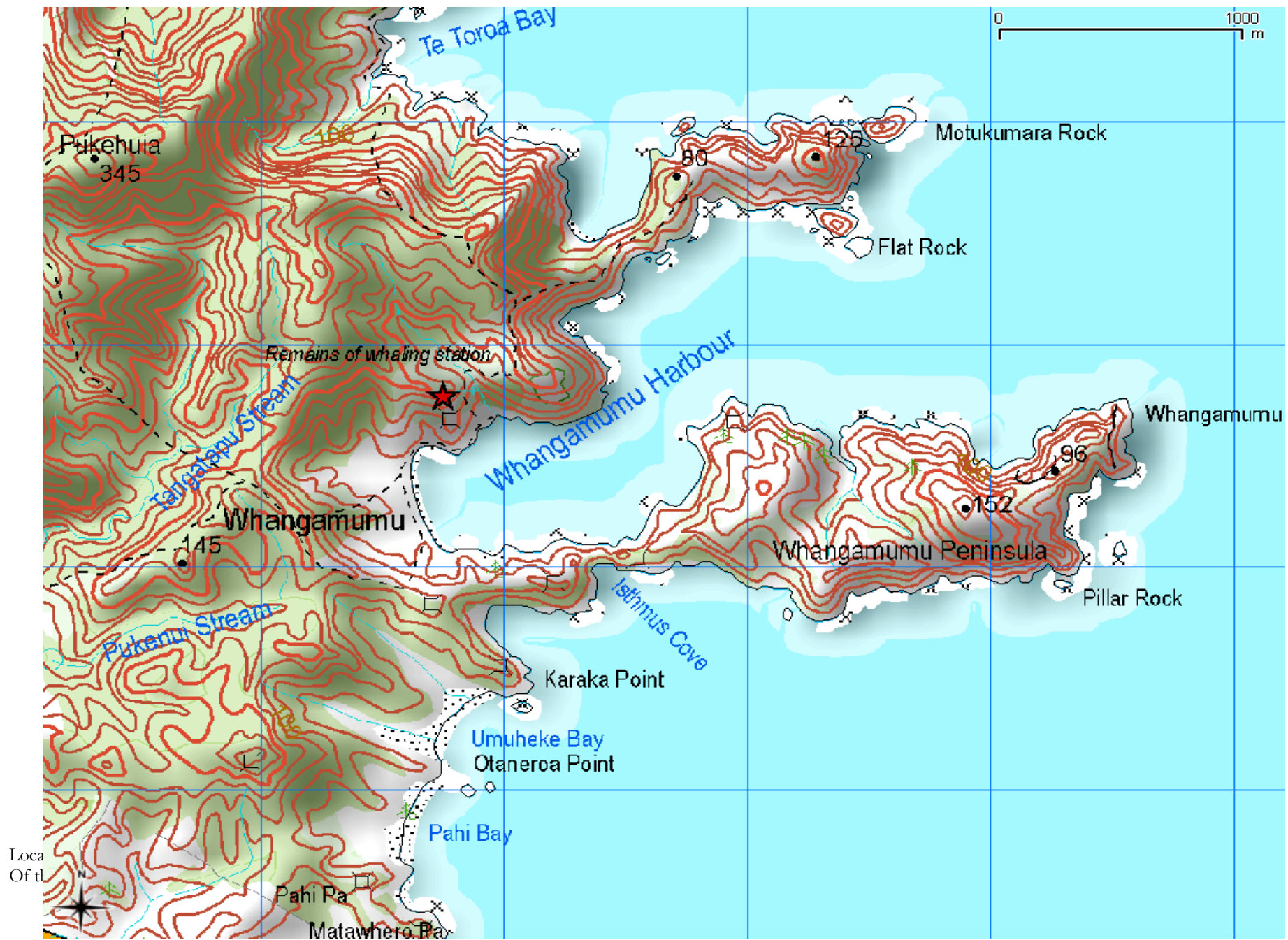
Sources for the whaling station are relatively comprehensive. The Auckland Weekly News (New Zealand Herald) has a large amount of images of the station however reproduction costs are very high. The Auckland Institute and Museum Library (Auckland War Memorial Museum) also has a range of images and accounts that are available. Apparent gaps in source information are accounts from the families of whalers who stayed at the station.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Weekly News 25th June 1903 pg 12
- ²Boese 1977:372-378
- ³Prickett 2002:151
- ⁴Boese 1977:374
- ⁵“Veteran Whaler” c. 1934 Russell Museum. Record # 53
- ⁶Historic Northland 1991, Russell Museum pg 53. Record # 99/1385
- ⁷Boese 1977:373
- ⁸“Veteran Whaler” c. 1934 Russell Museum. Record # 53
- ⁹Northland Regional Magazine No.14, April 1961, p 23
- ¹⁰Boese 1977:374
- ¹¹Ibid :374
- ¹²Historic Northland 1991, Russell Museum pg 53. Record # 99/1385.
- ¹³Boese 1977:36.
- ¹⁴Weekly News, July 26 1901 pg 5
- ¹⁵Cawthorn 2000:10
- ¹⁶Modern Whaling Hunting” Russell Museum. Record # 98/458
- ¹⁷Boese 1977:376
- ¹⁸Russell Museum extract
- ¹⁹“Veteran Whaler” c. 1934 Russell museum. Record # 53
- ²⁰Pickmere 1961:29
- ²¹Boese 1977:377
- ²²Ibid :377
- ²³Ibid :381
- ²⁴Prickett 1983, 1989, 1990, 2002; Campbell, 1992, 1993; Jacomb, 1998
- ²⁵Prickett 2002:10
- ²⁶Salmond, Reed 2001:7
- ²⁷Lee 1983:165
- ²⁸Russell library record 1977, Russell Museum. Record # 98/612
- ²⁹Prickett 2002:8
- ³⁰Grady 1986:56-58
- ³¹Ell 1970:35
- ³²Prickett 2002:6
- ³³Ibid :7
- ³⁴Cawthorn 2000:10
- ³⁵Prickett 2002:138
- ³⁶Russell library 1977 Russell Museum. Record # 98/612
- ³⁷Cawthorn 2000:10
- ³⁸Prickett 2002:138



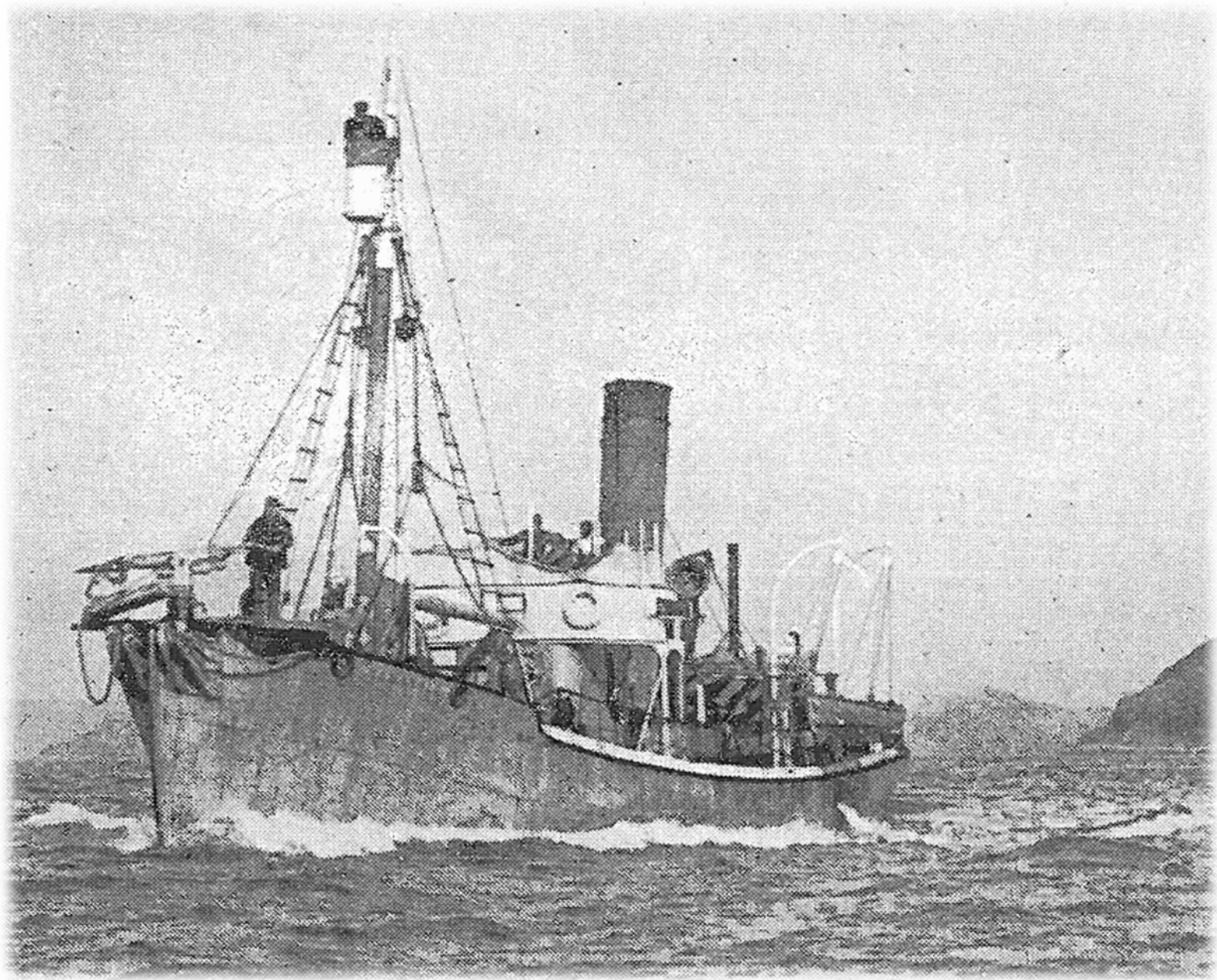
Appendix 1: Whangamumu Whaling Station on the eastern side of the Rakaumangamanga Peninsula, Bay of Islands. (Map toaster topo-graphic maps).



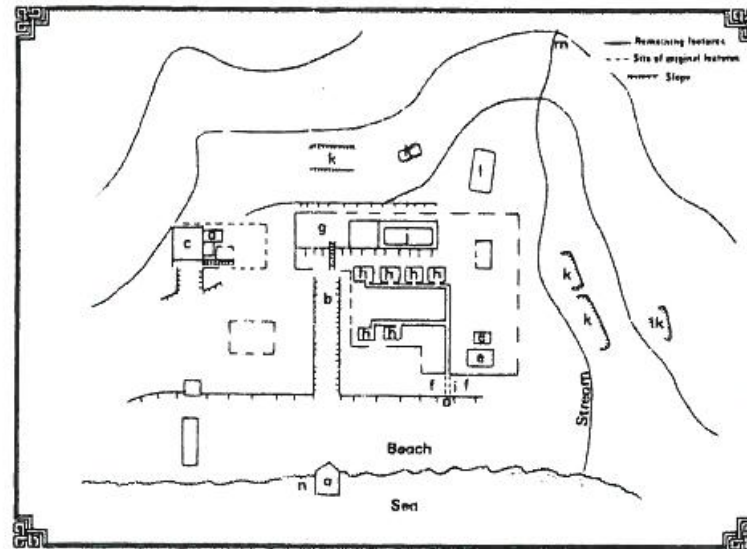
Appendix 2: Location of the whaling station in the Whangamumu Harbour. (Quantum GIS topographic maps).



Appendix 3: Location of the whaling station within the DOC Scenic Reserve Quantum GIS aeriels.



Appendix 4: "The Hananui II in the Bay of islands" Northlander Magazine.



KEY

- a) Main ramp up which whales were winched. A wooden portion bridged the present gap between the toe of the ramp and the factory platform.
- b) Central point of the factory where the whales were cut up and processing began.
- c) The blubber went westward to buildings represented by the raised concrete platform on the slope above the main factory where it was minced.
- d) It was then cooked in 'digestors' – giant pressure cookers which extracted the oil.
- e) The precious oil was piped across to two large holding tanks on the eastern side of the works near the stream.
- f) The blubber was stored in 400 gallon tanks and then poured into 44 gallon drums for exporting.
- g) Meanwhile the meat and bones went to the factory floor for preliminary chopping.
- h) They were then dropped into the large concrete vats visible today. The tops of the vats were level with the factory floor. Here the flesh and bones were cooked slowly, for 36 hours or so. The pipes that heated the water can still be seen in the base of some of the vats. The fat rose to the surface where it was scrapped off by hand. The meat, dissolved by the cooking, floated out when the vats were emptied.
- i) The outfall to the beach where the contents of the vats were spilled out. The bones were collected and processed to be used as fertilizer.
- j) The power for the industry was supplied by the boiler which is still visible today; it supplied heat for the cooking, and the power to winch up the whales, the whaling boats, or loads like coal that were brought in by sea.
- k) The terraces on the east side of the stream and behind the factory contained huts and houses. The largest being a three bedroomed house on the terrace above the boiler.
- l) The terrace with the chimney on the western side of the stream was the cookhouse.
- m) The water supply for the works came from the stream, and some of the piping still remains at the waterfall.
- n) The main jetty was alongside the main slipway.

Appendix 5: Plan of the whaling station remains and description of works. (The Department of Lands and Survey).



Appendix 6: Whangamumu whalers. Mr C Cook and Co's harpooners and boat-men. 1901 (Weekly News.Auckland War Memorial Museum).



Appendix 7: Whangamumu whaling station workers from left to right: Nevil Cook, Charlie Kydd, Bob Hakaria, unknown, unknown, George Hakaria, unknown. Front row: Mr Macklntosh (engineer) post 1910. (Drummond/Te Wake Collection Russell Museum 03/66).



Appendix 8: The ship "Hananui II" and a whale on the slip at Whangamumu c.1910. (Capt G.P Hall collection Alexander Turnbull Library F-69217-1/2).



Appendix 9: Whangamumu whaling station reflecting the factory remains and slip today 2009.(A. Blanshard DOC Bay of Islands area office).



Appendix 10: Whaling shed and carcasses at Whangamumu c.1910. (Photographer unknown Ross collection, Alexander Turnbull library F-69176-1/2).



Appendix 11: Whangamumu whaling shed remains today 2009. (A. Blanshard DOC Bay of Islands area office).

