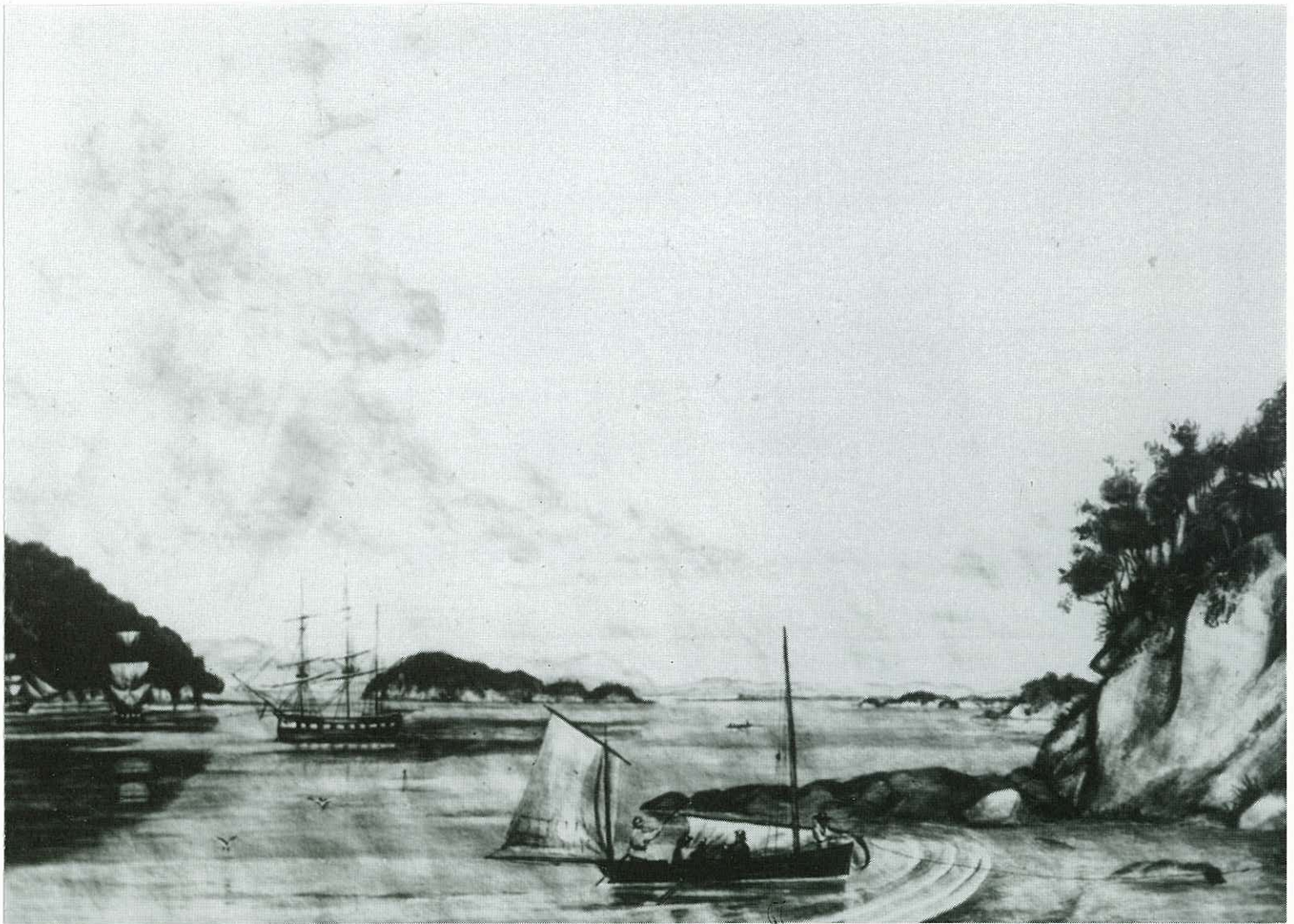




# Abel Tasman Area History



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



# Abel Tasman Area History

by Dawn Smith

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**Cover Photograph:** Preliminary Expedition at Astrolabe Roadstead 1841. Copy of a painting by C. Heaphy. Bett Collection, Nelson Provincial Museum.

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# Preface

## GEOGRAPHIC AREA HISTORIES

The Department of Conservation administers approximately 45% of the 2.3 million hectares of land within the Nelson/Marlborough Conservancy area. The human history of any region is shaped by a variety of influences, notably cultural and geographic. As the largest land manager in Nelson and Marlborough, the Department has a statutory and moral responsibility to ensure that historic values present on the land are recognised and, where appropriate, protected for the future. However, before we can effectively identify and protect historic places in any area we must have a comprehensive understanding of past human activity.

The Geographic Area Histories are one of several tools identified in the Conservancy's Historic Resources Strategy to help staff develop an understanding of historic values. Ten areas loosely embodying the large land areas managed by the Conservancy have been defined and it is intended that a general historical overview be written for each. These histories, despite the depth of research required to write them, will not be completely definitive, rather their purpose is to be only sufficiently comprehensive to describe and provide context for the full range of human activities known to have taken place. Anyone wishing to develop more detail than that provided in the text can refer to the full bibliography at the back of this document.

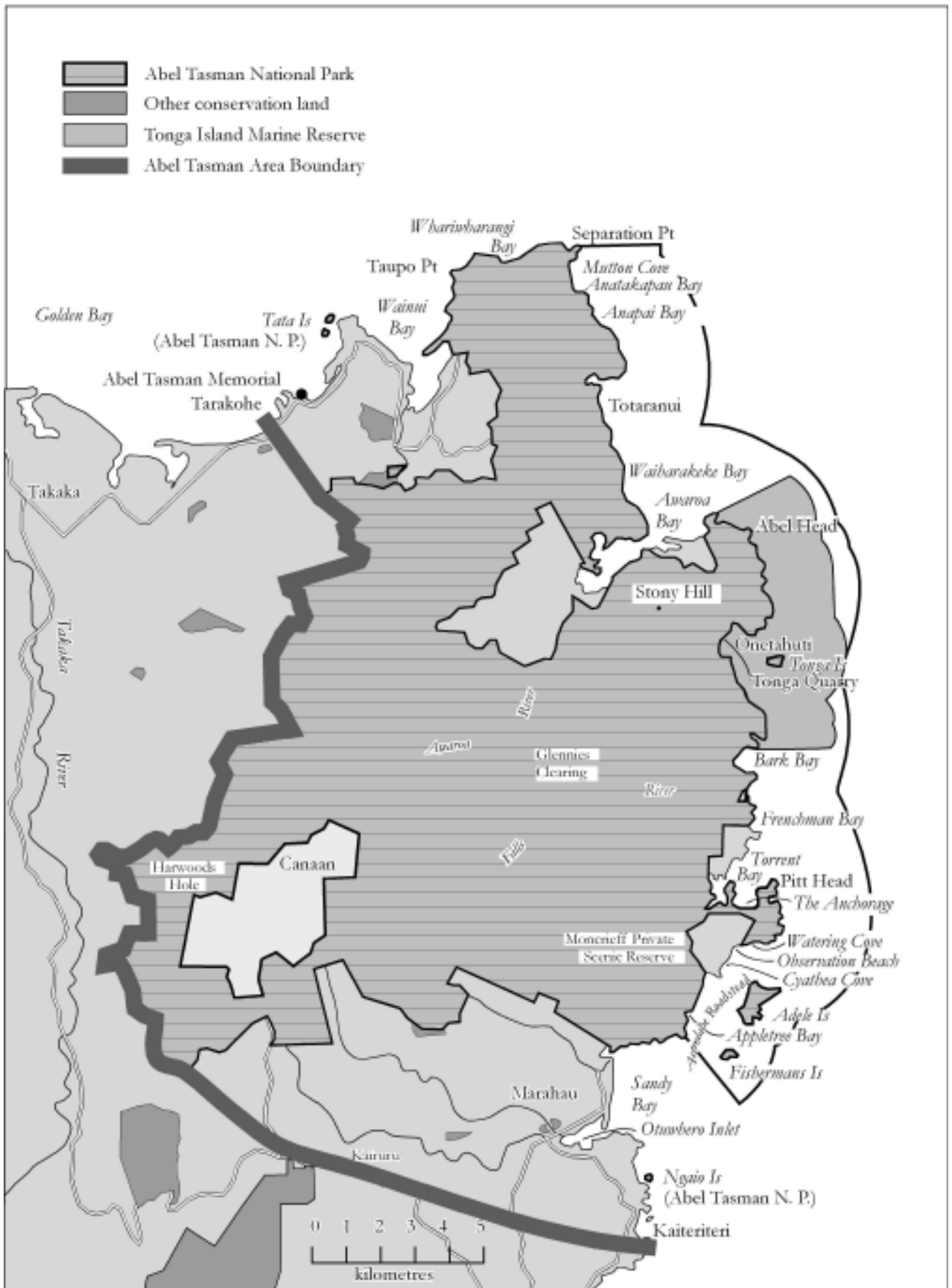
This history of the Abel Tasman area was chosen as the prototype because it is not only the smallest geographically and comparatively sparsely populated, but is also predominantly National Park with a high number of visitors and is fairly well documented.

Other areas for which Geographic Area Histories will be written are: Golden Bay, Northwest Nelson, Tasman Basin, Buller, Nelson Lakes, Richmond Ranges, Marlborough Sounds, South Marlborough and Kaikoura.

Steve Bagley

Senior Conservation Officer, Historic Resources.

# Map 1 Abel Tasman Area



# 1. Introduction

The traditions and recorded history of the land which comprises Abel Tasman National Park and its surroundings tell of some 800 years of human activity. A mild climate and sheltered coastline attracted a mainly seasonal usage by a succession of Maori tribes. European exploration and subsequent settlement resulted in a period which saw active exploitation of the area's natural resources. The ensuing depletion of these resources and the uneconomic nature of farming caused a decline in the area's population. Recreational use of the coastline for boating and camping led to a campaign for the protection of its natural values, and the National Park was established in December 1942. The Park has been managed by a succession of authorities with a continuing focus on the preservation and enhancement of its natural and cultural heritage and on an appreciation and enjoyment of this heritage by visitors.

## 2. Maori History

A rich history exists of Maori association with the Abel Tasman coast. Archaeological evidence suggests an occupation span of some 800 years. A much longer occupation is indicated through oral traditions.

### 2.1 MAORI TRADITIONS

Maori cosmology and creation myths tell of predecessors of the earliest inhabitants of the region. Traces of their passing remain in features of the landscape and the names they have been given.

An ancient name for the South Island, Te Waka o Aorangi, comes from the voyage made by Aorangi which ended in a violent storm. The waka, the crew and their cargo turned to stone, thus creating the South Island. The tau ihu of the waka forms Farewell Spit, Golden Bay, Tasman Bay, the Marlborough Sounds and Cloudy Bay.

Another legend tells of Te Komakahua, a leader of the Kahui Tipua, ogres with magical powers. To separate warring factions within his party, he isolated one of these enormous creatures in a cave at Wainui. Ngarara Huarau became the terror of passing travellers, and a small cave in Wainui Inlet bears his name.

Visits of early travellers to the region such as Rakaihautu, Ngahue and Poutini also feature in a number of legends (Mitchell 1991: 8-12).

## 2.2 MAORI SETTLEMENT

Descendants of these early visitors were in occupation at the time of Kupe's arrival in the early part of the tenth century.

Early tribal names associated with the region include Rapuwai, Waitaha and Ngati Wairangi. The first resident individual in the top of the South Island who can be named was Pohea, who came to Arapawa Island from the Whanganui district about 1450. He established a pa named Matangi Awhea at Auckland Point and, along with his followers, travelled widely in the area.

Ngai Tara occupied the Waimea district from about 1550 and spread out from there, before being displaced by Ngati Tumatakokiri in the early 1600's. The newcomers became dominant over a large area, including the western Sounds, Tasman and Golden Bays.

Ngati Tumatakokiri were in occupation at the time of Abel Tasman's visit to Golden Bay in 1642, and they were not finally displaced until the late 1790's. Their conquerors were Ngati Apa, Ngati Kuia and Ngai Tahu, known now as the Kurahaupo Alliance.

The tribes of the Alliance were in turn overwhelmed when the Taranaki and Tainui tribes in Te Rauparaha's confederation swept through the region in 1828. The areas surrounding and including the present Park were settled by Ngati Rarua, Ngati Tama and Te Ati Awa (Mitchell 1991: 13-44).

A story arising from this time relates to the existence of a taipo (goblin) in the Canaan area. After Charles Heaphy had crossed the Takaka Hill in December 1843, Maori on the coast asked if he had encountered the Taipo (NE 13/1/1844). Jimmy Perrot of Awaroa said that Maori refused to speak about the Canaan area for fear of offending the Taipo. An explanation came from a Maori who had been occupying a seasonal pa at the time of the raids by Te Rauparaha's allies. He was one of a group out snaring kaka when the pa was attacked, and they fled into the hills. They reached the area now known as Canaan and had decided to take refuge there, when a fearful rumbling noise came from underground. Terrified by what they took to be the voice of a taipo, they retreated back down the hill (NEM 6/6/1928). Loud rumbles heard after heavy rain in the Canaan area are thought to be caused by the underground drainage system (Sixtus 1992: 61).

Another story with a number of versions from the late 1820's concerns two men who survived a shipwreck on the West Coast and made their way north along the coastline. They managed to reach Totaranui, where they were killed by local Maori (Allan 1965: 14-15).

## 2.3 ARCHAEOLOGY

Little traditional information survives from which to construct a picture of the lifestyles over time of the coast's early occupants. Archaeological work over the past 40 years has afforded some insights into their activities.

Archaeological site surveys conducted by Owen Wilkes (1960), Athol Anderson (1966), Aidan Challis (1974/5), Kevin Jones (1980), Barry Brailsford (1981) and Ian Barber (1988-91) have now covered most of the coast in the area and have resulted in the recording of over 120 sites.

A wide variety of site types occur, including middens, pits, terraces, defended sites (pa), gardens, stone working floors and artefact findspots (Jones 1980: 8). These have been interpreted to indicate a mobile lifestyle based on seasonal fishing, gathering and horticulture (Anderson 1966: 62).

Sites typically occur in places offering combinations of natural advantages, being favourable to everyday life and customary practice, eg. kumara storage and defence. The soft-shored bays and estuaries of the Abel Tasman coast are easily accessible by sea and afforded fresh water and a range of food resources. They are comparatively sheltered and contain pockets of sandy-soiled, flat land suitable for horticulture. Consequently, sites have been recorded right around the coast, with the majority of occupation sites (middens, ovens) located in the bays. Kumara storage pits were generally sited on readily accessible, well drained ridges around the living areas. Pa are found in places with naturally defensive features (cliffs) and a panoramic outlook, such as prominent headlands, particularly where the headlands were accessible only by a narrow, and therefore easily defended ridge (Jones 1980: 11).

Evidence for early Maori occupation has been found in the form of 'Archaic' artefacts from Awaroa, Anapai and Totaranui. Moa bone was also found in the lower layers of the archaeological site at Anapai (Wilkes 1963: 88). There has been no radiocarbon dating of these early sites but, on the basis of the above evidence, it is expected that earliest occupation of the coast might go back some 600 years.

Archaeological excavation of sites in the Park has been limited to the excavation at Anapai mentioned above, the testing carried out by Anderson in nine areas (1966), Brailsford's excavation of two sites on the Totaranui foredune in 1981, which yielded a radio carbon date of 450 BP (before present), and Barber's 1988-1995 excavations on midden sites at Sawpit Point, Awaroa Inlet. Of these only Barber's excavations can be described as intensive.

The Sawpit Point excavations have demonstrated that the occupants relied heavily on the abundant pipi beds in the inlet, almost to the exclusion of other species, including the also abundant cockle. The fish species eaten (red cod, barracouta and tarakihi) and the absence of snapper have been interpreted as indicating seasonal occupation during the non-summer months (Barber 1994: 207). Radio carbon dates from the Sawpit Point sites indicate occupation during the 16th Century.

Some 14 hectares of Maori horticultural soils have been identified in the Sandy Bay area (Challis 1978: 28). The deliberate alteration of the soil (usually through the introduction of gravel and charcoal) was to improve the drainage, warmth and moisture retention in the soil, necessary for the successful cultivation of kumara in temperate climates. Other locations where horticulture is likely to have occurred are Torrent Bay, Bark Bay, Awaroa, Totaranui and Whariwharangi. The kumara storage pits along the coast could have been used to store either locally grown kumara tubers, or those brought in from outside as stocks for future seasonal use.

None of the six recorded ditched pa in the area have been archaeologically investigated, but pa are generally accepted as a 'later' site type (post 1500 AD). Of these, Kaka Pa on the headland at the northern end of Kaiteriteri is the best known and most publicly accessible.

Records made by the early European visitors to the area have left a picture of small settlements. D'Urville, Barnicoat and others record Maori occupying Taupo Point, Mutton Cove, Mosquito Bay, Boundary Bay, Torrent Bay, Te Pukatea Bay and Adele and Fishermans Islands.

A chart from D'Urville's 1827 visit shows six huts at Torrent Bay (Wilkes 1960: 28), one of which was sketched by de Sainson (Dennis 1985: 94). At Whariwharangi in 1843, Barnicoat observed uninhabited huts and steep gardens of Indian corn. He also described and illustrated the small settlements in Wainui Inlet, including Taupo Point (Barnicoat 1841: 136-140).

Maori are said to have been living at Totaranui after William Gibbs' arrival in 1856, with a 'pa' on the peninsula adjoining the lagoon at the north end of the bay (Pratt 1956: 3).

A somewhat ambiguous engraving, discovered some years ago in a granite cave near Tonga Bay, has been interpreted as possibly being of Maori origin. If so, it is the northern-most example of Maori rock art known from the South Island (Trotter 1971: 29-30).

## 3. Post-European History

### 3.1 EUROPEAN DISCOVERY

The first recorded contact by Europeans with the Abel Tasman area came during the time when Ngati Tumatakokiri were in occupation.

#### **Abel Tasman**

In 1642 Abel Janszoon Tasman was leading an expedition initiated by the Dutch East India Company. The Company was hoping to discover land rumoured to lie in southern seas which would increase its opportunities for trade.

Tasman had charge of two ships, the *Zeehaen* and the *Heemskerck*, and made landfall off the West Coast, in the vicinity of Punakaiki, on 13 December 1642. The two ships sailed north along the coast, until they rounded Farewell Spit and anchored in a large open bay on 18 December 1642 (Bagley 1991: 4-5). The ships anchored at sunset about four miles from shore, somewhere off Wainui Inlet. Two ship's boats had been sent ahead and they returned on board when two canoes approached from the shore. Shouts from the occupants of the canoes were responded to and an exchange of trumpeting followed.