



The 'Moioio Island Slate' was discovered by Margaret Hoskyn, a survey assistant, during an archaeological survey of the earthwork features. Only when it was thoroughly cleaned did the writing engraved in it become visible. The location of the slate and the record of missionary teachers in the area support the view that the writing is that of a Maori doing his or her homework in the 1830's or early 1840's. Photograph by Derek Mitchell.

although the sharp cold of winter sou'westers could not be avoided. Many of the houses on the island had a raised rim around their perimeter. This suggests earth was heaped up around the outer walls to keep out drafts at ground level.

Food was plentiful in Tory Channel but a great amount of time had to be put into gathering it and drying and preserving it against the winter. The kumara gardens required frequent attention because once the fertility of the soil was worked out after a few years cropping another patch had to be cleared and worked up with stone and wooden tools. The original gardens were often ready for replanting after lying fallow for about 15 years.

In early times Moioio probably stood on its own as a settlement with a population of 150 people but in later years Kaihinu Point pa was developed and together they made a powerful base for the hapu. George Angas left us invaluable paintings of structures that existed on both pa in 1844. From this pa base, the various whanau of the hapu went out for weeks at a time to gather shellfish and fish to dry, rats, weka and pigeons to preserve in fat, forest ferns and fern root to process.

They were seagoing nomads who carried with them in their canoes all the necessities of life. In a matter of minutes they could construct a snug

overnight shelter from poles they carried in the canoes and local vegetation.

For longer stays they built more permanent dwellings about 2½ metres wide and up to 4 metres long. These were usually made from cut saplings bent over and stuck into the ground to form a hooped framework. These dwellings were entered by crawling in through a narrow hole at one end and were too low to stand up in. However, they were warm, dry, sleeping places when heated by a fire near the entrance way.

NATURE DICTATED

As the Maori travelled the Sounds and ventured into Cook Strait they had to be careful for signs of coming bad weather and watchful to visit the food gathering areas in the right harvest seasons. Life was dictated by nature's patterns and nature could not be hurried or delayed.

What nature provided, man would wrench from you. The hapu had to be eternally vigilant to protect the gardens and store houses from raids by nearby enemies. It was not sufficient to be a successful hunter-gatherer-gardener in the pa period after 1600 AD. It was also necessary to be a highly skilled warrior. If Moioio and Kaihinu Maori follow the evidence revealed in research in other South Island areas life was hard, short and punctuated by pain.

A life expectancy of 30 years was the allotted time for the Pa Maori people. They were terminally old at 40 and few, if any, lived beyond 45 years. Although such a life span might seem appallingly short by our standards, it was typical of most societies before the intervention of modern dentistry and modern medicine.

In 1830, Jacky Guard, tough ex-convict, sealer, whaler, trader and adventurer brought his 16 year old wife from Sydney to set up camp at Te Awaiti in Tory Channel. Then European ways began to impinge on Moioio life.

Some of the men became whalers and developed new skills as hunters in the Strait. One remarkable indication of the changes that were to follow is engraved in a piece of slate-like stone recovered from Moioio during an archaeological survey.

On this 'slate' a Maori incised letters of the alphabet and other symbols that suggest religious signs found on the vestments of missionaries. When holding this 'slate' it is not difficult to envisage the student painstakingly working it with a sharpened iron nail. Mission stations established in the area in the 1830's endeavoured to bring education to the Maori. This artifact is possibly our last tangible link with the people who lived out their lives on Moioio Island.