

AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY FIELD CLUB SCIENTIFIC TRIP TO PONUI ISLAND, AUGUST 1978

Introduction and Acknowledgements

by E.A. Brown

In 1978 Ponui Island was chosen for the Field Club Offshore Island Scientific Trip. As little data on the island has been published and it is close to both the mainland and Waiheke Island (thus providing a contrast with many of the islands studied by Field Club), it was felt that Ponui would be a useful place to study.

A small party, of five people, attended the Scientific Trip to Ponui Island from 26 August - 2 September, 1978. The island is privately owned and farmed by the Chamberlin family who granted the Club permission to make a visit for scientific purposes. Research was carried out on the geology (unpublished), botany, birds and archaeology of Ponui. The party was based at Poroaki Bay (Fig. 1).

History

In 1826 Ponui was one of four islands (the others being Paki, Pakahi and Pakatoa) chosen for settlements by the first New Zealand Company. The settlers came ashore at Pakahi but returned to their boat, the *Rosanna*, having been frightened by the gestures of warriors in a passing war canoe (Maddock and Whyte 1966, p.248).

In 1853 Ponui was sold to the Crown for £100 by two Maoris, Karamu and Kupenga. Almost a year later Frederick and Charles Chamberlin bought the island on a Crown Grant. Clearing and burning were initiated before the arrival from England of a prefabricated Baltic pine house (Fig. 2) which was erected at Poroaki Bay. Frederick Chamberlin returned to England in the 1860's and the three branches of the family who presently farm Ponui are descendents of Charles and Ann Chamberlin.

Prior to 1900 gumdiggers operated on the island; when not required for scrub cutting etc. Maori parties were employed for gumdigging (E. Chamberlin pers. comm.). About the turn of the century kauri (*Agathis australis*) was logged from the area around the trig.

At present the island is farmed for wool (about 8 500 sheep) and beef (about 1 000 head of cattle). Approximately two thirds of the islands 1 770 hectares are in pasture and this is slowly increasing with the removal of teatree scrub (*Leptospermum* spp.) on easier slopes.

Geology and geography

Tilting and erosion have removed overlying Tertiary formations, expos-

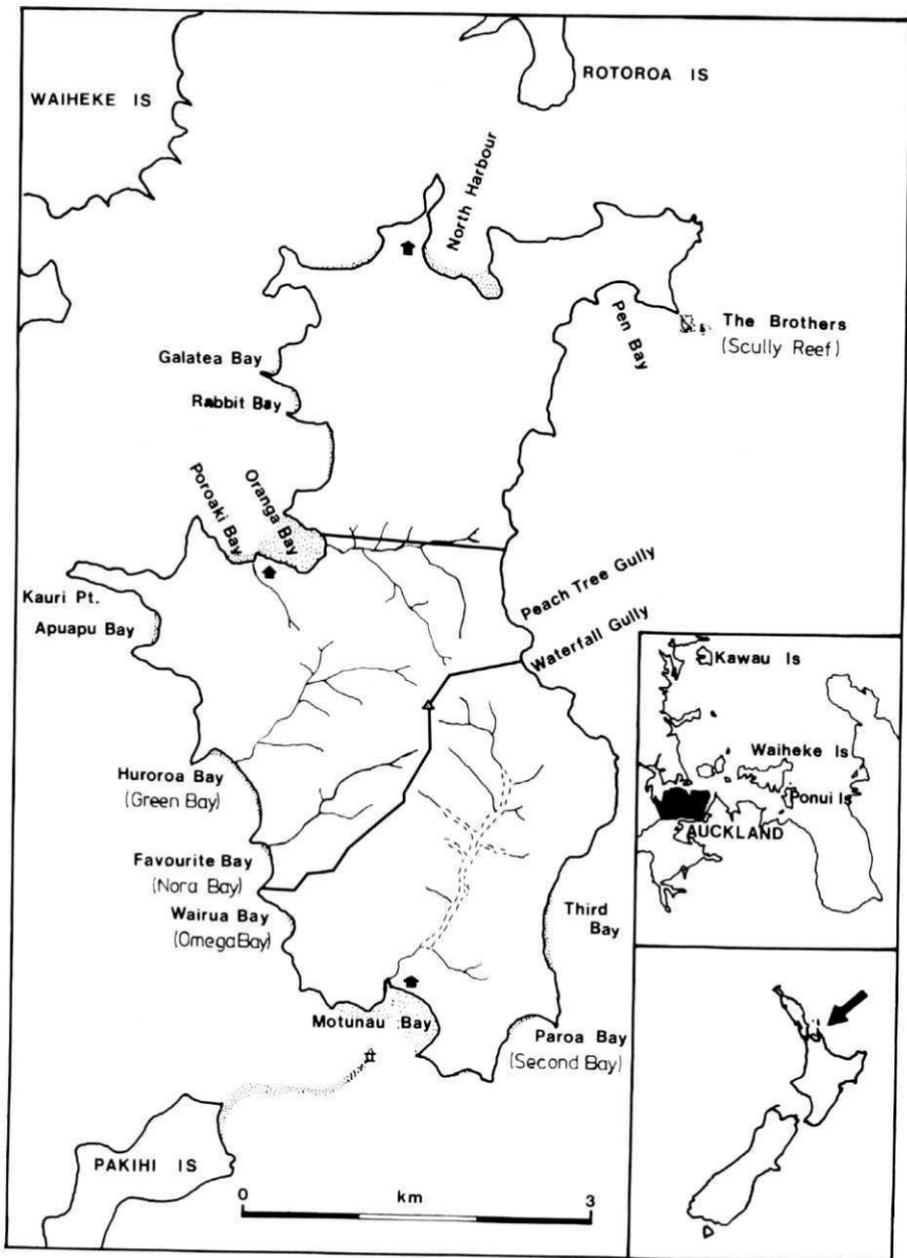


Fig. 1. Ponui Island with place names (those in brackets the names used on NZMS 1, Sheet N43, Ponui, 3rd edn.), major streams and farm boundaries.



Fig. 2. The original Baltic pine house which was erected at Poroaki Bay in the 1850's.

ing a folded and crumpled greywacke basement. At least part of the greywacke is Jurassic in age and deep weathering has produced a grey clay soil that is frequently stained yellow or brown by hydrated iron oxides (Seagar 1966).

An 18-21m thick band of red argillite associated with chert outcrops in a NW line across the island and north of Third Bay there is a siliceous bed (c. 1m thick) containing copper compounds. Small amounts of gold have also been found (and mined) on the SE coast.

The main ridge rises gently from the north to the trig station and then descends towards the south coast where it is terminated by cliffs. The west coast of the island is a series of low cliffed headlands which alternate with sandy beaches. Seagar (1966) describes the east coast as a "typical fault line coast with headlands of steep rugged aligned cliffs formed from truncated spurs". Wave action has resulted in shingle beaches and platforms such as Scully Reef while the two extensive flats present at the northern end of Ponui represent Pleistocene and Recent beaches, 1.5m above high tide level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the whole party I would like to thank the many people who helped make this trip possible; in particular Chris Turnbull who arranged details and Mr Arthur Calvert who transported us to and from the island. A special mention is due to the Chamberlin family, who not only allowed us to wander freely on their island, but also provided us with a house and electricity (a definite asset on a scientific trip).

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