Following the success of the 1977 Hen Island camp, a group of Field Club "oldies" formed the Offshore Island Research Group, with the aim of organising annual field trips to the northern offshore islands. The first trip was to the Cavalli Islands during the New Year period of 1978-1979. On December 28th, a party of sixteen left Whangaroa in a heavily laden launch towing two dinghies. We spent ten gloriously fine days camped around the old homestead in Papatara Bay (Fig. 1) on the largest of the Cavalli Islands, Motukawanui, and returned to Whangaroa late on Sunday January 7th. The party consisted of Dave Court, Anne and Roger Grace, Glenys and Bruce Hayward and Kathryn (9 months), Rod Hitchmough, Phil Millener, Phil Moore, Jon Nicholson, Gillian Puch, Gael and Ross Ramsay, Lin Roberts, Richard Willan and Anthony Wright. We enjoyed the company of Dick Anderson (Wildlife Service) and John Gardiner (Chief Ranger, Bay of Islands Maritime and Historic Park) for three days late in the trip. Party members studied the islands' archaeology, birds, botany, geology, insects, lichens, lizards, rats and marine ecology. The results of many of these studies follow.

The trip was notable for the long period of calm sunny weather, enforced noon siestas, sunburnt bodies, crayfish dinners, the consumption of 55 tanks of air, 340 litres of petrol, 570 litres of mainland water, 200 onions, and the 34 candles on Roger's birthday cake.

The Cavalli Islands are situated off the eastern coast of Northland between the Bay of Islands and Whangaroa, some 2-4km out from Matauri Bay. The largest island, Motukawanui, is in the centre of the group (Fig. 2). It is 4km long, 2km wide, rises to 177m high at the trig and covers an area of 310 hectares. Around this main island are a further 33 formally named islands, rocks and reefs and many more unnamed ones, of which we have informally named seven for reference (Fig. 3).

South of Motukawanui is a group of "southern islands" which includes Motukawiti or Step Island (second largest island at 37.5 hectares), as well as "Algal Rocks", Kahangaro, "Kahangaroiti Rocks", Motuhuia, Motukahakaha, Piraunui, Tarawera, Whatupuke and Whatupukeiti Rocks. One to two kilometres east of Motukawanui are the "eastern islands" of Motuhurakeke, Te Anaputa, Te Anaputaitai and numerous rocks. Off the north tip of Motukawanui are the "northern islands" of...
Fig. 1. Looking south over Papatara Bay, Motukawanui, to Motukawa Pt. and some of the southern islands and mainland beyond. The old homestead where the party camped is in the foreground.

Fig. 2. Cavalli Islands from the north, showing all but a few of the northern islands. The east coast of Northland is in the distance. The islands in the foreground are (from left): Panaki, Hamaruru and Motutapere (half shown). Haraweka is the round island between Panaki and the large island, Motukawanui. The eastern islands of Motuharakeke (half shown) and Te Anaputa are in the left middle. The southern islands are beyond Motukawanui. Photograph: D.L. Homer (New Zealand Geological Survey).
Fig. 3. Map of the Cavalli Islands off the north east coast of northern New Zealand. Names in parentheses are unofficial names used by our party for reference.
“East” and “West” Hamaruru, Haraweka, Horonui, Motutapu, Motutapere, Nukutaunga, Panaki, “The Finger” and Tuturuowai. There are numerous small islands and rocks adjacent to the coast of Motukawanui and these include Motumuka, Motukeokeo, Motukaroro, Moturahurahu, Te Toi, “Roost Rocks”, “South Twin”, “North Twin”, Kaitirehe Rock, Motumahanga, Parawanui Reef and Te Karo.

From prehistoric times through to about 1900, the Cavalli Islands were home to numerous Maoris. Although most of the individual islands are still known by their Maori names, the group as a whole owes its name to the first European visitor, Captain James Cook. An extract from his journals for Monday November 27th 1769 describes the occasion (Beaglehole 1955): “At 8am we were within a mile of a group of small islands lying close under the main land and NW by W½W distant 22 miles from Cape Bret, here we lay for nearly two hours having little or no wind: during this time several canoes came off to the ship and two or three of them sold us some fish — Cavalles as they are called which occasioned my giving the islands the same name — after this some others began to pelt us with stones and would not desist at the firing of two musquet balls through one of their boats: at last I was obliged to pepper two or three of the fellows with small shott after which they retired, and the wind coming at NW we stood off to sea.”

Very few of the islands have been unmodified by man’s activities over the last 100 years. Motukawanui for example, was farmed from the latter part of the nineteenth century up until 1974, when it was bought by the Lands and Survey Department and all stock removed. The homestead in Papatara Bay was last permanently occupied about 1953. It and a number of outbuildings and stockyards are still standing, though in dilapidated condition. For many years the island supported several hundred head of cattle but since their removal the grass has grown to waist height and areas of teatree, which had grown up during the last twenty years of absentee farming, have spread even further (Fig. 4). Regeneration from several remnant patches of native bush is just beginning. The island was transferred into the new Bay of Islands Maritime and Historic Park when it was formed in 1978.

Motukawaiti (Fig. 5) has also been farmed for a long time. It is privately owned, largely in grass and supports about 20 cattle, a horse and tame turkeys. Other islands that were grazed by cattle at one time are Whatupuke and Kahangaro, but both are now very much overgrown. Panaki and Hamaruru in the north, had domestic pigs on them for a while, but these are no longer present. Goats were formerly present on Nukutaunga but the last was shot in 1972. Many of the islands appear to be rat-free, as kiore (Rattus exulans) are only known to be present on Motukawanui.

The least modified islands are the smaller, most exposed ones such as Motuhuia, Te Anaputa, Motuharakake, Motutakapu and Motukeokeo. All the islands other than the two largest, Motukawanui and Motukawaiti, form the Cavalli Islands Maori Reservation administered by a Board of Trustees.
Fig. 4. View south over Waiti Bay, Motukawanui, to Te Karo Island (off the point, middle right) and Motukawaiti and Kahangaro beyond. Long grass and teatree scrub are the dominant vegetation on Motukawanui.

Fig. 5. Looking south from the cliff tops above "Moturahurahu Bay" across "Limonite Bay" and the southern end of Motukawanui. The small islands of Motukoaro and Motukeokeo are visible off the eastern (left) side of Motukawanui, with the long profile of Motukawaiti behind.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE CAVALLI ISLANDS