

LINK TO LOCAL MAORI HISTORY UNCOVERED

A rare link to the past has been uncovered at Pegasus Town in North Canterbury with the discovery of an old carved wooden post (pou) just south of the old Kaiapoi pā.

The pou was discovered during the clearance of vegetation from a remnant waterway channel (Taerutu Gully) that had once led past the pā and fed its residents.

Burnt portions rising from the base of the carved matai trunk indicate that it had been standing while being burnt; leading local Tāngata Whenua and Pegasus Town Archaeologists to believe it may once have been part of Kaiapoi pā's palisade defences which were breached by fire in the 1830s.

The pou has been inspected by Roger Fyfe of Canterbury Museum, who believes it may be the only example of a palisade post recovered from Te Waipounamu/South Island.

"While there are quite a few surviving examples from abandoned pā in the North Island, this appears to be a rare surviving example for the South Island. The way the top of the pou has been fashioned also appears to be unique in that it has a deliberately designed fitting to which a carving would have been separately attached, while most other known examples were carved as one piece," Mr Fyfe said.

Pegasus Town's Hapū Liaison Te Marino Lenihan says "the fact this pou has turned up at this time is very significant, particularly given that we're about to start carving new pou for this landscape in recognition of local heritage. It shows us that the mauri of our taonga is still strong, and it is a sign that we are being looked over by those who have gone before us."

Infinity Investment Group Chief Executive Bob Robertson says the find is an important link to the region's history.

"Discoveries like this are not made every day and we want to see it preserved for future generations, as do local Māori and others helping us out." he says

The waterlogged taonga is in an advanced state of degradation and will be transported to Auckland University's Conservation Laboratory as soon as possible to prevent further damage.

“We have been liaising with Te Ngāi Tūahuriri Rūnanga, Canterbury Museum and conservation experts about how best to handle the artefact appropriately and transport it safely to Auckland with as little impact as possible before it is treated and restored,” says Mr Robertson.

Local Ahi kā in Auckland (Ngāti Whātua) have been contacted so that they know of the pou's imminent arrival and to allow for suitable arrangements to be made to welcome the taonga into their takiwā or area.

Treatment of the pou is expected to take two years, after which Ngāi Tūahuriri has requested that it is returned home to be looked after. Chairperson of Te Ngāi Tūahuriri Rūnanga, Clare Williams, says that “taonga like this provide our children and grandchildren with a window to our past and is something that can inspire them to learn.”

Treatment Background

- Wood is a structural complex consisting of numerous cells made up of two main materials, cellulose and lignin.
- When wood degrades water replaces the cellulose and lignin which has been progressively lost through degradation.
- When degradation has taken place the cells (and object) keep their shape because water is acting as a bulking agent.
- Degraded wood, unlike sound wood, begins to collapse as soon as there is any drop in the moisture level below full saturation. It is the negligible tolerance of waterlogged wood to drying that poses serious problems for the survival of waterlogged taonga.
- The pou requires partial or total bulking of the degraded cell lumen/walls to prevent further cell collapse, warping and/or shrinkage.
- Treatment would involve cleaning to remove mud and inorganic matter; replacing the water, which currently occupies the degraded cells, with a water soluble synthetic ‘wax’ called Polyethylene Glycol (PEG); freeze-drying to remove surplus water from the cells without the normal surface tension drying stresses.

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