

Historian scrutinises Tasman's voyage and visit to Wainui

In June 2012, a seminar was held in Nelson to investigate the possibility that one of Abel Tasman's boats came to shore when the Dutch explorer discovered this country in 1642.

The idea, had it taken hold, could have shifted popular belief of the earliest European footing in New Zealand from that of Cook's men, near Gisborne, to Tasman's in Wainui Bay, 127 years earlier.

While researcher Rudiger Mack's claims were set honestly, his methods left many of his contemporaries doubting. Local historian Robert Jenkin has given a brief account of why Mack's propositions were rejected by national scholars, including him. Some have also rejected Mack's more recent discovery of a canoe landing site at Taupo point - claiming it to be the oldest maritime structure in New Zealand. This interpretation was first publicised by The University of Canterbury and was published in a peer-reviewed article.

Robert refers to Mack's earlier research as "a red herring", but says the hui that brought the Dutch Ambassador, Arie van der Weil, to the region three years ago has inspired further enquiry by himself and others.

The author of *Strangers in Mohua* says he's "interested in the 'real' mysteries, as opposed to mistaken ones," and is currently researching the entire leg of Tasman's 1642-43 voyage around the coast of Aotearoa.

The scene in Wainui Bay on 19 December 1642 was one of unique naval engagement between Māori and Europeans. The two ships, *Heemskerck* and *Zeehaen*, while anchored about 6km offshore, were approached by at least seven waka. One open boat, the *Zeehaen's* "little prau" was rammed. Four of her crew were lost in this attack. Another three escaped by swimming, as cannon and musket fire from the ships forced the waka to retreat. Soon after, as the Dutch sailed away, they counted 22 waka close to land, with crews of 30 each according to one of their accounts. Eleven of the 22 came after them, but once in range of cannons these were also fired on and so turned back to rejoin the rest.

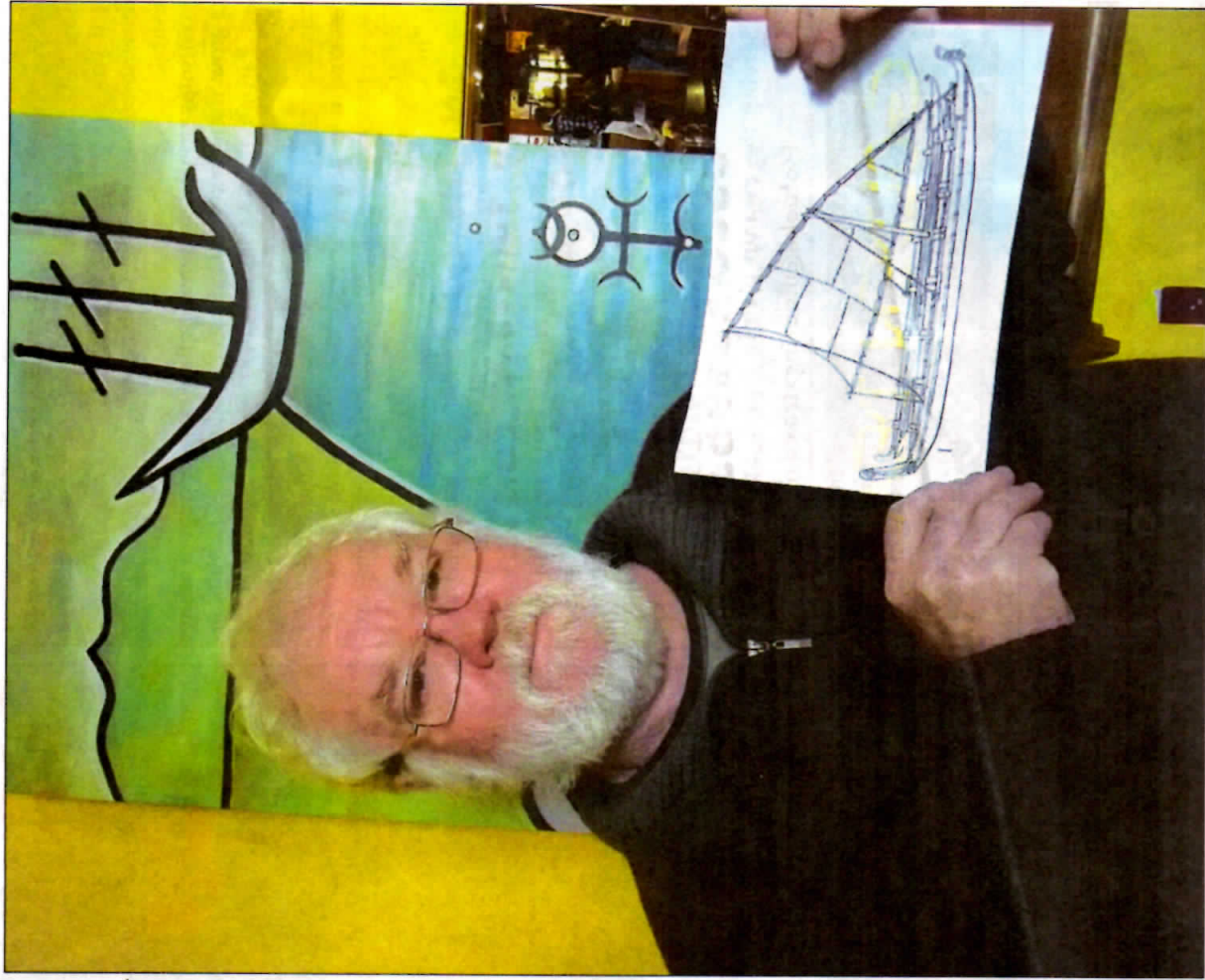
Given there are no independent Māori oral traditions concerning Tasman, researchers rely on reconstructing events with their best efforts, says Robert. During the seminar historian Dame Anne Salmond commented that an explanation of the "attack" on the 19th could well have been that Māori trumpets on the previous night amounted to "a ritual challenge rather than the onset of hostilities". A reported "gruff hollow voice" could have been played through a

they are as likely to have been a war fleet of another iwi, an idea that he relates to evolution of the Māori waka, during four to five centuries, from high-decked sailing craft with double hulls capable of return ocean-voyaging, through to large open monohulls, efficient as war craft.

"This helps to correct the common misconception that while Europeans were busily evolving new technologies between the 13th and 18th centuries, Māori were in technological stasis.

"I think it is unlikely that the locals could have amassed a fleet of 22 or more double-hulled waka," says Robert. "No solid argument against their being visitors has ever been advanced and... Golden Bay was an important staging post on voyages through the territory to get much wanted pounamu (greenstone) on the West Coast."

Original illustrations created on Tasman's expedition depict the meeting of worlds from (an imagined) bird's-eye view, with some Māori paddlers appearing to have "wrong" proportions. Mack has presented an engraving by Witsen, published 62 years after the voyage, as better drawn, suggesting greater authority. An enlargement of the image *Vessel and appearance of*



Local historian and artist Robert Jenkin holding his depiction of a 12-metre double-hulled waka taua (war canoe) as illustrated by Abel Tasman's artist in Golden Bay in 1642. Photo: Rae McDowell.

STILL IN THE VOICE, could have been played through a wooden trumpet (pukaea) or a shell trumpet (putatara). The Dutch, "thinking this was an entertaining welcome", replied with trumpets of their own, and then with cannon fire.

"Maori would have been totally upset, as a noise so loud would never have been heard before...creating great confusion."

A captive taken by Māori in the subsequent attack was presumed dead. Robert suggests that he might still have been alive, since Dutch eyewitnesses were probably too far away to know for sure. The small Dutch boat attacked by Maori was a "tingang", an Indonesian craft (Tasman's base was in today's Djakarta). Fellow researchers have concluded, along with Robert, that on its way back to the Heemskerck "it was being paddled by its Dutch crew and not rowed. Whether or not this made it seem a safer target we can only guess." Similarly, speculation arises around a white flag held up by one Maori who was then knocked down by grapeshot, just as the 11 waka caught up with the ships off Separation Point. On seeing this, the rest at once abandoned the pursuit.

Since the time of James Cook, Europeans assumed that the Maori Tasman met in Golden Bay were locals from this area, then known as Ngati Tumatakokiri. Robert suggests

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Vesse/ and appearance of the inhabitants of New Zealand (1705) reveals what Mack interprets as a Dutch boat near land. Robert says this later engraving was more likely a reinterpretation of existing images and therefore should not be used as a new source. Other researchers were not even able to verify that the boat resembled a Dutch craft, he says.

Robert sees no decisive evidence that channels cleared of rocks at Taupo Point were once a Māori launching site. "It happens to coincide with coal seams...that probably made it easier to move the rocks off the surface. I tend to think they could be Māori launching sites and always did. The coal seams might have helped in clearing the channels...but the idea that they date back to 1642 is completely unsupported."

Robert's most recent research toward a publication about Tasman's voyage is based on a detailed reading of every available contemporary resource "and an awful lot of work on Google Earth", he says with a chuckle. His final account



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will also be told partly in pictures. A reproduction of one of Robert's paintings of the Heemskerck and Zeehaen passing Cape Farewell on December 17 1642 has a realistic quality, yet imparts a "story-tale" feel – one of adventure on the Southern seas.

A more Māori perspective and narrative is still needed though, he stresses.

"For this to be written as history I would really like there to be a hui-style gathering where these ideas could be put, and probably historians need to describe better than they have so far what the evolution might have been from waka like the Anaweka waka [found in Golden Bay in 2011 and last caulked around A.D. 1400] to the monohulls that we see today."

Rae McDowell

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