

Bowling stones Tuku Kohatu, Pirori, Maika, Pua(Aitutaki)

The stone disc shown in the picture, next to an ordinary lawn bowl for comparison, comes from the eastern end of the Otumoetai pa. It is said to resemble a stone bowl (ulu, olohu) of the kind once used in the Hawaiian Islands of Central Polynesia. Discs such as these were used in a game of bowls called Maika.

I have also been informed by a gentleman from Aitutaki in the Cook Islands that the disc is similar to those used in an old game called pua, once played between rival villages. This is also the name applied to the disc. In that case it is made from a hard wood, not from stone, then left to soak in mud to increase the weight. Once the disc is saturated a cord is wrapped around its circumference and with a flick and pulling motion (similar to that of a yoyo), the disc is on its way down a prepared track. The object of the game is to see who can send their disc furthest with some accuracy.

These stone discs have only been found in the Tauranga and Mount Maunganui areas in New Zealand. This disc is made of a soft, coarse grained stone probably a local volcanic Rhyolite it is 13.5 cm in diameter, 8.5cm thick and weighs 2.52 kg.

Throughout the last 150 years various collectors of Maori artefacts have come across these discs and deposited them in museums for safe keeping. People are now able to research and document these artefacts, but more importantly it enables us to form an appreciation of, and an insight into, the lives of past cultures and possibly their pastimes, while appreciating the rarity of such taonga throughout New Zealand.

Edward Earl Vaile was a collector who donated 14 bowling stones and 11 pumice bowls, all found at Mount Maunganui and Motuhua Island, to the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Vaile was born on 3rd March 1864 at Hampstead, London, England. He was educated at Auckland College and Grammar School. In 1886 he joined the family real estate business and was asked to give his advice on the value of an estate of undeveloped pumice land between Rotorua and Taupo. At this time, Vaile retired from the family business and became a farmer. He also had an interest in philanthropy and endowed the archaeologist's position at Auckland Museum.

Despite the availability of these objects for research purposes, mysteries remain such as why the stones are limited to one locality? Is there any linkage to these stones and those of the Pacific Island nations? Were they imported here or locally manufactured? Were they used to establish who the top athlete was or simply part of a game to pass the time? Taonga (artefacts) such as these create an endless list of questions, but based on current knowledge one could easily accept that the discs were used in a similar manner as remembered by our Pacific neighbours.

Kati ra inaianei