

# Oihi Mission Station 1814-1832

## Historic Heritage Assessment

Melina Goddard, DoC Bay of Islands area office  
2010



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

Oihi Mission Station 1814-1832: Historic Heritage Assessment.

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Cover image: Augustus Earle 1793-1838. Tepoanah (Te Puna) Bay of Islands, New Zealand. "A church missionary establishment" 1827?. Nla. pic-an2838550-v National library of Australia.

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“Marsden’s Cross” today, overlooking Oihi Bay. Marks the spot where Marsden preached the Christmas day sermon). 25<sup>th</sup> December 1814 (image: K. Upperton DoC 2009).



Figure 1: location of the Oihi mission station in the Marsden Cross Historic Reserve, Bay of Islands, Northland



**Figure 2: The Oihi mission station today. The foot of Rangihoua pa is on the left side of the bay (M Goddard, DoC 2010).**



**Figure 3: Oihi mission station today as seen from the lower terraces of Rangihoua pa. The terraces seen on the slopes represent the former locations of the missionary buildings (K. Upperton, DoC 2009).**

## 1. SITE OVERVIEW

Oihi Mission Station is located on in a sandy bay on the Purerua Peninsula, Bay of Islands. Today it is known as “Marsden Cross” and is the site of New Zealand’s first Christian mission station which was set up by Reverend Samuel Marsden and Ruatara chief of Rangihoua Pa (figs 1-3). Marsden preached New Zealand’s first Christian sermon here on Christmas morning, 1814, which marked the beginning of New Zealand’s first established European community. The station operated for seventeen years under the protection of the adjacent Rangihoua Pa and is an example of long-term interaction between two markedly different cultures. Today the only remnant of the mission is large terraces cut into the slope, which once housed the mission buildings. A large cross of Celtic design marks the approximate location of where Marsden preached the Christmas day sermon and there are memorials to the former missionary families who lived here. The station was the first New Zealand land sale and the site of the first school. Overall, the importance of the Oihi mission station lies in its success as New Zealand’s first established European community operating alongside Maori and the foundations that it laid for future mission stations in New Zealand.

Recorded prehistoric archaeological sites within the Marsden Cross historic reserve are the gardening lines on the slope of the mission station and the site of Rangihoua Pa.

- Land status: *The Oihi mission station is located within the Marsden Cross Historic Reserve.*
- Administered by: *The Department of Conservation Bay of Islands Area Office*
- Access by: *boat and Rangihoua Road via Marsden Cross Trust Board land public right of way.*
- Heritage status: *Protected under the Historic Places Act 1993, the Conservation Act 1987, and the Reserves Act 1977*
- Visitor numbers *unknown.*
- Actively managed site number 22.
- Site area: *17 hectares (Marsden Cross Historic Reserve).*
- Functional location number *DN-61-200-2085.*
- NZAA site record number *Q05/5.*

## 2. HISTORY DESCRIPTION

The establishment of New Zealand's first mission station had its beginnings while Reverend Samuel Marsden was the principal chaplain of the New South Wales penal settlement (fig 4). He met with Maori people on Australian trading vessels and was impressed by their qualities but concerned at the stories of lawlessness from New Zealand. Marsden's ambition for a mission station was furthered while he was on board the *Ann* that was bound for New South Wales in 1809. It was on this voyage that he met Ruatara from the Bay of Islands. Marsden found Ruatara unwell and ill-treated and he nursed him back to health.<sup>1</sup> The friendship that formed between Marsden and Ruatara gave him the necessary local contact in the Bay of Islands to ensure its successful establishment and future survival.<sup>2</sup>

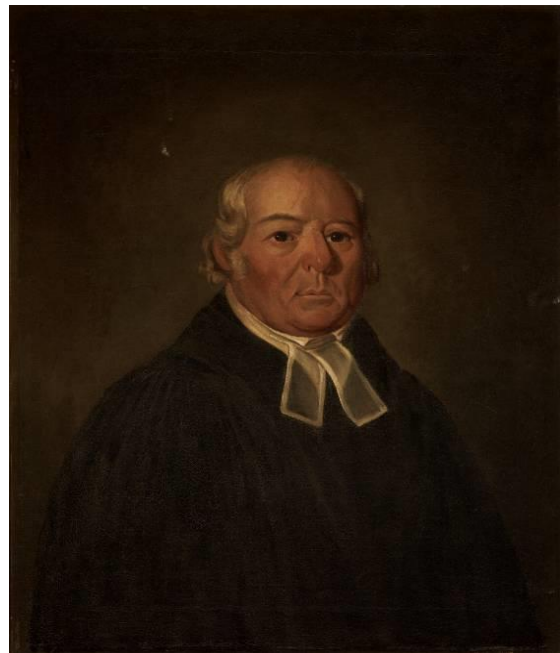
Marsden had gained the support of the Church Missionary Society for his venture and obtained the services of two men – William Hall and John King, who were later joined by John Kendall, a schoolteacher. Marsden purchased the brig *Active* and in March 1814 he sent William Hall and John Kendall to New Zealand to study local conditions and to report on the attitudes of Maori to the proposal to form an English settlement among them. The investigation was promising and Marsden gained the support of Ruatara, Hongi Hika of Kerikeri, Tara of Kororareka, and Pomare Nui of Matauwhi Bay.<sup>3</sup>

On the return of Hall and Kendall to Australia the *Active* was fitted with all the essentials and on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1814 the brig, in the charge of Captain Hansen, sailed to the Bay of Islands. Among the persons onboard were settlers Thomas Kendall, with his wife and three sons, William Hall, a carpenter with his wife and their son, John King, a shoemaker with his wife and their son, and Hansen's family. Also on board were Hongi, Ruatara, and as a passenger, farmer J.L Nicholas.<sup>4</sup>

On Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1814, the *Active* arrived at the Bay of Islands and anchored at the cove of Oihi under Ruatara's pa, Rangihoua (see appendix 1). J.L Nicholas described the scene before them that afternoon:

*"We landed at the opening of a narrow valley, through which a small meandering stream made its way to the sea. The hills on each side were very steep; in some places almost perpendicular and covered with fern and trees. On the top of the hill that rose to the left of us with a rugged ascent overlooking the harbour, was the built town of Rangihoua now the residence of Ruatara and lately that of Te Pahi"*<sup>5</sup>

Ruatara, in preparation for Marsden's arrival at Rangihoua and for the first sermon, fenced in half an acre of land and erected a pulpit and reading desk in its centre. Black Maori cloth covered the pulpit and upturned canoes were used for seats. At 10am on Christmas day Marsden took his place at the pulpit and reading desk and addressed the congregation with Ruatara interpreting for his people (see appendix 2). There were chiefs and people from Kerikeri and Kororareka in attendance and three hundred warriors danced a furious haka around Marsden at the close of the service.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 4: The Reverend Samuel Marsden**  
(Alexander Turnbull Library)

The next morning work quickly commenced to construct houses for the settlers, and terraces for them were excavated in the steep hillside previously used for Maori gardening. While timber was being sourced a temporary communal building was constructed that was almost eighteen metres long by five metres wide, thatched in Maori style with the help of the people of Rangihoua Pa.<sup>7</sup> A workshop and forge were built to burn charcoal for tools to be manufactured as trade items.<sup>8</sup> And the sawyers of the settlement were kept continuously busy cutting timber in the sawpit located at the foot of the mission settlement.<sup>9</sup>

The settlers lived together in the thatched hut for a month while the *Active* was loading timber from the Kawakawa district.<sup>10</sup> The conditions at Oihi were not favourable and it would have been hard for the new settlers, especially since John King's wife was expecting their second child.<sup>11</sup> Following a spell of wet weather John King wrote about the new settlement to a friend in England:

*"We are in good health, but our hut is made with rushes by the Maoris'. It has no chimney and will keep neither rain nor wind out. We have no window in it. Mr Marsden gave orders to have it made. He says it is very comfortable indeed. This is a very wet day; it has been so for this three days".<sup>12</sup>*

More comfortable buildings were erected by 1815 using mainly local materials with the help of the people of Rangihoua Pa. By 1816 the buildings were complete and land had been cleared for gardening.<sup>13</sup> On 21<sup>st</sup> February 1815 Mrs King gave birth to a son at Oihi, Thomas Holloway the first European boy to be born in New Zealand; he lived for only four years.<sup>14</sup> In May 1815 Mrs Hall gave birth to the first girl of European parentage in New Zealand<sup>15</sup>, and during this time a deed was executed by which the title of the Oihi land was granted to the mission society<sup>16</sup>. The deed describes the boundaries of the land, which on later survey was found to be 60 acres, the price of twelve axes.<sup>17</sup>

Only months after the settlers had arrived Ruatara was found dangerously ill and likely to die. This was a serious matter, since no other chief was as dedicated to the cause. However Marsden received assurances from local chiefs and particularly Hongi Hika that if Ruatara should die they would protect the mission settlement.<sup>18</sup> On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1815 Ruatara died, leaving Marsden and the mission greatly saddened<sup>19</sup>.

On Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1816 New Zealand's first school opened at Oihi with Kendall as the schoolteacher and an attendance of 33 Maori and European pupils. The school was one of the clusters of buildings on the high ground on the north side of the creek behind the Marsden Cross. The subjects taught were mainly handiwork and the language used was exclusively Maori.<sup>20</sup> As well as maintaining a school here for nine years Kendall also wrote books on the Maori language, one of which forms the basis of written Maori, as we now know it.<sup>21</sup> On occasion lessons were taught outside the classroom as noted by Kendall in the school register for October 1816:

*"We have also been under the necessity of following several of our people into the bush, where we taught them their lessons".<sup>22</sup>*

At times throughout the mission life at Oihi the settlers lived in great poverty alongside their Maori protectors, and were often dependent on them for food.<sup>23</sup> The settlement also lacked leadership as it seems that no one was delegated to this role by Marsden and the early years of the mission was marred with personal rivalries. However by the time that Marsden visited again in 1819 the settlers, in spite of their differences, were growing in their understanding of the Maori people.<sup>24</sup>



The Oihi mission station had been established for twelve years when the suggestion was made that it should be closed.<sup>25</sup> By 1831 five mission stations had been established in the Bay of Islands and Hokianga area and Oihi mission station was in the process of being transferred to nearby Te Puna. It had been decided by 1827 that Oihi was to produce food to supply the needs of the other stations. However the lack of suitable lands for agriculture acted as a catalyst in the move to Te Puna. Additionally the mission houses required a great deal of repair and the lack of level land was a limiting factor in constructing new ones. Te Puna had adequate level ground for both buildings and agriculture and in 1832 the move was complete. Oihi was closed after seventeen years of service.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. FABRIC DESCRIPTION

The mission was once an extensively built community. Today all that remains is large terraces or house platforms that step up the slope above Oihi Bay. Numerous contemporary accounts and paintings of the mission provide a detailed picture of the buildings. For example we know of the thatched hut that was the first building that the settlers lived in, and that there was a schoolhouse, workshop and forge.

After the mission was moved to Te Puna the history of the buildings becomes unclear. Once talks were under way for the relocation of the mission the chief Wharepoaka made it clear to Marsden that, if the settlers were moved, no one would touch their houses at Rangihoua. The buildings would be left standing until they were rotten, and when other Europeans asked whose houses they would be told they belonged to the missionaries.<sup>27</sup> It is likely that parts of the structures were utilised during the move from Oihi to the new Te Puna mission.



The **Figure 5: The mission station today showing the grass track that leads to the memorials and the large house platforms cut into the slope (M Goddard DoC 2010).**

monuments located on site today are part of the modern fabric of the site. These are the King memorial, the Hansen memorial and Marsden's Cross. The reserve has been grazed since the

missionary period and the features of the site are well preserved. In 1979 the Oihi mission station was gazetted as part of the Bay of Islands Historic and Maritime Park. The station today is under long kikuyu and there are two maintained tracks that lead to the memorials (fig 5).

Exotics from the European settlement are present onsite. The most prevalent are the two (or more) lemon trees and the small rose bushes that are scattered amongst the terraces.

A geophysical survey of the site was conducted in 2009. This involved the use of a fluxgate gradiometer which measures underground magnetic anomalies and both geomorphological changes and human induced soil changes (see appendix 3). As expected the results showed possible hearths and house structures from the European occupation of the site.<sup>28</sup> Indicating further fabric remains of the site are subsurface.

#### **4. CULTURAL CONNECTIONS**

This site is connected to all New Zealander's as part of their country's early history. It is connected to descendants of the missionaries and settlers of Oihi, the descendants of the people of Rangihoua Pa and the great chiefs Te Pahi and Ruatara.

#### **5. NATIONAL CONTEXT**

For New Zealand the Oihi mission station represents early European settlement and the beginnings of well-documented relationships between Maori and European. While the mission's evangelical accomplishments were limited, given that they did not manage to convert many Maori, the settlers did establish themselves firmly and gained the respect of the Maori people.<sup>29</sup> Most importantly they laid the foundations for the establishment of further mission stations in the Bay of Islands and New Zealand.

Until the establishment of the Oihi mission station the whalers and sealers that frequented the New Zealand coast were the only substantial European influence.<sup>30</sup> This influence depended on trade and commerce and for Maori the most coveted of trade items were muskets and ammunition. The drawback of this for the missionaries was that they were forbidden to trade in these.<sup>31</sup> The schoolhouse run by Kendall may have held the most interest for the Maori people given they were fed by the mission if they attended. Additionally Ruatara had great hope that in establishing agriculture there could be a regular supply of a variety of foods for his people.<sup>32</sup>

The environment that Marsden and the missionaries entered into on their arrival at the Bay of Islands had previously been volatile in European opinion. The implications of the "Boyd massacre" delayed the arrival of both missionaries and other settlers.<sup>33</sup> In 1809 owing to a series of unfortunate events the crew of the Boyd were massacred by Maori, this in turn caused the death of the chief Te Pahi of Te Puna, who had been a friend of Marsden's. Echos of the Boyd tragedy resounded throughout the north for many years.<sup>34</sup> Although the Boyd tragedy caused a hiatus in Europeans arriving to New Zealand shores stability was regained by 1814.<sup>35</sup> The whalers and ships began to return and with them the missionaries.<sup>36</sup>

The relationship between Maori and the whalers had begun towards the end of the eighteenth century and despite setbacks, it continued after the founding of the mission.<sup>37</sup> It is likely that this influence is partly what motivated Marsden in the first place to set up the mission station. Although the mission did not manage to convert many, since Maori had their own belief system, it was at least a tolerated system and given European contact history local people had reason to distrust

Europeans and vice versa. These aspects considered part of the success of the mission was that they survived in this environment for so long.

## **6. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

Oihi mission station is a nationally significant site. It was New Zealand's first Christian mission station and the first established European community and the first recorded birth of a child of European parentage. It was the first land sale and the site of the country's first schoolhouse. The Christmas day sermon was the first of its kind preached on New Zealand soil.

## **7. FABRIC SIGNIFICANCE**

Today the only remains of the former mission station are the terraces where the missionary homes were once located on the slope (see appendix 4). Further fabric remains relating to the mission are subsurface and the geophysical survey in 2009 has confirmed this. Part of the fabric that is also culturally significant is the burials of the missionaries who lived here. The site has modern fabric values represented by the three monuments dedicated to the history and people of the site.

## **8. CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Oihi mission station laid the foundations for future mission stations in New Zealand. It is significant to all New Zealanders as part the country's formational history. The descendants of the missionaries and other settlers, who lived here, have strong ties to this site. In addition to European bonds, the people of Nga puhi, descendants of the great chiefs Te Pahi and Ruatara, have strong whakapapa associated with the site. Overall the cultural significance of the site is from the bond that was formed by Ruatara and Marsden.

## **9. MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

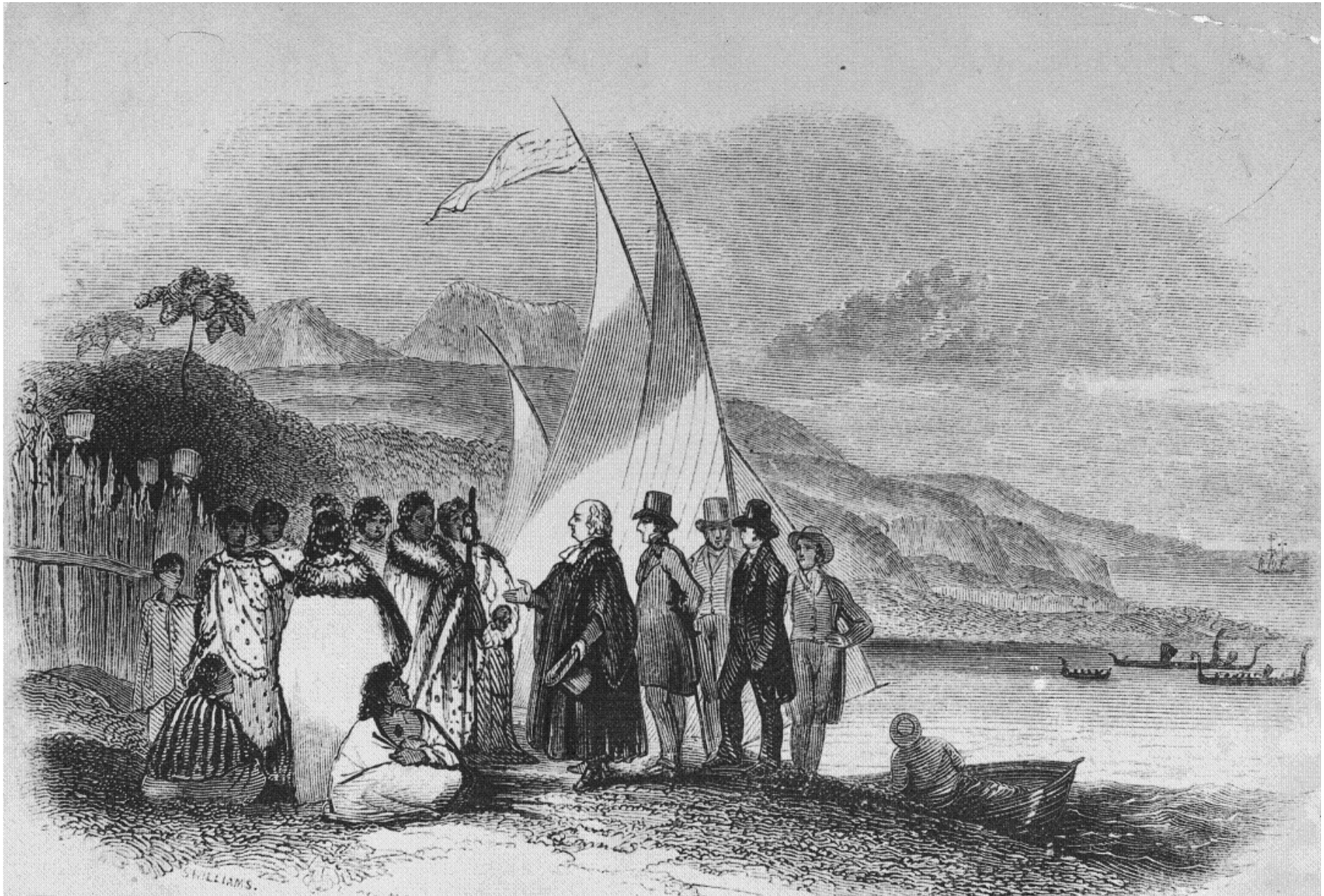
- A track counter needs to be placed in an appropriate location on site
- The site needs historic interpretive signage.
- The tops of the terraces (not scarps) could be mown to offer better visibility in conjunction with interpretation.
- Signage directing people to the site. Signpost "historic site" on state highway 1 and at the start of Purerua Road.
- Care needs to be taken, when and if clearing the terraces of grass, that the rose bushes are not removed.
- The lemon trees although healthy should still be monitored.

## **10. MANAGEMENT HISTORY**

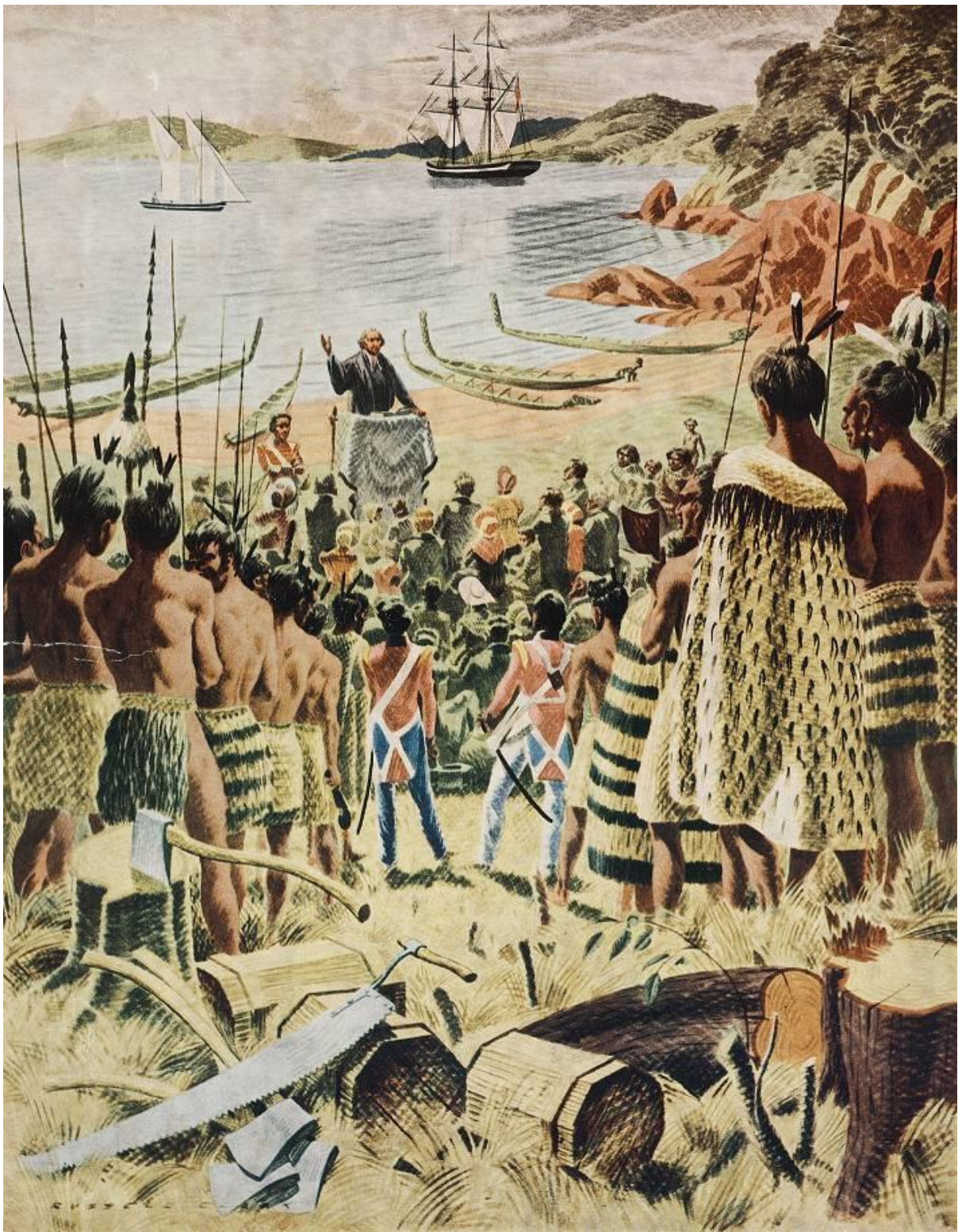
- 1814: Station construction began.
- 1832: The mission station was abandoned.
- 1907: Marsden's Cross was erected.
- 1979: The mission station was gazetted as part of the Bay of Islands Historic and Maritime Park. Since then management of the reserve has revolved around weed control and signage
- 2009: A geophysical survey of the site was conducted
- 2009: A track was constructed to the Hansen memorial on the west side of the stream
- 2011: Further geophysical survey was conducted by Archaeological Solutions Ltd; uncovering further subsurface fabric remains relating to the history of the mission station and Maori occupation. Excavations are planned for the site in 2012.

## 11. MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTATION

- DOCDM- 655450
- Current DoC management file numbers- [HHA-01-02-41-01](#) NLB-1; [HHA-01-02-41-02](#) NLB-1; [HHA-01-02-41-03](#) NLB-1; [HHA-01-02-41-04](#) NLB-1; [PAR-01-06-11](#) NLB-1
- Heritage assessment *yes*
- Baseline inspection: *Report and proposals for Marsden Cross historic and scenic reserve. 1977, Lands and Survey Department, Auckland.*
- Oihi and Oihi mission station AMHP22
- Geomagnetic survey, Marsden Cross and other sites, Bay of Islands. Prepared for the Department of Conservation, Bay of Islands area office. Prepared by Geometria Limited PO Box 68-653 Newton Auckland. June 2009.



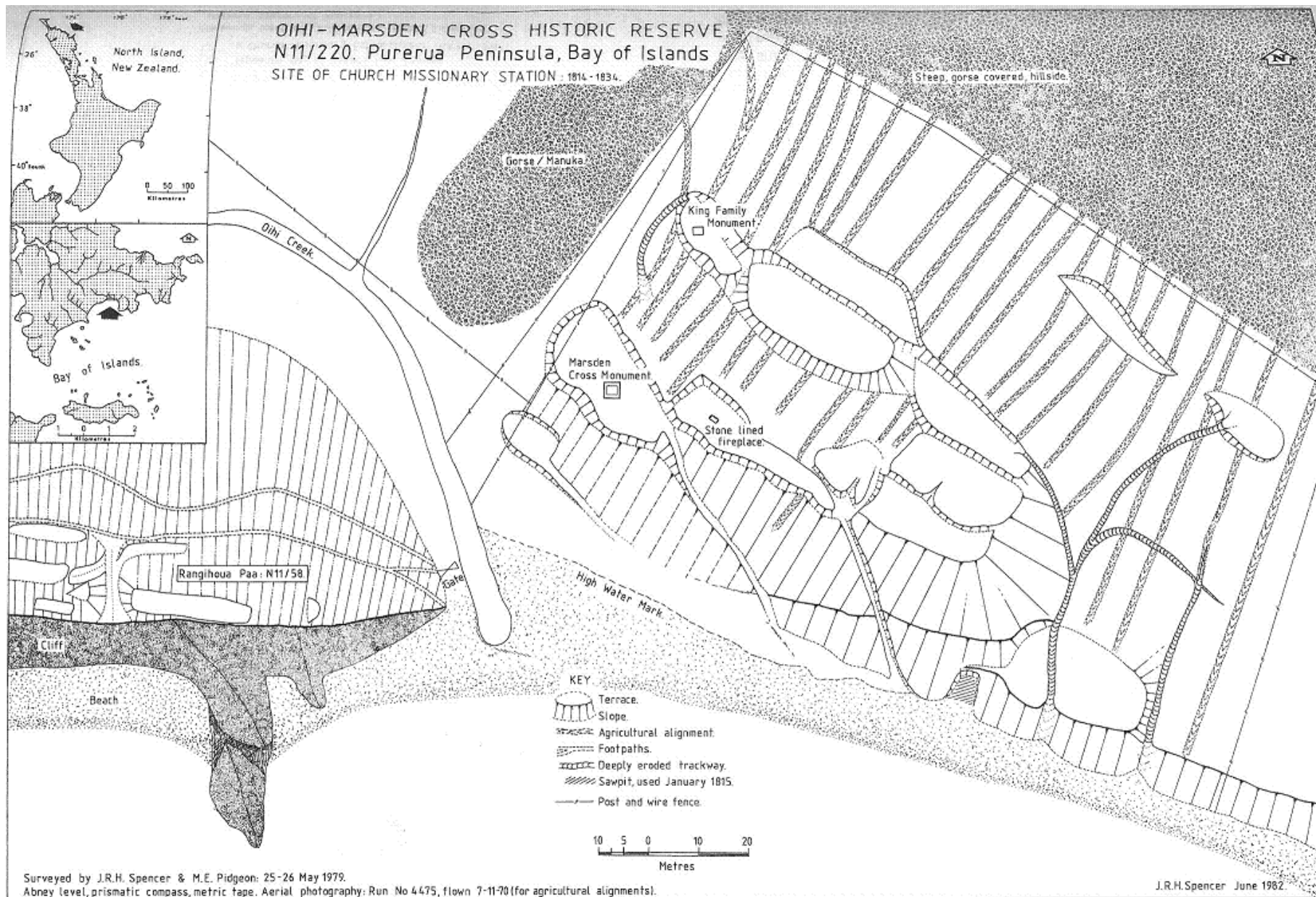
Appendix 1: The landing of Reverend Samuel Marsden in New Zealand (Rangihoua pa) December 1814 (*Alexander Turnbull Library*)



**Appendix 2:** Samuel Marsden's first service at Oihi, Bay of Islands, Christmas day 1814. Shows Marsden at the podium and Rutara to his right dressed in British regalia (*Alexander Turnbull L*)



**Appendix 3: Results of the geomagnetic survey overlaid on GoogleEarth aerial (Badar 2009).**



**Appendix 4: Sketch map of the archaeological features of the Oihi mission station and the foot of Rangihoua pa (Spencer 1982)**



## SOURCES

### *Primary*

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### *Secondary*

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### *Illustrations*

*Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington New Zealand.*

“Landing of the reverend Samuel Marsden in New Zealand”. December 19, 1814. By Samuel Williams. 1788-1853. F- 542-1/2-MNZ

“Samuel Marsden’s first service in New Zealand. The gospel of Jesus Christ first proclaimed on these shores by the Rev. Samuel Marsden at Oihi, Bay of Islands, Christmas day, 1814. By Russell Stuart Cedric Clark, 1905-1966. B-077-066.

“Revd Samuel Marsden. First missionary to New Zealand. 1764-1838”. By Joseph Backler, 1815-1897. G-620.

National Library of Australia

Cover image: Augustus Earle 1793-1838. Tepoanah (Te Puna) Bay of Islands, New Zealand. "A church missionary establishment" 1827?. Nla. pic-an2838550-v National library of Australia

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> lands and survey report 1977:6
- <sup>2</sup> Harvard-Williams 1961:22
- <sup>3</sup> Lee 1983:62
- <sup>4</sup> Lee 1983:63
- <sup>5</sup> Nicholas, 1817, I:170
- <sup>6</sup> Lee 1983:64
- <sup>7</sup> Lee 1983:64
- <sup>8</sup> Nicholas 1817: vol 1 208
- <sup>9</sup> Bawden 1987:110
- <sup>10</sup> Bawden 1987:109
- <sup>11</sup> Bawden 1987:110
- <sup>12</sup> Elder 1934:97
- <sup>13</sup> Bawden 1987:109-110
- <sup>14</sup> Lee 1983:66
- <sup>15</sup> Lee 1983:74
- <sup>16</sup> Elder 1932:123
- <sup>17</sup> Lee 1983:66
- <sup>18</sup> Lee 1983:67
- <sup>19</sup> Lee 1983:73
- <sup>20</sup> Lee 1983:78
- <sup>21</sup> Lee 1983:103(*a karao New Zealand, grammar and vocabulary of the New Zealand language and easy lessons in the New Zealand language by John Kendall*)
- <sup>22</sup> Elder 1932: 128
- <sup>23</sup> (Bawden 1987:86).
- <sup>24</sup> Lands and Survey 1977:8
- <sup>25</sup> Bawden 1987:135
- <sup>26</sup> Lands and Survey 1977:9
- <sup>27</sup> Elder 1932:476
- <sup>28</sup> Bader 2009:10
- <sup>29</sup> Lee 1983:69
- <sup>30</sup> Lee 1983:70
- <sup>31</sup> (Lee 1983:58).
- <sup>32</sup> (Bawden 1987:112).
- <sup>33</sup> Lee 1983
- <sup>34</sup> Lee 1983:56
- <sup>35</sup> Lee 1983:56-57
- <sup>36</sup> Lee 1983:57
- <sup>37</sup> Lee 1983:70

