

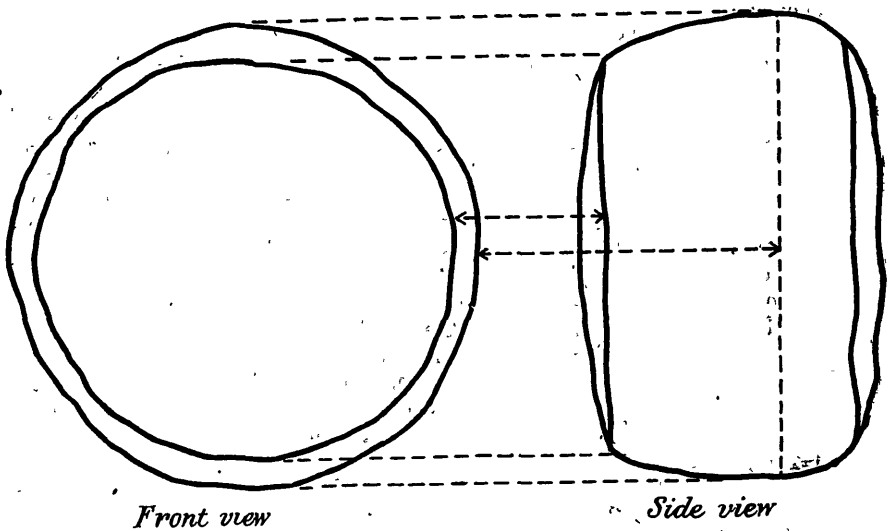
ART. L.—*Concerning certain Ancient Maori Stone Implements found at Tauranga.*

By C. A. SEMADENI.

[*Read before the Auckland Institute, 11th December, 1912.*]

ABOUT ten years ago, while I was living in Tauranga, I commenced to make a collection of ancient Maori "curios," and during the next few years I spent a good deal of my leisure time fossicking in the neighbourhood of old and long-since-abandoned Native settlements, particularly near Mount Maunganui, at the south-eastern entrance of the Tauranga Harbour. This place must at one time have had a fairly dense population, and frequently during a heavy westerly gale the sand was removed from the sites of old dwellings near the beach.

Here most of my finds were made. Among them are certain peculiar implements of stone, rather roughly finished, and in the form of discs. Their size and weight vary considerably. I suppose I found a dozen or thereabouts in all, and perhaps as many more were picked up by others. They

*Front view**Side view*ROUGH SKETCH OF STONE BOWL. (About half-size. Weight, $4\frac{1}{2}$ lb.)

were sometimes called, among some of my friends, "cheese-stones," and this name is apt enough, for many of them do resemble small cheeses in appearance.

Although I often tried to find out what their possible use could have been, I could find no one who had ever seen such implements used by the Maoris, and some of the friends I consulted had had dealings with the Natives for as long as fifty years before. It was pretty evident, then, that these implements could not have been in use for a very considerable time. The late Major Mair examined them, and so did Mr. Waite and Mr. Cheeseman, and several old residents (both Maori and pakeha) of the Bay of Plenty.

On one occasion a friend and I found one of these stones, and as we strolled along the hard sand at low water my companion bowled it along

in front of us. We noticed that it ran with a wide and regular curve, and my friend jokingly remarked that "the ancient Maori must have played the ancient game of bowls." The incident is probably forgotten by my companion, but I have often recalled it, and wondered if this were really the explanation of the matter. I often thought it might be, but I was afraid to put forward the theory seriously, because at first the idea of the fierce cannibals of old amusing themselves in this manner appears somewhat ludicrous. Recently, however, I was reading again an old friend—Captain Cook's Voyages—and in his account of the Sandwich Islands Natives I found this passage: "They play at bowls with pieces of whetstone, mentioned before, of about a pound weight, shaped somewhat like a small cheese, but rounded at the sides and edges, which are very nicely polished; and they have other bowls of the same sort, made of a heavy reddish-brown clay, neatly glazed over with a composition of the same colour, or of a coarse dark-grey slate."

After reading this I made a careful re-examination of the stones (nine in all) still in my possession, and tested them pretty thoroughly, with the result that I have come to the conclusion that they are really and truly "bowls," and that the sport of bowling must have been indulged in long, long ago by the Maoris in the vicinity of Tauranga. Further, the game was most likely played on the hard level sand at low water. Cook does not mention the kind of ground on which the Sandwich Islanders played, but it would probably be the beach. I tried the bowls on a lawn, which just then was rather "heavy," as it had not been cut or rolled for a couple of weeks, and, although the bowls ran fairly well, the work of sending them across the green was too hard for pleasure; but on an asphalt court they ran well and easily, and even a couple which seemed to the eye to have no "bias" (or bevel on the circumference) curved quite 5 ft. from a straight line in travelling 20 yards. Hard, wet sand would form a splendid bowling-surface for them, and if it became "cut up" after a few games there would be no trouble in shifting to another "rink."

Mr. Cheeseman tells me that there are some of the Sandwich Islands bowls in the British Museum, and that a drawing of one which he has kindly examined might very well be taken for a sketch of one of those which I handed to him. It seems possible that Cook underestimated the weight, as the one in question is $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. across, and one of mine but slightly larger ($4\frac{1}{4}$ in.) weighs more than $4\frac{1}{2}$ lb. The lightest I have weighs $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb. The largest weighs $6\frac{1}{4}$ lb., and is nearly 6 in. in diameter. It runs beautifully—but I must not be carried away by a bowler's enthusiasm. The average weight of those I have is 4 lb. 9 oz.; the average diameter about $5\frac{1}{4}$ in.; and the average thickness nearly 3 in.

The drawing mentioned above, Mr. Cheeseman informs me, is in Heape and Partington's work on "Polynesian Ethnography," which makes a reference to the extract from Cook's Voyages which I have quoted, and also mentions that this Sandwich Islands game is described in Byron's Voyages and in Ellis's Journey through Hawaii.

As to the reason for the fact that these discs have been found only at Tauranga, and apparently nowhere else in the Dominion, I think, on the whole, that I had better leave it to be explained by more competent writers. I might, however, hazard a prophecy that if this little paper calls attention to the matter similar stones may yet be discovered in other parts.

In conclusion, I should like to state that if any bowler or collector wishes to examine them I shall be very pleased to afford him an opportunity.