



Zane Grey Slept Here

This article was published in the Taranaki Herald
Stamp column in the 1950s

The Bay of Islands has probably more stamps associated with its long and colourful story than any other district in New Zealand.

One of the most attractive would be the first stamp to have had any direct connection with the Bay, the well-known 5d swordfish stamp of 1935.

Designed by two Wellington artists, R. E. Tripe and W. J. Cooch, the stamp was intended to illustrate the exhilarating sport of deep sea fishing. It was a sport which was much in the news during that era, thanks to Zane Grey, the Ohio born dentist turned author, who descended upon the Bay of Islands, enjoyed a veritable orgy of fishing and then put his pen to work to make New Zealand deep sea fishing known throughout the world.

As the original prize winning design did not show the famous "hole in the rock," the post office asked the designers to make a fresh drawing to include not only the "hole," but also the sea birds which forever accompany boats fishing near Piercy Rock. Many years ago the post office showed the sketches at a philatelic meeting in Taranaki. Next day the local post office was asked for one of the 5d stamps without the hole in the rock.

Cape, Brett, Piercy Island and Bay of Islands were among the 70 or so names placed on the map by Lieutenant James Cook of HM Bark Endeavour a little over 200 years ago. It was in November 1769. Cook had sailed north past the Barrier Islands which he had named, and one day he noted "a remarkable point of land giving entrance to a large and pretty deep bay." On November 27 (really the 26th as Cook used "ship-time" which commenced at noon) he wrote:

"At 3 p.m. passed the point of land before mentioned, which I have named Cape Brett in honour of Sir Piercy. At the very point of the Cape is a high hillock and near one mile from it is a small high island or rock with a hole pierced through it like the arch of a bridge, and this was the reason why I gave the cape the above name, because Piercy seemed very proper for that of the island."

Sir Piercy Brett (later Admiral Brett) was one of the Lords of the Admiralty when Cook sailed from England. His sailing orders were signed by Brett, along with Edward Hawke and Charles Spencer. Sir Edward Hawke (later Baron Hawke) was greatly honoured by Cook having his name given to our huge East Coast bay. The family name appears in New Zealand sport as well, in the Hawke Cup for cricket.

The Maori name of Cape Brett on which the light- house was erected in 1910 is Rakau-Mangamanga, Piercy Island is Motu Kokako - Motu Meaning Island and kokako being what is generally called the native crow.

Cook entered the Bay of Islands on November 29 and sailed again early on December 6 after a pleasant but busy stay. The Endeavour struck a sandbank on entering the Bay off Motu Arohia Island, and had another argument with a sunken rock on the way out, but fortunately without suffering any damage in either case.

What other name could Cook have given to this place?

I have named it the Bay of Islands on account of the great number which line its shores, and these help to form several safe and commodious harbours."

CAPT. JAMES COOK, JOURNAL 1769.