



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

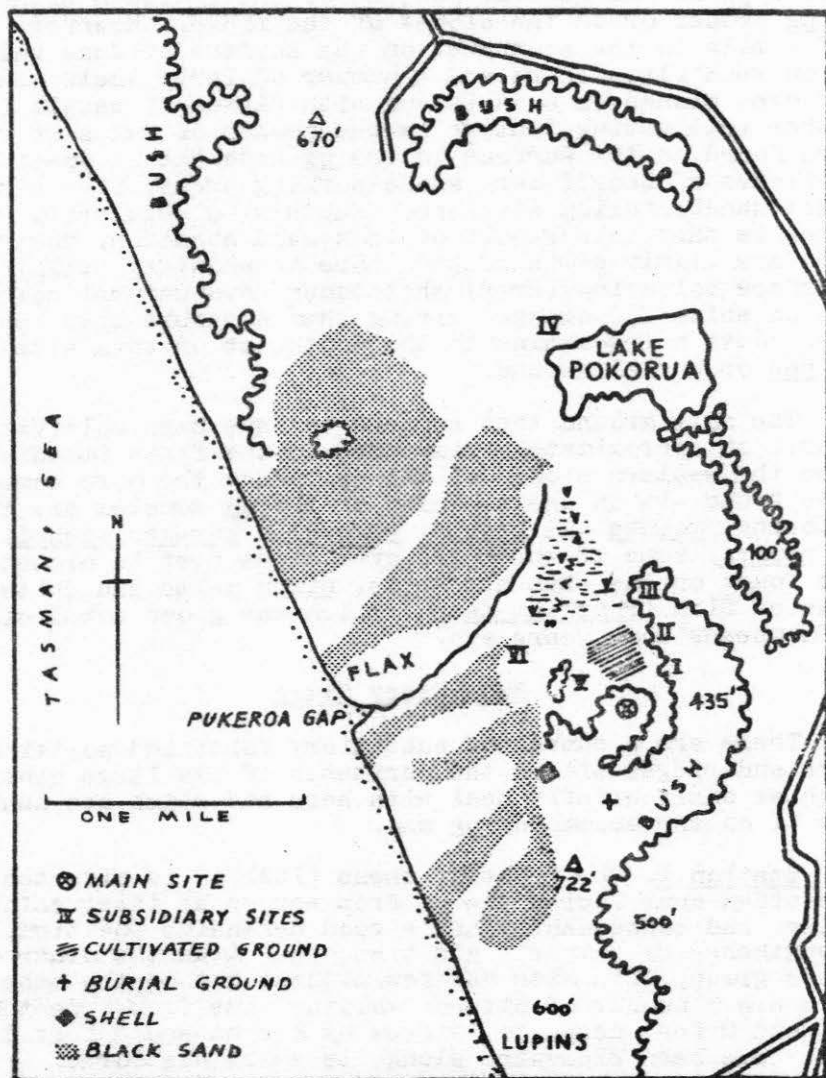
A COASTAL RIDGE PA. AWHITU PENINSULA

By K.J. Maddock and A. Taylor

While occupied by the Ngata-te-ata tribe, the Awhitu Peninsula was possibly one of the most densely populated areas in the Auckland Province, with the result that there are a large number of pa sites along its thirty mile coastline. First among these is a large ridge pa (NZMS 1: Sheet N47 and part N46 (Pukekohe) 159173) and its six associated kainga which lie immediately within its perimeter between Lake Pokorua and Pukeroa gap (see map).

Situated on a 440 yard ridge running almost directly east and then turning sharply north, this site has a number of staggered terraces cut into the northern and western sides of a knoll that forms the principal area of defence. The four largest terraces measure 108 feet by 10 feet; 117 feet by 22 feet; 114 feet by 32 feet; and 117 feet by 26 feet, with scarps from 10 feet to 24 feet in height. In addition to these there are several shorter terraces averaging 25 feet in length. Typically, the uppermost part of the knoll has been levelled, forming a terrace 132 feet long with a width of 6 feet at its northern end and 27 feet at its southern. On this is a tahi which is 11 feet long and 8½ feet wide with 7 foot scarps on the northern and eastern sides from which a commanding view of the surrounding countryside is available: from it the Manukau harbour, Auckland Isthmus and Rangitoto Island can be seen as well as the Tasman Sea which can be glimpsed between the sand hills to the south. An interesting feature of this site is a well defined concealed entrance or kuwaha which is 21 feet long and 5½ feet wide with 16 foot and 10½ foot scarps. At its narrowest point the steep-sided ridge between the knoll and southern range of 500 foot sand hills is only 15 feet wide, and consequently defence of this area was a relatively simple matter; so much so, that there are only three small defensive positions along its length. They consist of short ramparts, trenches and side passages situated on three stepped terraces.

On the western slopes of the ridge is a fresh water spring, whilst on the knoll is a bell-shaped water storage pit approximately 12 feet deep. Along the ridge and on the pa terraces are a large number of rectangular storage pits generally grouped in twos and threes with, occasionally, entrances clearly evident. Among them are several with connecting passageways 2 feet wide. Baulks separating pits are from 2 feet to 3 feet in width. The pits are 15 feet long and 8 feet wide with occasional larger ones 24 feet long by



14 feet wide. The depth of pits varies: some are 3 feet deep while others are 4 feet.

Possibly the most interesting feature of the principal central pa is the general absence of shell midden either on the pa proper or on the slopes of the ridge. However, about half a mile to the southeast on the surface of dune gullies and on sand flats there are a number of large shell middens with oven stones in association with flakes of basalt (153173). Another interesting feature is the number of lumps of red ochre found on the surface in the pa area. It is possible that the flakes of basalt mark stone-working areas, i.e. adze and chisel manufacturing stations. Further, a peculiarity of the flakes is that as a result of iron-sand abrasion, their surfaces are highly polished and, more interesting still, carry a surface colouring (grey) that tones down natural colours, such as white and orange, giving them a marble-like appearance. Just a few chains to the southeast of this site is an urutapu or burial ground.

The only ground that appears to have been cultivated is an area of approximately six acres on the flats immediately below the western slopes of the pa. Among the more common trees found within the vicinity of the pa complex are the following: manuka and kanuka, rewarewa, karaka, kowhai, rata, and puriri, some of which are over eight feet in diameter. Also found on the site are ferns, nikau palms and quite large areas of flax (Phormium tenax) which was grown commercially by Europeans some years ago.

Subsidiary Sites

There are a number of subsidiary fortified positions on spurs and ridges within the perimeter of the large central pa which we shall briefly deal with here and which are numbered I to VI on the accompanying map.

Station I. The first of these (163174) is situated on a deep-sided spur facing the pa from across an intervening valley, and consequently has a good defensive position, strengthened by ramparts and trenches. Like the other stations in the group, this site has few middens but on the other hand there are a number of pits of varying size from 6 feet by 3 feet and 2 feet deep, to 10 feet by 8 feet and 3 feet deep, which have been excavated along its short platforms.

Station II (163178) also occupies a spur on the same ridge as Station I and, similarly, has a number of rectangular and square pits along its short platforms which could be either whare or kumara storage pits - or both.

Station III. Situated on a hill at the end of the above ridge is Station III (162181). This also is an excellent defensive position (steep slopes down to the valley floor) and also has definite evidence of occupation in the form of pits and terraces.

Station IV. Almost on the shoreline of Lake Pokorua is Station IV, situated on a low hill. Occupational evidence here is also in the form of pits and terraces.

Station V. Lying between the main central pa and the creek running from Pukeroa Gap is hill Station V (156176) with its rectangular pits and terraces. An interesting feature of this site is its well preserved earthworks.

Station VI. Possibly the strongest fortified position of the group of subsidiary sites within range of the main pa is Station VI. (149181) This is on a ridge which rises up in a gap in the hills leading to the coast. The steep sides, combined with swamp around the inland end and a creek parallel with one side, make it an ideal position. The top of the ridge has clearly been levelled and pits excavated in groups of twos and threes along its full length. At its northern end are short platforms and ramparts.

Artefactual Material

No artefacts were recovered from either the main pa or its associated sites during the survey, neither was any excavation carried out. However, we were informed of material found by Mr. W.S. Rutherford of Orua Bay on the sand dunes above the pa, including a number of adzes. Unfortunately, we have not, at the time of writing, been able to inspect this collection.

The present owners of the property on which the sites are situated, Mr. and Mrs. R. Walton, recovered two canoe paddles from the swamps near the lake but unfortunately these were accidentally destroyed two or three years ago.

Conclusion

From the above brief survey of the main pa and its subsidiary fortified positions, it is obvious that the area is important archaeologically and consequently a much more detailed site survey is planned for the future. Also, excavation work is projected. Finally, if it had not been for the hospitality and considerable assistance given to us by Mr. and Mrs. Walton on our visit to the site, the above work could not have been carried out. And so we thank them.