



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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A RECONNAISSANCE OF WAREHOU PA, MAKARA

by J.W. Brodie

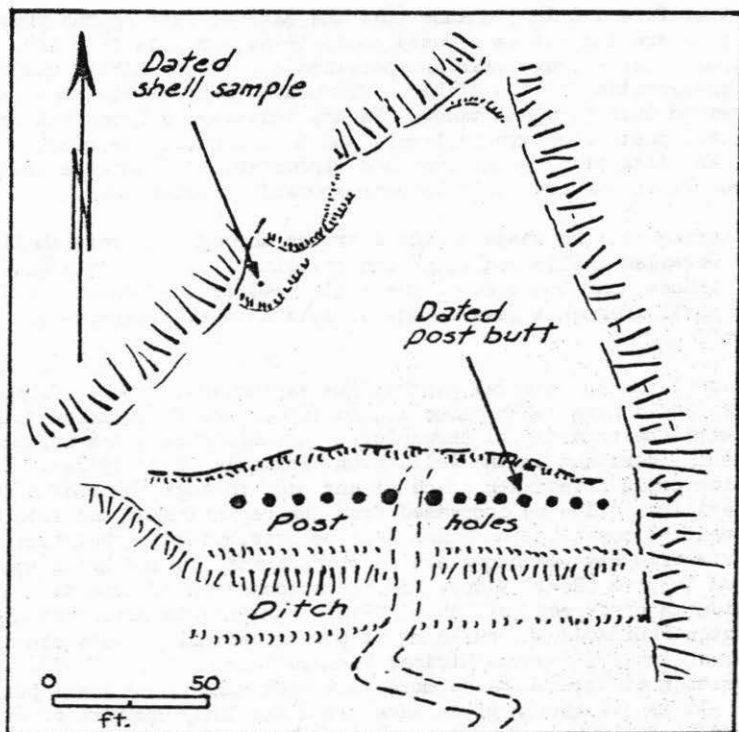
This note records the results of a reconnaissance made in 1957 and 1958 by Martin Hill and the writer, of the well preserved remains of a small fortified pa on the western headland of Owhariu Bay, Wellington, overlooking the small indentation known as Warehou Bay. (Grid reference N160, 269305). The existence of this pa has been briefly mentioned by McLeod in Best (1919), Davis (1959), and Daniels (1960).

The pa is located on a narrow headland projecting to the north. The site is rendered secure on the converging eastern and western sides by steep coastal cliffs up to 100ft. high. The eastern cliff is located on a fault zone and is in parts further oversteepened because of this.

Obvious remains of defensive works are restricted to a ditch and bank backed by a terrace which formerly carried a heavy palisade, the post holes of which, and in some instances the post-butts, are still extant. The ditch and palisade extended east-west from cliff to cliff, and enclosed a small triangular terraced area. The palisade was approached by a zigzag pathway up the steep southern slope.

Further excavation has since been carried out by the Wellington Archaeological Society and is reported elsewhere (in this issue).

In at least four positions on the coastal ridge to the south, groups of terraces are found on the sheltered southeast-facing sides of minor spurs. These extend from the pa site southwards for about a mile. Extensive middens are found on the valley floor of Warehou Bay stream immediately below the pa. Half a mile to the east is the long-occupied village site at Owhariu Bay.



A survey was made of the pa (fig.1) and one of the post hole depressions of the main palisade was excavated. Digging revealed a hole 5'6" deep and 12" in diameter over the bottom two feet, here containing a sector of post occupying one side of the hole. The wood was kindly indentified by the Forest Research Institute as totara. The sample showed 90 annual rings. It could be judged that most of the original trunk had been utilized though an outer 2 inches may have been lost by trimming or subsequent decay. There are 20 rings per inch on the average. A sample free from roots and fungus, centreing around the 60th ring from the present outer surface was selected. The period of growth subsequent to this ring is thus not less than 60 years and is perhaps as much as 100 years. C^{14} analysis kindly furnished by Nuclear Sciences Institute establishes its "age" as 310 ± 60 years before 1950 (Ferguson and Rafter 1959).

The "age" 310 ± 60 years for the sample means that there are 2 chances in 3 that the age lies between 250 and 370 years before 1950 (and a 95 per cent chance that it is between 190 and 430 years before 1950). Jansen (1962) has pointed out that absolute tree ring dates and ^{14}C dates indicate the possibility of changes in the atmospheric ^{14}C specific activity with time. This may mean, as indicated by his table, that a ^{14}C date of 1620 A.D. has to have 20 years subtracted giving a corrected date of 1600 A.D., 1740 A.D. similarly becoming 1700 A.D.

There is therefore a 2 in 3 chance that the date of cutting the tree (and presumably of erecting it as a post) could be as early as 1630 A.D. and as late as 1765 A.D. The average year is approximately 1715. Little can be deduced from the preservation of the timber. There are local stories that some of the posts survived into European times. Twenty years ago substantial remains of post butts existed just below ground level, and have sensibly decreased in size since then. If any loss of material from the circumferential surface of the specimen has occurred, then the age would be correspondingly lessened.

On a hut terrace on the western side a trench through the very shallow powdery grey soil revealed shells and flint and obsidian flakes, firmly embedded at a depth of 3 to 4 inches near the base of the soil. ¹⁴C measurements on paua and other molluscan shell fragments gave an age of less than 160 years, that is the shell is "modern".

The palisade forms an integral part of the earthwork defences. Their construction (or repair) could have taken place around 1630. The radiocarbon dates may be compared with the traditional chronology. At this period the influence of Ngai Tara was still dominant in the Wellington Peninsula (Best 1918a). Equally, construction could have taken place at any time through the median date 1715 to 1765. Ngati Ira influence increased from the beginning of the 18th Century onwards and late construction might best be attributed to their activity. Certainly Owhariu Bay was one place at which Ngati Ira and Ngati Awa came into conflict in 1825-26 (Best 1918c). If the association of late date and Ngai Tara construction is preferred (cf Adkin, 1910) then in this north-west coastal area of Wellington Peninsula the building of strong defensive posts continued later than has been implied for the Miramar Peninsula area (Best, 1917). The north facing position of Warehou pa (a more localized name which seems preferable to "Makara". It is a European-given name, from the large numbers of warehou that were caught in the bay) and of the very similar spur-end pa between the streams entering the eastern side of Te Ika a Maru Bay three miles south both command strategic canoe landing places, that might have furnished bases or access to Muaupoko or other northern invaders.

The second pa on the western side of the head of Te Ika a Maru Bay has a more commanding but less secure situation, and is supported by more massive earthworks. There is no record in the literature or on maps that the Warehou site was occupied at all by Ngati Awa. By analogy with other localities occupied by them in the Wellington area such an event is unlikely.

However the shell date shows that Ngati Ira may have utilized the site up to the invasion of Ngapuhi in 1820, and their defeat by Ngati Awa in 1825-26.

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WANGANUI ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

The Wanganui Archaeological Group established under the auspices of the Wanganui Public Museum has been functioning actively since April, 1960 under the Chairmanship of Mr W.E. Jagger. The present Secretary is Mr A.J. Bannister. The Group has 26 senior and 13 junior members, with subscription rates of 10/- and 5/- respectively. The Group has Institutional Membership with the New Zealand Archaeological Association.

Field days are held perhaps six to nine times a year, with usually an equal number of evening meetings when the last Field Day is reviewed and the next one planned and discussed, followed wherever possible by a speaker or a short programme of films. Attendances have not been very good, and it has been left to a hard core of enthusiasts to carry on. The Wanganui district abounds in sites of archaeological interest, particularly the hill and ridge-top pa. The Group feels that large-scale excavations would be beyond their capabilities at present, even if desirable, and it is therefore concentrating on investigations of sites, collection of history, and the recording of sites; with the odd dig whenever anything promising is encountered. The stage has now been reached where the sites visited and re-visited during the last year or two are being recorded under the "Site Recording" scheme of the N.Z.A.A.

Although the work of the Group has not been spectacular, it is felt that a firm foundation has been laid, and experience gained which should be an aid to future activities.