



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/>.

ADDITIONAL EXCAVATION ON THE MAIN UPPER TERRACE
HAMLINS HILL (N42/137)

Peter Pearce,
University of Auckland.

Abstract

A salvage operation was undertaken in May 1974 to further investigate the threatened Hamlins Hill site. Underneath a midden and a stone scatter, structural evidence of firescoops and a possible earlier house or shelter were found. Also in a large area where only one posthole was discovered it is thought there may be an open area. The evidence now, accumulated from three excavations, suggests that we have here a prehistoric living site - possibly a small village.

INTRODUCTION

The lower knoll at Hamlins Hill excavated twice in 1969 (Davidson 1970; Irwin in press) had not been completely quarried by May 1974 and a further salvage operation was therefore organised. The initial aim was to locate additional house outlines on the open areas but this aim was changed during excavation to investigating a rock scatter and midden on the southern edge of the main upper terrace. The intention here is to describe the excavation, to discuss further the features found and to present results so far obtained from analysis of the material.

Aims

In this excavation the main purpose was to determine what had occurred in the open areas of the site, i.e. those areas unobstructed by pits or other surface features. It was thought from previous excavation on the site that evidence of house outlines might also be obtained here or, if not, that it would reveal other activities not encountered (Fig. 1, Areas A, B and C). However, once excavation demonstrated that these areas had in fact not been used, the excavation strategy was changed, and attention shifted to the edge of a scarp dropping away to three pits and below that to another terrace (Fig. 1, Area D). Here the attention was focused on a scatter of

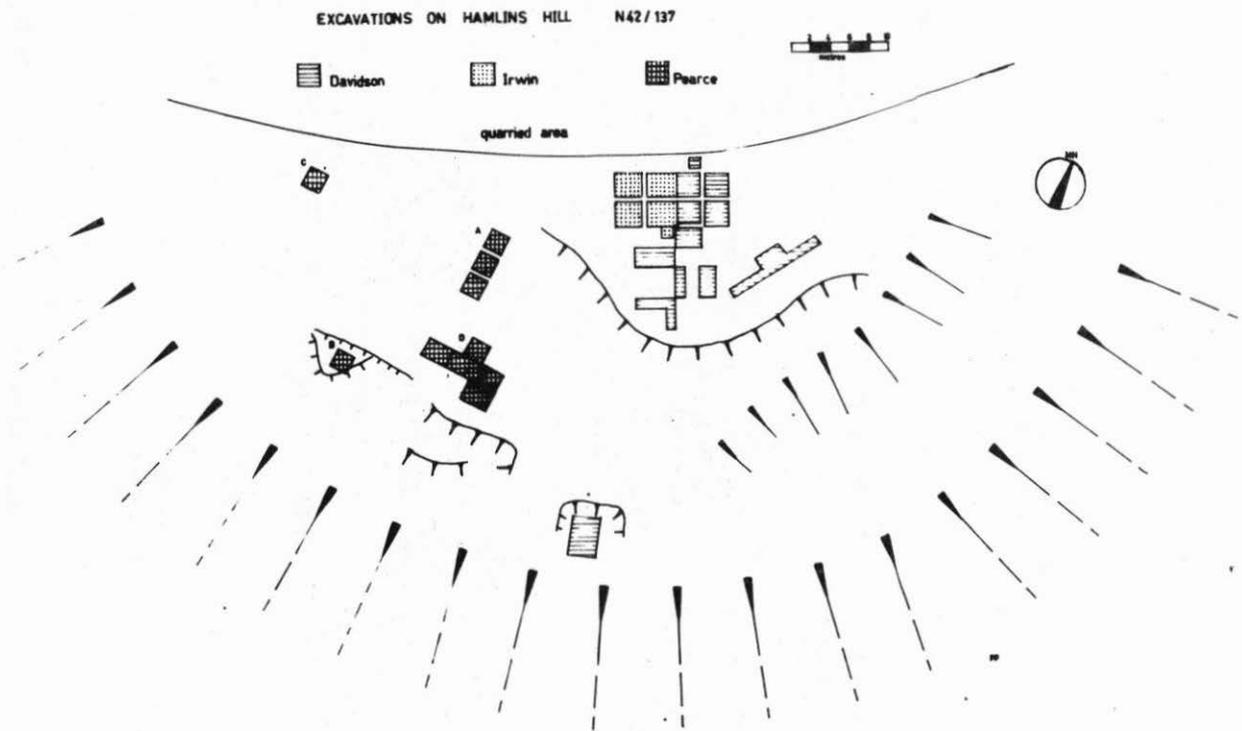


Figure 1. Map of excavated areas on Hamlins Hill.

rock lying on top of the latest cultural layer which was largely composed of a lens of shell midden. An attempt was made to define the spatial extent of the rock scatter and also that of the midden.

Methods

An effort was made to cover as great an area as possible in the time available. It was gridded in a system independent of Davidson's (1970), mainly for convenience. Squares were numbered according to their location and also in order of excavation. The squares were turfed and later trowelled. Although no screening took place, as much cultural material as possible was retained with the exception of shell, which was sampled only. Sections and floor plans of each square were drawn as appropriate and photographs of the excavation and the completed surface areas were taken.

EXCAVATIONS

Squares A1 and A2, each $2m^2$, were excavated by natural layers (Fig. 1). Following the removal of the topsoil and turf layer, excavation proceeded down to a non-cultural layer of yellow clay in which a posthole was revealed in the south-west corner of A2. This was in possible association with two other small although less certain posthole-like features in the same square which together formed an alignment. To follow this alignment, a third $2m^2$ square (A3) was opened which did not reveal any continuation of the aforementioned line. In fact, the only cultural material from A3 was a flake of chert. Having established that house structures were not present, two further exploratory squares were opened up in two other open areas.

The first, B1, was set on a small terrace adjacent to a group of three pits. Again no positive evidence for structural features was obtained. The basal layer proved to be very lumpy. Although at the time it was felt it may have been a disturbed fill, it was not excavated further because of its hardness and compactness. Subsequently small test pits within the square showed that the lumpy clay at the base of the cultural deposits progressively became more like the consolidated clay, indicating that all the new material was probably natural.

The second square, C1, was placed in another large open area adjacent to that designated as area A. Again it revealed little except that the natural may have been of a rather different texture. In that area the basal deposit consisted of a creamy coloured gritty clay with small nodules in it which overlay the yellow clay that formed the natural elsewhere on the site.

Since C1 proved culturally sterile, the investigation of areas B and C was halted and attention was diverted elsewhere.

A new area D (Fig. 1) was next investigated to see whether it contained cultural deposits. Selection of the area was accomplished by probing the general locality with a steel instrument. By this means it was discovered that beneath the surface, at the edge of the terrace, was what appeared to be a concentration of rocks. A 3 x 2 m square, D1, was laid out in this vicinity to investigate the composition of the feature. Removal of turf showed that the rocks were in large part scattered throughout the grey soil which was lightly flecked with yellow clay (Fig. 3). The rocks appeared to be randomly distributed throughout the square and formed neither coherent patterns nor discrete clusters. The rocks were then removed and excavation proceeded to natural. In this layer obsidian flakes were discovered, and on the surface of the natural were structural features identified as postholes and firescoops (Fig. 2).

Area D was further extended to determine the extent of the rock scatter. The rocks were found to extend eastward, but a midden deposit was encountered. Attention was transferred to the midden in order to define its relationship to two small humps on the edge of the terrace, which appeared to be the sides of a small pit. The extension were D2 (2m²), D3 (2m²), D4 (3.5 x 2m) and D5 (3 x 2 m). These four squares all contained a mixture of midden and black soil down to the natural clay base (Fig. 3). In the natural of this area many postholes and oven pits were uncovered and defined (Fig. 2). A 50 cm² total midden sample was taken from square D2 in three 5 cm spits. From the rest of the midden all bone and other cultural items apart from shell were collected. While the area revealed the remains of a possible structure, this could have been nothing more than a work shelter or cookhouse, as the principal activity, given the density of oven pits, was for cooking. Little charcoal was found in association with these oven pits. This shows that they had either been cleaned out or the ash and charcoal removed by wind and erosion. Most of these oven scoops showed discolouration from burning; few were filled with stones. Due to a shortage of time, the two humps described above were only partially investigated. From the small part excavated, however, it would appear that they more likely derive from another oven pit than the edge of a storage structure.

DISCUSSION

The features from which several possible structures may be inferred are shown in Fig. 2. A north-south depression in square D2 may be linked with a trench/depression and some postholes from D5. These in turn can be linked to a row of postholes in D4 which are

rather elongated. When these last were excavated, their fill, a puggy light grey clay, differed from that in other postholes which was midden mixed with black soil or just dark soil as in area D. The structure formed by these features may represent a fence line or, as was originally thought during excavation, a drain in which the postholes in D5 were cut at a later time. A third possibility, excluding the more trench-like depression in D2, is that the postholes represent one side of a fence enclosure or perhaps even a building. From other postholes in D3, D4 and D5, other arrangements forming buildings can be made. Because of this an area with one or more buildings could be postulated. However, it is felt that because of the large number of postholes only rather tentative inferences can be suggested for their use. The one really strong argument for a structure of some kind is based on the remains of wood fragments beneath the western edge of the midden in square D2. Here a small fence may have been constructed to retain the midden. A slot-like hole and two stake holes on a northeast-southwest line in square D2 all possessed similar fill in which wood fragments remained. This suggests contemporaneity of all three features which, because of their position along the edge of the midden, also suggests that they formed a fence restricting the dumping of the midden.

In Fig. 2 the postholes are divided into two groups on the basis of depth. Those which are cut no more than 10 cm into the yellow clay layer are described as shallow, while others are considered as deep. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that this particular depth distinction is meaningful.

The other common structural features in the bottom layer are oven pits. These, like the postholes, are cut into the natural clay layer. In square D5 it was noted above that one oven pit cut into a posthole, establishing it as being later. This is an indication that any structure in that area was built before its use for cooking. However, as the oven pits in the main appear to be located in areas not occupied by postholes, it is possible that in general their use and that of any structures was contemporary. Yet without evidence of postholes later than oven pits and one case of the opposite situation it seems more probable that many of the other oven pits were of a later date. This conclusion agrees generally with the situation elsewhere (Davidson, 1970, p. 116; Irwin in press), although in this instance the situation remains uncertain.

It should be noted that the presence of features in area D contrasts with the situation in areas A, B and C. The latter revealed no evidence of cultural activity apart from one flake and a posthole. These open areas were therefore either not used, or used for activities which have left little or no cultural trace. Admittedly, further

excavation is needed to better define the extent of such areas, but the present evidence indicates that they may well lie outside the parameters of the settlement itself.

Finally, a three period occupational sequence can be postulated. The earliest period is evidenced by the postholes, the middle period by the oven pits and the latest period by the midden. This sequence is derived from a review of the stratigraphic layers, and the excavation itself, in area D.

MIDDEN

The midden lens (Fig. 3) was associated with the black soil underlying the turf and overlying the postholes and oven pits. A preliminary analysis of remains of cultural material sampled from the lens is presented below.

Shells

Shells represented in the midden are as follows: *Chione stutchburyi*, *Amphidesma australe*, *Amphidesma subtriangulatum*, *Amphibola crenata*, *Comminella adspersa*, *Comminella glandiformis*, *Lunella smaragda*, *Zeacumantus* sp., *Pecten novaezelandiae* and *Maoricrypta costata* (?). These identifications coincide with Davidson's descriptions (1970, pp. 113-4) which also provide an account of the habitat of these shells. Because the study of the total midden samples excavated in three 5 cm spits has yet to be concluded, the list may not represent the complete range of shellfish exploited. The major point is that the samples from this midden reinforce Davidson's (1970, p. 113) view that the shellfish, *C. stutchburyi* (cockle) is by far the most important in the diet of the inhabitants of this site, as would be expected from its location near the inner Manukau Harbour mudflats.

Bones

Bones were very thinly scattered through the midden. From the material to date the following identifications have been made.

Fish: Eight individuals of *Chrysophrys auratus* (snapper) are present as determined from upper right premaxillae. *Thyrsites atun* (barracouta) is represented by jaw fragments only.

Rat: Two individuals of the native rat (*kiore*) were identified from mandibles.

Dog: At least one individual of *Canis familiaris* identified from three vertebrae, including one atlas, and some skull fragments, including frontal, lachrymal and temporal bones. In addition, there was a tooth fragment, probably from a premolar. There are also some foot bones which appear to be metacarpals or metatarsals.

Bird: Some bird bone is present, but as yet species' identifications have not been made.

The bone then represents an additional meat constituent in the diet. However, it can be seen that apart from *C. stutchburyi*, relatively little food is represented by the total material recovered.

CONCLUSION

Excavation has shown that the major activities identified for other areas of the site by Davidson and Irwin also occurred in area D. The occupational sequence is similar, apart from the fact that no pits were excavated, and the material recovered also appeared to be very similar to that found previously. The site then shows further evidence of its use as a living site - perhaps a small village, in which a large variety of activities took place. Excavation has also shown that some open areas were not used at all for these activities.

The evidence indicates occupation over a fairly substantial span of time, probably by a small group. The questions of the duration of each occupation and also those of possible seasonality require closer consideration and are currently under examination. This is possible because of further midden study and because the lower knoll of N42/137 is being further investigated before it is totally quarried away. The excavations at present in progress are focused on a wide area of the site recently uncovered by bulldozing which stripped away the topsoil and turf. This may permit us to understand, areally at least, the major activities represented and the relationship of the various features one to another, as these activities shifted from one location to another within the site during its occupation.

Finally, it should be noted that the author is responsible for any of the ideas or interpretations offered in this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Initially I would like to thank Auckland Meat Co. and the quarrying agent, W. Stevenson and Sons, for their permission to excavate on Hamlins Hill. Secondly, I would like to thank Professor R. C. Green for his initial stirring of interest and continuing

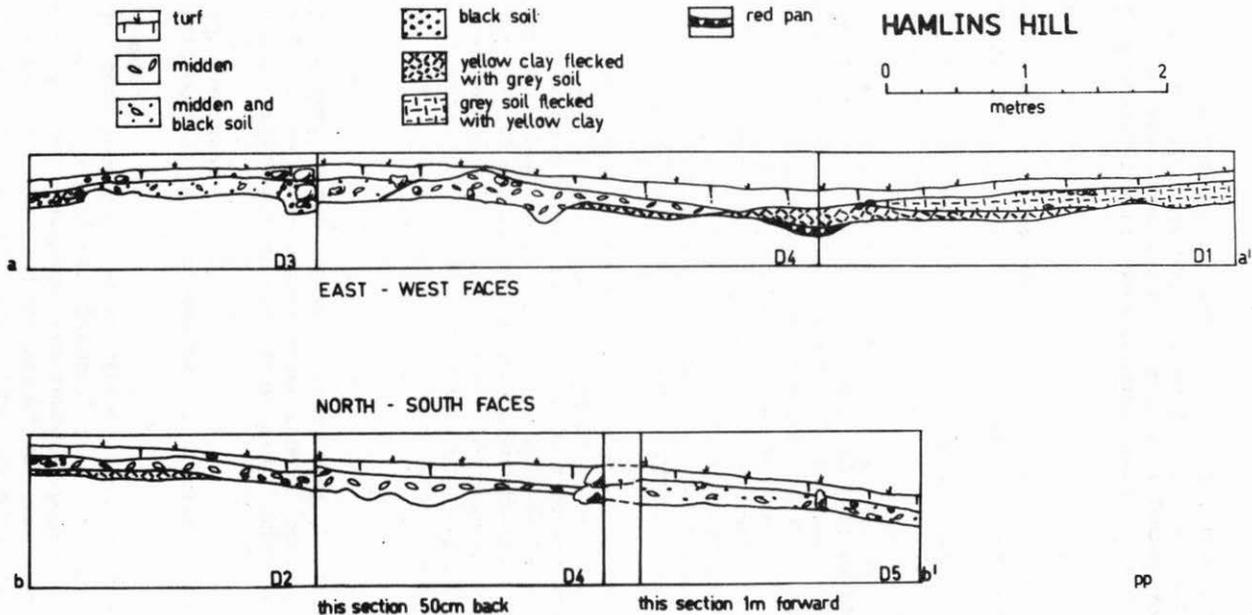


Figure 3. Main cross-sections, Hamlins Hill excavations.

pressure for publication and also to Mr G. J. Irwin for his unending help in getting a draft together. Finally, it was not possible to conduct this excavation without the experienced and skilful help of the excavators both from Auckland University and from the Archaeological Society.

REFERENCES

Davidson, J. M. 1970 Salvage Excavations at Hamlins Hill, N42/137, Auckland, New Zealand. Rec. Auckland Inst. Mus. 7: 105-22, March 31st.

Irwin, G. J. (in press) Further salvage excavation on Hamlins Hill, N42/137, Auckland, N.Z.

HAMLINS HILL N42/137

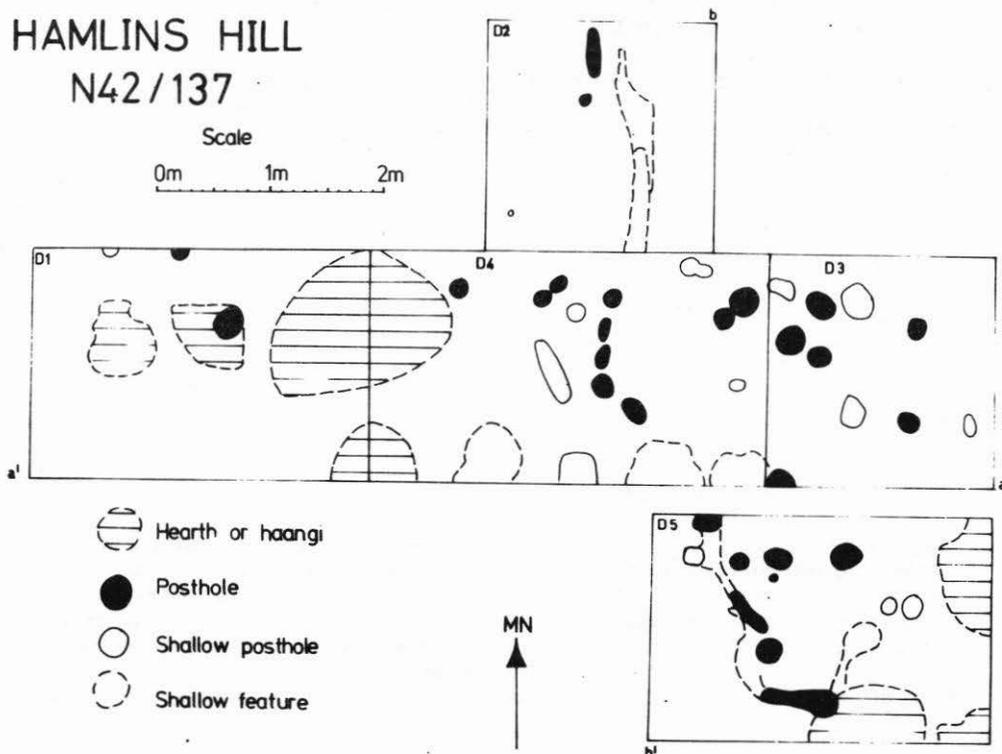


Figure 2. Plan of features uncovered by excavation.