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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE LOWER KARORI STREAM

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On 19 April 1987 a party from the Wellington Archaeological Society visited the lower Karori stream to the west of Wellington city. The objective was to record any archaeological remains still evident in the area and, in particular, to investigate reports from earlier this century of the presence of the remains of a "pa" or "village", and a "burial ground" at the mouth of the stream.

The lower Karori stream is presently under investigation as a possible location for a sewage treatment plant for Wellington city. Two sites within the lower valley have been identified as potential locations for a plant (Beca Carter Hollings and Ferner, 1986). The secondary objective of a survey was to investigate the likely archaeological implications if this development went ahead.

Information about the archaeology of the Karori stream mouth is mostly from McLeod (in Best, 1917:9) and Best (1918:87), although others, such as Beckett (Evening Post, 24 October 1953), have also reported evidence of occupation, and the finding of artefacts. Unfortunately they do not indicate precisely what the evidence of occupation was, nor exactly where it was. McLeod's note on the Karori stream mouth says simply: "At the mouth of this stream a village has stood in the past, and signs of occupation are seen in other places in the vicinity. A considerable amount of village debris is still observable, and a number of old implements have been found there" (McLeod in Best, 1917:9). In a paper on shell middens in the Wellington area, Best (1918:87) echoes McLeod's comments when he writes that "the old village-site at the mouth of the Karori stream is still in evidence, and has furnished a number of stone implements to the relic-seeker."

While the presence of shell middens and oven debris is suggested by these sources, an element of confusion is introduced by another source. A map of the "Wellington Country District Shewing Native Names", published by the Department of Lands and Survey, compiled from information supplied by Best and McLeod, shows a "pa" and a "burial ground" at the Karori stream mouth.

The exact location of the pa remains uncertain. The map has a scale of one inch to the mile and shows the pa on the western side of the stream, with the burial ground on the eastern side. It is possible that the "pa" referred to is

simply the "village" under a different label. The use of labels, such as "pa", is not very consistent in these sources.

Identifying the pa with the village creates one difficulty. The pa is marked on the map on the western side of the stream while the most likely site for a village is on the eastern side of the stream on a sheltered area of a colluvium fan, above the valley floor. A small number of baches now occupy this area. In the 1940s there was a farm building and sheep dip on the site. An inspection of exposed sections and patches of bare earth, however, revealed no traces of earlier occupation.

The burial ground is thought to have been in a sandy area on the eastern side of the stream. Within the last decade a burial has eroded from this area and was reported to the Historic Places Trust. A local bach owner pinpointed the same area as the place where human remains had been uncovered from time to time in recent years. The extent of the burial ground, and what now remains of it, is unknown.

There is now little likelihood of sites surviving on the valley floor itself as the stream is actively eroding and reworking old deposits. Most of the alluvial surfaces, particularly near the stream mouth, appear to be very recent. No evidence of occupation was seen in stream banks or other exposed sections. Burnt and fire-cracked stones and charcoal were seen eroding from a section cut back into colluvium on the western side of the stream mouth but the remains were very sparse.

Two other areas in the lower valley were closely inspected as these were identified in the 1840s as gardens belonging to the Te Atiawa settlements of Waiariki, which was situated in the next valley to the west (Brodie, 1986:29). There was no tangible evidence of gardening in exposed stream sections at either of the two sites.

It now seems that most of what will ever be known about the archaeology of the Karori stream mouth is contained in some meagre notes made some seventy years ago.

The place identified as a possible site for the sewage treatment plant is unlikely to contain anything of archaeological value. It is on the valley floor and the surfaces here, as near the mouth, appear to be of quite recent date. No archaeological remains were seen. The alternative site includes the area where the baches are now situated. No evidence of prehistoric occupation has been found there. It is, however, immediately adjacent to the burial ground.

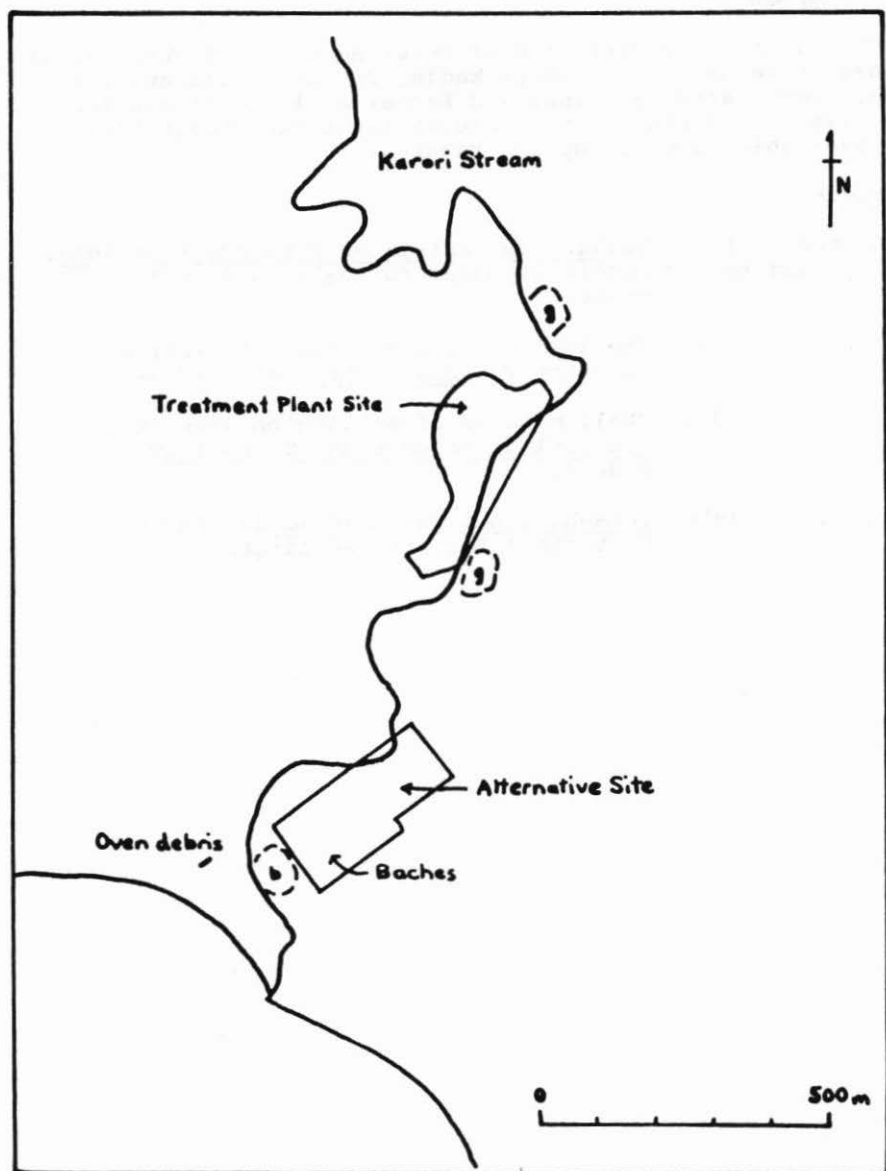


FIGURE 1. Lower Karori Stream: b = burial ground; g = 1840s garden sites. Redrawn from Fig. 8.2, Becca Carter Hollings and Ferner (1986).

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