



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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/>.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PUKENAMU: INITIAL FINDINGS FROM EXCAVATIONS AT TE HORO, KĀPITI COAST

KIRI SHARPE

In 2007 a large quantity of shell midden was uncovered during works for a 22-lot subdivision called Pukenuamu Estates, located 60km north of Wellington on the Kāpiti Coast at Puruaha Road, Te Horo (see Figure 1). The subsequent excavation revealed a large site with ovens and shell middens, ubiquitous to Kāpiti Coast archaeology. The site also contained features less commonly seen on the Kāpiti Coast, such as postholes, a pumice hearth, complex stratigraphy, oven stone caches and possible house and working floors. Also unusual was the relatively large quantity of artefacts found.



Figure 1: Te Horo on the Kāpiti Coast, with Kāpiti Island to the west

The property in question consisted of a flat area of grassed farmland, rising to a ridge of dunes terminating at the shoreline. The area in which this property is situated is part of southern end of a long dune belt that borders the south-west coast of the North Island, extending from the Manawatu River in the north to Paekakariki in the south (McFadgen 1997: 5-6). The dune belt is made up of different stages of dune formation, each dated to a different time period. The oldest dunes are called the Foxton dunes (6500-2000 years BP). After the Foxton dunes came the Motuiti (1720 years BP) then the Older Waitarere (400 years BP) followed by the Younger Waitarere (150 years BP), each phase identified by its degree of soil profile development (McFadgen 1997: 8). The property discussed here is located in a dune system classed as 'Waitarere-Motuiti' (400-900BP), where these two dune phases have not been able to be separately distinguished (McFadgen 1997: 10).

It has been surmised that an early (ca. 400-500 years BP) cultural period and a later cultural period (dating from just before and after European contact) existed in this region. The early period featured centralised occupation sites located close to the sea utilising imported stone resources, as well as satellite sites including those utilised for food gathering. The environment was well-forested with lakes and lagoons and plentiful food. The later period sites (identified by oral accounts) are often described as *pā*, located along waterways and positioned further inland than the early period sites. These sites do not tend to contain midden or imported stone and the settlement pattern is dispersed. A possible reason for this shift in settlement focus is environmental change, particularly forest clearance and dune advance (McFadgen 1997: 5).

Relatively little targeted archaeological investigation has taken place in this region, with the majority of our knowledge on Kāpiti Coast archaeology confined to the sites uncovered in the dune belt. With the sea immediately to the west and the Tararua Ranges to the east, this narrow belt of dunes was originally interspersed with swampland which was later drained for European farming purposes. It is now a very popular area to live and is rapidly developing to a dense suburbia. This rapid development has revealed (and destroyed) many archaeological sites, the majority of which consist of pre-European shell middens containing only the occasional fragment of bone, minimal artefacts and the very occasional accompanying structural feature (O'Keeffe 2011: 49). Four sites are recorded in the NZAA Site Recording Scheme in the vicinity of the property in question, two of which (R25/23 and R25/24) were recorded as part of the works described here (see Figure 2). Site R25/12 was the location of the discovery of an outrigger canoe float in the later nineteenth century, ploughed up while working in the area of a formerly drained lagoon. Site R25/13 is described as prehistoric occupation and was recorded and subsequently investigated in 2000 by Michael Taylor and Annetta Sutton, revealing 6 areas of occupation including ovens, middens and artefacts.

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



Printed by: NZHPT National AA

11/02/2014

Figure 2. NZAA recorded archaeological sites in vicinity of Puruaha Road, Te Horo (ArchSite). Subject property indicated by black border

In May 2007 subdivision works began on the property, including the creation of artificial lakes, access roads, right of ways, driveways, house platforms and the installation of services. Works ceased after large amounts of shell were uncovered during the creation of the access roads. At this stage work to create the artificial lakes had been virtually completed, and topsoil stripping and some earthmoving had taken place on the majority of the access ways. The author was commissioned to undertake an archaeological assessment of effects of this property, and identified many areas of archaeological interest ranging from a small scatter (0.5m x 0.5m) of surface shell to large areas (12m x 12m) of exposed *in-situ* midden and one possible pit. In addition, a moa tibiotarsus was found lying beside one of the newly formed roads, having already been excavated out of one of the new artificial lakes prior to the author's arrival. The lack of working or burning on the bone indicated that it was not from a cultural context (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Moa tibiotarsus found during the archaeological assessment at Puruaha Road, May 2007

An archaeological authority (2008/146) was subsequently granted, which required that a Section 15 investigation be carried out prior to earthworks recommencing. This investigation was carried out in March-April 2008, led by the author. Subsequent monitoring also took place of the earthworks needed to complete the roading within the subdivision. With the arrival of the recession on our shores, the remaining works (driveways, house platforms and services) were halted. As they have not yet recommenced, analysis and write-up has unfortunately been left in limbo.

Approximately 20 areas of archaeological interest were identified, most of which were investigated and subsequently destroyed. One area revealed a roughly square patch of burnt wooden material in association with a posthole, theorised to be part of a possible house floor. The majority of the artefacts came from one particular area, found scattered down a dune slope exposed to the elements some time previously by the removal of topsoil. These artefacts were not found *in-situ*, however it is likely that they eroded down from the top of the dune from which was excavated a possible working or living floor consisting of a flat surface of hardened, dark-coloured sand running under the top of the current dune surface. Only a small portion of this surface was to be affected by the roading works, thus it is likely that much of this site still remains. At the base of this dune a number of oven stone caches were found, representing several different periods of deposition.

A small amount of recovered midden material has undergone preliminary identification, and the most exciting point of difference to other Kāpiti Coast midden analysed by the author is the relatively large amount of bone present, including fish, bird and mammal. The shellfish species are those commonly identified from this region (Tuatua *Paphies subtriangulata*, Venus Shell *Dosinia anus*, Knobbled Whelk *Austrofuscus glans*, Trough Shell *Macrea discors* and Triangle Shell *Spisula aequilatera*). Also present are kina, barnacle, cake urchin and land snails, as well as unidentified carbonised seeds.

Approximately 186 artefacts were recovered; out of these, around 172 are stone flakes and debitage (including obsidian), ten are adze portions, two are pumice artefacts (one ‘ball’ and one grooved fragment), one is a stone fishing lure and one is a possible pounamu point (see Figures 4-7).



Figure 4: Pumice hearth and profile view of an oven stone cache



Figure 5: Fragment of ‘grooved’ pumice and pumice ‘ball’

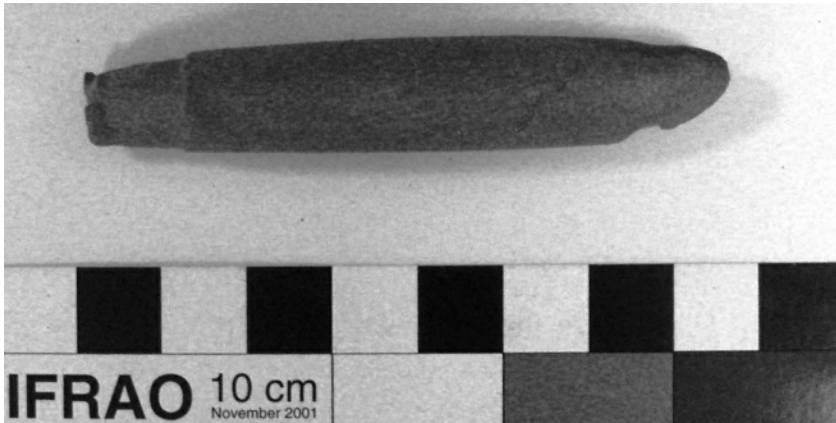


Figure 6: Stone fishing lure

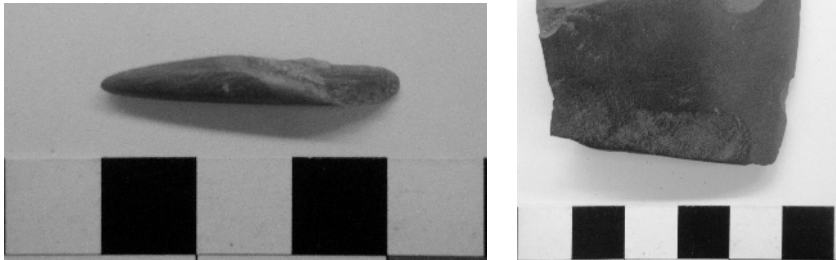


Figure 7: Possible pounamu point and adze fragment

It is important to note that these sites had been severely damaged prior to investigations taking place, both by the earthmoving and the subsequent exposure to the elements. This may affect the overall research results as none of the sites investigated were wholly intact.

In conclusion, a large quantity of archaeological material was uncovered and documented during earthworks at the Pukenamau Estates subdivision, including many middens, ovens and structural features, all of which indicate this was a significantly-sized Māori occupation site. It is hoped that the artefactual analysis and interpretation of the archaeology will commence this year, which will include the writing of a report and a follow-up article in *Archaeology in New Zealand*.

References

- McFadgen, B. 1997. *Archaeology of the Wellington Conservancy: Kāpiti-Horowhenua: a Prehistoric and Palaeoenvironmental Study*. Wellington: Department of Conservation.
- O’Keeffe, M. 2011. Archaeological Assessment: MacKays to Peka Peka Expressway. Unpublished report for NZTA.
- Petersen, K. 2007. Archaeological Assessment Report, Puruaha Road, Te Horo. Unpublished report for Pukenuamu Estates Ltd.