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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT U14/3283 AND U14/3284, OMOKOROA ROAD, OMOKOROA: INTERIM REPORT

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Introduction

Archaeological investigations were carried out over three weeks in October-November 2007 at sites U14/3283 and U14/3284 on the east side of the Omokoroa Peninsula, between Omokoroa Road and the coastal margins adjacent to Tauranga Harbour. This work was carried out under authority number 2008/64 issued by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust prior to earthworks associated with a residential development and a link road.

An archaeological assessment identified one previously recorded site (U14/711), and a further three sites were found and recorded during the survey (U14/3282, U14/3283, U14/3284). Two areas were noted as having the potential for archaeological evidence although nothing was apparent on the surface. These places are referred to as Possible Sites A and B.

The landscape of the Omokoroa Peninsula, like much of the coastal area throughout the western Bay of Plenty, consists of rolling hills and level ground ending at an escarpment adjacent to Tauranga Harbour of approximately 20 m high. Tephra-based soils, derived from successive volcanic eruptions, mantle the area. The topsoil is typically dark brown to black, and friable, overlying a yellow brown tephra. Where ploughing has occurred, the topsoil is deeper than what would normally be encountered in an undisturbed soil profile, and the interface between topsoil and subsoil is sharply defined.

Excavation

A mechanical digger was used to remove turf and topsoil from eight areas. Seven of the areas opened contained archaeological features. Approxi-

mately 2500 square m were stripped, and exploratory trenches were dug over part of the remainder of the area. A very high number of archaeological features were excavated – 1686 across all areas (Table 1). A brief description of each area is given below.

Site	Area Name	Feature Type	Number	Totals	
U14/3283	Area A	Pit	15	205	
		Posthole/stake hole	167		
		Firescoop	5		
		Other	18		
	Terrace 1	Pit	6		65
		Posthole/stake hole	54		
		Firescoop	3		
		Other	2		
	Terrace 2	Pit	0		138
		Posthole/stake hole	132		
		Firescoop	4		
		Other	2		
	Terrace 3	Pit	54		431
		Posthole/stake hole	327		
		Firescoop	44		
		Other	6		
Area C	Pit	90	568		
	Posthole/stake hole	369			
	Firescoop	99			
	Other	10			
Possible Site A	Area B	Pit	22		
		Posthole/stake hole	64		
		Firescoop	10		
		Other	2		

		98
U14/3284	Pit	32
	Posthole/stake hole	103
	Firescoop	29
	Other	17
		181
TOTAL		1686

Table 1: This table gives numbers of types and features in each area.

After topsoil removal each area was scraped down by hand and features excavated to reveal shape and dimensions. Storage pits were fully excavated, half sectioned or trenched in order to obtain depth measurements and an indication of fill type. The dimension and fill of each feature, stratigraphic relationship, and association with contemporary features (where known), was recorded in an IPAQ hand-held computer and downloaded each evening into a Microsoft Access database. Photographs were taken of features, or groups of features. All features and excavation areas were mapped by Ben Thorne, of Thorne Archaeology, using a Leica 1200 self tracking total station, and the excavations tied into the New Zealand mapping system using existing survey control points.

U14/3283

Five of the areas opened were on U14/3283: Areas A and C, Terraces 1-3 (Figure 1). The site was relatively undisturbed by modern farming and ploughing, although rabbit damage was common and had disturbed the archaeology in some places. Area A and Terraces 1-3 had been identified during the site assessment as having archaeological evidence. Prior excavation experience in the Omokoroa area of where sites are located in relation to topography dictated where other ground with archaeological potential was to be stripped. Area C therefore had nothing visible on the surface but was at the top of the escarpment slope and was relatively flat.

Area A

Area A was a level area on top of a knoll and contained rectangular storage pits, configurations of stake holes that may have belonged to windbreaks and other temporary structures, and numerous scattered postholes and stake holes. The pits appear to have been contemporary in that they were on the

same alignment and several had a ‘step/shelf’ at each end close to the ground surface and a board slot on the upper edge of the ‘step’. The westernmost and flattest portion of Area A was surprisingly devoid of features and had possibly been disturbed or truncated although the stratigraphy did not indicate this was so. It could be that some levelling had taken place here in association with the adjacent house, reputed to be the remodelled early 20th century farmhouse. Only a few modern postholes were found across the area.



Figure 1. Panoramic view of the investigation area showing areas excavated. U14/3283 Area A is at the top of the slope (left), with Terraces 1-3 descending the slope. Area C is adjacent to Terrace 3, and Area B is the area the upper centre of the photo. U14/3284 is on the escarpment slope to the right.

Terrace 1

Terrace 1 was located on the slope below Area A. This area was apparent on the surface as a slight change of slope with midden present under the grass at the northern end. Removal of the turf confirmed that it was not a terrace with a cut backscarp, and the occupation surface was not level although not as steep as the slope above and below. A small number of firescoops, scattered postholes and stake holes, and a few small, square bin pits were discovered here.

Some of the features were dug into an overlying dark brown layer containing shell midden relating to a second use of the area, once shell midden had built up. Features were dispersed and there was little intercutting.

Terrace 2

Terrace 2 was directly downhill from Terrace 1 and also appeared to be an area of different slope angle, but when the turf was removed it also was not a cut terrace. Both Terrace 1 and 2 may be natural 'slump terraces'. Features here were grouped into two distinct areas of activity: a cluster of firescoops and postholes at the southern end, and at the northern end a windbreak formed from 16 closely spaced postholes with a parallel row having fewer postholes of uneven spacing. Shell midden appeared to have built up on the northern side of the windbreak. Surprisingly, when the excavation area was extended, no features were found on the slope beyond the postholes to account for the shell deposit.

Terrace 3

Terrace 3 had been created by making a substantial cut into the hill slope. The level surface measured 27 x 7 m and contained 431 features (Figures 2 and 3). Many of these were intercutting and it was clear that there had been more than one occupation of the terrace. A degree of spatial differentiation of features was evident: postholes and stake holes, with later overlying firescoops, were mainly at the northern end on a slightly higher part of the terrace separated from the middle section by a shallow transverse scarp. The middle section contained round bin pits, and there were small square or rectangular bin pits at the southern end. Rua were dug into the 2-3 m high backscarp at the southern end of the terrace. There was another rua at the northern end of the terrace but this was dug into the terrace surface rather than the backscarp. This rua represents a different period of use as it did not relate to the pattern of activity present on the terrace. A large rectangular pit with angled rafter slots dug into the backscarp of the terrace was present in the middle part of

the terrace. The pit fill was sealed by material washing down the slope from higher up, with firescoops dug into the new surface.

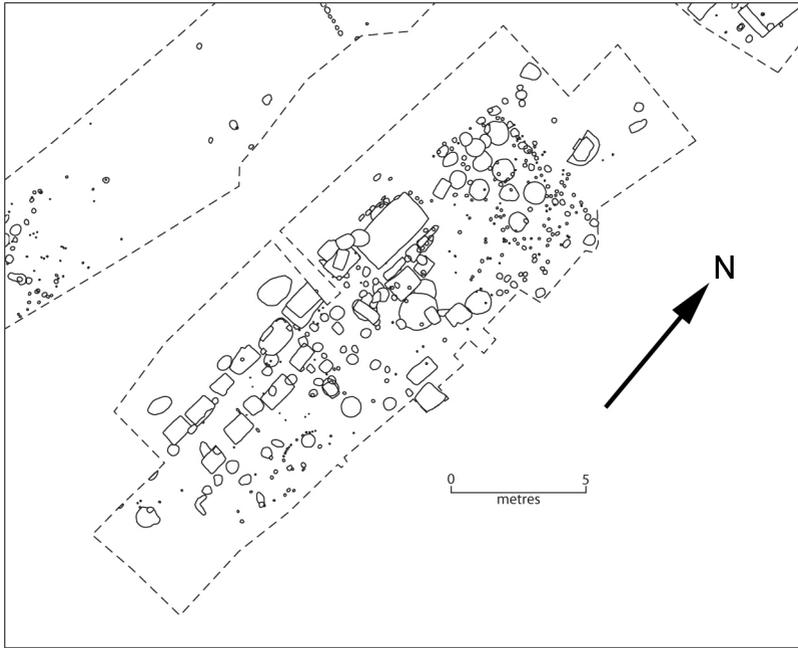


Figure 2. Plan of features excavated on Terrace 3.

Area C

Area C was to the east of Terrace 3 and on the same level. The undifferentiated slope extended from Terrace 3 to the southern end of the flat area which formed the top of the escarpment overlooking the harbour. This flat area showed several different clusters of activity, none of which was apparent on the surface, and like Terrace 3 there was spatial separation of different types of features. Rua were dug into the terrace backscarp, and there were clustered firescoops near another part of the backscarp. Rectangular storage pits were present, many of which were intercut by several other pits, and there were numerous postholes and stakeholes with differing fills which seemed to relate to occupation phases. As on Terrace 3, shell midden overlay the earliest features and appears to represent activity on this part of the site, and downslope wash from activity higher on the slope. Although the rear of the area was a definite scarp, it was so modified by rua that it could not be determined if it was a cut

scarp, or a natural slump scarp which had been modified. In some places there were up to seven superimposed activities including rua, rectangular storage pits (intercutting), firescoops and postholes. Interestingly, the area of intense activity came to a relatively abrupt end on the northeast side, though nothing in the topography indicated why activity should have been restricted. Analysis of the postholes according to fill type and colour (and implied phases of occupation) might provide evidence of a fence on the northern side.



Figure 3. Photo looking along southern half of Terrace 3 from north to south prior to excavation of the rear 1 m of the terrace. The edge of the large pit with rafter slots is visible in the lower right of the photo.

Unusually, the eastern extremity of Area C had evidence of historic European occupation including square postholes in a grid pattern and small

rubbish pits containing glass, nails and bricks. The manufacturing method used to attach the tops of bottles indicates a 1870-1880s date for occupation, and this site was possibly one of the first residential European sites on Omokoroa.

Several storage pits were present on the slope between Area C and Terrace 3. These pits were notable for the shallow angled postholes along their edges indicating where the roof rafters had been buried into the slope (Figure 4). Unusually for the Omokoroa area, one of the pits had clearly been left open for some time once it was disused: successive thin lenses of fill had washed in around one of the central posts. When the pit was about half filled the post was pulled out or had rotted away. At that point the pit was deliberately filled, possibly with material dug out of the adjacent uphill pit.



Figure 4. Pit in Area C with rafter slots along the edge. The pit has been half-sectioned but the outline of the full pit can be seen.

Area B

A level and slightly elevated area to the northeast of U14/3283 was identified during the initial survey as a 'possible site'. During excavation it became Area B. Pits, rua and a few postholes were dispersed across the area but it was not dense with features, nor were there clusters of pits. The area appeared to

have been ploughed repeatedly with plough lines evident in the subsoil under thick topsoil. Ploughing had obviously destroyed shallower features but there is some patterning to the pit distribution.

U14/3284

This terrace was on the escarpment slope to the east of, and below, Area B. A digger was used to excavate the terrace and backscarp, exposing the midden which had been found by probing. Again, it is likely that the terrace and backscarp were a natural feature modified and used on several occasions (Figure 5). Similar features were discovered here as on Terrace 3, U14/3283, although not in the same density. Again, rua were dug into the backscarp of the terrace and there was evidence of successive occupations, although the rua appear to have been the first. Features were dug into or covered by the mixed midden and dark soil layer that overlay parts of this terrace and resulted from cooking activity on the terrace.



Figure 5. U14/3284 showing backscarp and terrace excavation.

Artefacts and Samples

Over 45 obsidian flakes or cores were found across the excavations. The majority of these were found as the site was scraped down by hand after the digger had removed the topsoil. Other artefacts found within the fill of features included two sinkers, two files or abraders, one stone with a polished surface, and a pounamu chisel.

Samples of charcoal and unburnt shell were collected from features for dating. Relatively little bone of any sort was recovered. In some cases soil samples were taken from the base of pits. Ten litre bulk samples of midden and shell from firescoops were also taken for analysis.

The flat top of the escarpment, above U14/3283, and to the north of Area B was also trenched in strips. Several rectangular pits, and one large rua, were encountered, but there were surprisingly few archaeological features. However, the topsoil here was deep and the land had probably been ploughed repeatedly. The lack of midden reinforced the interpretation that ploughing had taken place. Features here were mapped but not investigated further.

Discussion

A number of archaeological sites have now been investigated in the Omokoroa area, primarily in the Lynley Park subdivision which is adjacent and to the south (excavated by Louise Furey but not yet written up). Few rua were found in the eight sites investigated in Lynley Park, although alignments of rectangular kumara pits were common. All sites (with the exception of part of pa U14/712) had been ploughed so that only the bases of firescoops and postholes were found, and reduced to one undifferentiated level. Several occupations must have been present at each site because there was intercutting of features but only in obvious situations (such as postholes dug into pit fill) could they be differentiated chronologically.

On U14/3282 and 3283, however, ploughing was only obvious in Area B although there had been modifications in Area A which had destroyed archaeological features. Terrace 3 and Area C had not been ploughed and therefore had stratigraphy, but the density of features is exceptional and appears to represent repeated reoccupation or lengthy occupation with shifting of activity areas. It is perhaps significant that Terrace 3 and Area C of U14/3282, and U14/3283 are low on the slope and sheltered from the prevalent southwesterly wind. Windbreaks on the southwestern side of some features such as firescoops in Area C and the midden deposition on Terrace 2 suggest a similar function.

Although brief, and lacking detail, this interim report has been submitted for publication in order to inform other archaeologists working in the Bay of Plenty area of what is being found. It is difficult to compare and contrast

information within the region in the absence of some written records. Given the amount of large scale development requiring archaeological investigations in the Bay of Plenty (and elsewhere) it is understandable that final reports are not being prepared within a short time of completion of fieldwork. It is, however, difficult to make value judgements on site significance or importance of the archaeological remains without knowing what else has happened recently in the area.

References

Furey, L. 2007 *Archaeological Assessment: Omokoroa Road, Omokoroa*. Unpublished report to Fiducia Ltd.