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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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EXCAVATION OF A HOUSE-FLOOR AT WAIMATE PA

by A.G. Buist

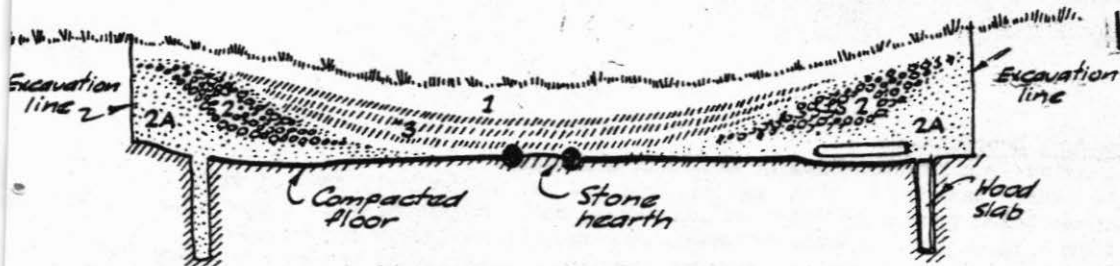
Description of site:

The area on both sides of the mouth of the Kapuni River, South Taranaki, was the site of two fortified pa and an unfortified occupation area. Waimate Pa, N129/100, is an island formed by the ancient river course and lies on the east of the present river mouth. Orangi-tuapeka Pa, N129/101, is on the west side of the river mouth. The headland between the two pa, N129/102, is a flat area of some twenty acres and has no defences apart from the steep bluffs on either side. Some three to four feet of volcanic soil lies above a hard sand-stone pan. In this surface soil numerous pits are visible.

History of site:

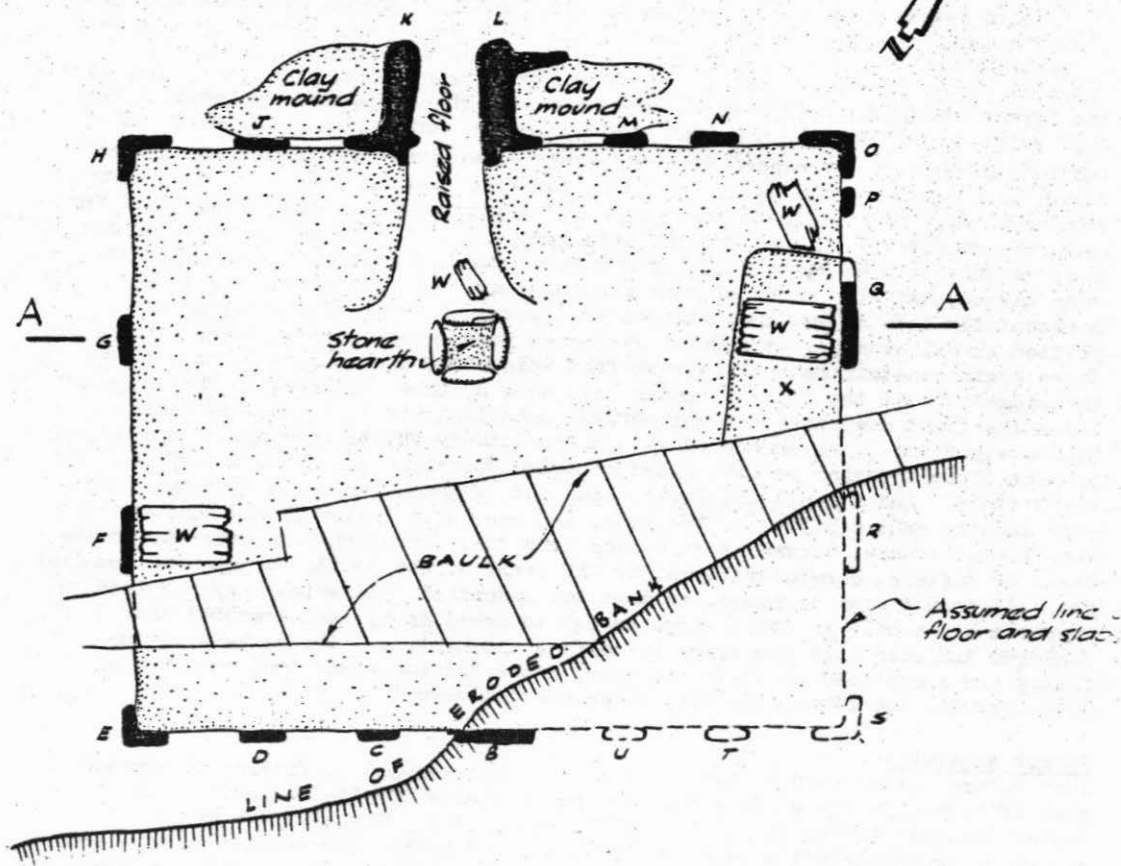
The area is one of the best documented sites in Taranaki, if not New Zealand, both by way of recorded tradition and recorded description. In June 1833 Wi Kingi Matahatea defeated the Waikato raiders at Te Namu Pa, near Opunake. He later occupied Orangi-tuapeka Pa and re-fortified it. Here, in 1834, he defeated the Waikatos under Potatau te Wherowhero and ended the Waikato raids into Taranaki (Smith 1910 p.512)

In October 1834 the area was bombarded by a British expedition in a valiant effort to rescue a whaler's wife, Betty Guard, and her two children, who were being held ransom. After a series of brilliant but inexplicable naval manoeuvres between the South Taranaki Bight and Blind Bay, the H.M.S. Alligator succeeded in landing a party of Marines at the mouth of the Waingongoro River some three miles down the coast. This party succeeded in moving a small cannon across country and finally took the pa. This was a purely punitive attack as the hostages had been released at the landing. On October 9th 1834 the whares were burnt and the expedition left, ending the first brilliant engagement of the Imperial Forces against the Maoris of New Zealand. Dr W.B. Marshall, Surgeon on H.M.S. Alligator wrote a book of his experiences which was published two years later (Marshall 1836). In this he describes in detail the Waimate sites before their destruction.



- LAYER 1 : Turf & topsoil
 LAYER 2 : Yellow clay lumps in black loam
 LAYER 2A: Chocolate loam
 LAYER 3 : Black loam with charcoal at base

LONGITUDINAL SECTION A-A



PLAN OF HOUSE FLOOR at SITE 129/102

SCALE 0 1 2 3 FEET

DNR

Contemporary Description:

The following is extracted from Dr Marshall's account.

'Waimate itself was built on an insular rock ... was excessively crowded with huts, these being generally disposed insquares, but occasionally so ranged also as to form long narrow streets. Of these huts there were nearly two hundred standing when we entered the pa, varying however in form, as it was evident they varied in their uses. In the samples they afforded of domestic architecture of the New Zealanders, there was little remarkable when contrasted with similar edifices of the northern Tribes, except that they appeared to have been constructed with more nicety, and carefulness, and with greater attention to beauty of appearance. They were divisible into four varieties.

1. The Whare Mehana; Warm, or sleeping houses (Mahanga AGB)
2. The Cautas; Cook houses, or kitchens (Kauta AGB)
3. The Mauas; Open or store houses
4. The Watas; or wood-houses (Whata AGB)

'The Whare Mehana consisted of a single apartment, and appears to have been used almost entirely as dormitories. They displayed a greater degree of care as well as skill in the construction, than any of the other varieties. Yet, their external appearance was rude, the walls and roof being made of mud and clay, and the former staked in on all sides; the stakes at the sides being pointed at the top, so as to correspond in height and appearance; whilst those in front and behind were cut to correspond with the gable ends of the roof; over which the turnip and kumara spread out their thick foliage, forming a sort of leafy canopy over all, very refreshing to the eye, which might otherwise have tired at gazing upon the monotonous dullness of the town generally. The interior of these houses was, on the other hand, beautifully and even elegantly fitted; the walls as it were wainscoted with a row of cane running round the whole room, and divided horizontally into square compartments by ligatures of carefully twisted and plaited grass, crossing at regular distances four smoothed and polished stanchions, these again sustaining a frame-work from which four arches sprang, to support the ridge pole at the top, it being held also by three pillars, in the shape of which the first dawnings of architectural embellishment is seen, they being handsomely formed, and decorated with comparatively chaste carving. A carpet, or perhaps I ought rather to say, a bed of dried fern-leaf was carefully spread over every floor. And a small hollow, scooped out of the ground mid-way between the door and the centre pillar of the room, and carefully walled in and bottomed with smooth oval stones, served as fireplace, the fuel for which hung from one of the beams or rafters, carefully tapued by the owner of the house, for his own peculiar use. In such a room or house, as that now described, and which only requires to complete it, a hole in front large enough to creep in by, and a wooded door rendered indispensably necessary to confine the heat, all the members of the family are accustomed to sleep together, numbering sometimes ten, and even a dozen person, and comprising men, women and children.'

Recent excavation:

Just before Easter 1962 a visit to the site was rewarded by finding an exposed slab of totara in the eroding bank on the east edge of site N129/102. Over Easter the area inland from this slab was excavated. The slab was first excavated to complete its exposure and was found to be thirteen inches wide and one and a half inches thick, protruding a few inches above a lens of hard-pressed soil. On the assumption that this lens represented an horizon, possibly a floor, further excavations on the deduced line of the slabs revealed three further post-holes and the corner of the structure. Details of the excavation will be published in a report after the completion of a more complete investigation of the whole area. A description of the findings may, however, be of some value at this stage.

The excavation proved that the slab first seen was one of the wall posts surrounding a floor and, I suggest, the floor was a house-floor and the structure a small house or whare mahanga. There were seven along the length and four at each end, all slab-shaped (see plan). In four of these rotted totara wood still remained in situ, whilst in two the upper parts of the slabs lay across the floor itself, having been broken at ground level. (It may perhaps be mentioned that totara is a very durable wood and is used, for instance, as survey pegs and house piles). The floor itself was concrete hard with sand mixed with natural clay. The fill one to two inches above the floor level was heavily impregnated with charcoal. Extending across the floor, but more thickly at the periphery of the floor, the black loam was mixed with lumpy clay from the yellow subsoil. These findings suggested that the house had been burned and the earth which had been heaped outside the walls had collapsed into the house carrying with them two unburnt slab posts.

A twelve inch square hearth of flattened beach stones set on edge lay in the floor opposite the entrance. The entrance itself was interesting being only ten inches wide as defined by holes five to seven inches wide and fifteen and seventeen inches long and thirteen to fifteen inches deep extending at right angles from the line of the wall. The floor measured ten feet eight inches long and eight feet nine inches wide. Although part of the north-east corner had eroded away before the excavation, the shape could be readily deduced.

The artifacts found confirmed early European contact: numerous chunks of amorphous cast iron were found in the lower part of the fill, on the floor and in the post-holes; these were presumably shrapnel from the six-pounder carronade. A ceramic trader-bead was found against the south wall. A piece of green bottle-glass and a copper fish-hook were found in two post-holes. The complete bowl of a clay pipe and fragments of another were found on the floor near the hearth. A piece of worked flint (?gun-flint) was found on the floor near the entrance. The only Polynesian artifact was a well-made stone net sinker.

The complete bowl pipe had been identified by A.H. Oswald, Birmingham Museum, as belonging to the 1780-1830 period of manufacture, and the fragmented pipe as before 1800 - although he remarks that the absence of top makes dating difficult.

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