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EXCAVATION OF A SMALL SETTLEMENT SITE (Q22/21) NEAR WAVERLEY, SOUTH TARANAKI

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This report describes the excavation of a small settlement site occupying a spur on the south side of the Kokako Stream near Waverley, South Taranaki (Fig. 1). The site lies at 60 m a.s.l. and about 5 km from the coast. It lies in an area which contains extensive archaeological evidence of fortifications and cultivations, including pa, storage pit sites, borrow pits and made soils (Buist 1976). The excavation was intended to shed light both on the nature of this type of settlement and, indirectly, on the antiquity, nature and scale of cultivation in the vicinity.

The team of about 12, directed by Richard Cassels, worked on the site for a little over two weeks in December 1974. An area of some 56 m² was investigated. All excavation was done by hand.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Kokako or Wilson site (Q22/21, grid reference 443591) was recorded by Alastair Buist. The lower part of the spur had been levelled at some time to create a large flat area 32 m long and 12 m wide (Fig. 2). There was one pit at the ground surface within this area and also evidence of cooking in the form of charcoal and fragments of oven stones. Near the top of the spur were four pits and a small terrace.

Adjacent to the site was a cluster of pits (Q22/37) and a large borrow pit (one of a set of borrow pits recorded as Q22/36) (Fig. 3, Plate 1).

METHOD

Exploratory excavations were undertaken in a number of areas to establish the range of subsurface features present, and with the intention of later concentrating on the most promising areas. Potential house sites were particularly targetted. At the time of the excavation (1974) few houses had been identified by archaeologists and it was hoped that this site would produce at least one of these elusive structures.

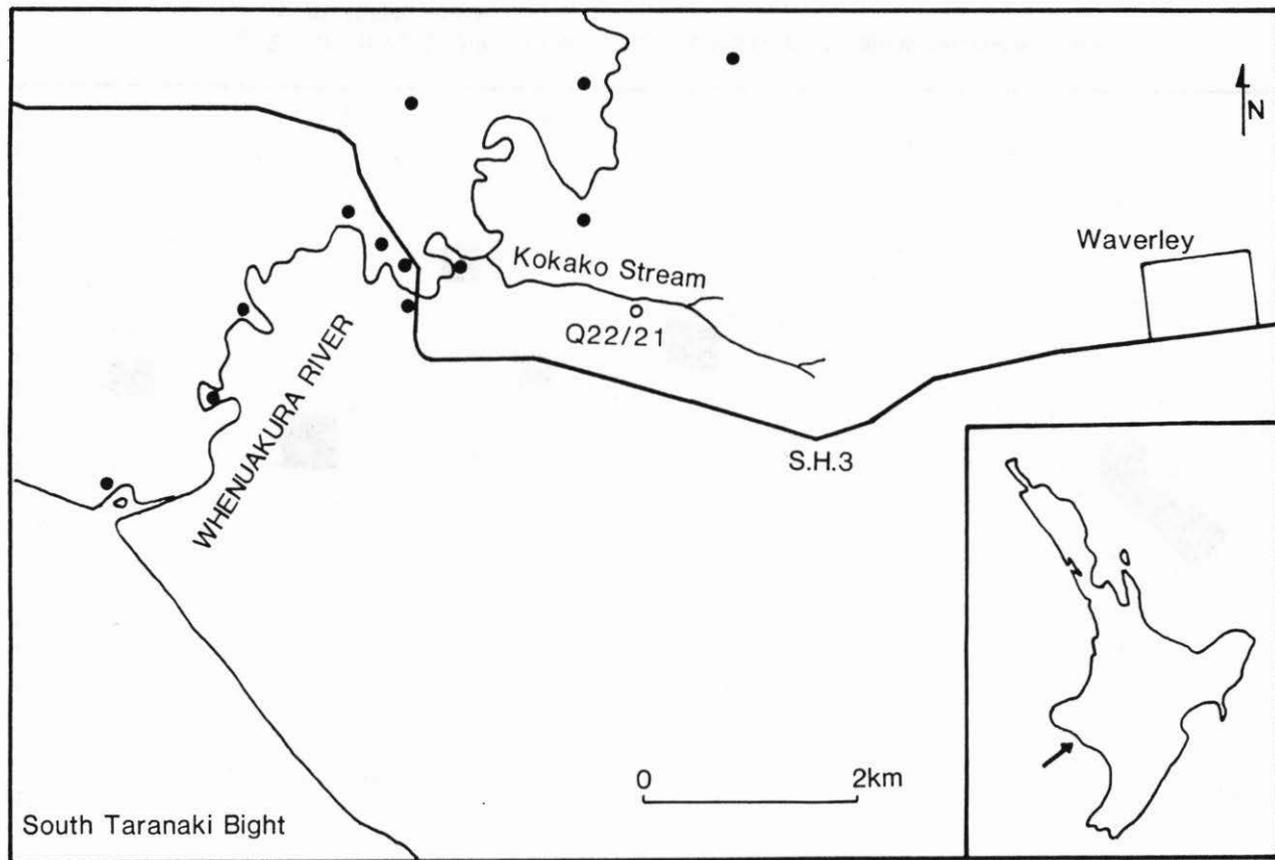


Fig. 1. Waverley area showing location of Q22/21. Solid circles = pa.

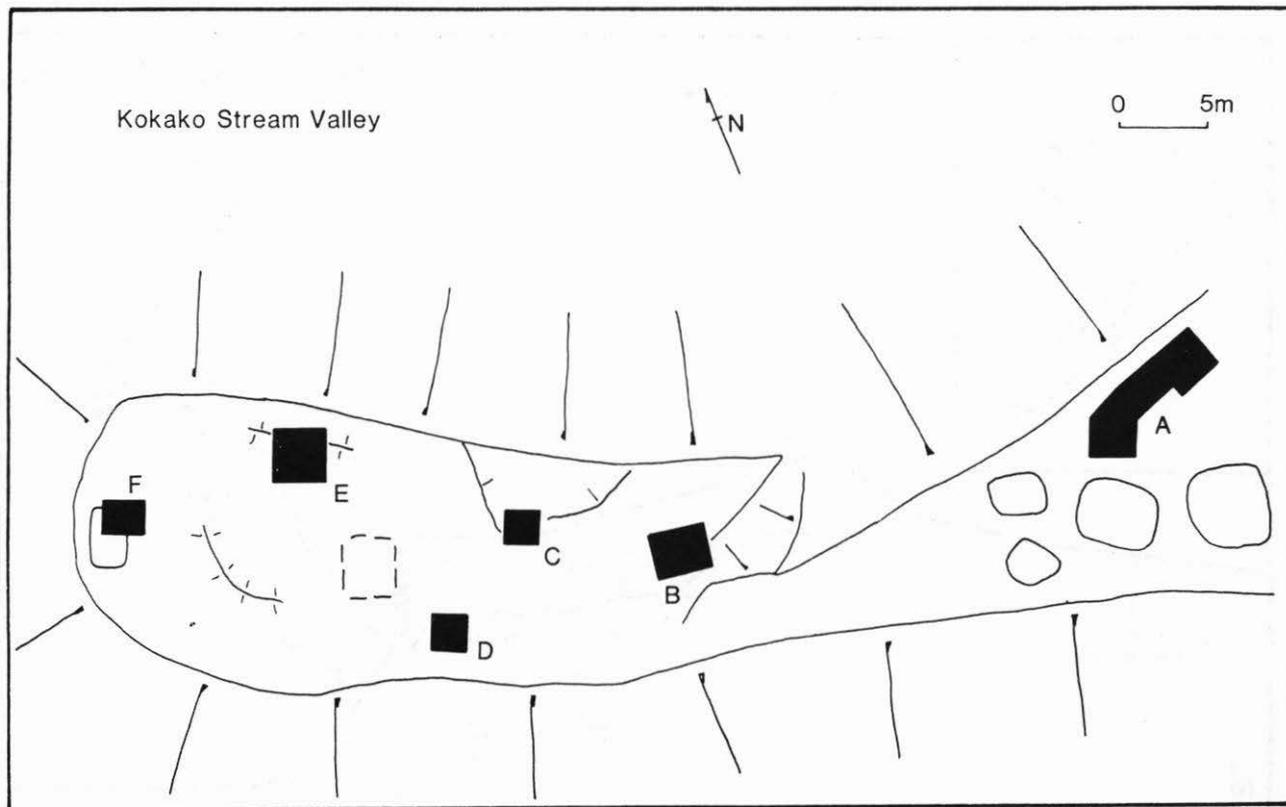


Fig. 2. Site plan, Q22/21, showing surface features and areas excavated. A-F = excavated areas.

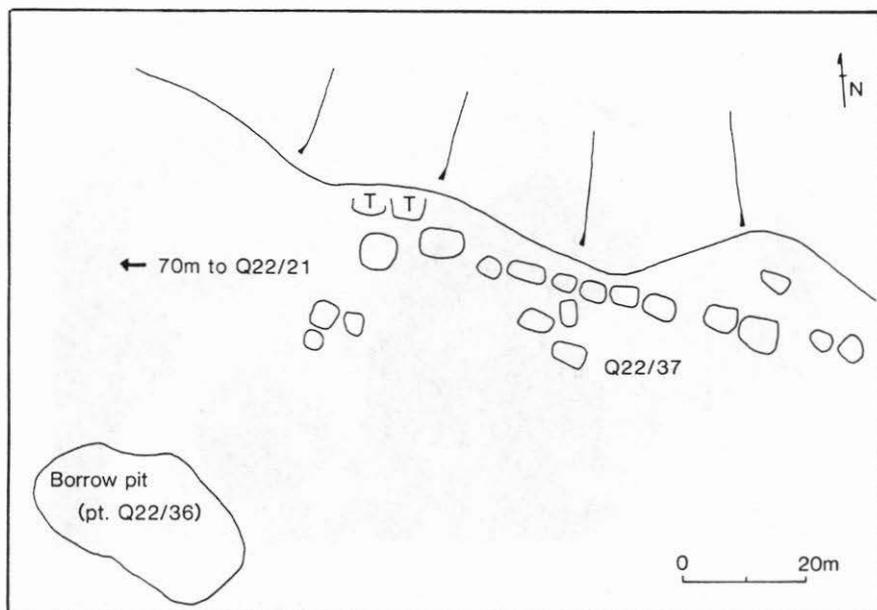


Fig. 3. Site plan, Q22/37. T = terrace.

Five squares were opened on the main part of the site and one on the small terrace near the top of the spur (Fig. 2, Plate 2).

Soil conditions made detection of archaeological features very difficult. The lower part of the spur lacked the mantle of volcanic ash found over most of the surrounding area. Instead, the substrate was composed of various marine sands, some weakly cemented, and usually overlain by artificially redeposited material. The redeposited material was often made up of a mosaic of different sediments, and features dug into it tended to merge into the background.

The ridgetop had been levelled, in whole or in part, on a number of occasions. The limited extent of the excavations made it difficult to distinguish localised levelling and reshaping events from those which had an impact over a wider area. It was impossible to adequately reconstruct the history of occupation without this information.

The results from the initial investigations were disappointing and the plan to put further effort into the more promising areas was abandoned.



Plate 1. Aerial photo from the northwest showing Q22/21 (foreground right), part of Q22/36 (centre right, largely under shadow), and Q22/37 (centre). Photo: Alastair Buist.



Plate 2. Q22/21 under excavation. The spur as seen from adjacent high ground to the south. Photo: Richard Cassels.

RESULTS

Six separate areas (A-F) were examined (Fig. 2).

Area A

This small terrace, which was about 8 m long and 4 m wide, was identified as a possible house site. It faced north and was very warm and sheltered except from westerly and northwesterly winds. Unlike the rest of the spur, this part of the site was covered in Egmont Ash.

Five main activities occurred in this area. First, a rectangular storage pit was dug (5.6 m long by a minimum of 1.0 m wide and 0.6 m deep) (Fig. 4, Plate 3). East of the pit, traces of what may have been a small shelter were found (Plate 4). Second, the pit was filled in. It may have been in use for some time before it was filled in as the one pit wall that was completely exposed was eroded. Three different materials were used to fill the pit, the lower two containing quantities of charcoal (and one fractured ovenstone). This indicated that cooking had been carried out somewhere in the near vicinity. Third, fires were lit towards the back of the terrace. Two small obsidian chips were found amongst the scatter of charcoal and ovenstones. Nine possible stake holes were found in the burnt area but no pattern was evident and, as they were mostly dug into the pit fill, their identification remains in doubt (Fig. 5). Fourth, material spilled over onto the terrace when the storage pit just to the south was dug. Finally, in recent years, a sheep was buried at the back of the terrace.

The pit was not fully excavated so neither the width nor the position of the entrance were established. The roof and rack structure is unusual in having posts located along the side wall of the pit. The three postholes discovered were unmistakable but no more could be found, although a fourth, at least, must have existed.

A regular and definite depression was found at the west end of the pit. It was cut about 150 mm below the pit floor. It was not obviously a drain and its function remains unknown.

The features next to the pit, the possible small shelter, remain enigmatic. The many patches of soft fill could be the result of cracking of the exposed surface during the time of occupation, tree roots, rabbit burrows, or prehistoric construction. Some features initially seemed to be postholes, because they appeared to have definite round edges. Further work, however, resulted in the exposure of an array of long cracks (Fig. 4, Plate 4). The lack of any other evidence of occupation in this area also counts against interpreting these features as a structure.

In summary, this level terrace, which seemed an excellent position for a house site, turned out to be simply a levelled area used first for a storage pit and later for fires. Its use, however, pre-dates the construction of the adjacent storage pits.

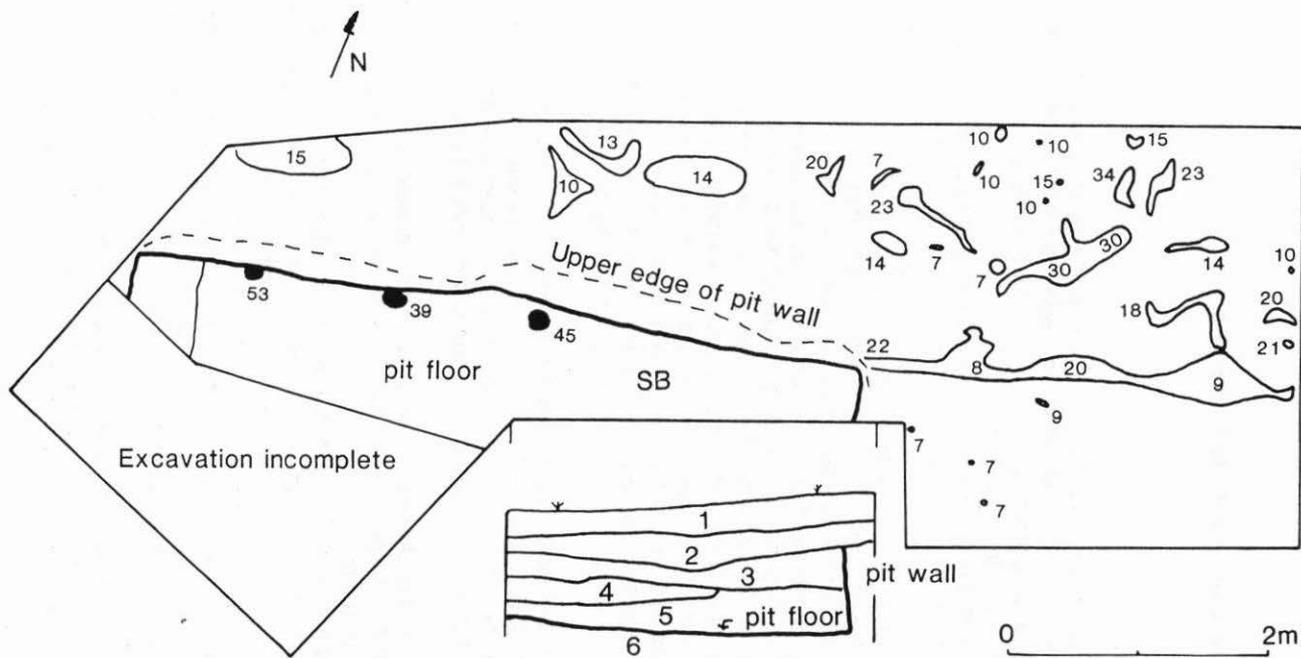


Fig. 4. Plan of Excavation Area A. Figures give the maximum depth of the feature in cm. SB = Sheep burial. Section drawing: Layers 1-2 = topsoil and overburden; 3-5 = pit fills; 6 = undisturbed subsoil (volcanic ash).

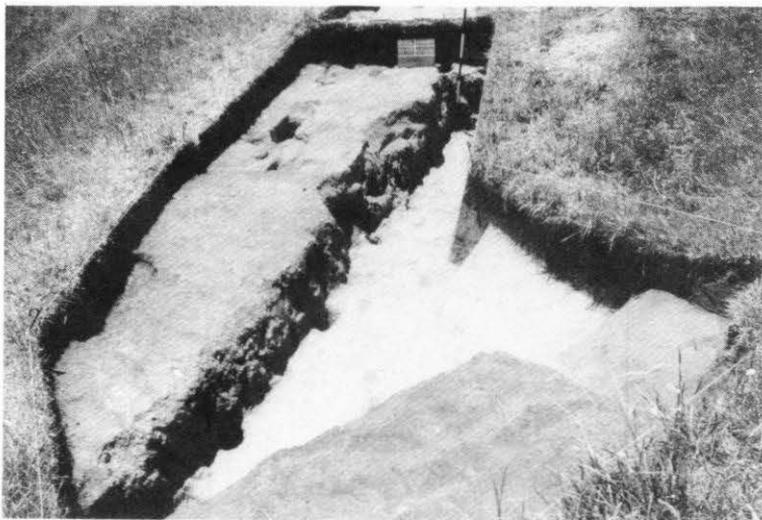


Plate 3. Excavation Area A. The pit wall runs through the centre of the excavation. Photo: Richard Cassels.

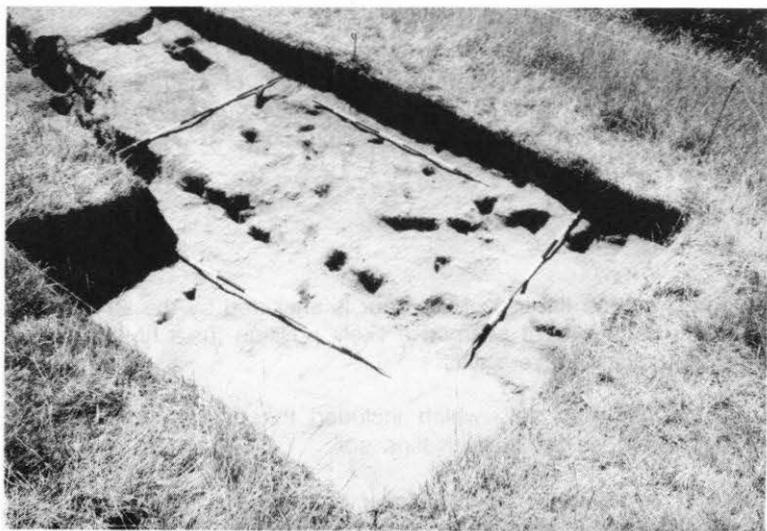


Plate 4. Excavation Area A. Features east of the pit. Photo: Richard Cassels.

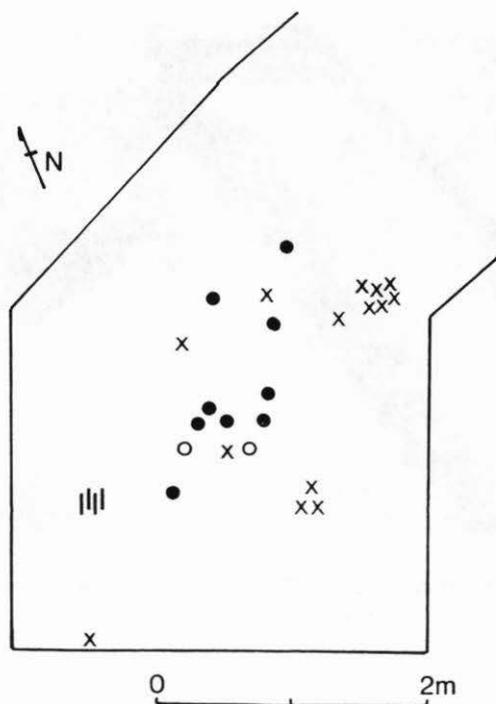


Fig. 5. Part of Excavation Area A. Plan of features postdating construction and infilling of the pit. X = ovenstone; O = obsidian; infilled circles = possible stake holes; lines = burnt clay surface.

Area B

At one point the flat top of the spur is sheltered by the steeply rising part of the ridge. Such a spot seemed a likely position for a house.

The sequence of layers was:

Layer 1: A sandy soil, which included the modern topsoil, and which probably represented a cultivation soil.

Layer 2: A 100-200 mm thick layer of sand and small sandstone lumps apparently spread deliberately over the site.

Both layers contained scattered charcoal. Strictly speaking, Layer 1 was not a layer at all but a soil which had formed within the top of the Layer 2

deposit. For convenience, it is designated here as if it were a separate layer. Layers 1 and 2 were common to Areas B-E. A piece of obsidian, described as a core, was found near the bottom of Layer 2.

When Layers 1 and 2 were removed a depression, in places up to 300 mm deep, was identified along part of the back of the terrace. Like Layers 1 and 2, the fill of this feature contained scattered charcoal. No definite traces of occupation were found below the possible depression. The underlying sediments were a confusing series of sand and ash layers and lenses which appeared not to be *in situ*, but which may have been only indirectly a result of human activity. Some material could have been slope wash. Interpretation proved almost impossible.

It is possible that this part of the spur had been quarried, and was the source of the material (Layers 1 and 2) spread over a large part of the adjacent area.

Area C

This square was opened up to investigate a feature which could be seen in an eroding cutting on the side of the spur and which seemed likely to be the side of a pit.

Layers 1 and 2 were as in Area B. Charcoal was present in both layers and a piece of obsidian was found in Layer 2. Three or four hollows were dug into the sand below this layer, one of which was cut through another (Fig. 6). They were all irregular but roughly circular in outline, and varied in size from a small scoop 500 mm in diameter and 150-200 mm deep to one large pit about 1250 mm long, 750 mm wide, and 700 mm deep. At the base of the fill of the largest pit, concentrations of charcoal and occasional ovenstones showed that it had been used for cooking. At one point the edge of the pit actually overhung, which is remarkable given the unstable sand in which it was dug. Only one possible posthole was found and even this was not very definite.

All these features can be interpreted as fire scoops or ovens. This part of the site was given over to cooking at one stage in the history of the site. It was then filled over with materials brought from other areas. The materials were of a very mixed character and included patches of charcoal and fragments of ovenstones. Three pieces of obsidian were also found.

Area D

The stratigraphic sequence was the same as in Areas B and C, that is, a 70 mm deep topsoil (Layer 1), over a 100-200 mm layer of sand containing lumps of sandstone (Layer 2). Underneath Layer 2 was a cooking and rake-out area, consisting of fractured ovenstones and numbers of shallow bowl-like depressions cut into each other and containing large lumps of charcoal (Fig. 7). Some charred wood was found amongst the oven debris and a piece of wood about 500 mm long was also found. It is clear that most of the cooking was done in the vicinity of Areas C and D and that ashes and charcoal were tipped or spilled naturally over the slopes below (where they are visible in natural

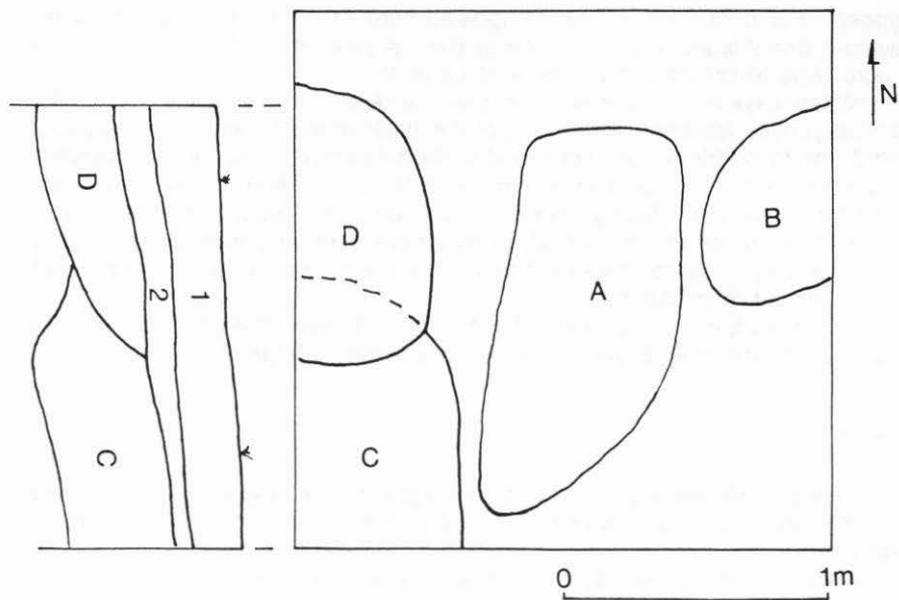


Fig. 6. Excavation Area C. Plan and west baulk section drawing. A-D = firescoops.

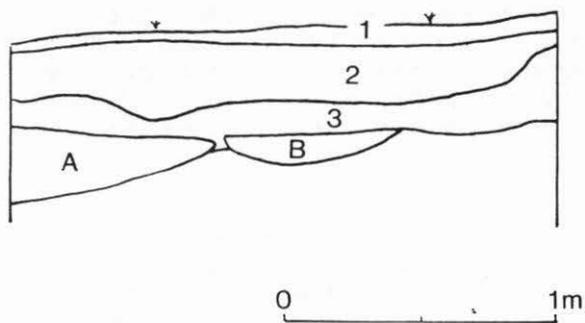


Fig. 7. Excavation Area D. West baulk section drawing. A and B = firescoops. L 3 = rake-out.

exposures).

Like Area C, this area represents a cooking and rake-out area.

Area E

This square was placed on part of a large flat area containing a low bank. It was a likely position for a house. A number of possible postholes were encountered, but as all had been dug into fill it was impossible to identify them positively, nor did they form any recognisable pattern.

Layers 1 and 2 were the same as in Areas B-D. Underlying Layer 2 was a further layer of fill (Layer 3). Two pieces of obsidian were found in this layer. Layer 3 overlay a fire scoop which had been cut into the top of the fill of a small rectangular pit (Fig. 8). Two flakes of obsidian were found in redeposited material. Two pits were located but their position, at the edge of the excavated area, meant that some of their dimensions were not determined. One pit was 900 mm across and about 450 mm deep. Its function was not determined. The sides of the pit were dug into sand and it would be remarkable if they remained vertical for any length of time. No postholes were found in the portions of the pits excavated.

Adjacent to the pits was the low bank which was evident at the surface. It was made up of a mix of materials and contained patches of charcoal, odd ovenstone fragments, and rare stones. Two silhouettes of wooden articles, one a straight stick about 400 mm long, were found under the bank. The construction of the bank pre-dates the digging of the pits and represents a considerable investment of time and effort. It was built over a very uneven surface, which may indicate some earlier activity in this area.

Area F

This square was excavated to investigate the stratigraphic relationship of a large pit evident at the surface (about 3 m long and 1.5 m wide) to the sequence of events established from the other squares. The end of the pit was sectioned (Fig. 9). The pit was cut through some 500 mm of fill into the underlying undisturbed strata. It was about 1.2 m deep. The excavation established satisfactorily that this pit, and presumably also all the other big pits visible on the surface at present, belonged to the last phase of occupation of the site. In particular, this pit cut into Layer 2, as identified in Areas C-E, and therefore postdated it. There was, however, no sign of Layer 1 (the cultivation soil) here; this suggests that the cultivation phase may have been contemporary with the construction of the storage pit.

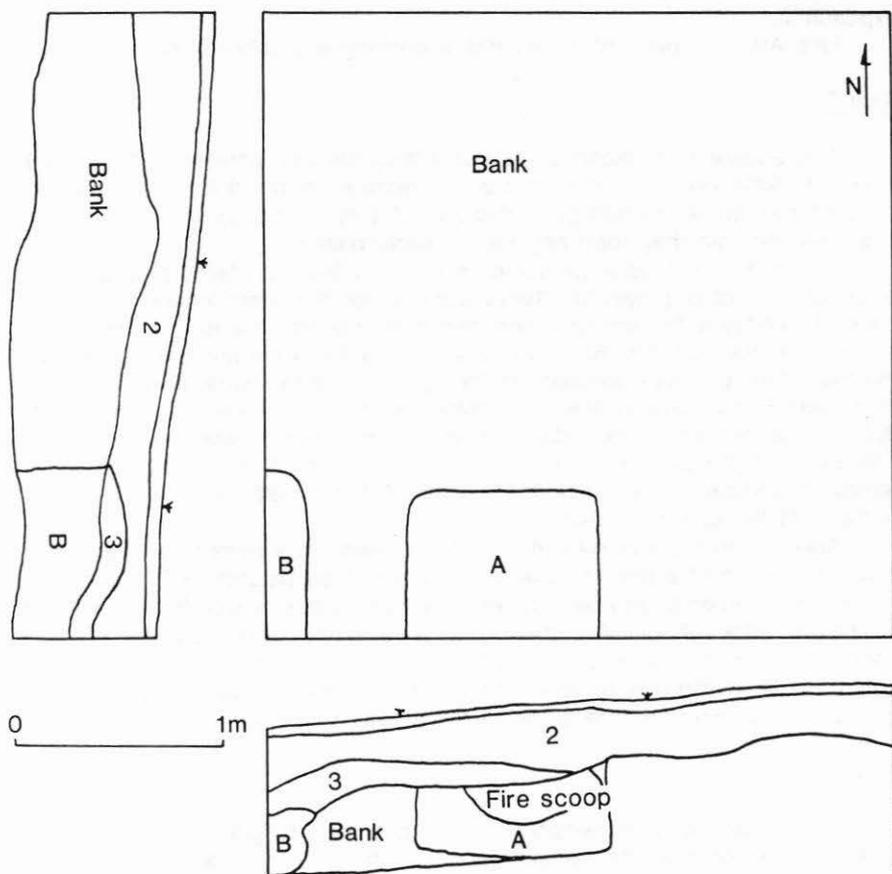


Fig. 8. Excavation Area E. Plan and south and west baulk section drawings. A and B = pits.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the sequence of events in each excavation area and tentatively correlates some events from different areas. It necessarily simplifies the occupational history of the site and is offered only as the minimum which is required to account for the evidence. The sequence of events begins with the building of the bank in Area E. The material used to form the bank hints at earlier, undefined, activity nearby. On this newly created surface two small pits were dug whose function remains uncertain. These were then filled and a

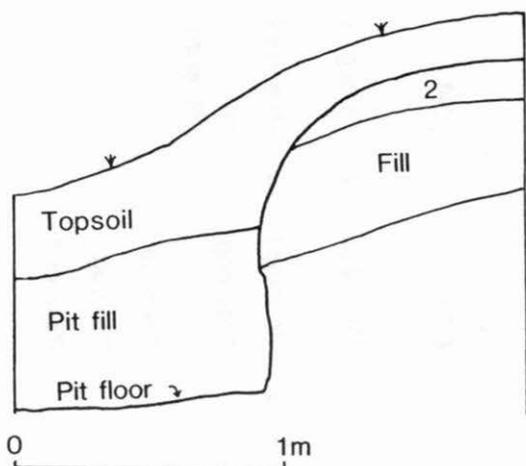


Fig. 9. Excavation Area F. West baulk section drawing.

firescoop was dug into the top of the fill of one. Cooking was concentrated in the vicinity of Areas C and D, presumably about the same time as these events were occurring in Area E.

A layer of sand and sand rubble (Layer 2) was then spread across the lower part of the site. This was a major re-levelling of the site and affected Areas B-F. The material was possibly quarried from the sloping part of the spur around Area B. In this material a cultivation soil (Layer 1) was formed. The pits evident at the surface, on the evidence from Area F, postdate Layer 2. They may have been contemporary with the phase of cultivation represented by Layer 1. Quarrying sand to create garden soils is a feature of this part of Taranaki: the large borrow pits, such as Q22/36 (Fig. 3, Plate 1), are a prominent feature of the local archaeological landscape.

The range of activities found in the excavated areas was very restricted. There is clear evidence of cultivation, cooking, and storage. There is no evidence that the storage was contemporary with the cooking, although the storage pit in Area A pre-dated the hypothetical final storage/cultivation phase. The lower part of the spur was generally used for cooking, at least until the major re-levelling occurred. Few artefacts, and no faunal remains, were found. The eleven pieces of obsidian recovered were mostly single pieces found in fill. The upper part of the spur, which was covered with volcanic ash, was the favoured place for storage pits.

No clear evidence of houses was found. The houses may have been insubstantial structures which left few traces in the archaeological record or the traces may not have survived subsequent modification of the site. It could, of course, also be argued that the excavations were too limited to find any houses

TABLE 1. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IN EXCAVATED AREAS AND TENTATIVE CORRELATIONS

<u>Area A</u>	<u>Area B</u>		<u>Area C</u>		<u>Area D</u>		<u>Area E</u>		<u>Area F</u>
Sheep buried									
Storage pits adjacent dug	Cultivation	=	Cultivation	=	Cultivation	=	Cultivation	=	Pit dug
	L2 spread	=	L2 spread	=	L2 spread	=	L2 spread	=	L2 spread
Fires lit	Depression formed?		Cooking/rake-out		Cooking/rake-out		Firescoop		Fill deposited
Pit filled in							Pits filled		
Pit dug							Pits dug		
							Bank built		

that might have been there.

The antiquity of the occupation has not been established, but the lack of items commonly found in mid 19th century sites may be an argument for a prehistoric date.

The site was probably used only on a temporary basis by people tending crops in the vicinity. Short stays during the growing season would account for much of the evidence. The possibilities cannot be narrowed further on the basis of current evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

The excavations revealed evidence of three activities: cultivation, storage, and cooking. The first activity was represented by the soil found over much of the lower part of the spur; the second by the pits in Areas A and F and at the ground surface on the upper part of the spur; and the third by the cooking/rake-out area in the vicinity of Areas C and D.

The results of the excavation are consistent with the interpretation of the site as a small, probably seasonally occupied, settlement which was associated with the tending of gardens.

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Aidan Challis made detailed comments on a draft version of this paper. The interpretation of field notes, plans and sections are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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