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EXCAVATION OF A WATERLOGGED SITE NEAR KAIKOHE

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A small salvage excavation of a waterlogged site, P06/82, at Kaikohe, was undertaken during two one week period in March 1995. This was carried out by archaeologists from Northland Conservancy, others from Auckland and Hamilton and several volunteers. The following is a brief preliminary report on the investigation. Identification and analysis of some of the material from the site is still to be completed.

SITE DESCRIPTION

P06/82 is a waterlogged inland site on a farm to the southwest of Kaikohe (see Fig. 1). It is located on the periphery of a basalt lava flow, in a small depression containing a spring which once fed directly into the Kaipae Stream.



Plate 1. Site P06/82 located at the base of the hill.

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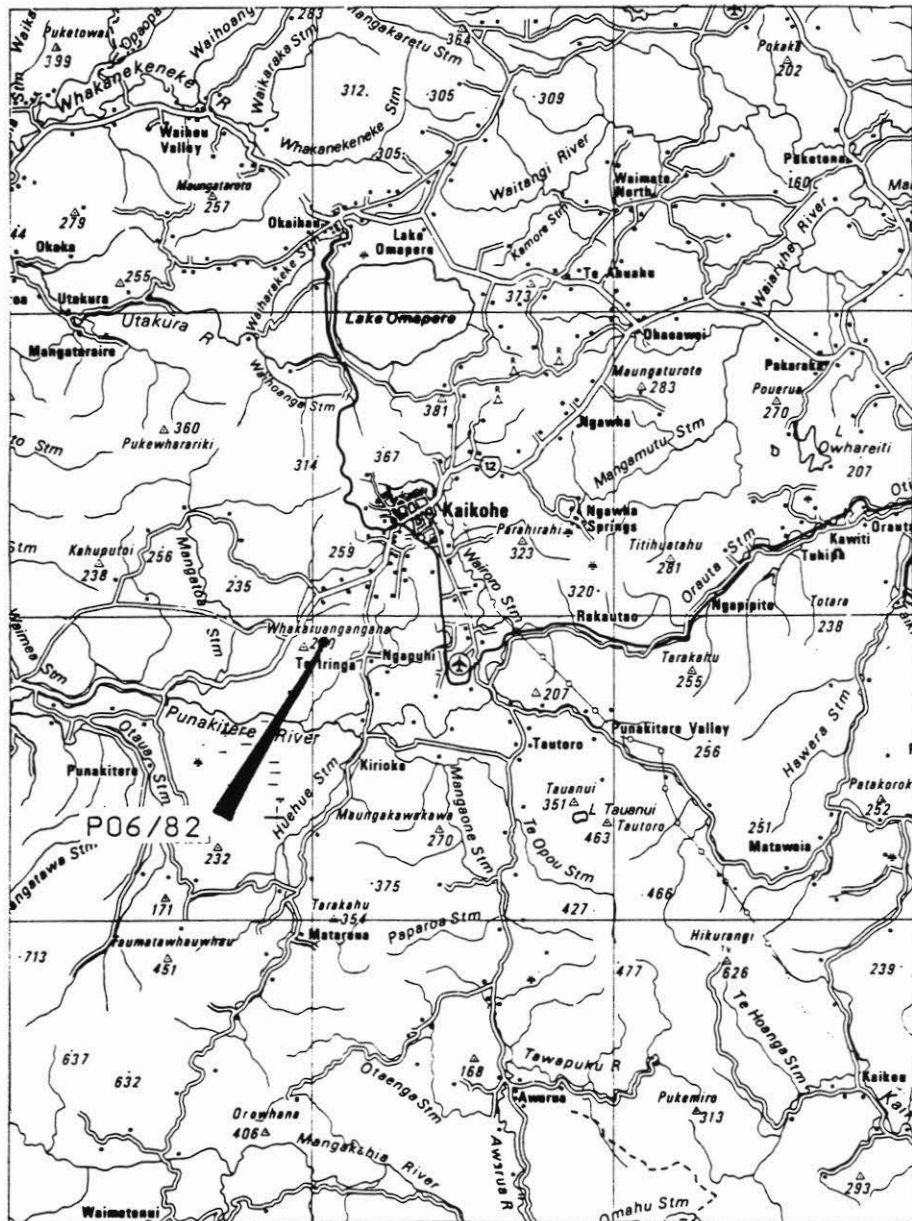


Figure 1. The location of P06/82, southwest of Kaikohe.

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The course of the stream has since been altered and straightened by the present owner and the location of the site dammed to form a stock water supply. Newly sown pasture covers the surrounding gently rolling farmland and basalt boulders edge the northeastern end of the dam. The farm 'M T Holdings' runs a variety of stock and is owned by Maureen and Terry Wooldridge of Kaikohe.

In 1993 the dam, measuring approximately 29 x 15 m in size, was deepened using a mechanical excavator leaving a central 16 x 2.5 m 'island'. An assortment of artefacts were found by the owner in the resulting spoil heap. These consisted of eight fern root beaters, a paddle shaped agricultural tool, a top, a possible awl, and an agricultural implement, possibly a ko with a broken handle. They are at present undergoing conservation at Auckland University and a selection were featured on the cover of the June 1995 issue of 'Archaeology in New Zealand'. A basalt adze and pieces of at least two grinding stones were also recovered.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Three pa are recorded near the location of the site. One of importance is Pakinga, N15/11, which is believed to be the training ground for young Ngapuhi warriors and the birthplace of Hone Heke. Little information is available about N15/51 which is a ridge pa, extensively modified by rotary hoeing before being planted in pines in 1962. The third site, P06/82, is a reputed pa although there is little remaining evidence of earthworks apart from a ditch on the northeastern side. A small fireplace and three pits were also recorded at this site. Slightly more distant are two additional pa: N15/50, located on a ridge and known as Mawhiu and Whakaruangangana, N15/70, thought to be very old with only vestigial earthworks remaining (Lee J 1971 & NZAA Site Record Forms).

THE EXCAVATION

The objectives of the excavation were:

1. To investigate stratigraphically the unexcavated 'island' in the centre of the dam for the purpose of retrieving any remaining artefacts and to determine the nature and extent of the site.
2. If possible to recover samples for radio-carbon dating.
3. To invite representatives of the tangata whenua to visit the site and be involved in the investigation.

The excavation began with a small ceremony conducted by local kaumatua, Mr Ron Wihongi, and attended by members of the tangata whenua

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Plate 2. Archaeologists in action.

and Mr Jack Lee, the local historian. One of this group, Mr Colin Rameka, later assisted with the excavation.

The investigation was essentially a salvage excavation of the central 'island' and certain relatively undisturbed areas on the slopes of the site before it was reflooded as a stock water supply. At least 60,000 gallons of water had to be pumped from the site before work could begin and accumulations of rain and spring water were removed daily.

The stratigraphy consisted of four layers:

Layer 1: Silt approximately 10 cm in depth.

Layer 2a: Dark brown peat varying from 25-40 cm in depth.

Layer 2b: Yellow brown peat approximately 7-10 cm in depth.

Layer 3: Peaty clay with vegetation inclusions approximately 10 cm in depth.

Layer 4: Sterile whitish clay.



Plate 3. A weeding implement.

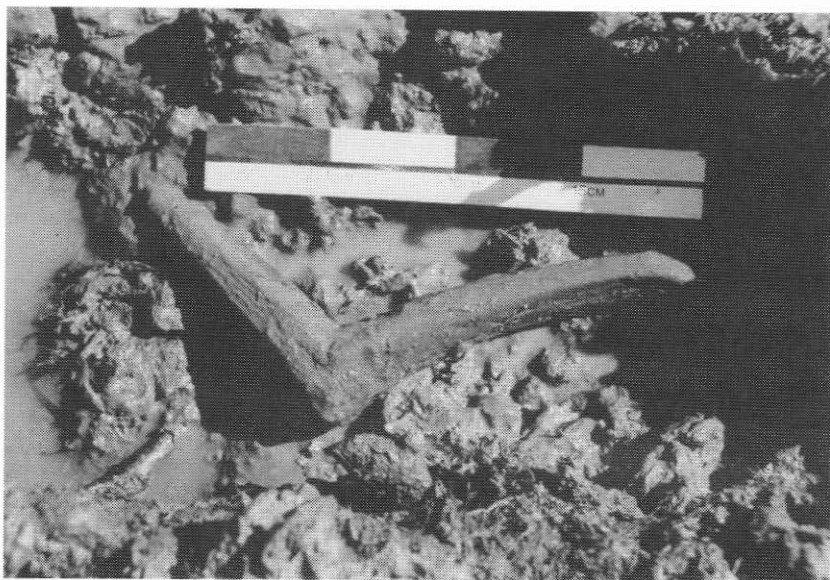


Plate 4. A ko or digging stick footrest.

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'Drifts' of wood, deposits of seed and other organic material, *in situ* roots and tree stumps and lenses of charcoal were all found within the peat and the majority of the artefacts were located at the base of this layer.

Organic material and artefacts recovered included gourd seeds, gourd shell, hinau berry kernels, a number of other seeds and kernels still to be identified, fragments of leaves, a few possible fragments of fish bone, several stone flakes and a number of wooden artefacts. The wooden artefacts comprised two *ko*, three weeding implements possibly *ketu*, two beaters, the blade end of a paddle shaped implement, three *teka* (*ko* footrests) and a collection of five short sticks, several with rounded ends. Wood which may possibly have been parts of implements or had areas of suspected working was also retrieved.

A large deposit of hinau berry kernels near a collection of wood splittings close to the spring at the eastern end of the dam suggests a localised activity area. Kernels from this location and another more generalised collection from the central part of the site have almost identical radiocarbon dates of 220 ± 50 BP and 220 ± 40 BP.

DISCUSSION

The artefacts and seeds appear to represent a single deposition. The wooden implements were held down by a network of tree branches and must have been deliberately placed in the water either for safety during a time of warfare or as a means of preserving them and increasing their weight. The fact that more than 30 tools were retrieved suggests that their owners were either driven from the land or were killed in battle.

Identification of organic materials and analysis of the artefact assemblage will provide information on Maori gardening and the ecology of this area in the early 18th century.

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