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EXCAVATION ON PA SITE, T8/8, AWANA GREAT BARRIER ISLAND

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At the request of the Ngati Wai on Great Barrier Island in November 1990 Jan Coates and the author excavated two small terraces on a pa (T8/8) at Awana (Fig. 1).

The pa is large and visually impressive and contains three defensive ditches, and many terraces, platforms and pits. The site was recorded and mapped in 1975 by Coster and Phillips (Coster and Johnston 1975). Due to its size the recorders divided the pa into ten areas (A - H) (Fig. 2) where features appeared clustered. Excavation was carried out in Area H, the surface features of which included five terraces, two shallow depressions and two pits (Fig. 3). These pits (referred to by Coster and Johnson 1975 as e and f) were clearly visible in 1990 and excavation was designed to reveal their dimensions and internal features) and to determine whether the terraces were artificially formed.

An area of six square metres was opened up on Terrace 5 and four square metres on Terrace 4 encompassing Pits e and f (Areas 1 and 2 on Fig. 3). Later these two areas were joined by a narrow trench shown on Fig. 4).

The stratigraphy was as follows:

Layer 1 Turf and topsoil 50 - 100mm deep - grey-brown soil.

- 2 Moist dark brown soil up to 180 mm deep with the addition of lumps of yellow and red clay, beach-rolled and angular rocks, chert and obsidian flakes. Features were found dug from this layer into layer 3.
- 3 Subsoil - yellow or reddish-yellow clay. The two colours were quite distinct and were natural deposits, often with the yellow overlying the reddish-yellow clay, and seen in several exposed sections on the headland.

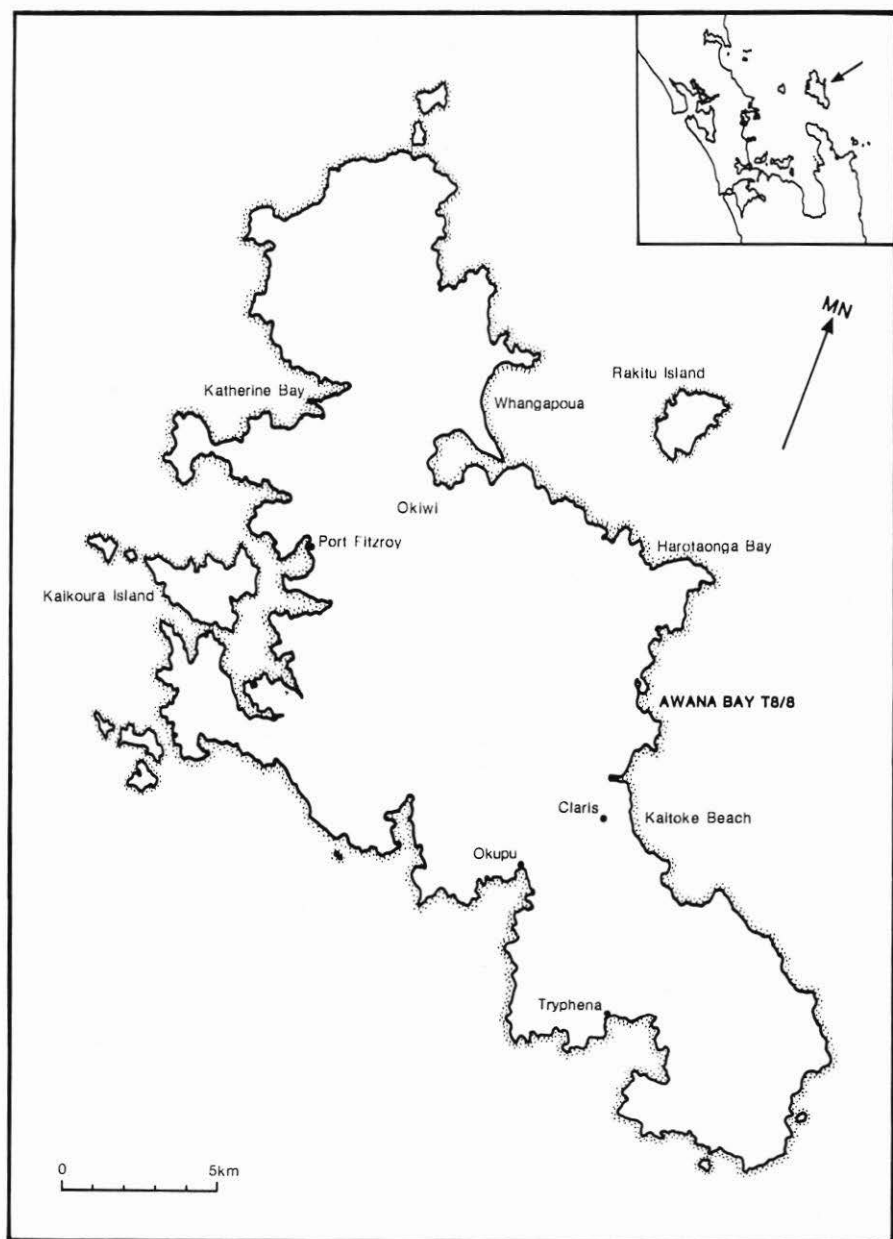


Figure 1. Great Barrier Island - Awana Bay, showing location of T8/8

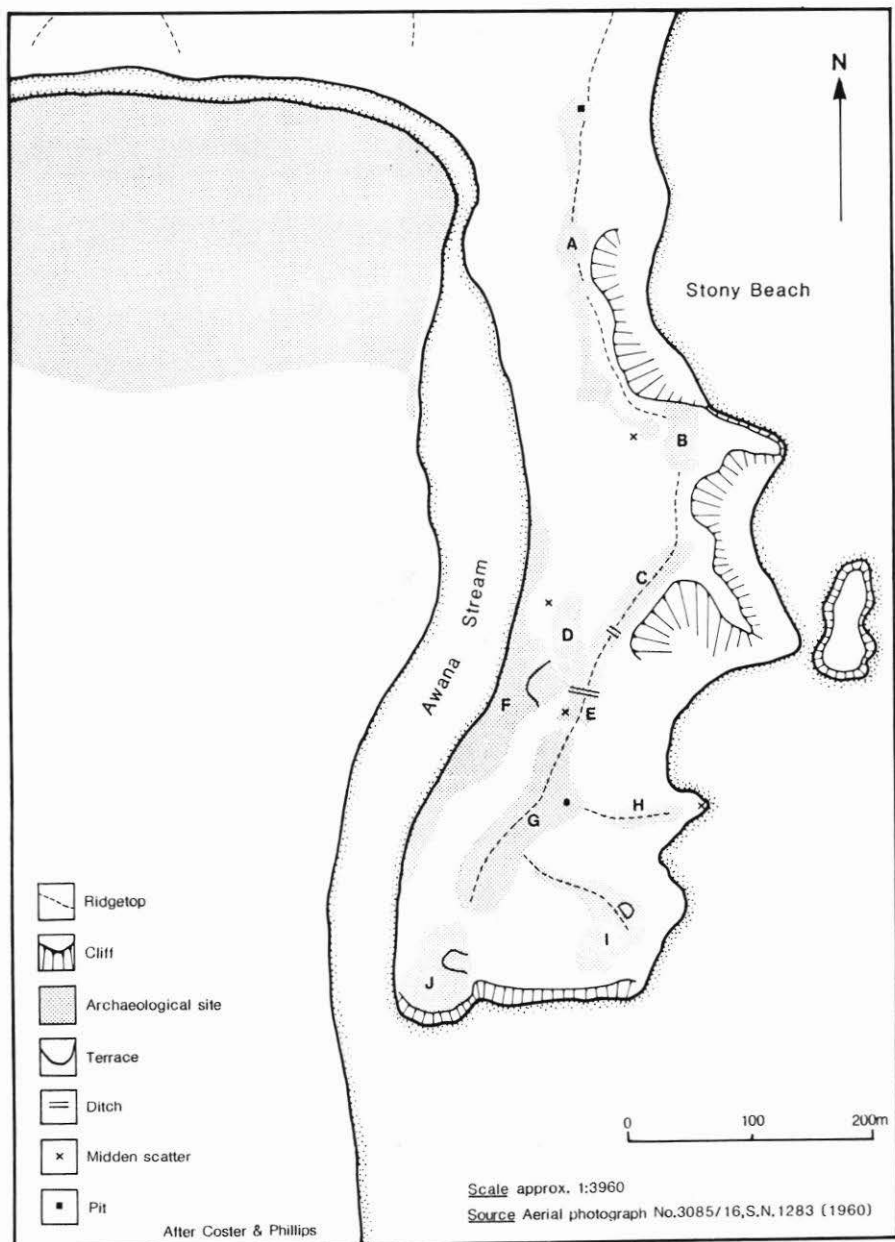


Figure 2. T8/8, Awana Bay, showing features recorded. Sketch plan by pacing and compass.

FEATURES

In Area 1 only one feature was found at the eastern end of a shallow depression (Fig. 4). This was a firescoop measuring 0.62 x 0.68m. Its depth was 0.15m and it was filled with black soil with numerous lumps of charcoal and shattered stones.

Firescoops and postholes were found in Area 2 and are numbered 1 - 8 on Fig. 4 and described below:

Feature	Size	Fill
1 Firescoop	0.30 x 0.22 x 0.10m	Layer 2 mixed soil
2 Firescoop	0.76 x 1.08 x 0.10m	Black soil, charcoal, water rolled and heat shattered rocks
3 Firescoop	1 x 1.20 x 0.20m	Same as feature 2
4 Firescoop	0.94 x 0.30 x 0.10m	Same as feature 2
5 Posthole	0.23 x 0.23 x 0.15m	Greyish-yellow clay with pieces of charcoal and red clay
6 Posthole	0.12 x 0.13 x 0.05m	Same as feature 5
7 Posthole	0.19 x 0.19 x 0.09m	Grey clay
8 Oval depression	0.32 x 0.16 x 0.22m	Grey clay and charcoal

Feature 8 (which was later than Feature 7) had straight sides and a flat base. Two pieces of obsidian were found in the fill of this feature.

ARTEFACTS

Artefacts were recovered from both Areas 1 and 2. Stone flakes were examined for use wear using a binocular microscope x10 magnification.

From Area 1 a small polished greywacke flake was recovered and 18 pieces of locally available chert of poor flaking quality. 29 pieces of obsidian were also found (17 grey and 12 green), 23 of which had a maximum length of less than 20mm. No use-wear was observed on any piece.

Two water-rolled oval andesite hammerstones were found in Area 2 with evidence of use on one end of each. A circular andesite stone was also found but with no clear evidence of use. 36 pieces of poor flaking quality chert and 22 pieces of obsidian (2 of which were green) were also found in this area. The obsidian ranged in size from 20-30mm maximum length. Red ochre was found smeared on a flat piece of chert. In addition two pieces of broken basalt adze were found in Area 2, which on hand specimen appeared to be very similar to Tahanga basalt. The two pieces fitted together and indicated that when whole

the adze would have been large, although there was no blade or butt. It was 890mm in width and 350mm thick and was fully polished with some hammer dressing on the sides.

The total assemblage of obsidian (51 pieces) was examined for use wear. 19 of the grey pieces (51% of the grey assemblage) contained a rough cortex, many suggesting that they had been broken off small cobbles: one piece was a pebble 3mm long with one end knocked off. Moore's (1988:12) flow diagram was followed in attempting to define a source for the obsidian. It would appear likely that the grey obsidian came from sources on Great Barrier Island itself. 12 of the 14 pieces of green obsidian were of the clear "bottle glass" green colour typical of the obsidian from Mayor Island. The source of the remaining 2 pieces of green obsidian is uncertain although Mayor Island cannot be ruled out as the source. These 2 pieces were an opaque green and both had water-rolled surfaces. One of these (a core) was the only piece in the obsidian assemblage to show any signs of use wear. On this core there were two used concave edges measuring 20mm and 12mm respectively. Both used edges displayed unifacial damage consisting of the regular removal of tiny flakes along the used edges consistent with their having been used in a scraping action, perhaps for the whittling of wood. The remainder of the assemblage would appear to be debitage.



Plate 1. Awana Bay Pa,T8/8, Great Barrier Island.

Photo: George Balloghy.

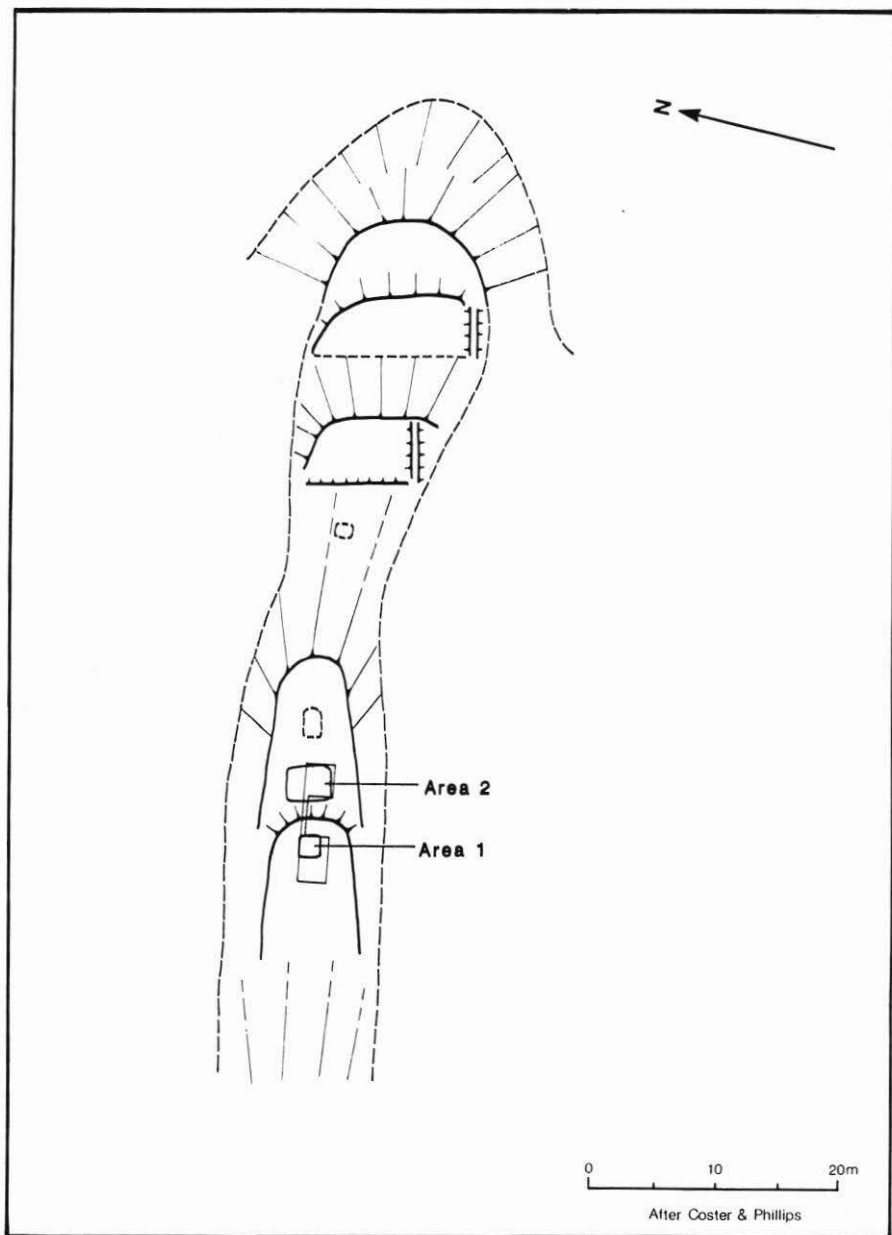


Figure 3. T8/8, Awana Pa, Area H showing area excavated. Sketch plan by pacing and compass.

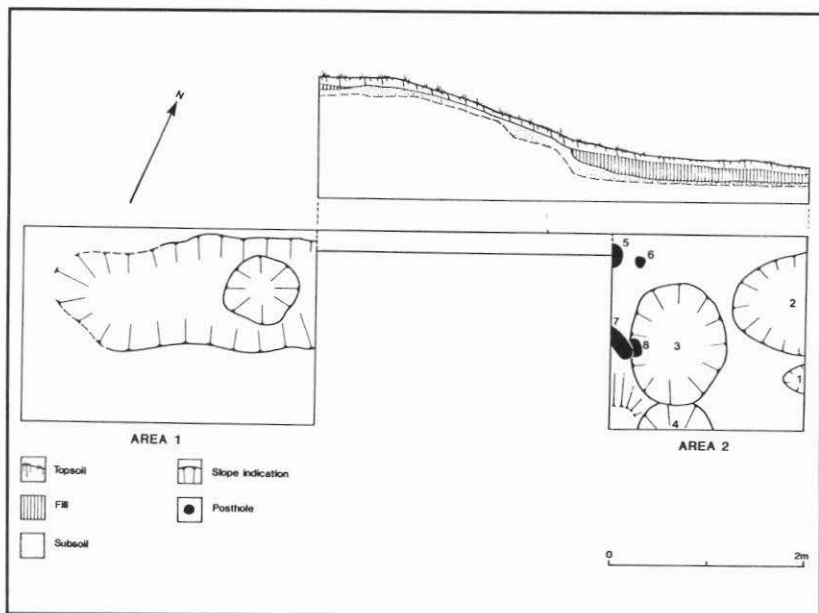


Figure 4. T8/8, Area H. Ground plan and cross-section showing features excavated

DISCUSSION

Excavation of Area 1 did not extend far enough to the west to determine whether this was an artificial terrace or not. The firescoop and stone flakes indicated that the area had been used, although not intensively. It was clear that Area 2 had been deliberately cut back into the hillslope in order to provide a relatively level occupation area (Plate 1). Although only one period of occupation was evident the sequence of events suggests repeated use of this small terrace with features dug from Layer 2 into the subsoil. Some features could have originated from any level in Layer 2 as they were not visible until this layer had been removed. The firescoops contained no ash or signs of burning of the sides or base. It could be that they contained small smouldering fires or even that charcoal and hot rocks were brought to this terrace from a nearby large fire. There were no remains of food scraps (shells or any bones) in or near to the scoops. It is possible that the postholes at the rear of the terrace in Area 2 were part of a windbreak or even a lean-to type of roof sheltering the people huddled around the fires. The number of features excavated was not large. However, only a proportion of the two terraces was excavated and it is possible that other features indicating a wider range of

activities could have been present outside the bounds of the excavation.

The steeper slopes of Awana pa (Areas A-D on Fig. 2) contained terraces and pits defended by two or possibly three transverse ditches while Areas E-J were on the more gentle slopes outside the defended area. Here there were several terraces and one large pit measuring 8 x 6 x 1 m and, in Area H, the terraces and pits shown in Fig. 3. It appears likely that the main occupation of this pa centred on the flat-topped headland and that the upper terraces, defended by ditches, steep scarps and sheer cliffs, were a safe refuge in times of stress. The areas excavated consisted of a very small part of this large and complex pa. They were on an east facing ridge and sheltered from the prevailing south westerly winds and could have housed a small family group during seasonal occupation of the headland.

Prior to excavation, rectangular depressions of what appeared to be two storage pits were clearly visible. However excavation showed that no such pits existed and the experience can be regarded as yet another instance of archaeologists being misled by what appeared to be straight-forward evidence of subsurface remains.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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