



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



This document is made available by The New Zealand
Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

EXCAVATION ON TAKARUNGA (MOUNT VICTORIA),
R11/109, AUCKLAND

Brenda Sewell
Department of Conservation
Auckland

In May 1985 the New Zealand Post Office requested the presence of an archaeologist when they put down an auger hole for a new radio mast on Mount Victoria, Auckland. This cone (Takarunga) (Fig. 1) was a famous pa of the Ngati Paoa people and it is a conspicuous landmark of the Waitemata Harbour. Over the last 100 years it has been considerably modified by defensive works (gun emplacements etc.) and by the construction of a 14 m deep reservoir in the crater on the top of the cone about 30 years ago.

It was planned to erect the new radio mast less than 2 m from the Post Office control room and associated paths and only 6 m from the top of the reservoir (Fig. 2). Consequently it was not anticipated that any archaeological features associated with Maori occupation of the cone would be present. A mechanical auger dug the first hole for the mast. While it was in action it was not possible to see what it was cutting through. Only when the auger was lifted could the cross-section of the hole and the fill be examined. Surprisingly, at a depth of 900 mm the auger cut through a layer of dark soil and midden suggesting the presence of an occupation layer earlier than the European modifications to the cone. An area of 2.4 x 1.7 m was excavated by the machine to a depth of about 750 mm. The remainder of the fill was removed by hand.

The stratigraphy was as follows (Fig. 3) -

- Layer 1 Turf and topsoil
- Layer 2 Old buried asphalt footpath
- Layer 3 Footpath fill
- Layer 4 Brown friable soil, lumps of scoria, concrete etc
 - European fill.
- Layer 5 Brown friable soil with the occasional shell.
 This was a redeposited soil but it is not certain
 whether it was laid in historic or prehistoric
 times. However the matrix was similar to that of
 Layer 4 and it is likely that both were laid at
 the same time, probably during construction of
 the reservoir.

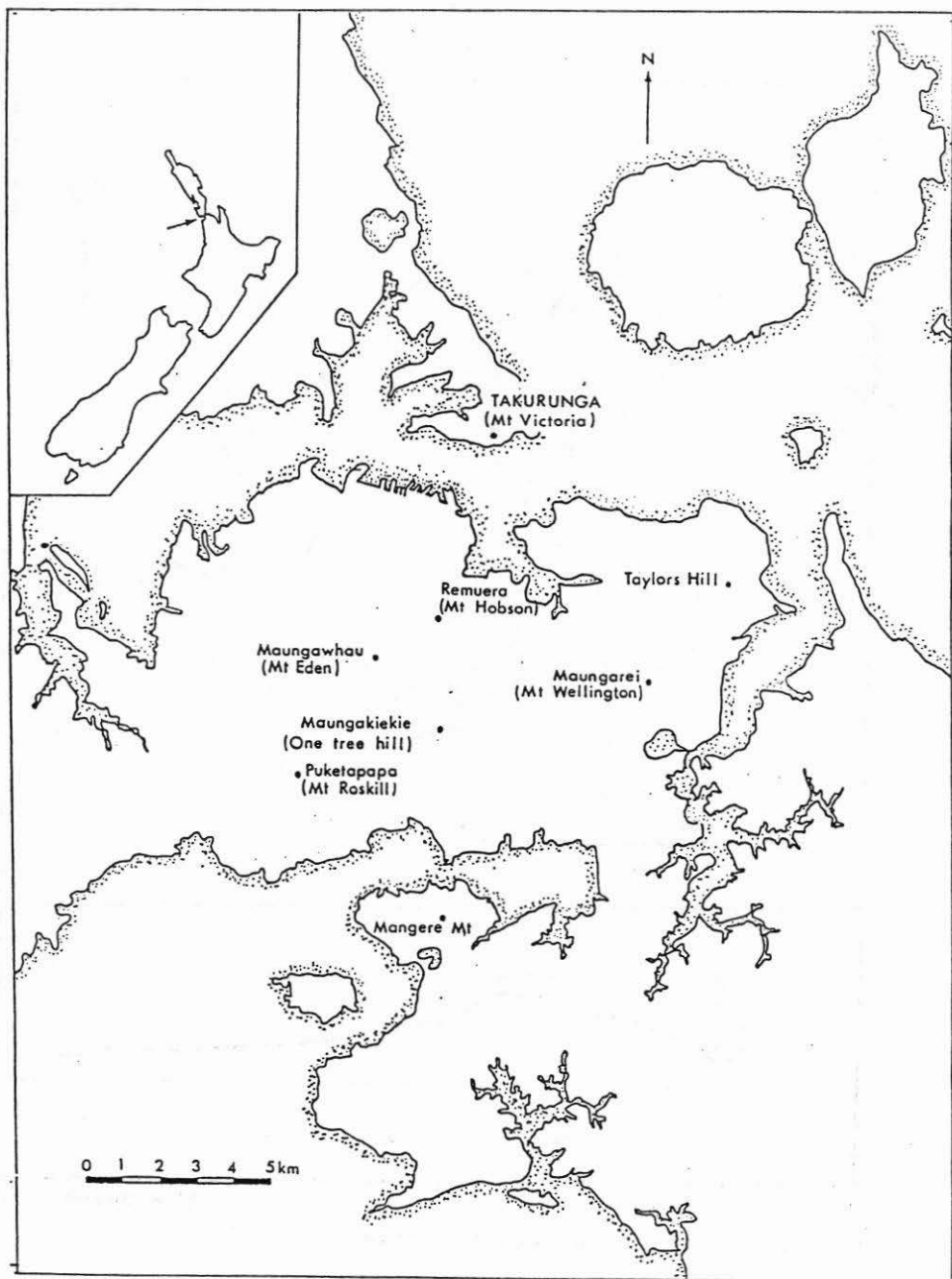
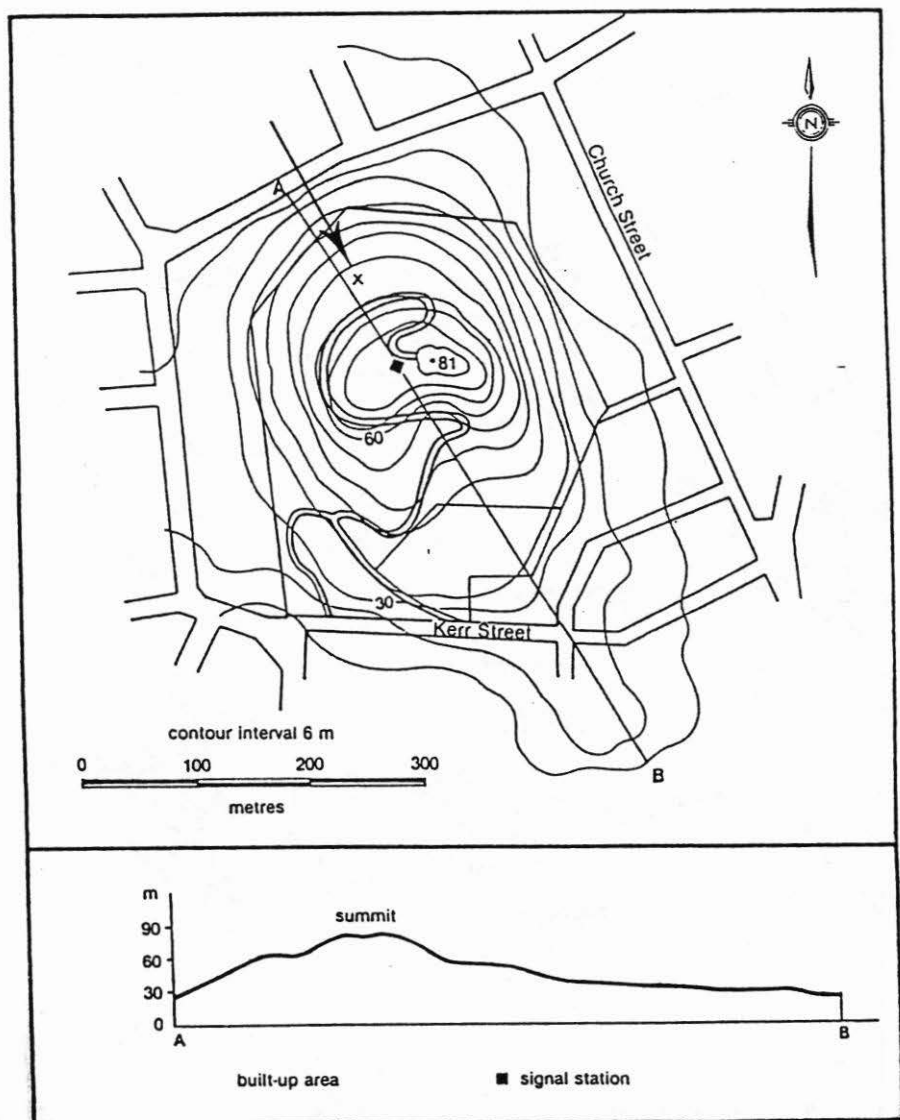


FIGURE 1. Location map.



(After Searle, 1981)

FIGURE 2. Takarunga (Mt. Victoria).

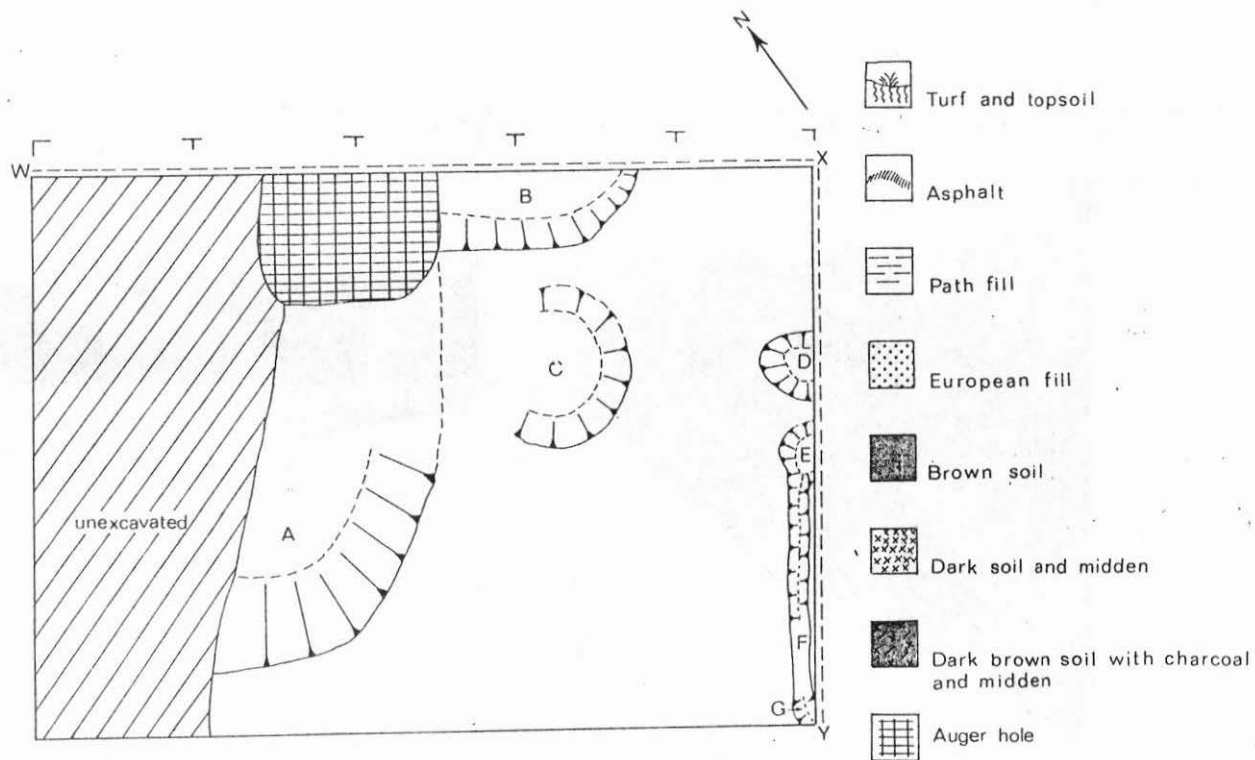


FIGURE 3. Takarunga: Ground plan.

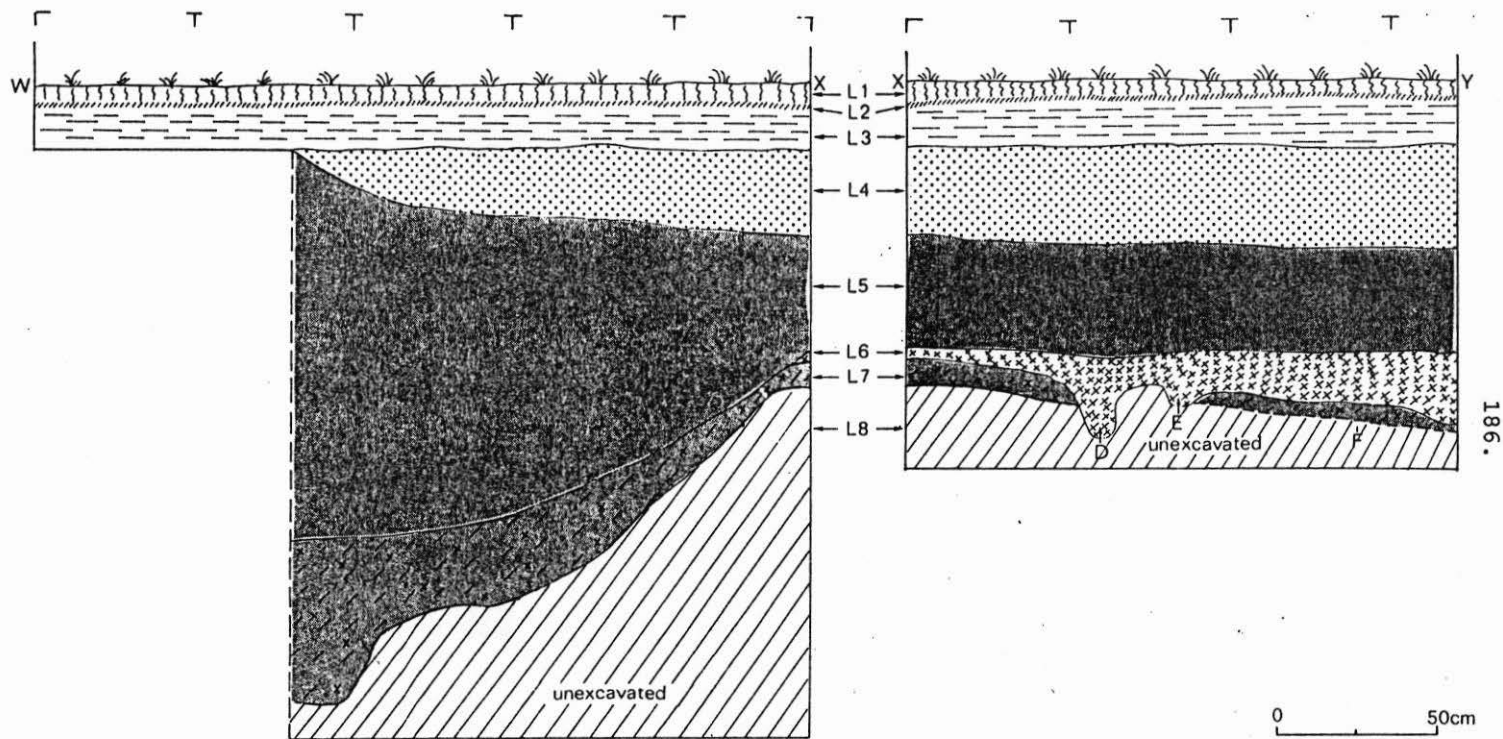


FIGURE 3 (continued). Takarunga: Cross sections.

- Layer 6 Maori occupation layer consisting of hard packed brown soil with midden and lumps of clay-like material.
- Layer 7 Orange brown fill with shell.
- Layer 8 Orange clay-like subsoil with lumps of scoria.

Layers 1-5 represent modifications over the past 100 years. Layers 6 and 7 are the Maori occupation layers. Layer 6 was fairly consolidated and it could be postulated that the surface of this layer formed a well-used living surface. The matrix was a dark brown soil with many pieces of charcoal, some snapper bones and many shells mixed throughout. The shells consisted primarily of cockle (Chione stutchburyi) and pipi (Paphies australis) (both large and very small shells) with some scallop (Pecten novaezelandiae), mud snail (Amphibola crenata), cat's eye (Turbo smaragdus) and a few large mud oyster (Ostrea lutaria). In addition one rock oyster (Crassostrea glomerata) and one dosinia (Dosinia anus) were recovered. Most of the shells are freely available along the immediate foreshore.

Excavation revealed 7 features (Fig. 3), as follows:

- A. This appeared to be a pit although it was not fully emptied. The dark brown fill contained a quantity of shells, many pieces of heat-shattered rock, interpreted as broken oven stones, and an adze flake.
- B. This was an oval feature alongside the north-eastern baulk. At its south-eastern end it was shallow and it deepened towards the north-west. It appeared to run into the pit as the fill of these two features was indistinguishable.
- C. This was possibly a posthole. It was extensively damaged by the auger in its first cut. It was 200mm deep and filled with midden.
- D., E., and F. Postholes. These features were filled with a dense concentration of cockle shells in a dark brown matrix and were dug into the subsoil.
- G. This feature was a long, narrow trench about 100 mm wide and of similar depth. It ran from feature D to feature F. It was filled with loosely-packed cockle shells and light brown sand. It is possible that this trench was some sort of drain, or alternatively that it formed a bedding trench for defensive purposes of similar construction to that found on Mount Roskill (Fox 1980:48).

Only a very small portion of Mt Victoria was excavated -

insufficient to come to definite conclusions as to the nature of occupation. However it does appear that there were two periods of activity - the pit and feature B relating to the earlier period, followed by in-filling and the laying of a living floor into which the other features were dug. It is possible that these features related to defensive works - feature C could have supported a large post while features D-G could be part of an inner defence of similar construction to that described by Fox (1980:48) at Mt Roskill.

This excavation, covering one day, was a salvage operation carried out in far from ideal conditions, including the "assistance" of at least six Post Office employees who delighted in leaping into the excavation and scrabbling around whenever my back was turned. It did show however that there are considerable Maori remains in situ on the north-western portion of the summit despite the considerable modifications over the last 100 years. The presence of intact features in an area thought to be completely destroyed can only act as a salutary reminder that subsurface remains are likely to be present even when the surface evidence suggests otherwise.

Acknowledgements

To Bruce Hardy and the Post and Telegraph gang for assistance and support.

To David Veart for excavation assistance and S. Maingay and H. Albert for illustrations.

References

- Fox, A. 1980. The pa on Mount Roskill, Auckland, (N42/11).
 Dating evidence from the 1961 excavations. Rec. Auck.Inst.Mus. 16:45-61.
- Searle, E.J. 1981. City of Volcanoes: A Geology of Auckland.
 2nd ed. Longman Paul, Auckland.