



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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could easily find a home within the Site Survey Scheme. The pro's and cons of any such move cannot be discussed in this Newsletter, but I hope that the system described will give food for thought to the many Association members, who, like myself, are involved in the Site Recording Scheme.

EXCAVATIONS AT MT. WELLINGTON by J. Golson.

The decision of the Auckland City Council to begin the construction of a large reservoir on Mt. Wellington has provided the opportunity for the first extended excavations on one of the major pa of the Tamaki isthmus. The work is being undertaken by the University of Auckland Archaeological Society. A generous grant from the National Historic Places Trust has made possible the recruitment of full-time labour from members of the Society, two or three of whom are on the site at all times. Volunteer labour is occasionally available during the week and abundantly so at weekends. Excavation began on the weekend of March 26, 27, and will come to an end when the bulldozers move in during the first half of May. Day to day direction is in the hands of Leslie Groube under the general supervision of Jack Golson.

The area under excavation is one of the two lowest parts of the crater rim: a breach in the crater rim facing N.N.W., 20 yards across at its narrowest point and 30 yards long. This area comprises two parts, a large square flat (to be called the lower flat) bounded on the west and south by a 5/1 scarp leading up in the one direction to a 15 foot wide terrace (the upper terrace) beneath the steep slope of the breach wall, in the other to a 25 foot wide flat strip (the upper flat) sloping above the high steep fall into the crater itself. Twenty five feet below the top of the crater scarp is a terrace (the lower terrace) beyond which no excavation has been contemplated.

The aim of excavation has been to dig a complete section from the lower terrace, covered beneath the grass with scoria boulders, up the crater scarp, with its surface scattering of shell, over the upper flat on which no surface features were present, across the lower flat with its dispersed rectangular pits clear to the outer edge of the rim. From this section line excavations were to be carried west and east as occasion warranted and to link up with excavations on the upper terrace.

Initial attention was devoted to the upper flat, the excavation of which has been virtually completed. The entire area proved to be covered beneath the topsoil with a layer of scoria, on top of which at one point only there were earth ovens and a midden. The underlying scoria layer itself was almost completely devoid of cultural material of any kind, but because of the lack of uniformity in its constitution it has been interpreted as artificially laid. The scoria served to seal off the various remains of previous occupation.

On the western half of the upper flat there consisted immediately beneath the scoria level of ovens and firepits associated with charcoal and fragmentary shell. Some of these ovens proved to have been dug into the consolidated surface of the fill of an earlier pit. The pit in question is a large affair 20 feet, by 10 feet, by $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep. Its fill was an unstable conglomeration of rubbish; layers of shell and scoria. Towards the bottom was a complex zone of burnt material.

To the same period, both of use and abandonment, belong two other rectangular pits nearer the crater scarp. The smaller of these, lying side by side with the larger pit just described, is 13 feet, by $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet, by 3 feet deep and is provided with a central row of postholes. There was burnt material both on the bottom of this pit, as well as on that of its neighbour.

The third pit, to the east, had an unstable fill of shell and scoria very similar to that of the first pit, and as with its two partners there was an extensive burnt layer towards the bottom of the fill. With this pit, however, there have been complications which have still not been satisfactorily resolved. There is some evidence that two pits stood on this spot, the later one shorter and deeper than and/or on a slightly different line from the earlier. If this should prove to be the case, the two rows of postholes in the floor would be satisfactorily explained as belonging to two different structures. The overall dimensions of 19 feet, by 10 feet are those of the complete pits. The depth is $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

The history of the upper flat can be carried further. Hard against the complex pit just described there lies to the north a huge pit 21 feet long and $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep. The compact

fill of this pit with layers of uniform material fairly evenly bedded stands in strong contrast to the fill of the pits hitherto described. There is no direct evidence of the relative age of this pit and the others, but it is possible that the recutting of the pit immediately to the south may have been made necessary by the close presence of a pit sunk to so much greater a depth.

On the other hand there is very clear evidence of the age relationship of the huge pit and the scarp that falls north to the lower flat, for the cutting of this scarp has removed the upper part of the northern wall and some of the fill of the pit in question.

A remarkable feature of the upper flat is that the levelled surface into which the pits described were dug and which gives the upper flat its form is not, except along its northern edge, a natural, but is a built up surface. The natural begins to fall to the crater some 10 feet south of the scarp to the lower flat, but the surface continues level to from 15 feet to 20 feet southwards. As a result, the entire 4 foot southern face of the smallest pit on the upper flat is cut through built-up material and all but one foot of the northern face.

The material of which the build-up is composed is bonded scoria derived from neighbouring higher areas of the cone at a time when human activity there was providing it in quantity, but carried and deposited probably by natural forces. This observation we owe to Messrs. Kour and Scholfield of Geological Survey who have kindly undertaken the investigation of the geological aspects of the site. That the build-up in question took place within the period of human occupation is proved by the rare but definite presence of shells in the layers that compose it.

These observations on the build-out of the crater rim prepare us for the story of the outer scarp. Though the investigation of this area has not yet been completed, it is obvious that the even 30° slope of the surface down to the lower terrace bears little relationship to the subsoil features. This is most evident at the bottom of the scarp. From surface indications the lower terrace is about 12 feet wide. In reality it is over twice as broad and is backed by a vertical scarp in scoria which falls into what appears to be a pit. All these features are masked by a tremendous deposit of soil, shell, and particularly scoria boulders, which obtains a thickness on the back of the terrace of 9 feet.

The layer of shell and scoria can be followed higher up the scarp towards the scarp edge over which they were dumped as refuse during habitation and construction. The scarp edge itself has not been fully investigated, but it is already obvious that it is cut from the same level and through the same layers of build-up as the pits of the upper flat. An interesting feature of the scarp in front of the smallest part of the upper flat is that it is faced with a regular wall of scoria boulders.

Investigation of the lower flat has only just begun and little can be said of it except that besides the rectangular pits visible on the surface there are others of which no surface indication remains.

The upper terrace has been tested only. Two 9 foot squares, separated by a 3 foot baulk have revealed evidences of cooking pits cutting across each other in a complex fashion. These occurred immediately below a scoria layer that may be correlated with that sealing in the upper flat. A circular pit a yard in diameter and a possible palisade posthole on the edge of the scarp are the only structural features of note.

In view of the amount of earth turned over and the abundant traces of human activity, finds of artifacts have been negligible. Two broken bone points were discovered on the upper terrace: a simple pendant of bone in the fill of the huge pit on the upper flat: a broken needle low in the fill at the bottom of the crater scarp. Obsidian is present but not common. The most surprising discovery has been that of a broken hogbacked adze amongst the scoria boulders of one of the layers of the crater scarp.

The scarceness of artefacts is disappointing because the cultural affiliation within New Zealand of the authors of the Auckland pa are completely unknown and the Mt. Wellington excavations have so far advanced us no further towards an answer. However, evidence of great importance has been obtained for the scale, intensity and continuity of activities on these pa, and sufficient carbon samples have been collected to provide the dates we badly need to discover the period and duration of their occupation.
