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EXCAVATIONS AT R11/1394, 'HAWKINS HILL', SOUTH AUCKLAND:
AN INTERIM REPORT

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The site R11/1394 is situated in a gently undulating paddock, with some low exposed basaltic lava and tuff outcrops, bounded to the west by the Southern Motorway and to the east by Fisher Road. As the site appears to have no known name it was dubbed 'Hawkins Hill' after the development company. To the north is a large industrial estate and to the south, residential housing (see Foster and Sewell, this volume, Fig.1). The block of land encompassing the site is part of the last remaining undeveloped land extending as a narrow band from the Southern Motorway to the Tamaki River. Eventually all of this block will be used for industrial purposes.

In November 1984, industrial development on this property was temporarily halted after preliminary site preparation had exposed subsurface archaeological deposits. An initial ground survey of the as yet unaffected sections of the property was undertaken and archaeological features recorded. These included areas of shell midden, a small terrace, and a shallow depression approximately 3 x 5 m. A limited three day test excavation was authorised to determine whether the archaeological deposits would provide evidence for a variety of prehistoric activities within the area. The results and recommendations of the test investigation of site R11/1395 are contained in Coates (1984).

As a result of recommendations a four week salvage excavation in December 1984 and January 1985, was authorised under N.Z. Historic Places Trust Permit 1984/47. The entire project was both supported and funded by Hawkins Developments Ltd.

Prior to excavation Mr W. Motu from the Kokiri Unit at Mt. Wellington conducted a karakia. Subsequent to that event we had the very good fortune to make contact with the tangata whenua for this area, the Ngati Paoa. As a result of this contact we were honoured to have a party of elders visit the site to inspect the excavation and offer a karakia. We are deeply indebted to the elders of Ngati Paoa for their kindness and continued support for our work.

Other sites investigated in the same region are shown in Figure 1 in the Foster and Sewell article on the Fisher Road sites in this volume. Excavation at Westfield (Furey 1982) produced evidence for a wide range of activities associated

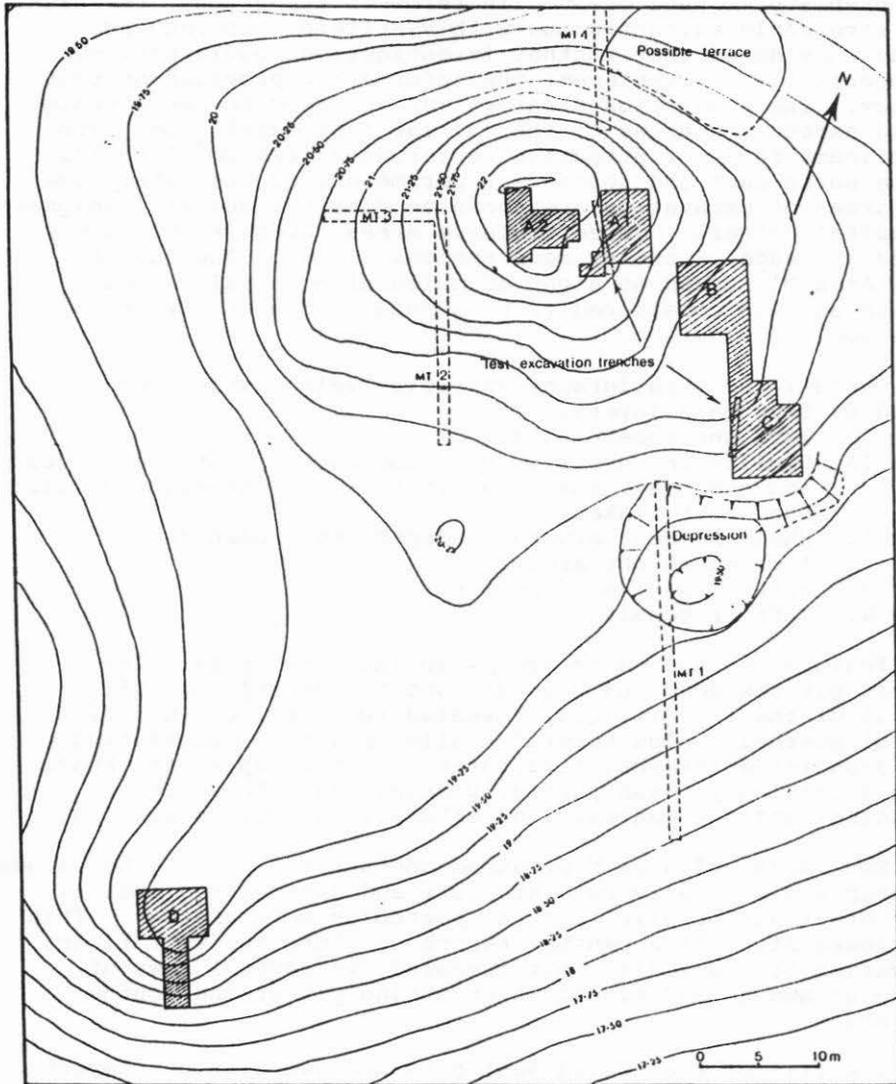


FIGURE 1. R11/1394, Hawkins Hill, showing areas excavated.

with prehistoric habitation. In terms of topography, the Hawkins Hill site could be contiguous with Westfield. Consequently it was considered that further investigations would provide an opportunity to supplement the information provided by that project. The excavation strategy was designed to concentrate on and extend the areas of the initial test excavation, with the primary focus of attention centering on two small knolls on the north-east and south-west perimeters of the site. The four areas of excavation are shown on Figure 1 and are designated by capital letters. Three of these areas (Areas A, B and C) showed evidence of two or more periods of use. The fourth area (Area D) showed no signs of cultural material or modification and was considered to be a natural feature of the landscape.

Overall the stratigraphy was relatively simple, and consisted of five main layers:

Layer 1. Turf and modern topsoil.

Layer 1A. Similar in composition to the topsoil but also containing charcoal, small basalt rocks and numerous obsidian and stone flakes.

Layer 2. Shell midden varying in depth and concentration; limited to one area.

Layer 3. Subsoil derived from ash.

Layer 4. Tuff or basalt.

Features excavated in Area A included two pits. The largest pit was deep and was cut into the underlying tuff. Removal of the fill material revealed two parallel rows of central postholes plus several smaller postholes suggesting some associated internal structures. On the top of the knoll a small shallow pit was partially excavated. This pit had two corner and one central line of small but deep postholes.

Excavation of Area B produced another two pits. The largest was deep and partially cut into tuff and ash derived subsoil. Both corner and parallel central postholes were present. This pit showed signs of a central hearth cut into the tuff floor. Excavation of the smaller pit revealed two central rows of postholes and an additional intercutting pit at the south-west end.

The fill of the two largest pits had two distinct layers. Between these two layers were several small firescoops and shell remains. There was no well-defined evidence for either drains or sumps in any of the pits. However the naturally porous nature of the volcanic tuff may account for the lack of drainage features.

Area C was an artificially levelled area formed by the placement of a mixture of soil and midden material. No structural evidence was found in association with this material. Removal of the midden revealed a cooking area containing several ovens and firescoops. Adjacent to the cooking area was a pattern of postholes and slots which suggested one and possibly two house structures.

Four machine trenches were dug at the end of the excavation. Two of these trenches provided further evidence of large pits and numerous postholes.

The excavation provided evidence which suggests the existence of a small habitation unit. Associated activities include obsidian and stone flaking, food preparation and the construction of substantial food storage facilities.

Acknowledgements

The excavation team was supported and assisted by numerous volunteers. As so frequently happens with salvage excavations in the Auckland area today, construction work begins and continues during the actual investigation period. The continual noise from heavy machinery, drilling operations, daily blasting schedules, the unending roar of motorway traffic, and hot summer weather can create somewhat uncomfortable and trying working conditions. The crew and all who assisted on this project are to be thanked for their unbounded patience and fortitude.

References

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- Furey, L. 1982 Interim report on excavations at N42/941, Westfield South Auckland. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter, 25:138-143.