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# EXCAVATIONS AT SITE R11/229 PAPAHIKAU SOUTH AUCKLAND

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This paper briefly summarises a rescue excavation on the banks of the Pukaki Creek which flows into the Manukau Harbour to the east of Auckland International Airport (Fig.1). A full excavation report is presented in Foster and Sewell 1995. The tangata whenua of the area are Te Akitai and their oral history recounts that their ancestors lived at Matukurua (Wiri and McLaughlins mountains) and came to the banks of the Pukaki Creek for fishing and to tend gardens.

In 1972 Sullivan recorded 61 sites along the Pukaki Creek (Sullivan 1973). The creek was one of the portages between the Manukau Harbour and the Tamaki River. She ascribed a 19th century date to some of these - in fact the name of some are still known - for example Mitimiti and Papahinu where a Wesleyan native chapel was built in the early 1850s. There was also a small European settlement at Tautauoa. Although Papahinu was occupied earlier, we do know that the major occupation began in the early 1830s when Te Akitai returned to Pukaki following the intertribal wars of the 1820s, during which time the area was deserted (Fenton 1879: 72-5). In 1863 the Land Wars started and Te Akitai again fled to the Waikato. The Papahinu area was largely confiscated after the Land Wars.

Here we had a site with a known beginning and end to its main occupation. A site to add to the short list of specifically early contact and historic sites - Motuora in the Bay of Islands (Groube 1966) and on the Hauraki Plains Oruarangi (Best 1980), Raupa (Phillips 1986, 1988), Waiwhau (Phillips and Green 1991) and Opita (Phillips 1994). Part of Papahinu was to be destroyed when a road and bridge for the south eastern access to the Airport was built. Te Akitai asked that a full archaeological investigation be undertaken to record as much information as possible about their ancestor's homes before they were destroyed for ever. Excavation provided an opportunity to examine a Maori site from a crucial period of New Zealand history when European influence could be expected to make significant inroads into traditional Maori life.

Between 29 November and 23 December 1993 we excavated here and at a nearby site R11/1800, a site of similar age but consisting almost entirely of large storage pits, possibly for storage of crops before they were taken to

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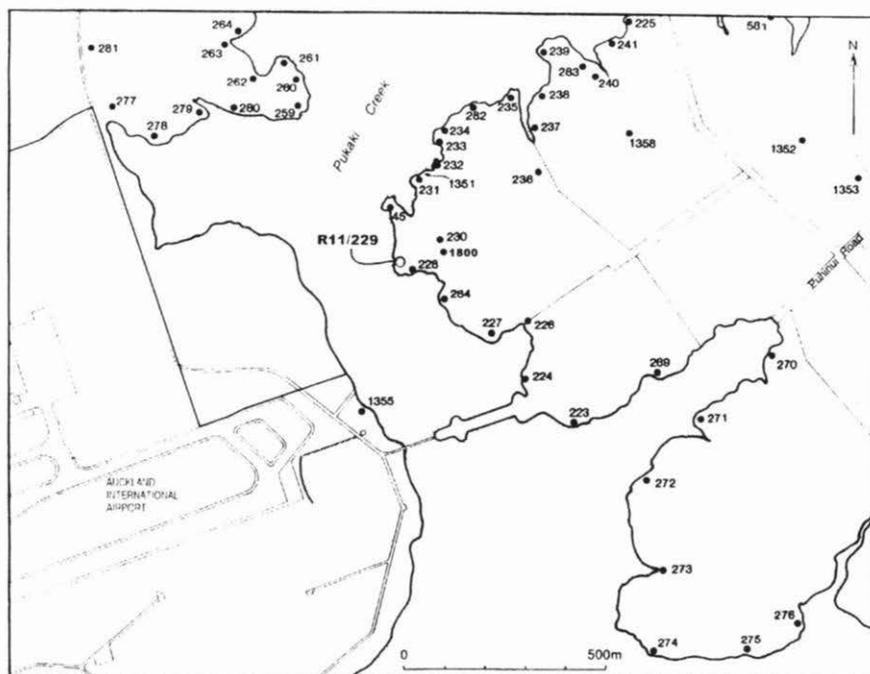


Figure 1. Location map.

Auckland for sale. R11/229 was situated on the southern end of a small promontory with cliffs some 5 m high and jutting into the Pukaki Creek almost opposite the end of the airport runway. At the northern end is the Chapel Point pa. An area of approximately 1500 m<sup>2</sup> was excavated. The site continues to the north, towards the pa, but this area was not affected by road construction and has not been damaged. A PC 60 tracked excavator was used to strip off the turf and topsoil. This machine was very manoeuvrable and the excavations were designed so that it never needed to drive over an area being worked on. Features were excavated by hand.

The stratigraphy was simple. In the extreme south west portion of the site there was an earlier occupation layer with a calibrated <sup>14</sup>C date of 1460-1646. No features were found that belonged categorically to this occupation. The majority of features related to the settlement of 1835-1863. Over 1400 individual features were recorded (Fig. 2). Two articulated burials in shallow pits were excavated by a Te Akitai elder and removed for reburial.

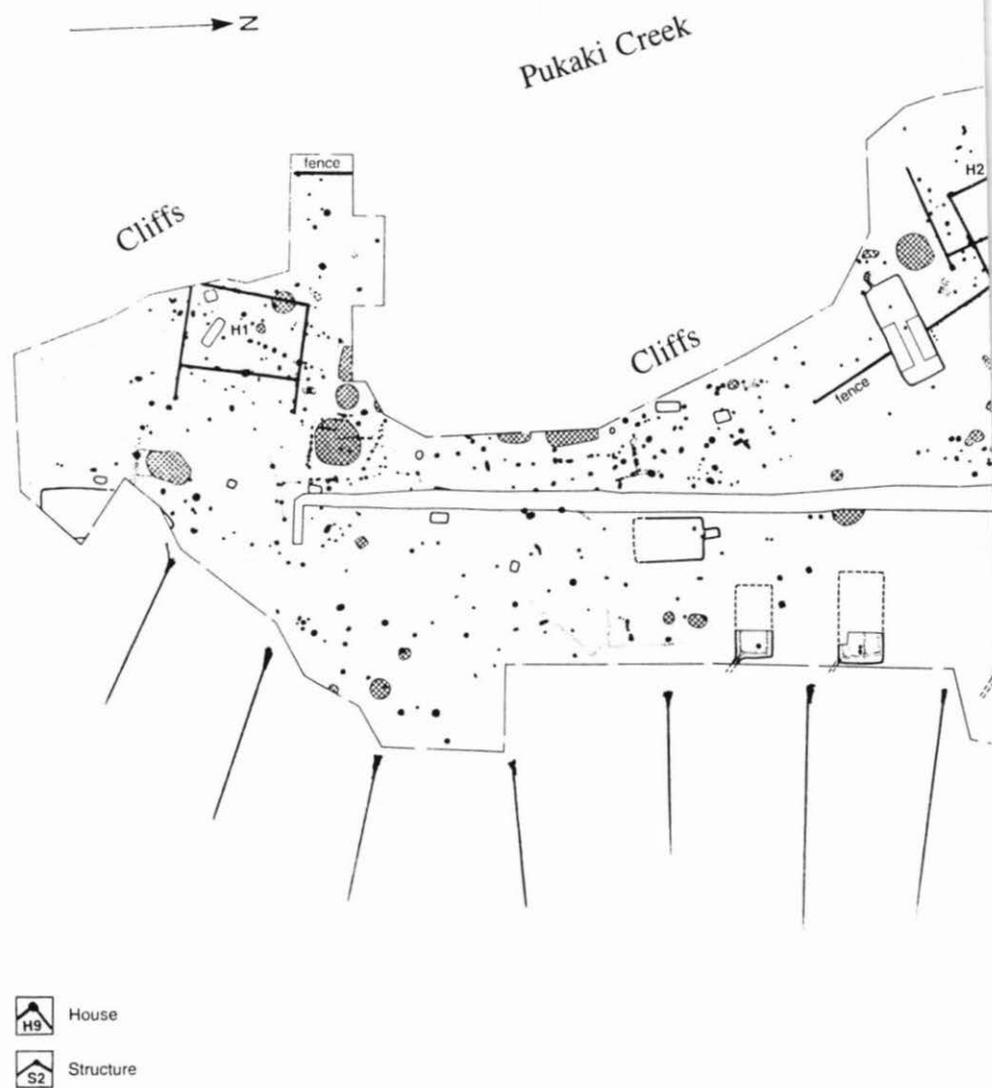


Figure 2. Site R11/229, Papahinau.

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Fifty-one fires or hangi were found with two main clusters of cooking activities - one in the southern part and the other partially surrounded by a fence. There were 37 pits, including a number of extremely small bins and several very small but deep rectangular pits. We contemplated the possibility of the latter being latrines but found no supporting evidence for this. There were six large deep rectangular pits, five of which had exit drains dug from the surface and two with exit tunnels leading to external drains. In the north west corner of the site was an interesting complex consisting of two deep pits, one with internal drains, an exit tunnel and then an open drain 80 cm deep. Alongside was a shallow drained pit with a small, burnt scoop at one end and an entrance on the eastern side which was interpreted as a house. None of these features was dug by spade and it is probable that they were built early in the historic occupation.

A total of 14 houses, or parts of houses, were identified, although it is likely that there were more that were not recognised as such. H6 post-dated H4 with bedding trenches on three sides and some metal and other European artefacts trampled into the floor. Houses 10 and 11 were obviously not contemporary. They had bedding trenches and square spade-dug postholes - many with remains of posts *in situ*. H12 had deep square postholes and no bedding trenches for walls and no porch and it is probable that this was a typical 19th century pataka. H13 and 14 were the most recent houses. The bedding trenches and drains were square in profile and all spade dug. In these features we found pieces of clay pipe, glass, nails and pieces of chert and obsidian. Neither house had obvious postholes for ridge supports and it is possible that they were built with head-high walls across which trusses were nailed to hold up the roof.

The superimposition of some houses and their form emphasises the conservative nature of the people. Even though European tools had been adopted, the form of the houses still largely retained the traditional outline. Specifically, the later houses (those with evidence of the use of spades) tended to cluster at the northern end of the site where the main concentration of European artefacts clustered. Other features include grooves or trenches and drains, the earlier ones having a U-shaped profile while the later ones were rectangular. We identified fences around the cooking area and along the cliff edge and also drying racks - two parallel lines of postholes. Some of the postholes could have held supports for elevated storehouses or platforms (pataka or whata) which are not easy to identify archaeologically. It is possible that there are three or four of these in addition to H12 which, if it were a pataka, would have been the most ornate of all the structures of this settlement.

There is also a double line of postholes (S5), many spade dug, and it is possible that this could have been a hakari (feast stage). Not one of the

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enormous structures known from the Bay of Islands and elsewhere which were several stories in height (see Urry 1993 for a discussion of these spectacular structures), but a more modest affair of perhaps one or two levels at the most. Finally there is a double row of small stake holes leading into a larger hole which could possibly be some sort of rat trap.

Artefacts of Maori origin consisted of four greywacke adzes and one Tahanga basalt adze or part adze, several dozen pieces of obsidian, one greywacke adze flake and three bone fishhooks, which were found in the southern (early) portion of the site. Artefacts of European origin include nails and pieces of rusty iron, an iron cooking pot and two (non-matching) handles, three matchboxes, a shingle knife, scissors, a brass keyhole surround and a horseshoe for a carthorse. There were also seven buttons, 29 fragments of clay pipe, two pieces of slate pencil and fragments of beer, wine and gin bottles and four pieces of window glass but only 12 ceramic fragments (5 of which formed one object) and five small fragments of brick - in fact quite a variety but not a lot of anything.

In the Hauraki Plains sites there was a persistence of traditional materials in the early part of the 19th century up to 1820, and then a gradual increase in European items. A similar pattern emerged at Papahinua after 1835 with the greatest number of European items found in association with the later houses. Even then obsidian was found in the same deposits indicating a continued use of traditional tools although it is noticeable that the greatest concentration of obsidian occurred in an area where structures were thought to be early in the historic period and there were no European artefacts. Only one greywacke flake was recovered. These are usually plentiful in Auckland prehistoric sites. Their lack here could suggest that some stone tools were replaced by metal axes early in the sequence, although use of obsidian with its very sharp cutting edges appears to have continued well after the introduction of metal knives.

Even though there was a change in construction methods the houses retained their traditional shape. It is just possible that at least one house had a European-type window, with window glass and a door with a keyhole. In other aspects the changes were less obvious - protein still came from the sea rather than introduced mammals - a few pig bones were the only mammal bones found. There appeared to be no change in the traditional hangi cooking methods apart from two iron pots. Unlike mid-19th century European settler's sites where large quantities of ceramics are found, here only a few fragments were recovered suggesting retention of traditional forms of eating and serving food.

Les Groube (1965) suggested that large nucleated villages began to be found in the early years of the 19th century based on the availability of pits,

potatoes and guns. This does not appear to be the case here, where it looks as if the excavated site, along with the other 19th century sites close by formed a collection of hamlets with the chapel and marae, at no great distance from any of them, forming the focal point. Possibly each of these hamlets would have been occupied by a single whanau.

Unlike the early 19th century Hauraki sites, at Papahinu the people had regular (certainly weekly if not daily) contact with Europeans. Notwithstanding this, the presence of many European articles only late in the occupation and the continued use of obsidian throughout the sequence indicates a persistence in traditional ways. The excavation provided a clear example of an early to mid-19th century post contact/historic site in the Auckland region and illustrates not only the changes that took place but also the continuity of traditional Maori lifestyle up to the settlement's abandonment in 1863. The changes which did occur were melded into the traditional lifestyle.

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