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FIELDWORK ON MOTUTAPU ISLAND, HAURAKI GULF

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Motutapu Island is situated in the Hauraki Gulf, adjacent to Rangitoto. It is a fertile undulating island of some 3,700 acres, with a number of permanent streams. About 80 sites of prehistoric occupation have been recorded including fortifications, undefended pit and terrace sites, and middens.

The results of the site survey, and excavations on three sites, two "undefended sites" and a stratified midden/working floor, have been published. Golson's excavation, however, which first drew attention to Motutapu as a research area, remains unpublished except for summary reports (see References).

During the summer 1970-71 further excavations were carried out at Station Bay on the north-east coast of the island. Miss Leahy conducted additional excavations at Site N38/30, previously excavated and published by her, and the headland pa, N38/25, on the eastern side of the bay was also investigated.

The pa is characterised by a deep transverse ditch which cuts off the headland from the land to the north. The interior of the pa rises to a small well defined tihi with steep scarps. On the seaward side of the tihi is a smaller transverse ditch and beyond that a narrow flat-topped ridge running down to a rocky point.

The investigations were designed to compare the material culture, faunal remains and structures of the pa with those of the undefended sites nearby in an attempt to establish whether or not the same people were responsible for both types of site.

A complicated sequence of building and rebuilding a substantial palisade with associated fighting stage was revealed immediately inside the ditch. Inside this, on the largest flat area on the pa was a cooking and midden area. At an earlier stage, probably before the digging of the ditch and building of the palisade, a number of pits, not all contemporary, were dug in the same area. Limited excavations on the tihi and on a small side terrace revealed no midden at all, but a sequence in both areas of pits dug and then deliberately refilled to make flat terrace surfaces with no visible features.

Outside the ditch, excavation of the largest of a series of still visible pits suggested a sequence of use and reuse probably concurrent with the use and reuse of pits in the main part of the pa before the building of the ditch.

The midden area inside the pa yielded material which will be studied in comparison with the midden from the two undefended sites. There is an initial impression of several points of difference between the pa and the

other sites. Information on pits will be added to a growing body of information on similarities and differences within and between sites in this small area.

The few artefacts recovered from the pa can be regarded as typically Classic Maori. The most striking difference was the complete absence from the excavations on the pa of the range of flakes, hammerstones and grindstones, in local material, so typical of the undefended sites. It must be emphasised, however, that so far the excavations on the pa suggest strong spatial separation of activities, and more areas must be sampled before absence of flakes, etc. from the pa is confirmed. Obsidian was quite numerous.

Additional evidence is still accumulating from the earlier excavations. Radiocarbon dates for one of the undefended sites are now available and analysis of sources of obsidian from the undefended sites and the Sunde site has yielded some very interesting information about changing patterns of distribution of this material through time.

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