



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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## HOUSES, PITS AND POTATOES IN THE CHATHAM ISLANDS

D. C. Simmons

In 1835, friction developing between a section of the Ati Awa confederation and Te Rauparaha caused the exodus of the Ngati Mutunga and Ngati Tama Tribes of the Ati Awa to the Chathams. The Ati Awa had originally come from Taranaki, moving to Wellington in the wake of Te Rauparaha following his conquest of the Wellington area in 1820. One of the main purposes behind his move to Wellington, as stated by Te Rauparaha, was to set up a trading base from which guns and other goods could be obtained from European ships (12). When Te Rauparaha first saw Wellington in 1819 the harbour was deserted. One ship was seen in Cook's Strait, that of Bellinghausen the Russian explorer. The success which came from Te Rauparaha's foresight is to be seen in the price paid by the Ngati Mutunga and Ngati Tama in 1835 to go to the Chathams. Although Captain Harewood of the Rodney claimed his ship was forcibly taken over, he was nevertheless well paid for transporting the five hundred Maori to the Chathams. A nine pounder cannon, a carronade, forty-one muskets, seven tons of potatoes and two and a half tons of pork were snugly stowed in the hold when the Rodney returned to Wellington. Included in the belongings of the Maori taken to the Chathams were seven canoes ranging in size from thirty to sixty feet, to be used for trade with whaling ships, and seventy tons of seed potatoes. The Maori were so wealthy in trade items they could afford to pay, among other things, the forty-one muskets even though they intended to conquer the Islands. (7: 53 & 11) Presumably they would need firearms for the purpose as they had no guarantee that the Moriori were indeed as peaceful as they were reported to be.

In the Pre-European phase the Moriori had no cultivated crops. Fern root was probably dug, eaten and occasionally replanted. That is, a root was replaced in the area dug. The Moriori had little contact with Europeans between 1791, when they were discovered, and 1835, as all attempts to persuade them to grow potatoes or raise pigs for trading, failed. Some time after 1804 there were former whalers or sealers resident in the Islands growing pigs and potatoes for sale. The Maori do not appear to have taken kumara with them from New Zealand but concentrated on potatoes and, almost certainly, pigs. Engst says of the arrival of the missionaries in 1843, "we found nothing for life's comfort than pigs and potatoes". These were the two most sought after trade items, if one excludes women. (4: 109) The Maori, in contrast to the Moriori, were eager to trade with the ships. The introduction of Maori potato agriculture, to the Chathams, dates to 1835. The Moriori, after their enslavement, were forced to cultivate the land by their Maori masters but it is not until 1848, after their nominal release from slavery, that distinct Moriori settlements with agriculture can be identified. There is little to distinguish these from contemporary Maori villages. The introduction of agriculture to the Chathams also hastened the marked deforestation. Maori

and European gardens were only practicable in the areas of bush or former bush where the soil was fertile enough to grow a good crop. The remaining areas of Chatham Island are peat lands with no shelter from the prevailing south westerly wind. In order to produce a good crop a sheltered garden in the bush or in a hollow was (and still is) necessary.

The success of the new industry can be gauged by the fact that in 1840-41 the new settlements at Petone and Wellington were dependant on potatoes shipped from the Chathams. Likewise, in 1851 there were simultaneous shipments to California, Sydney and Wellington, and in 1856 a thousand tons of potatoes were exported (4.111) In the bush garden climate, wheat, barley and oats were also grown and exported, mainly by Europeans. The boom period of ship revictualing was over by 1868. Export of potatoes, wheat and barley continued until 1890 but by 1868 about 400 of the Maori were ready to return to Taranaki. The interracial, nationalistic wars in Taranaki certainly played a part in their desire to return, but even more importantly, trade was falling off at a time when comparative affluence had been achieved. The return to New Zealand was principally to the Urenui district of Taranaki but some Maori did settle round Wellington and other areas in the south-western part of the North Island. Just how many Moriori accompanied the Maori, either as unofficial slaves or hangers-on is not known. What little information there is, suggests that some of the Moriori were presented as personal "servants" to friendly chiefs. Such were the two men who were given to Haua, chief of Ngati Raukawa and who lived on at Otaki until about 1900. Other Moriori had come over earlier; Richard Taylor recorded the genealogies of two Moriori living in Wanganui in 1846 (13). There are unconfirmed reports of Moriori, occupying a similar position to those at Otaki, from other areas.

Chatham agricultural sites are subdivisible into two groups Maori and Moriori. Maori sites are those occupied by Maori after 1835. The Moriori sites are those which were occupied by the Moriori after their release from slavery in 1848. Moriori manuscript sources indicate that most of these sites were still occupied in 1862. It is unlikely, in view of the falling Moriori population at that time, that many of these sites remained occupied after 1868. When S. Percy Smith ran his survey of the Chathams in 1868, Moreroa village was still occupied but another, Otonga, was deserted. Between 1835 and 1962 the Moriori population fell from 1673 to 150. (10) The Moriori population in 1848, when the Moriori agricultural villages were established, was, according to Selwyn's account, 268, accounting for the smallness of these sites in comparison with the contemporary Maori sites. (4) The Maori population at this time was about 400.

One of the early Maori villages is Wairarapa village (C I 16 N) situated on the North East of the Island some two miles east of Kaingaroa. This site was occupied when the German missionaries landed in 1843 but does not appear to have been occupied in 1868. It is situated on a gentle slope overlooking the sea with cultivations in a sheltered valley enclosed on three sides but open to the north. The whole of the complex is fairly well protected from the prevailing south westerly winds. The basic settlement unit in this village is of two types.

1. A European type house 15' x 12' with schist stone hearth and fireplace made by the dry stone technique. This type of house is a fairly typical colonial shack. Associated with this, above-ground house, are two or three pits with raised rims on three sides. This pattern is repeated at least three and probably more times. (Fig. A).
2. The second type of unit is a pit 10' x 6' with 12" raised rims on four sides broken by a two foot opening near one corner of the front wall flanked by two internal buttresses. (Fig. B). The present depth of the depression is two feet in the centre. The general appearance of this type of pit is similar to the house floor reported by Buist at Waimate Pa (N. Z. A. A. 5 No. 3. 1962: 185). At Wairarapa village the best preserved example of such a pit is situated on a ridge with the door facing south and some yards distant from all other habitation which consists of an above-ground house and two pit group. Another of these pits is associated with a raised rim pit 6' x 4' x 18").

The pits associated with above ground houses are more likely to be for storage than habitation. The only crop grown on the site was potatoes. Pigs were probably kept and some of the field evidence may relate to shelter for these animals or for storage of salted meat. Storage pits in close association with a house would be unlikely to be used for pigs. The separate side-entrance pits could have served this purpose but even this is doubtful.

Kaingarua Maori village (C I 20 N), covers about a quarter mile on a small ridge overlooking a fresh water lake. The field evidence has been obscured by the siting of the various Kaingarua Homesteads and outbuildings. Occupation consists mainly of small 8' x 6' and 10' x 6' terraces on which there are signs of midden and the occasional four stone fireplace or ovens. Some large pits may have been present west of the present homestead. Kaingarua village was occupied until about 1860 and continued after this period in an area on the east side of Pateriki lake where the church was sited.

A site occupied by Maoris until fairly late times is Tupurangi (C I 78W), a flat peninsula on the extreme north-west of the Island. Tupurangi supported a population of 100 until about 1880. Schist stone hearths for European style houses are still visible. The area is peat under a shallow bush soil, and a complicated drainage system is still in evidence despite later ploughing. At least two acres and probably more were cultivated. There are no signs of pit storage possibly because of the peaty nature of the soil.

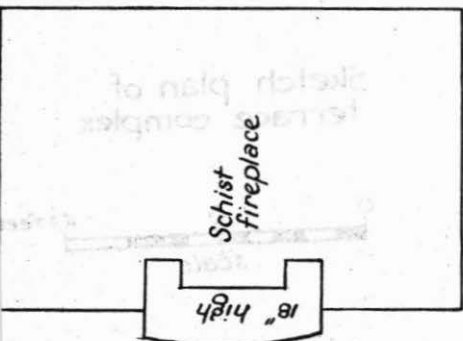
Similar Maori complexes to those at Wairarapa and Kaingarua probably existed at Whangarua and Waitangi. The first was not visited and no certain trace of the second could be found. Moriori agricultural sites are similar to the Maori sites but are usually much smaller. Moreroa village (C I 128 L. W.), on the western lagoon shore was still occupied in 1868. Moreroa village consists of one large pit 15' x 12' x 2' with complete raised rims on three sides and an incomplete rim on the south

side facing two associated shallow depressions or flattened areas, which could be above ground housing (Pl I). There are approximately nine shallow depressions in the village but it was difficult, because of heavy grass cover, to determine from surface indications what their relationship is. The eastern end of the Moreroa peninsula is under heavy fern. It is an historic Moriori cemetery.

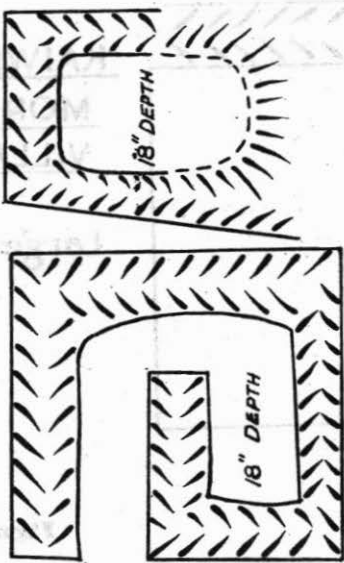
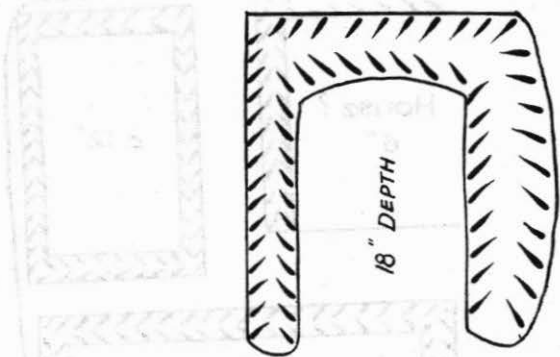
On the north head of Kaingaroa harbour is a small settlement, Kaiwhata (C I 21 N), which in 1868 was occupied by Moriori. It appears to have been dependant on Kaingaroa Maori village. (C I 20 N). Schist fireplaces, similar to those at Wairarapa were noted but also large raised rim pits either occurring singly or in complexes. The largest pit is 20' long by 6' wide by 4' deep. (Fig. C) A complex of a terrace and two small pits was apparently entered by a sunken path running parallel to the slope on the western side and cutting back into the hill on the northern side. On the southern side is what appears to be a house terrace which is backed on the north side by the two pits. The slope of the hill is east to west. If the house entrance was to the south, as it seems to be, then a person emerging from the door could enter the pits by way of the path which starts at the back wall of the house and after a right angle turn at the outer end of the pits, penetrates into the hill in front of the northern rim of the pits. (Fig. D)

Otongo Moriori village (C I 58 S. W.), was definitely abandoned before S. Percy Smith's survey in 1868 but was still occupied in 1862. It is situated on a small ridge flanked on two sides by a gully and on the third by a steep slope leading to the sea 250 yards distant. (Fig. E). The most noticeable complex is a 6" depression, with slightly raised rims, measuring 12' x 10', in the centre of which is a stone-lined fireplace. This depression in turn is separated from an eighteen inch deep pit by a low, flat topped bank on the northern side. This pit is also 12' x 10'. On the western side of this pit and with one wall in common is another small 5' x 4' pit about 2' deep. (Fig F). In a row to the northward of this complex are three other 6" deep depressions with slightly raised rims of approximately the same dimensions as the first. To the west and in front of these are two small depressions 10' square x 6" deep and 6' square by 4" deep. In line with these and immediately west of the deep pit in the first complex are two narrow pits each 4' x 1' x 2' deep separated by 3' of undug ground. Near the western terrace edge, and not in line with the other features, are two terraces cut into the hill-side, 6" deep at the back and each 10' long by 6' wide in overall dimensions. The northern end of the site is marked by a made pathway in the north eastern corner leading up to the main row of depressions. Near this entrance is a series of stones which appears to mark the foundations of an apsidal structure facing the path, possibly a chapel. To the west of this again are ovens and midden heaps. A flat area on the ridge to the north east has been cultivated. Field rows such as are produced in potato growing are still visible. The cultivation was between a quarter and a half acre in extent.

Mention has not been made here of historic Maori or Moriori sites which have no discernible surface features, or where as in the case of Taupeka (C I 33 N), they have been obliterated by moving sand.



HOUSE



**WAIARAPA MAORI VILLAGE**  
House and pit complex



Fig. A.

slope to sea - 34 -

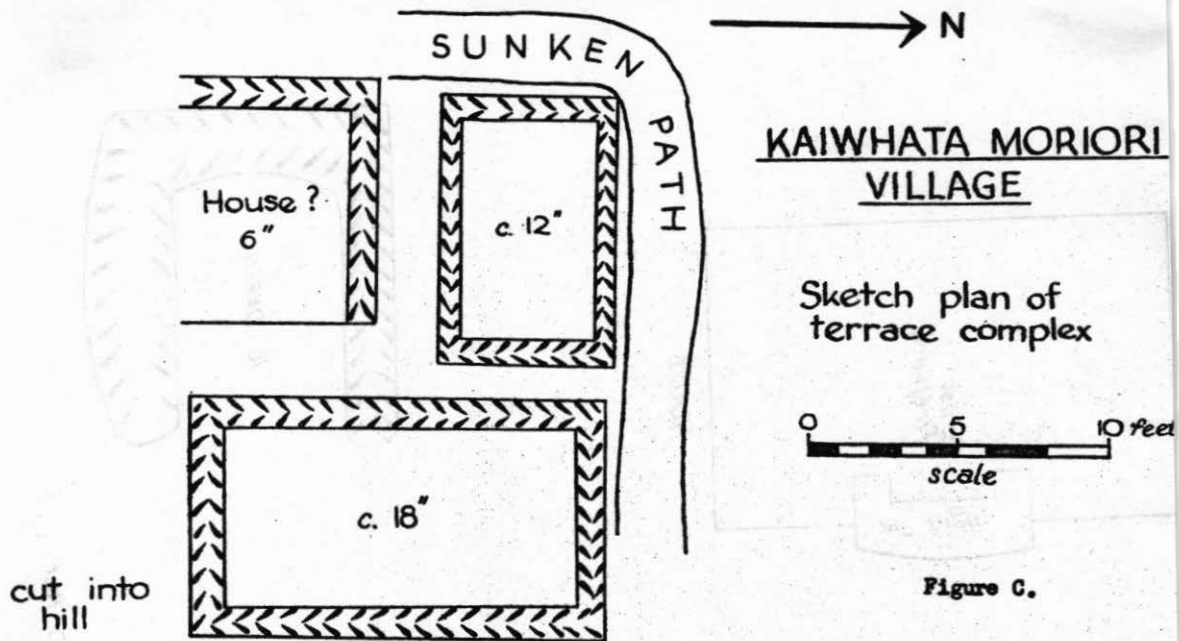


Figure C.

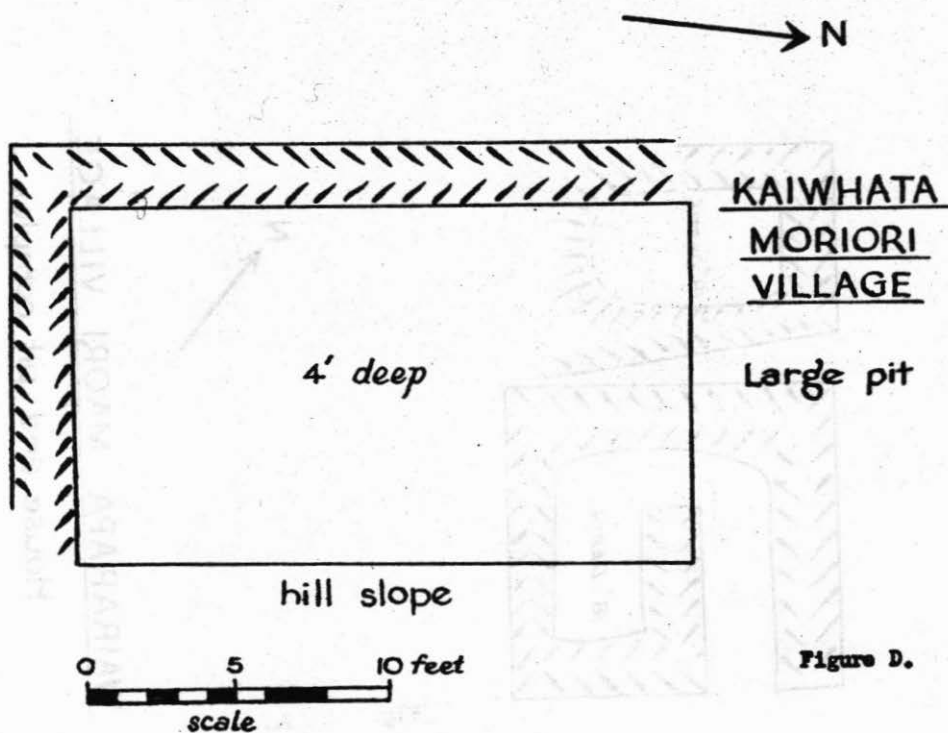


Figure D.

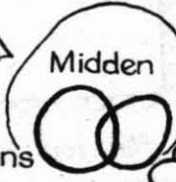
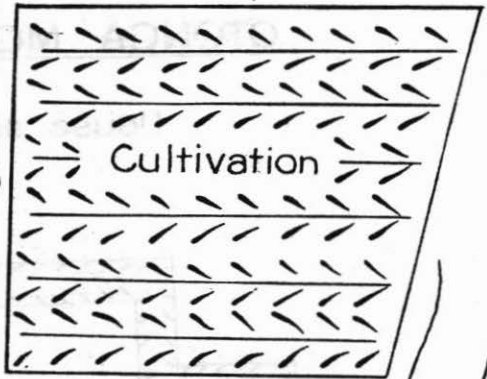
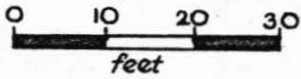
Akeake trees

to other fields?



# OTONGA MORIORI VILLAGE

Sketch plan

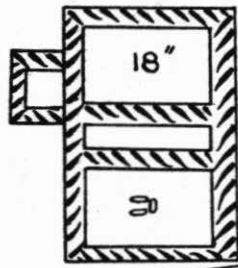
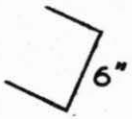
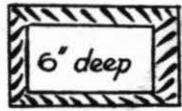
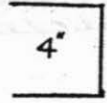
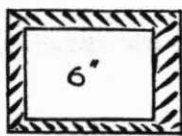
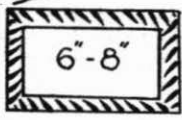


PATH

Slope to sea

TERRACE

Terraces



GULLY

Figure E. GULLY and STREAM



# OTONGA MORIORI VILLAGE

House and pit complex.

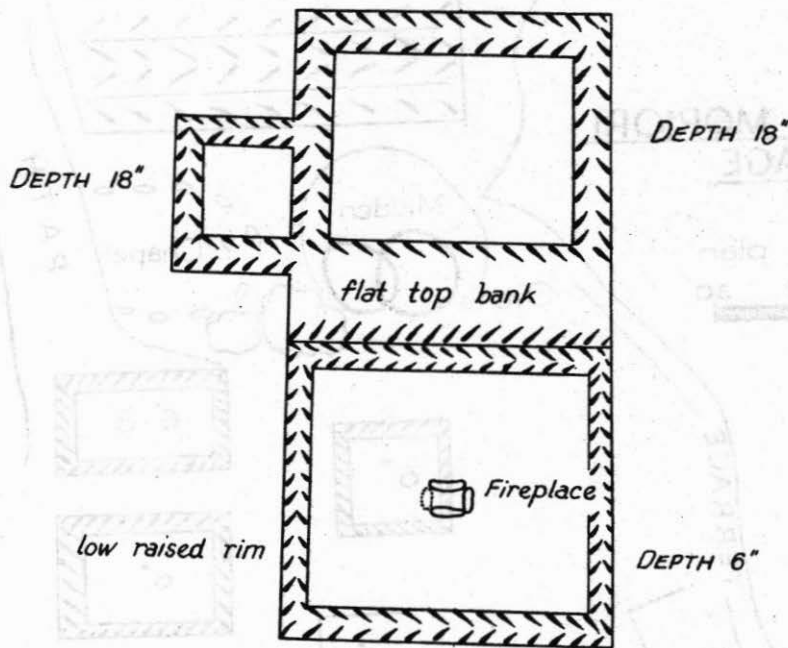


Figure F.

## Discussion

The variety of the houses and pit evidence from the Chathams parallels the bewildering array of structural remains from New Zealand. In the Chathams we can definitely state that the field evidence was associated with potato agriculture and that none of the sites dates prior to 1835. This would suggest that in New Zealand pit storage was used for potatoes and that many of the inexplicable pits in the Wellington area and probably Taranaki, if not other areas, can be associated with growing potatoes for trade purposes. European stone hearths have not been recorded very often in New Zealand on Maori sites. Selwyn in 1848 says that "Pomare's house in the Chathams was built like those of the whalers with bunks against the wall" (4). Teviotdale in his diary (14) (July 30, 1932), records that during his excavation at Tarewai Point on Otago Heads he found a hut site with a European style fireplace having a large hearth stone across the front. On the floor of the hut he found a clay pipe, three pieces of partly worked greenstone, a perforated bone handle and a blade of a patu. These items and others indicate that the site belonged to the contact period before guns had become common or metal had superseded bone or stone for artifacts. Tarewai Point also illustrates the selective nature of culture contact. It is likely that the pit storage, probably used for potatoes in the Chathams, was an adaptation of the type of store used previously in New Zealand for kumara. However the antecedents for these complexes must be sought in New Zealand. The Ati Awa were growing potatoes in Wellington in 1835. Presumably their sites there will contain analagous remains to those recorded in the Chathams. H. Parker (2) has already placed on record the above ground house type with four-stone fireplace used by the Maori living in the final period at Kumara-Kaiamo pa, Urenui. He considers this to represent the house of group returning to Taranaki from the Chathams in 1868. From the evidence cited here it is more likely that this final occupation represents the period of the exodus in 1820.

## WAIRARAPA MAORI VILLAGE

Side entrance raised rim pit.

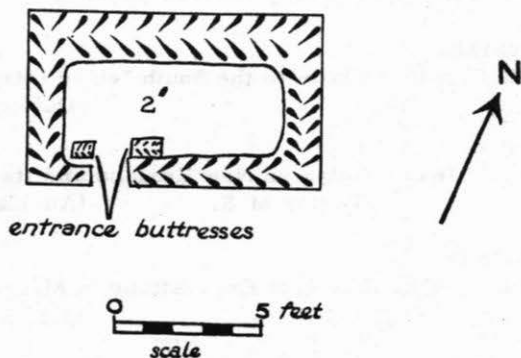


Figure B.

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