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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS AT N42/941,
WESTFIELD, SOUTH AUCKLAND

Louise Furey
Auckland

The rescue excavation of part of N42/941 was conducted in response to plans by Ministry of Works and Development to lay the Maui Gas pipeline through the site and was carried out under contract to N.Z. Historic Places Trust (Permit No. 1981/51).

N42/941 is situated on the Tamaki Isthmus (Fig. 1), adjacent to the flanks of Te Apunga-o-Tainui or McLennan Hills, formerly a volcanic cone, now quarried away. A long low ridge 10 m high, beside the southern motorway, N42/941 has surface evidence of terraces, storage pits and shell midden.

The decision to excavate this particular site was based on several factors. Firstly, the area is known to have been important traditionally with the portages between the Manukau Harbour and the Tamaki River in the vicinity. The portage to the south of Te Apunga-o-Tainui was the traditional crossing place of the Tainui canoe. Te Apunga-o-Tainui, formerly an impressive archaeological site, has been almost completely quarried away with no archaeological and little traditional information available. Hamlins Hill (N42/137) and Otahuhu (Mt Richmond) are nearby. Secondly, the area is within the volcanic zone with erupted material from McLennan Hills and Otahuhu distributed over the area, contrasting with Hamlins Hill which is within the zone of exposed Pleistocene clays. A difference in utilisation of the two substrate might be expected. Thirdly, the ridge on which N42/941 is situated is 200 m long and is surrounded by low lying land, with a poorly drained area abutting the ridge at the southern end. The location of the ridge suggests a desirable living site in pre-historic times. Fourthly, the remainder of the site is zoned for industrial development which is due to begin in the near future.

The area to be directly affected by the pipeline had three apparently levelled areas with shell midden spilling off the uppermost level area (Fig. 2). Volcanic rock was visible through the grass on the slope. Immediately to the north-west of the fenceline separating this end of the site from the remainder were two large but shallow depressions. Other less definite depressions on the area to be excavated looked like possible pits.

Excavation of the southern part of N42/941 took place from 30 October to 16 December 1981. A total of 267 person days were

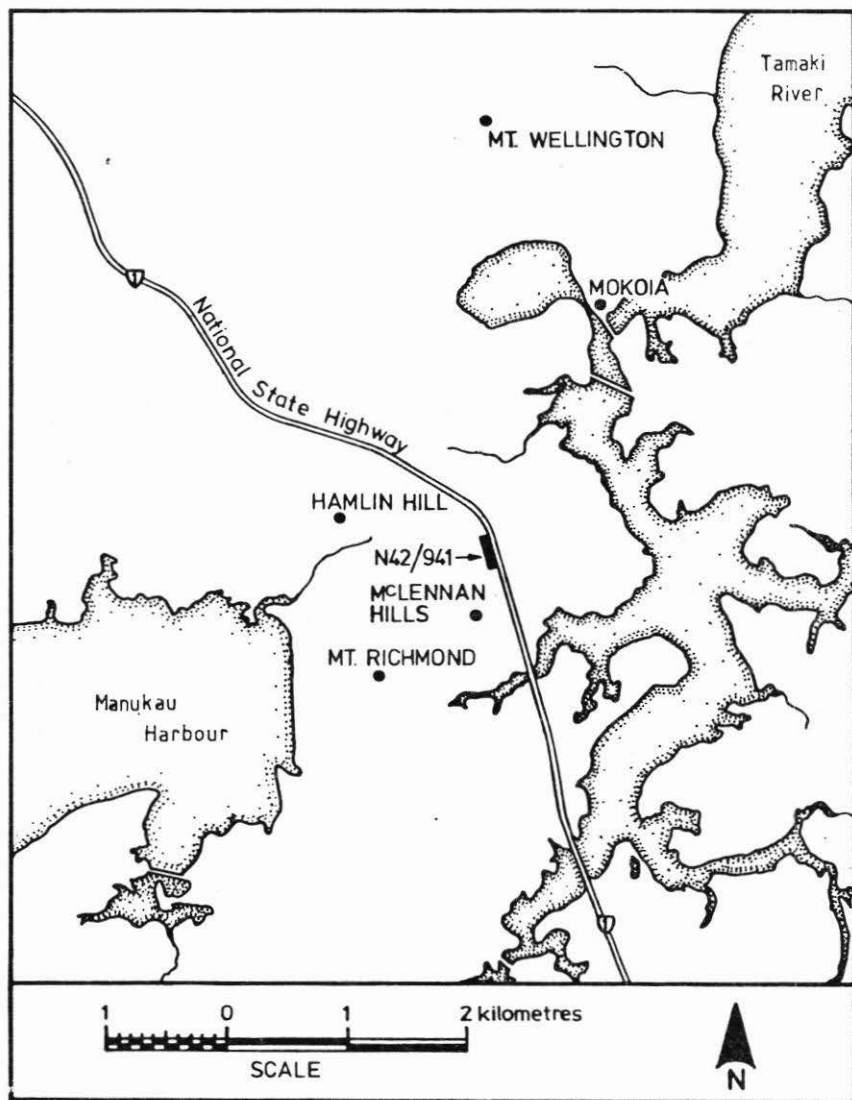


FIGURE 1. Location of the Westfield site (N42/941).

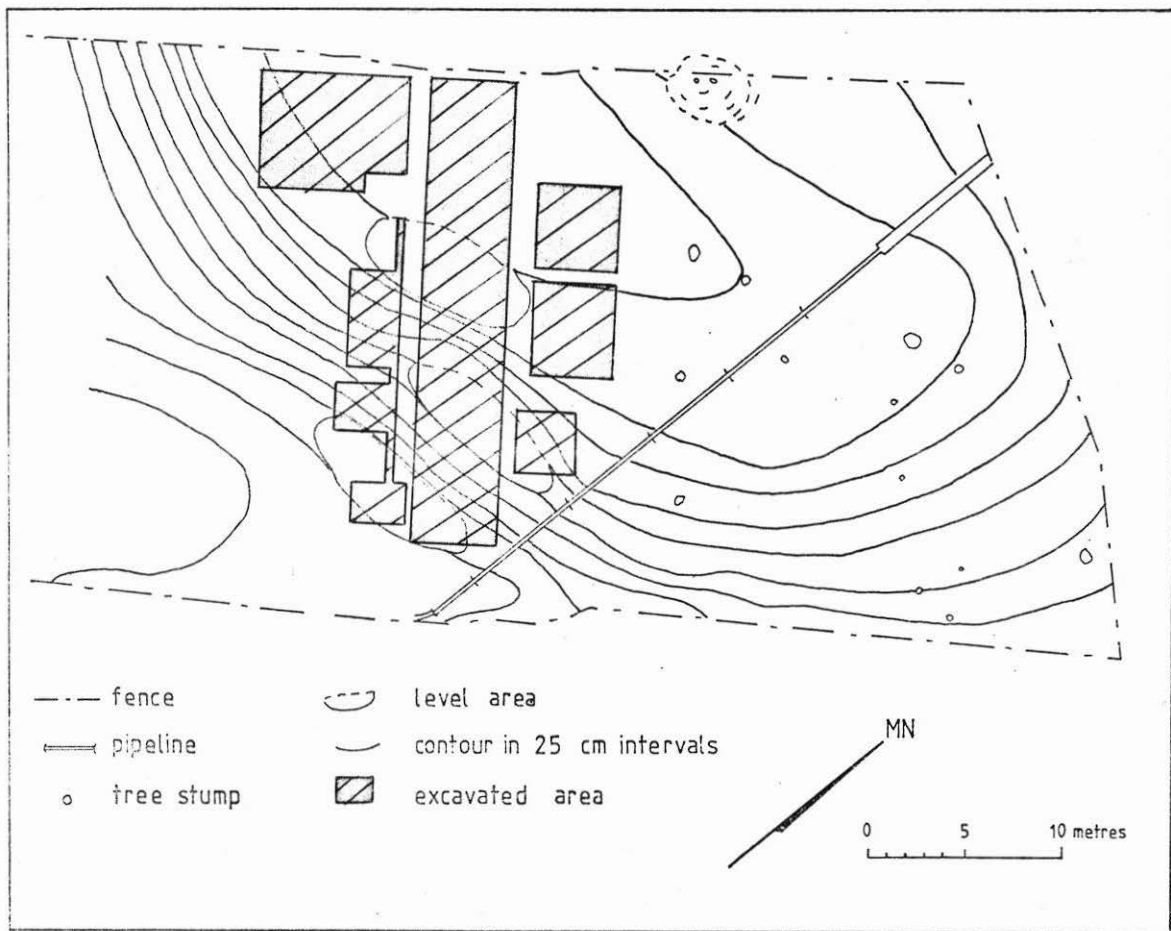


FIGURE 2. Plan of excavated area at Westfield.

spent on the project involving a core group of seven people with fifteen others present for shorter periods. A total of 244 m² was opened up (see Plates 1 and 2).

Media reporting of the excavation was mixed, with emphasis on the hardworking archaeologists and the impending deadline before the bulldozers moved in. Articles were printed in the Auckland Star (14 November 1981), N.Z. Herald (9 December 1981) and Eastern Courier (9 December 1981). A television crew visited the site and the excavation will feature in the programme Science Express.

Before excavation began on the site, Mr Bob Kerr, representing the Maori people of Mangere, visited the site and said a karakia.

Excavation was designed to intersect the three level areas on the southern slope to determine if they were terraces and if so, the nature of the evidence on them. In addition the ridge-top was opened up and the excavation expanded to follow interesting features as work progressed. A 50 cm wide trench was also dug through one of the depressions on the north-west side of the fence to determine if it was a storage pit.

The stratigraphy over the site was simple and consisted of five main layers.

Layer 1A - topsoil,

Layer 1B - similar to the topsoil but with the addition of charcoal flecks. The majority of the artefacts were found in this layer, although no structures were associated with this layer,

Layer 2 - shell midden, not present over the entire site,

Layer 3 - ash sub-soil,

Layer 4 - clay.

The cultural deposit was shallow with a maximum depth of 40-50 cm. A large cooking area with a stone backed fireplace was uncovered within the midden. Quantities of fish bone, bird bone and dog bone were also found in the midden. Estuarine shellfish species predominated.

Features excavated on the lower terrace included a storage pit complete with a sump and a stone lined drain, a number of post-holes on the ridge top indicating several superimposed structures on the same stratigraphic level and within an area that had been cleared of naturally occurring rocks, stone alignments through the midden area and concentrated stony areas located on top of natural rock outcrops. The features were dug into the clay surface on the ridge top and into ash sub-strate on the slope. The middle level area had no postholes and basaltic rock was located beneath

the cultural material. The upper level area did not appear to be a terrace but was formed by the accumulation of shell midden on the slope.

The depression on the north-west side of the fence was a storage pit, or rather two intercutting storage pits. This was not examined further, although shell and charcoal samples were taken from the floor of the later pit and sections were recorded.

A number of artefacts were recovered, including a shell pendant (Fig. 3) made of *Glycymeris laticostata* or dog cockle shell, two bone needles, two small chisels (one greenstone), five complete adzes, four broken adzes, a number of broken adze butts, two sandstone files, one large well used hammerstone and approximately 800 flakes of obsidian, chert, greywacke and basalt, most of which are small in size.

Evidence uncovered suggests a habitation site where a wide range of activities were carried out including stone and obsidian flaking, food preparation and food storage. Structural evidence is present along with features and alignments constructed from stone. The artefactual material is similar to that recovered from other Auckland sites, the adzes being predominantly of the ungripped quadrangular sectioned type commonly found in the Auckland region.

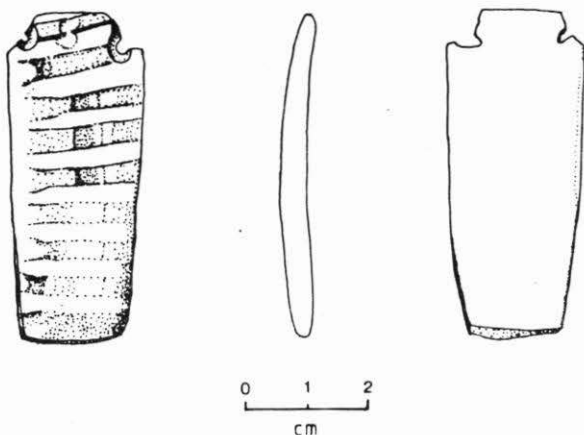


FIGURE 3. Shell pendant.

Acknowledgements

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WESTFIELD Plate 1. View south: trench through pit in foreground.



WESTFIELD Plate 2. View north with Hamlins Hill behind.