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INTERIM REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION OF THE FISHER ROAD SITES
(R11/887, 888 AND 899), MT WELLINGTON, SOUTH AUCKLAND

Russell Foster and Brenda Sewell
N.Z. Historic Places Trust
Auckland

A 20 ha block of land between Fisher Road and the Tamaki River is being developed for industrial use by Hawkins Development Ltd. A number of archaeological sites had been recorded on this block by Veart, Rickard and Bulmer (1985). A condition of the Authority to Modify granted to the developer by the Historic Places Trust was the excavation of selected areas before development work began.

Three sites were selected for excavation in order to further our knowledge of the settlement around Te Apunga O Tainui (McLennan Hills) (see Fig 1). Other areas of settlement in this region have been excavated by Furey (1982) and Coates (1986). Together these sites represent one of the last remnants of prehistoric habitation in the volcanic lava fields of the Auckland Isthmus.

The visible evidence of these three sites included a shell midden and a number of postholes, ovens and a pit in the road cutting at R11/887, shell midden eroding down the exposed sides of a lava flow at R11/888 and at R11/899 a terrace with two pits, a stone-lined hearth and shell midden eroding from the terrace edge.

Prior to excavation the area was visited by Ngati Paoa elders who approved the excavation and blessed the site.

During the excavations progress was reported in the Auckland Star and South Auckland Courier. A number of school parties visited the sites and a very successful 'open day' was held for the public. In addition a 'working day' was held for archaeologists and students who were not involved in the excavation.

The excavation (Fig.2)

The sites were excavated under N.Z. Historic Places Trust Permit 1985/20 by a team of six to ten people between 4 July and 20 October 1985. In order to fit in with the developer's plans it was agreed to excavate over the winter months. Consequently a considerable amount of time was lost through inclement weather.

Excavation of each site was done in two stages. Initially hand excavations were undertaken to establish the stratigraphy

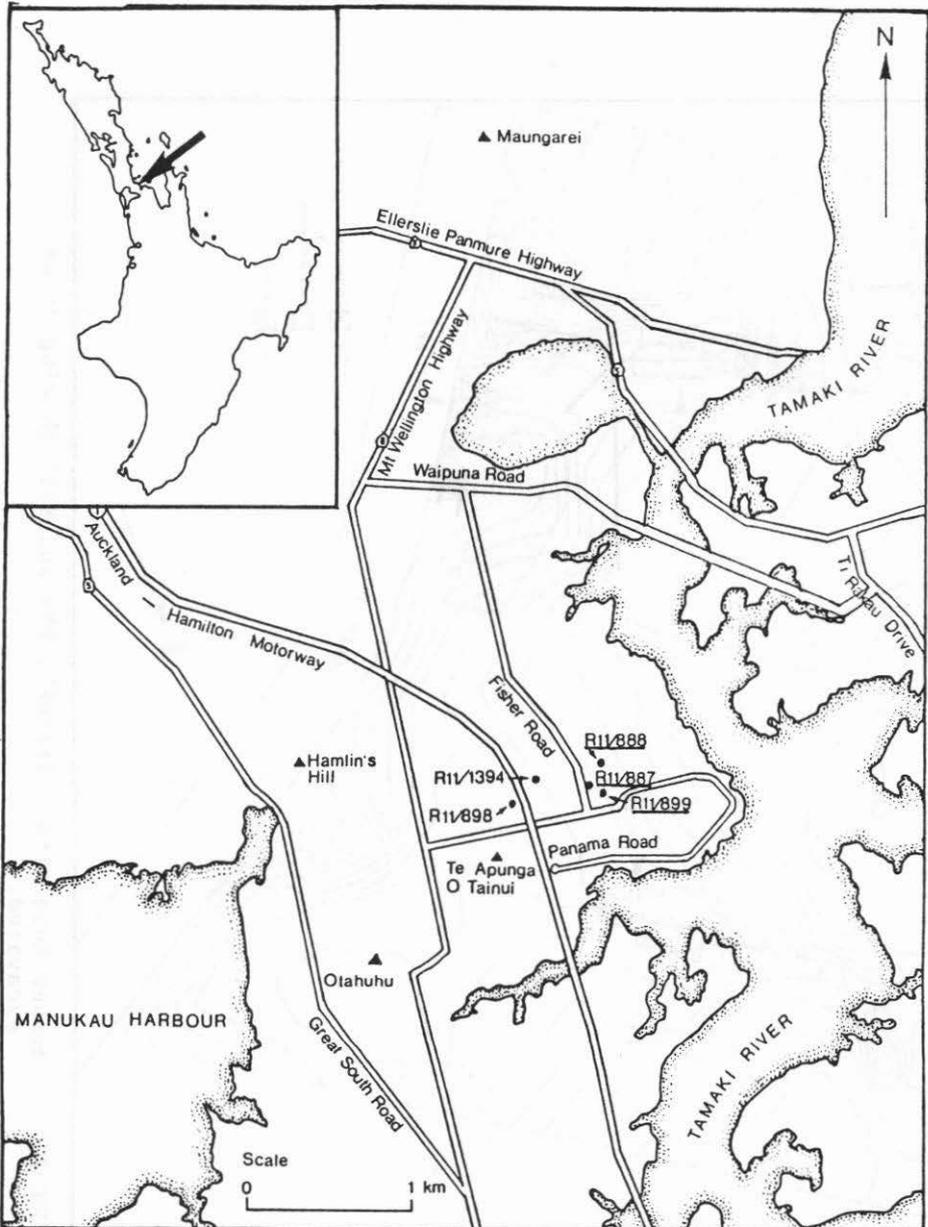


FIGURE 1. Location of sites.

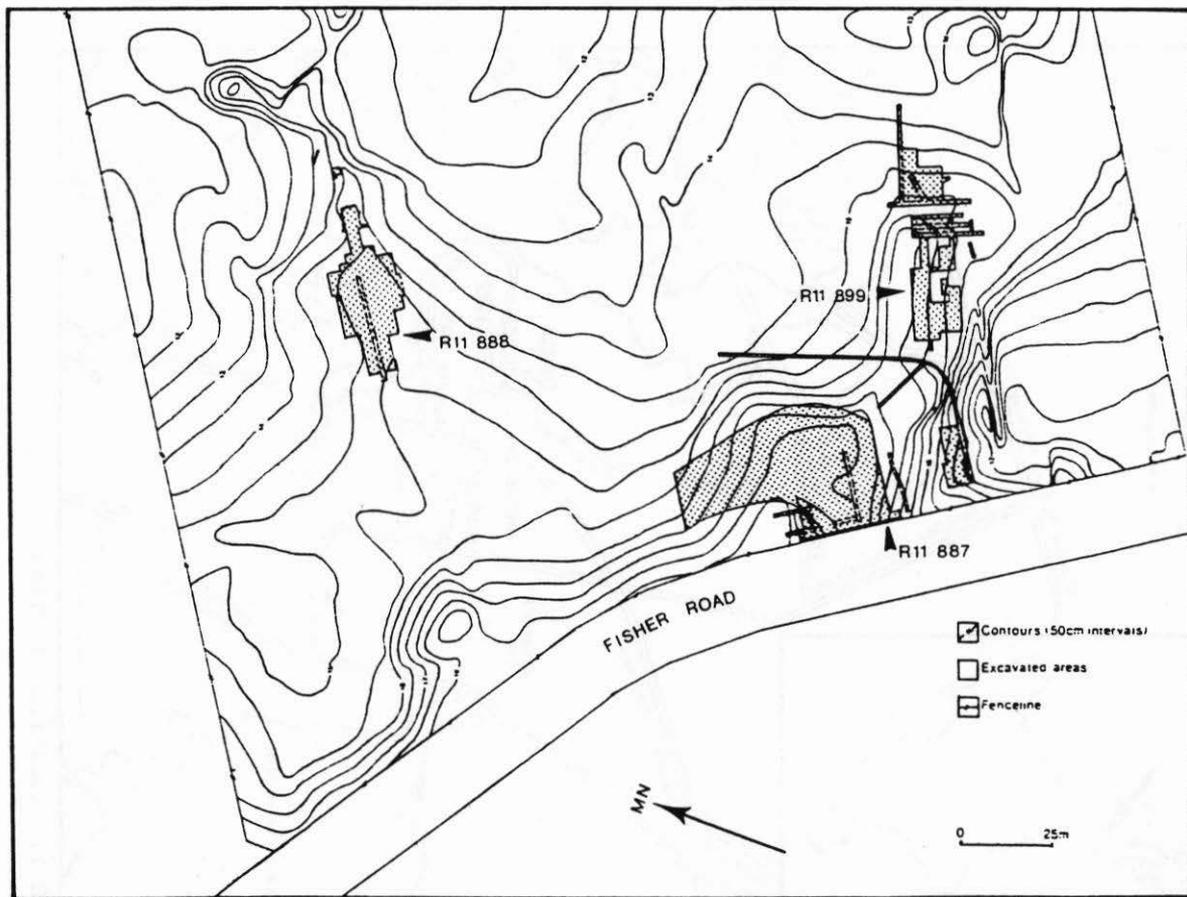


FIGURE 2. Fisher Road sites (R11/887, 888 and 899) showing areas excavated.

and range of features. This was followed by extensive machine trenching and scraping to look at the extent of the sites. In all a total of 3000 m² was excavated,

The general stratigraphy of the sites was similar overall and relatively simple with four main layers:

Layer 1A. Topsoil.

Layer 1B. Similar to the topsoil but with the addition of shell midden and other cultural material.

Layer 2. Subsoil of a yellow/brown weathered volcanic ash.

Layer 3. Basal layer. This was layered tuff at sites 887 and 899 and basaltic lava flow at 888.

Excavation of R11/887 revealed two discrete cooking areas, containing a number of ovens and firescoops. Close by were five very shallow pits with floor drains in four of these and the fifth containing a sump but no drains. Another portion of this site contained over 100 postholes although their configuration did not suggest the outline of any buildings. The majority of the obsidian flakes found were recovered from this part of the site.

At R11/888 excavation showed the presence of an extensive laid shell living surface. There was no evidence of any building associated with this. In addition, a little way from the shell floor, the outlines of two large and one small ground-level structures were excavated. These structures were indicated by lines of central postholes and peripheral drains.

Excavation and trenching of R11/899 produced 13 large deep pits and three small pits. Two of the large pits were totally emptied. One contained a double row of postholes, a step, a corner buttress and a single circular floor pit. The second was without step or buttress but contained six inter-cutting floor pits (Fig.3). A pit of similar construction was excavated at N38/25, Motutapu Island by Sullivan (1972). Other features excavated included ovens, firescoops and hearths, the remains of at least three superimposed houses, indicated by slots and postholes, and a single large house of similar construction with an internal firepit and a porch (Fig.4). Two stone-lined hearths were also excavated. The presence of such hearths is often regarded as indicative of a house site, however there was no good evidence for either of these hearths to have been within houses.

The evidence encountered at these sites suggests that they represent habitation units, including evidence of houses, cooking, food storage and stone working. The radiocarbon dates for these sites (see Foster, this volume) indicate that they are contemporary, both with each other and with the other sites



Figure 3. R11/899: large storage pit with intercutting floor pits.

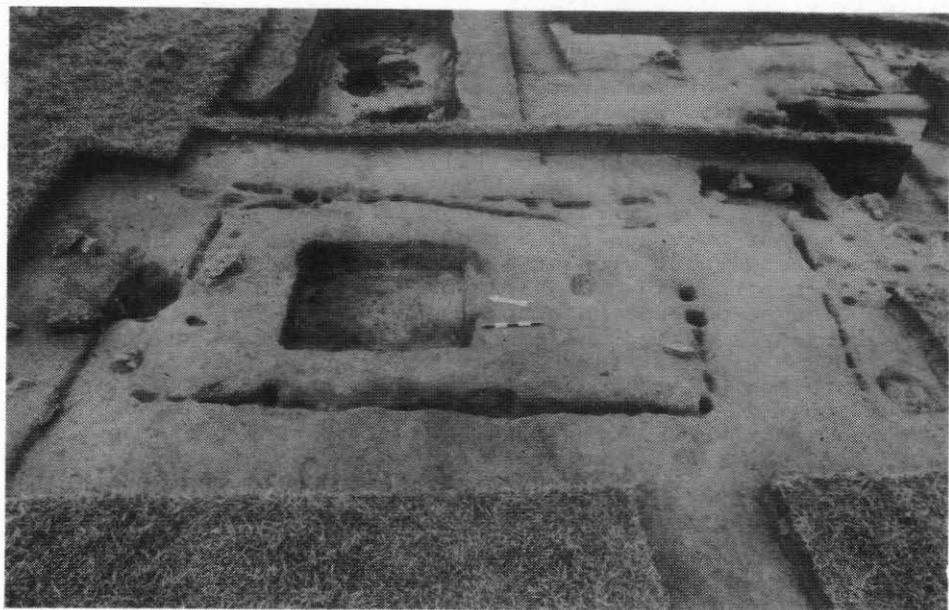


Figure 4. R11/899: slab and post house with porch and central firepit.

excavated in the Te Apunga O Tainui lava field (R11/1394:Coates 1986; and R11/898:Furey 1982).

Acknowledgements

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