



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

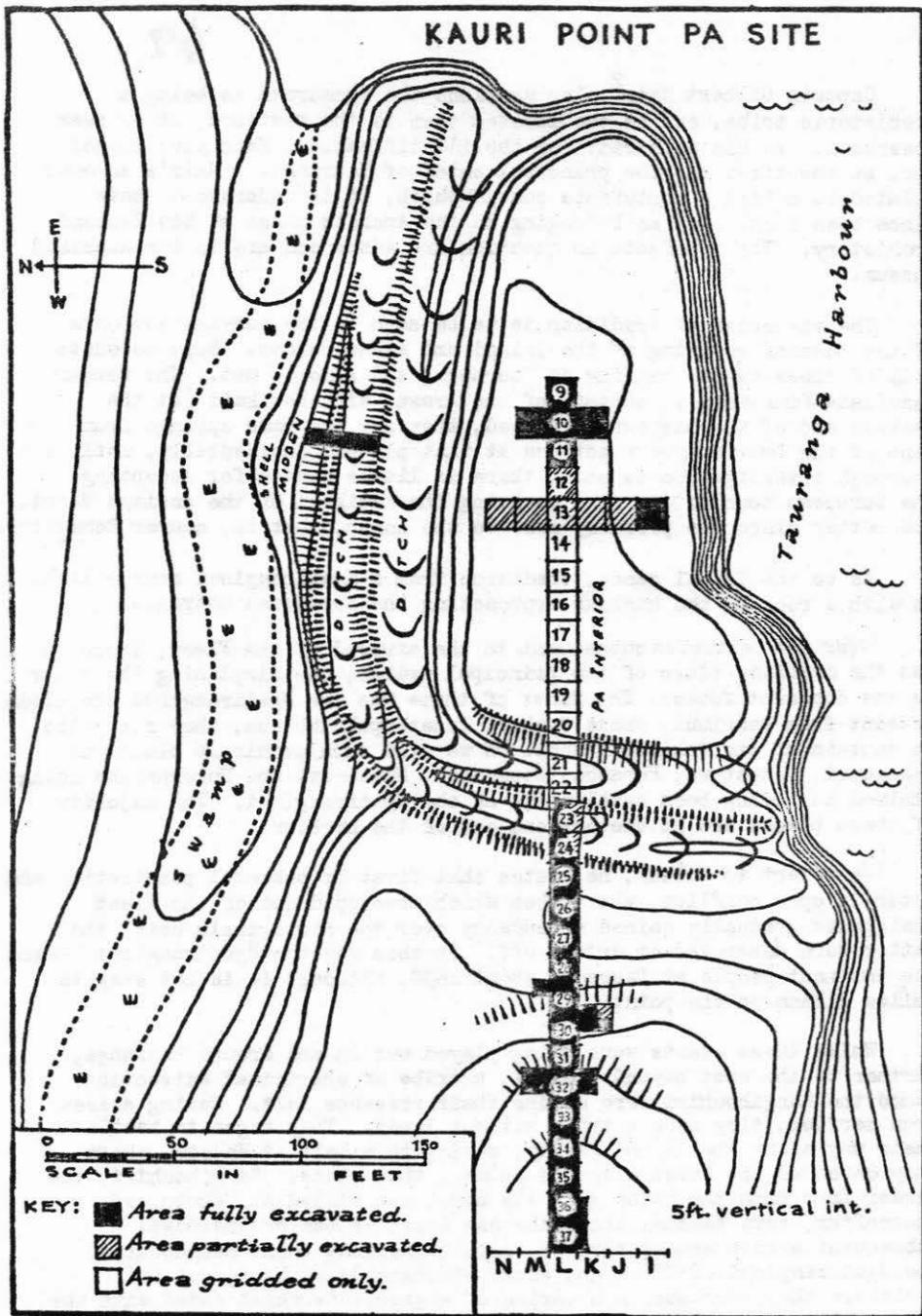
**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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## KAURI POINT PA SITE



This, then, was the position of the tribes at the time of the first authenticated visit by Europeans to Tauranga. That occurred late in June 1826, when the Church Missionary Society's schooner Herald came down from the Bay of Islands in search of foodstuffs.]

References:

1. J.A.Wilson, The Story of Te Waharoa; 1906
2. Transactions New Zealand Institute, XXIV:240.
3. L.W.Melvin, Journal No. 4 Tauranga Hist.Society.

(3) The Excavations

by J. Golsen

The site is small but impressive. It stands on an old sand dune covered by volcanic ash : there are wave cut cliffs above the Tauranga Harbour east and south, a steep slope down to a small swampy creek to the north and westwards a gentle swale between the pa and the next dune. Round the western and northern slopes sweep two well preserved ditches excavated to about the same level. The outer ditch is fronted by a small bank and backed by a large one : its outer scarp where best preserved measures on the surface 4 ft., its inner one 7 ft. The inner ditch is much more impressive with an outer scarp of 7 ft. and an inner one of 11 ft. There are traces of a bank above the inner scarp along the western edge of the pa. The interior area is a triangle with apex to the east, 40 yards across the base and with a length of 100 yards. This area is flattened but apart from one platform at a lower level midway along the southern side there are no distinguishable earthworks. On the northern side of the pa, from the outer ditch down to the creek, large shell middens swell the natural contour of the hill.

To the west the next dune is higher but smaller in extent. The northern and eastern slopes of this hill have been terraced. No features are visible on the terraces or on the hilltop, but midden material outcrops on the slope falling northward to the creek.

Enquiries have failed to discover the Maori name for the site and even to confirm Ngaiterangi possession of it except in the most general way. These considerations have assumed some importance in the light of the excavated evidence.

Surprisingly the story of Maori utilisation of the site has been most clearly told by investigations outside the pa, on the terraced hill and in the intervening saddle. Originally these had been intended as secondary to excavations within the pa itself, where we hoped with the time and labour available to clear the entire site. So complex was the history of habitation here, however, that an area of only 600 sq. ft. was fully excavated. Three times this area was cleared outside the pa in the form of a long trench running eastwards from the top of the terraced hill, across the terraces and the saddle, and through the outer bank and ditch into the large bank between the two ditches.

### The Long Trench

Evidence for three periods of constructional activity was recovered in this trench.

#### Period 1

Representative of the first period are two very small excavations made into the subsoil in the swale between the two dunes before any of the 3 ft. of overburden now present in this part of the site had accumulated (Squares L25 to L29). Traces of a third structure are to be seen cut through by the side of a sunken building of period 2 in the site's history, but its investigation has not yet been undertaken.

No artefacts have been recovered definitely belonging to period 1.

#### Period 2

In terms of construction period 2 is characterised by the digging of postholes, the making of ovens and the sinking of pits on the surface of the mixed gritty and sandy formation by which the excavations of period 1 were sealed.

Three pits (Squares L22 and L23), one cutting across the infilled remains of an earlier two, are surmounted by the bank between the two defensive ditches of the pa; one of the two earlier pits is partly cut away by the outer ditch; two other pits, one dug through the infilling of the other, are sealed below the outer bank. (Squares L24 and L25).

It is considered that to the same period belong the building of the visible terraces on the terraced hill and the construction on them of pits subsequently infilled and thereby obliterated from view. The evidence is provided by the lowest terrace and a large pit made on it (Squares L29 and L30). This pit is dug through the skirts of the gritty and sandy formation where it lenses out against the lower slope of the hill. The yellow layer which sits on top of the gritty and sandy formation at this point and constitutes the top element in

the wall of the pit is best interpreted as redeposited subsoil derived from the digging of the pit. It forms part of the material from which the lowest terrace is built up and cut from the slope of the hillside.

This argument for linking together the lowest hillside terrace and its pit and the structures some 20 yards away beneath the defensive banks because they are built on the same surface, is not unassailable. The case would have been proved could we have shown that the mixed gritty and sandy formation had been deliberately laid down to make a living and building surface, in the same way that the lowest terrace had been deliberately constructed. But Mr. Schofield's and Mr. Pullar's careful study, independently and jointly, of the formation in question, demonstrated, as their contributions later in this Newsletter make clear, that such an interpretation is not possible.

The arguments for assigning the lowest terrace to period 2 are, therefore, circumstantial.

1. there is on top of the mixed gritty and sandy formation no visible trace of an old soil or a weathered horizon cut through by the pits beneath the defences or sealed in by the building of the lowest terrace;
2. the structures in the two areas are comparable in type;
3. the subsequent history of the two areas is similar.

We assign to period 2, however, not only the lowest terraced hill, but the two higher terraces as well (Squares L31-32 and L33).

There is no direct evidence that all these terraces were built and used at the same time, e.g. in the form of continuous layers related to construction or habitation. But this conclusion has been drawn on the basis of the following evidence: -

1. though there is an absence in the excavated area of evidence for contemporaneity, there is an equal absence of evidence against: no terrace is demonstrably later than any other;
2. the disposition of the terraces on the ground suggests planning as a unit;
3. the structures investigated on the different terraces bear formal and functional resemblances to each other;
4. the layers of fill that sealed in these structures after their abandonment and partial infilling pass unbroken over the three terraces, suggesting that the terraces went out of use together.

To period 2 we attribute the earliest structures on top of the terraced hill (Squares L35 to L37), for reasons similar to 1-3 above.

The constructions of period 2 are intensely interesting. Twelve have been completely excavated, 4 on top of the hill, 2 on the top terrace, 3 on the middle terrace, 1 on the bottom terrace and 2 at the base of the hill. Two very encouraging features are: firstly, the plans are clear because 10 of them had undergone no structural alterations during use nor subsequent disturbance; secondly, the 12 examples comprise a variety of types some of them subserving different functions. Some evidence has been forthcoming, and more could be obtained by extension of excavation along the individual terraces, for the different structures which together made up the domestic unit at the site. Information of this type is needed for any assessment of the character of the settlement and the size of its population.

The excavated structures may be described under the following heads:

(1) Rectangular structures with Hearths A-E

Five of the structures were provided with one or more scooped hearths and three of them (A-C) are certainly dwelling houses.

Two of these, one on top of the hill (A) (12 ft. x 6 ft.), the other on the lowest terrace (B) (16 ft. x 7 ft.), are basically identical structures, though the latter is sunk twice as deeply into the ground (4 ft. as against a maximum of 2 ft.). The identity rests in their size and their postholes, two rows of four. House B is provided with a buttress in the centre of each short side, presumably to act as a step because of its depth.

House C, on the middle terrace, 12 ft. x 5 ft. has 3 hearths, presumably used at different times. Its main difference from houses A and B lies, however, in its postholes. There is a central row of holes and some rather irregularly disposed holes against the uphill wall of the pit.

Structure D, 10ft. x 5½ ft., situated on the top terrace and aligned across it, is unique in its possession of three slots running from wall to wall across the floor parallel to the short sides of the pit. These are regularly placed, but the central one is much narrower and shallower than the others. In addition this slot was seen to cut across the filling of one of the postholes in the centre of the pit. This suggests that the slots may have belonged to a second phase in the utilisation of the pit. The number and alignment of the postholes in the only row of postholes in the pit gives support to the suggestion of a period of structural alteration or repair. There is a small hearth, but whether the

structure thereby qualifies as a housepit is uncertain. Similarly the function of the slots remains obscure.

Structure E lies at the base of the hill. It is small, 7 ft. x 4 ft., and has three postholes arranged in a triangle on its floor. A couplet of postholes outside each end of the pit may be structurally connected. There is a hearth against one wall and much charcoal was embedded in the floor. Its smallness suggests that it cannot be a dwelling pit.

### (2) Rectangular Structures without Hearths F-I

Four of these were excavated, three of them in close association with dwelling pit A, the fourth on the middle terrace near dwelling pit C.

Pit G is cut across the remains of pit F, which it therefore postdates. The two are essentially similar structures, however, - bin type pits roughly 5ft. x 3 ft. They seem to be connected with house A - there is even the suggestion of an access between - and may be interpreted as food stores for the family group in the dwelling house.

Pit H, 7 ft. x 6 ft., is a squarish structure, aligned with house A. It is certainly not a dwelling house, having no hearth or trampled floor. It has a central row of three posts and must form a unit with the dwelling house.

This conclusion is supported by the juxtaposition on the middle terrace of house C and pit I, for the latter is identical with pit H, though it is somewhat deeper. It measures 6 ft. x 5 ft.

### (3) Non-Rectangular Structures J-L

Three of these were excavated. Structure J is a small bell-shaped pit, mouth narrower than base, side by side with structure E at the bottom of the hill. In the bottom of the pit there are two rectangular slot like depressions. Structure J may be a small storage pit. Structure K is a shallow basin-like depression, 4 ft. x 2 ft., on the slope above pit D on the top terrace. Outside it there are two very deep postholes, one at each end.

The function of this structure is obscure.

Structure L is a basin-shaped depression dug into the scarp of the middle terrace and cutting the uphill wall of structure I. It has a posthole in its floor. It is possible that structure L served as an entrance to the deep pit I.

(4) Patterning

- (a) the association of two structures with hearths and interpreted as housepits (A and C) with identical structures without hearths (H and I);
- (b) the association of housepit A with two identical structures of different date (F and G) interpreted as larders.

In addition to these fully excavated structures a number of others belonging to the same phase were partially cleared:

- (a) on top of the hill part of a rectangular pit with postholes cut across by a similar pit perhaps of the same phase, the remains being disturbed by two later diggings;
- (b) below the bottom terrace what appears to be a rectangular pit dug totally into built-up material, missed completely during excavation but visible in section in the wall of the long trench;
- (c) beneath the outer bank of the pa two deep rectangular pits with postholes, one dug through the infilled remains of the other;
- (d) beneath the large bank between the two ditches of the pa three rectangular pits one certainly later than the other two, and these possibly contemporary. These earlier pits are dug through the same sandy layer which forms the living and building surface further west in the long trench. The more easterly of the two, provided with a drain along its west wall, is not only disturbed by the building of the later pit, but is partly destroyed by the digging of the outer ditch. At least two floor levels and two patterns of postholes are in evidence in this pit. The third pit on this site discloses a unique structural feature, closely placed postholes lining the earth walls of the pit.

Little cultural material was discovered in connection with the structure of phase 2 and this largely in the form of flakes of obsidian, hand stones, and the like in the filling of the pits. Whether these objects belong to phase 2 or later depends obviously on when and how the pits came to be infilled.

Period 3

The visible ditch and bank defences belong to this phase in the history of the site. Of these the middle and outer banks and the outer ditch have been investigated. The former seal in, the latter cuts through structures of period 2.

The outer ditch is flat bottomed, 2ft. wide at the base, 12 ft. at the level of the outer bank. The outer scarp is 6 ft. high, the inner 9 ft. The ditch is dug  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ft. into natural. There is some evidence that the inner bank was originally 3 ft. high and was subsequently heightened to its present  $7\frac{1}{2}$  ft. This evidence consists of an apparent stakehole sunk from the 3 ft. level. No postholes were found on top of the enlarged bank over the 10 ft. stretch which was searched for them. Similarly no postholes were found over a similar distance on the outer bank.

Beyond the outer bank and marginally overlying it the final occupation is characterised by an 8 in. thick shell midden tailing out westward toward the base of the terraced hill. This is interpreted as representing habitation following immediately on the construction of the defences. Circumstantially the final occupation of the hillside terraces and the hill top, taking place on top of the filled up pits of period 2, is considered to be contemporary. This occupation is characterised by hangi and the digging of small irregular pits, some of which were found to contain human remains.

If these correlations can be sustained, period 3 becomes reasonably well provided with artefacts - a typical ungripped adze of Duff Type 2B from a late posthole at the top of the hill, sinkers from the lowest terrace and five unbarbed onepiece fishhooks (2 of bone, 3 of shell) right on top of the tail of the outer bank.

The evidence suggests that period 3 in the form of the construction of the defences and the habitation which followed on began when the structures of period 2 had largely infilled. This observation has important implications, as will be seen later.

#### The North Flank of the Pa

The evidence of the history of the site obtained in the long trench was supported and extended by investigations on the northern flank of the pa above the creek.

Here there were signs of extensive shell middens outside and below the outer ditch, an unimpressive earthwork on the surface at this point. These offered the opportunity of investigating aspects of the prehistoric economy at the site. A 5 ft. wide trench was therefore put down through these middens, extending across the outer ditch and into the middle bank.

The middens though disappointingly poor in anything but shell proved to be of impressive depth (6 ft.) - they consist of two elements: an earlier one composed almost exclusively of cockle (Chione stuehburyi), and a later one composed equally exclusively of pipi (Amphidesma australe).

Most surprising of all, however, they date before the construction of the pa, for the outer ditch is in part excavated through them. They belong therefore to periods 1 and/or 2 and it is logical to think of them as linked with the intensive habitation represented by the pit complexes of period 2.

There is a further circumstance connected with the excavations here. It appears, though the supposition badly needs testing by further work, that at this point the middle bank overlies and the outer ditch cuts through an earlier levelled terrace running laterally along the hillside. Since the shell midden just overlaps this level terrace, the latter is seen to be quite definitely a feature of the early occupation of the site. May it not be that the hill which in period 3 was a ring ditched pa had previously been terraced for settlement like its neighbour to the west?

### The Interior of the Pa

At this point in the discussion we can profitably turn to a description of investigations inside the pa where the major effort had initially been intended.

It must be stated at the outset that discoveries here cannot at present be fitted into the framework of periods satisfactorily established in the other areas of excavation. However, a satisfactory sequence of structures was achieved at one point, even though, within the time available, this could not be followed through to its beginnings.

### Period A

The sequence as established starts with a large rectangular (no.2) pit, with a hearth and presumably therefore a dwelling. This pit, orientated east and west, is dug through the filled in remains of an earlier pit (no.1) and presumably the complexity of postholes in the bottom of pit 2 is due in part to the presence of abandoned postholes from the earlier structure. The multiplicity of holes suggests, however, that the superstructure of pit 2 underwent repair and renovation during which the "floor" of tramped clay built up to a depth of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ins.

Pit 2 has some features worthy of note. Posts were recessed into the earth walls of the pit and access to the pit gained by a regular step and doorway on the southern side. At its eastern end there are two small bin-like pits, one cut across the filled in remnants of the other, which appear to be associated with the living pit, perhaps as larders. This arrangement is comparable with dwelling pit A on top of the terraced hill and may indicate that pit 2 belongs to period 2 in the history of the site.

After the abandonment of pit 2 and its infilling, a third pit, pit 3, was dug across the north eastern quarter of the earlier structure. Though pit 3 had itself been disturbed by subsequent activities, with the result

that no consistent posthole pattern or trace of hearth was recovered, the tramped "clay" floor covering the bottom of the structure suggests its use as a dwelling house. With this house may be connected a similarly aligned rectangular pit without hearth situated immediately to the east.

Pit 3 was succeeded by pit 4A, a bin shaped structure, dug entirely through the fill of previous pits and resting on the same floor level as pit 2. Pit 4A is thought to be associated with pit 4B, a deep and rather narrow rectangular pit, which runs outside the area of the excavations southwards. Pit 4B was cut through the fill and floor of pit 2 and in addition to its own postholes carried the remnants of pit 2 postholes in its floor.

The infilling of pit 4B marks the end of a distinct stage in the structural history of this part of the site and this has been nominated period A. A rather uneven surface, variegatedly yellow in colour, composed of the fill of all previous pits and here and there the remnants of the subsoil into which they were dug, constitutes the level into which the features of the next structural period, period B, were dug. This yellow surface was discovered over a wider area than that of the structural sequence pits 1 - 4A/B which has been described above.

- a. some parts of this area could not be investigated beneath the yellow horizon because time was limited in view of the complexities of excavation;
- b. in other parts where investigations were made beneath it a variety of structures were found, all belonging to period A but whose detailed relationships to each other and to the sequence of pits 1-4B could not be fully elucidated, and which in certain instances came out into unexcavated ground.

The following types are represented amongst these structures:

- a. a rectangular pit with buttress, not fully excavated.

Though no hearth was found in the excavated portion, a tramped "floor" suggests it may have been a dwelling house;

- b. two rectangular pits with corner hearths.

The earlier is a mere remnant with a single dimension of 3½ft. recoverable; the later pit which destroyed it runs off east and south into unexcavated territory. The combination of small size and hearth is reminiscent of pit E at the base of the terraced hill;

- c. one small rectangular pit not fully excavated, 5ft. wide with an irregular slot-like feature in the floor, vaguely comparable to the slotted pit D of the terraced hill;

d. two essentially similar oval pits, the one cutting across the other, and both belling underground to a larger base than surface area. These pits are identical with one apparently belonging to a late phase of period 2 on top of the terraced hill;

e. two small oval depressions, perhaps vaguely comparable with pit K of the terraced hill.

### Period B

The following features are characteristic of the later period in this area of the investigations.

(1) a mass of postholes of all sizes scattered with no discernible pattern over the yellow surface of filled-in pits;

(2) a round bell-shaped pit nearly 3ft. deep, with a rectangular slot in its base and approached by a narrow sloping entrance from the north. The slotted base is reminiscent of period 2 pit J at the foot of the terraced hill. This pit cuts through the floors of the period A pits 2 and 3 described above, and is pit 5 in the structural sequence at this spot. It is the only one of the excavated pits that betrays itself at the surface; the round hollow that it forms at the surface and other identical hollows on unexcavated ground in the vicinity were originally thought to be tree dimples;

(3) a small hollow containing human bones;

(4) in the western part of the excavated area midden material consisting of fragmentary shell and cooking stones. One of the cooking stones proved to be a broken hogbacked adze (Duff Type 4A).

The features listed above are not strictly contemporary manifestations: the very complexity of the posthole scatter (1 above) suggests rebuilding on the same spot, while in stratigraphic terms the shell midden overlies the postholes. It is possible that this last is in part a fortuitous feature, due to the dispersal of previously concentrated middens by early European farming.

There are a number of obvious parallels between periods A and B at this part of the site and periods 2 and 3 established elsewhere. In both areas the earlier period is that of greatest structural activity. This activity is of a comparable nature and similarities extend to details of the structures involved.

Likewise the later periods in the two areas are comparable manifestations, with less and different structural evidence, associated middens and small pits with human bone.

This suggests we might provisionally equate period A with period 2 (and

1?), period B with period 3. This would assign the bulk of the occupation within the area of the pa to a period before the building of the visible defences and associate with the defensive phase only the late cooking and posthole digging activity. On this interpretation the pa would not appear to be a site of full or permanent settlement.

This is a large conclusion to draw, however, from the available evidence. Excavations within the pa have been very limited in extent and no certainty can at present be entertained as to what constitutes the pre- and post-defensive phases there. A major aim of future excavation must be to investigate the nature of the habitation that went on at the site after the ditch and bank were built.

#### (4) Technical Contributions

The two contributions which follow stem from questions asked of and observations made by Mr. Schofield, as geologist, and Mr. Pullar as pedologist, at the Kauri Point site. In these contributions they have been joined by Mr. Melvin who, as a local historian, has contributed relevant information about the probable history of the site after the Vesey Stewart's Ulster settlement of the Katikati area (including Kauri Point) in the '70's of last century. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to all three for the time they gave to the work at Kauri Point itself and the trouble they have gone to since to elucidate its problems here.

To illustrate the nature and importance of geological and pedological considerations in the interpretation of the formations which go to make up an archaeological site, we have selected for particularly detailed discussion the sequence in square L26, in the dip between the two hills. A diagrammatic section of the south wall of this square is given below.

#### DIAGRAMMATIC CROSS SECTION OF SQUARE L26

