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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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MANUKAU CAVES AND ROCK SHELTERS

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A common archaeological feature of Manukau pa sites is the natural cave and rock shelter used for occupation or storage purposes. Usually, evidence of occupation is in the form of shell middens and low interior stone walls and rock alignments (Plan A-C) separating dwelling areas from sections previously used for burial: bones either being concealed under loose rock, in volcanic soil, behind interior outcrops or in crevasses (Taylor, 1966). On account of general close proximity to occupation areas on pa sites, and the presence of artefacts, it is doubtful whether Manukau cave and shelter dwellings were merely used by fishermen, hunters and travellers as in isolated coastal and forestry regions (Best, 1916). Probably they were used rather by slaves, the sick, the outcasts (old people responsible for the burial of the dead and involved in hahunga ceremonies), or by women - as whare kohanga. No less frequently, they would also have been used during sieges - many are within the perimeter of pa defences.

Occasionally, entrances to Manukau caves and rock shelters used for living and storage purposes show evidence of having been fenced (Plan B); post-holes having been observed, for example, at the entrance of a shelter near Mangere Mt (NZMS.1, Auckland, 278-495: N.42).

In a number of Manukau caves and rock shelters, occupation areas have compacted volcanic soil overlaying the natural rock flooring; among these are the Waterlea caves (Plan A) branching from the interior base of a volcanic crater (NZMS.1, Auckland, 301-489: N.42), and an Onehunga cave (NZMS.1, Auckland, 332-517: N.42), which also features (Plan C) rock alignments and burials.

Both large and small dwelling caves with occasionally their fireplaces have been recorded in the Manukau area; the smaller ones being the most common - some averaging only 4 to 5 ft from floor to roof, from 8 to 10 ft from front to back wall.

Small artificial caves, in papa, have been observed on the Manukau which were possibly used for storage: fishing nets, for example. However, nothing has been recorded to compare with the artificial caves of the Rotorua area (Plan C), which were used as food stores and dwellings (Cowan).

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