



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

MAORI PA WITHOUT VISIBLE EARTHWORK DEFENCES

by J. T. Diamond

To date, pa sites showing defence works such as ditches, banks and scarps are well documented and every Newsletter adds more to this formidable list. Within my research area - the Waitakere Ranges to the west of Auckland city - I have found a type of pa that, whilst built on high headlands and ridges, does not appear to have any of the above defences.¹

As most of the coastal area had been grassed for farming about 70 years ago, I originally assumed that any ditches or banks had been destroyed in the course of cultivation or by grazing stock. However, as I surveyed the sites and inspected them more thoroughly I found that there was no surface evidence of any type of defence works to be found on them except for the natural defences such as cliffs or steep slopes. I realise however, that excavation could reveal, as it has done at Kauri Point, Katikati, that under an apparently undisturbed area there are in fact ditches, banks and pits. I enquired from several old residents whether they remembered any visible defences across the ridges or in any other strategic positions on pa sites I enumerated, but in all cases I received negative answers. Therefore only by excavating will proof be obtained regarding the lack or otherwise of defence works.

Where I have surveyed pa sites on the Waitakere coast, I have found that they conform to this pattern. The top of the ridge or headland is flattened and varies in width from 9 feet to 12 feet. There are usually two or three small pits dug into this flat area but seldom any terraces. Then dug in along the sheltered side of the ridge or on the gentler slope there is a terrace 6 feet to 12 feet below the flattened top and up to 100 feet long. In a few cases a step of a foot or two occurs but there is never a drastic change in the level of the terrace nor is it usual to find any pits dug into this terrace. This layout plus the almost complete lack of midden material is typical of pa sites 200 feet or more above sea level on ridges and headlands along the west coast of the Waitakere Ranges. With plenty of trees of various sizes available within a short distance of these pa, plus the fact that the area was isolated, the inhabitants may have considered pallisades a sufficient defence against the occasional war parties. Again with its many rock shelters, the ranges would provide excellent places of refuge should the enemy be too powerful. Therefore it is possible that this type of pa was developed to suit the conditions under which the local people lived.

In 1961 I found a similar type of pa site on the west coast of the Coromandel Peninsula at Darkie Stream.² Again there was a complete absence of visible earthworks for defence purposes, midden material was missing, pits were usually located above the terraces, not below, and

only three terraces had pits dug into them. Other features common to the Waitakere and Coromandel sites are as follows. Practically all terraces were dug back into a ridge and had three sides, pits were like trenches, the width being one third or less of the length; and heavy bush covers the hills behind the beach. Again, pa sites defended by ditches, banks and scarps, which are not found in the Waitakere Ranges south of Bethell's beach, are not found in the area surveyed on the Coromandel Peninsula, or, in fact, for many miles on either side of it.

The type of pa I have described is certainly not so distinctive or as interesting as the type commonly recorded. So many features one has come to look for in a typical pa site are lacking and therefore I would think that for this reason they are being overlooked. I was once guilty of doing just this, but since carrying out a survey of the Waitakere area and finding so many sites conforming to this pattern, I feel that more attention should be paid to them. Are they common throughout New Zealand? Are they an older type of pa from which the pa defended with earthworks has evolved? Are they a type constructed to suit local conditions or a certain tribe? These and many other questions arise from a study of pa sites constructed to this simple pattern, but unless many more are recorded no conclusive evidence can be deduced.

References.

1. Diamond, J.T. 1961 "Fortified and Settlement Sites, Waitakere Area". N.Z. Arch. Assn. Newsletter, vol. 4 no. 2, p.54-55.
2. Diamond, J.T. 1962 "Field Survey of Western Side of the Coromandel Peninsula near Port Jackson". N.Z. Arch. Assn. Newsletter, vol. 5, no. 1, p.38-41.

AN EARTHWORK IN FIJI

ANNE LEAHY

During a recent holiday to Fiji I visited an agricultural experimental station at Koronivia. This station is situated on the King's Road about ten miles from Suva and about two miles from Nausori, a town on Fiji's largest river, the Rewa.

The station farms a very irregularly shaped plateau which rises from an extensive area of swamp. The flat top is gradually being cleared of trees and scrub and in the course of clearing part of the plateau two unusual features, that appeared to be earth works, were discovered.