



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION MONOGRAPH 14:**

**Susan Bulmer, Garry Law and Douglas Sutton (eds), *A Lot of Spadework to be Done: Essays in Honour of Lady Aileen Fox***

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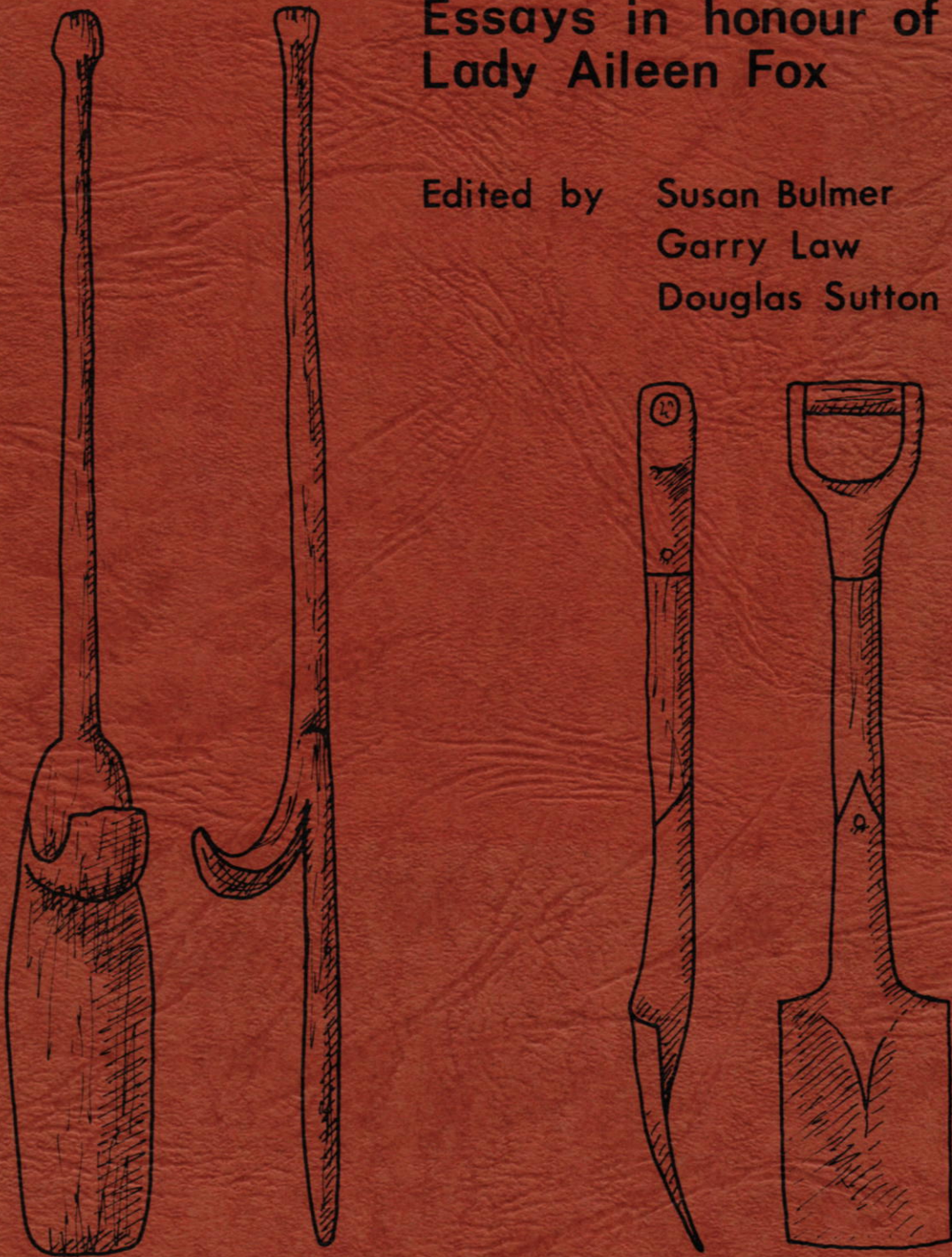
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# A LOT OF SPADEWORK TO BE DONE

Essays in honour of  
Lady Aileen Fox

Edited by Susan Bulmer  
Garry Law  
Douglas Sutton





# MOERANGI: A FORTIFICATION OF THE TAURANGA BUSH CAMPAIGN 1867



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The punishing battles of Gate Pa and Te Ranga in 1864 inevitably led to extensive confiscation of land from the Maori protagonists. In 1866, two years after the principal battles, the Pirirakau hapu and some visiting Ngati Porou opposed the surveying of the inland boundaries of the confiscated land. These boundaries passed through land which Pirirakau, a hapu of the Ngaiterangi, regarded as theirs, and which they occupied and cultivated. The European forces saw these crops, which must have been extensive, as a strategic food resource. The food would have been available for an "invasion" of Pai Marire adherents from the nearer parts of the Waikato, who were rumoured to be willing to assist Pirirakau in opposition to European settlement.

Accordingly in late 1866 and early 1867, colonial forces made two sweeps through these areas, destroying crops and maize and potatoes, and driving Pirirakau into the Kaimai and Mamaku hinterlands (Fig. 1). This policy was clearly different from that advocated, with the benefit of hindsight, by H.H. Greer in the months following the battles at Gate Pa and Te Ranga.

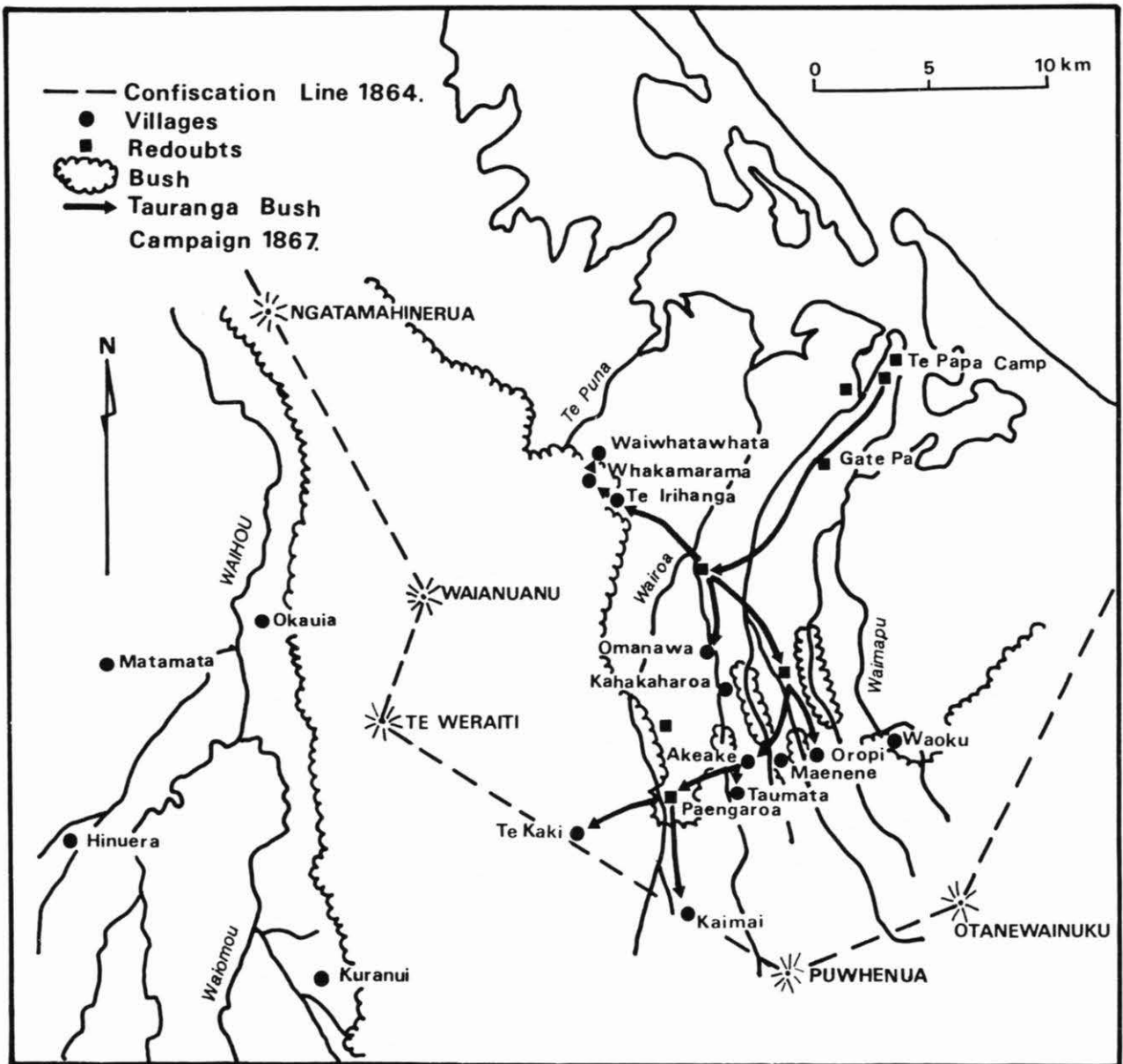


Fig.1 Movements of colonial forces during the Tauranga bush campaign, 1867 (after Stokes 1980).

At Tauranga, the rebels have retired into the ranges where the bush would enable them to elude any offensive movement on our part.... The advice to follow up success however plausible and popular, is therefore on such occasions out of place.

(Greer 1864)

By 1866 Imperial troops and marines had been replaced by colonial forces with military settlement in mind. They were helped against the pleas of Pirirakau, by some 200 Arawa recruited at Maketu by Major William Mair. This was the principal force involved in the Tauranga "bush campaigns" of 1866-67. (For accounts of this campaign, see Cowan 1956:152-160; Andersen and Pedersen 1956; Stokes 1980).

By February 1867 surveyors were able to move along the intended boundary, and a fortification had been constructed by William Mair and the Arawa on the survey line. This was on the site of the destroyed settlement of Paengaroa, which had been "a fine village" (Andersen and Pedersen 1956). It was one of several such villages on the edge of the large gullies which cut through country, otherwise of low relief, inland of Tauranga. Control of the edges of these gullies, many of them with recognised trails alongside, would have been an important element of strategy.

William Mair and the Arawa reached the site of Paengaroa late in the morning of 2 March 1867, where they "took up a position on the edge of the ravine". Their object was to control the movement of and force back Pai Marire forces in the settlement of Kaimai whose fires they could see at night some distance south. Early in March the Colonial force started to build a redoubt "and with only half a dozen spades completed two and a half sides by night - besides building huts" (Mair 1867). (There is some variation between sources

on the exact date of building. Mair's diary was apparently written some time after he had left the field, and may not be regarded as completely reliable.) About 6 March William Mair was withdrawn from the field for duties as a magistrate at Opotiki. Within a week the Arawa under H.T. Clarke must also have been pulled back, withdrawn to meet a threat to the Rotorua district where they arrived 20 March (Cowan 1956:161). The redoubt was therefore occupied for a short period of time by a large body of men (120 Arawa and some Europeans), and was built quickly. The redoubt may have remained functional, however, since Ensign Wm Hobson (-Coates?) was allocated land in the immediate vicinity in 1868 (S.O. plan 1319C). Officers seem to have been allocated land adjacent to redoubts in this area; William Mair, for example had an allotment adjacent to the Omanawa Redoubt (S.O. plan 440).

#### The Fortification

The fortification described in this paper was built between 27 February and 4 March 1867, and survives in good condition. It is an example of a gunfighter fortification built by Maori colonial forces. Similar examples are rare. The name "Moerangi" is that given to the site by elders of the Ngamanawa Incorporation (Marwick, pers. comm.). The description of the site below is based on surface survey only.

The fortification is rectangular in plan and measures about 40 x 30 m with the longer axis parallel to the scarp of a large deep gully (Fig. 2). Access under cover of scrub, to a supply of water would be an important reason for the location next to a gully. The south-east corner is indented in a further small rectangle. The reason for this is not clear. There may have been tents or some form of shelter here before the redoubt was started and these were left

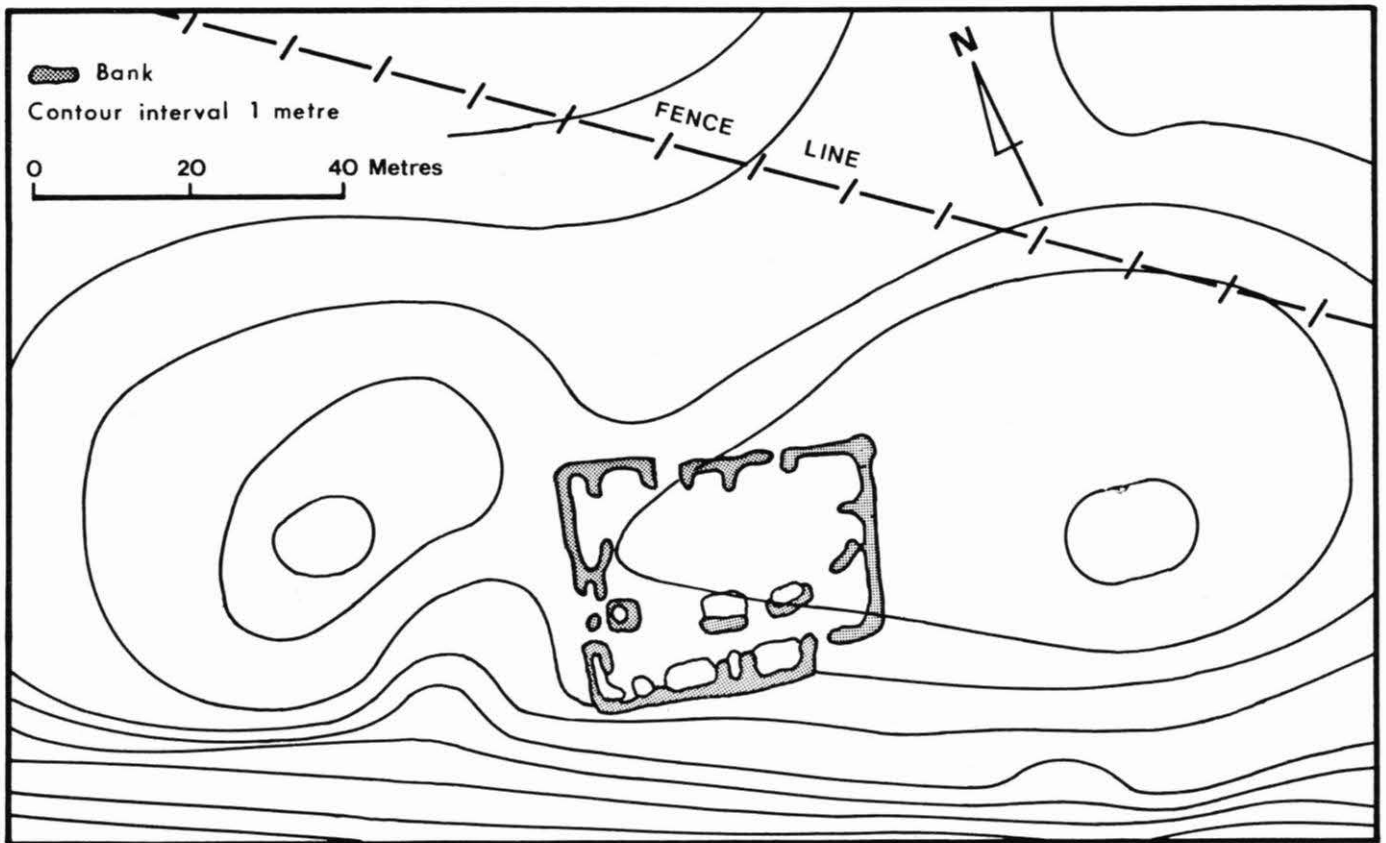


Fig.2 Topography of the immediate surroundings of the Moerangi fortification (based on plane table and alidade survey). Contours in metres.

standing. Alternatively, the bank may have been started from the south-east about 10 m from the scarp of the gully, and then it was decided to continue the wall for forming a terrace with spoil thrown down into the gully. The base of this terrace, between the south bank and the gully, is well below the apparent natural ground level of the site. The bank could readily have been formed by cutting a terrace close to the gully. Enfilading of a small section of ditch would also have been possible. The value of this is clear, but why it should be adopted on so limited a section of ditch is not clear.

The principal defences are a ditch or rifle trench and bank, with a rifle trench inside on the west, north and east sides. The rifle trench was visible as a crop mark in November 1981, but was not noticeable in earlier visits. No ditch is visible outside the western bank. Smaller banks at right angles to the main one and running into the redoubt would have protected the defenders against enfilading fire. This would have been a risk from the west and possibly also the east where there is rising ground overlooking the interior of the redoubt (Fig. 2). The ditch outside the bank is relatively narrow and may also have been a rifle trench rather than a principal barrier.

Entrances to the site occur on the north wall to the west; and on the south to the east, which would also serve as access to the gully for water or retreat.

An unusual feature is an internal bank with continuation of the rifle trench behind it to the south; this trench is about 7 m long and lies on the eastern side diagonal to the main orientation of the redoubt. This commands a flat area with no structures evident in the northern half of the enclosed area; it could have



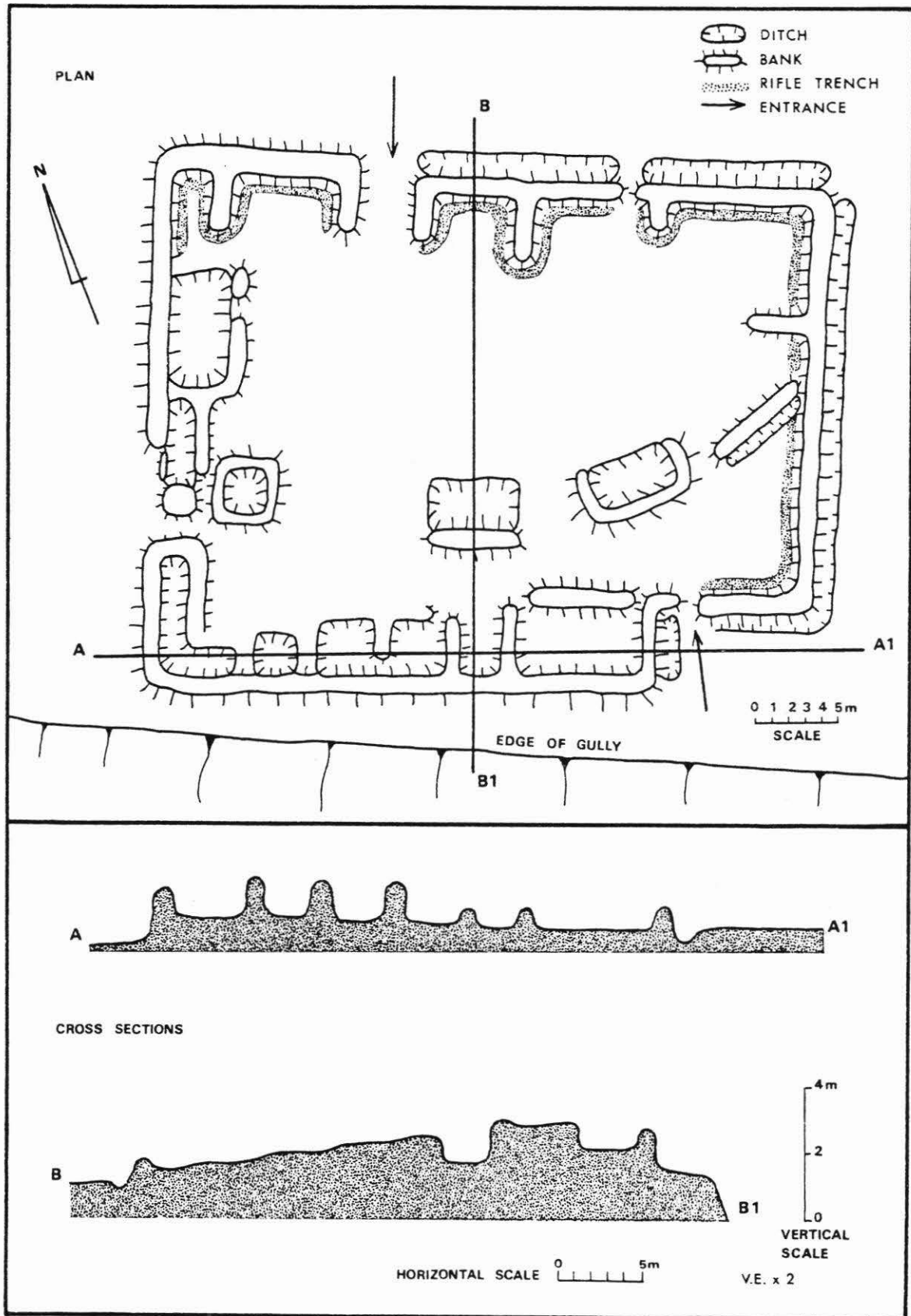


Fig. 3 Plan and sections of the Moerangi fortifications (plan from tape and compass survey; heights from plane table and alidade). Crop mark of the rifle trench inside bank is shown shaded.

been used to provide additional defence if the redoubt was entered from the front, or covering fire if a retreat was needed to the rear of the redoubt and into the gully. (The apparent rear exit is close by). From this position it would also have been possible to fire on attackers from the north and more importantly to the west on the knoll which overlooks the site.

Another response to the possibility of gun-fire entering the redoubt defences may be seen in the configuration of the northern bank. The segment between the entrance and the north-western corner is clearly offset forward from the rest of the west and north walls (Fig. 3). If there was a rifle trench outside the bank (as opposed to defensive ditch, see further discussion below), this offset would have prevented gun-fire entering from the knoll to the west.

William Mair's diary refers to huts; these are undoubtedly the sunken rectangular depressions, some with walls, which occupy the western and southern part of the redoubt. The western wall of the redoubt has suffered some stock damage. The relatively narrow rectangular depressions abutting and inside the defensive bank are probably rifle trenches, but some of the structures inside that again are huts.

The flattish northern half of the area within the walls is somewhat enigmatic. The use of bivouacs or tents for shelter in this space must be considered, although it was exposed to fire from the west. For a force of up to 220 men, much of the cooking and indeed living must have been done outside the fortification. The intention in building the redoubt must have been for a smaller force to stay for a longer period of time. With 4-6 men to each hut, the redoubt could have held up to about 50 men which would have been adequate for its defence.

### Discussion

Maori gunfighter paa have been little documented by primary field work since the original military accounts of the nineteenth century. In the main, these describe Maori fortifications of the major battles (e.g. Mould 1869). Detailed accounts of defences constructed in the relatively mobile "guerilla" fighting of the late 1860s are few (Smart 1961; Nevin and Nevin 1980). Many of the surviving fortifications are in remote and relatively difficult country, and are only now receiving archaeological attention with the increase in forest establishment.

Is Moerangi, built by Arawa acting under European colonial military leadership, in any sense a Maori gunfighter paa as opposed to European redoubt? The distinction has often appeared to be a useful one. Drawing on Thomson (cited in Best 1927), Golson 1957: 106) noted "where in an English fort the ditch was deep and outside the defences, being designed to obstruct the enemy, in a Maori stronghold the ditch was shallow and inside the palisade, being intended to cover the defenders firing from it". The rifle trench was prominent at many Maori fortifications such as Gate Pa and Te Ranga (Tauranga): Paterangi and Rangiriri (Waikato); Wehengaiti (Rotorua vicinity); and Oika paa (Whenuakura, Taranaki). Rifle pits are a prime element in the defence of the Whirinaki Valley fortifications Hinamoki 2 (N95/56), Okupa N95/5) and Te Tapiri (N95/58); all date to 1865 (Nevin and Nevin 1980). The development from rifle trench to rifle pit has been described as "a particular feature of the later paa of the Maori war period, where it served an identical function with the ditch which it tended to replace" (Golson 1957:105). The rifle pit might also have served a need for housing in paa occupied for any length of time, particularly in the inland parts of the Bay of Plenty. Such an argument needs documentation in detail that

cannot be followed up here, but clearly there is much scope for consideration of function, traditional ways of building fortifications, and European influence on Maori fortification.

The evidence available from the surface survey of Moerangi is inadequate to place it as a Maori gunfight paa (principal defences: rifle trenches and palisades) or a redoubt (principal defences: a ditch and bank). Contemporary European accounts vary, sometimes calling it "breastworks" or "redoubt" (Clarke 1867). Excavation would be needed to reveal further information about the defences primarily, but also of structures within the paa. It would establish whether the forward ditch was a rifle trench or a physical barrier to stop a charge, and the nature of any link between this and the redoubt interior. Because of the attenuated nature of this ditch it is tempting to see it as a rifle trench. Emphasis has been placed on the fact that gun-fire could enter the redoubt from a knoll to the west. A typically gunfighter Maori palisade, with flax padding to stop bullets, would largely remove the risk. The possibility of trenches on this knoll having been ploughed under in past years could also be investigated by excavation.

If Moerangi did have a substantial ditch and bank defence, then it presents a model quite at variance with other Maori gunfighter paa of the 1860s. A ditch and bank to break the force of an attack is European, and ultimately may be attributed to European direction of the work. Te Porere, near Lake Rotoaira, the latest and in many ways the oddest of Maori gunfighter paa also is in a European style, although it was not apparently effective (Smart 1961). It would therefore be too easy to regard the Moerangi fortification as an example of a European redoubt. It was built



in large part by Arawa and it may well be the result of absorption of a European concept, so clearly demonstrated at Te Porere two and a half years later by Te Kooti's force.

#### Conclusion

Moerangi paa is a gunfighter paa built on the destroyed settlement of Paengaroa during the Tauranga bush campaign of 1867. Its location appears to have left it exposed to gunfire from nearby higher points of ground. From a surface survey, it is not possible to say whether the outer ditch which partially surrounds it was a rifle trench or a physical barrier. If it is a rifle trench, then the site shows some continuity in Maori gunfighter fortifications; if a physical barrier, then the fortification is European in style, as might be expected from a force lead by Europeans.

#### Acknowledgements

Dr J. Hamel and Miss A. Leahy assisted with survey of the site. Mr S.R. Peers kindly gave permission to enter his land. Mr I. Marwick, Honorary Ranger for the Ngamanawa Incorporation first drew the site to my attention. Mr M.J. Larsen, Survey Information Officer, Department of Lands and Survey, Hamilton, provided copies of Survey Ordinance plans 440 and 1319C. Dr E. Stokes kindly permitted use of the map.

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