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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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NEW SITES ON RED MERCURY ISLAND (WHAKAU)

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During an Auckland University Field Club scientific camp on Red Mercury Island in August 1971* one new midden site (NZAA Site N.40/75) and a possible pa site (N.40/76) were located.

The island is covered for the most part in thick bush and scrub, and bounded on all sides by steep cliffs up to 100 metres high. Only two areas of flat land occur along the shoreline, a boulder terrace at Roly Poly Bay, and an area behind Lunch Bay. The latter is the only extensive area of flat land with good water supply, and is the location of the only midden site discovered (grid ref. N.40/424876).

The midden is situated close to two previously recorded pa (Mountain 1911) - one at Whakau Point (Site N.40/66), and the other on Te Atiaroa Cliffs (Te Papaki Pa). The latter was not located, and the former shows little sign of occupation, although shell material and one obsidian flake have previously been collected from there.

At the eastern end of the island, on the southern slopes of Trig A, the remains of what appears to be a trench was located. The area, however, is covered in thick bush, and no other features were noted, although the hill is ideally situated for a pa. On the ridge extending west from Trig A, patches of red clay are exposed, and these are likely to have been used by the Maoris as a source of ochre. The ridge is appropriately named Te Kokowai (= red ochre).

The midden site (N.40/75) appears to be quite extensive, but is largely covered in scrub and bush. Numerous flakes of grey basalt and obsidian are scattered over the area, along with shell material. The obsidian flakes are of two types, one typically Mayor Island, and the other clear light grey in colour and of lower refractive index, and which may be from a mainland source.

A few basalt artifacts were collected, including one adze roughout, a broken blade, a partially ground blade, and a finished type 2B adze

*Tane, Vol. 18 (1972) - report in press.

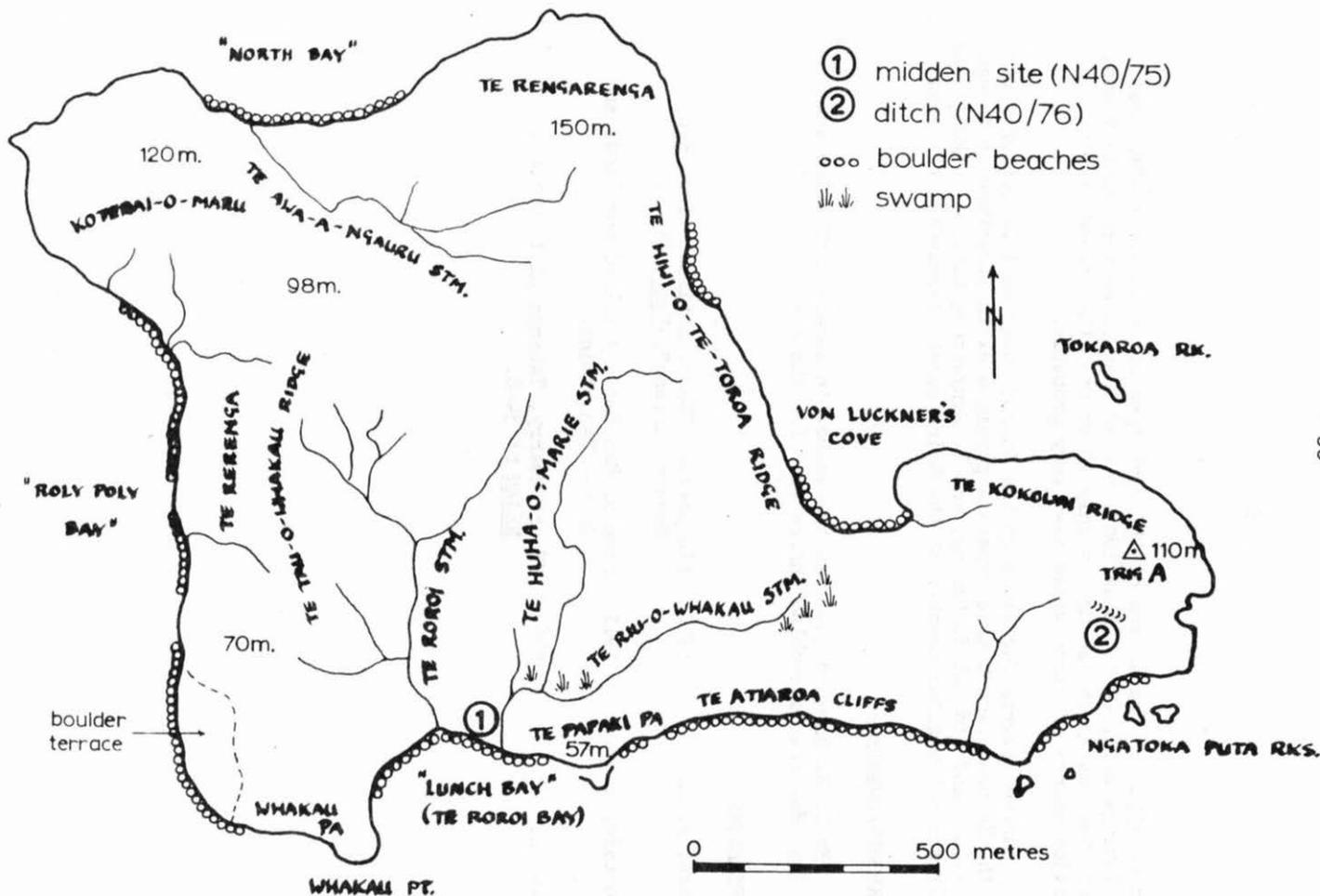


Fig. 1. Map of Red Mercury Island.

(Moore 1972). Comparison of the rock type of these adzes with that of Tahanga Hill, Opito (Shaw 1963) showed them to be very similar and, since the quarry at Tahanga is only 14 Km from the island, its use as a major source of stone would seem very probable.

Further search for sites on the island could well be concentrated in the Koterai-o-maru area, where a possible earth structure is thought to exist, and also at Te Rerenga and Te Rengarenga Hill. Te Rengarenga Hill was not visited because of the thick scrub surrounding the area.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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