



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/>.

by M.J .G.Smart

The well preserved earthworks of Operiki Pa are situated on the left bank of the Wanganui River, half a mile beyond the modern Maori village of Koriniti. The site selected for this fighting pa, was from all aspects a strong defensive position. Well guarded on the southern boundary by the steep banks of the Operiki stream and protected against an attack by way of the river by the bend of the river flowing some sixty feet below the Pa.

For the protection of the eastern flank a high embankment some nine feet in height had been erected. For added protection a ditch had been dug on both sides of the embankment, making Operiki a defensive position of great strength, possibly one of the strongest pas on the river.

Traditional evidence records the fact that Operiki was never taken in battle, and on one occasion only did an enemy party force an entrance inside the ramparts. This was during a period of siege by a strong war party of Waikato tribes, who having failed in a frontal assault, besieged Operiki in the hope of starving the defenders into submission. Entry was actually gained by a small party of Waikato under cover of darkness and during a period of heavy rain when the mist obscured the vision of the sentries. The presence of the enemy within the Pa was soon detected, and after a short struggle the intruders were killed.

Realising the impossibility of taking Operiki the Waikatos raised the siege and departed.

Years later another large war party from Waikato came down the river with the object of again attacking Operiki. During their passage downriver, they openly boasted that they would take Operiki by weight of numbers and actually invited members of the upper river tribes to join them in their victory.

The Waikatos took up their position on a low hill named Manukaroa, a short distance upstream from Operiki and on the opposite bank of the river. This party fought hard to storm the earthworks of Operiki, but without success. Stratagem was resorted to, but their efforts failed to entice the defenders from their stronghold.

As a final desperate measure, the Waikatos adopted a form of attack perhaps unique to Maori warfare. A large rangi or shield made from interlaced supplejacks and saplings was constructed, in the hope that it would serve to protect the attacking party from the spear-thrusts of the defenders. A determined effort was made to undermine the earthworks, and in this manner, effect an entrance into the Pa. The men of Operiki extended a platform out from the palisading and hurled down heavy river boulders which smashed the framework of the rangi, and the attacking party was killed by the spear-thrusts of the defenders. As the survivors of Waikato left the vicinity and paddled back up the river, the victors lined the palisading and fighting platforms of Operiki and roared out their "ngeri" or song of derision:-

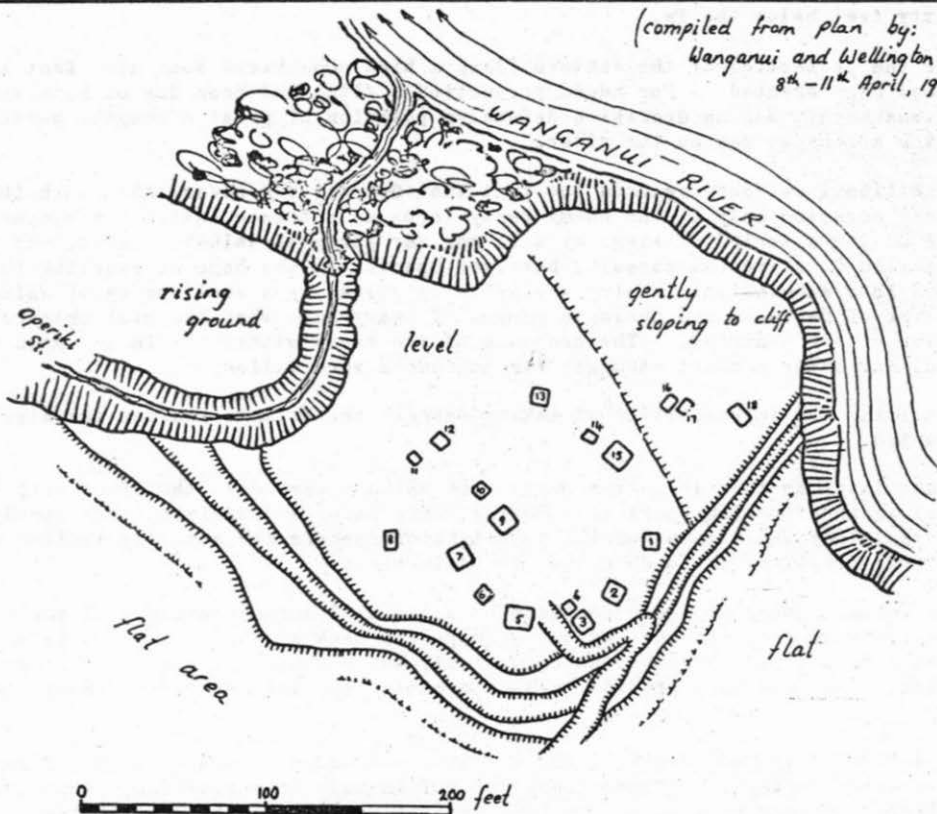
176

SKETCH PLAN

SITE NUMBER *N. 131/1*Map number *N. 131 (NOT PUBLISHED)*

Map name —

Grid reference —

SITE TYPE *PA (OPERIKI)*(compiled from plan by:
Wanganui and Wellington Senior Scouts
8th - 11th April, 1955)

| | | |
|---------|---|-------------------------|
| Pit no. | 1 | 7.5' x 6.5' x 26" deep. |
| | 2 | 9' x 8' x 39" |
| | 3 | 8.5' x 7.5' x 28" |
| | 4 | 5.5' x 4.5' x 12" |
| | 5 | 13' x 10' x 51" |
| | 6 | 6' x 6' x 23" |
| | 7 | 10' x 9' x 37" |
| | 8 | 9' x 6' x 18" |
| | 9 | 9' x 9' x 37" |

| | | |
|---------|----|--------------------|
| Pit no. | 10 | 6' x 6' x 17" deep |
| | 11 | 4' x 4' x 17" |
| | 12 | 6' x 5' x 16" |
| | 13 | 7' x 7' x 13" |
| | 14 | 6' x 6' x 20" |
| | 15 | 10' x 9' x 40" |
| | 16 | 6' x 4' x 25" |
| | 17 | 6' x 4' x 21" |
| | 18 | 10' x 6' x 54" |

"Te rongō mai koia koe
 Ko te waro hunanga kai tenei?
 Ko te wara hunanga tangata tenei
 Ko nga Tuatara o Kawakawa.
 Kei ngenge kau ou turi
 I te hapainga i te kakau o te hoe
 A kia riro atu te Toka i Matai
 E tu ake nei te whakawehi o te riri."

("Have you not heard that there is the dread chasm in which
 man and food are destroyed, and of the damned tuatara of Kawa-
 kawa? Have care lest your knees be wearied to no purpose in
 wielding the paddle-shafts. When the Rock of Matai, the
 buckler of war-time, is carried away, then may ye prevail.")

The Tuatara of Operiki has a reference to the spirit of the fighting men of
 Operiki, and Kawakawa is the name of a rapid in the Wanganui River close to Operiki
 Pa. Two large boulders in the river near the rapid were known to the Maoris of the
 district as Parui and Paraerarahe. Toka i Matai is the name of a great boulder
 in the river close to the site of Operiki Pa.

Should this historic Pa need further claim to fame, it was here that the great
 Ngati Ruanui chief Pamoana, grandson of Turi and his wife Rongorongo, went to stay
 in order to consult the people of the river tribes regarding his intention to proceed
 to Hikurangi Pa to ask for the hand of Taurira, the beautiful grand daughter of
 Poutama nui tē awa.

When word was received that a visit by Pamoana would be welcomed at Hikurangi,
 he left Operiki Pa and was escorted up the river by a fleet of canoes. His visit
 was successful and after his marriage to Taurira, Pamoana returned to Operiki where
 he made his home, and it was from this historic event that the Ngati Pamoana tribe
 came into being.

On the death of Raimona Hiroti o te rangi, one of the chiefs who fought the
 Hauhaus at the Battle of Moutoa Island, he was buried within the confines of Operiki
 Pa where his tombstone stands today overlooking the Wanganui River.
