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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS AT PAEROA

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In February 1984 an exploratory excavation was undertaken near Paeroa (see Fig. 1). A group of students and others from the University of Auckland and the Archaeology Society went down for two weeks to dig at the sites of Raupa and Waiwhau. The sites are located on the junction of the major rivers - the Ohinemuri and Waihou - that flow through the Hauraki Plains, meeting at the town of Paeroa.

The junction has now been relocated downstream by re-channelling of the rivers. Much of the area has also been modified by agriculture, the building of stop-banks and drainage operations. All the low-lying land was inundated by silt from the Martha mine gold-tailings at Waihi, up the Ohinemuri River. Raupa and Waiwhau have been damaged by these activities and are now under threat of complete destruction from flood protection works by the Hauraki Catchment Board. The silting and alteration of the landscape obscured both sites so that they were discovered by accident during the latest stop-bank construction.

The principal aims of this excavation were:- to discover the boundaries of the sites; ascertain their state of preservation; to gain some idea of the range of material that remained; if possible to see whether they were both inhabited at the same time; to locate the courses of the, now shifted, Waihou River; and also, to enable amateurs and unqualified students a chance to gain some experience.

Raupa N53/37

The excavation revealed the site of Raupa was originally a large pa site, covering an estimated 2 ha, defended by three ditches cut across a meander in the Waihou River (see Fig. 2). The interior of the site had a large amount of midden. Trenches and areal excavation showed a complex arrangement of postholes, pits and firescoops. There was also a wide range of artefacts, viz. obsidian and chert flakes, adzes, pounders, anvils, grindstones, bone items including awls and a needle, ornaments including a dog-tooth pendant, a bone toggle and red ochre.

While much of the area between the ditches had been damaged, the centre of the site appeared to be more or less intact. The site is recorded in oral histories (Kelly, 1945), as well as early historical sources, having been visited by Marsden in 1820. No historical material was located in the undisturbed layers.

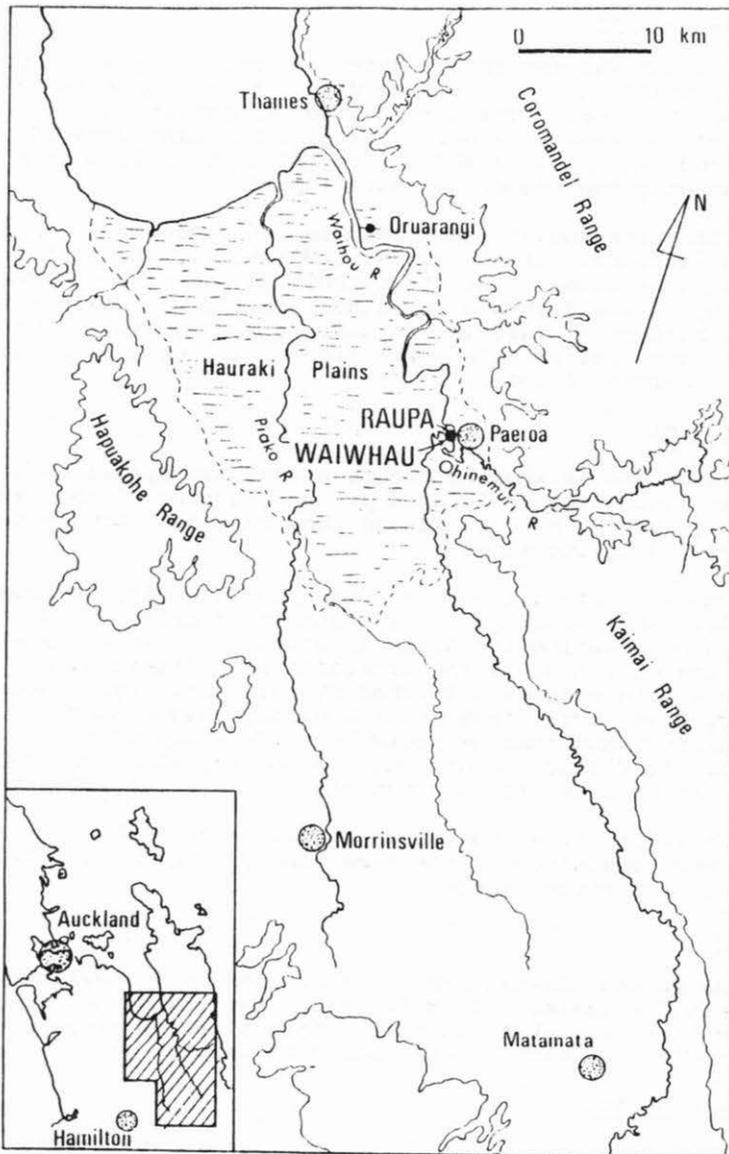


FIGURE 1. Location map.

Waiwhau N53/198

Waiwhau was not investigated as thoroughly as Raupa. It was presumably a large village site, on the opposite bank of the Waihou River. The actual size is unknown but is probably somewhere between .5-1 ha. The site has been damaged by early ploughing, which has mixed the top 40 cm of soil together, leaving only the deeper deposits intact.

This site showed many postholes, firescoops and pits in trench sections. Areal excavations revealed the partial outline of a house. It was notable in containing a great quantity of obsidian and few other artefacts. Again there was no historical material in undisturbed layers. This site was unknown historically apart from a name on a land map calling it "Waiwhau Pa Block".

Significance

Raupa and Waiwhau belong to a fast-disappearing category of flat-land sites. Located at the junction of the two major waterways of the Hauraki Plains they must have always been favoured as living sites.

Raupa is significant in being the same size as Oruarangi Pa. Oruarangi produced a large number of artefacts which has been used to define the North Island Classic assemblage. Unfortunately, most of the artefacts were fossicked and only half the site remains untouched by this activity. Recent work by Best (1980) shows that Oruarangi had a long and complex history and that it probably holds clues to the development of the Classic tradition. Raupa has also been shown to be a complex site with a great depth of overlapping layers.

It is not known how Waiwhau relates to Raupa, but if both sites were inhabited at the same time it would point to Paeroa being a population centre.

Future

Raupa and Waiwhau are to be progressively destroyed over the next few years. I would argue that one of two options should be taken: what remains of both sites be preserved; or, a thorough, on-going investigation be undertaken.

Acknowledgements

My first thanks must go to the diggers who were all volunteers, in fact some gave up paid work to attend the excavation. Many people brought their own cars and transported people and gear.

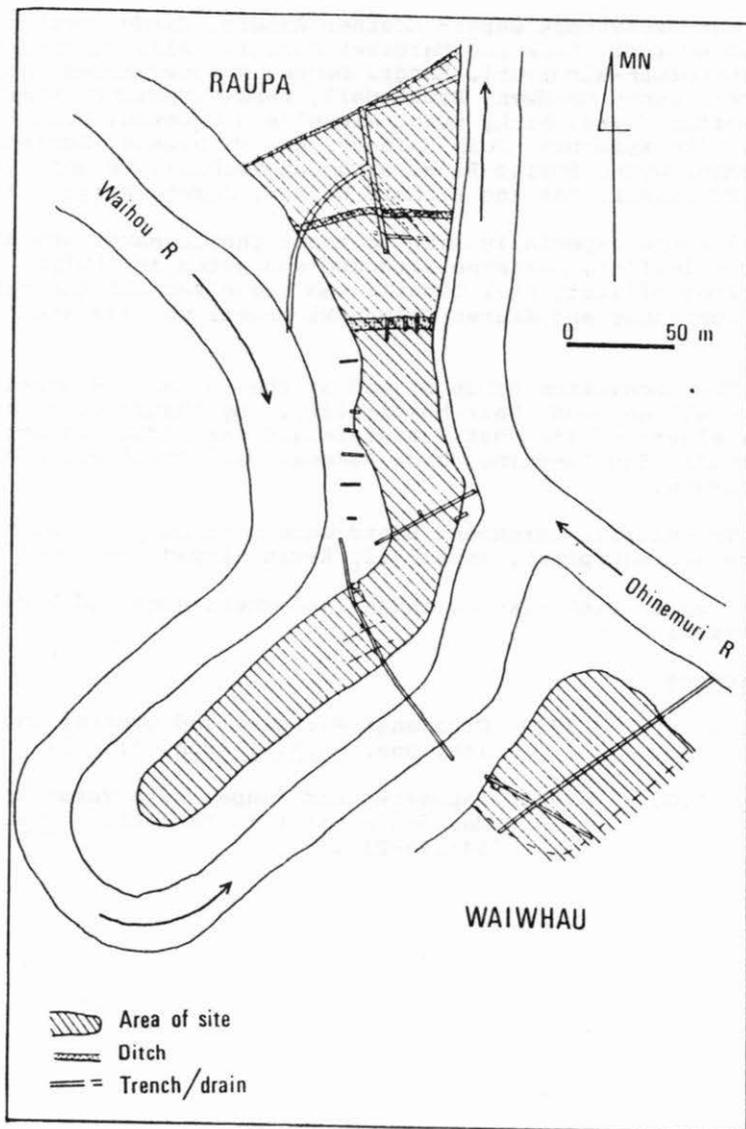


FIGURE 2. Position of Raupa and Waiwhau, and excavations.

The excavators were:- Heather Albert, Cathy Austin, Graham Bycroft, Dick and Margaret Cardiff, Allan Carpenter, Kaaren Cofman-Nicoresi, Sandra Denne, Myfanwy Eaves, Judy Gardner, Jenny Goodwyn, Bruce Hall, Wendy Harsant, Sheila and Martin Hayes, Nicky Hunn, Michelle Johansson, Caroline Keen, Elke Kurschus, Joan Maingay, Kay Mathewson, Adrienne Slocombe, Wynne Spring-Rice, Nicholas Twohill, Melanie Virtue, Ed Visser, Pat and Richard Walter, Jeremy Wright (Fig. 3).

I would especially like to thank Sheila Hayes who prepared a leaflet, Adrienne Slocombe who acted as public relations officer, Nick Twohill who organised all the catering most admirably and Kaaren Cofman-Nicoresi who assisted in lab work.

The excavation group stayed at the Te Pai o Hauraki marae and we all enjoyed their hospitality. My thanks go to the Maori elders of the Ngati-Tamatera and the marae committee; especially Shu Tukukino, Dick Rakena, Mate Royal and Winnie Hutchinson.

The Hauraki Catchment Board were most helpful, with advice and equipment, especially Kevin Simpson and John Cox.

I would also like to thank landowners Alec and Paul Rasmussen.

References

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