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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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SITE SURVEY IN THE MARSDEN POINT

AREA, WHANGAREI HARBOUR

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Whangarei

An archaeological site survey was conducted south of Whangarei, covering approximately 55 km². The triangular area was bounded by the Whangarei Harbour, the Mangapai River, State Highway One, the Ruakaka River and Bream Bay (see Fig. 1). The survey was initiated due to the proposed rail link from Oakleigh station to Marsden Point. Two preferred rail routes and eight alternatives that lead to a large area of proposed industrial development, span most of the area surveyed.

The survey was completed by the authors with the help of three other people. The six month Labour Department Project Employment Program was carried out in the period January to July 1981. The Ministry of Works and Development, Whangarei, sponsored the project, providing necessary equipment and maintaining the work with essential services throughout it's term.

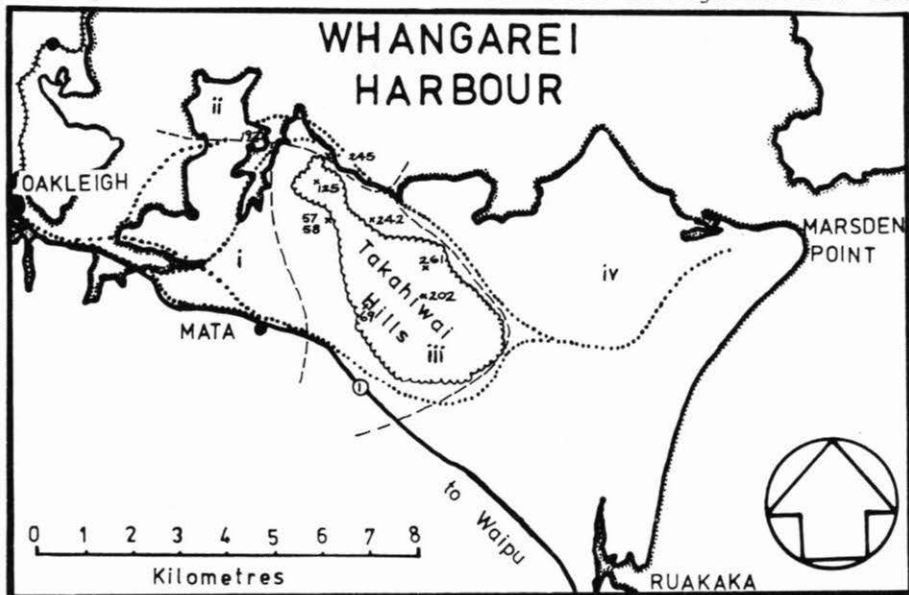


FIGURE 1. Marsden Point site survey area.

The work was supervised by Stan Bartlett, Northland filekeeper. Twelve copies of the report were distributed to relevant local bodies and government departments.

The surveyed region can be roughly divided into four areas from west to east.

1. The Skull Creek - Mata Creek watershed of poor clay soils, originally carrying dense kauri and mixed podocarp forests, is now in pasture.
2. Mangawhati Point and Hewletts Point, a small area of Whangarei limestone and good soils, now in pasture.
3. Takahiwai - Mata hills of greywacke and argillite, previously supported kauri and mixed podocarp forests. These mixed bush covered hills rise to 200 m above sea level.
4. Marsden Point - Ruakaka River hinterland. This large flat area of consolidated Kaihu sands has a few hills rising to 25 m. These sands are overlain by peat deposits containing kauri stumps, logs and gum. The area was drained this century and is now in pasture.

Results

Site Type	No. found	Site Type	No. found
Pa	30	Agricultural lines	5
Pits	20	Working area	1
Terraces	13	Stone retaining wall	1
Pits/terraces	14	Burials	2
Midden	149	Mining drives	1
Ditch	2		
		TOTAL	239

TABLE 1. Recorded sites

1. Skull Creek - Mata Creek watershed. Seventeen sites were found including 14 middens, one pit, one terrace and one pit/terrace.
2. Mangawhati Point. Forty-four sites were found: three pa, 29 middens, one pit, four terraces, four pit/terraces, three agricultural lines and one burial. Two middens were found on a remnant island in the harbour. Hewletts Point. Thirty-five sites were found: three pa, 22 shore-line middens, two pits, two terraces, two pit/terraces, one burial, one agricultural system and one stone retaining wall/terrace/midden. One midden was also recorded on a small island. One European mining drive was found.
3. Takahiwai - Mata hills. Eighty-eight sites were found in these densely scrub covered hills: 20 pa, 15 pits, six terraces, eight pit/terraces, two ditches, 36 middens and one agricultural system. Some ridges were heavily occupied; others show no evidence of occupation.

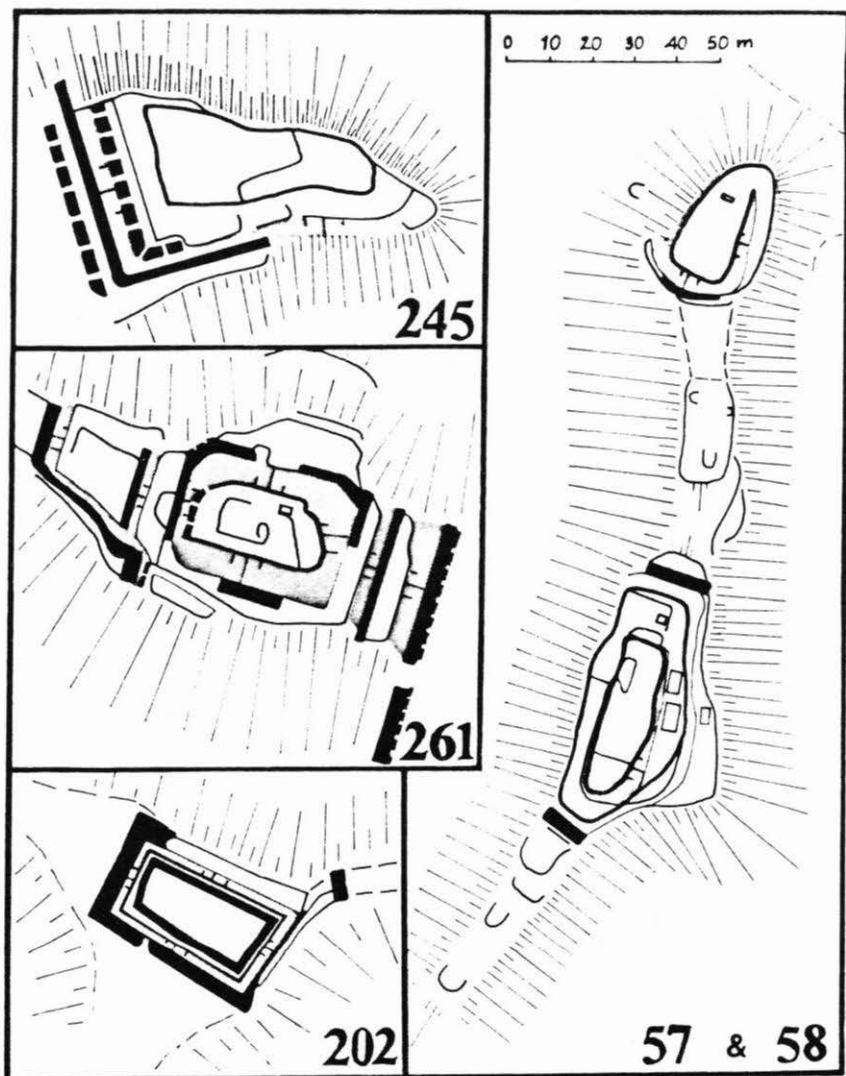


FIGURE 2. Basic plans of pa recorded in the survey area.

4. Marsden Point - Ruakaka River hinterland. Forty-four sites were recorded, most of which are around the coastal perimeter. Four are pa, the remainder being midden.

Site types of particular interest

Five areas of diverging, long shallow grooves were found on both steep and gentle slopes of the fertile coastal Takahiwai hills, Mangawhati and Hewletts Points. This method of cultivation was used until forty years ago, with the kumara tubers growing larger in the shallow soils of the steeper slopes.

A total of 482 midden were recorded, of which 332 were aggregated into 149 recorded midden sites. One hundred and fifty were associated with other site types. Table 2 contains a brief summary of shellfish species.

- 82% had 90% or more cockles (Chione stutchburyi)
- 13% had 10% or more pipis (Paphies australe)
- 3% had 10% or more rock oyster (Crassostraea glomerata)
- 1% had 10% or more tuatua (Paphies subtriangulatum)
- 1% had 10% or more mudsnail (Amphibola crenata)

TABLE 2. Common shell in middens.

The following generalisations have been made about the composition of the minor species (less than 10%) found in cockle middens. These are from west to east (i.e. following along the tidal inner harbour towards the sandy coast): predominantly mudsnail, with few rock oyster and pipi; predominantly pipi, with few rock oyster; equal quantities of mudsnail, pipi and rock oyster; predominantly pipi, with few rock oyster; and predominantly pipi, with few scallops, volutes and mussels. These generally reflect the species found in the harbour flats today; excepting scallops, volutes and mussels that are found on the north head of the harbour.

Thirty pa sites were surveyed and mapped in detail. Of these the smallest measures 700 m² and the largest covers an area of 7500 m². Four are on headlands overlooking the harbour. Ten are on the hills facing the harbour and Bream Bay. Eleven are on the hills looking inland. Four overlook the Ruakaka estuary. One overlooks the Ruakaka River near its tidal limit. Four pa contained no pits and eleven had no midden recorded.

The classification of pa sites (Fox, 1976) according to their artificial defences was used.

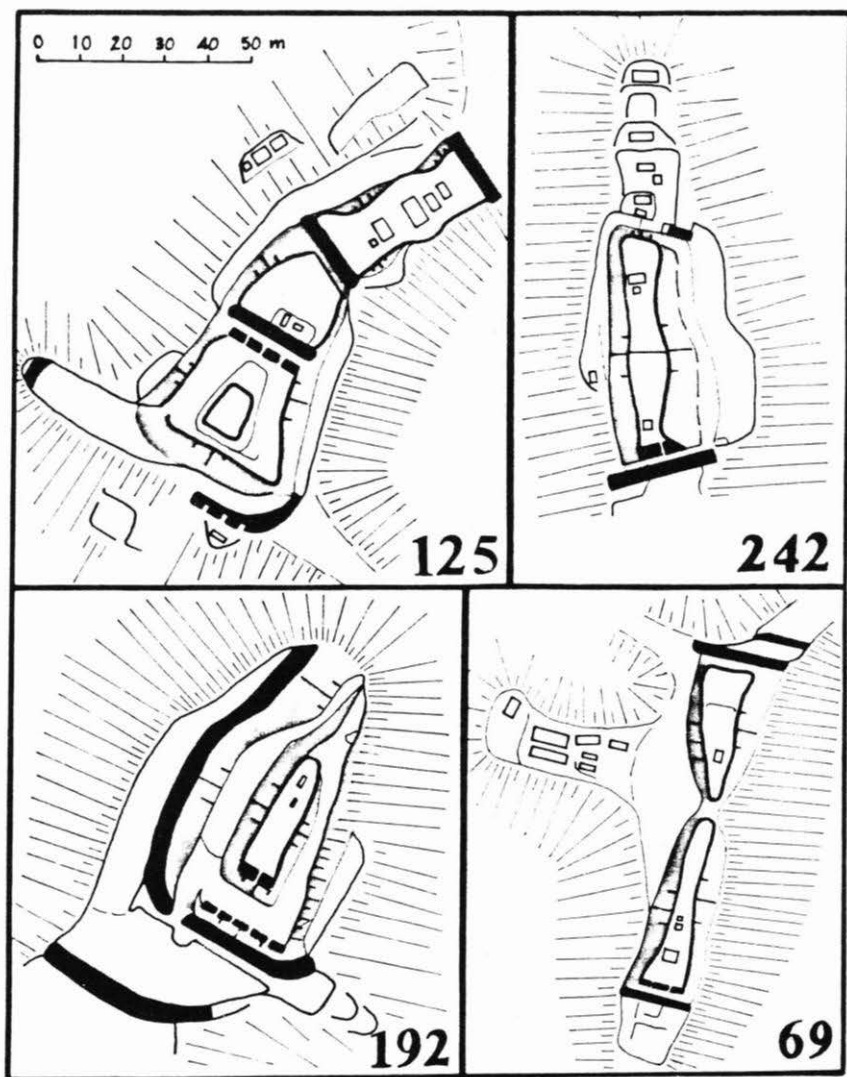


FIGURE 3. Basic plans of pa recorded in the survey area.

Class I. Three terraced pa were recorded. All appear to be poorly defended.

Class II. Sixteen transverse ditch and/or bank pa were found. There is considerable variation of position and defensive style. Four are cut by single transverse ditches with terracing of the steep slopes at the other end. Five have single ditches across a ridge of which N124/58 is an example (see Fig. 2). Another has two ditches dividing the major defended area into two equal parts. One pa has two close parallel ditches cutting off a small headland. Four pa on narrow ridge lines have ditches at either end. N124/69 is an example of this (see Fig. 3). One very large pa on a long spur has two ditches; one of which cuts off the ridge while the other is one third of the way along the pa, between which are major transverse scarps; and after which is major downhill terracing with many deep pits at the lower end.

Class III. Ten transverse and lateral ditch and/or bank pa were found. N124/192 (Fig. 3) and 245 (Fig. 2) on headlands are examples of this. N124/242 (Fig. 3) has lateral terracing as well as terraces containing pits on the steep spur. N124/261, Rangiora pa (Fig. 2), is a large complex site. It has five transverse ditch/banks with lateral ditches and terraces. Another pa has two parallel ditches cutting a ridge with long lateral terraces. N124/57 a knoll on a ridge, has a ditch at either end with lateral terracing between (Fig. 2). One large pa on a ridge has a transverse ditch/bank. The bottom of the ditch becomes a large lateral and, eventually, transverse terrace, before descending the spur with pits. N124/202 can be regarded as ring ditch work (Fig. 2). It has a platform enclosed by a ditch/bank/ditch. It's prominent feature is the 4 m scarp between the bank and outer ditch. It has been suggested that this is an early form of gunfighting pa. Two pa on the cliff edge overlooking the Ruakaka estuary have ditches at right angles to the cliff and lateral scarps.

Note that for comparative purposes all pa maps were originally drawn at 1:500 scale. The thick black lines are ditches, the thick black dashes are banks, the heavily outlined areas in the middle are the highest and best defended areas of the pa, and the grey shading indicates major defensive scarps.

Reference

- Fox, A. 1976 Prehistoric Maori Fortifications in the North Island of New Zealand. Auckland, Longman Paul.