



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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remainder of the material consisted of one roughout adze of the Opito pattern, numerous large pieces of obsidian and one half pebble with a bluish tinge. Material was gathered the following day until the natural was reached. This included an obsidian knife and two small fireplaces which were dismantled. One consisted of eleven stones (three of which were large flakes) and the other of fourteen stones. The rest of the material was made up of shells, flakes, and obsidian flakes.

HEADLAND PA (Site N40/15)

The headland PA lies on a promontory at the easternmost end of Opito Beach and is joined to the main beach by a narrow crest of land between Opito Beach and Crayfish Bay. It is judged to be several hundred feet long and perhaps a hundred feet high. No accurate measurements have yet been made. Its sides slope steeply and smoothly to jagged rocks at sea-level. A small path runs through the yellow grass and thistle along the side to the end of the headland and is littered with tiny fragments of black obsidian. Four large and deep pits lie at the far end which is almost a razor-back. The more obvious feature, and one which is visible from some distance, is a deep V notched into the top, halfway along. It is about twelve feet deep and five feet in width at the bottom. An ideal PA site for defence purposes, its steepness and narrow width make it unsuitable for any detailed investigation.

SITE SURVEY: PONUI ISLAND

JANET DAVIDSON

Following a visit to Ponui Island to inspect the site reported elsewhere in this issue (9) two days were spent in locating and recording sites in the vicinity. This was not a planned project but rather an attempt to make the most of an unexpected opportunity to visit one of the lesser known off-shore islands. However the field evidence on the island proved so extensive and so interesting that a preliminary report seems justified.

Ponui is an island in the Hauraki Gulf between the much larger Waiheke Island, and the mainland at Kawakawa. It covers an area of approximately 4,700 acres, most of which is hilly, the highest point being 567' above sea level. There is very little flat land, the largest flat area being at Motunau Bay, at the south end of the island, where the excavations took place.

The method followed in the field was the rather unsophisticated one of walking over as much land as possible in the time available, after preliminary consultation with the farmer, who was able to direct us to all the pa sites, but not to the smaller pit and terrace sites. As much of the island is scrub covered, the use of aerial photographs, had they

been available at the time would have been very deceptive. All sites located were recorded in the National site recording scheme, to which the numbers refer. The sites visited, and the area covered, are shown on figure 1.

Eleven pa sites were visited. One other was seen from the ferry (N 43/28). Two sites shown on the map as x and y were said by the farmer to be pa sites, but we did not have time to visit these and verify their exact position and nature. The pa varied considerably in size and complexity, but with one exception all were situated on the coast. A number of unfortified sites were also located, and ranged from single pits to pit and terrace complexes of considerable size. A very large amount of midden material was observed on the flat behind the beach at Motunau Bay, but otherwise middens were few and small.

#### BRIEF SITE DESCRIPTIONS

N 43/1: this site number refers to the entire midden area at Motunau Bay. It is almost certain that all this material is not contemporary. However, time did not permit a detailed inspection of the area and the collection of samples which would be necessary to sort out the sites.

N 43/2: a pa, at the end of Motunau Bay foreshore. A steep hill above the beach and the mouth of the valley provides natural defences on two sides, while the rear of the site is defended by a roughly semi-circular ditch, with an inner bank at some points. The interior of the site is terraced. One large pit was observed on one of the terraces.

N 43/3: a single pit, 15 feet x 9 feet, situated on a ridge overlooking Motunau Bay.

N 43/4: a small pa, with a single ditch and inner bank defending a headland with a steep natural slope on the other sides. There was one small transverse terrace at the extreme end of the site, and three pits, two immediately inside the ditch and one towards the centre of the site. There appeared to be a causeway across the ditch. Some distance up the ridge outside the pa, three rather indistinct terraces were seen. These were recorded as part of this site.

N 43/5: looking over the narrow strip between the beach and the foot of the cliff in the bay between the two pa N43/4 and N 43/6 a number of ovens, surrounded by midden were observed. The beach front is eroding and several of the ovens were exposed in half section. Others showed as crop marks.

N 43/6: a headland pa at a point where a natural saddle divides a flat rectangular area with cliffs on three sides from the main ridge. A ditch, and for part of its length a small outer bank, strengthen the natural defences across the saddle. The interior of the pa, which slopes transversely, has been flattened for habitation by the construction of four longitudinal terraces. No pits were seen.

N 43/7: a single pit 15' x 9' on a small knoll on a ridge.

N 43/8: an extensively terraced knoll on the ridge between Motunau Bay and the East Coast. One pit was located on an artificially flattened area surrounded by a low scarp and terrace and further terraces in the vicinity seemed to belong to the same site.

N 43/9: (fig. 2a) the features recorded under this number constitute what was in many ways the most interesting site recorded. It seems probable that at least two pa sites are represented. Two quite different natural situations, both of which were commonly utilised for defensive positions by the Maori are presented close together, and both of them have been used in this case, so that what are two quite different units appear today as one continuous site. Two ditch and inner bank units cut off a triangular shaped headland with steep cliffs on two sides. Because these ditches are not parallel, it is hard to see how they would be effective if both were in use at the same time. It is possible that the outer unit, which is shallower and far less impressive is earlier, and the deep inner ditch later. They thus would represent two different stages in the defence of the same site in the same way, the later ditch being an improvement. Immediately beyond the outer ditch is a site of a quite different kind. This uses natural defences on one side only, the other three being defended by a transverse ditch and inner bank at the upper end and by terrace and scarp on the other sides. No pits were seen on either unit, but further up the ridge, outside the site proper, two pits and a lynchet were located. This site serves to highlight some of the problems concerning development of pa, and the usefulness of a topographical typology. Both units are identical with sites seen elsewhere. Here, in what was evidently a desirable location two alternative positions were offered for defence and at one time or another both were used.

N 43/10: a pit on a small flat area, surrounded by a terrace on all four sides.

N 43/11: a pit complex. Four sites were arranged on a knoll 30' long, situated a short distance North of N 43/10.

N 43/12: a terraced hill top. This site is located on the highest point in the area (spot height 327') and has a commanding view over Motunau Bay towards Kawakawa in the south, and east towards Coromandel. It consists of a flattened area surrounded by a low scarp and two terraces on the north side.

N 43/13: a pit approximately 15' x 9' on the ridge between Motunau Bay and the East Coast.

N 43/14: a pa, the only fortified site seen which was not located on the coast. It is on a peak, on the ridge between the Motunau Valley and the coast, and on the present track from the south to the centre of the island, as are many of the other "inland sites" recorded. A natural flat knoll of roughly triangular shape, with strong natural defences on the south east

site only, has been strengthened by a ditch on the west side and a terrace and scarp on the north-east. The main ridge runs roughly north-south. There is a group of pits in the southwest corner of the site while the spur which runs down from the east corner towards the sea carries a series of short terraces. This was not one of the better preserved sites.

N 43/15: a pa site at the base of the spur which runs down from site N43/14 to the sea, and is a far more impressive pa than the other. The ridge is cut by a deep transverse ditch and inner bank. Immediately behind this is the tihi, a flat five sided area, with a number of indistinct pits. Two broad terraces with steep scarps extend around two sides below the tihi, and below these again there is a longitudinal ditch and scarp, and a transverse ditch and outer bank. On the fourth side, which accounts for two sides of the tihi, there is one terrace, with a ditch and scarp below it for part of its length, and a steep drop to the gully below. Beyond the lower transverse ditch, there is a flat area between the pa and the cliff edge. There were no pits on this flat area.

N 43/16: an undefended site with terraces and pits, which is at the west end of Motunau Bay on the cliff top and consists of a series of indistinct terraces and pits.

N 43/17: a pa standing on a long narrow ridge running down towards the sea. It begins with a transverse ditch and is divided in two by a second ditch. Both divisions are further defended by terraces and scarps. There are a few pits on the uppermost flat area. The earthworks do not continue up to the cliff, but are separated by a steep scarp and a flat area at the edge of the cliff, comparable to that at site N 43/15.

N 43/18: this was the only site whose existence was doubtful and consists of a few indistinct terraces on a small headland. No defences were present, but the area appeared to have been artificially levelled.

N 43/19: a midden at the mouth of a stream, and which is being rapidly eroded away.

N 43/20: (Sketch plan, fig. 2b). Another very interesting pa site, situated on a headland, it utilises the natural defences on all sides except the landward end of the promontory. At the seaward extremity is a small knoll connected with the rest of the site by a natural saddle which appears to have been modified so that there is a vertical scarp between the base of the saddle and the surface of the knoll. It is surrounded on three sides by a steep drop to the sea, although there is a small spur with two small terraces on one side. Traces of midden were observed. The second part of the site uses the natural defences on two sides, with the saddle at one end and a deep ditch at the other. There is a broad terrace and two smaller terraces along the south and west sides of this unit. The third part of the site between the deep ditch and a shallower ditch and inner bank, with natural defence on two sides, consists of a flat area with eleven closely grouped pits. The interest of the site lies in this distinction between an area with pits and one without pits. Considerable amounts of midden were observed on the sides of this site.

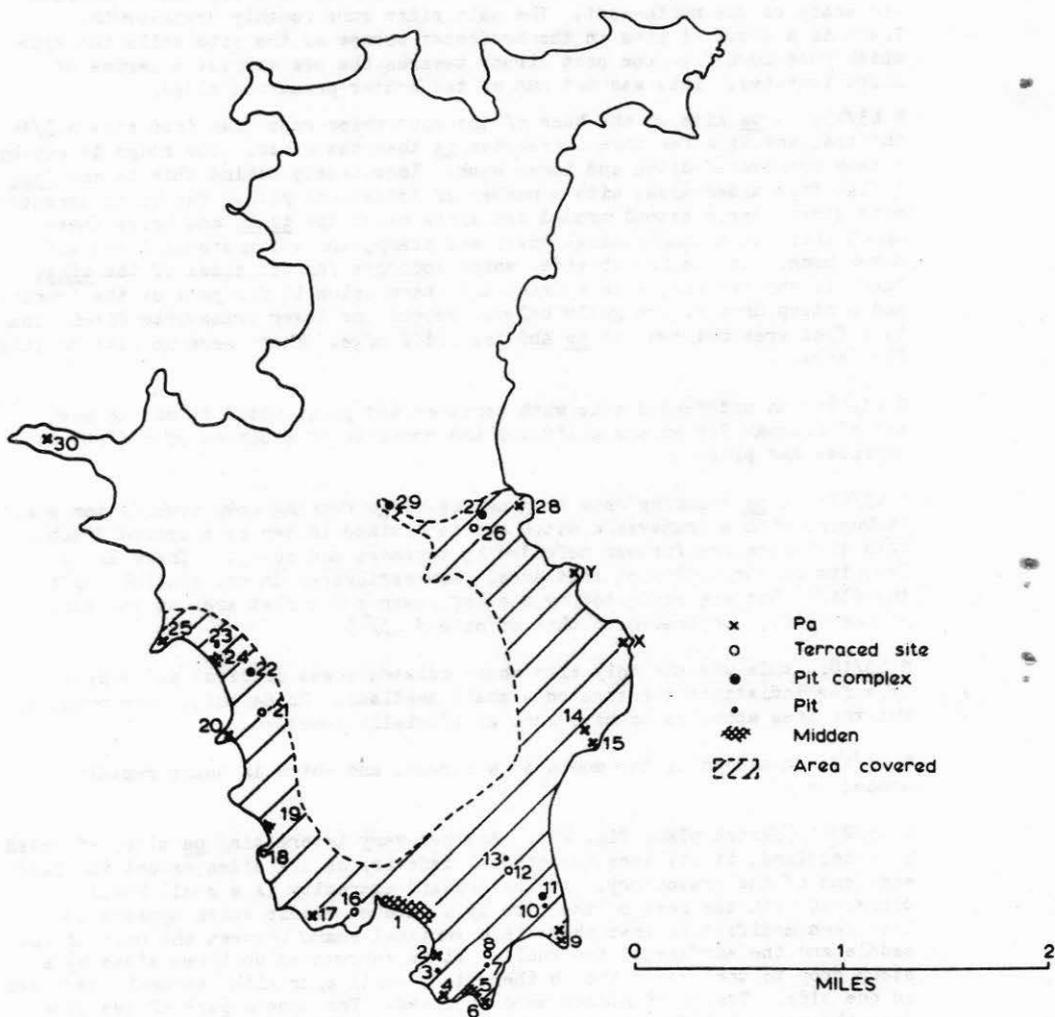


Fig 1 Map of Ponui Island, showing area covered and distribution of sites.

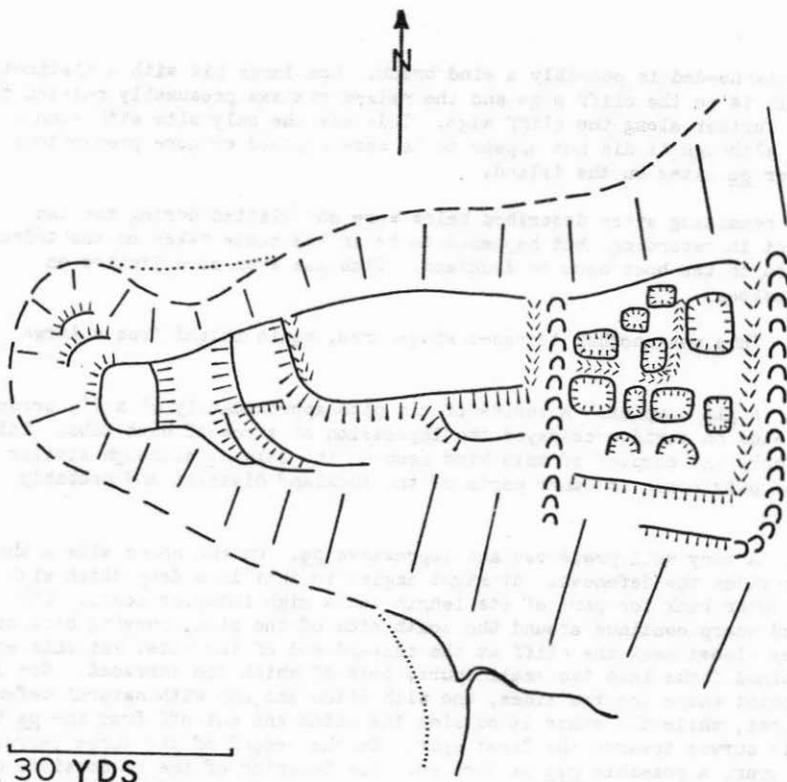


fig. 2b. Site N 43/20

N 43/21: an undefended terrace site. There is a fairly extensive series of shallow terraces situated on a small eminence on the 250' contour, about 300 yds. inland from site N 43/20.

N 43/22: a series of pits on the ridge directly north of site N 43/21.

N 43/23: a single pit, on a tiny bluff above a bend in the stream, with what appeared to be a drain in front of it. There is a scatter of midden on the bank below the pit.

N 43/24: a fairly large area of midden on the gentle slope behind the beach.

N 43/25: a pa, which has natural defences on two sides, and a ditch and scarp defending the landward end and a group of small pits at the seaward end. The site does not stand on the end of the headland but a natural saddle strengthened by a ditch, divides it from a narrow, razor-backed ridge running out into the sea. The surface of the site is flat and exhibits several interesting features. A low bank on the edge of the cliff where certainly no artificial

defence was needed is possibly a wind break. One large pit with a distinct, raised rim is on the cliff edge and the raised rim was presumably related to the bank further along the cliff edge. This was the only site with such a feature, although it did not appear to be more exposed or more precipitous than other pa sites on the island.

The remaining sites described below were not visited during the two days spent in recording, but happened to be in the route taken on the third day, to catch the boat back to Auckland. Time was even more limited on this occasion.

N 43/26. This was another terraced ridge area, again inland from a large pa site.

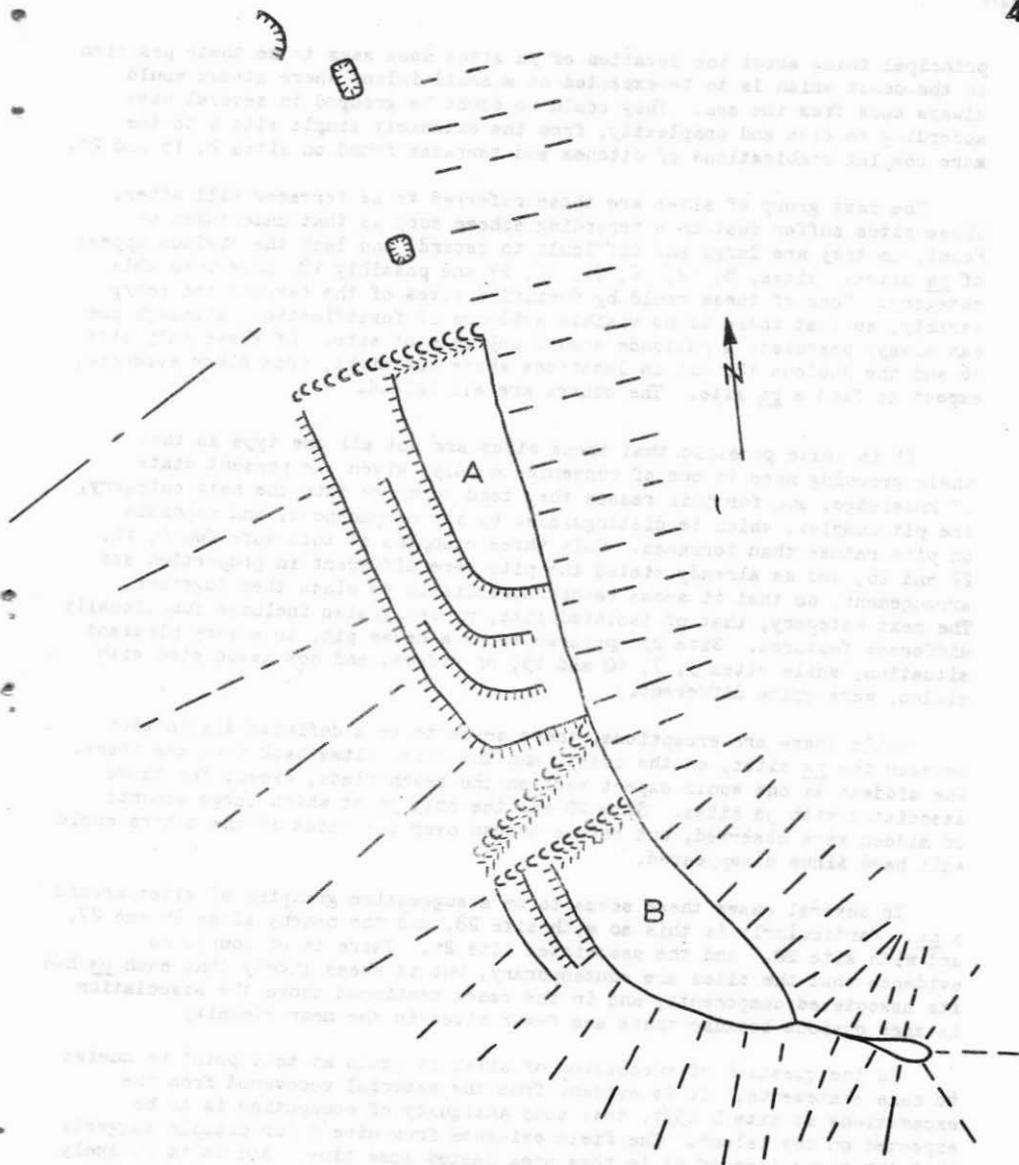
N 43/27. A pit complex. A series of six pits approximately 6' x 2', arranged side by side on a ridge conveyed the impression of a row of bath tubs. This was the only pit complex of this kind seen on the island, although similar groups of pits occur in other parts of the Auckland district and probably elsewhere.

N 43/28. A very well preserved and impressive pa. On the north side a sheer cliff provides the defences. At right angles to this is a deep ditch with a small outer bank for part of its length and a high interior scarp. The ditch and scarp continue around the south side of the site, curving back so that they almost meet the cliff at the seaward end of the site. At this end the headland forks into two small spurs, both of which are terraced. One is at the point where the two sides, one with ditch and one with natural defences, almost meet, while the other is outside the ditch and cut off from the pa by it, as it curves towards the first spur. On the second of the three terraces on this spur, a possible rua is located. The interior of the pa consists of a flat tihī area immediately behind the transverse ditch, and four transverse terraces, two of which continue round as lateral terraces, one on each side of the tihī. The scarps on this site are particularly high and steep. No pits were observed on the site, although there is a confused area outside the transverse part of the ditch which could be a number of pits.

N 43/29. A terraced but undefended site.

N 43/30. This site was observed from the water, and appears to be a very large headland pa. It has a sizable ditch, cutting off a large area of land and is clearly visible from some distance away.

Apart from the interesting features of some individual sites the most interesting information seems to come from a study of their distribution. For convenience the sites may be grouped into several categories, which seem to be in complementary distribution to a certain extent. The pa with one exception are coastal, and of these six are basically headland pa, that is they consist principally of a headland cut off by a defensive ditch. The others do not fit so easily into a topographical classification. The



Not to scale. Length of A 60 YDS. Length of B  
48 YDS. fig. 2a. Site N 43/9

principal thing about the location of pa sites does seem to be their position on the coast which is to be expected on a small island where attack would always come from the sea. They could no doubt be grouped in several ways according to size and complexity, from the extremely simple site 4 to the more complex combinations of ditches and terraces found on sites 2, 15 and 28.

The next group of sites are those referred to as terraced hill sites. These sites suffer most in a recording scheme such as that undertaken on Ponui, as they are large and difficult to record, and lack the obvious appeal of pa sites. Sites, 8, 12, 16, 21, 25, 29 and possibly 18, come into this category. None of these could be fortified sites of the terrace and scarp variety, so that there is no visible evidence of fortification, although one can always postulate a palisade around any type of site. Of these only site 16 and the dubious 18, are in locations where one might, from other evidence, expect to find a pa site. The others are all inland.

It is quite possible that these sites are not all one type so that their grouping here is one of convenience only, given the present state of knowledge, and for this reason they tend to merge into the next category, the pit complex, which is distinguished by its compactness, and emphasis on pits rather than terraces. Only three examples of this were found, 11, 22 and 26, and as already stated the pits were different in proportion and arrangement, so that it seems rather unrealistic to class them together. The next category, that of isolated pits, probably also includes functionally different features. Site 23 appeared to be a house pit, in a very pleasant situation, while sites 3, 7, 10 and 13, on ridges, and not associated with midden, were quite different.

While there are exceptions, there seems to be a definite distinction between the pa sites, on the coast, and the other sites back from the coast. The middens as one would expect were on the beach flats, except for those associated with pa sites. Site 20 was the only pa at which large amounts of midden were observed, but refuse thrown over the sides of the others could well have since disappeared.

In several cases there seems to be a suggestive grouping of sites around a pa. Particularly is this so with site 28, and the nearby sites 26 and 27, and with site 20, and the associated site 21. There is of course no evidence that the sites are contemporary, but it seems likely that each pa had its associated components, and in the cases mentioned above the association is more obvious because there are fewer sites in the near vicinity.

On the question of succession of sites it would at this point be unwise to make statements. It is evident from the material recovered from the excavations at site N 43/1, that some antiquity of occupation is to be expected on the island. The field evidence from site 9 for example suggests that the occupation of pa in this area lasted some time. And it is unlikely that the five other pa sites which are less than one mile from site 9, were all occupied contemporaneously. It is possible, but dangerous, to construct a sequence ranging from simple to complex.

Resources. There is very little true flat land on the island but there are a number of flattish hill tops, one of which is still referred to by the Chamberlins as the "Maori gardens." It would be interesting to know something of the island's potential for kumara growing, but it is only too likely that the locally known Maori gardens were potato fields. There is still some bush on the island and in pre-European times a fair amount of bird life would have been available, as is shown by the material from the excavations. The coast of the island abounds in rock oysters and other rocky shore shellfish, and fish were probably plentiful. There are a number of shingle beaches, which lack the abundant shellfish of sandy and tidal beaches, but these are also present in places around the island. A large area of tidal mudflats is exposed at Motunau Bay, and several of the beaches on the west side of the island are sandy and have beds of pipi. The island is so small that it would be no arduous task to travel from one side to the other in search of food.

Artefacts. Six adzes are in the possession of Mr F. Chamberlin, and are all from the Motunau Bay flat. Only one of these is a 'typical' 2B. Two complete adzes and one broken specimen are flaked and only partly polished. While they do not have definite butt modification they are by no means typical 2B adzes. The other two have oval cross sections and are hammer dressed and only partly polished. A fishing sinker with a projecting knob for attachment was found on site N 43/6. The Earnest Chamberlins also have several adzes, all of 2B type and four of which are from the vicinity of the homestead at Porokai Bay. The fifth, a well finished nephrite adze was found on site N 43/20. They also have several wooden artefacts from a small swamp near the homestead.

Ponui Island today is a little known and seldom visited island. For this reason it offers some very valuable information to the archaeologist. It is well known that the Auckland area offered a favourable environment to its pre-European inhabitants, and also that most of the sites, except for the large and spectacular terraced cones have long since disappeared. The off-shore islands still preserve a total range of both large and small sites which must once have been present on the mainland. Because Ponui is so isolated today, one can easily forget that in Pre-European times it must have been far more important. The concentration of field evidence suggests that it was well populated for some period of time. The results of two days of unplanned field work show that a wealth of information can be obtained from the islands, and that the islands can supply information on the range and distribution of sites which it is no longer possible to obtain in many parts of the country. Allowances must of course be made for the effect of an island environment, particularly in the distribution of pa sites, but this is more than compensated for by the totality of the evidence available and the manageable size of the area involved. The results so far obtained suggest that further recording both on Ponui Island and on the other islands in the Hauraki Gulf would be well worth while.

I would like to record my gratitude to Mr and Mrs F. Chamberlin and family of Motunau Bay, for their kindness, and interest in the work, to Mr E. Chamberlin for permission to visit sites on his land and to record artefacts in his possession, and to Molly Nicholls and Anne Leahy, but for whom this field recording would not have taken place.

### PRELIMINARY REPORT ON WHIRITOA

by Eleanor Crosby

Site N53/4 on Whiritoa Beach has been excavated by R. Jolly over the last few years. Most of the digging was concentrated in one small area and the very careful collections he has made are now being studied at the Anthropology Department of the University of Auckland.

The site is a midden at the north end of the beach (see N.Z. 1:33600 Series, Paeroa map, grid ref. 387088). It is on a strip of sand-dunes running approximately east/west from the beach to a tidal creek behind. The total area of the site was formerly about four acres, but an area of almost one acre, in a large blow-out on the coastal edge, was destroyed years ago by fossickers. The site covers about 52 square yards and is situated on the top of a sand-hill, about 75 yards from the creek. This area is about to be destroyed by sand quarrying.

#### STRATIGRAPHY

While an incomplete record has been made of the layers, the probable sequence of occupation may be reconstructed on the basis of the stratigraphy shown in two three foot six inch test squares. (Fig. 1) Layer 7 is a fine, clean sand on which was deposited a thin layer (6) of yellow clay-like material. Overlying this is a grey soil (layer 5), samples of which Mr D. Kear of the Soil Survey branch of D.S.I.R., has taken for further analysis. This soil was about two inches thick. Through these two layers and into the sand pit-like depressions were cut which are probably fire pits. As a result only a small portion of the soil and clay layers are left. In these pits, whose size and shape are unrecorded, is a fill, (layer 4), of a dense, black, sandy charcoal, containing a few 'basaltic' flakes, some much cracked cooking stones, and quantities of granular charcoal. Above this is a layer (3) of dirty sand about 10" thick, (with a charcoal admixture which looks as if it could have been caused by worm activity). Most of the cultural material comes from layer 3. Layer 2 is another black deposit containing cooking stone and flakes of obsidian and