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SOUTH TARANAKI QUARRY SITES

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The detailed study of two circumscribed areas in South Taranaki by Walton and Cassels (1992: 160) inspires this short paper on the distribution of quarries throughout the district. A plea is made that the term "borrow" be dropped despite the traditional use in archaeological literature. To borrow implies an intention to return: there is no indication that those who took one soil substance to add to another ever intended to return it. What they actually did was quarry it, with no thought of return, or borrow.

Although quarry sites occur throughout Taranaki, the concentration in South Taranaki is far greater than elsewhere. They occur sporadically in North Taranaki from the Waitara area to the Mimi area, but as far as I am aware, none are present between the Manawapou River, south-east of Hawera and those in the north. From the Manawapou River south-east to the Waitotara River quarries occur some 40km down the coast. The reason for this is not transparently obvious, except to suggest that the roughly east-west consolidated sand dune ridges (later covered with Egmont ash) are more pronounced in the south than in the west or north Taranaki. Another contrast between the two areas is the almost exclusive confinement to river terraces in the north. These terraces were formed in flood plains and provide a ready source of sand. Present day commercial quarrying above the left bank of the Waitara River has exposed a profile of loam of 0.5 metres, coarse grey river sand 0.5-1.0 metre thick, and an undetermined depth of plus 3.0 metres of round waterworn pebbles and sand. It can be assumed that the quarries which lay further up the river have a similar profile (Walton 1984: 54). The large quarry on the left bank of the Waiongana River, west of the Waitara, illustrates the river terrace locality (see Plate 1).

The physiography of the dune area of South Taranaki (Fleming 1953: 24) is that of an inland series of Pleistocene drift sands carried inland and later covered with Egmont ash. On the seaward margin of the coastal plain more recent advances of wind-blown sand were fixed by vegetation which, Fleming suggests, was removed by European farming activities exposing these dunes once more to wind blow. This seaward margin varies from 2km to about 5km. On the coast itself there are exposed and actively shifting dunes on the tops of cliffs from Patea to Hawera. It is not possible to determine whether the seaward area was previously quarried by the Maori because of this alteration of the landscape, but there are certainly no distinctive features such as those inland.

This survey covers the area between the east side of the Manawapou River and the west side of the Waitotara River. Although numerous groups of

rectangular surface pits and collapsed rua in the coastal plain from here to Opunake indicate intensive agricultural activity, there are no quarries. Colin Smart surveyed the coastal area east of the Waitotara River for some 18km and recorded 22 groups or single quarries (Smart 1962: 175). If these are added to those of the present survey, some 77 sites occur along 50km of coastline.

Surface pits and collapsed rua in the coastal plain from here to Opunake indicate intensive agricultural activity, there are no quarries. Colin Smart surveyed the coastal area east of the Waitotara River for some 18km and recorded 22 groups or single quarries (Smart 1962: 175). If these are added to those of the present survey, some 77 site occur along 50km of coastline. As recorded by Walton and Cassels, many of the quarries are associated with groups of pits, field systems and pa. However, many appear to be isolated from any other signs of agriculture. They vary considerably in size, but this is of no momentous significance. Some lie on the north aspect of ridges, but others occur on headlands of flat tablelands. Indeed , the largest is on tableland above the left bank of the Whenuakura River at the west end of the complex described by Walton and Cassels.

Some 55 areas of quarrying have been plotted (see Fig.1). Each area may have a single quarry, while others have been plotted more broadly to incorporate multiple quarries along a ridge. Each site, but not individual quarry, has a site number. A more detailed count of each site in the survey area would reach a figure far above 55. Some areas have intensive concentrations, but there are gaps in-between. The reason for this awaits explanation. There does not appear to be an exponential relationship between quarries and surface pits or pa. Within this survey area the greatest concentration of pits occur in areas remote from quarrying; two such large concentrations of pits lie on the south side of ridges in the Kakaramea district, seaward of the State Highway, but the intensive quarrying lies inland. However, it must be said, surface pits are easier to obliterate than quarries, so it is difficult today to be certain of the relationship with quarries that may have occurred in the past. The scattered areas of pits are not shown in Figure 1, but pa sites are marked.

Isolated quarries occur in areas remote from the coastal area. These occur on headlands in the more heavily dissected country inland from Waverly to the Pates River. These do not relate on the surface to Pleistocene sand dunes. Only a detailed excavation of these sites will reveal the nature of the quarried material.

DISCUSSION OF PLATES

Plates 4 (Q21/156), 7 (Q21/181), and 8 (Q21/185).

The area inland from Manutahi and Kakaramea contains a large number of

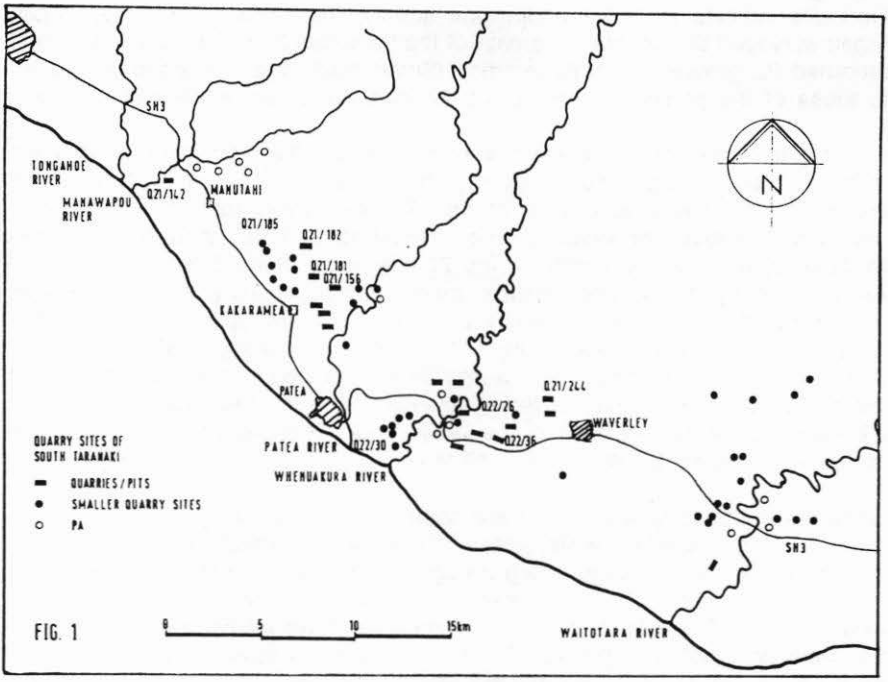

Fig. 1. South Taranaki quarry sites.

quarries, but no obvious accumulation of pits or pa. The only large complexes of pits lie in the area seaward and remote from the quarries. The most remote of these quarries, Q21/156, indeed is associated with a pa on the edge of the valley into the Patea River — but this pa is a small gun-fighter's one, probably one of Titokowaru's, who occupied the area briefly in 1868, in the last of the Taranaki Wars.

Plate 5 (Q21/3)

One 1km x 2km area between Patea and Whenuakura was intensively cultivated. This is the traditional place of Turi's settlement after Kupe's exploration in the early Maori occupation of South Taranaki. Figure 1 plots only the quarries, but the whole area was studded with groups of pit and field systems, most of which have fallen to farming activities in the last 30 years. One large pa, Tihoi, occupies high ground at the mouth of the river. The famous Waitori carved wood find spot, Q22/15, lies near the coast west of the pa.

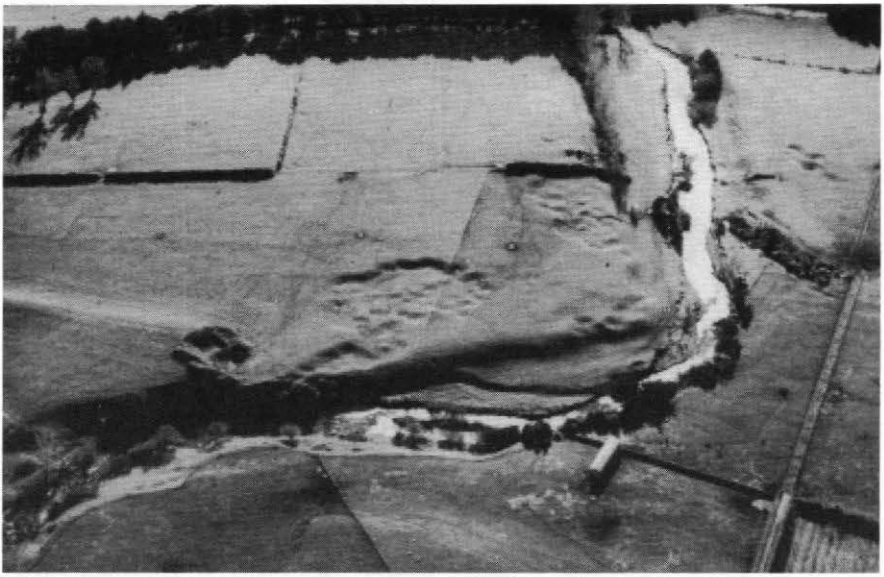

Plate 1. Quarries Q19/280 and 281, Waiongana River terrace, North Taranaki. Photo: Nigel Prickett.

Plate 2. Quarries and pits complex Q21/229, inland Waverley.

Plate 3. Quarries and pits complex Q22/25, left bank, Whenuakura River. Remains of pa site Q22/26 right lower.

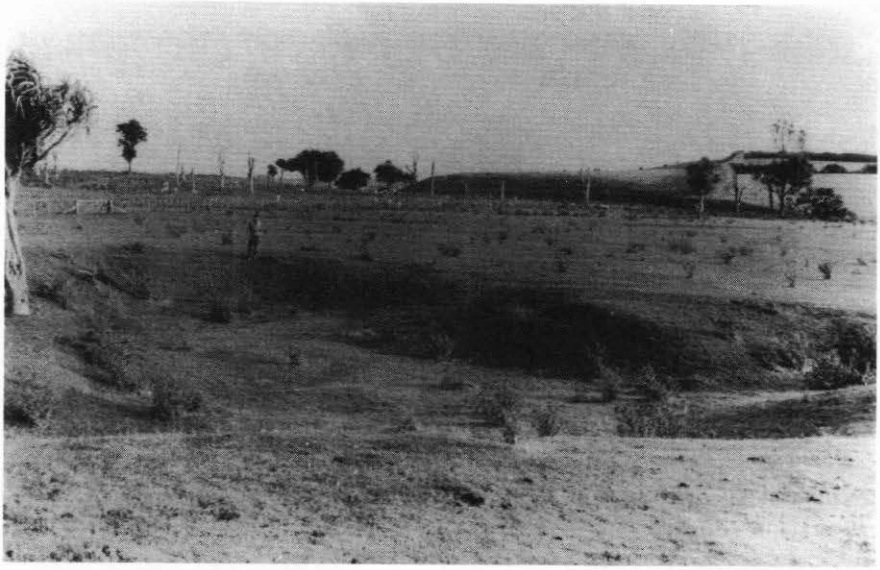

Plate 4. Quarry Q21/156 near edge of bluff into the right bank of the Patea River at Otoia.

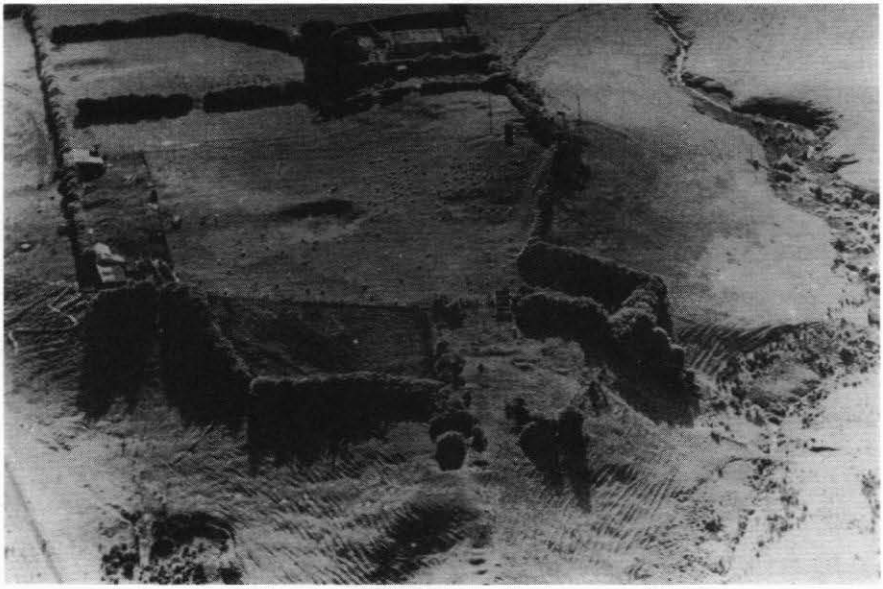

Plate 5. Quarries and pits, Q22/3, west of Whenuakura River mouth area.

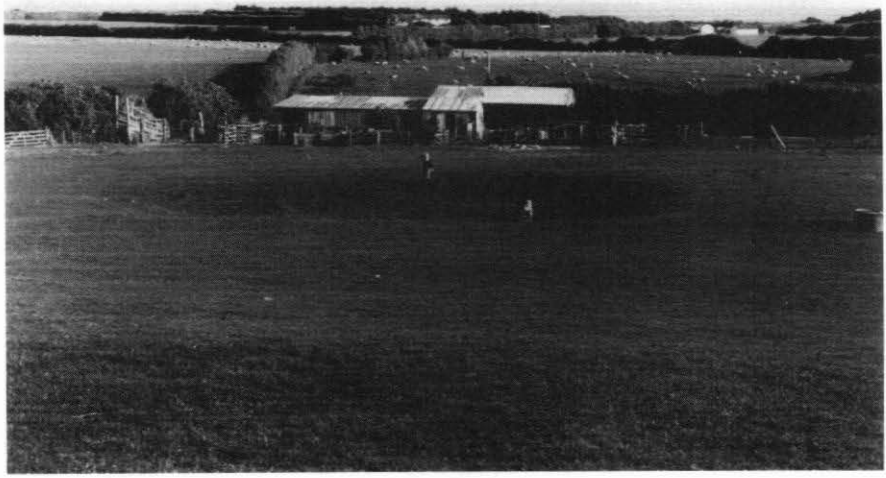

Plate 6. Ground view of Q22/3 quarry.

Plate 7. Quarries Q21/181, inland Kakaramea. These continue on ridge across the gully to the tree studded knoll, top right, Q21/182.

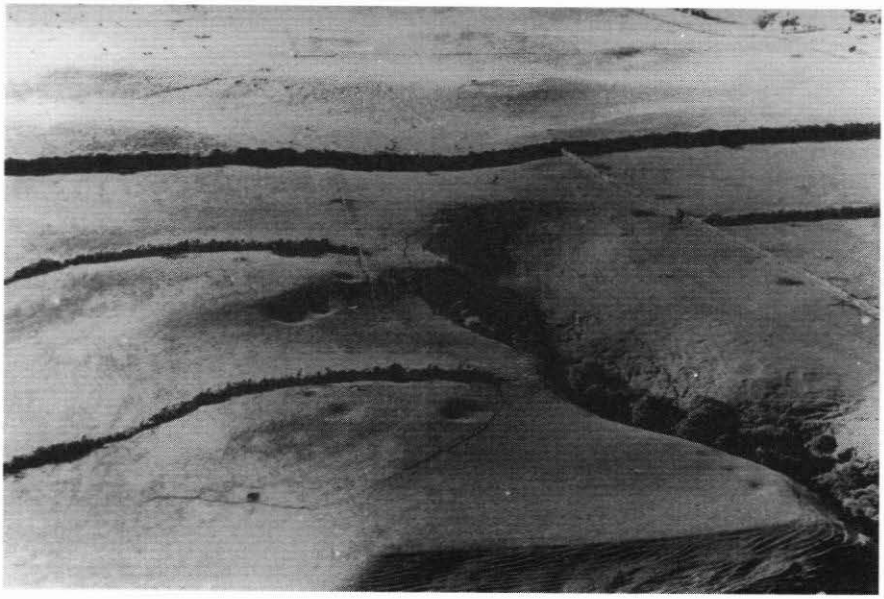

Plate 8. Quarries Q21/185, inland Kakaramea.

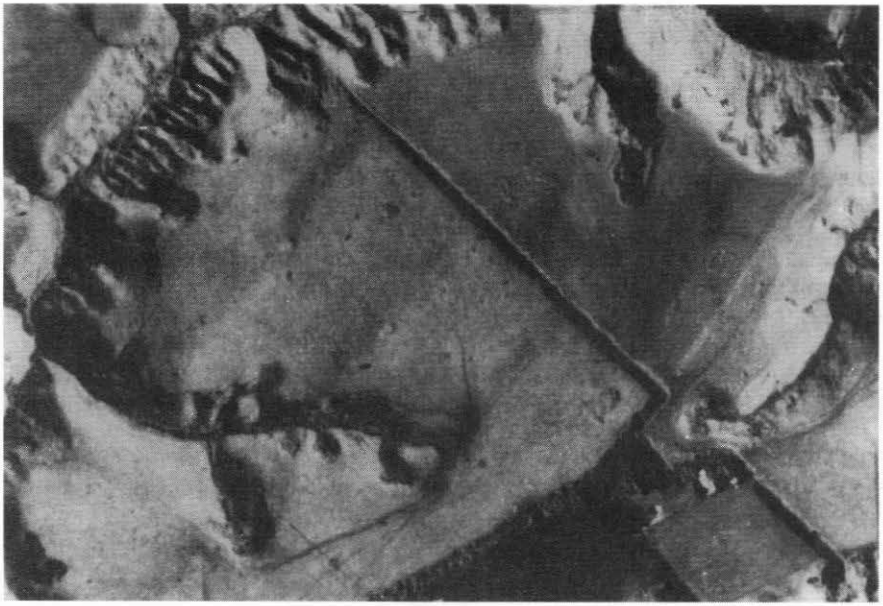

Plate 9. Part of aerial survey photo 1904/3 (8.5.51) showing quarry and pit complex Q21/142-145, east of the Manawapou River. Two semicircles of pits can be seen above the quarry.

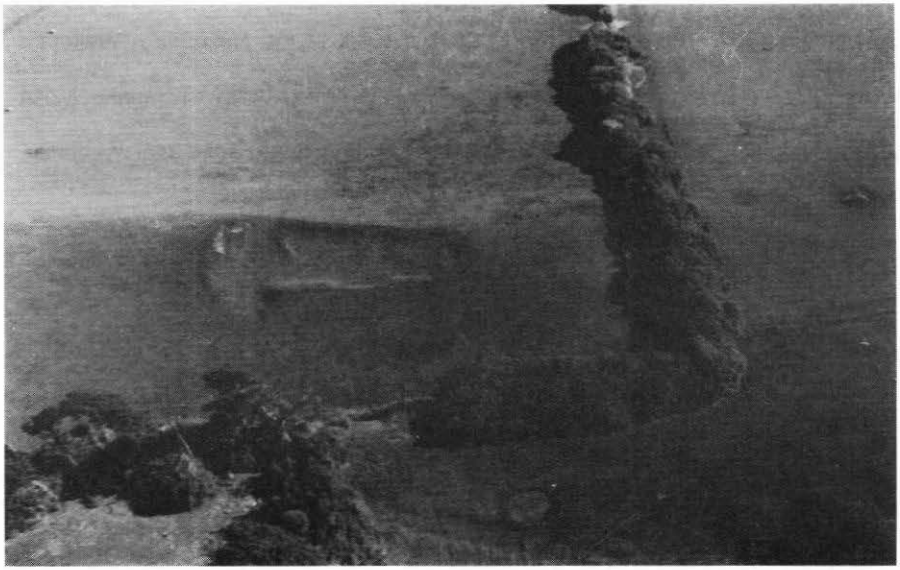

Plate 10. Closer view of Q21/142.

Plates 9 and 10 (Q21/142).

This single large quarry on the tableland above the left bank of the Manawapou River is associated with groups of pits. It is situated on a low ridge above flatlands which would have been ideal for cultivations. The land between the Manawapou and Tangahoe Rivers to the north west has not only a complete absence of coastal dunes but also the greatest number of pits in the area; but there are no quarries. The nearest pa (see Fig. 1) are even more remote.

The purpose of this brief paper is to place the detailed investigations of Walton and Cassels into a broader area context, and so inspire an investigation in far greater detail of the extent of Maori agriculture in South Taranaki. I wish to acknowledge the field surveys of Kelvin Day in the Waitotara area and Chris Jacomb and Peter Bristow in the Whenuakura area, which enlarged the number of quarry sites in the survey area.

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