



NEW ZEALAND
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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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Unfortunately, though there were three feet of loose debris on the floor of the tunnel, only the top two inches showed any evidence of human occupation. We pointed out the lack of evidence of long usage to our farmer friend and he accepted our findings, particularly when we pointed out that there were undoubted remains of a Maori village in the scrub on the hill fifty feet higher up. Though he was disappointed he appreciated our point that the Maori of old were not likely to use a draughty and fairly damp rock shelter when there was a comfortable village close at hand.

These two digs brought home to us our lack of numbers so we decided to stage a Field Day with the object of attracting new members. We decided to make the Tamahere Pa the central feature of our Field Day because of its unique character and, as a contrast, we then proposed to take the party to the Narrows Pa which is of the headland type. The latter two have not as yet been excavated by us though they are included in our future plans. Specially invited to attend the Field Day were the members of the Waikato Historical Society and the members of our own parent body the Waikato Branch of the Royal Society of N.Z. (formerly the Waikato Scientific Assn.). The support accorded this venture exceeded our wildest dreams because on March 12th we found ourselves leading a convoy of 38 cars and trucks crammed with 150 adults and children.

We are considerably elated by the many congratulatory remarks about the Field Day which were showered upon us, and the numerous enquiries from prospective members augers well for the future.

TAMAHERE PA

by C.G. Hunt

Tamahere Pa is situated about seven miles from Hamilton just off the main highway to Cambridge, though it is separated from the road by a deep gully which entails a detour along the Matangi road.

It was here that Wirimu Tamehana signed the peace with General Carey in May 1865. The exact spot where the treaty was signed on a piece of notepaper, is stated to be marked with a cairn and it was while searching for this monument that we located the central citadel of the pa. The pa belonged to a hapu of the Ngati-Haua and the local chief was Te Keihi who was a kinsman of Tamehana.

The locality is a flat plain laid down by the Waikato River in the geological past but the pumicious alluvium has now been deeply scored

by local streams which have carved wide and tortuous gullies. These gullies are swampy and covered with raupo and scrub but the surrounding land is now fertile farmland.

There are numerous surface indications of fortifications scattered over a wide area but the citadel is at the rear of Mr. H. Peterkin's farm and is situated on a half-acre Maori reserve. The central redoubt is located on a hillock surrounded by swamp. This hillock is 100 feet high but is slightly lower than the surrounding farm lands. To give access to the hillock across the swamp, an earth causeway has been constructed from the higher banks to a spur conveniently leading down from the hillock. This causeway is all of forty feet high and the approach bank has been cut away to provide spoil and to make a better grade. The labour involved must have been prodigious and it is difficult to see why it was built so high as a lower one could have served the purpose.

Thick scrub consisting mostly of blackberry, gorse and acacia covers the hillock down to swamp level and this had to be cleared before excavations could commence and the general lay-out of the redoubt could be revealed.

At a point just beyond where the causeway joined the leading ridge of the hillock a defense ditch had been dug to a depth of about fifteen feet. Excavations revealed that this had been protected on the inner side by a palisade which continued right round the top of the hillock thus enclosing an area of less than a quarter acre. Inside this palisade were what we at first believed to be five excavated hut sites but, on further excavation, one of these turned out to be two hangi close together. Evidence was quite clear that they were hangi in spite of the fact that the characteristic stones were missing apart from a few shattered fragments. A curious feature of the four hut sites was that there was no vegetation growing in them though acacias were growing thickly right up to their edges. The sole exception was the largest site (B) which had two straggly acacias just inside its perimeter. Our excavations revealed that fern had been used almost exclusively for bedding as microscopic examination of the material from the floors of the hut sites showed no sign of other vegetation. One member subsequently put forward the theory that the fern had made the soil of the hut sites too acid for acacias which are legumes and dislike an acid soil. Soil samples were accordingly taken at various levels and subsequent tests revealed the PH count of one sample to be 4.9 and of the other 5.5. Both thus show a fairly high acidity and would support the theory that had been propounded.

East of the enclosed area a partly overgrown track led down the side of the hillock to a good freshwater spring which must have been the source of supply for water used by the inhabitants. At the rear of the defences another partly overgrown track led down a steep ridge to the swamp and this could have been, and probably was, an escape route,

On the southern side of the fortified area was a small terrace at a lower level. It is quite common to find such artificially created terraces on hilltop pa where extra space has had to be provided for additional hut sites. However, this one revealed no such site and we conjectured that the terrace may have been constructed after the introduction of firearms. The main fortified area would be within range of old time muskets from the higher level fronting the pa and, though some of the inmates could have found shelter behind the defence banks, not all could have done so. We believe that this lower terrace was constructed to give added shelter because it is located in a position which is out of range from the surrounding high land though we have no direct evidence that the pa was ever attacked by a raiding party armed with European weapons.

About a half-mile south of the pa are the remains of an earth dam and fragments of the mill that once existed there. We had been informed that the local Maori had had a flour mill in the district before the area was cut up for European settlement, but its location was not known until our discovery. Some small lumps of red ochre were found on the pa site but no artefacts. As the fortified pa is small in area and rather unique in character we restored it to its original state with the exception of re-erecting the palisades and huts, while a set of rails was erected across the causeway to keep out stock.

As the pa is now not likely to be damaged by stock the members of the local group will be very pleased to show any visiting archaeologists over this unusual site provided they pay a visit before the blackberry and acacia take charge again.
