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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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TAUANUI PA, WHAKATANE.

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Introduction :

During the last two years more than a hundred sites have been inspected in the Whakatane district for the purposes of finding one suitable for detailed excavation. One of us (A.D.M.) eventually selected the Tauanui Pa for survey and soil probing, principally because of its distinctive terrace and scarp morphology and its wealth of tradition. It is one of the earliest sites of the district, having been occupied circa 1550AD (Best, 1925 : 1144); there were two main "aboriginal" tribes in this district, the Te Hapuoneone and the Tini o Toi. Tauanui Pa was occupied by the Ngati Ruapururu a sub-tribe of the latter. Tradition does not record whether the site was left unoccupied at any stage in its history or whether it was occupied at a later date by the Ngati Fukeko. Land was first offered for settlement in January 1893 when 1400 acres in the block were sold for ten shillings an acre. Vegetation was then largely forest with the lower slopes in manuka and fern, but it is now wholly in grass except for patches of bush in the gullies.

Topography :

The terrain is hilly. The Tauanui Pa is situated at the foot of the Whakatane Fault scarp and overlooks terraces in the Whakatane River Valley. All the land is heavily mantled with volcanic ash sometimes to the depth of 100ft, and this gives the land a smooth appearance.

The site occupies the crest of a very steeply scarped grey-wacke spur (N78/459113) along the Whakatane-Gisbourne State Highway at the entrance to the Waimana Gorge (fig.1.) It is in a very commanding position where its occupants could have controlled the route through the gorge and could scan the Opouriao Valley. Of all the Ngati Ruapururu sites, Tauanui Pa is the best lookout post in the locality, and because of the war-like nature of the neighbouring tribes (Best 1925), its value for surveillance would have assured its continual occupation at least in times of strife and tension.

Surface Features :

The site could be classified as a headland pa (Golson and Green 1958:51) The spur is gently curving from north to south with an altitude of 300ft at the top and 180ft at the bottom. In plan, the crest is much like an elongated hour-glass (Fig.2). Aspect is generally towards the west becoming more north-westerly at the top. Spur sides slope at 45 degrees with the steepest at 53°, the natural steepness thus contributing largely towards the defence of the site. Adequate water supply came from permanent streams flowing down each side of the spur but no springs were found on the crest.

Earthworks :

For convenience these are referred to as the upper and lower earthworks, the former covering an area 70ft by 300ft long and the latter 120ft by 750 ft. and separated by a waist 20ft wide (Fig.2). The upper earthworks are characterized by steep scarps ranging from 13 to 25ft, a feature in defence not previously observed in the Whakatane district. The main terraces are 30 to 70ft.

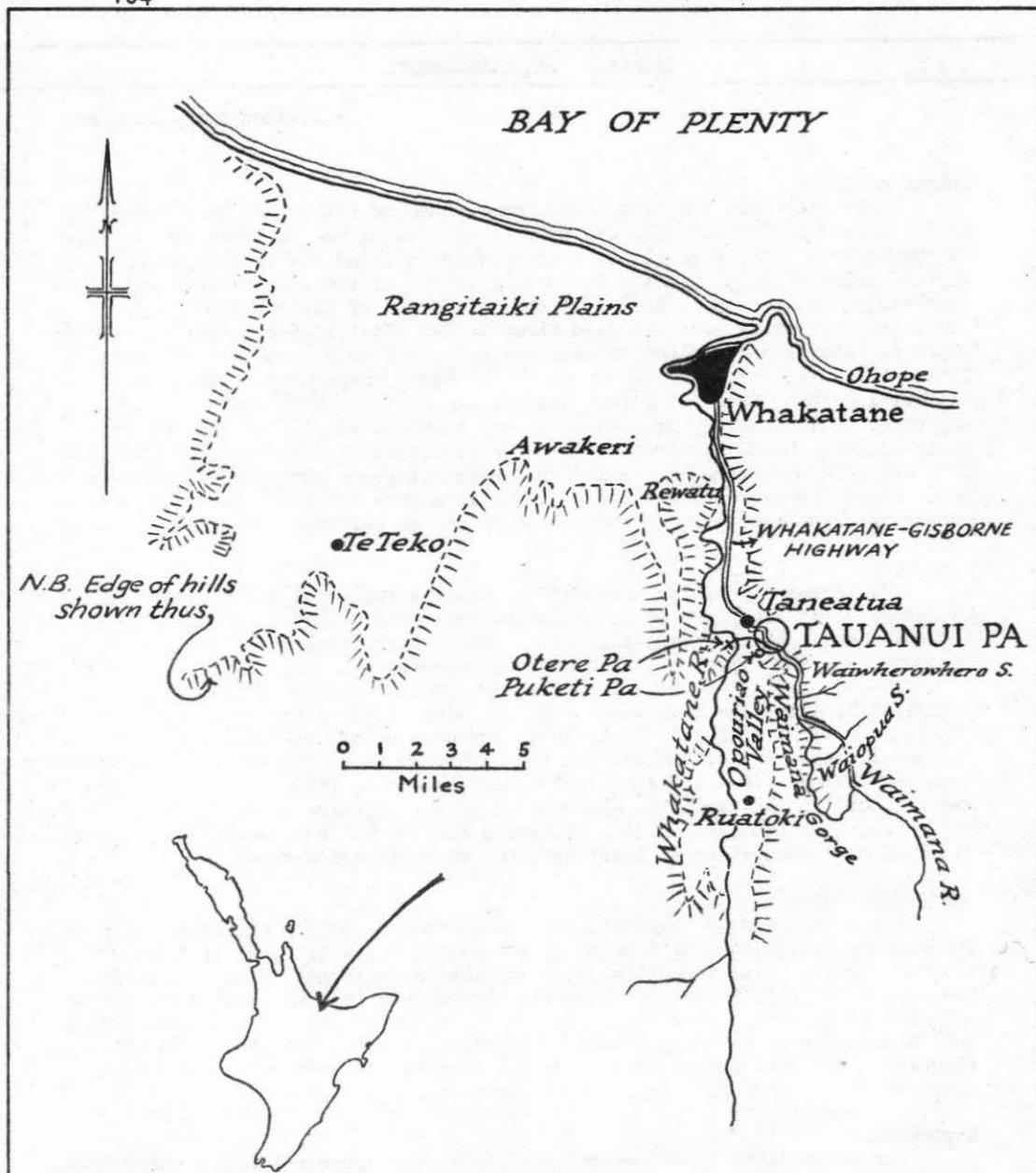


FIG. 1

Map Number : N. 78/1
 Map Name : TANEATUA
 Grid Reference : 459113

Site Number : Taneatua 8
 Site Type : Tauanui Pa

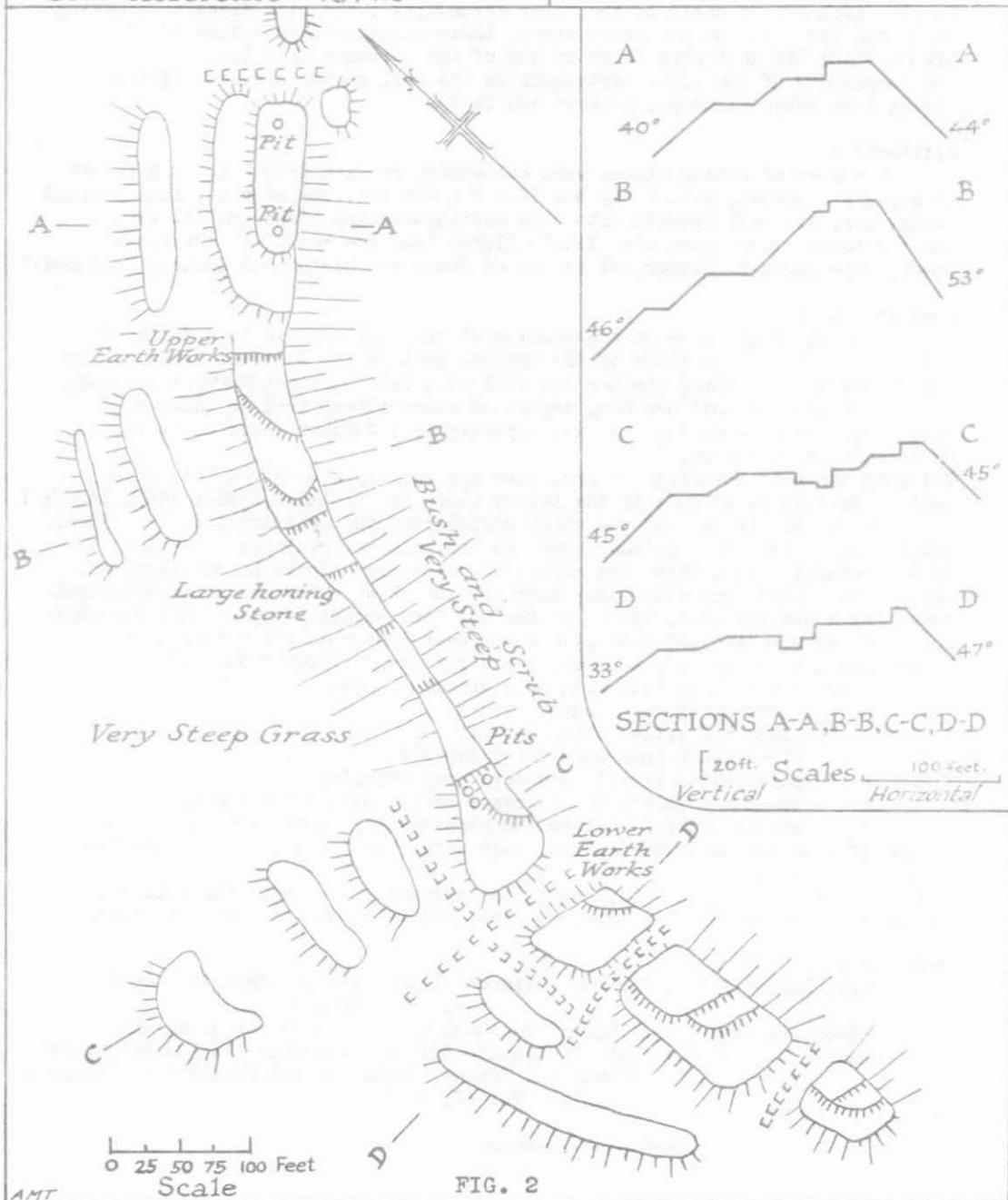


FIG. 2

wide with a number of smaller ones of 10 to 15ft down the western slope. The lower earthworks consist of a series of terraces of low scarp, 3 to 5ft., separated by longitudinal and transverse ditches 15ft wide and 14 to 16ft on the highest side. West of and well below the crest are two distinct series of terraces.

No pit dimples were noted on the upper earthworks, the pits discovered having to be dug for; but on the lower works, three circular depressions 3ft in diamet. and 2ft deep were found on one of the terraces (fig 2).

The morphology of the lower earthworks is the most common around Whakatane having been noted at Ohope, Awakeri and Te Teko.

Artifacts :

A number of honing stones were collected, ranging from 8 x 4 x 3 inches to 3 x 2 x 2 inches, with a big one 18 x 6 x 4 inches. The stones, fine grained sandstones, are well rounded with some having straight sides and all very smooth; these stones were most likely lifted from the bed of the Whakatane River. (see photo in Historical Review of Whakatane Historical Society Vol X no 4.)

Soil Probing :

Briefly, this means an examination of the soil profile to a depth of 3 to 5 ft. If the character of the natural soil in the district is known, it can easily be determined whether the soil on a site has been disturbed or not. In this region the soil has many layers of volcanic ash such as Tarawera, Kaharoa and Taupo - so that the ash layering is a further check on soil disturbance at the site.

Volcanic ash beds covering the greywacke are largely missing on this site, most excavation being done in the yellow block bed (Pullar, 1961 : 120). In a pit on the top terrace of the upper earthworks, the artificial fill is 38in. comprising a mixture of yellow brown ash and pale yellow lapilli resting on the natural yellow block bed containing dark grey blocks of rhyolite. The topsoil is a black gravelly sandy loam of 9in. which thickness is of the right order for a natural soil. Glints in the top 9in. topsoil suggest that the soil contains Tarawera Ash and that it has not been disturbed for a long time.

In another pit on the same terrace, the stratigraphy (downwards) is :

- 6 in. black sandy loam with many bracken roots.
- 3 " black sandy loam, burnt stones.
- 3 " black and yellow brown lapilli.
- 3 " black sandy loam with sandy lapilli
- 6 " pale yellow lapilli and dark grey rhyolite.
- 12 " black and yellow brown greasy sandy loam, burnt stones.
- 23 " shells, largely chione and amphidesma ; burnt stones.

In the pits on the lower earthworks, only a few burnt stones were uncovered near the surface.

From the soil probing the only conclusion arrived at is that the soil has not been disturbed for some time, at least not after the Tarawera eruption.

References :

- Best, Elsdon 1925 : "Tuhoe, Children of the Mist". Polynesian Memoir No. 6 Wellington.
- Golson, J; Green, R.C. 1958 : "Handbook No 1. NZ Archaeological Ass.
- Pullar, W.A. 1961 : "Kapu Te Rangi"- Soil and Volcanic Ash Investigation" Historical Review, Whakatane and District Historical Society. Vol IX, no 3.