



NEW ZEALAND  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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## TE RAPA PA

By C.G. Hunt

### Introduction

The Site. Te Rapa pa<sup>1</sup> is on the banks of the Waikato River in Hamilton City not far from the Waikato Hospital. (NZMS 1: Sheet N65 (Hamilton) 795455 N25 ) The name of the suburb of Te Rapa and the racecourse were apparently derived from this pa though they are situated some five miles to the north. Geologically the locality consists of pumiceous alluvium laid down in the geological past and since deeply eroded by the Waikato River and local streams. There are three river terraces in this locality and there is ample evidence that the Waikato River not only formed these terraces but has also changed its course near the site of the pa. At present the river flows past east of the pa but a deep watercourse running round the north, west and south boundaries is undoubtedly a former bed of the river, which is now drained by the small Kourahi Stream which joins the Waikato north of the pa site. The fortification is thus standing on an elevated terrace protected by the river on the east and a swampy gully on the remaining sides. The banks are steep and the top terrace is about 100 feet above the river level.

History. Recorded history of the pa is scanty but Maori tradition states that it was once in the territory of the Ngati Mahuta. About 1750 the pa was captured by the Ngati Raukawa and, though the latter were driven out, they returned and occupied the pa until the invasion of the Waikato by Europeans.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the outbreak of the Waikato Wars the pa was visited by Ashwell,<sup>3</sup> Hochstetter,<sup>4</sup> Gorst,<sup>5</sup> and Fenton,<sup>6</sup> and possibly other Europeans who have left no record. Hochstetter's map of the Waikato shows a flour mill situated on the Kourahi Stream. When the British forces marched into the Waikato after the battle of Rangiriri the inhabitants of the pa withdrew to Maungatautari without waiting to be attacked.

Following the confiscation of Maori land in the Waikato and its subsequent subdivision among soldier settlers, the pa site came into the possession of William Australia Graham who was responsible for much of the original surveying of Hamilton and the surrounding district. He subsequently served as Mayor of Hamilton for a period. During his ownership the level portions of the pa site were grassed for farm land though the steep banks were left in light scrub as they remain today. Graham was responsible for planting an area on the middle

terrace with oaks, walnuts and elms which have grown to maturity and remained until recently. Kahikatea trees once grew in the swampy gullies but these were cut down for timber in the early days of settlement by Europeans.

In quite recent years the site came into the possession of the Hamilton City Council and was set aside as a reserve called Richmond Park. It was never developed as a playing area but was used by Boy Scouts and Girl Guides as a camping area and, for a short period, as a range for the local Archery Club. Late in 1959 earthmoving machinery began operations for a by-pass route and approaches to a new traffic bridge across the Waikato River and it was at this stage that local archaeologists investigated the site.

### Excavations

After a preliminary site survey in November 1959 a team of sixteen from the Waikato Archaeological Group carried out excavations on December 15th and 16th. On the 15th they were assisted by five Archaeological Society members from Auckland.

It was deemed futile to do any excavation on the lowest terrace, because this had obviously been greatly disturbed by Local Body workmen laying stormwater drainage and sewers. No indication of the mill mentioned by Hochstetter was found, though there appeared to be the remains of a small earth dam. The nature of this lowest terrace showed it to be the obvious and most practicable point for hauling out canoes and for loading and unloading operations. The middle terrace was much larger and, though it was covered by a grove of European trees with grass beneath, there were surface indications of human occupation. The level area was dotted with sixty-five circular depressions. Some of these were excavated to their full depth and revealed that they were bell-shaped rua. Those that were completely excavated were carefully measured and recorded. At the foot of a spur leading from the middle terrace to the highest level was a ditch and fosse which at first appeared to be part of the fortifications. This defence did not extend from the river to the Kourahi Stream, as it should have done if it was intended as a defensive barrier, therefore this theory is untenable. A more probable explanation is that it was dug by Europeans to facilitate the loading of milled logs on to barges in the river.

The highest terrace was about three acres in extent and excavations were done at several points. Evidence was uncovered at the top of the spur leading up from the middle terrace, which indicated that a gateway (waharoa) had once existed there. Round the perimeter of this top terrace

ample evidence was found that this portion of the pa had been completely surrounded with palisades, with gateways in appropriate places. Little evidence was found of habitation and none of sunken hut sites. No artefacts were found though some obsidian chips and a few small lumps of red ochre (kokowai) were uncovered. At the bottom of one of the rua were found a few fresh-water mussel shells (Hyridella menziesi) a lump of pumice which might have been used as an abradant and an English sixpence.

Soon after these excavations were carried out the earth-moving machinery took over and proceeded to cut away the terraces and fill the gullies. Periodic inspections of the area were made as this work proceeded but nothing new was revealed. The workmen were most co-operative and reported when anything unusual was uncovered. One report that large quantities of bone were being exposed was immediately investigated but the bones proved to be those of sheep and cattle. In the course of these road-making operations one stone patu and six stone adzes were found and details of these have been recorded.

#### Conclusion

The most interesting feature of the site was the large number of rua. These were so numerous that they were almost touching each other and they must have held far more food than was needed by the inhabitants who occupied the fortified portion of the pa. One theory advanced was that this was a suitable place for the storage of food where it was collected before being shipped down the river for trading with Auckland. All signs of the original fortification are now completely destroyed and all that remains to mark the spot is a suitably inscribed brass plaque erected by the Hamilton City Council.

#### References

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- (6) Fenton, J. 1879. The Waikato War 1863-1864