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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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THE ESK REDOUBT, MIRANDA

P. S. Bellwood

Some three miles west-south-west of the settlement of Miranda, on the Thames Estuary, is situated a well-preserved square earthwork, defended by a deep ditch and low internal bank (map N48 Mangatawhiri 768188). The historian James Cowan (1922) provides the evidence for identifying this as the Esk Redoubt, and it is marked as such on the one-inch map. I quote from Cowan's (1922) section on the Miranda expedition of November 1863, p. 313: 'On the 16th November a force of about nine hundred men, under Lieut.-Colonel Carey (Brevet-Colonel Carey according to G. le M. Gretton "Campaigns and History of the Royal Irish Regiment", London 1911), embarked at Auckland for the Thames Gulf. The object of the expedition was to occupy the principal Maori settlements on the western shore of the gulf, whence men and supplies had been sent to the Waikato, and to establish a line of forts across country from the sea to Queen's Redoubt'.

Three redoubts were constructed - the Miranda, the Esk, and the Surrey. Cowan reproduces an old sketch of the Esk Redoubt, on p. 314 of his book, which should be compared with the plan presented with this article. It will be noted that the configuration of the western angle on the sketch (on the right-hand side) is wrong. The bastion has a single flank facing north-east, not north-west as in the sketch. Nevertheless, this illustration is an aid to interpretation, and clearly shows a stone building and tents inside the rampart, as well as some of the outbuildings.

Both Best (1927) and Golson (1957) describe the effects of gun warfare on the construction of the Maori pa, but make only brief mention of British redoubts, presumably due to the comprehensiveness of Cowan's account. This plan is presented here because little archaeological work appears to have been done on these sites, understandable perhaps, in view of the richness of earlier remains.

The fort is situated on a fairly flat-topped rise, surrounded by sloping ground on all sides except the south-east, where it abuts on to a steep gully, which was used as a rubbish chute by the soldiers, yielding numerous wine-bottles, potsherds, and tin cans. A high rise some 150 yards to the north overlooks the interior of the fort, and it was from here that the artist drew the sketch reproduced in Cowan. This is puzzling, considering the known range of firearms.

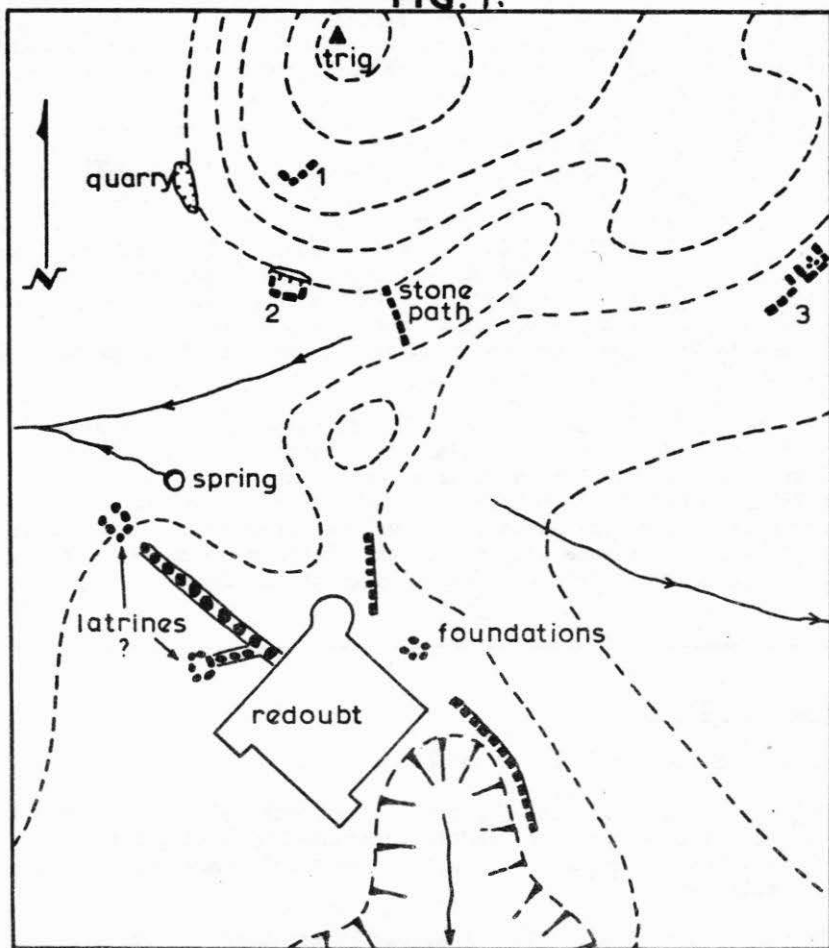
Notes to Fig. 1

- 1) Level platform with stone foundations.
- 2) Small stone building 5 x 6 m. The north wall is cut into the hill slope, 2 metres high, and is surmounted by a slight bank to divert surface drainage. The east and west walls are approximately a metre wide.
- 3) Two adjacent areas 10 x 5 m. partly enclosed by foundations. The north-eastern enclosure contains a large pile of stones, and a fragment of window glass was found in the vicinity.

Entrances

The sketch in Cowan shows some sort of bridge across the ditch on the north-eastern side, but the main path leading to the redoubt joins the north-western side, and one would expect an entrance here. There could, therefore, have been two entrances.

FIG. 1.

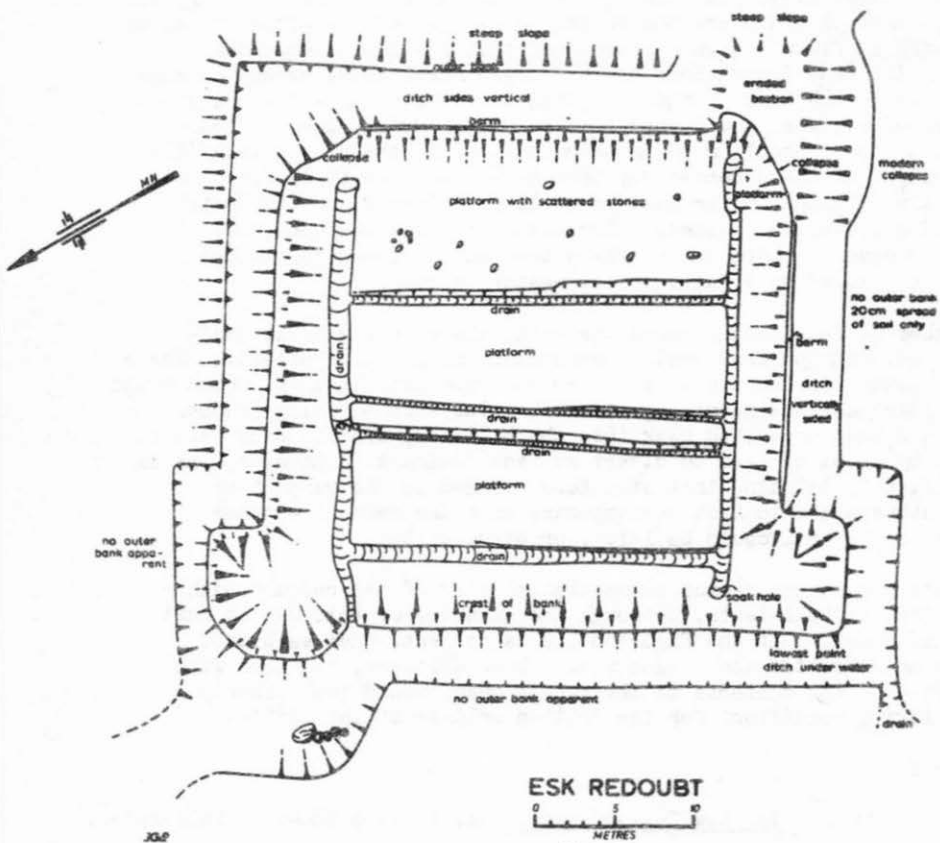


- form lines
- ~ streams
- stone paths

0 50 100
metres

jae

ESK REDOUBT, MIRANDA



ESK REDOUBT

0 5 10
METRES

FIG. 2.

The interior of the redoubt, within the banquettes, is approximately thirty metres square (surveying was carried out with metre tapes), and is divided into three level platforms by small carps and drains (see Fig. 1). On the uppermost platform are the scattered remains of the stone hut shown in the sketch in Cowan's book - presumably this was the headquarters building. Its true foundations are no longer observable, except perhaps by excavation. The inner banquette still survives to some 75 cm above the old ground surface, and beyond this the ditch drops with vertical sides to a depth of about 2m 50 cm below the top of the banquette. The original height of the defences may thus have been over three and a half metres. A very slight outer bank is still preserved along the north-eastern and south-eastern sides. Three corners have bastions, the northern one covering both the north-eastern and north-western sides. The ditch is drained by a gully in the western corner.

A number of features surround the fort, shown on the small-scale plan (Fig. 1), redrawn from aerial photographs by Mr J. Schofield. These consist of pathways, leading to a number of stone outbuildings, which could have been latrines, washrooms, or stables. One such building (number 2 on the plan) has been excavated back into the hillside, and its back wall is surrounded by an earth bank to divert surface drainage. However, one is only justified in thinking that structures linked to the redoubt by definite pathways are in fact contemporary with the redoubt - other structures in the area could be later, or even earlier.

Cowan's reproduced sketch shows the interior of the redoubt with something like 17 bell-tents, although the accuracy of this sketch must be placed in doubt. If the figure of 17 is correct, then each tent would have accommodated about nine men. This evidence, together with that supplied by the contents of the refuse dump, would imply fairly congenial living conditions for the British soldier of the 1860's.

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