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THE POUERUA PROJECT: PHASE II, AN INTERIM REPORT

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This paper reviews the fieldwork and other research done since the first interim report (Sutton, 1983), with emphasis on excavations undertaken in the 1983-84 summer. It also outlines plans for the Phase III excavations and completion of the project.

The mapping project is continuing. Janet Leatherby and Peter Morgan are now funded until 24 June 1984. In this period they will finish mapping at Pouerua. Inking of the final map will begin when field work is completed. The map has an accurate horizontal scale of 1:1000, one metre contours, and records all archaeological evidence on the large area now covered.

As explained earlier (Sutton, 1983) the project is divided into three phases each of which centres on a summer excavation season. Phase I included the research done from April 1982 until March 1983. Phase II comprised work done in the following year. Phase III covers the period from now until the end of March 1985. Each excavation season deals with increasingly complex categories of sites. Excavations of Phase I were reported last year (Sutton, 1983). Excavations in Phase II focussed on the ancillary fortifications of which there are five within 2 km of Pouerua. Three of these were excavated and an initial area was dug on the rim of the Pouerua cone. Progress in the field computerisation of excavation records will be reported separately (Sutton, n.d.).

N15/261

N15/261, also known as the 'cattleyards pa', was excavated by a group working with Andrew Crosby, David Nevin and Doug Sutton in the month following 22 November 1983. The site record form describes the site as a modified hill, "approximately 50 metres by 30 in extent, defended by steep scarps on the north and east faces and by a double L-shaped ditch and bank on the other two faces." There appear to have been either two or three phases of ditch construction. These had the effect of extending the area defended, from a flattened rectangular hillock to include a large adjacent terrace, and a lower terrace which contained at least four houses.

Three areas of the site were excavated. First, a trench was dug through the double ditch and bank on the southern edge of the site. This revealed intercutting pits beneath the innermost bank and a complex sequence of ditch digging and partial infilling. Some midden and dateable charcoal samples were recovered. Second, a 9 x 5 m area was laid out around the stone hearth on the tihi. It revealed a prehistoric house which had apparently been rebuilt two or three times. The dense concentration of stone artefacts in this area suggests lengthy occupation. The house was of a form common to the most elevated and largest of the houses excavated at N15/505 and 255 in the previous summer. It is a relatively large structure, its length:breadth proportions are similar to those of the prominent houses at N15/505 and at N15/255. It was built on a man-made flat surface, very probably had upright walls, gables at both ends and a clear but flat area in front of its front wall or verandah. This set of attributes may be characteristic of the most elevated houses on late prehistoric complex open settlements and small pa. It is tempting to suggest that they belonged to individuals of rank but at present our sample is tiny and such speculation must be put aside, at least for the moment.

The third area excavated on N15/261 was the lower terrace, or 'the apron' as we called it (see cover). Areal excavations were laid out on two of the terraces on which square stone hearths showed through the turf. An interesting stratigraphical sequence was defined. The earliest phase of occupation involved the construction of at least five storage pits. Four of these were long and narrow, being 8 x 2 m, and were parallel to each other. They were later infilled with material from the western end of the pits and the upper portion of the narrow banks which separated them. The ground surface was lowered at least 90 cm at this time and some of the fill was moved beyond the eastern end of the pits and there used to build a terrace 5 x 9 m upon which a prehistoric house was then constructed. A larger house was built over the truncated pits. It was built in one of the styles we have seen repeatedly at Puerua. More than 46 postholes were defined, including some which represent a line of very stout posts around the edge of this terrace just to the north of the house.

The house contained some early historic artefacts: a stem fragment of a clay pipe, 12 or 13 undecorated pottery sherds, four of which fit together to form part of a circular

bowl approximately 7 cm in diameter and, finally, two buttons. One of these was found to tally with buttons of a type which American experience, at least, suggests dates from 1785-1800 (Nigel Prickett, pers. comm.). It is made of brass or bronze with a brass eye soldered directly to the back. The larger house on the apron at N15/261 may therefore date to the protohistoric period. Every attempt will be made to establish exactly when the house was occupied. At present, however, the scarcity of historic items, the early date of manufacture likely for the two very similar buttons, and also for the ceramics, and the presence of these items in a traditional Maori house amongst 1600 stone artefacts suggests a date before 1840 and possibly before 1820.

N15/224

N15/224 was the second ancillary pa dug this summer. It is situated on a craggy hillock just south-west of the Pouerua cone. It is naturally defended by steep scarps on three sides and by stone-retaining walls supporting defensive terraces on the other. This most unusual site was described in some detail by Caroline Phillips (1980:158-160; see her Figure 8). It was excavated by ten graduate students working with Roger Green, Caroline Phillips and Wynne Spring-Rice, as a fieldwork methods training exercise. The excavation took place 5-18 December.

Six areas were dug. A 4 x 6 m area was excavated on Terrace 3 and a house plan recorded (see Phillips, 1980; Figure 8 for this report). A long one to two metre wide trench was dug from the top of the site through two stone retaining walls and out to the site's edge. Charcoal samples were recovered which will date the construction of each of those walls and the intervening terrace. The ditch which defines the top of the site was trenched at another location to establish the antiquity and function of what some of us, including the author, suggest might be a feature added in the early historic period which is related to gunfighter warfare.

Finally, a 5 x 6 m area was laid out around a small and rather scrappy stone hearth located on the western edge of the highest part of the site. The remains of a small and rather inconsequential house were uncovered.

Despite all expectations to the contrary, N15/224 is a site of the prehistoric period. No historic artefacts were found there either during excavations or in other areas which

were searched for ferrous and non-ferrous objects by Phil and Jeannette Salmon of the National Detectors Club. Further, stratigraphical evidence and the small number of artefacts found at the site suggests that it was occupied only briefly, although possibly more than once.

'Haratua's pa'

This year the Pouerua archaeologists had a Christmas holiday. When we returned to camp Anne Leahy began the excavation of a pa on the property of Mr and Mrs Dave Rensch, about 2 km from the Pouerua cone. The site is known locally as 'Haratua's Pa' and is believed to be the one destroyed by Colonel Despard and his men on 16 July 1846. The occasion was Despard's attempt to further damage the interests of the hostile natives after his bloody repulse at Ohaeawai in June.

Somewhere near Pakaraka there are the remains of the pa destroyed by Despard. We are not, however, sure that the pa on the Rensch property is it. Suspicions were first aroused when Phil Salmon's metal detectors failed to locate more than a bent nail, one horseshoe and a number of modern high velocity bullets in the site. This apparent absence of historic metal objects drew attention to a total absence of ceramics, glass or metals from the various eroded banks on the site. The pa could, nonetheless, still have been Haratua's, if it was a traditional site which was intermittently and sparsely occupied in the historic period.

As the excavation proceeded, however, and no securely provenanced historic items were found, it became more and more unlikely that this was Haratua's Pa. The excavation consisted of a long one or two metre wide trench through the double ditch and bank at the southern end of the site and a 5 x 5 m area dug down to natural as part of a transect laid out from the bank on the edge of the transect to the top of the tihi.

The trench through the ditch and bank showed that the highest, innermost bank was built in two or three phases over a flat living surface. The inner ditch was clearly first made wide then partially infilled to narrow it and steepen its sides. The outer ditch was constructed in a single event and left shallow, flat bottomed, broad and enigmatic.

A rectangular storage pit had been built on the bank between these two ditches and the trench was laid out so that

it would go through the pit's western end. This was actually done because of the possibility that the pit was a collapsed rifle pit or bombshelter.

A dark layer 20-30 cm thick and resting on the floor of the pit was found to contain carbonised and dessicated kumara tubers (Plate 1). These were often complete, although very fragile. A narrow trench along one edge was excavated in the layer and a sample of kumara sent to Doug Yen in Canberra for identification and analysis. The rest of the dark deposit in the pit was left intact.

The kumara were found with other plant remains, still to be identified, but these did not appear to contain corn, white potato or any other plant of the historic period. This, with the stratigraphical evidence, strongly suggests that these are prehistoric kumara thus adding strength to the view that this is not Haratua's 1846 pa.

The other area excavated at N15/44 showed a complex stratigraphical sequence beneath a terrace-edge bank. It included three horizontal living surfaces; pits dug into the hard substratum had drains, some of which were filled with scoria cobbles.

N15/5: Pouerua

The author excavated on the rim of the Pouerua cone 24-31 January. An 8 x 8 m area was opened up on the western side of the third major terrace downslope from the tihi (Plate 2). A 2 x 11 m trench was laid out off one side of the square excavation through the adjacent ditch and bank.

Excavation showed there to have been a complex, wholly prehistoric occupation sequence at this portion of the crater rim. There were two or three phases of ditch and bank construction revealed in the trench. These were built over a natural substratum of volcanic ash overlying coarse scoria. Postholes and a small pit were found in the basal ash of the trench but more extensive excavation is required before these features in the earliest occupation surface can be fully interpreted. Some midden was found at various depths in the remaining ditch and a brilliant triple row of deep postholes was found along the crest of the high bank above. This bank and the large flat terrace behind it have been built up significantly. There was just over 4.5 m of cultural stratigraphy in the ditch and bank sequences.



POUERUA Plate 1. Kumara at (N15/44).



POUERUA Plate 2. Teresa Cooper, Lizzie Baker and Evelyn Whyte excavating on the rim of Pouerua.

The adjacent square excavation contained evidence of an occupation sequence. The first phase, which may later be divided in two, involved the construction of shallow pits in the basal volcanic ash. This was probably an ideal material in which to build pits because it is warm and fairly dry but strong when consolidated. These pits were later infilled and two consecutive living surfaces made. A small rectangular firescoop and some 'stakeholes' were found on each of those surfaces. Charcoal from the scoops will allow radio-carbon dating. A number of consecutive prehistoric houses were built above the intermediate living surfaces. The hearth belonging to the last of these was still intact. Several former hearth locations were defined in the excavation and, in one corner, five rows of postholes were found. These may represent the back wall of a series of houses.

Complete posthole patterns were not recovered due to disturbance of other parts of the excavated area. A large number of artefacts were found in this excavation. They include pieces of greenstone, a shark's tooth pendant and a number of sandstone grinders and several whetstones.

Project progress

In the 1983 year those involved with the Pouerua project have written a draft report on each of the Phase I excavations. Funds to keep the project running through Phase II were granted. Awards were received from the University Grants Committee, Skinner Fund, University of Auckland Research Committee and the Social Services Research Fund Committee.

All the obsidian flakes recovered during Phase I were weighed as part of a study of materials use and curation (Crosby, Fung and Hoyle, n.d.), perspective drawings were prepared of the houses excavated in Phase I (Nowell and Cooper, n.d.), and a study of vegetation regeneration was begun (Chester, n.d.). The latter involved study of the species composition and age of stands of native forest near Pouerua which are shown on the 1854 landblock survey map. The main soil types at Pouerua; Aponga clays, and the Papa-kauri and Ohaeawai friable loams, were tested to establish their organic content, water retention properties and relative temperatures (Bhana, Hurdell and McKenzie, n.d.); the results suggest an explanation of the concentration of evidence of prehistoric horticulture on the quaternary volcanic soils of central Northland (Sutton, 1982). Work on obsidians and

nephrite has been completed by Brassey and Seelenfreund (1984) and Ritchie (n.d.).

David Nevin assisted with excavations in Phase I and II. Since January he has been working with early survey plans and land sale deeds for the Pouerua area in an attempt to locate Maori settlements of the period 1820-1860. David has had some success in finding on the maps, and on the ground, Titi-rangi, a kainga possibly of the chief Te Moerenga, which was visited by Henry Williams. He has also found the 1830s Te Aute house of Hepe Tapi and some very interesting early historic evidence on the Ngawhitu blocks immediately south of Pouerua.

Pam Chester is working towards her master's thesis on the pre-European vegetation history of the Bay of Islands region. She has taken pollen cores from inland and coastal locations, extracted pollen and begun identifying them with Dr David Pocknall, Geological Survey, Lower Hutt.

Yvonne Marshall will continue fieldwork for her thesis on the antiquity and functions of the terraces on the flanks of Pouerua. She is digitising the 1:1000 map of the cone and will run spatial analysis statistics on the data.

At the post-doctoral level Jeff Sissons is working on the traditional history of the Pouerua hapu up to 1835; the date at which the land there was sold to Henry Williams. Jeff is funded by the Social Sciences Research Fund Committee and is being guided in his investigation by Sir James Henare, Wiremu Wihongi and other Ngapuhi elders. He has taken a number of historic northern Maori manuscripts to them for their comments.

Very recently the project was awarded a University of Auckland Post-Doctoral Fellowship. The position will be advertised.

Phase III of the archaeology at Pouerua will centre on an extensive areal excavation on the rim of the cone. It will see the completion of stone sourcing studies by Rob Brassey, and the work of Pam Chester and Jeff Sissons. In addition the remarkable mapping job being done by Janet Leatherby and Peter Morgan will be completed and the Auckland Post-Doctoral Fellow will be working.

Several of these pieces of work will then be drawn together for publication. The author will spend 1985 and 1986

writing up the Phase III excavations and on analysis - hopefully before going on sabbatical in November 1986 - assuming for the moment, perhaps recklessly, the success of an application for leave.

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