NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/.

THE TAMAKI ISTHMUS by H.J.R.Brown.

The Maori history of the Tamaki Isthmus is "almost an epitome of the Maori history of New Zealand".

The Tamaki Isthmus with an area of about 54 square miles lies south of the North Auckland Peninsular and is covered by the present day urban sprawl of Metropolitan Auckland. It is less than 12½ miles from east to west and 7 miles from north to south. An indented coastline especially the northern coast gives it a total coastline of 68 miles.

The Waitemata Harbour to the north penetrates westward. The Manaka(u) Harbour to the south pentrates eastward, and extensions of the Waitemata -- two tidal creeks, further penetrate the land between and result in the formation of two very narrow land bridges linking the North Auckland Peninsular with the rest of the North Island.

Numerous isolated volcanic cones, mainly in the central and south eastern portions of the isthmus form the only heights, which are however much lower than the Waitakere Ranges to the west, and the Hunua Ranges to the south-east.

Volcanism made the isthmus more attractive to Polynesian settlers. Volcanic cones were extensively terraced and fortified, lava flows obstructed drainage and resulted in the formation of swamps (Eden Park) and their subsequent fauna, and provided stone for adzes, while ash and tuff ejected during the rapid formation of the volcanic cones and craters were weathered into a fertile easily worked soil, which, when mixed naturally with clays and alluviums, provided a wide range of soil types. With almost all the isthmus sloping toward the north, semi-tropical food crops could be easily cultivated. Fertile soils, adequate rainfall, high equable temperatures and few frosts generally resulted in the harvesting of large quantities of good quality kumara, taro, yam, hue and edible fern root. Forest crops were lacking on the isthmus.

This defect was more than overcome by vast beds of shellfish existing over more than half the Manuka and in all the bays and esturies of the Waitemata. Fish of most species abounded and seasonal migrations of tamure (snapper) were carefully followed. Shark and occasionally whale and seal provided a change of diet and valuable material for the manufacture of ornaments and artifacts.

The advantages of abundant seafoods were doubled because of a tidal

variation of 3½ hours, twice a day, between both harbours with a result that there were nearly always beds of shellfish exposed on one or other side of the isthmus. Not only were Polynesians attracted to the isthmus, but also large numbers of kuaka (godwit), which rapidly grew fat on the abundant shellfish.

On the Tamaki Isthmus every promontory, whether hill or headland, was occupied by Polynesians at some time. When the population reached its peak in the 18th century only about 10% of all the sites seem to have been occupied.(2) Like all defensive sites the pa had to contain sufficient people to defend its circumference. The number of people [illegible] ded sites varies with the type of warfare, but 45 persons per chain of defended circumference has been taken as the approximate number needed for pa on the isthmus. This results in a total population of over 33,500 if all sites were inhabited at once. If Fenton is correct, the real population was probably between 13,400 and 14,000, or an average population density of approximately 250 persons per square mile.

Land capable of such a high population density was thus greatly sought after. Warfare was common. The portages to the east and west of the isthmus were of strategic value, especially to northern tribes, hill pa became extremely complex bastions, which were enlarged according to the nature and form of the volcanic cones.

1) Fenton, F.D., Important Judgements, 1866-1879, Auckland, 1879, p.57.

2) Ibid, p.62.

FIELD RECORDING by Michael Rowell.

Field recording has been continued in the Auckland area. Work has been started on Mt.Wellington, Mt.Albert, Mt.Roskill, Mangere Mountain, and at the South Kaipara Head. recording is still in progress. Excavation is under way on Mt. Wellington, on an area of the mountain which is to be destroyed by the building of a resevoir. This excavation is to be mentioned in another article in this issue.

Hd.	Te Tou	West of Auckland Gas Co. Works	270
O.	Umuponga	Okahu Bay	250
Hd.	Waikowhai	Wattle Bay	230
H & R.	Whakamuhu	Achilles Point	315
Hd.	Whau	Blockhouse Bay	193

(1) An approximate estimate only, as no earthworks or indications of settlement remain today.

(2) Includes a small settlement containing about 180 people which is located a little to the west of Te Pane o Horoiwi.

(3) The estimate given for Te Tatua is for three pa which are located close to one another.

(4) Types of pa indicated thus:-

H. Hill pa (mainly volcanic cone)
Is. Island pa
S. Swamp pa
Hd. Headland pa
R. Ridge pa
O. Open pa

Population Estimates for Pa Sites.

H.		McLennan Hills	1,575
Hd.	Karaka	Western Green Bay	225
Is.	Kohimarama	Tamaki Yacht Club House	180
Hd.	Matahere here	Parnell Park	243
H.	Matukaroa	Hamlin's Hill	495
O.	Mauinaina	Panmure Shopping Centre & State Housing Area	3,150 (1)
H.			
H.			
H.	Maungarei	Mount Wellington	2,385
H.	Maungakiekie	One Tree Hill	3,250
H.	Maungawhau	Mount Eden	2,250
Hd.	Mokoia	Western end, Panmure Bridge	270
Hd.	Ngahu-wera	Custom's Building	225
Hd.	Oka	Point Erin Park	315
O.	Onehunga	Onehunga	270
Hd.	Orakei	Point between Hobson Bay & Orakei Basin	450
H.	Otahuhu	Mount Richmond	2,295
H.	Owairaka	Mount Albert	1,575
S.	Pukekawa	Winter Gardens, Auckland Domain	153
H.	Puketapapa	Mount Roskill	1,450
H.	Rangitoto	Little Rangitoto	315
H.	Raratonga	Mount Smart	1,800
H.	Remuwera	Mount Hobson	1,350
Hd.	Rerenga-oraiti	Emily Place - south of King's Wharf	200
H.	Tauomo	Purchas Hill - north of Mt.Wellington	360
Hd.	Taurarua	Point Resolution	270
H.	Taurere	Taylor's Hill- Glen Innes	2,250
R.	Te Horotiu	Albert Park	364
H.	Te Kopuke	Mount St. John	315 (2)
Hd.	Te Pane o Horoiwi	West Tamaki Heads	465 (3)
H.	Te Tatua	Three Kings	4,000