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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## TWO WANDERING PA IN PORIRUA

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### Introduction

In 2001 two major contact-period sites in the suburb of Plimmerton became the subject of archaeological investigations. The investigations involved the resources of the Historic Places Trust, Porirua City Council and the local Museum Pataka. This combination of national and local authorities proved extremely effective and time efficient in protecting sites under immediate threat.

Both investigations arose as a result of development work being carried out in the area and the sites' lack of defined boundaries. Because the two sites are arguably the most important post-contact sites within Porirua City, historians and ethnologists had paid a great deal of attention to them and their location. However, neither site turned out to be where they were previously thought to have been, albeit; both were within two hundred metres of their presumed location. The two sites are extremely well documented in most respects through contemporary written accounts and artwork because they were the focus of national attention in the 1840s.

The sites are located in modern Plimmerton, a northern suburb of Porirua City on the West Coast of the lower North Island. Modern Plimmerton is defined as the settlement between the Main Trunk Rail Line and several west-facing beaches. Prior to 1886 Plimmerton was known as Taupo.

In the 1840s Taupo was the chief residence of the leading Ngati Toa chief Te Rauparaha who resided at a kainga referred to as Taupo Village. His nephew Te Rangihaeata also built a fortified pa nearby in 1843. Taupo Village was built

in the curve of South Beach whereas Te Rangihaeata's pa was placed at the northern end of Plimmerton Beach on a rocky outcrop between Plimmerton Beach and Karehana.

The Taupo sites are important in terms of regional history, with a great deal of mana attached to them by the local iwi. Their association with nationally historic figures and events reinforces this importance.

### **Taupo Village**

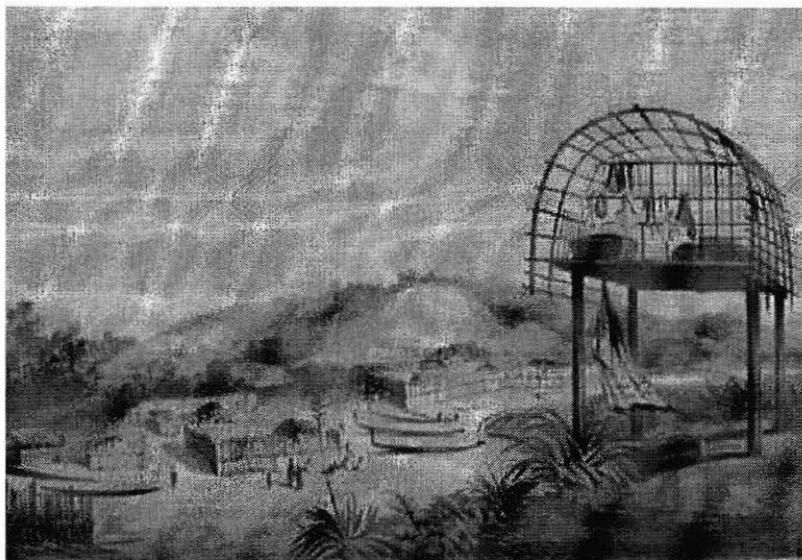
It is uncertain exactly what year Taupo Village was founded but it was between the years 1838 and 1841. As a domestic kainga it was, at least initially, unfortified. It was up until 1846 the main kainga of Te Rauparaha and therefore the centre of Ngati Toa influence. Following the Wairau Affray in 1843 the kainga may have been fortified. A lithograph by the artist George French Angas shows the village with a palisade surrounding it shortly after the affray.

Taupo Village was also the centre for missionary work in the area. In 1845 the Wesleyan missionaries Watkin and Ironside held a major hui there. A chapel was erected there in 1848 at the cost of three pounds. Despite this, Taupo was abandoned shortly after this – perhaps influenced by Te Rauparaha's decision to retire to Otaki in 1848.

It was from this site that British troops and Armed Constabulary acting under the orders of Governor Grey in June of 1846 seized Te Rauparaha. After this event the village gradually lost its pre-eminence to the kainga's of Takapuwahia and Te Uru Kohika in the inner Porirua harbour.

### **Taupo Pa**

The Wairau Affray had a profound influence on life at Taupo. Not only does it seem that a palisade was erected around the kainga, it also led to the decision by Te Rangihaeata to leave his pa on Mana Island and re-locate to Taupo. To summarise a complex event like the Wairau Affray is problematic but the essentials are that a party of colonists attempted to arrest the Ngati Toa chiefs Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata at a crossing point on the Wairau River. When they resisted a shot was fired and the tension exploded into a melee with a number of Ngati Toa and colonists being killed. This included Te Rongo, a wife of Te Rangihaeata. He in turn exacted utu by killing those colonists who had surrendered (hence the term massacre applied to the affair for many years).



*Taupo Pa, Porirua 1844 by George French Angas. Collection of Pataka Porirua Museum of Arts and Cultures. Despite the title this work depicts Te Rauparaha's Taupo Village. Note the defensive palisading.*

In the tension that followed, Te Rangihaeata along with several hundred of his followers, moved from Mana Island to the mainland at Taupo late in 1843 where he built a pa that he occupied until early 1846. Some of his hapu remained at the pa until at least the late 1840s. Above the pa a wahi tapu was created and remains now as an urupa and a native reserve. The placement of the pa was related not only to defence, it also brought Te Rangihaeata closer to the paramount chief Te Rauparaha at Taupo Village.

Several European writers and painters, notably George French Angas and Charles Gold, recorded the pa. These contemporary images depict a pa with extremely large palisades extending from the edge of the exposed rocky shore back to the bluff behind containing the wahi tapu. Other illustrations show a semi-subterranean house, an elevated pataka (food store) on a single large post and the interior of a house with carved ridgepoles.

### **The Re-discovery of Taupo Village**

There had been some concerns raised over a building development at Plimmerton Railway Station. These concerns were sparked initially by an anonymous phone call to the Ministry of Culture and Heritage alleging that human remains were being removed from the area by site developers. The Ministry contacted the New Zealand Historic Places Trust on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2001 who in turn contacted the writer at Pataka - Porirua Museum.

I contacted the Porirua City Council Resource Consents Manager who sent a Council Officer out to the site to place an abatement order on earthworks on the site. This seemed to be the quickest and most effective way of halting any further damage to the site until an assessment could be made. The abatement order was handed to workers on site within an hour of the Consent Manager being contacted.

Karen Greig, the Wellington Regional Archaeologist for the Trust, and myself went out to the site on the 16<sup>th</sup> March to assess it. We established there was a site there and the initial indications led us to tentatively identify it as a Maori site of the contact period (traditional material mixed with early European bottle fragments etc.). We also recovered quite a bit of bone material; almost all cow or horse. Given the presumed age of the site we believed it highly unlikely that any human remains were present despite the anonymous phone call.

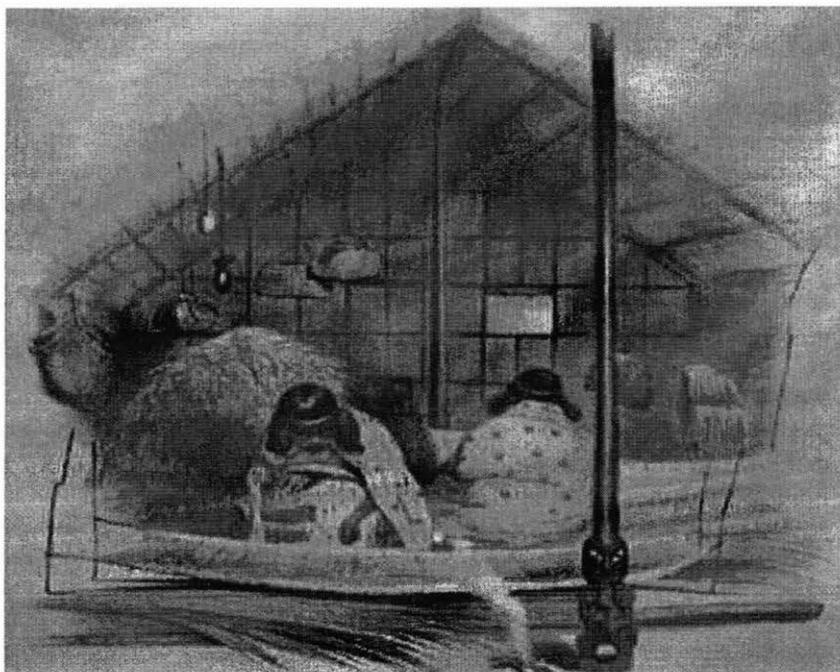
Historical records for the area led us to the conclusion that this was in fact Te Rauparaha's Taupo village of the 1840s. However this places the site at least 200 metres further north than where it was thought to be. Lithographs from 1843 and 1844 showed the village as being close by the Taupo Stream mouth at the southern end of the beach.

Karen contacted the landowner to discuss the matter with him and to set up a meeting with the three of us to explain the situation regarding his obligations under the Historic Places Trust Act. On the 20 March we met with him and had quite a good discussion resulting in an agreement that the Trust would carry out an excavation and then issue him with a permit to modify the archaeological site and allow him to proceed with his development.

I met with representatives of the Ngati Toa runanga on site on the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> March and they too were supportive of what the Trust proposed, although they were upset with what damage had already been done to the site. I also spent a few hours on site with the landowner and Tranzrail, (whose own

work impacted on the site's fringes), guiding them through the site boundaries and giving them limited permission to finish work on areas adjacent to the site.

On Tuesday the 3rd April I met with the Ngati Toa Kaumatua Council to discuss the site with them, and they resolved to allow an excavation to proceed with the aim of establishing that the site was Taupo Village. A further concern to them was to establish the boundary of the site so the rest of the site could be accurately marked on the District Plan so a reoccurrence could not happen. They also requested that I keep them informed and act as their advocate to both the Trust and the landowner. The Kaumatua Council have taken a very pragmatic view and endeavoured to make the most of the situation rather than worry over what might have been. They also visited the site while the archaeology was underway so that they can gain a better appreciation of the work involved.



*Detail from Food Supplies and Domestic Economy 1844 by George French Angas. Collection of Pataka Porirua Museum of Arts and Cultures. This image is of an interior scene of a house at Te Rangihaeta's Pa at Taupo. Note the substantial nature of house construction.*

The last problem occurring before the excavation took place was one of our own making. The Abatement Order issued by the Porirua City Council which had so quickly protected the site also included archaeologists. The Council had to decide if a Historic Places permit overrode the district plan when archeological investigations were being undertaken. If it did not then the Trust needed a land use consent for earthworks if: the earthworks were within 20 metres of the stream or were more than 25 square metres in area and over 0.5 metres in height or depth. If the works were more than 20 metres from Taupo Stream the earthworks limits became 100 square metres in area and /or 1.5 metres in height or depth. The issue was settled by a site visit by the Council and the decision that the excavation was going to be more than 20 metres from the stream and was moving less than 100 square metres of soil.

The excavation proceeded with only the usual problems of weather, staffing and limited time and a report on the work and its findings is currently being written by Karen Greig.

### **Taupo Pa**

As mentioned above the pa was gradually abandoned from 1846 onwards. One illustration by Charles Gold shows a still substantial pa in 1848. Elsdon Best could see no obvious remains by 1913 however ( Best 1913: 10). Until approximately the end of World War One holidaymakers used the section for grazing, and then when a house was constructed on the site along with a number of others, on adjoining sections. In 1936 water and sewage piping was added and in 1996 gas pipes laid.

Within a few days of the excavation being commenced at the Taupo Village site there was a further alert, this time by members of the local iwi. They had seen that there was to be a new house constructed where the old Taupo Pa was believed to be. At this stage no resource consent had been requested and a real estate sign with the proposed new housing was the only indication. The land developer was contacted and alerted to the area's historic and archaeological value. His response at first was uncooperative. His attitude changed however, when he became aware that the Council would issue no permits for the demolition of the old house or building permits for the new housing until the Historic Places Trust and local iwi were satisfied. All parties came to an agreement that at least demolition could be carried out on the existing building if an archaeologist was present. Over the period of a week this work was performed with myself present as the required archaeologist.



*Detail from Paremata Whaling Station 1843 by S.C. Brees. Collection of Pataka Porirua Museum of Arts and Cultures. In this work Taupo Village is depicted without palisades. Like Angas's image the Village is shown at the southern end of South Beach.*

Aside from the house construction and the above mentioned pipe laying there has been no record of substantial earthworks having been carried out. It therefore seemed likely that those areas of the section untouched by the aforementioned work would retain features from the pa. This likelihood would be increased given the size of the palisading associated with the pa and the semi-subterranean nature of at least some of the structures. The nature of the structures that formed the site are such that remnants of them were thought to probably remain in sub-surface deposits. However, given that there has been a large amount of activity since the 1920s on the site it is highly likely that the deposits would be disturbed and perhaps found only in isolated pockets. In fact during the demolition absolutely no material earlier than the 1920s was found – pure sand dune without even a trace of archaeological material was found. On

this basis resource consents were granted for further work – but still with the proviso of regular archaeological inspections.

This, however, still left the question of where Taupo Pa had actually been if it was not on this site. The answer came when further work was carried out in levelling the section. The back 400 mm of the section revealed a continuous section of midden and at least one probable posthole. It seems likely that the contemporary accounts and depictions placing the pa on the point of the headland were exaggerated and it was in fact some 75 metres further inland.

### **Conclusion**

Two major points can be drawn from these experiences at Taupo last year.

Firstly that no matter how well documented a site may appear to be from contemporary accounts a site's placement needs to be confirmed by modern methodologies. One site was very nearly lost because its placement on the district plan and in archaeological records relied on seemingly good contemporary accounts alone. A second area was unnecessarily protected for the same reason.

Secondly, Local Authority consents and permits can be used effectively and very quickly to aid in the prevention of site destruction. In most instances land owners and developers understand local authorities and their processes far better than they understand such matters as the Historic Places Trust Act. They clearly recognise that councils can make developments proceed very smoothly for them or they can make it very difficult. It is also in their best interest to foster good will with a council with whom they will have an ongoing relationship.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Karen Greig of the Historic Places Trust for her efforts during these projects, especially her trust in my decision making processes. I would also like to thank Puoho Katene, Miria and Ra Pomare of Ngati Toarangatira for their practical and positive attitudes in difficult circumstances. Tony Thomas and his team at Porirua City Council also deserve a special mention for their willingness to act quickly and decisively when the need arose.

### **Reference**

Best, Elsdon. 1913. Porirua and they who settled it. Collected Articles from *The Canterbury Times*.