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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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URENUI EXCAVATION - Preliminary Report

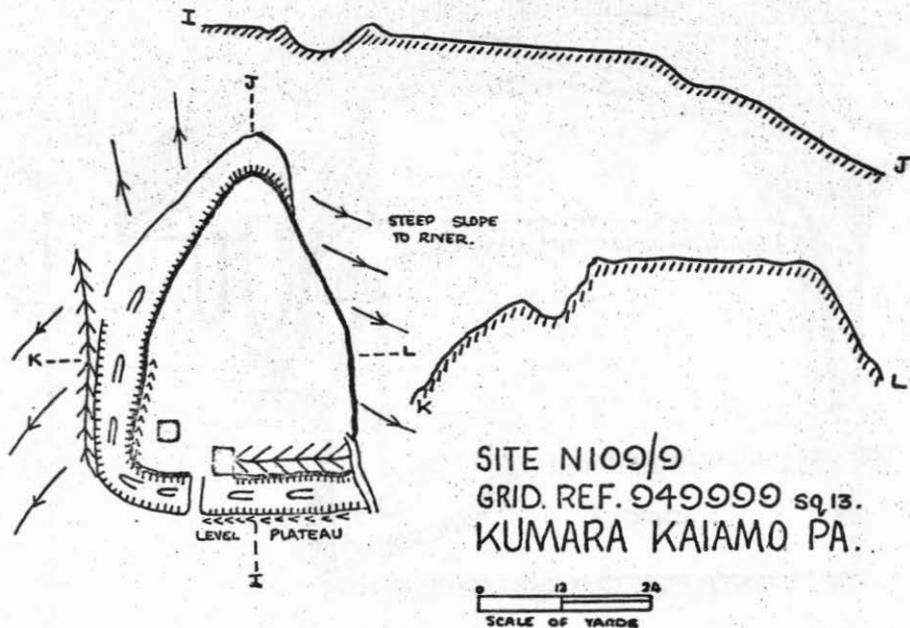
by R. H. Parker and A. G. Buist

Site N109/9

Inglewood 949999 Sq N13

Kumara-Kaiamo Pa

This site, recorded by Elsdon Best in the "Pa Maori", is situated in the township of Urenui on a small headland on the west side of the river. Best records it as having been built by the Ngati-Hinetuhi clan of Ngati Mutunga, but gives no other historic data. Within living memory it has been covered with bracken and seedling pines, the latter having been milled. Seedlings of pines are growing on the sides of the site still, but on the platform only a large pururi flourishes today, the rest of the area being in grass. A large karaka grows at the east end of the bank. Apart from the disturbance of the pine-growing, the upland transverse ditch had previously been filled in one area by spoil from the inner bank, to form a crossing to provide egress for the milling operations. Since milling the area has been grazed by sheep, some deep rua filled, and a small part of the bank removed for top-dressing soil. Rotted pine stumps are visible along the crest of the transverse bank and along the lateral west edge.

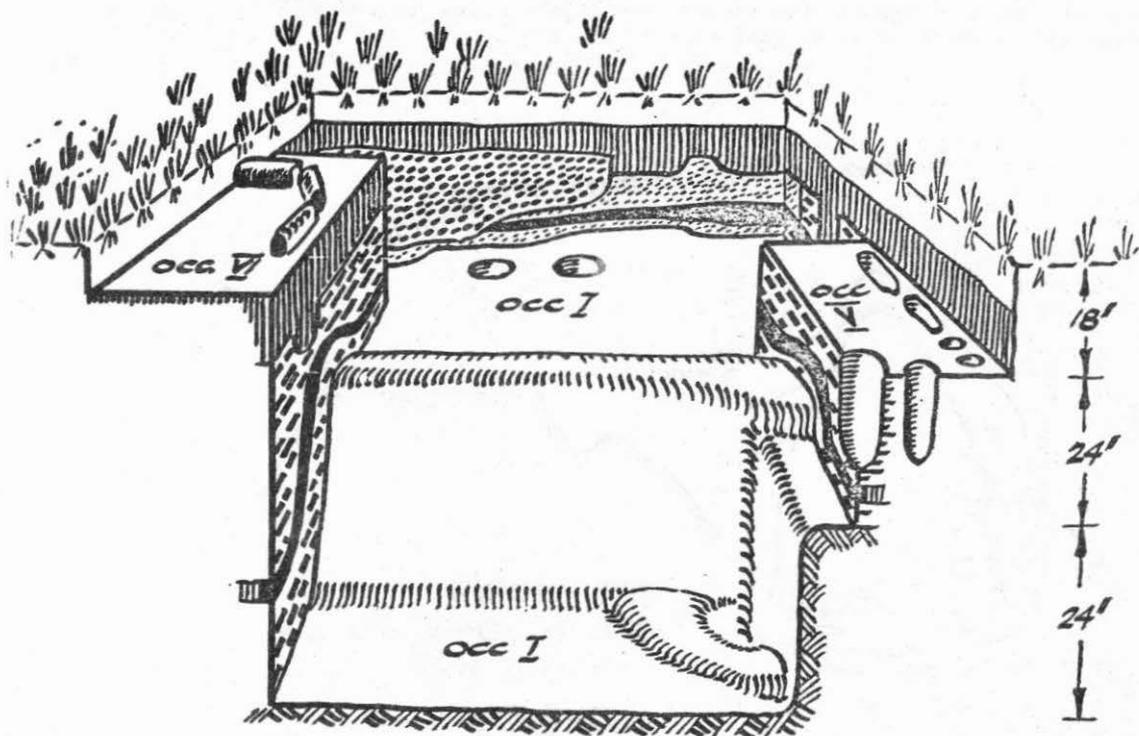


At Easter 1960, following the discovery of a hearth by Mr Dick Jonas, it was decided to carry out a preliminary investigation of the platform. The results of this were sufficiently intriguing to inspire a continuing excavation by Dick Jonas and a larger more concentrated effort over the Christmas holidays. With this stage of the excavation having been completed it is possible to arrive at some (still very tentative) conclusions. There were probably at least seven different phases of occupation.

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SQUARE F4 : NORTH EAST QUADRANT.LOOKING FROM EAST TO WEST

-  PHASE V OCCUPATION FILL
-  PIT 2 FILL
-  PIT 1 FILL
-  PHASE I OCCUPATION FILL
-  CHARCOAL LENS SEALING PHASE I OCCUPATION



PERSPECTIVE SKETCH SHOWING OCCUPATION
SEQUENCE

SITE 109/9 . PA KUMARA - KAIAMO
NOT TO SCALE

D.W.R. DELT.

It is obvious first that the site has experienced an exceptionally long history. One might hazard a guess that this headland above the Urenui River was occupied by its first human inhabitants at some time between 1200 A.D. and 1400 A.D. These first occupants found the site as a gently rounded headland terminated on the East and North by cliffs which fell precipitously for about a hundred feet to the West bank of the river. The settlers seemed to have ringed the knoll from cliff to cliff with a pallisade and, within it, in the area of our excavation, they built a small house, constructed by roofing a shallow pit. Just to the south of this they dug three or four small bin-shaped store pits, probably for the storage of kumera or taro.

Phase II

The next group of people to occupy the site levelled up the summit of the knoll by constructing a massive earth platform extending the level of the higher ground outward for a distance of about thirty feet to the north and west. The north-west corner of this platform stood about six feet above the natural ground surface.

Into this built-up area was cut a house pit of radically different type from the one built by the earlier inhabitants. A doorway, cut through the east wall of this house pit, gave access to two underground store pits each very much larger than the bin-like pits of phase I.

Phase III

The second occupation was in turn superceded by a third, again with a radical change in the type of storage. The store pits of phase III were deep and almost square. Their open top was covered with a light roof supported on centrally placed poles and probably sealed by mounding earth over it.

Phase IV

The fourth settlement stage was represented in the area excavated by two lines of massive post-holes, their former presence indicated by two foot wide holes cut down through the filled pits of phase III.

Phase V

The fourth phase again gave way to a fifth period during which the site was defended by a wide, rather shallow ditch with an earth bank built along its inner edge. The pallisade was now carried on the summit of the bank and the site became a fully developed Pa of a type common in Taranaki and certain other parts of the North Island.

From the village of this phase the excavations revealed a house floor, its hearth bordered with flat stones set on edge in the manner characteristic of the period and district. To the east of this were the remains of four hangi, and the same level produced a very large number of post-holes indicating the presence of other structures.

This settlement was followed by a period of abandonment during which the site seems to have been used as a kumera garden, since at this level large quantities of river sand had been worked into the soil.

Phase VI

The abandonment ended with the rebuilding of the Pa, possibly in the latter part of the eighteenth century. A narrower but much deeper ditch was cut and a higher and more massive bank was built, extending right around the southern and western sides. This new bank was again surmounted with very massive pallisades, the posts

of which were butted down for as much as five feet into the bank build-up. A short outer ditch and low outer bank seem to have been constructed at this period to strengthen the weak southern upland face of the Pa.

This sixth village again provided us with a house floor with stone bordered hearth and a large number of post holes. It seems certain that this was the village abandoned by the Ngati Mutunga when, about 1825, they left the district at the beginning of the migration which carried them nine years later to the Chatham Islands.

For the next forty-three years Kumara-Kaiamo, like the rest of the district, remained deserted, though a small military redoubt was built in the middle sixties in the vicinity of the abandoned Pa.

Phase VII

In 1868 the majority of the Ngati Mutunga returned to their ancestral land and it is likely that at this stage a few families returned to live on Kumara-Kaiamo, since at about this period two small pits were dug into the crumbled inner face of the main bank and two broken pipes were discarded and left on the surface, to be covered with the further erosion of the bank.

Well before the turn of the century the land passed into pakeha hands. At first the Pa remained under fern and was still relatively well preserved when Elsdon Best saw it in the nineties of the last century or in the early years of this. Later, however, a small plantation of pines grew on the outer face of the ditch and bank and, as their roots drove into and broke the fabric of the bank, whole sections collapsed into the ditch, particularly along the western side. More recently further erosion took place, as mentioned above. In the not too distant future the growth of the township will swallow the site completely.

It is tragic, though it is certainly inevitable, that this beautiful little Pa, with its astonishingly complete record of perhaps six hundred years of New Zealand history, should suffer decay in this way.

A full report on the excavation will be prepared and submitted for publication. Any consideration of the larger theoretical questions that may be raised by the evidence from the site cannot properly be raised in this brief report, herein.

We are grateful to the Regional Committee of the National Historic Places Trust for sponsoring the excavation; to Mr Gerald Pigott, the owner of the property, for permission to excavate, for his hospitality, and for his active interest and encouragement throughout; to all the residents of Urenui who have helped in a variety of ways; and to Mr Dick Jonas who by his preliminary work throughout the year made the implications of the historical sequence of the site much more explicit than would have been possible by the Christmas excavations alone.
