NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

WALLED SITES ON KAPITI ISLAND

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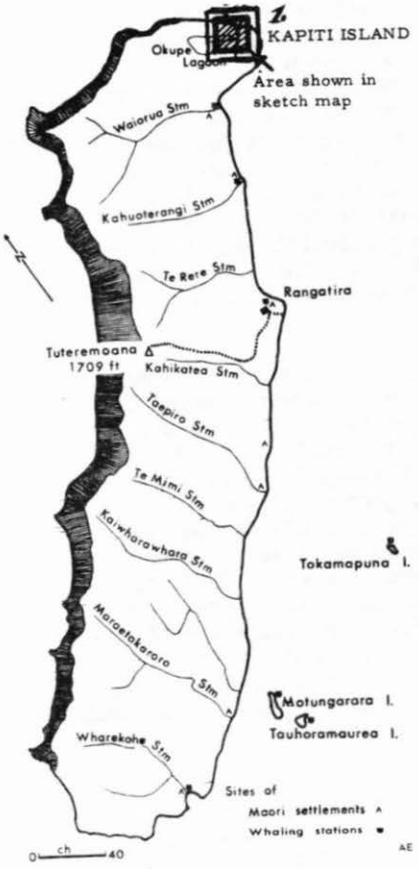
Two sites were visited, on the advice of Mrs W. A. Webber, who owns the north end of Kapiti. One site at Okupe lagoon, had two walled areas covering 7-8 acres altogether, while at the other, the mouth of the Wharekohu Stream (see Map 1), there was a single long wall of boulders neatly piled, so that the grassy area of about an acre behind the beach was enclosed by the sea, the swamp, the stream and the wall. There were two smaller walls at this Wharekohu site on the south side of the bay, probably sheltering former hut or camp sites.

The Wharekohu site, from the location and preservation of its walls, is almost certainly post-European. Within the enclosed area there is an old stone house, together with five barrel-shaped lumps of cement still showing the impression of staves. The wall, which runs from the first beach-ridge for approximately 100 yards back to the flax swamp, is of single boulder thickness, with large angular stones neatly piled about four feet high. There is hardly any surface stone remaining within the area, which would be ideal as a paddock or large garden.

The Okupe site is quite different, not only in the size, but in the nature of the walls, which vary from four-foot high mounds of very large boulders, some too heavy for one person to lift, surrounding plots from 5-6 yards square (see Map 2), to very low, very extensive mounds of smaller stone, running for up to 200 yards in a straight line, surrounding plots from 10 x 20 to 20 x 40 yards square. (See B on Map 2.) Some of these walls are more than ten feet across and about three feet high. (Of course, they could well have been higher and narrower once.) They contain sea-worn rock and pebbles. Very few of the rocks in these walls are more than six inches in diameter. There is a third type of wall nearer the lagoon which contains enriched earth and stones that have obviously been through fire. (See C, Map 2.) These walls are generally 4-6 feet in diameter and 2-3 feet high.

Similar fire blackened or reddened stones are a feature of the walls at Waikekeno and Tora on the Wairarapa Coast. Three possible explanations for this come to mind. The first is that the area was previously a feasting ground and that the tapu associated with kumara gardening meant


1.
KAPITI ISLAND
Okupe Lagoon
Area shown in sketch map
Waiorua Stm
Kahuoterangi Stm
Te Rere Stm
Rangatira
Tuteremoana 1709 ft
Kahikatea Stm
Taepiro Stm
Te Mimi Stm
Kaiwharawhara Stm
Tokamapuna I.
Maraetakaroro Stm
Motungarara I.
Tauhoramaurea I.
Wharekohe Stm
Sites of
Maori settlements
Whaling stations
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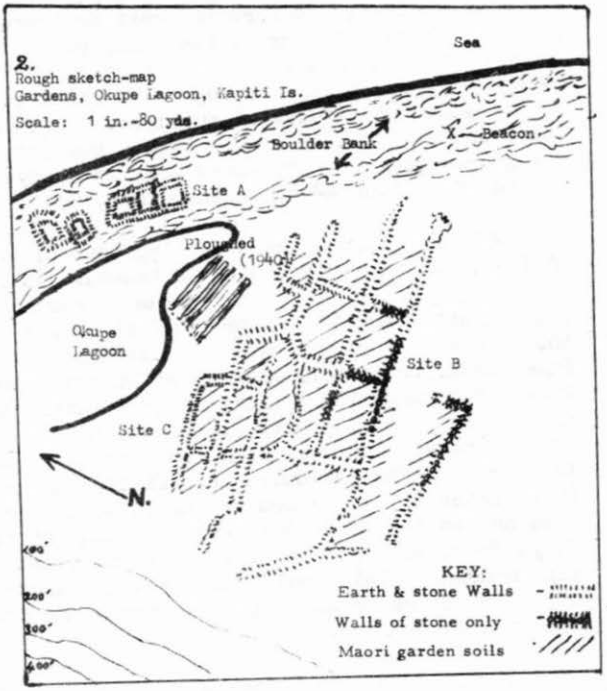
2.
Rough sketch-map
Gardens, Okupe Lagoon, Kapiti Is.
Scale: 1 in.=80 yds.
Sea
Boulder Bank
Beacon
Site A
Ploughed (1940)
Okupe Lagoon
Site B
Site C
N.
KEY:
Earth & stone Walls
Walls of stone only
Maori garden soils

that the oven stones had to be removed. This explanation does not accord with the evidence for gardening on the walls, which contain organically enriched, blackened soils, of so fine a texture that they could not have been moved there accidentally with the oven-stones. The second possibility is that the walls - or, rather, mounds - were used for propagation in areas where it was necessary to start kumara early. The stones and the blackened soil of the mounds would hold the heat. It was the Maori custom to lift the kumara crop. It is not inconceivable that, after the sprouting tubers were lifted and possibly replanted in the intervening plots, brushwood was inserted into the walls as shelter. Before the next September-October planting, the brush was burnt, to enrich the soil, partly through direct release of phosphorus, potash and nitrogen from manuka (Miller, Stout and Lee, 1955, 290), and partly through the effect of heat on the soil, which accelerated the release of nutrient. A third possibility was that the walls and mounds were used to ripen hue (gourds), but this is unlikely for gourds were seen by James Cook in "convex bow-shaped pits or 'dishes'". (Quoted by Colenso 1880, 9)

William Colenso, on a walking tour of the East Coast in the summer of 1842, saw a plantation at Te Kawakawa with "small screens formed of the young branches of Leptospermum scoparium (manuka) to shelter the young plants from the violence of the northerly and easterly winds, intersected the ground in every direction". (Colenso, 1846, 217) James Cook, describing gardens of kumara, taro, gourds and yams at Tolaga Bay said, "Each district (plantation or part of plantation) was fenced in, generally with reeds, which were placed so close together that there was scarcely room for a mouse to creep between". (Wright, 1836, 313) The brushwood that filled the walls might well have been burnt after it had passed its usefulness. Further investigation of the area showed the whole South-Eastern side of the lagoon, for almost 80 yards inland from its present shores, to be covered in predominantly pipi midden. This would reinforce the argument that the charcoal, shell and oven stones in walls (C) may have come from previous use of the area as a feasting-place.

Although we were informed by local fishermen that the Maoris once used to open the lagoon to the sea, there is no sign of any opening; instead there are two boulder banks at least 30 yards through and six yards high, separating the lagoon from the sea. Action of wave and tide on this North-Eastern tip of Kapiti is resulting in a prograded shoreline. It would be possible for storms to have thrown up boulder banks and obliterated all evidence of a previous connection between the lagoon and the sea. This seems unlikely because gardens (A) lie between the lagoon and the ocean, between the two boulder banks. It is conceivable, but improbable, that they are post-European for it would

require an immense amount of work for little reward, to create these gardens. Whalers (or their wives) would be ill-advised to construct such gardens when access to the mainland was frequent and easy, and crops such as the potato were produced on a much larger scale to satisfy European as well as indigenous needs. Such pocket-handkerchief (6 x 5 yards) beds do not seem to belong to the era of the horse and plough.

Soil within and beyond the enclosed garden plots was tested and found to show different colouration, texture and profiles within adjoining wall, garden and presumably non-garden areas. Within the pre-1855 lagoon area, the soil was black humus (10 inches) abruptly grading through rich brown (two inches) into a sandy yellow sub-soil. In the garden area (C) beside it, there were eight to ten inches of black sandy soil, with gravel, charcoal and pipi-shell throughout. The same sort of soil together with much larger stone, made up the walls of area C. In areas A and B, the garden soils were thinner and more gravelly, but more black than the soils immediately beyond the apparent garden. The garden soils in all sites contained charcoal, which was absent in apparently undisturbed soils beside gardens A and B. The walls in area B were of stone and of stone and soil. To test whether the stony portions of the walls had simply had the soil leached from them, we put a cut through one, but found no significant mounding of the earth beneath it, suggesting that pure stone had been heaped there.

Leaching of the finer materials could account for the present thinness of the top soil in garden sites A and B. Several 24-inch trenches cut into the sub-soil of gravel in and beside the garden sites showed sub-soils to be darker under former garden sites.

There were no pits but a few depressions (possibly natural), no sign of any pa in the immediate vicinity of the gardens. A pa has been recorded almost half a mile south, above the mouth of the Waiorua Stream (see Map 1).

CONCLUSIONS

The coastal area is, according to a local farmer who ploughed a plot beside the Okupe lagoon, frost-free from early September. It is very exposed. A delicate plant like kumara requires shelter and protection from the wind. The surface area within the walls is calm, even on the most windy days. Some soil has been carried, probably from the lagoon to the coastal gardens (A). Soil has probably been carried into the walls for part of gardens B and C. Were the walls or mounds

used for propagation? Why carry fine soil into the rocky mounds? Even if one threw stone and sandy soil indiscriminantly into a kit, most of the soil would sift from an ordinary kit before being deposited on the wall. It seems probable that in area B and part of C, some of the mounds as well as the areas between were gardened.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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