ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES ON SMALL ISLANDS IN THE EASTERN BAY OF ISLANDS, NORTHLAND

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SUMMARY

Twenty-one archaeological sites have been recorded on small islands in the eastern Bay of Islands. All but two of these are interpreted as pa sites because of their defensive locations on otherwise inconvenient, steeply sloping and cliff-bound rocky islets. A number of sites contain pits, suggesting storage of root crops grown elsewhere, such as on the nearby larger islands. This contact with other areas is confirmed by the presence of shells of cockle (Chione stutchburyi) and pipi (Paphies australis) that must have been collected from sandy beaches elsewhere, as this habitat does not exist around the small islands. Some of the pa are particularly noteworthy because of their small size, having less than 150m² of flattened ground, and therefore only enough space for a small family group of ten to twenty people.

INTRODUCTION

This survey was undertaken during the Offshore Islands Research Group’s Camp on Urupukapuka Island from 5—14 January, 1980. In recent years Anne Leahy and Wendy Walsh have carried out two site surveys in the eastern Bay of Islands. Their first survey (Leahy and Walsh 1976) recorded archaeological sites on the six largest islands - Motuarohia, Moturua, Motukiekie, Okahu, Waewaetorea and Urupukapuka (Fig. 1). Their later survey (Leahy and Walsh 1978) recorded the sites on the adjacent mainland. In neither of these surveys did they visit the smaller islands and rocks and therefore our aim was to complete the overall site recording in this area. All the smaller islands and vegetated rocks between Motuarohia and Motukauri Islands in the west and Moturahurahu Island in the east (Figs. 1, 2), were landed on and searched for archaeological evidence.

Several archaeological excavations have been carried out in the eastern Bay of Islands (Groube 1964, 1966; Kennedy 1966; Peters 1975), but all have been on Moturua or the mainland. No previous archaeological work on the smaller islands is known to us.
Early historical records of Maori occupation in the eastern Bay of Islands

When Captains Cook and Du Fresne visited the eastern Bay of Islands in 1769 and 1772 respectively, they commented on the large Maori population they saw in this area. Cook recorded a pa on Motuarohia and another possibly on Moturua. He wrote in his Journal that the Maoris "... seem to live in friendship one with another although it doth not at all appear that they are united under one head. They inhabited both the islands and the main and have a number of pa or strongholds, and they are all built upon such places as nature hath in a great part fortified and what she hath left undone the people themselves have finished." (Beaglehole 1955).

Marion du Fresne, who was in the area for a longer period, produced a map on which he located the pa that were present at the time of his visit (Kelly 1951). He shows six pa on Urupukapuka, two on Moturua, one each on Motuarohia, Waewaetorea and Motukiekie and fifteen on the adjacent mainland, but neither he nor Cook made any mention of pa on the smaller islands.

The tribe that lived in the area at the time of Cook's and Du Fresne's visits was Te Kurikuri, but they were conquered by the neighbouring Ngapuhi a few years later.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SITES (Fig. 1)

Site numbers are those of the New Zealand Archaeological Association's Record File. Grid references (e.g. 699581) are from NZMS 1, N12, Bay of Islands, 2nd Edition, 1970.

N12/208 (761567) ISLAND PA, Tawiriwiri. Whole summit of island terraced, with further terraces on northern slopes and deep ditch across southern end.
N12/360 (691540) ISLAND PA, Motukauri. Platform and terraces over summit ridge and upper slopes.
N12/361 (723547) ISLAND PA, Korowhiti. Platform and eight terraces over entire crest of this small island.
N12/362 (685579) ISLAND PA, Rangiatea. Platform on highest point with possible terraces down south east slope; single pit (2.5 x 1.5 x 0.5m) on saddle.
N12/363 (688578) ISLAND PA, Motuoi. Entire crest of island terraced, with additional terraces down southern slopes; abundant shell midden down southern slopes.
N12/364 (704566) ISLAND PA, Kuiamokimoki. Platform (8 x 3m), with terrace (20 x 4m) around east and north east; shell midden around terrace edge.
N12/365 (705564) ISLAND PA, Pakatahi. Platform (15 x 3m), with four terraces on crest of this small island.
N12/366 (710598) ISLAND PA, Motungarara. Platform with six terraces down southern slope; scattered shell midden over south east slopes.
N12/367 (729583) ISLAND PA, “North” Whagaapau. Three terraces along crest of this small island.

152
Fig. 1. Map of the eastern Bay of Islands showing area covered by the present site survey of the smaller islands. Pa (solid squares) and other sites (solid triangles) recorded on the small islands are shown with their N.Z. Archaeological Association Record File numbers for sheet N12. The location of other pa sites previously recorded in the area is also shown (solid dots).
Fig. 2. Aerial view looking south-west over the eastern Bay of Islands, showing some of the smaller islands with their site record numbers. The larger islands are Waewaetorea (left foreground) and Okahu (right foreground) with Motukiekie, Moturua and Motuarohia successively further in the distance. Photo: D.L. Homer, N.Z. Geological Survey.

N12/368 (7229581) ISLAND PA, “South” Whangaapau. Three terraces over crest of this small island; scattered shell midden.
N12/369 (731567) ISLAND PA, Poroporo. Platform and five levels of terraces over top of knoll in middle of island; 2 - 4m deep ditch across narrow ridge to north west.
N12/370 (742568) ISLAND PA, Paeroa. Large flat top with terraces on upper west and south west slopes; scattered shell midden.
N12/371 (747569) ISLAND PA, Te Ao (Fig. 3). Platform and terraces over top of island; four shallow pits; scattered shell midden.
N12/372 (750578) ISLAND PA, “Split” Island (Fig 4). Platform and six terraces over crest of small island; small patches of shell midden.
N12/373 (754569) ISLAND PA, Mahenotiti. Platform (20 x 8m) with two terraces down south west side and further terraces on south east side; scattered shell midden.
N12/375 (758579) ISLAND PA, Orereainui. Platform and terraces over crest of this very steep island; scattered shell midden.
N12/376 (769581) ISLAND PA, Kohangaatara. Platform and numerous large terraces over top of this steep island; three pits (largest 5 x 3 x 0.8m); scattered shell midden.
N12/377 (775576) ISLAND PA, Moturahurahu. Large platform on summit and large terraces down south west slopes; scattered shell midden.
N12/378 (730582) PIT/MIDDEN, “Middle” Whangaapau. Small pit (1 x 1 x 0.5m) on eastern end; scattered shell midden.
N12/379 (732565) TERRACES, Poroporo. Several low terraces on ridge.
Fig. 3. Sketch plan of Island Pa site (N12/371) on summit of Te Ao.
THE SITES

Twenty-one archaeological sites have been recorded from the small islands of the eastern Bay of Islands (Fig. 1). All the islands with a vegetated area of 150m$^2$ or more have evidence of Maori activity and several even smaller ("Middle" Whagaapau, Pakatahi and "Split") have sites. We have interpreted all but two of these sites as pa.

In general each small island is a complete pa site. The pa on Poroporo and Motukauri are the only exceptions, but in these instances the sites cover only one of the several, almost separate knolls that form the islands. Each pa site obviously relied heavily on the natural shape of the individual island for defence. The small islands studied are mostly 100 - 5000m$^2$ in area (typically 150 - 1000m$^2$) and are fringed by narrow intertidal rock platforms. Each island rises steeply from the sea with cliffs 3 - 100m high on all sides (Fig. 5). The lower cliffs on the sheltered side of each island can always be climbed in one or more places. Above the cliffs the islands generally have steep vegetated slopes that pass upwards into more gentle slopes and a small flat platform, 10 - 100m above sea level (Fig. 5).

The typical pa site consists of a platform on the highest point, varying in size depending on the island's shape, but usually around 5 x 4m. Many of the islands have a summit ridge which has been spectacularly carved into a series of subrectangular terraces (each about 4 x 3m). In addition, the more gentle upper slopes of some islands have also been modified with terraces of varying shapes and sizes (Figs. 3, 4). On some islands such as Mahenotiti and Poroporo,
where the slopes are steep, the scarps between terrace levels are 2-3m high but generally they average 0.5 - 1m in height.

Pits are present on the terraces in three sites (N12/362, 371, 376) and average 2.5 x 2 x 0.3m in size, with the largest 5 x 3 x 0.8m (Fig. 3).

Ditch defences are present on only the largest of the small islands (Poroporo and Tawiriwiri). In each case they have been dug across a ridge to impede approach from one end of the island only.

Scattered shell midden occurs eroding from the slopes around more than half of the sites (Fig. 4). The dominant shell types present are of shellfish that live on the rocky coasts around the small islands (e.g. Cookia sulcata, Crassostrea glomerata, Haliotis iris, Turbo smaragda, Thais orbita, Nerita melanotragus and Perna canaliculus). Also common, however, are cockle (Chione stutchburyi), and pipi (Paphies australis) that must have been collected from the beaches on the adjacent larger islands or mainland, as such habitats are not present around these small islands.

Fig. 5. Southern (sheltered) sides of Rangiatea (left) and Motuoi Islands, showing their rugged, cliff-bound shape capped by vegetated slopes and a summit ridge, which in the case of Motuoi is extensively terraced. These are among the largest of the small islands with pa sites in the eastern Bay of Islands.

The pa sites vary greatly in size. The smallest sites (Pakatahi, “Split”, “North” and “South” Whangaapau) have only a few terraces with less than 100m² total flat area (Fig. 4). The largest sites (Tawiriwiri and Motuoi) have numerous terraces, often quite large, and in excess of 1000m² of flat area.

The two sites not considered to be pa are a single pit on “Middle” Whangaapau and several low terraces on an elevated ridge south of the pa on Poroporo.

Most of the sites are in remarkably good condition despite their exposure, steepness and the threat of erosion. Dense vegetation protects most of the features, and in some cases where the scrub is
very low, makes interpretation difficult. A small number of instances of erosion were noted, particularly on the smaller, steeper islands such as Orerewainui.

DISCUSSION

It would appear from the accounts of Cook and Du Fresne (see introduction) that none of the pa on the smaller islands were occupied at the time of their visits and possibly that all predate the 1770s. It is unlikely that all these small island pa were built and used during the same period and they probably span a considerable period of pre-European Maori history of this area.

On the mainland and larger islands, pa sites are usually recognised by the presence of defensive ditches and sometimes banks. In fact many archaeologists are reluctant to call a site a pa when it lacks such features. Here in the eastern Bay of Islands however, we would argue strongly that all nineteen of our small island platform and terrace sites were pa, although only two have ditches. Our argument follows the same line of reasoning propounded over 200 years ago by Captain Cook when he visited a small island village (Fig 6) in Mercury Bay in 1769. Cook described it thus: “The little village was laid out in small oblong squares and each pallisaded round. The island afforded no freshwater and was only accessible on one side, from this I concluded it was not chosen for any conveniency it could afford them but for its natural

![Fig. 6. Sketch of the small pa at Mercury Bay visited by Captain Cook in 1769. Most of the archaeological sites on the small islands in the eastern Bay of Islands are thought to be the earthwork remains of small terraced and pallisaded pa such as this. Copied from a sketch by Cook.](image-url)
strength." (Beaglehole 1955).

The above description could fit any of the small island sites in the eastern Bay of Islands with their small rectangular terraces, lack of water and steep sides. There can have been no possible advantage to the people that occupied these rather inconvenient sites other than for the natural defence provided. Since they must have been defended sites, they probably also had partial pallisade defences like those described by Cook in Mercury Bay and shown in Figure 6.

The presence of pits on some of these sites suggests that in some of the pa at least, root crops were stored in the usual partly subterranean storage buildings. None of the small islands (except perhaps Tawiriwiri and Poroporo) were large enough for the growing of crops and therefore this stored food must have been cultivated elsewhere, presumably on the larger islands.

The larger pa sites on these small islands are equivalent in area to average-sized pa on the mainland and could house a reasonable-sized group of say 50 to 100 people. The pa on the smaller islands however, are very small and could comfortably house only 10 to 20 people each and were presumably the defended positions of small family groups. Small pa of these sizes are not often present on the mainland and are therefore of considerable interest and value.

REFERENCES


