

# Muiata Pa

## Historic Heritage Assessment

Kaitaia Area Office



Melina Goddard 2011



[newzealand.govt.nz](http://newzealand.govt.nz)

Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

Muiata Pa Historic Heritage Assessment

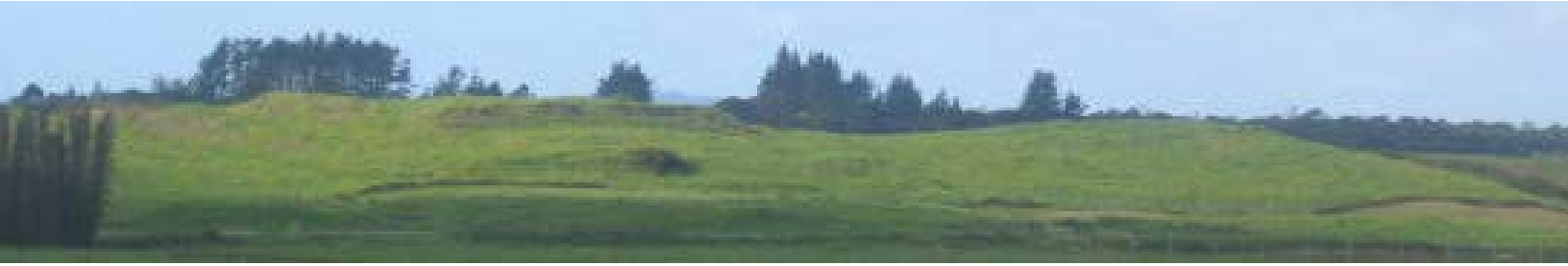
Melina Goddard, DoC, Kaitaia area office 2011

Cover image: tihi and upper terrace of Muiata pa taken facing west

Peer-reviewed by: Joan Maingay

Publication information

© Copyright New Zealand Department of Conservation(web pdf # needed)



## Contents

Site Overview	5
History Description	6
Fabric Description	9
Cultural Connections	12
National Context	12
Historic Significance	13
Fabric Significance	13
Cultural Significance	13
Management Recommendations	14
Management Chronology	14
Management Documentation	15
Sources	16
Appendix	17-18
Endnotes	

Image: *Muiata pa* profile as seen from state highway 1 facing north

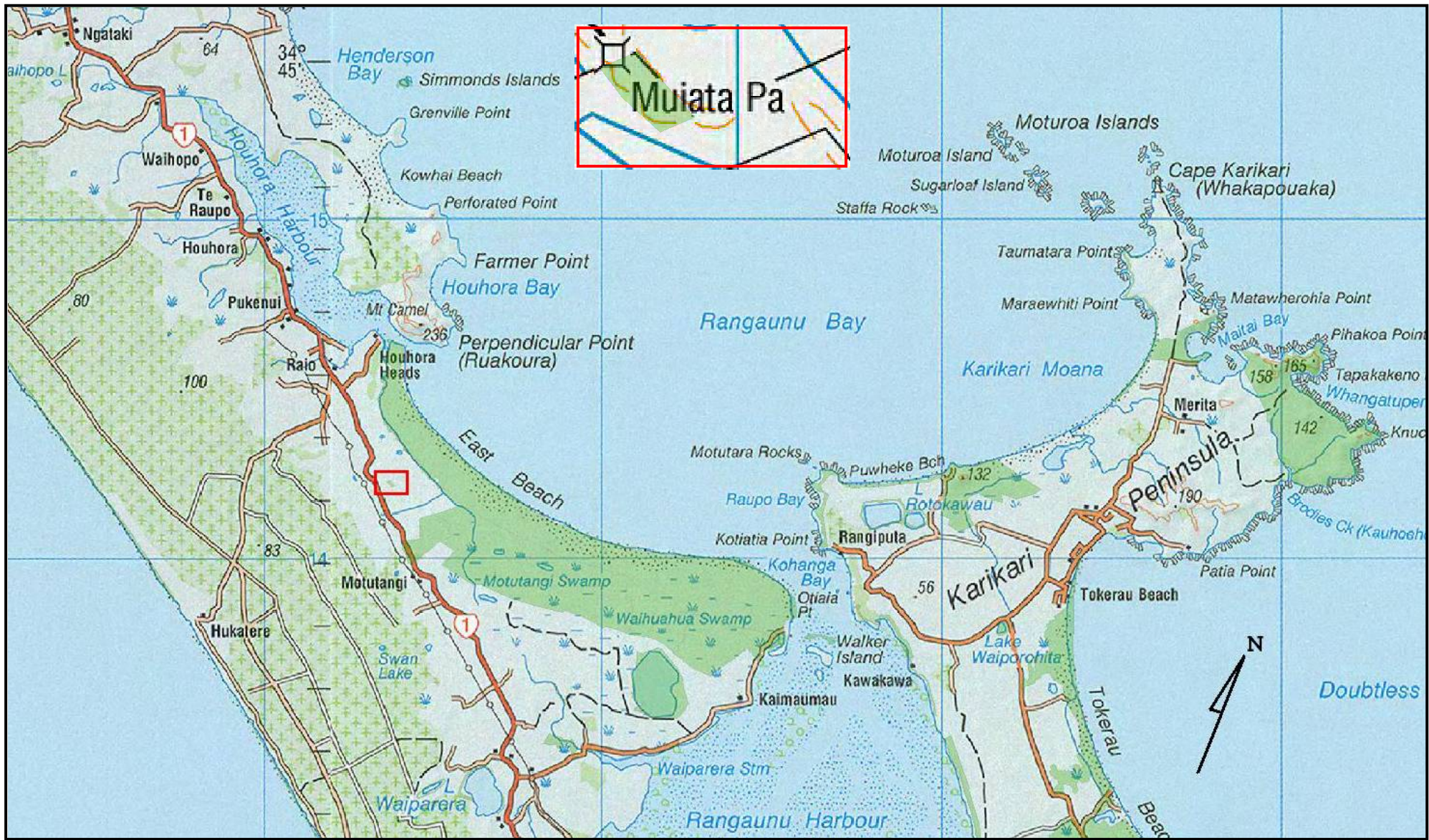


Figure 1: Location of Muiata Pa on the Aupouri Peninsula, Far North, New Zealand.

## Site Overview

Muiata Pa is located on low-lying farmland north of Rangaunu Bay near east coast of the Aupouri Peninsula. It is flanked by Houhora Harbour to the north and Rangaunu Harbour to the south (fig 1). Little is known of the direct history of the pa, however from the information that is available on the wider history of the area, the fabric of the pa and its surrounding lands, assumptions can be made regarding its function in the landscape.

The pa is located upon consolidated dunes of Pleistocene age within the Motutangi Swamp. Traditionally Motutangi was known as Motutengi, meaning three islands and the swamp was once a river on which the pa was strategically located. The pa would have acted as a guard and a refuge for villages nearby and may have been only accessible by canoe. It was probably associated with the tribes that emerged from the *Muriwhenua* people and there are numerous oral traditions associated with the wider area.

Although the pa and its adjacent lands have suffered damage in the past from various sources, the main earthworks are still intact and highly visible. The surrounding swamplands were drained in the 1970's but the potential for organic remains that survive in wetland environments should still be considered. The pa is one of three that are located within the swamp in relatively close proximity to each other.

The values of the pa are its cultural connections, its rarity as a previous wetland site and one of three pa located along what was once the Motutengi River. Together the three sites hold high potential for interpretation of an extremely rare archaeological landscape.

Land status: *Historic Reserve*.

Administered by: *The Department of Conservation, Kaitaia Area Office*.

Access by: *unmarked gravel drive*.

Visitor numbers: *Unknown, the public may be unaware of the site*.

Heritage status: *protected under the Historic Places Act 1993, the Reserves Act 1997 and the Conservation Act 1987*.

Site area: *1.2647 hectares*.

Functional location number: *DN-61-300-3048*.

NZAA site record #: *N03/113*.

## History Description

The history of Muiata Pa is drawn from oral traditions of the area and accounts from initial European contact there is little known of the direct history of the pa, but traditions may exist within iwi. This information leads to interpretations that help piece together a prehistoric context for Muiata pa.

### Maori History

The Aupouri Peninsula is a splinter of land at the northern tip of the country. Its name comes from the local iwi. It is also known as Te Hiku-o-te-Ika-a-Māui, the tail of Māui's fish.<sup>1</sup> The following history was taken from the Encyclopedia of New Zealand which describes some of the Maori people who settled the Rangaunu Harbour region and may have connections with Muiata pa.

By the end of the 18th century, the iwi of today were taking shape. In the far north, six tribes from the confederation now known as Muriwhenua emerged: Ngāti Kurī, Ngāi Takoto, Te Pātū, Ngāti Kahu, Te Aupōuri and Te Rarawa.<sup>2</sup>

Ngāti Kahu takes its name from Kahutianui-o-te-rangi, who was the daughter of Tūmoana. Tūmoana was captain of the Tinana canoe that returned to Hawaiki where his nephew Te Parata renamed the canoe Māmaru. The Māmaru returned to Muriwhenua territory, first sighting land at Pūwheke Mountain. Te Parata then married Kahutianui-o-te-rangi, and their descendants settled the Rangaunu and Tokerau Harbours.<sup>3</sup>

The Takitimu canoe was also associated with the area. It was captained by Tamatea, who is said to be one of the great explorers in Maori history. He landed at Awanui in Rangaunu Harbour. (This connection was once very important; Ngāti Kahu was sometimes known as Ngāi Tamatea). Northland traditions say that Tamatea explored the Kaipara and Hokianga Harbours before settling at Awanui and Kaitāia on Rangaunu Harbour.<sup>4</sup>

There is another story of a man named Rongomai *the captain of the Māhuhu* canoe (Māhuhu-ki-te-rangi is the main ancestral canoe of Ngāti Whātua). The canoe landed at Tāporapora-o-Toko-o-te-rangi, a promontory opposite the entrance to Kaipara Harbour. Rongomai drowned when his canoe capsized, and his body was pounded onto rocks on the northern side of the harbour entrance, Te Ākitanga-o-Rongomai (the beating of Rongomai). His body was eaten by trevally, and to this day his descendants will not eat that type of fish. Some accounts say that the *Māhuhu* people returned to the north and settled at Rangaunu Harbour, where the canoe was interred in a creek named Te Waipopo-o-Māhuhu.<sup>5</sup>

A small extract found in a Department of Lands and Survey report states that the pa was occupied and rebuilt by Hongi Hika during a northern campaign. However, no substantiating evidence for this has been found.

## European accounts

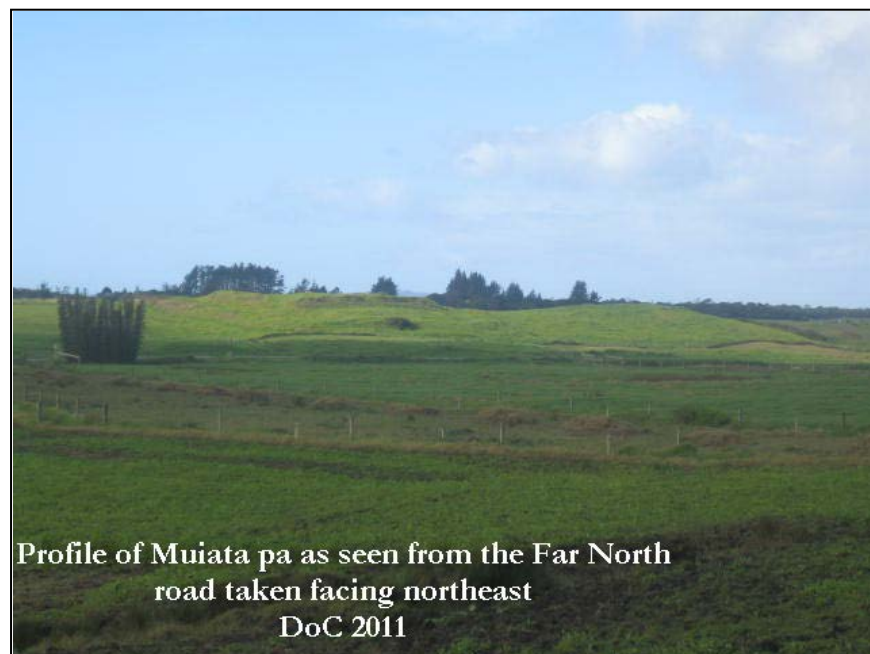
When Lieutenant James Cook first visited New Zealand in 1769 he sailed past the entrance of Rangaunu Bay and northward towards Houhora Harbour. He noticed the high hill at the entrance, which he named Mount Camel, and a large fire on Karikari Peninsula. He described the landscape as follows:

*'No Country upon earth can look more barren than the land about this Bay doth (Rangaunu), it is in general low except the mountain just mentioned and the soil to all appearance nothing but white sand thrown up in low irregular hills lying in narrow ridges parallel with the shore... the first ridge behind the sea beach is partly covered with shrubs plants etc but the second ridge hath hardly any green thing upon it which induced me to think it lies open to the western sea. As barren as this land appears it is not without inhabitants, we saw a village on the side of Mt Camel (according to Wilkinson several hipas) and another on the eastern side (Karikari) besides five canoes that were pulling off to the ship but did not come up with us.'*<sup>6</sup>

## Muiata Pa

The pa is located on a long sandstone ridge within the Motutengi Swamp (fig 2). Motutengi meaning 3 islands, also has 2 associated pa located within the swamp. One, possibly named Kauanga, is 200m south of Muiata pa, its name possibly Kauanga is on private land. This pa is partly covered with ti tree and has been built on sand. It has a ditch and bank defence and the highest point drops down to the partly drained swamp. The second pa is Ruatuora located northeast of the Far North Road on private land, it has 19 pits, numerous terraces several ditches and 10 features described as “dips” in the rim of the pa. It was once surrounded by Motutengi Swamp and the owner found wooden artefacts when the swamp was drained; these are now in the Kaitaia museum.

Figure 2



A map from 1855 shows a portion of the “Motutengi River” This river runs from the inside of the Houhora Harbour to the Rangaunu Harbour and there were possibly various smaller waterways leading inland and out to the coast. This river would have provided access to Muiata Pa; and if not directly, then along an arm to its encircling swamp waters (fig 3).

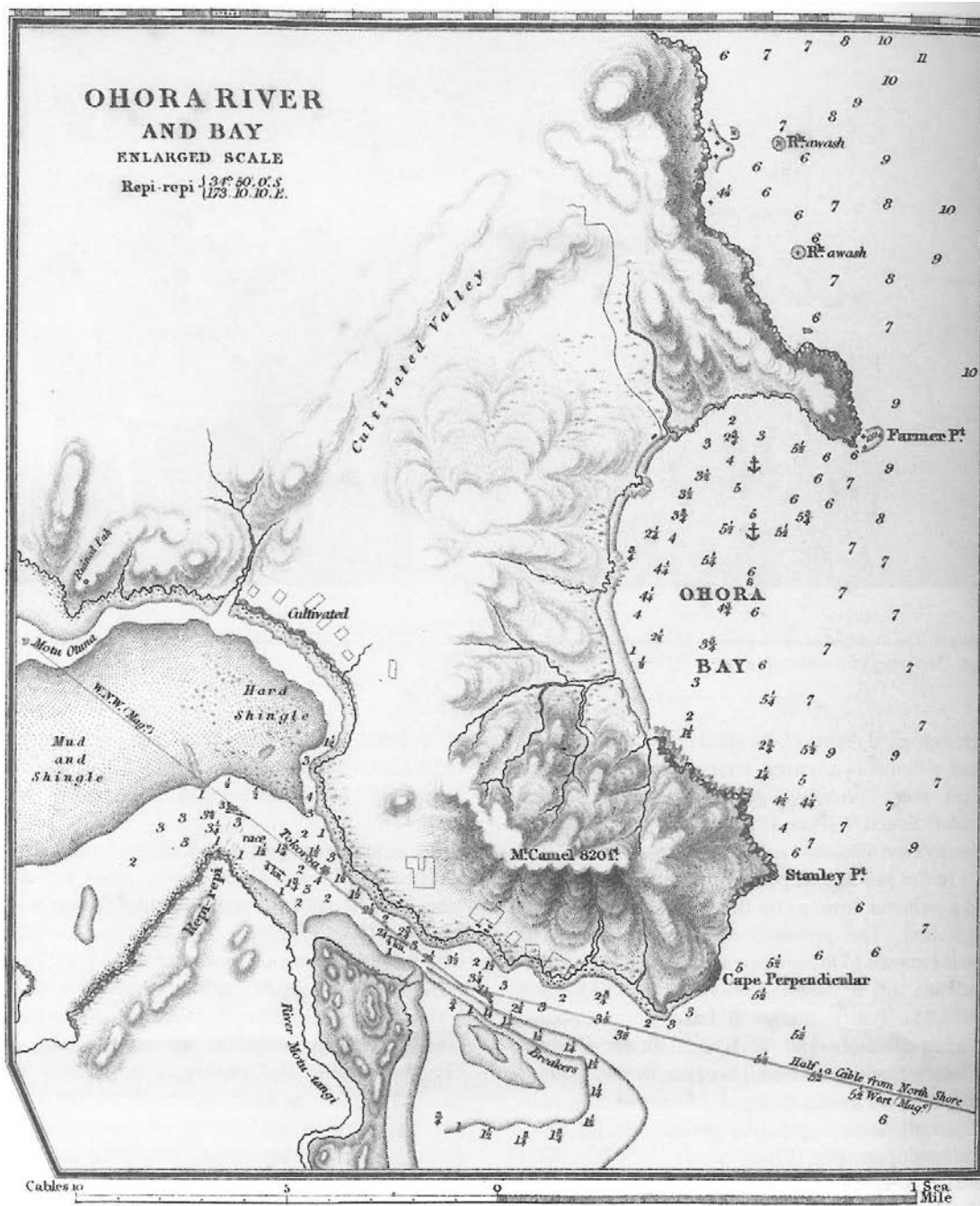


Figure 3: Map of the Houhora Harbour in 1855 by Capt. Stokes of the HMS Pandora. Note in bottom left the “River Motutangi” (From Furey 2002 Auckland Public Library)



Muiata Pa was strategically located along a communication route and was hidden from the coast although its fires may have been visible. It may have acted to guard this river route between the harbours. It could have had contact with the archaeological site, Mount Camel located on the Houhora Heads and in good view of Muiata Pa, and also with other villages. Additionally it may have been a refuge for families and tribes living in the area. The presence of the two defensive ditches on the eastern and western sides of the pa indicates that it acted as a defensive site in its final occupation years. If it is true that Hongi rebuilt and resided here for a time during his campaigns then it may have been uninhabited for a period or he overthrew it.

The soil type and the restricted space suggests that gardening activities may have been limited on Muiata. Crops may have been grown at kainga and brought to the pa, when required. There are pits here for storage, and a large one is located outside the defensive ditches on a small ridge top that is associated with the pa. It is possible that small scale gardening took place with the help of soil intervention but only archaeological excavations would be able to confirm this.

In Cook's account Wilkinson described seeing several "hipas" (pa); Muiata could possibly have been one of them. The land behind Rangaunu Bay was described as having "low and irregular hills" these are still visible from Muiata Pa, although now the former sand dunes are covered with grass.

## **Fabric Description**

The fabric is represented as built Maori heritage; pa earthworks. The features that make up the pa are large terraces, pits, a tihi (platform), and defensive ditches. The pa site measured from ditch to ditch is approximately 80m in length and from the fence to the last terrace (north to south) where the farm land or former swamp is, it is approximately 100m. On the eastern side beyond the defensive ditch is a long narrow ridge that measures approximately 70m x 60m this has four or more terraces cut into it and a pit approximately 5m x 3m situated on the highest point indicating activities that went beyond just defensive aspects of the pa (fig 4). The lower terraces that flank the pa are wide and long and suggesting use as living areas (fig 5).

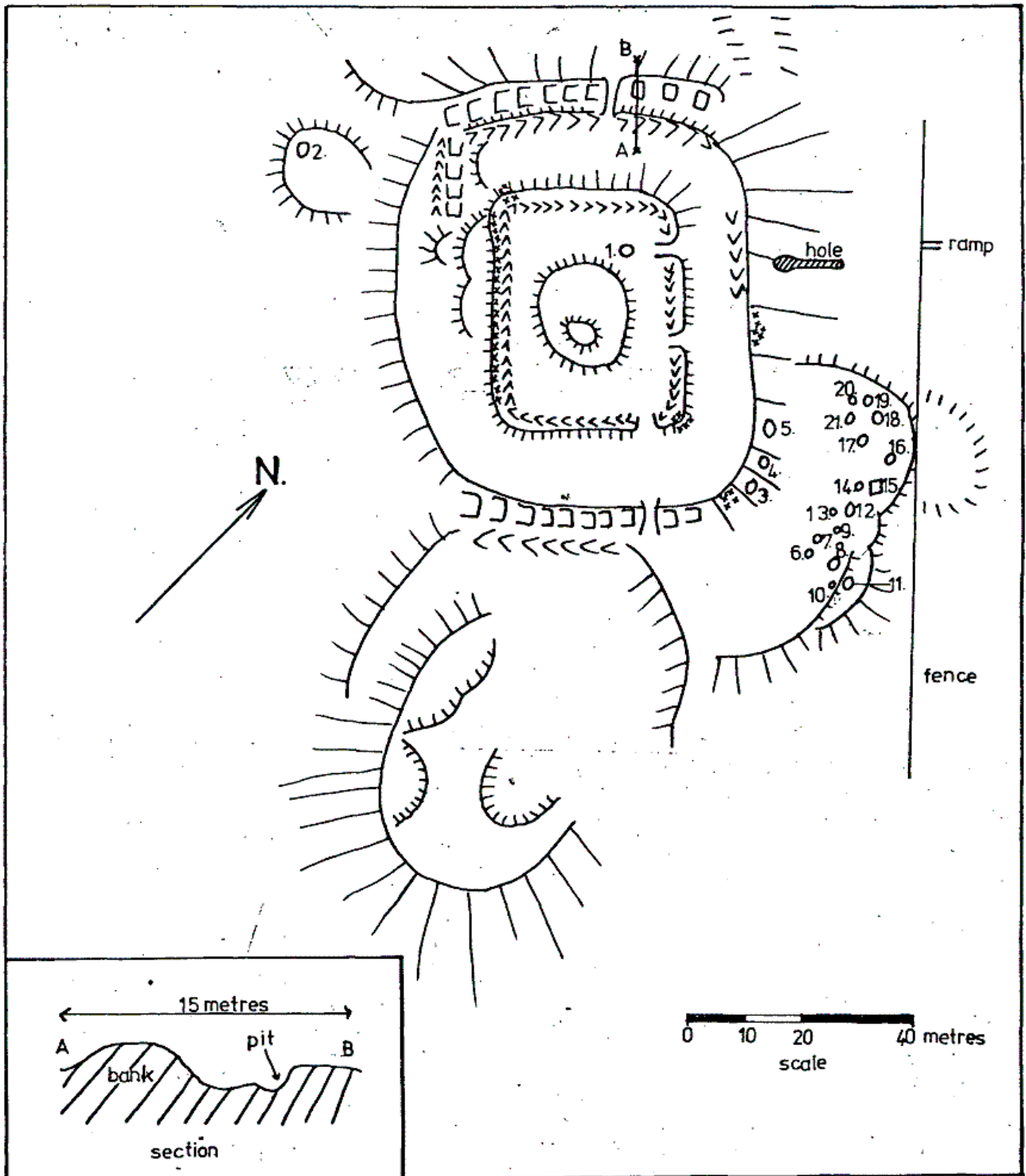


Figure 4: Aerial sketch of Muiata pa 1977 Foster (ARCHSITE)



Figure 5: The lower terraces of Muiata Pa facing south (DoC)

The pa is covered in thick, long kikuyu measuring up to 0.5m high in places. This acts to protect the site but obscures much of the features. Midden has been exposed in areas of the site through farming damage in the past but none was found in the 2011 site visit and is probably covered in thick growth. Cattle movements on the pa in the past are likely to have caused damage to the features but the current fence now surrounding the pa protects it. The pa was built on a consolidated sand dune that is rapidly eroding in places (see appendix 1). This does not appear to be a very stable or long term constructional method. However its main purpose was as a refuge and its location along the river may have been its most important or valued feature.

A basic plan of the pa was produced in the 1970's for the site record form (fig 4). On the recent site visit it was apparent that the features of the pa are far more numerous than the plan suggests. However the thick kikuyu obscures these details. The surrounding drained swamp lands of the pa also have archaeological potential and Muiata is considered a former wetland site that may still contain organic remains.

## Cultural Connections

The pa is culturally connected to the iwi groups and their ancestors associated with the land. It is also culturally connected to all New Zealanders as part of the county's prehistory and should be preserved for future generations.

## National Context

Muiata can be compared with other pa and kainga located in wetlands, which illustrates the importance of this site type. Two examples from the Bay of Plenty indicate how excavation can recover organic remains and inform on pre-European material culture.

Firstly Kauri Point Pa and its adjacent swamp located on the Kauri Point Peninsula underwent intensive excavations in the 1960's. Kauri Point is a consolidated sandstone plateau that juts out into the northern end of Tauranga Harbour. The swamp, in a gully on the north-east side of the pa, is fed by two springs that outflow from a waterfall into the sea. It has the natural defence of a gully on one side and cliffs on the other sides. The swamp was drained and excavated because it was assumed that it contained organic materials associated with the pa. Artefacts retrieved included, digging sticks and beaters and also textiles and cordage. These items only survive in wetland environments and represent a large part of Maori cultural materials.<sup>7</sup>

The second example is Kohika, a late Maori lake village. This undefended settlement was located within a lake that was drained for farming in the 1970's. It was conveniently located for coastal travel to and from the site and lay at the junction of the Tarawera and Rangitaiki Rivers. Excavations began here in the 1970's and continued at various times up to the mid 2000s. Rich assortments of artefacts were found that do not survive in most dryland sites, namely organic materials which make up much of prehistoric Maori cultural items. These were wooden objects- beaters, digging sticks, carvings, parts of canoes and house boards also matting, nets, cordage and faunal remains, some of which were made into a variety of fish hooks and other items. From the archaeological information found at Kohika the lake village was able to be reconstructed. Because of the great diversity of evidence recovered from the wetland an important contribution was made to our understanding of late prehistoric Maori culture in the North Island.<sup>8</sup>

The surrounding land of Muiata Pa was drained in the 1970's and has suffered much stock damage (fig 5). However there is still potential for archaeological remains to be recovered from the area. This highlights the care that needs to be taken in terms of its preservation.

In conclusion, Muiata and the two pa in its immediate vicinity are part of a rare and valuable landscape within a valuable landscape.



Figure 5: From the tihi overlooking the former swamplands that surrounded Muiata Pa towards the Houhora Heads facing north (DoC 2011)

## **Historic Significance**

Muiata Pa's historic significance lies in the oral traditions that are attached to the surrounding area, as part of New Zealand's early history, and the high potential the pa has to provide information on New Zealand's early past.

## **Fabric Significance**

The fabric significance of the pa is the earthworks and the subsurface evidence that the site contains.

## **Cultural Significance**

The site is culturally significant to the iwi groups associated with this area and the oral traditions attached to it. It is also significant as representation of New Zealand's prehistory.

## Management Recommendations

- A copy of the heritage assessment should be given to the adjacent landowners.
- Permission should be acquired from the Historic Places Trust if any earthworks are carried out on the pa or in its immediate vicinity
- The pa should continue to remain fenced, with the gates closed, so that no vehicles and cattle have access to the site.
- A more detailed plan of the pa should be produced. This would require the grass to be trimmed so that the features were clearer. However this not a priority as the pa is fenced from damage and has low visitor numbers.

## Management Chronology

- In 1977 the Minister of Lands set apart Muiata Pa as a reserve for historic purposes. Legal description, lot 1 DP 75668 section 84, block XV, Houhora East survey district: area 1.2647 hectares, more or less (S.O plan 50082). Gazetted 13<sup>th</sup> October 1977.
- 15<sup>th</sup> December 1977, Rodney Foster visited the pa with a Land and Survey officer to report on its condition and to map they features. These were put into a NZAA site record form. The site is reported to be well preserved and under pasture but with some erosion occurring in the corners. Recommendations were made to temporarily fence the eroding areas and re-grass to stabilize. Stock numbers on the pa were found to be light but cows none the less could cause considerable damage to the ground surface. At this time a Mr. Beazley was leasing the lands.
- 1977-1980s efforts were made by the Crown to make the two pa associated with Muiata protected private land, however the owners at the time did not agree. Janet Davidson also investigated the possibility of preserving the pa.

- 1998 a site visit to Muiata Pa was conducted by archaeologist Adrienne Slocombe. She reported cattle damage on the base and sides of the pa also that it was being used by surveyors as a base for the survey of a subdivision on the adjacent land. Holes had been dug to place pegs and tripods on features of the pa. Additionally a well worn vehicle track was visible on the eastern slopes of the site. The landowners and surveyors were approached by DoC staff. Recommendations were made to cease the grazing of cattle on the pa altogether, and to permanently fence it.
- 1999 the pa suffered further site damage in the form of diggers working on a section of the road. The outskirts of the earthwork features were damaged and two midden deposits were disturbed. The pa was also used by the landowner as a cow race and this significantly damaged the features of the pa. In addition a drain was dug in a corner of the reserve.
- 2004 an aerial was taken of the pa by Kevin Jones and is held at the Department of Conservation, Wellington.

## Management Documentation

Northland - Historic - **Muiata Pa** PAR-01-06-19 NLK-1 13/04/2000

Heritage Assessment: 996464

Baseline inspection: 1977, Foster, R. Report on Muiata Pa Historic Reserve, Motutangi. For the Department of Conservation, Kaitaia.

- 1970, Maori pa at Motutangi. Dept of Lands and Survey 17<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1999, Robinson, J. Muiata Historic Reserve damage inspection. Department of Conservation, Kaitaia.
- 1998, Slocombe, A. Muiata Pa. For Department of Conservation Kaitaia.
- 2011, Site record form updated on ARCHSITE.

## Sources

ARCHSITE:www.archsite.org

Claudia Orange. 'Northland region - First inhabitants: Māori', Te Ara - the *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 2-Mar-09. <http://www.teara.govt.nz>

Claudia Orange. 'Northland places - Kaitāia and district', Te Ara - the *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 7-Mar-11, pp 1-44. <http://www.teara.govt.nz>

Furey, L. 2002., Houhora: A Fourteenth Century Maori Village in Northland. *Bulletin of the Auckland Museum*19, 2002.

Irwin, G., 2004. *The Archaeology of a Late Maori Lake Village in the Ngati Awa Rohe*. Auckland University Press.

Rāwiri Taonui. 'Ngā waewae tapu - Māori exploration - The East Coast', Te Ara - the *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1-Mar-09 <http://www.teara.govt.nz>

Rāwiri Taonui. 'Ngāti Whātua - Origins', Te Ara - the *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 10-Dec-10. <http://www.teara.govt.nz>

Salmond, A. 1991. *Two Worlds: First meetings between Maori and European 1642-1772*. Penguin books, Auckland, New Zealand.

Shawcross, W., 1976. Kauri Point Swamp: The ethnographic interpretation of a prehistoric site, pp 227-305. In G.de G. Sieveking, I.H Longworth, and K.C. Wilson (eds). *Problems in economic social archaeology*. Duckworth, London.

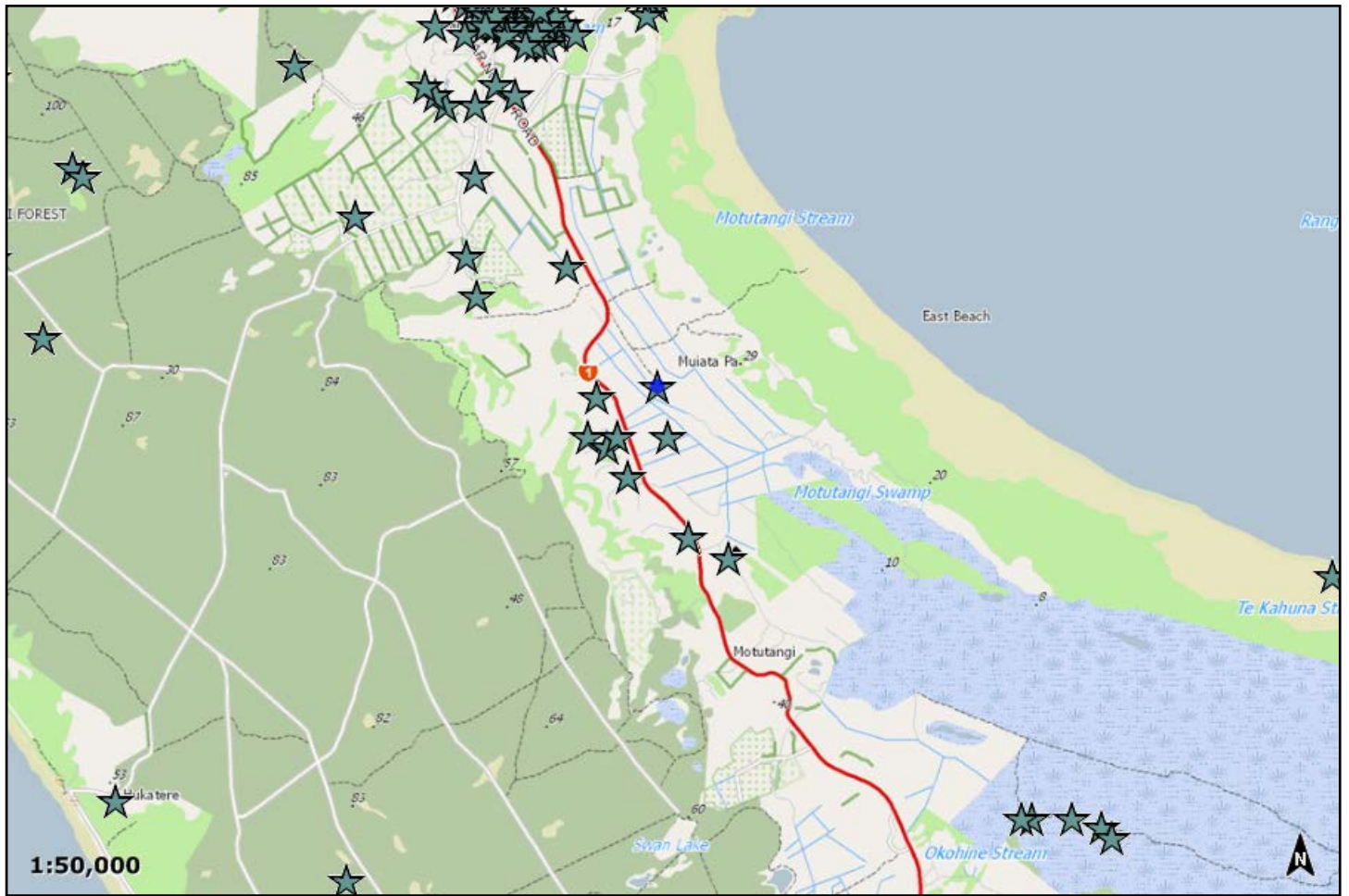




Appendix 1: Eroded area on the northern side exposing the consolidated sand dune base (DoC 2011)



Appendix 2: Aerial image of Muiata pa (Google maps)



Appendix 3: ARCHSITE generated map showing Muiata as the star with the blue dot and two other pa located within the Motutangi swamp area to the east. Located over state highway 1 are the midden and ditch system sites



Appendix 4: The tihi and surrounding terraces of Muiata Pa as seen from a pit on the eastern ridge

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Orange, C. 2009

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Rawiri, T. 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Salmond, A. 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Shawcross 1976

<sup>8</sup> Irwin, G. 2004