



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report October 2016

**Kiwi, Kiwi, Polystyrene Penguin, Spoonbill, Plover, Kiwi, Kiwi, Kiwi!**

### Visitors and Volunteers

- As the weather warms up and the vegetation starts growing we are appreciating having a few more visits from friends and volunteers. Dave returned to do an excellent job with the island mowing, which is no mean feat as he has to juggle the wet ground conditions and rampant grass growth. Dwane and John from FOMLI also visited to install the new kitchen cabinets and benchtop in the Ranger's residence (this is in progress right now – see next month's report for an update). We have had a couple of Adopt-a-Spot visits this month, from Angela and Delice, and Theda and her friends who planted a significant tree in their spot. Anna and Tammy continue to do a day's work every week on the island, chipping away at the bait station lines, as well as undertaking some kiwi monitoring and weeding, and whatever else is needed.
- It was great to see former Ranger Bernie back on the island for the day during the last volunteer Wednesday, he looked right at home back on the tractor to clear the drains and reform the driveway after the heavy spring rains of the last couple of weeks. The other willing volunteers continued their great work, including removing the battens from the decommissioned fence, removing some seedling and sapling macrocarpa springing up near the adult grove, working with Emma to re-cut and mark more bait station lines, attacking some fast growing thistles and releasing some plants from around Badham's Knob. Afterwards we all worked together to polish off one of Bernie's famous cheesecakes – thanks Bernie!
- During the school holidays we had a visit from the Drains to Harbour holiday programme run by Harriet and Nicki and sponsored by the Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust and Whitebait Connection ([http://www.whitebaitconnection.co.nz/information.php?info\\_id=144](http://www.whitebaitconnection.co.nz/information.php?info_id=144)). As well as doing a tour of the island, we did a coastal clean-up and the group turned the rubbish they collected into some amazing artwork. This great programme has engaged more than 80% of Whangarei's school children since 2006 in stormwater education. The programme made its second visit to Matakohē-Limestone Island and looks likely to include us into the future (along with class-based teaching, and visits to the Dragonfly Springs stormwater polishing project in Onerahi).
- Dai Morgan and his Northtec students came out to the island for a day to work on developing some theoretical research projects for suitable species translocations to the island, and also helpfully cut and marked some bait station lines on south side. At the same time the NorthTec Foundation Studies students put in a sterling effort and re-marked about half the lines on the north side of the island.
- We also had a walk around and discussion of the Maori gardening system on the north face of the island, attended by Heritage New Zealand Northland Area Archaeologist James Robinson, Kaumatua Freddie Tito and FOMLI committee members. Despite the poor weather forecast the walk around went ahead, albeit with a bit of a juggle of the programme to accommodate thunderstorm which at one point drowned out all conversation on the deck of the Ranger's residence forcing everyone to move inside so we could hear each other. At least during this time there was no lightning strike; we received a figurative, if not literal shock, during a thunderstorm a week earlier when there was a direct strike on the ridgeline above the Ranger's residence.



- Finally, October is Save the Kiwi Month and as part of the national programme of kiwi-related activities, the Island hosted its second annual Great Kiwi Morning Tea on Sunday 16 October. The weather on the Saturday had not been promising but Sunday was rain-free with just a bit of a sou'wester adding its bite to the arrivals and departures at the pontoon and threatening to blow away peoples' creative hats. More than sixty people attended, with an assortment of tasty baking provided by the FOMLI Committee. Jane Winton led a tour of the island for those needing to walk-off their caramel slice and bacon and egg pie, and Emma was able to work in the de-transmitting of kiwi Kahui Whetu who, as an adult female, doesn't need a transmitter attached as we can find her chicks via her mate Sir Ed (who is transmitted). This work was undertaken with the kind assistance of Miriam Ritchie from DOC who was attending in an otherwise personal capacity. Everyone had a lovely time and donations from guests and an auction of a FOMLI Fruitcake, Emma's Russian Fudge, and a Kiwi-Naming Opportunity raised over \$650. Thank you everyone



**Kiwi and Cake, what a Sunday**

- In other news Jono was off island for 1½ days for a first aid course run by the Red Cross, organised by Volunteering Northland (thanks Bart) and hugely subsidised by the Oxford Sports Trust, with parking provided by the Whangarei Club.

### **Predator Control**

We continue to have no predators caught on the island. During the next month we will do rodent indexing using the tracking tunnels. This will enable us to confirm that we don't have rats on the island (hopefully), and let us see if there are any mice about.

### **Flora and Fauna**

#### **Plants**

The flax flowers are just starting to blossom and the abundant tui are happy that there are still a few kowhai in bloom. The Poor Knights lilies near the Ranger Station have several stunning blooms and the karo are waving around abundant new growth. The oak tree is wearing her new leaves proudly, much to the delight of the boys who have previously only known her autumnal and winter vissage, and the fruit trees at the orchard next to the Manager's House are also starting to blossom. Emma is starting to plan for next year's planting season on the island with Dwane Kokich, and with expert advice from Wendy Holland and Andrew Townsend of DOC.

During the Wednesday volunteer day we were joined by a couple of fern experts. They concluded that there is not a great variety on the island, although we certainly have some, particularly on the southern side of the island. It is interesting to see these pop up as they weren't planted in recent times, so must have arrived via other means.

## Weeds

We are starting to clear moth plant again from around the Edge House ruins and ski slope and the wattles are starting to rear their heads around the Ranger Station and northern quarries once more. Luckily we don't need to be concerned about pod-bearing moth plant vines at this time of year, but we have removed hundreds of tiny seedlings via careful pulling and disposal. These days we also tend not to go out without at least one mini mattock to take care of thistles as we travel across the island and the boys are especially good at spotting the small ones, much more so than old dad (it's easier for them as they are closer to the ground!).

We are trialing using a push mower around the Visitors' shelter, and the orchard and surrounds of the Manager's house. It does a tidier job around the tight bits, especially when the ground is still soft.

## Kiwi

On 11 October we took delivery of a bumper crop of seven kiwi chicks for the island crèche, care of Todd Hamilton and Rolf Fuchs. During the two weeks prior there were an additional five chicks, in two different bunches. Emma is also starting to chase down the sub adult kiwi to transmitter them in advance of being returned to the mainland, with the first release scheduled for November out on the Tutukaka Coast. The kiwi have been quite active in the early evening before the moonrise and Emma has had one feisty male run literally right into her arms while fighting another bird, up on the track to Badham's Knob.



**Spring, four seasons and seven kiwi  
in one day**



**One of the 7 kiwi released on the  
island on 11 October**

Sir Ed has hatched two chicks, which have been transpondered and Sir Ed's transmitter band was changed. Jaycee (a NorthTec student) was over here with six children at the time so they were able to watch the proceedings.

## Birds

Emma, Charlie and Quincy spent an afternoon clearing weeds from the sandspit on Knight Island to the south of Matakoho for the benefit of nesting Caspian Terns, who are also showing up at the ruins and on the old wharf. During this same trip we were disheartened to see the huge amounts of rubbish accumulated on the previously un-visited sections of the island. This included a branded 'Kentucky Fried Chicken' potato and gravy pottle. The name got shortened to just 'KFC' in the early 1990's, so this piece of plastic has probably been floating around the harbour for a long time....

The first shining cuckoo of the season was heard, and a flock of Eastern bar-tailed godwits were seen on the wing in the channel. These are both sure signs summer is just around the corner.

We have started to notice Californian quail more on the island, no doubt looking for some safe spots for nesting and Spur-winged plovers have started nesting at the ruins. Spoonbills are also to be seen feeding at low tide at Shipwreck Bay.

## **Odd Stuff About Old Stuff**

Perhaps the most prominent place on the island, visually, archaeologically and culturally, Matakohe Pa is a regular stop on our island tour and when we feel like we need to exercise ourselves or the children. Jono's general korero about the Pa is from the point of view of an archaeologist and the place of the Pa in the island landscape, and the island in the geography and history of the Whangarei Harbour while acknowledging Te Parawhau, their construction and occupation of Matakohe Pa into the early 1820s, and their Mana Whenua over the island.

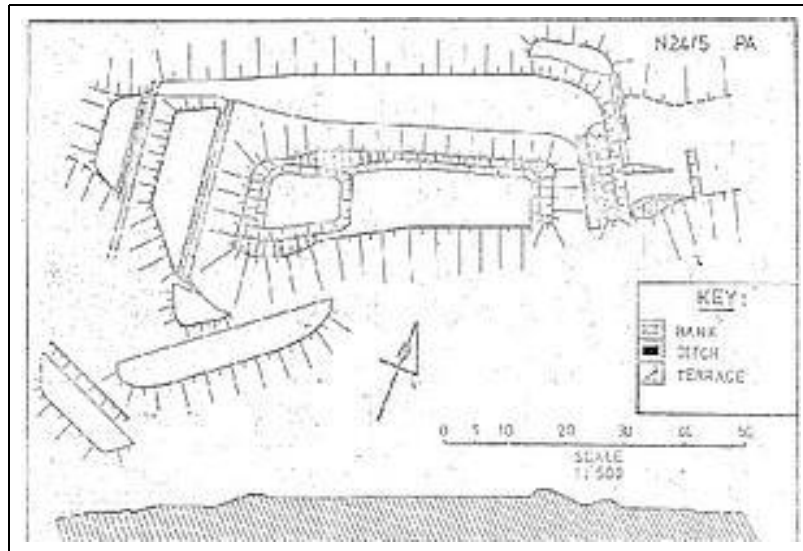
The Pa was first recorded as an archaeological site and formally entered on to the NZ Archaeological Site Recording Scheme in 1963 by C. W. Devonshire. Devonshire was provided the name of the island and pa by Mohi Tito and at the time it was first recorded the encircling defensive ditch could be easily seen from Onerahi. It was re-recorded and a tape and compass plan produced by C. Phillips and M. Horwood as part of the 1982 Project Employment Programme (or P.E.P. Scheme) survey of the Whangarei Harbour, sponsored by the then Historic Places Trust (now Heritage New Zealand) and the Northland Harbour Board. In 1990 the site was surveyed by S. Hakaria and M. Jellick under the direction of G. and D. Nevin for the Whangarei District Council, as part of a programme of site recording around Whangarei sponsored by the Council.

There is a certain amount of Art and 'Eye of the Beholder' involved whenever archaeologists come to record archaeological sites. In New Zealand, prior to the advent of Total Station theodolite and GPS-based recording of archaeological sites in the last twenty years, most sites were recorded using optical alidades and plane-tables and drawn in a style based on that used to record sites like Iron-Age hillforts in the UK, where the earliest professional/academic archaeologists practicing in New Zealand received their training. (In the USA in contrast, sites were typically mapped using a builders transit).

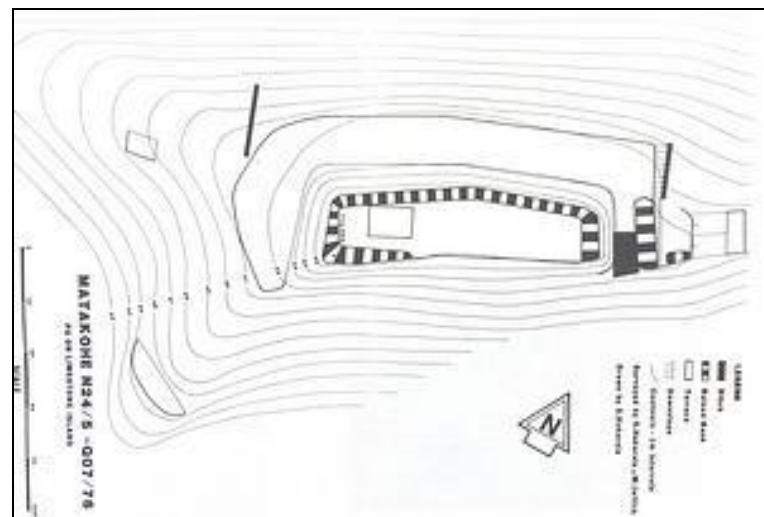
Below are maps produced by the P.E.P. and Whangarei District Council surveys in 1982 and 1990, and a LIDAR-based map using data supplied by the Northland Regional Council and turned into a hill-shaded digital elevation model of the pa and surrounding landscape. You may note some differences in the position and relationship between features, and even some features which have not been included in the second plan, either because of vegetation growth obscuring them, further erosion making them less obvious, or simply because they were missed.

The highest part of Matakohe Pa, the summit platform or tihi on the very top of the hill is protected by the natural steep slope or scarp to the south, and by an artificially steepened scarp to the north, dropping to a large terrace. The narrow eastern approach along the ridgeline is protected by a ditch and bank which would have been palisaded. There are several terraces on the western slopes below the tihi, one of which has a narrow, long ditch recorded, and which may have been a slot for a palisade, or drain. Generally the occupation of the tihi was reserved for the chief with others occupying the terraces below.

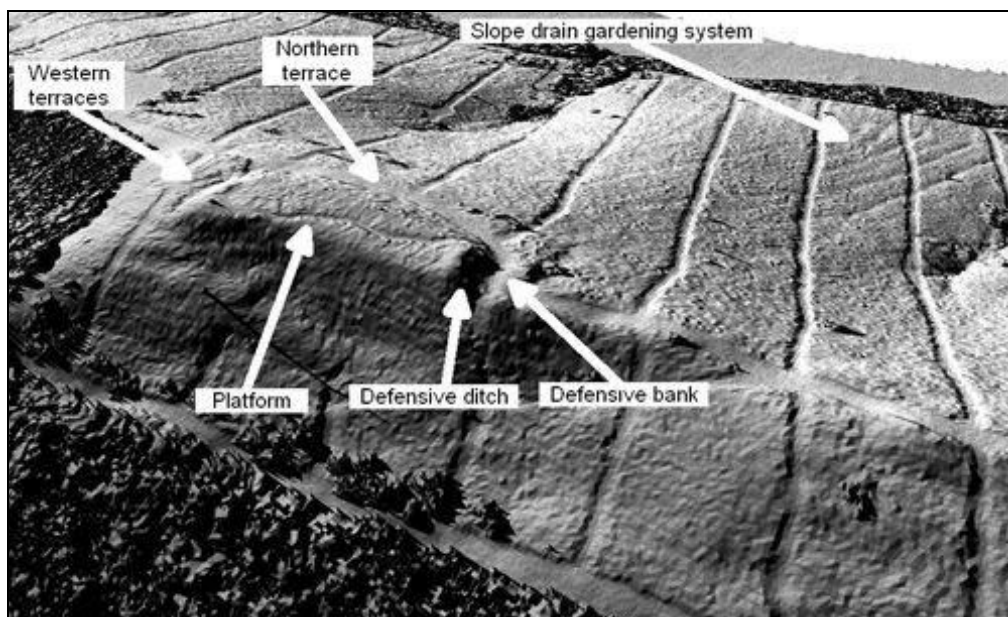
The site is what may be understood a typical late pre-Contact or early post-Contact pa site, with none of the changes introduced to pa design following the advent of musket warfare late in the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century wherein pa moved from the heights down to the flats, the traditional defensive ditch on major axes of attack and which served to slow an attacker and provide a height advantage to the defender armed with stone and wooden weapons evolved into a series of rifle pits, and the light timber palisade which was enough to stop entry but through which a musket could easily be poked, turned into a heavy stockade of close-set whole tree trunks with ground level-loop holes for the defenders to fire through (the classic example being Ruapekapeka Pa, built some 20 years after Matakohe Pa was probably abandoned).



1982 Tape and compass survey of Matakohe Pa



1990 Plane table and alidade survey of Matakohe Pa



Lidar-derived elevation model of Matakohe Pa and surrounding landscape, looking north west

## Charlie Chat

I was having a little walk around the orchard and I saw a tui and he went and drank some nectar from a flax flower and when he stopped drinking and flew away, his beak was red. That was pretty cool.

## Quincy Quote

You know when we let go the kiwi? I like when we get the baby ones from Todd, and then we get them again when they are big and put them off the island. That's all fun. We bring them here because that's the rules because stoats and other bad pests can't get them.

**Don't forget** to mark the date of the next **Volunteer Wednesday on 2 November**, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 0900 as usual



Proudly supported by; Environmental Northland, Forest Floor Nursery, Harbour Marine Ltd, Marine North Ltd, Northpower, Northland Port Corp, Northland Regional Council, North Tugz, Onerahi Lions, Phoenix Boats, Red Bull Powder Co., Tawapou Nursery.

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