



# **Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John walking track: final report**

**report to  
The Tupuna Maunga o Tamaki Makaurau Authority  
and  
Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga**

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## Introduction

The Tūpuna Maunga o Tamaki Makaurau Authority have upgraded the walking tracks on Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John (Sect 1 SO 454980). The tracks were previously unformed 'desire lines' and works involved formalising sections of this with gravel paths and boardwalks, as well as decommissioning and planting a track. Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John is a Tūpuna Maunga and a highly significant archaeological site, a volcanic cone pa recorded as site R11/15 in the New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) Site Recording Scheme (SRS), and is scheduled as a category A\* historic heritage place (item 01581) in the Auckland Council Unitary Plan. Four additional archaeological sites are also recorded on the maunga. These include the remains of a pre-1900 fence (R11/2362), and several post-1900 features (R11/2661, R11/2662, R11/2663). The Tūpuna Maunga o Tāmaki Makaurau Authority commissioned an archaeological assessment from CFG Heritage (Cruickshank and Glover 2020) that recommended obtaining an archaeological authority under section 44 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act (2014) from Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) to undertake the works. Authority 2021/380 was granted by HZPT on 29 January 2021.

## Background

Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John is a relatively small volcanic scoria cone with a single crater approximately 125 m wide and 20 m deep, located in Epsom. The main part of the cone was originally held as a reserve, but was returned to Ngā Mana Whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau Collective following a 2014 treaty settlement. Residential development and some minor quarrying has encroached on the lower slopes, obscuring much of the lower terraces and surrounding features. In spite of this damage from residential development, Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John is one of the better-preserved volcanic cones in central Auckland and evidence of past occupation is still clearly visible around the crater rim and upper slopes of the cone and can be easily interpreted.

### *Pre-European Māori*

The Tāmaki region was an important and highly populated area during the pre-European period. The central fertile field of igneous loams supported large crops of kumara, and the land was heavily gardened. The volcanic cones responsible for this highly fertile soil featured some of the most impressive pa in the North Island. The narrow isthmus separating the Waitematā and Manukau Harbours provided important portages between the two harbours, which also supplied plentiful marine resources.

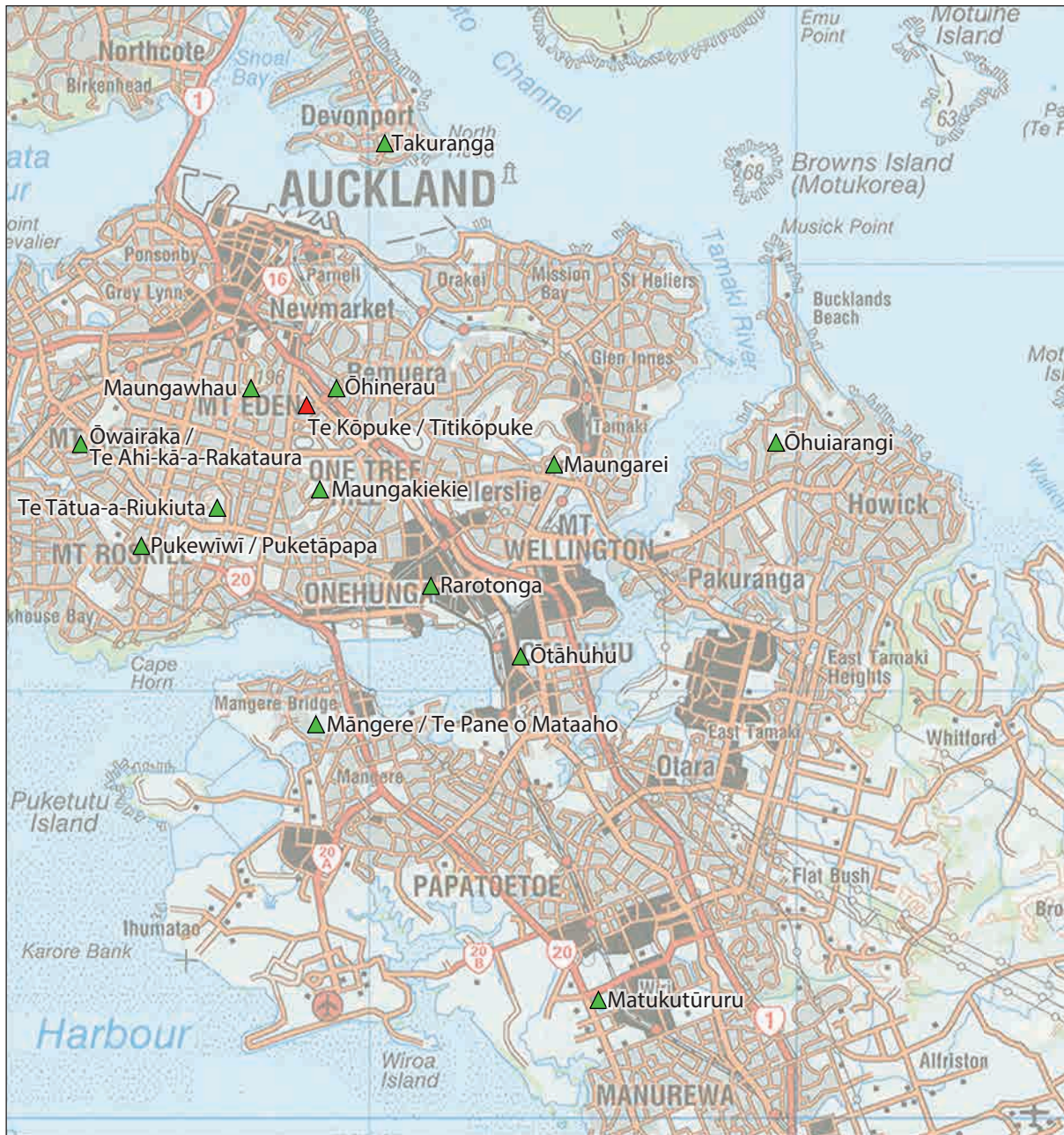


Figure 1. Location of Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John and the tūpuna maunga of Tāmaki managed by the Tūpuna Maunga o Tāmaki Makaurau Authority.

The name Te Kōpuke means ‘prominent mound’ (Hayward et al 2011: 134). The site was a defended pa site and the remains of four defensive ditches are still visible today. Two of these ditches cut through terraces, indicating that they are a later addition to the site and that the occupation sequence of the cone is much more complex than suggested by the traditional history (Fox 1977: 10). Other visible components of Māori occupation around the summit and rim comprise at least 25 terraces, many of which contain kumara pits and exposures of shell midden are also visible across the maunga. A plan of the visible features based on a 1970s survey by the Anthropology Department at Auckland University is shown in Figure 2.

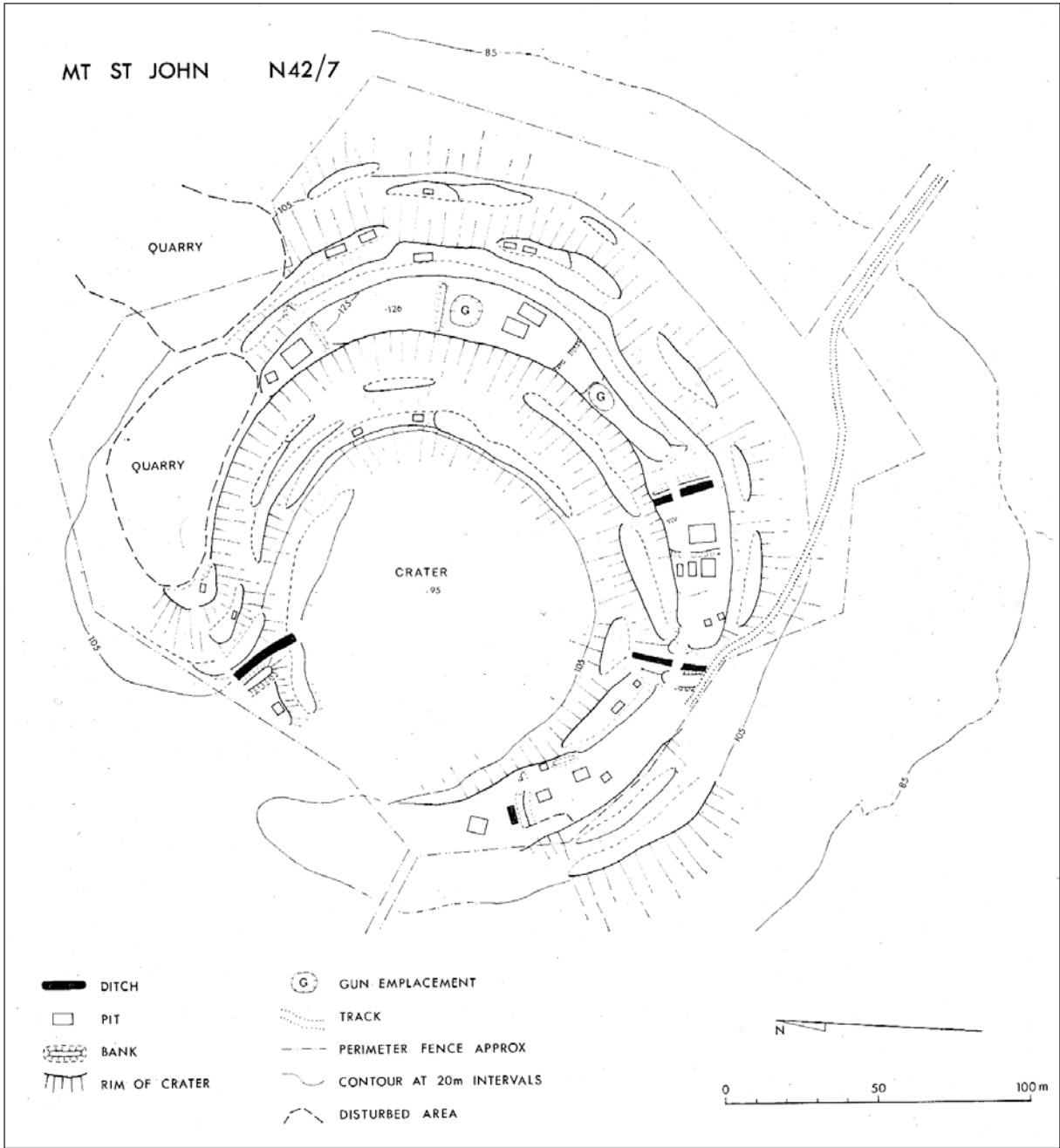


Figure 2. Map of Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John from Fox (1977).

Aside from the earthwork features around the cone rim and upper slopes, there would also have been extensive archaeological evidence on the lower slopes and flat land around the cone. Features in this area would probably have included gardens, occupation terraces and storage pits. Much of this area has now been modified or destroyed by residential development and roading.

*Historic*

Epsom as a suburb essentially began in the early 1840s, encompassing the valley that is situated between Maungakiekie / One Tree Hill, Maungawhau / Mt Eden, Te Kōpuke /



Titikōpuke / Mt St John and Te Tātua a Riukiuta / Big King. The area had been a productive horticultural area for Māori, and early European settlement reflected this, with the creation of farmlets within the valley. As time went on, these farmlets were subdivided and the population intensified, and by the beginning of the 20th century Epsom was a suburb with only small pockets of market gardens left (Bush 2006). As the area became more densely populated, drainage, wastewater and drinking water became major issues.

In 1872 four hectares around the summit of Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John were declared an Education Reserve and the land was vested in the Crown as a Public Recreation Ground in 1896. By 1876 a one-acre quarry reserve had been set aside on the north side of the cone, but this activity was never extensive and appears to have ceased around 1914 (Mt St John Management Plan 1983: 3).

During WWII, two anti-aircraft guns were placed within existing storage pits on the eastern side of the maunga. Very little information is available on these air defences, but based on aerial photography they were installed after 1940 and were removed prior to 1947. It is likely that vehicle access to the guns was created at the time, which could have impacted the archaeological features on the eastern side of the crater rim. These gun locations are recorded as site R11/2663.

The maunga was also used by the Ōtāhuhu Battalion of the Home Guard as a miniature rifle range (Bush 2006). It is not known where this rifle range was located, but it is noted in the site record form that the most logical place is within the crater itself. This rifle range is recorded as site R11/2661.

In 1978 the maunga was gazetted for protection as a Recreation Reserve and Historic Place (Hayward et al 2011: 135). In 2014 Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke / Mt St John, along with 13 other Tūpuna Maunga, was returned to mana whenua. These maunga continue to be maintained by Auckland Council on behalf of the Tūpuna Maunga o Tāmaki Makaurau Authority.

## Method

Earthworks were monitored by Hayley Glover of CFG Heritage Ltd between 2 November 2021 and 17 August 2022. Ground disturbance was limited as much as possible to reduce the potential for disturbance of any archaeological material. All ground disturbance was done by hand digging, with the exclusion of the Market Road entrance which was known to be highly disturbed, where a small hydraulic excavator was used for a section of works.

## Results

All track works and the removal of redundant assets like water troughs were carried out successfully with minimal excavation and no archaeological material or features were encountered. One Grey and Menzies bottle was found underneath the trough. Grey and Menzies Ltd were not founded until 1902 so the bottle post-dates this and could be as recent as the 1950s (Figure 3). During planting around the crater rim track that was being decommissioned, all visible surface archaeology was avoided, including terraces and several midden deposits that were visible eroding out of the track / desire line (Figures 4 and 5). One plant was dug into a small, relatively sparse, subsurface midden deposit, which was approximately 100 mm below the surface and appeared to be redeposited / disturbed. The hole dug for the plant was approximately 200 mm in diameter. The midden contained cockle, scallop, and snapper bone. No charcoal or lithics were present.

A final inspection of the completed track was carried out on 31 August 2022 (Figures 6 to 8).





Figure 3. Grey and Menzies bottle found beneath water troughs.



Figure 4. Midden eroding out of track near planting.





*Figure 5. Planting along crater track.*



*Figure 6. View of Market Road entrance after works completed.*





Figure 7. View of board walk going over ditch and boxed steps beyond.



Figure 8. New boxed steps from Belvedere Road entrance.



## Summary and conclusions

A post-1900 glass bottle and a very small amount of redeposited midden were encountered during planting. Otherwise, no other archaeological features or materials were encountered during track works. Excavations were limited in terms of ground disturbance, and the small amount of material affected by works was not in situ and could not be used to infer subsistence trends or timing of occupation.

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