

25 and 39 Wharekaho Road proposed plan change: archaeological assessment

**report to
Whitianga Waterways Ltd**

Ella Ussher

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1 Introduction

Whitianga Waterways Ltd are proposing a Private Plan Change to accommodate roading and approximately 220 residential and lifestyle allotments property at 25 and 39 Wharekaho Road, Wharekaho (Kuaotunu 6E1 and 6D2 Blocks) (Figure 1). The properties have never been surveyed for archaeology, but are in a relatively dense archaeological landscape at Wharekaho Beach. An archaeological assessment of effects is required in support of a private plan change application to Thames–Coromandel District Council. David Lamason of Planners Plus Ltd, on behalf of Whitianga Waterways Ltd, commissioned this assessment from CFG Heritage Ltd.

1.1 Statutory requirements

All archaeological sites, whether recorded or not, are protected by the provisions of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 and may not be destroyed, damaged or modified without an authority issued by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT).

An archaeological site is defined in the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act as:

- (a) any place in New Zealand, including any building or structure (or part of a building or structure), that—
 - (i) was associated with human activity that occurred before 1900 or is the site of the wreck of any vessel where the wreck occurred before 1900; and
 - (ii) provides or may provide, through investigation by archaeological methods, evidence relating to the history of New Zealand; and
- (b) includes a site for which a declaration is made under section 43(1).

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires City, District and Regional Councils to manage the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way that provides for the wellbeing of today's communities while safeguarding the options of future generations. The protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development is identified as a matter of national importance (Section 6f).

Historic heritage is defined as those natural and physical resources that contribute to an understanding and appreciation of New Zealand's history and cultures, derived from archaeological, architectural, cultural, historic, scientific, or technological qualities.

Historic heritage includes:

- historic sites, structures, places, and areas
- archaeological sites;
- sites of significance to Maori, including wahi tapu;
- surroundings associated with the natural and physical resources (RMA Section 2).

These categories are not mutually exclusive and some archaeological sites may include above ground structures or may also be places that are of significance to Maori.

Where resource consent is required for any activity the assessment of effects is required to address cultural and historic heritage matters.

2 Methodology

The New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) Site Recording Scheme (SRS) was searched for records of archaeological sites near the property. The digital library of archaeological reports held by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (NZHPT) was searched for records of archaeological investigations in the area. The New Zealand Archaeological Associations publications search engine was searched using keywords for research reports in the Archaeology in New Zealand news-

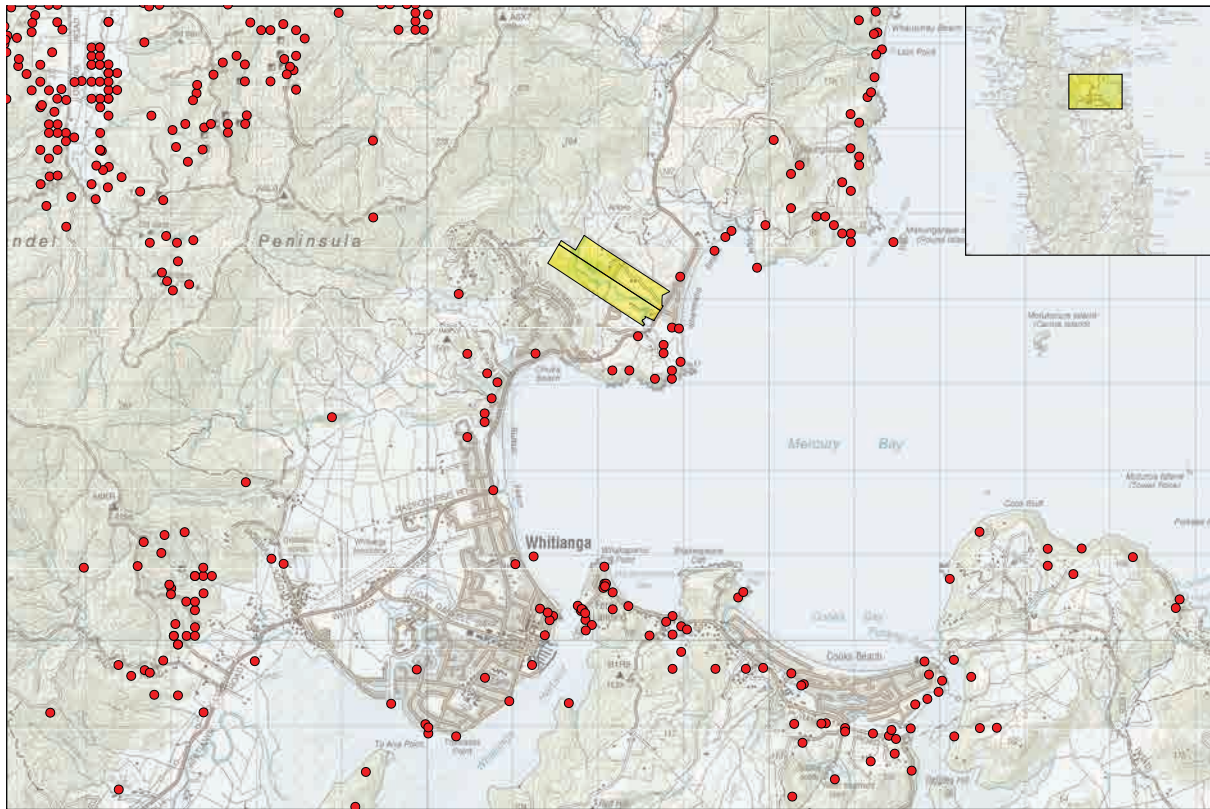


Figure 1. Location of 25 and 39 Wharekaho Road and recorded archaeological sites in the area.

letter (<https://nzarchaeology.org/publications/archaeology-in-new-zealand-ainz>). Old maps and plans held by Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) were reached using QuickMap software. Aerial photographs from Retrolens and in other online archives were searched. Old newspaper articles were accessed through the Papers Past online database. The Thames Coromandel District Council district plan maps were accessed through SmartMaps for items of interest (<https://tcdc.maps.arcgis.com>). Soil maps were accessed through S-map online (<https://smap.landcareresearch.co.nz/>). The property was surveyed on foot by Ella Ussher of CFG Heritage Ltd on 5 April 2022.

3 Background

The township of Wharekaho is situated in Mercury Bay, on the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula, a short distance from the Coromandel Ranges. These ranges consist of a greywacke basement rock, with andesitic and rhyolitic volcanic eruptions dating from the Miocene and Pliocene forming the landscape that is present on the peninsula (Homer and Moore 1992; Barker 1992). The later rhyolitic eruptions are responsible for much of the high-quality lithic resources that made the Coromandel Volcanic Zone a major source of obsidian and basalt for tool manufacture (Turner 2000: 271).

The soils on the properties are primarily Typic Recent Gley sandy soils closer to the beach and swampy areas near the mouth of the Tohetea Stream (Hewitt 1998; S-map), which would not have suited horticulture as these are imperfectly drained. However, further inland the soils become Te Toa clay over loam (60%) and Otorohanga loams (40%) classed as Typic Orthic Brown soils, which do drain well and would have been suitable for kumara production and storage.

Wharekaho beach itself is around 2 km in length and framed at either end by the Akeake Stream in the north and the Tohetea Stream in the south. Tohetea Stream runs inland through the

centre of the property at 25 Wharekaho Road. Maungatawhiri, at 300 m above sea level, shelters the bay to the north.

3.1 Pre-European Māori history

There is well documented pre-European Māori occupation around Te-Whanganui-o-Hei / Mercury Bay, with evidence dating back to at least the 15th century. The bay was named after a tupuna from *Te Arawa* waka, Hei, who settled in the area, while Whitianga is named Te-Whitianga-o-Kupe or Kupe's the explorer's crossing place. Ko Te Rā Matiti marae of Ngāti Hei o Wharekaho is today located below two prominent pā that sit on the headland at the southern end of the beach, Wharekaho and Wharetaewa pā.

3.2 Historic background

On 9 November in 1769 crew of the *Endeavour*, including Captain James Cook, botanist Sir Joseph Banks and the Tahitian navigator Tupaia, were welcomed onto Wharekaho Beach with a pōwhiri by the occupants of Wharetaewa pā. The visitors then were invited to the pā for a tour and feasting. Cook noted that there was "...good trade in fish here, and good water, wood, wild fowl and wild celery; and the officers were able to make an expedition into the country..." and of the pā he observed "...that a number of resolute men might defend themselves a long time against a vast superior force, armed in the manner these people are..." (Beaglehole 1934: 289–290). Cook also had the name of the ship and the date carved onto a tree in the bay, and as such believed he took possession of the country. A 'Native settlement' was still recorded in 1852 at Wharekaho by Commander Drury of the *Pandora* when he surveyed Mercury Bay (Figure 2), and a number of buildings were recorded in the bay by Commander Combe in 1901–02.

The timber industry played a significant role in the development of the Whitianga area, primarily for its supply of kauri, which was particularly useful as spars for ships. The forests inland of Wharekaho were harvested at this time. In the mid-1830s Gordon Browne and Ranulph Dacre established a timber and spar station in Mercury Bay on the east side of the harbour at Ferry Landing, which included the construction of a stone wharf which remains in place today. The original settlement at Whitianga was located around the wharf (Monin 2010). The operation was hindered by financial difficulties noted in 1838 or 1839, and in 1862 Dacre claimed that over four years they had invested more than £9000 with very little return (Furey 2011). In 1840, HMS *Buffalo* ran ashore onto the beach during a storm, giving its name to what is now known as Buffalo Beach (Monin 2010). This same year, Browne was declared mentally unwell by the surgeon from the *Buffalo*, Doctor Lane, and left Mercury Bay (Furey 2011).

The Auckland Sawmill Company was created in 1863, and land belonging to Dacre was leased for the construction of another sawmill. Due to the restricted space on the eastern side of the river, it was relocated to the western side in 1881, in what is now Whitianga. In 1882, the Auckland Sawmill Company was liquidated, and its assets claimed by a new company called the Mercury Bay Timber Company, which was officially recognized in 1884 (Furey 2011). The second town developed around this mill, which expanded from 1887 until its closure in 1922, after the kauri forests were exhausted (Monin 2010).

Wharekaho was later settled and farmed by the Simpson family in the mid 20th century, who still remain in the northern end of the bay. The beach is also known as Simpson's Beach.

3.3 Archaeological background

A number of archaeological surveys have been carried out in Wharekaho, targeting the headlands at the northern and southern ends of the bay, the dune system and the mouths of the Tohetea and Akeake Streams. No surveys have so far explored the interior of the bay, west of SH 25. Buist recorded the first sites in Wharekaho in 1963 and 1964: Wharekaho pā (T11/79) and Wharetaewa pā (T11/80), as well as a terrace by the Tohetea Stream mouth (T11/108) and a shell midden within the

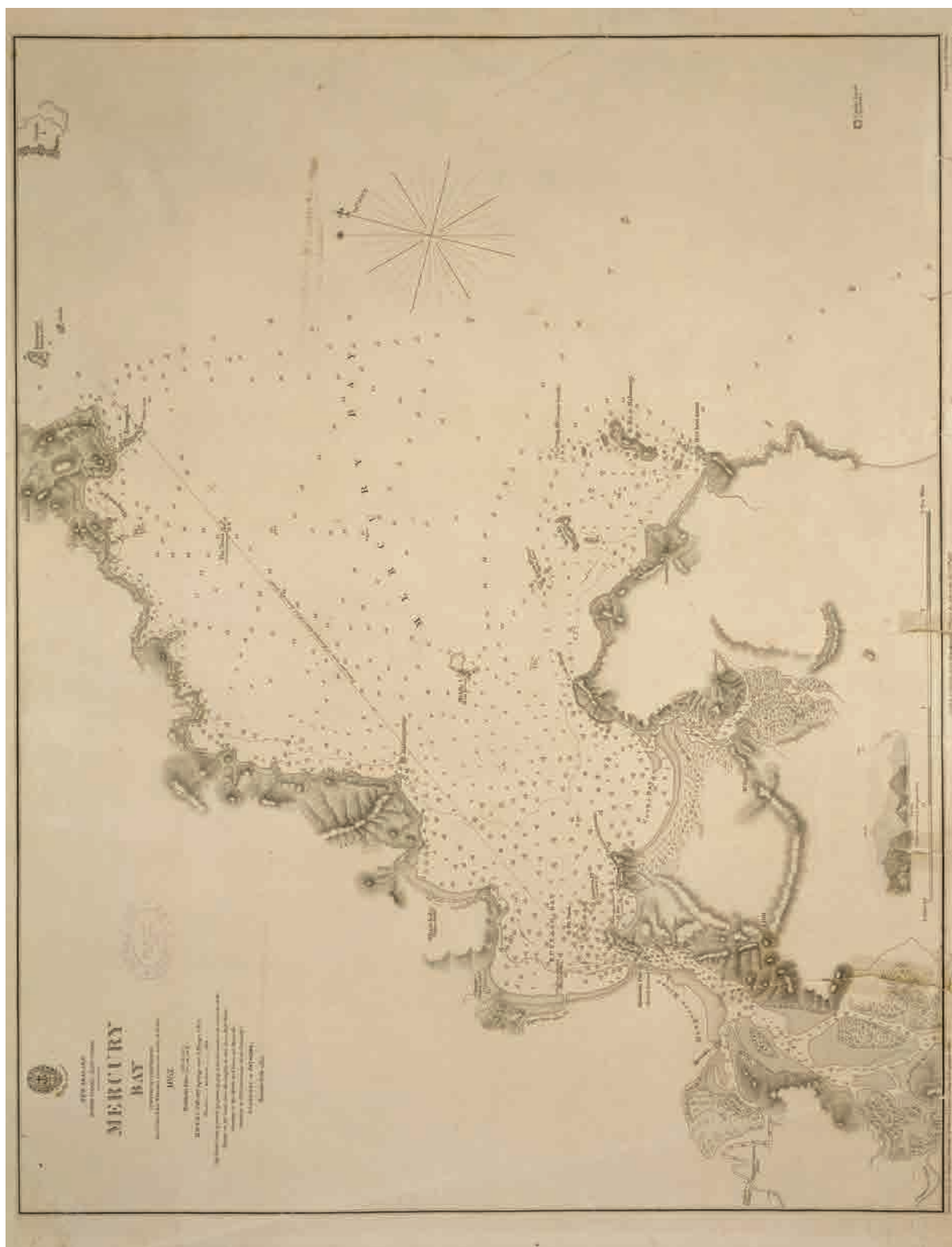


Figure 2. Commander Drury's map of Mercury Bay showing 'Native Settlement' at Wharekaho in 1852 (Auckland Libraries Heritage Collection Map 881).

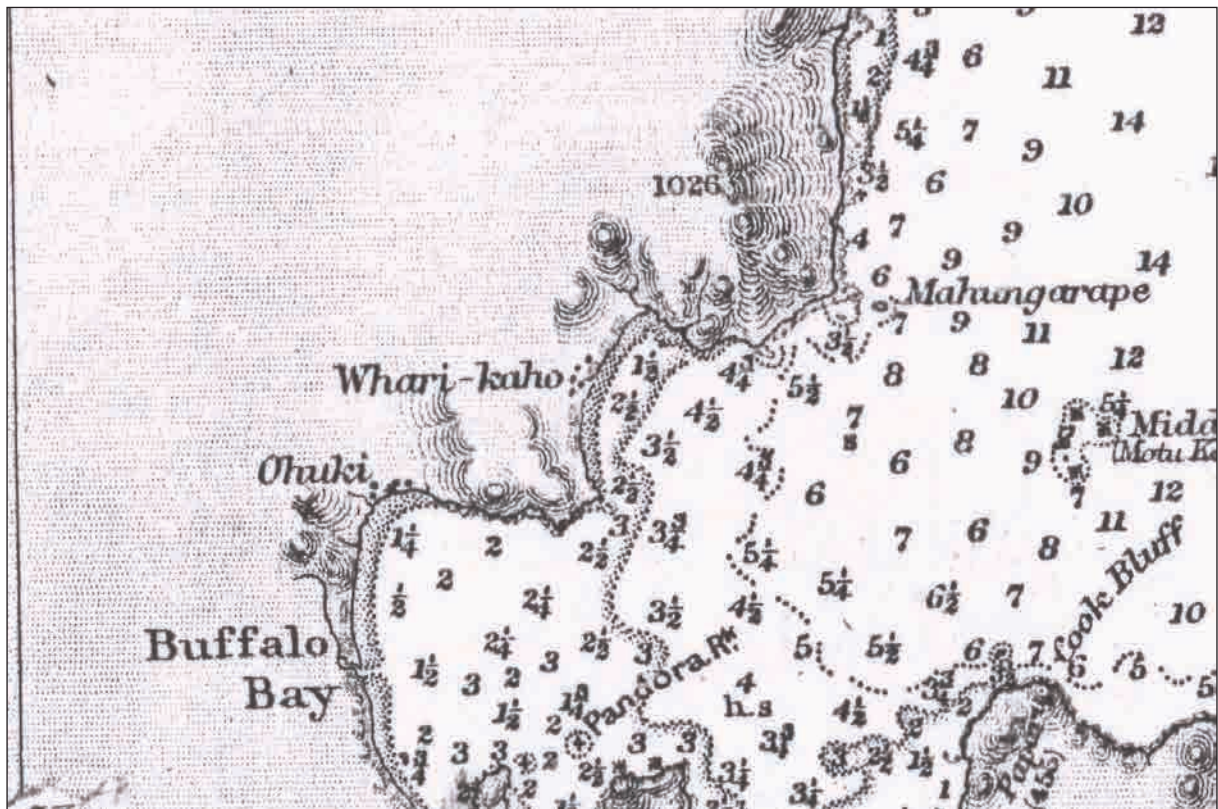


Figure 3. Detail of Commander Combe's map of Mercury Bay from 1901-2 (Thames Coromandel Libraries Map 19-104).

dunes (T11/101). In 1974 Gillian Puch surveyed an area around Maungatawhiri at the northern end of Wharekaho, recording 13 new sites (Puch 1975). These included two areas of midden, working floors and a pit near the Akeake Stream (T11/124 and T11/125). Moore recorded a third working floor in this area in 1978 (T11/348) but it is now thought to be an extension of site T11/124. Easdale and Jacomb (1982) surveyed Wharekaho Beach during their wider project to update the archaeological record for the Coromandel Peninsula, recording three new areas of shell midden (T11/505, T11/506 and T11/507). The most recent survey at Wharekaho was carried out by Ian Lawlor in 1993, targeting the southern end of the beach as part of an archaeological and heritage assessment for the Māori Land Court at the request of Ngāti Hei. Five new sites (T11/825, T11/826, T11/827, T11/828 and T11/829) were mapped and recorded, shedding light on the nature of occupation around the two pā with evidence of terracing, middens, and horticultural features such as stone walls and mounds.

4 Field assessment

The two properties are located in a rural landscape and are primarily under pasture with some bush cover. The Tohetea Stream runs east through 39 Wharekaho Road, before passing into the property at 25 Wharekaho Road heading to the sea at Wharekaho Beach. 39 Wharekaho Road is a combination of high points overlooking the beach and valley, and low-lying areas with swampy fringes. In contrast, 25 Wharekaho Road is mostly composed of the valley floor around the Tohetea Stream.

4.1 25 Wharekaho Road

The field survey targeted the river flats along the banks of the Tohetea Stream, with some assessment of the higher areas overlooking the valley. It was noted that the section of the Tohetea Stream

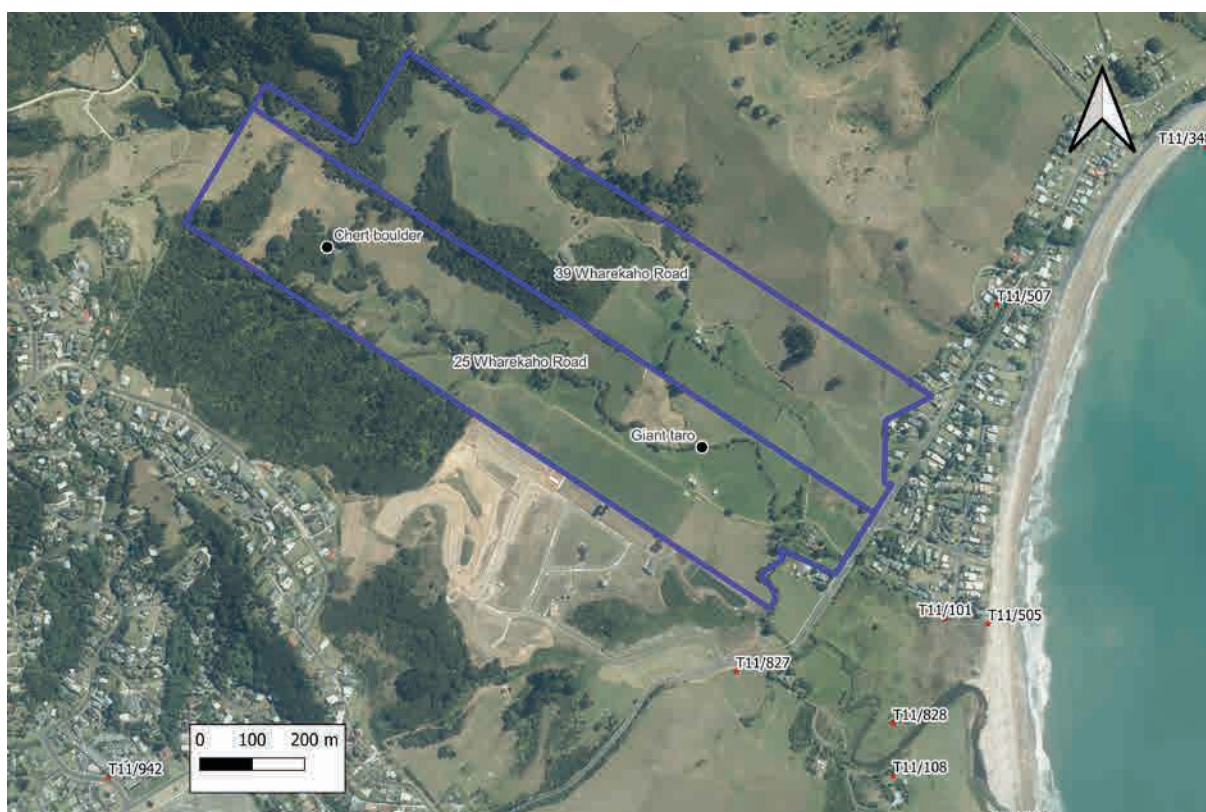


Figure 4. Map of properties at 25 and 39 Wharekaho Road, in relation to recorded archaeological sites and features noted during survey.

closest to the road, an area of around 100 m, has been modified and possibly widened. Large piles of soil were located on the paddock to the west of the stream. Comparison of historic and modern aerial photography indicates that the stream was re-routed on the eastern side of Wharekaho Road, and while it is still in its original location at 25 Wharekaho Road, it has been widened and dredged. Many of the swampy areas had also been drained to create pasture. No archaeological features or deposits were noted on the property, possibly due to this modification as there are many sites recorded on neighbouring properties around Wharekaho. The only two features noted on the property were a large chert boulder that had [possibly had some material flaked off it, and some giant taro (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*) growing within the Tohetea Stream that could be a remnant stand from past cultivation.

4.2 39 Wharekaho Road

The field survey for this property targeted the high points overlooking the valley floor and the section of Tohetea Stream that passes through the property boundary. It was noted that there has been erosion and slumping of many of the steepest sides of these highpoints, which may have removed any evidence of pre-European Māori occupation. In addition, a driveway and building platform has been constructed for the existing house on the property on the highest point in the valley. As with the property at 25 Wharekaho Road, the property has been grazed and the landscape modified to make it more suitable for this through vegetation and rock clearance, and drainage of swamps. The section of the Tohetea Stream that passes through the property was inspected for evidence of eroding shell midden or occupation layers, but no archaeological features or deposits were noted in this area or any where else on the property.



Figure 5. Piles of soil removed from banks of the Tohetea Stream in the paddock at 25 Wharekaho Road.



Figure 6. Drained swampy areas around Tohetea Stream at 25 Wharekaho Road.



Figure 7. Chert boulder on hillside above Tohetea Stream at 25 Wharekaho Road (photo scale = 1 m).



Figure 8. Giant taro (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*) growing in Tohetea Stream at 25 Wharekaho Road.



Figure 9. Erosion noted on the steep sides of some of the high points.



Figure 10. Building platform and existing house on highest point at 39 Wharekaho Road.



Figure 11. Section of Tohetea Stream within property at 39 Wharekaho Road.

4.3 Summary

The properties at 25 and 39 Wharekaho Road have been primarily under pasture since initial vegetation clearance associated with European settlement in Wharekaho. Recently there has been significant modification of the stretch of the Tohetea Stream closest to the sea. Aerial photography indicates that the stream was re-routed on the eastern side of Wharekaho Road, and while it is still in its original location at 25 Wharekaho Road, it has been widened and dredged. Other areas have also been modified in the past, with the construction of farm races, yards, driveways and houses, as well as swampy areas drained and stony areas cleared. Possibly due to this, no archaeological features or deposits were recorded on either property. The presence of both giant taro in the Tohetea Stream, and a chert boulder that appeared to have been utilised, suggest that pre-European Māori occupation had expanded inland from Wharekaho Beach, but there is little evidence of this on the properties surveyed.

5 Assessment

The following assessments of values and significance relate only to archaeological values. Other interested parties, in particular mana whenua, may hold different values regarding the proposed development.

No archaeological features or deposits were noted within the properties at 25 and 39 Wharekaho Road (Kuaotunu 6E1 and 6D2 Blocks) during background research or a field assessment. There are no archaeological constraints on the proposed plan change.

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