

Heritage Assessment Programme

IPENZ National Heritage Committee

SECTION A – GENERAL

A1 The Place/Item

Name: Ruapekapeka Pa

Built: 1845

Location: 5 km north of Towai, on Ruapekapeka Rd, off SH1, 42km north of Whangarei

City / District Council: Far North District

Heritage Register Status:

City/ District Council Plan:	Not listed in FNDC Plan, Land zoned Conservation
Historic Places Trust Register:	Does not appear to be listed
IPENZ Register:	No
DOC Register:	Actively managed and promoted heritage site
Other (specify):	

A2 Nominator Information

Name and contact details: Trevor Butler

Date of Proposal June 2007

A3 IPENZ Endorsement

IPENZ Heritage Chapter: Auckland

Name and Contact details: Chairman: John La Roche

Date of Endorsement:

SECTION B – DESCRIPTION

B1: History:

Ruapekapeka Pa is the site of the last battle of the first campaign of the New Zealand Wars (The Northern War of 1845-46) and is the only battlefield of the Northern Wars where visible fortifications remain.

Built by Warrior Chief Te Ruki Kawhiti in late 1845, the Ruapekapeka Pa consisted of a network of rifle trenches, bunkers, tunnels and a double stockade. It was purpose built by Kawhiti to counter European warfare techniques of the time. It provided views over the whole of the contested landscape of the northern campaign. In contrast to traditional pa, Ruapekapeka did not guard borders, command important routes of communication, or protect civilisations. Ruapekapeka Pa could be abandoned without qualm. The aim was to draw British troops to into battle on a difficult site.

No major buildings were erected. Instead, underground rooms were built that were designed to withstand heavy bombardment. Kawhiti and his men sheltered together in dark bunkers like a colony of bats, an arrangement which gave the pa its name, Ruapekapeka, *“the bats nest”*.

After two weeks of bombardment, the British troops breached the palisades and on Sunday 11th January, they entered the pa. They discovered, as with other Northern War battles, the pa had been abandoned before the troops entered. In the battle, the British suffered a total of 45 casualties, while the Maori killed and wounded numbered about 30.

At the end of January 1846, Kawhiti and Heke negotiated a peace with Governor Grey. Ruapekapeka Pa was never re-occupied and was left to deteriorate following the battle.

B2: Fabric (a) ‘As Built’

Ruapekapeka was a large pa, measuring 150m x 70m, surrounded by two rows of 3m to 5m high palisades. These palisades consisted of puriri tree trunks and split timber lashed together and reinforced with bundles of protective flax padding. Between the two layers was a two metre wide trench divided into numerous gun fighter pits. When attacked, the defenders could fire through the outer palisade at ground level while remaining well protected from return fire by the fence and earthen walls of the pits. A second line of defenders could fire from the embankment over the heads of those in the outer trench.

A network of underground connecting tunnels, and bomb-proof shelters, strengthened by strong puriri bearers were built within the pa. The shelters were protected by earthen roofs and robust wooden huts. During times of bombardment they provided excellent protection of the pa’s inhabitants in the same way that bomb shelters were later used in WWI. Scattered within and behind the pa were felled tree trunks and raised mounds to provide cover should the palisades be breached and to hinder the attackers in the event of a direct assault.

This type of pa was far better equipped to handle cannon fire than traditional pa,

<p>but almost as important as its innovative construction was the location. A pa built inland, a long way from European supply sources and navy ships was in a strong position. The attackers had to travel through rough, unfamiliar territory, dragging all their equipment with them and would have little choice when it came to finding a suitable base camp.</p> <p>(b) Modifications and Maintenance</p> <p>Following the battle, the site was not re-occupied and was left to deteriorate. As a result, the timber palisades have completely decayed and disappeared. The system of tunnels and shelters have also deteriorated over time, however there is clear evidence of the trenches and mounds that formed the pa. A well on the site remains intact.</p> <p>In recent years, DOC has established a car-park and loop track that passes through the British camp, down through the bush and up to the Ruapekapeka Pa site entrance where a waharoa (carved gateway) created by master carver Te Warahi Hetaraka has been erected. This work is part of a National Historic Heritage Restoration Project funded by DOC. In December 2003 the first stage of the restoration was celebrated when tangata whenua led a dawn dedication ceremony attended by the Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter.</p> <p>The site includes interpretation signage at both the pa site and the site of the British positions.</p>	
<p>B3: Community</p> <p>The site is cared for by the Ruapekapeka Pa Management Trust which represents six local iwi/hapu groups and descendants of the combatants. DOC works with this Trust in the management of restoration work which has been carried out by the Trust, DOC and various specialist consultants and contractors.</p> <p>The site is of national cultural and historical significance because of its role in the mid-19th century dealings between the Crown and Maori. Ruapekapeka has been identified as a key historic site on the DOC estate in Northland.</p>	

SECTION C – EVALUATION

C1: History: Assess relative value in history	Score
<p>The Ruapekapeka Pa historic reserve is a notable part of New Zealand history as this is where the largest battle in the northern area of New Zealand was held. Ruapekapeka may not have been the first pa to utilize trenches or to have strong palisades, but the combination of design innovations made it one of the most effective against assault by muskets and heavy artillery. At a time when British military technology led the world, this Maori reaction to the threat of artillery</p>	5

<p>bombardment represents an ingenious indigenous response to European firepower and is a significant engineering innovation.</p> <p>The fortifications so impressed the British that following the battle, military engineers from Britain twice surveyed the defences, built a scale model for education purposes, and tabled the plans in the House of Commons.</p>	
<p>C2 Fabric: Assess relative value of fabric</p> <p>The remains of the Ruapekapeka Pa defences consist mainly of the earthworks and mounds, however the layout and extent of the defences are clearly evident. With the benefit of interpretation panels, the remains can be easily interpreted together with their location relative to the British position to enable visitors to the site to understand the nature, extent and effectiveness of the engineering works.</p> <p>There are few remains of modern defensive pa and Ruapekapeka Pa is the most intact of this type of pa that utilised a network of rifle trenches, bunkers, tunnels and a double stockade built specifically to withstand artillery bombardment.</p>	3
<p>C3 Community</p> <p>The Ruapekapeka Pa is regarded highly by the community, DOC and local authorities. The fact that it does not appear on many registers is an omission rather than a reflection of its relative importance to the community.</p> <p>Ruapekapeka Pa can be found on most tourist web sites, promising an encounter of a modern Maori Pa. International tourists with an interest in military history have sought out Ruapekapeka Pa as the site of innovation in defences that influenced the technology used by the allied forces during WWI. The site is increasing in value to the Northland community as a tourist destination and as a site where innovative Maori engineering is celebrated.</p>	5
Cultural heritage score out of 15	
	13

<p>Recommended Plaque Wording:</p> <p><i>“Ruapekapeka Pa is a site of significant engineering innovation. At a time when British military led the world, this Maori reaction to the threat of artillery bombardment represents an ingenious indigenous response to European firepower.</i></p> <p><i>Built by Warrior Chief Te Ruki Kawiti, the network of rifle trenches, bunkers, tunnels and double stockade withstood the British bombardment for twelve days.</i></p> <p><i>The fortifications so impressed the British that following the battle, military engineers from Britain twice surveyed the defences, built a scale model for education purposes, and tabled the plans in the House of Commons”</i></p>	
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Attachment: DOC Brochure “Ruapekapeka Pa Historic Reserve”