

## 2 Culture and history

### 2.1 Background

Point Dorset has a long history as a coastal defence site. For many centuries, the Point has been used to defend Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington Harbour).

#### 2.1.1 Oruaiti Pā

The palisaded fort Oruaiti Pā was situated on the headland at Point Dorset and was one of a series of pā on Motu Kairangi (Miramar Peninsula, see Map B<sup>1</sup>). The pā would have accommodated around 50 huts. No surface evidence of the pā remains.

Oruaiti Pā was visually connected to the major pā of Te Whetu Kairangi (the site of Worsler Bay School) and the headland pā of Rangitatau (above Tarakena Bay). These were established by the descendants of the two half-brothers Tara and Tautoki, sons of the Chief Whatonga. Ethnologist Elsdon Best (1901) estimated Oruaiti Pā was built in 1625AD.

The site was occupied for centuries until Ngāti Ira took over from their Ngāi Tara relations and intermarried with them. In the early 18th century, the heke (migrations) of the Taranaki tribes occurred into and around Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

When New Zealand Company representative William Wakefield arrived in 1839, Te Atiawa Māori were resident on Motu Kairangi (Miramar Peninsula) but it was not considered one of the main areas of occupation as there were no major Te Atiawa pā or kaingā (villages) there.



**Pou whenua at Oruaiti Pā**



**1937 photo of original 6-inch gun emplacements positioned facing south over the harbour entrance.**

From Alexander Turnbull Library,  
Ref: 1/4-048821-G.

#### 2.1.2 Fort Dorset

A military reserve was proposed for this site in the 1850s (Cooke 2000). In 1880, Colonel Peter Scratchley surveyed the area and proposed a three-gun battery at Point Dorset.

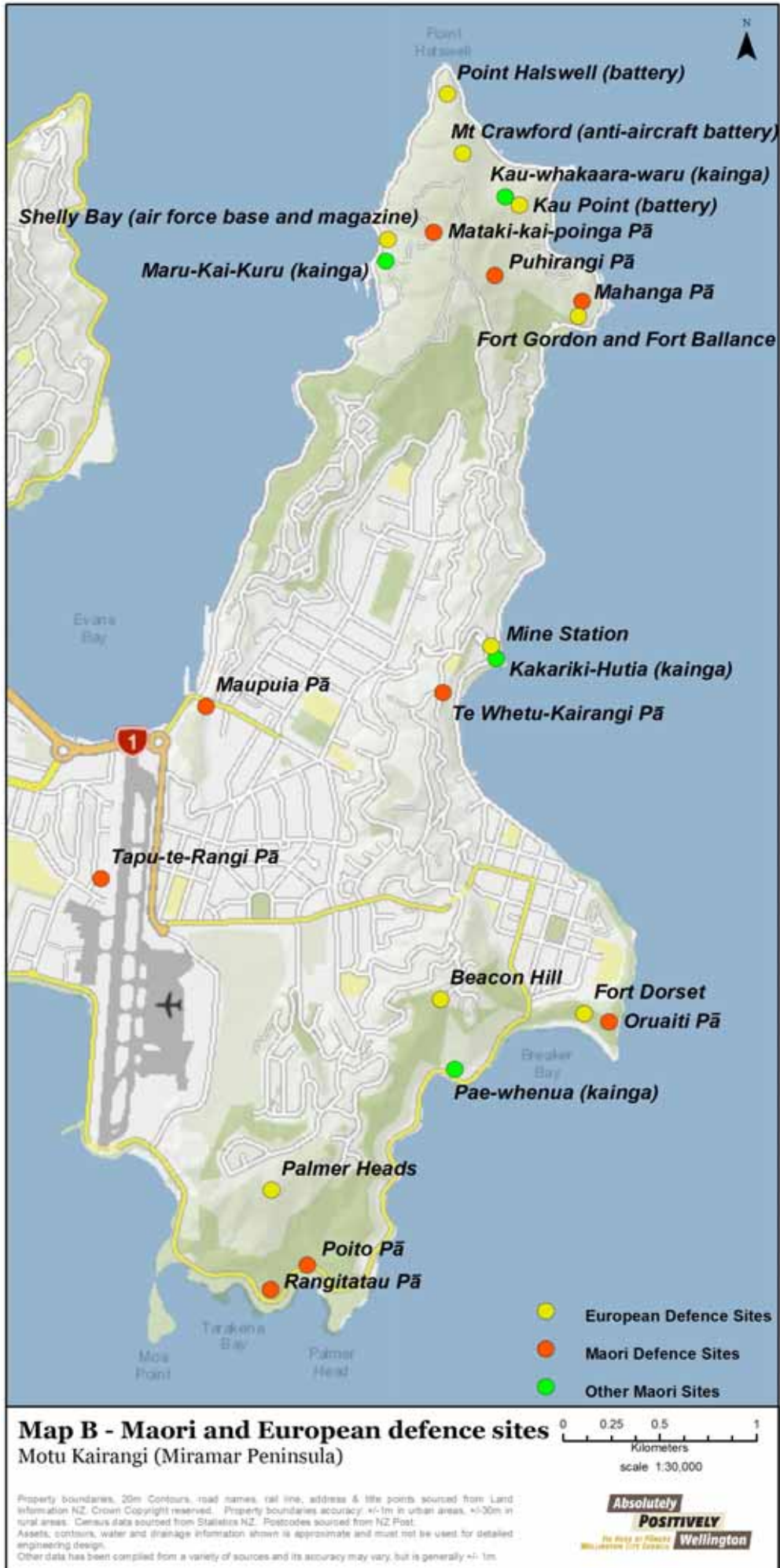
The land was used by the Defence Force between 1905 until 1991 as Fort Dorset. In 1910, the first guns were installed to protect the entrance to the harbour. This battery had two 6-inch guns but all structures have since been destroyed.

The fort expanded during the 1930s to accommodate more soldiers and prepare for the Second World War. The Steeple Battery was built in 1935 and had two 12-pound guns, but has also been destroyed. An anti-submarine MIL loop was situated off Point Dorset.

The Gap Battery, built in 1936 and in 1939, had four 4-inch guns. Some of these gun emplacements have been partially buried. The Beach Battery was constructed in 1942 and had two 12-pound guns (partially damaged). Roads, observation posts, searchlights, magazines and barracks were also built to support these defensive positions. The coastal defence area remained operational until 1957. The guns were finally removed in 1960/1.

Map C shows the location of the military installations and the year they were built. An asterisk indicates the structure is still standing. A Ministry of Works map of the fort from 1966 also shows the four battery sites (see Map D).

<sup>1</sup> Sources of Pā sites - Crawford (1872), Struthers (1975), Wellington City Council (1994)



- 1 Pillbox (<1942)
- 2 Searchlight emplacement (ca. 1942)
- 3 Possible remains of trig station (?)
- 4 Wood and brick embedded in escarpment (?)
- 5 Searchlight emplacement (1937)
- 6 Beach battery\* (1942)
- 7 Searchlight emplacement (1942)
- 8 Steeple battery (1935)
- 9 Terraces and pipes - Magazine (1942)
- 10 Gap battery (4 x emplacements)\* (1936, 1939)
- 11 Old roadway (>1941)
- 12 Gap Battery observation post\* (>1925, <1941)
- 13 6-inch Battery day observation post\* (1937)
- 14 Old concrete fence posts\* (?)
- 15 Old pathway leading to Gap Battery (>1941, <1945)
- 16 Magazine Building (<1941)
- 17 6-inch gun emplacements (1910)
- 18 Original/night 6-inch battery observation post (<1925)
- 19 Radar building (<1942)

\* indicates standing structure



**Map C - Oruaiti Reserve Military Structures**  
Based on archaeological survey by Opus - March 2011

Property boundaries: 20m. Contours, road names, rail line, address & title points sourced from Land Information NZ. Crown Copyright reserved. Property boundaries accuracy: +/- 1m in urban areas, +/- 30m in rural areas. Census data sourced from Statistics NZ. Postcodes sourced from NZ Post. Assets, contours, water and drainage information shown is approximate and must not be used for detailed engineering design. Other data has been compiled from a variety of sources and its accuracy may vary, but is generally +/- 1m.

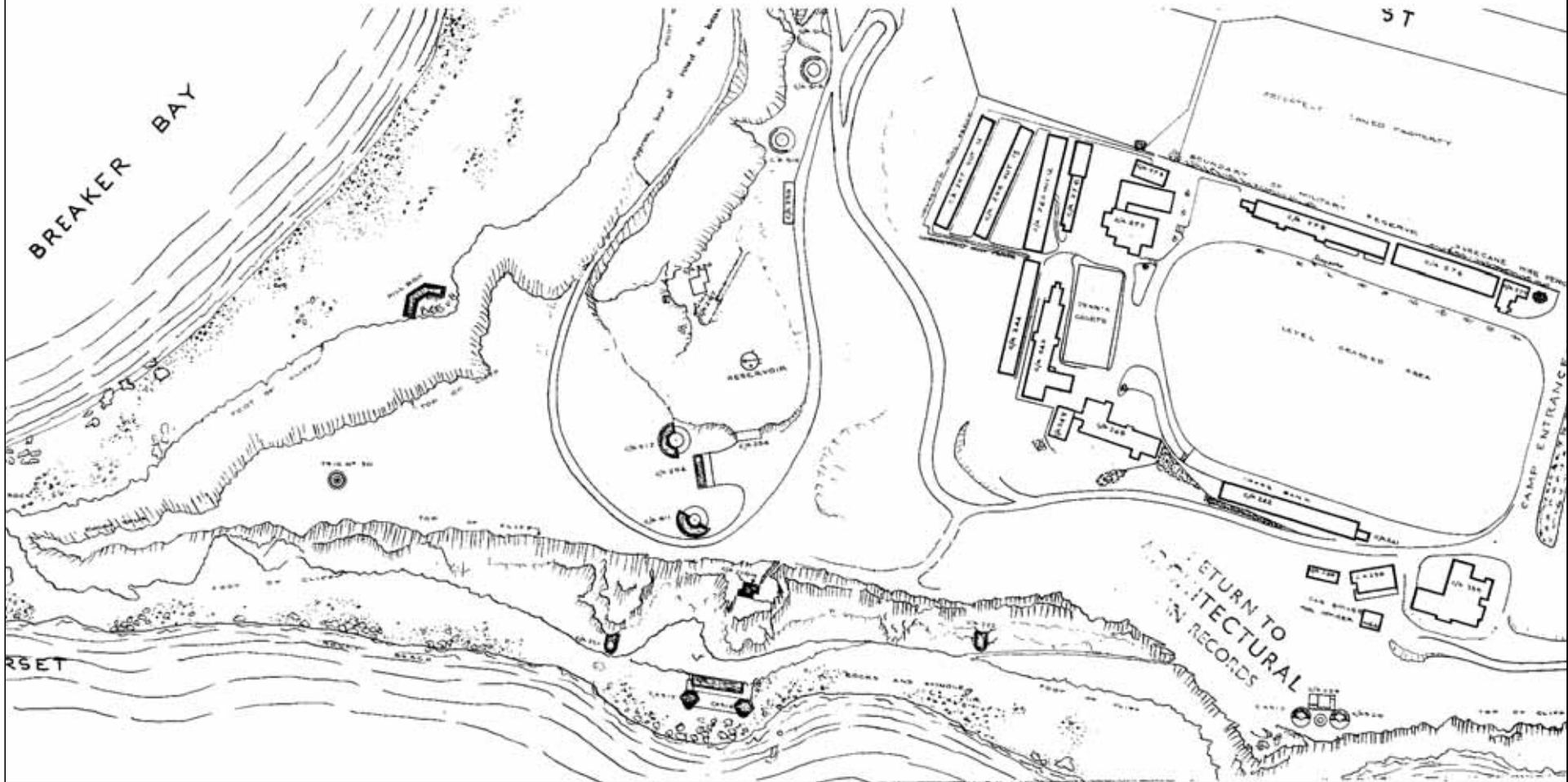
MAP PRODUCED BY:  
Wellington City Council  
101 Wakefield Street  
WELLINGTON, NZ  
(Adapted from Opus 2011)

ORIGINAL MAP SIZE: A4  
AUTHOR: P&G  
DATE: FEB 2011  
REFERENCE:

**Absolutely**  
**POSITIVELY**  
We Stop at Absolute  
**Wellington**

**MAP D MINISTRY OF  
WORKS PLAN OF  
FORT DORSET IN  
1966.**

**Ref: GA 8927. (OPUS 2011)**



Fort Dorset was one of many coastal defence sites that operated on Motu Kairangi (Miramar Peninsula, see Map B<sup>2</sup>). The others were:

1. Point Halswell, on the site of the Massey Memorial
2. Kau Point
3. Fort Ballance at Point Gordon, above Scorching Bay
4. A mine station at Worsler Bay
5. Shelly Bay Air Force Base
6. Beacon Hill observation post
7. Palmer Heads, south of Strathmore
8. Mt Crawford (anti-aircraft battery)

Most of the remaining military structures from Fort Dorset are in poor condition; they have become overgrown with vegetation and also have graffiti. Some are unsafe. There is no information on-site about the structures and this makes it difficult to understand their purpose and how they operated, and to visualise which parts of the harbour were patrolled.

### 2.1.3 Shipwrecks

The rugged Wellington coast has damaged some ships and destroyed others<sup>3</sup>. Some, which sank near Point Dorset, provide diving opportunities. The pre-1900 wrecks are protected under the Historic Places Act and it is an offence to remove anything from them.

- SUBRAON: In 1848, the *Subraon* sank at the southern end of Breaker Bay during a storm.
- TUI: In 1886, the *Tui* struck Barretts Reef. It rests 500m north of the reef.
- WILLIE McLAREN: In 1889, the *Willie McLaren* hit the bottom near Steeple Rock. It is 300m from Seatoun Beach.
- WAHINE: In 1968, the interisland ferry *Wahine* struck Barretts Reef during an extreme storm. 53 lives were lost. It capsized near Steeple Rock and the wreck was cut up and sold as scrap. A memorial to the *Wahine* is at nearby Churchill Park in Seatoun. One of the propellers is at Wahine Memorial Park, just south of Breaker Bay.

## 2.2 Issues

Point Dorset is important historically – it was occupied by Māori for several centuries before European colonisation and was the location of a military fort between 1910 and 1991. It is part of a cultural landscape and is directly linked to other sites on Motu Kairanga (Miramar Peninsula, see Map B). Point Dorset is representative of defence sites used by Māori and European and is not unique in Wellington (OPUS 2011).

### 2.2.1 Stabilising heritage assets

Unfortunately, some of the historic features of Point Dorset have been destroyed (OPUS 2011). Oruaiti Pā was destroyed by the subsequent military installations over the past century. Some of the buildings and structures associated with Fort Dorset are damaged and no repairs have been carried out on the remaining structures for decades. This lack of maintenance has led to some of these structures becoming a danger to public safety.



**Observation post**

There are natural and human threats to the asset, including erosion of the cliffs above the Beach Battery, seismic creep (movement of fault line), vandalism and graffiti.

<sup>2</sup> Sources of Military sites: Waters (2004) and Cooke (2000)

<sup>3</sup> Maritime Archaeological Association of New Zealand, Te Ara website ([www.teara.govt.nz](http://www.teara.govt.nz)), Dive webpage ([wdg.rexedra.gen.nz/ships/wrecks](http://wdg.rexedra.gen.nz/ships/wrecks))

The Council will obtain engineering advice on the structural integrity of these structures, and advice will also be sought from a defence expert on the regional and national importance of individual structures. This will be used to determine which structures to keep and maintain, repair and strengthen, fence off from the public, or dismantle or consolidate.

### 2.2.2 Protecting heritage

There is no on-site information to help visitors find out about Oruaiti Pā and the remaining defence buildings, though some guided walks have been organised in the past to help interpret the site.



Observation post (OPUS 2011)



Beach Battery (OPUS 2011)



Buried emplacement – Gap Battery (OPUS 2011)

### Current condition of some of the military installations at Oruaiti Reserve

Tauranga waka (waka landing sites) will be located near the Hector Street entrance and at Breaker Bay, near the track to the lookout area (which would be used as a safer landing during northerly winds). A pou whenua (land post) will indicate the tauranga waka.

The policies in 2.4.2 outline some ways to improve understanding and appreciation of the features of Oruaiti Reserve.

### 2.3 Objective

- Recognise, protect and interpret the historical and cultural features of Oruaiti Reserve.

## **2.4 Policies**

### **2.4.1 Stabilising heritage assets**

- Where appropriate, historical features will be stabilised and made safe for the public. Expert advice from engineers and defence experts will be obtained by the Council and used to identify which structures to:
  - keep and maintain
  - repair and strengthen
  - fence-off from the public
  - dismantle or consolidate. Any removal of existing structures will occur when their impacts on the environment, public safety, heritage significance and recreational uses outweigh the benefits of retaining the structure.
- Significant hazards associated with the remaining historic structures will be identified (eg by signs) and/or avoided (eg fencing, alignment of historic trail) or mitigated.
- Vegetation around the remaining structures will be maintained to protect the historic features (and views) and minimise damage to structures. Any uncommon indigenous plants will be identified and protected.
- Any earthworks will be carried out in line with the archaeological requirements of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.
- Visitors will be encouraged to keep to the track near Oruaiti Pā to limit future damage.

### **2.4.2 Protecting heritage**

- Work with the Trust as per 1.8: Co-management.
- Work with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust on the management of this historic site.
- Where appropriate, Māori place names will be used, in conjunction with European place names, on signs and maps.
- Develop a route to show the key features including the pā site and its link to other places on Motu Kairangi, the defence installations, the coastal ecology, the views and surrounding landmarks. This may include installing signs or developing a brochure to support this route.
- Interpret tauranga waka sites.
- Allow approved operators to conduct guided walks highlighting the history of this site. Develop protocols for this activity.