

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCREENING: ESK PARK

### LEGISLATION

Under the current legislation (HNZPTA 2014) all archaeology is protected. This includes both recorded archaeology (that which we know is present) and unrecorded archaeology (that which remains to be formally identified).

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RISK SCREENING

#### BACKGROUND

Archaeology Hawke's Bay Ltd was approached by Rachel Stuart (HDC – Parks & Reserves) to provide archaeological advice regarding the ongoing management of the Esk Park, SH5, Eskdale, Hawke's Bay. Whilst there were no recorded archaeological sites within the Park it does lie within a wider environment of cultural and archaeological importance.

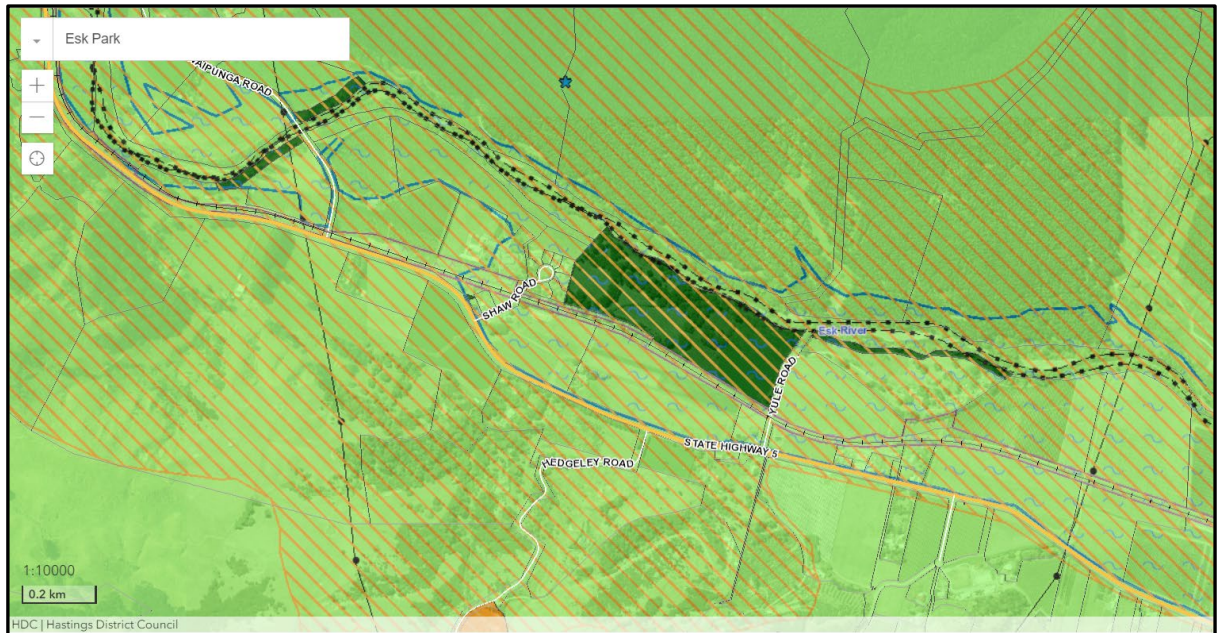
A cursory consideration of the area in question confirmed that the nearest currently recorded archaeological site is V20/209, a single pit located on the opposite side of the Esk River, within PanPac forestry. The Park itself lies on the southern banks of the current river course. Whilst there was no immediate and obvious archaeological risks associated with the Park, as a Park Management Plan was being proposed HDC have requested that an Archaeological Screening of the Esk Park environs be undertaken to provide advice and guidance for its long term management, including the management of any identified or potential archaeological risk areas.

#### PROPOSED WORK

##### *Location:*

The site considered herein is the Esk Park, SH5, Eskdale, Hawke's Bay. It lies approximately 15 km north of Napier City, but falls within the Local Government Area for Hastings District Council. The Park comprises an area of 12.543 ha largely bounded by the Esk River on its north side and the Napier – Wairoa Rail line on the south. It is currently zoned as Park Reserve and houses a limited amenity set of toilet blocks and scattered playground

equipment, all of which is reaching its replacement due dates. The wider area is zoned as Rural Character Landscape Area, and the park is located within an area identified as being a River Hazard.



Esk Park within its immediate environment (Source: HDC Intrapaps)

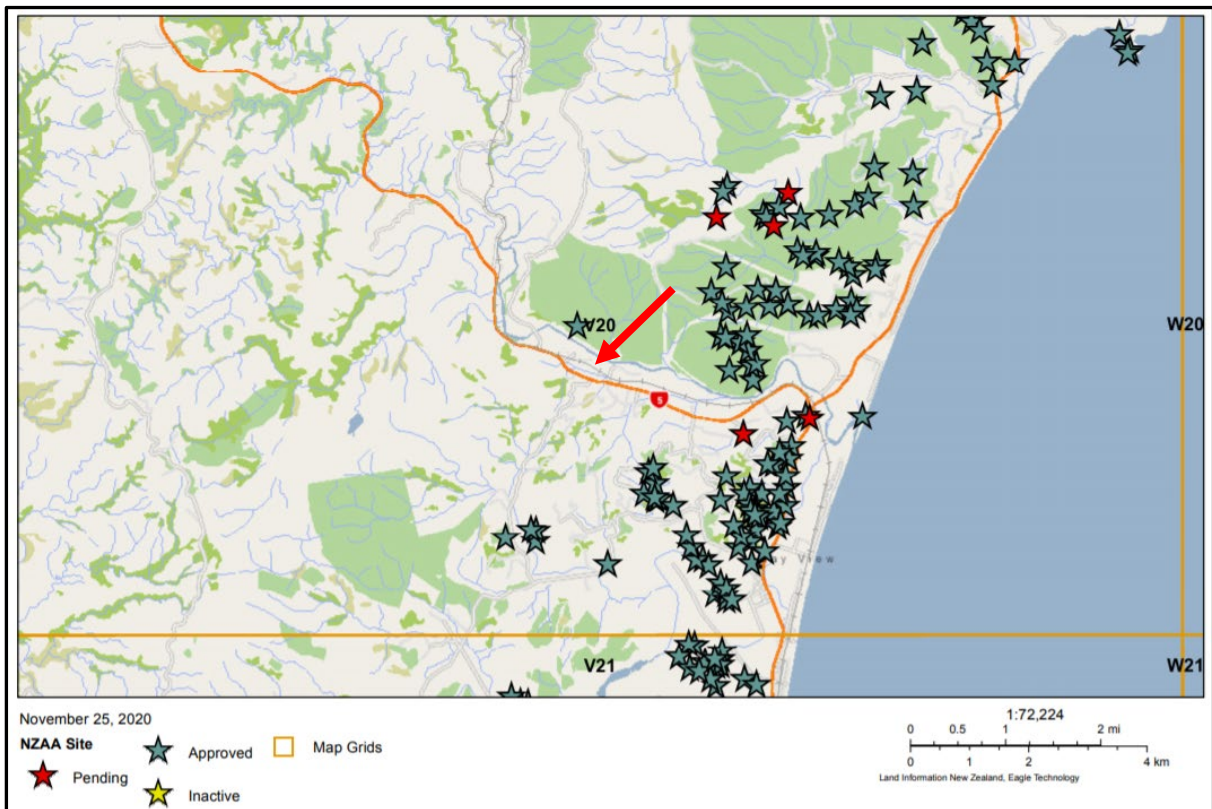
*Proposed work:*

There are no current specific proposed works for the Esk Park, however as a Recreation Reserve it is available to be leased or utilised for a range of activities that fit within the rules outlined for HDC Parks and Reserves. At present the Esk Park is governed by a generic Park Management Plan, but a specific Esk Park Management Plan is currently being considered. Therefore it has been seen as an ideal opportunity to ensure that any areas of archaeological significance or risk are clearly identified and factored into the future management and activities within the Park. Such activities could include the construction of walking or cycling paths, installation of new playground and other recreational furniture, construction of new toilet facilities, concessions for activities within the Park that may require road access or building construction, access to and across the river; and plantings, landscaping and other maintenance and beautification activity.

This screening process therefore is intended to determine if and to what level there are archaeological risks associated with the Esk Park, and to provide a recommendation as to how best to manage or mitigate any such risks.

RECORDED ARCHAEOLOGY

There are currently no recorded archaeological sites in the immediate area of the Esk Park, the nearest site being V20/209, a single pit located ca. 450+ m to the north west across the Esk River within the PanPac forest. More widely there are a large number of recorded sites to the northeast associated with the Tangoio coastal hills, and to the south and south east associated with the numerous pā and occupation areas that made up the Kaimata and Heipipi Complexes.



Esk Park (arrowed) within the wider archaeological landscape.

According to the HDC District Plan there are no items of cultural or historic interest identified within the Esk Park at present, although this may change during the proposed Management Plan process.

## AERIAL & HISTORIC IMAGES

The earliest Retrolens publically available aerial images for the area date to 1938, however the earliest image that clearly shows the Esk Park area in its entirety, as bounded by Shaw Rd and Yule Rd, dates to 1943. In this image the area is covered in a mixture of grass and shrubby vegetation as might be typical of a riverside environment. It appears that there are bare patches to the south that might be the result of periodic flooding and scouring from the river.

An image from 1969 shows more grass cover and more mature trees. In this image there are a large number of vehicles parked across the area, although whether this is a single event or typical of the era 'summer camping' is not known. The presence of several distinct tracks across the park area towards the vehicles suggests that vehicular access at this time was a frequent event.

A 1988 image shows the Esk Park area beginning to take a form more similar to that seen today. A circle of trees to the east many of which remain today can be seen, as can the access way that currently runs through the park.



An excerpt from a Retrolens 1943 aerial showing Yule and Shaw Roads (arrowed).



An excerpt from a Retrolens 1969 aerial showing Yule and Shaw Roads (arrowed): note the large number of vehicles parked amidst the trees.



An excerpt from a Retrolens Nov 1988 aerial (post Cyclone Bola) showing Yule and Shaw Roads (arrowed): note the circle of trees.

Historical images from the Napier MTG were scanned, and although none were found that related specifically to the Esk Park there were several images relating to significant flood events in 1924 and 1938 where it is understood that several metres of silt was deposited across the wider Esk Valley area.

None of the images, aerial or historic identify any potential archaeological features. However, the flood history identified in the historic images and the apparent scouring in the 1943 aerial all suggest that any archaeological sites within the Esk Park environs are likely to be either lost to river action or buried beneath significant depths of alluvial overburden.



Historic photo located in the MTG archive believed to capture the aftermath of an Esk flood possibly in 1924 ([https://collection.mtghawkesbay.com/objects/82253\\_](https://collection.mtghawkesbay.com/objects/82253_)



Historic photograph located in the MTG archive believed to show the 1938 Esk Flood where up to 3 m silt deposition was recorded across the valley (<https://collection.mtghawkesbay.com/objects/95629>)

## SITE VISIT

A site visit was undertaken by Gaylyne Carter (AHB) on 30 Nov 2020. Conditions were overcast but otherwise fair. The park area was assessed via a pedestrian inspection of the ground surface. In particular evidence of modifications to ground surfaces, exposures of soil profiles and vegetation anomalies were sought. No invasive test pits or augers were undertaken as it was not considered to be of any value at this time. Only the publicly accessible area of the park was walked, the leased area to the east was in long grass and was not able to be closely assessed.

It was apparent that the main park area is a moderately undulating valley bottom that has been heavily landscaped through planting both in the historic past and more recently as evidenced by large numbers of trees ranging from mature to sapling. There are localised areas of excavation where items of playground equipment have been installed, along with two toilet block structures with associated services. Adjacent to one block is an artificial

mound atop which a water tank has been placed. The maturity of the trees growing on this mound suggests it has been there for some time.

The Esk River flows adjacent to the park, the channel of which features several small terraces, presumably representing low and high water flow rates. The banks of the Esk appeared to show evidence of periodic scouring as would be expected given the flood history of the river. The banks were not examined closely given the flow depth and rate, and working alone at the time of visit. It is not considered likely that a closer inspection at this time would have revealed anything of note. However, this could be verified if required at a time when the flow rate and conditions are safer to do so.

No evidence of archaeological features or materials were noted during the site visit. No occupation or activity indicators such as burnt stone, shell, or charcoally soils were noted in the exposed surfaces around the mature trees. Nor has any such material been reported during any of the planting activity that has occurred in recent years.



View from public area of Esk Park across leaed paddocks towards SH5 and the Esk Church.





Toilet block with artificial mound (right of image) atop which sits a water tank (arrowed) – note maturity of trees growing on the mound.



General view of the park from eastern boundary: note trees lining the access road and the mix of very mature trees and recently planted saplings.



Series of terraces dropping from the main park level down towards the river.



Esk River channel looking across to the PanPac forests.

## WIDER ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE CONSIDERATIONS

There have been limited archaeological investigations in the Esk Valley area, and those that have occurred have primarily been associated with forestry and residential development activity in the surrounding hills. Although river corridors are well recognised as focal points for Māori having provided transport routes as well as valuable resources, the identified archaeological record along river corridors is largely limited to the pit and occupation sites of the higher ground.

In regions such as Waikato there is an increasing awareness of the potential for significant archaeological landscapes to be present within the lower reaches of the river corridors. These landscapes are often flagged by the presence of large 'borrow pits' a feature of the horticultural activity of several regions including Waikato. Hawke's Bay does not seem to have these borrow pits outside of a few isolated examples such as at Clifton. Without these 'borrow pits' or other obvious surface indicators there has to date been little to drive archaeological investigations within the flood plains and river corridors.

The rivers of Hawke's Bay are also renowned for their migratory forms, many of the river courses seen today are 20th Century realignments, efforts to control the flow and reduce the flooding that features heavily in the latter 18th and early 19th century accounts of life in the Heretaunga region in particular. Assumptions that archaeology does not exist or survive in these areas is being challenged with recent finds. For example as part of the Whakatū Arterial Project several hearth and oven sites have been added to the archaeological record. Most of these features were located immediately below the existing topsoil, however V21/465 was identified 150 cm below the modern surface, overlain by a silty deposit 60 – 80 cm thick, presumed to be flood deposition from the Karamu Stream. Occupation of these sites appears to date from the 1600s through to the 1800s, as is typical for the (limited) Hawke's Bay scientifically dated occupation sites, with V21/465 falling into the earlier bracket as would be expected with the silt overburden.

Given the recorded flood history of the Esk River over the past ca. 150 years, it should be considered likely that similar forces are in play in this location as has been observed

associated with Te Ngāruroro Awa and Te Karamu Stream. The recognized alluvial silt overburden resulting from frequent past flood events may have rendered invisible from the surface features such as postholes, pits and puke that might otherwise be expected to be detected on historical aerial photographs or from surface inspection.

## CONSTRAINTS & LIMITATIONS

It is entirely possible that there are wahi tāpu or other knowledge that may directly affect this archaeological risk assessment that are not yet identified within the District Plan or other consulted sources and to date have not been considered. It is assumed that tāngata whenua will be consulted with during the proposed Management Plan process. Should information be presented that may have archaeological implications it is recommended that this be considered and advised upon by a suitably qualified archaeological professional, and if necessary the recommendations made herein revised accordingly.

This document is a high level risk assessment intended to provide broad guidance only, it does not constitute a full archaeological assessment of effects.

Note that a low level of archaeological risk does not equate to no archaeological risk.

## SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Esk Park is located within an area of acknowledged wider archaeological significance. There are a number of recorded sites in the area, particularly in the Tangoio and Bay View coastal hill areas. It also lies in an area of Hawke's Bay that was significantly altered by the uplift from the 1931 earthquake. This event resulted in the drying out of former swamps as well as shifts in the natural courses of the regions rivers. Prior to this uplift and preceding drainage intervention by farmers and other agencies, these broad valley bottoms were often areas of swampy wetland. Such environments were resource rich for tāngata whenua providing birds, fish and plant materials. Therefore, the significance of this area as part of a wider archaeological landscape of occupation and activity is considerable.

However, the historical evidence clearly demonstrates that the area has been, and remains flood prone. Therefore any archaeological presence will have been exposed to drying effects

of uplift and drainage, scouring effects of flood through the river channel environs, and deposition of a significant overburden of silt throughout the wider valley. All these events will have compromised or destroyed much of any potential surviving archaeology, or buried it deeply within the silt overburden.

## RECOMMENDATION

As there are currently no specific proposals for work to be undertaken in the Esk Park, the recommendations provided here relate more to the ongoing management of the park for archaeological risk than to the specific risks posed by any particular proposal. That said, it is noted that the playground furniture and toilet facilities are due for an upgrade in the near future and these activities will likely have some sort of earthworks associated with them.

There are currently no recorded archaeological sites within the Esk Park, nor have there been any indicators of unrecorded archaeological sites identified or reported to date. Potentially the area with the greatest inherent archaeological risk is the river channel where evidence of weirs, pātuna and mooring posts could survive embedded out of sight within the banks of the current channel. However, at present there is no direct evidence that such structures were ever in this particular section of the river, or that any evidence of them survives.

Evidence for other resource gathering or processing activities such as postholes, pits and hearths could theoretically lie preserved beneath the alluvial silts across the wider area of the park. Again there is no evidence to date suggesting that this is the case, or if so that they are within 500mm of the current ground surface (as would be encountered during planting and other minor earthworks noted around the park).

Therefore it is recommended that from an archaeological perspective the Esk Park be managed under an Accidental Discovery Protocol (ADP) approach in the first instance. This would be sufficient for all minor earthworks across the main park area such as plantings and other earthworks < 300 mm in depth. Any future proposal that potentially affected the river corridor or more extensive excavations for building foundations, access roads or service installations should be subject to a project specific screening to determine whether an ADP remains an appropriate management approach on a case by case basis.

It should be noted that due to the flood history of the area it is very possible that isolated objects including taonga such as adzes or koiwi tāngata (human remains) could have been deposited anywhere in the park environs. Such objects whilst not archaeological sites are of significance and require reporting and managing under archaeological protocols and cultural tikanga. Therefore any proposed management plan should include guidance around process and procedure should such objects be encountered during earthworks including planting.

At the appropriate juncture AHB would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of an Archaeological Accidental Discovery Protocol and other related guidelines for inclusion in an Esk Park Management Plan. As previously noted should any new information relating to pre-1900 activity within the Esk Park environs come to light during the Management Plan process the recommendations presented to date should be reviewed by an appropriately qualified archaeological professional.