

# Palisades and kumara pit

The earliest pa fortifications in New Zealand have been dated back to the late 15th or early 16th century, about five hundred to six hundred years after the Maori arrived in the country. Pa continued to be built and inhabited until the early 19th century.

Pa are usually conspicuous as the sites chosen were mostly defensible high points, often the end of a steep-sided ridge or spur or a coastal headland where cliffs provided a natural defence. Pa were also built on the edges of swamps.

*"Distant roars of a haka and massed voices chanting, penetrated the walls.  
Raise up raise up the corner post  
Place it gently – ah ever so gently,  
Now erect on yonder headland  
Standing forever watchful.*

*This reminded them of the events taking place on the palisade wall."*

From BEHIND THE TATTOOED MASK, by Pat Heretaunga Baker

The earthworks we see today are only part of the fortifications that once existed. Originally, the scarps and banks were crowned by strong palisade. These in turn were surmounted by fighting stages – high platforms from which the defending occupants of the pa could hurl missiles such as stones or long spears down at their attackers. These posts here have been placed in the holes of the original palisades – not the size.

While there was no set plan for the interior, a frequent feature is a tihi (summit platform) for the chief. Flattened terraces provided a level foundation for whare (house). Kumara (sweet potato) were stored in a rua (underground pits). These are visible today as rectangular depressions and were originally a metre or more deep, covered with a pitched roof.



Department of Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai