

New Developments at Historic Ruapekapeka Pa

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The newly completed car park at Ruapekapeka Pa in Northland is the first step of the stage two development plan for the site. The overall development of the Pa facilities will include safer parking for cars and buses, landscaping and beautification of the site and track upgrades for easier access to important sites.

For Shaughan Anderson, Programme Manager for Visitor and Historic Assets, the development of Ruapekapeka is the culmination of decades of personal and professional interest. “It has taken us a long time to get to where we are and develop good working relationships with the various interested parties. The accomplishments at Ruapekapeka are a credit to our staff, contractors, and the Management Trust, and it would not have happened without the support of the local community and the Minister in Wellington”, said Shaughan.

With the car park earthworks complete, the installation of new signage and vehicle bollards is all that remains for this part of the development phase. Site Supervisor Sean Tuckey was pleased with the speedy progress at the work site, “The weather was with us, and the rain held off long enough to get the earthworks done and the gravel down”.

The site is co-managed with the Ruapekapeka Pa Management Trust, which has been party to DOC’s consultation process. The Trust is a charitable organisation that represents six local hapu, all descendants of the original combatants. In recognition of their valuable work, the Trust and its Chairperson Ripeka Taipari received two Northland Conservation Awards in a ceremony late last year.

Of the developments, Ripeka said, “The Management Trust was pleased with the new car park as it is much larger and in a safer position than the old one.



“We look forward to seeing it filled as more and more visitors come to this special place to learn its history”, she said. Years of negotiation and trust-building with the tangata whenua, has led to a mutual respect for each others knowledge, passion and skills, giving rise to a spirit of cooperation that surround the project.

As well as the physical development, an oral history project spearheaded by DOC historian Dr Peter Clayworth, will collect personal family histories about the battle at Ruapekapeka. Contributors will include the descended family members of the original combatants, such as Raumoa Kawiti descendant of the original Pa builder Te Ruki Kawiti.

The first stage of the Pa’s development was officially opened by Chris Carter, at a dawn ceremony in December 2003. The first round of upgrades included, interpretational signage, and an impressive Waharoa or carved gateway at the entrance to the Pa.

The Pa site is of national significance because it is the site of the last battle of the first campaign of The Northern War of 1845-46, the first of the New Zealand Wars. As well as the Pa itself, the British positions occupied during the battle are contained within the reserve, and the military engineering at the Pa is an international example of local Maori adaptation to superior British firepower. Historic Specialist, Jonathan Carpenter said, “The Pa is one of New Zealand’s most important historic sites, and is the only battlefield of the Northern Wars where visible surface features remain. We have taken great care to site the car park where it will have the least effect on archaeological and landscape values”.