

Geography Case Study

Mataimoana | Mt Crawford



This case study was prepared by Kate Curtis, an experienced Geography educator and knowledgeable local on behalf of the Miramar Prison Community Garden. Kate is able to support guided fieldwork and tours of Mataimoana | Mt Crawford based out of the community garden. Find out more and get in touch at www.miramarprisongarden.org/for-educators and learning@miramarprisongarden.org.

Assessment opportunities

This case study supports geography fieldwork located at Mataimoana | Mt Crawford, on the Miramar Peninsula in Wellington, New Zealand. It was developed with NCEA Level 1 Geography courses in mind, and supports work towards Achievement Standard [1.2 Explore an environment using data](#).

Ākonga should use this case study to build an understanding about the environment, prior to and during fieldwork, to understand and form conclusions about the environment. Possible focuses could include:

- Explore accessibility of Mataimoana | Mt Crawford for local Wellingtonians. Consider access to public transport, suitability of trails, amenities, and information availability.
- Explore how the local area has changed over time. How has land use changed? Who has occupied the land over time?
- Explore the use and potential use of the area for Wellingtonians. How is it used now and how could it be used in the future? What different perspectives are there on its future use?
- Explore how land use within the Miramar Prison Garden is influenced by the environment

Background and location

Mataimoana | Mt Crawford is located at the northern end of Te Motu Kairangi | Watts Peninsula, approximately 4 kilometres east of Wellington CBD. It is prominent within the Wellington Harbour, surrounded on three sides by a narrow coastal road and rocky beaches. Largely unpopulated, access to Mataimoana | Mt Crawford is through the densely populated suburbs of Miramar and Maupua. The surrounding taiao is steep and vegetated with a mixture of radiata pine, grasslands, and native bush. A small creek runs down the southern slope.



Figure 1: Location of Mataimoana | Mt Crawford

Currently managed by Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) on behalf of the Crown, Mataimoana | Mt Crawford and the surrounding area is the location of several historic sites associated with early Māori settlement, and with military infrastructure built between the 1880s and World War II. It also contains the Wellington Prison, closed since 2012, and related garden and farm buildings.

In 2011, Cabinet agreed that Te Motu Kairangi | Watts Peninsula should be protected and preserved for celebration and enjoyment of national heritage, culture and arts. Funding was secured by LINZ in 2019 to establish a reserve. However the parcel of land currently occupied by the former prison, garden and farm was not included in the reserve. An application was made under COVID fast-track legislation in 2023 by Taranaki Whanui and the Wellington Company to purchase the land to build around 700 homes. After significant public opposition, the application was rejected by the Minister for the Environment and the future of this land remains uncertain.

Read more: [Inside early housing plans for Wellington’s disused Mt Crawford Prison site](#) March 29, 2023.



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|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Mt Crawford Prison | 6. Kau-whakara-waru Kainga | 11. Shelly Bay |
| 2. Puhirangi Pā | 7. Point Halswell Lighthouse | 12. Chocolate Fish Cafe |
| 3. Te Māhanga Pā Fort Balance | 8. Massey Memorial | 13. Fairy Garden |
| 4. Te Māhanga Kainga | 9. Point Halswell Battery | 14. Miramar Prison Garden |
| 5. Kau-whakara-waru Pā | 10. Te Mata ki Kai Poinga Pā | |

Figure 2: 2012 aerial imagery showing location of key landmarks

People and use

Today, Mataimoana | Mt Crawford is used primarily as a natural reserve and recreation space. It has grown in popularity, particularly since the COVID lockdowns of 2020-21, and is well-used by mountain bikers, dog-walkers, and hikers. While most visitors are locals, the proximity of the popular tourist attraction Wētā Cave, interest in military history, and visits to film locations for Lord of the Rings and other major films has seen increased visits from tourists. After several years of trapping and monitoring, Miramar Peninsula is now predator-free, and community groups are working to restore native plants to further support the thriving native bird and reptile population.



Figure 3: Map showing the phase 1 area now considered predator free by the Predator Free Miramar project.

A thriving community garden is located on the site of the former Wellington Prison garden and the former prison farm remains active, leased to a private farmer who maintains a small herd of cattle and two horses, Sid and Theo.



Figure 4: One of the productive gardens within the Miramar Prison Garden.

The ongoing use of Mataimoana | Mt Crawford remains uncertain, with many differing perspectives on its future. Some in the community would like to see the remaining military and prison buildings restored and made available to the public. Some Māori with a connection to Mataimoana would like to see the prison building removed as a harmful instrument of colonisation. There is a need for more affordable housing in Wellington, however, the site is steep, and exposed with poor access and infrastructure, making it questionable as a viable site for significant development.

Historical and Cultural information

Several Māori groups established settlements on and around Te Motu Kairangi, beginning with Ngāi Tara, who established a major pā further south above what is now known as Worsler Bay, known as Te Whetūkairangi. Ngāti Ira later established the main pā on Mataimoana | Mt Crawford, Mataki-kai-poinga, and a large settlement Kau-whakāra-warū kainga in Kau Bay.



Figure 5: Te Karaka kāinga in 1879, located on the eastern coastline below Te Motukairangi

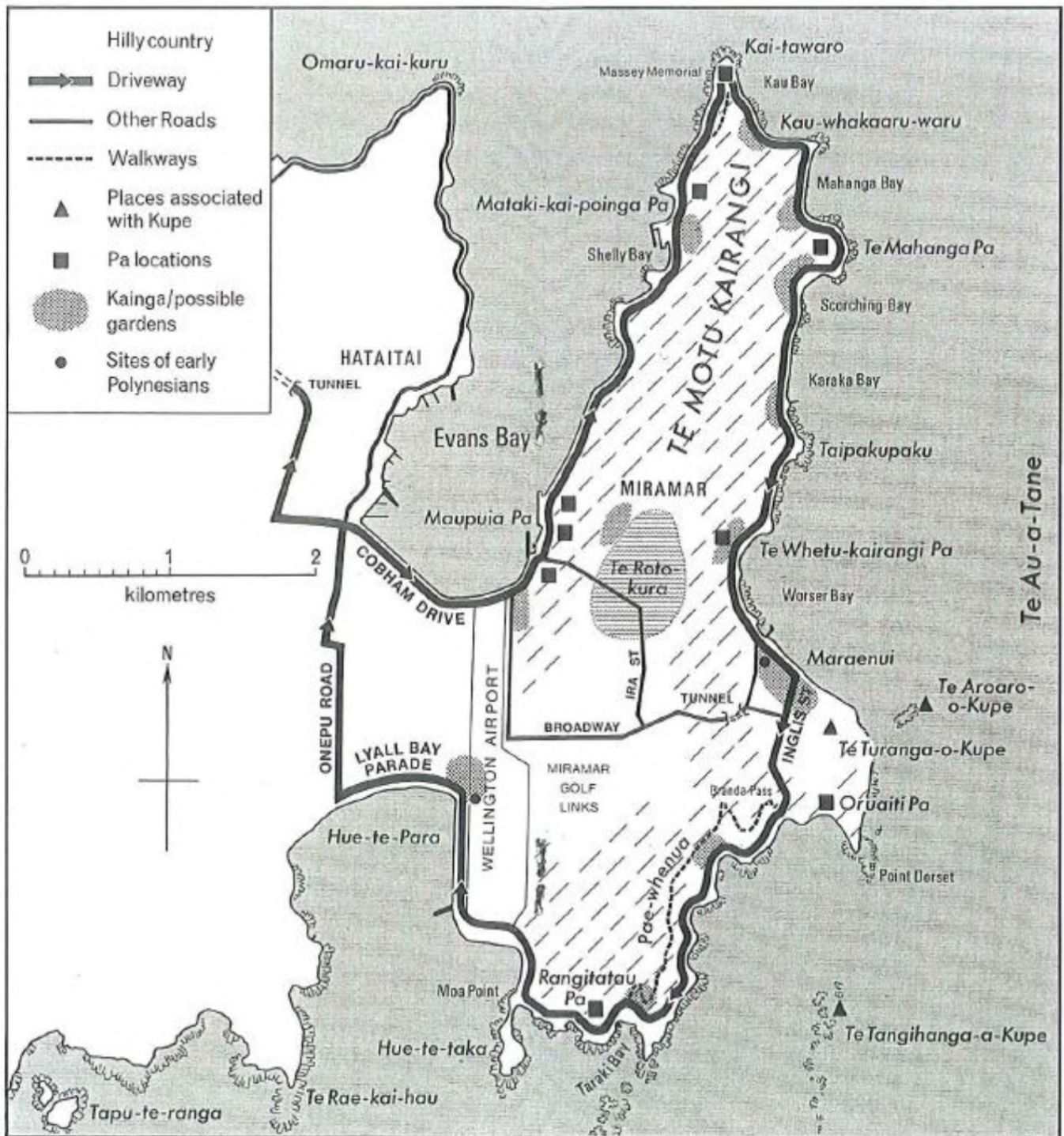


Figure 6: Jones 1986 map of Māori sites on the Miramar Peninsula.

Following European arrival in Wellington, the Miramar Peninsula, as it became known, was subdivided in 1844 and James Coutts Crawford purchased large parcels of land, draining the Para lagoon that once filled the peninsula basin and establishing a large cattle farm.

The subdivision included small military reserves at Points Dorset and Halswell. These were later used to build extensive defensive structures, including the Point Halswell Battery in 1885. Construction on Fort Ballance also began in 1885. Built in response to the perceived threat of Russian invasion, Fort Ballance was built on the site of Te Māhanga Pā, where terraced hut sites were still visible. During construction, large totara posts that had made up parts of the pā's fortifications were unearthed. Below the pā Te

Māhanga Kainga provided housing and a rich source of food first to Ngāti Ira and later to the Te Āti Awa hapu. It was later the site of a NIWA research centre, and is now abandoned.



Figure 7: Detail of James Crawford's proposed subdivision of the Miramar peninsula c. 1878

Point Halswell Prison was built initially as a camp to house prisoners used to construct these military structures. Prisoners were later used to build the Wellington Prison (commonly known as the Mt Crawford Prison), which opened in 1927 and closed permanently in 2012. The prison building still remains near the summit of Mataimoana | Mt Crawford and is slowly falling into disrepair.



Figure 8: Aerial image of Wellington Prison taken shortly before it closed in 2012.



Figure 9: Wellington Prison vegetable garden, 1950.

Shelly Bay

On the eastern slopes of Mataimoana | Mt Crawford is Shelly Bay, once a major naval base and shipyard. More recently the ageing buildings were converted into artist studios, light industry spaces, and a busy cafe. After a lengthy and controversial campaign by Taranaki Whanui and developer The Wellington Company, with widespread opposition including a lengthy occupation by a group called Mau Whenua, the site was sold and work began on an extensive, 400-home development project in January 2023. After most of the remaining buildings were demolished, the site was purchased by Sir Peter Jackson and Dame Fran Walsh, who intend to restore the site and keep it open for public use.

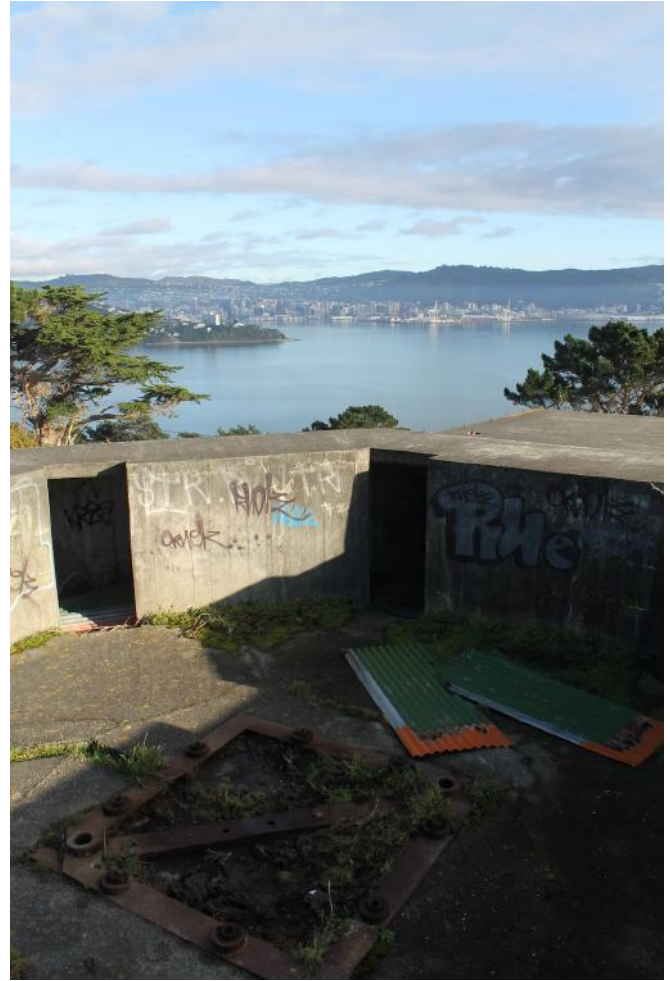


Figure 10: Shelly Bay in late 2023.

Read more: [What killed the Shelly Bay project \(including timeline\)](#), September 4, 2023

Watch: [Sir Peter Jackson turns back time at Shelly Bay](#)

Selected Images



Fort Ballance

Point Halswell Battery



Eastern slope



Wellington Prison

Selected Data

1) Weather log

Data gathered at Miramar Prison Community Garden for December 2023 - January 2024.

IN = temperature inside the greenhouse, OUT = temperature outside.

2023	IN MIN	IN MAX	OUT MIN	OUT MAX
1 st Dec	13.9	22.8	11.9	15.9
2 nd Dec	13.2	23.2	12.4	18.1
3 rd Dec	15.6	16.8	14.7	15.6
Rain	9-65 mm			
4 th Dec	13.3	17.7	12.4	14.0
5 th Dec	13.1	21.9	12.7	17.5
6 th Dec	15.0	28.9	14.7	18.0
7 th Dec	15.2	24.7	14.4	21.0
8 th Dec	15.7	28.9	12.9	20.2
9 th Dec	16.2	26.7	13.9	18.6
10 th Dec	15.0	17.2	11.1	15.7
Rain	4.57 mm			
11 th Dec	11.0	28.2	9.4	18.2
12 th Dec	11.0	24.5	12.4	19.9
Rain	21.1 mm			
13 th Dec	11.8	20.1	9.6	15.5
14 th Dec	13.3	25.6	12.3	18.2
15 th Dec	15.1	19.3	13.8	17.0
16 th Dec	15.6	17.0	14.7	16.9
Rain	3.56 mm			
17 th Dec	15.9	21.0	16.0	19.0
Rain	4.3 mm			
18 th Dec	15.3	23.4	13.6	18.8

2023	IN MIN	IN MAX	OUT MIN	OUT MAX
19 th Dec	16.3	29.2	14.4	21.8
20 th Dec	16.1	23.8	14.7	20.2
21 st Dec	16.6	20.6	15.6	18.3
22 nd Dec	16.2	22.7	14.6	19.0
23 rd Dec	17.1	25.4	15.9	21.8
Rain	4.83 mm			
24 th Dec	18.7	23.4	17.4	20.5
Rain	3.05 mm			
25 th Dec	18.3	22.4	17.0	20.2
Rain	3.65 mm			
26 th Dec	17.6	32.1	17.0	21.9
27 th Dec	17.2	24.9	14.1	19.2
28 th Dec	15.5	25.5	13.1	22.0
29 th Dec	18.6	20.5	16.6	19.6
Rain	7.87 mm			
30 th Dec	17.6	29.0	17.6	21.3
31 st Dec	18.6	29.0	17.0	22.2
1 st Jan 24	16.0	25.9	12.1	20.6
Rain	18.1 mm			
2 nd Jan 24	15.5	25.1	13.0	21.5
3 rd Jan	17.0	27.8	14.9	21.3
4 th Jan	17.6	30.0	16.0	19.8
5 th Jan	17.1	25.7	16.0	17.7

2) Sketch of the Miramar Prison Garden



3) Aerial image showing 5 metre contour lines

Zoom in to read the contour lines and explore the area.



4) Aerial map overlaid with 2023 proposed development plans

Red: Shelly Bay parcel

Orange: Corrections land parcel

Green: Heritage park parcel sought for purchase by developers

Pink: Proposed cable car line

