

West Melton Alternative Energy Project: Archaeological Risk Assessment

Prepared for Canterbury Regional Council
(Environment Canterbury)

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Disclaimer and Limitations

This report is an archaeological assessment. It is prepared for the purpose of presenting the results of archaeological research undertaken by South Island Archaeology (SIA) for Environment Canterbury (the Client) in relation to the investigation of alternative forms of land use (specifically, a solar farm) for the West Melton Reserves. This report should be viewed in light of the subject, purpose and assumptions only and cannot be relied on for anything apart from the purposed described in this report. This report does not make statements of mana whenua values, nor does it attempt to quantify any cultural values across the project footprint.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of Report

South Island Archaeology (SIA) was commissioned by Environment Canterbury to prepare an archaeological risk assessment as part of their investigation of alternative forms of land use (specifically, renewable energy in the form of a solar farm) of the West Melton Reserves. These reserves are an area of 2600 hectares located to the west of Christchurch and south of the Waimakariri River (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Table 1 lists the legal descriptions of the area investigated.

This report presents an archaeological risk assessment of the project area, and highlights key areas of archaeological risk. It does **not** constitute an archaeological assessment as required for an archaeological authority application. This report was prepared by Katharine Watson on behalf of South Island Archaeology Ltd (SIA).



Figure 1. Christchurch and the area to the west of the city, showing the location of the area of interest (outlined in red). Image: Canterbury Maps 2025.

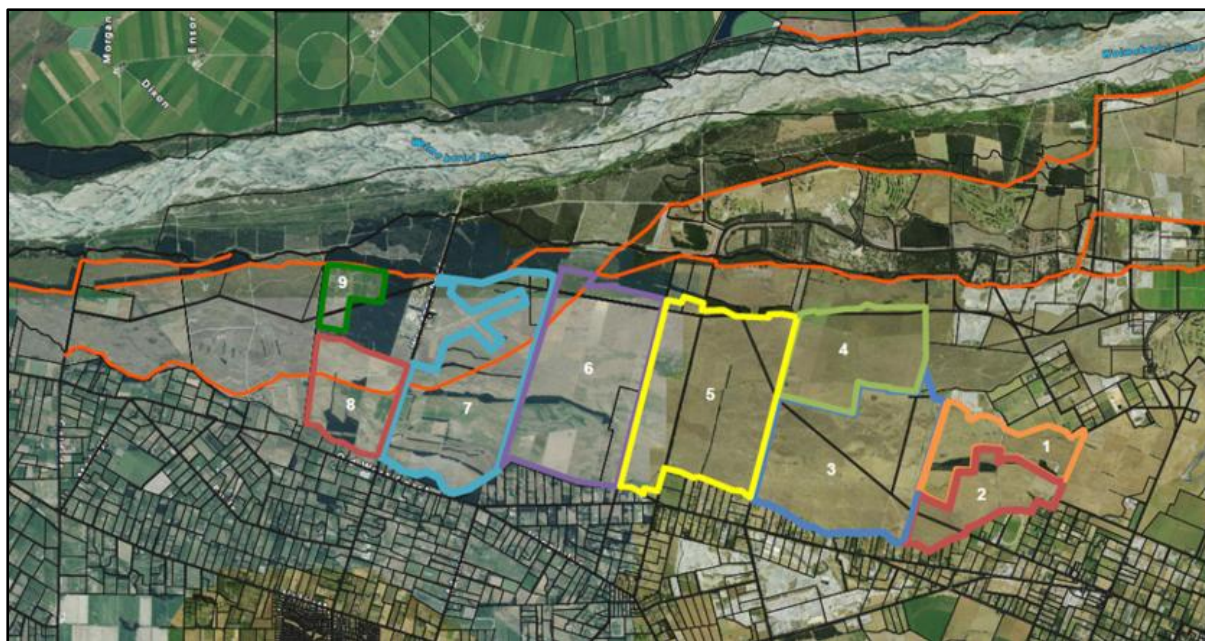


Figure 2. Detail of the project area (Parcels 1-9). Image: supplied.

Table 1. The legal descriptions of the land parcels in the area of interest. Information supplied by the client.

Parcel no.	Address	Legal description
1	715 Pound Road	Lot 1 DP 70658 & Sec 28 SO 470773
2	33 Guys Road	Lot 1-2 DP 67948
3	231 School Road	Lot 1-4 DP 68764
4	76 Clarksons Road	Lot 1-2 DP 26644
5		Lot 11 Waimakariri Reserve
		Lot 1-3 DP 26437
		Res 2464
		Pt Res 947
		Pt Res 947
6	Old West Coast Road	Pt Lot 8 DP 24168
	Old West Coast Road	Res 2464 & 2467
	Old West Coast Road	Pt Res 947 & 2466
7	Lot 13 Waimakariri Reserve	Pt Lot 8 DP 24168
	Lot 13 Waimakariri Reserve	Res 2464 & 2467
	Lot 13 Waimakariri Reserve	Pt Res 947 & 2466
	Lot 13 Waimakariri Reserve	Lot 1 DP 59937
8	Lot 14 Waimakariri Reserve	Pt Res 947 & Res 2470
9	Lot 14 (3) Waimakariri Reserve	Pt Res 947 & Res 2470

2. Statutory Requirements

There are two main pieces of legislation in New Zealand that control work affecting archaeological sites. These are the *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014* (HNZPTA) and the *Resource Management Act 1991* (RMA).

Heritage New Zealand administers the HNZPTA. It contains a consent (authority) process for any work affecting archaeological sites, where an archaeological site is defined as:

Any place in New Zealand, including any building or structure (or part of a building or structure), that:

- Was associated with human activity that occurred before 1900 or is the site of the wreck of any vessel where the wreck occurred before 1900; and
- Provides or may provide, through investigation by archaeological methods, evidence relating to the history of New Zealand; and
- Includes a site for which a declaration is made under section 43(1).

Any person who intends carrying out work that may modify or destroy an archaeological site, must first obtain an authority from Heritage New Zealand. The process applies to sites on land of all tenure including public, private and designated land. The HNZPTA contains penalties for unauthorised site damage or destruction.

The archaeological authority process applies to all archaeological sites, regardless of whether:

- The site is recorded in the NZ Archaeological Association Site Recording Scheme or included in the Heritage New Zealand List,
- The site only becomes known about as a result of ground disturbance, and/ or
- The activity is permitted under a district or regional plan, or a resource or building consent has been granted.

Heritage New Zealand also maintains the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero of Historic Places, Historic Areas, Wahi Tupuna, Wahi Tapu and Wahi Tapu Areas. The List can include archaeological sites. Its purpose is to inform members of the public about such places.

The heritage places under consideration in this report and the timeframe/age of these places is restricted to archaeological sites as defined in the HNZPTA.

3. Methodology

This report is based on desk-top research only. Research was carried out using a range of historic and archaeological/cultural information sources including:

- the New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) Site Record Database (ArchSite);
- the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) List/Rārangi Kōrero;
- archaeological/cultural reports associated with the area;
- the Waimakariri District Plan;
- LINZ survey plans, historic maps and photographs from various sources;
- land occupation records (primarily street directories and the electoral roll); and
- historic newspapers, via the PapersPast website.

No site visit was carried out as part of this risk assessment.

4. Historical Background

4.1. Māori History

Traditional accounts record that Waitaha were the first occupants of Te Waipounamu, followed by Ngāti Mamoe, with Ngāi Tahu arriving in the early-mid 17th century. Archaeological evidence indicates that Māori settlement of the Canterbury area was focused on the east coast, with permanent settlements typically established at river mouths. The occupants of these settlements followed a way of life that involved travelling inland to harvest seasonally available resources, and they were engaged in large-scale trade networks that saw high-quality stone resources (including greenstone/pounamu, silcrete, argillite and obsidian) move around the country. Later, following the extinction of moa and the decline in fur seals, Māori settlements became focused around pā or kāinga (Anderson 2025, Challis 1995, Jacomb 2009).

The Waimakariri River lies immediately north of the project area. It is named for the cold (makariri) waters that run down the river from the Southern Alps. The river is an important part of Ngāi Tūāhuriri's identity, as well as a significant ara (trail). This ara was used as part of the traditional route to Te Tai Poutini (the West Coast), as well as to a number of mahinga kai associated with lakes in the Canterbury high country (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu 2023). These upper reaches of the Waimakariri were an important source of weka, kiore (rat) and forest birds for Ngāi Tahu (Anderson 2025: 226-227). The estuary at the river's mouth – Te Riu-o-Te-Aika-Kawa (Brooklands Lagoon) – was also a kāinga mahinga kai (food-gathering place). Pātiki (flounder), rōrōa (shellfish), tuaki (cockles) and whētiko (mudflat top shell) were collected here (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu 2023).

4.2. European Occupation

4.2.1. Pastoral runs

The project area includes land that was formerly part of three pastoral runs: Coringa (Run 27), Ashfield (Run 37a) and Tresillian runs (Run 37; Figure 3). These runs were the first European use of the area.



Figure 3. The project area (in red) in relation to the boundaries of pastoral runs in 1860. Image: Browning 1860, Google Earth.

Coringa

Charles Haslewood took up Run 27 (and the adjoining Run 102) in the autumn of 1852, naming the combined runs Haslewood (Acland 1975: 34-35). Haslewood died in May 1858 and the station was offered for sale two months later (*Lyttelton Times*, 26/5/1858: 5). At the time, the property was described as having a dwelling, huts, stockyards, hurdles, and dipping troughs (*Lyttelton Times*, 2/6/1858: 6). Current research could not determine the exact location of these improvements, and the 1860 map of the run does not indicate the location of the station homestead (Browning 1860).

Edward Merson Templer purchased Coringa in 1858 (Acland 1975: 34-35). Templer is believed to have constructed a homestead on the station in 1865, and this remained on the property until the 1980s (Canterbury Maps 2022, Templer 2022). This was located at what is now 609 Avonhead Road, outside the project area.

The proximity of the run to Christchurch meant that much of the land was quickly converted to freehold. By 1865, the run was 4000 acres, down from the original 10,000 acres. Following Templer, George Stead bought the run and owned it until his death in 1908 (Acland 1975: 34-35).

Ashfield

Ashfield was formed out of the Tresillian Run 37, which was taken up by Charles Haslewood for Charles Wedge, in October 1851. The following year, the lease was sold to John McLean and Allen R. Macdonald, who divided Run 37, leading to the formation of Ashfield (10,000 acres), which was held by McLean and run by his brothers, Allan and Robertson. Allan lived at Ashfield and the 1860 map suggests the homestead was to the north of the project area (Acland 1975: 35-36; Figure 3).

As with Coringa, much of the run was quickly converted to freehold and some of it was also taken for river conservation work (see below). By 1890, there was only 714 acres of leasehold remaining (Acland 1975: 36).

Tresillian

When Run 37 was divided in 1852, Allen R. Macdonald took up the west half, of 10,000 acres. Macdonald and his brothers ran this property until late 1854, when they sold it to Charles Reed, who named the property Tresillian. The first homestead was built on the banks of the Waimakariri River, approximately 3 km northwest of the Miner's Arms (an accommodation house to the west of the intersection of Miners Road and Old West Coast Road; Acland 1975: 37). This suggests it may have been at the location shown in Figure 3, and possibly within the project footprint, on the northern edge of Parcel 9 (Figure 4). No structural remains are visible in this area in aerial photography dating to the 1940s. The Brabazon brothers bought the property in 1865. In 1895, the leasehold was taken over by the National Mortgage and Agency Company, who gradually sold it off (Acland 1975: 37).



Figure 4. 1940s aerial photography, showing the approximate area of the station marked on the 1860 map of pastoral runs. Parcel 9 of the project area is at left. Image: Canterbury Maps 2025.

4.2.2. The flood protection reserves

In 1868, the Canterbury Provincial Government passed the Canterbury Rivers Act. This was in response to floods earlier in the year that had caused a significant amount of damage in the province and was passed to enable measures to be put in place to prevent further flood damage (*Star* 20/11/1868: 2). Amongst other things, it led to the establishment of the South Waimakariri Board of Conservators in the following year. To facilitate the work of the Board of Conservators, parcels of land were vested in them as endowment lands (Norton 1985: 3).

Several of the reserves vested in the Board of Conservators now make up the West Melton Reserves: Reserves 947, 2464, 2466, 2467 and 2470. These reserves were formed out of the pastoral runs discussed above and were vested in the Board of Conservators in 1880 (LINZ 1880a, b, c and d).

Reserve 947 was by the far the largest of these, and a number of embankments were constructed in this reserve. An 1875 survey plan shows the location of these works, and indicates that the No. 10 embankment was within the project area (Figure 5). This embankment is still visible on aerial photographs today, just east of Clarksons Road (Figure 6). Another of these embankments – No. 8 – has been recorded as archaeological site M35/2312 (this is outside the project area, but confirms that physical evidence of these embankments remains in situ today). The embankments were formed from various materials including shingle, concrete blocks, and cement (*Press* 12/11/1890: 6, *Star* 12/1/1882: 3).

The reserve land was leased to various people for the remainder of the 19th century, who are likely to have used the land for running stock. No attempt was made to identify these lessees. Aerial photographs from the 1940s show few structures on the land, beyond fences and shelterbelts (Figure 7).

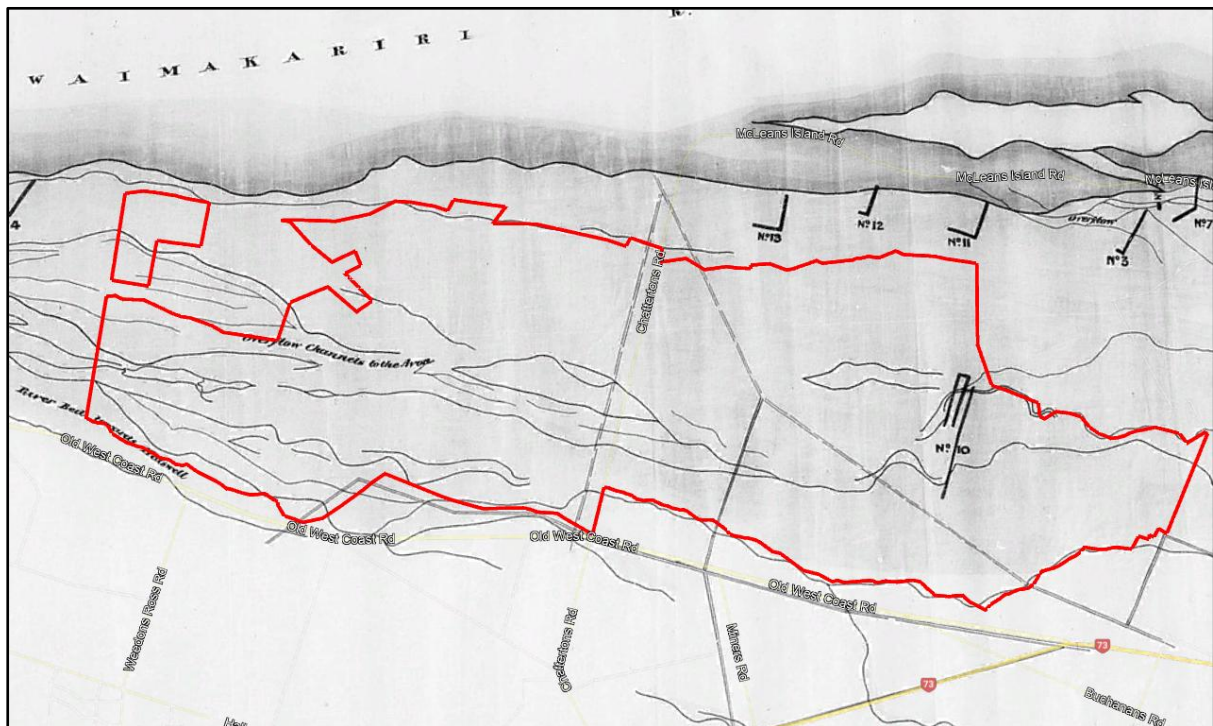


Figure 5. The embankments built by the Board of Conservators, 1875, in relation to the project footprint (red outline). Image: Google Earth, WRPWD 1875.



Figure 6. The embankment (red arrow; the project boundaries are shown in red). Image: Canterbury Maps 2025.



Figure 7. The proposed footprint (in red) overlaid on a 1940s aerial photograph. Image: Canterbury Maps 2025.

4.2.3. The Dobson benchmarks

In order to ensure that the river conservation works carried out by the Board of Conservators were fit for purpose, they commissioned Edward Dobson, the Provincial Engineer, to survey the area. This led to the establishment of the Dobson benchmarks: 28 stone benchmarks laid out over a distance of 13 miles 33 chains (21.6 km). The stone benchmarks were 8 by 8 inches (20 x 20 cm) square, 36 inches

(90 cm) high and engraved with a number. One remains in situ near the airport (outside the current development envelope) and is recorded as archaeological site M35/331. Information in the West Melton Reserves Management Plan indicate that at least eight benchmarks remain extant (Figure 8). Three of these are within the project footprint, in Parcels 4 and 6.



Figure 8. The red dots indicate the location of surviving Dobson benchmarks (the green dots are recorded archaeological sites). Image: Environment Canterbury n.d.

4.2.4. The Paparua water race scheme

In 1886, Reserve 947 was brought within the boundaries of the Waimakariri water race district (*Lyttelton Times* 9/12/1885: 6, *Star*, 12/1/1886: 3). This allowed water races to be constructed from the Waimakariri River through the reserve and neighbouring rural sections to facilitate the agricultural and pastoral development of the area. Water races that are part of the Paparua water race run through the project area (Figure 9). A survey plan dating to 1895 shows part of the route of two branches of the race, indicating that at least some of it was constructed in the 19th century (Figure 10).



Figure 9. Branches of the Paparua water race scheme within the project footprint (outlined in red). The green lines are the main channels, and the blue lines are the laterals. Image: Canterbury Maps 2025.

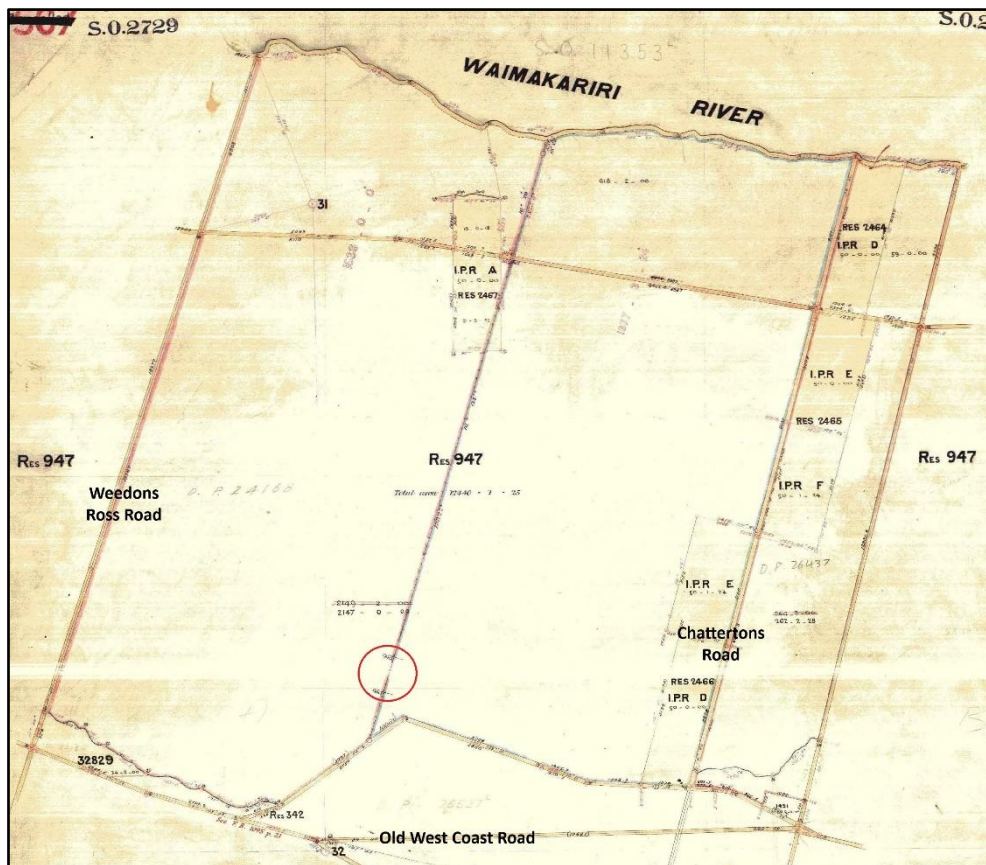


Figure 10. A 19th century survey plan that shows the location of two branches of the Paparua water race, between Weedons Ross Road and Chattertons Road. Image: LINZ 1880e.

5. Previous Archaeological Work (Figures 11-13)

5.1. Recorded archaeological sites

There are a number of archaeological sites recorded within and around the footprint of the proposal. The number of such sites recorded indicates that there is the potential for more sites associated with Māori use of the area to remain in situ below the ground surface.

Table 2 and Figure 11). All of these are Māori archaeological sites and all are ovens. Several of the sites refer to more than one oven and were originally documented in a paper by R. J. and R. B. Rains (Figure 12). The number of such sites recorded indicates that there is the potential for more sites associated with Māori use of the area to remain in situ below the ground surface.

Table 2. Recorded archaeological sites in and around the area of interest. Source: NZAA 2025.

ArchSite no.	Location	Site type	Description
M35/3	On Ross Road, just over 1 km north of its intersection with Old West Coast Road	oven	Site exposed during road scraping. The oven consisted of a circular area of charcoal and burnt broken stones, approximately 700 mm in diameter. Recorded in 1971.
M35/4	About 400 m of Ross Road, and 1.4 km north of intersection between Ross Road & Old West Coast Road	oven	Oven stones and charcoal in two areas, approximately 9 m apart. Recorded in 1971 and described as eroded at the time.
M35/5	On south side of relict river channel running roughly east-west through 715 Pound Road, east of Guys Road	oven	Scattered fire-cracked rock and small deposit of charcoal stained sand. The fire-cracked rock was scattered across an area measuring roughly 2 m across, and had been disturbed from the original context by the stump grinder and growth of the tree line. A small irregular-shaped deposit of charcoal-stained sand was recorded at approximately 250 mm below the ground surface, immediately below the topsoil and was 300 x 350 mm and 30 thick. The feature contained only charcoal and charcoal stained sand. These features were found during earthworks in July 2025.
M35/149	Northwest of intersection of Ross Road and Old West Coast Road.	oven	Noted as having been subject to stock damage and erosion. Zone 6, Figure 12.
M35/150	Between Range Road and Ross Road	oven	Noted as having been subject to stock damage and erosion. Zone 7, Figure 12.
M35/151	About 800m north of Old West Coast Road, and east of Ross Road	oven	A number of ovens. Noted as having been subject to stock damage and erosion. Zone 8, Figure 12.
M35/152	North of Old West Coast Road, west of Chatterton Road	oven	Noted as having been subject to stock damage and erosion. Zone 10, Figure 12.
M35/153	Either side of Chatterton Road	oven	Noted as having been subject to stock damage and erosion. Zone 11, Figure 12.
M35/154	East of Chatterton Road	oven	Noted as having been subject to stock damage and erosion. Zone 12, Figure 12.
M35/155	Mostly to west of Guys Road	oven	Noted as having been subject to stock damage and erosion. Zone 13, Figure 12.



Figure 11. Recorded archaeological sites (green) in the vicinity of the area of interest (outlined in red). Image: NZAA 2025.

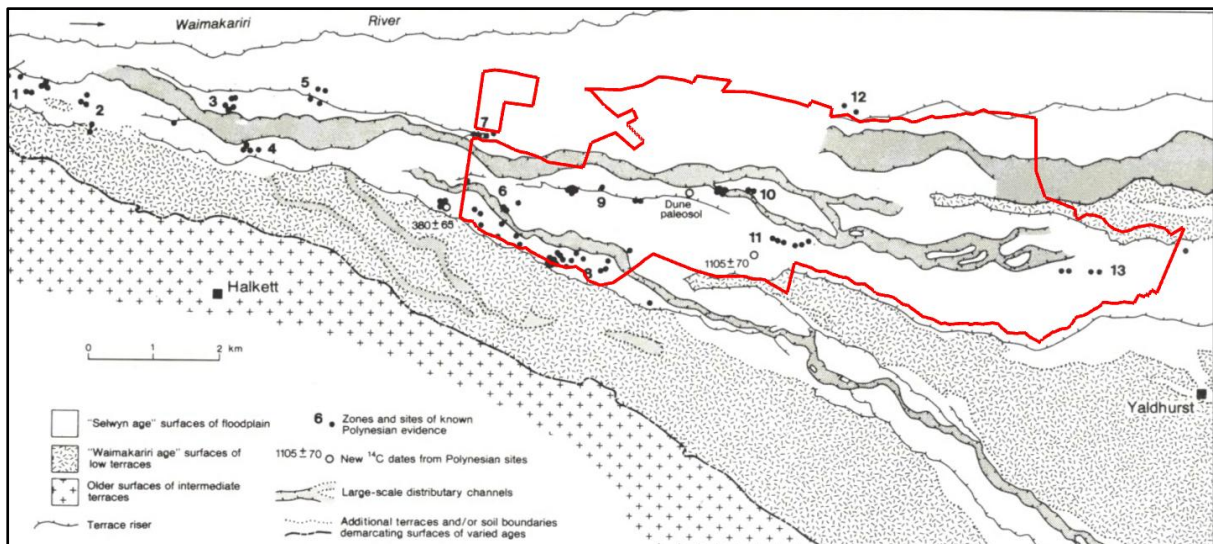


Figure 12. The location of the oven sites recorded by R. J. and R. B. Rains (referred to in Table 2 above). The number of such sites recorded indicates that there is the potential for more sites associated with Māori use of the area to remain in situ below the ground surface. Image: Google Earth.

5.2. New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero

There are no heritage sites listed on Rārangī Kōrero/the New Zealand Heritage List in close proximity to the proposed works.

5.3. District plans

The project footprint lies within both the Christchurch City Council and Selwyn District Council areas. There are no scheduled historic sites within the footprint of the project area administered by Christchurch City Council. There are, however, two sites of significance to tāngata whenua scheduled in the Selwyn District Plan (Figure 13). These are two of the ovens recorded as archaeological sites. They are scheduled as sites C44 (M35/3) and C45 (M35/4) in the district plan and are described as being near Weedons Ross Road.

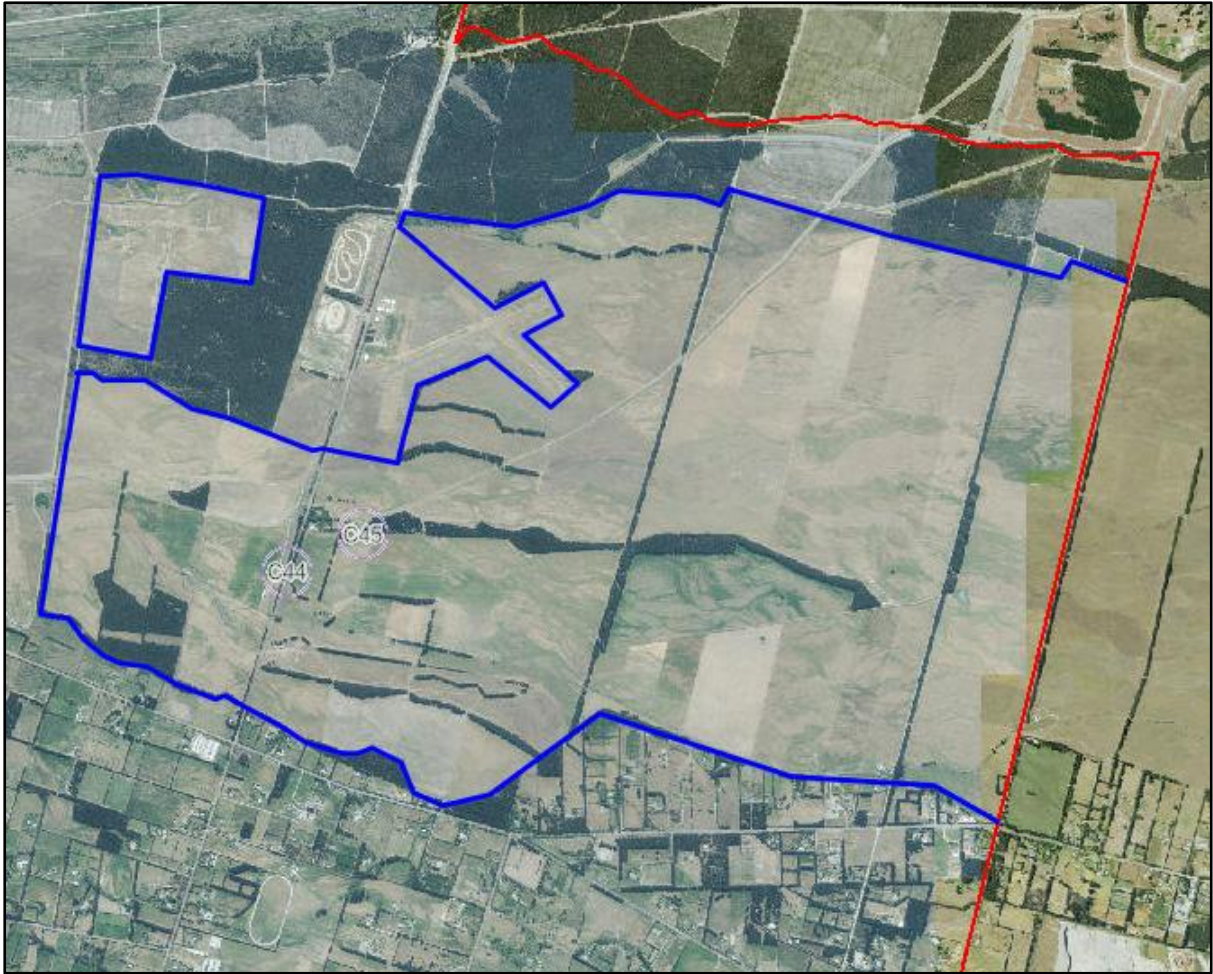


Figure 13. Scheduled sites C44 and C45 within the project boundaries (in blue) in the Selwyn district (red lines).
Image: Selwyn District Council 2025.

6. Research Results

The research carried out has identified a number of pre-1900 archaeological sites within the boundaries of the project area. Some of these sites are recorded, others are not. The sites are as follows:

- Māori ovens (M35/3, 4, 150, 151, 152, 153 and 155)
- embankment No. 10
- three Dobson benchmarks
- 19th century water races

In addition, it is also possible that there are more unrecorded Māori archaeological sites in the area, and that the Tresilian homestead was located in the area.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research carried out indicates that there are a number of recorded and unrecorded archaeological sites within the proposed project footprint. All of these sites are protected by the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act, and an archaeological authority would be required to destroy, damage or modify them. In the first instance, it is recommended that disturbance of these

sites is avoided. While the location of some of these – the embankment, the Dobson benchmarks and the water races – are clearly documented, the oven sites were recorded prior to the advent of modern GPS technology. As such, the location information available about them is indicative, rather than accurate. It is recommended that an archaeological survey is carried out to determine the exact location of these sites, and to inspect the surrounding area for similar archaeological sites. It is also recommended that any disturbance of these sites is avoided during any earthworks for the project. Given the nature of Māori archaeological sites, it is possible that such sites remain in situ below ground but with no surface evidence remaining. As such, it is recommended that a precautionary archaeological authority is obtained for the project. It is also recommended that the northern boundary of Parcel 9 is inspected to assess whether or not any evidence of the Tresilian homestead remains.

7.1. Summary of Recommendations

- Avoid all known archaeological sites, whether recorded or not.
- Archaeological survey of the recorded oven sites, to establish exactly where they are and enable them to be avoided during any earthworks.
- Archaeological survey of the general area of the recorded oven sites, to establish whether or not there are any other similar archaeological sites in the area.
- Archaeological survey of the northern part of Parcel 9, to establish whether or not there is any physical evidence of the Tresilian homestead.
- Obtain a precautionary archaeological authority to allow for the possibility that Māori archaeological sites survive below ground but with no above ground evidence. An archaeological assessment will need to be prepared for this application.
- Consultation with Mana Whenua is recommended.

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