

## 2020 Report – 150th Mobile Tower Completed by Rural Connectivity Group



The RCG achieved its 150th mobile tower live at Tongapōrutu. The area is on the historic and picturesque Taranaki coast and has a long history of Māori settlement and of iwi movement up and down the coastline.

The RCG team were very respectful of this history when working early on with iwi Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Tama to agree on a site location that did not interfere with a pā site or ancient burial grounds. Once a site location was decided on, they agreed protocols to follow in the case of any accidental discovery of artefacts. Daniel McCurdy, an archaeologist from Geometria, led the RCG application to Heritage New Zealand for permission to modify a historic site. This was duly given, allowing the tower to be built.

Works commenced in August 2020 with a karakia, and the excavation works were overseen by kaitiaki monitor Ngatai Rauputu, representing both iwi, as well as Daniel the archaeologist. During the excavation a small midden and hāngi pit were uncovered about 20 centimetres below the surface, both in good condition. It was agreed that it looked to be a spot where a small whānau group had stopped during their travels in the area, to shelter behind the sand dune and have a hāngi. Maybe it was a cold and windswept Taranaki day and they needed to fill their puku to continue the journey in the unpleasant weather?

Ngatai and Daniel took samples from the midden and hāngi, believed to be quite old, and they have been sent off for carbon dating. Because of the RCG pre-work with Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Tama and Heritage New Zealand, the find was able to be assessed on site and samples taken, and work could continue uninterrupted.

It is exciting to think that this ancient whānau sheltered in a spot close to where an RCG mobile site now provides comfort and safety for travellers along State Highway 3. Their modern-day whānau are also very grateful for the fast broadband and mobile services from Spark, Vodafone and 2degrees, as are the permanent residents of Tongapōrutu village. Everyone involved with this project has been especially pleased with the respectful approach to mana whenua and the engagement process undertaken. It is a worthy site to have obtained the title of 150th site!