

Notes From Our Readers

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Rapa Nui National Park 1993-1999

Rapa Nui Land Management: A Personal Chronicle

The following notice appeared in *El Mercurio* on 1 March, 2000:

"Nuevo uso del suelo en Isla de Pascua. Por primera vez el Gobierno planificó el uso de las 16.600 hectáreas de suelo que posee Isla de Pascua. La idea es compatibilizar la protección de atractivos arqueológicos y ecológicos con las necesidades de la etnia rapanui".

"Esta zonificación, acordada por el Consejo (Comisión) de Desarrollo de la isla y el Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales, permitirá que hoy el titular de esa cartera, Sergio Galilea, entregue 1500 há—que antes correspondían al fundo Vaitea, de la CORFO, y al parque nacional Rapa Nui—a 267 familias de esa etnia. Las parcelas sólo pueden ser vendidas a otro rapanui, pues está prohibido que extranjeros o chilenos "continentales" adquieran tierras".

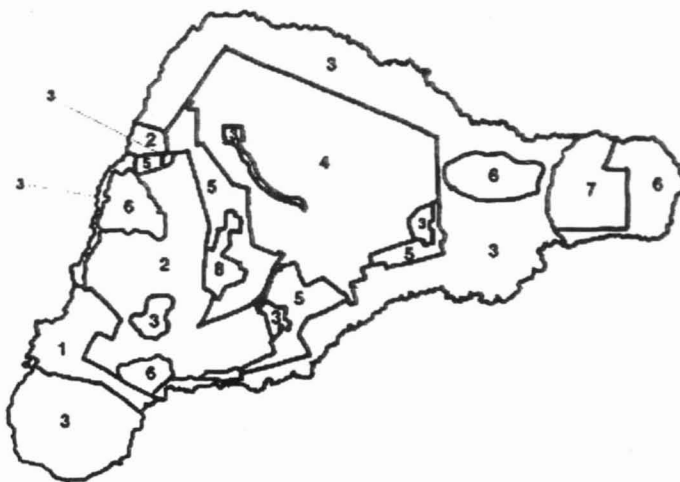
The quote from *El Mercurio* is public information concerning the new plan for distributing land on Easter Island. It says something incredible: "...for the first time the government **planned** the land use to make archaeology, ecology and the needs of Rapanui people compatible".

The truth is rather different. In 1997, at the so-called "Ad-hoc Lands Commission", it was the general manager of SASIPA who decided which lands were to be separated from Vaitea Ranch. Most of the 1000 hectares chosen were worthless eucalyptus groves or rocky slopes on Maunga Terevaka. The selection of 500 hectares to be taken from the National Park was my responsibility, even though I had asked for a general management plan for a sustainable development of the island since 1995. The wish for a plan was due to the problems created by cattle, and my desire to apply environmental law. Any project concerning the Park territory should have an environmental impact assessment. However, there was no environmental impact study undertaken, at any level.

The official position of CONAF (Corporación Forestal Nacional), the Chilean agency in charge of the Park, was established by the Director in March 1999. The position stated that in restoring lands to the Rapanui people, the balance between land and patrimony should be considered, particularly because the Rapanui people depend on their archaeological heritage for tourism, their only industry. Thus, we hope that, in the short term, appropriate lands for cattle will be given to the Rapanui people outside the Park territory.

One visible consequence of land mis-management was the necessity of fencing important archaeological sites, instead of fencing animals. The Park and the Council of Elders #2 began fencing monuments, but there are hundreds of large monuments and thousands of fragile sites that still need to be protected.

The Comisión de Desarrollo de Isla de Pascua, created by the Indigenous Law in 1993, was finally installed in June 1999.



A map of Easter Island showing the distribution of land described in the note from José Miguel Ramírez.

1. Urban area.
2. Rural area.
3. Rapa Nui National Park
4. Vaitea Ranch
5. Parcelas (1500 hectares) distributed in August 1999.
6. New land for parcels to be taken from the Park (Orito, Roiho, inland La Perouse and eastern half of Poike Peninsula).
7. New land for parcels to be taken from Vaitea Ranch (western half of Poike).
8. New forestation – municipal area to be taken from Vaitea Ranch

Its first goal was the distribution of 5-hectare parcelas to 267 families. Several individuals were appointed to the Commission: the Governor (Rapanui); Mayor (Rapanui); President of the Council of Elders #1 (Rapanui); and representatives of the Navy, Education (Rapanui), CORFO (Corporación de Fomento), Mideplan (Ministerio de Planificación), CONAF (the administrator of the Park), Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales (lands), and CONADI (Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena). In addition, five Rapanui were elected by the local community. So there were 9 Rapanui and 6 Continentals (although the representatives of the Navy, Mideplan and CORFO did not participate).

It was said that once those 1500 hectares were distributed, a change had to be made in order to avoid the mistakes that occurred after the distribution of lands in 1988, when 36 parcelas were given inland from Vaihu (and taken from the Park). At present, only three of those parcelas are in use, but most of the surface archaeological sites on those parcelas were destroyed by bulldozers. So, for the next distribution the Commission should have had a general management plan. A large amount of money was mentioned as necessary to accomplish such a goal. The administrator of the Park prepared a proposal for the government in order to rescue the sites inside the parcelas, for one million dollars.

But, the Rapanui governor announced that more land must be given out as soon as possible. On September 1st, the local

office of lands began allowing more people to sign up for new parcels, in addition to those on the previous waiting list. Thus hundreds of new names were included, some coming back from the mainland or from other countries to participate. So the number of applicants increased dramatically. If the number of 5 hectares per family is seriously considered, there is not enough land for the present generation, even if the whole island is considered as a flat, clean surface.

On October 15th, some local members of the Commission were invited to the center of Vaitea Ranch to see what lands could be given away. But it was already decided: the manager of SASIPA had a plan to reduce their herd of cattle (1300 animals) by one fourth in three years, so they still needed about 1000 hectares from the center of the Ranch to the north, at the southeast side of the road to 'Anakena. Since neither Maunga Terevaka nor Poike were available because of the poor quality of the soil, there were only 900 hectares of good land left to be distributed. So the other 600 hectares had to be taken from the Park, and Rano Kau was selected.

At this point it is impossible to describe every event, meeting and letter which followed. But I would like to mention the incredible support that came from Hawai'i in those difficult days. Back in June 1998, we had the first direct contact with the Hui Lama Science Club from the Kamehameha Schools, under the direction of Dr. Chuck Burrows and Dr. Steve Montgomery. They wanted to help Rapa Nui's forest restoration and sustainability of natural and cultural resources. They brought and planted hundreds of seeds in Rano Kau.

In October 1999, we constructed a 10 meter circular *manavai* for flora dedicated to the Rapanui people in Mataveru Otai, in the Park headquarters. Nāinoa Thompson, the navigator of the *Hōkūle'a* who had just arrived to the island, also participated by bringing the Hawaiian *aloha* spirit of the Polynesian relationship to Rapa Nui. Rapanui and Hawaiian students planted 400 seedlings of Koa (*Acacia koa*) on the slopes of Rano Kau.

After a meeting held on October 28th, at the Topa Ra'a Hotel, the headquarters of the Hui Lama, a resolution was signed by the representatives of some cultural institutions: "Whereas, in Rapa Nui we have celebrated the successful arrival of *Hōkūle'a* in the farthest corner of Polynesia on its voyage of sustainability together with the *kanaka maoli* of Hawai'i from Kamehameha Schools, Hula Halau, and the Polynesian Voyaging Society. We are now concerned about land redistribution and how its cumulative environmental impacts may affect the future of our natural and cultural patrimony as well as the safe water supply from the slopes of Rano Kau volcano above the village of Hanga Roa, and the sustainable management of our Rapa Nui National Park. We recognize that Rapa Nui is a microcosm of Earth and Humankind relationships, and can be an excellent model of recovery and sustainable development, so we hereby request the aid and advice of our Pacific family in Hawai'i *Nei* to protect the island, and to restore its forests, marine wildlife and seabird colonies. Maururu, Rodrigo Paoa Atamu, Kahu Kahu O Hera; Johnny Tuki Huckle, Tu'u Hotu Iti; Niko Haoa Cardinali, Mata Hoe Vaka Kahu O Hera; Petero Riroroko

Atan, Rapa Nui Chamber of Tourism; Sergio Rapu Haoa, Comisión de Desarrollo; José Miguel Ramírez, Parque Nacional Rapa Nui".

Several letters, emails, radio statements and newspaper articles later, I was called in and told that I had lost my position. After more letters and the intervention of a supporting politician, I was fired from CONAF.

On 10 May, El Mercurio de Valparaíso announced that the Regional Secretary of Lands and Governor Hey recognized that it is necessary to protect the park. This followed criticism from various groups defending the island's heritage. Now it is said that 90% of the parcels will come from Vaitea and 10% from the Park. The governor also noted there are about 900 families asking for 5 hectare parcels. Where will this land come from? The new announcement indicates that we saved Rano Kau, at least. But, on the other hand, instead of the original offering of good land from the Vaitea Ranch, lands that are useless for farming will be taken from the Park, plus a section between Rano Raraku and La Pérouse that already was bulldozed about 30 years ago. Sustainable development? Protection for the patrimony and tourism? The only protected area on the island is Vaitea (and incidentally, the "5-star resort" rumor fits perfectly now). What is not protected is the Rapa Nui National Park, declared a World Heritage Site in 1995.

Moai Sightings



MOAI PRODUCTION: Charlie Love (on the left), an archaeologist from Wyoming, has recently created a cement *moai* that was poured into a mold; it weighs a little over 6 tons. It will be the subject of some more experiments in moving the statues. As Charlie informed us, "Yes Virginia, there are more than two ways of moving these things. We are doing it quietly without NOVA's help. This statue has dye in the cement so that the color is nearly identical to fresh Rano Raraku tuff. We are pouring several more, so that if someone wants one, we will have them for sale." Charlie estimates they would cost in the