

The Prehistory of Kiritimati (Christmas) Island, Republic of Kiribati. Excavations and Analyses

Atholl Anderson, Helene Martinsson-Wallin and Paul Wallin
The Kon-Tiki Museum Occasional Papers, Volume 6, 2002

Review by Georgia Lee

THE PREHISTORY OF KIRITIMATI (Christmas) ISLAND describes a joint ANU Kon-Tiki Museum project, its background, excavations, and results. Softcover, the book contains 144 pages, numerous plates and drawings, charts and graphs. The four Appendices include a paper by Barry Fankhauser on the sourcing of basalt from Kiritimati; a discussion of the Late Quaternary by Geoffrey Hope; the shellfish collection by Lyn Schmidt; and fossil bird and rat bones by Alan Tennyson.

Kiritimati (Christmas) is one of the northern Line Islands that also includes Palmyra, Washington (or Teraina), Fanning (or Tabuaeron), and Jarvis. These islands have a total area of 371 square kilometers. None were inhabited at the time of European discovery, but more than half of them have some evidence of pre-European settlement and subsequent abandonment.

These islands are not just isolated, but are isolated in "mystery archipelagos" (p. 9). The dominant research questions that arise include from where, when, and by whom had they once been settled? And why were they abandoned? The authors conclude that abandonment probably was caused by a combination of environmental hazards, tenuous horticultural productivity, and unsustainable harvesting of natural resources (p. 11).

The authors describe a nightmare mix-up with some other researchers as well as the Kiritimati authorities (p. 16). The Kon-Tiki Museum and ANU researchers obtained a permit prior to the time that a French group applied to excavate the same sites. However, despite the earlier agreement and their having paid for a research permit, a French group was allowed to come in and excavate on the island before the Kon-Tiki group arrived. As may be imagined, considerable problems resulted. It is to the credit of the authors that their project was able to proceed so ably and it is also of considerable interest to read of the varying conclusions that were reached by these two disparate groups.

One of the most tantalizing parts of this project involves a search for the source of two basalt tools found on the island. Exhaustive scientific tests reveal that they did not originate from any of the quarries or sources currently in the databases, but the closest link appears to be the Hawaiian Islands (p. 99).

Captain James Cook was the first to discover Kiritimati on the 24th of December 1777 (thus "Christmas Island"); later arrivals were shipwrecked crews. In 1913 the island was leased to grow coconuts for the copra trade; and in 1924, Kenneth Emory spent seven days on the island, making an inventory of the archaeology of the island. There seemingly is a lot yet to learn about the Line Islands and, as this book describes, there still remains more mysteries to be solved (p. 86).

This book may be purchased from the Kon-Tiki Museum, Bygdoyesveien 36, 0286 Oslo, Norway.



L'expédition

A novel by Pierrette Fleutiaux

Editions Gallimard, 1999. In French. ISBN 2-07-075567-3

Review by Louise Noel

ANGÈLE LAPÉRIERRE, A TRAVEL WRITER, organizes an expedition. The goal is to explore Easter Island and, more ambitiously, to solve the "mystery of the world." Any tourist can cover Easter Island from east to west and north to south, but for an explorer the expedition is a goal in itself.

Angèle assembles her team: three women and a man. Angèle's second in command is Delépine, a finicky spinster. Then, there is the biologist Monica Martinière, a pretty woman who is crazy about her body and who "loves men as she does her plants." Finally, Banks, a young accountant, is in charge of supplies and finances.

The novel consists of the diary of Angèle Lapérierre whose great model is the navigator La Pérouse. The burlesque adventures begin even before the voyage does, continue in Chile and then on the island. Another team is already there, a film crew in the process of shooting a movie. The members of the expedition become friends with some islanders, admire the moai, explore lava tubes and volcanic craters, and struggle with Rapanui, a language they cannot fathom.

There is a jumble of picturesque, comical, amorous, and finally, tragic episodes. Only this recovered journal is left. After it has been read, one begins to wonder. Hasn't the author disguised a more serious reflection upon our world, tourism, civilization, women's destiny, relations between the sexes, in short, a metaphysical novel in the guise of a fantasy?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EASTER ISLAND UPDATE FROM DAVID STANLEY

I recently visited Easter Island to update my *South Pacific Handbook* and Rapanuiphiles may find some of the following information useful.

The best US\$2 I spent on the trip was for a 45-page English translation of the Spanish language captions at the Museo Antropológico Sebastián Englert. At Rano Kao I tried to hike around the crater rim, but became unnerved by the sheer cliffs and turned back. It's not something you want to do alone. Rano Raraku has got to be the top sight on the island, though one should be aware of the numerous tour groups that have lunch in a small park next to the ranger's office. If you visit the quarry at any other time of day, you'll probably have it to yourself.

The notorious La Pérouse Bay container port and freezer plant seems to have been shelved. What I did see in that area was a squatter's hut proudly displaying a red-and-white *reimiro* flag just a short distance from Ahu Te Pito Kura. More of the same is visible elsewhere along this coast, and the house next to Ahu Tongariki, depicted in a previous issue of the *Rapa Nui Journal*, is still there. Ahu Akivi is engulfed in agricultural development, and it was sad to observe the seven *moai* staring forlornly at a nearby farmhouse as loud music rolled across the field. It would have been worse to have seen hotels and strip malls going up next to the archaeological sites, but I fear that may come in time.

Some change is for the better. The roads to 'Anakena and Rano Raraku are now fully paved, making rental bicycles a practical option for getting around. Hanga Roa probably has more taxis per capita than any town in the Pacific, and these can be useful to hikers. I easily negotiated acceptable one-way fares to selected starting points for day hikes: 'Orongo US\$5, 'Anakena US\$7, and Rano Raraku US\$8. Sernatur has established high tourist taxi tariffs with waiting time built in, so to get to Rano Raraku I had to ask a couple of drivers before finding one willing to accept the local price. You can only do that with taxis flagged down on the street. If your hotel receptionist calls a taxi for you, you'll be expected to pay the full tourist price. A little Spanish goes a long way here, and of course, you'll want to pay in pesos.

The hike from 'Anakena to Hanga Roa around the north end of the island was superb, lasting six hours all told. Every so often I'd come upon a lava tube or an *ahu* with fallen *moai*, and those bold little brown hawks were watching me all the way. Along the way I saw a good many of the 4,000 horses and cattle that range across the island, doing their share of damage to the archaeological sites. The only humans I encountered were two equestrian visitors with a local guide. Another good hike is to the top of Maunga Terevaka, along a track that begins near Ahu Akivi (not the road closest to the *ahu* but the other one 20 meters south). The return route is via the large eucalyptus forest just southeast of the summit, passing Rano Aroi, then down a usually dry streambed to Vaitea. I have to admit, I did the Maunga Terevaka trip seated in a Landcruiser.

Much of my time on Easter Island was spent inspecting the 10 hotels and 40 *residenciales*. Most were almost empty in late April and early May – obviously the number of beds on the island is much greater than the number of airline seats. My advice to the experienced traveler willing to take small risks is not to book a room in advance, but to wait to arrange something at the accommodations counters facing the baggage claim area inside Mataveru Airport. That's where I met Teresa Araki, who proved a gracious, helpful host. During the low season (April to October), room rates are discounted and reservations are only necessary if there's a particular place where you want to stay or if you're very fussy. Even during the peak season – such as during the Tapati Rapa Nui in early February – getting on the flight is more of an issue than finding a room.

Among the properties I visited, in the budget category I especially liked Residencial Kona Tau (Diego Jaime), Cabanas Vaianny (Teresa Araki), Residencial Miru (Janet Hei), and Residencial Vai Kapua (near Restaurant Kopakavana). Residencial Apina Nui has closed and Residencial Ana Rapu is not recommended. Among the medium-priced places, the good choices seemed to be Residencial Villa Tiki, Hotel Gomero, Residencial Chez Erika, Hotel Orongo, Hotel Victoria, Hotel Chez Joseph, Hotel Poike, Cabañas Vai Moana, Residencial Chez Cecilia, and Residencial Mahina Taka Taka Georgia. Residencial Tadeo y Lili and Residencial Chez Maria Goretti cater for the French-speaking market.

Easter Island doesn't have any real four- or five-star resorts (thank God!), and the handful of upscale hotels that do exist didn't impress me. Hotel Manutara and Hotel 'Otai are within earshot of noisy discos and should be avoided on Friday and Saturday nights. The old wing of Hotel Hanga Roa is

slowly falling apart and the 30 smallish rooms in the new triplexes simply aren't worth US\$270 double. Hotel 'Iorana has the best rooms on the island, but it's isolated and uncompetitive. The new Hotel Taha Tai is also way overpriced, and their tiny swimming pool was empty when I passed. The LanChile flight crews stay at the Hotel Hotu Matu'a, where many of the rooms are rather old and with worn carpets. The airline must get a special rate. Readers of this Journal may wish to peruse the jumble of artifacts in the Hotu Matu'a's mini-museum just off the lobby.

I found the restaurants of Hanga Roa surprisingly good. I enjoyed a huge US\$8 tuna steak at La Tinita on Te Pito o Te Henua between hotels Manavai and 'Otai. Restaurant El Cuerito Regalon, near the market on Atamu Tekena, serves mostly Chilean dishes, but it was packed with tourists virtually every night so they must be doing something right. Restaurant Tavake nearby had a less expensive dinner menu I sampled several times. My favorite place was the Aloha Pub, halfway up Atamu Tekena toward the LanChile office. Their *ceviche* (raw tuna marinated with lemon juice) was outstanding with cold Chilean beer. A place across the street and slightly down the hill from Aloha had great *empanada* pastries costing only a few dollars. My worst meal on the island was *nanue* (rudderfish), an oily fish with a pungent taste much appreciated by the Rapanui.

Polynesia is famous for its dancers and the Kari Kari Ballet Cultural ranks among the finest troupes in the region. They perform twice a week at Hotel Hanga Roa – well worth the US \$15 admission. In mid-summer (December to February) Kari Kari puts on a third weekly show at Hotel 'Iorana, and another group, the Ballet Folklorico Polinesia, performs at Restaurant Kopakavana twice a week. Compact discs of this music can be purchased around town.

Hanga Roa must have enough handicrafts on display to fill several large American department stores. The new Handicraft Market opposite the church has the best selection. One vendor there wanted to swap a wooden *moai* for my shoes! The Municipal Market on Atamu Tekena sells more handicrafts than vegetables, and there's a new Handicrafts Pavilion in front of the airport terminal. As always, prices vary wildly and it's smart to shop around. The finest objects I saw on sale were displayed at the Galeria de Arte Aukara on Avenue Pont off Atamu Tekena, not far from the LanChile office. These museum-quality woodcarvings by Bene Tuki are priced US\$100-700, and each is a unique work of art. Numbered prints on tapa by Bene Tuki's wife, Ana Maria Arredondo, were US\$15-50 apiece. The serious collector need search no more.

Travelers: Bring money! Credit cards are not readily accepted as vendors often have to wait months to be paid. I took U.S. dollars in cash but the clerk at the Banco del Estado told me they were giving cash advances on Visa and MasterCard with a US\$400 per day maximum paid out in pesos only. The bank also changes traveler's checks, deducting a flat US\$10 fee for any number of checks. American cash is changed into pesos at a rate close to the one offered in Santiago without any commission at all. Visitors to Easter Island interested in saving small amounts should try to pay for everything in pesos. Only tourists pay in U.S. dollars and dollar prices are invariably higher. Excess pesos can be used for duty free shopping on any LanChile flight.

Among the other features of contemporary Hanga Roa are the telephone cards available at the Entel office opposite the bank, and the growing number of internet offices around town where you can check your e-mail for US\$1.50 per 15 minutes. A tip: Take your passport to the post office on Te Pito o Te Henua and the postmaster may agree to stamp "Rapa Nui" in it for you.

I found the printed matter available on Easter Island very expensive. The park staff at 'Orongo no longer sell guidebooks and maps, and the island maps available at the museum and souvenir shops were of variable quality and overpriced. The point here is, bring your own maps and guidebooks with you. No newspapers or magazines are published on Easter Island – the *Rapa Nui Journal* is the closest you'll come. If you have a portable FM radio you can listen to Rapanui broadcasts over Radio Manukena at 88.9 MHz weekdays from 8am to 11am and 2pm to 5pm. Other times, the presenter speaks in Spanish.

The local LanChile office on Atamu Tekena will tell you there is no need to reconfirm your flight, but do you trust them? If possible, visit their office and leave a local contact phone number to make sure your reservation is still in their system. Upon arrival in Chile, be prepared. An entry tax or "*cobro por reciprocidad*" will be collected from you with the amount varying according to nationality (U.S. passports US\$61, Canada US\$55, Australia US\$30, Mexico US\$15, etc.). On the plus side, the airport departure tax you were warned about was probably already factored into your plane ticket. Recent fumigations have wiped out Hanga Roa's insect population, and the Chileans aren't taking any chances with the dengue fever mosquito. The aircraft's cabin will be sprayed moments before you take off for Santiago. And with that I say 'iorana to Easter Island until my next edition.

[Other excerpts from David Stanley's book are available online at www.southpacific.org. David Stanley's new Easter Island page is online at http://www.southpacific.org/text/finding_easter.html]

DEAR FRIENDS OF RAPA NUI:

For the first time ever, Rapa Nui is experiencing an outbreak of dengue and dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF). According to our relatives on Rapa Nui, the disease is severely debilitating, but other negative effects beyond the actual symptoms of the disease have already impacted the island. Dengue alerts to potential tourists and to tourism agencies, plus news reports, have already adversely impacted tourism, the island's primary source of income. This jeopardizes the livelihood of the majority of the people on the island.

The disease is transmitted by a mosquito known as the *Aedes aegypti*, which almost certainly was transported to the Rapa Nui from Tahiti within the past three to four years. This mosquito bites during the day and prefers to feed on humans. While fumigation and clean-up efforts have begun, more appropriate, ecologically sensitive and long-term solutions are needed in order permanently to eradicate the mosquito population from the island. The habitual use of pesticides is not an acceptable solution. Some of the pesticides being used now are either banned outright or controlled in the United States by FDA regulations. If they're not safe in the United States, they're not safe on Rapa Nui either. It goes without saying that the more that

pesticides are used, the greater the resistance that the mosquitoes develop to them. That, in turn, would then require the use of either greater quantities of the same already dangerous pesticides or chemically different pesticides, the end result of which may cause even greater health risks for the human population of Rapa Nui.



A small brush chipping machine already taken to the island by Tito Paoa. It's success was clearly demonstrated, but it is too small to make much of a dent in the waste vegetation that litters the island. The projected purchase of the Bandit Chipper will have much greater capacity and will handle larger pieces of vegetation (Photo: Tito Paoa).

Long-term success in eradicating the *Aedes aegypti* population elsewhere in the world suggests that other measures must be implemented. Mosquito larvae can grow in as little as a teaspoonful of standing, stagnant water. The mosquito's minimal reproductive necessities use the dead and unmulched refuse of organic materials, such as dead palm or banana leaves, coconut shells, shrubbery, trees and branches of trees, together with such inorganic waste products as glass and plastic bottles, plastic bags, tires and even discarded crockery shards, the ideal breeding locations.

At this time there is an urgent need to reach out to help the people of Rapa Nui and I am asking for your cooperation. There are three areas in particular in which the Rapa Nui people will need assistance: First, there is no modern machinery on the island to mulch, shred or chip such organic waste as dead palm or banana leaves, coconut shells, shrubbery, trees and branches of trees. The island must acquire a large, industrial-sized, transportable brush-chipping machine. Second, appropriate means to facilitate the recycling of plastic and glass products and their removal from the island must be developed. Last, the education and public awareness programs already begun on the island must be made more comprehensive and be supported by permanent educational and municipal structures oriented toward the development of a social consciousness regarding the relationship between environmental issues and public health.

Although Rapanui living away from the island and the many concerned persons who have visited and who love our island should not hope unilaterally to rescue the island's residents, but we can help them to help themselves. In order to assist in the communal project of eradicating the *Aedes aegypti* population, I am asking for donations in order to purchase and

ship a brush-chipping machine to the island. This represents an integral part of the long-term solution to this present epidemic. Moreover, it is an ecologically sound step for it will play a major part in the elimination of the mosquito's breeding grounds. As a secondary consequence, the mulching of these organic compounds further addresses the chronic dearth of arable topsoil on the island. At present, brush is removed by burning. This method has disastrous consequences. First, burning produces carbon dioxide which, in fact, attracts mosquitoes. Moreover, experience teaches us that burning produces uncertain results. Many branches and coconut shells do not burn completely, but do leave tiny cracks or indentations in the wood where water may collect and stagnate. Also, the ground upon which organic waste is burned becomes space no longer suitable for vegetation and can take many years to be reconditioned and made arable. A brush-chipping machine will completely shred the dead organic material into useful mulch that can be used for gardens and crops.

One of my priorities is to support a recycling program. By educating Rapa Nui residents regarding the environmental impact of the non-biodegradable items introduced to the island, we hope further to eliminate potential breeding grounds of the mosquitoes. Discarded plastic items such as food and soda containers are abundant. The very same twenty-foot shipping container that we would use to transport the brush-chipping machine could be used as the collection center for items of man-made non-biodegradable products. Once the container is filled, it can be shipped to continental Chile for proper recycling.

Easter Island is in need of a long-term plan to educate people regarding the proper disposal of man-made containers and to develop modern, environmentally safe and efficient ways to turn vegetation waste into useful mulch. The purchase of a brush-chipping machine is a step in the right direction towards a long-term solution.

The cost of the Bandit Chipper (model 90XP www.banditchippers.com) machine is approximately \$10,000.00. In Chile, the same machine sells at twice that. The shipping container will cost \$1,000.00 (which is more or less its same cost in Chile) and shipping charges are approximately \$3,500.00. In order to help the anti-mosquito effort on Rapa Nui, I am asking you to help as much as you are able in order to purchase and ship the brush-chipping machine.

Please send your tax deductible donation to the Easter Island Foundation (P.O. Box 6774, Los Osos, CA 93412) or to the Conventual Franciscans of California (National Shrine of Saint Francis of Assisi, 610 Vallejo Street, San Francisco CA 94133) and please specify that your donation is for the *He Tama'i i te Nao Nao i Rapa Nui* (the War Against the Mosquitoes in Rapa Nui) Campaign. For your tax purposes, both organizations are legal non-profits with tax-exempt ID numbers. If there are any funds left over from this campaign for the brush-chipping machine, they will be used for the support of the comprehensive recycling project on Easter Island. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Maururu atu i a korua,

Charles Tito Paoa (562) 951-3337; TitoPaoa@charter.net

[At this moment, the EIF has received \$3135 from various donations toward the purchase of a chipper. Ed.]

DEAR EDITOR:

On August 7th the faculty and students of the 2002 University of Hawai'i Rapa Nui Summer Archaeological Field School gathered at Mataveru Airport to share tearful farewells with the museum staff, the Rapa Nui high school students who had worked with us, most of the Kari Kari dance troupe, and numerous other friends from our month-long sojourn on the island. There were 16 of us, led by UH professor Dr. Terry Hunt and TAs Amy Commendador, John Dudgeon, Jace Mikulanec, Brett Shepardson, and Tom Sprague.

Anyone who attended the Rapa Nui symposium at the 2002 SAA meetings in Denver will remember the work of the UH crew, much of which relates to a model of archaeology developed by Robert Dunnell of the University of Washington. This model (to which I can't do justice here) suggests that cultures living in uncertain environments survive better if they channel energy into cultural elaboration (such as funerary monuments) during fat times, thereby hedging their bets for lean times, during which they can channel energy back into reproduction and food production. This is a benefit that cultures stand to gain from "wasteful behaviors" regardless of their own reasons for engaging in them. In terms of Rapa Nui, this suggests the possibility that the elaborate and energy-intensive *ahu-moai* cult actually helped the ancient islanders to survive and keep population levels at sustainable levels, an intriguing alternative to some of the theories currently in vogue. Of course there is much more to it than that, and I highly recommend the article on this topic that Hunt co-authored with Carl Lipo in the book *Pacific 2000*, recently published by the EIF. Our work focused on the Akahanga Quadrangle where we surveyed sections of the quad, then recorded features, took GPS points and photographs, and made maps. We also did some experimental kite photography. A team of Chilean archaeologists had surveyed Akahanga in the 1970s, and their results were published in an archaeological atlas, but it is difficult to obtain and it only marks features with numbers thus there is no discrimination between an *umu* and an *ahu*. So the only way is to resurvey. We also used new technologies and methods and we recorded features that may not have been included in the previous survey, such as rock mulches. We worked with over a dozen Rapa Nui high school students, many of whom already had quite a bit of archaeological field experience from last year's UH field school. I've been teaching high school for 12 years, so I felt right at home in their company. It was especially positive to discover how serious many of these students are about understanding and preserving their heritage and traditions.

During our last week we excavated some test pits to gain further information about settlement activity in Akahanga Quad. We found charcoal, bones (fish, rat, and bird), human teeth, a beautiful incised stone of the sort Métraux described as a weight for fishing nets, and lots of obsidian. As we were within sight of the *ahu* itself, we became part of the tours, with several groups stopping by each day to observe us in action, craning to get a glimpse into our test pit, looking perhaps for dead aliens or Inca gold. There were quite a few visitors to the island while we were there, including the BBC and the Discovery Channel. I spent some time talking with archaeologist Charlie Love, who has been working on the island for nearly 30 years. He has acquired quite a store of knowledge and some amazing maps

that really awe beginners like me. The BBC crew interviewed Hunt while we were working one day. Some of us were making maps in the background (the coastal area of Akahanga), so watch for us in the documentary. We also had the unique privilege of a guided tour with Sergio Rapu, former governor of the island and our host at the Hotel Topa Ra'a, our very comfortable home on the island.

Now we're all back home and undergoing acute Rapa Nui withdrawal. We've got our shell *lei* and our fishhook pendants, our sculptures and posters up in our rooms, our Topa Tangi and Kari Kari CDs, and our memories. Several of my fellow students also got tattoos from Tito Araki, an excellent local tattoo artist. Most of us are already planning our next visit. Before we left, Dr. Hunt announced that there will be two field school sessions on Rapa Nui next summer, so there should be plenty of opportunities for both new and returning students who want to learn cutting-edge archaeological field methods on "the world's most amazing island", as Hunt so accurately describes it.

'Iorana! Scott Nicolay

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The Archive of Maori and Pacific Music, Anthropology Department, University of Auckland, New Zealand. Four major collections of audio and video material has been deposited in the Archive over the past months. All are available for listening on the premises of the Archive. More information: <http://www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/ant/seminar/anthroSEMINAR2001term2.htm> or contact: r.moyle@auckland.ac.nz



EASTER ISLAND FOUNDATION NEWS

CHRISTOPHER M. STEVENSON, THE NEW PRESIDENT of the EIF, assumed the office in May. One of his new initiatives will be to add members to the executive board to assist in fundraising. The Foundation is looking for persons in the corporate sphere to assist in the fundraising process by making personal contacts with companies that will support the mission of the EIF. If you think that this challenge is for you, or if you know