

light of some of the people on the ship). The scientists were allowed a few hours to visit on the island and were astonished by the changes that have occurred since their last visit.

A SHOW ENTITLED *EL MAR PASCUENSE* appeared recently on Chilean TV. It featured images of divers spearing, angling, and netting fish, and harvesting coral. Most significantly, it showed a Rapanui woman cleaning several dozen heads of coral, getting them ready for the tourist trade; and a marine biologist in the deep (in scuba gear) carefully covering a chunk of coral with a plastic bag and then prying it off the rock to which it was attached. Later, on dry land, he used a knife to search in-between the coral's protuberances and came up with several small shrimp, a couple of tiny crabs, and other living creatures. All these, he noted, would have eventually been food for fish, but with the reduction in the quantity of coral, these natural breeding and maturing places for fish as well as their food supply are being eliminated. An island elder came on the screen to say that 50 years ago there were *cualquier cantidad*—a huge amount of coral, but now there is hardly any. The program also showed an islander knee-deep in water and holding aloft a burning torch, then reaching down and pulling out a lobster. The voice-over said that the population of lobsters has decreased drastically in the last couple of decades. How well we know. Twenty years ago it was a rare week that went by when lobster wasn't served at least once. Over-harvesting has made it an expensive rarity.

A NEW SCHOOL will be constructed at the site of the old leper sanitarium; this school will encompass the upper grades, corresponding to high school level.

EASTER ISLAND NOW HAS ITS OWN CONSEJO DE MONUMENTOS de Rapa Nui! The National Council of Monuments has been setting up regional councils in order to have decisions made locally. The Rapa Nui Council includes the Governor, Mayor, Sergio Rapu, two representatives of each of the Council of Elders, the Director of the Museum, and the head of CONAF on the island. From now on, every permit or anything concerning archaeology, will be discussed on the island and then the local decisions will go to the Consejo de Monumentos in Santiago for final approval.

THE POSSIBILITY OF THERE BEING A SENATOR from Rapa Nui was raised by Vice President of the Senate, Mario Rios. However, other senators objected and rejected the idea of an Easter Island senator. Their reason is that, by so doing, there would have to be constitutional reform, making Easter Island into a new Region. They think it a better idea to just have a Representative from the island. And they pointed out that only 1500 people on the island have the right to vote, far less than the 40,000 in the XI Region, the smallest of all.

IN A MOVE SURE TO CONFUSE everyone, the municipalidad has decided to rename some of the streets in Hangaroa village. Policarpo Toro has been renamed Atamu Tekena (after an 1888 island leader), and the old Atamu Tekena street is now called Capt. Policarpo Toro Hurtado. Fortunately, no one pays much

et al.: Letters

attention to street names (now painted on the curbs) and all mail comes into the post office anyway.

CONAF (National Parks of Chile) has produced a nice brochure about Rano Raraku for the visitor (in Spanish). A self-guided walk with 14 stations is described in the brochure along with a plea for conservation. Available from CONAF on the island. It has been translated into English and there are hopes to produce this version soon. A large interpretative sign has been installed near the parking area at the quarry.

NEWS FROM THE EASTERN PACIFIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION: The Eastern Pacific Research Foundation has temporarily suspended efforts to excavate on Easter Island due to on-going political strife and a ". . . general hostility toward any archaeological work". However, for 1999, they are making plans for a project in the Gambier Islands. Anyone interested in that project may contact Robert Lemker at 390 Glade Road, Suite 108-345, Colleyville, TX 76034, or email at <eprf@write.com>

ANOTHER EARTHWATCH PROJECT is scheduled for Easter Island, with sessions held during the time from 3 October to 20 November, under the direction of Dr Christopher Stevenson. Anyone interested in participating should contact Earthwatch (Anne Geoghegan at 800-776-0188, ext. 181; or by fax: 617-926-8532).

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor:

Rapa Nui Journal (Vol. 12:3) September 1998 contains an article contributed by Mr. Vince Lee in which we are treated to his opinions on the recent *moai* transport field tests of Dr. Van Tilburg and her UCLA team. It should be known by all readers of *RNJ* that Mr. Lee was not involved in any capacity with Van Tilburg's research, is not a spokesperson for the team's results, and is not in any way connected to the project report.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Lee found it necessary to attack persons and institutions through *RNJ*. Readers may draw their own conclusions as to the intent of Mr. Lee's rather undignified, self-aggrandizing words or *RNJ's* publication of this article.

Articles such as Mr. Lee's, containing negativity and personal attacks, should be edited before being published by *RNJ*. Is not the effort of human expression better spent building up rather than tearing down, developing cognitive connectivity rather than piece-meal rambling, and integrating grander, broader understandings of people, culture, and history? Is there not an implied responsibility of *RNJ* to "take the high road" with regard to material it publishes for the world to read? Is there not a responsibility for contributors to write in a professional manner?

Mr. Lee was brought to the Island by the NOVA television production company as a late addition to the on-camera cast who were to be featured in the NOVA documentary based on the UCLA field tests. Mr. Lee's function was to generate counterpoint, or better yet controversy, in on-camera scenes, leading to an adversarial tension in the final televised program. NOVA

has found that this confrontational style of documentary program generates favorable viewer ratings.

The definitive report from the UCLA experiments will be published in established research journals. The television version will appear on NOVA in February 2000, as a part of the *Secrets of Lost Empires* series.

What the UCLA experiment set out to examine was the thesis, developed by Dr. Van Tilburg, that the technology of the Polynesian voyaging canoe, its construction, operation, and materials handling may have been directly applicable to the transportation and erecting of the Rapa Nui *moai*. Preparation prior to the on-Island tests included substantial research, discussion with voyaging canoe specialists, site surveys, computer-based robotics analysis, and concept pre-testing in Los Angeles.

Using an accurately detailed 10-ton concrete replica *moai*, the experiment demonstrated a method of transporting the *moai* over level and up-slope terrain. Following the transit tests and in conjunction with Claudio Cristino, the *moai* and *pukao* were lifted to a vertical standing position on a temporary *ahu* created for the purpose.

Key to the tests and central to the thesis was the use of a timber frame for transporting and lifting the *moai*. The frame was derived from double-hulled Polynesian voyaging canoe configuration and employed structural features common to the canoes. A crew of 40 Island men and women provided the pulling power to haul the frame with its *moai* cargo.

The frame remained underneath the *moai* throughout, whether acting as a sliding-bearing surface while the *moai* was being drawn forward over a semi-continuous surface of timber "ties" derived from the Polynesian canoe-ladder, or as the *moai* was being levered and back filled into the vertical position on its *ahu*. The use of this maritime-derived structure proved invaluable and is a principle difference separating this experiment from past attempts. From these results, a very reasonable picture can be created of *moai* transit methods. Factors such as the size of the workforce needed, the materials required, methods that can be employed, the skills needed, effective deployment of the crews, and the rate at which progress can be made can now be computed.

What was amazing to anyone witnessing the experiment is the speed at which the frame and *moai* advance, once static friction is broken by the pulling crew and motion ensues. The comfort level and footing available to the pulling crew determine the speed that can be made good, which was approximately 8-10 MPH in our experiment—judged by how fast a canoe moves through water. The continuing progress made by the crew is limited only by how much timber material is available to form the roadbed surface ahead.

In the process of running the experiment, many elements of physical reality came to light that would be second nature to the professionals of the past but which we had to learn. A grand sense of awe settled on those of us involved, leaving a permanent appreciation for the technical knowledge and management skills of the original Island population who accomplished the massive *moai* works.

Throughout the experiment, the notion of Polynesian voyaging canoe technology as being a plausible technology central to *moai* transit came through loud and clear.

The Van Tilburg team is a network of motivated individuals with wide-ranging cultural, educational, technical, and social interests related to Polynesia. Credentialed people with new ideas that add to the understanding of the *moai* of Rapa Nui or its maritime heritage are always welcome into the team.

The team wishes to thank once again, the many from on and off Rapa Nui who contributed time, thought, labor, materials or financial support to this experiment. In particular, we wish to thank JoAnne Van Tilburg for her unending leadership on behalf of Pacific archaeology; NOVA who provided the financial kick to take this program over the top and their production crew; the Island team of 75 under Niko Haoa, Christian Arevalo, Raphael Rapu, and Ono Tuki who made this experiment a reality; Santi Hito, Kent Sherwood, Darus Ane, Johannes Van Tilburg, Zvi Shiller, Margee Ralston, Rene Edmunds, and Curt Johnson of the Los Angeles crew; and the Island officials who authorized our work. To Vince Lee, we extend thanks for publicizing the program through *RNJ*.

Building on the *Moai* experiment, a follow-on project involving cultural reconnection through double-hulled Voyaging Canoes is developing fast. Contact us if you've got something to add or to offer!

Ted Ralston

Field Engineer, Van Tilburg Moai Project 1998
562-593-5802 / Email: pua62488@aol.com

REPLY BY VINCENT LEE

☰ Dear Editor:

Re-reading my article in light of Ted Ralston's letter, I am inclined to let my summary of his team's project, including our treatment by its leader, stand precisely as written. My references to the latter were simple statements of fact and I believe any objective observer present during the NOVA shoot would agree. Regarding the UCLA experiment: inasmuch as my ideas were inspired entirely by their results, an analysis of those results was a necessary introduction to my impromptu alternative. As an architect who works primarily with drawings, my only disappointment was that *Rapa Nui Rocks* did not include the sketches with which I illustrated my scheme.

Ted's letter raises an issue I decided not to address in my article, but which is probably more important than moving big rocks. Architecture is far from a hard science, but no less of a scientist than the late John Wheeler, my physics professor at Princeton, used to say "...forget what worked—you already knew that—pay attention to what didn't..." The whole point of the scientific method is to learn from mistakes, which is what I did on Easter Island. NOVA's insistence on having independent experts participate in such projects is not a matter of "ratings." Rather, it recognizes that mistakes are often less obvious to those who make them than they are to outside observers with a more detached, or at least different, point of view. Controversy need not necessarily result, but usually does when such observations are greeted with defensiveness. Even scientists are human, after all.

Be that as it may, the whole point is to come up with ideas: ideas that work. Credentials, computer studies, cultural research, advance preparation and even hard work, count for little if they fail to solve or even address the problem. In this

case, the crux of the problem is getting an 80 ton *moai* that final fifty meters or so up onto a seacoast *ahu*. Anyone who can do that can surely get the same *moai* across the island, but the reverse is by no means true. My own brief attempt to address the dilemma on Easter Island was itself a study in unanticipated difficulties, design errors and marginal results—but by following Professor Wheeler's advice and paying attention to what didn't work, I'll do better next time (see *Rapa Nui Rocks Update in this issue*).

Vince Lee
Design Associates, Wyoming

✉ Dear Editor:

The next Rapa Nui Rendezvous site has been selected—Hawai'i, August 7-12, 2000. This gives us some time to do advanced planning such as the following:

I would suggest that the individual responsible for audio-visual requirements contact, or better yet, visit the proposed site to determine what equipment is available and whether it meets present-day requirements. Some of the equipment of the initial screening area in Albuquerque was outdated but due to the power failure, we ended up with a more up-to-date location with excellent equipment.

Also, since lack of simultaneous translation seemed to be the biggest single drawback noted in Albuquerque, we should try to address this problem early on. The costs quoted for simultaneous translation at Albuquerque were quite high and could not be met. So the powers that be need to come up with a plan to raise sufficient monies to meet such costs.

One note here deserves mention. Although we did not provide simultaneous translation in Albuquerque we may have contributed the push necessary for the University to purchase the necessary equipment. When first contacted about simultaneous translation equipment in late 1996 and early 1997, there was none available at the University. However, a few weeks before our August meeting, the Law School purchased 60 sets! If so, thanks should go to Florence Wengard, an Albuquerque resident and member of the Eastern Pacific Research Foundation, who spearheaded the effort to locate the necessary equipment.

There are other aspects of the proposed meeting in the year 2000 on which I would like to comment, but will save them for a follow up letter.

William R. Bartlett
Reno, Nevada

✉ Dear Editor:

In the last issue of the *Rapa Nui Journal* you published an article entitled "How did Chile acquire Easter Island," by Carlos López, the Consular Agent for Chile in San Francisco. I was somewhat disturbed by the content of this piece and will outline my reasons in the following.

First of all, it seems to me that the author celebrates the Chilean colonization of Easter Island while the major colonizing powers have withdrawn from their colonies quite some time ago, often apologizing for their actions and sometimes trying to make up for the damage, although I know that this is not the case in the Pacific, where colonization is still in full swing. On the other

hand, the author himself recognizes that the annexation of Easter Island by Policarpo Toro should be seen in the light of 19th century empire building. What he does not say, however, is that the Republic of Chile's move into the Pacific, in that period, corresponds to the fact that its expansionist desire had been boosted by two major territorial victories in the 1880's. After a struggle that had lasted for 300 years, the Mapuche people were finally subjugated and confined to reservations in 1883 while, simultaneously, the Republic of Chile annexed large territories belonging to Peru and Bolivia, after these countries were defeated in the War of the Pacific (*sic!*) (1879-1883) (See Porteous 1981). The author gives a good example of Chile's imperialist pretensions, in that period, when he quotes the renowned Chilean historian Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna, to have said in an 1885 article about the *distribution* (my emphasis) of the Pacific Islands, that the French annexed Tahiti "under our own noses". A critical historical analysis would have pointed out this curious imperialist drive in a new nation that had only recently gained independence from Spain in 1818; it would have analyzed how and why the colonized became colonizers within a time span of less than 70 years.

Secondly, the author strips the Rapanui people of any kind of agency whatsoever. The article is speckled with details of how the land and the cattle changed owners, of how the Chilean government made its decisions, of how the claims of the French were undermined, of how Chile "acquired" Easter Island. But where are the Rapanui people in this account? There is no mention of their intelligent and fearless resistance against the colonizers, first against the *Compañía Explotadora de Isla de Pascua*, which reigned on the island for more than 50 years as if it were a *fundo* (and this because the Chilean government had virtually abandoned the place); and later against the reign of the Chilean Navy that, contrary to what Mr. López says, was just as "odious" as the *Compañía's* and terrorized the Rapanui people (see Grifferos 1997). Two well-documented acts of resistance against the colonizers are the uprising led by the prophetess Angata in 1914 and the one led by schoolteacher Alfonso Rapu in 1964. It was Rapu's action that obliged the Chilean government to finally incorporate Rapa Nui into the Chilean administrative system, and it was not a voluntary decision of the Chileans, as the author makes it appear. Several other acts of resistance have occurred throughout the years, and are continuing to do so until this very moment (see e.g. back issues of the *Rapa Nui Journal's* section on "What's New In Hanga Roa" on this matter).

Thirdly, the author's final note about how the initiative for Chile's possession of the island rests with the missionaries, and about how "the generous sacrifices" of the missionaries "provided the proper conditions for Chile's actions in Rapa Nui", is hard to swallow in the context of his analysis. Why does he need to justify Chile's actions on Rapa Nui after having celebrated those very actions? Or does he feel safer to do so in the company of the Catholic Church? His closing remarks also show once again Mr. López's peculiar understanding of historical processes. It seems to me that it was the strained relationships between the Frenchman Dutrou-Bornier and the Catholic mission in Tahiti, with strong connections in Valparaíso, that contributed to the planting of the Chilean flag on Easter Island. (The author's fascination with flags as symbols of nationalism is in-

teresting in itself). Also, as he indicates himself, it was the rivalry between England and France which must have played a major role in the Chilean colonization of Rapa Nui. One can suggest that the Chilean government of that period must have felt confident in the takeover of the island, as it could be sure to be backed by the English, who had a big presence in Valparaíso around the turn-of-the century. It seems naïve then, to insinuate that the priests “planted the Chilean flag” out of love for Chile, as their principal motive must have undoubtedly been to save the souls of the Rapanui people. In this context I would like to endorse the analysis made by Chilean historian Nelson Castro, who argues brilliantly that Catholicism was appropriated by the Rapanui as a tool of resistance against Chilean colonization. He shows us how, be it unwittingly, missionization became instrumental in the reestablishment of Rapanui leadership and Rapanui identity, in their struggle to overcome the cultural deadlock caused by the devastating events of the 1860’s (see Castro 1996).

I would like to invite Mr. López to read, not only the work of Grant McCall and Douglas Porteous (what would we do without them?) on the colonial nature of the relationships between Rapa Nui and the Chilean nation-state, but also the recent work of his young compatriots Alejandra Grifferos and Nelson Castro, who shed such a different light on the historical processes involved in the Chilean colonization of Easter Island.

Riet Delsing
Department of Anthropology
University of California at Santa Cruz

REFERENCES

- Castro, Nelson. 1996. *Misioneros y milinaristas. Isla de Pacua, 1864-1914*. Universidad de Valparaíso. Tesis para optar al grado académico de licenciado en historia.
- Grifferos, Alejandra. 1997. *La otra cara del paraíso. Comunidad, tradición y colonialismo en Rapanui 1864-1964*. Universidad de Valparaíso. Tesis para optar al grado académico de licenciada en historia.
- Grifferos, Alejandra. 1998. Colonialism and Rapanui Identity, In Christopher M. Stevenson, Georgia Lee and Frank Morin, eds. *Easter Island in Pacific Context. South Seas Symposium. Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Easter Island and East Polynesia*. The Easter Island Foundation, Occasional Paper 4. Bearsville and Cloud Mountain Presses, Los Osos.
- McCall, Grant. 1891. *Rapanui*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
- Porteous, Douglas. 1981. *The Modernization of Easter Island*. Victoria, Canada: The University of Victoria Press.

Short Notes From Our Readers

Reflections on Rapa Nui
Jacqueline J. Cohen

In early December, I was fortunate enough to accompany a small group of horseback riders on a three-day trek across the rough and rugged terrain of Rapa Nui. As an educational adventure tour organizer, I’ve traveled far and I’ve traveled wide. But I’ve never traveled to any place quite like Rapa Nui. Since the age of six when I saw my first picture of a *moai* in a geography book, I was fascinated with the idea of visiting the island. And

like many travelers, arriving there was nothing less than a dream come true.

I can’t say that my relationship with Rapa Nui was one of “love at first sight.” It happened slowly, almost insidiously. But inevitably, the island and its people became very much a part of me. What a rare and unexpected souvenir I took home. Perhaps I “fell” for the place while riding horseback through the eucalyptus forest en route to our group’s campsite at Anakena. Or the memory of laughter and song we shared with our new-found friends each evening by the fire. Did it happen as I sat quietly in the cramped quarter of a cave listening to Pitaki, our hired horseman and guide, tell the tales of Hotu Matu’a that his grandfather had once told to him? Perhaps it was my first, figgy taste of *pica* fruit pulled fresh from the tree, the evening I watched the moonlight cast its shadowy glow upon the face of my “favorite” *moai* at Tahai. I can only be certain of just one thing—it was mana. Pure magic.

I am convinced that seeing the island by horseback played a large role in fostering such a deep appreciation for Rapa Nui.



On the back of a horse, there were boundless opportunities to see and experience this little island from a unique perspective. On the back of a horse, I wasn’t a tourist; I became an explorer—with an infinite number of paths to choose.

Ironically, it was in the process of organizing this particular trip that an airline sales representative cautioned me against spending “too many” days on Rapa Nui unless my clients had a serious interest in archaeology. Three days was the recommended limit; I opted for five. While the group boasted a writer, a hair stylist and an ex-professional jockey (among others), none of us were archaeologists. But at the end of our five days, none of us wanted to leave.

What is there to be done on Rapa Nui after all the routine stops at the major archaeological sites have been made? In all honesty, the answer is “not too much.” But for me, that’s where the magic begins. Blessed by a strange and wonderful remoteness, the island offers a respite from a world obsessed with “doing” at the expense of “being.”

Rapa Nui is an incredible place to be. When I return again, I plan on spending more time. And I plan to spend it simply waiting for the sunset.

For more information on organized horse trekking on Rapa Nui, contact World Discovery Tours at 888.876.4055 (continental U.S.) or 781.934.8333 (worldwide). Or, visit the company’s Web site at www.worlddiscoverytours.com.