

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL SITES SURVEY: THE FIRST PHASE

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This paper summarises the scope and results of the Solomon Islands National Sites Survey in its first four years of operation. The survey commenced with the appointment of an archaeologist to the Solomon Islands National Museum through the British Voluntary Service Overseas programme.

It is hoped that the Survey will continue to be administered by volunteers until it is taken over by Solomon Islander Lawrence Foanaota, who participated in its establishment and who is at present following a degree course at the University of Auckland in New Zealand.

The aims of the National Sites Survey are as follows:-

- 1) To adapt the discipline of archaeology to produce a survey suited to the resources, needs and peoples of the Solomon Islands;
- 2) To conduct archaeological surveys throughout the islands and to assess the potential of each island's archaeological resources;
- 3) To assess and respond to threats to archaeological sites from all destructive agencies;
- 4) To work within the Solomon Islands National Museum to ensure the systematic documentation and adequate storage of all archaeological materials and information gained during the course of fieldwork;
- 5) To provide information on archaeological discoveries to the people of Solomon Islands through the media, exhibitions, and the development of educational curricula materials;
- 6) To combine archaeological survey with the systematic recording of oral traditions, in particular those which may be of importance in reconstructing the recent past.

To date over 700 sites have been entered on to file, of which about 55% have been recorded in surveys conducted by the Solomon Islands National Museum; the majority of the remainder being sites recorded under the auspices of the south-east Solomon Islands Culture History Project directed by Professor Roger Green of Auckland University and Dr. Douglas Yen of the B.P. Bishop Museum in Hawaii. Members of this project have provided substantial support for the National Sites Survey since its inception. Financial grants have been received from the Australian Government under the South Pacific Cultures Fund scheme.

NATIONAL SITES SURVEY 1976-1978 (Miller 1979)

- Choiseul: Survey of the south-eastern section of the island. A test excavation on Nuatambu Island, important in oral traditions as the centre for the manufacture of the major exchange media (*kesa*) of the island, revealed a two metre cultural deposit, including clamshell fragments related to the manufacturing process.
- Isabel: Survey in the Bughotu area of, *inter alia*, traditional defensive, sacrificial and village sites.
- Kolombangara: Survey in advance of roadbuilding and logging activities by Levers Pacific Timbers Limited, recording shell money caches, pottery-bearing sites and ridgetop settlements.
- Makira: Survey of the route of a proposed road along the coastal plain of the Arosi district revealing a high density of settlement and associated sites, and the test excavation of a typical midden site.
- Malaita: A brief survey of traditional sites of the inland Kwaio district in the company of anthropologist Professor Roger Kessing.
- New Georgia: Survey in the Viru Harbour region in advance of logging activities being undertaken by the Kalena Bay Logging Company, recording coralline rock-built fortresses, stone settings and inland ridge-top settlements.
- Ontong Java: Survey in advance of proposed airstrip construction with test excavations at pottery-bearing sites on the major islands.
- Simbo: Survey of traditional settlements associated with local genealogies. Test excavations of pottery-bearing sites.
- Vaghena: Survey in advance of a possible mining operation. Test excavations of pottery-bearing sites.

NATIONAL SITES SURVEY 1978-1980 (Roe, forthcoming)

- Kolombangara: Three surveys in advance of further logging operations and roadbuilding by Levers Pacific Timbers Limited, recording inland settlement sites, agricultural terraces and a concentration of pottery-bearing sites on the southern coast. Active site protection measures undertaken.

- New Georgia: Two surveys in the Government land area of northern New Georgia in advance of a new logging operation by the company already working in Kolombangara, recording significant pottery-bearing, ridge-top settlement and ritual/religious sites.
- Guadalcanal: Survey of brief duration in the mountainous inland areas of the Paripao district, recording a range of traditional religious sites and burial enclosures.
- Santa Catalina: Survey of the entire island (located off the south-eastern tip of Makira) recording a plethora of agricultural, settlement, burial and traditional religious sites in addition to the collection of valuable oral traditions material.
- Nggela: Survey of the northern coastal areas of Nggela Sule in advance of a proposed new road and associated agricultural development, recording a number of sites associated with local oral tradition in addition to a few defended hill-top sites.
- Shortland Is.: Survey of the island of Alu in response to large scale logging operations by the Allardyce Lumber Company, recording some pottery-bearing and traditional religious sites.
- Malaita: Very brief survey of coastal religious sites as part of a school cultural project in the Dorio district.

The characterisation and classification of sites in the Solomon Islands is proving extremely difficult owing to the extraordinary degree of variety that has emerged from the surveys to date. It appears that one cannot predict the form of sites at one end of an island from survey results at the other, although for some site types in certain areas there is a limited degree of similarity, as in the agricultural terraces recorded from Kolombangara and northern New Georgia. In addition to attempting to produce a general description of this site variety, work continues to attempt to characterise the more common artifacts. Pottery, previously regarded as being restricted in distribution to the south-east Solomons, northern Choiseul and the Shortland Islands, appears to have been in use at some time throughout the greater part of the western Solomons. An initial investigation using metrical characterisation of stone axes and shell rings suggests that these artifacts might be sensitive to variation between areas. There has been a general attempt to collect information on local classifications of traditional sites and artifacts to supplement observable patterns and to relate them to extant features recorded during surveys.

The archaeological heritage of the Solomon Islands is under severe threat, not only from large-scale development projects, notably logging operations and road building, but also from the sale of traditional artifacts to travellers and oceanic voyagers. Legislation has been enacted at both national and local levels to meet these threats. By-laws have been passed by the Assemblies of Western, Isabel, and Makira and Ulawa Provinces preventing the sale of traditional artifacts and allowing for the establishment of protected areas of archaeological and historical significance. The Provincial Assemblies of Guadalcanal and the Central Islands are due to table similar by-laws in the near future. Legislation at national level prohibits the exportation of traditional artifacts from any province without an official permit issued by the Minister of Youth and Cultural Affairs through the Solomon Islands National Museum. Successful negotiations with Levers Pacific Timbers Limited in the western Solomons have considerably reduced the potential threat from logging operations in Kolombangara and New Georgia. Details of future logging extensions are now deposited with the National Museum sufficiently in advance of commencement to allow for comprehensive surveys and site protection measures to be carried out in the areas concerned. The company itself has become actively involved with site protection with the provision and placement of site marker posts, whilst in the forest surveys prior to logging, sites of archaeological and historic interest are mapped with the assistance of the landowners' representatives under the general guidance of the North New Georgia Timber Corporation. Offers of financial assistance for archaeological survey have also been received. Provincial Assembly Planning Offices have responded well to requests for information regarding development projects and the distribution of specially designed forms has assisted in the more efficient planning of surveys. A small, but fairly significant, threat to Solomon Islands' sites is also posed by natural occurrences such as earthquakes and periodic cyclones which have the capability, especially in exposed coastal areas, to destroy completely parts of the archaeological landscape.

Reporting of the activities of the National Sites Survey has been through the local media and by informal talks at schools and religious institutions; an exhibition on the archaeology of the Solomon Islands formed part of the nation's independence celebrations. Professor Roger Green (1977) has provided a short culture history of the Solomon Islands for use in schools, and an oral traditions project has been sponsored by the Solomon Islands National Museum.

Recent developments have been encouraging, with the granting of a second archaeology scholarship in Archaeology by the Solomon Islands Government and the establishment of the first Provincial Cultural Centre (on Guadalcanal) which will be actively involved in site preservation and archaeological survey. Above all, the number of requests from the rural areas for archaeological surveys to be undertaken hints at an increasing public awareness and concern for the future of the Solomon Islands' past.

PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO THE NATIONAL SITES SURVEY

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