



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN FIJI

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Archaeology in Fiji has gathered impetus during the last eighteen months and now that the objectives are more clearly understood and publicised, there has been a corresponding increase in support from people in various parts of Fiji. Prior to this - apart from Gifford's pioneer excavations and Laura Thompson's records from southern Lau, the only substantial field work had been that of an administrative official Mr. A.L. Parke. Over a period of several years, Mr. Parke located many fortified sites in the Rewa region, most of which were those conveniently described as ring-ditch forts. His valuable work has been extended by the Fiji Museum Archaeological Survey which serves as a means of uniting scattered and sporadic attempts by individuals working alone and without specialist help. Modelled on the New Zealand Site Recording Scheme, the survey contains files into which is entered all information from organised field work, individual reports and literary references.

Site numbers are based on a combination of code for the particular island and the number of the relevant map sheet in the 1:50,000 series which is the only one on a suitable scale and with a grid which will eventually cover Fiji. To give an example, Gifford's Site 20 at Sigatoka becomes Site VL 16/1 or Viti Levu, Sheet 16, Site 1. This is easily followed as the 1:50,000 series runs in sets and in this example is entitled Viti Levu, consisting of 20 sheets in all which cover not only Viti Levu but the satellite islands as well. Each set receives an initial code and islands not yet covered by the series are provisionally coded by island name and sites numbered consecutively. As the map series is extended, the provisional numbers will be replaced by permanent file numbers dependent on the name of the set in which they fall. To aid quick sorting in the files, each category of site has a distinctive colour box at the top of each envelope, e.g. blue for caves and red for ring-ditch sites. The method is unsophisticated but it is adequate at this stage of Fijian archaeology and, moreover, it is capable of extension to further categories or sub-categories.

Excavations have been started at several places. A mound within a ring-ditch at Nasinu, quite close to Suva, provided a training ground for Museum assistants and several helpers. Post-holes were revealed in two squares, some five thousand sherds were obtained, one stone adze and another stone artifact were the only non-pottery materials of note. Preliminary work on the sherds shows that less than 1% were decorated and of this total about half a dozen were rather worn cross-relief sherds, similar to those found by Gifford in what he called his Early Period. The mound at Nasinu showed stages of lateral extension with build-up probably taken from elsewhere which accounts for cross-relief ware close to the

surface. The remainder of the pottery consisted of jars with outflaring lips and plain bodies although there were sherds suggestive of water vessels rather than cooking vessels.

More significant excavations were started at Karobo about half way between Suva and the site at Sigatoka which has been the subject of discussion elsewhere. Karobo revealed both cross-relief and flat-bottomed dishes or trays, hitherto only known from the dunes at Sigatoka. Since then, two other sites near Sigatoka have been located which show evidence of flat-bottomed dishes. The south coast of Viti Levu may well hold the key for the solution of what is up to now regarded as an enigmatic item in the pottery assemblage.

The Sigatoka Valley is the object of a long term survey by the Fiji Museum. From quite close to the sea to over fifty miles inland there are distinctive archaeological features. The most remarkable are circular mounds linked by causeways to other mounds, sometimes merely twin units but in several sites forming complex systems of interlinked mounds. Each mound has four causeways which join it to the neighbouring mounds and in one site the aerial photograph shows that this technique forms well-defined access ways through and across the soft ground comprising the site. Together with these linked mounds there are also stone faced ones, mounds of earth only and mounds of stone facing covered by layers of earth. Some of these mounds have shallow ditches around them. There are also terrace systems and ridge forts in the upper valley and several communities still making pottery. With all these features, it is readily appreciated why the Sigatoka Valley has been chosen as the region deserving Museum priority.

During the wet season when extremely heavy rain slows down field work, it was decided to work through the very good coverage of aerial photographs taken at 8000 ft., in order to locate and plot sites on the 1:50,000 series. Most of this work has been undertaken with the specific aim of plotting the distribution of ring-ditch fortifications on the windward side of Viti Levu and ultimately extending it to the intermediate and dry zones to see (a) what overall pattern was emerging (b) where the greatest local density of sites is (c) what relation ring-ditch fortifications had to topography and (d) significant common morphological factors or what variants might be expected both within a single area and over the whole region. Mr. Ross Duberal of Geological Survey has done an extremely fine job of doing the initial raw plotting while the Fiji Museum is in the process of working through the photographs again to pick up more sites and to plot in those already located by ground survey. To date, over 600 ring-ditch sites have been plotted on the windward side of Viti Levu; no doubt almost as many again lie unseen in the bush along the ridges of the major river valleys. Tentative results suggest that the greatest density lies on the deltas and alluvial flats up the main rivers of the windward side,

with a marked tapering off towards the intermediate zones. There, the ring-ditches are thinly represented while preliminary inspection of dry zone areas shows an even lower density although river valley systems still provide evidence of activity. On Vanua Levu, work has been started by Mr. Geoffrey Parler of Labasa on recording 14 flatland and 28 hill forts in the Bucaisau Valley. A feature of the latter category of sites seems to be the extensive cutting of supplementary outer ditches where a ring-ditch occupies a hill-top with ridges falling away from it.

This work becomes important when one considers the reports of ridge forts in the interior of Viti Levu and on some of the outlying islands such as Wakaya, some eight miles east of Ovalau. Eight of the Wakaya fortified sites have been mapped by Mr. Les Thompson, a surveyor of the Lands Department, Suva. Some of the complex sites mapped by him show similarities to recently mapped sites from Samoa and indeed, even to New Zealand examples. Mr. Thompson's splendid work has been supplemented by his own pottery collections from the sites and by those of schoolboys from Levuka. The southern part of the island is to be examined by a Museum party in May, 1965 and by the end of the year the results of this project will form the basis of the Museum's first archaeological publication.

Surface collections in Rotuma were made by Mr. A.L. Parke during a four month stay; these collections were mainly shell and stone adzes with some shell pendants and ornaments. Mr. Parke undertook limited excavations of a few burials with permission of the Island Council. In addition to skeletal remains, he brought back grave goods consisting of pearl shell breast amulets, pearl shell fishing lure, reel ornaments and shell pendants. This material is being prepared for publication.

A Fiji Museum Archaeological Expedition has been working for ten weeks on Kabara, in the southern Lau Group. Financed by money most generously provided by Bernice P. Bishop Museum, the arduous work has been undertaken by Mr. Colin Smart. He has located distinctive terraced fortified sites on limestone bases, burial and occupation caves, coastal burial and occupation sites and in one or two cases, quite deeply stratified sites with relief pottery at lower levels have been found by test excavations.

Work in 1965 will concentrate on consolidating the preliminary work with as much activity as possible within the limits of finance and personnel. Publications on Wakaya and Kabara will provide a summary of what is known at present about two regions of Fiji. They might, perhaps, demonstrate that Fijian archaeology has just as much in common with Polynesia as it has with Melanesia. Indeed, a true understanding of Polynesian prehistory must rely, in part, on the study of archaeological projects undertaken in Fiji.