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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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ARCHAEOLOGY IN WESTERN SAMOA

R.C. Green

Introduction

As their part in a three year programme of research in Polynesian prehistory outlined by archaeologists at the Tenth Pacific Science Congress (Green 1961), New Zealand based participants agreed to carry out investigations in Pitcairn and the Chatham, Cook and Samoan Island groups. That New Zealand archaeologists are fulfilling these tasks is indicated by the University of Otago expedition to Pitcairn led by Mr. P.W. Gathercole, the Otago Museum expedition to the Chatham Islands led by Mr. D.R. Simmons, the Canterbury Museum expeditions to the Cook Islands led by Dr. Roger Duff, and the University of Auckland expedition to Western Samoa led by the author. All have occurred within the 1962-64 period; the funds and equipment for the research being derived in part from local New Zealand sources through the two Departments of Anthropology, the Canterbury and Otago Museums and the National Historic Places Trust, and in part from a major grant by the National Science Foundation of the United States to the Bernice P. Bishop Museum for work in Pitcairn, the Cooks, Samoa and the Society Islands (Emory 1962).

The investigations in Western Samoa covered a period of seven months from December 1963 through June of 1964. Operations over the entire period were directed by six people, each for different shorter but overlapping periods, so that overall continuity of the programme was maintained. The expedition daily employed between six and more than thirty Samoan labourers in one or more crews at various times and places. While in Samoa we enjoyed the co-operation and assistance of both the Western Samoan Government and its departments and the direct assistance of the Western Samoan Trust Estates Corporation. To them, and in particular to their representatives, Mr. E. Stehlin and Mr. P.W.H. Kelly, we owe a special vote of thanks. For their goodwill toward our endeavours we owe a debt of gratitude to many of the people of Samoa.

Investigations

The focus of the investigations were the mounds at Vailele, some three miles along the coast east of Apia. Originally cut into by bulldozers, they were investigated and reported on by Mr. J. Golson in 1957 and inspected by the author in 1960. The recent excavations at Vailele continued throughout a six month period and included a site survey of all mounds in the area. This was designed to relate the mounds being excavated to others in the locality recorded by Thomson (1927), Freeman (1944) and Golson (1957). All other projects were carried out concurrently with the Vailele project for shorter periods of time as personnel and circumstances permitted.

In 1957 Golson undertook a brief test excavation covering 120 square feet in the interior of a large earthen mound at Vailele of rounded rectangular form, about six feet in depth and 120 by 170 feet in size. The mound had already been cut into by a bulldozer for fill needed in a nearby stockyard, and this had exposed a set of neatly stratified occupation layers. In the lowest habitation layer Golson encountered the first pottery to be reported from Samoa. Three charcoal samples from this layer were later radiocarbon dated to the 1st century A.D. (Golson 1962:175). The nature of the

adze types or other items in the culture of that period were not well defined, so that only the well known form of Samoan adze with a quadrangular section and without tang, belonging to Duff type 2C could be confidently assigned to that period.

Our initial and continuing tasks were therefore:

- (1) - the fullest possible definition of adze forms and other items that could be stratigraphically associated with this early pottery:
- (2) - the exposure of sufficiently continuous stratigraphic sections through two of the mounds to permit specification of the main occupation layers, their extent, and the form and function of the mounds at different periods in time:
- (3) - the testing of two other mounds to obtain further stratigraphic records which would permit one to pinpoint the major common events in the local sequence, and
- (4) - the recovery from the latest layers of sufficient items of pre-contact and early post-contact age to provide us with some idea of the continuities and changes that had taken place over the last two thousand years in the surviving material culture. While all personnel contributed to these tasks the main burden of conducting this work fell on the author, his wife, Kaye, who drew all the thousands of feet of section, Mr. G. Boraman who directed operation on SU-Va 2, and Miss E. Crosby who supervised most of the work on SU-Va 3 and 4 and also contributed greatly to the final excavations on SU-Va-1.

As a result of these excavations a collection of 447 sherds of Samoan pottery, of which about 9% are pieces of rim, was assembled, the majority of it coming from the lowest two layers in SU-Va-1 and much of the rest from the lowest layer in SU-Va 4. As before, these sherds were lacking in any sign of decoration and come in two main forms: one a thick ware with a distinctive feldspathic basalt temper and the other a less frequent, finer tempered and thinner ware. Both appear to belong to large simple bowl forms with flat rims whose lips fall into several distinct varieties according to the amount and direction of the thickening at the lip, the presence or absence of small facets on it, and the angle of the flat lip surface to the wall of the vessel. These observations in general parallel and expand on those made by Golson (1962: 176).

Associated with this pottery in SU-Va 1 are a number of adze fragments and a few complete specimens belonging to types other than those 2C found by both Golson and ourselves. In Duff's revised classification of 1959 these include 2A, 3G, 4E, as well as a general type 2 adze with a base flattened semi-circular section and a convex rather than a straight cutting edge. Finally, there are portions of unclassified adzes and chisels, some with ovoid to elliptical sections that may not be easily accommodated within existing Polynesian adze typologies.

Other items of this period include ungrooved stone octopus lure sinkers of the coffee bean form, a perforated and grooved anchor or large sinker, a smaller net sinker, adze grinding stones, pebble chopping tools, hammerstones, cores, and numerous flakes, some of which have been fashioned into piercing tools and one of which has been made into a fine blade flake chisel. As may be expected there are also several unidentified objects. Taken together, this collection forms a typical Polynesian assemblage associated with a plain pottery, which from its temper was probably made in Samoa.

The attempt at building a local stratigraphic sequence was also successful to a limited degree, each mound presenting several common events in otherwise dissimilar sequences. During the latest prehistoric occupation of all four mounds, they seemed to

have functioned as house platforms which yield a complex pattern of post holes and a fair number of 2C and 4E adze pieces, the types commonly expected in late contexts in Western Polynesia. According to Golson (1957: 24) who consulted the people of Vailele village, this latest stage of settlement is plausibly associated with a traditionally remembered village belonging to the High Chief, Salima, thus placing it in traditional reckoning about 13 generations ago, or in the first half of the 17th century A.D. approximately. In this respect it is interesting to note that our survey of 110 mounds in the Vailele-Fagali'i locality indicates that the main concentration is $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile inland and includes the large mounds of Tapuitea and Laupule (Freeman 1944). These are to be associated with Saleupolu, the ancestral village of present day Fagali'i and Vailele, while the mounds at Suga, where we excavated (east of present day Vailele) are by comparison few in number (seven or eight), somewhat separate from the main concentration, and only a few hundred yards from the coast. Thus they need not be directly equated with the larger and better known mounds of Vailele (Freeman 1944) or the Saleupolu village of Tupuivao and later chiefs of the 18th century to whom they are traditionally referred.

At any rate the next use of the Suga mounds identifiable archaeologically is in the historic period when they served either as burial mounds for Solomon Island plantation labourers at the turn of this century, or as mounds on which plantation owners built various structures. Our stratigraphic sequence for this locality thus spans some 1900 or more years in which the mounds exhibited varying shapes and sizes and performed a number of different and frequently unknown functions.

A second part of our programme concentrated on the area inland of Luatuanu'u, a village some $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Apia. Our attention was called to the numerous prehistoric terraces and fortifications in this area by Mr. J.W. Hart, whose interest and assistance stimulated our initial efforts. Here, on the principal open fern-covered ridges directly behind the present day coastal village, we recorded and mapped a set of large earthen terraces formerly used as house platforms. They extended inland along this ridge for over a half mile. Much of this work was directed by Mr. G. Boreman and in the course of it a large collection of fragmentary adzes was made from the house floors and terraces. During later stages more of these terraces and house platforms were recorded and mapped on other nearby ridges.

Some two miles inland from these terraces our attention was early drawn by Mr. Hart to a large fort which stood at the apex of the ridge systems, at a point where they coalesce into a main ridge between the two major stream valleys so that the position dominates the entire area. This ridge fort was not only of impressive dimensions, but most of it was covered in heavy bush and not easily accessible. The basic map which accompanies this report (fig.1) is a tribute to the energy and skill of Dr. Stuart Scott. Its double ditch and bank system across the ridge at the most accessible point, its system of internal and ridge spur defensive ditches, the presence of large deep pits, sometimes in pairs in the interior, and the system of small terraces concentrated on one of the main slopes within the fort, provide numerous parallels to ridge pa in New Zealand and similar fortifications now being recorded in Fiji. It presently stands as one of the best mapped examples of Western Polynesian fortification. Limited test excavations on it were made by Dr. Scott, Mr. Boreman and the author. Those across two of the pits and another half-way into the inner bank were the most useful for stratigraphic purposes and for obtaining necessary charcoal samples. From this experience on a fortified site we went on to map and record numerous others both in this area and elsewhere on Upolu.

Our Luatuanu'u survey thus provides extensive information on fortifications, earthen terraces and mounds, and a great deal of information on the stone pavements, house outlines, and adzes to be found on their surfaces.

A third part of the programme, carried out by Miss J.M. Davidson, concentrated on the south coast village of Lotofaga and its traditionally remembered villages inland. The first part of this research consisted of three test excavations in different parts of the raised sand beach still occupied by the older part of the present village. Here sections cut by high seas had exposed deeply stratified midden layers. In carrying out these excavations controlled midden analysis was a primary concern, and a major aim, the hope of recovering items of fishing gear. The refuse, however, is not of the concentrated kind and the yield of midden or artifactual materials is not high, although the stratification is fairly well developed to depths between four and eight feet. As a consequence, few distinctive artefacts other than stone flakes were recovered and the items of fishing gear were limited to three or four, plus a few sea urchin spine files. Again, the time span covered by these deposits extended from present European period, back into contact and prehistoric deposits. One prehistoric burial was uncovered, studied and reburied.

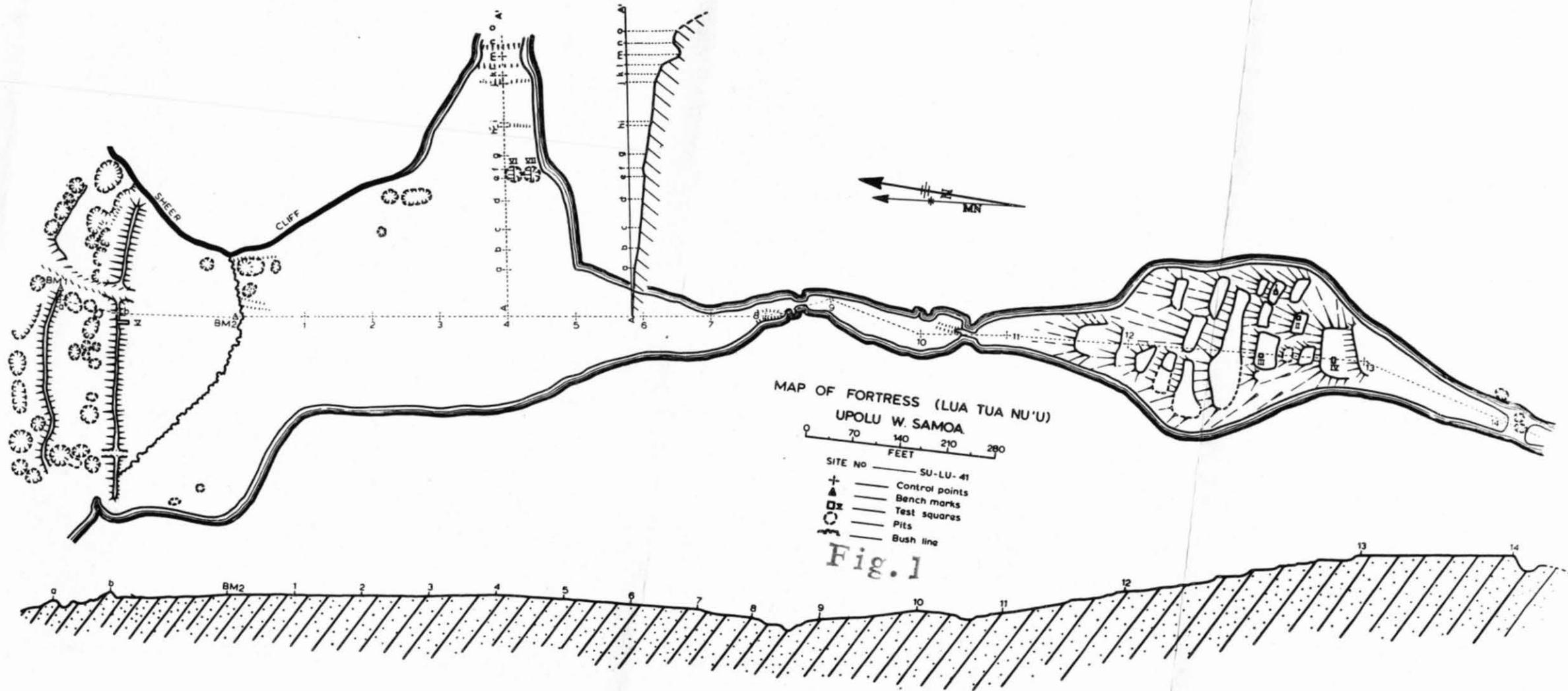
A second part of Miss Davidson's project consisted of the field recording of inland sites in order to furnish comparative material complementary to the survey of sites in the Luatuanu'u locality and as further documentation of the inland to coastal shift of villages discussed by Golson (1957:18). In this project the inland sites of the traditionally remembered villages of "new" and "old" Etemuli and the important site of Vaigafa were all visited and recorded. The field monuments of Vaigafa proved to be extensive, covering an area over a mile in length and up to 1/3 of a mile in width at the center. The sites were of many kinds including round and round-ended houses both on the flat and on terraces, large circular raised rim pits which proved to be large ovens, small earth and stone mounds, and various ditches and stone alignments. Nearby, on a small volcanic cone called Maunga Ali'i, well-made stone mounds of various shapes were mapped in detail. Further fortifications in the area were also recorded along with information on a number of more widely scattered sites.

General Survey

Through the efforts of all members of the party most of the accessible areas of the coast and parts of the inland of Upolu were visited in the hunt for suitable sites, especially productive beach middens. In the process a number of individual field monuments were recorded. Also, all but two of the off-shore islands were surveyed for possible sites which might provide evidence of fishing gear and/or concentrated deposits of refuse, but the search was without marked success. Finally, a survey trip around the island of Savai'i not only provided a preliminary estimate of its archaeological potential, information on a number of field monuments and beach middens, but also some details on yet another large and complex stone mound in the Palauli area associated with numerous other remains that merit immediate and more detailed investigation.

Summary

In sum our efforts were productive, some of our aims were filled and others frustrated, and our appetites whetted for a further and more intensive attack on Samoa's prehistory. The time for definitive conclusions is still for the future, but a great deal of further information pertaining to the last 2,000 years of Western Samoan prehistory is now available.



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