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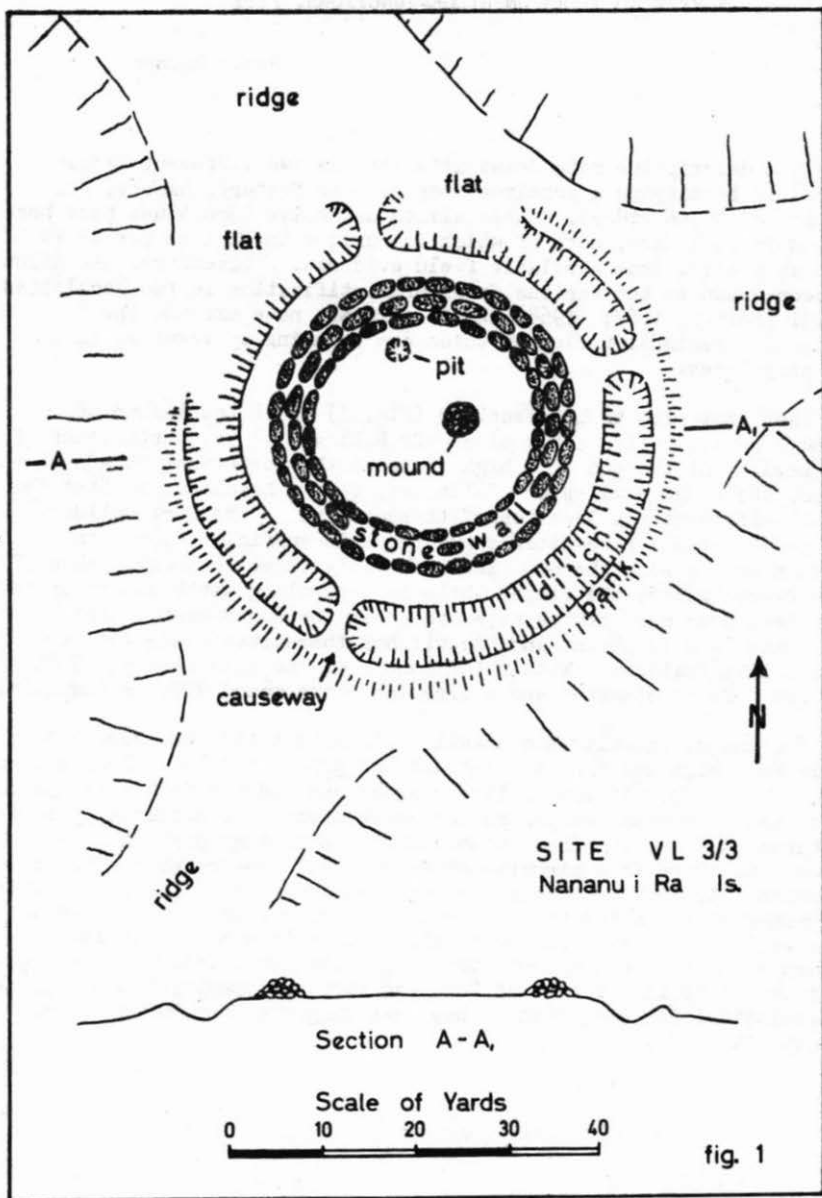
FORTIFIED SITES ON RIDGE-JUNCTIONS, FIJI

Bruce Palmer

This descriptive note draws attention to two different Fijian methods of fortifying a prominent topographic feature, namely, the junction of three ridges. Specialised defensive techniques have been adopted in each case, both of which are unique in Fiji as far as is known at present from available field evidence. Elsewhere, attention has been drawn to the various forms of fortification in two localities in Fiji (Palmer, 1967; 1968) and the present note extends the distinctive regional varieties which are becoming apparent as field-work progresses.

The first site to be described (Fig. 1) is on the island of Nananu i Ra which lies a few miles off Rakiraki on the north coast of Viti Levu. At the end of a high ridge on the north-eastern arm of the island, the ridge divides and falls away to two headlands so that the site itself is at the junction of three ridges. The fort builders have constructed a ring-ditch since there is sufficient space to position such a form there. There are only three causeways, each of which faces towards the ridges while an encircling ditch and outer bank is evident over most of the site except in the north-west sector. There, the bank is absent and the ditches themselves grade into a terrace-like feature. Within the centre of the site is a pit 3 ft deep and 5 ft in diameter and a circular stone mound 9 ft in diameter.

The unique circular stone wall positioned inside the ring-ditch is six feet high and fifteen feet wide at ground level. There are no openings in this wall and if it indeed belongs to the defensive system and is not a European enclosure for sheep located coincidentally inside an abandoned fort, its form is unusual. On another part of Nananu i Ra there is a circular stone wall with one opening which may be defensive but, again, it could be a protective measure for stock during hurricanes, while on the mainland behind Rakiraki there is a circular stone wall without any opening in it. During the middle of last century sheep were run on both the island and the mainland so that one might expect to find traces of European farming superimposed on earlier archaeological features such as has been suggested for Wakaya Island (Palmer, 1967: 31).



SITE VL 13/3

Lomaivuna

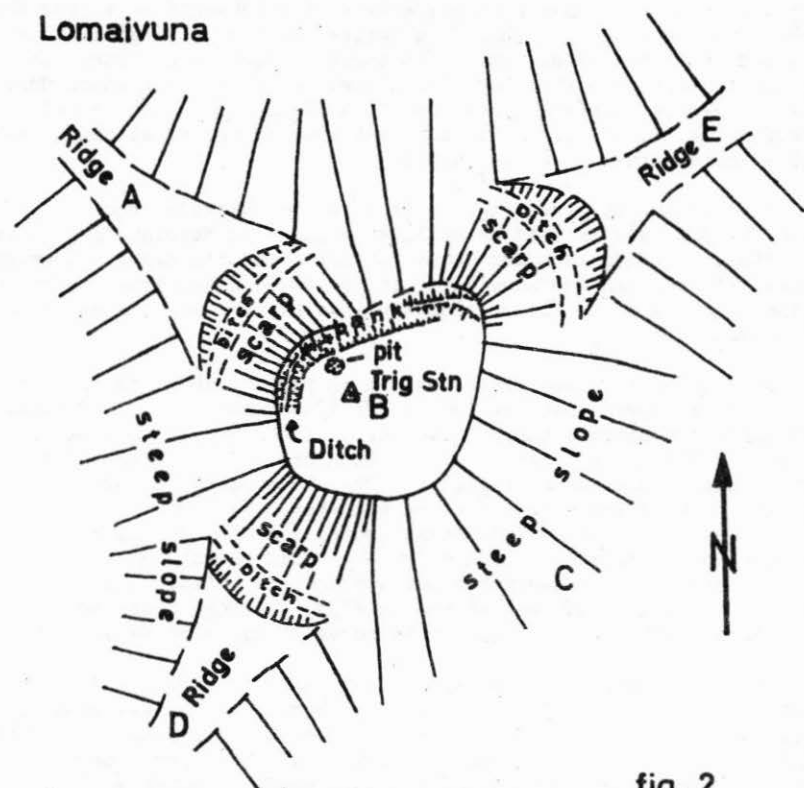
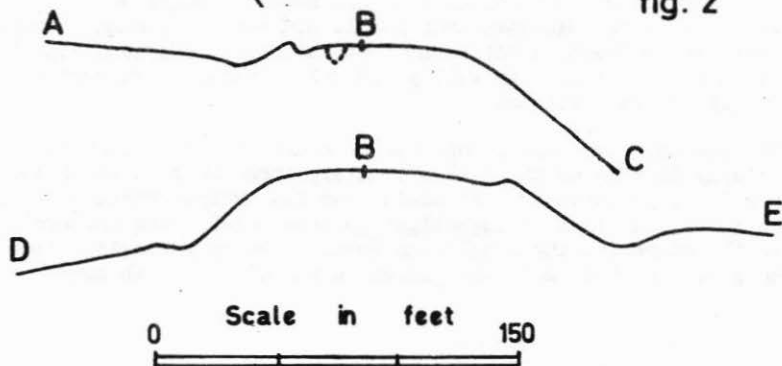


fig. 2



Irrespective of this factor which ultimately should be resolved, there is, however, clear evidence that the ring-ditch form was applied to a topographic situation in preference to ditch-cutting across the three separate ridges. This is a device which might legitimately be expected in such a situation. Its absence suggests a strong cultural impulse to reproduce the ring-ditch form, hence any site which does show cross-ridge cutting of ditches in a similar situation could therefore be looked upon as significant when occurring within a clearly defined concentration of ring-ditches.

The second site (see Fig. 2) is known as Nakovekovevou (site VL 13/3) and is said by village people from Navolau to be a very old site as nothing is known about it apart from its name. Overlooking Navolau Village and the Rewa River, it is built on and around a hillock at the junction of two lower ridges with a higher one as seen in the cross-sections.

Surrounded by steep slopes except on ridge A where the latter is only a little lower than the summit, VL 13/3 shows how the fort-builders have cut cross-ditches through the three ridges radiating from the citadel. The scarps from this operation are quite marked and the ditches themselves curve slightly. The steep slopes bounding most of the site provide additional defence but where the slope is not so much of an obstacle (as at A) additional protection has been given by the construction of ditch and bank defence. This variety of inner ditch together with the cross-ditches surrounding the citadel are the only examples of their kind seen as yet in Fiji, although there are unconfirmed reports of the latter features in parts of Vanua Levu.

There are known sites which suggest that with some care, a ring-ditch fortification could have been constructed at Nakovekovevou by angling the lay-out to take in more of Ridge A. On some sites with a slightly less pronounced slope the hillock has been completely ringed near its base, leaving the citadel in splendid isolation well above the defences. That the Nakovekovevou people did not do so might suggest that this site reflects a different fort-building tradition, especially as it is situated in a river valley and delta system which contains several hundred ring-ditches.

No more positive conclusions can be drawn at the present time, particularly in view of the lack of pottery from the site and traditions relating to its occupants. It would seem that ridge-junction sites will provide a fruitful line of investigation when considering the evolution of both the ridge and the ring-ditch forts. Further consideration must also be given to stone wall enclosures in association with some

fortifications to determine whether they belong to the proto-historic period or not. They may be an earlier or later feature used on some ring-ditch sites.

The site plans used in this note are based on surveys by L. E. Thompson, Lands Department, Suva, who first recorded the two fortifications described here. Grid references to both sites are as follows:

Site VL 3/3	Nanani i Ra Island	N. 10976	E. 6631
Site VL 13/3	Nakovekovevou, Rewa	N. 7730	E. 7472

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