



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

In your last issue (March 1992) you published a paper by Simon Best entitled 'Fortifications in Fiji and Samoa: Comparisons and Predictions', in which the author made several comments about my work (and that of my colleagues, Dan and Alison Witter) at Tataga-matau in American Samoa. I should like to examine some of his comments here, because I feel that they misrepresent what we have written about this site.

It is quite true that following our first season (1985), we believed that the ditch found above the quarry area that we had been contracted to rediscover, served to provide primary protection for the quarry. As we pointed out then, and as Best reiterated in his paper, it had good parallels in Western Samoa. Best, however, stated (pp. 40-41) 'A suggestion by the author [Best] that the "fortified quarry" might in fact be part of a larger site was rejected by Leach, and no plans had been made to investigate these or any other such features further up the ridge.'

On the contrary! Our Final Project Report...(Leach and Witter n.d. [1985]) quite clearly stated as the first Recommendation for Future Research: 'With more time and manpower we should have liked to map the Upper Terraces [lying above the ditch found in 1985] and the Western Working Floors...Although this was not essential for the nomination [of the quarry site to the National Register], it should be an integral part of any future study' (Leach and Witter n.d.: 56).

It should be noted that a copy of this report has been held by the Anthropology Department in Auckland since late 1985.

Thanks to the skills of Simon Best and the assistance of Alison Witter, the site map was extended by an excellent survey completed during the second fieldwork season (1988). As soon as additional ditches and defensive features were encountered above the first ditch, we were happy to revise our earlier interpretation concerning what the lower ditch was defending, and to endorse the view that one or two fortifications had been constructed on the SE and SW arms of the site (Leach and Witter 1990: 55). At the same time we cautioned that in view of the complexity and frequency of features on the main ridge, 'the present site boundaries should not be regarded as final' (ibid.).

In discussing the large ditch found at the top of the site in 1988, Best stated (p. 41) '....Leach makes the suggestion, quoting a local tradition, that the large ditch was dug by Tongans merely to impede access between villages (Best, Leach and Witter 1989: 9, 10). The place of the Terrible Tongans in the oral history of this area of the Pacific, and the lemming-like use by archaeologists of oral tradition to explain archaeological features, is a subject in its own right....'

Let me put the record straight by quoting from those very pages (Best, Leach and Witter 1989: 9-10):

'Research since the 1988 fieldwork suggests that the upper ditch was known locally at the time of Kikuchi's survey. Although Kikuchi did not visit Tataga-matau, one of his informants described

a large, deep ditch...on the mountain path leading from the village of Leone to the village of Asu. The ditch was excavated by Tongans in order to impede communications between villages. The ditch can be crossed only by placing a log across it. (Kikuchi 1963: 68)

Kikuchi listed this ditch as T-99. If this ditch is indeed T-99, then the possibility that it was constructed by Tongans and that the adjoining ridge tops were occupied by Tongans, has to be considered. So far nothing found on the site appears to be of Tongan manufacture or design, from the artefacts to the earthworks. Furthermore, as Davidson noted for Western Samoa,

A problem in the interpretation of Samoan warfare is the importance given today to stories about Tongan invasions. Many forts and other field monuments are attributed to Tongans. (Davidson 1974: 241)

She commented that most fortifications known on Tongatapu and Vava'u are historic and Fijian influenced, and that Samoa has a long history of fort construction in its own right. A more likely context for the building of the fortifications at Tataga-matau can be taken from the remarks of an informant that 'the villagers from Leone or elsewhere would often fight over the right to quarry and grind their adzes there' (Kikuchi 1963: 154).'

It is our view that archaeologists in Polynesia should be aware of the oral traditions concerning their area of study and should consider the archaeological implications of these stories of culture contact, as we did above for Tataga-matau. It should have been obvious to Best that having considered possible Tongan influence, we rejected it, on archaeological grounds. To be accused of 'lemming-like' use of oral traditions in site interpretation is an unjustifiable criticism, since it is based on Best's failure to appreciate the overall context and trend of our argument. Best's earlier criticism, that we had no plans to investigate the features above the quarry, is also unwarranted, as demonstrated above.

I, too, should like to finish with some predictions. Firstly, despite Best's misrepresentation of our views, I think that Tataga-matau will eventually be shown to be the single, large fort that Best is proposing, though this will need to be proved in a well thought-out archaeological programme. Secondly, Best will need to reduce the level of innuendo and misrepresentation in his published papers to throw off the self-proclaimed title of 'definitely out-of-favour archaeologist'.

Helen M. Leach  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Otago

## References

- Leach, H.M. and Witter, D.C. n.d. [1985]. *Final Project Report on the Survey of the Tataga-matau Fortified Quarry Complex, near Leone, American Samoa*. Prepared for Government of American Samoa, Office of Historic Preservation, Department of Parks and Recreation, Pago Pago, American Samoa.
- Leach, H.M. and Witter, D.C. 1990. Further investigations at the Tataga-matau site, American Samoa. *NZ Jnl of Archaeology* 12: 51-83.

Dear Editor,

It would appear that I can expect no financial contribution from Leach towards resurveying the West Samoa sites. However, she has provided some unexpected and very welcome moral support.

From a position of denying the existence of the fortification above Tatagamatau she has passed through a stage where she accepts the possibility that there are two forts, joined like a pair of Siamese twins, to the ultimate stage of predicting that the whole complex will one day prove to be a single fortified unit.

Although this is gratifying enough, the implications that flow from it are even more surprising. Since Leach continues to stress the similarity that she originally pointed out between Green and Davidson's West Samoa forts and her initial interpretation of Tatagamatau, it follows that she must now also be questioning the integrity of the former.

This is considerably further than anyone else has committed themselves since I suggested this possibility, and demonstrates an unexpected receptiveness to radical ideas. The down side of joining me in peddling this sort of innuendo, however, is the risk of ending up in the same out (of favour) basket.

But take heart – WE ARE ON THE SAME SIDE!

Simon Best  
Auckland

Dear Editor,

I would like to take the opportunity through *AINZ* to introduce myself as a new NZAA Council member.

I have an MA from Otago University and worked for Lands and Survey in the East Coast. In 1986 I left archaeology to complete an MA in Guidance and Counselling and work as a counsellor with individuals and developing and facilitating group programmes.

In 1991 I came back into archaeology as DOC Conservancy Archaeologist

for both East Coast and Hawkes Bay conservancies.

I believe my time outside the profession has been invaluable in assessing my role and evaluating issues in relation to the development of archaeology in New Zealand.

In my role on NZAA Council I will endeavour to encourage NZAA to address the following issues:

1. Archaeology and our relationship with tangata whenua. During my 18 months in DOC I have attempted to establish a working relationship with iwi in the conservancy and encourage their involvement in archaeology. This requires addressing issues such as ownership of information and what is consultation.

I have agreed to collate information on archaeology and our relationship with tangata whenua for NZAA Council and would appreciate input from everyone – any problems, concerns, ideas?

This issue will not be addressed easily and I would eventually like to see the establishment of a subcommittee to present something to the next AGM. If you are interested in being part of a long-distance subcommittee, please contact me.

2. Ethics. The issue of a Code of Ethics is also not going to be resolved easily. Ethics is a profession in itself. We have people in NZAA who have completed university papers on ethics and it seems appropriate to seek their input.

For issues relating to developing a Code of Ethics and obligations to Indigenous people, see *Antiquity* 66 (1992): 260-266.

3. Group discussion. I would encourage well-facilitated group discussion of a range of issues at each conference. Conference is the only current opportunity for NZAA members to discuss in detail the range of views on issues such as ownership of information, tangata whenua input, management and protection, Historic Places Bill, and Code of Ethics.

It is essential we make time as a group to discuss these issues.

4. Raising profile. I would like to see NZAA take on a more visible political role as one way of raising the profile of archaeology in New Zealand.

Those are some of my ideas for the year. I would appreciate input, arguments or support to develop them.

The next Council meeting will be some time in September. If any members have issues they wish raised at that meeting, or input into my ideas, I can be contacted at Department of Conservation, PO Box 668, Gisborne (tel. 867 8531) or 9 Magnolia St, Gisborne (tel. 867 7573).

Pam Bain  
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