



NEW ZEALAND  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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## TWO RING-DITCH SITES ON GAU ISLAND

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### INTRODUCTION:

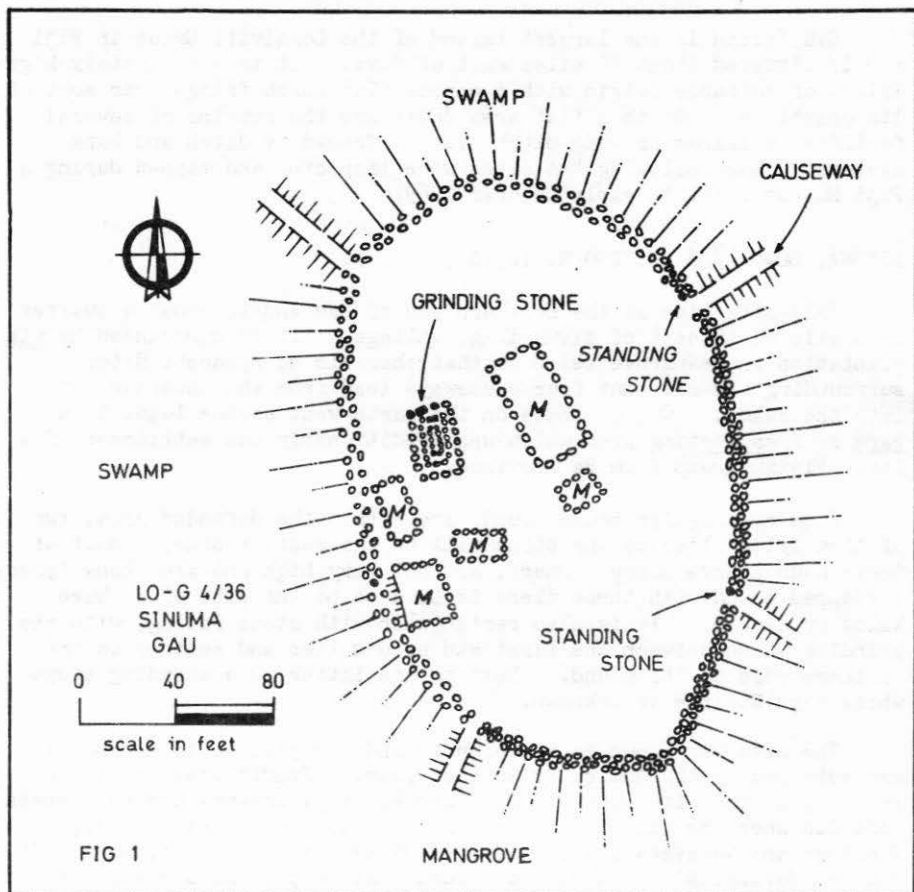
Gau Island is the largest island of the Lomaiviti Group in Fiji and is situated about 70 miles east of Suva. It is a moderately high island of volcanic origin with a narrow flat beach fringe over most of its coastline. On this flat area there are the remains of several fortified villages or ring-ditch sites defended by ditch and bank systems. The following two sites were inspected and mapped during a Fiji Museum visit in early October 1969.

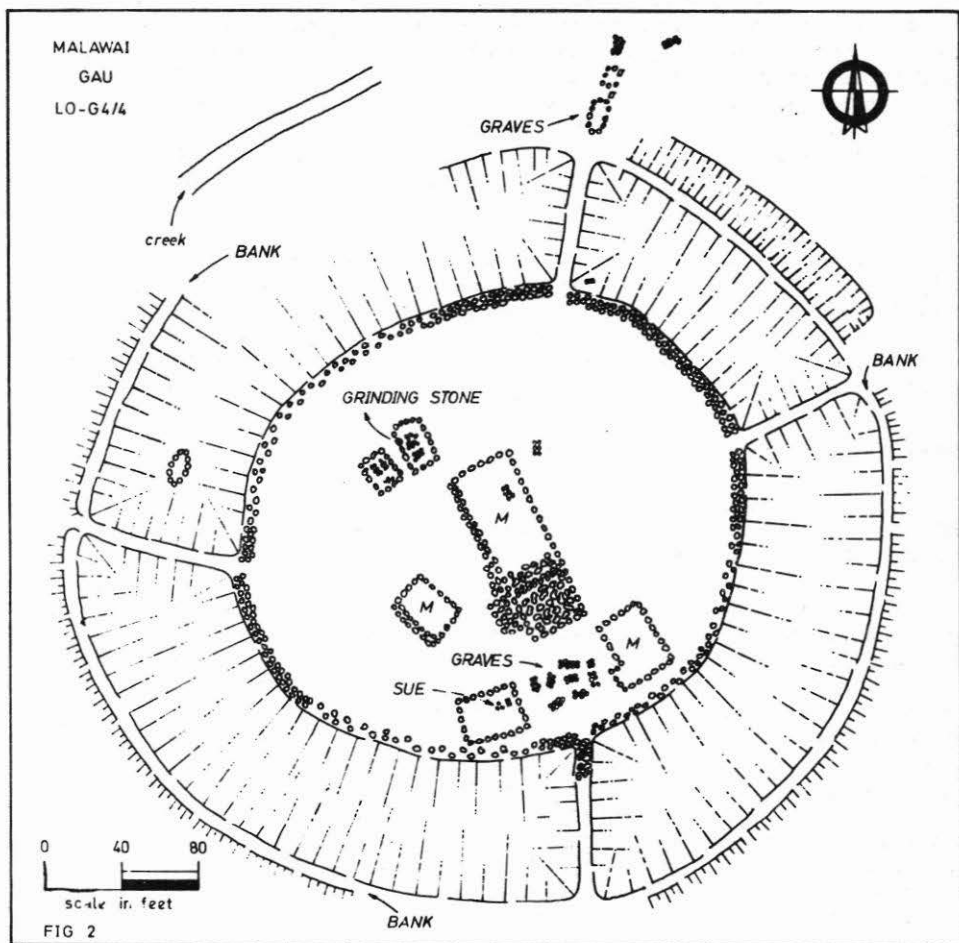
SINUMA, LO-G 4/36 (N.7250 E. 12110), FIG. 1.

This site lies at the northern end of Gau and is about a quarter of a mile north-east of Navukailagi village. It is surrounded by via plantation and mangrove swamp so that there is no apparent ditch surrounding the site but four causeways lead from the interior out into the swamp. One of these on the north-west sector leads to a rara or open meeting area which was traditionally the settlement of a later Fijian group from Ra Province.

Five rectangular house mounds are within the defended area, two of them lying close to the stone wall on the western side. Most of these mounds have sharp corners, are not very high and are stone faced. A stepped mound with three tiers is said to be the site of a bure kalou or temple. It is also rectangular with stone facing, with one grinding stone between the first and second tier and another on the northern edge of the mound. Next to the latter is a standing stone whose significance is unknown.

The site was known to be defended and occupied in 1854 since it was surveyed by the Admiralty in that year. Traditional knowledge relating to the site records that Ratu Watisoni Komainaduruvesi Cebeta left Bau where he was of the same mataqali as the Vunivalu (i.e., Tunitoga and Wasavakatoga). After a disagreement Ratu Watisoni left Bau for Tovulailai on Nairai but found that people had already settled there. He moved to Gau and landed at Sinuma where he and his party spent the night. The next day local people belonging to the Mataqalis





of Navudrau, Tavotavo, Nacurukau, Nukubolo and Yaboka saw the way Ratu Watisoni's people respected him; therefore, they agreed to instal him as the first Ratu of Sinuma or Navukailagi as it is known today. They built the site of Sinuma and settled there.

People of Sawaieke, about three miles south, became jealous and killed Ratu Watisoni when he was alone on the seashore at Sinuma. According to local informants in 1969 the Sinuma people heard about the incident and the identity of the attackers from their priest or bete. They formed an avenging party and went to Sawaieke, slaying all women and children met with. Those who escaped fled south to the village of Nukuloa but were attacked in turn by those people who were, according to the Sinuma informants, the true Gauans. If the above information is correct, it implies a movement of population from Viti Levu prior to 1854.

It is of further interest to note that the Sinuma people sent for help in Viti Levu from non-Bauan-speaking peoples. People of Ra responded to this call for aid and settled at the rara or open space at the end of the north-west causeway shown on the site plan. This suggests some close link between the original groups at Sinuma and the people of Ra Province.

MALAWAI, LO-G 4/4 (N.6993 E. 12475), FIG. 2.

On flat land near Nabuni creek on the eastern side of Gau opposite Nukuloa lies the site of Malawai, about half a mile from the present-day village of the same name.

The site is basically a single ring-ditch with outer earth bank and a small section of a narrower, second ditch on the north-east side. The main ditch is 66 feet wide and is bounded by a low stone wall along its inner margin. Four causeways are present with stone paving on a short section of one of them. Near the northern causeway is a black stone, while near the western one is a 10 ft. high mound in the ditch, thought to be a grave. Five house mounds are present in the interior of the defended area, on one of which there are sue or stone pot-stands. They are rectangular and stone faced with one having an irregular outline while another has stone piling along the western edge. There is a cluster of grave cairns by the southern causeway, while another mound has three graves and a grinding stone on it. The large 4 ft high mound is the first of its kind seen in Gau. It has a paved section at one end separated by a 1 ft high stone wall and a little paving beyond

this. A small paved extension is seen abutting the rest of the paved area, while a grave is located further along the mound. Beyond the northern causeway is another group of grave mounds, some of which have standing stones, slabs or grinding stones. Traditional information records that Malawai was settled by three mataqali, namely Nauluvatu, Naiyalayala and Namuani. They were said to be from the same people of Verata in Viti Levu who settled at Nukuloa and were subsequently sent from there to the site at Malawai. This information was recorded during the visit in 1969.

These two sites form part of a much larger study of the ring-ditch sites on Gau at present being prepared for publication by the Director of the Fiji Museum.