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Conservation Assessment Project 1995

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For the future, the Hotelera Panamericana has ambitions plans to remodel the old hotel Hanga Roa ("where Kevin Costner slept"), and in 1996 Lan Chile airlines plans to offer a package tour for high school and college students in Chile and Tahiti.

The author also commented that there are no bars on the island where one can drink a cold beer nor are there restaurants where one can eat local fish.

Did this person actually visit Rapa Nui?

• **Restoration of a moai in Rapa Nui**

Under the initiative of the Museo Sebastián Englert, the damaged moai at Ahu Tahira, Vinapu, was repaired. This statue was vandalized earlier this year, as reported in *RNJ* 9(1): eyes and a smile were scratched into its face. The restoration was done by a specialist in rock art conservation, Antoinette Padgett, who volunteered her services. The cost of materials for the repair was financed by the Rotary Club of Isla de Pascua; shipping charges for the materials were paid by the Easter Island Foundation. The restoration was done by authorization of the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales, with technical support from the Centro Nacional de Restauración y Conservación, the collaboration of the Easter Island Foundation and under the supervision of the Museo Sebastián Englert and CONAF. □

Conservation Assessment Project 1995

In July of this year, a month-long project to assess changes in the condition of some of the island's petroglyph sites was undertaken by Antoinette Padgett and Georgia Lee, under the auspices of the University of California, Berkeley, University Research Expeditions Program (UREP). The study was based on a series of documentation programs that began in 1981 and resulted in the accumulation of slides, photographs, drawings

and field notes (Lee 1992). Using the earlier research as a control, several sites were selected for assessment: these



Figure 2. Rano Kau's spectacular panel before vandals carved initials into it. The panel is 5 meters across. Deeply carved designs—some in intaglio—swirl around the boulder. The large bearded face on a fish body is similar to some that are carved on the heads of wooden kavakava figures.

include Orongo and others that receive a fair amount of visitation from tourists.

The project was approved by the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales and CONAF (National Parks of Chile). As part of the program, the World Monuments Fund provided funding in order that Paula Valenzuela of the Centro Nacional de Conservación y Restauración, Santiago, could represent that organization and work with the project. A total of 16 volunteers from the United States, Canada, and Sweden provided the work force.

The study focused on a variety of problems: animal damage, microflora or plant damage, spalling, erosion, unstable rock surfaces, graffiti, and abrasion. Preliminary results suggest that several sites are in peril, with the petroglyph site at Orongo being the most fragile. Although it was anticipated that the site was suffering from erosion due to natural forces and foot traffic, close examination revealed that general erosional forces are at work and the site is in danger of falling down the cliff. Cracks were observed in the petroglyph panels and the petroglyph area is generally undermined. Stabilization is vital if the site is to be preserved.

Sites with petroglyphs on ground level lava flow (*papa*)



Figure 1. Petroglyph at Hanga Piko that appears to represent a large tree. Drawing shows the panel prior to its being vandalized.

have been affected by hooves of cattle and horses which roam freely over them. The most seriously damaged are at La Pérouse Bay. Many motifs also have been damaged by being scraped with stones, a local practice to make the designs stand out more clearly for tourists (Lee 1994).

Only two of the examined sites have suffered from graffiti. Unfortunately, it is two of the most significant panels that were targeted. One, at Hanga Piko (Figure 1), represents the only example of what appears to be a large tree engraved into a vertical panel. Vandals have scraped new (obscene) designs onto its surface. The other (Figure 2), a truly fine panel in the caldera at Rano Kau, has been damaged by recently carved initials despite the fact that it is far from the tourist track and very difficult to reach. Already in 1981 someone had carved a name into this panel but it was otherwise undamaged. In addition to the graffiti, the top of the boulder is being impacted by people walking on the designs. The motifs here are the finest in Oceania thus the desecration is particularly tragic.

Other damage to certain sites is due to attempts to make latex or resin castings from the petroglyphs. Replication efforts have left a variety of residues on several excellent panels at Tongariki and Vai Tara Kai Ua.

A final report on the project is now in process which will include suggested recommendations for some of the problems identified and for preserving the cultural patrimony of the island.

It is hoped that professional engineering assistance can be obtained to deal with the severe erosion problems at Orongo. □

References

- Lee, G. 1992. *The Rock Art of Easter Island: Symbols of Power, Prayers to the Gods*. Monumenta Archaeologica 17. Los Angeles: The Institute of Archaeology, UCLA.
- Lee, G. 1994. The Petroglyphs of Easter Island: Problems of Natural Erosion and Human Impact. *Lavas and Volcanic Tuffs: Proceedings of the International Meeting, Easter Island, Chile, 25-31 October 1990*. Edited by A.E. Charola, R. J. Koestler and G. Lombardi. ICCROM.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

☐ I just wanted to drop you a note and tell you how much I enjoyed your article on petroglyphs in the last issue of *RNJ*.

Mark Blackburn, Hilo, Hawai'i

☐ . . . an article on the rock art of Hawaii being like or unlike that of EI would be OK by me, but an article on Hawaiian rock art *per se* wouldn't.

Robert Langdon, Canberra, Australia

☐ Thank you once again for producing a very informative and enjoyable journal.

Dr. Paul Geraghty, Institute of Fijian Language and Culture

☐ In your recent article in *RNJ* (June 1995) regarding Hawaiian petroglyphs, you mentioned that "Triangle bodied anthropomorphs holding paddles aloft were notable." I have wondered if there was some special significance to this holding aloft position. I have seen a Tongan club which shows anthros holding aloft unidentified objects.

Calvin Malone, San Francisco, California

Editor's note: Aside from general Polynesian conventions which appear to permeate the artistic output, precise significance of the 'aloft' position is unknown to me. Perhaps some of our learned readers can help out? I did note that contemporary paddlers raise their paddles in that manner as a gesture of triumph.

☐ In the last issue of the *RNJ* 9 (2) 1995 you mentioned the map published by CONAF. Please note that WMF contributed to its original development but was not involved in its publication. Any requests for copies of that map should be addressed directly to CONAF, Oficina de Informaciones, Of. 206, Avda. Bulnes 259, Santiago de Chile. Fax 56-2-671-5881.

Dr. A. Elena Charola, World Monuments Fund

☐ I want you to know that I appreciate the fine work you do to edit the *Rapa Nui Journal*. I read each issue from cover to cover just as soon as I receive it. My colleague, Dr. Jerry Slattum, shares my enthusiasm for your efforts. I do not know if the *Journal* can stand any more "moai sightings" but I was amused by the latest one.

Like a group of young executive-types lined up and about to launch into a brief-case precision drill in the annual Pasadena "Doo-Da Parade", so Easter Island's "los siete monos" are depicted holding tool cases on the cover of the Summer '95 catalog of Jensen Tools Inc. (Phoenix, AZ). However, I suspect that most readers of the *Rapa Nui Journal* are not ready to renickname this *ahu*, "los siete 'yuppis'."

Dr. Ernst F. Tonsing, California Lutheran University

Ed. reply: The moai see you, the moai want you. □

REVIEWS

☐ *Isla de Pascua: Horizontes Sombrios y Luminosos (Historia Documentada)*. [Shadowy and Shiny Horizons-- Documented History]. 1995. Jesús Conte Oliveros, Ph.D. Centro de Investigación de La Imagen, Casilla 53564, Correo Central, Santiago 1, Chile. Approx. US price: \$52.

Review by William Liller, Viña del Mar, Chile

After reading the squib about Dr. Conte that appears on the inside back cover, one wonders to what good fortune we owe