

Current status of the archaeology department at the Fiji museum

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In his book 'The Fijian Way of Life, Ravuvu states that "The vanua (land) contains the actuality of one's past and the potentiality of one's future. It is an extension of the concept of the self. To most Fijians, the idea of parting with one's vanua or land is tantamount to parting with one's life" (1983: 70)

The development of the archaeology department at the Fiji Museum has been a timely event, enabling it to take on some of this responsibility through cultural resource management programs and the introduction of land information systems. This paper will focus on some of the major developments that have taken place in the Fiji Museum's Archaeology Department, as a heritage management agency, since 1994.

Since 1940 the Fiji Museum has been responsible for the administration of the Preservation of Objects of Archaeological and Palaeontological Interest Act, however without qualified staff, or the necessary systems or structural set up, this responsibility was impossible with only one Field Officer supervising research and liaising for cross Departmental projects. It was not until 1994 that the Archaeology Department came into being, with the government increasing the Museum's grant to allow for the employment of an Australian Volunteer through the Australian Volunteers Abroad Scheme to set up the Department. In 1995 we gained a Japanese Volunteer and myself as a local Graduate Trainee in Archaeology. This year we have managed to employ a trainee field officer to train under our present Field Officer. I am currently carrying out a Graduate Diploma in Archaeology at the Australian National University and will return to manage the Department in 1997. We also have another person currently carrying out a full degree in Archaeology at the Australian National University and when she completes the course in 1998 there will be two trained Fijian archaeologists in the country. In 1996 we were advised that our application for the provision of equipment to the department had been approved. \$700,000 worth of equipment will be received in the near future from

the Japanese government. The Archaeology Department now has a full compliment of staff and equipment.

Since 1994 many new systems have been set in motion and the Department is fully operational. This department is the only agency managing and researching archaeological sites in the whole of Fiji, and as a result it was necessary to develop a Corporate Plan for the department in order to visualise its aims and objectives. This was achieved in 1995.

Many links have been set up with various government agencies throughout Fiji in order to ensure the aims and objectives of the department are achieved through an integrated approach to cultural resource management. So far this has been very successful, The main agencies include the Native Land Trust Board that is responsible for administration of Native Land in Fiji, consisting of over 85 % of all land. The Department of Tourism who works to set up eco-tourism operations in Fiji, the Department of Forestry, Environment, and Town and Country Planning.

With the ever changing needs of cultural resource managers and increasing development currently taking place all over Fiji, it became a priority of the Department to review the existing legislation to fulfil the needs for protection of cultural resources. A review was undertaken and is now nearing completion. At the same time as this was being carried out, other government departments were working toward the same ends, reviewing and implementing environmental legislation which encompassed all aspects of the environment including cultural resources. The aim of the legislation review was to put cultural resource management into a Fijian context whilst enabling managers greater control.

In a recent study, known as the Melanesian Cultural Heritage Management Identification Study, one of the major points of concern defined for Fiji was the lack of co-ordination, monitoring and control the government has over international researchers coming into Fiji to carry out research. This concern was highlighted at the Museum where many researchers failed to supply the Museum with documentation about their work when they completed it. Subsequently, much of the information relating to the prehistory of Fiji is not held in Fiji and Fijian people cannot access information about their own prehistory. In an interview with the Head of the Research and Development Section of the Ministry of Education it was stated that research permits were granted if, and only if, the research benefited the nation of Fiji.

The process of issuing permits is not just a formality in Fiji, it requires that Fijian protocols are followed by the Museum in order to make the permit valid. These protocols include contacting and meeting with the Roko Tui in each Province (Government representative of the people who will then go with the Museum staff to the land owning unit and present a sevusevu to formally ask permission to carry out archaeological research on their land. When the project is approved then the District Office will be contacted to

advise them of what is happening in their District. Permits are not valid unless the land owning units have approved the research. These protocols cannot be carried out within a week's notice of the researcher arriving in the country. In the past cowboy research has taken place, people have not been following the appropriate channels and have not given duplicates of the final reports to the Museum or other appropriate authorities. This lack of information return makes it very difficult for people to co-ordinate research efforts within the country and for other researchers to put their work in a Fiji wide context.

In order to mitigate some of the problems associated with ad hoc research, the permit system at the Museum was reviewed as part of the legislation review. Now, research approvals are given after receiving an application form and an application fee from the researcher. This form is then investigated and recommendations submitted to the Fiji Museum's Board of Trustees for approval. A permit issued by the Fiji Museum can only come into effect when a Research Permit has been issued by the Department of immigration. Without this permit and approval from the land owners the Museum permit becomes invalid.

It is only by the grace of the Fiji government, and in the case of archaeologists, Fiji Museum, that people are allowed in to carry out their research. Tighter controls and greater monitoring of projects has been implemented. From the time the application to carry out archaeological work is lodged, until the finished document is received, researchers are on probation. Permit conditions that have been imposed and are monitored, include producing a six monthly progress report, requiring further time scales for completion of work, sets of slides, filling out of site recording forms, sending all documentation regarding the research and published work to the Fiji Museum and so on. Progress is monitored by the Archaeology Department, and failure to carry out any of these operations will result in loss of privilege to carry out further work in Fiji. It must be stated that being able to carry out research in Fiji is not the right of an international researcher, but a privilege. It must also be stated that Fiji is not a particular researchers' territory and people should not consider it to be that way.

Site registration management has also been revised at the Museum. Prior to 1994 site registration was very informal, with forms having inconsistent data and some records having no data, many sites from the 1980s onwards have never been registered. In 1994 the site registration system was revised. New forms were developed and a new numbering system according to the newly produced topographic maps was implemented. In 1995 the Department received funding from the New Zealand Aid agency to purchase a new computer and computer software to run a GIS. The new site recording system is in the process of being computerised with all data prior to 1994 having already been entered onto an intermediate data base. It is hoped that by the end of the year, all records will be entered and up graded onto a more sophisticated system. In conjunction with other GIS utilising departments the Archaeology Department aims to develop a visual

mapping system, with the ability to carry out general statistics and modelling options. Storage and collection of material has for many years not been managed or monitored. The archaeology storage area is currently being organised and a new system implemented. Again this will be computerised thus making identification and access of collections easier. It is hoped that incoming material will be catalogued and boxed according to the new system. In the long term this can only benefit people wishing to carry out research on the collections. Much of the collections are under utilised, they are quite extensive and could be invaluable for those wishing to work on materials from excavations previously carried out. It is hoped that these collections will be fully accessible in the future.

In relation to research, the Fiji Museum Archaeology Department has devised a research strategy for archeological investigations. It basically follows the aims of the Environment Strategy developed for Fiji in that it identifies 5 areas that are to be focused upon. Researchers will be encouraged to look to these areas for their project topics. The areas include the Sovi Basin, Koroyanitu Range, Ovalau, Taveuni and Kadavu.

In line with the survey strategy, many local projects are currently underway with field programs being organised according to demands of locals requiring assistance with their own projects. Many projects are initiated by villagers who wish the museum to come and survey sites in their area. These projects are often on going and the museum generally funds field work programs from its limited budget. In other instances such projects are funded through other agencies and are generally interdisciplinary projects with a group of people working toward the same end. As limited systematic on ground surveys have been carried out survey work is much needed on a Tikina (district) level to identify and record sites. Such projects are an increasing part of the department duties. Currently these projects have included some sites within the areas selected from the Regional Survey Program, but many are on an ad hoc basis. Through these projects it is hoped that management and development of the sites will enable site integrity to be monitored in the form of sustainable development.

Incorporated into the department's objectives is to increase awareness through community education programs. Over the past years this has been carried out in various public relations exercises through lectures to school programs. In the case of such programs, the media has played an enormous part in the dissemination of information, particularly through news articles relating to visits of international researchers. The newspapers also play a major role in information exchange.

With the ever increasing amount of field work being carried out, an ideal way to increase village awareness is through brochures in English and Fijian about what archaeology is, including information related to the area where the work is being carried out. Much interest and discussion has been generated in rural areas. Where ever possible information sheets are developed for specific areas prior to field work.

During the course of 1996 we have also gained approval to teach a one semester, first year course in archaeology at the University of the South Pacific in Suva. This course is being run by Fiji Museum and USP staff. The course is intended to create a greater awareness about archaeology and is not intended to produce archaeologists. It is hoped that the course will give those interested in archaeology a better understanding of it before they take on further studies overseas. With very few local people being involved in archaeology, the course will focus on the South Pacific Region to generate interest amongst the Pacific community.

With the developments that have taken place in the last two and a half years academic research projects have not been a major priority. The setting up of the department, community education programs and involvement in the development of landowner projects has been our priority. Now that these priorities have been in operation over the last couple of years, academic research will become an increasing part of the department's role. Recently the Head of Department has set up links with the Australian National University and the Simon Fraser University. Through these projects, ongoing programs have been established. One of the aims in the future will be to look at forming links with other archaeology departments within the region and creating regional programs with a large local contingent.

Currently much of the work carried out in the Archaeology Department relies on assistance from the community through sponsorship, overseas aid programs such as Japanese and New Zealand aid, and the Fiji government. Indeed our attendance at this conference was through sponsorship by Air Vanuatu who supplied two return air fares for the Fiji Museum delegates. Without such help many of our programs would not be possible.