Summary Report to the Vanuatu Government on Distance Education in the South-West Pacific: Cultural Heritage Training 2001-2003.

Workshop and Training Program on Uripiv and Wala Islands, Malakula 2001.

Stuart Bedford and Ralph Regenvanu 2002
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Archaeological Research and Training Program on Uripiv and Wala Islands, Malakula 2001.

Dr Stuart Bedford¹ and Ralph Regenvanu²

This summary report presents the results of the Vanuatu component of the Sasakawa funded training program titled "Distance Education in the South-West Pacific: Cultural Heritage Training 2001-2003". This program is being jointly run by Drs Stuart Bedford (New Zealand Historic Places Trust) and Glenn Summerhayes (Australian National University, Canberra), the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) and the Papua New Guinea National Museum. The program will initially be carried out over a three year period from 2001-2003.

Program Background and Objectives

The objectives of this program are to train nationals of Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea in the following areas of cultural heritage management. Participants, depending in part on their literacy and other educational skills and in part upon their previous experience, will expect to be conversant with all or at least a number of the following range of skills at the completion of the program:

1) Identification and recording of cultural and archaeological sites;
2) Archaeological assessment and excavation techniques;
3) Heightening public awareness of cultural and archaeological sites;
4) Production and distribution of reports throughout the community;
5) Development of cultural heritage management policy;
6) Development of cultural heritage database.

The 2001-2003 training program which began on Malakula continues on from the pioneering training programme instigated by The Australian National University-Vanuatu Cultural Centre Archaeology Project which began in 1996 (see Bedford et al. 1999). That training programme has been focused on the island of Efate as it was the island most affected by expanding development which often threatens a regions cultural heritage. All Vanuatu Cultural Centre Fieldworkers from Efate along with some from other islands have participated in that training programme. A much greater understanding of what constitutes an archaeological site along with experience of a variety of excavation and survey techniques has also been achieved.

The 2001-2003 Cultural Heritage Training Programme focuses on the northern islands of Vanuatu which are severely under-resourced in terms of trained personnel and previous educational programmes. The increasing threat from mining activities and other development on these islands makes the need for training and survey

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particularly urgent as little of the cultural heritage of these islands has been recorded.

The training programme is also designed to further develop and enhance the already established structure of site survey and recording that is employed by the Vanuatu Cultural and Historic Sites Survey (VCHSS). Vanuatu Cultural Centre fieldworkers from the outer islands who have not previously participated in earlier training on Efate have been particularly encouraged to join the new programme.

At the completion of the programme the respective countries will have a core of trained personnel who will be fully conversant with all facets of cultural heritage management and be confident to run similar programmes independently in the future. Greater awareness of cultural heritage in general will be generated throughout local communities along with government institutions. This will in turn encourage its preservation.

**Fieldwork Timeline for 2001**

**18th July 2001, Port Vila.** Bedford flew from Auckland to Port Vila and began initial preparation for Malekula fieldwork. Bedford met with the Director of the VCC Ralph Regenvanu and VCHSS staff to finalise the details of the training workshop that was to be held in Malekula. This meeting was the conclusion of regular contact, planning and discussions which dated back to January 2000 when the initial application for funding was made to the Sasakawa Foundation. The final numbers of VCC Fieldworkers that were to attend the workshop, and from which islands, was decided. Press releases were also planned at this stage.

**19th-22nd July 2001.** Bedford flew from Port Vila to Malekula to discuss the project with Chiefs and communities from different areas in the North East. Met by Numa Fred the Director of the Malekula Cultural Centre. Visited Senal Village on mainland Malekula and the adjacent Uriipiv Island (19th). Recently excavated Telecom trenches on the island revealed disturbed archaeological deposits.

Visited Rano Island (20th) and completed an initial reconnaissance along with discussions with Chiefs and the local community. Later in the day a similar visit was undertaken on Norsup Island. The night was spent on Uriipiv Island where a large community gathering was being hosted by the Central Malekula MP John Morrison Willy. This provided a further opportunity to discuss the project with the wider community. MP John Morrison Willy and the Chiefs of Uriipiv Island expressed their support for the project.

A more detailed survey of both Uriipiv and adjacent Uri Island was undertaken on the 21st of July. All of the communities visited expressed much enthusiasm for this type of work to be carried out within their area. Returned to Port Vila on the 22nd.

**23rd-29th July 2001.** Final logistics of the fieldwork and workshop were organised. Survey and excavation equipment along with recording gear were prepared and some materials were packed to be shipped to Malekula. A radio interview outlining the objectives of the Sasakawa funded Cultural Heritage Training Programme was
prepared with Abong Thomson of the VCC. It was subsequently broadcast on National Radio on the 28th of July.

**31st July 2001.** Flight to Lakatoro with Vanuatu Cultural and Historic Sites Survey (VCHSS) staff (Willy Damelip, Richard Shing and Andrew Hoffman). Met at the airport by Numa Fred and other Malekula fieldworkers, including Jimmy Sananbath (NW Malekula), Dick Dickinson (Maskelyne Islands) and Dani Fraser (Uripiv Island). Bought supplies and hired several small boats for transport to Uripiv Island. Other fieldworkers from other islands in Vanuatu, principally from the north arrived over the next few days. These included Fred Leo (Pentecost), Takau Mele (Senior Chief of Malo, Aore and Tutuba), Philip Talebu (Ambrym), Zelotis Werere (Banks Islands [Gaua]) and Franklin Woleg (Banks Islands [Mota Lava]). The manager of the VCHSS Martha Yamsiu also joined the group on Uripiv Island.

**31st July - 19th August 2001.** This whole period was spent principally on Uripiv Island where both surveys and archaeological investigations were undertaken. The VCC fieldworkers experienced all aspects of the above investigations. The surveys and mapping focused on the nasaras on the island of which there are seven. Mapping of the structures and the recording of associated oral traditions were carried out under the instruction of Willy Damelip and Andrew Hoffman. Archaeological excavation on the island, concentrated mainly at Velavi village, revealed deep cultural deposits dating back to the initial settlement of the island some 3000 years ago. This presented both the participants of the workshop and the wider community with a valuable and tangible example of the spectacular nature of some of the archaeological deposits of which previously they had been largely unaware.

![Figure 1. Members of the survey team, Uripiv Island.](image-url)
20th-28th August 2001. The workshop moved further up the coast to Wala Island for this period of time where we were fed and housed at Serser village. This shift was designed to further highlight the Cultural Heritage Programme amongst as many communities as possible and also give the VCHSS staff and VCC fieldworkers the opportunity to utilise the skills learnt on Uripiv Island, in a different area. Wala Island is also an area which is experiencing increasing numbers of tourists and was therefore seen as an ideal location to discuss heritage issues with the local community.

29th-31st August 2001. The last days of the workshop on Malekula were spent in the north-west of the island, near the village of Tenmiel. The group had the opportunity to attend another con-currently run workshop on the sustainable management of cultural resources, specifically focusing on the pressures of tourism on cultural heritage. A number of caves with some of the most spectacular rock art in the Pacific were the specific subject of the workshop. Issues were discussed and the VCC fieldworkers also had the opportunity to visit the caves.

31st August 2001. All staff and trainers returned to Port Vila. Other fieldworkers returned to their home islands. Several days were spent in discussions with the Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre Ralph Regenvanu relaying the results of the fieldwork programme, the ongoing commitments in relation to the Cultural Heritage Training Programme, and planning for 2002.


Details of the Workshop

Uripiv Island

There were two main aspects to the training on Uripiv Island. One was focused on archaeological investigation and survey in an attempt to build up a picture of the long history of the island. The other was surveying the island for ceremonial structures and old villages which were then recorded in detail. Traditional stories relating to these structures or sites were also recorded. Many of the recorded kastom stories relating to the various nasara are stored in the tabu room of the Cultural Centre and can be accessed only through permission from the kastom owners.

Uripiv has a total of seven nasara spread across the island. During the time of the workshop four of these were recorded in some detail; they included Emil Port Nambe, Emil Potun, Emil Taun and Emil Gnumwamb. A major part of the mapping exercise initially involved the clearing of bush which in a number of cases had begun to completely cover the sites. Fully completed maps of the various nasara were made after the workshop and have been sent back to the relevant families on Uripiv Island.

Archaeological investigations were concentrated on the sheltered part of the island which faces the mainland. The sheltered beach makes an ideal canoe landing place in almost all weather and tides. A total of 13 one by one metre testpits were excavated across a grid through the current Velavi village (Jimis). This area is also the area where the first mission station was located in the 1890s. Excavations were
concentrated about fifty metres from the current seashore and about 6-7m above the current high tide mark. As it turned out it was an ideal place to begin excavations. In the first testpit at a depth of only 60-70cms pottery with very distinctive decorations was recovered. Pottery with these decorations, made with a fine-toothed stamp, is known as Lapita, after a village in New Caledonia where a very large site was recorded in the 1950s. This pottery is associated with the first human settlers in Vanuatu and dates to around 3000 years ago or 1000 years before Jesus Christ!

Lapita pottery was located in five of the thirteen testpits (see Figures 3 and 4) which suggests the original Lapita settlement was relatively small, around 1000 sq metres or less (although this has yet to be confirmed). It very soon expanded but the distinctive Lapita pottery was abandoned to be replaced by plain cooking pots. Pieces of the later plain cooking pots were found in all of the testpits. The excavations have also revealed that the first settlers brought with them pigs and chickens. It appears that these domesticates were regularly consumed along with a wide range of locally available resources including shellfish, fish, turtle and birds. Rats also came with the first settlers. Other items of material culture included a number of shell rings fashioned from different shell species including Tridacna (clam shell or natalae), Trochus (Troka) and Conus. A small piece of volcanic glass found on the surface next to the Telecom trench has been sourced to Gaua Island in the far north, a clear demonstration of connections with the north.

All of the testpits were excavated to the sterile ground level (ie. to the level which dated to before human arrival) which in most cases was down to the old beach surface. When people arrived 3000 years ago this area of the island (which is now some 50 metres from the sea and 6-7 metres higher) along with the first villages would have been much closer to the sea. Since that time the island has been slowly but steadily rising out of the sea due to tectonic activity.
Many of the testpits were very deep (one was up to 2.5 metres) and contained remains of past human occupation all the way through the stratigraphy. This ranged from cooking fires, household debris and in two of the testpits burials were located. These were in between earlier and later evidence of settlements. The archaeological excavations on Uripiv Island have revealed the rich and long history that has survived beneath the ground surface of this relatively small island. The culturally rich nature of the structures seen across the island, in the form of the seven nasara are equally impressive.

The Lapita pottery comprised a number of vessel forms and designs. Many of the designs appeared to be very roughly finished suggesting that this site dates to the
latter period of the Lapita period in Vanuatu, probably around 2700 years ago. Generally Lapita pottery on Malo which dates to around 2900 years ago has much finer decoration and a wider variety of vessel forms suggesting it is a little bit earlier. Malo may have acted as some sort of initial arrival point from where people explored and settled other islands in Vanuatu. It is only through further research that this suggestion can be tested.

![Figure 4. Lapita sherds from Uripiv and Wala Islands](image)

**Wala Island**

A total of 8 Vanuatu Cultural Centre Fieldworkers participated in the workshop on Uripiv Island and this increased to 10 on Wala Island where we were joined by Fidel
Yoringmal and George Lorens (both of Wala Island). Dr Glenn Summerhayes also arrived from Australia at this time to help further with the training programme. As on Uripiv Island a great many members of the local communities from Wala were employed on the project. A series of 1 by 1 metre test pits (9) were again excavated across a grid running through Serser Village, the site of a former mission station, located on the sheltered western side of the island looking toward the mainland. As on Uripiv Island the archaeological excavations revealed deep cultural deposits, including deposits associated with the islands earliest inhabitants. Lapita pottery was found in one of the testpits that was excavated into a terrace at the back of the village. Some of the testpits reached depths of up to 2m of cultural deposit before the sterile former beach or uplifted coral was encountered. In some of the testpits large pieces of later style pottery vessels were recovered. Numerous ovenstones and firescoop features were recorded at different levels throughout the depth of the testpits. Turtle bone was very frequent in the lower levels of the testpits.

People from Wala expressed surprise at the depth of the archaeological deposits and their explanation and were very appreciative that the Programme had enhanced community knowledge, awareness and encouraged local participation.

These investigations confirm that both Uripiv and Wala Islands along with the rest of Malakula was settled some 3000 years ago when populations moved out of the Bismarck Archipelago to the east, through the Solomon Islands, onto the Reef Santa Cruz, Banks and then to Santo/Malo and Malakula. The archaeological record also indicates that people related to the same cultural group (Lapita peoples) moved on to New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. Other islands in Vanuatu where Lapita pottery has been found previously include Malo, Aore, Tutuba, Malakula (Malua Bay), Efate and Erromango.

One of the more important features of the sites in the islands in the north east of Malakula is that they are well preserved, particularly those on Uripiv Island where they are buried in some cases by a volcanic ash (probably from Ambrym where an enormous eruption occurred around 2000 years ago) and sand deposited by cyclones. Further details and a discussion of how the results from Malakula fit into the wider Vanuatu and Pacific picture can be found in a number of more recent articles (Bedford 2000; Bedford, Spriggs, Wilson and Regenvanu [1998]; Bedford, Spriggs and Regenvanu [1999]).

**Discussion**

The workshop and training programme carried out in Malekula in 2001 was very successful on a number of fronts. These included such aspects as:

**Staff training**

The principal objective of the Programme is the training of ni-Vanuatu in a wide range of skills in relation to cultural heritage management. All VCHSS staff and VCC fieldworkers involved in the training program on Malekula are now fully conversant with a wide range of skills including the identification and recording of cultural, historic and archaeological sites, archaeological assessment, excavation and
recording techniques, and the need and methodology involved in heightening public awareness of cultural and archaeological sites.

After participating in the project the VCC fieldworkers, many of whom had no previous awareness, are now familiar with what constitutes an archaeological site and the processes involved in archaeological work which they can then explain to their home communities. This will further facilitate heightened local awareness and understanding of archaeology and the implementation of cultural heritage protection. The VCC field workers greatly increased their knowledge and skills.

The VCHSS staff, some of whom had not previously worked outside of Efate, also greatly enhanced their skills and as the training advanced they took on an increasingly supervisory role. Moving into new areas provided them with the opportunity to utilise and test newly learnt skills. Being intimately involved in such a project also made staff more aware of the different aspects of managing a large project, including such factors as general project management and planning, time scheduling, and resource management. The Training Program has further developed and enhanced the already established structure of site survey and recording that is employed by the VCHSS. The Project was also very fortunate to have Yoko Nojima, a Japanese PhD (Hawaii) join us on Uripiv Island and on Wala Island. She was able to contribute to the training with her experience relating to cooking methods through time throughout the Pacific and was able to identify different methods in the archaeological record.

**Wider Community Awareness**

Heightened community awareness is also a major objective of the Project. Wider community interest was very high particularly of course on those islands on which we worked. But news travelled fast and we were repeatedly visited by inquisitive locals.
from further afield. We were also able to hire a generator and video equipment on Wala Island to show a locally produced film "Footprint blong Bubu" (Pathways of the Ancestors) to the local community and school groups. Its content had much in relation to the archaeological material that was being uncovered on the islands.

At all times local communities gave their full support and encouragement. The deeply stratified archaeological remains were a revelation and the communities were grateful for enhancing their awareness and that they were fully involved in the Programme. All schools in the area were encouraged to visit the sites where we worked. Some of the schools that toured included Uripiv Primary School, Lakatoro Junior Secondary School, Norsup Junior Secondary School, Walarano Primary School and Aulua Secondary School. Again the response from all schools was extremely positive. They explained that they did not have ready access to information on the archaeological history of Vanuatu or the Pacific and would very much appreciate any printed material. A further, and very crucial component of heightening awareness amongst the wider Vanuatu community were the series of national radio broadcasts on the project and press releases.

Figure 6. Participants on Uripiv Island. L to R at rear: Elder Klastin Regenvanu, Tasonmal Veremaito, Andrew Hoffman (VCHSS), Willy Damelip (VCHSS), John Regenvanu, Stuart Bedford, Ysee Bedford, Elder Ken Vermaio, Nesak Naika, Takau Mele, Numa Fred (MCC), Richard Shing (VCHSS); Centre: Philip Talebu (VCC), Franklin Woleg (VCC), Dennis Ken, Jimmy Sananbath (VCC), Fred Leo (VCC); Front: Dani Fraser (VCC), Glen Banga, Zealotis Werere (VCC), Richon Joshen, Dickinson Dick (VCC) and Herenis Narshel.
**Ongoing work and results**

A final detailed radio interview summarising the results of this year's project and the plans for 2002 was prepared and then broadcast in mid-September. The interview included a summary of the project, along with the views of all participants and some of the community leaders involved. All were very positive and in the case of all of the VCC fieldworkers from other islands there was a hope expressed that one day a similar program could be run on each of their own respective islands. Newspaper articles have also appeared discussing the results of the project.

The first component of a proposed booklet is also now progressing with a cartoon format, as per an earlier VCHSS publication, having been decided on. Illustrations are now being prepared, incidentally by one of the VCC Fieldworkers from Wala Island, Fidel Yorigmal. This report is a further addition to the ongoing efforts in relation to the dissemination of information. Details of the programme will also be posted on the Vanuatu Cultural Centre’s web page http://artalpha.anu.edu.au/web/arc/vks/vks.htm.

**2002 and Beyond**

The following years work plan in Vanuatu has already been discussed and costed by Bedford, Summerhayes and Regenvanu. Discussions and explanations of the Programs objectives were relayed to various chiefs and landowners in other areas of Malakula during the 2001 field. All were supportive of the 2002 field season being held within their areas. The fieldwork component of the training programme for 2002 is planned for August and September. Funding has once again been secured from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation of Japan.

Further areas to explore in 2002 are the high school curriculum and how cultural heritage, including archaeology can be more emphasised. The production of printed material (ie booklets) which can be widely distributed appears to be the most easily achievable goal for this aspect of the project to 2003.

**Acknowledgments**

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The Project's smooth running would not have been possible without the full support of all staff at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, and particularly so the staff of the VCHSS (Martha Yamsiu, William Damelip and Richard Shing) and the enthusiastic fieldworkers from the various islands (Dani Frazor, Fred Leo, Dickerson Dick, Jif Takau Mele, Philip Tabelu, Jimmy Sananbath, Zelotis Werere, Franklin Woleg, Fidel Yorigmal, George Lorens) who were attentive for the full period of the workshop. Abong Thomson of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre prepared the radio broadcasts. The staff of VanAir at Norsup, Malakula were very helpful in coordinating flights and
shifting large amounts of gear. On Malakula itself Fred Numa, Director of the Malakula Cultural Centre, guided us through some five weeks of community discussions and negotiations. Having him as the liaison person greatly lessened any suspicion that the project might have initially attracted. All members of the local communities contributed to the success of the Project. In particular the Project wishes to thank the Chiefs on Uripiv Island, including John Young Regenvanu, Chief Oded Samson, Elder Ken; Uri Island, MP John Morrison Willy and Chief Don; Wala Island, Chief Don Malep, Chief Albert Peter and John Kalorib.

Two other members of the training team who were essential to the running of the Project on Malakula were Andrew Hoffman, an Australian volunteer at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and Yoko Nojima, a Japanese PhD student (Hawaii).

Also a special thank you goes to all landowners and local members of the fieldwork crews for their co-operation, assistance and friendship. This is far from a comprehensive list but included on Uripiv Island: Karangon Kalsin, Lotty Woloi, John Maggi Moken, Lesley Say Willie, Richon Joshen, Glen Banga, Herenis Marshel, Tasonmal Jeioch, Wolika Philip, Bill Maki, Willikan Woloi; Silvester Nioken, Carlplelo Banga, Leo James, Keith Maki, Abel Malisa, Kalkoa Kagsei, Robinson Shem, Eso Niarshel, Nesak Naika, Dennis Ken, Elda Klastin Regenvanu, Elda Ken Vermaito, Malisa Abel, Leo Marshal, Graham Willie, Delwin Bob, Akau Ken, Smith Naika and Captain Paul. On Wala Island participants included John Batis, Charlie Malep, Wesly Kensei, Jackson Marenato, Kalwensi, Attison, Peter Barnato, Kalno Renmal and Holin Ruru.

References

