

## *First On the Scene*

Critics of TIGHAR's work have held that Earhart and Noonan could not have landed at Nikumaroro because nobody who came along later found them. It is a visit by British colonial authorities in October 1937 that has been most loudly touted as proof that TIGHAR is wrong. According to a "History of Gardner (Nikumaroro) Island" by Osborne Publisher, the visit was made by "Professor Henry [sic] E. Maude and a team of British surveyors" who "spent 3 days on Gardner, conducted a full investigation of island and lagoon"; "No evidence of Amelia/Fred was found."

According to the official report of the trip, the British delegation that visited Gardner on October 13 – 15, 1937 was made up of Lands Commissioner Harry Maude, Cadet

Officer Eric Bevington, and 19 Gilbertese islanders. The purpose of the visit was to evaluate the island for future colonization. To that end Bevington, on the first day, took a walk around the atoll with some of the Gilbertese. The second and third days were mostly spent digging wells at the island's west end in an attempt to find potable water.

Harry Maude is skeptical that Earhart and Noonan ended up at Gardner; but it was Eric Bevington who had the best look at the island in 1937, so we were delighted when an article about the Earhart Project, which appeared in *Pacific Islands Monthly* magazine, brought the news that a diary which he kept of his visit to Gardner Island mentions "signs of previous habitation" seen on the island. The magazine's Washington Bureau chief, David North, was able to get us a current address and phone number for Eric Bevington, and we interviewed Mr. Bevington at his home in England on January 22 & 23, 1992.

Bevington cheerfully allowed us to copy his photographs and diary. We were particularly interested to learn anything he might remember about the "signs of previous habitation" he saw. As best he could recall "it wasn't much ... like someone had bivouaced for the night" but he was quite certain of where he had been on the island. With no knowledge of what we had found on Nikumaroro or where, he marked the spot on the map where we recovered the remains of the shoe.

Photo courtesy Eric R. Bevington



**Eric R.  
Bevington**

**1992**

**1937**



TIGHAR photo by P. Thrasher

Eric Bevington's diary completes the sequence:

- July 9, 1937      Search planes see "signs of recent habitation."
- October 14, 1937   Eric Bevington sees "signs of previous habitation."
- December, 1938    While clearing underbrush, the first Gilbertese laborers find "the skeleton of a woman ... with size nine American shoes."
- September, 1944   Coast Guardsmen find an unexplained "water collection device."

Traces of Earhart and Noonan were seen by virtually every group that came to the island in the seven years after the disappearance. 

