

August 24 through September 29, 1998

FOR TIGHAR'S FOURTH major expedition to Nikumaroro we've adopted for our motto the title of Amelia's famous poem. We've also decided to use four slash marks (from a TIGHAR's claws?) rather than the Roman numeral IV as a mark of our determination to find the conclusive evidence it will take to end the Earhart mystery.

The wealth of new information that came out of Niku III and its aftermath has enabled us to formulate new hypotheses to test—hypotheses based to a far higher degree upon hard facts than has ever before been possible. Continuing research and analysis is sure to provide still more facts with which to further refine our theories about what happened and where to look.

We really want to get out to Canton Island as soon as possible to investigate the engine story (see "The Canton Engine," p. 16). While we're in the neighborhood we want to fly over Nikumaroro and get detailed aerial photos, including infrared, to see if we can learn more about whatever may be lurking in the bush along the Nutiran shore (see "Corroboration," p. 12).

For the Niku III Expedition we have once more engaged the services of the good ship *Nai'a*. She more than proved her worth bringing us safely through the storms of Niku III and the dangers we've faced together have built a relationship of mutual trust and camaraderie between the TIGHAR team and *Nai'a*'s officers and crew. We have her from August 24



to September 29 so, allowing five days transit time on each end, that gives us 26 days on the island. That's twice the time we had on Niku III. The TIGHAR team for Niku III will be the survivors of Niku III (see "The Team," p. 6) plus a few additions. Niku III, for all of its frustrations, provided a perfect testing ground for many new technologies and we learned many valuable lessons. To list just a few:


- Don't let anyone talk you into going in cyclone season (duh).
- Don't count on assembling the ultra-light airplane aboard the ship. Break it down into smaller components, pack it in secure containers, carry it ashore, and assemble it on the island.
- Underwater visibility in the lagoon is minimal but the sharks are not a problem.
- Pulse-laser technology works well for controlling and mapping archaeological sites.

At this time, it appears that an intensive eyeball and hand-held metal detector search of the Nutiran beachfront and the lagoon shore where Mr. Songivalu told of seeing airplane debris will be a major focus of Niku III. Considerable brush clearing will be necessary to do a thorough job. Searching the reef-flat where Ms. Taiki saw part of a wing should be relatively easy at low tide, but the chances of wreckage surviving in such a dynamic environment seem small. The lagoon floor just inside Tatiman Passage seems a logical place to look for wreckage that may have been washed through from seaward and we developed good techniques for this type of operation on Niku III. An underwater search of the reef edge and crevasses along the breaker line is more dangerous, but can be done safely with proper precautions.



Nai'a under sail. TIGHAR
photo by P. Thrasher.

THE NEW INFORMATION WE HAVE, AND ARE STILL getting, about the site in Aukaraima district (see “The Castaways of Gardner Island,” p. 32) will require careful review to determine the best course of action there. It’s quite apparent that the easy stuff was found by Gallagher in 1940 and the not-so-easy stuff was found by us in 1991 and 1997. Whatever remains is the not-at-all-easy stuff, but it may be the best stuff (i.e. an unmarked grave). We’ll probably want to expand the search area and deploy a number of different techniques and technologies to be sure we find what is there.

Funding an expedition of this magnitude is always a challenge but we’ve done it before and we’ll do it again. Public awareness of our work is at an all-time high as a result of two television documentaries about the Niku III expedition (ABC *Turning Point: What Happened To Amelia Earhart* which aired June 12, 1997 on the ABC network, and *Discovery Sunday: The Search For Amelia Earhart* which aired August 24, 1997 on the Discovery Channel). More important, the strength of our case is now such that we’re asking prospective sponsors to take a logical step, rather than a leap of faith. With the continued support of the TIGHAR membership, we’re confident that the necessary funding will be found. 

*Lagoon shore, Aukaraima District. TIGHAR
photo by P. Thrasher.*



Courage

*Courage is the price that life exacts for
granting peace.*

*The soul that knows it not, know no release
From little things.*

*Knows not the livid loneliness of fear,
Nor mountain heights where bitter joy
can bear*

The sound of wings.

*How can life grant us boon of living,
compensate*

*For dull gray ugliness and pregnant hate
Unless we dare*

*The soul's dominion? Each time we make
a choice, we pay*

*With courage to behold the restless day,
And count it fair.*

-Amelia Earhart, 1927

As the Earhart Project begins its tenth year we salute the courage that you, the members of TIGHAR, have shown in making possible the discoveries set out in this issue of *TIGHAR Tracks*. In striving to unravel the truth about the fate of the remarkable woman who wrote this poem, we have all come to understand a little of what she was trying to say. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to serve on the expeditions have certainly known, at times, “the livid loneliness of fear” but everyone who has supported this work has known “bitter joy” and has heard “the sound of wings.” Writing a check is an act of courage just as surely as is shooting the channel at Niku in a ten-foot northwesterly swell, and those of us whose job it is to sometimes do the latter, thank all of you who consistently find the courage to do the former. Amelia said it best. “Each time we make a choice, we pay with courage to behold the restless day, and count it fair.”