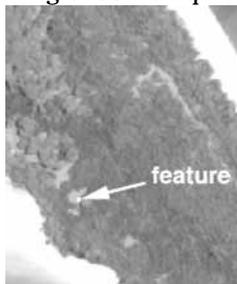


And a New Mystery...



Perhaps the strangest discovery of the Niku III expedition was a figure near, but not at, the Seven Site. It is apparently man-made, laid out on the ground in brilliantly white pieces of coral in one corner of a bare patch of dark gray coral rubble. The white coral pieces that make up the figure are, in most cases, only one piece deep and no portion of an underlying gray piece is white (so it does not appear to have been made by the spilling of some liquid bleaching agent). Other identical white coral pieces occur randomly throughout the area but are widely scattered. White coral pieces of similar size but exhibiting a much smoother and eroded appearance may be found in abundance on the ocean beach about 150 meters away. Our impression is that someone at some time and for some unknown reason, gathered up several hundred pieces of white coral from the immediate area and laid them out in this design on a low mound of gray coral that appears to be the backfill of a shallow



depression. There are other similar depressions in the area but we don't know their age or their origin. Test holes dug in the area reveal no underlying layer of white coral that could have been dredged up by a burrowing crab. We have never seen anything remotely resembling this feature on any part of the island.

The figure's shape can be variously interpreted. Some describe it as a "6" or it could be a drawing of a fat-headed snake, but it seems to most resemble a printed capital letter G. There are no snakes in the Central Pacific and the language of the people who lived on the island has no words with an initial letter G (Gallagher was "Karakā" or "Kela").



At only about a meter in height it seems awfully small and ambiguous to be intended as a signal to aircraft, and it's too far back in the bush to be seen from the shore or indeed by anyone who doesn't happen into the clearing. A metal detector sweep found a few flakes of rusted metal in the clearing about three meters from the feature but no other sign of human activity.

Perhaps it's only a random drawing by a bored child or maybe it has a more profound significance. As if we didn't have enough mysteries to contend with.....