

October 11, 2007

Dear Ian,

I have been remiss in writing you since we returned from Nikumaroro. We found the island very much still there, though steadily wasting away on its southwestern side. I enclose a little report I've prepared for colleagues who ask about the project.

I took your letter of 30 April with me to the island, and it was thought-provoking indeed to compare your 1941 observations with ours 66 years later. The Sir Harry Luke Avenue could still be found, but only with a good deal of chopping. The government station had been overgrown considerably even compared with its 2001 condition, and storms had decapitated quite a lot of the coconut trees, dropping one of them on the Rest House cookhouse - which until this event had stood fairly intact. The carpenter's house, which was still partly standing in 1989 when we first visited, had blown down in 1990. We were able to locate and excavate its original site, but found that it was perhaps ten meters closer to the shore than it had been in '89. Or rather, the shore was now ten meters closer to the site. The whole place really had quite a melancholy aspect, but I suppose there's something to be said for the triumph of nature over the hand of man. We paid our respects to Gerald Gallagher's one-time resting place, despite his no longer being there.

Our work went quite well, though as usual we did not return with any kind of unequivocal proof of the fate of the elusive Earhart. And the island was as beautiful as ever, though the reef is taking a long time to recover from its bleaching episode a few years back. The birds were fledging, the lobsters were molting, and the turtles were laying eggs along the shores.

My major responsibility to the project at this point is the analysis of results from the "Seven Site," and I am finding the place even more puzzling than it was before. It's evident that a number of things have happened on the site over the years. Someone has camped there, cooking bird, fish, and turtle on at least five separate campfires. The US Coast Guardsmen from the nearby Loran station in 1944-46 fired off a lot of M-1 rounds, and a couple of .45 calibers; they or someone else fired a .22 cal. gun there as well (Gallagher had a .22). Someone scattered corrugated iron and other iron objects (now reduced to rust) over the site, and someone dug a number of evenly spaced holes that we assume were for coconut planting. And someone cleared the immediate site of big trees in about 1940-41 (as indicated in a 1942 airphoto). Which leads me to a question for you. We know that shortly before Gallagher relocated to Nikumaroro in August of 1940, he inquired of Jack Kimo Petro, who was then on the island, about the availability of *kanawa* trees, which he wanted cut for transport to the sawmill on Beru. We know from one of Gallagher's telegrams to Henry Vaskess that at least one *kanawa* was cut down near the site where the bones were found. In a 1941 airphoto, we see odd linear markings on the reef flat just offshore of the "Seven Site." We're wondering if these marks might represent dragging cut logs across the reef to a ship waiting offshore. What we're imagining - though Gallagher reported nothing of the kind - is that a number of *kanawa* might have been cut on the site, carried out to the shore, and then winched out over the reef flat to a ship like *Nimanoa*, lying off the reef. So my question for you is - was this kind of thing ever done, to your knowledge? It would involve lying to off the windward side of the island, which strikes me as something I'd rather not do if I were in command of a ship, but it doesn't seem inherently infeasible. Does this make any sense, in your experience?

We have no plans at the moment for another trip to Nikumaroro, but are hoping to spend more time with the WPHC archives in New Zealand, and to follow your suggestion to check in Honiara for records that might have wound up there. I've just learned of an historian on the faculty of the University of the South Pacific who may be interested in documenting the history of the WPHC, something I've been hoping that someone would undertake.

I hope this finds you well and enjoying life. Ric Gillespie and some of my other TIGHAR colleagues are in Wales at the moment, helping local archaeological authorities and the RAF decide what to do with a P-38 that has emerged from a beach in quite remarkably good condition. It's being kept quiet at the moment to avoid attracting "relic" hunters, but news will doubtless leak out in the not too distant future.

Best wishes, as always,

P.S. - As I think you know, I'm fascinated by what it must have been like to live through the momentous years 1940-41. I recently stumbled on a copy of Michael Dobbs' *Churchill's Hour* - one of his series of novels about Churchill's prosecution of the war - found it fascinating and evocative, and just received in the mail a copy of *Never Surrender*, the novel covering the three weeks ending with Dunkirk. Do you know the series, and if so, do you find its portrayal of the times reasonably accurate?