

BREAKING NEWS

January 28, 2003

TIGHAR has learned that, last year, a marine biologist who was paying a brief visit to Nikumaroro came across an object that might be an identifiable component of a Lockheed Electra.

He did not photograph or recover the object because he was familiar with TIGHAR's work and assumed that we had already seen it, but we have since interviewed him extensively and have learned as much as he could tell us about what he saw and where he saw it.

Normally, we would be eager to share everything we've been able learn about this interesting new lead, but experience has shown that Nikumaroro is not as remote a place as it may appear to be. In 2001 we published detailed information about an anomaly we noticed in a satellite photo of the island. We considered it to be an interesting possibility worthy of further investigation, like many others we have explored on Niku. The media, however, seized upon the story and blew it way out of proportion. Within weeks we were contacted by the captain of an ocean-going salvage tug who had happened to be in the region and had diverted to Niku to check out the location shown on the TIGHAR website. Finding nothing underwater, he removed a piece of shipwreck debris from the reef. Had the anomaly in the satellite photo turned out to be aircraft wreckage (instead of an unusual patch of red algae, as we eventually determined) the damage done by the would-be salvager could have been devastating.

Consequently, in order to protect this newly reported artifact until we can get there to check it out, we are not disclosing any more about it than has been described above. We trust that everyone will understand that our intention is not to be secretive or to raise speculation that a "smoking gun" has been discovered. We want to be very clear that we consider this to be nothing more, and nothing less, than the latest in a long series of possible clues to be followed up on. Some of those clues have led to significant discoveries but most, like the satellite photo anomaly, have been disappointments. That's just the way the real world of scientific inquiry is.



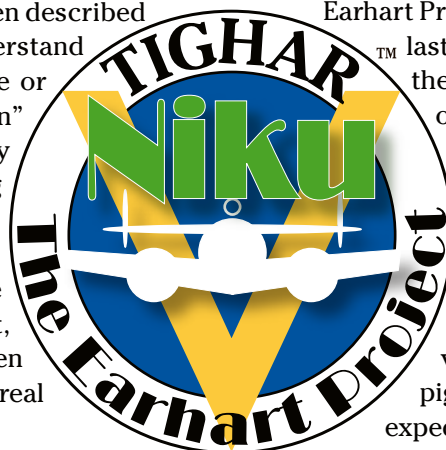
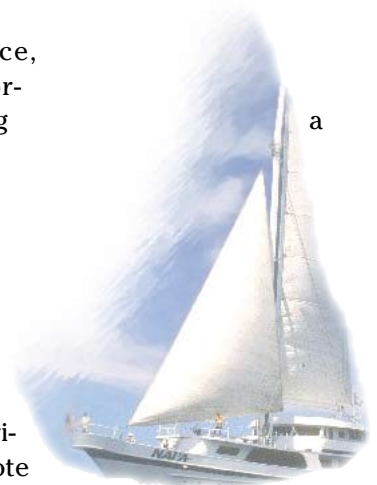
But, for all the caveats, hope springs eternal and we are, naturally, very eager to get back to the island to inspect the object and, if it looks like it might indeed be an Electra component, recover it for analysis. An airplane part found at Nikumaroro that could be conclusively linked to a Lockheed Electra might give a significant boost to fundraising for the Niku V expedition now planned for the summer of 2004.

Niku Vp in 2003

By fortunate coincidence, *Nai'a* Cruises in Fiji is exploring the possibility of making first-ever tourist scuba-diving cruise to the Phoenix Islands in June of this year. Since 1997, *Nai'a* has supported five scientific expeditions to the Phoenix Group, three of them under charter to TIGHAR, and is now hoping to find enough customers who want to experience the wonders of this remote region to justify a commercial cruise to be known as the "2003 Phoenix Rising" expedition. For TIGHAR, it's a perfect opportunity to send a small team to Nikumaroro for a few days to investigate our exciting new lead.

In fact, even before we learned of this intriguing possibility we were looking for a way to get some much-needed preliminary work done on Niku in preparation for Niku V. Our Earhart Project Advisory Council (EPAC) conference last summer identified an "overwash" area on the island's west end that will be a major focus of 2004 search. We need to get a handle on what the vegetation is like in there so that we know what we'll be up against. We also need to install a tide measuring device to collect data that will enable us to fine-tune our tidal "hindcasting" to 1937.

The *Nai'a* "Phoenix Rising" trip provides a perfect opportunity for us to piggy-back our "Niku Vp" (p for preliminary) expedition. Two members of the 2001 Niku III



expedition team have volunteered to go at their own expense. Three other members of the team can put up part, but not all, of the cost of their participation. The "Paradise Now" raffle of a week at a luxury Virgin Islands villa is aimed at making it possible to send these highly-qualified TIGHARs to the island this year and to also send a TIGHAR researcher to Fiji for six weeks to continue the search for the all-important bones taken there from Nikumaroro in 1941.

You Can Join The Expedition

To make sure that *Nai'a* has enough customers to make the trip economically viable, we're also inviting and encouraging TIGHAR members to sign aboard for the *Nai'a* 2003 Phoenix Rising cruise. The price tag per person is \$9,300 plus airfare (about \$1,200 from Los Angeles), and the five day voyage each way to the Phoenix Group is not for landlubbers, but for those with the desire, the constitution, and the means to participate – and especially for scuba divers – it's a chance-of-a-lifetime opportunity to see and experience one of the most beautiful, wild, and untouched regions left on the planet. It's also probably the only chance anyone will ever get to visit Niku as part of a TIGHAR expedition without having to endure the Purgatory of hacking underbrush for weeks on end. As an added incentive, because you'll be an official member of the TIGHAR expedition, at least a portion of the expense of your participation may be tax deductible. We'll be happy to provide details for your tax preparer.



Painless Philanthropy

We very much want to put a TIGHAR team on the island this June but to do that we need your support. Fortunately, expedition team member Andrew Mckenna (TIGHAR #1045EC) has made it possible for us to offer an enticement worthy of our need by donating a week at his luxury villa Harbor Lights in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands as the prize in our Paradise Now raffle. Other members of the Earhart Project Advisory Council have contributed the funds to let us make round-trip airfare for two from anywhere in the continental U.S. part of the package. At \$25 per chance or five chances for \$100 this is about as painless as philanthropy gets. Please see the enclosed sheet for details and get your chances for **ParadiseNow.**

Priorities

In an investigation like The Earhart Project there is always tension between pushing the research forward and reporting on the research that has been done. Our new lead and the prospect of an expedition to Nikumaroro this year has, necessarily, delayed the completion of the magazine-sized Special Report issue of *TIGHAR Tracks*. Having now organized and launched the Paradise Now campaign we can get back to work on that very important publication, which we hope to be able to send out before the end of February. Once that is done we'll turn our attention to producing the long-awaited Niku III documentary film. Thanks for your patience and understanding.