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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2009

## Mokumanamana (Necker) Island: Isle of mystery

*Archaeologists are intrigued by the ancient sites on a remote northwest Hawaiian island*

By Helen Altton

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Sep 18, 2009



After living 18 days on a remote island in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, Kekuewa Kikiloi is reveling in the "incredible" experience and still nursing sore feet from the rugged volcanic terrain.

Kekuewa Kikiloi *photo: The Honolulu Advertiser* "There is definitely a little bit of mystery and suspense" about Mokumanamana (Necker) island in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, said the University of Hawaii graduate student in anthropology.

Kikiloi and Anan Raymond, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional archaeologist based in Portland, Ore., were dropped off on Mokumanamana by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration research ship *Hi'ialakai* during a monthlong marine and archaeological expedition.

The ship returned to Honolulu on Sept. 6, but Kikiloi said he is still recovering from the "feat" of living in a remote environment with no fresh water or trees about 460 miles northwest of Honolulu. He described the expedition at a news conference yesterday in Honolulu with Raymond speaking from Chicago by teleconference.

The monument has been nominated as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site.

Kikiloi said he has been to the monument nine times and four times to Mokumanamana, second in the northwest chain after Nihoa. He and Raymond studied 34 heiau (religious structures) on the 46-acre island.

It was the longest archaeological research project ever conducted there. Kikiloi said the island's "archaeological record as a whole" was the most significant discovery.

"There are few cases in Hawaii where you can see an intact cultural landscape" with nearly 100 percent native plants and animals," he said.

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The scientists found more than 30 craters from bombings and shrapnel fragments next to heiau sites but are not sure who caused the damage. Nonetheless, Kikiloi said, "The landscape is uncompromised by human development. It is incredible ... invigorating to go there."

Even so, he said, they were "counting the days" until the ship picked them up. "We were in a time warp."  
 "How did they do it?" Kikiloi asked, regarding the island's early inhabitants. "We can barely do it today, and we have all this technology. How did they get water? These people were stronger than we ever thought."

He said Mokumanamana has "some of the most interesting archaeology in Hawaii, if not the Pacific."  
 It was an "awesome" experience, both as an anthropology student and native Hawaiian because of the religious significance of the heiau, Kikiloi said. How the people survived and constructed large monuments remains a puzzle, he said. Only three agricultural terraces were found, and the source of the stone for the structures is unknown.

Raymond said the island is a dangerous place to walk around because the 15 million-year-old volcanic rock crumbles easily with the weight of feet or a hand. And thousands of birds cover the island. "Where you would like to put your hand or foot has seabird chicks. You have to move very slowly. It is extremely rugged. You have to travel on all fours in many locations."

The heiau has upright structures along the crest of the island, perhaps oriented to astronomical phenomena, the scientists said. Kikiloi said there are similar upright structures on Hawaii's mountain peaks.

Stone images have been collected from the island, most of which are in the Bishop Museum and some in the British Museum, he said.

**Ancient objects found on remote Mokumanamana 'an archaeological mystery'**

*By Audrey McAvoy  
 Associated Press  
 September 18, 2009*

Researchers on a rare expedition to a now uninhabited rocky outpost north of the main Hawaiian islands found a partially finished human stone carving and the remnants of what may be a craftsman's workshop.

The findings at the remote Mokumanamana island, about 460 miles northwest of Honolulu, were part of the most extensive archaeological



Photo: Honolulu Advertiser

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survey of the tiny outcrop in 85 years.

University of Hawai'i anthropology doctoral student Kekuewa Kikiloi spent 18 days on the 46-acre island along with Anan Raymond, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service archaeologist.

The inhospitable island lacks fresh water, trees that would provide cover, and is continually buffeted by wind. It's frequented by seabirds, but is otherwise desolate save for the ruins of ancient heiau, or shrines, that line the top of a ridge running along the spine of the island.

"It's somewhat of an archaeological mystery as to how people survived on this island in the past and constructed these huge monuments," Kikiloi said yesterday.

The newly discovered carving resembles other stone figures found on Mokumanamana during a trip to the island sponsored by Hawai'i's provisional government shortly after the U.S.-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893.

That expedition brought several figures to the main islands, most of which are now at the Bishop Museum.

Kikiloi said it's not clear what the images were used for, but they're unlike any other objects in the Hawaiian islands.

In general in Hawaiian tradition, he said, images are often used as a focal point during prayer and worship of gods.

The partially unfinished figure found on this trip has a blank face, as though the artist didn't gotten around to carving facial features. It also appears that its left arm has broken off.

The workshop was far from the heiau. Raymond said someone may have been working on the figure to take to a heiau and would have done so if it was finished.

It's unclear when humans lived on the island or if they had a long-term settlement there.

But Kikiloi said coral objects near Nihoa, which he believes was a staging ground for the construction Mokumanamana's heiau, date to the 1500s.

Mokumanamana has an unusually high concentration of heiau — at least 34 on just 46 acres.

Kikiloi believes Hawaiians built the shrines there because Mokumanamana was considered the gateway to the afterlife. He said he plans to address this theory in his doctoral dissertation.

Mokumanamana lies on the Tropic of Cancer. This means the sun — which represents life and death in Hawaiian tradition — goes directly over the island on the summer solstice, the longest day of the year.

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Moreover, the Tropic of Cancer is called "Ke ala nui polohiwa a Kane" in Hawaiian, or "The Dark Shining Path of Kane," and is often used as a metaphor for the path to the afterlife.

"When spirits separate from the body after someone passes away, they go on a second half journey to return to the source that everything is created from," Kikiloi said.

There are similar shrines, with upright stones, atop the highest peaks of Maui and the Big Island, on Haleakala volcano and Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea volcanoes, respectively.

Mokumanamana is one of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and is inside the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument created by President George W. Bush in 2006.

*There are two other similar stories out of Hawaii. Visit the following links. All links have fascinating pictures, so I recommend a visit.*

Researchers uncover secrets of mystery island by Duane Shimogawa

Early Hawaiian Stone Figure Found on Remote Island by Audrey McAvoy (who also posted the above story).

References:

Altonn, Helen. 2009. "Mokumanamana (Necker) Island: Isle of Mystery". Honolulu Star Bulletin. Available online: [http://www.starbulletin.com/news/20090918\\_Isle\\_of\\_mystery.html](http://www.starbulletin.com/news/20090918_Isle_of_mystery.html)


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