

# NIUE



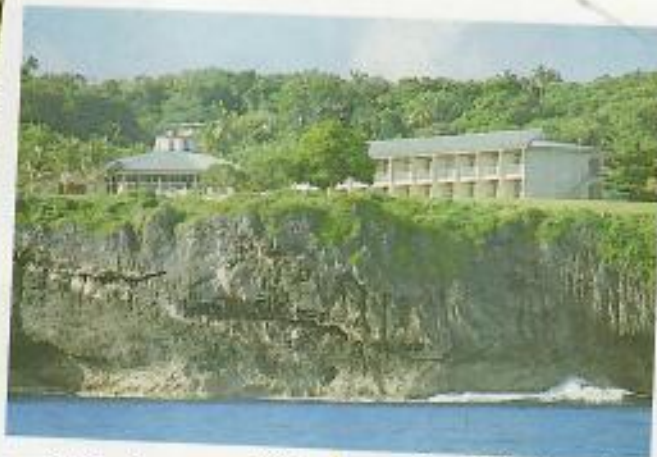
**N**iue is one majestic island — the largest coral island in the world. The people of Niue have the same nature as the climate of the island itself — warm and gentle. They are a fun loving people with a great sense of humour and a genius for entertaining.



**T**here can be few places in the world to match the mysterious beauty of Niue. In the hinterland, still untouched by the twentieth century, there are exotic bush gardens and tropical rainforests, and on the coastal shelf there are the lagoons and grottoes, caves and chasms unique to this beautiful place.



## ISLAND OF MAJESTY



**F**ishing is a way of life on Niue — and great sport for visitors. The surrounding reefs abound with exotic tropical fish for the spear fisherman, and the deeper waters beyond teem with tuna, swordfish and Spanish



mackerel. Ashore there are amenities for the sportsminded — tennis and golf and the facilities of the Niue Sports Club.

**H**otel accommodation is provided at Aliiuki, at the very top of the cliffs there, with magnificent views of the Pacific Ocean. The Hotel Niue is right up to international standard and offers the best of both worlds, for example the hotel serves dishes from the



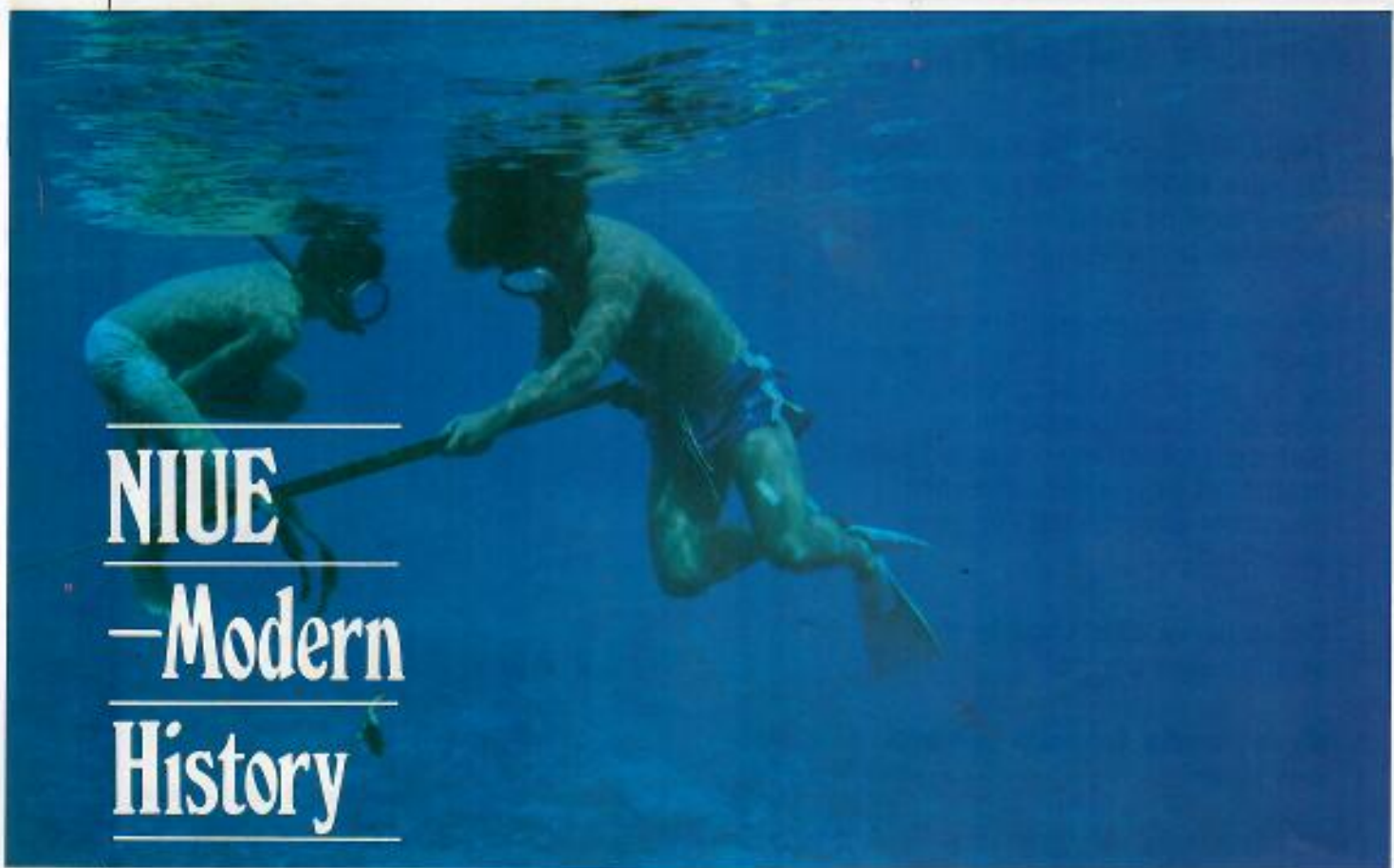
great restaurants as well as the crab, fish and paw paw dishes of the Polynesian. The facilities are



top class and the atmosphere is quiet — tranquility — Niue.







# NIUE

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## -Modern

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## History

**When Captain James Cook discovered Niue he called it Savage Island. This was because of the islanders' hostile conduct and fierce appearance when he made landings on the west coast on June 20, 1774. But this name persisted for little more than a century.**

**N**iue is believed to have been inhabited for more than 1,000 years — the origin of these first migrants is thought to be Samoa. Later hostile migrations from Tonga followed. The third migration, after the 16th century, was led by a Tongan chief of part-Niuean descent and resulted in the chief assuming power over the whole island.

The Tongan influence remains in Niuean vocabulary today. But it also contains many words that are absent in Tongan but are common to Samoa, the Eastern Polynesian languages, or both. And still two distinct dialects are spoken on Niue.

By 1852, it is recorded that between 200 and 300 Niueans had accepted Christianity and by 1854, when the first books in Niuean were

brought to the island from Samoa, heathenism had been virtually abandoned.

Back in 1861 census revealed a population of 4,700, compared with the highest known figure of 5,070 in 1884 and a record low of 3,747 in 1928. During the second half of the 19th century, quite a number of Niueans left the island either voluntarily or involuntarily. In 1863, for instance, a Peruvian

slaving vessel carried off about 130 men and in 1868, the notorious 'Bully' Hayes kidnapped about 60 men and 30 women and took them to Tahiti. Later hundreds of others went to work on the phosphate islands of the eastern Pacific. In 1899, it is recorded, 561 Niueans were away working abroad. Today as many Niueans live and work in Auckland as live at home.

Interesting characters to influence





1. The clear waters around Niue are ideal for snorkelling.
2. Down among the taro. Niuean boy all smiles at work.
3. Smiling Niuean girl holds high a local coconut crab.

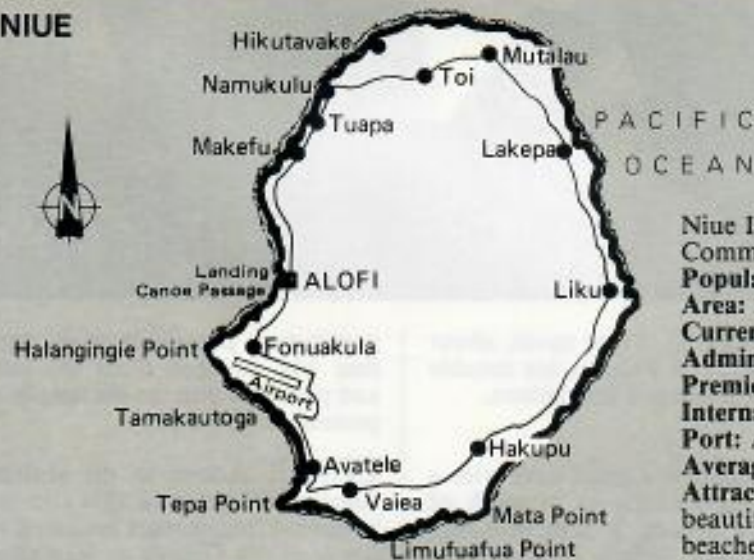
Niue included an Englishman, Henry Head, who was shipwrecked there in 1867. He married the high chief's daughter, had 15 children, and became the most influential person on the island, apart from the resident missionary. In 1876, the Niueans elected a king, Mataio Tuioga. The first king's successor Fataaiki, under Head's influence, petitioned Queen Victoria unsuccessfully to take Niue under her protection. But the Union Jack was not hoisted over the island until 1900 when a British official Basil Thomson declared it a British protectorate. British sovereignty was proclaimed on October 10, 1900, when the Earl of Ranfurly, Governor of New Zealand, visited the island.

But Niue was annexed to New Zealand the following year with S. Percy-Smith the first government resident. The island was made a separate administration with its own resident commissioner and island council in 1904. The first Niue Assembly was established in 1960 with an elected representative from each of the island's 14 villages, under the presidency of the resident commissioner.

On October 19, 1974, Niue attained self government — exactly 74 years after the proclamation of British sovereignty. Robert Richmond Rex headed the first government and today still holds the office.



## NIUE



Niue Island is a self-governing member of the Commonwealth.

**Population:** 3,843 (1976).

**Area:** 258sq km.

**Currency:** New Zealand dollar.

**Administration centre:** Alofi.

**Premier:** the Hon. R.R. Rex.

**International airport:** Hanan.

**Port:** Alofi.

**Average temperature:** 24.7 deg C.

**Attractions:** Solitude. Outdoor activities include beautiful rainforest and caves to explore. Swimming beaches, angling, reef fishing, tennis, nine hole golf course. Alofi market.



# Exploring The Subterranean WONDERLAND

One of the attractions of Niue Island are the caves. Right around the atoll, subterranean upheavals have produced deep chasms in the limestone. These inland and coastal caves, some nearly a mile deep, are well worth a visit.

**N**iueans once lived in the caves; and they provided ideal refuge during times of war but some remain unexplored even today.

Research excavations are being carried out at some of the ancient burial caves by New Zealand teams, investigating human bones.

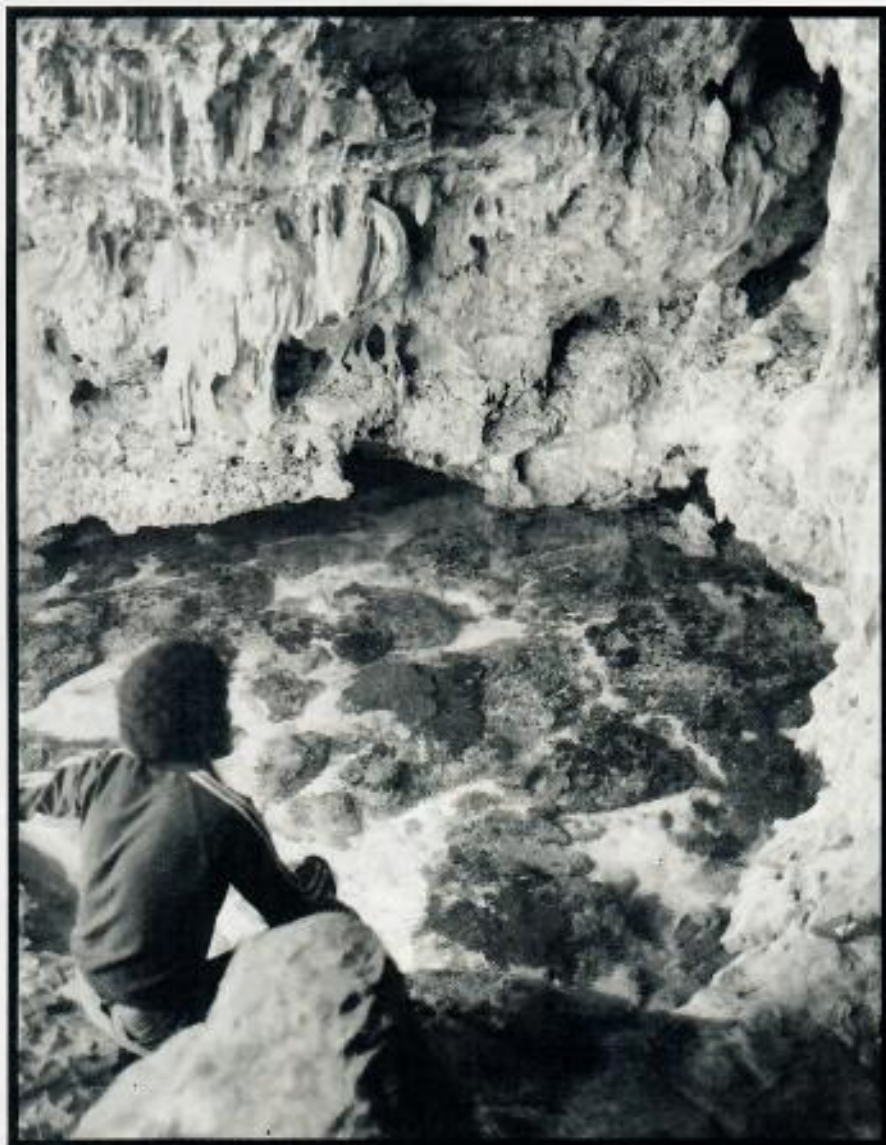
Some of the caves you can explore yourself but for the bigger, more remote trips one should arrange to have a local guide show you through.

These are the more well known caves:

**MAKATO:** A fresh-water chasm about 90 m off the road opposite the Roman Catholic Mission. The name means "echoing stone".

**PENIAMINA'S GRAVE:** The grave of Peniamina, the Niuean who first brought Christianity to the Island, is in a small clearing on the left hand side of the road 5 km north of Alofi and near Makapu Point. Peniamina's Day is observed as a Public Holiday on the 4th Monday in October every year.

**AVAIKI:** The name is a variation of Havaiki, the ancestral centre of Polynesia. This is where the first canoe landed. There is a fine swimming hole in a cave north of the main cave. The area is occasionally prohibited when kaloama, a small species of fish, prized for food, are running in the pools.



**PALAHA:** These caves, about 180m north of Palaha, are notable for their limestone formations.

**HIO:** This is a small cave with a sandy beach about 45 m south of Matalave School. It was here that the Peruvian "black birder" Irole was wrecked in 1877. The local

people took possession of the liquor that was salvaged from the wreck and poured it into the sea despite the protests of the captain.

**LIMU:** Access to the sheltered beaches and caves in this area may be gained from a track leading down north of the Church at Namukulu. Other tracks lead down from the



southern end of the northern end of the wall. Limu is the Niuean word for "seaweed".

**MAKALEA:** The track to this cave is about 180m north of the Limu track. Access is through a smaller cave leading to the beach which is a good source of small shells. Near the small cave is the entrance to Makalea which has a domed roof perforated by a small hole.

**MATAPA:** This chasm may be reached by a track continuing from the main road at the foot of Hikutavake Hill. The fresh-water stream entering the chasm below sea level keeps the water cool and it is said that the chasm was used as a swimming place in the olden days by the Kings.

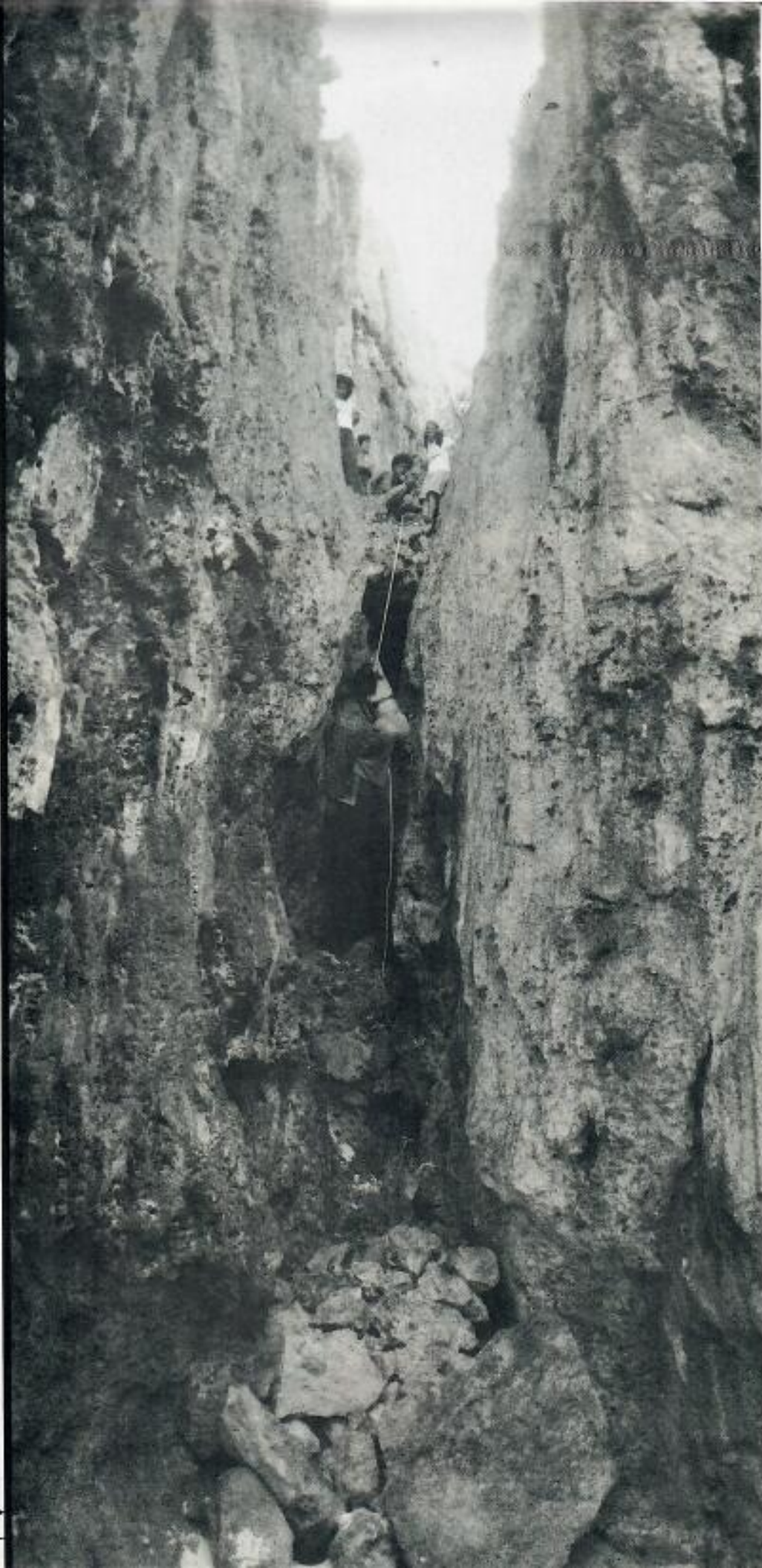
**TALAVA:** The track to the rock formation known as the "Arches" leads off from the track to Matapa just before it starts to descend, and is easily followed for the first part of the journey, which takes about 20 minutes. At low tide, access may be gained to a large cavern containing good examples of stalactites and stalagmites. A light is necessary to explore this cave.

**ULUVEHI:** This is a landing that was used by trading schooners in the early days. The track leads down to the sea from the north-east corner of the Mutalau Village green. A Peruvian "black birder" took off many Niueans from here in 1860 to work in the guano mines in Chile — none returned.

**TUO:** This is an interesting stretch of reef, approached by a track which begins behind the house at the entrance to Kofekofe School and where there is a resonant rock which sounds like a bell when struck. At Tuo in ancient times mothers were permitted to throw undesirable children over the cliff, after first making the proper incantations to the gods.

**MOTU:** A canoe landing used by Lakepa village fishermen is to be found on a stretch of reef about 2½ km south of Lakepa. The canoes are stored in a cave at the top of the cliff and are carried down to sea level by means of a ladder. There is a hole in the floor of the cave which has not been explored but apparently leads to a cavern at sea level.

**VAIKONA:** One of the most remarkable chasms on the island is reached by Namuke sea track







ARRIVED FRIDAY VIA TONGA, A SUPERB POLYNESIAN AIRLINES FLIGHT I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD DOESN'T SEEM TO KNOW ABOUT THIS BEAUTIFUL PLACE IT IS TRULY PARADISE. IT'S HOT AND SUNNY ALL THE TIME, YET NOT TOO HUMID AND WE'VE SPENT HOURS EXPLORING AND SWIMMING IN THE POOLS OF THE MAGNIFICENT GROTTO'S AND CAVERNS THAT MAKE-UP THIS BEAUTIFUL COASTLINE. SOMEONE TOLD US THAT NIUE IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST CORAL ISLAND. THE SEA IS CRYSTAL CLEAR AND UNBELIEVABLY BLUE. WE'VE HARDLY BEEN OUT OF THE WATER. DAD'S BEEN DEEP SEA FISHING AND HE'S EVEN BEEN DOING A BIT OF SNORKELLING, AND WE BOTH HAD A ROUND OF GOLF THE OTHER DAY. OUR HOTEL IS EXCELLENT AND WE LOVE THE ISLAND STYLE FOOD EVERYTHING'S SO CASUAL AND THE PEOPLE ARE EASY-GOING AND FUN LOVING. WE COULD STAY HERE FOR EVER. SEE YOU ALL SATURDAY.

LOTS OF LOVE MUM + DAD.



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THE ESPLANADE  
AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEHLAND



**NIUE ISLAND**  
 THE PACIFIC'S CORAL GEM

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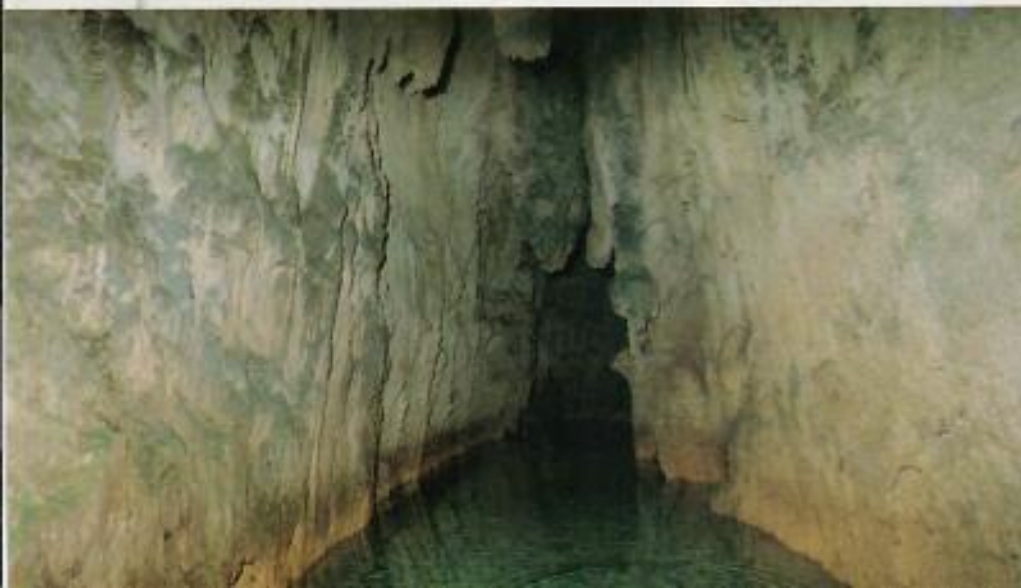
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➤ leading from the main road about 4 km south of Liku. The path is difficult to follow towards the end and the access through a cave requires care. A guide is necessary.

In the chasm is a deep pool of crystal clear water, slightly brackish, which is fine for swimming. At the far end of the pool a fall of rock blocks off another pool which may be reached by climbing over the rock.

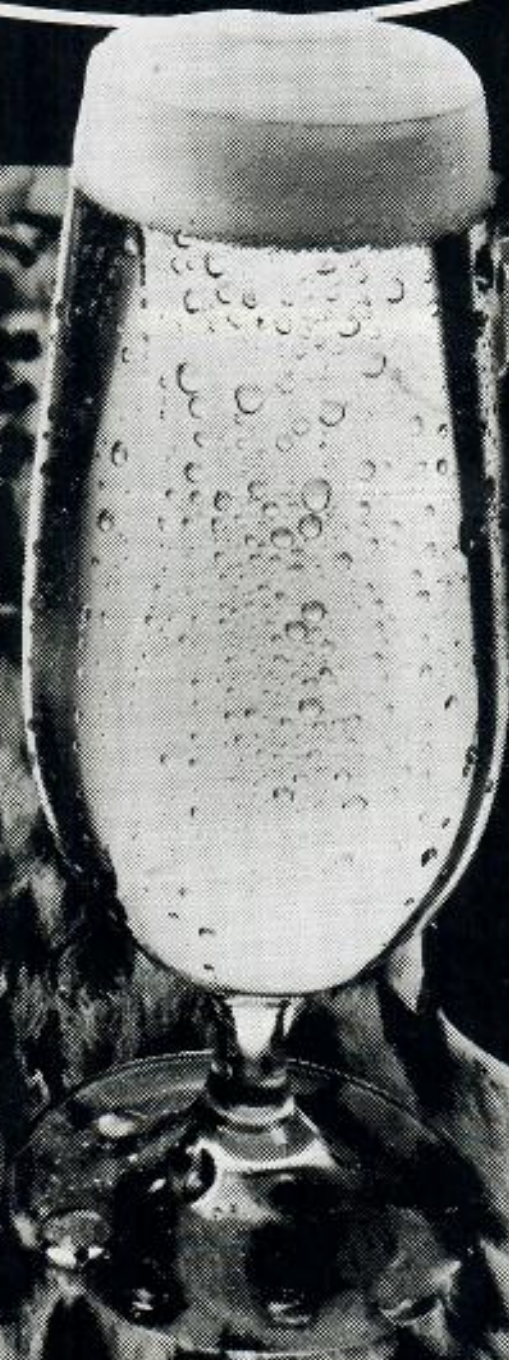
**TOGO:** Everyone should make at least one trip to Togo (with a guide) which is reached by a track starting about 4 km north of Hakupu. After leaving the bush the track descends through a mass of jagged coral pinnacles to a little grassy flat, from where a passage leads off to the edge of a ravine. At the foot of the ravine there is a beach of fine golden sand, from which some coconut trees rise almost reaching the rim of the ravine. At the end of the chasm lies a pool of fresh water. The climb down to the beach is fairly difficult.

**AVATELE:** A popular swimming spot opposite the large and modern church.

**OPAAHI:** This is the site of Captain Cook's landing in June, 1774. He met a hostile reception and was himself nearly hit by a spear. The Niueans retreated after several volleys were fired by the Marines and the landing party returned to the ship.

A track leads down to the landing place, which is still used for canoes, from near the water-tank almost opposite the L.D.S. Mission. ☺





**Taste**



# Robert Richmond Rex: PREMIER

**Robert Richmond Rex, Niue's much-loved and respected premier, at 71 is one of the British Commonwealth's elder statesmen. His task is leading one of the world's smallest countries into the last quarter of this century. That assignment is all-important for the 4,000 Niueans on the remote, single 258sq km uplifted coral island.**

**A**s well as being premier he is also Minister of Finance; Minister for Government Administration including Housing and Information Service; Minister of Customs, Shipping and Trade; Minister of Inland Revenue; and Minister of Police; Transport; Immigration and Emigration.

Premier Rex is a lean, swarthy man whose looks belie his age. Like all Niueans he loves the beauty of the outdoors of his island home and is happiest fishing the crystal clear waters or working the lush land. "I'm keen on planting and working the soil," he says. "I'm not a politician at heart. Like everyone at home I feel best in our traditional dress (European casual clothes)."

Life started modestly for young Rex. He was born in 1909, the youngest of six children — his mother a Niuean, his father, an Australian. Lesley Lucas Richmond-Rex, had come to Niue in 1898 and set up as a general merchant; but during the First World War was financially ruined, when big pre-paid orders never arrived in Niue and communications with the island were severed.

After schooling at the local Government Tufukia School, young Robert was taken to Samoa in 1923 by his father to begin "learning a trade" in a sugar mill. Just over a year later, Robert was obliged to go with his father to Suva where he worked for a while doing mechanical work. He finally realised his ambition to go to sea and signed on with the Union Steam Ship Company as deck boy on a ship bound for Canada.

On his father's request months later, he rejoined him in Fiji. Times



*Premier Robert Rex ... on official business in Auckland recently.*

were hard and work proved difficult to find, and so Robert returned home to Niue. "The world was a harsh place in those days" the Premier reflects, "but at least at home there was plenty to eat, there was no rent to pay and things were not too bad."

In 1934 Robert again secured a position aboard a small ship and spent several months at sea. But his mother, who had lost an older son Harry at sea, finally succeeded in persuading her youngest son to give up his seafaring ways.

Perhaps this was the turning point for Robert Rex. He stayed on dry land and secured a modest casual administration position. Then he obtained full employment with the Government. "I was the 'jack of all trades'," Premier Rex recalls. "One day an interpreter, the next day foreman of a road gang and the next day I would be running the shipping office."

With the coming of the Second World War, some 500 young Niueans tried to join New Zealand's armed services. Robert Rex, who had had years of territorial training in Fiji, was among the first to apply. But the volunteers were not enlisted. Instead of going to war, Rex stayed



on in Niue.

In 1941 he married a young part-Niuean school teacher, Patricia Tagalo who had returned from New Zealand. The couple have four children and have also two adopted children. After the war, the young couple decided to set up business. Patricia resigned her teaching job and managed their tiny grocery concern and by 1952 Robert was able to resign his Government job to join her in working their now flourishing business.

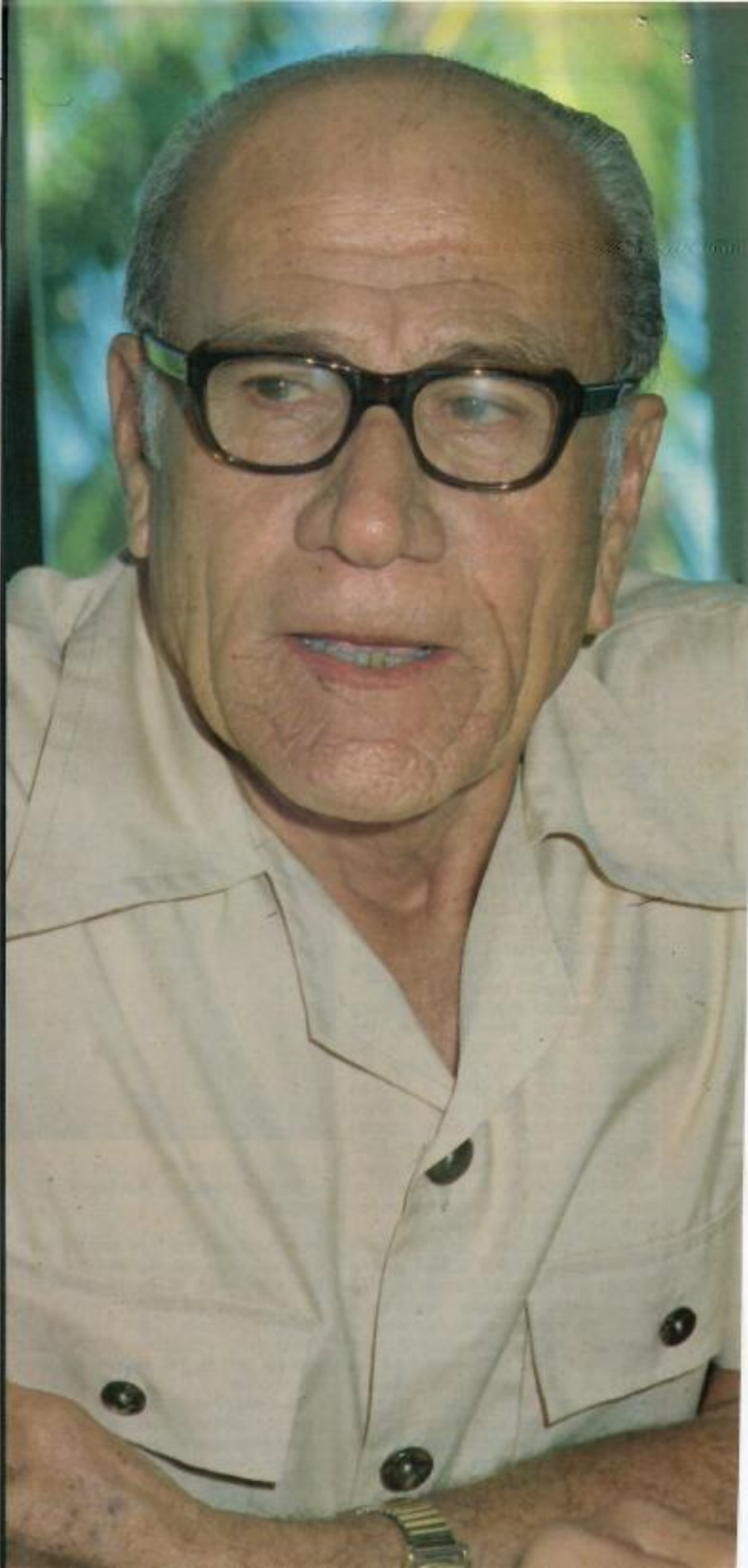
**“WE NEED  
MORE  
TOURISTS IN  
NIUE”**

Robert Rex's political career began when he was elected a member for the main settlement of Alofi on the island council and over the years he became one of Niue's most experienced local politicians in the village council system. Then with self government in 1974, as leader of the Government's business, Robert Rex became premier with a cabinet of three. Premier Rex, now in his third term, says he has not yet made a decision whether to stand again next year or not.

He cites the two main achievements during the term of his leadership as completing the water reticulation and electricity supplies for the whole island. Of the future, he sees improving communications to Niue as the island's number one priority.

“We need more tourists in Niue — but this will only happen if transport services are improved (it is presently a week between flights to Niue),” he says. Of the Niue islanders' exodus to New Zealand, the premier says: “It saddens me to see all these people saving up their money to go to New Zealand (Niueans are New Zealand citizens). They do not always know what they are putting themselves into. I feel they are better off in Niue.”

Some 7,000 Niueans now live in New Zealand. But although some 200 Niueans leave home to migrate to New Zealand each year, the declining rate of population has steadied. The premier believes the people have realised they can enjoy a healthy, good life working the land “at home” in an environment outsiders would simply describe as paradise. ☉





PAPER No 8  
SESSION III - Country reports

DOCUMENT No 8  
SECTION III - Rapports nationaux et territoriaux

THE ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL HISTORY  
AND SPECIAL CONSERVATION PROBLEMS OF  
NIUE ISLAND

by

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ENVIRONNEMENT, HISTOIRE NATURELLE ET PROBLEMES DE CONSERVATION  
DANS L'ILE DE NIUE

par

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Représentant du Territoire de Niue

Summary

The environment, vegetation and fauna of Niue are briefly described. An account is given of particular conservation and pollution problems, and comments are made on proposed conservation measures. References are listed at the end of the paper.

\* \* \*

Résumé

Bref aperçu du milieu physique, de la flore et de la faune de Niue. Problèmes particuliers de conservation et de pollution et mesures envisagées. Bibliographie.



\* \* \*

Niue is an isolated island approximately 480 km (300 miles) east of Tonga and 560 km (350 miles) south-east of Samoa. It is roughly circular and just over 295 sq. km (100 sq. miles) in area (21 x 18 km or 13 x 11 miles).

It is a raised atoll of coralline limestone about 62 m. (200 ft) high with a prominent coastal terrace between about 20 to 28 m. (60 to 90 ft) above sea level. The island has a slightly depressed upper surface representing the "lagoon" of the original atoll. The island, both upper surface and coastal terrace, is heavily vegetated, except where artificially cleared by man.

There is no true reef (and no lagoon); the island is surrounded by an intertidal platform, varying from a few metres to several hundred metres in width, cut in the original limestone of the island. This platform has a thin discontinuous veneer of living corals on its upper (intertidal) surface and rich coral growth over the edge in sub-tidal waters.

There is no surface or running fresh water and no good harbour. The mean annual temperature is 24.7°C (76.5°F), the mean annual rainfall is a little over 2000 mm (85.7 in.) and the mean annual humidity is 79.7%. The island is on the edge of the hurricane belt and severe destructive hurricanes have occurred, the latest being in 1958, 1960 and 1968. It is inhabited by a little over 5,000 people, mostly Polynesians, and the population has remained stable at this level for many years (i.e. emigration to New Zealand approximately balances the birth rate). It is within the boundaries of New Zealand and its people are New Zealand citizens.

The soils are shallow, reasonably rich, partly derived from outside sources (assumed to be either airfall volcanic dust or tidal wave volcanic debris into the original lagoon) and have an unusually high, natural radioactivity of an obscure origin. There are no mineral deposits that we are aware of and drilling for buried phosphate deposits has produced no result, but there is a latent commercial interest in the presumed deep source of the natural radioactivity. There are soil and geological bulletins and maps published and available on the island.



### Vegetation

This has been greatly modified by man. The original virgin tropical rainforest which once covered the island has now been reduced to remnants totalling about 6000 acres. The low coastal forest of the lower terrace is still largely intact and also totals about 6000 acres. There are large areas of second growth in various stages and "millable forest" has been estimated in official reports as about 13,600 acres. There are large areas (approximately 8000 acres) of unproductive "fern-land" scrub in the old lagoon basin generally thought to be the result of prolonged overcropping and subsequent soil impoverishment. 629 taxa of vascular plants are listed by Sykes in the 1965 botanical survey, including an estimated 175 indigenous plants (endemics and naturally occurring species) the largest number being in the Orchidaceae.

### Marine invertebrates

There is a reasonably rich coral fauna which has not been documented. A mollusc checklist is available. Reef crabs and other crustaceans, such as crayfish, are well represented with many common Indo-Pacific species. Reef animals are subjected to fairly intensive harvesting for food, but locally-applied restrictions (fono) in certain areas from time to time allow rapid recovery of these temporary reef "reserves".

### Terrestrial invertebrates

Entomological surveys have been carried out and 376 species in 15 orders have been recorded by 1968. Plagues of lopper caterpillars have stripped leaves from trees after hurricanes and had drastic effects on commercial honey production (the moth involved is Cleora samoana). There is a prominent and abundant land crab fauna (about 6 species), important both as a local food source and because of its biological interest. One species is poisonous to eat (? sometimes) and is thus a minor medical problem and all the edible species are potentially subject to overcropping.

### Marine fish

There is apparently a reasonably rich and varied offshore fauna. Extensive fishing is done by canoe and there is an SPC preliminary report on fishing problems and potential.



### Freshwater fish

Subterranean cave waters contain a small species of bully and an eel. Both are now being studied in the Dominion Museum and are of general biogeographical interest.

### Reptiles

There are 4 or 5 lizards recorded from the island, sea snakes are common in inshore waters and marine turtles are often seen and sometimes caught by fishermen.

### Birds

The most recent survey, by Dr. Wodzicki, gives a total of 19 birds (5 sea birds, 3 shore birds and 11 land birds). There are no introduced birds (and here I exclude fowls and ducks), making Niue of special interest from the point of view of studying the effects and changes brought about by introductions on other islands.

Some birds are in a precarious state, probably due to introduced ship rats, man's effect on the habitat and hunting by man for food (especially with shotguns). Examples are the Pacific Pigeon, the Blue-crowned Lory, the Fruit Dove and the Swamp Hen. Most birds are not endemic forms restricted to Niue but three species appear to fall into this category. The Fruit Dove (Ptilinopus) may be an endemic form; the Polynesian Triller (Lelage) and the Polynesian Starling (Aplonis) are endemic named subspecies but both are fortunately still very common birds.

### Mammals

The Polynesian rat (Rattus exulans) and the black or ship rat (Rattus rattus) both occur on Niue and both cause damage. Dr. Wodzicki has studied these two animals in detail on Niue (and on the Tokelaus) (see paper No 31 in this volume).

The flying fox, Pteropus sp. (the exact species present is not known as yet) was common on the island. The numbers are declining drastically as they are shot extensively by man and used for food.

### Agriculture

Copra, kumaras, limes, frozen passionfruit pulp and honey are

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produced and exported. Most of the normal tropical food plants, such as taro, manioc, bananas, etc., are grown for local consumption.

Fowls, pigs and cattle are run on the island for local use. Some sheep are being grazed experimentally, and (to complete the mammal list) dogs and some cats are present but do not appear to become feral.

#### Special conservation problems

##### A. Destruction of natural resources:

1. Forest destruction by clearing and milling.
2. Soil loss by burning and shifting cultivation.
3. Bird and flying fox decline in numbers due to
  - (a) destruction of forest habitat,
  - (b) overshooting,
  - (c) inadequate protection regulations.

##### B. Various forms of pollution and other disturbances:

1. Chemical and bacteriological pollution. I do not know enough to talk about these two matters.
2. Subterranean water resources are of vital importance to the island and are naturally potentially subject to pollution. There is a major freshwater lens under the entire island at approximately sea level.

In 1967 an agreement was signed by WHO, UNICEF and the N.Z. Government, on behalf of Niue, to provide piped water for domestic use from bores and to improve sanitary facilities in the village schools. When this project is completed, the present reliance on roof catchments for water will be virtually eliminated. A WHO sanitary engineer visited Niue last year to check on progress with the water supply development and general sanitary standards.



3. Blasting of reefs has only been on a very small scale to produce a little boat harbour alongside the only wharf and a safe reef swimming pool for school children.

C. Miscellaneous points of interest

1. Conservation of archaeological sites is now under discussion, as important archaeological sites have recently been brought to the Government's notice.
2. Tourism has not as yet affected the island, but may begin soon in a very small way with the recent completion of the airfield and the building of a small hotel very shortly.
3. The crown of thorns starfish has not been recorded from the island waters (as yet!).

Comments on conservation measures

1. The N.Z. Government has recently examined the question of conservation education in schools on Niue (and the Tokelaus) and is to produce a series of short school texts for use on each of these islands in the near future.
2. New and reasonably comprehensive nature conservation legislation is presently being considered by the Niue Assembly and may soon be enacted.
3. An interesting conservation measure is the Huvalu Tapu Forest maintained by the Hakupu Village Council (unsurveyed, but possibly 2000 to 3000 acres). This is a totally protected area of virgin original forest where human entry or any use whatsoever has been totally forbidden since pre-European times and this protection is maintained by church-supported Polynesian type tapu. Very occasionally privileged people have been given special permission to enter this reserve and see this unique sample of original Niue, with its huge rain forest trees, its abundant and undisturbed pigeon and flying fox flocks and its reservoir of fearless daytime-active (in contrast to the elsewhere nocturnal) land crabs.

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Held at Noumea, New Caledonia  
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5 to 14 August 1971  
in collaboration with the  
International Union for Conservation of Nature  
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Published by the South Pacific Commission,  
Noumea, New Caledonia. 1973

2-24-75 South Pacific Comm. 460-65



SEA TURTLES

NIUE

GH BALAZS  
1980s