

Toni L. Han

## Archeology and the Public at Bishop Museum

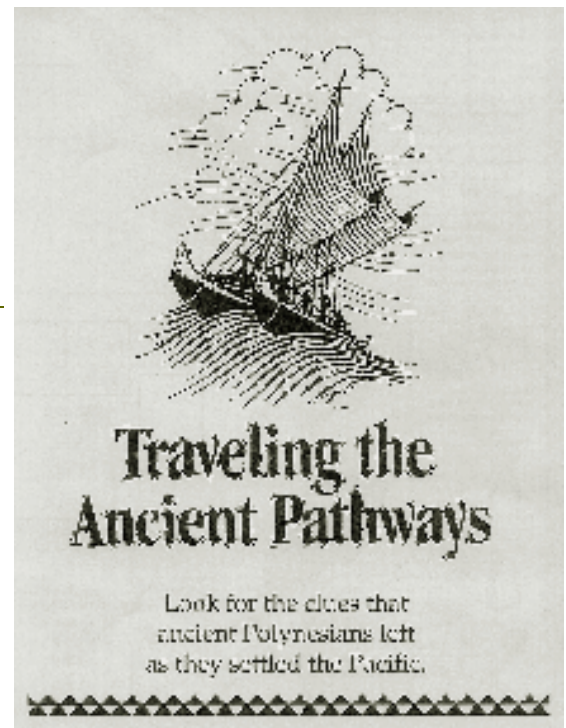
The role of the museum in cultural resource management is a continually challenging one. Museums need to address not only the conservation of cultural artifacts in order to preserve them for the future, but also must take responsibility for the interpretation and presentation of museum holdings for the general public. The Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu is an important source of cultural information for Hawai'i and other Pacific islands and serves as an extremely significant conveyor of island heritage to citizens and visitors of the state.

Bishop Museum was established in 1889 to house the "treasures" of the Kamehameha dynasty. Its founder was Charles Reed Bishop, the husband of Bernice Pauahi Bishop, granddaughter to Kamehameha the Great, who unified the Hawaiian Islands. Since its beginning, it has become the foremost repository of natural, cultural, and archival resources of the Pacific region. The anthropology collection currently includes 73,450 Pacific and Hawaiian ethnological artifacts, as well as 1,105,000 archeological specimens, and it continues to grow.

Just as collections have expanded, the Bishop Museum audience has also increased. The audience now includes families and other community members who have a vested interest in the region and neighborhood in which they live. The Bishop Museum Association alone has over 10,000 members.

As it becomes increasingly difficult to fund research expeditions like those of the 1920s and 1930s, and with donations diminishing yearly, collections during the last 30 years have centered around a vigorous program in cultural resource management. Responding to the mandates of county, state, and federal laws and regulatory procedures, the museum began its CRM program in the late 1960s. Since then, Bishop Museum has conducted over 520 projects, extending throughout the main islands of Hawai'i, Samoa, and Micronesia. Non-CRM, but often federally-funded (NSF, DOD-Legacy) projects have been conducted in all of the major island groups in Oceania.

In the last decade, movies such as the *Indiana Jones* series, *Rapa Nui*, *Congo*, *Romancing the Stone*, and travel books have contributed to the



romance of "ancient" and "exotic" cultures and places. The growth of the communication and electronic media format has enabled a wider range of accessibility to a larger group of people around the world. With this exposure, the public is no longer satisfied with passive learning through exhibitions. People now demand and expect a higher level of participation in the process of learning. They want to know more about cultural diversity and values; they want more than superficial displays of aesthetically pleasing examples of the culture. They want to be transported physically, intellectually, and spiritually into the past.

At Bishop Museum, this challenge has been approached by presenting archeological information using a multi-level approach. Designated cultural resource specialists work with archeologists, educators, and public outreach staff to develop and interpret archeological as well cultural information to make it available to the public. Working with other departments, the challenge is to demystify archeological findings that are often only published in scholarly journals. Working from an education perspective has forced the museum staff to better articulate the information and interpret results. Working with the public outreach and community development departments have provided other venues by which archeology can reach a wider community.

In the last two years, archeology staff have played a critical role in the presentation of two exhibitions, *Hawai'iloa, Ka 'Imi 'Ike—Seeker of Knowledge* and *Kaho'olawe, Ke Aloha Kupa'a i ka Aina—Steadfast Love for the Land*. Both of these exhibitions relied heavily on archeological data,

which added not only to the artifactual content but also to the contextual integrity of the subject matter. The *Hawai'iloa* exhibit dealt with traditional Hawaiian navigational methods, theories, and possible migration routes of the ancient Hawaiians. Modern Native Hawaiian navigators acknowledge that archeological research has provided much of the basis from which they have resurrected the ancient wayfinding techniques.

The *Hawai'iloa* exhibition was divided into two main components. One described and displayed the efforts of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and other native practitioners of all crafts that were needed to recreate and construct a traditional Hawaiian, double-hulled, long distance voyaging canoe. The other component dealt with the ancestral Hawaiians. Where did they come from? How did they get here? What did they bring, and why and how did they change? This is where archeology has played a pivotal role. Information had to be presented in a way that appealed both to those who knew about Polynesian pre-history and to those who knew little or nothing about the region in general. Not only did we strive to teach about the specific issues, museum archeologists also felt strongly that archeological methods, techniques, limitations, and interpretation needed to be presented. All of this had to make sense, be interactive, fun, and thought provoking, as well as instill a sense of Hawaiian values.

We managed to succeed by providing the following devices:

- a computer voyaging game, which simulates the sea-faring experience;
- a take-away worksheet, entitled, "Traveling the Ancient Pathways,"—a two-sided, 11" x 17" format which on one side had a stamping exercise designed to navigate the visitor between various island groups of Polynesia to teach them about significant cultural features of a specific island group (Fiji, Tonga, Marquesas, etc.) and on the reverse side, questions were posed so that groupings based on shared cultural traits could be circled and conclusions drawn about the pathways of Polynesian voyagers;
- a 30-page Teacher's Packet of the following activities—preparing for a trip, identification of plants and plant properties, navigation with a log sheet for an imaginary trip, role of crew members (navigator, sailmaster, etc.), an excavation done in the schools using classroom garbage, plotting a course on the ocean, learning about constellations, and constructing a paper star compass.

Other programming included lecture series by scholars and native craftspeople, hands-on

demonstrations of crafts, and a sail on the canoe itself.

Our current exhibition about the island of Kaho'olawe is currently in its final planning and design phase. Similar programming like the *Hawai'iloa* is being planned for this exhibition. A teacher's packet, lectures, films, a computer exercise, and a possible island tour are being planned. The most significant aspect of this exhibition is the partnering of museum staff with several community groups, primarily a Native Hawaiian, politically active group, the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana. Until 1991, the island had been used by the United States Navy as a bombing target. For the last 20 years the Hawaiian community has worked hard to stop the bombing and to secure the island back for the people for cultural and educational use. Bishop Museum worked with members to determine culturally appropriate materials for the exhibition, and involved them with the design and gathering of new materials.

The exhibition focuses on the island, its past, present, and future. It attempts to represent the island as a living entity. The island's past is illustrated through early archeological investigations conducted in 1913 and 1931. Much of what is known about the island's past is drawn from these investigations. Virtually no other archeology was done during the period 1940 to 1990, although scattered monitoring has been conducted by Navy archeologists and others contracted by them. As mandated by the current agreement between the state, federal, and Native Hawaiian organizations, cultural and extensive archeological investigations are planned and will be conducted as part of the clean-up of ordnance and revitalization of the island. It is hoped that the exhibition will stimulate appreciation of Kaho'olawe's past and its potential for future use as a cultural center.

The future of archeology at Bishop Museum relies on the use of the data gathered for educational purposes to be used through exhibitions, publications, and outreach programs. It will require our staff to be creative, innovative, and sensitive in presenting our data while still maintaining objectivity and accuracy. The Bishop Museum's anthropology department has its foundation in the dirt, having conducted excavations and collections before the required regulatory laws were created. Now it is time to give back that information to a community that wants to be part of a meaningful dialogue between the past and the future.

---

*Toni L. Han is a cultural resource specialist in the Department of Anthropology at the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i.*