

Maurice Major

## Learning About The Past, Learning From The Past Bishop Museum and Communities Working Together

**T**oday in Hawai'i, the Bishop Museum and over a dozen firms do what might be termed CRM archeology, primarily for Section 106 reviews. While contract archeologists may be too loose-knit to be considered a unified "community," they communicate more with each other than they do with Native Hawaiians and other interested groups. Outreach by archeologists and interest by others has begun to change this situation.

Earlier in this century, two pioneers of archeological investigation in Hawai'i operated differently amid the island communities. Bishop Museum's Kenneth Emory and John Stokes both practiced generalist anthropology, collecting ethnographic information, recording oral history, and learning to speak Hawaiian—all in addition to recording archeological sites. Some of their practices, such as collecting burials and recording a limited range of information about sites, now appear inappropriate and obsolete, but Emory's and Stokes's careers still hold lessons for today's archeologists. Although they were scholars, these men did not separate themselves from the communities in which they worked and accepted information offered to them by non-professionals. Their friendly relations with contemporary Hawaiians helped advance both their immediate goals and the discipline of archeology in Hawai'i.

Today, CRM firms operate under competitive bidding conditions that leave little or no time for community interaction. Because of the pressure of deadlines and the absence of statewide policies or procedures for involving the community, communication between archeologists and the communities in which they work occurs sporadically at best. In the context of increasing interest in sovereignty among Native Hawaiians, which in part stems from, and reinforces interest in, the ancient culture, this situa-

tion can be and has been perceived as evidence of archeologists' disregard for Hawaiian understandings of and attitudes toward the past.

Archeologists can ill-afford to let this remain the case in a place where descendants of our subjects still live on the land.

One area in which mechanisms do exist for communication between archeologists and Hawaiians is that of human burials. In 1990, the state legislature passed an act establishing for each island a Burial Council charged with recommending treatment of human remains. This empowered Native Hawaiians in an arena that had previously been the domain of state and CRM archeologists and opened official lines of communication among the parties. Archeologists often end up mediating the interests of community members and clients, a position that can lead to greater cooperation, but often involves discomfort.



In some cases, archeologists have worked with cultural monitors suggested by Burial Councils, an arrangement that has fostered understanding between CRM professionals and Native Hawaiians.

But governmental mandates do not represent the only way in which archeology is becoming more enmeshed in the community. Bishop Museum archeologists recently have made advances in the areas of fieldwork partnerships

and public education. (See Toni Han's article that discusses exhibiting partnerships in this section.) On Maui, Bishop Museum archeologists worked closely with Lahaina Restoration Foundation, using community volunteers to help excavate. On Moloka'i, the Museum's last three projects have employed Hawaiian activists during fieldwork in an effort to establish constructive dialogue with a "tough audience" and expand the pool of archeologically-aware individuals on the island. Through these projects Hawaiians who may once have been adversaries of CRM professionals now act as partners, and networks are being established that connect archeologists and community members. As a result, sites may be better protected.

Through employment with CRM firms, internships sponsored by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, in association with the University of Hawai'i's Anthropology Department, as well as through community activism, an increasing number of Hawaiians are taking the initiative to become "archeologically involved." The Moloka'i Archaeology Series, monthly lectures and field trips led by archeologists who have worked on the island, has been organized by local residents interested in furthering public understanding of archeology. Each session draws 50 to 150 non-archeologists; guided tours include almost as many participants, exposing many local residents to both archeological theory and the field sites themselves. On the archeologists' end, the Society for Hawaiian Archaeology's initiation last year of an annual Archaeology Week, represents a new arena of outreach benefitting both archeologists and the communities they serve.

The area of publications, however, remains a weak link in communication between archeologists and others. CRM reports consist primarily of the technical volumes produced to satisfy contracts; they are usually distributed only to clients and State Historic Preservation Divisions. Academic journal articles may be more accessible physically, but do not speak to a lay audience. For many islands, the only widely available published materials are decades-old Bishop Museum monographs. Popular magazine articles rarely come from archeologists, instead being the domain of professional writers who sometimes grasp neither the subtleties of archeological interpretation or the real constraints of CRM fieldwork. Newspaper articles and television news address controversies,



particularly between archeologists and Native Hawaiians, and balanced coverage of archeology in the news media is rare. In fact, the often sensationalist coverage has made many archeologists wary of communicating outside their discipline, exacerbating their problems with communities.

The practice of archeology outside of the non-archeological community cannot continue indefinitely, and archeologists need to demonstrate how their discipline contributes to the wider world. Changes in the legal environment have mandated dialogue between communities and CRM professionals. Projects that voluntarily involve Native Hawaiians in archeological work represent one avenue that is increasingly well-travelled, and growing public interest in the past provides the opportunity to expand and replicate such efforts. Public outreach programs such as Archaeology Week and the Moloka'i Archaeology Series show promise in educating those who may not wish to be directly involved in doing archeology, but who remain interested in the findings. With continued efforts, partnerships can be built so that the practice of archeology may more closely resemble the past, when archeologists belonged to the community and the community participated in archeology. Through encouraging open communication, archeologists may avoid repeating past mistakes that drove wedges between themselves and communities.

#### **Suggested Reading**

Emory, Kenneth Pike. *O'ahu Excavations*, Bishop Museum Press, 1961.

Stokes, John F.G. *Burial of King Keawe*. 1930.

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Photos of volunteers by P.C. Klieger, 1993.