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# Easter Island's Rapa Nui National Park

## *Fragile Tie Between Past and Present*

**By Peter Keller**

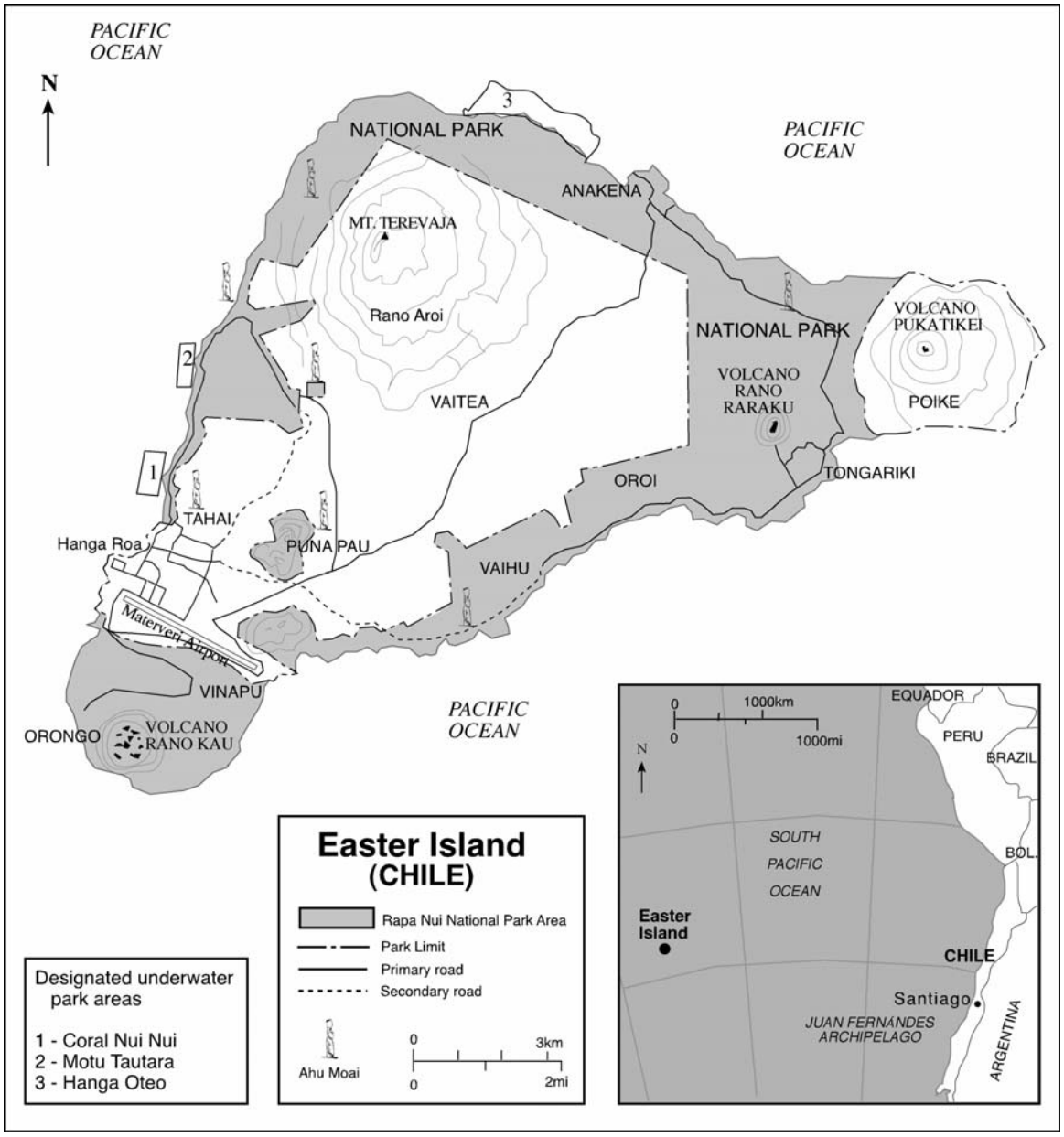
APRIL 30, 2001

HANGA ROA, Chile–Once toppled and downcast, the monuments and people of Easter Island are now upright and proud. Located in the South Pacific Ocean some 3,700 kilometers west of the Chilean mainland, this island is home to Moai carved heads that transcend a 1,400-year history. Both the native islanders and monuments have survived for centuries, but do they have the stamina to survive another millennium in the face of diluting ethnicity and eroding Moai?

Easter Island is the world's most remote inhabited island. From here one has to travel more than 1,900 kilometers in any direction to encounter inhabited land. The island evolved from the eruption of three volcanoes over a span of 300,000 to three million years ago. The volcanoes form a triangle in the shape of a modern-day Stealth jet fighter. Whether Polynesians or South Americans settled Easter Island has long been the subject of debate among archaeologists. In 1947 explorer-archaeologist Thor Heyerdahl set out to prove his theory that Easter Island was settled from the east when he successfully sailed his balsa raft, *Kon-Tiki*, from South America to Raroia, a Polynesian island. Nevertheless, today a more commonly accepted theory is that migrants from the Marquesas, a group of islands halfway between Easter Island and Hawaii, settled this subtropical landscape around the 4th century A.D. It was relatively unknown until Dutch-mariner Jacob Roggeveen arrived. Since that fateful Easter Day in 1722 when Roggeveen dubbed the Island "Easter," waves of nationalities have left their mark on Rapa Nui, as it's called by native islanders.

One can be Rapa Nui, speak Rapa Nui and live on Rapa Nui. *Rapa* means island and *Nui*, big. The Rapa Nui people have endured much and with reason are proud survivors. After Dutch sailor Roggeveen explored the region, the Spaniards, British, French and Russians all sent separate expeditions to Rapa Nui in the 18th century. The 19th century saw Peruvian slave raids carry off at least 2,000 Rapa Nui to work on Peruvian coastal guano deposits. By 1870, disease and slavery had wiped out all but 111 Rapa Nui. Since that time Rapa Nui population levels have steadily risen to the current 1,800. (Though Easter Island's population is over 3,000, not all are Rapa Nui.) However, historical population levels are estimated to have been as high as 16,000 before a collapse due to disease, warfare and resource scarcity.

In 1888, Chile annexed the Island and subsequently leased the land to a sheep-breeding company that confined the Islanders to Hanga Roa, the Island's sole community. During the sheep-ranching era, which lasted until 1953, nearly half of the Island became a national park, created in 1935. The Island was controlled by the Chilean Navy from 1953 until 1965, when civilian rule replaced military command. One year later, invited by a conservative Chilean government, the U.S. Air Force arrived, which caused considerable social change in only a few years. Before it departed in 1970, making a quick exit after the election of socialist Salva-




dor Allende, it had installed water and electrical systems in Hanga Roa, and built an airstrip for large airplanes.

The U.S. servicemen produced not only material goods, but also children. The general manager of the water and light company, Gerardo Valasco, told me the sad story of a young Rapa Nui boy who had never met his North American father, and wanted to. You can cross Easter Island on foot in less than a day and find someone in half an hour. Thinking it couldn't be that difficult to find his father, the 18-year-old boy flew to Chicago to search for him. The boy knew only his father's name and didn't have any address or phone number. At the airport he asked for his father — and began to realize the United States was much larger than he'd imagined. He gave up his search and returned home.

Besides the Air Force base, U.S. influence resulted in significant changes on two other occasions. In 1986, NASA funded a $7 million project to lengthen the Island's runway to 3,300 meters as an alternate airport for emergency Space-Shuttle landings. Movie star and director Kevin Costner stirred the next wave of change by shooting his 1993 movie "Rapa Nui" on Easter Island. The experience had a powerful effect on the life of Islanders; they developed a keen awareness of their uniqueness and from this began a new approach to marketing the island. The tangible result of the movie is the number of vehicles on Easter Island. In 1971, there were only 16 autos and one minibus. Numbers grew slowly until movie production required autos — and paid well for renting them. The demand, and influx of money, created an auto-buying spree that increased registered vehicles to the 1,500 currently on the Island.

Just the words, Rapa Nui, sound tropical and exotic. The thought of Rapa Nui creates an image of coconut and banana trees swaying in a tropical breeze. However, after landing at the airport and hiking up Rano Kau volcano, I realized that Easter Island is essentially rock and grasslands. If you took away the plantations of Eucalyptus trees imported from Australia, and the Hanga Roa fruit trees such as banana, papaya, guava, coconut and avocado, the Is-

*Hanga Roa, Easter Island's sole community, lies in the distance with Mataveri Airport in the foreground. The runway doubles as an emergency Space Shuttle landing strip. Lining the runway is a plantation of Eucalyptus trees.*

land would be a windswept grassy knoll. Temperatures range from 60° F to 90° F, and humidity is much lower than in the tropics. A cool breeze off the ocean and occasional brief showers combine for a surprisingly pleasant climate.

The famous Easter Island heads, known as Moai, were carved and erected as a tribute to deceased members of the ruling class. All the Moai standing today have either been restored or reconstructed. Before 1956, the Moai that now stand upon platforms (known as *ahu)* had been toppled. Inter-tribal wars, slave revolts, earthquakes and tsunamis had brought down all the Moai by the mid-19th century. All but seven of the 300-plus Moai looked inland, so as to create a sense of the ruling class watching over their people. As a result of class and inter-tribal conflicts, the Moai were knocked down face first so the eyes would no longer be watching. Moai were carved out of rock from a hillside quarry on the Island's easterly edge. Placed upon 245 *ahu* lining the coast, the true mystery today is how the Moai — standing from two to ten meters and weighing tens of tons — were transported several kilometers from quarry to platform. Theories range from dragging on wooden runners to lifting with a large bipod and cable attached to the neck. Certainly the most creative version is Erich Von Däniken's. His book, "Chariots of the Gods," explains that extraterrestrial intervention was the method of transporting these giants.

Various governments, organizations and individuals have helped restore Moai over the past five decades, beginning with Norwegian Thor Heyerdahl in 1956, American William Mulloy in the 1960's and most recently a team of Japanese archaeologists. The latter added a new twist in restoration techniques; they used a large crane donated by Japanese Tadano, a manufacturer of hydraulic cranes, to

*Rolling grasslands and rocky terrain characterize Easter Island. At twice the size of Manhattan it is the most remote inhabited island in the world.*

*Stone statutes called* Moai *were toppled during inter-tribal conflicts and earthquakes, the last having fallen by the mid-19th century.*

raise the multi-ton Moai into position.

In 1995, Rapa Nui National Park was designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Several years later UNESCO earmarked $671,000 for the restoration of *Ahu Te Pito Te Kura*, the tallest Moai — at 10 meters — ever placed upon an *ahu*. Next to *Te Pito Te Kura* is a perfectly round stone the size of an ice chest with the same name. The name translates as 'the navel of light,' and symbolizes Easter Island as the Navel of the World to Rapa Nui. However, the money has not yet arrived at the 'navel of the world' because signatures are needed at the navel of government in Santiago. Park Superintendent Marcos Rauch, an archeologist educated at the University of Chile, was quick to point out that "Not all the money will be coming to the park; at least ten percent will be used for administering the project from the central office." As manager of the only cultural park in Chile, he came to Rapa Nui straight from the university and has worked his way to the top post over the past ten years.

* * *

Park Ranger Maria Chavez looked as though she were meditating as she sat on a grassy knoll overlooking Ahu Tahai. When I approached she broke out of her trance-like gaze out over the endless Pacific. In an open field under the watchful presence of seven Moai, we began the usual "ranger chat." Several times during our half-hour conversation, motorbikes sped noisily past us, using the park as a shortcut between the island's only town, Hanga Roa, and their homes. Ahu Tahai is the

*Ahu Tongariki, restored in the mid-1990's by Japanese archaeologists with assistance of a crane donated by Tadano Company, a crane manufacturer*

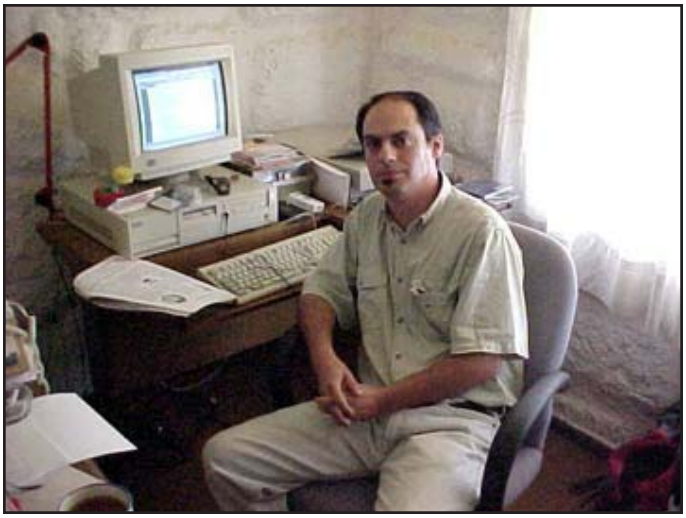
most popular tourist attraction because of its proximity to town and the beautiful sunsets that silhouette its Moai. I asked Ranger Chavez why she didn't stop the motorbikes from crossing parklands.

"I could tell them to stop," she said, "but they won't listen. They know I can't do anything about it." Ranger Chavez's only weapon against violators of park rules is the whistle she carries. She often uses it to gain the attention of visitors who climb the platforms to get better pictures. With a polite wave from Chavez, visitors quickly scurry off these ancient artifacts. However, motorcyclists wouldn't even hear her whistle, even if she chose to waste her breath on the endless procession. We finished our ranger chat as Chavez left to scare away several horses that were approaching an ahu. Her whistle didn't work on the horses, either but her dog knew how to get them away.

Days later, in a conversation with Superintendent Rauch, I asked about regulations that protect park resources. He confirmed that "rules have been developed, but park rangers do not have the authority to enforce these rules." Those that do have authority to write tickets, the *Carabineros* (the national police force), are usually not around when the violation occurs.

After several months' immersion in the Chilean parks system, I have come to a conclusion that a priority of Conaf should be the development of a park-ranger school or a co-education arrangement with the Argentine Ranger School. Conaf also needs to develop regulations that will allow park rangers to enforce laws and write tickets. This may be a tall order, considering the tight grip *Carabineros* have on police functions. However, I believe with proper training, park rangers could take on these duties. My specific suggestions for Rapa Nui National Park would be to hire seasonal park rangers, especially during the busy season of January and February. This would give rangers a higher profile during a time when most people are visiting Rapa Nui.[1]

I also think a visitor center is needed in Hanga Roa. The first management plan, completed in 1976, listed this as a high priority. It appeared again in the 1997 revised-management plan. However, only half



*Marcos Rauch, Superintendent of Rapa Nui National Park: at 35, he is the youngest manager in the Chilean park system.*

the projects listed in the 1976 plan were ever completed. Obviously, creative ways need to be found to fulfill management plans. Sernatur, the Chilean travel bureau, recently developed its own plans for office expansion. Conaf's cooperation with Sernatur's office-expansion project could lead to a win-win situation in the form of a new business office and a jointly staffed visitor center. Thus the current Conaf business office could be moved from the outskirts of town to Sernatur's central location. This would foster cooperation among the alphabet-soup bureaucracies in Hanga Roa. Some government officials and local townspeople I

*Park Ranger Maria Chavez and her dog shoo away horses from Ahu Tahai.*

[1] Chilean and Spanish park officials have recently developed a ranger exchange program between Rapa Nui National Park and a national park on the Canary Islands. Due to the reverse-high-season of the two parks, perhaps park managers could take advantage of this supply/demand equation to the benefit of each park.

spoke with questioned whether Conaf has the capacity to protect the park. A presence in town could help shore up fragmented relationships between Conaf and other entities.

* * *

No sensible park manager would even consider such an outing, but it was the only way I had to experience a day in the field with a park ranger. So I straddled the back of a Suzuki motorbike and held on to Park Ranger Fernando León Icka for dear life. All indicators pointed toward disaster: I had no helmet, was wearing shorts and a T-shirt, and we were zooming down a gravel road. Our destination was Rano Raraku, an extinct volcano with moist bedrock that had been used for hundreds of years to carve Moai from a freckled hillside. Halfway across the Island to our duty station, I began to loosen my deadly grip around Fernando's waist. I looked around, astonished to see we were alone on the coast road; tour vans were not out this early in the morning. I could smell the ocean breeze and was mesmerized by curling waves crashing on the rocky shore. My fixed stare was interrupted only by fallen Moai that scattered the coastline, looking like giant chess pieces knocked over by an opponent who deliberately shook the board in frustration. In my awed state I forgot my motorbike worries, until we made a sudden left turn and began crossing gullied ravines. Fernando traversed the tightrope with accuracy and safely delivered me to the ranger cabin.

*Fernando León Icka patrolling his sector for garbage at Rano Raraku, an extinct volcano where Moai were once carved from volcanic rock.*

We toured his 'bare-bones' duty station before he left to patrol a nearby sector and I hiked off to explore the area. I circled along the crater rim of Rano Raraku Volcano and was rewarded with a tranquil early-morning view of the popular Moai quarry. I had been here once before, but with a tour group. Guided tours come here on Saturdays and Tuesdays. On those days the atmosphere is completely different. The volcano hillside and picnic grounds are filled with hundreds of people from around the world. Tour guides can be seen jockeying for parking places in the shade.

Easter Island guides have created a guides' association, and a majority of tour leaders have joined. They pay dues annually and the association sponsors workshops for guides, and serves as a common voice in discussions with park management. Since Conaf does not charge guide fees and has no ability to control access, park officials were delighted to see the guides form an association. This has facilitated and will continue to facilitate better communications across a variety of issues, such as conservation of Moai and visitor education.

Considering tour-excursion routines, I think Conaf should work with the guides' association to develop a daily schedule that spreads out visitor use across the week. Now, all tour companies tend to follow the same circuit at the same time. It is like traveling in a cattle herd. Dispersing use across the week rather than concentrating it will foster better-quality visitor experiences. As visitation grows, controlling when and where people go will become more important. Statistics over the last two decades clearly indicate a steady rise in visitation. A comparative analysis of total visitation, which includes those arriving by airplane and boat, shows a dramatic rise. In 1980, over 5,700 came to the Island; in 1990 it was nearly 11,130; last year over 30,500 stopped on Easter Island to see its treasures. Of these totals, upward of 70 percent were foreigners.

Fernando returned before noon and we made rounds to pick up trash. Luckily garbage has not become an eyesore here as it has in parks on the Chilean mainland, where some trails and picnic areas have trash flapping in the wind. He described how the eight rangers on staff rotate to a different sector each week, except the cushiest sector of all — Anakena Beach. The park's Chief Ranger patrols Anakena, one of two sandy beaches on Easter Island. This has led to many complaints among park staff members because the Chief Ranger doesn't give up this prime sector. Moreover, as many told me, "He's Chilean." Distinctions are often made between who's native and who's not.

After patrolling for garbage we returned to the ranger cabin to eat lunch. I read through the Rangers' notebook used to record daily patrols. Comments and observations were written in Rapa Nui as well as Spanish. Rapa Nui is an eastern Polynesian tongue related to the Maori of the Cook Islands. The alphabet consists of only 14 letters. Rapa Nui is taught in the Island school and nearly all students and school alumni speak the language, as well as Spanish. One ranger wrote the following in the notebook: "*Hetiti ite manavai o te Ha'ari. Ko Maoa te mahana iorana*." The only word I recognized was the last one, which means both hello and good-bye. Staff in the park headquarters taught me several Rapa Nui phrases, such as *Pehe Koe* — how are you? *Riva-Riva* — good; *Rake-Rake* — bad; *Mauruu*

— thank you; and *Paka-Paka* — a toast. Language is a critical element for the survival of a distinct culture, and the Rapa Nui are keenly aware of this and ardently promote use of their language within the community.

After lunch we spent the afternoon visiting park neighbors. One elderly man with gray hair, a sun-bronzed body, bare feet and no shirt told me that the Moai were his ancestors. He wanted me to understand the fundamental connection between the living and the dead — and that both need care and respect if Rapa Nui culture is to continue. When I told him I was studying the national park, he automatically said, "Well then, you should study me, because I am just as much a part of the park as these Moai." This sentiment was one I heard over and over in conversations about my work.

I agree that the current generation of Rapa Nui people is as important to the island culture as the Moai. However, defining Rapa Nui ethnicity is tricky. Considering the fact that only 111 Rapa Nui survived 19th-century Peruvian slave raids and off-island diseases, how pure is the bloodline? Rapa Nui have been intermixing with the French, North Americans, Germans and Chileans for over a century. It's difficult to find a Rapa Nui without a foreigner in the family tree. So what defines ethnicity? Is it physical appearance, blood lineage, language or something else? There may come a time when the only common Rapa Nui link is the language. Luckily, Rapa Nui culture has experienced a resurgence of interest, thanks to *Tapati*, the Rapa Nui Festival held annually since the 1970's. This weeklong festival showcases Rapa Nui music, dancing, sport and crafts. The Festival has become *the* cultural event of the year, a sign that Rapa Nui people are becoming as important as their Moai.

As an afternoon rain shower approached, Fernando and I returned to town on his motorbike. This time I did not fear the ride, but thought of the old man's lecture and wondered what it felt like to be Rapa Nui and enfolded in your history. Without a doubt, this had to be the source of the overwhelming pride I sensed in each Rapa Nui I met.

* * *

Chile's Indigenous Law of 1993 created the Easter Island Development Commission. Comprising 14 members, the Commission allocates its seats among six persons elected from the Rapa Nui community, the provincial governor, the town mayor and six representatives of various governmental ministries. The commission's foremost task is to study and propose land-distribution and land-use issues, focused mainly on land restitution to the Rapa Nui community.[2]

Easter Island, which is twice the size of Manhattan at 45.6 square miles, is divided into four land-ownership categories. Conaf-administered Rapa Nui National Park covers 43 percent of the island. Vaitea, a state-managed ranch, occupies the center of Easter Island with 37 percent. Hanga Roa has 3 percent, and the remaining 17 percent is rural common domain. By law only Rapa Nui can own private land, and they cannot sell to foreigners, not even continental Chileans. A person of Rapa Nui heritage is defined by having at least one parent of Rapa Nui ancestry. One result of Rapa Nui-only land ownership is that commercialism has been kept at bay. For example, if you wanted to open a McDonalds and were not Rapa Nui you would have to find a Rapa Nui business partner. Community pressure may keep him or her from entering into business with you. If you did succeed, it would become clear in no time at all that you'd invested in a project for which you had no right to ownership and subsequently no chance to make a profit.

Ten years ago former Chilean President Patricio Aylwin promised to restore land to the Rapa Nui community. Last year his promise was fulfilled when 1,500 hectares (about 9 percent of the Island) were given back by means of a lottery. The former presidentially-appointed provincial governor, Jacobo Hey Paoa, a law school classmate of Miguel Aylwin — son of the former president — led the restitution process. Land was distributed to 280 previously selected Rapa Nui who picked numbers to determine which five-hectare parcel each would receive.

Of the 1,500 hectares returned, 425 were national-parkland in Vaihu, an area that doesn't contain Moai or other archeological artifacts. This year the Commission and the National Lands Office are studying another round of restitution totaling, 2,500 hectares. Most officials I spoke with predicted this will be the last round because the stakes become higher as land availability becomes scare.

The two remaining sources, parkland and Vaitea ranch, are being eyed for a re-takeover by some members of the Rapa Nui community. Vaitea is a state-managed ranch operated by Sasipa Limited (*Sociedad Agrícola y de Servicios Isla de Pascua*), a small, public enterprise. In addition to the ranch, with its slaughterhouse and butcher shop, Sasipa is the harbor-port authority and also manages the Island's water and electrical systems. However, Sasipa is not alone in having a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. The national park, designated a World Heritage Site in 1995 (the first in Chile), now has an international profile and the World Heritage Commission has concerns when park resources are converted to private ownership.

*Corporación de Fomento de La Producción* (Corfo), the Chilean Economic Development Agency, has recently initiated a study of Easter Island's carrying capacity. It's a nine-month study to determine the level of services and number of people Easter Island can sustain without straining current ecosystems. However, according to several sources,

[2] Besides creating the commission and its duties, the law allows Rapa Nui families to return to indigenous surnames unused for the past two centuries due to diseases and slavery that nearly wiped out the population's identity. It is common now for families to bring back traditional surnames; almost 50 are currently in use.

the real reason behind the study is to stop the flow of "wanna-be" residents from the mainland. Rapa Nui welcome tourists who come for three days, spend money and then leave; what they don't care for are "Contis" (slang for mainland Chileans) or other foreigners who come to stay. Considering the desire to limit the number of people who live on Rapa Nui, several Islanders are starting to promote the Galapagos Islands as a model for Easter Island. Legislation for the Galapagos Islands, a national park under Ecuadorean control, sets limits on who is eligible to live on the Islands, essentially a method of immigration control. On the other hand, those with a strong understanding of the Chilean constitution don't think a Galapagos-type model would fly here.

* * *

Erosion comes in two forms: natural and unnatural. The monuments of Easter Island, which include Moai, *ahu* and petroglyphs, are experiencing both. Elements of natural erosion include rain and lichens, which slowly dissolve away rock formations. Fires set deliberately to clear pastureland for livestock accelerate unnatural erosion. At times fires burn out of control onto parklands, subsequently heating Moai and petroglyphs and causing fractures to develop in the rock. Other unnatural erosion is caused by humans climbing on monuments and visitors marking petroglyphs with chalk for better photographs. In addition, free-ranging livestock accelerate erosion when they rub up against monuments and/or defecate on them, leaving an acidic mixture that decays the soft stone.

In an effort to educate guides, who in turn can educate their clients, the New York-based World Monuments Fund presented a seminar on conserving Rapa Nui archeological heritage. The three-day seminar held in mid-April coincided serendipitously with my visit. Experts in the field of monument conservation conducted studies and gave lectures on solutions for reducing monument erosion. Treatments now exist for coating monuments with a chemical that prevents erosion. However, at nearly $15,000 per Moai, this solution is out of reach. A public-education program is the most feasible option. One particular idea that could be initiated immediately is a video production to educate visitors on what they can do to conserve Rapa Nui monuments. In cooperation with the national airline (LanChile), and perhaps other corporations, this video could be shown on flights to Easter Island. Considering the fact that only one carrier flies to Easter Island and that a captive audience is seated for five to six hours (from either Santiago or Tahiti), it seems like the perfect opportunity.

*One form of natural erosion, lichens growing on the face of a Moai. Lichens are a symbiotic relationship between certain fungi and algae; they dissolve rock to obtain nutrients.*

* * *

It became known as the "secret decree" because few knew of it and *decreto secreto* made good word-play with *Decreto Supremo*. In December 1999 former President Eduardo Frei signed *Decreto Supremo* No. 547, which designated three Easter Island coastal zones as underwater parks (the first in all of Chile). The decree prohibited all activities that can adversely affect flora and fauna within the marine ecosystem. The Chilean Navy controls offshore activities and thus develops regulations governing the sea. Nevertheless, before I received a copy of the Decree from the Island's Naval Office, few had seen it, including Conaf and Sernatur officials and the man who initiated the idea, SCUBA diver Michel García.

García, a 22-year resident of Rapa Nui from France, came here with his brother Henri García on a 1979 expedition led by Jacques Cousteau. When Cousteau and his team completed their four-month tour, Michel stayed. He is cautious when he speaks about the proposal he developed, for he does not want to be associated with the result. The Chilean Navy has virtually reversed his advice. The Navy controls all land 80 meters inland from the shoreline and authorizes uses within this perimeter. García's dive shop is easily within this imaginary line. He doesn't want to rock the boat, and therefore doesn't point out that the Navy ignored his recommendation to protect the most important diving area. Instead, Navy officials left a spectacular coral and fish zone near the harbor open to fishing, while declaring the opposite side of Easter Island an underwater park. The protected area is too far away for dive tours, and Navy boats patrol the Island only once a week, essentially leaving it open for illegal fishing.

* * *

The Man had little patience for me; I was just a small-fry gringo "reporter" from an obscure North American foundation. I arranged an interview the day before, not knowing that he had scheduled other appointments at the same time. When I arrived at his house two other reporters were waiting to speak with him after my interview.

"What is the history of the Elders Council?" I asked, starting off with what he confirmed to be an easy question.

"It's a long story, you can find that information else-

*The next generation of Rapa Nui enjoying a horseback ride at Ahu Tahai. Their challenge is to conserve the monuments that define the community's past and maintain a living culture that will enrich their future.*

where. Everybody knows it," he quickly replied.

"Tell me more about the petition you sent to the United Nations requesting assistance in securing a referendum for Easter Island independence," I said, thinking this would get him interested.

"That never went anywhere. Now we want the Chilean government to ratify OIT 169. You need to read that to understand the situation better. And remember 'land' and 'territory' is the same. What other questions do you have?"

Figuring this was my last chance to avoid a third strike, I asked, "What is the major controversy now?"

Firmly and resolutely he responded, "We want the whole island back."

As he was starting to fidget in his chair, I could see I had struck out and was being sent to the dugout.

My interviewee was Alberto Hotu, the President of *Consejo de Ancianos* (Elders Council), former Mayor of Hanga Roa and renowned expert in Rapa Nui land issues. With the few clues he gave me I began my search for answers. The Elders Council is a restart of a tradition from Rapa Nui culture. Rapa Nui families elect the council and the president of the council now has a seat on the Easter Island Development Commission.

My search for meaning of "OIT 169" led me to the United Nations web page. After a little research I learned that OIT stands for *Organización Internacional de Trabajo* or the International Labor Organization. OIT 169 was a convention concerning "Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries." Part II of the convention addressed land rights, with the first sentences stating, "The rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy shall be recognized." Hotu's original goal in writing a petition to the United Nations in the late 1980's, signed by nearly all Rapa Nui people, was to force a referendum on Easter Island independence. Since that never happened, he tried to force the Chilean government to ratify Convention 169. Chile never did, and still hasn't. To date, only 14 countries have signed, they include — surprisingly — Peru, Mexico, Guatemala and Bolivia. Conspicuously absent from the list of countries that have ratified the convention is the United States.

As for getting the whole island back, the chances of that are even lower than the chances of unraveling the mystery of how Moai were transported. Not all Rapa Nui support the call to regain control of Easter Island; some shrewdly recognize the benefits and stability provided by Chilean presence. For instance, college-age Rapa Nui are offered free education on the mainland. No property or income taxes are collected on Easter Island and numerous bureaucratic jobs are available in a variety of Chilean ministries. What does the Chilean government get in return? A nifty tourist destination.

* * *

In a Boeing 767, the powerful jet engines shook the cabin. As we lifted from the Space Shuttle landing strip, I looked back at Easter Island to see its brown grass and rocky shores slowly shrink into the distance. I thought about the effort to curtail Moai erosion and the struggle to maintain a cultural ethnicity that nearly went extinct. I couldn't thinking that, worldwide, we were losing the battle a little bit each day. I faded off to sleep hazily wondering if it would be possible to stop time, but all too aware that no civilization is eternal. ❑

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

# FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITITES

Shelly Renae Browning (March 2001- 2003) • AUSTRALIA
A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

Wendy Call (May 2000 - 2002) • MEXICO
A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Martha Farmelo (April 2001- 2003) • ARGENTINA
A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine doctoral candidate and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of Italo/Latino machismo. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Gregory Feifer (January 2000 - 2002) • RUSSIA
With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for Agence France-Presse and the weekly Russia Journal in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Curt Gabrielson (December 2000 - 2002) • EAST TIMOR
With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing MIT in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

Peter Keller (March 2000 - 2002) • CHILE
Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Leena Khan (April 2001-2003) • PAKISTAN
A U.S. lawyer previously focused on immigration law, Leena is looking at the wide-ranging strategies adopted by the women's movement inPakistan, starting from the earliest days in the nationalist struggle for independence, to present. She is exploring the myths and realities of women living under Muslim laws in Pakistan through women's experiences of identity, religion, law and customs, and the implications on activism. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she was raised in the States and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

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ICWA Letters **(ISSN 1083-4303)** are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers by subscription.

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Author: Keller, Peter
Title: ICWA Letters - The Americas
ISSN: 1083-4303
Imprint: Institute of Current World Affairs, Hanover, NH
Material Type: Serial
Language: English
Frequency: Monthly
Other Regions: East Asia; Sub-Saharan Africa; Mideast/North Africa; South Asia; Europe/Russia