

# Terevaka.net Archaeological Outreach 2012 field report: Community-based archaeology

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Rapa Nui, like many other islands in the Pacific Ocean, boasts a rich and island-wide sense of community. Many members of the local community come together on a weekly, if not daily, basis to enjoy traditional sports, music, dancing, and artwork. This vibrant modern community stems largely from a shared love of, and interest in, traditions of the island that have existed for many centuries.

The Terevaka.net Archaeological Outreach (TAO) program is now exploring new ways to encourage a community-based approach to archaeological research and conservation on the island through educational opportunities for local high school students and local tour guides.

Over the past nine years, the educational program has reached more than seventy local students, three of whom have gone on to receive university degrees in archaeology or conservation. Over the course of nine years, the students have undertaken six distinct research projects – ranging from ethnographic interviews to micro-environmental analysis. Their research and data have been published on the Internet ([www.terevaka.net](http://www.terevaka.net)), in international conference proceedings, in academic journals, in newspapers, at film festivals, and in popular magazines (Rutherford et al. 2008; Shepardson 2006, 2010; Shepardson & Torres Hochstetter 2009; Shepardson et al. 2004, 2009, 2010, 2011; Torres Hochstetter & Shepardson 2005).

While the specific research interests of students have changed each year, the goals of the TAO program remain constant. First, our work aims to utilize archaeology as a foundation for education and opportunity within Rapa Nui's island community. Second, our projects promote awareness of and expertise in archaeology and cultural conservation. And third, we document, study, and conserve the remarkable treasures of the past that remain on Rapa Nui today.

All three high schools on the island (Colegio Hermano Eugenio Eyraud, Colegio San Sebastián de Akivi, and La Aldea Educativa) welcomed collaboration with TAO, as the standardized Chilean curriculum often neglects exposing students to the history and prehistory of their own island with any depth.

During the two-week intensive course in July of 2012, local Rapa Nui high school students began to research the history of archaeological excavations on the island. Students spent many hours in the William Mulloy Library to gain a better understanding of the history, methods, and technology of excavations throughout the 20th and 21st centuries on the island. Their research led to interesting discussions, heated debates, and ultimately the foundation of a publicly accessible database of archaeological excavations on Rapa Nui ([www.terevaka.net/dc/databases/tao\\_2012](http://www.terevaka.net/dc/databases/tao_2012)). The first season of this research was devoted primarily to the excavations conducted in the 'Anakena area by researchers from Norway, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Chile, Rapa Nui, and Brazil between 1986 and 1988 (Skjølsvold 1994).

In the years to come, TAO students and staff will continue to add to the public database until we have successfully documented all known archaeological excavations on the island. This database serves a number of critical purposes. First, the database offers a direct line of access to cultural information for members of the local island community, tourists, and archaeologists. This web resource will add a new dimension to tourism on the island and allow Rapa Nui-philes all over the



Figure 1. A screen-shot from our publicly-accessible database of excavations.



Figure 2. TAO staff and students on a field trip at 'Anakena Beach.



Figure 3. TAO students (left-to-right: Hamene Tuki, Kamila Astete, Merahi Hey, Natalia Cifuentes, Macarena Terongo) attend a field trip lecture by Beno Atán at Ahu Tongariki.



Figure 4. Students Natalia Cifuentes and Tahira Hey talk to TAO Director Britton Shepardson about the prehistory of the Vinapu area.

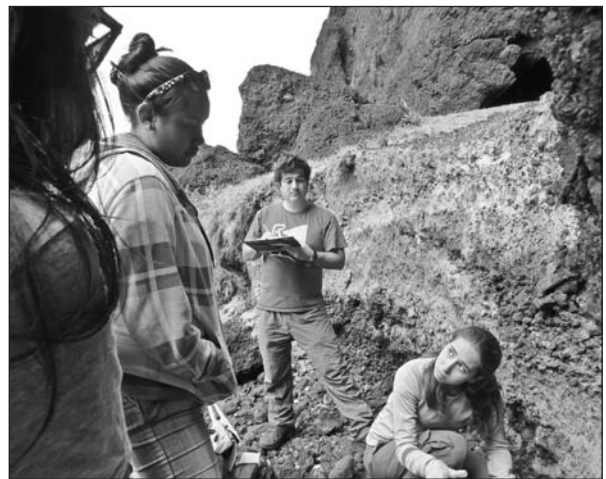


Figure 5. TAO students observe an excavation conducted by Irene Arévalo, Corporación Nacional Forestal de Chile (right) and Francisco Torres, MAPSE (center) at Ovahe Beach. Irene completed the TAO program in 2003 and later received a degree in conservation while attending university in Santiago, Chile.



Figure 6. Staff and students of TAO attend a field trip on the Poike Peninsula.



Figure 7. TAO students collecting information from excavation reports in the William Mulloy Library on Rapa Nui.

world who cannot actually travel to the island a new opportunity to explore and share the rich history and prehistory of Rapa Nui. Open and convenient access to scholarly information can also prevent damaging and invasive excavation projects in the future that would be unnecessary if archaeologists have full access to prior excavation reports.

Second, the public database can raise the bar for the island's expectations of visiting research archaeologists. All too many foreign (and Chilean) archaeologists have conducted extensive research on the island but never made all of their findings available to the public. As we move to an age of heightened globalization and shared responsibility, it becomes imperative that archaeologists share not only their conclusions, but their data as well. Local high school students on the island are now encouraging all archaeologists to submit thorough and detailed reports of excavation work to the local museum so that those reports may be published on the publicly accessible webpage as well.

Third, while technology rapidly advances in archaeology, research continues to focus on excavation. This type of research often damages the inherent cultural value and aesthetic appeal of archaeological sites on the island. The research also often yields an abundance of artifacts and samples which the local Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert (MAPSE) no longer has the space or resources to adequately curate. By aggregating *all* excavation records into one database, TAO hopes to emphasize the excessively destructive impact attributable to archaeological research over the past century on the island. Until archaeologists have exhausted all other non-invasive methods for research, perhaps excavation should wait.

TAO also worked closely with local tour guides, primarily from the Explora Rapa Nui, to develop a network of community-based researchers. More than anyone else (even archaeologists), tour guides on the island scrutinize the archaeological remains of the island on a daily basis. They observe, compare, and document the ancient remains in their own ways. TAO has donated digital cameras and global positioning system units so that tour guides can collaboratively add to detailed Internet databases using Google Maps in real time. While these tour guides may not have any formal or academic training in systematic archaeology research, their documentation of sites and collaborative development of island-wide databases may be a non-invasive approach to investigative archaeological survey (and perhaps our greatest hope of comprehensive coverage of the island in any realistic timespan).

As is always the case in the TAO program, this year's students had opportunities to attend local lectures by archaeologists, conservators, and other

researchers. They also had various opportunities to explore archaeological sites around the island.

Next year, we are looking forward to another successful educational season with local students and local tour guides. Together, we hope to continue our mission to empower the local community on Rapa Nui, to protect the island's fragile cultural and natural heritage, and to study the island's ancient culture.

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