

Getting to know you

Mara Mulrooney

- Q. How did you get into archaeology, and specifically Easter Island archaeology? What triggered your interest?
- A. During my third year at UC Santa Barbara, I took a class on the Inka Empire by Katharina Schreiber simply because it fit into my schedule. After taking that class, I decided that I wanted to one day become a professor of archaeology. During my last year at UCSB, Dr. Terry Hunt gave a guest lecture in one of my classes and he advertised the first University of Hawai'i Field School on Rapa Nui, which I attended in July 2001. After visiting the island, I decided to shift my regional focus from South American archaeology to Pacific archaeology.
- Q. Who or what do you consider as your most significant influence (scientific or otherwise) either as a person or a particular work (or series of works)?
- A. My mom has definitely influenced my life most significantly. She taught elementary school for over 20 years, and has always inspired and encouraged me to follow my own passion for teaching and conducting research. Professionally, my professors at the University of Auckland, especially Thegn Ladefoged, Simon Holdaway, Melinda Allen, Peter Sheppard, and the late Roger Green, have been most influential in guiding my research practices.
- Q. What theory or project of yours turned out differently from what you had expected as, for example, a complete surprise?
- A. My doctoral research has changed significantly over the past few years. When I began doing the background research for it, I envisioned a dissertation that would deal with issues of social complexity and evolutionary ecology on Rapa Nui. As I continued to do research and gather field data, I realized that my dissertation was more about empirically assessing one aspect of the collapse scenario on the island than anything else.
- Q. What would you have done if you had not pursued your current line(s) of research and interests?
- A. I probably would have followed the dreams that my dad had for me, becoming a pharmacist.
- Q. What was your best Eureka moment?
- A. I'll never forget the day that I gave my initial department seminar that outlined the background to my PhD research in 2007, and Roger Green was sitting in the front row. As I evaluated the evidence for the collapse scenario on the island, Roger attentively listened, nodding his head in agreement as I pointed out some of the limitations



- of the evidence. It was so inspiring to have one of the “greats” of Pacific archaeology supporting my research endeavors at that early stage.
- Q. What do you hope to accomplish (in archaeology) on Easter Island in the future?
- A. I would like to continue to share the results of my research, and the research of others, with the entire Rapa Nui community.
- Q. What is your favorite Easter Island site and why?
- A. I could never choose just one. The entire island really can be conceptualized as one continuous archaeological “site”, and each area of the island has its own unique draw. The Hanga Ho‘onu region will always hold a special place in my heart, as it is the focus of my doctoral research and is an amazing area to have had the opportunity to work for the past 5 years.
- Q. What myth or misinformation about Easter Island would you like to dispel?
- A. I would like to dispel much of the information that has been presented as “fact” in documentaries and other popular media, especially the perception of the island as a textbook example of a “collapsed” society with the Rapanui people as the perpetrators of “environmental suicide.”

- Q. What's the most important thing you'd like visitors (or scientists, for that matter) to know about Easter Island?
- A. Don't believe everything you read or see on television. If you decide to visit the island, respect the people and the place, and take a step back to admire the cultural achievements, past and present, of the Rapanui people.
- Q. What advice would you give to a person interested in Easter Island archaeology or anthropology (or those fields generally)?
- A. To remember that it is a privilege to be able to study someone else's culture, not a right.
- Q. If you could, what would you change about the fields of archaeology and anthropology?
- A. Too often, archaeologists get too focused on publishing scientific articles and books, and the general public and local communities with whom we work do not get

to hear about the results of the collection and analysis of archaeological data. One of the most important responsibilities of archaeologists is to share our findings, and I would like to see this emphasized more in the future.

- Q. What are you currently reading?
- A. *How Chiefs Became Kings: Divine Kingship and the Rise of Archaic States in Ancient Hawai'i*, by Patrick Kirch.
- Q. Credentials?
- A. PhD in the works for early 2012, Anthropology, University of Auckland; MA, Anthropology, University of Auckland (2005); BA, Non-Western Art History, Anthropology Minor, University of California, Santa Barbara (2001).
- Q. Date and place of birth?
- A. October 26, 1979, Carson City, Nevada, USA.