

Yavu and Hill-Forts: An Archaeological Survey of South Natewa Bay, Vanua Levu

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Background/Explanation

In the summers of 2013 and 2014, researchers from the University of Alabama and Northern Kentucky University led by Sharyn Jones conducted excavations at an archaeological site in South Natewa Bay on the island of Vanua Levu, Fiji. With the final Research Experience for Undergraduates in 2015, I was able to participate in a limited archaeological survey of the bay within the vicinity of Nasinu village, located on the southwest shore of the bay. Further work will involve laboratory analysis of a small sample of diagnostic ceramics recovered from the sites. Archaeological information, paired with ethnographic data, creates a continuous past that is linked to the present.



Outcomes

Conducted over a period of several days on a series of overland hikes across the southern sector of Natewa Bay, our survey utilized ancient occupation sites within local knowledge known to be within their *mataqali*, the land historically belonging to their clan. During our excursions, we discovered the location of several stone *yavu* (including at least one with design features more similar to those found in the Lau Group and Tonga), as well as burial sites located contemporaneously with these.

We also were able to survey a terraced hill-top fortification, strategically located to provide overwatch over the entire southwest sector of the bay. The fortification is surrounded by a large moat and nearly vertical faces, with two causeways on the shallower faces providing access to the terrain below. Additionally, oral history accounts suggest the existence of a larger structure that once existed within Nasinu itself, the description of which is consistent with a large Lauan/Tongan *yavu*. However, the use and significance of this structure is not confirmed, having been vacant while the eldest informants were still children, and built upon by a modern community center in the latter half of the 20th century.



Yavu: A large platform made of volcanic rock and/or coral, on which ancient populations built house structures. In Fiji, associated with the Late Period, but evidence of earlier period occupations have been found within the same context. While individual *yavu* are often designed for a household, larger *yavu* have been documented.