



Cultural Survey of the Nakorotubu Range, Ra and Tailevu Provinces, Fiji.

Author: Nakoro, Elia

Source: A Rapid Biodiversity Assessment of the Nakorotubu Range, Ra and Tailevu Provinces, Fiji: 68

Published By: Conservation International

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1896/054.059.0111>

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

Chapter 10

Cultural Survey of the Nakorotubu Range, Ra and Tailevu Provinces, Fiji.

Elia Nakoro

Team members: *Tevita Digio (Soa Village),
Joji Vuli (Verevere Village) and
Sireli Nakanatabua (Nasau Village)*

SUMMARY

An archaeological assessment of any given area involves collecting information about the location, distribution and organization of past human cultures across a large area. Engaging the assistance of several guides, a non-invasive cultural survey of the Nakorotubu Range was conducted identifying and exploring archaeological sites of significance.

Utilizing the guides knowledge and local stories providing some hint of a greater past, the oral history of several archaeological sites in the Nakorotubu Range was documented. A major portion of the cultural sites identified during the survey belong to the people in the districts Bureivanua, Nakuilava and Bureiwai.

While most sites in the area have been well preserved over the years, a select few have been disturbed by human and non-human interaction over recent years with the introduction of livestock farming and agriculture in the area.

INTRODUCTION

Nakorotubu, one of the 19 districts in the province of Ra is rich in cultural history that spans over centuries in time. Given that there have been no previous archaeological records or research conducted in Nakorotubu, the archaeological assessment conducted over a span of two weeks was the first of its kind and nature in this area.

The area is littered with fortified village sites, ancient burial sites, old village sites or koro makawa and other interesting non-invasive archaeological finds. This chapter will explore the various cultural aspects of Nakorotubu, giving site names, descriptions, and brief discussions on folklore, the uses and significance of such locations, the imminent human and non-human threats as well as recommendations on how to maintain and preserve the cultural sites.

METHODS

The Fiji Museum-Archaeology Department's assessment of the archaeological/historical sites in Nakorotubu was documented from the local guide's knowledge of the sites and through the collation of oral history of the sites background and significance from the elders of the village of Matuku, Soa and Nasau.

The sites were mapped using a GPS receiver (GARMIN GPSmap 76CSx) and a rough sketch of the layout of the old villages and settlements was produced.

RESULTS

Nakorotubu Area

An annotation of the sites recorded from the forest area towards the village of Matuku is provided below. The location of the cultural sites in Nakorotubu are presented in Map 9.

Rock Shelter (Plates 54 & 55)

About 20 minutes walk, southeast from the Base camp 1 is the rock shelter. Commonly

known as the qara vatu, the site is a gigantic rock face used by the forest gatherers from the surrounding villages as a resting place at night.

Kena i talanoa [Legends and Myths]

According to the guides, the cave is sacred and renowned for its mysterious aura. The story passed down from their forefathers to the present day community is that if one should spend the night at the shelter he should put away his sharpening tool [flat file] and not leave it lying around carelessly. Should this happen, the tool would disappear the following day and it is said that the sharpening files are taken by spirit inhabitants of the shelter who continue to carve out the cave.

The rock shelter has a few chambers containing scattered remains of potteries. Water seeps through the rock layers from the top of the rock shelter and according to the guides, people would stand underneath the dripping water to fill their containers.

Kena i talanoa [Legends and Myths]

According to the guides, the cave is sacred and renowned for its mysterious aura. The story passed down from their forefathers to the present day community is that if one should spend the night at the shelter he should put away his sharpening tool [flat file] and not leave it lying around carelessly. Should this happen, the tool would disappear the following day and it is said that the sharpening files are taken by spirit inhabitants of the shelter who continue to carve out the cave.

Stone Alignment (Possible Lovo Pit) (Plate 56)

This stone aligned feature was found a few metres away, south from the foot of the hill where the rock shelter is. The stones are clearly visible and are a clear indication of human inhabitation in the area. Within the stone alignment is a depression that could have been an earthen pit or lovo (Plate 57). The diameter of the pit is about 1 m and around 25 cm deep at the deepest point.

Grave Site (Plate 58)

The team stumbled upon an unknown site containing four visible burial mounds with stone alignment (Plate 59). The villagers from Soa who have encountered the burial site previously on hunting expeditions, are unaware of the owners of the site although there are claims from other sources at the camp site of its links to the people of Nabavatu who were fleeing from their place of dwelling during the introduction of Christianity.

This site is located on a high terraced platform overlooking the lower surroundings of the area.

Nabavatu Old Settlement Site (Plate 60)

Similar to the grave site, very little is known about this old settlement site which lies along the hunting paths at the confluence of the Olou and Caquru creeks (Plate 61).

Kena i talanoa [Legends & Myths]

An elder informant claims that when Christianity was introduced, the colonial government made sure that conversion was widespread reaching even people in the highlands. Those who were critical were imprisoned for not accepting the new religion. The people of Nabavatu were believed to have broken out into the forest towards the north. Evidence of this could be given with the existence of several other settlement sites beyond the mountains trailing northward believed to be tied to the ancestors of Nabavatu.

This particular site was made up of terraced platforms outlined with stone formations and huge boulders but no evidence of house mounds that could have probably eroded due to heavy rain. This small settlement is about 22 m wide and about 35 m in length. The site is not strategically located but is close to its source of drinking water and livelihood possibly in the form of agricultural practice.

Unknown Site (Plate 62)

While walking through the forest, the team stumbled upon an unknown site (Plate 63) Located on one of the more elevated points, the site is fortified with visible terraces along the sides of the hill and an almost circular house mound about 20-25 m in diameter. Similar to the other unknown sites, the guides have an idea of its location and existence but know nothing of its past inhabitants or the settlement name.

Nabavatu Old Settlement Site (Plate 64)

The name of this site is confirmed and identified by the guides as Nabavatu. The site sits on a ridge top with terrace-like features identified to be the works of humans and suitable for dwelling. The site contains mostly stone aligned burials and a single raised earthen house mound of about 10 m in width and 15 m in length.

The area along the stream is scattered abundantly with huge boulders and stony bedrock all the way from the village of Matuku towards headwaters. The name Nabavatu translates to “stone barricade” which is a form of cultural identification for the yavusa [tribe] and mataqali [clan] having identified themselves with the natural physical features of the place. The name was carried through to other places of settlement during the time of break away northward.

Caquru Old Settlement Site (Plate 65)

The old village of Caquru (Plate 66) is situated on high grounds where it has been leveled for habitation purposes. On the site are three house mounds, two mounds of which are raised earthen material while the third one is raised and aligned with stones. All the house mounds are about the same size ranging from 15-20 m in length and width (see Table 10.1).

According to the oral history collected, the inhabitants of Caquru are also members of the Nabavatu clan.

In their village role [tutu vaka vanua] the people of

Caquru are the War lord's [Vunivalu of Soa village] companion. Traditionally they are to live right next to the Vunivalu

to converse with and entertain so that he does not get bored.

Table 10.1 descriptions of house mounds found at the Caquru Settlement Site

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	9	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound
2	11	8	Raised mound with stone alignment
3	9	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound

The following sites are nestled in the hills enclosing the village of Soa

Nakorovia Fortified Site (Plate 67)

This fortified site is located on the mountain range northeast of Soa village. At an elevation of about 251 m, the settlement begins with the entrance at Matauvatukia which was according to guide sources guarded by warriors during its last inhabitation. Running along the range, the site contains seven house mounds (see Table 10.2). One of these mounds accommodated a burekalou [temple] being of circular shape and about 7 m in diameter. At the mid point of

this set up is a platform rising up to almost 10 m in height and at the top is a 7x7 m house mound.

Tevita Digio of Soa village, whose ancestral ties to Nakorovia (Plate 68) was in his clans' role as the warriors [liga ni wau] of the land, laments on how the ancestral settlement, called Namolibale was strategically located at the foot of the hill of the Nakorovia site. Given their roles as protectors the warriors were positioned in such a location to ensure the Vunivalu and the people of Nakorovia were well guarded on the mountain range and the people of Nakorovia had the advantage of overlooking the surrounding areas.

Table 10.2 Brief descriptions of house mounds found at the Nakorovia Fortified Site

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	11	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound
2	15	2	Raised earthen rectangular mound
3	27	15	Raised earthen rectangular mound
4	7	7	House mound on a high platform
5	11	7	Raised earthen rectangular mound
6	7	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound
7	Diameter 7		Raised circular mound

Namolibale Old Settlement (Plate 69)

This site is located within the area of Base camp 2 north east of Matuku village. It is very widespread and thickly vegetated with cevuga (*Hedychium gardnerianum*) plants making it difficult to investigate the total number of house mounds present in the site. According to the guide, this is the initial site before people dispersed elsewhere. Its inhabitants were said to be of heavenly origin and not from Nakauvadra, “from heaven God placed them in Namolibale.” The Na-

molibale site can be found at the foot of the mountain below Nakorovia and contains four raised earthen house mounds. Three of the mounds are almost identical in size ranging from 10-25 m in length and width while the fourth mound, circular in structure is believed to be a temple and has a diameter of about 20 m across (see Table 10.3).

Namolibale (Plate 70) is where the Vunivalu resided with the people of the mataqali Nasea who were the spokes-people.

Table 10.3 Brief descriptions of house mounds found at the Namolibale Old Settlement

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	20	10	Raised earthen rectangular mound
2	20	15	Raised earthen rectangular mound
3	25	10	Raised earthen rectangular mound
4	Diameter 20		Raised circular mound

Cuva Old Settlement (Plate 71)

Cuva settlement (Plate 72) is about 463 m southwest of Namolibale. Both settlements are located close to the Cuva creek- a source of strength and livelihood for the people.

Cuva site accommodates 4 raised earthen house mounds with size ranges between 10-20 m in length and width (see Table 10.4).

Table 10.4 Brief descriptions of house mounds found at the Cuva Old Settlement

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	15	10	Raised earthen rectangular mound
2	15	10	Raised earthen rectangular mound
3	15	12	Raised earthen rectangular mound
4	20	15	Raised earthen rectangular mound

Nalami Fortified Site (Plate 73)

On the mountains northwest of Soa village is the site called Nalami. Constructed on one of the peaks along the ridge (Plate 74) the site offers a spectacular view of the surrounding area. The site is well planned and protected. The western end of the site is a cliff that drops right to the foot of the mountain and the eastern side of the settlement is fortified by a ditch with the only access to the village being a causeway.

Within the fortified settlement, the house mounds are neatly aligned with the burekalou located on a raised platform symbolic of its importance in the settlement. At a lower elevation, house mounds for the commoners are positioned close to the ditches (see Table 10.5).

The site belongs to the people of the yavusa Nakase and their responsibility in the traditional hierarchy is the liga ni magiti. Their role is characterized by the provision of food crops and the rearing of animals such as pigs for the Vunivalu.

Table 10.5 Brief descriptions of house mounds found at the Nalami Fortified Site

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	Diameter 10	Height 4	Raised circular mound
2	25	15	Raised earthen rectangular mound
3	23	16	Raised earthen rectangular mound
4	8	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound
5	7	6	Raised earthen rectangular mound
6	9	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound
7	6	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound
8	8	6	Raised earthen rectangular mound
9	7	5	Raised earthen rectangular mound
10	9	8	Raised earthen rectangular mound

Toro ni vuaka [piggery] Site (Plate 75)

The piggery for the Vunivalu can be found east of Nalami about 393 m away. Using the rock formation to contain the pigs, the site spans to about 70 m enclosed and well designed with a maze-like setup where the animals could move around freely.

NASAU AREA (Map 4)

Nasuku Old Village Site (Plate 76)

Dawasamu is the name of the hill where the old village called Nasuku (Plate 77) is situated, on a raised coral platform just before the village of Nasau. It is a massive site with fully intact house foundations and well preserved under a dense canopy. Nasuku contains about 30 house mounds including both raised plain earthen mounds and the ones with stone alignment (see Table 10.6). The site is extensive and the people utilized the rock outcrops for added protection. The site is used by some of the villagers to harvest wild yams and in doing so an elderly man came across an undamaged clay pot tucked away in the crevices of a rock structure. Covered with a thick layer of algae, the pot has remained hidden and undisturbed by humans and animals for many years (Plate 78).

Kena i talanoa [Legends and Myths]

Nasuku was said to be occupied when the ancestral gods made their way out of Nakauvadra following the ridge or the waka ni vuga yali as it is known locally. The site belonged to the Yavusa Naloto, and the name of their army was Dritabua. The site was set up during the civil war when cannibalism was at its peak. Christianity was introduced first in Bau, then Sawakasa and later to the Dawasamu site. At this point the Vunivalu decided to introduce Christianity to other places known locally as the event called “valu ni lotu” in an effort to end cannibalism. He went up the Wainibuka all the way up to Nalawa and following the traditional protocol he managed to reach Nadroga, Navosa and Naitasiri.

Matavanua Old Village Site

During the site investigation, the guide took us to Matavanua and pointed out the site which has been greatly disturbed-flooded, overrun with bamboo and damage by livestock. It was because the site was so heavily destroyed it was impossible to locate and identify the house mounds.

Koronigata Old Settlement Site (Plate 79)

Koronigata (Plate 80) is located further about 120 m

northwest of Matavanua. Six house mounds were identified however, the wet climate has accelerated erosion and surface runoff in the area (see Table 10.7). Other threats to the site

include trampling by livestock and the invasion of the fast growing African Tulip trees.

Table 10.6 Brief descriptions of house mounds found at the Nasuku Old Village Site

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	3	2	Mound with stone alignment [Naulunivuaka]
2	3	2	Mound with stone alignment [Naulunivuaka]
3	7	5	Raised earthen house mound [Naulunivuaka]
4	3	2	Mound with stone alignment [Naulunivuaka]
5	8	5	Mound with stone alignment [Naulunivuaka]
6	8	5	Mound with stone alignment [Naulunivuaka]
7	3	1	Mound with stone alignment
8	12	10	Mound with stone alignment
9	5	4	Mound with stone alignment
10	7	5	Half stone alignment and earth
11	7	5	Mound with stone alignment
12	14	9	Mound with stone alignment
13	12	8	Mound with stone alignment
14	10	5	Half stone alignment and earth
15	8	5	Mound with stone alignment [yavu ni turaga]
16	7	5	Half stone alignment and earth
17	3	3	Circular Mound with stone alignment [temple]
18	10	10	Raised earthen house mound
19	8	6	Raised earthen house mound
20	12	8	Mound with stone alignment
21	10	7	Mound with stone alignment
22	5	4	Mound with stone alignment
23	8	6	Raised earthen house mound
24	5	4	Raised earthen house mound
25	5	4	Raised earthen house mound
26	3	3	Raised earthen house mound
27	5	4	Raised earthen house mound
28	7	5	Raised earthen house mound
29	Is not a house mound but the big rock where the pot is tucked away in		
30	5	4	Raised earthen house mound

Table 10.7 Brief descriptions of house mounds found at the Koronigata Old Settlement Site

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	7	6	Raised earthen mound
2	7	5	Raised earthen mound
3	8	4	Raised earthen mound
4	7	5	Raised earthen mound
5	6	4	Raised earthen mound
6	7	5	Raised earthen mound

Navalesara Old Settlement Site

This site has been used by the traditional owners as a taro patch and the only house mound that they have preserved is the foundation of a church- circular in structure with stone edge alignment. The foundation is raised to a height of about 80-90 cm with a diameter of about 6-7 m.

Navunibulu Old Settlement Site (Plate 81)

The site at Navunibulu contains four house mounds with overgrown vegetation and grass cover (see Table 10.8). Also abundant on the site are the cevuga vulavula (*Hedy-chium gardnerianum*). The house mounds are not in a good state having been eroded and trampled upon by wild cattle that broke out from the nearby dairy farms.

Table 10.8 Brief descriptions of house mounds found at the Navunibulu Old Settlement Site

House Mound #	Estimated Length [m]	Estimated Width [m]	Composition of the Mound
1	7	6	Raised earthen mound
2	5	4	Raised earthen mound
3	6	5	Raised earthen mound
4	6	6	Raised earthen mound

Kena i talanoa [Legends & Myths]

According to oral accounts, the site Lele originally belongs to the people of yavusa Namoa and Delainaloto who stayed in Nasuku, Dawasamu for a brief period. They first settled in a place called Navunibulu for a number of years. Dispute arose when they tried to install their own chief and the Taukei Dawasamu [chief of Dawasamu] caught word of this and sent one of his warriors from the mataqali Colata to force them out.

The group moved and settled in another place they called Lele. The Taukei Dawasamu was displeased to find out that they were still close by and again sent a message for them to move further. It was at this point that the clan members of Delainaloto finally separated from those in the yavusa Namoa and moved on further to build a settlement called Tomuna, in the Sawakasa district. After spending a number of years at Tomuna the Delainaloto faction continued to search for land until they moved to Vorovoro where they have stayed till the present day. The people of Namoa settled in a place known today as Luvunavuaka.

Lele Old Settlement Site

This ancestral site accommodates seven earthen house mounds all of which have been eroded and overrun with thickets and shrubs. The site as mentioned above belongs to the group of people that were sent away from Nasuku village resulting from a dispute

Nasaumaki Old Village Site

Nasaumaki village site has eight eroded earthen house mounds thickly covered with ferns, cevuga and other vegetation. The poor site condition made mapping impossible and a major threat to this site is the presence of an old cattle farm in the vicinity where the livestock are left to roam free and trample the area.

Tomuna Fortified Site

Situated at the very top of a mountain, Tomuna (Plate 82) overlooks the surrounding area, an attribute ideal during inter tribal warfare times. On the site is a very big house foundation more the 10 m in length and about 7 m in width. The site has clearly been disturbed by wild pigs burrowing into the ground looking for wild yams. Some of the plants that are significant indicators of the presence of the settlement is the *Cordyline terminalis* or vasilii.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The inspection of the forest vegetation of the surveyed area revealed that there is much history contained within the district of Nakorotubu pertaining to traditional and cultural development and linked strongly to the identity of its people.

Such history should be preserved whether they are tangible or intangible cultural assets. In this case, some evidence of cultural features has been destroyed influenced greatly by human inhabitation in the form of rearing livestock, and natural processes.

The department wishes to recommend:

- That proper documentation of the survey and oral history be undertaken to avoid the loss of traditional knowledge about these sites.
- The Fiji Museum Archaeology Department be included in any future surveys of the area to allow for the completion of the survey in the overlooked areas within the Biodiversity survey region.
- The villagers should be aware of the threat that livestock pose on their ancestral grounds and
- The department would also be interested in presenting findings and creating awareness should there be any workshop planned for these regions.

REFERENCES

Legislative Council. 1927. Final Report by Chairman on the Province of Lomaiviti, Ra and Tailevu, Native Lands Commission, Council Paper, No. 94.