Easter Island

Scientific Exploration into
the World's Environmental
Problems in Microcosm

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Scientific Exploration into the World's Environmental Problems in Microcosm

Edited by

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Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Thor Heyerdahl
Respected, esteemed and admired for years by many.
Thor Heyerdahl, a scholar, an intrepid explorer,
a natural leader and humanitarian.

Co-Editor
John Loret, Ph.D. D.Sc.

Dedicated to young explorers everywhere who may keep the passion
always alive in their quest for knowledge; their compassion for all
humanity and their appreciation of all life on earth.

Co-Editor
John T. Tanacredi, Ph.D.

Foreword

MARC A. KOENINGS

General Superintendent, Gateway National Recreation Area and New York Harbor Parks

I have been in the National Park Service for over 25 years now, and one of the most enduring legacies of my tenure as a Superintendent is the work done by thousands of dedicated people committed to preserving our natural and cultural heritage. This dedication is no less intense on the international scaled even with what sometimes appears to be overwhelming obstacles.

My first reaction upon picking up the draft manuscript was — I hope this work is not another eco-tour attempt playing on the lack of information available, on the mysteries of Easter Island. I also wanted to know...what was so compelling to engage the National Park Service? From several different facets, it is clear that this World Heritage Site is still, after over 50 years since Jacque Cousteau's work on the island, a fascinating area to explore and learn about a culture that has only remnants remaining, while documenting a marine ecology still mostly unknown.

Primarily, what are the very real lessons we can learn from Easter Island as we daily ponder the impacts of global climate change? It is becoming increasingly evident that we live in a closed system; it may be on a global scale, but it is a closed system. We, like the past residents of Easter Island, are pushing the limits of resource utilization that will result in the failure of the health of ecosystems and ultimately a decline in human populations. Easter Islanders had an option to migrate to another region; they didn't — a collapse of the global system does not afford that luxury for us; we can't...

The issue of tourism offers simultaneously a curse and a blessing. It is presented with some very practical management suggestions to protect the integrity of the Moai — perhaps not unlike what is done at Stone Henge. Equally practical are suggestions on how to map the Moai placement and most importantly how to protect the stone from further deterioration from the ravages of tourists and nature.

Equally compelling is the discussion on the contemporary society. What are their dreams and aspirations? Can the destiny of the Rapa Nui include that elusive balance of modern convenience with the preservation of their remarkable heritage?

It has been a wonderful experience for me over the years to work and help shape the direction of our nation's National Parks. I am very happy to be able to make a contribution to our global thinking on environment and culture by presenting this work to you...truly a contribution to our world heritage. I thank Dr. Loret and Dr. Tanacredi for making it happen.

Photo images 64 years apart exhibit changes in vegetative cover and surface erosion to Moai figures.

Acknowledgments

This work is the result of the combined efforts of all those 1996 through 2000 Easter Island Expedition participants listed at the end of this work. An enthusiastic “bravo” and “thank you” go out to all their efforts and contributions. Special appreciation goes to the staff of the Explorers’ Club, The Science Museum of Long Island, the National Park Service at Gateway National Recreation Area for all their assistance, funding support and patience in making this book possible. We would care to acknowledge all those who took the time from their own hectic schedule to review the draft manuscript for this effort especially Dr. P.A. Buckley, Dr. Stephen Shafer, Mr. Fred Rubel, Dr. Chikashi Sato, Dr. Robert Cook, Dr. Paul V. Loiselle, Dr. William Kornblum, Dr. George Fame, Mr. Marc Koenings. Dr. Lori Zaikowski and Dr. Martin P. Schreibman; without your professional eye to detail and accuracy this work could not have been completed. Special thanks go to all the peoples of Easter Island and Chile; especially Sergio Rapu, Jose Migual and CONAF (Chilian National Park Service). We would care to acknowledge those who grappled with the preparation of the manuscript, initially Debbie Wynne and finally Debra Jedlicka, both of Dowling College; they performed beyond the call of duty. Finally to Ms. Joanna Lawrence, Editor at Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, for her foresight, intuition and guidance in making this work happen. It should be noted that any mistakes or omissions are totally the results of the editors.

X

One of the thousands of petroglyphs on the island depicting an octypus ... species of a size long gone from the island's coastline.

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