

'Opunohu Valley Archaeological Project Mo'orea, French Polynesia

by Patrick V. Kirch

The 'Opunohu is a large, amphitheatre-headed valley situated on the northern side of Mo'orea Island, in the Society Islands group of French Polynesia. The valley was the setting for Roger C. Green's pioneering settlement-pattern study in 1960-61, and much of the upper valley consists of a cultural preserve under the protection of the French Polynesian government.

In 1991, Dana Lepofsky, then a graduate student at Berkeley and member of the OAL, began renewed archaeological investigations in the 'Opunohu Valley under the overall supervision of Prof. Kirch. Lepofsky spent several field seasons in the valley, concentrating primarily on the remains of prehistoric agricultural systems, a site category which had been largely neglected in earlier studies. Lepofsky also conducted a study of human-induced environmental change in the valley, based on sediment profiles from trenches in the valley floor and from other excavations. Her doctoral dissertation (UC Berkeley, 1994) focuses on the sequence of prehistoric agricultural intensification.

OAL research in the 'Opunohu Valley recommenced in 1999, with an emphasis on household archaeology. This research is being conducted by Jennifer Kahn, with assistance and supervision by Prof. Kirch, and will form the basis for Kahn's doctoral dissertation. Since 1999, field work has been carried out in the valley every summer, using Berkeley's Richard Gump Research Station as a base of operations. To date, areal excavations have been carried out at three extensive household complexes in the Tupaururu section of the valley, including both rectangular (fare haupape) and oval-ended (fare pote'e) house types.

Publications:

1992 D. S. Lepofsky, H. Harries, and M. Kellum, Early coconuts on Mo'orea Island, French Polynesia. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 101:229-308.

1994 D. S. Lepofsky, Prehistoric Agricultural Intensification in the Society Islands, French Polynesia. Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

1996 D. S. Lepofsky, P. V. Kirch, and K. P. Lertzman, Stratigraphic and paleobotanical evidence for prehistoric human-induced environmental disturbance on Mo'orea, French Polynesia. *Pacific Science* 50:253-273.