

Southwest Islands surveyed in December

Agencies sought archaeological artifacts, invasive weeds and insects, and agricultural potential.

A field trip to Sonsoro and Hatohobei States took place from December 22 through 31, 2002, with four important agencies conducting surveys on the islands. *Atoll Way*, the Hatohobei State boat, departed Koror on December 22 with approximately 50 passengers, the majority of whom were islanders visiting for the holidays. The four agencies and their purposes are as follows.

An Archaeological Survey Team from Japan, with Professor Michiko Inoh, Ph.D., National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka and Rintaro Ono, doctoral student at University of Sophia in Japan. This team conducted a preliminary data gathering in Hatohobei Island.

The Bureau of Agriculture, Weed Survey Team: Dr. Joel Miles, Professor of Agriculture at Palau Community College and Mr. Joseph Tiobech conducted invasive weed survey and collected specimens from both states as part of a national effort which began in early December to identify and make a comprehensive listing of current invasive weed species in the entirety of Palau. Two international experts, Ms. Barbara Waterhouse, Botanist from the Centre for Tropical Agriculture, Australia and Mr. Jim Space from the Pacific Island Ecosystems at Risk, Arizona, USA, traveled to Palau and led the survey which started in Koror and Bebelob. A national report will be out later in January 2003.

The Bureau of Agriculture, Pest Control sent Dr. Keiichi Takahashi, JICA and his partner Mr. Albert Arborea. Their mission was to conduct a survey on invasive insects, the rhinoceros beetle, which have devastated coconut trees on the islands of Sonsoro State, especially Fanna.

Agriculture experts from the Republic of China (Taiwan) also went along to assess potential agricultural projects in the islands. The team members were Mr. Ming-li Hsu, team leader, Mr. Kwang-Hsiung Li, the specialist, and Mr. Shao-Yu Hsu.

In addition, medical personnel Nurse Ngoriakl Olmetolei provided medical care and replenished islanders' medical supplies. Sonsoro State Governor Laura Istrago traveled to Meril to initiate a state program on Turtle Monitoring, which will research turtle nesting activities and characteristics in an effort to help in the growth of the islands' turtle population.

Atoll Way landed on Sonsoro on the 23rd at 7:00 a.m., delivered people and supplies, and sailed again at dusk. On Christmas Eve at 7:00 a.m., the boat landed in Pulo Anna. At 3:00 p.m. on the same day, it landed on Meril Island. The boat continued on to Hatohobei and Helen's Reef, spending three days before returning, stopping at each island to pick up passengers going back to Koror. Overall, it was an excellent trip. The weather was sunny during the days with calm seas. At night the rain-

poured, filling up water tanks for all the islands the boat visited.

Each of the agencies that went on the trip will submit detailed reports. Some preliminary results of the surveys conducted during the trip are as follows:

The Archaeological Team toured all the islands but only excavated in Hatohobei. They found some artifacts. However, time was very limited, so they felt they didn't do a thorough job. Interesting artifacts were found from all the other islands as well. Data were collected and a report will be forthcoming.

Several invasive weed species were found on all the islands. However, the list was not as long or as bad as what was found in the other Palau states, perhaps due to the islands' distances from other islands. This raises the importance of quarantine efforts to prevent introduction of unwanted pests to the islands.

Rhinoceros Beetle (larvae) was

confirmed to have transported and ravaged coconut trees on Fanna, Sonsoro and some on Meril. The Bureau of Agriculture has sought help from SPC for biological control. It is anticipated the virus will be sent to Koror in time to meet the March 2003 field trip. The good news is that the oriental fruit flies which have devastated agricultural products in the rest of Palau were not found on any of the islands. This stresses more of the importance of people's cooperation to avoid bringing in fruit products and live plants or animals which may cause introduction and spread of harmful pests.

The Taiwan Agriculture experts traveled the islands and provided advice to school teachers for their school vegetable gardens. They also donated some gardening tools for each school.

Two patients were referred to Koror for further medical care. Both are currently doing much better, and they

may travel back on the next trip.

Field trips to the islands in 2003 will occur in March, June, August and December. Exact dates of the trips rely mostly on availability of funding and the boat. Weather conditions also play an important role in the scheduling of these trips. Anyone interested may call or write the Sonsoro State office (488-1237) or the Hatohobei State office (488-2218) to inquire.