

A LAKE LANOTO'O EXPERIENCE

The Story of Lake Lanoto'o

Located inland high in the centre of Upolu Island is one of Samoa's exquisite unique wetland ecosystems "Lake Lanoto'o" other references called it Goldfish Lake (South Pacific Handbook: 1986). The serenity and greenery surroundings of mountains with lush vegetation overlooking the green waters of the oval shape lake, provide an environment that is left to its natural state, untouched and invigorating. My interest in Lake Lanoto'o is not just confine to the biological diversity of species that exist in this wetland ecosystem but also the story of how the lake was formed. This story comes from Kramer's (1995) collection of historical oral traditions of the Samoan Islands. According to Kramer's (1995) account the legendary Samoan story of "Lulai and Lulago" indirectly relates to the origin of the lake. Hence, to make a long story short...this is how it started.



Hon. Tagaloa Tuala Sale Tagaloa & staff of the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment at Lake Lanoto'o 2003

In the village of Samata (Savaii) two girls Lulai and Lulago were both married to Si'utaulalovasa, and one day their husband left to visit his family on Upolu Island. Whilst being away his wives ran away and lived with another chief Tupa'isafe'e. When Si'utaulalovasa returned he found both his wives pregnant and living with another chief, to his dismay and feeling of betrayal.

He left and returned to Upolu, even though his wives called and followed him. Meanwhile, chief Tupa'isafe'e realised that his women had left him, he also went searching for them in Upolu, when he found his women with their husband Si'utaulalovasa they all boarded a boat and were travelling when the rosy dawn appeared. He (Tupa'isafe'e) looked at one woman and pointed first at the sunrise then at her belly and the child was called "Ata" (sunrise), he looked again at the second woman and pointed at his pole (oar) then at her belly and the child was called "To'o". In keeping with Kramer's (1995) story, the name To'omata in Samata is said to have been formed from To'o ma Ata, the two sons of Si'utalalovasa. It is said that Ata was slain in battle and his brother To'o, living on Upolu Island was saddened by his brother's death, and he went inland and dug a hole and filled it with his tears. Thus, the Crater Lake Lanoto'o is named after him.

Like many of Samoa's historical oral traditions this story also reflects the close interaction between our ancestors in the past and nature. It highlights our cultural traditions and beliefs that our natural environment and all its existence are symbolic of historical events, we now only recalled as myths and legends. Again there is always another story about the origin of the lake, based on scientific evidence and data. This more comprehensive and elaborate story based on scientific evidence can easily identify the features of the lake being a dormant or dead volcanic crater formed from a series of volcanic events during the formation of the Samoa Islands 3000 years ago. I am not disputing this because it is also true, however as one who enjoys

oral tradition stories, I quite like the cultural, aesthetic and sentimental value attached to this legendary myth.

When I visited Lake Lanoto'o as part of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) preparation for the National Awareness Biodiversity Day, it was also my first time to see this lake that I have mentioned so many times to students and researcher's interested in biodiversity and the different types of ecosystems found in Samoa based on reference materials and existing information in the MNRE Resource Centre. I found the hike a big challenge not only because I was not prepared to undertake such an enduring longest walk I have ever experienced, in addition the wet and rough terrain of the trail did not provide comfort but only added to the unfit state of my health, which was urging me to stop and return to base.



However, I was so determined hearing the encouraging words of my colleagues whom we walked together saying “o le a le aoga na e sau ai pe e le vaai i le vai with your own two eyes”. And yes I pulled up all the last strength I had and walked without stopping until I reached my destination “Lake Lanoto'o”, telling myself if my boss and the minister of MNRE can make it there, so can I. And yeah I did made it, and it was just a breath taking experience, all that aching pain I had during the walk had just passed away, was filled with calmness and appreciation of natures gift. This is one of the most beautiful natural sites that Samoa possessed and we should protect it and sustain its current features. As I recalled the impression of marvel and delight in the faces of all my colleagues when we had reached the lake, and the conversations we had about the origin of the lake and its important role to biodiversity as a wetland ecosystem. It was from this walk that I wanted to share my experience and find out more about the lake especially its oral tradition side, since scientific evidence and further research studies on the sustainable management of this wetland ecosystems will be one of DEC's on-going continues activities.

The description provided in the South Pacific Handbook (1986), best illustrate a picture of the lake.

“The opaque green water of this seldom-visited crater lake is surrounded by a mossy green forest dripping with the ever-present mist. Swimming in it is an eerie experience. To add to the other worldliness of the place, Lake Lanoto'o is full of goldfish, but you'll have to wait patiently if you want to see any from shore.”

Fact finding:

- 1) According to Kramer (1995) scientific exploration revealed that Dana and Couthouy (extracted from their article on “The microfauna of Samoa” : 1897) visited lake Lanoto'o being the first white people to see the lovely forest lake, found it to be nine and a half fathoms deep in its centre, while they calculated the height of the crater rim to be 770 metres. Alternatively, Kramer (1995) states that he found the height to be 700 metres and it is surrounded by a crater wall of approximately 30 metres, is round in shape and has a diameter of about 1km.

Toloa the wild duck *Anas superciliosa* found throughout the Pacific is regularly found on the inland lakes of Lanuto'o.

- 2) Lake Lanoto'o was long proposed as a conservation area for nature tourism in particular, but whose surrounding forests were severely damaged by Cyclones Ofa and Val, was surveyed only for obtaining an upland forest comparison of bird richness and abundance with the lowland forests on Upolu. The site is part of the "Eastern Upolu Uplands" identified as a conservation priority by the SPREP survey (Pearsall and Whistler 1991) and contains a nationally rare and important swamp forest ecosystem containing the endemic screwpine *Pandanus turritus*. However, no vegetation study was undertaken by this survey. (extracted from the "The Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Coastal Lowlands of Samoa, 1992").

Think of others when using Natures resources!

Childrens Corner



1. I lay my eggs in the nest of other birds. I am a:
a. Penguin b. Cuckoo c. Chicken d. Ducks.
2. My skin colour is white and I live in decomposed logs. I am a:
a. Dog b. Chicken c. Bird d. Beetle
3. I make a natural sweetner and can sting. I am a:
a. Mosquito b. Honeybee c. Flea d. Spider
4. I eat cattle ticks and live with my friends at Apia pulu trees. I am the:
a. Kingfisher b. Fantail c. Swiftlet d. Minor bird
5. Samoans believe I came from the head of the eel. I am the
a. Coconut tree b. Kava plant c. Mulberry plant d. Banana tree
6. I am only fished twice a year in Samoa as a special delicacy. I am the:
a. Sea turtle b. Mullet c. Palolo d. Seaweed
7. I am only matured to lay eggs at 30 and can live for hundred years. I am the:
a. Sea turtle b. Mullet c. Palolo d. Seaweed
8. I am a carnivore with a flat body, several pair of legs and a painful sting. I am the:
a. Slug b. Centipede c. Snail d. Beetle
9. I live in the sea and breed on the beach. I am a:
a. Turtle b. Parrot fish c. Coral d. Cat
10. I am sweet, thin and tall. I am a:
a. Breadfruit b. Sugarcane c. Taro d. Mango tree

