

# ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES AT ILE DE LA PASSE

## MAURITIUS

### THE 2005 SEASON OF FIELDWORK



*Figure 1. Earthwatch team members, staff and students from the University of Mauritius and Mauritian volunteers excavating trenches TR15 and TR16. (mp05hp0331)*

**A Report Submitted to Sponsors**

by

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**ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES  
AT ILE DE LA PASSE, MAURITIUS**



**The Archaeology, Architecture and Conservation of an Historic Islet.**

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## THE PROJECT

### Architectural and Archaeological Studies at Ile de la Passe, Mauritius

The project at Ile de la Passe is concerned with the archaeology, architecture and conservation of an historic islet. The extensive survey of the standing monuments, structures and other remains was initiated by the National Heritage Trust Fund (NHFT), now the National Heritage Fund (NHF), in 2002. The cutting back of vegetation and clearance of blown sand is revealing hidden features, while targeted excavation (Fig. 1) is resolving specific problems of chronology, examining relationships between structures and features, and shedding light on aspects of everyday life of troops garrisoned on the islet.



*Figure 2. Ile de la Passe. (mp05nc0323)*

### The Research Site

Ile de la Passe (Fig. 2) guards the main entrance through the coral reef into Grand Port at the south-east of Mauritius. Control of this coral islet was the key to control of the Indian Ocean from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century until 1810. The islet, pivotal in the last Napoleonic naval victory over the British, the "Battle of Grand Port" celebrated on the Arc de Triumph, boasts some of the most impressive surviving examples of early modern French military architecture in the southern hemisphere. Later British military installations are of considerable importance for the heritage of Mauritius and of interest to students of colonial history.

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## Participants

### *Specialist Participants in 2005*

Yann von Arnim, Underwater Archaeology and advisor on artefact conservation.  
Owen Griffiths, Identification of Organic Material.  
Kurt Springs, Field Assistant, Doctoral Student, University of Buffalo.  
Natalie Summers, Archaeological Assistant, underwater and terrestrial.

### *Earthwatch volunteers*

Team 1 (17 to 31 January): Stephanie Green, Karl Kirk, John Louson, Trudy Louson, Alexandra Nicol, Dominique-Emma Wauters, George Wiess and Maria Wyrasek.

Team 2 (1 to 14 August): Christina Benson, David Denton, Jack Holmes, Margaret Holmes, Rosemary Jones and Donald Lee.

Team 3 (15 to 28 August): Bradley Braun, Leslie Davis.

### *METU Research Assistants for post-fieldwork in Ankara*

Aylin Açar and Çiğdem Özkan.

### *Finds Conservation Abroad*

Noël Siver

### *Participation of University of Mauritius Students*

In January trips to Ile de la Passe were organised by Dr. Vijaya Teelock, Head of the the Department of History and Political Science at the University of Mauritius, thereby providing the opportunity for 33 students accompanied by Cultural Anthropologist Maya de Salle Essoo and Museologist Corinne Forest, to visit and participate over the two weeks of fieldwork. In August we were delighted that six students, Pavisha Beedasy, Meera Dhookeea, Amreen Rambocus, Sheetal Soobron, Musheera Abdool Rahman-Saumtally, Tiwari Luxmidevi and Sofia Raszy, participated in the project as part of a course on Archaeology and Heritage Studies. We should also note the enthusiasm of Ram Singh who, beyond his responsibility of driving the University bus, was always willing to help in the field.

### *Volunteers*

Participation of Mauritian volunteers is particularly encouraged because it is a crucial means of disseminating the importance of Cultural Heritage both within and beyond Mauritius. Among those who joined the team are Aurélie Antoine, Céline Baissac, Gabriel McGregor, Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière, Hervé Henry, Jean-Philippe Kervern and family, Edouard Labat, Van G. Lanza, Sarojini Nosib, Christopher Rogers, Manuela Rogers, Michele Smith, Tania Smith and Pamela Summers.

### *Workmen*

Workmen were employed to clean up the islet, to clear vegetation, to help with emergency conservation measures and with heavy excavation work and backfilling.

### *Boat crew*

Jean Claude Farla and his crew assure, in calm or rough seas, a safe trip (Fig. 3).



*Figure 3. The speed boat returning from Ile de la Passe. The islets, located on the reefs, can be perceived as grey lumps on the distant horizon. (mp05nc0732)*

**ILE DE LA PASSE**



**2005**

*Figure 4. Participants and visitors in 2005.*

## Visitors and Press

We welcomed many groups of visitors (Fig. 4) during the 2005 campaign at Ile de la Passe. The NHF Director, Dr. Musleem Jumeer, accompanied by two NHF Board Members, Mr. Amourdon and Mr. Soobrattee, visited the islet in January. The group also included students R. Neemajee and Y. Kareembaccus from Hamilton College, K.S. Muazzam and R. Lawthan from the Islamic Cultural College, and J- L and E. Veerapen from Bhujoharry College.

It was a pleasure to welcome Paul and Georgina Corson, Jean-Luc Mure (French Attaché for Co-operation) and Roseline Rivoire, and stimulating to host our colleagues, Dr Vijaya Teelock, Prof. Richard Allen and researchers Brindah Annasawmy, Brian Chung and Simila Ramlogan, from the Aapravasi Ghat Project.

Other groups of visitors included Prithiviraj Nosib (National History Museum), Ravi Bhootooa (Frederik Hendrik Museum), Rupear Vikash (Museum Council), Dilshaad Balbolia (Ministry of Arts and Culture), Ruth Bone and Martine Goder (conservation volunteer and Nurseries Supervisor, Mauritian Wild Life Foundation).

It was also our pleasure, in spite of a daunting August rough sea, to take to the islet, Dominique Lapiere, Bruno Letimier, Thérèse Pilot and Jean Bernard Théodorine from the Mauritius Commercial Bank as well as Danielle Babet-Chavrimootoo, Alain Huron, Sandrine Julien and David Martial from the Blue Penny Museum.

On the final day of the campaign (Fig. 5), an enthusiastic group of 36 students accompanied by Vanessa Seebaluck, Jodi Naidoo, Ranjini Naidoo and Manond Jagai, from the University of Technology, Mauritius, made a memorable visit.

Various articles appeared in the media after reporters and photographers came to the islet. Groups included Mardaymootoo Sooben from *Le Matinal*, Aline Groëme, Daniel Marie, Nicholas Rainer, Diane Henry, Ludovic Ah-Yu and Guillaume Gouges from *l'Express* and Jean Claude Antoine from the *Week End*.



Figure 5. An enthusiastic group eager to learn more about the history of Ile de la Passe. (mp05nc1632)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all we would like to thank the National Heritage Fund of Mauritius for continuing support of our work on Ile de la Passe in 2005. We are particularly grateful to the Chairman, Mr Philippe La Hausse de Lalouvière, the Director, Dr Musleem Jumeer, and NHF staff for their interest, enthusiasm and support.

We would like to thank Dr Vijaya Teelock for her enthusiastic support and for arranging the formal participation of students from the University of Mauritius. We also thank Dr Teelock, Chairperson of the Appravasi Ghat Trust Fund, for kindly allowing Ms Jayshree Mungur, research coordinator of the Appravasi Ghat Project, to act as the NHF liaison officer for the 2005 fieldwork campaign.

We were afforded every facility by Mr. Prithiviraj Sunil Nosib, Acting Director of the National History Museum, Mr Ravi Bhootooa and the staff of the National History Museum at Mahébourg. We would like to thank them, and the Director General of the Mauritius Museums Council Mr. Sahezahan Abdoolrahaman, for their friendship and support.

Grants and sponsorship have made possible the continuation of the project in 2005. The Earthwatch Institute continues to support the project and three teams of volunteers from Earthwatch participated in 2005. Funds contributing towards operational expenses and permitting the employment of local labour for cleaning and clearing have been received from the Mauritius Commercial Bank, General Construction and Phoenix Camp Mineral Ltd. Harel Mallac Electronics Ltd loaned a computer, essential for the digital recording, processing and archiving of data during the season while Gaz Carbonique helped with transport. The Kervern, Koenig, Larcher, Rey, Le Court and Tennant families kindly lent a grass cutter.

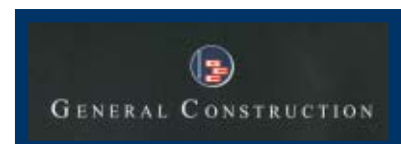
The Coast Guard again removed sacks of rubbish for proper disposal on the mainland and assisted the MSPCA (Mauritius Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) team who came to Ile de la Passe to rescue a stray dog.

Jean Claude Farla's skills and knowledge of the bay always guaranteed a good trip to and from the islet. Villa Le Guerlande accommodating the Earthwatch team agreed to special rates.

Last, but by no means least, our thanks go to all those whose contribution made the 2005 season possible, and to our family and friends without whose generosity and hospitality the season would not have happened.

### Sponsors

The continuation of the project lies in the generosity of all our sponsors and friends to whom we extend once more our deepest thanks.



**Phoenix Camp Mineral  
Phoenix Beverage Group**

**GAZ CARBONIQUE**



## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

It was rewarding to welcome many groups of visitors, amongst which were sponsors, professionals, students, school children, journalists, film crews and friends. Several articles appeared in the national press and visitors enjoyed their visits showing great interest for the islet and its history. The recent campaigns have produced finds which, it is hoped, will be displayed in the National History Museum in Mahébourg.

General Construction produced a splendid 2005 calendar featuring photographs of Ile de la Passe taken by Christian Bossu-Picat.

In November 2004 the Principle Investigators gave oral presentations and poster session at the Earthwatch Conference in Boston as well as a lecture on Ile de la Passe at the University of Buffalo, USA.

In August we were delighted to attend the opening of the *Peopling of Mauritius* and the *Aapravasi Ghat* exhibitions at the National History Museum in Mahébourg. On that enjoyable occasion Geoffrey was honoured to open the special hands-on archaeological enterprise for local school children. It was very encouraging to see, in the ensuing days, the extent to which the children, and indeed their teachers, enjoyed learning in this practical way.

## **SCOPE OF THE REPORT**

This short version of the report on *Architectural and Archaeological Studies at Ile de la Passe, Mauritius - The 2005 Season of Fieldwork*, is requested by the Earthwatch Institute, the main sponsor of the 2005 season, and has been prepared for them, for other sponsors or potential sponsors, for participants and for all those interested in the project.

The report has benefited greatly from discussions with Miss Jayshree Mungur, Research Coordinator of the Aapravasi Ghat Project and Liaison Officer for the National Heritage Fund, who freely shared her unparalleled knowledge of recent archaeological investigations in Mauritius.

Digital versions of these annual reports for sponsors, prepared since 2003, are available on the web at

<http://www.mauritius.metu.edu.tr>

## **Maps of Ile de la Passe**

The topographic survey commissioned by the NHT from A. S. Calloo, sworn surveyor, in 2002 provides the base map for all studies. Ten stations set in concrete form the reference points for current and future surveying. The map itself is tied to the National Grid of Mauritius. An arbitrary height of 100m above sea level was given to Station A.

This map was updated after the 2004 season of fieldwork, most notably by the addition of Structures 32 and 33. In 2005 the West Ditch was added (Fig. 6).

Several old maps from different archives continue to be used in our research, in particular for studies related to the chronological development of defences and structures on the islet.



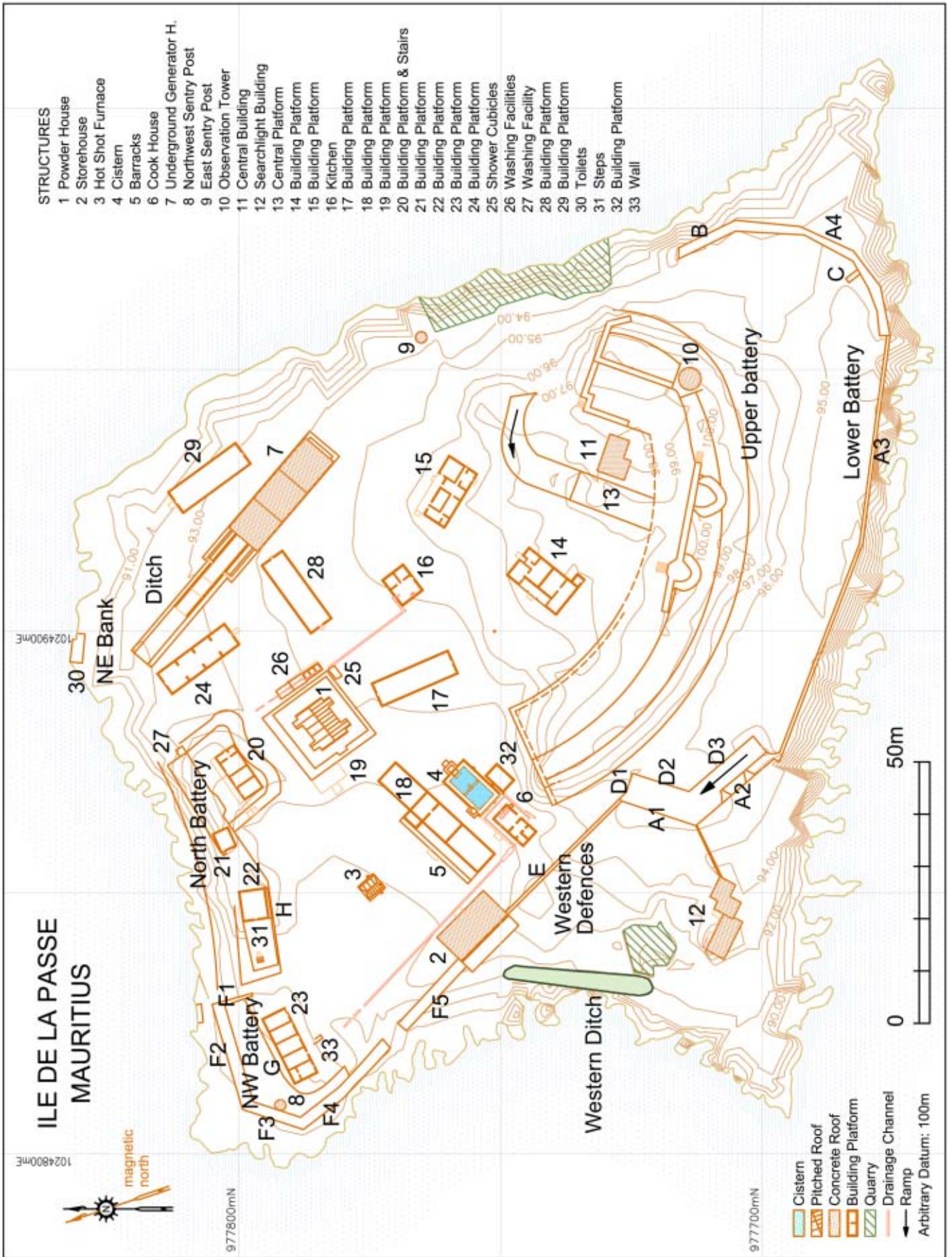


Figure 6. Map of Ile de la Passe showing standing monuments, structures and other features.

## THE 2005 SEASON

### The Islet and its Monuments

It is to be noted that both in January and August the island retained a reasonably clean aspect, the amount of accumulated rubbish being less than it was a few years ago. In January an unfortunate stray and starving dog was captured by the MSPCA (Mauritius Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) assisted by the Coast Guards. At the end of the August season the islet was left free of rubbish, some ten sacks having been gathered up by our workmen and kindly removed by the Coast Guard for proper disposal on the mainland (Fig. 7). The grass has again been cut over the area from the Landing Place and the base of the Upper Battery (Fig. 8) between the Store House and the Powder House as well on the top of the Upper Battery.



*Figure 7. The Coast Guard collected the sacks of rubbish for disposal on the mainland. (mp05nc1610)*



*Figure 8. Workmen were employed to clean up the islet, clear vegetation and help with heavy excavation work and backfilling. (mp05nc1209)*

## Survey and Excavation

Survey was limited to accurately locating the West Ditch so as to add it on the site plan and to the occasional collection of surface finds. In January, Mr Yann von Arnim, assisted by Miss Natalie Summers, carried out some underwater survey along the edge of Ile de la Passe, discovering two anchors on the seabed but little else.

Carefully targeted excavations (Fig. 9) were conducted in three locations:

1. Inside the NW Battery where trench TR11, started in 2004, was completed;
2. Within the West Ditch where Trenches TR15 and TR16 were aimed at recovering material dumped in the West Ditch, which was evidently used as a kitchen midden.
3. In the Central Area west of the Powder House where the main objective of Trenches TR17 and TR18 was to look for evidence for the existence of a timber frame barrack building shown on an 18<sup>th</sup> Century map.

All trenches were backfilled at the end of the season.

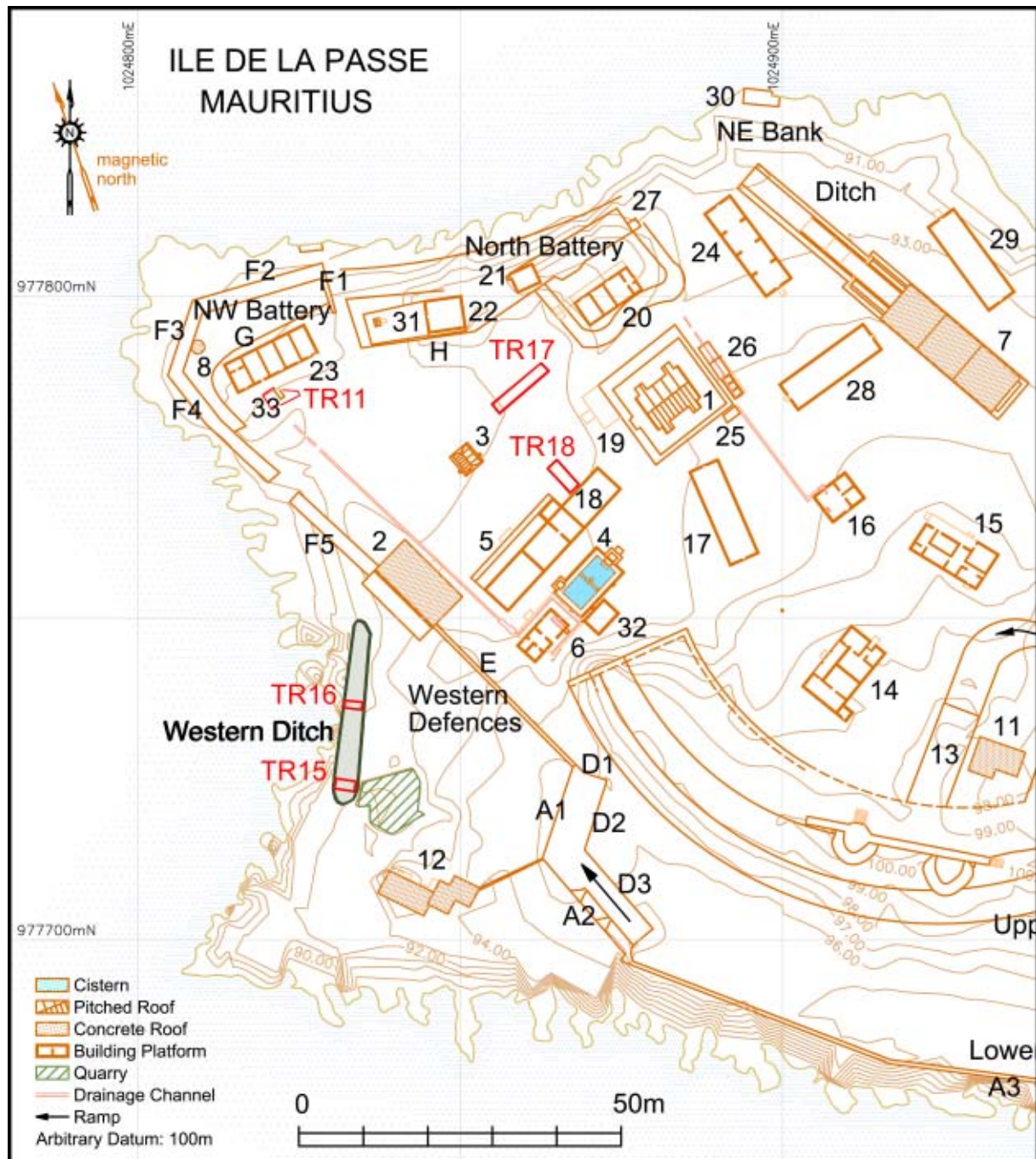


Figure 9. Plan of the north-west area showing location of 2005 trenches.

## Recording Graffiti

A central component of the research design at Ile de la Passe is recording of the graffiti (Fig. 10) that have been carved into the walls and, less commonly, the sides of rock-cut features. In January 2005, the database was designed by Earthwatch volunteer Karl Kirk while others from the team helped entering the data and archiving the digital photos (Fig. 11).

In 2005 a decision was made to abandon the earlier program of trying to record systematically each carving on a wall-by-wall basis because this had been found too difficult due to differential preservation and legibility. The new system and database allows for the most readily identifiable and legible carvings to be recorded first. It also permits recording to jump from wall to wall, and indeed from structure to structure, as lighting conditions and weather change. After considerable experimentation progress was made but proper transcription from the photographs and notes will need to be followed by collation in the field.



*Figure 10. The Earthwatch team measuring the location of selected graffiti on the enclosure wall of the Powder House. (mp05hp0511)*



*Figure 11. Karl, using his much valued expertise as a database manager, working on the Access database for the graffiti while Maria helps archiving the digital photos. (mp05hp0343)*

## Conservation and Restoration

In August, repair of the Sentry Box has again demonstrated that small-scale conservation and restoration can be undertaken. The task was undertaken by Van Lanza with the help of a local mason, Patrick Pauline. Blocks that could be identified were put back in place and new blocks were cut to fit the voids (Fig. 12). Lime was mixed with sand to make up the mortar. However, the difficulty of loading and unloading equipment, tools and materials at the Landing Place and the absence of secure storage on the islet greatly limit what it is possible to do. We hope and expect that in future seasons it will be possible to undertake further work of this nature, and in particular to clean, excavate, record and restore the emplacements on the Upper Battery.

It has to be noted that regular cutting back of grass and control of overgrowing vegetation (Fig. 13) limits damage to the exposed structures.



*Figure 12. Patrick, a local mason with experience of cutting soft coral in his native Rodrigue, demonstrated that the soft coral could be easily cut and shaped with a saw. (mp05nc1422)*



*Figure 13. Sidney using a grass cutter to cut back long grass around the cistern. (mp05nc0722)*

## Processing Finds

The finds have been placed in temporary storage in the National History Museum in Mahébourg. At the end of the August season the team was provided with working space in a large lower floor room of this historic building. Here it was possible to sort out, label and pack the bones and shells (Figs 14 and 15).

Owen Griffiths examined the small land-snail shells. No rare or extinct species were recovered. He reports:

- Large series of *Tropidophora fimbriata*. Endemic. Still survives on the island.
- Small series of *Truncatella marginata*. Native. Still survives on the island.
- 2 x *Melampus lividus*. Native. Still survives on the island.
- Small bag of marine shells.



*Figure 14. Celine, Aurelie and Bradley sorting shells and bone in the National History Museum where the material from Ile de la Passe is stored temporarily. (mp05cn1508)*



*Figure 15. Geoff, Sofia and Leslie labelling and packing bones and shells at the end of the August campaign. (mp05cn1507)*

## Pointe du Diable

At Pointe du Diable a French battery, recorded on a map of 1759, complimented the defences of southern Mauritius at Ile de la Passe. This was destroyed by Willoughby in 1810. Later military structures were integrated with the 20<sup>th</sup> century defensive systems on Ile de la Passe in both the First and Second World Wars.

A visit in January 2005 was followed up in August by a brief preliminary survey (Figs 16 and 17). There is much recording to be done if all remains are to be documented and studied.



*Figure 16. Visit in January 2005 with the Earthwatch Team 1. (md05hp0110)*



*Figure 17. In August 2005, Earthwatch Team 2 and students from the University of Mauritius documented part of the French Battery at Pointe du Diable. (md05nc0113)*

## OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

### Survey

A few finds picked up from the surface were added to the collection of artefacts from Ile de la Passe but are of less interest than those recovered from excavation.

Mr Van G. Lanza has most graciously handed over to the National History Museum in Mahébourg eleven items that he himself has picked up at Ile de la Passe in past years. The precise location of each of these finds was assiduously recorded at the time of discovery, with both notes and GPS (Global Positioning System) positions. We ourselves have catalogued these objects and assimilated them into the Ile de la Passe collection of finds. One of these objects, a cap badge of the 56<sup>th</sup> West Essex Regiment of Foot is of particular interest. It is, however, in several fragments so that it requires expert cleaning and restoration.

The two anchors located during the underwater reconnaissance add to the record of items that lay on the seabed.

### Excavation inside the North-West Battery

In 2004 trench TR11 was laid out to investigate the coral and lime mortar wall of Structure 33, which was visible in the eroded bank on the south-eastern side of WW II Structure 23 and assumed to date from the French period. There was interest both in the possible identification of the structure with elements shown on contemporaneous maps as well as in establishing the stratigraphic relationship of the visible wall with Walls F4 and G of the North-Western Battery (Fig. 9).

In the first 2005 session of fieldwork the eastern portion of the section was extended to the north-east (Fig. 18). There were two objectives; firstly to locate what was expected to be the north-east wall of the structure and, secondly, to explore further the earlier levels which had great potential interest. Neither of these aims was achieved. No trace of additional walling was found and, because the top of the bedrock rose up, the pre-wall surfaces were found to peter out immediately to the east of the 2004 trench edge. In a future campaign trench TR11 could be extended south-westwards to establish the stratigraphic link between Structure 33 and Wall G of the North-West Battery.



*Figure 18. Excavating trench TR11 with the Powder House and Hot Shot Furnace behind. (05jv0428)*



Many of the animal bones from trench TR11, the majority of which would appear on superficial examination to be cattle, but also some pig, have been sawn for marrow extraction (Fig. 19). The exact date of the levels from which these sawn bones were recovered is not yet certain. The ceramics and glass are perhaps indicative of a date in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century rather than the 18<sup>th</sup>, in which case the wall of Structure 33 would belong to the British rather than the French period. Such a result would be surprising and, given the characteristic butchering practices just mentioned, of some chronological and cultural importance.



*Figure 19. Sawn animal bones from trench TR11. (mp05hp1434)*

### **Excavation in the West Ditch**

Trenches TR15 and TR16 (Figs 1, 9 and 20) were both located in the rock-cut ditch-like feature, the West Ditch, located on the western edge of the islet. This ditch is aligned approximately north-south, extending from close to the rear of the Store House. The linear nature of the ditch together with its position does make it very likely that it formed part of a defensive scheme early on in the French period, and that it was abandoned unfinished.



*Figure 20. Excavation in the West Ditch, probably part of an abandoned scheme of defences. (mp05nc0824)*

On the surface of the fill in the central portion of this rock-cut ditch a concentration of large animal bones, some of which appeared to be partially mineralised, suggested that there might be some undisturbed deposits at this location. Excavation was restricted to two small trenches, TR15 and TR16 (Fig. 9), with the twin objectives of examining the base of the ditch so as to ascertain its profile, and the recovery of objects and other material of potentially intrinsic value. Excavation was begun in January 2005. The trenches were backfilled at the end of the campaign and in August trench TR16 was reopened and completed.



*Figure 21. Wet sieving by trench TR16. (mp05nc0212)*

All soil was carefully sieved through fine mesh to ensure total recovery of the small bones (fish, bird, rodent and reptile) without undue breakage of fragile pieces. In January the contents were dry sieved while in August it was decided to wet sieve in adjacent pools of seawater in order to lessen the chances of damage to delicate bones. Since waves frequently break over the edge of the islet at this point, sometimes leaving standing seawater in the central portion of the ditch, no harm was done by sieving in salt water. There is a strong possibility of later intrusion as a result of burrowing animals (e.g. crabs and rodents), human activity (e.g. the presence of a Second World War electricity cable from the generators in the Storehouse to the Searchlight Building, and the activities of fishermen and wave action during storms and cyclones. A combination of a very strong southerly wind and high tides in August caused seawater to pour into the ditch so that we were able to observe how the fill was churned up by natural forces.

Perhaps as much as 30% of the fill was, however, made up of animal bone and marine shell (Fig. 22). None of the bone was articulated. Species represented include horse (teeth), pig (tusk), cattle and sheep/goat. There is also much fish and some bird bone. These shells and bone clearly represent a deposit of food waste. Mixed together with the food refuse were pieces of waste from a bone-working industry that was producing buttons, brushes, gaming pieces and, doubtless, other items (Fig. 23). A number of generally small fragments of porcelain, pottery and pieces of green and black bottle glass were also found. The date of the finds would seem to be early 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. from the British period. The strongest evidence for this suggested dating is a serial of military uniform buttons, mostly made of pewter by English manufactures. These can be identified and provide evidence of the particular regiment represented.

The animal bones and the pieces of worked bone waste do not (on a first superficial inspection) appear to have been greatly damaged. This observation, if confirmed, would be evidence that we are here dealing with a primary deposit. In this case we might have a small part of the refuse from the garrison. The size of the bones as well as the angle at which some of the larger pieces are found to be laying are probably indications that the deposit accumulated quickly. In any event, there is no trace of layering and trampling as might be expected if the accumulation had been a slow one.

The location of trench TR16, more or less in the centre of the ditch, is at the shortest distance of the footpath leading from the Cook House over Wall E at the south-east corner of the Store House to the sea. Whether the deposit represents the secondary deposition of a dump, or a first-time refuse pile is of little significance for the great value of the bones in assessing the diet of the garrison since it is clear that they ultimately derived from the kitchen.



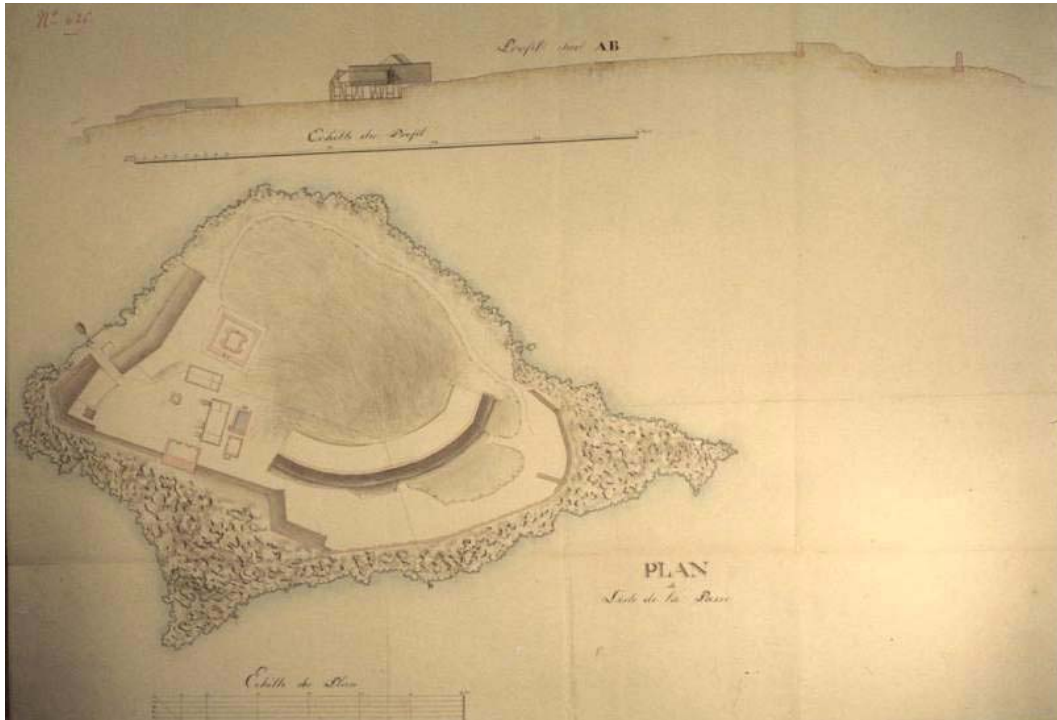
*Figure 22. A selection of the animal bone, fish bone and shell from trench TR16. (05boneshell)*



*Figure 23. Waste from the manufacture of bone buttons and a fragment of a brush from trench TR16. (05bbutton)*

### Excavation in the Central Area

Excavation of an area between the Powder House and the Hot Shot Furnace was conducted primarily to establish whether remains of a structure, as shown on one of the early maps (Fig. 24), could be found. Trench TR17 (Fig. 25) was expanded to a final size of 10.00 by 2.00 metres and bedrock has been reached across the entire excavated area. No traces of cuttings into the bedrock that might have been associated with an early timber frame barrack building nor evidence for the existence of other structures in this location were noted. At the east end a roughly circular feature represents an area where lime mortar and crushed brick were once mixed.



*Figure 24. French map showing the timber frame barrack between the Powder House and the Hot Shot Furnace.*



*Figure 25. Trench TR17 did not produce any evidence for the barrack on the French map. (mp05nc0312)*

Trench TR18 (Figs 26 and 27), was laid out over what should be the southern end of the timber-framed building which trench TR17 failed to locate. If traces of the structure are extant at the southern end of this trench they are very ephemeral. It would seem, however, that if the building was in fact erected, rather than merely proposed, no beams or posts had been cut into the bedrock. At the south-eastern end there were traces of a lime mortar surface. This may have been no more than the remains of mixing lime mortar because the level mortar covered area was irregular and restricted. In any event, no traces of any built structure were recognised. The mortar surface was not removed.



*Figure 26. Team, students and volunteers digging trench TR18. (mp05cn1003)*



*Figure 27. Bradley brushing trench TR18 before final photography. (mp05cn1121)*

## Graffiti

The majority, and by far the most interesting, of the graffiti on Ile de la Passe appear to have been cut by British troops who were stationed on the mainland of Mauritius from the 1840s until perhaps as late as the 1870s (Fig. 28). These graffiti record names, numbers, ranks, regiments and dates. Very occasionally there are representations of regimental emblems such as crossed flags, crowns and a single Irish harp. The carving exhibits various styles with differing degrees of competence. Stencils were sometimes used, as evidenced both by the form of the lettering and numbers as well as by the occasional reversal of individual characters. This new observation carries the implication that soldiers visiting the islet came with the explicit intention of carving their names, bringing with them stencils for that purpose. A number of individuals have recorded their presence more than once, presumably indicating visits on different occasions. Some of the most elaborate and competent of the graffiti from this period were carved on the inside of the barrel-vaulted roof of the Powder House in positions that could not be reached from the floor.



*Figure 28. Graffiti carved by British soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot. (mp05nc1226)*

In the first part of the 2005 campaign a small number of graffiti cut on walls of the Powder House and elsewhere during the Second World War, indicated by **WW II** or the date, (Fig. 29) were spotted. These are less informative than the 19<sup>th</sup> century graffiti, although one poignantly says **CHRISTMAS**. The term World War Two had actually been used as early as 1938: [www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/world\\_war\\_4-name.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/world_war_4-name.htm) -



*Figure 29. Jn Fidèle carefully inscribed his name and the date, 24 October 1945. Was it just chance that this was the day the United Nations came into being? (mp05nc1444)*

No graffiti dating to the French period, i.e. before 1810, have been recognised, nor do there appear to be any British graffiti that belong to the period after 1810 when Ile de la Passe was garrisoned. While it is possible that some of the names do belong to this latter period, but cannot be recognised because they do not include dates or regimental information, it can easily be imagined that officers would not have taken kindly to troops defacing garrison buildings. This same attitude would also, perhaps, explain why there are no (recognisable) carvings dating to the period when the Observation Tower and associated structures were being constructed, even though the walls and surfaces of existing buildings were by then already scarred.

### Documenting Pointe du Diable

A reconnaissance was made of the structures on the hill above the French Battery. Here it was discovered that much of the WW II camp together with associated defensive structures are reasonably well preserved although roofs other than concrete ones are all gone (Figs 30 and 31). An interesting surprise was the recognition that some structures were originally constructed in earlier periods, perhaps during the First World War and possibly at other times. It may also turn out that one or more of these structures were converted from civilian use.



*Figure 30. Disused buildings on the hilltop at Pointe du Diable. (md05nn0106)*



*Figure 31. Roofless masonry building. (md05nn0148)*

Measurements were taken at the French Battery (Figs 32 and 33) to produce a detailed plan of the standing defences. It was noted that nothing remains of the structures on the south side of the battery depicted on the 1759 map beyond the end stubs of two walls. These structures, presumably destroyed by Willoughby in 1810, have long since washed away. No trace of later, British, proposed rebuilding of the battery shown on a plan of 1812 could be found. It seems likely that little if anything was actually built, but further research is required.



*Figure 32. The French Battery at Pointe du Diable, as seen today, cut by the main road. (md05hp0101)*



*Figure 33. The vault at the southern end of the battery was documented with the help of digital photos and control points for photo-rectification. (md05nc0101)*



## MAIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS

Excavation reveals what is under the surface and adds to our knowledge information that would otherwise stay buried. The fragility of the site demands however great respect and the choice of the location and size of the trenches to be dug must be carefully evaluated beforehand.

The excavation of trench TR11 did not provide evidence as to the function of Structure 33, nor did it confirm the date of construction as had been hoped. Although the recovery of archaeozoological and archaeobotanical material from yet earlier levels was slighter than had been anticipated, the recovery of animal bone, which exhibits very different butchering practices from those observed in trench TR16, is of not inconsiderable interest.

The dump of animal bone, marine shell and waste material in the Western Ditch holds considerable potential for further study, even though it turns out to postdate French rule. If the evidence of the buttons can be taken to be conclusive, the dump dates to the early years of British activity on Ile de la Passe, perhaps somewhere between 1810 and the early 1820s. This dump of animal bone, including waste material from bone working, has great potential for the study of the diet and other activities of the garrison on Ile de la Passe during some part of the British period. Amongst the bone there is a considerable amount of fish, very little of which is of any size. Small lagoon fish and shellfish would thus appear to have formed a substantial part of the diet. With regard to the mammals, it would appear that the great majority were slaughtered and butchered elsewhere. Whether they were slaughtered on Mauritius or came salted from Europe is a matter for further research. In any event, almost all of the bones have been cut for the extraction of marrow, an indication of relatively poor diet and/or scarcity of meat. On a later occasion, it might be desirable to extend these trenches in order to obtain a larger sample of bone for analysis but any such expansion should be made only after consultation with a specialist in archaeozoology and, ideally, with the specialist who is to study the material being there to supervise the recovery of the bone during excavation.

The importance of the archaeozoological material for comparative studies with sites on the mainland of Mauritius together with the evidence from shipwrecks (such as the Sirius) demonstrates that the continuation of archaeological investigations at Ile de la Passe will produce results that shed light on many aspects of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Mauritius.

In the central area, excavation of trenches TR17 and TR18 shed some light on the building shown on a late French plan, together with a detailed elevation, with convincing evidence that even if the building was ever erected in this location it was certainly not built in the manner depicted. There is no cutting in the soft bedrock, either within these two trenches or in the immediate area where much of the surface of the bedrock can be seen.

As for graffiti, they are important for two reasons. Firstly they hold not inconsiderable historical potential and may perhaps lead to the discovery of new evidence in archives and museums in the UK. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, these graffiti represent both personal and group reactions to and interactions of European troops and officers with what in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the vacant buildings on a beautiful but desolate islet that had been the scene of British heroism and, eventually, Napoleonic victory. There are no graffiti that predate the abandonment of Ile de la Passe by the British Garrison, apparently in the late 1830s. This need cause no surprise since no army officer would tolerate men scrawling their names on garrison buildings, still less set an example by incising their own. Some names are found in several places, presumably representing multiple visits. The majority of the 19<sup>th</sup> century graffiti were made by the Fifth Fusiliers, there being few if any of other regiments.

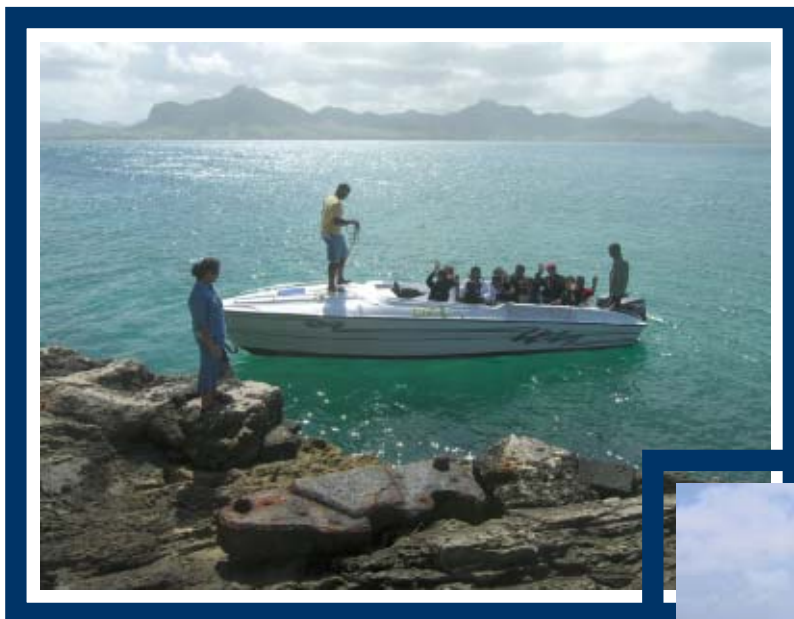
All these marks and signs are symbols made by individuals who do not feature in texts and documents, and as such they provide insights into the attitudes and culture of the common soldier which, as well as being reflections of their identities, influence our own reactions and sense of identity. This perhaps goes some way to explain why graffiti carved before 1945

might be considered important evidence of identity and place, while more recent carvings and spray paint seem to be little short of vandalism.

Finally, the preliminary survey at Pointe du Diable demonstrated the importance of this strategic site in both the French and the British periods of rule, putting the defences on Ile de la Passe in the wider context of the defensive systems for the south of Mauritius. Of particular importance was the realisation that there are a large number of standing military structures, mostly roofless and covered with vegetation, that were associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century batteries. A full architectural survey of these remains would be of considerable interest well beyond Mauritius. It is vital to begin this work now because the reinforced concrete structures and elements constructed in WW II are coming to the end of their natural life.

## **FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

This fragile jewel continues to shine in the midst of glistening waves but desperately needs attention. The interest and enthusiasm of all the young visitors from Universities and schools (Fig. 34) brings hope for its preservation. Ile de la Passe made more accessible to visitors, Mauritians and tourists, could generate resources that would secure its own sustainable future. The Mahébourg Bay has the potential to become an animated historic landscape where past and present merge into a virtual reality (Fig. 35).



*Figure 34. Visitors taking with them fond memories of glittering waves. (mp05nc1659)*



*Figure 35. From the French Battery at Pointe du Diable a window opens onto the past re-enacted. (md05hp0115)*