

ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES AT ILE DE LA PASSE

MAURITIUS

THE 2006 SEASON OF FIELDWORK

January and August 2006



Figure 1. The NHF organised a visit for the Minister of Arts and Culture, Honorable Mahendra Gowressoo, on the 20th January 2006. (mp06nc1147)

A Report Submitted to Sponsors

by

Geoffrey D. Summers and Françoise Summers

**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 (Figs 1, 2 and 3) is concerned with the archaeology, architecture and conservation of this 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. Architectural studies are unravelling the function of structures, together with structural details and their chronology, while also providing information relevant to preservation and restoration with appropriate materials. Targeted excavation is resolving specific problems of chronology, uncovering features not recorded in archival sources, examining relationships between structures and features, and shedding light on aspects of everyday life of troops garrisoned on the islet. Recording of 19th and 20th century graffiti provides poignant testimony of troops stationed on the islet and will provide a valuable sources for historians of Mauritius, empire and military matters.



Figure 2. Ile de la Passe from the boat. (mp06hp0124)

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 18th 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 Triumf, 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. The site has vast potential for sustainable tourism development which requires the drawing up and implementation of a management plan together with the provision of infrastructure and wardens or guardians.

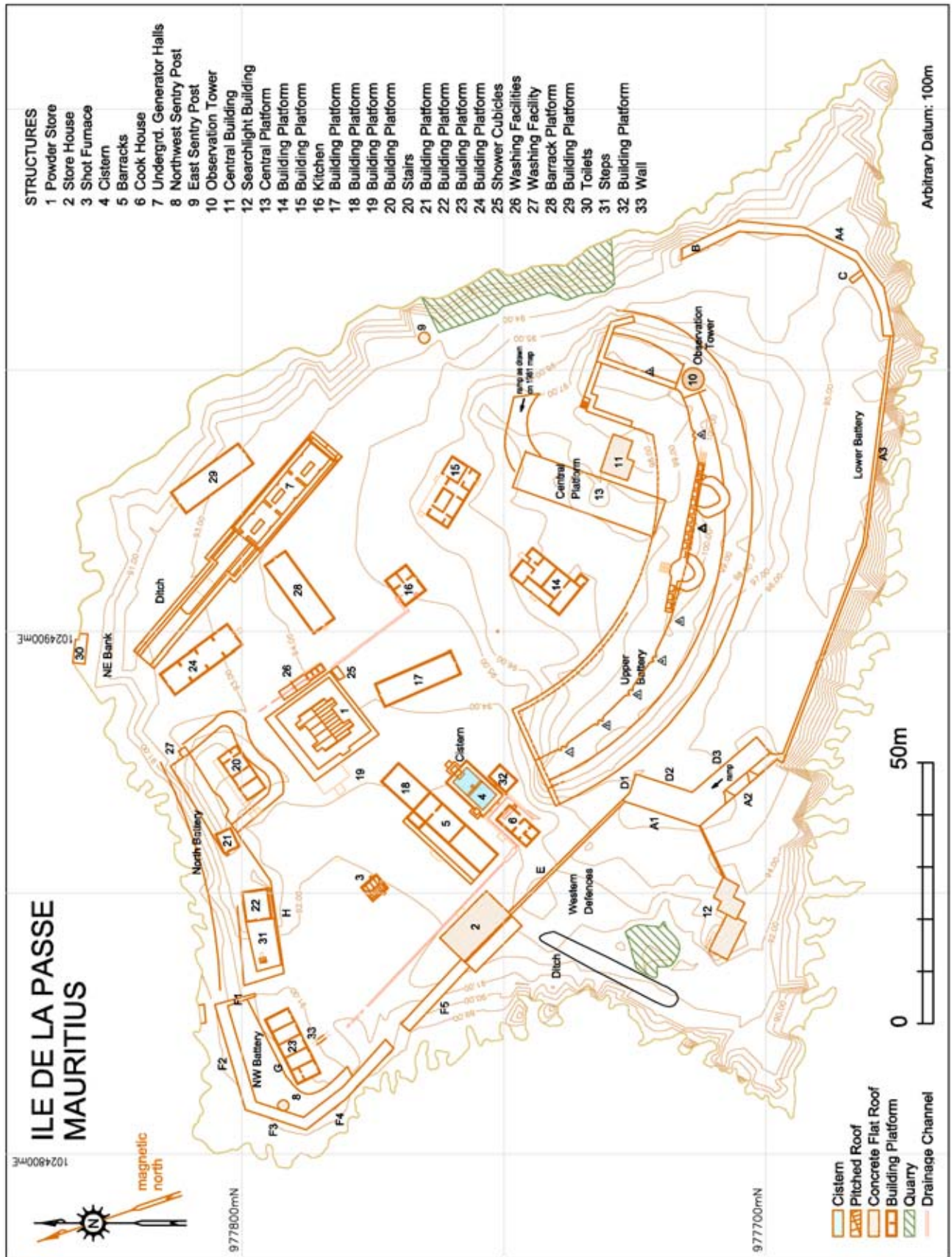


Figure 3. Map of Ile de la Passe showing standing monuments, structures and other features.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly we would like to thank the National Heritage Fund of Mauritius for continuing support of our work on Ile de la Passe in 2006 and organising a visit (Fig. 1) for the Minister of Arts and Culture, Honorable Mahendra Gowressoo, in January. We are particularly grateful to the Chairperson, Miss Diana Bablee, and NHF staff Mrs Ram-Gopal, Dr Anwar Janoo and Mr Daby, for their interest, enthusiasm and support.

We thank Dr Vijaya Teelock for her enthusiastic support and arranging for formal participation of University of Mauritius students in January. In addition, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Appravasi Ghat Trust Fund Dr Teelock kindly permitted Ms Jayshree Mungur, research coordinator of the Appravasi Ghat Project, to act as the NHF liaison officer for the January 2006 fieldwork campaign.

We were afforded every facility by Mr Sunil Nossib and Mr D. Ramracheya, Acting Directors, as well as 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 Abdoolrahman, for their friendship and support.

Grants and sponsorship have made possible the continuation of the project in 2006. The Earthwatch Institute again supported the project with two teams of volunteers from Earthwatch participating in 2006. Funds towards operational expenses and the employment of local labour for cleaning and clearing were received from the Mauritius Commercial Bank, General Construction and Phoenix Camp Mineral Ltd. Harel Mallac Technologies Ltd loaned a computer, essential for the digital recording, processing and archiving of data during the season while Xerox provided photocopying facilities. Gaz Carbonique helped with transport and consumables.

The Coast Guard again removed sacks of rubbish for proper disposal on the mainland. 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 special rates.

Last, but by no means least, our thanks go to all those whose contributions made the 2006 season possible (Figs 4, 5 and 6) and to our family and friends without whose generosity and hospitality the season would not have happened.

Academic

Use has been made of unpublished reports written by Dr Marina Carter for the NHF. We are very grateful to Dr Carter for sharing the results of her research with us and allowing us to take them into consideration here. It is to be hoped that the NHF will soon publish Dr Carter's very important reports as a monograph.

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.



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Figure 4. In January 2006 Earthwatch team, students, volunteers and workmen participated with enthusiasm. (mp06hp0124, mp06nc0825, mp06nc0210, mp06hp0709, mp06nc0825, mp06nc0819, mp06hp0601, mp06nc0703)



Figure 5. The enthusiasm of the August 2006 Earthwatch team, workmen and volunteers equalled those of previous campaigns. (mp06nc1211, mp06nc2102)



Figure 6. The team also enjoys the ride in La Renaissance, a large pirogue skilfully driven by Jean Claude Farla and his crew. (mp06nc1407, mp06nc1406)

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August 2006

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Participants

Specialist Participants in 2005

Yann von Arnim, Underwater Archaeology and advisor on artefact conservation.
Owen Griffiths, Identification of terrestrial shells.
Owen Jones, Architectural Assistant, University of London.
Çiğdem Özkan, Field and Administrative Assistant, Middle East Technical University.
Jean Claude Sevathian, Botanist, Wilde Life Foundation of Mauritius.
Natalie Summers, Archaeological Assistant, Reunion University.

Earthwatch volunteers

Team 1 (January 9-22): Bruce Denner, Loretta Denner, Dennis Devlin, Tamara Kozlawski, June Tayler, George Weiss and Jack Wood.

Team 2 (August 7-19): Deanna Macek, Johanna Hickman, Valerie Meixner, Christoph Niessen, Ulrike Niessen and Emily Olson.

METU Research Assistants for post-fieldwork in Ankara

Çiğdem Özkan and Tuna Kalaycı.

Volunteers

Among those who joined the team were Aurélie Antoine, Amrita Gopaul, Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière and family, Edouard Labat, Kareen Lincoln and Van G. Lanza.

Participation of University of Mauritius Students

In January trips to Ile de la Passe were organised by Dr. Vijaya Teelock, Head of the Department of History and Political Science at the University of Mauritius, thereby providing the opportunity for 8 students, Yusreen Abdullah, Ashvin Ahotar, Krisha Beebeejaun, Banita Gopaul, Indra Jhingree, Amreen Rambocus, Marie Lorena Saint-Pierre and Ashtalukshmee Kajal Sembhoo, to join us during the January season.

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 use great expertise and experience to provide safe and enjoyable transport to and from the islet.

SCOPE OF THE REPORT

This Report covers all aspects of the scheme of work that was set out in the *Research Proposal: The 2006 Season* submitted to the NHF. Results from each of the issues to which research was directed during the course of the 2006 campaign are hereby provided, together with assessments of the work undertaken.

Designations of Structures and Features in this report follow those given in previous seasons, and which can be found in earlier *Reports* for 2002 to 2005.

A short version of the report on *Architectural and Archaeological Studies at Ile de la Passe, Mauritius - The 2006 Season of Fieldwork*, is requested by the Earthwatch Institute, the main sponsor of the 2006 season, and has been prepared for them, for other sponsors or potential sponsors, for participants and for all those interested in the project. The sections entitled The Project, Acknowledgements, The Team, Scope of the Report, Public Outreach, Overview of Results and Future Perspectives appear in both reports.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

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.

It was rewarding to welcome many groups of visitors, amongst which were sponsors, professionals, students, journalists, film crews and friends. Several articles appeared in the national press and visitors enjoyed their trip to Ile de la Passe 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 in a special exhibition scheduled for 2007.

An MBC documentary film entitled *Couleurs Marines* by Jeelany Khodabocus was made and broadcasted in 2006 (Fig. 7) while the same team is preparing a shorter piece for the series "Buried Memories" for TV5.

A Web Page to present the short reports to sponsors, participants and the general public has been set up at:

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



Figure 7. Jeelany Khodabocus prepared a short documentary on Ile de la Passe for his very successful series entitled 'Couleurs Marines'. (mp06nc0804)

The Visit of the Honourable Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture

On Thursday 26 January the close of the January campaign was marked by the visit of the Honourable Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture (Fig. 8), and a party of 42 which included officials from the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the National Heritage Fund, the Ministry of Tourism and the press. We thank the NHF for organising this visit and both the Special Mobile Force and the National Coast Guard for their assistance. Jean-Claude Farla and his crew were once more asked to organise the boat trip and a safe landing which is not always easy in the absence of a jetty. This opportunity was taken to stress to the Minister and to members of the NHF Board the importance of going ahead with the prepared tender for a new jetty and the repair of the Storehouse and Observation Tower.

Soft drinks presented by Phoenix Beverage were kept cold in dry ice provided by Gaz Carbonique. It was a pleasant surprise for our guests to have cold drinks and ice cream on Ile de la Passe which is not linked to the electricity mains! The SMF had set up a tent on the islet to provide some shelter for lunch. The Coast Guard helped with transport as well as being on hand to ensure the safety of the guests. Sacks of rubbish were removed by the Coast Guard team so that the islet was left clean and tidy.

When after lunch the Minister and guests visited Ile aux Fouquets, also known as Ile au Phare, it was noted that the accumulation of rubbish there was a disgrace and something had to be done. Suggestions of setting up a NGO for the management of the islets were made and the Minister and Members of the NHF Board were very receptive to these ideas.

The list of visitors prepared by the NHF is given below.

Officials from the Ministry of Arts and Culture

Honourable Mahendra Gowressoo (Minister of Arts and Culture)

Mr. R. Auckle

Mr. D. Ramkhelawon

Mr. G. Deodanee

Mr. A. Chundhansingh

Mr. R. Gouruah

Mr. A. Seegoolam

NHF Board Members

Mr. N. K. Ballah (Permanent Secretary)

Mr. G. Soobarah

Mrs. D. Ram-Gopal (Administrative Secretary, NHF)

Mr. R. Amourdon (Ministry of Tourism & Leisure)

Mr. S. Abdoolrahman (Mauritius Museums Council)

Mr. R. Luximon (Ministry of Environment & NDU) Representing Mr. P. Kallee

Miss. P. Poinen (Ministry of Environment & NDU)

Mr. R. Bhootooa (Mauritius Museums Council, Mahebourg)

MBC Team

Mr Appayah, Mr. B. I. Gownowry, Mr. V. Pillay, Mr. S. Seebaluck

The press included

Mr. M. Bonomally, Mr. M. Namdarkhan, Mr. P. Kenjychan, Mrs. J. Anabelle Volbert, Mr. P. Joganah, Mr. R. Callichurn, Mr. J. Gajadhursingh, Mr. Y. Rivet, Mr. M. Doris Felix, Mr. Thierry-Léon, Mr. P. Ramlochun, Mrs. P. Cheekooree, Mr. Jean. A. Laperotine, Ms. N. Bhallah, Ms. C. Jankee, Ms. P. Fulana, Mr. T. Fine, Mr. Butlan, Mr. J. Helix, Ms. N. Prayag.

Other visitors interested in multi-media development, who have expressed their interest for the work done at Ile de la Passe, were Nichal Kattadasamy and Maneesha Syea



Figure 8. The visit of the Honourable Mahendra Gowressoo, Minister of Arts and Culture, on the 26th January 2006. (mp06hp0803, mp06hp0850, mp06hp0824, mp06hp0872, mp06hp0862, mp06nc1142, mp06hp0830)

Visitors and Press

It was a pleasure to have many groups of visitors during the 2006 campaign at Ile de la Passe (Fig. 9).

Thursday 12 January

P. Kallee (NHF Board Member and Ministry of Environment)
Pat Ng Cheong Tin (NHF Board Member and Mauritius Chamber of Architects)
R. Luximon (Ministry of Environment)
Jayshen Dagali (Ministry of Environment)

Saturday 21 January

Yann von Arnim, Jeelany Khodabocus and a camera team from the MBC visited on Saturday. Mr Khodabocus produced an excellent documentary film entitled *Couleurs Marines* which was broadcasted on MBC.

Monday 23 January,

We were very pleased to have a visit from members of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust. The Chairperson, Dr Vijaya Teelock, was accompanied by three Board Members, Mr Thodda, Mr Peerbux and Mr Deenand, the consultant architect Munish Pandit and Researcher Satyenda Peerthum. The group also included a guest and Atish Miraj from Step Ahead Primary School.

Wednesday 16 and Saturday 19 August

Jeelany Khodabocus returned with a film crew from MBC to film for part of a short documentary they are making for TV5. On Saturday the same crew filmed excavated finds together with documentation in progress and work on architectural and archaeological excavations at the expedition base at Pointe D'Esny.

Thursday 10 August

Christine Issah and Jean Claude Sevathian, respectively Tourism Manager and Botanist of the Mauritian Wild Life Foundation together with Consultant and Liaison Officer Anwar Janoo and Co-ordinator Ricardo Lalande, both from the NHF, were taken round Ile de la Passe and Ile aux Fouquets. Jean Claude Sevathian made a further examination of the existing flora during the visit. He was able to confirm that no endangered species were present and at the same time giving welcome advice as how best to minimise pressure on the endemic species growing on the islet.

Saturday 12 August

Diana Bablee, Chairperson of the NHF, Anwar Janoo, NHF Liaison Officer, Jayshree Mungur-Mehdi from Aapravasi Ghat, Nipon Mehdi, Philippe La Hausse and other visitors were taken around both Ile de la Passe and Ile aux Fouquets.

Staff and Students from the University of Technology, Mauritius

Following presentation by the Principle Investigators at UTM (the University of Technology, Mauritius), on Tuesday August 8, a total of 35 students and staff from UTM came on Friday August 11. The students have been given assignments related to this educational fieldtrip.

On Wednesday 16 August Professor Peter Coupe, Director General of UTM accompanied by Penny Harlow, came to discuss informally possible future project development which has the potential to involve both students and staff from UTM.



Figure 9. Visitors and press were guided around Ile de la Passe as well as Ile aux Fouquets, also known as Ile au Phare. (mp06nc0802, mp06nc1622, mp06nc0810, mp06nc0103, mp06nc0812, mp06nc1611, mp06nc0941, mp06nc2004)

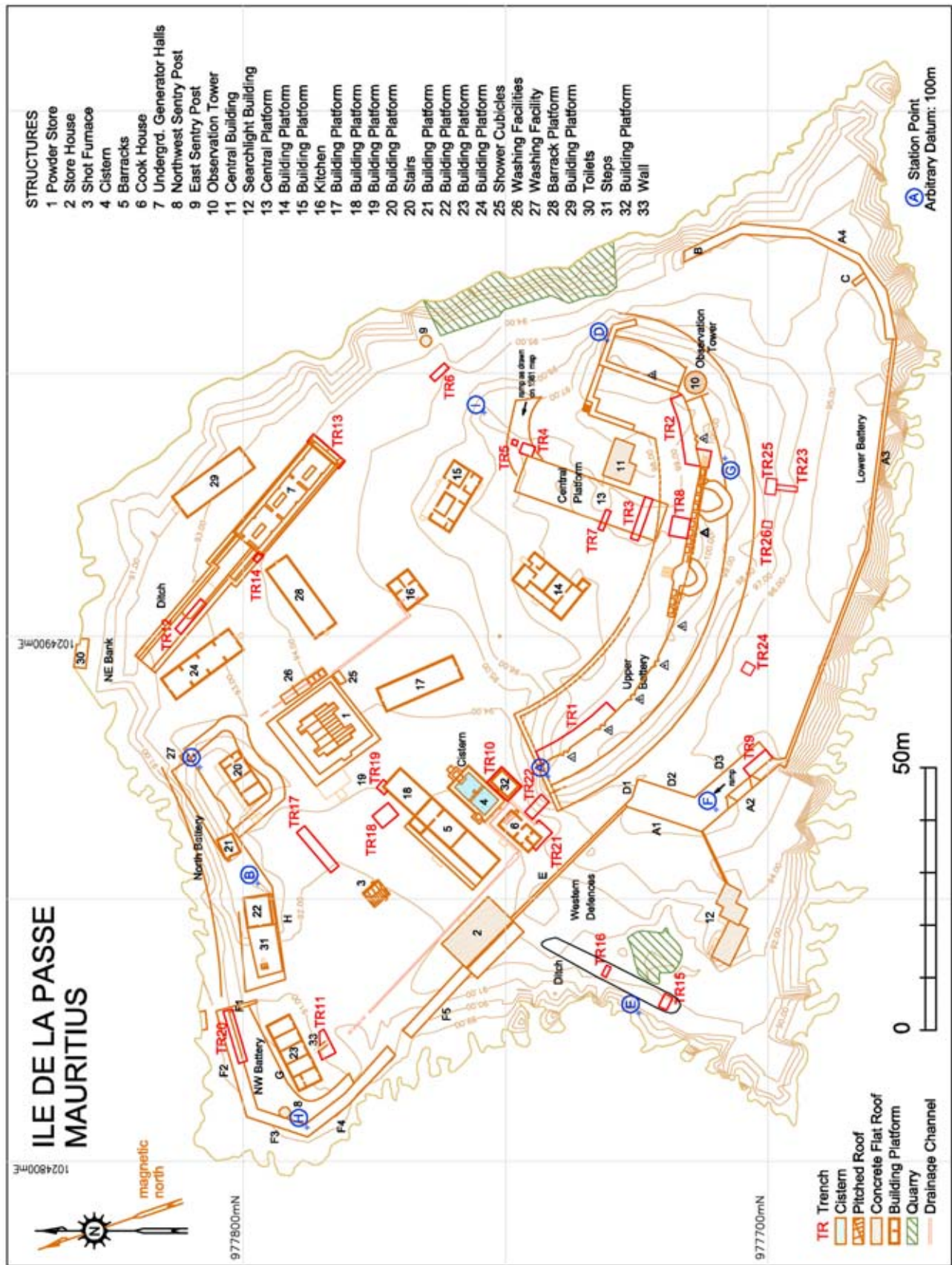


Figure 10. Map of Ile de la Passe locating structures and trenches.

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

The field work was conducted in two sessions, the first in January and the second in August, a total of four weeks being spent on the islet. There were three areas of investigation at Ile de la Passe in 2006:

- archaeological
- architectural
- epigraphic

Archaeological Investigations

A total of eight new trenches were excavated in 2006, and named in the order in which they were started (Fig. 10). The soil was sieved if considered necessary (Fig. 11).

The first three trenches, TR19 (Fig. 12), TR20 (Fig.13) and TR21 (Fig. 14), were completed in January. Trench TR22 was started in January (Fig. 15) and completed in August 2006 (Figs 16 and 17). Trenches TR23, TR25 and TR26 on the Western bank of the Upper Battery were all excavated in August (Figs 18, 19 and 20). Trench TR24 (Figs 21 and 22) was excavated during the August campaign by Dr Anwar Janoo to investigate possible remains for presettlement.

The trenches were backfilled once all the photography and recording (Fig. 22) was completed.



Figure 11. Where it was considered necessary, the soil was sieved. The most interesting finds came from the fill of the old quarry at the foot of the Upper Battery. (mp06nc1719)



Figure 12. Trench TR19 located over the north east corner of the WW II platform, Structure 18. (mp06nc0642)



Figure 13. Trench TR20 was located on top of the North West Battery where earlier maps indicated two canon emplacements. One of them, at bottom right, was quickly revealed and found to have been blocked up in a later phase. (mp06hp0913)



Figure 14. Trench TR21 investigated the space between the south west corner of the Cook House and the quarry cut. (mp06nc0819)



Figure 15. Trench TR22 at the foot of the north end wall of the Upper Battery, was started in January 2006. (mp06nc0922)



Figure 16. In August 2006, trench TR22 was planned and cleaned for final photography before being back filled. (mp06nc2113)



Figure 17. A quarry for building blocks was revealed by Trench TR22. (mp06nc2021)



Figure 18. Trench TR23 investigating the rock-cut feature at the bottom of the southern bank of the Upper Battery. (mp06nc1414)



Figure 19. Trench TR25 revealed a right angle turn in the rock-cut feature. (mp06nc2145)



Figure 20. Trench TR26 confirmed the absence of a cut in the bedrock a few metres west of trench TR25. (mp06nc2130)



Figure 21. Trench TR24 was located on the west side between the Upper Battery and the Lower Battery, to investigate a natural solution hole at the foot of the Upper Battery rampart. (mp06nc1716)



Figure 22. Anwar Janoo and team members planning Trench TR24 before it is backfilled. (mp06nc2105)

Finds from the 2006 Season

The most productive units were those of trench TR22 which provided a good context from the fill of the quarry. Animal bones (Figs 23 and 24) were kept and will be studied by Dr Anwar Janoo.

To the collection of worked bone from previous seasons was added a button (Fig. 25) and pieces from which buttons were cut out confirming that they were made on the islet.

Among the most interesting artefacts were the fragments of clay pipes including those with the manufacturer's stamp (Fig. 26).

Two gun flints were recovered (Fig. 27). A cannister shot (Fig. 28) was one of the few finds from trench TR26.



Figure 23. Fish bone recovered from the fill of the quarry in trench TR22. (mp06nc2308)



Figure 24. A selection of bird bone from the fill of the quarry in trench TR22. (mp06nc2339)



Figure 25. A worked bone button trench TR22. (mp06nc2209 and 10 - IP06TR22U02bon01)



Figure 26. A clay pipe with a manufacturer's stamp was found in the quarry fill of trench TR22. (mp06nc2920 - IP06TR22U05pip01)



Figure 27. Gun flint, from trench TR22. (mp06nc2203 - IP06TR25U02stn02)



Figure 28. Cannister shot from the fill of the rock-cut feature on the western bank of the Upper Battery. (mp06nc2238 - IP06TR25U02met01)

Architectural Investigations

The standing buildings were examined and photographed to document any significant changes in the state of preservation. It has to be stressed once more that the Hot Shot Furnace (Fig. 29) is in urgent need of attention and expertise.

The Powder House (Fig. 30) is well preserved but remains fragile and will rapidly deteriorate if visitors cannot be stopped from lighting fires by the walls within the inner court.

To the existing documentation of standing structures, photographs and notes were added to describe log put holes (Fig. 31) for scaffolding used during construction.



Figure 29. The Hot Shot Furnace needs urgent attention if further collapse of the roof is to be prevented. (mp06nc0802)



Figure 30. The Powder House continues to suffer from fires lit very near its fragile walls. (mp06nc0103)



Figure 31. Log put holes for scaffolding, at top right, were first noted while recording graffiti on the walls of the Powder House. (mp06nc0408)

The Date the Observation Tower, Central Building and Searchlight Building

The date of three buildings (Structures 10, 11 and 12 on Figure 6), the Observation Tower (Fig. 32), Central Building (Fig. 33) and Searchlight Building (Fig. 34) has long been a mystery (la Hausse de Lalouvière 1998, 64). It has become clear, as noted in Summers and Summers 2005, 23, that they were part of a complex and integrated set of defences linked in some way to those at Pointe du Diable. No documentary evidence for the construction these substantial defences has been found, e.g. by Ashley Jackson in his 2001 book. Professor Denis Devlin, team member in January 2006, came up with the intriguing idea that they might very well date to the 1930s, and that research in the National Archive of Mauritius might come up with something to confirm this.



Figure 32. The Observation Tower with its dangerous collapsed roof. (mp06nc1311)



Figure 33. The Central building clearly built in two phases. (mp06nc0505)



Figure 34. The Searchlight Building was altered and reused during WW II. (mp06nc0881)

Epigraphical Investigations

Recording of graffiti (Fig. 35) was once more focused on those of the Powder House. Students from the University of Mauritius recognised names of Mauritians, possibly soldiers who were posted on the islet during WW II (Fig. 36). The graffiti from soldiers of the Vth Foot regiment seem to be the earliest that occur. Prof. Dennis Devlin (Fig. 37) contributed significantly to the study helping to establish a list of Regiment that visited Ile de la Passe. Graffiti have been scratched in the soft coral (Fig. 38) for over a century and a half and has to be recorded (Fig. 39) before they disappear.



Figure 35. Control points were marked and measured when graffiti were photographed for photo rectification. (mp06nc0341)



Figure 36. Students from the University of Mauritius recognised names of Mauritians. (mp06nc0506)



Figure 37. Prof Dennis Devlin made a significant contribution to the study of graffiti. (mp06nc0319)



Figure 38. Graffiti have been scratched in the soft coral for over a century and a half. (mp06nc0606)



Figure 39. Owen Jones, a British postgraduate student in architecture, used his laser meter to measure control points for photorectification. (mp06nc1308)

Cleaning and Monitoring of the Islet

The islet continues to be an attractive place for adventurous visitors (Fig. 40). Measures have to be taken to prevent damage as the number of visitors will significantly increase once a safe jetty is built to facilitate access.

Once more, the National Coast Guard from Mahébourg (Fig. 41) very kindly helped with the removal of sacks of rubbish that were collected during the 2006 campaigns.



Figure 40. The number of visitors will significantly increased once a safe jetty is built to facilitate disembarking and embarking from the boats. (mp06nc0817, mp06nc1616 and mp06nc0502)



Figure 41. The Coast Guard from Mahébourg assisted with the removal of sacks of rubbish. (mp06nc1217and mp06ncmp06nc2110)

Survey at Pointe du Diable

Brief investigations at Pointe du Diable (Figs 42 and 43) confirmed that the defences at that strategic point were fully integrated with those on Ile de la Passe during the period before World War Two.



Figure 42. In January a boat trip was arranged to Pointe du Diable so as to photograph the Battery from the sea. (mp06hp0343)



Figure 43 New plans of the Battery will be compared with Frech and British plans in the archives. (mp06hp0205)

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The primary aim and objective of the Ile de la Passe Project (Fig. 83) is the preservation of the internationally important remains of the defences erected during the French Period. Added to this is preservation and enhancement of defences from later, British, phases. These jewels of Cultural Heritage must be preserved above all else for the benefit of future generations of Mauritians.

The heightening of public awareness, particularly in the Mahébourg Bay area, of the importance and uniqueness of the structures that remain on Ile de la Passe. Public outreach to local communities through a travelling exhibition for schools, pamphlets and presentations as well as the involvement of Mauritian university students and other interested parties is important. Production of guide books, tourist trails, and so forth, designed to promote increased levels of tourism should go in hand with the provision of infrastructure that will be necessary to cope with the safety and comfort of the anticipated increased numbers of visitors. Particular attention should be given to the impact of such actions which should not have a negative effect on the preservation of cultural remains.

The Ile de la Passe Project has now reached a critical stage. Inscription of Ile de la Passe on the UNESCO Tentative List of World Heritage Sites followed by inscription on the World Heritage List has to be an immediate priority. The Ministry of Arts and Culture has stated that support for the continuation of the project will be assured by the National Heritage Fund. The preservation of Ile de la Passe depends on the implementation of a viable management plan.



Figure 83. Embarking for a pleasant morning ride to Ile de la Passe. (md06nc1405)

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