

Prehistoric Archaeology of Tumon Bay

If you attend Chief James A. Brodie Memorial, J. F. Kennedy, or St. John's, your classrooms sit on the cliff line above Tumon Bay. You may not realize that Tumon is one of the richest and most investigated prehistoric cultural areas on island. While there have been many archaeological projects throughout Guam, none has received as much attention as Tumon Bay. The reason for this is the intensive amount of hotel and business development around the Bay, and the efforts of the Historic Preservation Office and archaeologists to protect ancient villages from destruction during construction. The analysis of the findings from these investigations has greatly contributed to our knowledge of Guam's prehistory. You should understand from this, that every time a hotel or other building is designed for the Tumon Bay shoreline, it will be built on top of an old Chamorro village. If not for the work of the archaeologists, the entire history of that village would be lost.

1059 dots representing archaeological sites are shown on the map of Guam on the front of this brochure. Many sites are found in Tumon, as you can see from the number of dots in the inset. Archaeologists have revealed two major prehistoric periods, the Pre-Latte (from first colonization until ~ A.D. 800) and the Latte (from A.D. 800 until the arrival of the Spanish). Pre-Latte sites are not common, frequently found below Latte-age materials, or in the earliest beach sands. They are sometimes found in the interior of the island. Pre-Latte Pottery tends to be thin, red slipped, and may have incised designs filled with a (white) lime paste and fired. Some Pre-Latte pottery is very thick. Stone artifacts are rare, but may be found with burials from this time-period. Reef fish and shellfish were common foods, and we assume that varieties of plant foods (e.g. coconut, taro, banana, breadfruit, and pandanus) were also eaten. Latte sites are found from the beaches into the interior along river valleys and inland near springs and other water sources. The characteristic latte stone foundation appears during this time. Latte were often shaped from limestone, but volcanic rocks were also used. Burials are usually associated with latte structures. In addition to shellfish and reef fish, pelagic (open ocean) fish were also being eaten. Horticulture becomes more important and many sites are located near agriculturally productive soils. A new pottery style developed with thick rims, and no polish or decorations; and stone artifacts, particularly lusong (grinding stones) become abundant.

The descriptions and photos contained in this pamphlet illustrate some of the findings from Tumon Bay sites.

Photographs of Latte Stones from Fa'fai



The photo is from a partially restored latte at the village of Fa'fai, just north of Gun Beach (Goknga).

View of a portion of the Outrigger Hotel property showing pit features (1020 BCE - AD 1035)



Postholes, storage pits and burial features often appear as dark sand areas contained within lighter sands. This happens because sand from the living floor of the village turns dark from food remains and charcoal, and then becomes fill when the pits collapse or are closed up. The pit feature shown is from a burial.

Outrigger Burial Missing Skull

We frequently find burials with missing body parts. Sometimes this is due to damage from earlier construction; sometimes this is accidental due to later burials at the same location; and sometimes this is purposeful. Historic records tell us that the Chamorro worshipped ancestors, and would often keep the skull of an important deceased person in the clan house to maintain a connection between past, present, and future.



Outrigger Burial Missing Leg Bones

This photograph of a burial shows missing tibia, or shin bones. Historical writings refer to dead buried with their lower legs sticking out of the ground making it easier to get tibias to make spear points.



Bone Spear Point from Villa Kanton Tasi Project

This is a two and a half inch fragment of a spear point made from a human tibia.



DFS Rockshelter excavation showing hearth (AD 675)

Coconut shell was a favorite material used for cooking fires. Its charcoal, found in the DFS hearth (dark area), gave the radiocarbon date for the site.