Afetna Point, Saipan

Archaeological Investigations of a Latte Period Village and Historic Context in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

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with contributions by

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Cover: Afetna Point to Agingan Point, Tinian in the background

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Preface

This book is based on research conducted by Cardno GS between 2014 and 2017 during archaeological inventory survey and data recovery excavations at Parcel 004-I-52 in San Antonio, Saipan, in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Preliminary results have been presented at the 2nd and 3rd Annual Marianas History Conferences held in Saipan and are available to the public via www.Guampedia.com. Rosanna Barcinas is especially thanked for coordination and inspiration to make these events and their contributions a reality.

The authors would like to acknowledge the following individuals and their institutions on Saipan for their continued support. At N15 Architects, Andrew Ashburn, Chris Fryling, and Catherine Shai maintained an open door policy with staff archaeologists. At Honest Profit International Ltd. (HPIL), Peter Che was instrumental in keeping staff archaeologists in the loop with Win Win Way's project manager Elaine Kwok and their construction scheduling. They ensured access to Hofschneider Engineering and project biologist and permit facilitator John Gourley.

The CNMI Historic Preservation Office (HPO) with Mertie Kani and her staff archaeologists coordinated their permitting requirements with project staff and the Japanese Consulate in a changing economic climate and Typhoon Soudelor. HPO staff archaeologists Erik Lash, Jennings Bunn, and Jim Pruitt helped guide the data recovery and laboratory analyses at critical junctures, and HPO review board members Dr. Hiro Kurashina and Don Farrell and especially Dr. Mike Carson, offered advice when sorely needed. Former San Antonio resident Robert Hunter at the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs (DCCA), welcomed staff archaeologists on more than one occasion and shared the CNMI Museum's guidelines plus childhood stories of the property.

John Scott of AMPROUXO graciously gave field staff an unexploded ordnance safety brief. Win Win Way safety officer Ponce Raza helped establish almost daily contact with the CNMI police department for removal of World War II era combat ordnance. Spontaneous encounters with Scott Russell of the CNMI Humanities Council also provided focus and context to almost daily surprises in the field, as did conversations with colleague Dr. Mike Dega at Scientific Consulting Services, Lon Bulgrin of Naval Facilities Engineering Command Marianas, the late Carmen Sanchez, and Sam McPheters.

SWCA staff osteologist, Kathy Mowrer, shared the challenges of fieldwork and always reported with a smile for everyone. Cherie Walth of SWCA crafted an excellent burial report out of hours of sand and sweat and sun. Dr. Mark Horrocks of Microfossil Research Ltd conducted microfossil identification from five subsistence features containing charcoal radiocarbon dated by Beta Analytic. Judy Amesbury of Micronesian Archaeological Research Services helped identify midden shell and tools, and Darlene Moore discussed the complexity of late Pre-Latte ceramics from the perspective of Chalan Piao. Dr. Jolie Liston discussed aspects of feasting in relation to cooking features at the site. Joe Garido and Joe Quinata also discussed alternative uses of dogas shells in earth oven cooking and traditional Chamorro place names, while Moneka de Oro discussed use of stone tools in traditional herbal medicine.

Cardno GS staff included project manager Todd McCurdy in Honolulu and Terry Rudolph in Boise, Guam archaeologists Rick Schaefer, Jacy Moore, and Brent Coffman, plus Saipan archaeologist John Castro. Boise based Cardno GS archaeologists Isla Nelson and Robert Jones shouldered much of the manuscript generation, while Dr. Danny Welch calibrated radiocarbon dates and integrated microfossil results and ground stone tools into the text. The opinions presented herein do not reflect those of Cardno GS, its subconsultants, the CNMI HPO, or HPIL and the senior author is responsible for all errors in reporting and interpretation.

The Procedures for the Treatment of Human Remains adopted by the CNMI in 1999 were followed during data recovery excavation, analysis, and reporting. Only selected photographs from analysis are included in this book as per HPO consultation. No photographs of excavated remains in the field are presented. Human remains were not removed from the island and are temporarily curated at the CNMI Museum of Culture and History pending reburial consultation with the Chamorro community, the HPO and DCCA, and HPIL.

This book is dedicated to the people of San Antonio, past and present, who have endured yet another disaster from Typhoon Yutu to become even more resilient.

Chapter 1

Introduction to Afetna Point on Saipan

1.1. Afetna Point Then and Now

When Spanish Captain General Ferdinand Magellan (Portuguese born Fernando de Magallanes) first anchored off the island of Guam in 1521, the inhabitants of the small Latte Period village at Afetna Point on the southwest coast of Saipan (Figure 1.1-1) some 218 kilometers (km) or 135 miles (mi) north were likely unaware. News from their Chamorro cousins to the south soon reached their shores probably along with iron nails, glass beads, and other objects of trade from the rather rude visitors.

Subsequent shipwrecks during the Manila Galleon trade period between the Philippines and Acapulco in Mexico (1565-1815) and the eventual arrival of Spanish missionaries and their military in 1668 would change that splendid isolation. Archaeological investigations of the Afetna Point village yielded traditional Latte Period burials, cooking features, ceramics, stone and shell tools, datable charcoal, and microfossils from food remains and fuel dating from the 1400s before Magellan's arrival to the early 1700s a century or more later, as well as Pre-Latte Period remains perhaps dating to A.D. 500-1000 or earlier. Examination of deeper excavations suggests the property may not have been habitable when sea levels were higher prior to 500 B.C. and at the arrival of the first Austronesian settlers a millenium or two earlier circa 1500 B.C. as indicated at other landward sites nearby.

No direct evidence of foreign Contact before Spanish occupation of the Mariana Islands in 1668 and the forced abandonment of Chamorros from Saipan during *La Reduccion* circa 1730 was encountered at the site, after which time the island remained virtually empty until the arrival of Carolinian and Chamorro settlers from Guam nearly a century later circa 1815. Spanish resettlement until 1898 (the Spanish-American War), the German occupation from 1898-1914 World War One (WWI), and the Japanese sugarcane period from 1914-1944 World War Two (WWII) left few traces on property which was located at some distance from the few population centers on the island to the north. However, the construction of a concrete Japanese ammunition magazine just before the war brought home the reality of global conflict to the native and immigrant residents, even if it was not obviously defended. Strongpoints were established at Agingan Point just to the south and measured targets were flagged in the lagoon for use during the American invasion.

On June 15, 1944, the location was called Yellow Beach 2 by the U.S. Marines and Army infantry braving Japanese artillery to establish a beachhead before capturing As Lito airfield (today Isely Field International Airport) the following day. The beachhead then served as a resupply landing for the next week or two as U.S. Marines and Army Infantry took the battle east and north to slowly clear the island of enemy strongpoints, and removed battle weary and wounded to off-shore medical treatment. An inventory survey in 2014 recorded post-war U.S. Coast Guard Loran Station buildings and antenna support structures, and a modern boxing rink and fruit stand built upon post-WWII era structural remains. Excavation in 2015 yielded subsurface remains of the late prehistoric village around a deep sand mine from the 1980s. Archaeological lab work conducted during 2017 yielded a complex record of this long history, from Pre-Latte artifacts and Latte Period features and burials to WWII Japanese war casualties, American combat weapons and discarded field gear, unexploded ordnance, and post-war disturbances.

Figure 1. Location of Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands

Afetna Point has long been an idyllic landscape punctuated by episodes of intense struggle on a global scale for Saipan over centuries if not millennia, perhaps beginning nearby circa 1500 B.C. with initial settlement of the archipelago. Today regional competition for Asian tourism and American military investment makes Saipan and its neighbors once again a nexus of geopolitical struggle, but its prehistory has deep roots that tie the Mariana Islands and its modern culture to ancestral island SE Asia. Afetna Point contributes to this story and leaves the visitor captivated by its beauty today as it did in the past.

This book presents the results of the first half of this story, that of the late prehistoric or Latte Period village at the site and its historic context. Remains of the equally prolific WWII invasion beach site will have to await another telling.

1.2. Afetna Point Archaeological Project

The Afetna Point Archaeological Survey and Data Recovery Project was conducted by Cardno GS for Honest Profit Limited International (HPIL) of Hong Kong, People's Republic of China, in support of a proposed resort development at Parcel 004-I-052 in San Antonio, Saipan (Figure 1), Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The CNMI Historic Preservation Office (HPO) identified the project area as having a high potential for encountering significant archaeological and historical resources. Previous investigations reported subsurface archaeological deposits on the property, it is located on a National Historic Landmark WWII American invasion beach, and supported a USCG Long Range Navigation (LORAN) Station used from 1944 to 1978.

Figure 2. Project Location on Saipan

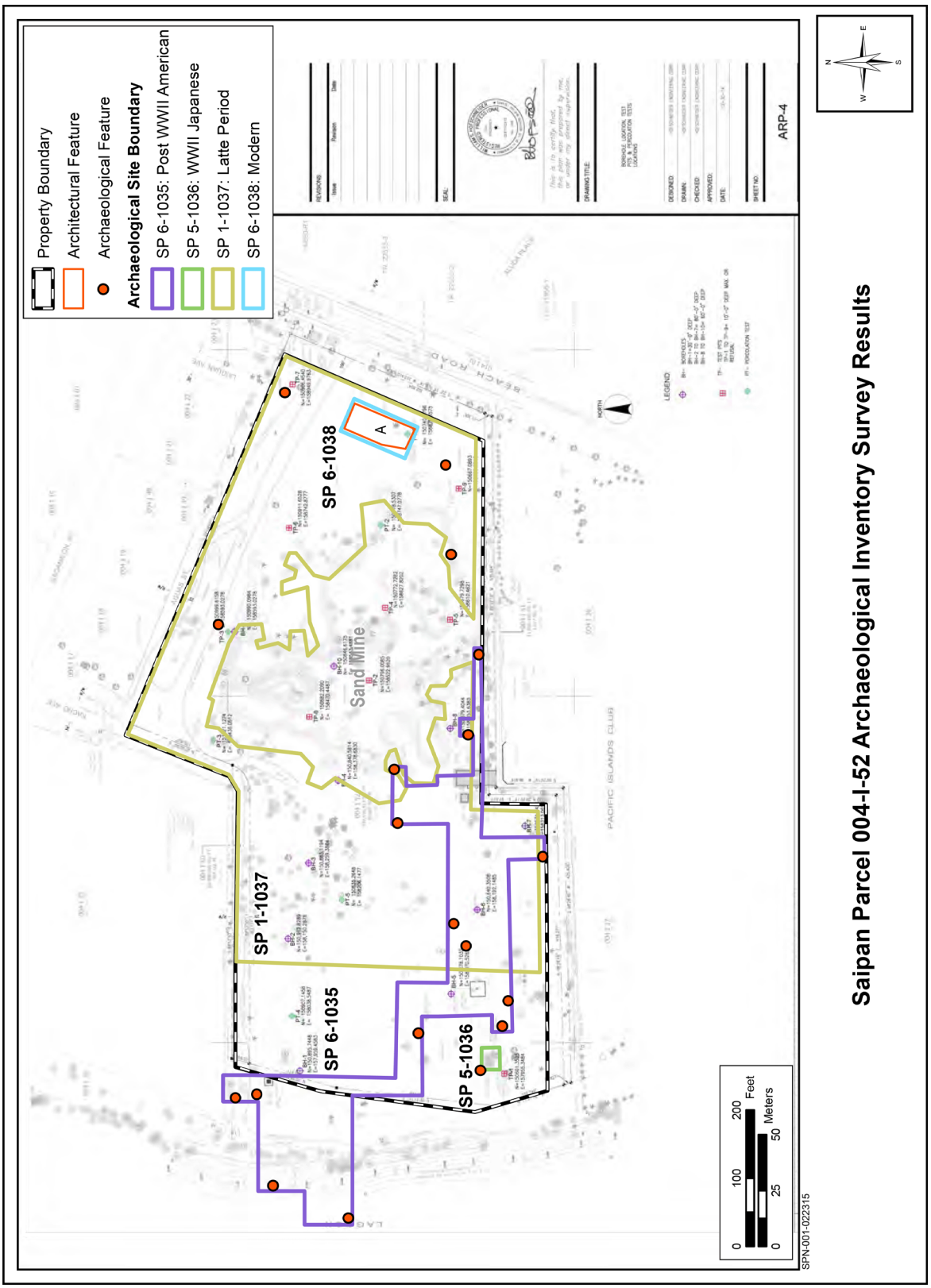

Figure 3. Archaeological Inventory Survey Results

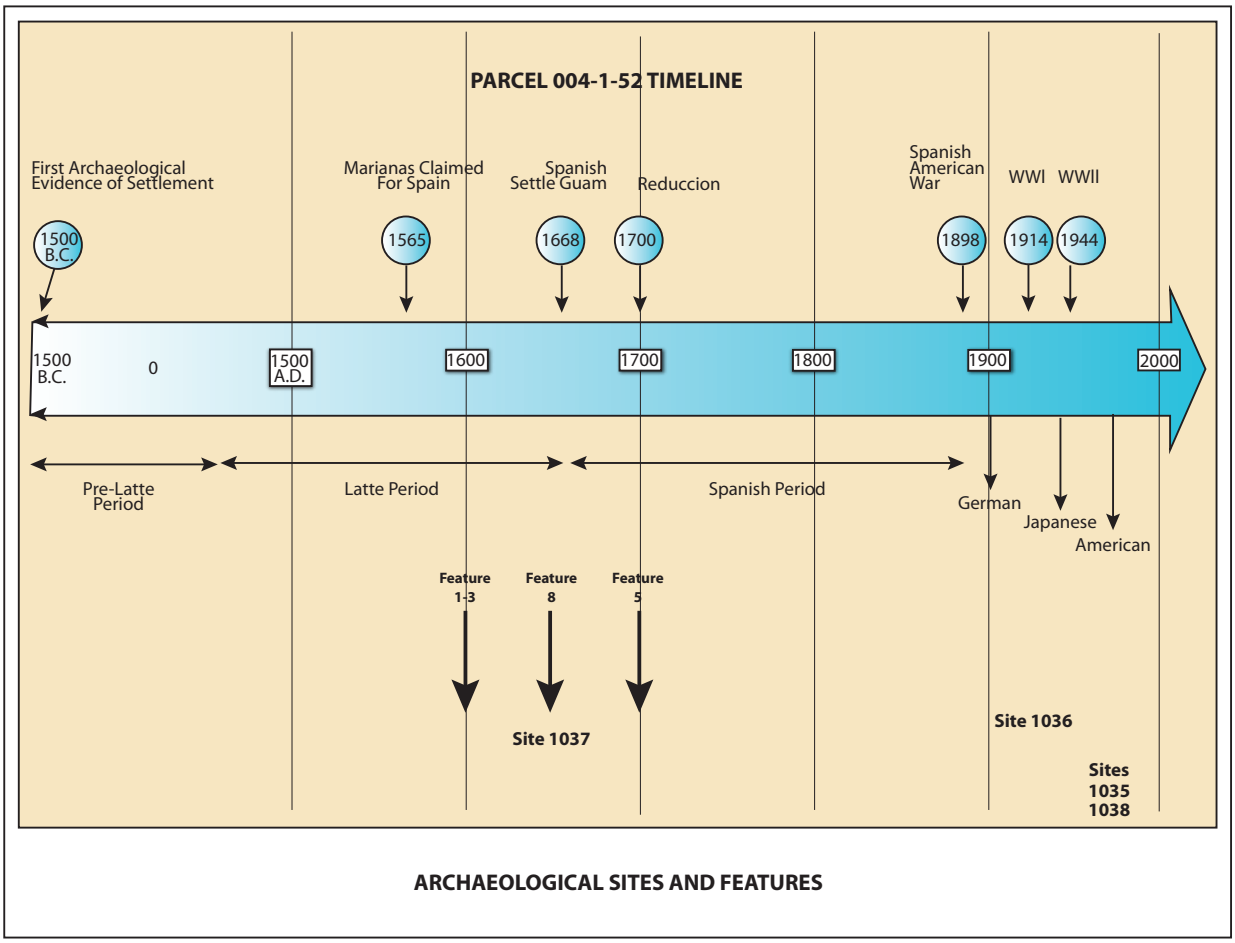

Figure 4. Timeline for Parcel 004-1-52, San Antonio, Saipan

The proposed resort development measured approximately 40,827 square meters (439,458 square feet), or 4.09 hectares (10.1 acres). It is situated immediately north of the Pacific Islands Club, bounded to the east by Beach Road (Figure 2), to the west by the Lagunan Garapan and Philippine Sea coast at Unai Afetna, and to the north by residential neighborhoods and San Antonio Middle School. In 1987, a sand mining project removed an unknown number of prehistoric human remains from the east half of the parcel, in an area measuring approximately 0.91 hectares (2.25 acres).

In 2015, Cardno GS completed an Archaeological Inventory Survey report of the project area that included National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) significance evaluations at four surface sites (Figures 3 and 4) with recommendations for their treatment (Dixon and McCurdy 2015a). The four archaeological sites were assigned permanent numbers by the CNMI HPO: SP 11037 is a subsurface cultural horizon with prehistoric remains; SP 5-1036 is a WWII Japanese ammunition magazine; SP 6-1035 is the remains of the WWII and Cold War USCG LORAN station; and SP 6-1038 is a modern concrete pad for a boxing rink and then a fruit stand formerly on the west side of Beach Road, with a WWII buried structural component.

The overall strategy employed during 2015 data recovery fieldwork and 2017 labwork, after consultation with CNMI HPO (Dixon and McCurdy 2015b and 2015c), consisted of implementing three phases of investigation. This strategy involved a combination of mechanical excavation conforming to the project

engineering design including large scale vegetation clearing, global positional system (GPS) recording of all significant artifacts and features including burials, and manual excavations targeting features found to have intact remains for radiocarbon dating and microfossil analyses.

All activities outlined in this project complied with pertinent sections of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and associated 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 800, as well as with CNMI Public Law 3-39 and in accordance with 55-10-725 *Standards for Excavation Permits. The Content, Format, and Submission Standards for Final Reports of Archaeological Projects in the CNMI.* When human remains were encountered the *Procedures for the Treatment of Human Remains* adopted by the CNMI in 1999 were followed.

All excavations, testing, and reporting relating to cultural resources in the form of archaeological sites, features, structures, artifacts, and human remains were carried out under the supervision of Cardno GS senior archaeologist Boyd Dixon, Ph.D. meeting the professional qualifications found in the Secretary of Interior Professional Qualification Standards, 48 Federal Register 44716.