

Canoes of Vanuatu: Sustainable Sea Transport

Vanuatu Cultural Centre



VANUATU

Espiritu Santo

Malekula

Port Vila

Tanna

Erromango

Ambrym

Sate

U.S.A.

HAWAII

PAPUA
NEW GUINEA

SOLOMON ISLANDS

VANUATU

FIJI

WESTERN SAMOA

COOK ISLANDS

TAHITI

NEW CALEDONIA

TONGA

NIUE

AUSTRALIA



Vanuatu's canoe culture is a living one!

- First canoes brought the intrepid Lapita people, food crops, knowledge & island technologies
- Continues to meet day-to-day needs for fishing, transport & hauling goods, visit gardens, 'wokabot' to visit family & friends & trade/exchange goods
- Canoes linked all islands of Vanuatu and beyond
- Ship, water-taxi, fishing boat, truck & family car – working boats & are free!
- 'Spare parts are on the island'- sustainable'!!!
- Sea is a highway!



- Canoe styles vary by Is.
- Imp't in oral histories



Canoes as expressions of TK

- Brilliant expression of traditional knowledge;
- Various woods chosen, carving techniques, canoe & sail designs, lashings & caulking methods, joinery, rope making, sail weaving;
- Many different trees used on a sail canoe;
- Canoes also helped maintain biodiversity;



Knowledge of the sea, weather, marine life, navigation & sailing techniques

- Tides, currents, swells, winds, weather prediction, cloud types, cyclones, etc.
- Navigation - environmental & celestial cues;
- Sailing, steering, paddling & safety techniques in various weather conditions
- Knowledge of offshore marine life - whales & dolphins, turtles, flying fish, tunas & other pelagic fish, seabirds, etc



Large inter-island sail canoes -were tabu, used in trade (redistribute resources & 'bisnis pig'), ceremonies & strengthening kinship alliances & knowledge diffusion



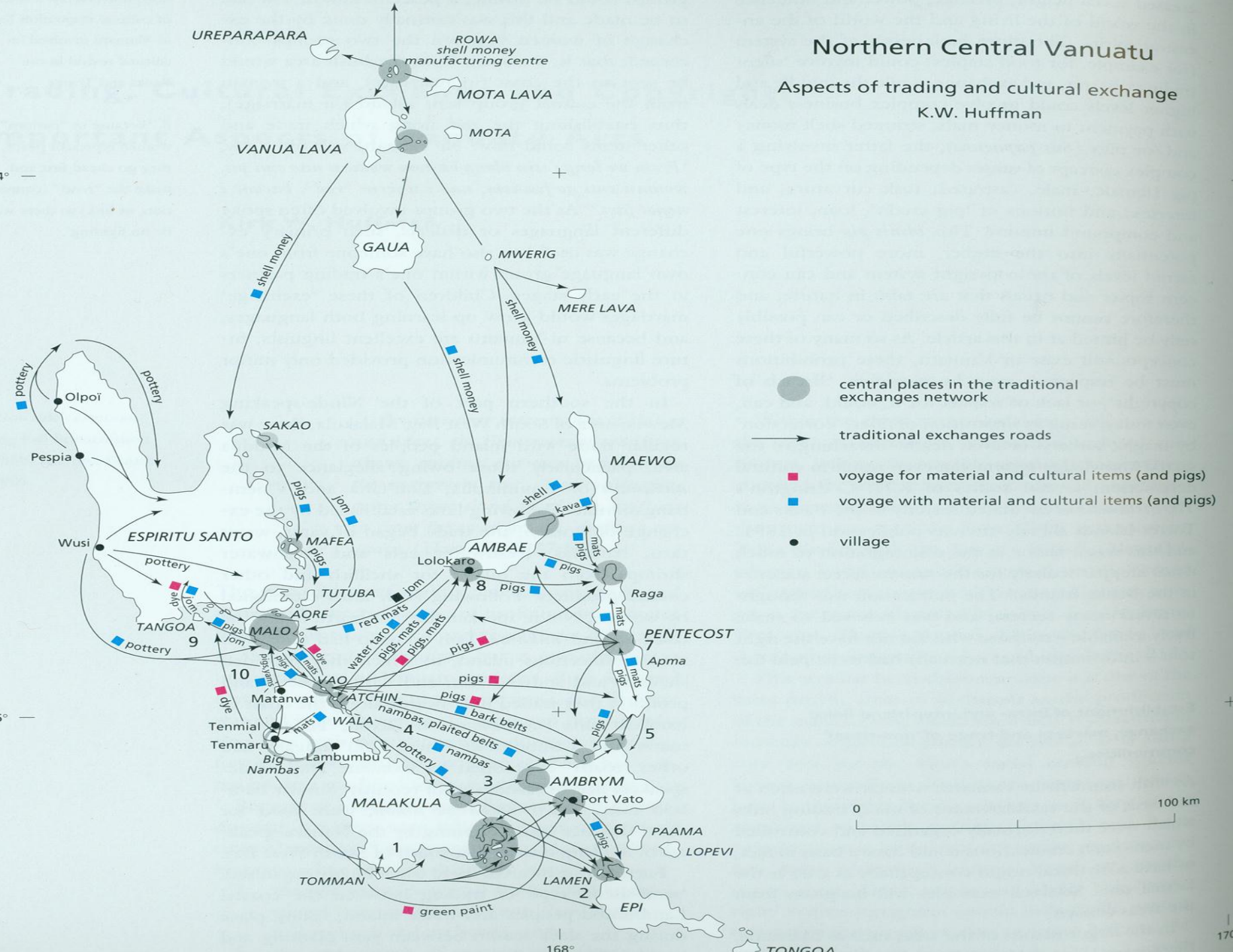
Northern Central Vanuatu

Aspects of trading and cultural exchange

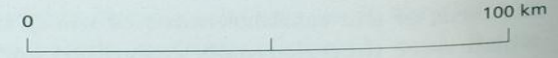
K.W. Huffman

14°

16°

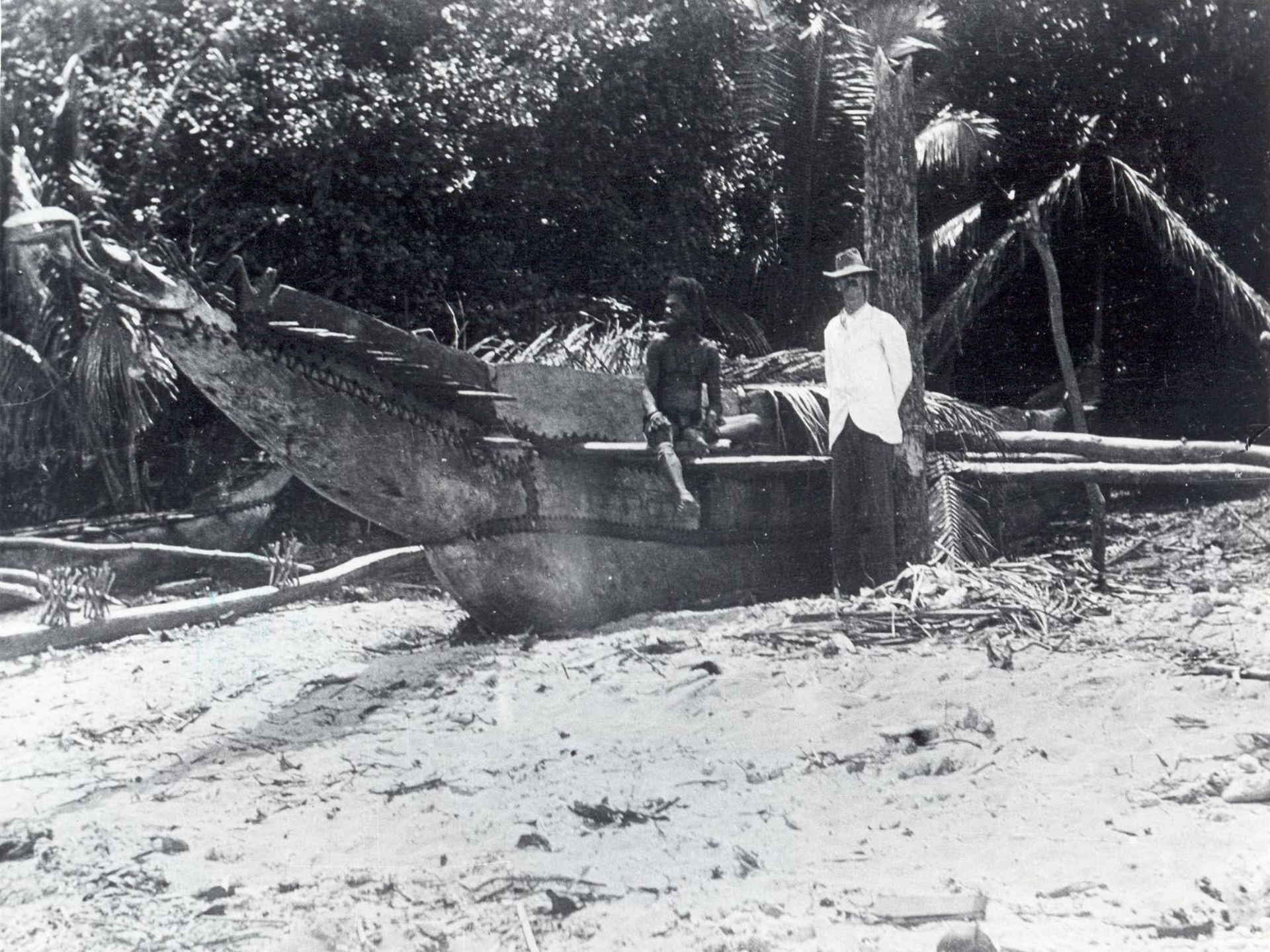


- central places in the traditional exchanges network
- traditional exchanges roads
- voyage for material and cultural items (and pigs)
- voyage with material and cultural items (and pigs)
- village



168°

170°









Whalers, Sandalwooders, Blackbirders, Traders,
Planters & Missionaries all came to coastal areas -
depopulation, displacement & disruption of seafarers













BAMBOO RAFT, TORRES ISLANDS

BEATING HOBBY





VCC Canoe Program

- Document different canoe & sail styles & ethnobotany
- Encourage & promote canoe use and events incl. inter-island sail canoes
- Museum exhibition/poster
- Canoe picture booklet
- Produce canoe sails
- Promote canoe handicrafts
- ‘La Renaissance’-highlites
- ‘Vanuatu’ canoe to PNG
- Fisheries program in 1990s
- Dayspring IV of Aneityum
- National Arts Festivals
- Te Ngaru Matua Waka Fest
- Melanesian Arts Festival
- Akhamb Sandrawing Fest
- Community Workshops



Two types of pre-contact sails; 1) Oceanic Spritsail -
'Wing tip' unique to central & northern Vanuatu
(Delta-foil with vortex lift!!!-a study in birds)



2) Oceanic Lateen sail of TAFEA seen by Cook - links with Polynesia via back migrations



Sails today - Sprit, lug & 'leg of mutton'











10
2096

















Canoe knowledge & practice issues

- Loss of traditional designs
- Loss of TK associated with the sea, weather, navigation
- Loss of sailing skills
- Loss of canoe cutting skills
- Shortage of preferred trees (need to replant)
- Lack of accessible canoe cutting tools
- Canoes are under-valued & are taken for granted
- Helps to sponsor canoe events to promote them
- Need to ‘mainstream’ canoes in development programs





What is the economic contribution of canoes? Million's of vatu every island/year!



Concluding Remarks - Why do people continue to sail canoes?

- **Mostly due to a need!**
- Remote areas where shipping is limited for fuel, spare parts
- Areas where people live on offshore islets but have gardens on the mainland
- Remote areas where the cash economy is limited as boats are expensive to purchase
- Festivals & canoe races stimulate sail canoe use, so skills are maintained
- Cultural revival & identity are additional reasons & strengthened by Festivals & other canoe events



Concluding Remarks -other observations

- Paddle canoes still common & used for coastal work including fishing & some inter-island travel
- Introduction of FG canoes has not been self-sustaining
- Donors contribute to an artificial economy by donating O/B boats to communities for the asking
- often no training goes with the boats regarding maintenance & small
- business management skills so many of these donations are not sustainable
- Many 'random' boat donations have undermined sail canoe revival attempts & associated TK
- Gov't policy not always supportive of inter-island sailing due to safety concerns -Provincial Gov'ts often ban inter-island travel!

- Canoes remain an enduring expression of Oceanic ingenuity, art, science, tradition & knowledge & an appropriate symbol of independence, self-reliance & cooperation.
- We need to support this rich heritage!



Tangio Tumas & Fair Winds

