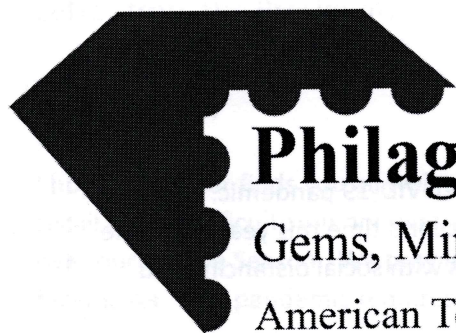




Philagems International

Gems, Minerals and Jewelry Study Unit

American Topical Association

A quarterly bulletin featuring articles, reports and checklists covering all phases of gems, minerals and jewelry on stamps.

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CONTENTS

Message from the President	2
<i>Josef Charrach</i>	
Sodalite – My Hometown Stamp and Mineral	3
<i>Christopher Craig Robinson</i>	
Birthstones – Part 2	8
<i>Nancy Swan</i>	
Nauru. Known and Unknown.	
An Environment Damage by Mankind	11
<i>Prabir Datta</i>	
New Issues. Illustrations	15
<i>François Brisse</i>	
New Issues.	16
<i>Dominique Robillard</i>	

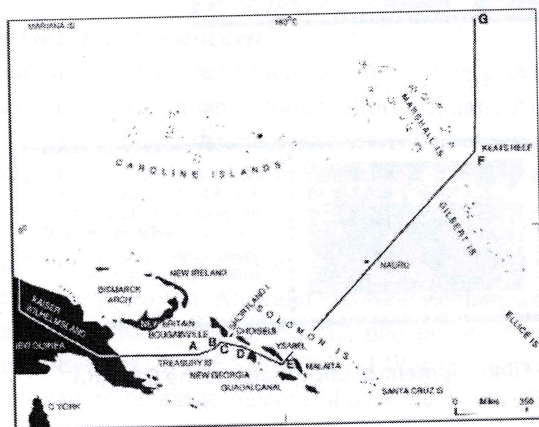
Nauru. Known or Unknown. An environmental Damage by Mankind

Prabir Datta

Introduction

This tiny Commonwealth country was the wealthiest place on the planet for years, with the highest GDP per capita in the world, until the fortune was squandered, leaving the country “bankrupt”. In the past one hundred years, her people have been brought close to extinction; they have had to contend with three colonial powers and devastation of 80 percent of their island through mining of their rich phosphate reserves. When people hear about Nauru they are either unaware of the country or may think of little more than refugees and riots.

Nauru is a small, uplifted limestone coral atoll, about eight square miles (about 21km²) in area; 4km across and 5km in length with extensive deposit of phosphate from centuries of bird droppings. Nauru was unknown to the western world until John Fern on the ship *Hunter* found it on November 8, 1798. His New Zealand ship was en route to China. He named it “Pleasant Island” because of the nature of the inhabitants who rowed out to the ship.



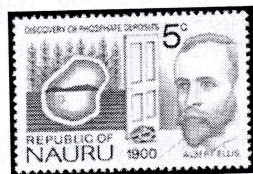
Discovery of Nauru by John Fern



Pinnacles formed by bird dropping

Discovery and mining of phosphate

The island was allocated to Germany under the 1886 Anglo-German Convention. Phosphate was discovered later in 1899, when a young chemist, Albert Ellis, in the service of Pacific Islands Company, conducted a chemical test of a piece of Nauruan rock that had been used as a door stopper in its Sydney office. It had been brought there by an official who visited Nauru some years earlier. This discovery increased the economic importance of Nauru. The Pacific Phosphate Company (PPC) started to exploit the reserves in 1906, by agreement with Germany. The island was captured by Australian forces in 1914 and administered by Britain. In 1920 the League of Nations gave Britain, Australia and New Zealand a Trustee Mandate over the territory. In reality, the island was administered by Australia. The three governments bought out the Pacific Phosphate Company and established the British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC), who took over the rights to phosphate mining. The Phosphate Commission operations were a great commercial success. On July 6, 1907, the ship *Fide* first exported phosphate ore.



Albert Ellis discovered phosphate in Nauru



Excavation of the phosphate



Transport of the ore



Processing and loading phosphate by cantilever



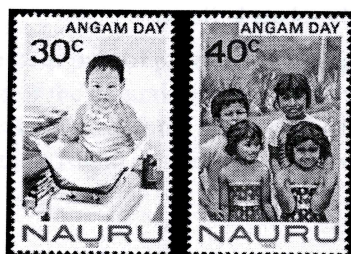
First shipment of phosphate on the S.S. Fido

Socio-cultural effect of mining

When mining began in 1906, the Nauruan population was less than 1,000 people and continued to maintain their traditional structure in leadership of tribes, districts and family mobility. In 1952, Nauruans established a less hierarchical structure of themselves in the form of Nauru Local Government Council which gave voice to United Nations Visiting Missions to whom they expressed their growing list of concerns. This built their case for independence. Thereafter, Hammer DeRoburt became President and ruled the country for most of its twenty years of independence, intermittently from 1970 onwards until his death.

Demographic imbalance

Nauruans were concerned that their small numbers, amounting to 1,084 in 1921, contributed to their lack of voice with Australian administrators. They were vastly outnumbered by the mining contractor labor and administration force. Reproduction of their tribal group has been an ongoing concern for Nauruans. A young woman's fertility was preciously guarded and socially supported so that she had the best chance to produce healthy offsprings. A target population goal of 1,500 was finally reached in 1933. Thus, the birth of the 1500th Nauruan in October 1933 was a major event which is still celebrated annually to this day, known as Angam Day.



"Angam Day" when population reached 1500 in 1933. Still being celebrated.

Retarded development

Gap between rich and poor started widening and the island's community's environment was more than just commercial property for others. Increased productivity that phosphate brought to Australian and New Zealand farmers, was more than the reality that Nauruans were experiencing from outsiders.



H.E. Hammer DeRoburt raised concern to U.N. and fought for independence.

Humanitarian concern

Nauruans were aware of their loss of autonomy as BPC took control of their island and began expressing it through pressure on Australian administration officials. Autonomy had been snatched from them and compensation was necessary. Hence, the independence, Hammer DeRoburt and his government began to seek international for compensation claims and the Rehabilitation exercise.

Loss of autonomy

The Nauru Island Agreement (1919) did not include Nauruans, rather it set out the powers of the three governments, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand as the British Phosphate Commissioners. Nauruan's rights to their island were totally set aside. All phosphate deposits, land, building, plant and equipment were vested in the commissioners. In 1952, after World War II, Nauruans established the Nauru Local Government Council. This was an attempt to regain some control over their own affairs, lives and establish less hierarchical leadership channels

Welfare issues

The Australian administration established a hospital. Roads and other amenities were set up with the Nauruan Administrative funds. BPC bore the cost of a rail system, storage for phosphate and cantilever. By 1966, Nauruans were strongly pushing for independence. Administration cost represented 20% of the value of phosphate export at that time. Temporary residents on the island saw few advantages of modernization.

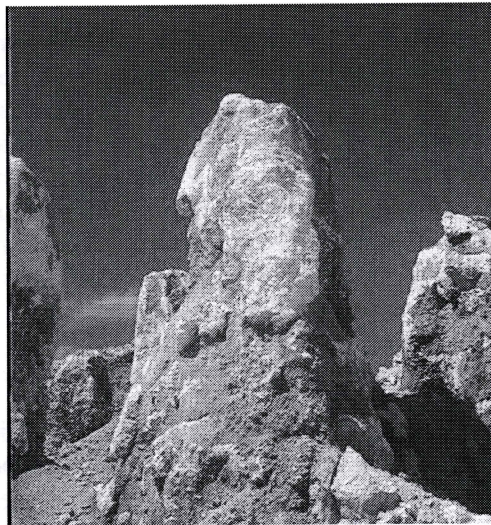
Rehabilitation of the island

Nauruans concern for the future of their island began in the 1920's and 1930's, which was expressed in poetry. However, after independence in 1970, Nauruans purchased the mining assets for \$21 million. Further consideration was given to the feasibility of cutting down the pinnacles to re-construct a flat surface on Top side, relocation of the airport and other amenities to the flattened area and consider future residential development on the coastal area. As a result of the hearing of Nauru's case by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Nauru was awarded compensation of A\$219 million and further A\$12 million each from New Zealand and United Kingdom. Australian payment was spread over five years. Nauru's future without phosphate, and no viable means of support other than the money, provides a new dimension to consider for their future.

Conclusion

The Nauruan case of impact of phosphate mining on the lives of a small island people in the mid Pacific presents a striking example of the natural resource curse thesis. Nauru has one of the highest rate of obesity and diabetes in the world, for example, after the traditional island lifestyle and diet was abandoned in favor of imported food. Nauruans cling to their island as their homeland while seeking advice that is acceptable to their own values.

Nauru today is exhausted of her phosphate reserves. The land remains in devastation condition which is due to mining with only a few trees along the coastal line. Its wealth has also plummeted, meaning it is now among the poorest countries, and, according to New York Post, some locals believe the Gods were so angered by the environmental destruction of Nauru they curse locals to experience poverty and hardship for ever.



Present look of pinnacles on topside with no vegetation. Looks like moon craters.

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Birthstones – Part 2

Lapis Lazuli was the "sapphire" of the ancient world but has a hardness of only 5-6. It was valued as a protector from evil. Intense dark blue with minor amounts of calcite and pyrite, is considered to be the best. Mostly from Afghanistan in the past, dark blue lapis is now also found in Chile, Argentina, while Russia and China are known for a pale blue and the USA, for a darker shade.

