

## VOLUME 15, NO. 4 Winter 1997

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A National Park for Bats  
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*By Chris Stein*

While tourists continuously crowd into Yosemite, Yellowstone, and other famous national parks of the United States mainland, most are unaware that there is now another U.S. park, far out in the Pacific, that is equally magnificent yet free of crowds. At the National Park of American Samoa, you can relax alone on a pristine beach, watch giant flying foxes soar with frigate birds and fairy terns in broad daylight, snorkle in a paradise of brilliant reef fish, and even spot occasional dolphins and whales.

The National Park of American Samoa was dedicated this past September, nine years after the U.S. Congress passed legislation authorizing its creation on November 1, 1988. In effect, the park turned just four years old this year, because it wasn't officially established until 1993, when the government of American Samoa (representing eight villages) signed a 50-year lease with the U.S. government. But the idea and preliminary plans for a national park to help protect flying foxes began as early as the mid-1980s, largely through the efforts of BCI. (See sidebar to right, also *BATS*, Winter 1992 and Winter 1988.) In fact, if not for BCI's efforts, this unique tropical island park might still be on the drawing board. Today, after years of planning and negotiating, it is well on its way to becoming a model for rain forest, coral reef, and wildlife preservation in the South Pacific.

The park encompasses approximately 8,000 acres, spread over three of American Samoa's seven islands. Roughly 2,500 acres of Indo-Pacific coral reefs are also preserved as part of the park. In addition to protecting unique flora and fauna, the National Park Service has a specific directive from Congress to help preserve the fa'asamoa ("the Samoan way"), as well as the numerous archeological resources found on park land.

Park staff recently completed a general management plan for the next 20 years. The plan includes developments not found anywhere in the continental U.S., such as a rain forest canopy walkway and a bat observation tower. Although it will be several years before these unique facilities are constructed, the park is open, and adventurous travelers are invited to visit American Samoa--the only U.S. territory south of the equator--now, before the secret is out! When you come, be sure to say hello and ask park staff to direct you to the best observation points for watching flying foxes.

*Chris Stein is Superintendent at the National Park of American Samoa.*

For more information on visiting the park, write National Park of American Samoa, Pago Pago, American Samoa 96799, or call (684) 633-7082, or send an e-mail message to [NPSA\\_Administration@nps.gov](mailto:NPSA_Administration@nps.gov).

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[SIDEBAR]

# **New Park Reflects a Decade of BCI Efforts**

## **1983**

Botanist Dr. Paul Cox, an authority on Pacific Island plants, contacts Merlin Tuttle when his studies reveal the decline of Samoan flying foxes (*Pteropus samoensis*). Cox becomes one of BCI's first members.

## **Dec. 1985**

Cox and Tuttle visit American Samoa with BCI Chairman Verne Read and his wife, Marion. BCI initiates discussions with Samoan governor A. P. Lutali about protecting flying foxes from commercial hunting and setting aside lands for a national park for further protection. Tuttle makes friends with local hunters, who become key advocates for the park and game laws.

## **May 1986**

Read and Tuttle meet with members of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C. to suggest the idea of a national park.

## **Oct. 1986**

American Samoa passes legislation protecting flying foxes from commercial hunting and establishing game laws.

## **Jan. 1987**

Cox, Read, and Tuttle testify at congressional hearings held in American Samoa on the creation of a park, with Cox also serving as translator.

## **Aug. 1988**

Cox, Read, and Tuttle testify at hearings before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands in Washington, D.C. BCI members across the U.S. begin a letter-writing campaign to their representatives.

## **Sept. 1988**

With strong bipartisan support, the bill to create the Samoan park passes unanimously in the House of Representatives but must still pass in the Senate. BCI members continue their letter-writing campaign, now directed at their senators.

## **Oct. 1988**

BCI staff and colleagues succeed in an all-out effort to gain Senate approval for the bill, then continue working to ensure that U.S. President Ronald Reagan signs it.

## **Nov. 1, 1988**

One day before his deadline, President Reagan signs the bill, creating the United States' first tropical rain forest national park-- the National Park of American Samoa.

## **Aug. 1992**

BCI hosts 21 Samoan high chiefs and government leaders on a tour of Hawaiian national parks so they can better understand how a park can protect wildlife and cultural heritage.

## **Aug. 1997**

Cox, the Reads, Tuttle and Congressman Bruce Vento (an original sponsor of the bill to create the park) join government and park officials in American Samoa for the park

dedication.

*BCI's success in American Samoa would not have been possible without the generosity of Verne and Marion Read, who funded many of the trips to American Samoa and worked to garner support for the park. Verne Read won the 1989 Chevron Conservation Award for his outstanding efforts.*

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Some of those who helped found the park gather proudly in front of the official National Park Service sign. Included are Congressman Bruce Vento, Verne and Marion Read, and Paul Cox (all front row, beginning second from left).



The author shares information about the park with BCI colleagues on their recent visit for the park dedication. From left are Gary Barbono of the National Park Service, Marion Read, Verne Read, Dale Crane (retired Chief of Staff of the Parks and Public Lands Congressional Subcommittee), and Chris Stein.

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