

NATIONAL SITES AND PLACES OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE IN FIJI

A collaborative submission by the Department of Heritage & Arts, Fiji Museum and National Trust of Fiji – national institutions responsible for the assessment, demarcation, designation, safeguarding and management of sites and places of heritage significance in Fiji.

DEFINITION

According to UNESCO, the term “Heritage” encompasses tangible, intangible, moveable, immovable, cultural and natural places/sites that are significant, exceptional, and important to the nation and its communities because of its aesthetic, historical and cultural values. Individuals, groups and nation have a deep sense of connectedness to the place or monument.

INTRODUCTION

Although legislative and institutional arrangements put in place at the national level for heritage protection, promotion and management have been in existence since the early 19th Century, national consciousness regarding heritage conservation and associated mechanisms yet remains a new concept amongst many in Fiji.

Institutions and legal mechanisms for the safeguarding of Fijian heritage assets.

The three (3) institutions responsible for heritage activities in the country include the Department of Heritage & Arts, the Fiji Museum and the National Trust of Fiji.

The Department of Heritage & Arts, currently under the Ministry of Education is responsible for national matters such as policy and legislative advice to government so as to foster the development, management and recognition (including appreciation) of places, sites and monuments of heritage significance. The Department is also responsible for the coordination of activities pertinent to the nomination of national heritage sites for international listing (such as UNESCO World Heritage inscription).

The idea of a Fiji Museum was first discussed in 1904, followed by the passing of a Fiji Museum Ordinance in 1929. The current Museum was built in 1955 to house the enormous collection of national heirlooms and artifacts donated and collected by the Curator on behalf of the Board of Trustees. However, most also are oblivious to the fact that the Fiji Museum is mandated under the POAPI¹ Act (CAP 264) to conduct archaeological impact assessment on sites of cultural significance (archaeological and paleontological remnants). The Act also creates a permit system for excavation, searches and removal of monuments from traditional sites, including penalties for breaching mandate of Act. This gives the Museum authority to demarcate boundaries of sites of heritage significance after its assessment.

The National Trust of Fiji on the other hand was established in 1970 to provide for the protection of Fiji's cultural, natural and national heritage. The National Trust Act (Cap 265) of 1978 was later strengthened by the Government's National Heritage Strategy of 1996 and the National Trust Amendment Act of 1998.

¹ Preservation of Objects of Archaeological and Paleontological Interest Act.

The National Trust Act (Cap 265) stipulates that the purpose of the Trust shall be to promote the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands (including reefs), buildings, furniture, pictures and chattels of every description having national, historic, architectural or natural interest or beauty; the protection and augmentation of the amenities of any such land or buildings and their surroundings and to preserve their natural aspect and features; to protect animal and plant life; and to provide for the access to and enjoyment by the public of such lands, buildings and chattels. The National Trust of Fiji is responsible for the conservation and management of sites and places of heritage significance in Fiji.

NOMINATION AND DESIGNATION OF NATIONAL HERITAGE SITES.

Nomination of a site

Presently, there is no formal or set process for nomination of a site for consideration at the national level besides that which is articulated in the Fiji Heritage Bill currently before Parliament.

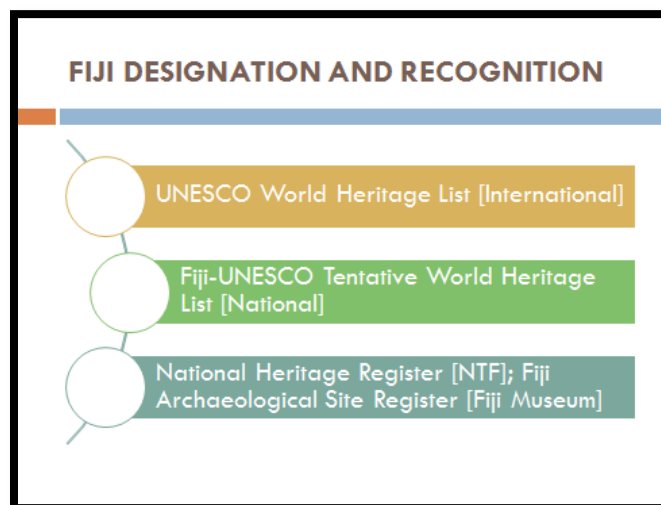
Sites that are managed by either the Fiji Museum (FM) or the National Trust of Fiji (NTF) were or had been:

- (a) Gazetted by Fiji Museum or the National Trust of Fiji under their respective legislations;
- (b) Donated in “good faith” by the owners for safekeeping by the State;
- (c) Researched by either Fiji Museum or National Trust and found the site to have national heritage significance and importance. Some are pursued through the recommendation of other government Departments, NGOs, and communities.

Levels of designation

Fiji currently has three levels of designations sites and places that are considered to have heritage significance.

- (a) **National Heritage Register (NTF), Fiji Archaeological Site Register (FM):** The two registers serve as a first step for registration of sites of heritage significance at the national level and in communities. The National Heritage Register is managed by NTF while the Archaeological or Monumental Sites Register is cared for by the Fiji Museum. Sites identified or given to either institution are managed by FM and NTF respectively. Government provides an annual grant to both institutions to facilitate amongst other things the maintenance of both sites.
- (b) **Fiji-UNESCO Tentative World Heritage List:** Fiji as a state party to the 1972 World Heritage Convention has a tentative list of sites it sees or considers to be cultural and/or natural heritage of outstanding universal value and suitable for inscription in the world heritage list. This is the precursor list to the main UNESCO World Heritage List. Fiji’s Tentative list was reduced to three (3) after Levuka was successfully inscribed. The Tentative List include places and sites such as:



- *Sovi Basin* [Naitasiri] (registered in 1999)
- *Sigatoka Sand Dunes* [Nadroga] (registered in 1999)
- *Yaduataba Crested Iguana Sanctuary* [Bua] (registered in 1999)

(c) UNESCO World Heritage List: This is a prestigious list under UNESCO. National heritage sites nominated by various state parties go through a detailed, rigorous and long process because of the technicalities involved. Even the evaluation is also strict. For Fiji, *Levuka Historical Port Town* is the **ONLY** site inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site and it took the Culture Sector **20 years** to develop the nomination until its final approval.

In essence, a local site of heritage significance is articulated in **(a)** before a general proposal with supportive justification is prepared for UNESCO arguing the uniqueness and authentic nature of the proposed site. Should this be successful, a site can then be listed under **(b)**. Finally for a national site to become a **(c)**, UNESCO World Heritage Site, it should be listed first as a Fiji-UNESCO Tentative Site followed by thorough assessment and research before it can ultimately attain a spot in the prestigious list.

NATIONAL SITES AND PLACES OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE (FIJI)

The list of sites detailed below inculcates those that are maintained and managed by the Department of Heritage & Arts, the National Trust of Fiji and the Fiji Museum.

1. Department of Heritage & Arts managed site.

The Department of Heritage & Arts after the recent inscription of Levuka Historical Port Town as a World Heritage is currently managing the site with an office established in Levuka Town.

LEVUKA HISTORICAL PORT TOWN, Ovalau [UNESCO World Heritage Site].



The town and its low line of buildings set among coconut and mango trees along the beach front was the first colonial capital of Fiji, ceded to the British in 1874. It developed from the early 19th century as a centre of commercial activity by Americans and Europeans who built warehouses, stores, port facilities, residences, and religious, educational and social institutions around the villages of the South Pacific island's indigenous population. It is a rare example of a late colonial port town that was influenced in its development by the indigenous community which continued to outnumber the European settlers. Thus the town, an outstanding example of late 19th century Pacific port settlements, reflects the integration of local building traditions by a supreme naval power, leading to the emergence of a unique landscape.

Levuka is famous for many of Fiji's other "firsts." It was the site of Fiji's first bank, post office, school, private members club, hospital, town hall, and municipal government. It was the site of Fiji's first public electricity system and Fiji's first national newspaper, the Fiji Times, was founded in Levuka in 1869. Interestingly, the Royal Hotel (which is still in operation today) is the oldest hotel in the South Pacific!

2. National Trust of Fiji managed sites.

The National Trust of Fiji manages the following 9 sites considered to be of cultural, natural and national Heritage:

1. *Yadua Taba Wildlife Sanctuary* (natural heritage)
2. *Sigatoka Sand Dunes National Park* (cultural and natural heritage)
3. *Sovi Basin Protected Area* (natural heritage)
4. *Garrick Memorial Forest Reserve* (national heritage)
5. *Momi Battery Historic Park* (national heritage)
6. *Borron House* (national heritage)
7. *MH Building in Levuka* (cultural heritage)
8. *Laucala Ring Ditch Fort* (cultural heritage)
9. *Waisali Forest Reserve* (national heritage)

YADUA TABA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, Bua [Fiji-UNESCO Tentative WH² Site]



The Fijian Crested Iguana (*Brachylophus vitiensis*) is perhaps the most iconic species of the Fiji Archipelago.

Yadua Taba Island in Bua became Fiji's first Wildlife Sanctuary following the discovery of the species from the island in 1979.

Leased by the National Trust of Fiji in 1980, the island lies 20 km west of Vanua Levu.

Through a range of conservation actions in the past three decades, the island boasts some of the best remaining examples of the critically endangered Tropical Dry Forest, more than 10,000 iguanas and a handful of other native and endangered species.

The 70 hectare island is monitored by a National Trust Ranger from the neighbouring island of Yadua who patrols the island and its coastline every 3 days.

The island is restricted for visitation; special permission can be sought from the National Trust of Fiji Director.

Given the distance of the island from the nearest village of Denimanu on Yadua, monitoring is a challenge.



² World Heritage

SIGATOKA SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK, Sigatoka [Fiji-UNESCO Tentative WH Site]



The Sigatoka Sand Dunes stands out as one of the more unique natural wonders of the Fiji Islands. This distinctive landscape covers an area of 650 acres, of which 390 acres was established as Fiji's first National Park in 1989.

Bursting with metallic magnetic minerals, these parabolic sand dunes are results of thousands of years of sedimentation from Fiji's longest river, the Sigatoka River.



Secreted underneath the blowing sands and vast diversity of plants and animals that exist in the park, is Fiji's most outstanding evidences of man's historical migration through the Pacific.

This rich combination of geomorphologic, ecological and cultural attributes make the park an excellent center for recreation, research and education. An attribute recognized by government who provided much needed funding for the building of new officers for the Park Rangers, a new Resource Centre, an ablution block for students and a new Visitor Gallery. Work on the new Visitor Centre and Gallery still continues and is expected to finish this year.



The park is open 7 days a week from 8am – 4:30pm and annually welcomes over 6,000 students and 8,000 visitors. The park is managed by a Park Manager with support provided by 4 Rangers.



Programs and activities are part of the park experience upon request.

SOVI BASIN PROTECTED AREA, Naitasiri [Fiji-UNESCO Tentative WH Site]

Sovi Basin Protected Area (SBPA) is Fiji's largest terrestrial protected area nestled between the Medrausucu, Korobasaga and Nakeva-Naitaradamu ranges, 35km from Suva.

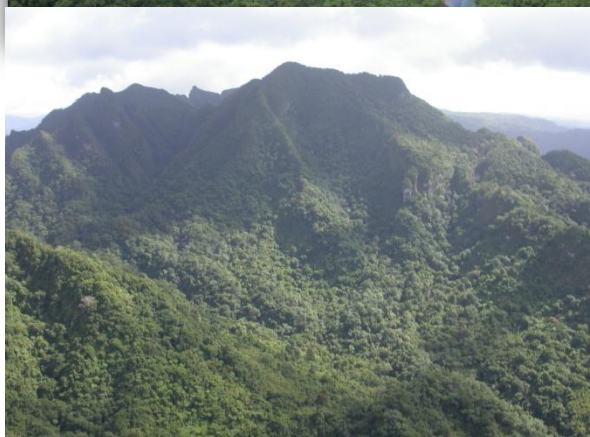
The SBPA covers an area of more than 16,000 hectares owned by 13 landowning units who reside in six separate villages within the provinces of Naitasiri and Namosi.

The area consisting of undisturbed tropical lowland, upland and montane forest vegetation, is the habitat of some of Fiji's rarest biodiversity including endemic species like the Long legged Warbler (*Trichocichla rufa*) and the ancient gymnosperm *Acropyle sahniana* (Drau tabua), both of which are globally listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List 2006.

This is one of the most recent of all NTF acquisitions with the lease signed in 2012 although the process took more than 20 years.

The Sovi Basin Protected Area is co managed by the National Trust and the 6 villages of Namosi, Delailasakau, Naseuvou, Nadakuni, Nukusere and Naivucini.

Visitation to the site is at the discretion of the landowners and the Director National Trust of Fiji.



GARRICK MEMORIAL FOREST RESERVE, Navua.

The Garrick Memorial Forest Reserve located 10mins from Navua Town was donated to the National Trust of Fiji by the Garrick Family in 1983 as a Native Reserve.

There were two considerations to this gesture by the Garrick family, one was the result of the rapid loss and degradation of native forests in the country and the other was the family members genuine desire to give something back to the country that had given them an opportunity to live, work and prosper.

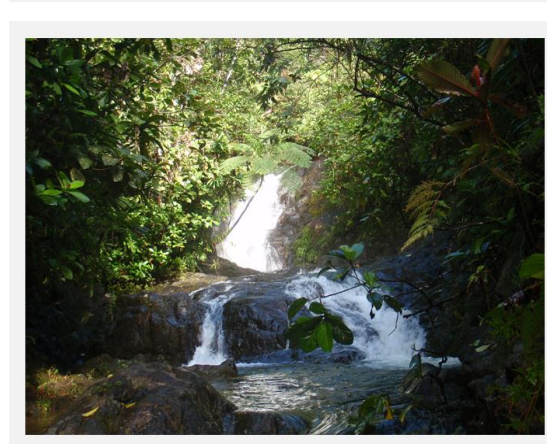
Under the terms of the deed of gift there was to be no logging, farming or development of any kind on the reserve.

The 439 hectares of hilly freehold at Calia West consists of old growth lowland forests and contains some native species notably among these are the only protected populations of two recognized Fijian endemics:

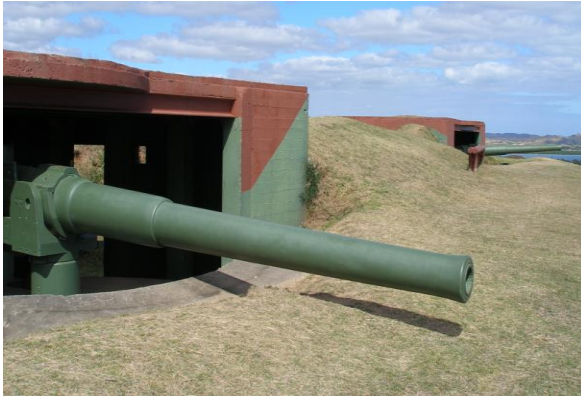
- Soga - Sago palm (*Metroxylon vitiense*)
- Nanai - Ciccada (*Raiteana knowlesi*), illustrated in Fijian \$100.00 note.

The National Trust of Fiji monitors the site remotely and has been working closely with Nature Fiji Mareqeti Viti in the preservation and replanting of Sago Palms.

The Nanai featured on the Fijian \$100 dollar bill emerges in the Reserve once in every 8 years with the last sighting in September 2009, the next expected emergence will be in 2017.

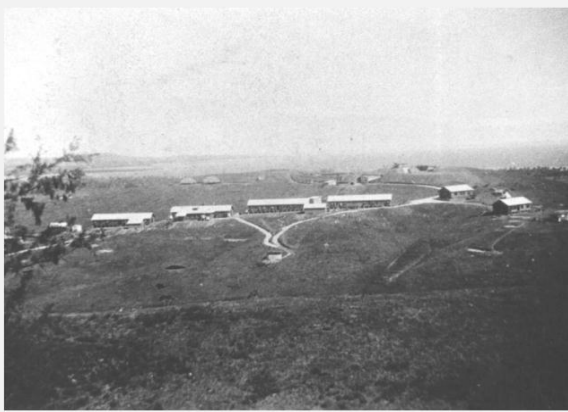


MOMI BATTERY HISTORICAL PARK, Nadi.



In early 1940s, Fiji waited for a war that never arrived. Gun batteries, airports, camps, and other infrastructure were constructed to secure Fiji from the invading Japanese forces during the 2nd World War.

One of the remaining batteries from this conflict is in Momi which still holds two 6" Breech-Loading Naval Guns, one of which was used during the Boer War in South Africa and the other from the 1st World War. Other structures include a Command Post, Fire Control Rooms, Armories and foundation of the barracks and a hospital.



The site was selected to guard the Navula Passage, the main entry point to Nadi Harbour where the main Air Defense Force was based. This airbase was the foundation for the Nadi International Airport.



The site was donated to the National Trust of Fiji in 1986 by Tremol Crowl and is the only well kept WW II structure open to the public.

Financial assistance from government has resulted in a new Visitor Information Centre built at the site. The centre is now complete and work on the interpretation is in progress. This Centre will offer students and visitors a more in-depth view of the conflict and history of the site.



The site is managed by 2 National Trust Rangers from Nabila Village. Opening hours are from 9am – 5pm daily including Public Holidays.

BORRON HOUSE, Suva.

The home of James Borron, one of the early English settlers in Fiji and associated with Mago Island.

The house sitting on manicure lawn on top of a hill with a 180 degree view of the sea is well known amongst the local population as the home of the late Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna who occupied it for some time until his death.

Borron house was decreed to the National of Fiji in 1977 by Mr. Borron in a deed of gift.

The deed stipulates that Borron House was to be used as a State facility for the accommodation of distinguished official visitors from abroad. In accordance with that wish the 1980 Government decided to use the house as a State facility for the accommodation of State guests and other visitors from abroad.

In 1982, the management of the Borron House was taken over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism.



OLD MORRIS HEDSTROM BUILDING, Levuka.



MHs, a name anyone growing up in Fiji will be familiar with, this chain of shops was found in the major towns of the country. It was the one stop shop/meeting place, selling groceries, clothes, shoes, home ware, toys gardening and hardware items. Humbling though was its beginning in the town of Levuka.

Established in 1892 by two Fiji residents (the late Sir John Maynard Hedstrom and the late Mr. Percy. A. Morris, the Morris Hedstrom partnership continued to trade in Levuka from 1902 until the partnership was formed into a liability company on October 12th 1910.



This original and the first MH Building in the country still proudly stands today in the old Capital of Levuka. The big red building with the MH LTD sign boldly painted across is hard to miss as you enter the town.

The land on which the building stands was leased by the National Trust of Fiji in 1979 with the main objective of preserving the historical building.



Though the role of the building has changed its function as "the meeting place" has not, the building now houses the town's museum, library, and community hall. Now referred to as the Levuka Community Centre the building is managed by 3 National Trust Rangers who attend to the occasional tourist that visit the satellite Museum in the centre and will conduct heritage tour upon request. They also manage the Library, organise afternoon and school holiday programs/Library week for the children, and maintain the Centre.

LAUCALA RING DITCH FORT, Nasinu



One of the least known and published site of the National Trust of Fiji, the Laucala Ring Ditch Fort is a twin ring fortification covering an area of 1.1556 hectares on the outskirts of Suva. The National Trust acquired the crown lease to the site in January 1977 for the purpose of preservation of historical reserve.

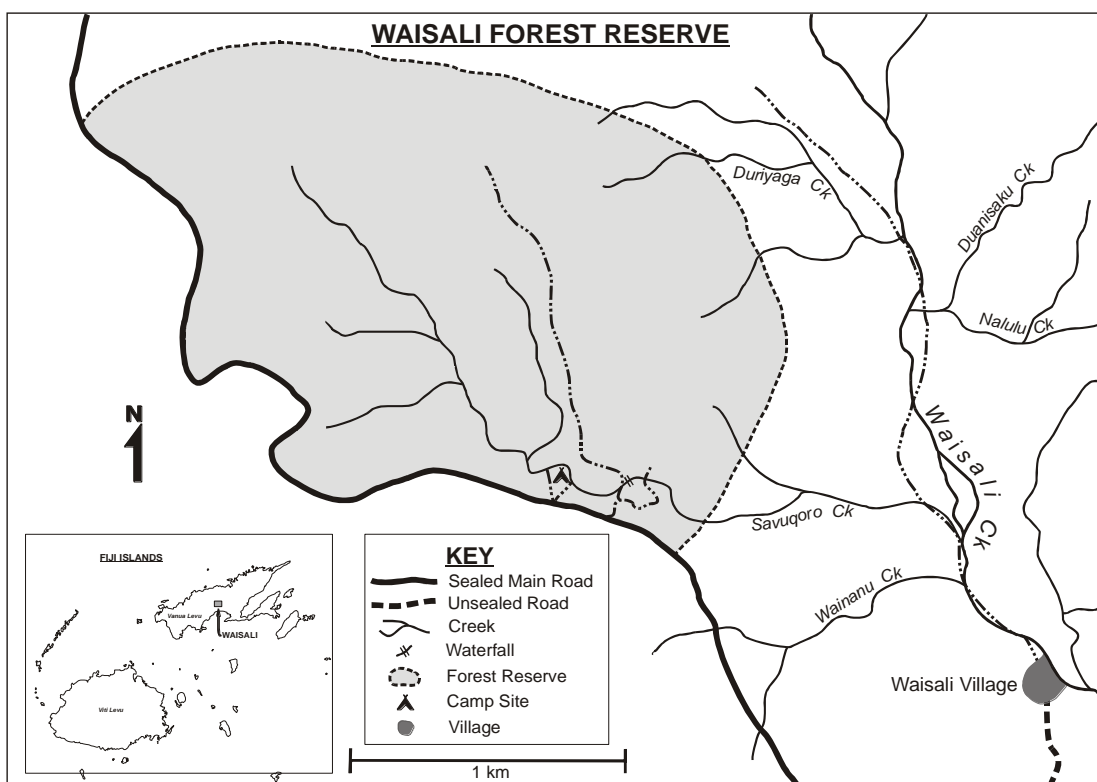
The fort is still clearly identifiable, with a well-defined ditch and four obvious causeways, the second and adjoining forts is much less obvious at ground level. The site is a well preserved example of a type of Pre historic site, common in SE Viti Levu.

The National Trust working with the residents that reside around the fort and with assistance from USP Tourism Dept and the Itaukei Trust Fund are collaborating on a proposed culture-based tourism initiative to showcase a piece of Fiji in the pre-historic era. A sketch of the reconstructed concept is provided in the picture on the right.

The site will be co-managed by the community and the National Trust of Fiji.



WAISALI FOREST RESERVE, Savusavu.



Waisali Forest Reserve is situated 30mins out of Savusavu Town along the Hibiscus Highway toward Labasa. The National Trust submitted a proposal to make the area a forest Reserve in 1982 with the area gaining the status of Nature Reserve in 1991. A lease with the community landowner was signed by the National Trust in 1996 to take over custodial responsibilities of the Waisali Reserve.

The Forest Reserve is the only National Trust site on main island of Vanua Levu and boasts an area of unlogged tropical rainforest with parts containing native hardwoods such as *Dakua* and softwoods such as *Yaka* and *Yasi*. The proximity of the Reserve near the highway makes it unique and vulnerable.

The Reserve also holds a protected population of the endemic Fiji Ground (*Platymantis vitianus*) and Tree frog (*Platymantis vitiensis*). These two endemic native species are restricted to undisturbed forest area or islands without predators such as the mongoose, cats and dogs.

The site has a basic Visitor Centre and is looked after by 2 NTF rangers from the village of Waisali.

3. The Fiji Museum

The Fiji Museum looks after 2 sites, one of which has been gazetted by government:

- (a) Nasonini Battery Gun Site (nationally declared Monument)
- (b) Bilo Battery Gun Site (national heritage)

NASONINI BATTERY GUN SITE, Suva [Domain], (Nationally declared Monument)



The World War II site within the Forum Secretariat grounds, referred to as the “Nasonini Site” was deemed to have been one of the most significant WW II sites for Fiji. Built in 1939, the site has unique architectural features.

With clear view of the Suva Harbour including entrance, the sole purpose of building the gun emplacements on such locations was to track down all enemy ships entering the Suva and prepare for attack.

The bunker sites represent an interconnected series of WW II sites in Suva and around Fiji. The paintings in one of bunkers illustrating the guns and the method of loading is unique and has, thus far, not been found in other bunker sites surveyed in Fiji.



BILO BATTERY GUN SITE, Lami.

Fiji is proud of the military prowess it exhibited when World War 2 broke out in September 1939, especially as it had no previous modern military tradition. An important part of the Fiji Defence Force during this time was the Bilo Battery Gun Site. The Bilo Battery was constructed in January of 1941 to defend Suva Harbour.

Shortly after being built, Bilo Battery withstood a devastating cyclone during February of 1941 which damaged most of the infrastructure in Suva. The damage to the newly completed Bilo Battery was promptly fixed and military training and planning was able to proceed normally.

The Bilo Battery was a key part of the defence of Fiji, being one of only four gun positions protecting Suva. The others were located near the Parliament House, Veiuto, at the Forum Secretariat/Nasonini area, and at Flagstaff Reservoir Hill. Other gun batteries in Fiji were on the western side of Viti Levu, at Momi and Vuda. The Bilo Battery was home to two 6" guns and two 4.7" guns. While there are no guns remaining at the site, the underground ammunition storage is still there.

During the war years the New Zealand Army replaced the Fiji Defense Force and they were in turn replaced by the United States Army, before the U.S. Army pulled out of Fiji in 1944, to head to the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea as the battle continued in the Pacific further north.

Today, the Bilo Battery stands as a physical reminder of World War 2.

