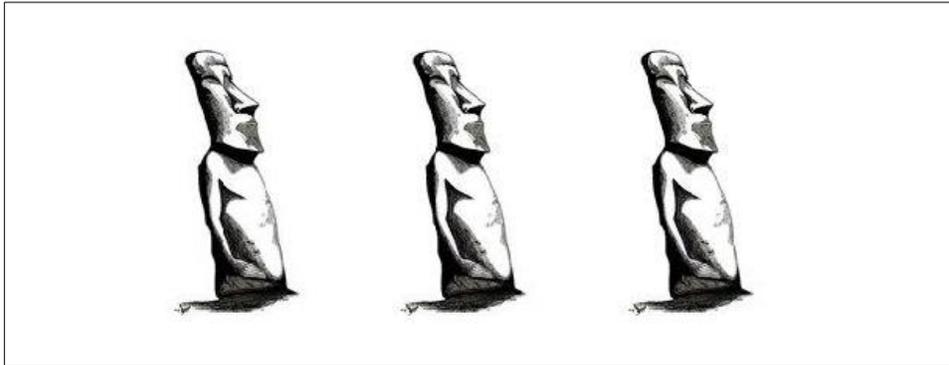


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A DAY IN THE LIFE **ARCHAEOLOGIST & AUTHOR**

Jo Anne Van Tilburg, Ph.D.

By Jane R. Snyder

When asked where her love of the natural world originated, archaeologist Jo Anne Van Tilburg, Ph.D., says, “*From the time I was a small child I was interested. In fact, one of the earliest photos my parents have of me is at about three years old, dressed warmly, walking down a dirt road picking up rocks.*”

Considered the world’s leading expert on the mysterious Easter Island (Rapa Nui) statues, Jo Anne has picked up her fair share of rocks during the course of her amazing career. Besides directing the Easter Island Statue Project, she is Research Associate at The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Director of UCLA’s Rock Art Archive. Her newest book, *Among Stone Giants: The Life of Katherine Routledge and Her Remarkable Expedition to Easter Island*, is an impressive biography of another trailblazer much like herself.

Born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Dr. Van Tilburg received her BA in Humanities and Social Science at the University of Minnesota. After completing her first master’s degree in Educational Psychology at UCLA, she worked as a junior high school social science teacher. Later, while working with high school boys through the Fernald School of UCLA’s Psychology

Department, she cleverly used archaeology to get them interested in learning.

When she took a break to spend some time at home to raise her daughter, Jo Anne's avocational interest in archaeology deepened. She decided to return to UCLA, where she earned a Ph.D. in the field that has held her passion ever since. She did a typical combination of archaeological fieldwork, interspersed with compiling research in her busy campus lab. Prior to finishing her Ph.D., Jo Anne worked on excavations in California, Mexico, and Guatemala.

"I was more or less a grunt on those projects. I basically had a chance to get my feet wet in a lot of things. I worked in pottery labs identifying lithics (stone tools). I also recorded prehistoric rock art."

How she wound up working with the Rapa Nui community to inventory, describe, and catalogue the 887 statues (*moai*) that cover Easter Island is a story all by itself. Her success in documenting the size, shape, design, and placement of the prehistoric monoliths has brought Jo Anne worldwide attention. And the entire world continues to be fascinated by the *moai*, which average 14 feet tall and weigh between 8 and 10 tons apiece.

"Of all of the fields of archaeology, it was prehistoric rock art that interested me the most because it dealt with not only what people made, but what people believed. I love ancient aesthetics. It's a window into a people's way of looking at the world."

Dr. Van Tilburg says that people always respond to the glamour of archaeology, to the excitement, and to what she calls the "*Indiana Jo Anne-ish*" part of it. What they don't always understand is the hard, lonely fieldwork that is necessary to locate all the clues and then tie them together to reveal an entire story.

There are no typical days in Jo Anne's life. Her work is divided into blocks of time in and out of the field. Sometimes she is sitting alone at a computer, writing. Sometimes she is busy supervising the 30 people at the Rock Art Archive, a research facility that is charged with conserving, preserving, and archiving the records of prehistoric art in California, the Far West, and the Pacific.

On average, she travels to Easter Island twice a year, staying anywhere from 2 weeks to 4 months at a time. Though she has taught in UCLA's archaeology program in the past, Jo Anne is

currently not teaching, but focused on research, lectures, and promoting her book.

Dr. Van Tilburg spent five years researching the life of Katherine Routledge in England, Scotland, and Africa, where the Routledges lived for two years. She feels that the journey she took while writing her book was as exciting as any archaeological project in that she had to excavate the records of one woman's life *“with as much care, really, as I've been trained to excavate the soil to seek the answers to the past.”*

Among Stone Giants follows a woman raised in a repressive Quaker home as she battles the constraints of the Edwardian era, and the stigma of hereditary mental illness, in order to make a truly remarkable trip to Easter Island on the *Mana* Expedition in 1913. As unveiled by Van Tilburg, Routledge's life proves to be a compelling adventure.

“Following Katherine's path in that early part of her life was almost shamelessly easy. I met so many of her relatives, all of whom were more than willing to share their memories. I found pages and pages of her unpublished manuscripts and notes that were very useful to me. Walking in her footsteps on Easter Island is basically what I do.

“Katherine began the work I'm now finishing. She started the work in 1914, but was unable to finish it because she became a victim of schizophrenia late in her life. When I started this book, I was afraid that my researching her life might discredit her work, but it didn't. I can demonstrate that while she was working on Easter Island, she was in control of her illness, so her work is valuable and valid.”

Dr. Van Tilburg credits the ongoing support of her husband and her daughter for helping her to successfully juggle both her family and her career. Katherine Routledge may have begun the exploration of Easter Island nearly a century ago, but Jo Anne Van Tilburg's own achievements continue to honor the memory and accomplishments of her spiritual archaeological mentor.

For more information, or to purchase Dr. Van Tilburg's book, please visit:

www.easterislandstatueproject.org
www.amazon.com
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