

Mariana Islands

Micronesia, Pacific Islands

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Geography - Marianas

Mariana Islands

The Mariana Islands in Micronesia are the southern part of a submerged mountain range from Japan down to Guam, on the east of the Philippine Sea. A northern group of ten active volcanic islands is uninhabited, while a southern group of five raised coralline limestone islands includes Guam, Rota, Tinian, Saipan and uninhabited Aguijan. The land area is 1,008 km². The Mariana Trench east of the islands where the Pacific plate plunges below the Mariana plate is the lowest point on Earth at nearly 11,000 metres deep.

Philippine Sea
Mariana Islands
to the east





Mariana Islands

active volcanoes
in red triangles
→



Northern Mariana Islands
 The 750-kilometer-long Mariana Islands archipelago consists of 14 islands of the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the island of the Territory of Guam. The formation of islands began 42 million years ago when the Pacific Ocean Plate and the Philippine Ocean Plate pushed one another to form the Marianas Trench. Movement of the plates created a hot spot out of which volcanoes of the Northern Marianas Islands formed.



▲ Farallon de Pajaros

▲ Maug Islands
▲ Asuncion

U.S. Commonwealth of the NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

▲ Agrihan

▲ Pagan
 (2 active volcanoes)

▲ Alamagan
▲ Guguan

Philippine Sea

▲ Sarigan
▲ Anatahan

Farallon de Medinilla

Ruby (submarine)

Saipan
Tinian

Esmeralda Bank (submarine)

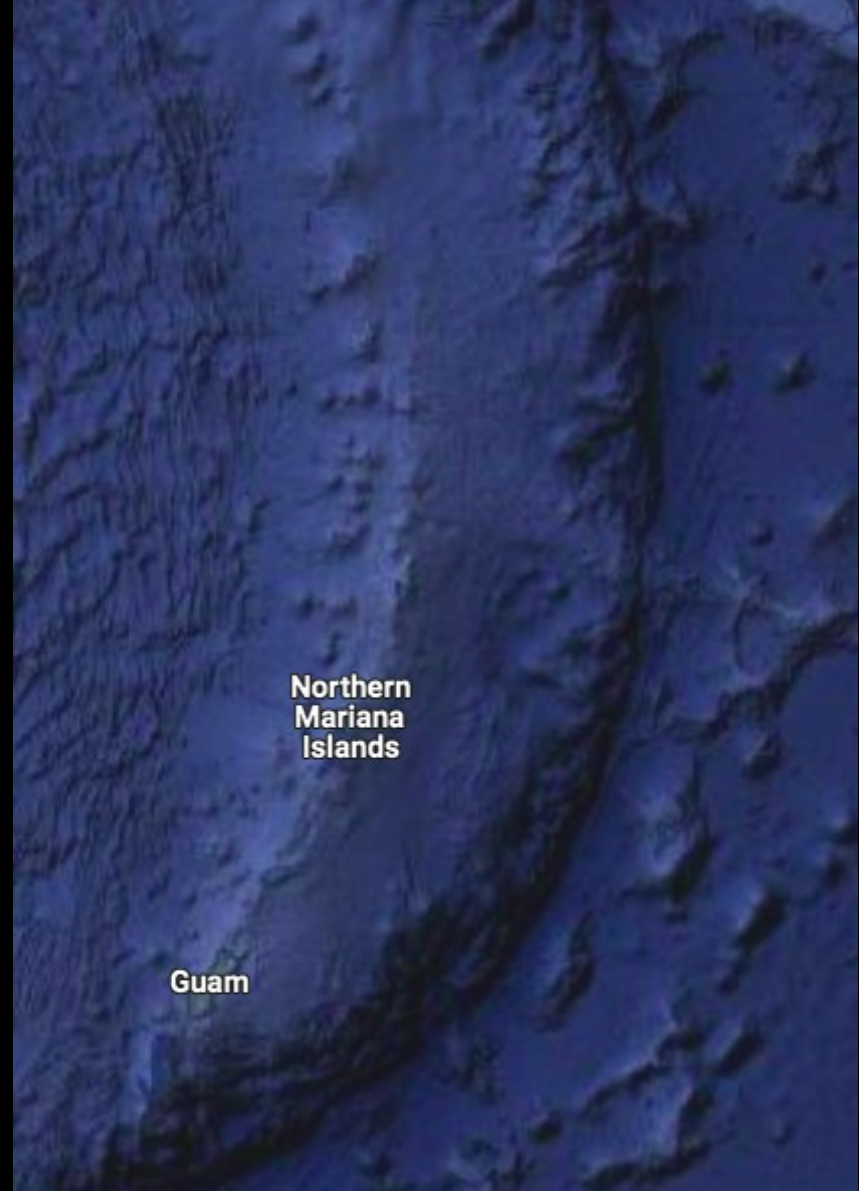
Rota

U.S. Territory of GUAM

NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN

Mariana Islands

bottom topography



Mariana Islands

The indigenous inhabitants are the Chamorro people with Philippine ancestry, who first settled there about 1400 BC. Spain first colonised the islands in 1667, but after losing the Spanish-American War in 1898, Spain ceded Guam to the United States, and the Northern Marianas were sold to Germany. After World War I they became a Japanese Trust Territory under the League of Nations, and after World War II which saw extensive fighting there, they became a United States Trust Territory under the United Nations. Some local inhabitants changed nationality four times.

Mariana Islands

With decolonisation, Guam with its major military installations and strategic position in the western Pacific remains a U.S. Territory, while the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands retains some ties with the United States. The population of Guam today is about 160,000, and the Northern Marianas over 50,000, mostly on Saipan.



Guam





Guam



Guam



Guam



Guam



Guam



Guam



Guam



Guam



Guam



Guam

Northern Mariana Islands





Saipan, Northern Marianas



Saipan, Northern Marianas



Saipan, Northern Marianas



Saipan, Northern Marianas – war relics



Saipan, Northern Marianas – war relics



Saipan, Northern Marianas – war relics



Saipan, Northern Marianas



Airport, Saipan, Northern Marianas

Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Robert Powers Jr. (1934-) and Cynthia Olson (1903-1988) arrived separately on Guam, one of the Mariana Islands, in May 1954. Robert was a young Bahá'í sailor from Arizona who was lucky enough to be posted to the Naval Air Station on the island. They held their first Feast together on the beach on 5 June 1954, held public Holy Days, placed weekly advertisements in the local paper, and contributed Bahá'í books to local libraries. Robert was transferred away some months later, leaving Cynthia alone.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

Cynthia became a Bahá'í in 1939, met Edgar (Olie) Olson, who ran a small grocery store in Wilmington, Delaware, taught him the Faith which he accepted in 1944, and they married a year later. They attended the Intercontinental Teaching Conference in Chicago in 1953, and wrote to the Guardian with a list of 'nice, warm' places to pioneer to including Cyprus, which the Guardian crossed out. They knew a man who had been a former Governor of Guam, and were eventually able to get security clearance from the US Navy, which controlled the island, on 24 April 1954.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia
and
Olie
Olson



Cynthia and Olie Olson

Cynthia wrote:

“Consternation! Apprehension! Now they were committed! They considered. Which one should go? Cynthia was timid about both prospects – setting out alone or staying and running their business, or selling it. One way or another, funds would be needed to enable one, or eventually both, to go. The decision... was that ‘Olie’ should stay and carry on at home. Cynthia should proceed alone.”

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

Cynthia arrived early on 2 May 1954, and had to wait all night to cable the Guardian of her arrival. Since Guam had no hotels or apartments for rent and few houses, she stayed a week with a friend of a Bahá'í, and then rented a small house infested with cockroaches that attacked all the food.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

“...that first evening and the next day she had some serious talks with Bahá'u'lláh. Never had she been so dismayed at a situation, and never had she prayed any harder. She was overwhelmed. The problem appeared insurmountable... Stuck in a house running over with bugs, with no transportation and no place to go. ‘Please God, help me!’”

Soon, with bug spray, she got rid of the bugs. She hadn't driven a car for 18 years, but prayed to Bahá'u'lláh that she might not injure anyone.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

Her first job was working for the radio station, recording commercials and editing the news. Soon she had a daily programme of her own, ‘Woman’s World’, which became popular and made her known all over the island. She first mentioned the Bahá’í Faith on the radio at Ridvan 1955 describing the calendars of the world. Later she became a journalist for the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific, covering most of Micronesia and giving her more contact with Micronesians.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

Mildred Mottahedeh, visiting the pioneers at the request of the Guardian, gave the first Bahá'í fireside in July 1954. Virginia Breaks, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh to the Caroline Islands, was a frequent visitor. Another pioneer family arrived in October. In late 1954, Cynthia bought a 'desirable quonset hut' on a cliff that was easily accessible and large enough for Bahá'í events, starting with a Feast on 30 December with Virginia Breaks.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)



Quanset Hut (US military WWII temporary structure)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

Charles Mackey, who had attended firesides in Philadelphia many years before, was referred to Cynthia, and began attending firesides regularly, took home books, and on 4 March 1955 asked to be a Bahá'í, the first local declaration.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

By March 1955, Olie had not been able to sell his business, so he liquidated his stock and arrived on Guam on 6 April 1955, forming a local Bahá'í group. He became a popular TV executive and owner of a famous Swedish pancake house. Another American who knew of the Faith, accepted it, as did one of his co-workers in March 1956. Robert Powers returned for a short time. A native Micronesian from Palau declared on 7 April 1956, allowing the formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly two weeks later. It was incorporated (legally recognised) on 8 April 1957.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)



First Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of Agana, Guam, April 1956.

First Local Spiritual Assembly of Guam 1956

First Local
Spiritual
Assembly of
Guam 1956

with
Robert Powers
Cynthia Olson



Cynthia and Olie Olson

In 1972, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the North West Pacific was elected, with Cynthia as a member. When the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Mariana Islands was formed in 1978, Cynthia was elected for two years. She passed away, still at her post, in May 1988.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)

Cynthia and Olie Olson

Olie travelled extensively for the Faith, including six months in the South Pacific in 1969. He helped to buy property for the Temple site and the National Bahá'í Center. In 1988, he made a final trip to Palau and Yap before going to Canada on vacation, where he died in September 1989.

(based on Earl Redman. 2017. *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.185-191)



Saipan, Northern Marianas