

Journal of Momi Kawelo The Mystery of Rapa Nui (Weeks Ten-Fifteen)

Week 10 - It's been four whole weeks since I've written in my journal! The last time I wrote was just before I fainted. The only thing I remember about the Marquesas Islands was the way some of the islanders took care of me when I was sick. For nearly two weeks I lay in bed with a fever. Ma was worried and flew down from Hawai'i to join me there. The Doc said it was pure exhaustion, but I tend to think I must have caught a "bug." Oh well, I feel great now and can't wait to join the rest of the crew when they reach Rapa Nui.

The canoe stayed five days in the Marquesas before leaving for Mangareva. Today we heard the news that they had made it to Mangareva! It took them 21 days to reach Mangareva from the Marquesas. I think of my `ohana on the canoe and I am so happy that they arrived safely. Now they are waiting for the winds to shift before they set sail for Rapa Nui. They don't want to sail into the southeast trades if they don't have to, so they are waiting for the winds to shift to the west.

Week 11 - We just heard that they're on their way! After eight days of waiting for a shift in the wind, the canoe took off from Mangareva today! I think of my canoe `ohana all of the time and my spirit is with them as they sail on this last, challenging leg of the voyage.

Week 12 - We heard from the escort boat that the canoe is in rough seas. The weather has been stormy with high winds, heavy rains and cloudy skies. I hope everyone will be okay. I can't stop thinking about them.

Week 13 - Whew! The skies have cleared and the crew is fine! Now they are sailing into the wind and it's slow going. They have to sail in a zig-zag pattern to make it. Every night I go out and sit under the stars. I watch the sky and feel the wind, and imagine I am with them on the canoe.

Week 14 - I haven't heard anything from the escort boat in a while. They must not be there yet or we would have heard. Once they get close, there are no seabirds in Rapa Nui to guide them to the island. It's going to be hard, but I know they can do it. Tomorrow, I'm packing my bags and getting ready to fly to Rapa Nui and meet the canoe!

Week 15 - I know that Rapa Nui is the most isolated island in the world and now I truly believe it! It took me several days and several planes just to reach it! The nearest piece of land mass is the tiny island of Pitcairn, and that's 1400 miles away!

The crew members who sailed the different legs from the Marquesas to Rapa Nui said it was really challenging particularly the Pitcairn/Rapa Nui leg. Hōkūle'a had to sail in the face of the winds and ocean currents. It was tough, but I knew that with the crew we had and the sturdiness of our wa'a (canoe), they would make it! And they did!

To show their Polynesian cousins an appreciation of their efforts, the Rapa Nui people had a grand welcoming. It seemed like the whole island showed up to greet the canoe. Even the mayor was there. Kekai did an oli (chant) asking permission from our hosts to set foot on their 'āina (land).

That was chicken skin! Then, there was music and dancing. We “busted out” our `ukulele and sang. Everyone got into the mood and started dancing — even Nainoa. It was better than “karaoke.”

We spent several days visiting places where work was being done to restore the moai (stone statues). Sau took a picture of me standing next to one of the stone giants. I looked so small — just like “one” termite leaning against a two-by-four.

A group of high school students from Hawai'i had just visited Rapa Nui and had planted over 300 pounds of sandalwood and koa saplings. They had sent seeds from Hawai'i almost two months before their trip and fortunately those seeds germinated. Boy it was great that Hawai'i was asked to take part in Rapa Nui's reforestation efforts.

On our next to last day we worked with high school students from the Rapa Nui Outrigger Canoe Club. They were interested in learning more about paddling, and we were glad to teach them what we knew. For fun, we had a canoe race. There were some good swells, and we caught a few waves. One of the kids got “haboot” (upset) with his crew because they kept losing. But I showed him a secret steering technique, and he beat the rest of us — hands down!

Now, that we've been to Rapa Nui, I think about what they're doing to preserve their environment and cultural traditions. I know that we've learned a lot from them and I feel that it's our responsibility to take that knowledge back to Hawai'i.

The crew and I spent a good part of the evening thinking about what we could do for our islands. How could we get adults and especially kids to think about conserving water, protecting our forests and polluting less? What could we do to teach the importance of cultural traditions and values? There must be something we could do using our canoe —Hōkūle'a.

Gotta think about that. And I know that I think better on a full stomach. Wow these pūpū (appetizers) are “some ‘ono!” Hey, I feel my brain starting to work . . .