

Redheads and Tall Voyagers

South American links to ancient New Zealand

EXCLUSIVE

Franklin eLocal has received a huge amount of feedback on the First Peoples of New Zealand series. The articles have brought back memories for many of what used to be taught at school about pre-Maori people. Our readers have called to tell us about finds they have made and experiences recounted to them by their parents and grandparents. They are enthusiastic to re-explore the history of our ancient land.

Maori oral history has always made it clear that people were well established in New Zealand before the coming of Kupe's fleet. Those early sailors found other people here when they arrived, digging for tree roots with digging implements and living off the plentiful kai provided by the land and the sea. The beliefs, religions, language and customs of these Old Ones were integrated with those of the newer arrivals.

There are New Zealanders who will tell you emphatically that their ancestors were not Polynesian, but voyaged from South America long ago. These voyagers were skilled in the understanding of ocean currents and in navigation. Even today, sailors and Pacific peoples speak of "jet currents" which can take a vessel at a great rate of knots. Thor Heyerdahl and his colleagues proved that the ocean between South America and the South Pacific islands was a highway, with his epic journey of the raft Kon-Tiki from Peru to the Tuamotu Islands in 1947. The islands lie in French Polynesia, with the Marquesas Islands to the north, originating point of the people called the Mori-Ori. Heyerdahl's discoveries excited the world in the following decades, but his achievements have been largely forgotten in New Zealand or are unknown to newer generations. He was one of several seekers of the past to point out the huge amount of artifact, flora and cultural evidence that shows a direct link between ancient New Zealand and our nearest major land mass toward the rising sun – South America.

Tall voyagers from Peru

Heyerdahl named his raft after Con Tiki Viracocha, (Indian for 'white man') who according to Incan oral history, was the supreme head of a fair-skinned people in Peru who left enormous ruins on the shores of Lake Titicaca. The legend continues with the mysterious bearded white men being attacked by a chief named Cari who came from the Coquimbo Valley. They had a battle on an island in Lake Titicaca, and the fair race was massacred. However, Con-Tiki and his closest companions managed to escape and later arrived on the Pacific coast.

Heyerdahl's research showed that when the Spaniards came to Peru, the Incas told them that the colossal monuments that stood deserted about the landscape were erected by a race of white gods who had lived there before the Incas themselves became rulers. The Incas described these "white gods" as wise, peaceful instructors who had originally come from the north in the "morning of time" and taught the Incas' primitive forefathers architecture as well as manners and customs. They were unlike other Native Americans in that they had "white skins and long beards" and were taller than the Incas. The Incas said that the "white gods" had then left as



suddenly as they had come and fled westward across the Pacific. After they had left, the Incas themselves took over power in the country.

Murals on ancient South American temples depict the fate of white captives being led to sacrificial altars while a mural in the Temple of the Warriors shows a ship with a large square rigged sail, similar to those found in ancient times in the Mediterranean Basin and Atlantic seaboard. A depiction of a ship like a Phoenician "round ship" (circa 1500BC) was found etched on one of the Easter Island statues by Heyerdahl's colleague Arne Skjolsvold, when the huge build-up of soil around it was dug away.

The mysterious Easter Island statues

In 1955, Heyerdahl organized the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island, off the coast of Chile, seeking the pathway of the mysterious fugitives. Based on native testimony and archaeological research, he said the island was originally colonized by Hanau eepe ("Long Ears"), from South America, and that Polynesians Hanua momoko ("Short Ears") arrived only in the mid-16th century. According to Heyerdahl, something happened between Admiral Roggeveen's discovery of the island in 1722 and James Cook's visit in 1774. While Roggeveen encountered white, Indian, and Polynesian people living in relative harmony and prosperity, Cook encountered a much smaller population consisting mainly of Polynesians and living in privation. Heyerdahl was told by islanders that there had been a rising of "short ears" against the ruling "long ears," and the rulers had either been wiped out, or fled the island. Heyerdahl obtained a radiocarbon date of around A.D. 400 for a charcoal fire located in the pit that was said by the people of Easter Island to have been used as an oven by the "Long Ears."

"Our carbon datings testified that these earliest discoverers of the island had arrived more than 1,000 years before the ancestors of the present Polynesian population," wrote Heyerdahl. He found that a people of highly specialized culture, with the typical South American masons' technique, had been at work on Easter