

Rarotonga fete to be more than Cook Isles tour

RAROTONGA — A navigational chart of the Cook Islands — 15 widely scattered, high volcanic islands and low, coral atolls north and west of Tahiti — became the most sought-after piece of paper on this well-tended gem of South Sea real estate before the arrival of the Hokule'a.

Sprightly Tereapii Kingan, the PEACESAT operator here, was a little miffed because Tony Utanga, the nautically minded secretary for the minister of internal affairs, ran off with her chart.

Tereapii had custody of it because she is the Rarotongan radio operator in daily contact with the Dorcas, escort boat for Hokule'a.

Tony now has the map in his office, where he spent a lot of time drawing lines and little x's to show the position of the canoe en route from Bora-Bora.

The map table is where 19-year-old Jason Brown, editor of Rarotonga's daily newspaper, the Cook Island News, comes for the latest report on the biggest story in town.

It is here that Andrew Turua, director of statistics, kept asking for an arrival time because his tribe, Ngati Uritaua, will put on the waterfront reception with a minimum of 18 dancers, five musicians and 10 singers.

One indication of excitement over the arrival of Hokule'a was that all the members of the Te Ivi Maori dance troupe came to the canoe arrival rehearsal.

Turua said Hokule'a will land at Rarotonga on the spot where his ancestors arrived 600 years ago from a canoe called Te Ru on this tiny island — 26 miles around, with a fringing reef, waving palms and jungle-robed mountains.

He said the greeting cere-



**bob krauss
aboard
the Hokule'a**

mony will be based on that arrival and has more than ceremonial significance.

"This arrival is involved in land rights," he explained. "The Maori (Cook Islanders consider themselves the original Maoris) word for canoe is *vaka*. The extended meaning of *vaka* is tribe, and the *vaka* or tribe is related to a piece of land."

So Turua's tribe claimed the land of Avatiu, where the harbor is now, by right of first occupation, although it later was claimed by a conquering chief.

The tribe won back the land in a historic court battle in which each side challenged the other's legendary accuracy. Turua said tribal leaders have been studying the court transcript for accurate historical information about the first voyaging canoe arrival.

He said the orator will use the arrival of Hokule'a to reaffirm the land rights of his tribe. Rarotongan chiefs will be responsible for luncheon and the government for a reception.

It isn't easy to get a reading about how the man or woman on a motorbike in Rarotonga feels about Hokule'a. The two radio stations keep playing Tahitian tunes about Hokule'a and giving out arrival times, sometimes wrong.

"I think it will be a great event if the canoe lands here on Saturday morning," said Rangi Tuavera, a schoolteacher and director of training for the



Andrew Turua and Tony Utanga look over a navigational chart of the Cook Islands in anticipation of the arrival of the Hokule'a.

government. "On Saturday afternoon, everybody goes to the rugby matches.

"At the moment, people look on it as a Hollywood adventure. But when they see what it is, they will realize what it means."

"I think it is being taken as a major cultural event," said Tony Utanga as he pored over his chart. "It's a pity we were restricted to sending only one Cook Islander on the canoe from Tahiti. We could easily have selected half a dozen qualified persons who wanted to go."

A girl in the post office

where I went to ask about mail schedules to Hawaii showed great interest when she learned that I was covering Hokule'a. She began asking questions.

The same response came from a man in a bar and a clerk in a store.

Timote Turu, research officer in the Cook Island Tourist Authority, said it wasn't clear to him what Hokule'a is trying to accomplish. When he learned that Hokule'a is tracing the old migration route from Tahiti to Rarotonga and from Rarotonga to New Zealand, he became very interested.

Geoffrey Henry, articulate leader of the opposition in the Cook Island parliament, said: "I think Polynesians will rediscover themselves through Hokule'a — not as Hawaiians or Tahitians or Rarotongans, but as members of a race we will have great pride in.

"I see that as a kind of bridge that Hokule'a is constructing."

Henry said that Polynesians in both Hawaii and Tahiti have been struggling to regain their sense of Polynesian identity, but that the Cook Islanders do not have this problem.

"We have been fortunate

compared to Hawaii and Tahiti in relations with our colonial partner," he said. "The New Zealand presence was minimal. This was not a conscious policy. New Zealand couldn't afford to be here. Our move to independence in 1965 was inevitable.

"I'm not sure they (residents of Rarotonga) will be on the beach because they haven't been starved for their culture. But I'll be there because Hokule'a gives me good reason to be extremely proud of my ancestors."

Turua said he hopes 2,000 of Rarotonga's 9,000 people will be at the dock.

The Honolulu Advertiser 7/20/85

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