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Tagata Pasifika

Crew to sail to NZ from Tahiti using celestial navigation

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A double-hulled canoe will depart Tahiti next week and navigate to Aotearoa using the stars, moon and currents to guide its voyage, announced Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage Chief Executive Bernadette Cavanagh.

“The passage from French Polynesia to New Zealand will be difficult and dangerous, and a testament to the skill of Māori ancestors who voyaged across the Pacific many times,” says Ms Cavanagh.

“We are honoured to have the Tahitian vessel Fa’afaite travel to New Zealand to be part of the flotilla in the Tuia 250 Voyage – an event where we recognise 250 years since the first onshore encounters between Māori and Pākehā.

“The story of the settlement of Aotearoa starts with the skill, innovation and courage of Polynesian navigators that journeyed across the Pacific and found this land.

“Fa’afaite and the crew from the Tahitian Voyaging Society represent their ancestor, ‘Arioi and master navigator Tupaia. He was on board the Endeavour as it made landfall in Aotearoa in 1769, and was pivotal in communicating with Māori,” Ms Cavanagh says.

The crew will voyage 2,330 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean. The voyage will take about a month.

The public will be able to join the journey by tracking the vessel from its planned departure on 20 August (NZ-time) by visiting www.tuia250.nz.

Fa’afaite will make its way to Rarotonga, where it will stop for two days, before heading to Rangitahua/ the Kermadec Islands, and then finally to Tauranga, New Zealand mid-September.

Tuia 250 Flotilla Kaitiaki Jack Thatcher says this voyage uses the same principles of the navigational practices that Tupaia and ancestors who first voyaged to Aotearoa would have used.

“The two Tahitian navigators will be using the natural environment to guide them – the sun at rising and setting times will greatly help these two navigators to keep their waka on their chosen path,” says Mr Thatcher.

“The moon and the stars will also be used to show the way. The stars have many patterns that the traditional navigator must memorise to enable the waka to stay on track. They will be expected to use ocean swells and the winds to help them maintain the direction of their pathway to target each island on their voyage path.

“The navigators are descendants of Tupaia, of Hiro, of Kupe, of Hoturoa, of Maui and this voyage will allow for those stories to be told as histories of the first settlements of Oceania, where the most wide-spread nation on the planet still lives today,” says Mr Thatcher.