

JOURNEY OF A WAKA

We know from Māori oral histories, and other evidence such as archaeology, that many ancestors of Māori began arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand more than seven hundred years ago. These ancestors sailed over a long period of time from East Polynesia in boats called waka hourua. These were dangerous journeys, but the ancestors were expert sailors. They planned carefully, knew when to leave, what supplies to take, and how to find land in the world's biggest ocean.

ESSENTIAL ITEMS

Waka hourua carried everything they needed for their journeys, including paddles, bailers to remove water, spare sails, ropes, clothing, adzes, crops, and anchor stones.

SIGNS IT IS TIME TO LEAVE

It was the right time to leave when there was plenty of food stored, when the seas were calm, the winds blowing east, and the birds migrating south.

WATER

Water could be stored in coconuts and bottle gourds. The sails of the waka would collect water when it rained.



FOOD

Different waka brought different kinds of food, including kūmara, bananas, taro and taro paste, yams, eggs, dried fish and vegetables, and coconuts.



DEPARTURE East Polynesia

PEOPLE ON BOARD

The main roles on waka hourua included rangatira (captain), tohunga (priest and navigator), kaihautū (person directing the paddlers), and kaiurungi (steerers). Some of these words are still used for leaders today.

ANIMALS ON BOARD

Some waka hourua carried kūrī (dogs) and others brought kiore (rats).



FISHING

While at sea, the ancestors probably caught mahimahi, flying fish, tuna, and sharks.



SUPPLIES FOR STAYING WARM

Rain capes and ponchos, probably made from tapa cloth or pandanus leaves, kept the ancestors warm and dry on their long journeys.



MIGRATING ANIMALS

Animals of mana such as Tohorā (humpback whales) are said to have guided waka on their journeys. The ancestors might also have followed migrating birds like Tītī (muttonbird), Toroa (albatross), Kuaka (bar-tailed godwit), and Pīpīwharau (shining cuckoo).



NAVIGATION

The ancestors of Māori were excellent navigators. They made their way across the ocean by keeping track of the stars, planets, ocean currents, the direction of the wind, and the position of the sun. They kept track of time by watching the phases of the moon.

SIGNS THAT LAND IS NEAR

Clouds ahead, seabirds and birdsong, insects blown to sea, seaweed, and floating leaves and branches told the ancestors that land was near.



ARRIVAL Aotearoa

