



Kupe Waka Centre Newsletter June 2020



**Support from
Hawai'i crucial
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The KWC planning and development team, (left to right), Charlie Wilson, Peter Phillips, Stan Conrad and Bill Rayner.

Kupe Waka Centre welcomes funding

For the last two decades Sir Hek Busby and his team worked to realise his vision of the Kupe Waka Centre. There is already a near-complete Whare Wānanga, a carving shed and Te Kāpehu Whetū, the star compass, on land donated by Sir Hek. There was always a problem of raising enough capital to complete the development.

Now the Government's Provincial Growth Fund has changed that with a funding contract. This funding will be used to complete the development and make the Kupe Waka Centre financially viable. The funds will enable the Centre to achieve its mission to promote kaupapa waka to all New Zealanders, create jobs, engage the local community, and protect the environment.

Sustainability woven into development

Sustainability is one of the key themes woven into the design and development of the Kupe Waka Centre. Everything starts from how we ensure that the mana of the site and its iconic status is protected.

"We don't want to overload the site with development, such that the very qualities that make it what it is, are destroyed," says Kupe Waka Centre project manager, Dr Peter Phillips.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the national and international economy has changed the way we will operate the Centre. The lockdown has also

allowed the project designers to stop and reflect and make sure that what they are planning in terms of the different sources of income, reflects the values of the site.

This includes reducing the numbers of tourists expected on the site and shifting the balance towards people who visit for education, training and awareness of Kaupapa Waka: waka sailing, waka building, traditional navigation and the lore which enshrines the knowledge and wisdom.

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Site features multi-purpose buildings

Sustainable site development for the Kupe Waka Centre will include creating efficient, multi-function buildings.

The Whare Whetu (Star House) will function not only as a place we can share waka trips and training and traditional navigation using virtual reality headsets, but also as a meeting and conference room.

That makes KWC more sustainable because there is less investment in buildings and less maintenance required.

Virtual reality will allow the Centre to show visitors not only celestial navigation, (such as the traditional way-finding route from the Marquesas to Hawai'i, using the Southern Cross), but also activities like waka sailing where visitors will experience sailing on board a waka hourua, a traditional double-hull ocean-going canoe.

‘The virtual reality headsets will also allow us to teach traditional way-finding to our waka crew members and supporters,’ says KWC project manager, Dr Peter Phillips.

The concept for the Whare Whetu and the use of

virtual reality headsets came about when it was realised the roof of a proposed Planetarium would be higher than the nearby Te Kāpehu Whetū (the Star Compass) that sits up on a flat part of the dune.

The proposed Planetarium would have blocked the Star Compass sight-lines to the west. The virtual reality solution is great, as it will allow us to show so much more than celestial navigation.”

The development will also save an extra building by extending the carving shed. This new proposal for what will become the Whare Waka, creates a large cover which will function both as a place to refit the waka and after that, will have other waka on display.

This will allow the Centre to show people all types of waka construction under-cover, sheltered from the weather. All the buildings will be linked by carefully designed, wheelchair-friendly paths and have ramps as universal access is another important priority for the development. They will also run on solar power with battery backup.



Arrival of Hōkūle‘a and Nainoa inspires Sir Hek’s legacy

Hawaiian navigator and voyaging leader Nainoa Thompson of the Polynesian Voyaging Society is a vital influence for the Kupe Waka Centre at Aurere. “None of this could have happened without that first visit of the waka hourua, Hōkūle‘a in 1985, and the impact this had on Sir Hek,” says Centre development manager, Dr Peter Phillips.

In 1983, in preparation for the Voyage of Rediscovery, a young Nainoa was anxious to learn the stars of the southern hemisphere. Guided by John Rangihau, Nainoa made his way to Aurere where he met then bridge-builder Hekenukumai.

The two spent the next year together keenly observing the night sky as Sir Hek recounted stories of the tūpuna.

That relationship would change history. With firm resolve, Hector told Nainoa:

“In this land, we still have our canoe buried. In this land, we still have our language and we trace our genealogies back to the canoes our ancestors arrived on. But we have lost our pride and the dignity of our traditions. If you are going to bring Hōkūle‘a here, that will help bring it back. Whatever you need to do, I am with you all the way.”

On December 7, 1985, Hōkūle‘a was greeted by Ngātokimatawhaorua and several hundred members of the Te Tai Tokerau community upon arriving at Waitangi.

Inspired by this historic landfall which affirmed Polynesian ingenuity and effectively quieted the naysayers, Sir James Henare declared that the Hawaiians arriving by traditional waka hourua represented “the sixth tribe of Te Tai Tokerau.”

Sir James then challenged Māori to follow suit with their own waka. This became a personal calling for Sir Hek, one which he pursued vigorously and

fulfilled in grand form with the completion of the iconic Te Aurere, and its Pacific-wide voyages of over 30,000 nautical miles encompassing Hawai‘i, Nukuhiva, Tahiti, New Caledonia, Rarotonga and Rapa Nui.

His waka legacy grew to include Ngāhiraka Mai Tawhiti and over 30 other waka, and created a movement propelled by a host of contemporary waka hourua that promote traditional voyaging among today’s generation.

Soon after the 1985 landfall, Sir James, Sir Graham Latimer and other revered kaumātua affirmed a process initiated by Hector for the naming of the Hawaiian tribe: “Ngāti Ruawāhia” means “tribe of the star Arcturus” which is Hōkūle‘a in Hawaiian.

Then in 1992, a sacred carved Hawaiian pou pou named “Māuipāmamao” was erected at Te Tii Marae, Waitangi to represent the “sixth tribe.”

Ngāti Ruawāhia is an extended family heritage that has been stewarded by two entities since the 1985 landfall: the Polynesian Voyaging Society which created and sails the Hōkūle‘a, and

Kamehameha Schools which has coordinated logistics, provided resources, and continues to serve as cultural and educational advisor for the Polynesian Voyaging Society.

Nainoa Thompson, President of the Polynesian Voyaging Society, and Dr Randie Kamuela Fong, Executive Culture Officer of Kamehameha Schools, worked with partners Bishop Museum and the University of Hawai‘i to form the ‘Aha Moananuiākea Pacific Consortium in 2018.



L-R, Dr Randie Kamuela Fong and Nainoa Thompson.

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Inspiring waka legacy

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Sir Hek's close relationships with both Nainoa and Randie going back some 35 years made his role as guiding elder for the Consortium especially meaningful, and he continues in that role today in spirit.

Throughout 2018, months before PGF funding was granted, some 25 Kamehameha Schools representatives of Ngāti Ruawāhia came to Aurere on three occasions to clean the interior and exterior of the unfinished whare wānanga.

Private donations from Hawai'i provided invaluable construction support in preparation for a dedication ceremony that Ngāti Ruawāhia was invited to conduct – Sir Hek named the house Whetū Mārama.

Together with Tārai Waka and Arawai Ltd., Sir Hek signed a Declaration of Kinship with the Consortium which forms the basis for support of cultural-educational collaborations, the refurbishing of Te Aurere, and plans for modest accommodations on land at Aurere which Sir Hek envisioned for Ngāti Ruawāhia members visiting the Kupe Waka Centre.

This partnership positions the Ka'iwakīlōmoku Hawaiian Cultural Center at Kamehameha Schools – where Sir Hek was honoured in special ceremonies – as a “sister centre” to the Kupe Waka Centre.

Sustainable site development

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There is a trade off in the number of tourists coming to the KWC site because cultural tourism is another way of spreading the message about kaupapa waka, but Dr Phillips believes they have now got the balance right.

The KWC is about sharing the history and stories that go back to Polynesian migration - across the Pacific and waka hourua arrival in New Zealand - sharing stories of voyaging, sharing skills of waka construction, and teaching traditional navigation.

Most recently Sir Hek's two waka hourua sailed to Rapanui and back, a journey of more than 9000 nautical miles.

This realised a dream of Sir Hek that a waka from Aotearoa should sail to the other points of the Polynesian Triangle as “Te Aurere” had sailed to Hawai'i in 1995.



Ngāti Ruawāhia with Sir Hek, Gina Harding and Jack Thatcher, before a pōwhiri at Te Tii Marae, Waitangi in 2018.

Virus impact shifts focus

The loss of international tourist visitors due to the impact of COVID-19 has resulted in a shift of focus to domestic tourism for the Kupe Waka Centre.

The Centre has reduced its expectation of visitor numbers and will be looking to the domestic market, including activities such as team building for businesses and government, as a small conference and meeting venue, and as an immersive visitor experience.

“We will offer a high quality experience where people spend hours exploring the Centre and learning about the different aspects of wayfinding, the stories about our waka hourua, and the dedicated work of Sir Hek,” says KWC project manager, Dr Peter Phillips.

Specialists at the Centre, including carvers, teachers and other staff, will also take visitors on guided walks around the Centre, enriching the experience with their knowledge of Mātauranga Māori and Kaupapa Waka.

Community outreach is another important aspect of the work of the Kupe Waka Centre and this will include a focus on school visits. Over time, free visits will be offered to primary school classes in Te Tai Tokerau.

They can participate in the virtual reality experience, a full tour, and maybe even some special activities such as making flax waka.

Another connection with the community will be seeking local volunteers for projects such as the planting programme of natives around the ponds and on the back dunes.

You can now go to the Kupe Waka Centre page on Facebook to keep updated on site development at Aurere and the opening there in late 2021.



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