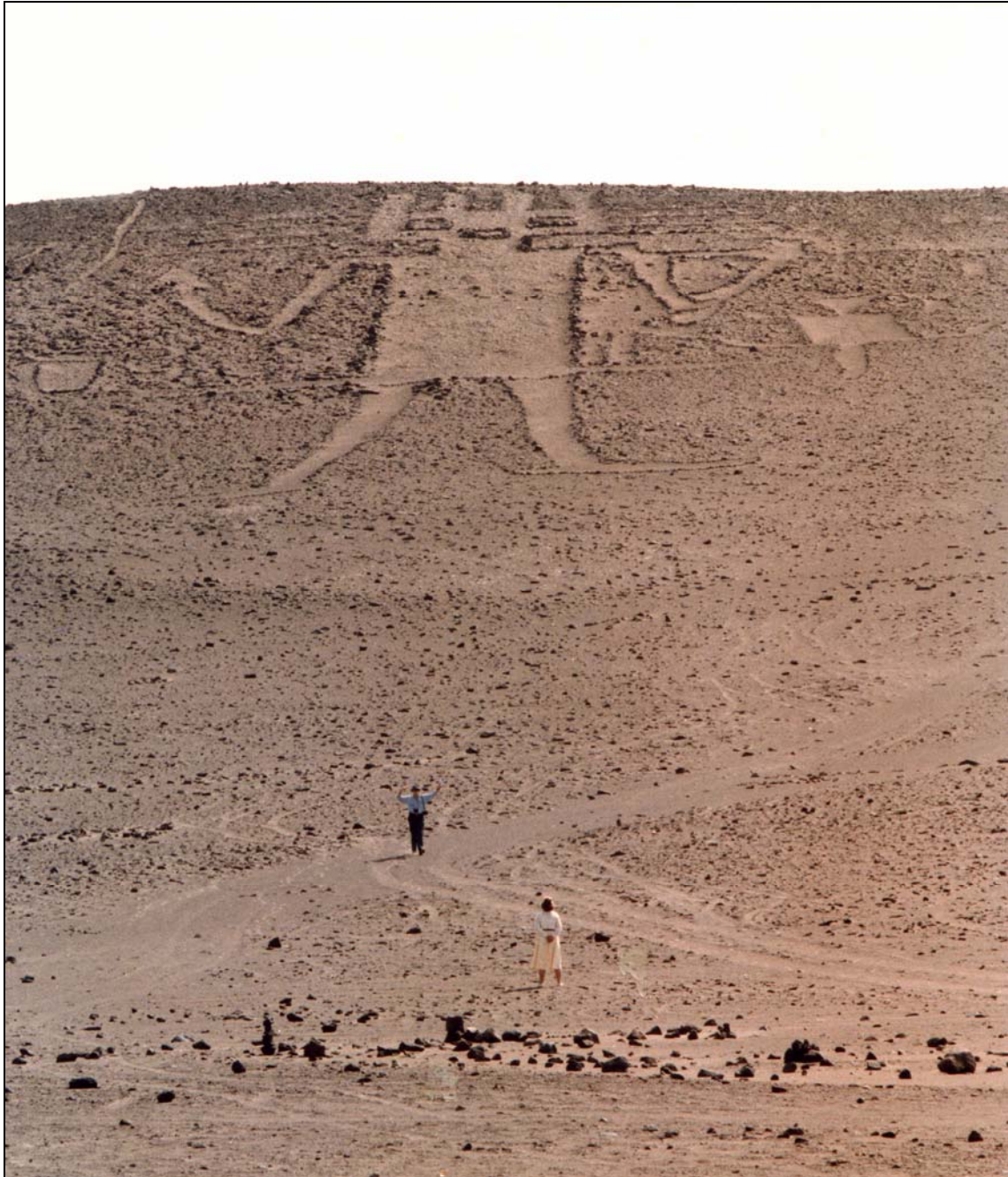


CHILE and EASTER ISLAND

Margie and I flew to Chile, in 1995. Our journey had been arranged to coincide with the Rapa Nui Festival that takes place during the first week of February. The travel agent said that if we arrived in Santiago a week earlier we could visit San Pedro de Atacama in the salt desert in the high Andes. We decided to do this as it would give us an extra week away from the English winter and allow us to get over the long-haul flight before going on to Easter Island, another five hours out into the Pacific. They also promised to show us the largest geoglyph in the world, over 300 foot long, picked out in stones.



Atacama Giant

We were met at the Santiago airport by our guide, Victor Venegas, who shepherded us to a hotel in the centre of town. One of our group was a retired schoolteacher. On the way into town he told at least three dirty stories and continued to tell more of the same smutty tales for the next two weeks. He became very tiresome and exactly the type you don't want as a travelling companion and precisely the reason *why not to go on group tours!*

San Pedro de Atacama is as close to hell as you would ever wish to come, being in the middle of a high altitude desert that is utterly barren. The hotel was as awful as the day was hot. The dinner served on our arrival after a very long and boring drive across the desert was terrible, and in the middle of the night I was hit by the worst bout of food poisoning I have ever experienced. All in all, it was not a good beginning to our adventure!

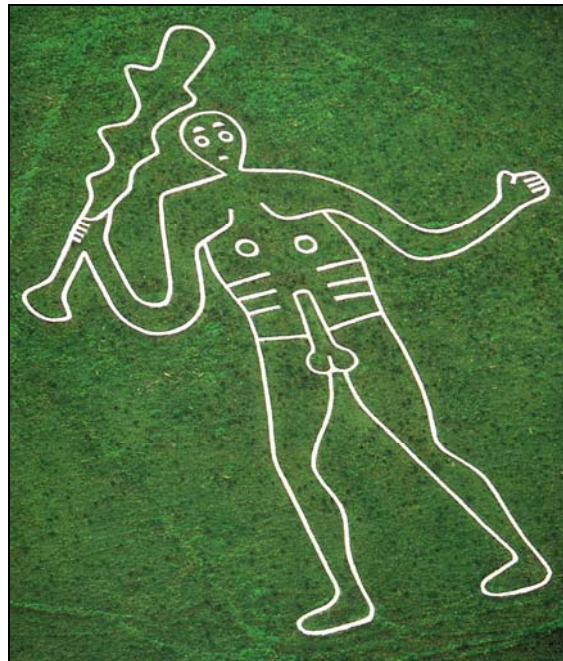
I was still suffering from stomach cramps when we set off north in a minibus for the town of Arica on the borders of Peru. The town clings to a delta formed by a river fed by the snow-melt from the mountains. It is surrounded by desert and a very bleak place, famous for having had its church swept a mile inland by a 60-foot high tsunami that also left an iron ship stranded half a mile from the harbour.

As a guide Victor knew all about how European stomachs react to Chilean food, so went to the chemist and bought some pills for me that worked immediately and by the following day I had completely recovered. I have kept in touch with Victor ever since and send him a \$50 note every year to buy a supply of *Chile Pills*.

On our various travels I have met and saved many fellow sufferers. Whatever is in them works like magic and instant death to tummy bugs! They are made in France but unavailable in Europe! My doctor has never heard of the drugs that are quoted on the packet!



Atacama 'Giant', Chile



Cerne Abbas 'Giant', England

The image of the giant man picked out in stones was large and very impressive rather like the Cerne Abbas Giant in Dorset, which is the same size.

The electricity board had planted a gigantic pole on the edge of the shepherds and llamas' geoglyph that rather took away from the scene, but seeing these works of art had made it worthwhile going to northern Chile.



'Shepherds with Llamas' and electricity poles, Atacama

We were taken to several museums in Chile and saw a lot of ancient dried-out mummies. I think that displaying the bodies of people who were ceremonially buried in the custom of the faith is one of the most gross things that our present civilisation condones, be it the body of an Egyptian pharaoh or an Inca princess. How would the archaeologists feel if they were dug up in 1,000 years' time and put on display?

I must admit that we did see some beautiful examples of weaving in the Arica Museum as well as a stone covered with cupules, but I was really pretty disappointed by all we were shown until our last day in Santiago, just before going to Easter Island. In the Natural History Museum Margie spotted an amazing totem pole called a 'Mapuche' that was about eight foot high. The pole had slots cut into the front face that acted as a ladder up to a neck and head wearing a hat that acted as a seat. A notice told us that the Shaman of the Mapuche tribe would climb to the top and sit on the hat. Apparently he would then go into a trance while the clan watched from below, waiting for something mystical to happen, and I don't mean *fall off*.

I was intrigued by the Mapuche totem pole and took a photograph, determined to have my own in the Agecroft garden when we returned. I didn't know how to accomplish this until one day the Electricity Board came to inspect the line that runs across the end of our garden and told me that we would have to cut down five of our giant poplars. I had no option but to allow them to fell the 80-foot high trees that we had planted as seven-foot high sticks, but insisted that they left two of them as ten-foot high stumps.

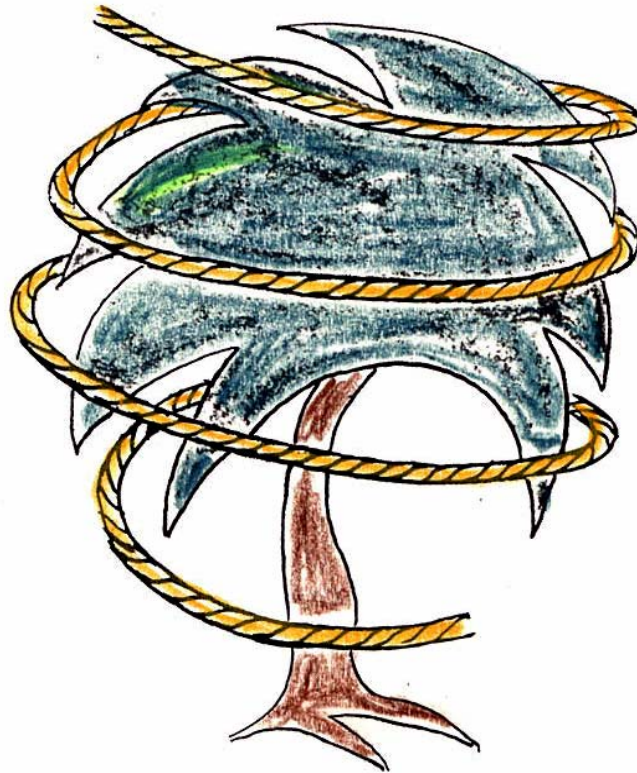
Our son Mark carved two Mapuches for me with his chainsaw to the measurements we had taken from the one in Santiago. It is easy to climb as it is just like a ladder using the holes as rungs and the back edges for handgrips. One has rotted off but the other is still standing and everyone who sees it wants to climb it and have their photograph taken sitting on top. The most excited guest to do this was our Chilean guide, Victor, when he visited, as his mother was a clanswoman of the Mapuche tribe. Jean Clottes couldn't resist, nor can our pet buzzard that uses it as a perch when eating a rabbit it has caught in our orchard!



Agcroft Mapuche

The excitement of our visit to Easter Island to see the sculptures was greatly added to because Damon joined us in Santiago for this leg of the adventure. The three of us were buoyed up with anticipation and couldn't wait to land on this unique and most remote spot on the Earth.

When I arrived home I wrote a little story about our trip to the Navel of the Earth and called it *The Missing Mulberry Tree and the Fallen Moai* so perhaps the best way to sum up one of the most thrilling experiences of my life is to include what I wrote straight after our return when it was fresh in my mind.



THE MISSING MULBERRY TREE

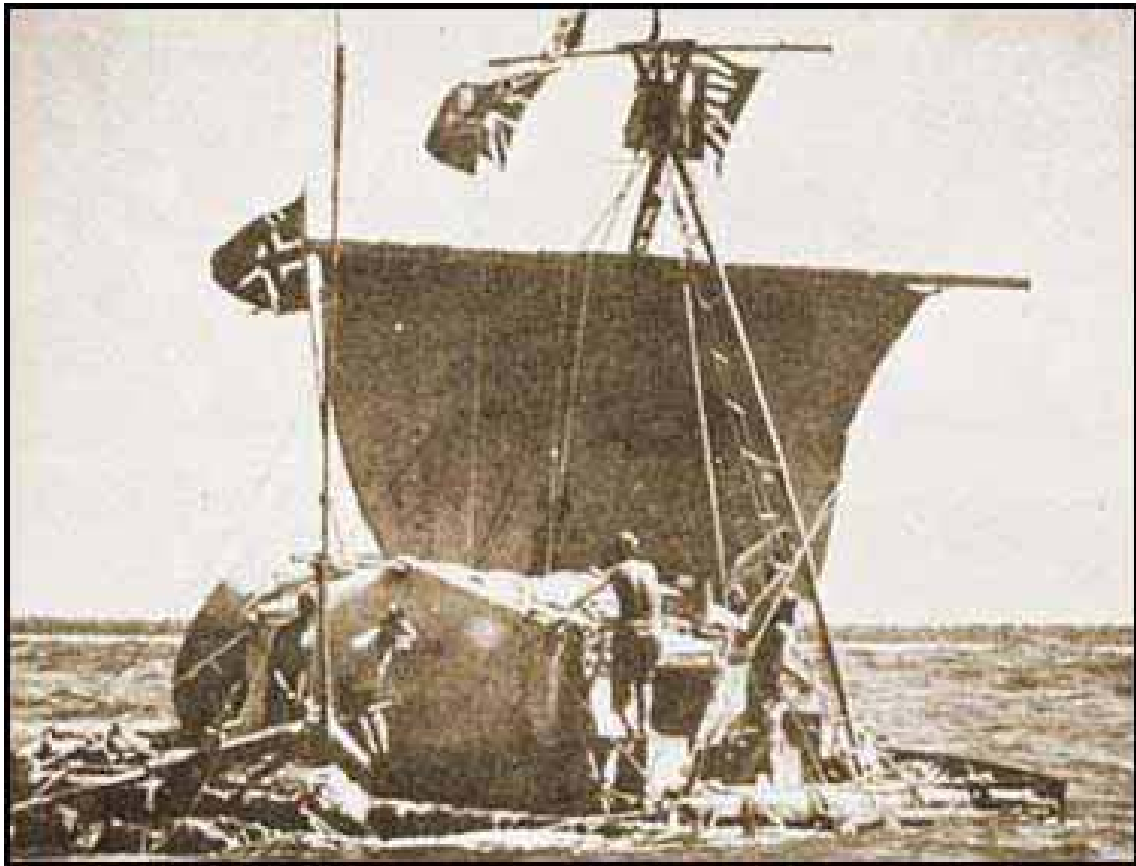
and the

FALLEN MOAI

If your destination is Rapa Nui, you don't just make a journey, you go on a pilgrimage. When you first stand in front of one of the giant statues, you experience a feeling of ecstasy. The moment can be compared to that of walking into the Pantheon or through the Siq in the moonlight to see the wonders of Petra. So it is when you stand before your first Moai.

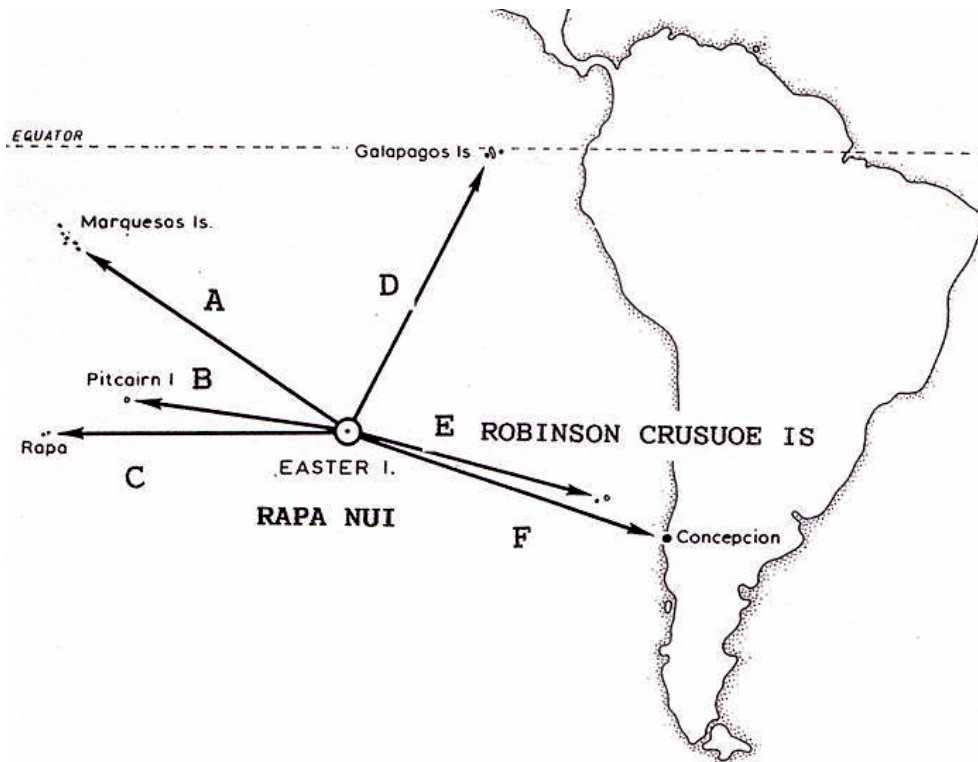
Our guide was Dr Georgia Lee, who has visited the island many times over the past 17 years and is the recognised expert on the island's petroglyphs, as well as being the Editor of the *Rapa Nui Journal*. With the combination of an expert guide and the Hotel O'ta'i, we looked forward to a fascinating week.

Rapa Nui is a tiny dot in the Pacific. It is 2,400 miles west of South America, and the same distance south-east of the Marquesas Islands. It is the most isolated island on the Earth. It is only 15 miles long and seven miles wide, and yet on this minute volcanic rock, completely cut off from the rest of the world, a savage cannibalistic people evolved a unique form of art that is recognised as being one of the Wonders of the World.

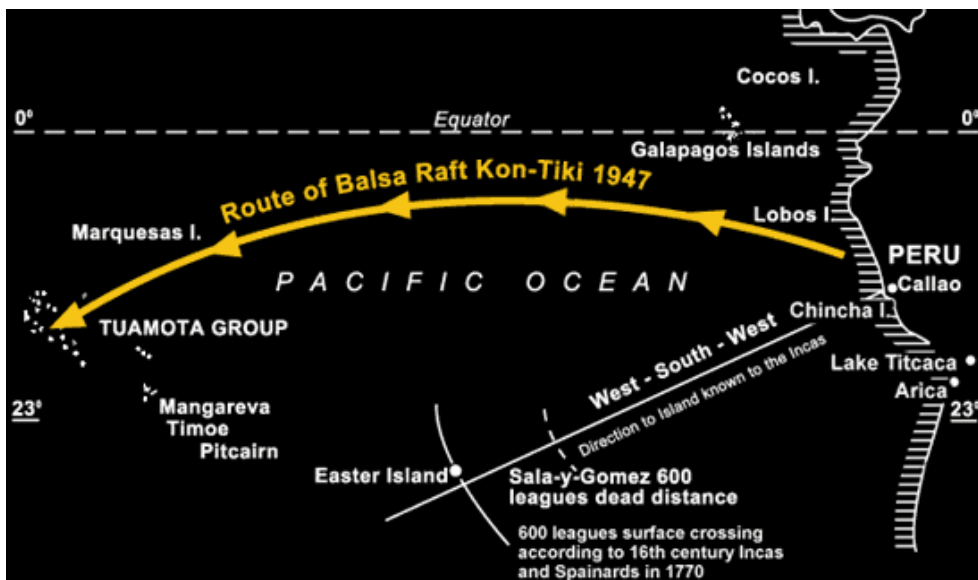


'Kon Tiki'

Since the days of *Kon Tiki*, many have desired to make this pilgrimage. Thor Heyerdahl's book launched a dream voyage for his thousands of readers. His daring and adventurous journey from Chile across the Pacific was an amazing feat. Reading the book fills one with admiration, but it is not until you stand looking at the balsa-wood raft, which is now housed in the Maritime Museum in Oslo, that you really comprehend what an immense achievement the voyage actually was. I wrote to Thor to ask for permission to include some of his writings on the Bradshaw website and he kindly agreed. What a man!



*Easter Island lies isolated in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean
 A 2,500 - B 1,400 - C 2,400 - D 2,400 - E 2,000 - F 2,400 miles*



The route of the 'Kon Tiki', 1947



Rapa Nui Moai

Other books also fuelled my dream of visiting the island. Metraux wrote an astonishing one after his visit with the 1935 Franco-Belgian expedition. The book gives the reader the full flavour of the island and its savage cannibals, and reads like a novel. It includes much of the information obtained by Katherine Routledge from her expedition in 1914, which is important, as at that time there were still people alive who could remember 1862, the terrible year the fate of the island's population was sealed by the Peruvian slave trade.

We descended the stairs of the jet after a five-hour flight to the loneliest spot in the world. The air was warm and smelt of tropical flowers and a thrill ran up my spine as my feet touched the ground. After many months of anticipation at last we stood on the island that was discovered by the Dutch in 1722. For years I had dreamed of making this trip to see the Giant Moai.

A welcoming party of beautiful grass-skirted Polynesian girls swayed their hips to the exotic music of strumming guitars. Smiling faces put welcome garlands of flowers around our necks, while laughter and sunshine filled the air. Quickly gathered up by our hosts we were whisked away to Hanga Roa, the only village on the island. Our small family-run O'ta'i hotel was surrounded by a garden of bananas and hibiscus flowers.

After settling into our rooms we assembled for the first of Georgia's lectures on the history of the island. She began by explaining that although the Rapa Nui natives could write, no one could read their 'Rongo Rongo' script, so all the stories about the colonisation of the island come only from spoken legends. However, a great deal of work had been done on the peopling of the Polynesian islands so what she was about to tell us, in all probability, was pretty close to the truth.



Easter Island 'Rongo Rongo' script

It is now believed that the first natives arrived by canoe from the Marquesas Islands some time between AD 450 and AD 1100 and that the Statue Culture ended around AD 1500, by which time the population had grown to about 8,000. In 1774 Captain Cook estimated the number of people to be 3,000. Whatever the figure, it means that over a period of 800 years the natives cultivated enough surplus food to support a workforce large enough to carve from the volcanic quarry of Rano Raraku some 1,000 statues, 230 of which they transported to and erected on 110 mausoleum platforms called Ahu, all but one of which were situated around the coast of the island.

The island was definitely settled from the west because the latest analysis of skeletal material shows a strong link between the mtDNA of the natives of Easter Islanders and those of the Marquesas Islands. They did not come from Mangareva, a small island near Pitcairn, as the natives on that archipelago did not have chickens, only pigs, and the Rapa Nui islanders landed with the Blue Asian chicken, but no pigs.

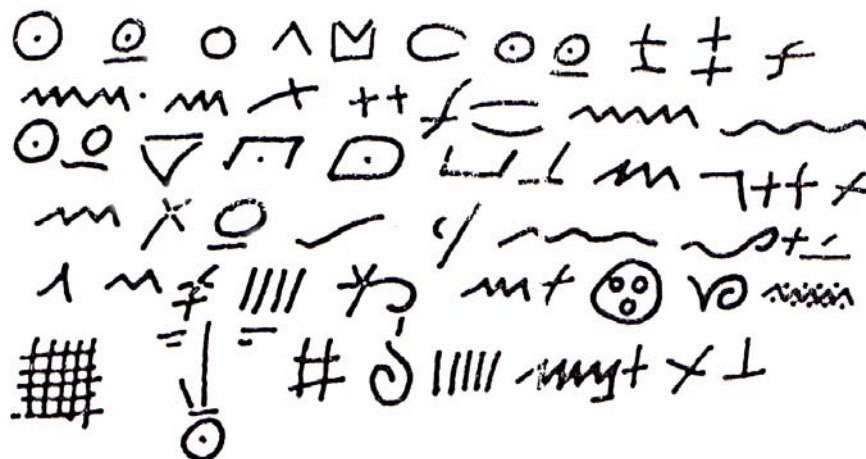
As an aside it is interesting to note that New Zealand was the last of the Polynesian settlements. The crews brought plants and animals with them but many of these died because of the cold climate. However, they did manage to cultivate one plant in New Zealand and this single survivor represents a complete mystery, because it is the South American sweet potato!

As yet Thor Heyerdahl's theories of settlement from South America are not supported by any concrete facts. The off quoted and famous dressed stone wall at Vinapu Ahu platform has nothing in common with Inca construction, although they look very similar. One of the most telling facts is that all the American peoples were expert weavers and potters, and the Rapa Nui islanders knew nothing of these two crafts, although the islanders did know how to make tapa cloth similar to that made in Burma.



Was 'Vinapu Ahu' built by the Inca? Most probably not!

The late Professor Barry Fell of Harvard University put forward an intriguing theory in 1975. He believed that Libyan sailors, employed by Ptolemy III, crossed the Pacific in 238 BC, reached South America, and the carved hieroglyphs found in a cave in Chile in 1885 are in Libyan script, claiming 4,000 miles of the continent's west coast for the Pharaoh!



Hieroglyphs found in a cave in Chile in 1885

If the Libyans possessed the craft and had the ability to sail across the Indian Ocean in 500 BC, why could they not have sailed the Pacific in 250 BC? It would be amazing if they had not as we know that they mined gold in Sumatra around that time. Barry Fell claims that there are many Egyptian and Libyan words found in the Polynesian language. A ship caught in a storm could possibly have landed up in Chile and the crew have left behind the inscription that has been found there. The question is, were they able to sail back to

Sumatra, or did they have no choice but to settle on the way? When Robert Hefner and myself were in Harvard to present Grahame Walsh's book on the Bradshaw paintings to the university library we were able to discuss Fell's theory with Stephen Jay Gould. Although Gould was a fan of Barry Fell, like us he thought it was all a bit too far-fetched.



Pacific and Atlantic Ocean currents



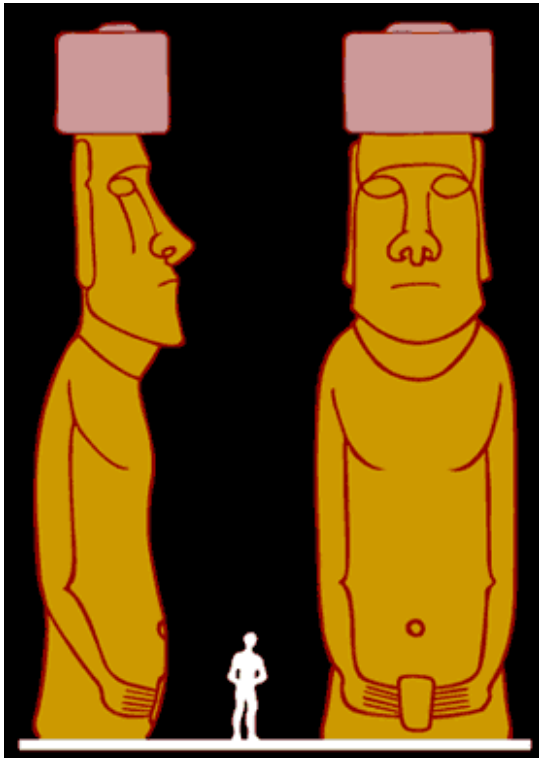
Dhows with Lateen sails dominate the Indian Ocean

When the Europeans first visited the island they found that the natives kept Asian chickens that laid 'blue' eggs. These are not found in South America.

Rats and chickens, along with bananas and many other plants, were also carried as cargo on the colonising canoes from Asia.

The teeth marks found on the fossil palm nuts on the island are those of the Asian rat, but the nuts are those of the Chilean wine palm! The pollen samples taken from the crater lake of Rano Rarakau show that the palms covered the island for many centuries before the natives arrived. During the last Ice Age 25,000 years ago the sea was 450 foot lower and a chain of islands existed between Easter Island and Chile, Robinson Crusoe Island being one, so probably the palm seeds were carried by the tides from island to island.

In the Museum of East Asian Art in Bath, England, there is a 3½ inch high figure carved out of a piece of translucent nephrite. This sculpture is from northern China's Neolithic Zhao-baogou culture, 4800–4000 BC. I personally think it has an astounding likeness to an Easter Island figure. It has a drum hat, broad flat nose, straight mouth, long ears and firm protruding chin with forearms by the side and fingers stretched across the stomach! The eyes are heavily emphasised, not by white coral insets as on Easter Island, but by being laterally pierced. Or is this just a coincidence?

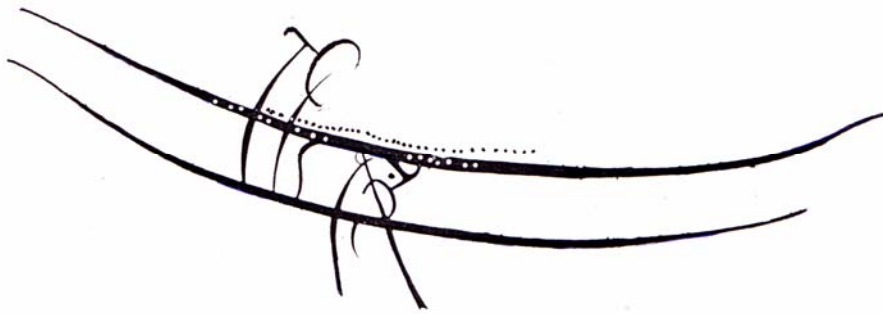


Easter Island Moai



Zhao-baogou Culture

Double Polynesian canoes definitely did sail the Pacific Ocean and reach Easter Island because at La Perouse Bay there is a 35-foot long petroglyph of such a craft. In Hugh Carrington's book *Life of Captain Cook*, he quotes from *Endeavour's* log recording Cook's comment concerning Easter Island: *the island is known to the people of Tahiti and New Zealand as Rapa-Nui, and there is at least one well-authenticated account of a canoe voyage to it from Tahiti and back.*



*The Double Canoe 36-foot long engraving from La Perouse Bay
Tiny cupules are lined up along one of the canoes.
Do they represent the crew?*

One of the items that must have been included in the first Asian canoe's cargo was the Paper Mulberry tree that is indigenous to Burma and was taken to all the islands by the Polynesian colonisers. The bark was used for centuries by the Burmese for making paper and is the raw material still used for beating out tapa cloth. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says that the Tahitians made three-foot wide rolls of cloth that were up to 600 foot long, equivalent to nine tennis courts lying end to end! The early Polynesian fishing nets in the National Museum of Washington DC are made of tapa.

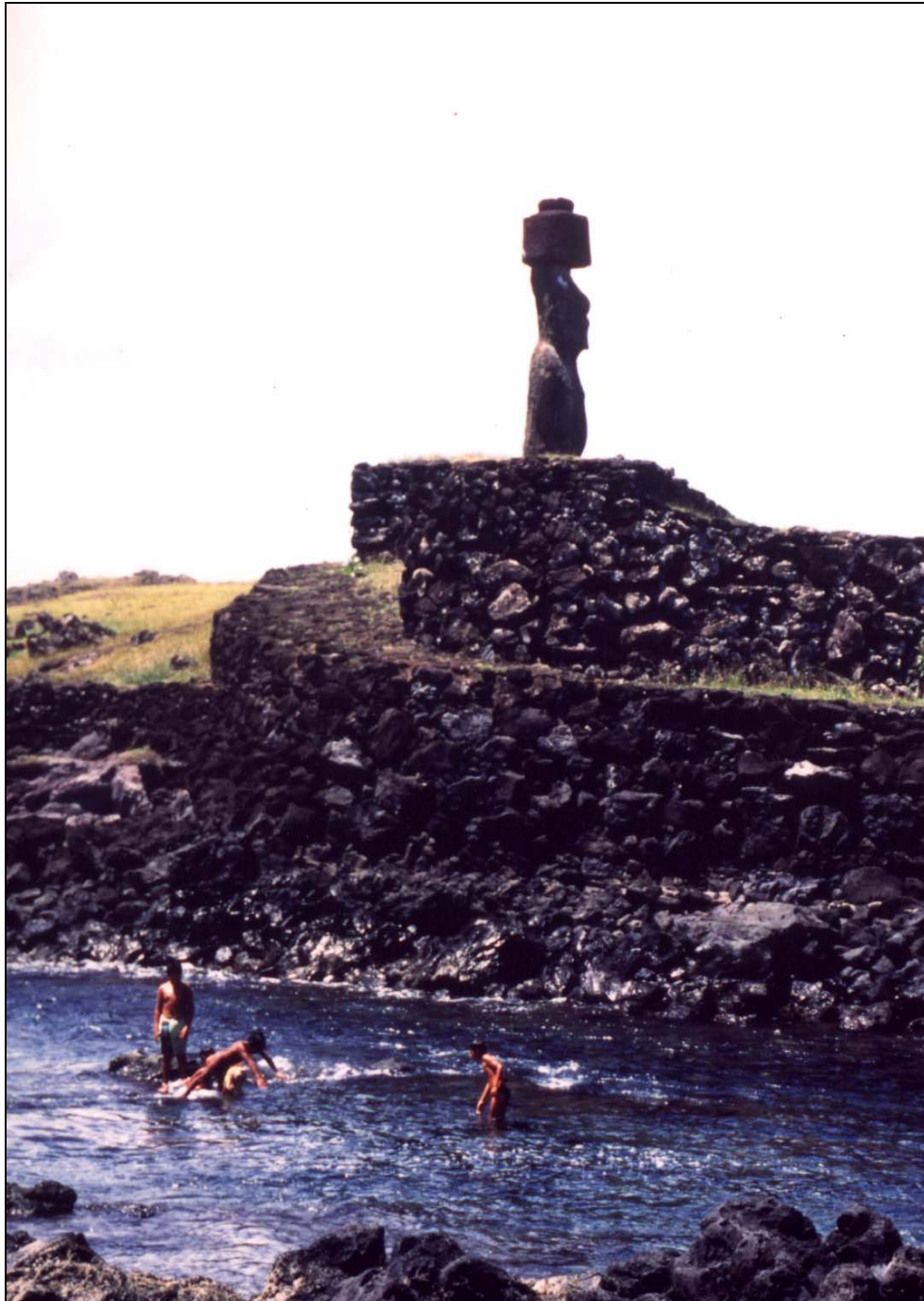
The extraordinary thing about the Paper Mulberry is that it depends on a tiny wasp to fertilise its seed, which means that the first settlers must have either purposely brought a few wasps along for the ride or done so accidentally! Tapa is not woven, the layers of bark are laid across each other and beaten together as with Egyptian papyrus.

My own thoughts centred on the fateful year of 1862 when the island natives were kidnapped by the Peruvian whites as cheap labour. I am ashamed to say, speaking as an Australian, that 'Blackbirding', the Australian slang word for the 19th-century slave trade, represents one of our darkest deeds. The trade was actually made legal by our Government in 1868! Over 45,000 natives were blackbirded and shipped to Queensland before the trade was stopped.

In March of 1821 Margie's great-great-grandfather, Thomas Raine, visited Easter Island as Captain of the Brigantine *Surry*. He was returning to Australia from Chile where he had been sent to collect a cargo of wheat for the starving convicts in New South Wales, England's new penal settlement.

While in Santiago Captain Raine was asked to look out for the crew of a shipwrecked whaler. *Surry's* log records that on arrival at Easter Island: *the islanders swam out to his ship with bags of sweet potatoes and capered on the decks in glee at Raine's gifts of shirts, handkerchiefs and knives.* The interesting thing about this report is that the natives were obviously accustomed to trading with Europeans in 1821, were a happy and healthy people, but also had to swim out to the ship apparently having no canoes!

As I have mentioned, our visit coincided with the Rapa Nui Festival, which consists of a competition of traditional native activities between three groups of islanders. The winning group won the right to crown the Queen on the final night in front of the Moai and a giant bonfire.



Children playing beneath a Moai

As the sun started to drop towards the horizon, Damon and I walked out from the village along the coastline to see our first Moai. In a small bay separating two Ahus golden-skinned children were diving into the crystal-clear waters of the bay. Breakers foamed on the reefs out at sea and lush rank grass covered the foreground of the sacred areas in front of the Ahu.

The first platform was dominated by four majestic statues, three of which still had their heads, but no hats. We stood in awe before the grey-brown giants that wore a speckled patination of silvery lichen.



Four Moai



The Seeing God

We walked on around the bay to a second platform. A 20-foot high giant statue stood here all alone, sporting an enormous red rock hat on his head. His eyes were of brilliant white coral, with black rock pupils. They stared out over our heads, with an enigmatic gaze, inland at the hills.

The sight filled us with disbelief. Here was living proof of man's ingenuity, ability and amazing imagination. The 'Spirit of the Place' was exhilarating. It was here surrounded by revellers that the Queen would be crowned at the end of the Festival beside a giant bonfire.

After a sumptuous meal, washed down with Chilean wine, the three of us wandered up the street to where the Festival was about to begin. Palm fronds had been used to decorate a stage and musicians were tuning up. Happy shouts filled the air as children started to gather in groups. Everyone wore body paint and little else. Jagged white lines and spirals mixed with Birdman images covered their bodies. Dancing girls with white feather tassel skirts flashed brown legs and swayed their hips. Shiny black hair and chicken feathers crowned their smiling happy faces. Chaotic crowds filled the road, yelling and waving to friends in the three competing teams. What an atmosphere!



Rapa Nui maidens

Much to the delight of the children, Damon blew up an unending supply of balloons that he carried in his pocket. One of the fiercest warriors wildly waved one around as he pranced about in the street. Everyone was bursting with excitement and expectation, and the crowd was vibrant with energy.

It had been a long day and the activities were obviously going to last well into the night. As this was only the first night of three, we turned for home, the Milky Way flowing across the sky above. Margie and I felt at home as we could also see the Southern Cross.



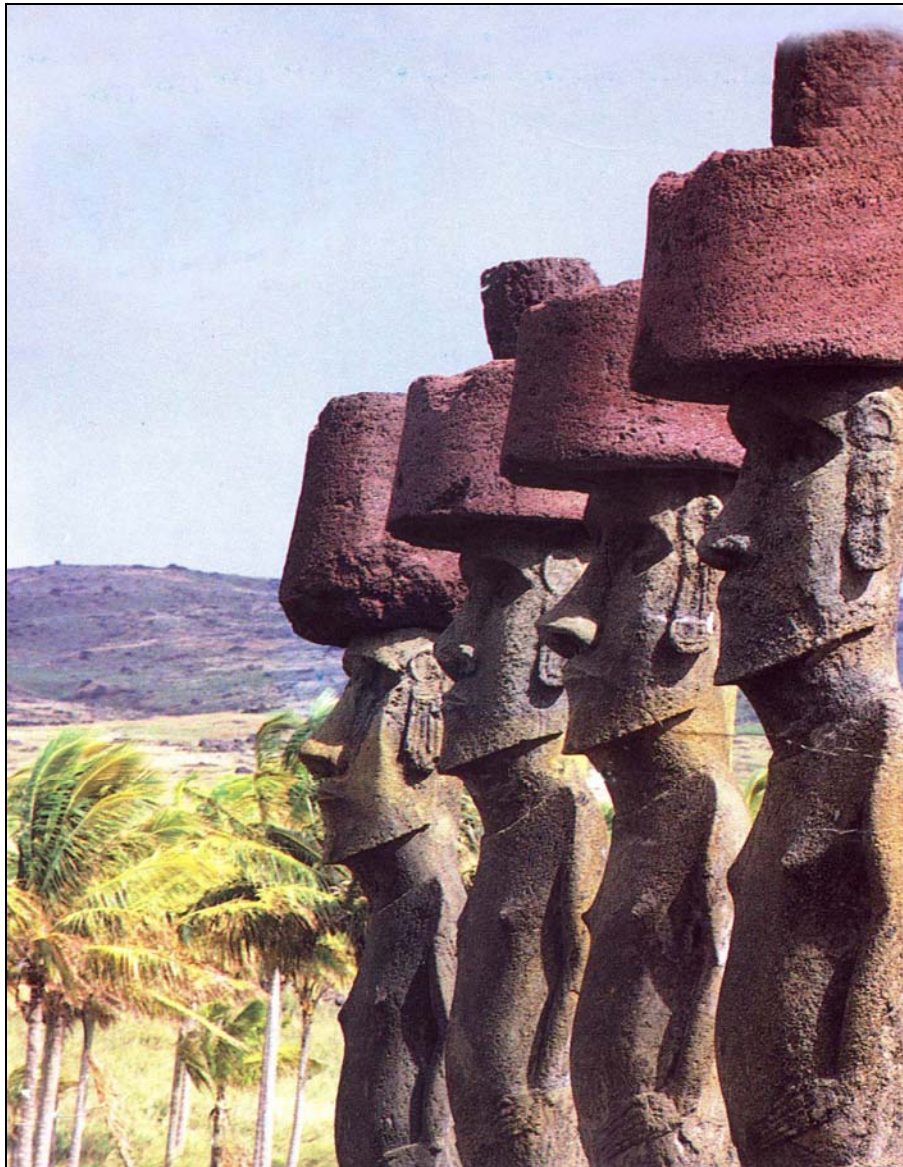
▲
'Navel of the Earth', note the cupules on the rock

Over the next week Georgia took us to all the important sites, including the *Navel of the Earth!* We saw the destroyed Ahus with their fallen statues, which nearly all lie face down on the inland side. We visited the reconstructed Ahus with their impressive re-erected Moai, all standing with their backs to the sea. The largest of the fallen statues is Paro that weighs 93 tons! Its red hat is six foot tall so once the Moai must have stood 40 foot tall.



'Paro', weight 93 tons, height 40 foot

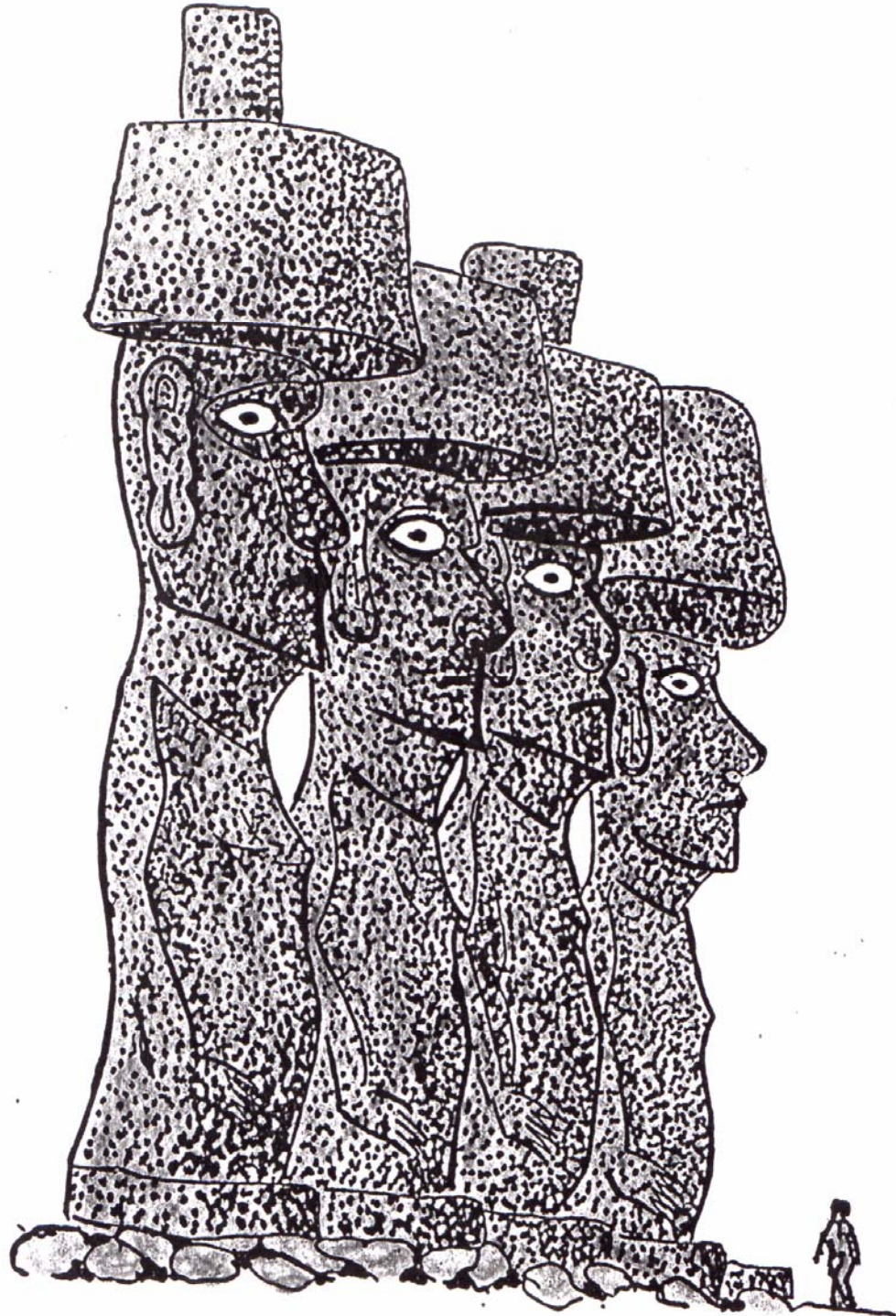
The Ahus were used as mausoleums, as on other Polynesian islands. The dead were exposed on them till the flesh had gone, then the long bones and skulls were collected and put in a cave. The Ahu are poorly constructed and hardly able to support the weight of the sculptures placed on them as the sea-facing walls are made from large rough rocks and the infill is merely loose rubble. Standing large Moai on this type of base must have been like balancing a pencil on a pile of marbles!



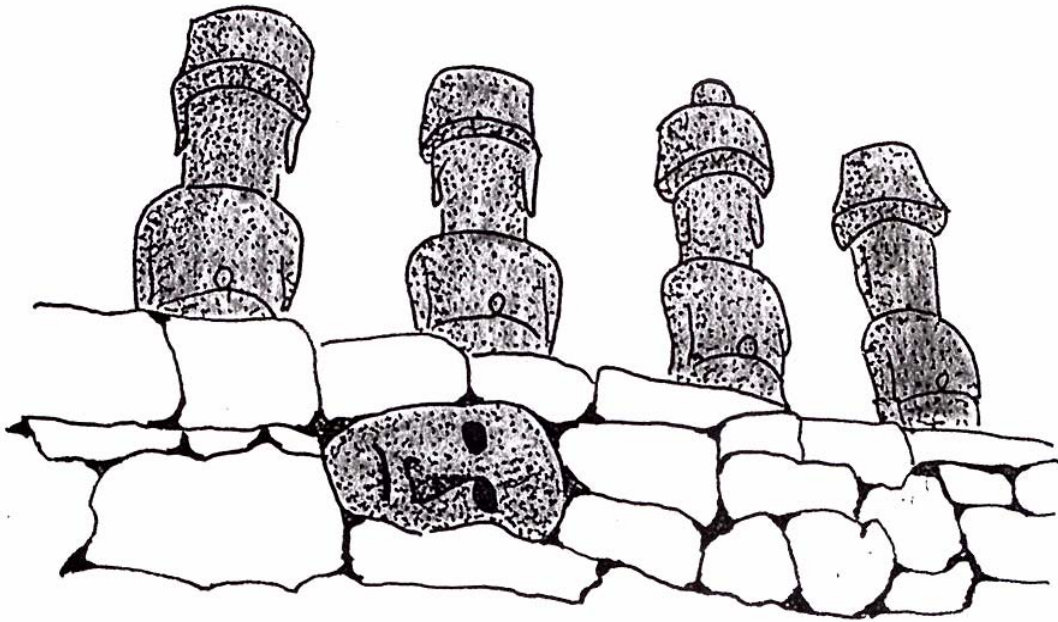
Anakena Ahu

The Anakena platform is in the centre of a lovely palm-tree valley backing onto a beach of pink sand and clear blue water that provide an incredible setting for the four giant statues, four wearing enormous red hats. This is where the first native canoes arrived according to legend so Damon and I couldn't resist swimming in the blue water to share the same view as they had enjoyed. How relieved they must have been to step ashore after being in the canoe for four weeks, especially as they didn't have to fight anyone for

possession of the island, it being deserted. It might have been a dead end but what an artistic legacy those first settlers left for us. A wonder of the world!



Anakena Ahu



The back wall of the Ahu that faces the sea is about 10 foot high and 100 foot long. It has been built using large rough but flattish stones placed on their edges, one of which is the face of an old statue, so it seemed that this Ahu had been rebuilt at some time and the broken sculpture had been used as part of the wall. What had caused the ancient destruction? I wonder if when they put the hat on the neck gave way?



Anakena Ahu

One morning we drove out to watch the sunrise over the Tongariki Ahu. It was a magic moment of mystic light and the re-erected Moai stood black against the golden dawn. In 1934 the Metraux had reported that the statues were lying face down, heads pointing inland, in a neat row along the Ahu, with their bases propped up on the platform.

In 1960 a tsunami wave hit Tongariki Ahu and rolled some of the statues inland, leaving them scattered around in chaos. Now they had been returned to their platform, and placed on cement bases. The tsunami that hit Arica in northern Chile in 1868 and swept the church a mile inland was 60 foot high! The problem with tidal waves is that they are very untidy, so it is hard to believe that they were the cause of toppling all the statues in a neat row as Metraux had seen them in 1934. Maybe one or two Ahus had lost their statues because of earth tremors or tidal waves, but surely not all of them.



'Tongariki Ahu', at dawn

One morning we visited the Virgin's Cave on the northern coast of the most eastern point of the island. It started to rain as we drove up the shoulder of the extinct Poike volcano that we had to cross to get to the site. The track was a tramline that soon turned into two streams and it was not long before the minibus was bogged. While Damon supervised the young men of the party to collect stones to extricate us, Margie and I climbed the slope and found there was a strong smell of sulphur in the air, so the volcano was still venting gas!

We also visited Puna Pau, the volcano quarry where the red hats were mined. Only fifty-eight statues wear hats although in the quarry thirty-three unused hats lie ready and waiting for wearers. The sight filled one with the sense that something catastrophic had happened, causing all work to stop suddenly, an immediate cessation and 'downing of tools' by the labour force.



'Red-Hat' quarry



'Rano Kau' crater

Orongo is the High Place of the Birdman Cult, thought to have begun around 1500. The village is perched on the rim of the crater of Rano Kau, a thousand feet above the sea, and looks across to the island of Moto Nui. Every year a man from each tribe would climb down the cliff, swim to the island, collect a Sooty Tern egg, swim back with it tied in his hair, climb the cliff and present it to his chief. The first chief to receive an egg would become king for the year!



'Moto Nui' or 'Sooty Tern Egg Island'

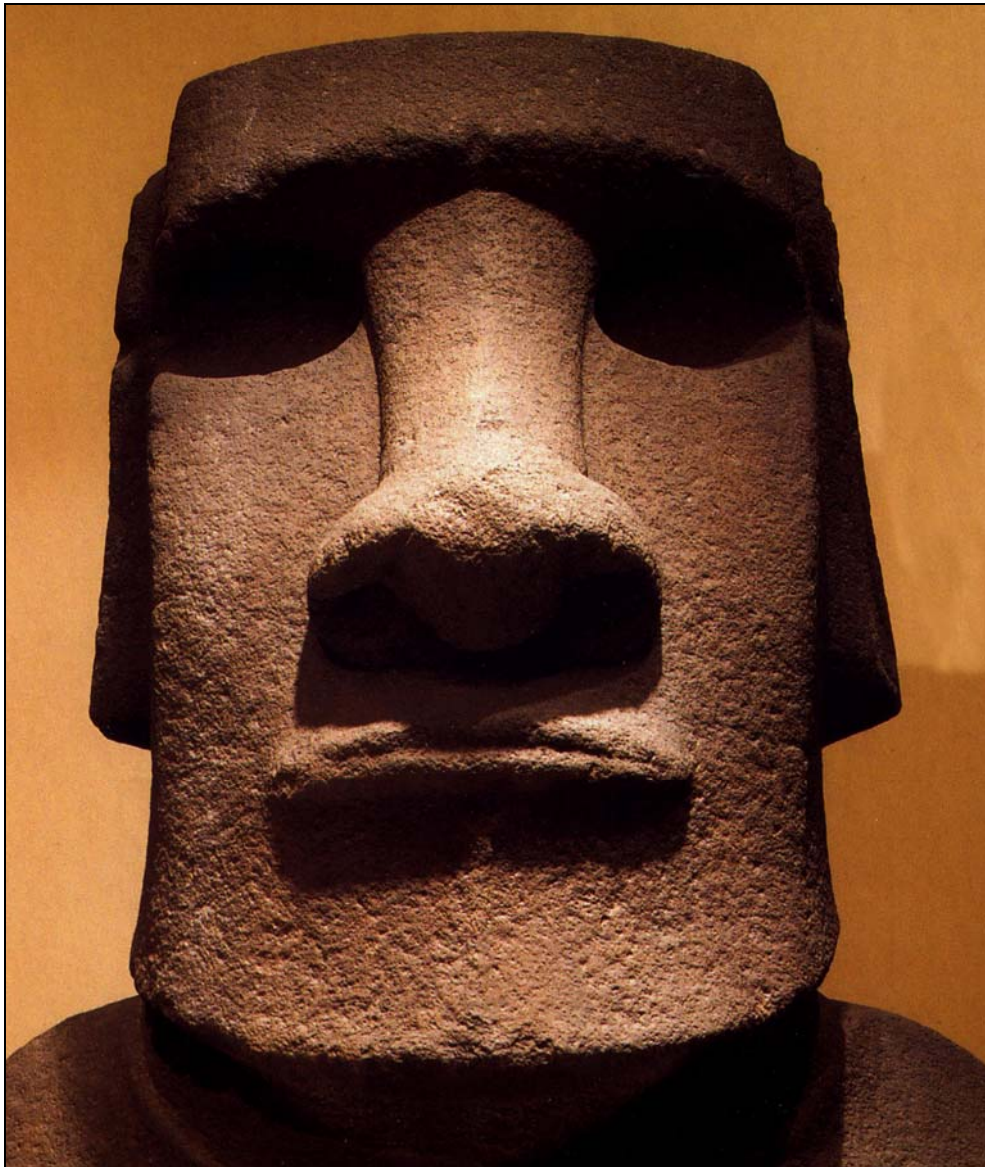


'Birdman' carving

Metraux was told that after the Birdman ceremonies the Priest made a human sacrifice and that the body was then eaten. If the sacrifice was the last swimmer home it would have been a great incentive to be first up the cliff with an egg! He points out that there is no equivalent of the feast of the Birdman Cult in the rest of Polynesia. The drama enacted on the flanks of Rano Kau seems to have evolved on the island and was unique, if Metraux was told the truth. Or had the South American Incas already arrived with their sacrificial practices?

Georgia told us that it was thought that the statue-carving period ended in AD 1500 when the Birdman Cult began. This is the time that the pollen counts of the palms in the crater lakes silt samples disappear, suggesting that all the trees had been cut down, so the evidence supports the date.

This could explain why Captain Cook reported that the Ahus were not being maintained when he visited the island in 1774 and was able to take away the eight-foot high Moai that now resides in the British Museum. How his men got this weight out to his ship and on board is beyond my imagination, although I suppose it was no different to winching a cannon on board!



Captain Cook's stolen 'Moai', British Museum

Cook and La Perouse reported seeing no signs of the natives worshipping the Moai and neither man reported any white eyes in the statues. Right from the first visit by Roggeveen in 1722, none of the sketches done of the Moai by the expedition's artists shows white eyeballs in the statues, and this must mean that the statue cult was long dead. No one knew about the white coral eye inserts until one was found in a cave quite recently.

The period around 1500 seems to have been a critical time in the history of the island. Had the natives cleared all the available land to grow crops, or had they cut down all the palms to use as rollers to move the statues? Or had there been a devastating drought? Or had the island been invaded?

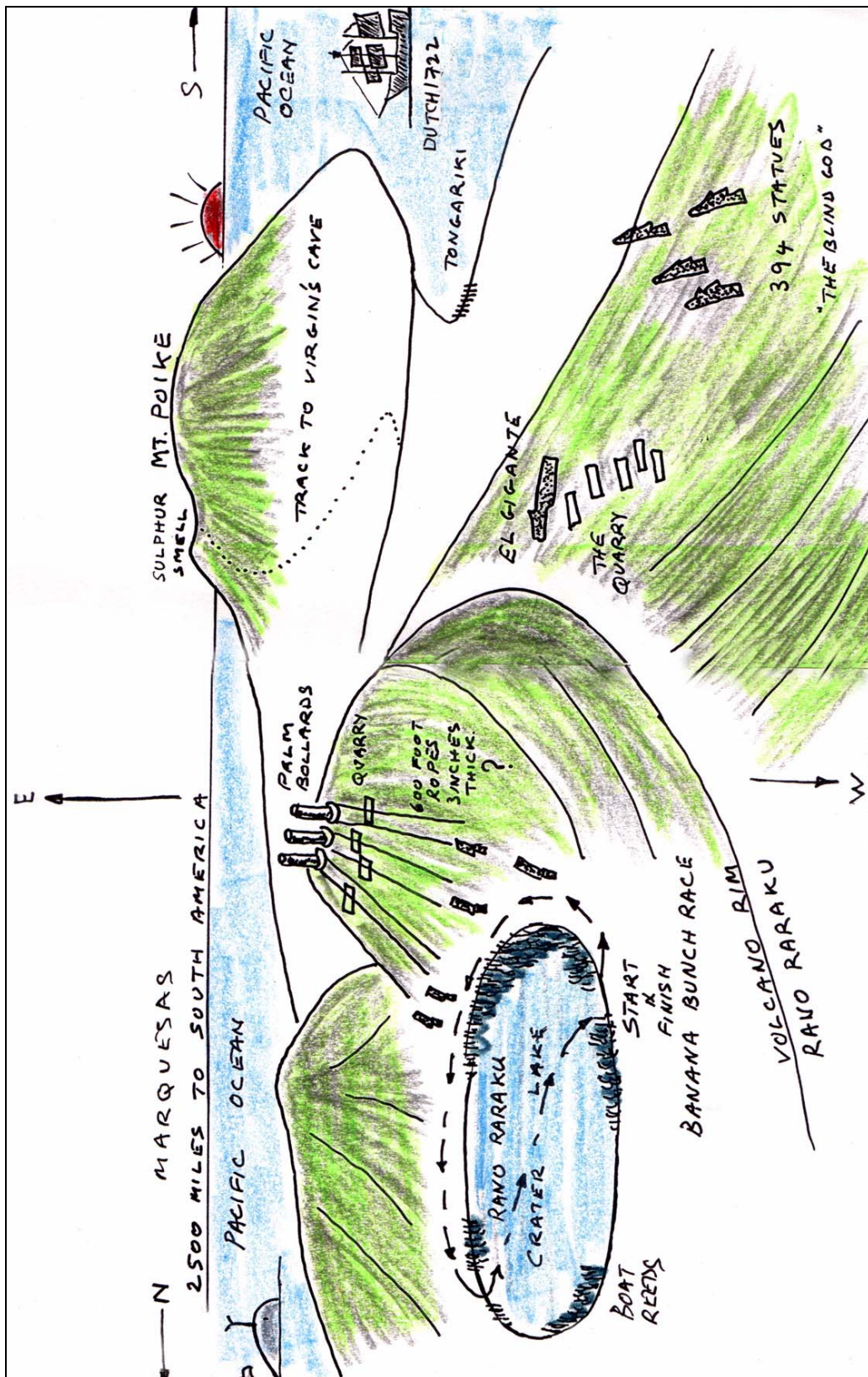
Damon's theory was that El Niño had caused a drastic change in the climate that had denuded the island of trees bringing about a fall in food production bringing famine and a fight for survival among the tribes? Could this explain the drop in population from Roggeveen's estimated 8,000 to Cook's 3,000? The idea of the tribes exploding into a civil war began to look very likely. Metraux writes in his book that the natives were constantly fighting among themselves and that after these battles the winning side would take the wives and children captive, and sometimes eat the vanquished men!

On the way back to the hotel, after watching the dancers for a couple of hours, the thought came to my mind that what they were really doing was 'canoe exercises'. We have been told that it would take up to a month for a canoe to be paddled from the Marquesas to Easter Island. I could well imagine that every half-hour or so the crew would stand up and partake in a group keep-fit programme to the beat of a drum and a rousing chant. It would have been essential for the crew to be able to leap ashore on arrival at the island in case they had to go straight into battle with the inhabitants. Dancing on the spot would have been an invigorating way of getting rid of pins and needles as well as being onboard entertainment, especially if someone fell overboard!

We were told that the younger sons of chiefs were regularly sent off with crews to settle their own islands and no doubt this is why Rapa Nui was colonised in the first place. It was unfortunate that they discovered an island that had no timber suitable for canoe building, the single available tree being the palm that is only good for making light fishing rafts that soon become water logged. The island was a dead end!

In *The Golden Bough* Frazer states that the Polynesians regularly killed two-thirds of their children to control their populations to fit the limited resources of an island. A very sobering thought in the light of the present population explosion of our island-planet!

At last what we had all been waiting for happened and we were in the van bumping along the track towards the statue quarry at Rano Raraku. I couldn't wait to get there and talk to these Giant Moai for the first time. These heads are quite different to everything we had seen up to now. They had tall broad faces, thin tapered heads, long pendulous ears and distinctive ski-jump noses that pointed out to sea like the bow of a ship. They have some of the most elegant faces that have ever been carved on the Earth. It is amazing that this art evolved here on Easter Island, a spot further from the mainland than anywhere else in the world, right in the middle of the Pacific Ocean!



'Rano Raraku' volcano, lake and quarry
 Rotate this page clockwise for Landscape image



Rano Raraku quarry

The van pulled up at the foot of the volcano and we walked up the slope towards the giants. We followed the paths through the lush grass between the sculptures, stunned by the immense sculptures. They are simply magnificent. We were allowed to caress the stone with care, which seemed to enhance the experience. It reminded me of the old days at Stonehenge when we were allowed to hug the stones and sit on the altar.

Margie and I wandered around for an hour trying to pick our favourite 'Blind God'. These Moai are all blind and *facing the sea*, whereas the ones facing inland had eyes! Why? They told us that the sculptures' eyes were not carved until they were transported to the Ahus, but as these sculptures have no resemblance to those on the coast, I wonder if that is true!



Squid petroglyph



The 'Blind' Moai stand sentinel...waiting...for what?

The profiles of the 'Rano Raraku' Moai facing out to sea are completely different to those of 'Anakena Ahu' on the coast facing inland



Sharing 'time and space' with a friend



'Kneeling Moai' found by Thor Heyerdahl

It appears to have a beard!

The Festival moved to Rano Raraku's lake and we went to watch the island's Olympic field events. The main one was a race by the young men around the lake, representing as great a test for them as the swim out to 'Moto Nui' island to retrieve the Sooty Tern egg for the 'Birdman' chief in the olden days.



'Rano Raraku' crater lake

The first half-mile lap was a sprint to the far side, and then a paddle back on a double banana-shaped raft made from the lake reeds. Without a pause the men started off again on the second lap, but this time they carried two heavy bunches of bananas suspended from a stick across their shoulders.



The coach follows load free, yelling encouragement!



'Rapa Nui' Marathon

Damon and I walked around to the far side of the lake to see the men arrive, panting and glistening with sweat, throw down their load of bananas and plunge back again into the water. For their second crossing the men swim. As the winner approached the shore the cheering became tumultuous. At last his feet touched the bottom and he staggered through the reeds to fall across the line into the arms of the Queen. A trial of integrity, rather than strength, like the *Magic Flute*. The lake is about a mile round so we estimated that they had run half a mile, paddled half a mile and swum the same. Not quite the Marathon, but then the runners were not delivering a message of victory over the Persians, only who had won a Queen!

We walked over to the next event, which was making the tapa cloth from a piece of Paper Mulberry tree bark. The wooden maces used by the girls filled the air with the rhythmic echo of the hollow knocking of wood on rock as they pounded the bark into a cream-coloured sheet of paper on a smooth stone. The finished cloth looks exactly like Egyptian papyrus.



Making tapa cloth

Another event was to fashion lethal spears. With little effort the men soon had a point knapped from a block of volcanic glass and bound to a crude shaft, producing a weapon. We had visited a volcano near the village where the ground was strewn with black razor-sharp chips of obsidian.

Damon and I climbed to the highest point on the rim of Rano Raraku volcano. From the top of this steep slope the 20- to 30-ton sculptures were lowered by rope, so carvers could finish them. On the very peak of the rim are three round holes carved into the rock, each five foot deep and over two foot in diameter. Into these the natives put palm trunks to act as bollards and then by running the rope around them they could control the statues as they lowered them down the 45-degree slope. It is calculated that the ropes must have been about 600 foot long and at least three inches thick! Where did all the material come from? If you don't have Mulberry trees you can't make bark rope!



*Damon on top of 'Rano Raraku'
and behind him the smelly sulphuric volcano of 'Poike'*

Ropes were also needed to move the statues to the platforms and it is estimated that 250 foot of rope would have been needed to pull the largest statue. To resist the combined efforts of 50 men, the rope must have been well over an inch thick and weighed over a ton. Half the population must have been employed making ropes!

We sat on the ridge and admired the breathtaking view. To the east was the volcano of Poike, to the west the volcano of Rano Kau and behind them the largest volcano, Terevaka, that had joined the other two together to form the island about 300,000 years ago. The whole of the southern plain stretched below us, covered in an emerald-green blanket of lush grass, and beyond that lay the Pacific Ocean, the curvature of the earth bending the horizon. It brought to mind lines from *Paradise Lost* by Milton:

*In his Hand, he took the golden compasses,
Prepar'd in God's Eternal store,
To circumscribe this Universe, and all created things:
One foot he centre'd and the other turn'd
Round through the vast profunditie obscure,
And said, thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,
This be thy just circumference, O World.*

How did the natives lift a six-foot high, eight-foot across, eleven-ton stone hat up on to the head of a Moai? How did they transport such a weight? This is the question most frequently asked about the island and it is yet to be answered. The 93-ton colossus *Paro* is four miles from the quarry. Some statues are 15 miles from the quarry!



Three massive holes for tree bollards

The next day we returned to the outer flanks of Rano Raraku, drawn like iron filings to a magnet. We gazed upon the faces of the statues that stand sentinel around the base of the volcano as they face out towards an ocean they will never see. These blind giants fill one with wonderment. They are majestic. The people might have been savages, but they were certainly very accomplished artists.

Georgia led us up the steep slope towards *El Gigante*, the largest statue ever carved. It is 65 foot long and estimated to weigh 270 tons. The sculptors must have realised that they would never be able to move this great weight. Was it intended to be the sleeping 'Mother Goddess' of the Easter Island? The sculpture is still fixed by its keel to the bedrock at the top of Rano Raraku.



'El Gigante', 65 foot long and weighing 270 tons

El Gigante is not the only unfinished sculpture in the quarry. We found a huge Moai nearly completed, but for a strange lump on his chin, as though it was intended to be a beard similar to the *Kneeling Moai* found by Thor Heyerdahl. Perhaps it was left to protect the chin while being transported.



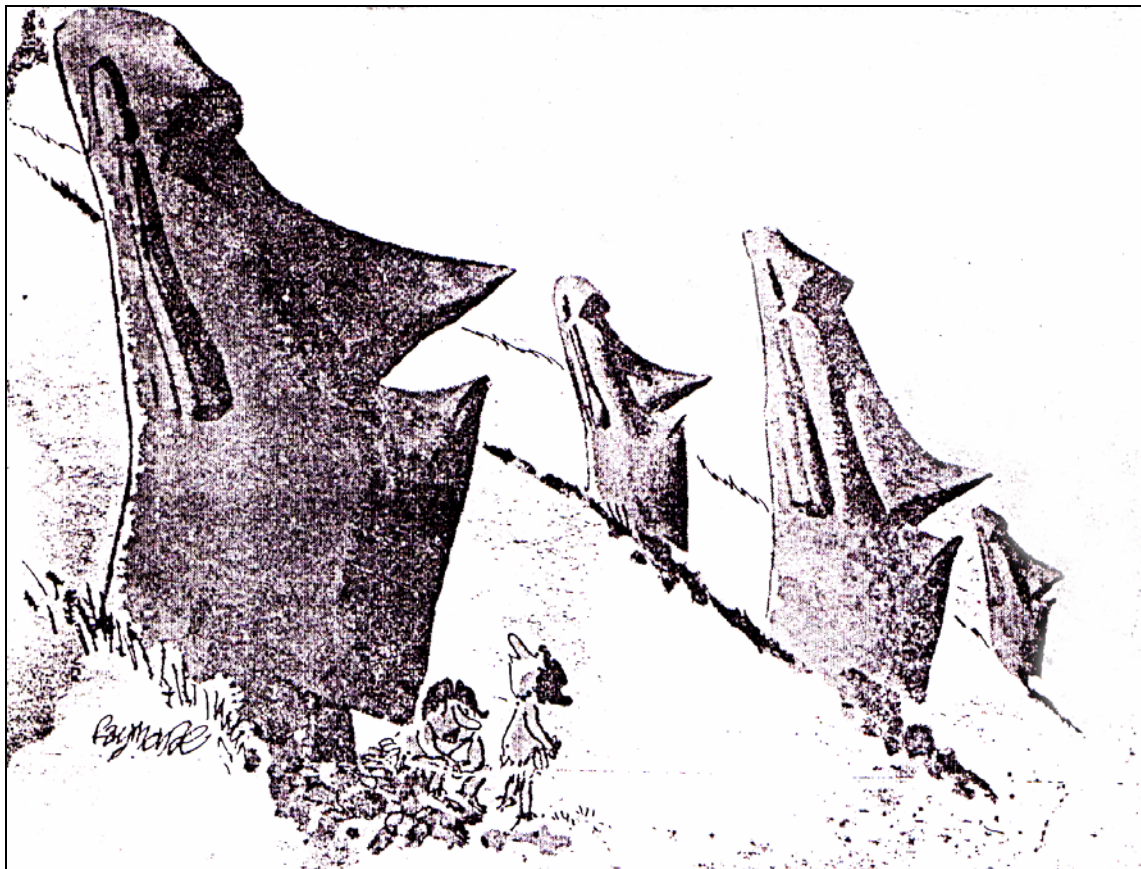
Why the lump on the chin? Another beard?



Still asleep in a pumice cliff



*Leaving Rano Raraku for the last time
The bollard holes are on the top of the peak and the lake on the far side*



*"Business is terrible. Nobody wants the big ones any more"
The sculptor's lament!*



'Blind Gods' also lament

Chronology of Easter Island AD

- 110–450 Settlers arrive, possibly from Marquesas Islands?
- 1500 Supposed end of statue carving? Beginning of Birdman Cult?
- 1500 Pollen counts show complete deforestation of the island.
- 1722 Easter island discovered by the Dutch navigator Roggeveen. No eyes in the statues on Ahus. Population 8,000 natives.
- 1774 Captain James Cook stops at Easter Island and estimates population of the island to be a maximum of 3,000 natives. He reports that most of the statues are standing, including the ones that he thought were boundary markers. He reports no trees or shrubs over ten feet high.
- 1786 La Perouse reports statues standing.
- 1821 Thomas Raine, Captain of *Surry* from Australia but doesn't land. The islanders swim out to his ship having no canoes.
- 1837 **Admiral Dupetit-Thouars reports Hanga Roa statues erect**
- 1862 **1,000 Easter Islanders are kidnapped, including King Kamakoi, his son, Maurata, and the Priests, and are taken to Peru to work in the nitrate mines on the islands off Pisco. The entire social order of the island collapses.**
- 1864 **27 years after 1837 Argentinean Father Eyraud reports no sculptures are standing.**
- 1865 Fifteen islanders return from Peru with smallpox.
- 1866 Father Eyraud returns with two helpers. Dies 1868.
- 1868 Bishop of Tahiti orders 300 natives evacuated to Tahiti, but the French farmer, Bornier, retains 111 natives against their will.
- 1914 Katherine Routledge arrives on the island, to begin the first scientific exploration of the Easter Island Culture.
- 1934 Alfred Metraux visits island with Franco-Belgian expedition, population grown to 450, the descendants of Bornier's 111.