Ngātokimatawhaorua

The biography of a waka

JEFF EVANS

THE POWER OF MANA WAKA TO INSPIRE A PEOPLE

This is the biography of the mighty ceremonial waka taua Ngātokimatawhaorua that rests on the Treaty Grounds at Waitangi.

The inspiration for its construction came from Te Puea Hērangi. In the late 1930s the Waikato leader held a dream to build seven waka taua for the 1940 centennial commemorations at Waitangi. By 1937 two waka had been commissioned. Carved in Northland under the guidance of Pita Heperi (Te Tai Tokerau) and Piri Poutapu (Waikato), Ngātokimatawhaorua was one of them.

But it was to be many decades before the true power of the waka to inspire a people was realised. In 1974 Ngātokimatawhaorua was refurbished by the late Sir Heke-nuku-mai-nga-iwi ‘Hec’ Busby for relaunching during Waitangi Day ceremonies. It was then that Te Puea’s dream turned into reality. By 1990, The Year of the Waka, 22 waka and their 2000 crew gathered at Waitangi. Ngātokimatawhaorua and others became symbols of Maori unity and pride and an important part of the renaissance of the traditions of carving and voyaging around Aotearoa and beyond.

Ngātokimatawhaorua is the story of this great canoe, the longest to be built in modern times, and those who carved and crewed it over the last 80 years.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JEFF EVANS is a writer and photographer based in Auckland. He has written several books relating to waka, including Ngā Waka o Neherā, Polynesian Navigation and the Discovery of New Zealand and Waka Taua: The Māori War Canoe. Between them, these books recall Māori migration traditions, describe navigation skills used by Māori to voyage between the islands in the central Pacific and New Zealand, and introduce the reader to waka taua. His most recent books are a biography of Hec Busby, Heke-nuku-mai-nga-iwi Busby: Not Here by Chance (Huia), and Reawakened: traditional navigators of Te Moana Nui a Kiwa (Massey University Press 2021).

SALES POINTS

- Evocatively written story of an important national taonga
- Vital reading for those who want to understand the power and significance of waka to unite and inspire
- Interviews with the key people involved with the waka from its revival in the 1970s up to today