



## **My Drift**

**Title: Easter Island**

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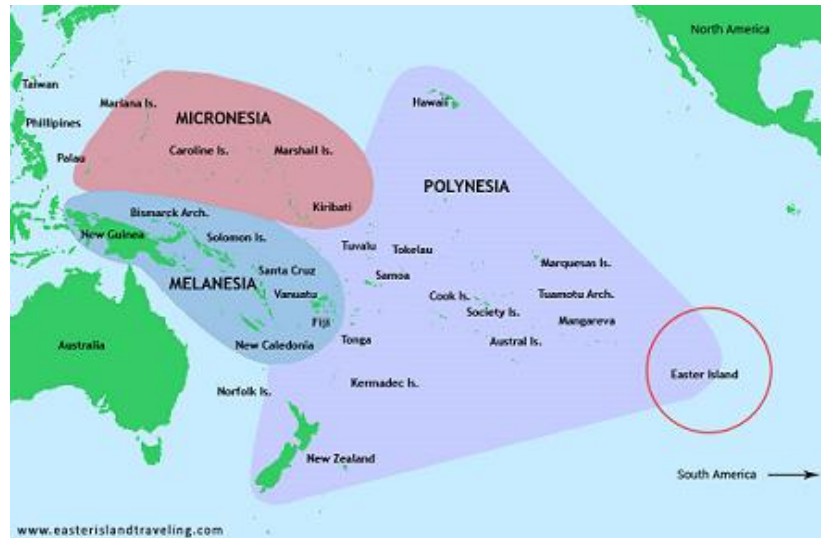
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**Don't you find all those large stone statues on Easter Island fascinating? Did you know that there are about 900 of these (officially called Moai statues) on this small island out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean? These massive megaliths are what this island is famous for. The moais were built in approximately 1100 - 1650 AD by the natives of this island also known by its Polynesian name Rapa Nui.**



**Easter Island is one of the most remote inhabited islands in the world. It is a territory of Chile which is about 2,300 miles away.**



**Easter Island is located at the eastern end of the Polynesia triangle.**



**Forming a triangle 14 miles long by 7 miles wide, Easter Island (population about 5,000) has an area of 63 square miles; its highest point is Mount Terevaka at 1,969 feet above sea level. Hanga Roa is the main town (population 3,300), harbor and seat of Easter Island. It is located in the lowlands between the extinct volcanoes of Terevaka and Rano Kau.**

**Let's learn more about those strange looking statues. Although often identified as "Easter Island heads", the statues have torsos, most of them ending at the top of the thighs; a small number are complete figures that kneel on bent knees with their hands over their stomachs. Some upright moai have become buried up to their necks by shifting soils.**

**Almost all moai were carved from compressed, easily worked solidified volcanic ash or tuff, found at a single site on the side of the extinct volcano Rano Raraku. The volcanic crater site is where 397 moai statues were left behind when production of the idols suddenly and inexplicably ceased.**



**Rano Raraku Volcano Crater and Quarry**

**On average, they stand 13 feet high and weigh 14 tons, human heads-on-torsos carved in the male form from rough hardened volcanic ash. The islanders call them "moai," and they have puzzled ethnographers, archaeologists, and visitors to the island since the first European explorers arrived here in 1722. In their isolation, why did the early Easter Islanders undertake this colossal statue-building effort? Unfortunately, there is no written record (and the oral history is scant) to help tell the story of this remote land, its people, and the significance of the nearly 900 giant moai that punctuate Easter Island's barren landscape**

**The moai and ceremonial sites are along the coast, with a concentration on Easter Island's southeast coast. Here, the moai are more 'standardized' in design, and are believed to have been carved, transported, and erected between 1400 and 1600 AD. They stand with their backs to the sea and are believed by most archaeologists to represent the spirits of ancestors, chiefs, or other high-ranking males who held important positions in the history of Easter Island, or Rapa Nui, the name given by the indigenous people to their island.**

**Moai Archaeologist Jo Anne Van Tilburg, who has studied the moai for many years, believes the statues may have been created in the image of various paramount chiefs. They were not individualized portrait sculptures, but standardized representations of powerful individuals. The moai may also hold a sacred role in the life of the Rapa Nui, acting as ceremonial conduits for communication with the gods. According to Van Tilburg, their physical**

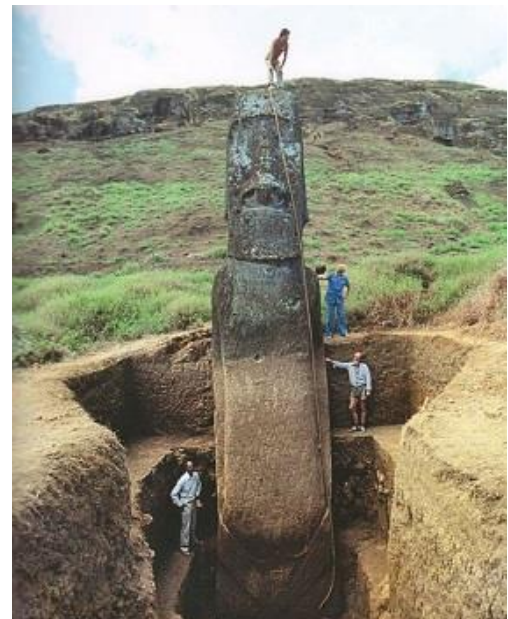


**position between earth and sky puts them on both secular and sacred ground; secular in their representation of chief and their ability to physically prop up the sky, and sacred in their proximity to the heavenly gods. Van Tilburg concludes, "The moai thus mediates between sky and earth, people and chiefs, and chiefs and Gods."**



**The native islanders who carved them used only stone hand chisels, mainly basalt toki, which lie in place all over the quarry. The stone chisels were sharpened by chipping off a new edge when dulled. While sculpting was going on, the volcanic stone was splashed with water to soften it. While many teams worked on different statues at the same time, a single moai took a team of five or six men approximately a year to complete.**

**Only a quarter of the statues were installed in their intended spots. Nearly half remained in the quarry at Rano Raraku, and the rest sat elsewhere, presumably on their way to intended locations. The largest moai raised on a platform is known as "Paro". It weighs 82 tons and is 32 feet 5 inches tall. Several other statues of similar weight were transported to ahu on the north and south coasts.**



**Paro**

Possible means by which the statues were moved include employment of a miro manga erua, a Y-shaped sledge with cross pieces, pulled with ropes made from the tough bark of the Hau tree and tied around the statue's neck. Anywhere from 180 to 250 men were required for pulling, depending on the size of the moai. Some 50 of the statues were re-erected in modern times. One of the first was on Ahu Ature Huke in Anakena beach in 1956. It was raised using traditional methods during a Heyerdahl expedition.



**Miro Manga Erua Sledge**

Another method that might have been used to transport the moai would be to attach ropes to the statue and rock it, tugging it forward as it rocked. This would fit the legend of the Moai 'walking' to their final locations. This might have been managed by as few as 15 people. The heads of the moai in the quarry are sloped forward, whereas the ones moved to final locations are not. This would serve to provide a better center of gravity for transport. The statues found along the transport roads have wider bases than statues installed on ahu. The fractures along the bases of the statues happened in transport and could have arisen from rocking the statue back and forth and placing great pressures on the edges.



### **Brief History**

In the prevailing account of the island's past, the native inhabitants consisted of a small group of Polynesian settlers who arrived by canoe in around 800 AD. These people who refer to themselves as the Rapanui and to the island as Rapa Nui were once had a large and thriving society. The island's native population probably exceeded 15,000 at its peak.



When they arrived, the place was covered with trees — as many as 16 million of them, some towering 100 feet high. But they doomed themselves by degrading their environment. When Captain James Cook visited there in 1774, his crew counted roughly 700 islanders living marginal lives, their canoes reduced to patched fragments of driftwood.

There are two versions of how this came about:

**Version 1:** These first Polynesian settlers were farmers, practicing slash-and-burn agriculture, so they burned down woods, opened spaces, and began to multiply. Pretty soon the island had too many people, too few trees, and then, in only a few generations, no trees at all. Around 1200 AD, their growing numbers and an obsession with building moai led to increased pressure on the environment. By the end of the 17th century, the Rapanui had deforested the island, triggering war, famine and cultural collapse.

The population dropped even further after the Europeans' arrival, as infighting between social groups led to crops and housing being burnt to the ground, resulting in famine and homelessness. In addition, raids by Peruvian slave traders, the introduction of European diseases and emigration meant that by 1877, only 111 people remained on the island.



OK, that's the story we all know, the Collapse theory. This new one is very different.

**Version 2:** The trees did die, no question. But instead of fire and farming, it was rats that destroyed the trees. Polynesian rats stowed away on those canoes came to the island with no enemies and lots of palm roots to eat, they went on a binge, eating and destroying tree after tree, and multiplying at a furious rate. As the trees went, so did 20 other forest plants, six land birds and several sea birds. So, there was definitely less choices in food, a much narrower diet, and yet people continued to live on Easter Island, and food, it seems, was not their big problem.

Rat meat, anybody? Archeologists examined ancient garbage heaps on Easter Island looking for discarded bones and found that 60 percent of the bones came from rats.





**So, they'd found a meat substitute. What's more, though the island hadn't much water and its soil wasn't rich, the islanders took stones, broke them into bits, and scattered them onto open fields creating an uneven surface. When wind blew in off the sea, the bumpy rocks produced more turbulent airflow, releasing mineral nutrients in the rock which gave the soil just enough of a nutrient boost to support basic vegetables. One tenth of the island had these scattered rock gardens.**



**When Dutch explorer, Jacob Roggevin, happened by in 1722, he wrote that islanders didn't ask for food. They wanted European hats instead. And, of course, starving folks typically don't have the time or energy to carve and shove 70-ton statues around their island.**

**Native families on Easter Island didn't fall apart. It's true, the island became desolate, emptier. The ecosystem was severely compromised. And yet Easter Islanders didn't disappear. They adjusted. They had no lumber to build canoes to go deep-sea fishing. They had fewer birds to hunt. They didn't have coconuts. But they kept going on rat meat and small helpings of vegetables. They made do.**

**One niggling question: If everybody was eating enough, why did the population decline? Probably by the various transmitted diseases introduced by Europeans when they came visiting.**

**So, what is the true version? Nobody knows for sure, but I think a little of both versions are what happened.**



### **How did Easter Island get its name?**

**On Easter Sunday 1722, Dutch admiral Jacob Roggeveen became the first European to land on this isolated Polynesian island and named it Paasch-Eyland – Dutch for ‘Easter Island’ – in tribute. As we learned earlier, the island is known by the name Rapa Nui to the islands’ inhabitants.**

### **Easter Island today**



**Hanga Roa is the main town on Easter Island**

### **Do they have hotels on Easter Island?**

**Yes, there are 4 or 5 places you can stay. Here is the newest:**



**Hangaroa Eco Village and Spa is Easter island's newest hotel, set dramatically on top of cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It lies five minutes from Hanga Roa. Rooms are chic and spacious, plus there are two restaurants and a luxury spa. This is an ideal place to escape and relax. It costs about \$300 a night.**

### **How can you travel to Easter Island?**

The only way to get to Easter Island is by plane, as it doesn't have any harbors that will accommodate ships or large boats. The shortest journey is from the Santiago airport in Chile, which takes five hours. It's also possible to fly over in seven hours from Tahiti.



Mataveri International Airport or Isla de Pascua Airport is located in Hanga Roa. As the most remote airport in the world, it is 2,336 miles from Santiago, Chile which has scheduled flights to it on the Chilean carrier LATAM Chile.

### **How does Easter Island get fresh water?**

Easter Island is a dry volcanic island with no rivers and little surface water, other than two crater lakes, and porous soil that doesn't hold much groundwater.

Native Easter Island people drank directly from the ocean at the seeps where fresh groundwater flows into the ocean. The island's current inhabitants still pump water directly from these freshwater spots in the sea and use it to water crops and provide water for their livestock.

The tap water on Easter Island is drinkable and completely safe. It comes from freshwater reservoirs located under the porous volcanic rocks. However, the absence of a sewage system is threatening the cleanliness of the island's underground water sources. But it would be hard to install one without damaging archaeological sites.

### **How does Easter Island deal with trash?**

Easter Island has a major trash problem. It's near what's known as a "trash vortex" in the middle of the South Pacific and floating waste is constantly washing ashore. Local officials estimate the growing population (mostly tourists) are producing more than 20 tons of trash per day. What can be done? Not much except for limiting number of tourists.



**Ocean Trash**



**Trash is packaged and sent to Chile**

It seems that Easter Island has always had and always will have more than its share of problems. But you have to admit that it is a fascinating place!



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