Maori traditions integral part of celebrations

Every year on Feb. 6, New Zealanders celebrate Waitangi Day, a public holiday to commemorate the signing of New Zealand’s founding document — the Treaty of Waitangi — between the British Crown and the Maori in 1840. The national holiday was first declared in 1875, since then, it has grown in significance in New Zealand through the Maori community and has fostered better understanding of the treaty’s ramifications. Official celebrations are held at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds in the Bay of Islands, Northland, but many other events are held throughout the country.

History of Maori

Maori have lived in New Zealand since approximately AD 1350. According to the Maori, the first explorer to reach New Zealand was the legendary figure Kupe. Using the stars and ocean currents as his navigational guides, he is said to have ventured across the Pacific on his waka hourua (voyaging canoe) from his ancestral Polynesian homeland of Hawaiki. It is thought that Kupe made landfall at the Hokianga Harbour in Northland, around 1,000 years ago. More waka hourua followed Kupe over the next few hundred years, landing at various parts of New Zealand. Meanwhile, the first European to catch sight of New Zealand was Dutch explorer Abel Tasman. He was on an expedition to discover a great southern continent “Great South Land” that was believed to be rich in minerals. In 1642, while searching for this continent, Tasman sighted a “large high-lying land” off the west coast of the South Island.

Prior to 1840, it was mainly whalers, sealers and missionaries who came to New Zealand. These settlers had considerable contact with Maori, especially in coastal zones. The Maori and Europeans traded extensively, while some Europeans lived among the Maori.

Waitangi activities

Each February, the queenCity of Auckland, one of the world’s largest Maori ceremo-
nial sites, hosts a festival on the day that includes kapa haka, which literally means “to acknowledge, promote and celebrate.” The day’s activities center on learning about Maori cultural activities, including kapa haka, crafts, Maori medicines, local legends and history.

Elsewhere, Waitangi Day celebrations offer a wide variety of activities from major sporting events to rodeos and a folk music festival. The article is an edited excerpt from the official website of Tourism New Zealand.

For more information, visit http://media.newzealand.com/en

Congratulations on the 180th Anniversary of Waitangi Day
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