



Geographers and Scientists

Examine the geography and science of Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

17. Ancestral stone statues ('moai')

Requirements: pen and paper

Working style: individually, with class discussion at end

Curriculum: Maths; History

Time: 20 minutes

Rapa Nui is famous for its large stone statues called 'moai' in Rapanui language. These are mostly carved from soft stone found in one volcanic crater on the Island, Rano Raraku.

These statues represent the living faces of important ancestors and when new, they gazed inland across their family lands, with their backs to the sea.

Over 900 statues were transported from the volcano to various sites across the Island. The tallest moai erected is called Paro and is almost 10m high and weighed 82 tons (about 75,000 kg). Work out how many people with an average weight of 80kg would weigh the same as Paro.



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There are various theories about how these statues were moved from their place of manufacture to their permanent site. One method may have been to 'walk' them upright by moving them side-to-side in a rocking motion using ropes and a team of about 20 people. There is no evidence of wheels or large animals being available on the Island to assist.

This 'walking' process would have taken a fair amount of time, especially for moving very large moai. Experiments using the above technique suggest a moai could have been moved 2.5 metres every minute. How many minutes would it take to move a moai 2500 metres (2.5 kilometres)? Now convert that into hours and then number of days.

Do you think this is a small amount or a lot of effort? What do you think this says about how important these moai were to Rapanui society?