

A mystery in the South Pacific Ocean

José Tuki is a 30-year-old artist from Easter Island in the South Pacific Ocean. He's sitting on Anakena beach and he's looking at enormous statues of people – the *moai*. The statues are from four feet tall to 33 feet tall. Some of them weigh more than 80 tons. They are hundreds of years old. The *moai* are made of a type of stone that doesn't exist on Anakena beach. People made the statues in a different place and then they moved them 11 miles to the beach. 'How did they do it?' Tuki asks.

The first Polynesians arrived at Rapa Nui (Easter Island) by canoe hundreds of years ago. This small island is 2,150 miles west of South America. These days, 12 flights arrive every week from Chile, Peru and Tahiti. In 2011, 50,000 tourists flew to Easter Island. All the tourists go to see the *moai*.

There are different ideas about how the Rapa Nui people moved the *moai*. Some historians think the ancestors used ropes and wood and pulled the statues along the ground. The scientist and writer Jared Diamond thinks that many people moved the statues. He also thinks that the people cut down the trees on the island. They needed the wood to move the statues. They also needed a lot of space without trees to grow food. Because they cut down the trees, there was an environmental disaster on the island.

But archaeologists Terry Hunt of the University of Hawaii and Carl Lipo of California State University Long Beach don't agree with Jared Diamond. They say that it was possible to move the statues with a small number of people and a system of ropes. Last year, National Geographic Expeditions Council paid for an experiment to test Hunt and Lipo's idea.

Easter Islander José Tuki says, 'I want to know the truth, but maybe the island doesn't tell all its answers'. He thinks that the *moai* are very special and powerful and maybe it's not a good idea to know the truth.

Keywords:

disaster (n) something very bad that happens and which causes a lot of damage

enormous (adj) something that is enormous is extremely large in size or amount

ground (n) the ground is the surface of the earth

grow (v) if you grow a particular type of plant, you put seeds or young plants in the ground and look after them as they develop

rope (n) a rope is a thick cord or wire that is used for jobs such as pulling cars or tying things together

stone (n) a hard solid substance found in the ground and often used for building houses

special (adj) different from normal and better or more important than other people or things

system (n) a set of equipment or parts which are used for doing something

truth (n) the truth about something is all the facts about it, rather than things that are invented or imagined

wood (n) wood is the material which forms the parts of a tree