

# Bobby Mercier returns from New Zealand

**Tribal ambassador struck by similarities between Grand Ronde, Māori culture**

By Ron Karten

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During almost two weeks in New Zealand among the Māori, Tribal member and Language and Cultural Specialist Bobby Mercier participated as an honored guest in the nation's Waitangi Day celebrations, held each year on Feb. 6.

The celebrations honor an 1840 treaty with the Māoris marking the founding of the New Zealand government.

Mercier was wowed by the Māoris' directness in confronting New Zealand's prime minister.

"All day, there was political stuff going on," Mercier says. "Protesters were saying, 'The government can't tell us how to live.'"

Māori leaders spoke directly with New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, and told her where treaty rights were not being honored, Mercier recalls.

"It was like if President Obama came out to Champoe Park to talk about our treaties," he says.

The annual Waitangi Day is held just inland from the coast where Māori wakas (canoes) are believed to have first landed in New Zealand, and just down the hill from where the original treaty was signed inside a great meeting house.

Although virtually all aboriginals in New Zealand are Māoris, each town has its own band and its own whare nui (longhouse, or meeting house), each very like the one being finished in Grand Ronde, Mercier says.

In fact, Mercier says that he was continually amazed by the similarities between Grand Ronde and Māori Tribal life.

"Just looking at the carvings," he says. "They're so similar to ours. The carving tools they used and the way they used them. And the jade blades they used for carving are identical to ours."

"The jade is what they have, and it's what we traded for. They have quite a bit of it there, and now I have quite the hookup."

"Their paddle-style is like ours. And how they carved whale bones."

On design, he adds, "We draw the physical form; they draw the spiritual form," but in the end, the drawing style looks much the same. Same concept, just the design is different.

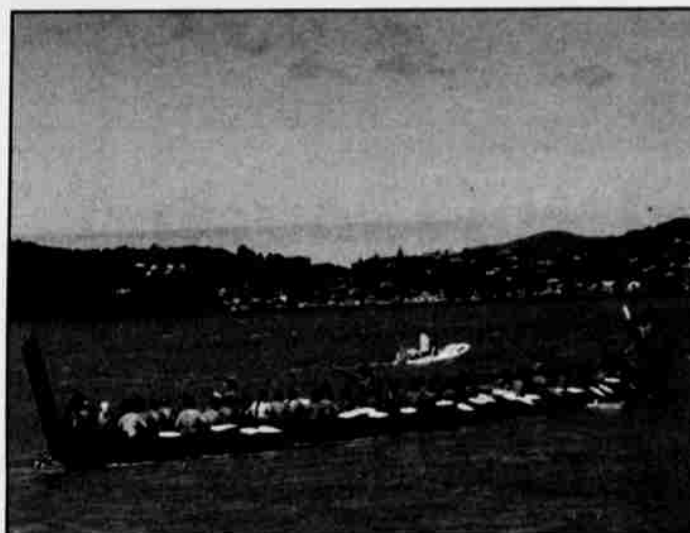
The biggest thrill though was the meeting of the minds. He felt right at home wherever he went.

His travels took him to One Tree Hill overlooking the city of Auckland, where his travels in New Zealand began. Under the tutelage of an Auckland Museum curator, author of a book on wakas, Mercier along with Suquamish Tribal members Bennie and Nic Armstrong,



**Tribal member and Language and Cultural Specialist Bobby Mercier, middle, visited the Auckland Museum during his trip to New Zealand last month.**

**At right, Tribal member and Language and Cultural Specialist Bobby Mercier is among the group that went out in the big waka, Ngátokimatawhaorua, nicknamed Natuki, during Waitangi Day celebrations in New Zealand. Mercier participated as an honored guest in the celebrations held each year.**



## Māori Dessert Recipe

### Ambrosia Ingredients

500 mls cream to be whipped or thickened cream  
1 liter of berry yogurt  
Any seasonal fruit strawberries, seedless grapes, plums  
1 bag marshmallows  
1 cup chocolate chips/bits  
½ cup of coconut (optional)

### Method

In a large bowl whip the cream until thick, add the yogurt and fruit; if using plums remove the stones and break up a little/cut fruit into small bite size pieces then add the marshmallows/chocolate chips/coconut.

Fold in all the ingredients together and chill for a couple of hours. Serve either in the bowl or you can spoon it into wine or martini glasses and top with grated dark chocolate and enjoy.

from Washington state, took two tours of the museum.

Day Two took them to sacred sites in and around Auckland, where they talked to carvers and Tribal leaders.

Day Three included a five-hour ride down to Waitangi where Tamahou Temara and Joe Harawira, leaders of the Toi Māori Art Museum, picked them up for the drive. During the drive, they met up with Māori leader Francis Memaku and his family, with wakas hitched to their cars. Together, they made the rest of the ride down to Waitangi and the celebrations.

"We met people all day long," Mercier says, "all the head people. And we gave interviews to television crews" that he remembers as "real nice guys."

In the evening they ate with Elders. Mercier called the lamb and pig dishes "a little bit different, cooked in different ways with different spices." He brought back recipes for some of the desserts.

For three nights, they stayed in the small city of Waitangi that sits by a big bay of warm, clear blue water.

On the first day in Waitangi, they went out in the big waka, Ngátokimatawhaorua, nicknamed Natuki, big enough for a 100 people, though the schedule did not call for it to go out until the second day. Everyone was excited. The waka had not been out for 70 years.

"I just planned on taking videos," Mercier says, "so I felt like it was an honor when they asked me to have a seat. They said, 'We want you to

come in,' so I peeled off my shirt and jumped in."

After a few hours on the water, he came back with sunburn among his memories.

They paddled miles out in the bay.

Now, at this point, it will be helpful to note that by tradition, New Zealand Navy captains always stop their ships and stand in salute while Māori wakas are in procession. The salute is a way for warships to acknowledge a friendly encounter.

And so it happened during this year's Waitangi Day celebrations that the Māori's waka came within saluting distance of a New Zealand ship.

"They were all on deck saluting us," Mercier says. Then, the skipper of the waka turned to others and said, "Wait till you see how long we can keep them saluting!"

And so it went, all in the good spirit of the afternoon. The waka soon turned for the row back to shore where

Mercier spent the rest of the day looking at other wakas, their designs, the woods used and carvings made on the wakas.

That night in a whare nui, Mercier says the singing seemed to come out of a Polynesian tradition.

"I love that music," he says. "I brought some home."

They shared the big meal with "a lot of talking," he says.

Following the visit to Waitangi, Mercier noted a memorable visit to the Ngati Awa Tribe in Whakatane where he stayed with the Memaku family.

"We got taken around by one of their spiritual leaders, Pouroto. He took us to all their ancient sites. We met with their master carvers and also recorded an interview for their national radio station."

"It was an awesome opportunity for a Tribal member to do that, to create these relationships between indigenous peoples," says Tribal member and Tribal Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis. "It's been a process we've been involved in over the last 20 years or so, where international Tribes come together and find ways to support each other. This is a part of that process."

"We're not the only Tribe in the Northwest that's keeping this relationship going," Mercier adds. "There's other Tribes doing this. Warm Springs, Puget Sound Tribes are also doing a ton of things with them, and a big project is also ongoing at Evergreen State College (in Olympia, Wash.). Even clear down in San Francisco there's a delegation of Māori people." ■