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TE WHAKAPAPA O TE TAIRAWHITI

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Fiesta with Spanish whanau

Saturday, January 08, 2011 • Edda McCabe

AFTER nearly 200 years, the descendants of Manuel José finally received their Spanish whakapapa and met their whanau from the opposite side of the Earth.

Manuel Jose's descendants gasped with surprise when Santiago Ayuso unfurled the whakapapa and read out their genealogy, helped by his English-speaking cousin Eva Garcia.

Silent tears slid down faces and hands were grasped tightly as Eva Garcia explained that Manuel Jose had a brother and two sisters.

All the relatives visiting the East Coast from Spain were descendants of Manuel Jose's sister Magdalena de Frutos Huerta.

At an emotional powhiri, more than 100 of Manuel Jose's descendants welcomed their relations from Valverde del Majanoon to Pokai marae.

The group of 10 relatives from the village where Manuel Jose was born were accompanied by Mayor of Valverde Rafael Casado Llorente with his wife and daughter, as well as journalist Florentino Descalzo, historian Jose Mariano Aguero (whose mother Maria Teresa Llorente researched the whakapapa) and Antonio Fernandes Monjas, whose ancestor was the godfather to Manuel Jose when he was christened in the Asuncion Church in Valverde on February 1, 1811.

When asked what their story was, Eva Garcia's answer was short and sweet: "My grandmother used to say that her grandmother said she had an uncle who went away and the family were waiting to go to him because he would be rich.

"That's all we had."

For many of the visitors it was their first journey out of Spain, and there was plenty of drama.

They were forced to land in China and sat in their plane for two hours, then had to run to catch their connecting flight to New Zealand after they landed in Seoul.

Another lot got their tickets upgraded to business class, which included hotel accommodation and meals in Dubai.

"This upgrade is a present, it is the time of the year, but to meet

our Maori family — this is the gift” said Monica Garcia.

The president of the Sydney Spanish Club Sergio Sanchez and his wife caught a bus from Auckland to Gisborne to be with us.

“My Kiwi friend didn’t tell us Gisborne had an airport so we caught a bus and it broke down twice,” he said.

At Pokai an historic “Twin Towns” agreement was signed between Gisborne District Council, the Valverde del Majano Council and the Manuel Jose of Waiapu whanau.

This is a unique document as it is the first to be written in Maori, Spanish and English. It is also the first twin town document between Spain and New Zealand and it is the first document of its type to include a “family”.

The visitors were treated to a week of meeting Joses and being guests of Jose families. They attended unveilings of Joses, attended church at St Mary’s in Tikitiki, watched sheep being shorn and helped to fleece and press the wool.

They saw a traditional hangi being prepared, and walked the 500 steps up to the East Cape lighthouse.

They saw the sun set at the mouth of Waiapu river, walked along the beaches and unveiled a painting of the Spanish flag on the back of the monument to Manuel Jose and his wives at Taumata.

They ate lunch right next to the sea on Matahi o te Tau veranda and walked on lands left to Manuel Jose’s children.

A highlight for the Joses was to take part in the Spanish tradition of eating 12 grapes in the first 12 seconds on the first minute of the New Year.

They travelled around in family vans, and cousins Driver and Ginger Walker of East Cape Camp Grounds found mustering the Spaniards a challenge.

“Getting them on to the vans took the longest time — man they can talk, and flat sticks too.”

Sleeping on a marae was a huge culture shock for the Spaniards, even though the Spanish Embassy in Wellington had sent notes on the protocols and what to expect.

“This is the first time my husband and I have shared our bedroom with 50 other people”, said Rosa Maria Virseda, wife of journalist Florentino Descalzo.

The visitors were billeted by Jose families in Gisborne for their first night on the East Coast, including George and Leonie Raroa, who hosted the Mayor and his family.

Despite work commitments in Gisborne, they travelled up and down the Coast three times to be with the whanau.

“We didn’t expect to get on so well with them. We showed them around Gisborne and we sat and had a few quiet beers down the fishing club after,” said George.

Language barriers were solved with the help of sign language and gestures, accompanied by fits of laughter and a few Spanish interpreters who joined the group.

Wellington-based journalist Amelia Martinez Lobo hails from Valverde del Majano and was welcomed earlier this year as the second person after our ancestor Manuel Jose to make footsteps in the valley he likened to the one he came from.

She helped out when cousins wanted to talk to each other, supported by her friend, another journalist from Wellington Diana Burns, who initiated the original research of Manuel Jose's birthplace.

Jose descendants decided they have to learn the language to talk to our relations and be in control of their own story.

The question in everyone's mind was: how do we know this connection is our ancestor?

"My mother, Suey Maaka, said her father said his grandfather came from a place called Valverde in Segovia," said secretary of the Manuel Jose Committee Anne Maaka.

"He landed at Awanui and it reminded him of Valverde where he came from, so he stayed."

My husband Stephen and I travelled around Spain in 2005 and I was excited when I first saw the name "Valverde", but this turned to disappointment when I realised how many Valverdes there are throughout Spain.

I was excited all over again when one week after our return to New Zealand, I heard Manuel Jose's birthplace had been found because in the whole of the region of Segovia there is only one village with the name Valverde and it's called Valverde del Majano, about 15kms from the city of Segovia.

It then transpired that only one child was born and given the name Manuel in the village of Valverde during the time that corresponds with an age timeline matching official records of Manuel Jose in New Zealand.

"All our family had was what our great-great-grandfather had said, that he came from Valverde in Segovia," said Anne Maaka. "I have a sister called Valverde and Connie Katae's place in Te Araroa is called Valverde."

Our relations left the Coast on New Year's day and a return visit to Spain was suggested for August 2012.

At the farewell, Santiago Ayuso said: "There is no adios, just see you soon primos (cousins)."





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