

THE MATARIKI PLANETARIUM OF RAPA NUI



Hangaroa, Easter Island
November, 2016

Dear Friend;

It is with great pleasure that we write regarding the progress of our project to create a Planetarium on Easter Island, in addition to our current research plans. We anticipate that the inauguration of the facilities, which cover an area of 2,700 sq. ft, will be complete by January 2017, while the film to be exhibited there should be ready by March.

The script for the film is our own. It describes the Rapanui and Polynesian creation myths, their vision of the cosmos, the knowledge they had of astronomical phenomena and how they applied this to navigation, agriculture, fishing, calendrics, and ceremonial activities. This knowledge, coupled with their navigational skills and human ingenuity, allowed the Polynesians to explore the vast Pacific Ocean and develop highly sophisticated cultures on the different islands they settled. On Easter Island, they sculpted the giant monolithic statues that have made the Rapanui so famous, dazzling the world with the engineering feat of transporting and erecting them. Ceremonies were performed before the statues in order to invoke the Rapanui ancestors and access their procreative powers (*mana*). The time to prepare, start, and end these rituals were marked by the rising and setting stars of particular stars. Astronomical phenomena also played an important role in the agricultural cycle and fishing. A few Eastern Polynesians, including the Rapa Nui, developed the process of intercalation to adapt their lunar calendar to the solar year, a technique shared with only a handful of ancient human civilizations worldwide. Another lesser-known fact is that the Rapanui are the only Polynesians to have developed a written script... In addition to Rapanui ethnoastronomy, the film features these and other interesting facts. Once completed, we hope to share a shortened version of our unique film with other Planetariums, in New York, Hawaii, etc., in order to promote our facilities on Easter Island.

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We have been working with Dr. Yuri Beletsky an astronomer that works in the Carnegie Las Campanas observatory in Chile, and who is also a well-known astrophotographer; Dr. Beletsky's work has been featured in National Geographic as well as numerous other publications worldwide. We are enclosing a sample of Dr. Beletsky's work on Easter Island and which we would like to print for the Planetarium. Most importantly, **he has also been working with us in the film to be featured at the planetarium. We also hired a local composer and musicians who will record the soundtrack of the film.** Yuri will be on Easter Island for ten days in late November to shoot the film with special cameras that record the landscape in a 360-degree angle.

Fortunately, we have funds for the production part of the film. We secured the National Park permits, transport for the crew, plus all the expenses regarding the soundtrack, as well as food and lodging for Yuri. Yuri pays for his own flights to come to Easter Island once or twice a month. **Once filmed, we estimate it will take two months of post-production to complete the film, which we will need extra funds for covering these costs.**

We have nevertheless encountered some unfortunate and unforeseen problems regarding the construction of the facilities of the Planetarium. The cost of freight from the mainland increased by 27% mid-construction; in addition, the land where we are building was incorporated into the urban town area this past July, and therefore the County Hall demands new regulations with all electrical and water installations done by their approved installers from the electrical company who charge more. All of this has greatly increased the cost of construction. In addition, the Power Plant cannot withstand the energy demands set by the growing population on the island, and power failures have become a daily event. This will worsen in the summer with the arrival of tourists whose total number we estimate will reach 150.000 this coming year. In order to ensure the correct exhibition of our film and functioning of the Planetarium, we have had to adapt the construction and install solar power, which implies additional costs. Nevertheless, most of the construction is complete and the dome has finally arrived. **What is pending now is the tiling of the floor (2,700 sq. ft) and the purchase and installation of 6 windows and 7 doors as well as some basic furniture; we must also paint a section of the building and give the rest a second coating; the toilets need to be equipped and we need to build closets, install curtains and all the interior lighting fixtures; we must repair the main access road and build a fence around that part of the property. Finally, we must print a brochure for our show, and create promotional material, photos, posters, a website, etc. All of these may sound like small details, but the correct operation of the Planetarium depends on them. We estimate the cost for these will be an extra US \$30.000 and realistically expect that it will take 2 more months to complete.**

With some help, we may be able to not only complete the Planetarium, but also the unique film that encompasses everything we know about Polynesian and Rapanui ethnoastronomy. This presents a great challenge, not only because it must be filmed in 360-degree vision, which has many constraints in and of itself, **but at the same time it must be a quality product, worthy of any of the films shown at the best**

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planetariums worldwide. It is the equivalent of creating a feature film, with a film crew, soundtrack, etc.. Securing the funds necessary to complete this project has not been easy, but we firmly believe that we can succeed in this challenge, thanks to the confidence and help of people who have made donations as well as the support of many other collaborators such as Yuri and others, astronomers, musicians, singers local dancers, etc, all of whom are cooperating in its creation. The Planetarium will be the vehicle for this film, a work of art, that will bring to life the essence of the ancient Rapanui culture, show the beauty of our island, and stir the emotions deep inside the hearts and minds of the spectator. We hope it invokes and inspires those feelings that permeate us when we observe the immensity of the night sky, that which encapsulates our past and future dreams.

We hope that the Planetarium film that we are developing with Yuri Beletsky receives worldwide distribution, because there are not many innovative planetarium programs today and this is, without doubt, a fascinating subject. Yuri has many contacts with different planetariums around the world, so this at least, should not be a problem. **In the film, we will mention the contributions that everyone has made to this project, as it might be the only way to express our thanks to those who have made this dream possible.**

Thank you again, best wishes, and all our love

Edmundo Edwards
The Pacific Islands Research Institute

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