

6,000km trip to reveal clues to ancient migration

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Two Durham University scientists are to play a key part in a 6000km trip following the migration route of ancient Pacific cultures.

Drs Keith Dobney and Greger Larson, both from the Department of Archaeology, will be joining the voyage, which will be the first ever expedition to sail in two traditional Polynesian boats - ethnic double canoes - which attempts to re-trace the genuine migration route of the ancient Austronesians.

The main aim of the voyage is to find out where the ancestors of Polynesian culture originated but the Durham University researchers will also be examining the local wildlife.

Dr Larson will be joining the expedition as it sets off from the Southern Philippines in late October, and Dr Dobney will join it in February with another researcher linked with the University, Prof Atholl Anderson, when it leaves the southern Solomon islands en-route into the Pacific.

They will be furthering their own research work along their way, taking hundreds of samples from animals such as dogs, cats, chickens and pigs to use in their ongoing investigations into the origin of these important farmyard animals which the ancient Polynesians carried with them into the remote Pacific.

Work by Drs Larson and Dobney - which probes the genetic make-up of domestic and commensal species linked with human migration - has

gained international media attention. Recent findings have focused on the origins and dispersal of domestic chickens and pigs.

The trip, called "Lapita-Voyage", will be crewed by two Polynesians, two scientists, a cameraman and the initiators James Wharram, Hanneke Boon (catamaran-designers) and Klaus Hympendahl (author and organiser of the project).

At the end of the voyage the two double canoes will be presented to the inhabitants of the small Polynesian islands of Tikopia and Anuta, acknowledging the debt owed by Western yachtsmen to the Polynesian inspiration for their 'modern catamarans'.

For further information about the voyage, go to: www.lapita-voyage.org

Source: Durham University

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