

Snow warrior ices the cake

Joe McLeod's working drawing for his warrior.



New Zealand's entrant in the recent snow statue contest in Japan literally bent over backwards to win the "fighting spirit" section for his country.

Hamuera Orupe (Joe) McLeod, a 24-year-old chef currently working for the Travelodge, Port Moresby, is a past master at sculptures in margarine and chocolate for the centrepieces of banquet tables.

But snow was a new ingredient — he'd never been near the stuff before

— and so were the three metre by three metre dimensions of the block from which he moulded a proud Maori warrior standing at the intricately fashioned prow of a canoe.

The statue took him nearly four back-breaking days to complete. He spend long hours out in the minus 8 degree celsius temperatures, bending and twisting to get the best results from the compressed snow.

But it was the backwards angle that got to Mr McLeod, making it necessary for him to seek medical advice which saw him return to Papua-New Guinea via New Zealand with the Japanese version of deep heat — a mentholated padding — firmly stuck to his sore back, and curing it very nicely thank you.

In spite of the aches and the extreme cold which gave him a condition the contest organisers thought was pneumonia on the last day, Mr McLeod says the competition was a fantastic experience he's keen to repeat should New Zealand enter again next year.

He had the assistance of three New Zealand students presently studying in Japan — Robert Scott, Hugh Wittaker, of Waitara, and Christine Faris, of Dunedin.

Under his instruction they chopped, chipped and moulded the basis of the warrior statue, while he saw to its overall design, proportion and detail.

Unlike the teams from eight other countries who took part — United States, Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, China, Philippines, Germany and Japan — the New Zealanders worked from a simple drawing with a tomahawk, spade and V-shaped chisel as their tools.

"The other teams had professionals

like rock sculptors and design experts, and they used everything from chainsaws to handsaws to achieve the effect they were looking for," says Mr McLeod.

"We had none of that. We simply used good old Kiwi ingenuity and it paid off."

The entrants worked from 9.00 a.m. to midnight to finish their statues, often with snow falling around them.

They took regular "get-warm-again" breaks in the centrally-heated competition headquarters and had meals provided by support teams from each of the countries.

Mr McLeod, who can produce a hangi heralded by many of his Tuhoe Tribe as the best, thought he should try one of those.

"But obviously it was much too cold. The ground was frozen completely although they were saying it was the warmest winter they had had in 54 years," Mr McLeod said.

He had been told the mid-winter temperatures in the Sapporo region in Japan's Hokkaido area, where the contest has been held for the past 10 years, were usually as low as 24 degrees below celsius.

The Maori warrior and canoe prow that Mr McLeod and his helpers produced caused considerable interest from Japanese and foreign visitors in the city for the festival surrounding the contest.

It is the first time New Zealand had been represented — Air New Zealand, Foreign Affairs and the Master Chefs' Association saw to our presence there — and the media along with Japanese armed with cameras were thorough in recording the fact.



One of Joe McLeod's winning chocolate sculptures pictured just after completion in Wellington in 1980. Photo credit Evening Post.