

## Press statement 27 April 2010

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### Multimillion dollar showcase for ancient art form

A new era has begun for Te Waipounamu, South Island Māori Rock Art. The Ngāi Tahu Māori Rock Art Trust has hit the 'go button' to build New Zealand's first interactive Māori Rock Art Centre, now it has secured the total \$2.7 million funding required to complete the project.

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu Kaiwhakahaere Mark Solomon said the project will showcase to the world what has too often been a neglected or ignored art form.

"This latest grant is a wonderful vote of confidence supporting the vision of the marae and the many groups, individuals and other funders that have supported the planning and development of this project."

Following his announcement of a Lotteries Grant worth nearly \$600,000 today, the Minister for Internal Affairs, Hon Nathan Guy said the funding will help the Trust to raise awareness and appreciation of Māori rock art and support its long-term protection and care.

Maori Rock Art Trust Curator Amanda Symon agreed with the Minister's comments and said she and the Trustees were thrilled the project has been funded through to completion.

"As well as offering a unique interactive visitor experience, the new centre will promote cultural revitalisation, heritage protection and enhance the Trust's core work of protecting Maori Rock Art sites.

"The centre will allow visitors to learn about Southern Maori rock art, through stories framed within the wider context of the culture and history of Ngāi Tahu Whānui in Te Waipounamu - both past, present and future. Showcasing Rock Art in this way will allow us to make huge inroads in terms of raising people's awareness and appreciation of this extraordinary art, so it can be better protected for future generations."

With the centre predicted to significantly boost visitor numbers to the South Canterbury region, Timaru Mayor Janie Annear said she was also thrilled with the funding to finally cement the project.

"We appreciate government support for this fantastic project. It will be the tourism hook for international visitors that we've always needed," she said.

More than 580 rock art sites can be found throughout Te Waipounamu. The majority are located in the limestone rich areas of South Canterbury and North Otago. As descendants of the Waitaha, Ngāti Mamoe and Ngāi Tahu people who created the art, Ngāi Tahu Whānui today have a special connection to the sites. The Ngāi Tahu Māori Rock Art Trust is funded by Meridian Energy and Te Runanga o Ngāi Tahu to support the local Rūnanga, landowners and their communities in the care and interpretation of Rock Art heritage. Work on the current project to develop a Rock Art visitor centre started back in 2006. Since then it has been a carefully researched Iwi driven project, with support and involvement from central government agencies, local council and community groups and several community funding and tribal organisations.

Wellington based exhibition developers Story Inc. have been engaged to develop the Centre. Story Inc. is behind visitor experiences such as the New Zealand Pavilion 2007 & 2010 World Expos and 'Zealandia' at Karori Wildlife Park. **ENDS.**

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