

Catherine Groenestein

A South Taranaki artist is giving her home town's most famous landmark a new lease of life.

Luther Ashford is repainting the waka sculpture that has been on Pātea's main street since 1933.

The Aotea waka carries 10 figures: Turi, his wife Rongorongo (who has a baby on her back), and seven other ancestors of Ngāti Ruanui and Ngā Rauru iwi.

The job was a huge privilege and responsibility, as the waka was important to the whole community, Ashford said.

She has memories of sitting on the base of the waka as a child to eat lunch, and said it was always a place to bring manahiri (visitors).

"It speaks to our origins and speaks to our future aspirations, that's what I think."

A previous painter had covered over details including the moko etched into the chins, and Luther will be repainting them as they were originally designed.

She has spent hours selecting realistic colours to replace the former yellow skin and blue cloaks. "I've gone through a million shades of brown, picking the skin tone, then picking the eye colours and hair colours."

The waka and its passengers have been cleaned and undercoated.

South Taranaki District Council community development officer Janine Maruera said Ashford was chosen because of her family connection.

"She doesn't just live here, this

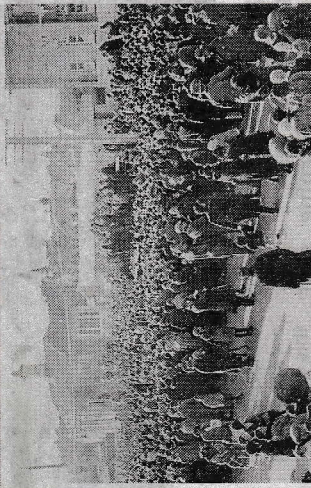
A monumental makeover



Luther Ashford says the job of repainting the waka is a huge privilege and responsibility.

Left: Hundreds turned out for the sculpture's unveiling in August 1933. Right: South Taranaki District Council community development officer Janine Maruera and Ashford discuss the project.

MAIN PHOTO: ANDY JACKSON/STUFF



is her tūrangawaewae. She is Ngāti Ruanui and Ngā Rauru, and importantly, she has the skills."

Kaumātua from Ngāti Ruanui blessed the waka before the project began.

Pātea Historical Society president Jacq Dwyer welcomed

the waka restoration.

"As a member of Pātea

Historical I see it as an

irreplaceable monument that is only there because local Maori fought hard to have it constructed 87 years ago.

"And then in my capacity on

the Pātea Community Board I see it as one of the jewels of Pātea."

She said building a memorial to Turi was the wish of Ngawaka Taurua, one of the 74 men sent as prisoners to Dunedin in 1872.

"There were hundreds of people there for the unveiling in

August 1933. It must have been quite a day for Pātea."

At that stage, they had run out of money so only four figurines were in the waka, with some carved from ponga logs added later. These were replaced with concrete figurines in 1956.

