

Te Horo stock tunnel set to re-open

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By ANTONY PALTRIDGE

NORTH TARANAKI'S historic Te Horo stock tunnel will be reopened in six weeks, after being closed for five years.

Since 1995, after the Cave Creek disaster, the tunnel has been closed because the Department of Conservation feared it was a danger to the public.

The closure of the tunnel meant walkers did not have the option of doing part of the Whitecliffs Walkway and returning to Pukearuhe through the tunnel and along the beach.

New Plymouth District Council parks director Grant Porteous said work would start this week with restoration expected to be finished in early May.

The Te Horo Tunnel Restoration Society had worked to raise the \$83,000 needed for the work to start, he said.

Mr Porteous said the council would administer the contract in association with DOC, which would carry out additional work on steps and structures within the tunnel itself.

The Lottery Grants Board had made a \$53,000 grant towards to the project, along with \$10,000 from the TSB Community Trust and \$20,000 from the NPDC.

Mr Porteous said the project would reinforce and seal the ceiling with concrete, to prevent debris from falling, and remove earth from the tunnel floor to expose some of its cobblestone base.

Mr Porteous said it was originally planned to remove all of the debris from the floor, but because of several roof collapses, taking it all out would have created a cavernous space.

The work would be carried out by McKenzie Construction, which specialised in tunnel work.

Restoration society member Ian Dudding, who wrote a history of the tunnel, said construction began in 1859, but was abandoned in 1860 with the outbreak of the Land Wars. Work resumed on the tunnel in 1888 and it was finished a year later.

"The Whitecliffs Walkway is one of the most significant walkways in Taranaki and the tunnel will complete its circular route once more. The tunnel will also give fishermen easier access to the beach and there's also the safety issue. If you're walking along the beach and you get caught by a high tide, you can get off the beach through the tunnel."

The tunnel was once the main road north, being the only accessible route until a bridle track, which was to become the state highway, opened over Mt Messenger in 1899.

"But the 80m-long tunnel remained as a mail route until 1909 and the last sheep went through it in 1960 en route to the Waitara freezing works.

Taranaki-Wanganui Conservation Board chairman Rex Moore congratulated the society for raising the money.

"The tunnel is of considerable significance to our area because of its history, because it is part of a unique recreation experience, and because of the element involving conservation of an important part of the heritage of our area."

The tunnel's closure meant the community and visitors had been stopped from fully experiencing the walkway, he said.



TUNNEL VISION: The Te Horo Stock Tunnel, looking through to the northern end of Whitecliffs Beach.