

TONGARIRO CENTENNIAL

A DAY TO REMEMBER

by Jocelyn Syme



Sir Paul Reeves addresses guests assembled in front of the Chateau Tongariro. Photo: Alan Mark

It was a day which blended past, present and future; Maori and Pakeha; young and old. A day which surely Te Heuheu Tukino IV, who gave his people's sacred peaks to New Zealand, would have been proud of.

September 23, 1987 marked the centennial of Te Heuheu's gift, which became New Zealand's first national park. Tongariro has been followed by 11 more national parks and three maritime parks.

Reinforcing those links with the past, Prime Minister David Lange gave the great grandson of Te Heuheu, Sir Hepi Te Heuheu, a framed copy of the original deed of gift signed 100 years ago.

And the world's first national park, Yellowstone, sent a commemorative plaque to the world's first national park given by the indigenous people.

But it was a day which above all else belonged to the thousands of people celebrating their park — particularly the tangata whenua, the Ngati Tuwharetoa.

The day itself dawned brilliantly clear after heavy rain. The mountains glistened with new snow and intensely black clouds scudded across the sky.



Kiwi and young admirer at the ceremony. Photo: Brian Enting.

For Huri Maniapoto, master of ceremonies for the day, the good weather was the answer to his prayers.

"We had that break in the weather just long enough for the celebrations — it poured down again at lunchtime. It was as if someone up there was controlling a switch on the weather.

"Certainly lots of our elders felt as if something or someone was around", he

said.

The celebrations started with a dawn ceremony organised by the Ngati Tuwharetoa to pay homage to Mount Tongariro, to pay their respects to their ancestors and to lift the tapu on the park visitor centre extensions.

Time for the older people to remember the past, and time for everyone to ponder why "the old man" gave the mountains to the people of New Zealand.

It was a ceremony which moved many people to tears.

For Sir Patrick O'Dea, the chairman of the National Parks Centennial Commission, the success of the celebrations depended on the bringing together of today's successors to the original parties which signed the deed of gift: Sir Hepi Te Heuheu and the Tuwharetoa people, and Government officials.

"I felt the past and present came together very strongly under the shadow of the mountain. One of the things that impressed most people was the sight of Sir Hepi leading the haka party himself using his ancestral mere which belonged to his great grandfather Te Heuheu Tukino IV."