

# A Traditional Meeting House For Blenheim Area

**Laurie Duckworth  
Designated Builder of Meeting House**

Laurie Duckworth and Kath McKinney  
outside the partially completed  
meeting house.



**Ko Tapuaeenuku Te Maunga  
Ko Wairau Te Awa  
Ko Rangitane Te Iwi  
Ko Omaka Te Marae  
Ko te kawa he paeke  
Ko Te Waipounamu Te Moutere  
Mo Nga Rangatira He Kahukiwi  
Mo Te Atua He Pounamu  
Ko Te Kai Rapu Ko Io Te Kite**

Omaka Marae Inc. formerly Marlborough Maori Community Club, has since its inception in 1959 worked quietly to establish a Marae for the Blenheim area (original Maori name Wai Harakeke). At this time there were very few established Marae's in Te Waipounamu and possibly only one traditional meeting house.

Omaka — "River between the hills". Omaka is South Island Maori for Omanga "Manga" being a general name for a tributary.

Omaka Valley is a riding in the Marlborough County Council and the Marae, some two and a half miles from Blenheim, was commenced in 1976 with land and buildings formerly owned by the R.N.Z.A.F. (incidentally Hon. Ben Couch served here during the war), ad-

jacent to the Omaka Aerodrome, the home of the first Aero Club to be formed in New Zealand.

Since this time considerable work has been done in converting the main building into a Whare Kai and accommodation centre which is supplemented by two cottages.

A Whare Runanga Committee was formed in October 1980 and successfully moved to secure more land from the Lands and Survey Department to enable the commencement of a Meeting House.

Like most races, the local Maori people believed that each person's history is precious and worthy of preserving.

The Meeting House would enable the learning and understanding of Maori History, tradition, arts and language, most important they would have a place to honour the dead.

The total marae would help all people to grow in knowledge, pride and heritage in the enduring creative qualities of the Maori people of today.

A management plan was drawn up, helpful initial discussions were held with Neville Baker of Maori Affairs, and about this time Te Waipounomau was very fortunate in that Wishie

Jaram was appointed District Officer. His guidance and encouragement is already reflected throughout the Island. Today we enjoy the progression of activity in many South Island centres.

Our own Committee had no established building fund but today we already have an entity worth \$45,000. The project is being done in five stages — currently it is entering Stage 3. Stages 4 and 5 will take another two years to complete.

The tukutuku work is about to be commenced utilising kiekie which is obtained from the Marlborough Sounds. The entrance will contain 8 Poupou and Keke and Maihi and Amo. They will all be carved from totara already secured from the West Coast.

Although the majority of the original inhabitants have strong Rangitane Ngati Kuia and Ngai Tahu connections the local Maori people in excess of 1,000 that the Marae will draw from are mostly transient. With this in mind the Marae will be non tribal and the Kawa will be Paeke.

The House when completed will hold 200 and sleep 130 and will cost approximately \$108,000.