

Weaving Ties To Oregon

■ Māoris bring 100 cloaks and baskets to Willamette University's Hallie Ford Museum of Arts in Salem.

By Ron Karten

It was a sunny, autumn day when the first meeting took place between the Māoris of New Zealand and two Indian Tribes of Oregon. It was on Friday, September 23 at Willamette University in Salem.

As first Siletz and then Grand Ronde members welcomed the Māoris with songs and drums, the Māoris walked forward, returning the music with songs of their own.

A crowd of hundreds witnessed the exchange and welcomes and then marched behind the aboriginals to the university's Hallie Ford Museum of Art where the first American exhibit dedicated solely to the Māori weaving crafts started its Oregon run. It will be at the Hallie

we meet again."

Inside the exhibition hall, cloaks, baskets and floor mats stood out from the walls or were held back behind glass showcases in something of a spiral leading to the center room, where giant photos of ancient Māori Tribal members looked out above some of the finest examples of aboriginal weaving that the world knows today.

Grand Ronde Tribal Cultural Collections Specialist Lindy Trolan, who worked with Hallie Ford and Siletz cultural specialists "for close to a year now" to put this exhibition together, noted how some designs "are practically identical to our basket designs."

Dobkins. They encountered an island without large animals and with flightless birds. "Carving and weaving were their highest art forms," she said.

It was not until the 1800s that New Zealand was colonized by the British but unlike the experience of the Tribes of North America, the Māoris and the British made one treaty — The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 — and all Māoris were included. The Māori language was given equal status with the English language and the Treaty was written in both languages, though there remain disagreements in some respects about what the Treaty really said.

The Māoris also were given equal rights to food and forest resources, according to Ranui Ngarimu, one of the weavers whose work is exhibited at the Hallie Ford. At home, she is President of the National Māori Weavers' Committee. "During the ensuing years," she said, "that hasn't always panned out. There are various claims against the government on breaches of that agreement. But, as each Tribe settles claims, they are able to move toward economic development."

For weaver Pip Devonshire, her university weaving studies gave her "a connection with my ancestors, just by recreating the techniques. My great grandmother was a weaver, and I feel that I have some connection with her through these techniques," she said. Of the



Tribal member Leslie Riggs sings an honor song with Eagle Beak.



People Of Pride — The Māoris sing songs of their own while members of the Siletz Tribe welcome them with Traditional Honor songs.

Ford through December 22.

With more than 100 pieces in two weaving styles, the exhibition drew both weavers from around the world and New Zealand transplants along with university teachers and students and the local community.

"Witness a celebration of nations," said Willamette President M. Lee Pelton.

"How often our ancestors met with other Tribes in this area," said Grand Ronde Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison. "If you listen, maybe we can hear them."

"It's like history repeats itself," she said.

Siletz Tribal Elder Aggie Pilgrim, also a representative of the International Council of the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers (See *Smoke Signals*, 9/1/05) along with Siletz Tribal Council Vice Chairman and Cultural Language Specialist Bud Lane smudged down the Māori group.

"It's an honor to be able to brush you down," said Pilgrim. "Our aura gets clogged up. It needs to be cleared up. Smoke takes that all up and only in one direction, to the Creator."

"I'm looking at the faces you have. I have seen these faces over the campfire a long, long time ago," said Māori Tribal Elder John Tahuparae. "Not as strangers, now

"It was pretty stunning to see their culture. It is present in everything they do," said Trolan.

Many of the weavers in the show had learned their craft in universities. And in fact much Māori culture is enmeshed in the New Zealand school system, all the way from pre-school through university, said Project Coordinator Rebecca Dobkins, who is also Curator of



Gifts For Our Leaders — Māori weaver Ranui Ngarimu presents Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy (right) with traditional Māori gifts and a book on Māori weaving. Ngarimu, along with her sister, played a part in the publication of the book.

Native American Art for the museum and Associate Professor of Anthropology at Willamette.

The Māoris, who are now about 20 percent of the nation's four million people, are thought to have come by canoe to an uninhabited New Zealand island some 1,000 years ago from the Polynesian, Samoan, Tonga and Fiji islands, said

cloaks she has in the show, she said, each would take three to four months to make "if I worked at it full time."

As her projects were finished, the curator approached her about putting pieces in the show, but she said, "Little did I know when I was gathering the flax that it would end up here."

Weaver Ranui Ngarimu said that when she was in her twenties, "I had a need to learn my language, and I realized there's a whole wider world than just language to the Māoris." She sought out master weavers to learn the craft. At the

time, she was in a performing arts group that needed costumes.

Weaver Donna Campbell learned her craft at design school, she said, "and through it, I discovered my identity, a way to be comfortable in my own skin."

"All have a lot of respect for the Māori," said David Hansen of Santa Rosa, California. He was on hand as a graduate of Willamette University, and was enjoying his 40th reunion. He also was on hand as a fourth generation New Zealander, and had seen the Māori exhibition

when it was part of a larger San Francisco celebration in August.

Georgian Le Anne Brown is a weaver, and "came to see the weavers and look at their techniques, how they prepare their materials, how they do the knotting. And I

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