

Puke Ariki: world's first fully integrated library and museum

Construction is under way on Puke Ariki, the world's first purpose-built, fully integrated library and museum. On the foreshore of New Plymouth — the largest city in the region of Taranaki, on the west coast of New Zealand's North Island — Puke Ariki (pronounced 'Poo-ke Ah-ree-kee') will merge the New Plymouth Library and the Taranaki Museum into a single heritage and information facility.

Puke Ariki is the brainchild of and largely funded by the New Plymouth District Council, which has put forward NZ\$12 million for construction and is fundraising NZ\$6–8 million for fit-out.

Puke Ariki is the result of nearly thirty years' investigation into how to meet the space demands of the New Plymouth Library and Taranaki Museum. The situation was particularly desperate for the museum, which has had ninety-five per cent of its collection stored away from public view.

Says Puke Ariki manager Suzanne Porter: 'The council was originally looking at building two new facilities — a library and a museum. But as Puke Ariki progressed in its planning, it became increasingly clear that an integrated service would bring advantages to the community that retaining two separate institutions would not.'

One of the features of Puke Ariki will be a fully resourced Taranaki Research Centre, which will bring together the library's prestigious New Zealand reference collection with

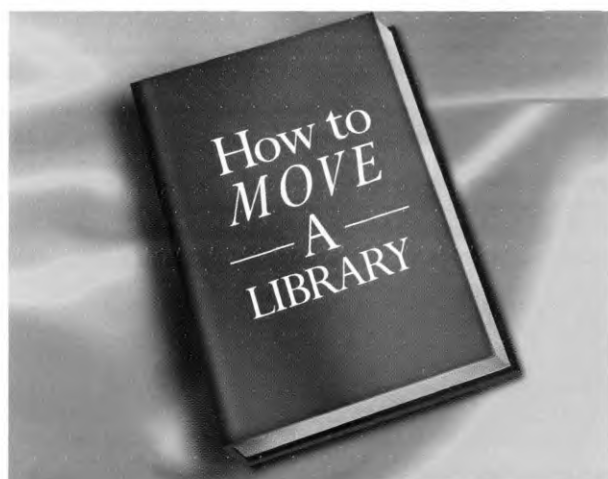
the historic archives and images held by the museum. Puke Ariki will also provide integrated education programs, a discovery centre in a children's and young persons' area, a Gallery of Taranaki Life, and a new Taonga Maori (Maori treasures) gallery. Visitors will be able to access the internet and selected databases, try new information tools and interact with displays.

Puke Ariki's position was an important site for pre-European Maori and for early European settlers. Its name honours the memory of an ancient *Pa* (fortified hill) and *Papakainga* (village) which once dominated this area, and is used with the full support of Tangata Whenua (local Maori people).

'Formal Maori input has been vital to the success of Puke Ariki,' says Ms Porter. 'The museum has a nationally important collection of *taonga* (Maori treasures), which need to be housed and displayed appropriately, and we needed *iwi* (Maori tribes) support and input for the stories of Taranaki that Puke Ariki will tell.'

'The New Plymouth District Council has worked closely with Komiti Maori (a committee comprising representatives of the eight *iwi* of Taranaki) right from when we started to look at what the new facility would need to deliver to the community. Puke Ariki has a strong Maori and Pakeha ownership, and Maori see Puke Ariki returning to this area the *mana* (prestige) of the original site.'

Puke Ariki's doors are due to open to the public in 2003. ■



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