

Union of Ancient Trees

Hononga Rakau
古代木提携

A world first union between primeval trees *TANE MAHUTA*, the ancient kauri (*Agathis australis*), Waipoua Forest, New Zealand and *JOMON SUGI*, the ancient yakusugi, (*Cryptomeria japonica*), Yakushima, Japan.

In 2006 Mr. Naoki Inohiza, Trade Development Manager from Tourism New Zealand, Japan, saw the similarities between the cultures from the remote communities of Hokianga, New Zealand and Yakushima Island, Japan. Both locations are home to ancient and iconic trees of the world. He saw the potential to highlight the importance of these ancient trees on a global scale while lifting the profile of each community.

Shane Lloyd and Koro Carman of Footprints Waipoua went to Yakushima to explore this initiative and meet with Mr. Tesei Shiba, a leader of conservation who was instrumental in obtaining United Nations World Natural Heritage status on the island of Yakushima. Friendships have grown from this first initiative resulting in several exchange visits.

Parties involved from New Zealand include Te Roroa, Waipoua Forest Trust, Tourism New Zealand, The Kaipara District Council, The Far North District Council, Department of Conservation and The Kauri Museum. Yakushima participants have been Mr Tesei Shiba *Guardian of Yakushima*, Yakusugi Museum, Ministry of Environment, Yakushima Regional Council, Yakushima Education Board, Yakushima District Forest Office, Yakushima Environmental Cultural Heritage Centre, Yakushima High School and Tourism New Zealand, Japan.

The agreement signifying the union between the peoples of Hokianga, Kaipara and Yakushima founded on the notion of *Hononga Rakau* (Union of Ancient Trees) was signed on April 23rd, 2009 between The Far North District Council Mayor, Wayne Brown, The Kaipara District Council Mayor, Neil Tiller, The Yakushima Mayor Tono Hidaka, Tim Groser, NZ Minister of Conservation and Alex Nathan, Te Roroa Whatu Ora Trust. This took place in front of *Tane Mahuta* in the Waipoua Forest.

The project is a commitment to recognize and protect the environment and save forests and in particular the ancient trees of the world; to develop opportunities in education and cultural partnerships, while raising the awareness of both areas in economic development. The key principles are based on eco-tourism and ensuring that developments benefit local communities, contribute rather than take from the environment and that protection and restoration of the environment is key to sustaining our communities.

For without our unique environment we will be lost