

# Kā tuhituhi o neherā MĀORI ROCK ART

## Rock art is found worldwide

For over 40,000 years, people created markings on rock faces and in caves. In Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Pacific, rock art reveals the lives and dreams of our early ancestors. Māori have made rock art in New Zealand since their Polynesian ancestors first settled these islands.

For around 800 years, Māori have created complex images of people, birds, animals, sea creatures, taniwha, waka and abstract designs on their landscapes. As Europeans arrived in Aotearoa, Māori incorporated new subjects, such as horses, houses and sailing ships into their art. The art ranges from small symbols to murals more than 20 metres long.

**RIGHT: Cave of the Eagle rock art site, Craigmore Farm, South Canterbury.**  
The figure is thought to represent Pouākai, the giant eagle, extinct for more than 500 years.



## What does Māori rock art mean?

The meaning and purpose of most rock art has faded over generations. Were the symbols wayfinding signs or did they indicate kai resources? Did they mark tapu areas or reference kōrero tuku iho – history, traditions and whakapapa? Or all of these things at once?

Māori rock art connects us to Māori ancestors in a tangible way. To see rock art is to imagine the artist and their way of thinking. It reveals the close physical, social and cultural relationship that mana whenua have with their world.



# WHAT IS ROCK ART?



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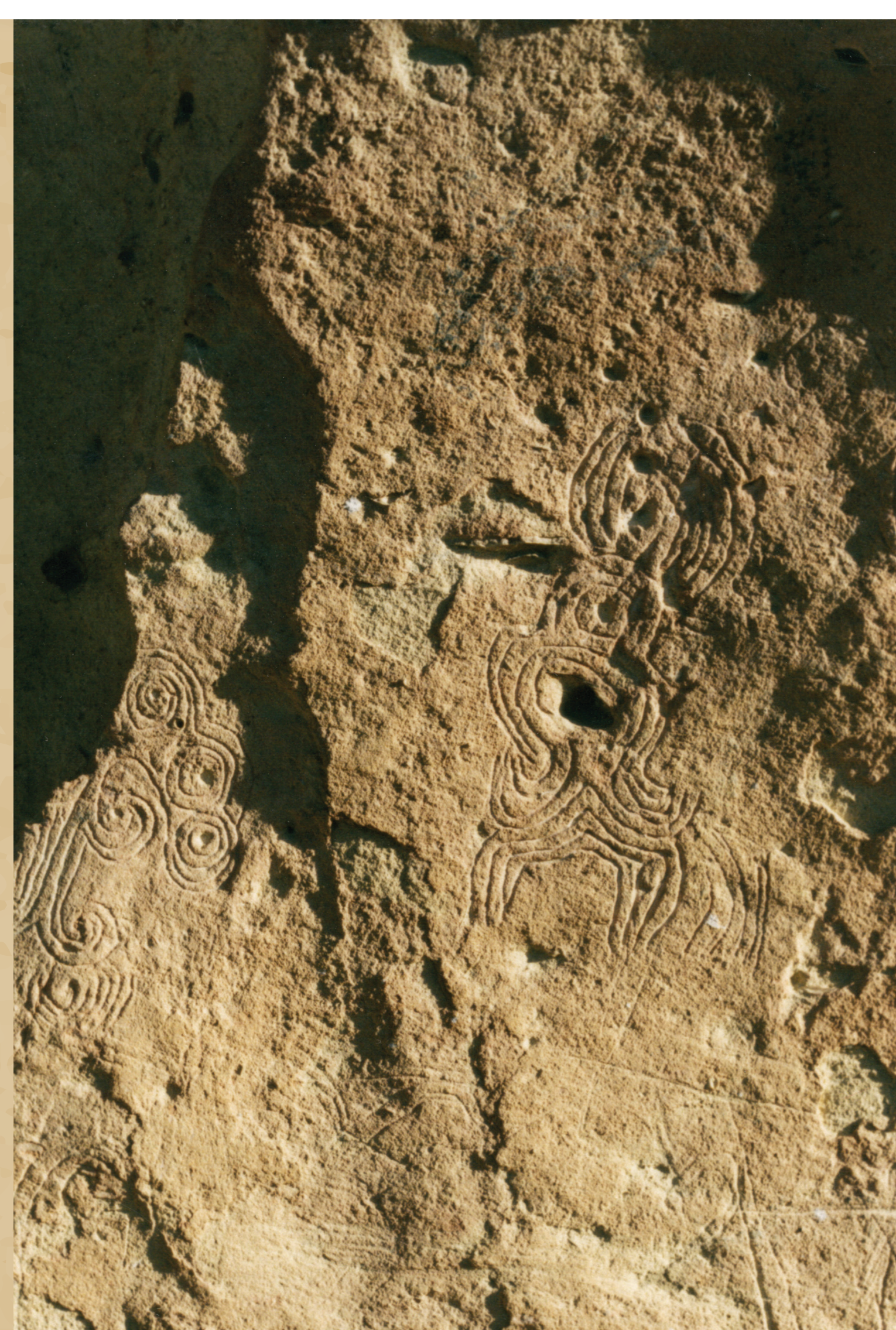
**There are more than 760 Māori rock art sites in Te Waipounamu alone**  
As Māori travelled, camped, cooked, hunted and held rituals in their whenua (land), they used the limestone outcrops particularly in South Canterbury and North Otago as both shelter and canvas.

## Visiting sites

There are several Māori rock art sites you can visit in Te Waipounamu: Takiroa and Maerewhenua, near Duntroon in the Waitaki Valley; Te Manunui at Maungatī in South Canterbury; and the Weka Pass site at Waikari in North Canterbury.

### TE ANA NGĀI TAHU ROCK ART CENTRE

in Timaru is New Zealand's only cultural centre dedicated to Māori rock art. The interactive exhibitions, hands-on activities, and virtual tours explore the creation of rock art, tribal traditions, associated practices and places such as mahika kai. Te Ana offers guided tours to the rock art sites at Ōpihi, led by the Ngāi Tahu guides.



An example of incised rock art from Waipati Creek, in North Otago.



Red abstract rock art at the Takiroa site, near Duntroon, in the Waitaki Valley.

## A skillful practice

Rock art designs are made in two ways: removing stone by incising, abrading or hammering; or with pigment painted or drawn onto rock. Māori in Te Waipounamu used pigments such as soot and kōkōwai (red ochre) mixed with other ingredients such as tarata gum and weka fat to form long-lasting paints for their art.



# MĀORI ROCK ART IN TE WAIPOUNAMU



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Using kinetic puppets based on Māori rock art designs to raise awareness and appreciation of this taonga in the wider community.



## Most Māori rock art is on private farm land

This limited access is one of the reasons for its survival. Over the years, Māori rock art in public places has been graffitied, ‘touched up’ or vandalised. Much art has been lost to quarrying, roading and dam projects. But farming can still pose dangers to Māori rock art.

Farming practices can change the hydrology of the land surrounding rock art sites. Irrigation, abstraction or damming impacts the moisture levels in and around limestone outcrops. Changes in moisture levels can lead to a build-up of salts as well as flaking on limestone surfaces, destroying rock art. Wandering stock may lick or rub against rock walls, and kick out the shelter floors.

## Collaborating to protect Māori rock art

The Ngāi Tahu Māori Rock Art Trust was established to help local rūnanga protect, manage and celebrate their rock art heritage. The Trust also works with landowners and farmers to identify and protect Māori rock art sites on their properties.

Many landowners feel a strong sense of guardianship towards the rock art on their land. Some use legal protections, such as Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga or QEII National Trust covenants, to acknowledge and protect rock art sites for future generations. They may also manage farm activities by offsetting irrigation and excluding stock from areas around rock art sites.

Rock art hui for landowners at Arowhenua Marae, September 2013.





# Kā tuhituhi o neherā

## MĀORI ROCK ART



### Ōpihi: Restoring a cultural landscape of Māori rock art

The Ōpihi Valley, near Pleasant Point, is the location of some of the most iconic rock art sites in Te Waipounamu.

The Ōpihi River was used by Ngāi Tahu as an ara tāwhito (ancient trail) and kai basket. The valley's limestone bluffs, walls and overhangs provided both shelter and a perfect canvas for art. The Ōpihi Wāhi Tūpuna contains 14 nationally significant rock art sites, including the famous Ōpihi Taniwha frieze.



One of the 'taniwha' figures from the iconic Ōpihi Taniwha frieze.

### Ecological restoration at Ōpihi rock art sites

A major ecological restoration project at Ōpihi is bringing back the wider cultural and natural values surrounding the rock art sites. The focus is on re-establishing the natural values that people experienced there many centuries ago.

The 10-year project involves planting more than 47,000 native plants in a range of ecosystems on site, including wetlands, stream banks, shaded gullies and sunny slopes. Many of the plants have multiple uses. Tī kouka and harakeke both have medicinal uses and can be used for weaving and clothing. Rautāwhiri and tarata are components of rock art paint.

Restoring the past ecology of the site means visitors get a better understanding of the lifeways of the people who created the art.

The ecological restoration at Ōpihi.

