

Manawatu Gorge POU 'WHATONGA'

The Manawatu gorge which is situated approx 20km East of Palmerston North connects the Manawatu region to the Hawkes Bay region. It's a unique piece of the region and is the only place in New Zealand where a river begins its journey on the opposite side of the main divide to where it joins the sea. This vital transport route is steeped in history and as we have come to know recently its steep rock faces and gorse covered hills are extremely prone to erosion with rock falls and road closures being an all too common occurrence.

As part of the 10 year Manawatu Gorge Biodiversity Project (2006 -2016) the construction of information Whare at the end of the gorge, gave the opportunity to tell the story or the history of the gorge. A main feature of this story was the construction of a Pou of Whatonga which seeks to bring to life the spirit of the Manawatu Gorge and rekindle the links with its people. The Pou of Whatonga stands 6 meters tall and is an iconic expression of the spirit of this location.



Designed by Artist Paul Horton and manufactured by Martin Engineering in Palmerston North the large structure made up of pipes and rolled plates that had been intricately cut to form an impressive and imposing piece that will tell the story for generations to come. Early talks with the artist made sure that the item was able to be dipped in a way that eliminated zinc traps whilst taking nothing away from the overall design.

Webforge (NZ) Ltd was proud to be entrusted with Hot Dip Galvanizing of this project and as the picture shows our team was pleased to be able to be part of an iconic piece and it gave each member of our galvanizing team a feeling of great satisfaction to be a part of it.

History of Whatonga

The history of Whatonga dates back to the original settlement of Aotearoa – New Zealand. Whatonga was the Captain of the Waka, KURAHAU. This was one of the original Waka that travelled from Hawaiki to New Zealand and brought the Tangata Whenua to this land. Whatonga initially settled his Iwi in the East Coast of the North Island around what is now known as Napier. After that early settlement, Whatonga sailed out to explore the shoreline of the new land. In his adventures he sailed down the East Coast of the North Island, through the Cook Strait between the North and South Islands, and then back up the West Coast of the North Island. Sailing up the West Coast he discovered the mouth of the Manawatu river. He then travelled up that mighty river and found an abundant land that would nurture his Iwi for generations. Whatonga pushed further up the Manawatu River and reached the Manawatu Gorge, Te Apiti, where the river had forged its way through the Mountains of the Ruahine – Tararua Ranges from the East Coast. Here he realized that he stood at the junction between East and West, and from here he sent his messenger back to the East coast via the Gorge route that he had just discovered. His message was for his people to join him in the abundant Manawatu plains or also known as TAPERU NUI O WHATONGA (the great food basket of Whatonga). Whatonga and his people settled well in the Manawatu and from his sons and their sons came the great line of the Rangitane people. The Pou to represent Whatonga will link the people of today to their origins both of ancestry and of their place in the spirit of this land.