



Tainui Awhiro celebrate return of land

by Sonya Haggie

A Government assurance that the Raglan golf course will be returned to its Tainui Awhiro tribal owners by the end of the year means the struggle to get it will soon be just a part of history. The woman who led that struggle is Eva Rickard. Here she talks about the past and the future.

Outside, the wind lashes against Eva Rickard's hilltop house.

It's a fitting background for the story she is telling — a story that began in the 1970s and ended recently when the return of Raglan golf course to its Maori owners was finally assured by the New Zealand Government.

"People have said to me 'you must be celebrating', but I'm not. The price we had to pay has been too great for any celebration," she says with a sadness in her eyes.

"I just sat down and had a cry to myself."

Those are gentle words coming from a woman with a reputation of being an ogre. It's a reputation she admits, but she is surprised at its extent.

"There was a photo of me in a Wellington paper during the meeting with Elworthy (minister of lands). My stomach was hanging down to here and I was eyeing them up," she laughs.

"I thought 'Gee, am I that much of an ogre?'"

"Now I'm going to write a book — about how all men are so easily conned," she laughs.

Mrs Rickard, a 57-year-old grandmother, has devoted much of her life to righting what she believes are wrongs committed at the expense of the Maori people.

Her fight to have the 25ha Raglan golf course returned to the Tainui Awhiro people began in the late 1970s. Even today she doesn't know why she became involved.

"I have often wondered what clicked to get me into it. I had my own house, I was a fat-cat Maori living a real middle class pakeha existence," she says.

She was even a member of the Raglan Golf Club and a regular golfer.

She is a very spiritual woman and talks often of myths, tradition, and her ancestors.

"Spiritually, I know why I became involved. I believe now that I was used by powers I had no control over because I did things I couldn't remember doing, said things I couldn't remember saying.

"I know I have a bigger struggle coming. I have this feeling there's a bigger thing coming."

She says other land struggles had ended in suicide for some Maori people.

"There were times I could have done the same but didn't. I kept going because I believe the young and their descendants have got to find a place in this land.

"I carried on because my future is in my grandchildren and I would hate them to inherit nothing."

From her Raglan house Mrs Rickard has a commanding view of the harbour and the golf course. Over the years she has often dreamed about the land and what its tribal owners could do with it.

An August date had been set for the owners to discuss the land's future. At that meeting Mrs Rickard was to present them with a proposal for its development.

She wants to develop it "for the sur-