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Press Release

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HISTORIC MAPS SAVE ORIGINAL MAORI PLACE NAMES

Historic maps which show original Maori place names of New Zealand have been published just in time to prevent further precious knowledge being lost, says New Zealand Geographic Board researcher, Te Aue Davis.

The maps, Te Ika a Maui (North Island) and Te Wai Pounamu (South Island), were today released by the Department of Survey and Land Information (DOSLI) on behalf of the Geographic Board.

“The maps show nearly 1200 names which include historic pa sites, kaingas (Maori villages), and natural features by the Maori names of 1840. Much of this knowledge came from our current generation of Maori elders who heard the information from their old people. When our elders die there is a real danger that the knowledge will be lost” Mrs Davis said.

“This makes the publication of these maps with their authentic names important for both Maori and Pakeha. Where Maori names are used in contemporary maps they are sometimes spelt incorrectly or used as compound words. This tends to destroy the meaning and origin of the name” she said.

Other sources of information for the names on the maps include the current members and staff of the Geographic Board and a Centennial Atlas planned for release in 1941, but never published. The place names for that project were compiled by Sir Apirana Ngata and other scholars of the time. Mrs Davies visited a number of kaumatua throughout New Zealand to check their views on authenticity of the 1940 names.

“These maps help to demonstrate that New Zealand is not a young country, but has a history going back over a 1000 years,” says the Chairman of the Geographic Board and DOSLI Director General, Bill Robertson.

“In the Wellington area for example, the early Maori explorer Kupe named what we know as Somes Island, Matiu for one of his daughters or nieces. Our Port Nicholson is Te Whanganui a Tara (the great harbour of Tara) named in the 14th century for the North Island chief, Tara.

“Today, there is little widespread evidence of Maori settlement sites. The maps are an essential record of the early place names which may otherwise disappear.

“I’m sure that there will be discussion about the meaning of the names, particularly in the cities where the Maori were not long established before Pakeha settlement. But the maps provide New Zealand’s first comprehensive, thoroughly researched, collection of Maori place names and their meanings,” Mr Robertson said.

The maps, which have macrons to indicate the stressed vowels and word divisions in the Maori names, are part of Maori Language Year and the 1993 International Year for Indigenous People. They are sponsored by the Department of Survey and Land Information, the Historic Places Trust, Te Puni Kokiri, GP Print and the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board.

As well as place names they show New Zealand's pre European rivers and lakes and vegetation including forest, tussock and high altitude plants. Noted Maori artist Cliff Whiting provided illustrations for the map. On the reverse is an alphabetical list of the Maori names with their meanings and the present day place name.

The maps will retail for \$28.80 a pair from DOSLI map shops.

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(Copies of the maps are available on request.)