



Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi  
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## **'Kahungunu Celebrates Matariki'**

### **'MATARIKI RITUAL SAVES NEW VINES'**

Matariki reignites a winter season story Hastings man John O'Connor never gets tired of rekindling at this time of the year.

Mr O'Connor celebrated Matariki Festival in 2002 with Ngati Kahungunu Iwi when he and his Matariki Wines staff were introduced to a Maori tradition organisers of this year's festival are keen to revive.

They gathered a collection of stones from around the vineyard, located on the famous Gimblett Gravels near Fernhill. The stones were marked and blessed, then returned to the vineyard as fertility stones.

When the winery's newest plot of land was planted, a small ceremony was held where the fertility stones were buried next to the new vines, to bring blessings to the land and a bountiful new season.

Mr O'Connor said the plants grew well from day one but there wasn't much thought given to the fertility stones until a disastrous frost which blanketed the region in November 2002.

Grape crops, not just the ones at Matariki, but in other new vineyards around Hawke's Bay were hit hard. Fruit losses were up around the 70 to 80 per cent mark on some varieties as the frost burnt new shoots.

When staff at Matariki assessed the damage at their vineyard, they found one parcel virtually untouched, at the site where the fertility stones had been buried.

Mr O'Connor said there was no geological or physical explanation, there had been no extra frost protection used.

"We don't know for sure but we feel that the blessing given to the stones protected this tiny area and allowed the land to deliver her bounty to us against all the odds, fulfilling the promise that is Matariki," he said.

This winter marks a decade of Matariki celebrations run by Ngati Kahungunu Iwi. There will be a series of events beginning this evening until July 2 in communities from Wairoa to Wairarapa.

Ngati Kahungunu Iwi promotions manager Te Rangi Huata said he hoped the story from Matariki Wines would encourage other growers and food producers to embrace the tradition for their fields, vineyards and orchards.

Others traditions on the revival list included Maori game tournaments, such as kai makamaka (knuckle bones) tititorea (throwing sticks), mahi ringaringa (hand games) and poi.

There were also workshop planned for constructing and flying traditional Maori kites.

“Kites were flown in the early morning from high places. A feather was placed on the string and prayers were chanted as it travelled upwards on the line symbolising the movement of the prayers skyward,” Mr Huata said.

And from the traditional to the contemporary, a modern spin would be put on the colours of fireworks displays which will be a feature of Matariki events.

“For us, we are saying blue represents Rangi Sky father. Green represents Papa earth mother. Yellow, white and red against the black sky represents the traditional Maori colours.

“The loud explosions represent the heartbeat of mother earth. White falling sparks represents the tears of sky father to earth mother,” Mr Huata said.

**For more information on other Matariki events around Kahungunu, contact Te Rangi Huata on (06) 8762718 or 027 5118 052. Website: [www.kahungunu.iwi.nz](http://www.kahungunu.iwi.nz)**