

Towering peaks and majestic waterfalls. Lengthy tunnels and lifelong memories.

Insider's Guide to Milford Sound.

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The heights, the falls

Number of permanent waterfalls:

Two – Lady Bowen Falls ⁽⁴⁾ and Stirling Falls ⁽¹⁰⁾

Number of waterfalls during rainy season: Much more, 100s even

'Animal' peaks: The Elephant ⁽¹¹⁾ 1517 m and The Lion ⁽⁹⁾ 1302 m

Most famous peak: Mitre Peak ⁽⁷⁾ 1692 m

Deepest point: 390 m below sea level

Annual rainfall: Over 6 m!

Maori history

Piopiotahi

Legend has it that the god Tu-te-raki-whanoa gave shape to Fiordland's coastline, attacking the towering rocks using his toki (adze) Te Hamo. Milford Sound is said to be his finest work.

The popular origin of why Milford Sound was called Piopiotahi by local Maori was that it came from a native thrush, the piopio, now thought extinct. Legend has it that when mythical adventurer Māui died a single piopio flew to the sound in mourning.

Another origin story lies in some of the boulders of Anita Bay ⁽¹⁵⁾. These stones are made of Pounamu (greenstone), a prized natural resource for local Maori for use both in tools and jewellery.

Piopiotahi was said to be the name of a canoe that visited here on a quest for Pounamu.

Milford Sound holds the distinction of being the wettest inhabited place in New Zealand – and indeed one of the wettest places in the world.

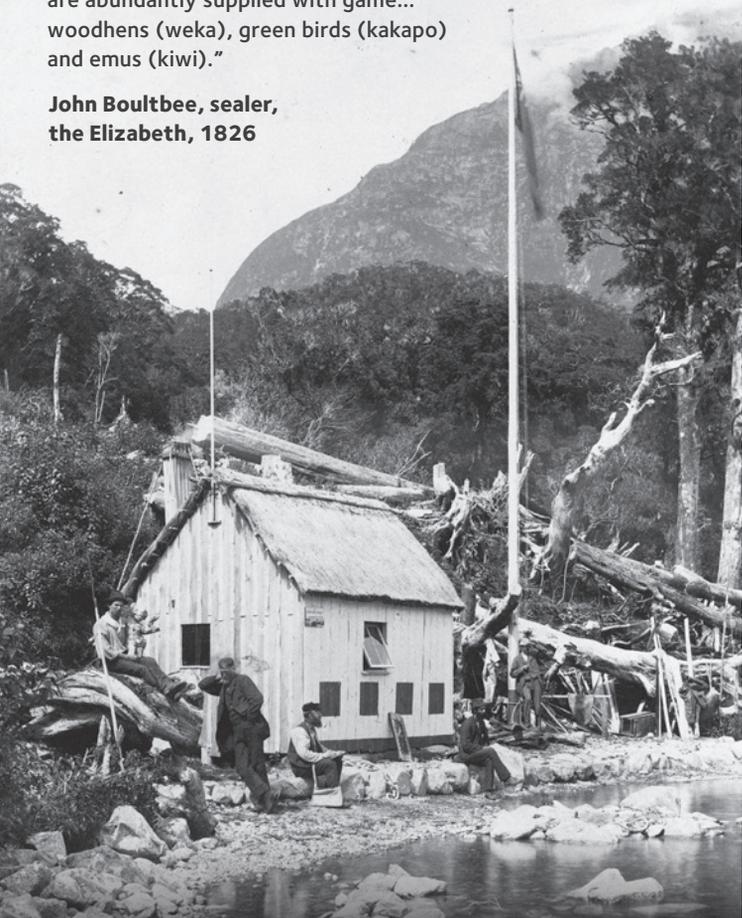
Sealers & settlers

Welsh sealer John Grono originally named the sound after his birthplace, Milford Haven. Another sealer, this time Scottish, Donald Sutherland was responsible for building three thatched huts⁽¹⁾ known as the 'City Of Milford' and, in 1890, cutting the Milford Track through the bush.

The development resulted in the opening of a boarding house by Elizabeth Sutherland, Donald's wife. This marked the start of 'asphalters' arriving in the region – visitors from New Zealand towns and further afield drawn to the unique beauty of Milford Sound.

"Milford Haven is a wild, romantic looking place, abounding in high mountains and intermediate deep valleys. The woods are abundantly supplied with game... woodhens (weka), green birds (kakapo) and emus (kiwi)."

**John Boulton, sealer,
the Elizabeth, 1826**

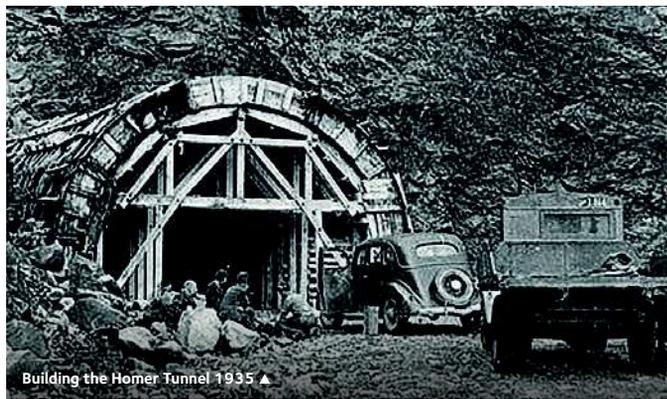


Men outside the Esperance Chalet, Kennedy Station, Southland
Ref: 1/2-024837-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand ▲

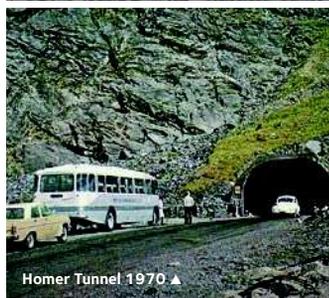
Wheelbarrows & avalanches

The incredible environment and wondrous sights of the sound is matched by the road in – State Highway 94 from Te Anau to Milford Sound one of the highlights of a day trip here.

Good things take time. Work on the road began in 1930, was delayed by WWII and completed in 1954. The Homer Tunnel was started in 1935 but not completed until 1953. It began with just five men using picks and wheelbarrows. It was hard, demanding work – they lived in canvas tents and makeshift buildings and were at the mercy of 'dry avalanches', noiseless falls proceeded by an extremely violent compressed air blast. With no time to avoid them workers were killed, concrete shelters destroyed and tunnel entrances engulfed.



Building the Homer Tunnel 1935 ▲



Homer Tunnel 1970 ▲



Lake Fergus, road maintenance 2010 ▲

After such incredible challenges the celebration was huge when the first private car drove through. Nowadays, with constant monitoring and management of avalanche risk still absolutely vital, visitors safely travel the 1.29 kilometre tunnel.

Rebirth and regeneration

A forest falls (and rises)

With little to no soil on the mountains, trees interlock their roots together and cling to the sheer rock walls, relying on moss and lichen for nutrients. This coupled with the large amounts of rain and snow make 'tree avalanches' a common occurrence. Look at the many ugly dirt scars on the hills and you'd be forgiven for thinking these are losses to be mourned. However they are a natural process of checks and balances for this 'catastrophe forest'.

Just as wildfires later provide fresh growth conditions in dry areas so too has this ecosystem adapted to use landslides to push out the old and grow up the new. After a landslide lichen, moss and other shrubs quickly cover the dirt and rock. This lays the groundwork for the regeneration of the forest and the renewal of life through the land.

Where two worlds collide

The geological forces at play in Fiordland are considerable. This is where the Indo-Australian plate plunges beneath the Pacific Plate, the meeting point is known as the Alpine Fault and the area above is pushed up forming the Southern Alps – the backbone of the South Island.

The area is also known for its speckled granite, dark slate and limestone some dating back 450 million years, commonly seen around the Homer Tunnel.

World heritage status

New Zealand has three natural areas listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Fiordland National Park (Te Wāhipounamu), South West New Zealand, within which Milford Sound rests is one of them. The area famed for its scenic beauty, covers 2.6 million hectares and meets all of the strict criteria used to judge places in need of special recognition and protection.

There are also ten designated marine reserves in Fiordland, 690 hectares of coastline along the north side of Milford Sound is one of them. Anchoring and fishing of any kind is strictly prohibited in this designated marine reserve area. Here, the famous black coral some over 200 years old, and teeming wildlife makes for some truly spectacular viewing, be it via the underwater observatory or out amongst it diving.

What's in the water?

If there is one thing that's true about the waters here it's that they are not one thing. Like other fiords in this area the top few metres of Milford Sound is made up of fresh water from the mountains and layer below salt water from the sea. The two layers don't mix and, with the top layer stained from forest floor run-off, many deep-sea species can be found just ten metres below the surface here.

Forest life

Within the trees

The cool temperate rainforest is dense around Milford Sound, with a huge range of trees, vines, climbers, perching plants and ferns making the damp, rich soils their home. The main tree species here is the Tawahai (Silver Birch), which can grow up to 25 metres in height. Mountain and Red Beech can also be seen along the road. 50 metres tall Rimu can also be spotted here, particularly at The Chasm.

Behind the name

South Island Piopio

AKA: New Zealand Thrush

Diet: Omnivore (mainly roots, berries and insects)

Famous for: Described as "New Zealand's best songbird"

Last confirmed sighting: 1905

Fatal weakness: Too friendly, slow, easy for predators to catch



South Island Piopio ▲



Bottlenose Dolphin ▲



Kea ▲



New Zealand Fur Seal ▲



Fiordland Crested Penguin ▲

Wildlife

Meet the locals

Dolphins

Bottlenose dolphins are often seen in Milford Sound, their acrobatic nature and social curiosity making them easy to spot from on board. It is said there are up to 60 dolphins in the sound. You may see other species too – the Common and Dusky dolphin can also make these waters home.

Kea

There's a call for the kea to be made New Zealand's national bird. Smart, inventive, more than a little mischievous, the world's only alpine parrot is both hardy adventurer and 'clown of the mountains'. But don't get too close to them or distracted. One kea may be dancing to entertain as another sneaks behind you and makes off with your stuff.

Seals

For the New Zealand fur seal days are spent basking and relaxing on rocks after nights diving for food. Nearly hunted into extinction in the 19th century, they were finally placed on the protected list in 1946. It is now the most common seal in local waters and can travel long distances (even right across the Tasman Sea).

Penguins

One of the world's most rare, the Fiordland crested penguin (Maori name, Tawaki) has a distinctive yellow stripe over each eye. There are also blue penguins (Maori name, Kororā) here, also known as 'little' or 'fairy' penguins. Keep your eyes open though, the world's smallest penguin can disappear beneath the waves quickly. Both species can be seen between October to December.

Bottlenose Dolphins

Lifespan: Up to 25 yrs

Length: Up to 3.8 m

Diet: Fish, squid

Top speed: 30 km/h

Diving depth: Up to 200 m

Diving time: Approx. 7 mins

Kea

Survival: Less than 40% celebrate their first birthday

Community: Live in groups of up to 13 birds

Threat: Until 1970 hunted by farmers due to stock attacks

Protection: In 1986 given full protection under the New Zealand Wildlife Act

New Zealand Fur Seal

Length: Up to 2 m

Diet: Squid, octopus, fish

Predators: Orca, sharks, sea lions

Communication: Barks, growls and whimpers

Diving depth: Up to 380 m

Diving time: Up to 15 mins

Fiordland Crested Penguin

Height: Up to 70 cms

Average lifespan: 15 – 20 yrs

Weight: Up to 4 kgs

Blue Penguin

Height: Up to 25 cms

Average lifespan: 6 yrs

Weight: Approx 1 kg

Tasman Sea

Milford Sound

- Nature Cruises
- - - Scenic Cruises
- Overnight Cruises
- Milford Track

* Cruise routes vary depending on weather conditions

The Sound

- Milford Lodge:** Site of the original accommodation built by Donald Sutherland in 1878
- Real Journeys Visitor Centre**
- Cemetery Point:** Named due to grave-like debris from Bowen Falls (and it has also been used as an actual cemetery in the past)
- Bowen Falls:** Named in 1871 after Lady Bowen, wife of then New Zealand Governor General
- Harrison Cove:** The most sheltered natural anchorage, location of the Harrison River
- Sinbad Gully:** Surrounded by Mt Phillips, the Llawrenny Peaks and Rahotu, where the kakapo was rediscovered
- Mitre Peak (Rahotu):** One of the world's highest peaks to rise straight from the sea floor
- Copper Point:** Named for the noticeable copper found in the rock, often the most windiest place in Milford
- The Lion:** Officially called Mt Kimberly, but known for resembling a giant feline
- Stirling Falls (Wai Mananu):** Named after Captain Stirling of the HMS Cleo
- The Elephant:** Mountain said to resemble its namesake's head
- Mt Pembroke (Puhipuhi Takiwai):** One of the highest Milford Sound peaks, home to Pembroke Glacier (the original glacier that carved the fiord)
- Marine Reserve:** Covering an area of 690 hectares
- Dale Point:** Northern point of the entrance to Milford, is almost impossible to sight from the open sea
- Anita Bay:** An historic location for the collection of Pounamu (greenstone) by local Maori
- St Anne Point:** Site of lighthouse, installed in late 1800s
- Deepwater Basin:** The end of the world-famous Milford Track

12
Mt Pembroke
2014 m

11
The Elephant 1,517 m

15
Anita Bay

14
Dale Point

10
Stirling Falls 146 m

9
The Lion 1301 m

8

7
Mitre Peak
1682 m

6
Sinbad Gully

5
Harrison Cove

4
Bowen Falls
160 m

3

2
Milford

17

Milford Sound, a UNESCO
World Heritage Site,
was once described by
Rudyard Kipling as...

"The eighth
wonder of
the world."



Real Journeys is a family owned business
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