Schist

Jargon hunter

Sedimentary rock

Sedimentary rock is formed in a two-step process. Firstly, layers of sediment such as sand and silt are deposited on the sea floor. These are then subjected to pressure of subsequent layers of sediment that squeezes out water and forms solid layers of rock.

Igneous rock

Igneous rock is formed by the solidification of magma (molten rock).

Metamorphic rock

Metamorphic rock is formed by pre-existing rocks physically changed through a metamorphosis requiring immense pressure and heat.

Jargon hunter

The word 'tor' is a Celtic word for an upstanding rock tower. Tors are common in some areas of Britain including Cornwall and Scotland.

Early settlers in Central Otago struggled to find traditional materials for building houses. Instead they had to use rock – and there was no shortage of this. Natural rocky sculptures perforate the landscape and jagged mountains reach for the skies.

The schist rock landscapes of Central Otago are one of nature's true spectacles. The rocky outcrops, known as tors, are among the most distinctive and iconic land features of the Otago area.

Schist outcrops or tors dominate parts of the Otago landscape

Central Otago schist is a metamorphic rock formed some 10-15km beneath the Earth's surface. Gradual uplift resulting from the movement of tectonic plates and subsequent erosion has brought all this rock to the surface. As the name suggests, this rock goes through a metamorphosis (change in form). Schist is formed from the metamorphosis of sedimentary and igneous rock that has been subjected to huge amounts of heat and pressure, resulting in a profound physical change in the nature of the rock.

Tor formation is quite a complicated process. Weathering and erosion of the schist rock over many millions of years, both above and below ground level, has left the strongest, most resistant parts of the rock intact. Gradual removal of the weathered material has then left the tors exposed.

Schist peppers this Central Otago view