

The Catlins coast



Top of the class

A new Museum is now open in Owaka, telling the special stories of the Catlins.



Those were the days...

Whaling in the early 1800s was a tough way to make a living. Open double-bowed boats and hand-thrown harpoons were used and crews had to be very alert to avoid being swamped or capsized by their prey. Many attempts failed and boats were sometimes overturned by the hunted whales.



Local lingo

The Catlins are named after Edward Cattlin, sometimes spelt 'Catlin', who ran a supply ship to Johnny Jones' whaling station. He made a large land claim just prior to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi to beat the stringent laws that were to be enacted by the treaty. His claim was for around 80km by 64km, some 512,000 hectares, but he ultimately only received about 100 hectares.

Pristine native bush, rugged coastlines, stunning waterfalls, a fossilised forest... This could only be the Catlins. More than just a natural wonderland, the Catlins is also a place with plenty of human history, both Māori and European.

The Catlins were first inhabited by the Māori from around 900-1700AD. It is believed that moa hunting drew them to the Catlins. The first Europeans to see the Catlins coast were the crew of Captain Cook's *Endeavour* in 1770. Sealing parties occasionally raided the Catlins beaches in the early 1800s and whalers started arriving in the 1830s.

Vast areas of the Catlins were covered in mature podocarp forests. Podocarps are a family of large coniferous trees mainly found in the southern hemisphere. New Zealand trees in this family include kahikatea, tōtara, mataī, miro and rimu. It was the logging of these and the establishment of farming that attracted the first permanent European settlers. A railway was built to service the logging industry and many small village communities developed.

The human population in the Catlins has declined steadily in recent times and is currently around 1,200. About 400 people live in the main town of Owaka. The popularity of the region as a tourist destination has helped the local economy, which otherwise relies mainly on farming and fishing.



Owaka is the largest settlement in the Catlins area



Wagon carrying logs being pulled across a waterway in the Catlins

