### **Tribal origins**

Ngāi Tahu trace their tribal identity back to Paikea, who lived in the Polynesian homeland of Hawaiki. To escape being killed at sea by his brother, he came to New Zealand on the back of a whale. Ngāi Tahu share this ancestor with the Ngāti Porou people. One of Paikea’s descendants was Tahupōtiki, from whom Ngāi Tahu take their name. He lived on the East Coast of the North Island.

### **The move south**

From the East Coast, Ngāi Tahu migrated south, first to Wellington, then across Cook Strait to the South Island. This was known as Te Wai Pounamu, the greenstone waters – named after the beautiful and valuable stone found on the West Coast. As Ngāi Tahu moved down the island they fought several battles with two tribes already living there: Ngāti Māmoe and Waitaha. By the end of the 18th century Ngāi Tahu had reached Foveaux Strait at the bottom of the South Island, and occupied the West Coast.

### **The land**

It was not just through warfare that Ngāi Tahu came to occupy much of the South Island. They also mixed with Ngāti Māmoe and Waitaha through marriages with the families of chiefs. They studied and adopted the traditions and history of Waitaha, whose ancestor Rākaihautū is said to have carved out the South Island’s lakes and mountains with his digging stick. Waitaha believed the landmarks surrounding them were their ancestors, and that the winds were related to each other like members of a family.

### **The wars with Ngāti Toa**

In the 1820s and 1830s the powerful chief Te Rauparaha led the North Island tribe Ngāti Toarangatira in attacks on Ngāi Tahu. Armed with muskets, they were seeking revenge for tribal insults and killings. They also wanted to take control of the valuable greenstone in the region. Ngāi Tahu suffered greatly. They survived for three months when Te Rauparaha surrounded their [pā](https://teara.govt.nz/en/glossary" \l "p%C4%81" \o "fortified refuge or settlement) at Kaiapoi, but when strong winds caused a fire, the enemy rushed in and killed the people. However, Ngāi Tahu did not lose their territory. On one occasion Ngāi Tahu nearly captured Te Rauparaha himself in a surprise attack from behind a hill at Kāpara-te-hau (Lake Grassmere).

### **The Ngāi Tahu claim**

Ngāi Tahu sold most of their land to the British Crown between 1844 and 1863. The Crown had promised to leave some of the land and the food-gathering places in the hands of the tribe, and to provide schools and hospitals. But the government did not keep these promises, and for 150 years, Ngāi Tahu pursued a claim for compensation. Their claim was finally settled in the 1990s. Among other things, it returned the sacred mountain of Aoraki/Mt Cook to the tribe and acknowledged their ownership of pounamu (greenstone).

In the 2013 census, almost 55,000 people said they were of Ngāi Tahu descent.

Ngāi Tahu committed themselves to the Treaty of Waitangi, with its leading chiefs signing at Akaroa, Ruapuke and Ōtākou during 1840. Ngāi Tahu believed that with the treaty would come material benefits. However, one purpose of the treaty was to facilitate the Crown’s purchase of land from Māori, to sell to settlers or commercial interests. From 1844 to 1863 Ngāi Tahu sold their lands to the Crown in a series of nine purchases. The largest of these was the Canterbury purchase of 1848, negotiated by Henry Tacy Kemp, which saw 20 million acres (about 8 million hectares) sold for £2,000. The other principal transaction was the Otago purchase of 1844: 400,000 acres (about 162,000 hectares)sold for £2,400.

### **Ngāi Tahu dissatisfaction**

It soon became apparent to Ngāi Tahu that the Crown would not honour the transactions, as they understood them. The tribe believed larger reserves should have been surveyed, their food-gathering places set aside, and schools and hospitals located within the villages.

The first formal statement of Ngāi Tahu grievances about the land purchases was made as early as 1849 by Matiaha Tiramōrehu. In the 1870s, Hōri Kerei Taiaroa began the pursuit of the Ngāi Tahu claim in Parliament. Subsequently almost every Ngāi Tahu leader until the 1990s was active in the cause.

Canterbury Ngāi Tahu understood that the hinterland had not been sold. It was this belief which inspired the prophet Te Maihāroa in 1877 to lead a party to Te Ao Mārama (Ōmārama) in the upper Waitaki basin, asserting a claim on the summer fowling grounds. Local sheep-run holders put pressure on the government, and in 1879 Te Maihāroa was forced from the interior of the South Island down to the coast.

### **Pursuing the claim**

Besides the ongoing petitions to Parliament and Queen Victoria, Ngāi Tahu sought redress in the Native Land Court in 1868, and before a series of royal commissions, in particular the 1879 Royal Commission headed by Francis Nairn and Thomas Smith. The interim report of this commission found that larger reserves should have been set aside. However, no action was taken and the commission’s funds were cut.

Ata Whenua

Fiordland was well known to the Māori, and many legends recount its formation and naming. Demigod Tuterakiwhanoa is said to have carved the rugged landscape from formless rock. Few Māori were permanent residents of the region but seasonal food-gathering camps were linked by well worn trails. Takiwai, a translucent greenstone, was sought from Anita Bay and elsewhere near the mouth of Milford Sound/Piopiotahi.

## First Europeans

Captain Cook and his crew were the first Europeans to visit Fiordland, and in 1773 spent five weeks in Tamatea/Dusky Sound. Cook’s maps and descriptions soon attracted sealers and whalers who formed the first European settlements of New Zealand. From the middle of the 19th century surveyors, explorers and prospectors began to penetrate the unexplored interior of Fiordland.  
Preservation Inlet boomed briefly in the 1890s after gold was found, but efforts to establish mines, timber mills and farms in Fiordland have generally been short-lived.

  
Original Beech Hut near the present site of Quintin Lodge on the Milford Track

## Early settlers

Quintin McKinnon and Donald Sutherland opened up the Milford Track in 1889 and began guiding tourists through the now world-famous route. Richard Henry, one of the pioneers of threatened species work transferred kākāpō and kiwi to islands in Tamatea/Dusky Sound in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

In 1986, Rakihia Tau filed the Ngāi Tahu claims with the Waitangi Tribunal. Negotiations between the Crown and Ngāi Tahu on the claims began in 1991, after the release of the tribunal’s Ngāi Tahu Land Claims report.

The negotiations which began in 1991 were suspended unilaterally by the Crown in 1994. Ngāi Tahu then sought and won court orders against the Crown, securing orders to prevent the sale of Crown-owned land and other Crown assets in the South Island. The Court ruled such assets had to be preserved for potential use in any settlement reached between the parties.

Following the intervention of the then Prime Minister, Mr Jim Bolger, negotiations were resumed in 1996. They led to the signing of the non-binding Heads of Agreement on the 5th of October 1996, then the signing of the Deed of Settlement at Kaikōura on the 21st November 1997, and the passage of the Ngāi Tahu Claim Settlement Act on the 29th September 1998.

Ngāi Tahu received cultural redress in the form of confirmation of the ability for Ngāi Tahu to express its traditional kaitiaki relationship with the environment, tribal redress, an apology from the Crown, acknowledgement of the role of our taonga Aoraki and economic redress in the form of a payment of $170 million plus the ability to purchase property from the Crown.

This financial acknowledgement has allowed the tribe to establish itself as an economic powerhouse within the South Island. Today, Ngāi Tahu has interests in fishing, tourism, property as well as a diversified equities portfolio, all of which are managed through [Ngāi Tahu Holdings Ltd](http://www.ngaitahuholdings.co.nz/).