

Cautious explorers, costly roads and powerful forces.

Insider's Guide to Doubtful Sound.

Maori legend

Many hands, many arms

According to Maori legend the fiords of this area were created by the god Tu-Te-Raki-Whanoa for providing refuge from the storming seas nearby.

Tu-Te-Raki-Whanoa came from the south and worked his way up the island. Wielding a magical adze he split the rock open to let the sea rush in.

In Doubtful Sound four young sea gods assisted him, using their own adzes to carve out the four arms – First Arm / Taipari-poto (short), Crooked Arm / Taipari-nui (big), Hall Arm / Taipari-roa (long) and Deep Cove / Taipari-tiki (little).

A history of doubt

When Captain James Cook got close to it's entrance in 1770 he decided on the name 'Doubtful Harbour'. That's because, fearing he would not be able to sail the Endeavour back out, he resisted entering the inlet and instead continued on around the island.

Did the captain ever regret not making the push further into the sound? Considering Felipe Bauza only properly charted its geography in 1793, 14 years after Cook was killed in Hawaii, it's doubtful.

The seal trade

In the early 1800s sealing arrived in New Zealand. In Doubtful Sound's Grono Bay ⁽²⁵⁾ a station helped sealers access nearby colonies on the Nee Islets ⁽²⁸⁾ and Shelter Islands ⁽²⁷⁾.

The New Zealand Fur Seal proved valuable for its blubber, which was made into oil for lamps, and for its skin, which was used in clothing. Hundreds of thousands of seals were slaughtered here and shipped back to the London markets.

The frenzied nature of the early trade was not sustainable however, and in 1875 the first steps were made to prevent extinction of the species. In 1946 the hunting of seals was banned, the fur seal finally gained full protection under New Zealand law.

Travelling the Wilmot Pass



There are differing reports as to the exact price of the Wilmot Pass road but, at approximately \$80 per square metre, this was New Zealand's most expensive. It was money well spent.

Construction took two years to climb up and over the 671 metres high pass. In 1965 the unsealed road was completed in time to transport machinery from Doubtful Sound to the Manapouri Power Station.

Now, with the station complete, the road is used for visitors wanting to access this incredible location. The only road on the New Zealand mainland not connected to the rest of the network, it is home to incredible moss gardens, towering waterfalls and absolutely, undisputedly, simply incredible scenic vistas.

Then & now

From one of the oldest boats to one of the newest...

Captain Cook's Endeavour

Launched: Yorkshire, England 1764

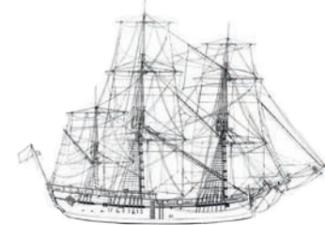
Cruising speed: 7 – 8 knots

Length: 32 metres

Capacity: 94

Armament: 24 small cannons
Threats: Death from dysentery, malaria, drowning and murder

Bar: Various barrels of whiskey



Endeavour ▲

Real Journeys Patea Explorer

Launched: Hobart, Australia 2005

Cruising speed: 25 knots

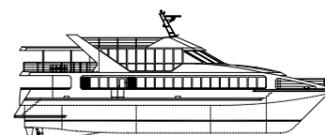
Length: 30 metres

Capacity: 150

Armament: Many Canons, Nikons and other cameras

Threats: Sandflies, rain

Bar: Quality local food, wine and beer



Patea Explorer ▲

Hydroelectricity

With great power...

It was a bold plan. In 1904 Mr P.S. Hay put forward a vision for power generation that involved drilling through 10kms of uncompromising Fiordland mountain. Remote and rugged, the landscape made such an idea difficult.

That changed in the 1960s when the aluminium smelter near Bluff demanded a large, consistent supply. The project was challenging. 16 men died either underground or on the Wilmot Pass. Trucks had to reverse out of the tunnel, which could take up to 7 hours. And the result?

Manapouri is now the largest hydro power station in New Zealand. 176 metres below lake level the machine hall and turbines provide an average annual output of around 4800 GW-h, with up to 510 cubic metres of water per second surging through the pipes and down the Tailrace Tunnel into Doubtful Sound.



The key figures

Project scope: 8 years, 1,800 workers

Tunnel: 2 kilometres, 9 metres wide

Turbine weight: 18 tonnes

Tailrace tunnel: 10 kilometres

Our environmental efforts

Saving Doubtful Sound

Doubtful Sound is isolated, beautiful and teeming with wildlife. It's also part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. But these aren't the only reasons why this incredible ecosystem needs protecting.

The modern New Zealand environmental movement began in the late 1960s with the push to protect this unique area.

The original power station plans required Lake Manapouri be raised up to 30 metres. It would have devastated much of the area's famed beauty, and the New Zealand public weren't happy about it. In 1970, before the times of social media, almost 10% of New Zealand's population signed the Save Manapouri petition.

Two of the leaders of this protest movement were Real Journeys owners Les and Olive Hutchins.



New Zealand Fur Seals ▲



Doubtful Sound ▲

Manapouri is the place New Zealanders first recognised the importance the greater environment has for the country as a whole.

In 1973 the Government created an independent body – the Guardians of the Lakes. Six were chosen, and Les Hutchins was one of these Guardians. He held the position for the next 26 years.

Nowadays the Leslie Hutchins Conservation Foundation receives more than \$50,000 annually from Doubtful Sound operations, money used for vital research, protection, education and conservation programmes.

Les and Olive's efforts paved the way for the protection of this incredible place. Real Journeys continue their hard work with our efforts to protect, sustain and replenish the unique environment of this region.

Anyone who has travelled here will recognise why the Maori name for Doubtful Sound, Patea, is so appropriate. Translated it means...

"The place of silence."

Real Journeys is a family owned business founded in 1954 by tourism and conservation pioneers Les and Olive Hutchins. We offer experiences in Milford and Doubtful Sounds, Te Anau, Stewart Island and Queenstown.

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World heritage status

New Zealand has three natural areas listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, an island group in the Sub-Antarctic, Tongariro National Park in the central North Island, and the third Fiordland National Park, known as Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand, within which Doubtful Sound rests.

These areas meet all of the strict criteria the organisation uses to judge places in need of special recognition and protection. Famed for its scenic beauty, Fiordland was first recognised as World Heritage Area in 1986 with the landscape described as the best modern example of Gondwanaland, in 1990 the Te Wāhipounamu World Heritage Area was extended to include Fiordland, Westland and Mt Cook National Parks.

Te Wāhipounamu stretches over an area of 2.6 million hectares, 10% of New Zealand's landmass. There are ten designated marine reserves here, Doubtful Sound contains one of them. The area covers a passage in the Te Awaatu channel between the Bauza and Secretary Islands ⁽²⁹⁾ known as 'The Gut' and has a high tidal flow teaming with wildlife. Measuring 93 hectares is the smallest of the ten reserve areas the largest being Long Sound at 3,762.

Anchoring and fishing of any kind is strictly prohibited in designated marine reserve areas, home to one of the world's largest populations of black coral trees some dating back to the 1800s.

Doubtful Sound contains one of the ten marine reserves in Fiordland. This area covers a passage in Te Awaatu channel between the Bauza and Secretary Islands.

Here comes the rain

This is one of the wettest places on earth, an average of over 200 days a year of rain delivering around seven metres worth of water from the heavens (which makes the waterfalls look truly magnificent). And, much like New Zealand's overall weather conditions, things can turn quickly too. Which is why even day-trippers are told to pack for summer and winter.

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.

Doubtful Sound is also known for its speckled granite, dark slate and limestone some dating back 450 million years!

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 Doubtful 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.



Bottlenose Dolphin ▲



New Zealand Fur Seal ▲



Fiordland Crested Penguins ▲

Wildlife

Meet the locals

Dolphins

The 60-strong pod of bottlenose dolphins here is one of the world's southernmost. You'll often find these incredible animals riding the boat's bow or, if in the mood, leaping through the air. Among the largest of their species this sleek grey and white mammal is built for speed, agility and excitement. Social beings, they use a complex set of clicks and whistles, working in groups to get food and raise calves.

Bottlenose Dolphins

Lifespan: Up to 25 yrs

Length: Up to 3.8 m

Celebrities: TV star Flipper, US Navy minesweepers

Top speed: Up to 30 km/h

Diving depth: Up to 200 m

Diving time: Approx. 7 mins

Seals

Near the sound entrance you'll find New Zealand fur seals basking on the rocks and streaking through the water. With a consistent mating season there is separation of adult males from cows and young seals for 10 months each year. While seeming friendly they're surprisingly quick and defensive when cut off from the water or protecting their young. This seal breed is known as the best for diving depth and time also – they'll go a long way for a good feed.

New Zealand Fur Seal

Length: Up to 2 m

Diet: Squid, octopus and fish

Breeding season: October – December

Predators: Orca, sharks, sea lions

Communication: Barks, growls and whimpers

Diving depth: Up to 380 m

Diving time: Up to 15 mins

Penguins

One of the world's most rare, the Fiordland crested penguin has a distinctive yellow stripe over each eye. You'll often see them on the Rolla ⁽¹⁹⁾ and Shelter Islands ⁽²⁷⁾ during breeding and moulting seasons, they like to nest close to the coastline. There are also blue penguins here, also known as 'little' or 'fairy' penguins. Keep your eyes open though, the world's smallest penguin can disappear beneath the waves quickly. They have been known to travel up to 1.5 kilometres inland to find the perfect nest site. Both species breeding season runs July – November.

Fiordland Crested Penguin

Maori name: Tawaki

Height: Up to 70 cms

Average lifespan: 15 – 20 yrs

Weight: Up to 4 kgs

Blue Penguin

Maori name: Kororā

Height: Up to 25 cms

Average lifespan: 6 yrs

Weight: Approx 1 kg

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.

Tree life

Between Lake Manapouri and Doubtful Sound the Silver Beech (Tawhai) tree dominates the landscape. Beneath them a number of shrubs and ferns thrive in the cool, wet environment, including the mighty Crown Fern. The Moss Gardens on the Wilmot Pass provide an excellent example of how smaller species can regenerate and grow the forest.

Behind the names

Spanish influences

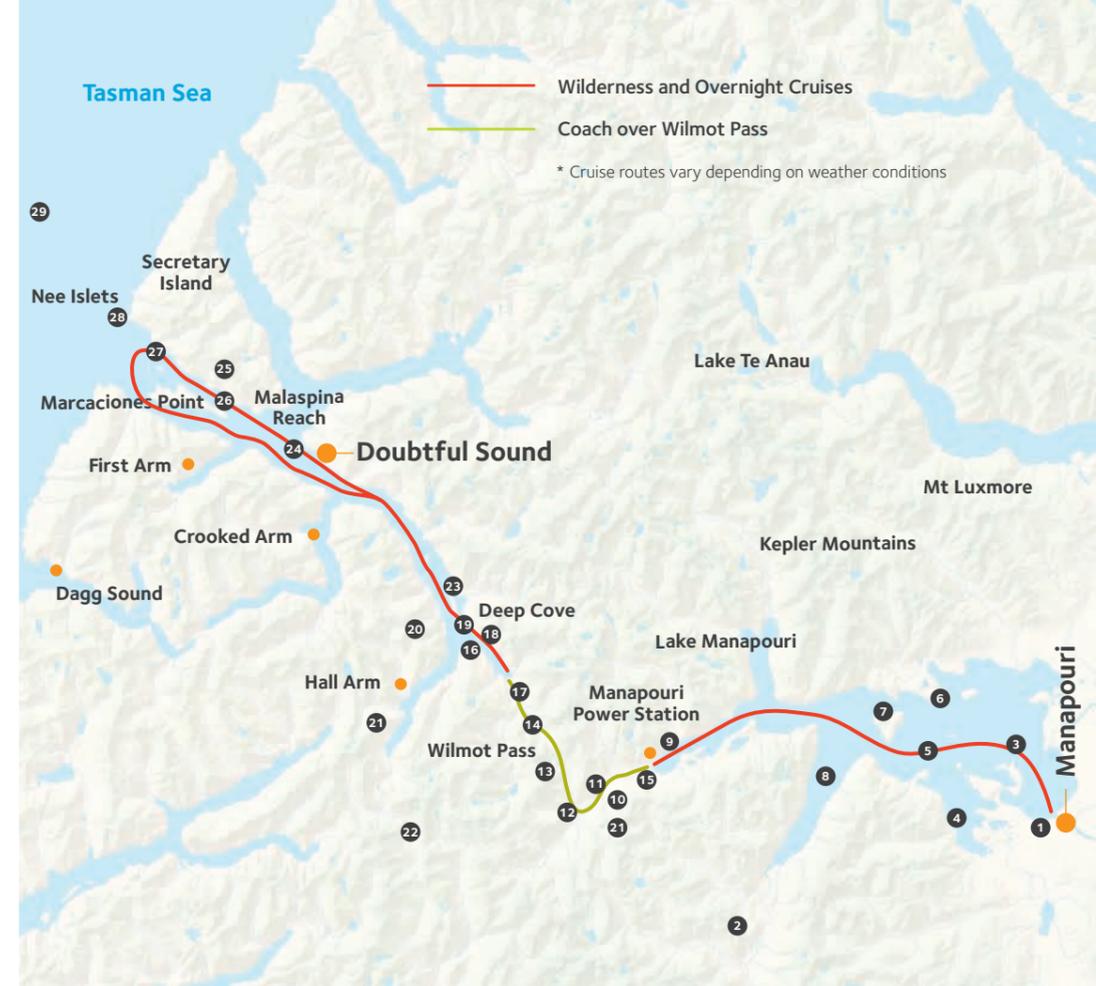
The first scientific expedition to properly chart the area was led by Alessandro Malaspina in 1793. Using a long boat his ship's hydrographer, Don Felipe Bauza, explored the far reaches of the Sound.

The map he produced from this journey was acclaimed for its detail and accuracy. No other part of New Zealand has such a collection of Spanish names, with Malaspina Reach ⁽²⁴⁾, Nee Islets ⁽²⁸⁾ (named after Luis Nee, the ship's botanist), and Marcaciones Point ⁽²⁶⁾ (the site of the first landing) some of the more notable locations.

Q

When is a Sound not a Sound?

Answer: When it is a fiord. Early sealers and whalers renamed Cook's harbour Doubtful Sound. As a post-glacier valley flooded by the sea, it should technically be called Doubtful Fiord. The second name has stuck however.



Doubtful Sound

1. Pearl Harbour Real Journeys Visitor Centre
2. Hunter Mountains 1768 m
3. Stony Point Light
4. Hope Arm
5. Channel Islands
6. The Beehive
7. Pomona Island
8. South Arm
9. West Arm Power station site
10. Spey River
11. Mica Burn Bridge
12. Moss Gardens
13. Cleve Garth Falls 365 m
14. Wilmot Pass Lookout
15. Tailrace Tunnel
16. Deep Cove Wharf
17. Wilmot Pass Road 22 km
18. Lady Alice Falls
19. Rolla Island
20. Commander Peak 1274 m
21. Mt Danae 1509 m
22. Mt Crowfoot 1695 m
23. Elizabeth Island
24. Malaspina Reach
25. Grono Bay
26. Marcaciones Point
27. Shelter Islands
28. Nee Islets
29. Marine Reserve

Wilmot Pass

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Lake Manapouri

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