

christchurch before 1850

Inner-city and coastal heritage trails

*The First Peoples
Waitaha to European in Christchurch*



Pre-European Christchurch

Imagine yourself on the site of Christchurch about 700 years ago. Surrounded by head-high flax and raupo, you seek out the higher dry sand dunes and terraces standing above a maze of streams and backwaters.



This was Ngā-pākihi-whakatekateka-o-Waitaha (the wetlands where Waitaha made fish spears from flax-stalks), which separated Banks Peninsula from the plains. From their arrival, Māori people used the rich food and fibre resources in this area.

Individuals and families held rights to specific food-gathering places. Known as mahinga kai, these places and the related knowledge, practices, and customs were essential to the identity and lifestyle of the people.

Apart from a few early settlements inhabited year-round, the wetlands were not seen as a permanent living place. Instead, Māori camped overnight at their mahinga kai and at established staging points on a network of trails traversing the wetlands between settlements to the north and south.

Migration and settlement

Three successive waves of Māori migrants preceded the arrival of the Canterbury Association settlers in 1850. Each wave saw settlement, displacement, and changing dominance. This pattern then continued with a fourth wave of migrants, the Europeans, who began arriving in the early to mid nineteenth century.



The first settlers – Waitaha to Ngai Tahu

The first Maori settlers in the Christchurch area were the Waitaha, who hunted and gathered food along the coast and in the estuary. In the 1500s, Ngati Mamoe migrated south from the North Island and assimilated Waitaha, first by intermarriage, then by warfare, and finally by negotiated peace. They were followed south in the mid 1700s by Ngāi Tahu, who after a similar process assumed customary authority over the Canterbury region and the wider South Island.



Settlements in the Christchurch area lived in by Waitaha then Ngati Mamoe fell into disuse by about 1700. Ngāi Tahu established major settlements on the outskirts of the present-day city. Kaiapoi, Rapaki, Koukourarata, and Taumutu are names that featured throughout the turbulent events of the early 1800s.

Muskets and measles

The peace negotiated by Ngati Mamoe and Ngāi Tahu lasted barely 50 years. A major feud developed on Banks Peninsula that eventually sapped the fighting strength and social cohesion of Ngāi Tahu. Known as the Kai Huanga feud, escalating insult and retaliation from 1824 to 1830 led to massacres of closely related people. For the first time the warriors used muskets, which had been obtained from early European sealers and flax traders.



Port Cooper Natives, 1849 by William Fox

In the early 1830s, Ngāi Tahu were further debilitated by the onslaughts of Te Rauparaha from the north. Also armed with muskets, Te Rauparaha was intent on conquering land in the South Island. One by one, Ngāi Tahu pās fell to his raids. Counter raids by Ngāi Tahu, re-united against this threat, eventually succeeded in driving Te Rauparaha back to the North Island.

At the same time, the epidemics of measles and influenza that accompanied the arrival of Europeans were decimating the surviving southern Māori people. By 1840, when South Island Rangatira signed the Treaty of Waitangi with the British Crown at Akaroa, Ngāi Tahu numbers in Canterbury had fallen from about 5000 in 1820 to about 500. Most of these people lived in settlements on Banks Peninsula. Their way of life had changed forever.

The arrival of Europeans – first contacts

In the first decades of the 1800s, European sealers and flax traders visited Banks Peninsula, and a few ventured onto the Canterbury Plains. Whalers who followed in the 1830s set up shore stations, and some eventually turned to farming.

As in the earlier waves of Māori migration into Canterbury, these new arrivals were made welcome. Ngāi Tahu willingly guided the settlers to suitable places for their activities and leased them land. Most of these early Europeans chose land close to Ngāi Tahu settlements at the fertile heads of bays on Banks Peninsula.

By 1840, about eighty Europeans were settled on the Peninsula. Many of them married Ngāi Tahu women. Their descendants and families were to become influential throughout the later history of Canterbury.

The first Europeans to settle on the site of Christchurch itself were two small groups of Scots led by Herriott and McGillivray, who took up land at Riccarton (Putaringamotu) in 1840. Discouraged by financial problems, isolation, and pests, they left in 1841. The fertile land they cleared was successfully settled by the Deans brothers two years later. By 1848, parties of Canterbury Association surveyors and explorers were frequent visitors at the Deans farm. Its location influenced the selection of the site for the new city.

The mounting wave of European settlers initially brought profitable trading opportunities for Ngāi Tahu. When the first Canterbury Association ships arrived in December 1850, Ngāi Tahu supplied the settlers with wheat, potatoes, and other produce. The signing of Kemp's Deed in 1848 accelerated the loss of their ancestral lands and by the end of the 1850s, Ngāi Tahu were no longer an economic force. The fourth wave of migration, displacement, and changing dominance had become irreversible.

A city in the swamp

Why did the Canterbury Association choose the wetlands of Ngā-pākihi-whakatekateka-o-Waitaha as the most suitable site for Christchurch? For more than 150 years, Ngāi Tahu had not considered the area suitable for permanent settlements.

The Association's surveyor, Captain Thomas, had initially selected the head of Lyttelton Harbour as the city site. A second assessment revealed its limited space, forcing him to look elsewhere.

From the rim of the Port Hills, extensive grassy plains beckoned and the Deans farm, on the margin of the wetlands, provided proof of fertility. With ample land seemingly available and access already established, Thomas chose a site close to Riccarton for this city in the swamp.



The Canterbury Plains, 1851 by W H Holmes

Māori in present-day Christchurch

Ngāi Tahu have always had a presence in the Christchurch area. In more recent times, the urban marae at Rehua was established to provide accommodation for apprentices in the Ngāi Tahu-initiated Māori Trade Training Scheme set up after the Second World War.

Today, with the settlement of their land claim with the Crown after 150 years of persistent petitioning, Ngāi Tahu are once more becoming a major social and economic entity in the centre of Christchurch.

Exploring early Christchurch

Use this brochure to guide you to traces of the first peoples on the landscape of Christchurch. The reverse side outlines the major events in the early history of Canterbury, ending with the Canterbury Association settlement in 1850.

On each of the following two trails you will find information panels and plaques that provide stories about historically significant sites.

For information on other sites significant to Māori, check Ti Kouka Whenua, the Christchurch City Libraries’ website on the Māori history of the Canterbury Plains
www.christchurchcitylibraries.com/tikoukawhenua

For further information, publications and brochures on heritage sites and walks in Christchurch contact Christchurch City Council.



Pou, Victoria Square

The content of this brochure was created with the support of: Turning Point 2000, the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board, the Canterbury Community Trust and the Christchurch City Council.



Inner-City Heritage Trail

Allow 30 minutes from the city to Barbadoes Street

This trail follows the Avon River (Otakaro) past sites that became the focus of early contact between Ngāi Tahu and the first Europeans.

1 Cathedral Square – central city. Plaques at Four Ships Court and on the east side of the Cathedral introduce you to the first peoples, Māori and European.

2 Puari – Worcester Boulevard Bridge. A panel here describes the site of a major Waitaha settlement. On the corner of Hereford Street and Cambridge Terrace, a plaque commemorates the burial place for this settlement.

(A visit to the Canterbury Museum at the corner of Worcester Boulevard and Rolleston Avenue, could be included between **2** and **3**. There you can see artefacts belonging to early Māori people and recreations of their lifestyle.)

3 Market Square – Victoria Square. Look across the Avon River to where early trading took place between Ngāi Tahu and European settlers.

4 Pou – Victoria Square. At the carved pou (post) you can listen to Ngāi Tahu’s creation legend.

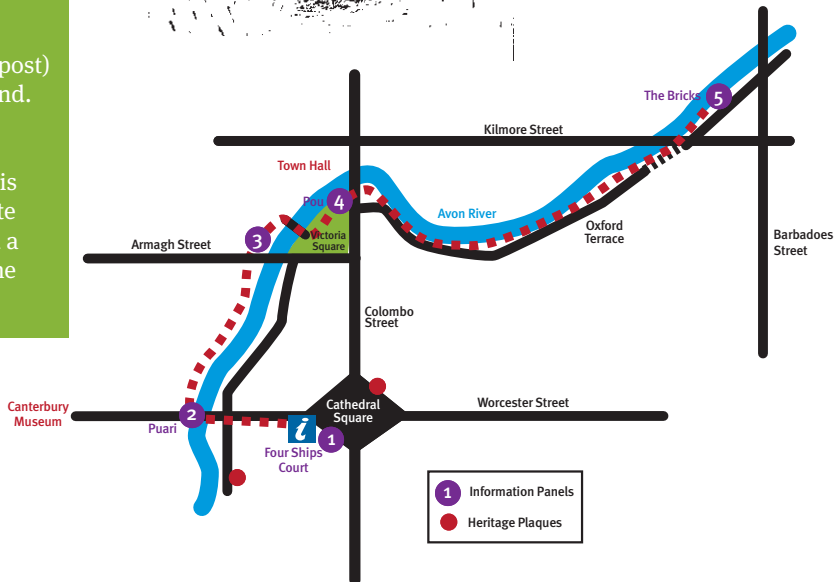
5 O-Tautahi /The Bricks – corner Oxford Terrace and Barbadoes Street. Panels at this site describe a Ngāi Tahu seasonal campsite that gave Christchurch its Maori name and a landing place on the Avon River used by the first European settlers.

Puari and O-Tautahi – early Māori settlements

Waitaha and Ngāti Mamoe established settlements in the wetlands on high ground and close to sidestreams in places such as Puari and O-Tautahi. Later, Ngāi Tahu used these places as overnight camps while they gathered seasonal foods. A plaque at Rehua Marae, Springfield Road, indicates the source of the freshwater springs on the northern boundary of Puari.



The wetlands and their waterways yielded waterfowl, fish, and eels. Flax, raupo, and the leaves of cabbage trees provided fibre for clothing, cordage, and containers. The tough flower stalks of flax were tied together to make mokihi craft for travelling the waterways. Visit Travis Wetlands and Cockayne Reserve and walk the Heathcote Towpath to see remnants of wetlands within the city.



Establishing a foothold – Europeans on the plains

The first Europeans relied on local Ngāi Tahu to show them the network of trails that traversed Banks Peninsula and the plains. Those Europeans who settled on the Peninsula and married Ngāi Tahu women then became interpreters and guides on these trails for later arrivals. Visit Four Ships Court (Cathedral Square) to read more about the many settlers who arrived before the organised European settlement by the Canterbury Association in 1850.

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, settlers in Christchurch relied on Ngāi Tahu to supply provisions. Ngāi Tahu farmers from outlying settlements brought produce to trade at Market Square (Victoria Square).

Within a generation of the arrival of the Canterbury Association settlers, raupo and flax, whare and tent fly gave way to gridded streets and ambitious stone buildings. Like their Māori predecessors, the European settlers named places after ancestors and their original homes, imprinting the new city with their European culture.



The Bricks Memorial

Coastal Heritage Trail

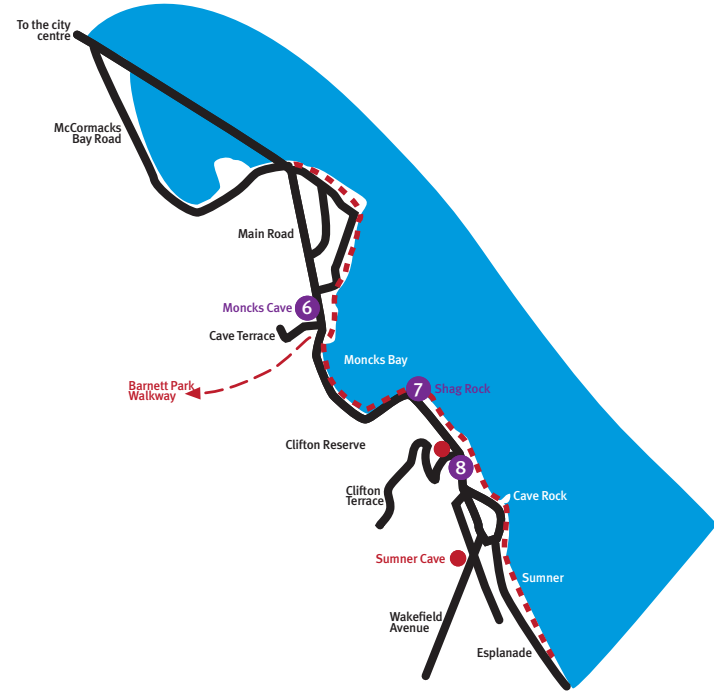
Allow 30 minutes from Moncks Cave (Redcliffs) along the coastal path to Cave Rock in Sumner.

Three sites – Moncks Bay, Shag Rock, and Sumner – are featured on this trail.

6 Moncks Bay, Redcliffs – In this area you can visit several nationally important archaeological sites.

7 Shag Rock – At this striking entrance to the estuary you will find a panel featuring coastal resources important to Māori.

8 Sumner, Clifton Bay – The rivers feeding the estuary became the entry point for the first European arrivals.



The earliest inhabitants

The first people living in the Christchurch area were the Waitaha. Human remains have been found at Rae Kura (Redcliffs), where the Waitaha had a major settlement amongst the sand hills.



Canterbury Museum

Moa bones were found in and near the Moa-bone Point Cave by sailors from the survey ship ‘Acheron’ in 1849. Excavation of the occupation layers in 1872, one of the first formal digs in New Zealand, contributed to the development of archaeological interpretation of the past. Material from these significant sites continues to contribute to present-day archeological research.

Coast and estuary

From the beginning, the Christchurch coastline was a major resource. Later, Māori ventured inland from their coastal settlements to gather seasonal resources from the forests. But when the forests were destroyed by fire about 500 years ago, people again became reliant on the coast. Several thousand camp sites have been found along the sand dunes between the estuary and the Waikari River mouth.

Right up to European times, Ngāi Tahu harvested shellfish, eels, and waterfowl on the tidal flats of the estuary, although they were no longer living here.

Look out for further information at Ferry Landing, McCormack’s Bay, and Ebbside Street.

Gateway to the city

The estuary and the rivers feeding it became the main entrance to the Christchurch area for the European settlers. Sumner was established as a convenient link between Lyttelton and the estuary. The Canterbury Association erected its store on a beach at Clifton Bay. Heavy goods were shipped from here across the Sumner Bar before being taken up the Heathcote or Avon Rivers to the new city site.

Other places to visit

On your travels through the city, look out for some other sites on the heritage trail. These are not shown on the maps.

Riccarton Bush

Allow 30 minutes to 1 hour to explore this historic site.



Deans Cottage, Riccarton Bush

Until the vast podocarp forests that covered the Canterbury Plains were destroyed by fire, they were a valuable source of birds and timber.

When Europeans arrived, some Ngāi Tahu people still lived at Riccarton Bush. Its name Putaringamotu, the ear severed from the body, eloquently describes the loss of the forest. This site was occupied by the first European settlers in the city area.

Today you can walk in Christchurch’s sole remnant of floodplain forest. On this site you can also visit Riccarton House and Deans Cottage to find information on the Maori and European history of Putaringamotu and Riccarton.

Linwood sand hills – A panel at the corner of Avonside Drive and Linwood Avenue features a traditional Waitaha story that explained the origin of the sand mounds and ridges along Linwood Avenue and adjacent streets.

Opawaho – A Waitaha satellite settlement is marked by an information panel on Richardson Terrace near the corner of Opawa Road. This site can be visited as part of the longer trail along the Heathcote River that tells the story of early European trade.

Cashmere Reserve – A plaque here explains the significance of a cave located on a traditional Māori route to Banks Peninsula.

Mt Pleasant – High on the slopes of Mt Pleasant, at the corner of the Summit Road and Mt Pleasant Road, a Ngāti Mamoe pā site is marked by a plaque.