

New Zealand from Above (Episode 1)

The West Coast and Northern South Island

In coproduction with Making Movies (New Zealand), Bearcage (Australia) and ZDF/ARTE

The very things that give the West Coast its beauty make it inhospitable at the same time: the landscape. In the 19th century, jobless gold-seekers and European migrants tried to settle down in the area, but the thick, impenetrable rainforest and swamplands made every attempt to cross the land impossible. Weathered tombstones from this period are the silent witnesses of the failed mission to dominate the implacable nature. Today, narrow white beaches stretch along the coastline, giving way to grassland dotted by cattle. In the south, the beaches are replaced by the Southern Alps, violently rising from the ground. The rainforest is home to a huge diversity of birds and trees, and, above all, moss. It is said, that things which don't move are covered by a thin layer of green moss within seconds. Even today, despite an improved infrastructure the area is still only sparsely populated by humans.

We continue our journey heading north to Tasman Bay. Located on the western side of the northern tip, the bay is named after the European discoverer Abel Tasman. The Dutch seaman had earmarked this very area to set foot on the island for the first time, but things developed differently. The Maori, who had already populated the island, attacked the crew after all communication efforts failed. Abel Tasman lost four crew members and started to call the area the "Bay of Murderers" - difficult to imagine when you see the beautiful beach and the celestial water. But the region around Tasman Bay has many faces: majestic mountains, flat open country, rivers, and bays that can only be reached by boat. Underground, an extensive cave-system stretches out, including two of the biggest and deepest caves of New Zealand. It's the only region where Pounamo, a green stone similar to jade and as hard as diamonds, can be found. In the Maori Culture the Pounamo plays a crucial role, it's used as a weapon and worn as jewelry.

Our journey ends at Farewell Spit, a land tongue which runs far into the ocean. The northern tip of the cliffs consist of limestone, that is shaped by the wild currents of the Tasman Sea, creating beautiful natural sculptures. Farewell Spit is a feeding ground and habitat for thousand of gannets, typical for New Zealand.