



New Zealand

The earth's crust is made up of enormous pieces of rock called plates. Strong forces inside the earth shift, twist, crack and crumble these plates.

New Zealand is on the edge of the Pacific Plate and was once part of a huge continent called Gondwanaland, located nearer to the South Pole.

About 200 million years ago, this continent split into South America, Africa, India, Australia, Antarctic and New Zealand. Over time, these new lands slowly drifted apart.

As the continents drifted, birds and windblown seeds could still cross the narrow seas, but slowly the area of water between the countries became too great.

The Tasman Sea reached its full width 60 million years ago. This wide area of water protected many New Zealand species from disease and enemies. About 5 million years ago, both the North and South Islands of New Zealand could be seen above water.

The Indo-Australian and Pacific plates moving against each other formed the volcanoes in the North Island, and the Southern Alps of the South Island were formed by the Indo-Australian and Pacific plates overlapping.

The Tuatara, weta and native frog have survived from ancient times. The Kauri, Kahikatea and Rimu trees growing here in New Zealand developed from Gondwanaland forests. Most of the plants growing in New Zealand are not found growing anywhere else.