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The South and North Islands were connected by an under-sea telegraph cable across Cook Strait in 1866. Ten years later, the telegraph connection between London and Wakapuaka, Nelson, spanned a fragile 15,757 mile (25,558 km) network via Gibraltar, Suez, Bombay, Darwin and Sydney. New Zealand was connected to the rest of the world!

In the mid-19th century, New Zealand's early European colonists had to wait two months or more for mail to arrive by sea from the other side of the world. Meanwhile, an Industrial Revolution (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/287086/Industrial-Revolution>) was sweeping Europe, with the rapid development of technologies such as the electric telegraph (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/585850/telegraph>).

The New Zealand Government was keen to see the country connected by telegraph both internally and with the outside world. Australia was linked to Europe in 1872, with messages being sent to Sydney by sea and cabled from there. ¹

The first Cook Strait communications cable, between Lyall Bay (<http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?q=lyall+bay+wellington&ie=UTF8&split=0&gl=nz&ei=q5L-ScrJLYm4sAO4m72ICQ&ll=-41.305408,174.795227&spn=0.099035,0.215607&z=12&iwloc=addr>) in Wellington and White's Bay in Marlborough, was completed on 26 August, 1866. The simple copper telegraph cable, laid across the Cook Strait seabed, enabled quick communication between the North and South Islands for the first time.



(<http://www.thehook.org>)
Whites Bay cable station group,
[Marlbrough Museum](http://www.marlbroughmusem.org)
 (<http://www.marlbroughmusem.org>)
 , 0000.900.0736
Click image to enlarge

The isolated and often stormy situation of the White's Bay (<http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=whites+bay&sll=-41.427283,173.9534&sspn=0.42835,0.878906&ie=UTF8&ll=-41.371398,174.058113&spn=0.111302,0.236549&z=12&iwloc=addr>) Cable Station made it an unpopular posting. The staff and equipment were moved to Blenheim (<http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?z=14¢er=marlborough+white's+bay&spn=0.000000,0.000000&split=0&q=nz&ei=MZ6LSfx-NZK2sAPHU35CA&ll=-41.509799,173.953228&spn=0.023139,0.053902&z=14&iwloc=addr>) in 1873, and the telegraph station finally closed in 1896, after a direct link had been established between Wellington and Christchurch. A building from the cable station is still at White's Bay. ²



(<http://www.thehook.org.nz/ass>)
Southern end of Cook Strait's telegraph cable - Whites Bay 1871, Marlborough Museum
(<http://www.marlboroughmuseum.org>)
0000.900.0735
Click image to enlarge

On Monday 21 February, 1876, a sub-marine cable was opened between La Perouse

(http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=la+perouse,+sydney&sll=43.166124,12.389832&sspn=0.38463,0.862427&q=nz&q=la+perouse&ie=UTF8&ll=33.96358,151.231613&spn=0.109344,0.215607&z=12&iwloc=addr) (Sydney) and [Cable Bay](http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=%22cable+bay%22+%2Bnelson&sll=-41.244772,172.617188&sspn=25.324594,55.195313&ie=UTF8&ll=-41.171677,173.420563&spn=0.099238,0.215607&z=12&iwloc=addr) (http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=%22cable+bay%22+%2Bnelson&sll=-41.244772,172.617188&sspn=25.324594,55.195313&ie=UTF8&ll=-41.171677,173.420563&spn=0.099238,0.215607&z=12&iwloc=addr) in Nelson. Laid, owned and managed by the Eastern Extension Australasia and China Telegraph Company Ltd, the cable was New Zealand's sole communication link with the rest of the world until 1902.³

The sub-marine engineering of the day was fraught with difficulties from weather, sea depth and currents. It was most important to keep the copper wire conductors protected and insulated, with gutta percha, a latex coating from Malaya (Malaysia), being used to cover them. The first cable was expected to last 10 years, but continued in use for 41 years.⁴



(<http://www.thehook.org.nz>)
Cable Bay, the Nelson
Provincial Museum
 (<http://www.museumnp.org.nz>)
 , Tyree Studio
 Collection 179078/3
 In the early 1900s other ca
 Click image to enlarge

The settlement at Cable Bay grew as the demand for telegraphic services increased. By 1888 there were 14 staff, including a superintendent, cable and telegraph men. A press man had the job of 'filling out' the international press briefs and sending them on to newspapers.⁵

A second cable was laid in 1890, by which time 17 staff and their families lived at Cable Bay. By all accounts, the community enjoyed good relations with nearby neighbours, Huria and Hemi Matenga, (<http://www.teara.oia.govt.nz/en/1966/matenga-huria-te-amoho-wikitoria/1>) and there was plenty of on-station fun, with a billiard room, tennis courts and water-related activities.⁶



(<http://www.thehook.org.nz/ass>)
Cable Bay, the Nelson
 Provincial Museum

In the early 1900s other cables were laid, including Vancouver to Doubtless Bay (Northland) in 1901,⁷

and Sydney to Auckland in 1912.⁸

(<http://www.museumnp.org.nz/>)
Copy Collection, C1781
[Click to enlarge](#)

The Cable Bay link was re-routed to Titahi Bay (http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=%22titahi+bay%22+wellington&ll=-41.14195,173.420563&sspn=0.099283,0.215607&gl=nz&ie=UTF8&ll=-41.093842,174.838486&spn=0.049678,0.107803&z=13&iwloc=addr) in 1917, with an underground cable to the Eastern Extension

Company's offices in central Wellington. The staff from Cable Bay were relocated to Wellington overnight on 22 August, 1917 and it was the end of an era for the small community. The cable station land was sold by the Crown in 1919.⁹

Various Cook Strait cables have linked the two islands for nearly 150 years, but the route is fractured with fault lines. Telecom laid a new \$38 million fibre optic cable between Levin (http://maps.google.co.nz/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=levin&ll=-41.244772,172.617188&sspn=25.324594,55.195313&ie=UTF8&ll=-40.611607,175.286522&spn=0.100082,0.215607&z=12&iwloc=addr) (Horowhenua) and Cable Bay in 2001, to provide additional security should a large earthquake hit the region.¹⁰

Year telegrams sent	International telegrams sent	International telegrams received
1900	62,275	55,601
1910	120,599	109,389
1964	753,750	679,089

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Written by: Joy Stephens Tags: [telegraph](#), [telephone](#), [communications](#)

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Want to find out more about the Telegraph Made World of Difference ? [View Further Sources here](http://www.thehook.org.nz/telegraph-made-world-of-difference/#Further_sources) (http://www.thehook.org.nz/telegraph-made-world-of-difference/#Further_sources).

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