

POUNAMU

Pounamu is a tough, semi-precious stone of cultural importance to Māori. It is of particular significance to the Ngai Tahu iwi (tribe) in whose territory in the South Island most pounamu resources are found. All pounamu is sourced from river boulders, and no in-place deposit has ever been found. Pounamu is also known as greenstone, or sometimes as New Zealand jade.

Jade is the name given to two types of silicate minerals which both come in a variety of colours, though the most valued is green. One is jadeite, from which the finest jade comes, but this does not occur in New Zealand. The other mineral is nephrite. Pounamu is the Māori term for both nephrite and bowenite, another mineral again.

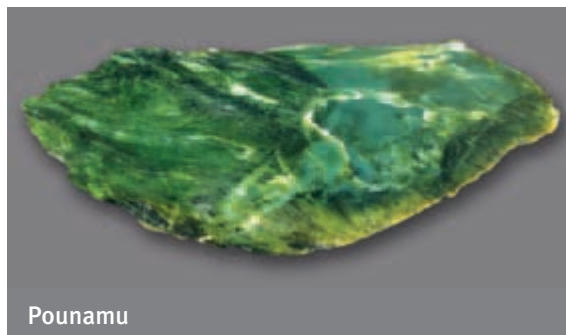
Mineralogically, nephrite is an amphibole of the tremolite ($\text{Ca}_2\text{Mg}_5(\text{OH})_2\text{Si}_8\text{O}_{22}$) – actinolite ($\text{Ca}_2(\text{Mg,Fe})_5(\text{OH})_2\text{Si}_8\text{O}_{22}$) series. Jadeite is a pyroxene ($\text{NaAlSi}_2\text{O}_6$). Bowenite is a type of serpentine ($\text{Mg}_3(\text{OH})_4\text{Si}_2\text{O}_5$).

Māori classify pounamu according to colour and have named many varieties. There are four main types: kawakawa, kaharangi, inanga and tangiwai. The first three are nephrite and the fourth is bowenite. Although Māori placed tangiwai as a variety of pounamu, they knew of its difference from the various types of nephrite.

Pounamu sources are confined to the South Island. Nephrite is found mainly in the districts surrounding the Taramakau and Arahura rivers in Westland and the Lake Wakatipu area of Otago. Bowenite is found mainly near the entrance to Milford Sound.

Māori traded pounamu in pre-European times, and made adzes, chisels and fishhooks, as well as the short hand club or mere-pounamu and the hei-tiki neck ornament. Many of these articles were strikingly beautiful. A commercial industry now sells carved pounamu as ornaments and jewellery, mainly to the tourist trade. Some of the greenstone products sold in New Zealand are manufactured from imported nephrite.

In 1997, Government vested all ownership of pounamu resources with Ngai Tahu. More information on pounamu is available on the Ngai Tahu website www.ngaitahu.iwi.nz



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