This timeline lists New Zealand's worst post-1840 natural disasters, transport accidents, fires, mining accidents and other tragedies that have caused major loss of life. Follow the links for more information on NZHistory, Te Ara and other sites. See also: map showing location of these disasters.

This list does not include loss of life due to enemy action in wartime, such as the First World War battle of Passchendaele, where, on 12 October 1917, 843 New Zealanders were killed on a single day, or the sinking of the liner Wimmera, which hit a German mine off Cape Maria van Diemen on 25 June 1918. Nor does it include major disease outbreaks, such as the 1918 influenza pandemic, which claimed about 9000 lives over several months.

1846 Taupō landslide
On 7 May a massive landslide on the shores of Lake Taupō overwhelmed the kāinga (Māori village) of Te Rapa, killing around 60 people, including Ngāti Tūwharetoa leader Mananui Te Heuheu Tūkino II. Find out more.

1855 Wairarapa earthquake
On 23 January a magnitude 8.2 earthquake struck the lower North Island. It killed between five and nine people in Wellington, Manawatū and Wairarapa and radically altered the landscape of the Wellington region. Find out more on Te Ara.

1863 HMS Orpheus shipwreck
On 7 February the Royal Navy steam corvette HMS Orpheus, carrying British troops, foundered at the entrance to Auckland’s Manukau Harbour. Of the 259 men on board, 189 died in the worst maritime disaster in New Zealand waters. Find out more about the Orpheus disaster.

1863 Central Otago floods
Twenty-five gold miners lost their lives as flash floods raged along the Shotover River, north-east of Queenstown, on 26 July 1863. Find out more on Te Ara.
1865 *Fiery Star* shipwreck
On 11 May the sailing ship *Fiery Star* caught fire and sank south of Cuvier Island, off the Coromandel Peninsula, with the loss of 79 lives. Find out more on Te Ara.

1865 *City of Dunedin* shipwreck
Leaving Wellington on 20 May, the paddle steamer *City of Dunedin* and its 39 passengers and crew disappeared without trace. The ship is presumed to have foundered in Cook Strait. Find out more.

1866 *General Grant* shipwreck
On 14 May the sailing ship *General Grant* was wrecked in the Auckland Islands, south of New Zealand, with the loss of (ultimately) 73 lives. Ten survivors were finally rescued 18 months later. Find out more on Te Ara.

1868 Great storm
On 3/4 February a violent storm swept across much of the country, wrecking 12 ships – including the *Star of Tasmania* and *Water Nymph* at Oamaru – and causing flash floods. More than 40 lives were lost. Read contemporary newspaper account.

1874 *Cospatrick* shipwreck
On the night of 17/18 November the emigrant ship *Cospatrick*, sailing from England to Auckland, was destroyed by fire off the Cape of Good Hope. Of the 473 people on board, only three survived. Although this tragedy occurred far from New Zealand and involved migrants who had yet to live in this country, the burning of the *Cospatrick* could be considered our worst civilian disaster. Find out more.

1879 Kaitangata mine accident
On 21 February, 34 miners were killed in an explosion at the Kaitangata coal mine in Otago. Find out more.

1881 *Tararua* shipwreck
On 29 April the steamer *Tararua* was wrecked off Waipapa Point, Southland. Of the 151 passengers and crew on board, 131 were lost in the worst civilian shipwreck in New Zealand waters. Find out more.

1882 Timaru harbour tragedy
On 14 May a sudden storm wrecked two large sailing ships, the *City of Perth* and *Ben Venue*, in Timaru’s exposed roadstead. Nine lives were lost. Among the dead were the port’s harbormaster and five local watermen, who had tried to rescue the ships’ crews. See memorial for this event and more information on Te Ara.

1886 *Tairaroa* shipwreck
On 11 April the steamer *Tairaroa* struck rocks near the mouth of the
Clarence River, north of Kaikōura, and sank with the loss of 34 lives. Read a contemporary newspaper account.

1886 Tarawera eruption
On 10 June the volcanic Mt Tarawera, south-east of Rotorua, erupted spectacularly, killing perhaps 120 people and burying the famed Pink and White Terraces on Lake Rotomahana. Find out more on this site and Te Ara.

1894 Wairarapa shipwreck
On 29 October, in a heavy fog, the liner Wairarapa steamed into cliffs on Great Barrier Island, with the loss of 121 of its 251 passengers and crew. Read contemporary newspaper account.

1896 Brunner mine accident
On 26 March an explosion at Brunner, West Coast, killed 65 coal miners in New Zealand's worst mining disaster. Find out about this and other mining accidents on Te Ara.

1900 Mōtū River accident
On 5 August, 16 children and two adults were drowned after their canoe capsized as they crossed the Mōtū River. Te Whānau-ā-Apanui placed a rāhui (ban) on fishing in the area. Find out about this accident. (Sooty's)

1902 Loch Long shipwreck
In late May the three-masted sailing ship Loch Long was wrecked off the Chatham Islands, with the loss of 24 lives. Find out more.

1902 Elingamite shipwreck
On 9 November the steamer Elingamite was wrecked on the Three Kings Islands, north of Cape Rēinga, with the loss of 45 lives. Find out more on Te Ara.

1909 Penguin shipwreck
On 12 February the Cook Strait ferry Penguin struck rocks off Cape Terawhiti and sank with the loss of 72 lives. Find out more.

1914 Landslide on Whakaari / White Island
On 10 September 10 sulphur miners were killed on White Island when part of the crater wall collapsed, causing a landslide. Find out more.

1914 Huntly mine accident
On 12 September 43 coal miners were killed in an explosion at Ralph's Mine, Waikato. Find out more.

1923 Ongarue railway accident
On 6 July the North Island main trunk express slammed into a huge
landslide at Ongarue, north of Taumarunui. With 17 deaths, this was the first major loss of life on New Zealand's railways. Find out more.

1926 Dobson mine accident
On 3 December an explosion at the Dobson coal mine on the West Coast killed nine miners. Read contemporary newspaper report

1929 Murchison earthquake
On 17 June an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale struck the north of the South Island, killing 17 people. The shock was felt throughout New Zealand but centred on the Murchison area, where it caused massive landslides. Find out more on Te Ara.

1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake
On 3 February New Zealand's deadliest earthquake, measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale, devastated much of Napier and Hastings. The death toll was 256. Find out more on Te Ara. See also: Images of the Hawke's Bay earthquake

1938 Köpuawhara flood
On 19 February a flash flood swept away a Public Works railway construction camp at Köpuawhara on the East Coast, killing 21 workers. Find out more.

1939 Huntly mine accident
On 24 September 11 men were asphyxiated by carbon monoxide at the Glen Afton coal mine, Huntly. Read more

1942 Seacliff Mental Hospital fire
On 9 December a fire at Seacliff Mental Hospital, north of Dunedin, killed 37 of the 39 female patients in Ward 5. Find out more

1943 Hyde railway accident
On 4 June the Cromwell–Dunedin express derailed near Hyde, Central Otago, with the loss of 21 lives. Find out more

1943 Paekākāriki maritime accident
On 19 June a LCVP (landing craft, vehicle and personnel) from the troop transport USS American Legion was swamped during an amphibious landing exercise at Paekākāriki, north of Wellington. Ten US Navy sailors drowned. Find out more

1943 US Liberator crash
On 2 August a US Liberator transport aircraft carrying enemy internees to Australia crashed into a mangrove swamp adjacent to Whenuapai airfield, killing 15 of the 30 people on board: nine Japanese (three women, two men and four children), three Thai students, and three
members of the crew. Find out more

1947 Ballantyne's fire
On 18 November 41 people were killed in New Zealand's deadliest fire, in the Ballantyne's Department Store in Christchurch. Find out more.

1948 Mt Ruapehu air crash
On 23 October a Lockheed Electra airliner crashed near Mt Ruapehu, with the loss of all 13 passengers and crew. Find out more.

1949 Walkanae air crash
On 18 March a Lockheed Lodestar airliner crashed near Walkanae on the Kāpiti Coast. All 15 passengers and crew were killed. Find out more from Te Ara.

1950 Ranui shipwreck
On 28 December the passenger launch *Ranui*, returning from a holiday trip to Mayor Island, was wrecked on North Rock, Mt Maunganui. Of the 23 people on board, only one survived. Read more

1951 Wellington to Lyttelton yacht race
On 23 January, 20 yachts left Wellington bound for Lyttelton in an ocean yacht race to celebrate Canterbury's centenary. Following a severe southerly storm only one yacht officially finished the race. Two others were lost along with their 10 crew members. Find out more.

1953 Tangiwai railway accident
On 24 December a North Island main trunk express plunged off the Tangiwai bridge into the Whangaehu River. The bridge had been fatally weakened by a lahar from Mt Ruapehu's crater lake. Of the 285 people on board, 151 were killed. This is New Zealand's worst rail disaster. See Tangiwai disaster for more information.

1959 Holmglen shipwreck
On 24 November the coaster *Holmglen* foundered north of Oamaru. All 15 crew were lost. Find out more.

1963 Northland bus crash
Fifteen people were killed in New Zealand's worst bus accident. A party was returning from Waitangi Day commemorations when shortly after lunchtime on 7 February the bus failed to take a bend as it descended Pilbrow Hill, in the Brynderwyn Hills, south of Whāngārei. Find out more.

1963 Kaimai air crash
On 3 July a DC-3 airliner crashed in the Kaimai Range, Bay of Plenty. All 23 passengers and crew were killed in what remains the worst air crash within New Zealand. Find out more.
1966 Kaitawa shipwreck
On 23 May near Cape Reinga the collier Kaitawa was lost with all 29 hands. Read more

1967 Strongman mine accident
On 19 January an explosion at the Strongman coal mine, near Greymouth, killed 19 miners. Find out more.

1968 Wahine shipwreck
On 10 April the Lyttelton–Wellington ferry Wahine struck Barrett Reef at the entrance to Wellington Harbour in atrocious conditions caused by tropical cyclone Giselle. Of the 734 passengers and crew on board, 51 died (a 52nd victim died several weeks later, and a 53rd of related causes in 1990). See Wahine disaster for more information.

1968 Inangahua earthquake
On 24 May an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale struck the Inangahua area on the West Coast. Three people were killed. Find out more on Te Ara.

1968 Maranui shipwreck
On 13 June the wheat-carrying coaster Maranui sank east of the Coromandel Peninsula when its cargo shifted in a storm. Nine of the crew drowned.

1979 Mt Erebus air crash
On 28 November an Air New Zealand DC-10 airliner, on a sightseeing flight to Antarctica, crashed into Mt Erebus. All 257 passengers and crew were killed in New Zealand's worst air disaster. See Mt Erebus disaster and the related entry on Te Ara for more information.

1985 Tory Channel air crash
Only one passenger survived when an Air Albatross Cessna flew into electrical wires strung across Tory Channel on 4 October. The pilot and seven members of two families were killed. Read more (Aviation Safety wiki).

1988 Whanganui air crash
On 12 May 10 people died when a charter plane crashed in Ahu Ahu Valley, near Whanganui. Read more

1989 Milford Sound air crash
On 8 August 10 people died when a scenic flight from Wanaka to Milford Sound crashed into the side of a mountain in the Upper Dart Valley. Read more

1993 Franz Josef Glacier air crash
On 25 October nine people died when a sightseeing plane crashed into Franz Josef Glacier on the West Coast. Read more

**1995 Cave Creek disaster**
On 28 April a Department of Conservation viewing platform built over a cliff at Cave Creek in the West Coast's Paparoa National Park collapsed, killing 14 people. Read more

**2000 Lindis Pass air crash**
On 24 April a Cessna aircraft whose passengers had been attending the Warbirds Over Wanaka airshow crashed into the side of a hill in Central Otago. The pilot and five passengers were killed. Read more

**2008 Tongariro tragedy**
On 15 April six students and their teacher from Auckland's Elim Christian College drowned in a caryoning accident while participating in an outdoor education programme near the Tongariro National Park. Read more

**2010 Fox Glacier air crash**
On 4 September nine people died when a skydiving plane crashed after taking off from Fox Glacier airfield on the West Coast. Read more.

**2010 Canterbury (Darfield) earthquake**
Although there were no deaths, this 4 September earthquake was — at the time — the largest to effect a major urban area since the 1931 Hawke's Bay quake. Read more

**2010 Pike River mine accident**
Two explosions on 19 and 24 November resulted in the deaths of 29 coalminers at the Pike River mine on the West Coast. It was this country's worst mining disaster since 1914. Read more

**2011 Christchurch earthquake**
At 12.51 p.m. on 22 February a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck 10 km south-east of central Christchurch at a depth of only 5 km. The death toll was 185*, making it New Zealand's worst natural disaster in terms of loss of life since 1931. Read more

**2012 Carterton balloon tragedy**
At approximately 7.30 a.m. on 7 January 11 people - five couples and the pilot - were killed in a balloon accident near Carterton. A fire ignited on board causing the hot air balloon to crash in farmland. It is New Zealand's worst ballooning accident. Read more on NZHerald website

**2012 Foveaux Strait fishing tragedy**
Around midnight on 14 March The Easy Rider, a fishing boat, capsized off
the northern tip of Stewart Island. Eight of those on board drowned. The single survivor said the boat was swamped by a rogue wave. Read more on NZ Herald website

2016 Kaikōura earthquake
At 12:02 a.m. on 14 November a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck New Zealand, causing significant damage to buildings and infrastructure in southern Marlborough and northern Canterbury. Landslides cut off road and rail links to Kaikōura, stranding large numbers of visitors in the popular tourist town. Two people lost their lives: one at a property in Mt Lyford as a result of a heart attack and another when a homestead collapsed in Kaikōura. Read more on Wikipedia

2016 Kaipara boating tragedy
On 26 November France, a chartered fishing boat, capsized while attempting to cross the Kaipara Harbour bar. Eight of the 11 men on board drowned. Read more on RNZ website

2019 Eruption of Whakaari / White Island
On 9 December, the active volcano erupted while 47 tourists and guides were on the island. Despite heroic rescue efforts, 21 people died at the scene or subsequently of burns or internal injuries. Read more on Wikipedia.

* The official toll was initially given as 18 but four further victims were confirmed by the coroner in February 2012.

See also:
- New Zealand disasters timeline and map on the Christchurch City Libraries site.
- Contribute your earthquake stories to http://www.quakestories.govt.nz
- The wreck of the Rena in historical context