

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Chair's corner

Beannachdan dhuibh — Greetings to you in Gaelic

Those of us with Scottish heritage celebrate our Scottish links during the year with ceilidh, dancing and pipe band competitions, Highland games, social Scottish country dancing, singing Auld Lang Syne and perhaps having a drop of whisky now and then.

Occasionally there are significant Scottish events that draw Kiwi Mathesons together as well as drawing other Kiwi Scots together.

This time last summer we were preparing for just such an event: the visit from the Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson, and Lady Matheson. At our gatherings they were warmly welcomed by other clan members as well as Mathesons. Our chief's visit to Kiwi Mathesons was recognised by everyone to be making a special contribution to his clan in New Zealand. Other clans enjoyed having a visiting clan chief too and celebrated the importance of the occasion with us.

The visit of the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo to Auckland in February 2026 also recognises the strength of New Zealand's links to its Scottish heritage. Touring to celebrate its 75th anniversary, the tattoo is titled [The heroes who made us](#) and tells stories about the heroes of the tattoo, of communities and of a nation. As usual the tattoo will bring together the best of Scottish tradition and spirit with cultural performances. I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to [see the tattoo](#) in New Zealand and I know other Mathesons are planning to come too.

Over the summer an enthusiastic group of Mathesons will set up our clan tent in the clan avenues in smaller, yet lively and engaging events. Visit the tent to see the display of Matheson stories and resources on family history, and to have a Matheson welcome to the annual cycle of Highland games and piping competitions.

Details of events are on page 10 of this newsletter, the [events page](#) of our website and in our [Facebook group](#). Come and share your family stories and meet other Mathesons from your area. I look forward to seeing you there.

Enjoy reading this newsletter over the summer, all the best for Christmas — and Bliadhna Math Ur (happy new year).

Lena Orum
Chair, Clan Matheson New Zealand committee
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Newsletter of the
New Zealand branch of the
Clan Matheson Society

December 2025

Issue 181

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International connections

Clan Matheson in New Zealand is part of an international network of people interested in Matheson heritage. They keep together mainly through international gatherings and an annual newsletter. We're pleased to send the 2025 international newsletter to those who have subscribed to our newsletter.

You'll see reports from countries where Clan Matheson is active because many Mathesons migrated there: New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the USA. Naturally enough there's a branch of Clan Matheson in the UK too, which also covers Europe.

I wish to give special thanks to those of you who give their time to make our society function all round the world. It gives pleasure to many and enhances our standing in the Highland community worldwide.
Sir Alexander Matheson, Chief of Clan Matheson



Clan Matheson New Zealand

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Clan Matheson New Zealand

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New Zealand features prominently in this issue of the international newsletter thanks to the visit earlier this year by Sir Alexander Matheson, Chief of Clan Matheson, and Lady Matheson.

Dive in and see what Mathesons are up to around the globe!



Clan Matheson at Hororata

by Rodger Matheson

I was pleased to return to Hororata Highland Games in Canterbury after missing a year. The games were busier than last time with a record crowd of 11,000 people and 20 bands. A highlight was the fantastic sight of the massed bands saluting the games chief after the clans and bands had been welcomed with a powhiri.

Setting out the Clan Matheson tent in St Andrew's Square at Hororata is always fun as we reconnect with 20 other clans. There were a good number of other clans folk who had travelled from the North Island to be there.

It was a busy morning of Mathesons calling into the tent. Locals were catching up with Graeme Matheson and Ellen McRae, Mathesons were very excited about their newly-discovered Matheson heritage, and friends came to see me since I was away last year.

The big map of clans continues to be a draw for all clans and we support them with tartan books, searching the internet and by showing them the great family history resources on the Clan Matheson New Zealand website.



As usual I called in to all the tents and this year I let them know about the New Zealand national pipe band championships in Taranaki next March. [Wayne Matheson](#) is coordinating the clan avenue.

My daughter Eden and I had spent a few days travelling so we could visit relatives and see some of the beautiful South Island. As a local I had relatives calling in. I have MacRae relatives on my mother's side. As a Matheson too, I thought the poster in the tent showing the beautiful Eilean Donan castle with both my clans in its history was a good fit.

As the games and competitions became more intense in the afternoon we had fewer visitors, and sometimes it was the offer of shortbread or toffees that started our conversations.

St Andrew's Square and the games were very successful and many connections were made celebrating our Scottish and Matheson heritage.



Another place name puzzle solved ...

by Andrew Matheson

We've discovered the story behind another of New Zealand's Matheson place names — though there's still a mystery attached.

On our website we have listed all the places in New Zealand with the name [Matheson](#) or [Mathieson](#), and investigated and where possible recorded the stories behind the names. These are mainly roads or streets (19 Matheson and 5 Mathieson), plus a couple of bays and of course the famous lake on the West Coast.

Mount Matheson was still a mystery, but I now have a pretty good idea of why it bears that name. This peak on the West Coast is 2,148 metres high and sits at the eastern end of the Strachan Range above the headwaters of the Otoko River (which flows into the Paringa River).

An article in the previous [issue](#) of the newsletter about a Matheson mountaineer on Mt Cook drew on information provided by Alister Matheson, a descendant of early Otago pioneers. In the 1890s Alister's grandfather Dougald Matheson had Freehold Creek run on the shores of Lake Ohau, and Alister advised that some early records of Dougald's explorations in the Southern Alps were mentioned in parliamentary papers. From these I dug further into Dougald's explorations and his link to Mt Matheson.



*Dougald Matheson's house at Freehold Creek,
Lake Ohau in the 1890s
(photo: Matheson family collection)*



*Mary Hyndman and Dougald Matheson
on their wedding day in 1897
(photo: Matheson family collection)*

In 1890 a Canterbury district surveyor called Noel Brodrick made a difficult first crossing of a pass, which was subsequently named after him, over the main divide between Lake Ohau on the Canterbury side and the Landsborough River on the West Coast. This was thought to be the first crossing of the Southern Alps between Whitcombe Pass in the north and Haast Pass to the south.

This wasn't exploration just for the sake of discovery, but it had an economic imperative: finding feasible routes to allow for the movement of people and goods.

Dougald Matheson joined these efforts, and spent time looking for gold along the way. The planned route was surveyed over another pass and down the Otoko and Paringa rivers to the West Coast, though it was never developed into a pack track or road.

... Another place name puzzle solved ...

In 1896 Brodrick's report in parliamentary papers includes a letter from Dougal describing how he took his pack horses right over the pass into the Landsborough River catchment, and suggesting that the whole route could be developed for transport to the West Coast and for tourism.

APPENDIX No. 8.—EXPLORATIONS.
ROUTE OVER SOUTHERN ALPS.

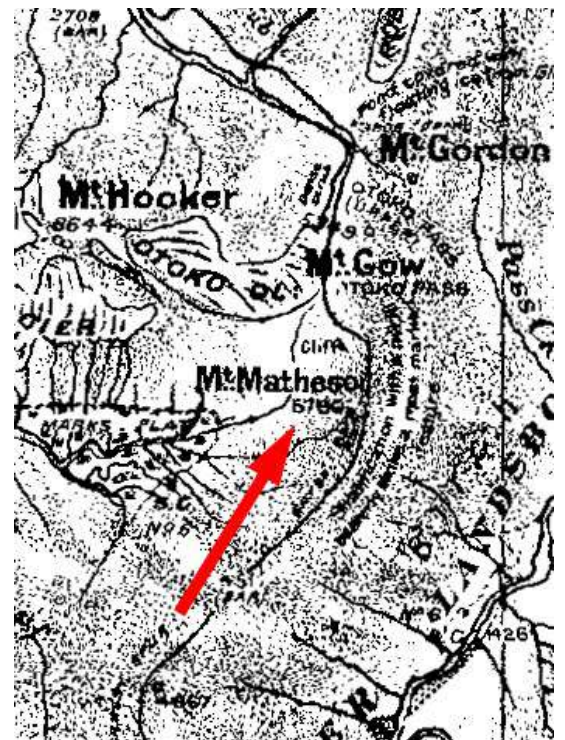
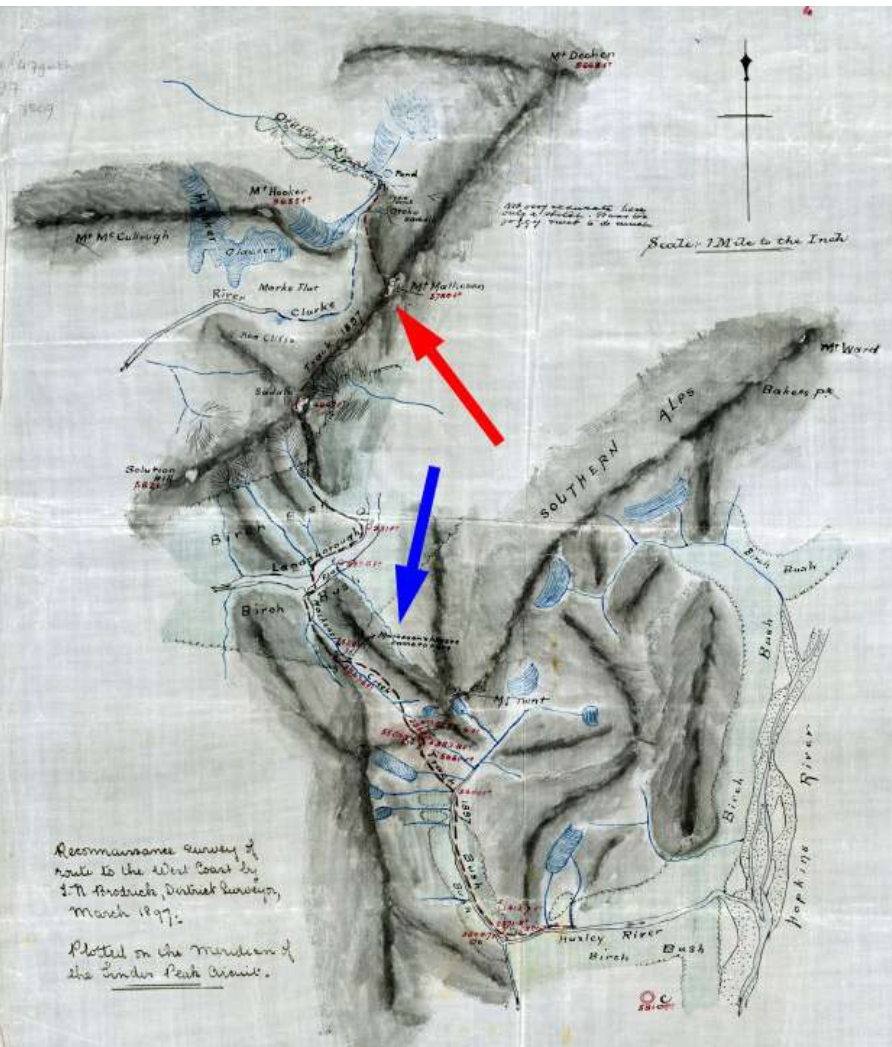
Cairnbrae, 22nd March, 1896.

Enclosed please find a letter written to me by Mr. D. Matheson, of the Freehold Creek, Lake Ohau, Otago. I would draw your attention to the fact that, by cutting a short track through the bush on the Huxley River, he actually succeeded in taking his pack-horses right over the pass I discovered in 1890, a report of which discovery is printed in the annual report of that year. Last year Mr. Harper reported to the Surveyor-General that he had visited my pass, which he condemned as impracticable. I doubted at the time whether he had ever been there, and now I feel certain that he was mistaken, and also that this route is an infinitely easier and better one than that discovered by Mr. FitzGerald. His pass is such a one as might be found in many

In March 1897 Brodrick surveyed the route over to the headwaters of the Otoko River. His resulting map marks the point to which Dougal Matheson took his horses into the Landsborough catchment (blue arrow) and shows Mount Matheson as a peak further along the route to the West Coast (red arrow).

In 1897 Brodrick's further report on the route in parliamentary papers contained a detailed and official map based on his surveys and those of Mueller and Roberts on the West Coast side.

The map again marks the point where Dougal Matheson took his horses and names Mt Matheson. It's almost certain that this is named after Dougal Matheson (1852–1931), shepherd, runholder and early explorer of the Alps inland from Lake Ohau.



Official map dated July 1897, showing Mt Matheson along the route between Lake Ohau and the West Coast, south of Mt Gow

Brodrick's map of his March 1897 survey

... Another place name puzzle solved

There is still a mystery, though, as the peak called Mt Matheson on today's maps is not the same one as the one on Brodrick's March 1897 map or the July 1897 official map printed in parliamentary papers.

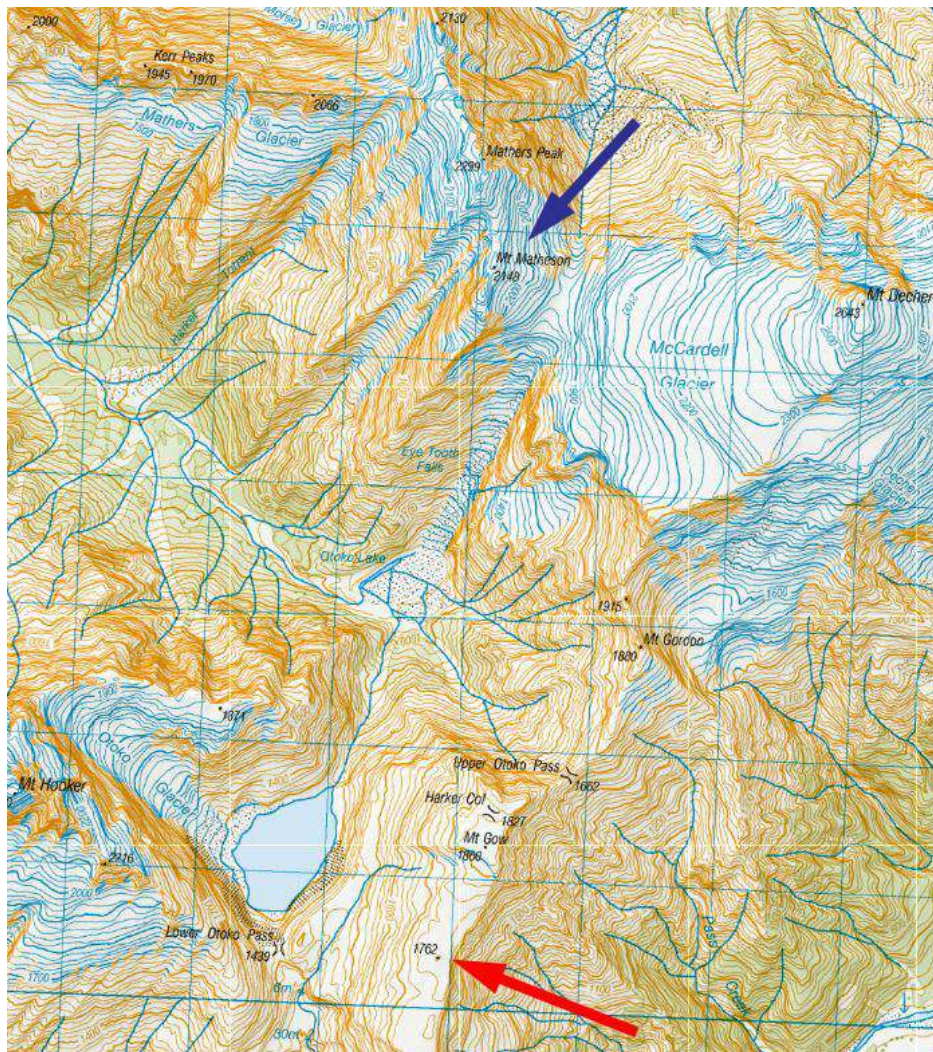
The 1897 Mt Matheson is on the ridge between the Landsborough River and the headwaters of the Clarke River, south of Mt Gow. It is 5,780 ft or 1,762 m high.

The current Mt Matheson is about 5.5 km to the north of the 1897 Mt Matheson, in the Strachan Range which lies between the Otoko River (which flows into the Paringa River) and the Morse River (a tributary of the Mahitahi River, which flows into Bruce Bay). It is 2,148 m high.

The earliest topographical map I can find of this area, NZMS 15 from 1949, has Mt Matheson in the 'new' position.

I can think of a couple of reasons for this discrepancy. One is that the name could have been transposed in error when maps were being redrawn.

Or it might be that the naming authority (the New Zealand Geographic Board) decided that the original Mt Matheson wasn't a sufficiently prominent peak — it is, after all, just a bump on a ridge. It's possible that the name was transferred to an unnamed peak still in the vicinity of Brodrick's route to the West Coast, a peak that was prominent enough to meet the criteria for being recorded as an authoritative place name and one that still has a link to the origin of the name.



The current Mt Matheson (blue arrow) and the 1897 Mt Matheson (red arrow)

Relationship chart

by Andrew Matheson

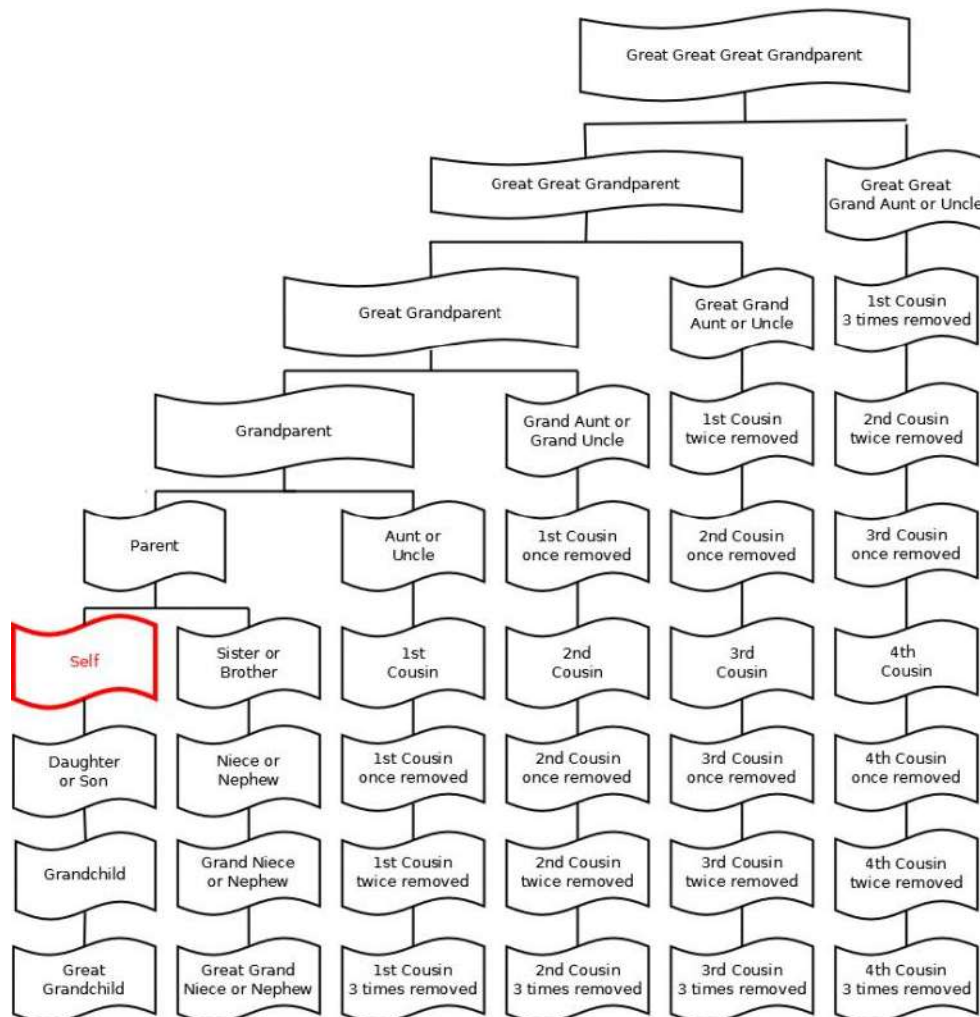
It's sometimes difficult to sort out who's who in a family tree. What's the difference between your second cousin once removed and your first cousin twice removed? Have you ever been confused as to how your great-grandmother has one 'great' in her title but her brother has two?

A relationship chart like this helps sort this out. A few points:

- 'Removed' refers to generations, so a relationship 'once removed' means that relationship shifted by one generation.
- I've always thought that in New Zealand we tend not to use the prefix 'grand' except for our grandparents and grandchildren. So our great-grandparent's siblings are great-great-uncles/aunts rather than the great-grand-uncles/aunts shown on the chart. Or have I got that wrong? Let us know in the [family history forum](#) or in our [Facebook group](#).

- Though I've been looking at family history for many years I had never previously thought that we have two sets of, for example, first cousins once removed: one going down the line (our first cousins' children) and the other going back up the line (our second cousins' parents). For the latter I think it's simpler to say "my father's/mother's first cousin".
- "Cousin" is the generic term for all the xth cousins nth removed. It's a word that's handy to avoid getting too tangled up unless you need to be very specific.

Family relationships can get complicated, as Ray Stevens explains through song in [I'm my own grandpa](#). Enjoy!



Scottish ceilidh in Auckland ...

by Rodger Matheson

Scottish Clans Association Auckland

The first mid-September ceilidh held by the Scottish Clans Association Auckland was a lively occasion, even though there was stormy weather outside. An afternoon ceilidh was organised so it could be a gathering for old and young alike. The ceilidh was held after the association's annual general meeting and during it the youth scholarship award was presented to Gilbert Hui Liu, a side drummer for the Papakura Pipe Band. Gilbert was awarded this scholarship from a strong group of applicants.

The Clan Matheson banners stood with other clans behind Anne-Marie Forsyth and the Auckland Scottish Fiddle Club who entertained and led the dancing. Folk singers Paul Brown and Noel Armstrong reminded us of Scottish stories told through music. We did so enjoy all these talented performers.

Thanks go to the committee for all their work and for the afternoon tea.



Ceilidh (pronounced 'kay-lee'):
a social event typically including Scottish or Irish folk music and singing, traditional dancing and storytelling.



... Scottish ceilidh in Auckland

Kids' ceilidh

It was good to be back from the Hororata Highland Games in time to go to the kids' ceilidh this year. It was a lively occasion with 72 young ones and their families. Highlights for me were the haggis ceremony performed by these young ones, and the Scottish dancing of course!

About a dozen kids paraded in with the haggis and a round of orange juice. They were accompanied by two pipers with the adults clapping them on. The usual haggis ceremony took place, and it was impressive to see someone so young addressing the haggis. The pipers took over again and piped the kids off. Everyone could then enjoy being served by the young ones with haggis and ice-cream, a first for me as a haggis accompaniment.

Children were dancing and dancing. I was reminded of really enjoying Scottish dancing myself as I watched the adults helping them to learn the intricacies of Scottish dancing. It was special to see my granddaughters enjoying the dancing too.

It was such a beautiful sunny day that the dancing didn't keep the children inside all the time, so there was lots of running around after a ball and climbing on the playground as well. A mid-winter Christmas kids' ceilidh in Scotland would be quite different. You might like to search for sites showing the fun that they have in Scotland — have a look at Ceilidh Tots.



Father Christmas gave out presents and there were lollies too. The afternoon finished with our Scottish traditional song Auld Lang Syne.

Thanks to Jeanette MacDonald for making this special event happen, the Auckland Scottish Fiddle Club for playing and to Clan Donald, Clan MacLeod of Auckland and Clan McLeod of Helensville for sponsoring the ceilidh.



News and events

Look out for the Clan Matheson tent

You can catch up with Matheson kinsfolk at all these events over the coming summer. Enjoy the Highland games or the pipe band championships, find out more about what Clan Matheson does in New Zealand, and perhaps meet some long-lost or never-met cousins.

Northland

The 152nd [Waipu Highland Games](#) will be held on New Year's Eve — Wednesday 31 December 2025 — rather than the traditional New Year's Day. You can buy a ticket on the day, but [advance purchase](#) will get you in the gate faster.

Manawatu–Whanganui

[Turakina Highland Games](#), Saturday 31 January 2026. Going strong since 1864, this is New Zealand's oldest festival of sports, music and dance.

Waikato

The [Paeroa Highland Games and Tattoo](#) will be held on Saturday 14 February 2026. No, the 'tattoo' isn't about getting some ink, but is the grand evening spectacle of music, marching and mass displays.

Taranaki

This year the New Zealand [national pipe band championships](#) will be at Inglewood on Friday 20 and Saturday 21 March 2026.



International Clan Matheson gathering

After a really successful international Clan Matheson gathering last year, plans are being made for another gathering in Scotland in July 2030. You'll be able to meet the Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson, and other Mathesons from all around the world.



How to connect with us

Clan Matheson New Zealand

We are the New Zealand branch of the international Clan Matheson Society. Our objectives are to:

- foster an interest in Matheson heritage
- forge links between people in New Zealand with Matheson heritage, and between them and kinsfolk in other countries
- help people with Matheson heritage find out more about their family history and family stories

Clan Matheson New Zealand

New Zealand Business Number
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www.clanmatheson.org.nz

[www.facebook.com/groups/
ClanMathesonNewZealand](http://www.facebook.com/groups/ClanMathesonNewZealand)

International Clan Matheson Society website

www.clanmatheson.org

Clan Matheson New Zealand trust

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Rodger Matheson (treasurer)	Auckland
Andrew Matheson (news editor)	Wellington
Wayne Matheson	Queenstown

Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand

Andrew Matheson

Chief's Deputy Lieutenant for New Zealand

Blair Matheson

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We welcome any support you can provide, whether a one-off donation or a regular payment.

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For any questions contact:
secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz