

Mt Aspiring National Park

Mt Aspiring National Park in Otago is a fitting end to New Zealand's Southern Alps. It has wide, rounded valleys with secluded flats, more than 100 glaciers, and mountain ranges with peaks higher than 2700m – including 3030m Mt Aspiring/Tititea, New Zealand's tallest mountain outside Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park.

The park protects more than 3555 sq km of land, and stretches from the Haast River in the north to the Humboldt Mountains in the south, where it borders Fiordland National Park. The park is now part of the Te Wahipounamu Southwest New Zealand World Heritage Area, which includes Aoraki/Mt Cook, Westland/Tai Poutini and Fiordland National Parks.

From a trumper's point of view, the national park has a split personality. Although it is the country's third-largest park, most trampers concentrate on the small portion around Glenorchy. Within this region is the Routeburn Track, a three-day alpine crossing that draws 13,000 trampers a year – only the Milford and Abel Tasman Coast Tracks attract more trampers. The spillover factor from the Routeburn – mainly trampers without reservations for the Great Walk – has made the nearby Rees-Dart Track increasing popular in recent years.

But for those who yearn for a bit of mountain solitude, Mt Aspiring National Park offers numerous escapes. Among the best is Wilkin-Young Valleys Circuit, a three-day alpine crossing out of tiny Makarora. Also covered in this chapter is the Mavora Walkway, which connects with the Greenstone Track. While the huts along the popular Greenstone are large and usually busy, it's rare to see more than a handful of trampers during the three days on the Mavora Walkway.

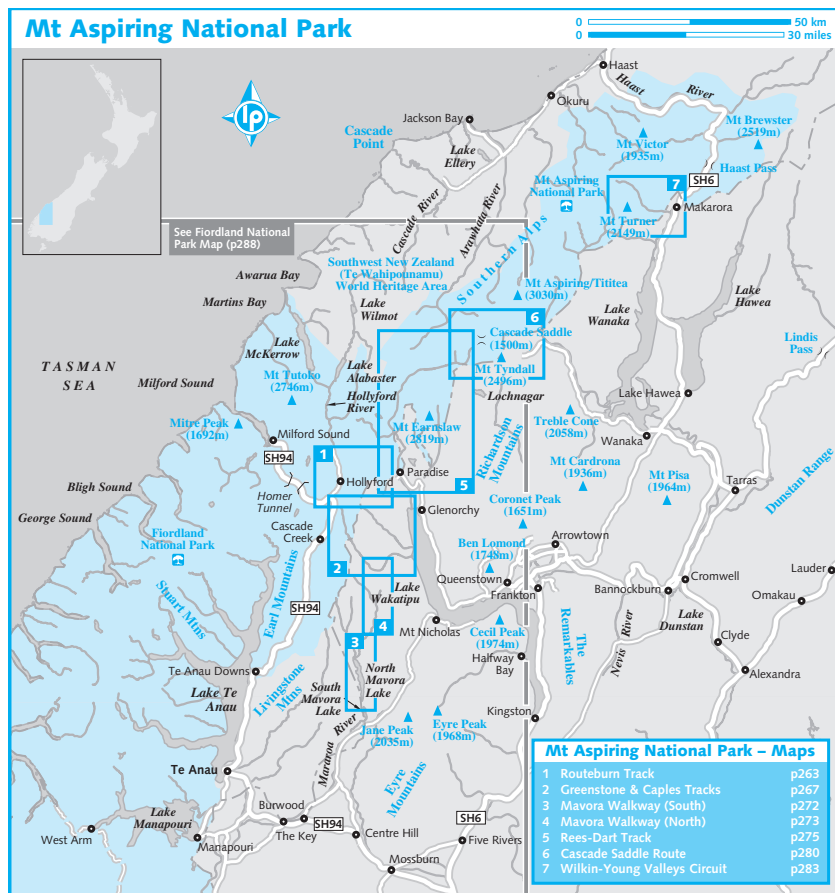
HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoying the grand views from **Harris Saddle** (p264) on the Routeburn Track
- Touching the snout of **Whitbourn Glacier** (p277) along the Rees-Dart Track
- Feeling as though you're standing on top of the world on **Cascade Saddle** (p281), with Mt Aspiring/Tititea looming overhead
- Finishing Wilkin-Young Valleys Circuit with a jetboat ride on the **Wilkin River** (p283)

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 03

■ www.queenstown-nz.co.nz

■ www.lakewanaka.co.nz



HISTORY

There are traces of a Maori village on the banks of the Dart River, oven sites at the point where the Matukituki River meets Lake Wanaka, and a moa-hunting site near Glenorchy. However, the real value of this area to the Maori was as a trade route between south Westland and Central Otago, and as a source of greenstone (*pounamu*), which was highly valued for its use in tools and weapons.

Maori expeditions in search of greenstone are said to have been conducted as late as 1850 – about the same time the first Europeans began exploring the region. In 1861, David McKellar and George Gunn, part explorers and part pastoralists, shed

some light on the Greenstone valley when they struggled up the river and climbed one of the peaks near Lake Howden. What they saw was the entire Hollyford Valley, which they mistakenly identified as George Sound in central Fiordland. The great Otago gold rush began later that year, and by 1862 miners were digging around the lower regions of the Dart and Rees Rivers, as well as in the Route Burn valley.

A prospector called Patrick Caples made a solo journey up the Route Burn from Lake Wakatipu in 1863, and discovered Harris Saddle, before descending into the Hollyford valley and Martins Bay. Caples returned through the valley that now bears his name, ending a three-month odyssey

in which he became the first European to reach the Tasman Sea from Wakatipu.

It was not until late in the 19th century that the first European crossed the Barrier Range from Cattle Flat on the Dart to a tributary of the Arawata River. William O'Leary, an Irish prospector better known as Arawata Bill, roamed the mountains and valleys of this area and much of the Hollyford valley for 50 years, searching out various metals and enjoying the solitude of the open, desolate places.

Mountaineering and a thriving local tourist trade began developing in the 1890s, and by the early 1900s it was booming, even by today's standards. Hotels sprang up in Glenorchy, along with guiding companies that advertised horse-and-buggy trips up the Rees valley. Sir Thomas Mackenzie, Minister of Tourism, pushed for the construction of the Routeburn Track and hired Harry Birley of Glenorchy to establish a route. In 1912, Birley 'discovered' Lake Mackenzie and the next year began cutting a track.

The famous track had reached Lake Howden by the outbreak of WWI, but the final portion wasn't completed until the road from Te Anau to Milford Sound was built by relief workers during the Depression – until then a tramp on the Routeburn meant returning on the Greenstone.

The first move to make Mt Aspiring a national park came in 1935, but for all its beauty and popularity with trampers and tourists, the park wasn't officially gazetted until 1964.

ENVIRONMENT

The landscape of the park is predominantly of glacial origin. During the ice ages, massive glaciers carved into the metamorphic and sedimentary rock. When the glaciers retreated they left a sculpted landscape of U-shaped valleys, small hanging valleys and rounded cirques and ridges. The park still contains more than 100 glaciers, ranging from the large Bonar Glacier to the smaller ones that hang from the sides of the Matukituki valley.

Much of the park is predominantly covered in silver beech, with red and mountain beech in the southern half. This makes for semi-open forests and easy tramping in most valleys – unlike in the Fiordland

forests, where you rarely step off the track because of the thick understorey. West of the Divide there is rainforest of rimu, matai, miro and kahikatea.

In between the valleys are blooming mountain meadows that support one of the greatest ranges of alpine plants in the world. In alpine areas there are beautiful clusters of snow berry and coprosma in subalpine turf. In the Route Burn valley, look for mountain daisies, snow grasses and veronica. Another beautiful plant of this region is the New Zealand edelweiss.

The forests are alive with native birds, including fantails, rifleman, bellbirds and pigeons. In alpine areas you may be lucky enough to see diminutive rock wrens and, along the rivers, blue ducks (*whio*) and paradise shelducks.

CLIMATE

The weather varies a lot across Mt Aspiring National Park. A rain gauge just west of the Homer Tunnel (which is actually in Fiordland National Park) measures 7110mm a year, while Glenorchy, 34km to the east, receives only 1140mm.

In general, the Route Burn and Dart valleys, and the western half of the Greenstone and Caples Tracks, receive about 5000mm of rain a year, and there is the possibility of snow above 1000m in almost any month. The lower Rees, Matukituki and Wilkin valleys are considerably drier, receiving an annual average of about 1500mm.

The weather tends to be most settled from late December to March, and February is often suggested as the best month for tramping. However, the park is a typical alpine region and you must be prepared for sudden changes in weather and unexpected storms, regardless of the month.

In spring and early summer there is a considerable chance of avalanches occurring in the valley heads and on steep slopes. To tramp any track but the Greenstone outside the months of November through May requires much experience and special equipment.

INFORMATION Maps

The best map that covers the entire park is the 1:150,000 Parkmap 273-02 (*Mt Aspiring*). It shows all the tracks, but is good

only for planning as its detail is too small to be useful while tramping. The DOC visitor information centres in Queenstown, Glenorchy and Wanaka are the best places to obtain maps.

GATEWAY Queenstown

☎ 03 / pop 7500

The South Island's most famous resort town – the bungy capital of adventure – is also a beehive of trampers and tramping services for the region.

INFORMATION

DOC Queenstown Visitor Centre (☎ 442 7935; 37 Shotover St; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Nov–Apr) The major DOC office for Mt Aspiring National Park, with maps, books, brochures and good advice for the entire park and beyond.

Info & Track Centre (☎ 442 9708; www.infotrack.co.nz; 37 Shotover St; ☎ 7am–9pm) Arranges transport to the Routeburn, Greenstone, Caples and Rees-Dart Tracks, as well as for the Fiordland National Park's Kepler and Milford Tracks.

Queenstown Travel & Visitor Centre (☎ 442 4100; www.queenstown-nz.co.nz; cnr Shotover & Camp Sts; ☎ 7am–7pm Dec–Apr, 7am–6pm May–Nov) The biggest booking agent in town. Provides general travel information.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Tramping equipment can be bought or hired at several places, including **Alpine Sports** (☎ 442 7099; 28 Shotover St; ☎ 9am–7pm), which has tents, trekking poles and stoves for rent. For food on the track head to **Alpine Supermarket** (☎ 442 8961; cnr Shotover & Stanley Sts) for a wide selection of package dinners and freeze-dried food.

SLEEPING & EATING

Queenstown Lakeview Holiday Park (☎ 0800-482 735, 442 7252; www.holidaypark.net.nz; Brecon St; sites for 2 \$28, d \$85–105; 📍) has tent sites and luxury flats overlooking the water, and is only a short stroll from the heart of Queenstown.

Black Sheep Backpackers (☎ 442 7289; www.blacksheepbackpackers.co.nz; 13 Frankton Rd; dm/d \$24/60; 📍) is a former motel turned pleasant hostel, with gear storage, a spa and of course, a pub.

YHA Queenstown Lakefront (☎ 442 8413; yhaqtn@yha.org.nz; 88–90 Lake Esplanade; dm/d

\$25/64; 📍) is one of two YHA hostels in Queenstown. Amongst its other pulling points are helpful staff and gear storage, and it also features a view of Lake Wakatipu.

Another Queenstown hostel, where you can rest your head and catch your breath between extreme activities and tramping adventures, is **Bungi Backpackers** (☎ 0800-728 286, 442 8725; www.bungibackpackers.co.nz; 15 Sydney St; dm \$20–22, d \$48; 📍), with a drying room, free luggage storage and a spa. There is also the **Hippo Lodge** (☎ 442 5785; www.hippolodge.co.nz; 4 Anderson Heights; dm \$24–26, s/d \$36/65; 📍), a smaller hostel up the hill.

Queenstown offers the best range of restaurants that can be found in the South Island outside of Christchurch and Dunedin. **Vudu Café** (☎ 442 5357; 23 Beach St; ☎ 8am–9pm) is always crowded for breakfast and light lunches, and it has the best coffee in town, while **Leonardo's Café & Espresso Bar** (☎ 442 8542; 22 Shotover St; ☎ 7.30am–5pm) is a mellow place to begin the morning with a cup of freshly roasted coffee and other tasty treats.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air New Zealand (☎ 0800-737 000; www.airnz.co.nz) has daily direct flights between Queenstown and Auckland (from \$143) and Christchurch (from \$97).

There are myriad bus options, and in Queenstown you can book most of them at the **Queenstown Travel & Visitor Centre** (☎ 442 4100; www.queenstown-vacation.com; cnr Shotover & Camp Sts) or **Info & Track Centre** (☎ 442 9708; www.infotrack.co.nz; 37 Shotover St).

InterCity (☎ 442 8238; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has a booking office in the visitor information centre, and offers daily runs from Queenstown to Christchurch (\$65, 7½ hours) and to Franz Josef on the west coast (\$99, eight hours). **Atomic Shuttles** (☎ 322 8883; www.atomictravel.co.nz) connects Queenstown with Christchurch (\$45, seven hours) and Greymouth via Wanaka (\$85, 10 hours).

There are also smaller transport companies, including **Topline Tours** (☎ 249 8059; www.toplinetours.co.nz) for Te Anau; **Bottom Bus** (www.bottombus.co.nz) for Dunedin; and **Wanaka Connexions** (☎ 443 9122; www.wanakaconnexions.co.nz) for transport to and from Wanaka, Invercargill or Te Anau.

ROUTEburn TRACK

Duration	3 days
Distance	32.1km
Track Standard	Great Walk
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Routeburn Shelter
Finish	The Divide
Nearest Towns	Glenorchy (p262), Te Anau (p291), Te Anau Downs (p293)
Transport	bus
Summary	New Zealand's renowned alpine crossing includes a full day above the bush-line as you cross Harris Saddle.

The Routeburn, one of New Zealand's best known tracks, is a tramp over the Main Divide. Much of the tramp is through thick rainforest, where red, mountain and silver beech form the canopy, and ferns, mosses and fungi cover everything below like a wall-to-wall carpet. However, it's the alpine sections that appeal most to trampers. The tranquillity of a tussock meadow sprinkled with giant buttercups and flowering Spaniards, and the dramatic views of entire valleys and mountain ranges are ample rewards for the steep hikes and frequent encounters with other trampers.

There is a considerable amount of climbing on the Routeburn because you have to cross Harris Saddle (1255m). However, the track itself is well benched and graded; in fact it's surprisingly wide in many places and is difficult to lose.

The track's overwhelming popularity resulted in the introduction of one of the first booking systems in New Zealand in 1995. Independent walkers need to reserve hut passes before embarking on the tramp.

In summer, be prepared for huts that are full, a constant flow of foot traffic and a small gathering of people admiring the views at Harris Saddle. You must put up with the large number of people because the mountain scenery is truly exceptional.

A strong trumper could walk this track in less than three days, but considering all the expense and hassle of booking the huts, why would you want to?

The track can be hiked in either direction, but most trampers begin on the

Glenorchy side and end at the Divide. One possibility for those who want to do a round trip is to tramp from Lake Mackenzie back to Routeburn Flats via Emily Pass. This is a difficult, poorly marked route with some unmarked stretches of bush and scrub. Interested trampers should consult DOC staff at Glenorchy, or the hut warden at Lake Mackenzie, before attempting it.

PLANNING When to Tramp

The four huts on the Routeburn Track are well serviced from November to April. Outside this period the track is a winter crossing that should only be attempted by experienced trampers.

Maps

There are many maps for the Routeburn, but the best is the 1:75,000 Trackmap 335-02 (*Routeburn & Greenstone*), which can be purchased at the DOC offices in Queenstown or Glenorchy.

Huts & Camp Sites

There are four huts on the Routeburn Track – Routeburn Flats, Routeburn Falls, Mackenzie and Howden – and all have gas rings for cooking. A **Great Walks pass** (adult/child per night \$40/20) is required, and there are hut wardens who will check to see that you have them.

The two most popular huts in which to spend the night are Routeburn Falls and Mackenzie, both near the bush-line. The route between them is the most spectacular section of the walk. The Routeburn Flats Hut was upgraded in the early 1990s to make it more appealing, but the views from this hut are not as dramatic as those from the porch of Routeburn Falls Hut.

You can completely avoid the huts by **camping** (adult/child \$10/5), but you are restricted to sites at Routeburn Flats (15 sites) and Lake Mackenzie (nine sites). Twenty minutes from Howden Hut is Greenstone Saddle, where there are 15 free sites.

Permits & Regulations

Because of the Routeburn's popularity, you must now book accommodation passes for huts and camp sites in advance for any tramp from November to April. You must then tramp on the days booked. Outside

that period, bookings are not required and the huts (\$10) are not serviced.

You can book passes through the **Great Walks Booking counter** (☎ 249 8514; greatwalksbooking@doc.govt.nz; DOC, PO Box 29, Te Anau) or online through **DOC** (www.doc.govt.nz) from 1 July for the following tramping season. From November to April, counter bookings can also be made at DOC's Queenstown and Glenorchy visitor information centres.

Overnight use of Harris Shelter and the track-end shelters is not permitted, and if you try tramping without purchasing a Great Walks pass in advance, hut wardens will charge you a premium rate for a bunk.

Guided Tramps

If you haven't booked a spot on the Routeburn in advance but really want to tramp it, **Routeburn Track Guided Walk** (☎ 0800-768 832, 442 8200; www.routeburn.co.nz) might be able to help. Utilising its own private huts – complete with hot showers, cold beer and soft beds – the company offers a guided three-day tramp (adult/child \$1090/850), or the Grand Traverse (adult/child \$1475/1150), which is a six-day combination of the Routeburn and Greenstone Tracks.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Te Anau (p291) and Te Anau Downs (p293).

Glenorchy

☎ 03 / pop 215

A picturesque hamlet at the head of Lake Wakatipu, about 47km from Queenstown, Glenorchy has a limited choice of places to stay and eat. You can get supplies, but the choice is restricted to what is sold at the camping grounds and hotel. Better to outfit your tramp and hire necessary equipment in Queenstown (p260). The **DOC Glenorchy Visitor Centre** (☎ 442 9937; glenorchyvc@doc.govt.nz; cnr Mull & Oban Sts) can make track bookings and check the latest track conditions.

SLEEPING & EATING

Glenorchy Holiday Park & Backpackers (☎ 442 7171; www.glenorchyinfocentre.co.nz; 2 Oban St; sites for 2 \$18-20, dm \$16) is a spread-out park, well set up for trampers, with a small store and transport to various tramping tracks, including the Routeburn.

Glenorchy Hotel (☎ 0800-453 667, 442 9902; cnr Mull & Argyle Sts; dm/d \$22/44, hotel d \$85-115) has a restaurant, backpacker accommodation and hotel rooms with private baths.

Kinloch Lodge (☎ 442 4900; www.kinlochlodge.co.nz; Kinloch Rd; d \$56-185), located at the northern end of Lake Wakatipu, is an alternative for trampers with a vehicle. This delightful lodge has comfortable rooms, a great restaurant and, most importantly, a hot tub. It also has secured parking on site and will transport you to the nearby tracks.

Glenorchy Cafe (☎ 442 9978; Mull St; ☞ 7.30am-5pm, to 9.30pm Sat) is the local hang-out for trampers. It serves freshly baked bread, organic salads and vegetables, and home-cooked meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

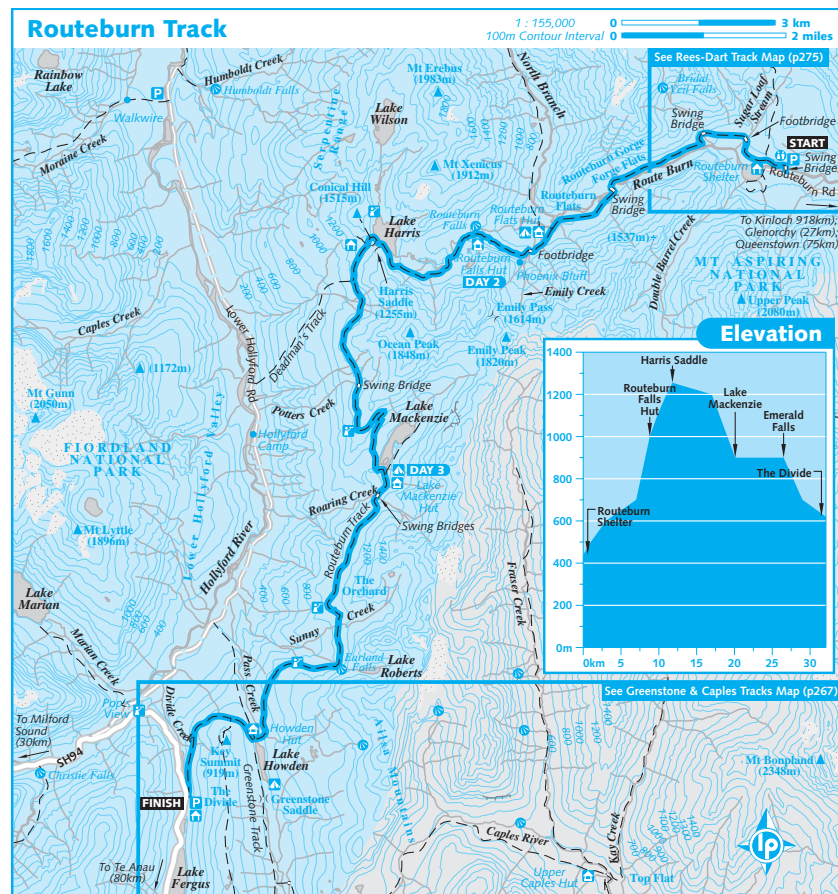
Backpacker Express (☎ 442 9939; www.glenorchyinfocentre.co.nz) operates out of the Glenorchy Holiday Park and provides bus transport between Queenstown and Glenorchy (\$15, one hour), as well as many of the area's tracks, including the Routeburn.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

During summer, **Kiwi Discovery** (☎ 442 7340; www.kiwidiscovery.com) runs between Queenstown and the Routeburn Track (\$30, two hours), via Glenorchy twice a day at 7.45am and 3.15pm. **Backpacker Express** (☎ 442 9939; www.glenorchyinfocentre.co.nz) also makes the trip, eight times a day, for the same rate. Both can be booked at the **Info & Track Centre** (☎ 442 9708; www.infotrack.co.nz; 37 Shotover St, Queenstown).

There is also trampers' transport between the Divide, Te Anau and Milford Sound daily during summer. **Tracknet** (☎ 249 7777; www.greatwalksnz.com) stops at the Divide on its way to Te Anau (adult/child \$30/20, 1½ hours, three daily). On two of those runs (10.15am and 3.15pm) you can hop on the southbound Tracknet bus and ride it all the way back to Queenstown (adult/child \$65/45, four hours).

Kiwi Discovery provides transport twice daily from the Divide to Milford Sound (\$30, one hour), Te Anau (\$35, 1½ hours) and Queenstown (\$65, four hours). This tour operator also has a Routeburn Circuit package (\$185) that includes transport to and from the track, and a 2½-hour cruise on Milford Sound.



THE TRAMP

Day 1: Routeburn Shelter to Routeburn Falls Hut

4 hours, 8.8km, 560m ascent

From the Routeburn Shelter, backtrack 200m along the road to the car park and trailhead. From here the track crosses the **Route Burn** on a swing bridge to its true left (north) bank, and winds for 1km through a forest of red, silver and mountain beech to a footbridge over Sugar Loaf Stream. The forest here is magnificent, with the track passing beneath towering red beech trees. Once across the stream the track climbs gently for 20 minutes until it reaches the swing bridge over the small gorge carved by Bridal Veil Falls. More impressive rock

scenery follows as the track sidles **Routeburn Gorge**, providing ample opportunities to peer at the deep pools at the bottom. The dramatic views end at Forge Flats, a gravel bar along a sharp bend in the Route Burn and a popular place to lie in the sun.

Just beyond the flats the track uses a long swing bridge to cross to the true right (south) side of the Route Burn. Because of slips and washouts that occurred during floods in 1994, the track has been rerouted beyond this bridge. Older maps show it passing through the Routeburn Flats (6.5km from the shelter) but it now swings into the bush and remains in the trees as it skirts the grassy flats. It's an easy 30-minute stroll along a level track through the bush to

a signposted junction, where the right fork leads to **Routeburn Flats Hut** (20 bunks), five minutes away. This facility was upgraded in the early 1990s and overlooks the river, the wide grassy flats, and the mountains to the north. Two hundred metres on is Routeburn Flats camping ground (15 sites).

The main track (left fork) begins a steady ascent towards Routeburn Falls Hut. The track climbs 270m over 3km (about 1½ hours) before reaching the hut above the bush-line. Emily Creek footbridge is the halfway point of this climb, and just beyond it the track sidles a steep rock face called **Phoenix Bluff**. You then break out and witness the most impressive evidence of the 1994 floods; here the track crosses a huge slip, where the excessive rain sent every tree sliding towards the flats below. The result was an opening in the forest, from where you can now enjoy a magnificent view of the valley and surrounding peaks.

From the slip you resume the steady but rocky climb to **Routeburn Falls Hut** (48 bunks). Built in 1996, the hut resembles a hostel much of the summer, with trampers coming and going and people always lounging in its large dining area. The hut is right at the tree line (1000m) and its long veranda offers views of the flats and the surrounding Humboldt Mountains. Right behind the hut is a private lodge for guided trampers. There is no camping around this hut and wardens are strict about enforcing this rule.

Day 2: Routeburn Falls Hut to Lake Mackenzie

4–6 hours, 11.3km, 215m ascent, 355m descent

From the hut it's a short climb to the impressive **Routeburn Falls**, which tumble down a series of rock ledges. Once on top of the falls the track cuts across an alpine basin towards the outlet of Lake Harris. The walk is fairly level at first – it crosses a couple of bridges and then begins a steady climb. You pass beneath a pair of leaning boulders, ascend more sharply and then arrive at **Lake Harris**. Sore legs and aching muscles are quickly forgotten as the stunning view of the lake materialises, especially on a clear day, when the water reflects everything around it. Carved by a glacier, Lake Harris is 800m long and 500m wide. In winter, it freezes over and chunks of ice are often seen

floating on the lake when the Routeburn Track opens for the season in October.

The track works its way around the lake along bluffs and moraines. You get a second jolt 1½ to two hours from the hut, when entering the grassy meadows of **Harris Saddle**. From this 1255m vantage point, part of the Hollyford valley comes into view, almost to Martins Bay if the weather is clear. If you are blessed with such weather, drop your packs and climb the steep side track to **Conical Hill** (one-hour return). The 360-degree view from the 1515m peak includes the Darran Mountains, Richardson Range (in Otago) and the entire Hollyford valley.

There is an **emergency shelter** on Harris Saddle, which is a popular place for tea and lunch. The track begins its descent towards the Hollyford valley via wooden steps and then turns sharply south. For the most part the track here is narrow but level, clinging to the Hollyford Face of the ridge, high above the bush-line. A strong trampler could probably walk from the saddle to Lake Mackenzie in less than two hours, but why rush? This is the best part of the trip, a stretch where you need to stop often and soak up the incredible alpine scenery.

After 30 minutes the track arrives at the signposted junction with Deadman's Track, an extremely steep route to the floor of the Hollyford valley (five hours). The immense views continue, and 2km from the junction with Deadman's Track the route crosses a swing bridge over Potters Creek. In another 30 minutes you can see the cabins of Hollyford Camp (p298) at the bottom of the Hollyford valley, directly below you.

Two hours from the saddle the track rounds a spur to the east side of the ridge and comes within view of Lake Mackenzie, a jewel set in a small green mountain valley. The DOC hut is clearly visible on the far shore. The track zigzags down to the lake, dropping sharply for the final 300m. It then skirts the bush and arrives at **Lake Mackenzie Hut** (50 bunks), a two-storey building overlooking the southern end of the lake. There are bunks on the 2nd floor of the hut, and additional beds in a separate bunkroom.

Because of the fragile nature of the lakeshore and the alpine plants, the Lake Mackenzie camping ground (nine sites) is a small facility, but it does include toilets, a water supply and a cooking shelter. The

lake doesn't have a conventional outlet, so please don't wash or bathe in it.

Day 3: Lake Mackenzie to the Divide

4–5 hours, 12km, 380m descent

The track begins in front of the hut, passes the lodge for guided trampers and enters the bush. You begin with a level walk, crossing several swing bridges over branches of Roaring Creek, and within 15 minutes begin climbing. The climb regains the height lost in the descent to Lake Mackenzie, and is steady but not steep.

About 40 minutes to one hour from the hut, the track breaks out at the **Orchard** – a natural clearing where a handful of ribbon-woods resemble fruit trees. The view of the Darran Mountains – especially of Pyramid Peak – is excellent.

More alpine views are enjoyed for the next hour or so, as the track passes through several avalanche clearings in the forest. Eventually you descend to **Earland Falls**, a thundering cascade that leaps 80m out of the mountains. On a hot day this is an ideal spot for an extended break, as the spray will quickly cool you off. If it's raining the falls will be twice as powerful and you might have to use the flood route, which is signposted along the main track.

The track steadily descends and after 3km emerges at **Lake Howden**. This is a major track junction and during the season it resembles a train depot, with trampers and guided walkers going every which way. The Routeburn Track is the right fork (west); the Greenstone Track is the left fork (south). If you're planning to spend an extra night on the track, you can either stay at the split-level **Howden Hut** (28 bunks) on the shores of the beautiful lake, or camp near the south end of the lake by following the Greenstone Track for 20 minutes to Greenstone Saddle.

The Routeburn Track swings past the flanks of **Key Summit** and in 15 minutes comes to a junction. If you're not racing to catch a bus, the 30-minute side trip (left fork) to the top is worth it on a clear day – from the 919m summit you can see the Hollyford, Greenstone and Eglinton valleys.

From the junction the Routeburn Track descends steadily to the bush, where thick rainforest resumes, before reaching the **Divide**, the lowest east–west crossing in the

Southern Alps. It's 3km (one hour) from Lake Howden to the Divide, where there is a huge shelter with toilets and a car park. Buses and vans are constantly pulling in here on their way to either Milford Sound or Te Anau. Welcome back to civilisation.

GREENSTONE TRACK

Duration	3 days
Distance	36km
Track Standard	easy tramping track
Difficulty	easy
Start	The Divide
Finish	Greenstone car park
Nearest Towns	Glenorchy (p262), Te Anau (p291), Te Anau Downs (p293)
Transport	bus, boat
Summary	Following the Greenstone River, a renowned wilderness trout fishery, this track passes through grassy flats and beech forest.

This tramp is the antithesis of the Routeburn. Some trampers just coming from the dramatic alpine scenery of the Routeburn or Milford Tracks may feel let down by the Greenstone, but most find it a pleasant change. Not nearly as popular as the Routeburn, the Greenstone is a historic trail that runs along the Greenstone valley.

The Greenstone River is renowned for its brown and rainbow trout, which average between 1.5kg and 3kg. Access to pools and holes is very good, because the track remains close to the river from Lake McKellar to near its mouth at Lake Wakatipu. Even non-anglers who keep one eye on the pools can often spot trout in the clear water. In fact, the track is so close in places that trampler traffic has made the bigger fish naturally wary and difficult to entice at times, especially during the busy holiday period. Long casts are not usually necessary, but sometimes they are the only way to fool a twitchy trout. To fish the Greenstone, however, you have to put in for a special controlled licence – in effect, you need to win an angler's lottery (see the boxed text on p266).

Although the Greenstone and Caples Tracks are described separately here, they can easily be linked to make a four- to five-day tramp. Routeburn trampers planning

FISHING THE GREENSTONE RIVER

One of the most enchanting places to fish in New Zealand is the Greenstone River. Accessed only by tramping the Greenstone Track or by helicopter, this luminous green river winds through golden tussock and is often surrounded by snowcapped peaks – even in summer. The trout are plentiful and of legendary size. The river is fly fishing only.

The Greenstone is New Zealand's most prized wilderness fishery. For this reason it became, in 2004, the first river in the country to be switched from an open fishery (anybody passing through can fish) to a controlled one, with a regulated number of anglers allowed on it. In short, whether you are a Kiwi or an overseas visitor, you have to win an anglers' lottery if you want to fish the Greenstone. Following are the three steps necessary before you can take your first cast:

- Purchase a whole-season fishing licence, which can be bought online from **Fish & Game New Zealand** (www.fishandgame.org.nz) or in person from fishing shops or post offices.
- Obtain a free backcountry licence online from the **Southland Region of Fish & Game** (www.southlandfishgame.co.nz), which is required to fish the Greenstone, Caples and Upper Oreti Rivers.
- On the same website, apply for a controlled fishery licence, which allows two anglers to fish one of the three stretches of the Greenstone for two days. You can – and should – apply for the special licence up to five days before you plan to fish. The controlled licence is also free, but there is no guarantee you'll get one – in fact, odds are probably against it.

The controlled fishery was instituted not to protect the trout, but to preserve the experience. To many, the most important aspect of a wilderness fishery is having a river to yourself, as opposed to sharing it with dozens of other anglers. On the Greenstone this is now guaranteed, as only six anglers a day are allowed to fish the river from McKellar Hut to Greenstone Hut. Lucky you if you win the Greenstone lottery and are one of them.

to continue on the Greenstone can easily walk from Mackenzie Hut to McKellar Hut, a 5½- to six-hour day.

PLANNING

When to Tramp

Being a low-level tramp, the Greenstone can be tramped year-round.

What to Bring

Giardia is present in the area, so be prepared to boil, sterilise or filter all your drinking water. Always use the hut toilet to prevent spreading the parasite. Anglers should bring fly-fishing gear only – no spinning gear is allowed on the Greenstone River.

Maps

The best map is the 1:75,000 Trackmap 335-02 (*Routeburn & Greenstone*).

Huts

There are two Serviced huts on the Greenstone: **McKellar Hut** (\$10) and **Greenstone Hut** (\$10), with coal fires, mattresses and running water. Wardens are present from late October until mid-April and will check that you have backcountry hut tickets.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

For transport to the Divide see p262.

Backpacker Express (☎ 442 9939; www.glenorchyinfocentre.co.nz) provides transport between Greenstone car park and Queenstown (\$30), departing at 10am and 2pm daily during summer. A water taxi picks you up at the Greenstone Bay wharf, on the western side of Lake Wakatipu, and takes you across to Glenorchy. A shuttle bus then takes you to Queenstown.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: The Divide to McKellar Hut
3–4 hours, 9km

You actually begin this tramp on the Routeburn Track, which climbs steadily through the bush and tops off at the junction to Key Summit – reached 30 to 45 minutes from the start. From there you make an equally steady descent, and after another 15 minutes arrive at **Howden Hut** (28 bunks), 3km from the Divide.

Take the southern (right) fork at the signposted junction near the hut and follow the western side of **Lake Howden**, a beautiful body of water. In around 20 minutes the track passes the Lake Howden camp site at the southern end of the lake. It then leaves

the lake and gently climbs to **Greenstone Saddle**, although you'll hardly notice when you have reached the low pass.

Less than one hour from Howden Hut, the track descends onto a grassy flat at a signposted junction. The left fork is the north end of the Caples Track, which reaches McKellar Saddle in 1½ hours.

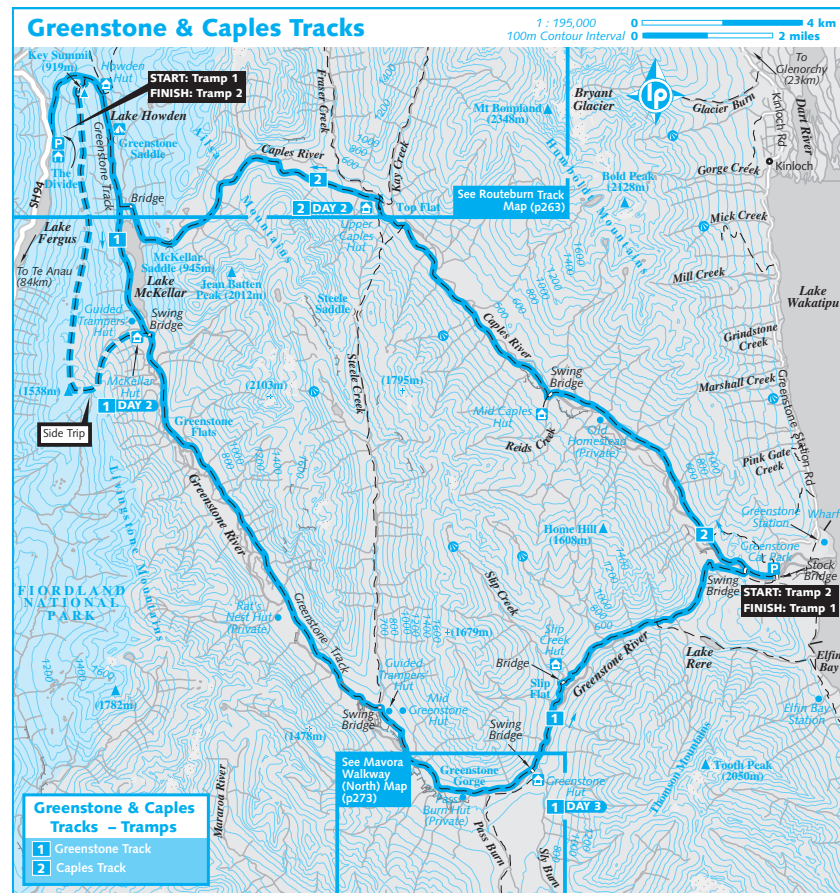
The Greenstone Track heads south (right fork) and crosses the grassy flat, where you are treated to views of **Lake McKellar**. It then gently climbs the forested edges of the lake, a couple of times dipping close enough for you to look for trout cruising the shoreline, but mostly skirting the hillsides, where views are but brief glimpses through the trees. Within one hour of passing Caples

Track (2.5km) you arrive at **McKellar Hut** (20 bunks), situated at a swing bridge that crosses the Greenstone River. The hut is in a small clearing, with the rocky face of Jean Batten Peak (2012m) looming overhead.

SIDE TRIP: PEAK 1538

6–8 hours, 17km, 918m ascent

If you have a spare day at McKellar Hut, an interesting day walk is to climb Peak 1538 just southwest of the hut. Departing from the 'McKellar Hut' sign on the way to Howden Hut, is a track that climbs to the bush-line. From there it's a steep climb through the alpine tussock to the top of **Peak 1538**. You can then follow the ridge to **Key Summit** (919m), descend to Howden



Hut, and follow the first leg of the Greenstone Track back to McKellar Hut.

Day 2: McKellar Hut to Greenstone Hut

4½–6½ hours, 16km

This day is spent tramping through the heart of the Greenstone valley, where you'll see lots of cattle and, if you're wearing polarising sunglasses, a few of the river's famous trout.

The track immediately crosses the **Greenstone River** on a swing bridge in front of the hut to the true left (east) side. You then cut through beech forest for 30 minutes (1.5km), emerging at the northern end of Greenstone Flats, which are dominated by Jean Batten Peak.

The track is well marked as it cuts across the bullrush grass and then returns to bush for almost 2km, skirting the Greenstone River along the east side of the flats. You'll pass many pools here and it's often possible to see trout in the middle of them. You cross a larger grassy flat and then the track moves higher, onto the forested bluffs that enclose the flats.

For the next three hours the track stays predominantly in the bush above the open valley to avoid leasehold grazing land. There is an occasional stretch of rocks and roots, but for the most part the track is a straight-forward tramp with little climbing. When you emerge into a large open flat you can soon spot Rat's Nest Hut, a private hut for musters on the opposite bank of the river.

You remain in grassy flats (watch out for cattle!) until the track ascends around a **gorge**. Short side trails allow you to peer down between the rock walls at the roaring Greenstone River, before the track descends to **Steele Creek** and a major swing bridge. Just before the bridge is a signposted junction with a track heading north (left fork) to Steele Saddle and Upper Caples Hut, a demanding tramp (10 hours). On the other side you break out of the trees and cross a grassy terrace to a signposted junction. The left fork heads off to a private hut for guided trampers. Right above you is Mid Greenstone Hut. This hut used to be the second stop along the track before DOC replaced it with the new Greenstone Hut, 1½ hours east along the valley; it is now closed to the public.

The right-hand fork descends to open flats for the next 3km. Re-enter the bush across from the confluence of the Greenstone River and Pass Burn; the hut on the other side of the river is private. The track now begins to skirt around **Greenstone Gorge**, and after 2km comes to a junction with a track to Greenstone Hut. It's a five-minute descent to the bridge across the Greenstone River, from where there's a good view of the narrow rock walls of the gorge. Another 10 minutes from the swing bridge is **Greenstone Hut** (20 bunks) and the northern end of the Mavora Walkway (p271). Greenstone Hut was built in 2003 to replace the eight-bunk Sly Burn Hut. This is a great hut with a huge kitchen and wraparound deck that overlooks the surrounding mountains.

Day 3: Greenstone Hut to Greenstone Car Park

4 hours, 11km

Begin the day by recrossing the bridge over the gorge and returning to the Greenstone Track. Head right on the main track as it continues on the true left (north) side of the river. You climb high above the gorge, and then swing left with the valley before crossing Slip Creek on a bridge and entering the western end of **Slip Flat**, 40 minutes to one hour after leaving Greenstone Hut. Just above the bridge is **Slip Creek Hut**. The two-bunker is an old but classic New Zealand Forest Service hut, and a possible place to stay if Greenstone Hut is overflowing.

It takes 1km to cross the flats and re-enter the bush close to the river. After 20 to 30 minutes the track crosses a stream and comes to a signposted junction. The track to the east (right fork) stays close to the river before crossing a stock bridge and heading for Lake Rere (one hour). Take the main track to the north (left fork), which remains on the true left (north) side of the river and climbs through the rest of the gorge.

About 1½ to two hours from the gorge the track reaches a swing bridge over the **Caples River**. A signposted junction to the Caples Track (left fork) is just beyond the bridge. The track to the east (right fork) continues along the true left bank of the Greenstone River for another 30 minutes before reaching a signposted junction.

The right fork quickly leads to a stock bridge across the Greenstone River and ends at the Elfin Bay wharf. The left fork continues east and in five minutes arrives at Greenstone car park.

CAPLES TRACK

Duration	2 days
Distance	30km
Track Standard	tramping track
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start	Greenstone car park
Finish	The Divide
Nearest Town	Glenorchy (p262), Te Anau (p291), Te Anau Downs (p293)
Transport	boat, bus
Summary	This scenic tramp is more difficult (but less crowded) than the Greenstone Track, because it involves a steep climb over McKellar Saddle.

The Caples valley separates the main body of the Ailsa Mountains from the Humboldt Mountains. Although it's a smaller and often steeper valley than the Greenstone, many consider the Caples to be more scenic, with its pretty park-like appearance created by grassy clearings enclosed by beech forest. Good trout fishing can be enjoyed in the lower Caples River, from its confluence with the Greenstone to the Mid Caples Hut.

The Caples valley is linked to the Greenstone valley by McKellar Saddle, so this track can either be walked separately, or combined with the Greenstone or Routeburn Tracks to make a four- or five-day tramp.

PLANNING

When to Tramp

Unlike the Greenstone, the Caples Track involves an alpine saddle, and therefore should be avoided in winter unless you are properly equipped for cold weather and snow. The best time to tramp is November to April.

What to Bring

Like the Greenstone, Giardia is present in the area, so trampers should be equipped to boil, sterilise or filter all drinking water.

Maps

The best map is the 1:75,000 Trackmap 335-02 (*Routeburn & Greenstone*).

Huts

Both the **Mid Caples Hut** (\$10) and **Upper Caples Hut** (\$10) are Serviced, with coal fires, mattresses and running water.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

For transport to the start at Greenstone car park see p266. For transport from the finish at the Divide see p262.

THE TRAMP

Map p267

Day 1: Greenstone Car Park to Upper Caples Hut

4–6 hours, 15km

The track departs the car park and in a few minutes passes a junction where the left fork leads to a bridge across the Greenstone River. Remain on the true left (north) side of the Greenstone River, pass the confluence with the **Caples River** and, 30 minutes from the car park, arrive at a signposted junction. Here, the Greenstone Track heads southwest, quickly crossing a swing bridge over the Caples.

The Caples Track continues along the true left side of the Caples River, but stays in beech forest above the valley to avoid crossing the grazing land of Greenstone Station. At one point the woolshed of an old homestead might be spotted on the far bank.

It's 2½ hours along the east bank before the well-marked track descends past an impressive **gorge** and crosses a bridge over the Caples to **Mid Caples Hut** (12 bunks). The hut is on an open terrace above the river, near the edge of the forest. From the hut the track remains on the true right (west) side of the river and crosses open grassy flats for the first hour. You then ascend into beech forest to round a small gorge before quickly returning to the flats.

Eventually the track turns into bush before it emerges at the southern end of **Top Flat**. It takes about 25 minutes to cross the flat and cut through more beech forest to Upper Caples Hut. Just before the hut is a signposted junction with the Steele Saddle route south to the Greenstone Track, an extremely difficult tramp (10 hours). **Upper Caples Hut** (12 bunks) is on a grassy flat

GONDOLA BE GONE! *Jim DuFresne*

I tramped the Caples Track recently, because I know how dramatic the scenery is in this special place, but I'm not sure if I will be able to in the future.

The battle between tourists and trampers in New Zealand often boils down to development and dollars versus conservation, and one issue more than any other has come to symbolise these heated confrontations: building a gondola in Caples valley.

Such intentions were first announced in 2000, when a proposal, dubbed the 'Milford Skytrail', included building a sealed road 11km up the Caples valley and a 13km aerial cableway. The cableway would transport gondolas further up the Caples and into the Greenstone valley via McKellar Saddle, ending at a point along the Te Anau–Milford Rd. There, shuttle buses would whisk the passengers to the South Island's mecca of tourism, Milford Sound.

Promoters of the project argue that better access would allow more visitors from Queenstown to reach the sound without spending most of the day on a bus. Developers in general contend that gondolas, new roads and helicopter concessions allow less-able people – non-trampers that is – to enjoy wilderness experiences that DOC has currently locked up. Trampers displaced from the Caples and Greenstone valleys due to development would simply tramp elsewhere.

Not so, say conservationists, who quickly organised a 'Gondola Be Gone' campaign with the backing of Public Access New Zealand, the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. Sacrifice these valleys to wholesale tourism and you lose two of the best areas for novice and family tramping, tracks with a good network of huts, undemanding terrain and reasonable weather in the often rainy and stormy national park. Alternatives for such gentle tramping just don't exist elsewhere in the Fiordland/Wakatipu region.

Once a road is cut and 85 towers erected for a gondola, a valley and its mature beech forest is lost forever. Or, as one Federated Mountain Clubs executive member put it, "We don't set aside national parks in perpetuity to build giant amusement rides, we protect them for their intrinsic values".

where the valley begins to narrow, 1½ to 2½ hours from Mid Caples Hut. It's a scenic location to spend the night, with the Ailsa Mountains rising directly behind the hut.

Day 2: Upper Caples Hut to the Divide

6½–7 hours, 15km, 520m ascent, 380m descent

The track leaves the valley floor and begins ascending towards McKellar Saddle, climbing 150m and passing the confluence of Fraser Creek and Caples River to a small, boggy meadow. From here the track continues to climb, and two hours from the hut you ford the Caples – now a mountain creek – to its true left side. The track

then crosses back to the true right side and makes its final ascent through open alpine terrain to the saddle, three hours from the hut. This can be slow going at times, because sections are very steep and the track is infused with ankle-jarring rocks and rocks.

McKellar Saddle (945m) is an extremely wet and boggy area, especially after a good rain, but since the mid-1990s, boardwalks have provided easy travel across it. The views are good from the saddle – on a clear day the peaks and hanging valleys of Fiordland can be seen to the west.

The track is well signposted as it leaves the saddle, and quickly descends 100m before swinging north and dropping another 200m via a series of switchbacks. You have more tree roots and rocks to negotiate, but the descent is not as steep as the climb. From the saddle it takes about 1½ hours to descend to the point where you break out of the bush near the head of **Lake McKellar**. Here, the track swings north to bypass swampy lowlands, then crosses a bridge to the signposted Greenstone Track.

WARNING

The upper Caples River can rise extremely fast during periods of heavy rain. You cross a number of unbridged side streams along the track between the Upper Caples Hut and the Greenstone Track, and caution should be used when travelling this stretch during foul weather.

To the north (right fork) the track leads to beautiful Lake Howden and **Howden Hut** (28 bunks), 45 minutes to one hour away. If you are returning along the Greenstone Track, the south fork can be followed to reach McKellar Hut, one hour away.

At a major track junction near Howden Hut, turn west (left) along the Routeburn Track, passing the flanks of Key Summit and another trail junction. The 30-minute side trip (left fork) to the top of **Key Summit** is worthwhile on clear days – when, from the 919m summit, you should be able to see the Hollyford, Greenstone and Eglington valleys. From the junction the Routeburn Track descends steadily to the bush and thick rainforest, before reaching the **Divide**, the lowest east–west crossing in the Southern Alps. It is 3km (one hour) from Howden Hut to the Divide, where there is a car park and a huge shelter with toilets and water.

MAVORA WALKWAY

Duration	3 days
Distance	51km
Track Standard	tramping track
Difficulty	easy
Start	Mavora Lakes camping ground
Finish	Greenstone car park
Nearest Towns	Te Anau (p291), Glenorchy (p262)
Transport	bus, boat, plane
Summary	This tramp includes alpine scenery, excellent trout fishing in the Mararoa River, and a lot less trampers than the Greenstone or Routeburn Tracks.

Mavora Lakes Park, in the Snowdon State Forest, lies within the Te Wahipounamu-Southwest New Zealand World Heritage Area. It is surrounded by the impressive Thomson and Livingstone Mountains, which have peaks that rise to more than 1600m, and now there is regular transport to the southern trailhead.

Still, it's hard to imagine the number of trampers on the Mavora Walkway ever approaching that on tracks such as the Greenstone and Rees-Dart; and that's good news for anybody who tramps to get away from the crowds, not join them.

Anglers, particularly those equipped for fly fishing, will also enjoy this trip. The short days between huts allow ample time to fish for brown and rainbow trout in the Mararoa River. The walkway then ends at one of the most productive stretches of the Greenstone River, where another day or two can be spent enticing the trout. Fishing on the Mararoa River is permitted with artificial baits only, while the Greenstone is exclusively for fly fishing – and you need to apply for a special permit (see the boxed text on p266).

Most trampers need four days to cover the walkway to Greenstone car park, but it can be done in three, as described here. The track was once used with the Greenstone valley to drive cattle from Martins Bay to Mossburn, so a few segments have a wide, road-like appearance. In fact, the first day is along a rough 4WD track that is open to trampers, mountain bikers and motorists who don't care about their shocks. Vehicles are prohibited beyond Boundary Hut.

The walkway can be tramped in either direction, but because it is easier to arrange return transport from the Greenstone Track, it is described here from south to north.

ENVIRONMENT

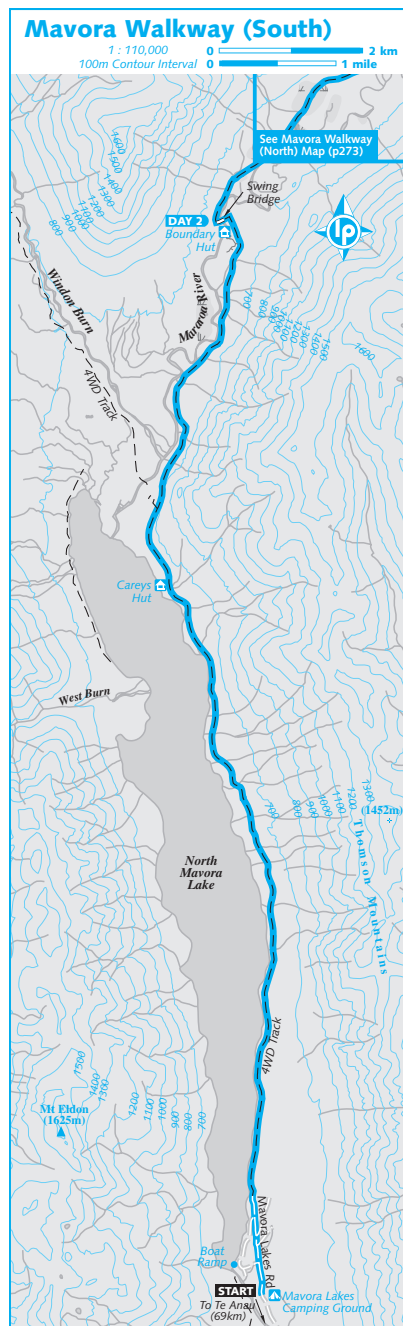
The Mavora Walkway winds through a much more gentle topography than the Routeburn or Caples Tracks, making the tramp ideal for families and others not up to a major alpine crossing. Park-like tussock grasslands and beech forests dominate the broad valley, which is up to 2km wide in places and is enclosed by 2000m peaks. Bird life is plentiful along the track and includes riflemen, parakeets, tomtits and robins in the open forests, and paradise ducks in the wetland ponds.

PLANNING
When to Tramp

Because part of the walkway passes through Elfin Bay Station (just north of Boundary Hut), it is closed from May to the Labour Day weekend in October.

Maps

The tramp is covered with limited detail on the 1:250,000 Parkmap 273-03 (*Fiordland National Park*), or on the 1:50,000



Topomap 260-E42 (*Walter Peak*) and 260-E41 (*Queenstown*).

Huts

Careys Hut (\$5), **Boundary Hut** (\$5) and **Taipou Hut** (\$5) are Standard, with tap water and toilets. **Greenstone Hut** (\$10) is Serviced.

NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

See Te Anau (p291) and Glenorchy (p262).

Mavora Lakes Camping Ground

A self-registration **DOC camping ground** (adult/child \$5/\$2.50) is near the southern end of North Mavora Lake, at the start of the walkway. The limited facilities include barbecues, water taps and toilets.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

From SH94, between Mossburn and Te Anau, turn north at Centre Hill or Burwood Station and follow Mt Nicholas Rd and then Mavora Lakes Rd (both unsealed) for 39km to the camping ground. This is a popular area during summer, so catching a bus to the turn-off on SH94 and hitching to the trailhead is not out of the question. **InterCity** (☎ 442 8238; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) buses pass the turn-off on their daily Queenstown–Te Anau run, charging \$25 from Queenstown and \$15 to \$24 from Te Anau.

From Te Anau, **Tracknet** (☎ 249 7777; www.greatwalksnz.com) will take tramping parties to the trailhead for \$40 per person. Another option from Te Anau is with **Wings & Water Te Anau** (☎ 249 7405; wingsandwater@teanau.co.nz), which will fly into North Mavora Lake in a floatplane that holds four passengers plus gear, for \$540 per flight.

For transport from Greenstone car park see p266.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Mavora Lakes Camping Ground to Boundary Hut

4–5 hours, 17km

The track is signposted at the southern end of North Mavora Lake and immediately enters beech forest, following a rough 4WD track along the shoreline. The lake is always close at hand, and is easily seen through the trees. After one hour (3km) the track departs the forest for good and swings up and away from the shoreline. If the weather is clear the next two hours will be hot (use

sunscreen!) and scenic – with the Livingstone Mountains rising steeply from the western shore of the lake.

Just before reaching the head of the lake, 9km (two to three) hours from the camping ground, the walkway passes **Careys Hut**. This seven-bunk hut is perched above the lake, overlooking a **gravelly beach**, an ideal spot for a dip on a hot day or casting for trout cruising the shoreline in the evening.

The walkway remains as a 4WD track, climbing above the head of the lake and passing a junction. The left fork, along a 4WD track that is rougher than the one you're following, is the route up the Windon Burn to Basic Forks Hut (three hours). The right fork is the walkway, which climbs the terraces above the **Mararoa River**. This is probably the steepest climb of the tramp, and it rewards you with good views of the valley and surrounding mountains.

After sidling the hill for 30 minutes, you drop back to the river and enter grassy flats bordering its banks. It takes one hour to cross the flats before a sign pops up pointing the way to **Boundary Hut**. This squarish, eight-bunk hut is on the true left (east) side of the river, and is pitched right above the water. It's enclosed by a fence to keep the cattle from joining you for dinner.

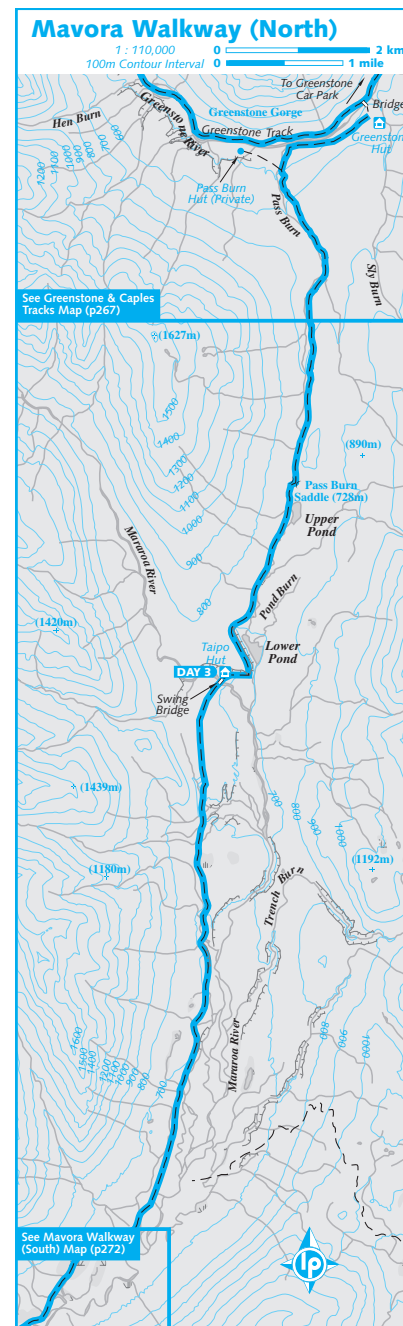
Day 2: Boundary Hut to Taipou Hut

4 hours, 13km

This stretch is occasionally listed as three hours, but most trampers need four hours or longer if the weather is foul. In such conditions you'll be slowed considerably searching for the next pole. The alternative to stopping at Taipou Hut is to push through to Greenstone Hut – a 23km, seven- to eight-hour day.

The morning begins by crossing the swing bridge seen from Boundary Hut to the true right side of the Mararoa River. High tussock grass greets you on the other side, but orange-tipped poles keep you on course. You quickly pick up an overgrown 4WD track and follow it easily up the valley. Within one hour (3km) the 4WD track swings northeast and the poles head northwest, an indication that you're about to begin sidling the base of the **Livingstone Mountains**.

This can be tedious walking at times because there is rarely a trail. Rather, you're



simply sidling the tussock sides of the ridge and leapfrogging from pole to pole, but at least the views of the valley improve greatly with the increased elevation. It's important to stay on course as the poles will lead you safely around several steep drop-offs and cliffs.

After two hours of sidling hillsides, or 11km from Boundary Hut, you make a gradual descent to the valley floor and finish the day crossing a grassy terrace that leads you to **Mararoa River**. On the other side is **Taipō Hut** (eight bunks) and between them a large swing bridge. Taipō Hut, perched above the river, is identical to Boundary Hut.

Day 3: Taipō Hut to Greenstone Car Park

6–8 hours, 21km

At Taipō Hut, the walkway departs Mararoa River for good and heads northeast across a terrace of tussock so high it reaches your chest at times. Within 1km you pass the northern end of **Pond Burn** and in another 2km (an hour from the hut) you arrive at scenic **Upper Pond Burn**.

At this point the orange-tipped poles disappear and a well-defined track takes over. You now begin the gentle climb to **Pass Burn Saddle**, reached two hours or 6km from the hut. The saddle is the highest point of the tramp, but at 728m is only 200m above the level of Lake Wakatipu, making it easy to miss. When the walkway drops into a gully to cross Pass Burn, you'll know you're on the descent.

Within 1km of crossing the creek, you arrive at a junction marked with orange-tipped poles. Admire the sweeping view of upper Greenstone valley and then head right (the fork to the left leads to a private hut). The next 2km is a descent into the **Greenstone valley** to the new **Greenstone Hut**, with the first half being a steep drop through the forest, where footing can be tricky at times.

You reach the 20-bunk hut in 3½ to four hours, about 10km from Taipō Hut, making it the ideal stop for lunch if you're pushing on. The hut is in a clearing above the confluence of Sly Burn and the Greenstone River, and under the rocky pinnacles of Tooth Peak. It's a five-minute descent to the swing bridge across Greenstone River

and its impressive gorge. On the other side you quickly climb out of the gorge to a junction with the Greenstone Track.

From Greenstone Hut it is four hours (11km) to the Greenstone car park. For a description of the route see p268. If your plan is to return to Te Anau, you can head west on the Greenstone Track. It's 4½ to 6½ hours to McKellar Hut and then three hours out to the Divide, where you can catch a bus along with all the Routeburn Track trampers.

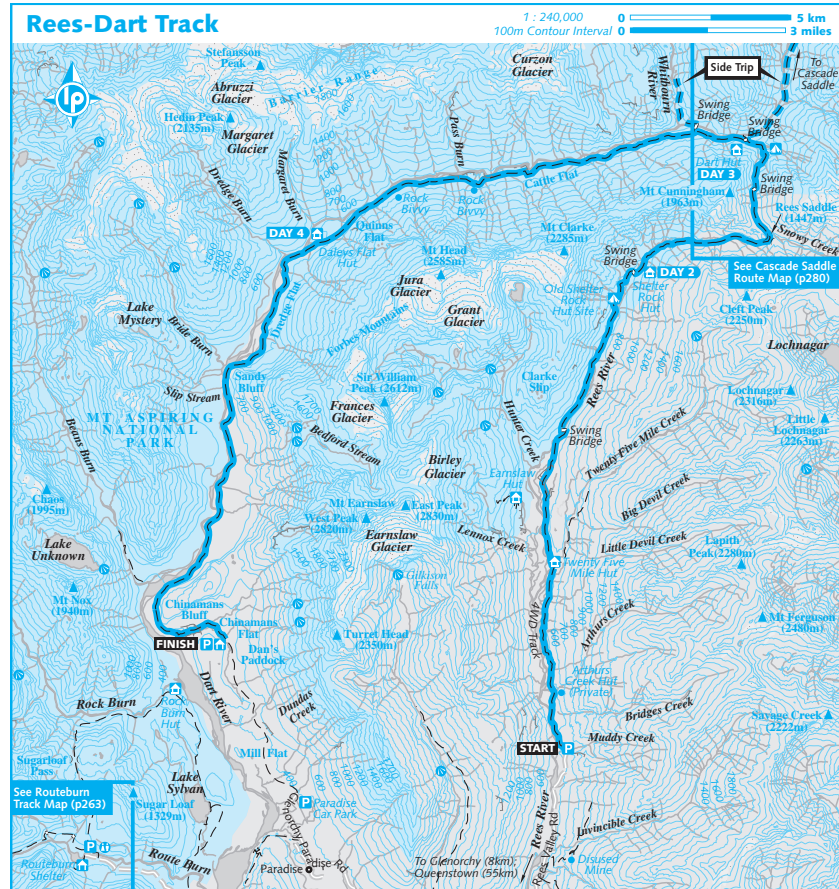
REES-DART TRACK

Duration	4 days
Distance	57km
Track Standard	tramping & easy tramping tracks
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Muddy Creek car park
Finish	Chinamans Flat
Nearest Town	Glenorchy (p262)
Transport	bus, jetboat
Summary	The alpine scenery, wild rivers and a possible day trip to Dart Glacier have made the Rees-Dart one of the most popular tracks in Mt Aspiring National Park.

Another alpine crossing in the Glenorchy region is the Rees-Dart Track, which connects two splendid valleys and winds through a variety of scenery, including grassy flats, lush forests and high bluffs. In recent years the Rees-Dart has become an extremely popular tramp and has been upgraded significantly. The reason for its popularity is that it offers an alternative to trampers in Queenstown who arrive without a reservation for the Routeburn.

Although the trip is rated moderate, it's longer and definitely more challenging than the Routeburn, Greenstone or Caples Tracks. However, most of the track is well marked and maintained, making the Rees-Dart a journey within the capabilities of average trampers.

Most people tramp Rees valley first and then return down Dart River – the easiest direction in which to climb Rees Saddle and the way the tramp is described here. Plan an extra night at Dart Hut if you want to include a day trip to Cascade Saddle to view Dart Glacier.



PLANNING

When to Tramp

Like the Routeburn and Caples Tracks, the high sections of the Rees-Dart are subject to avalanches in late winter and spring. The best time to tramp is November to April.

What to Bring

A section of track just north of Twenty Five Mile Hut can be very muddy at times. Gaiters are handy here. Giardia is present in the area, so you should be equipped to boil, sterilise or filter all drinking water.

Maps

The best single map to use for this tramp is the 1:150,000 Parkmap 273-02 (*Mount*

Aspiring), which has an enlargement of the Rees-Dart Track on the back. Otherwise, obtain two maps in the 1:50,000 Topomap 260 series, E39 (*Aspiring*) and E40 (*Earnslaw*).

Huts & Camp Sites

The three DOC huts available to trampers on this trip – **Shelter Rock Hut** (\$10), **Dart Hut** (\$10) and **Dalesy Flat Hut** (\$10) – are all Serviced, and come complete with mattresses, running water and solid-fuel fires for heating. Camping is permitted on this track, other than in the fragile alpine and subalpine areas which lay between Shelter Rock Hut and Dart Hut. Twenty Five Mile Hut is free.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

Backpacker Express (☎ 442 9939; www.glenorchyinfocentre.co.nz) supplies transport to both ends of the Rees-Dart Track. The Backpacker Express van departs Glenorchy at 9.30am daily during summer, and reaches Muddy Creek car park (\$15) at 10am. The van picks up at Chinamans Flat at 1.30pm for the trip back to Glenorchy (\$20). Once in Glenorchy you can pick up transport back to Queenstown or onto the Routeburn if you wish.

The highlight of the trip for many trampers is finishing the walk with an exhilarating jetboat ride down the Dart River. Backpacker Express also offers a tramper jetboat option that departs Sandy Bluff at 10am and 2.30pm, arriving in Glenorchy two hours later (\$90).

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Muddy Creek Car Park to Shelter Rock Hut

6–7 hours, 16.5km

Although a 4WD track leads up the Rees valley to the Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club's (OTMC) Twenty Five Mile Hut, the official and traditional start of the track is the Muddy Creek car park. From here you ford the creek and head along the 4WD track for 2km, reaching the private Arthurs Creek Hut just beyond Bridges Creek.

Grassy flats lie beyond Arthurs Creek, and it's one hour (4km) of open travel on the true left (east) side of **Rees River** until the track fords Twenty Five Mile Creek; poles mark the route. **Twenty Five Mile Hut** (four bunks) is on a terrace just before the creek, two hours from Muddy Creek. This hut is in poor condition and is not a very inviting place to spend the night.

The route continues along open river flats for another 1½ hours and can be extremely muddy at times – almost knee-deep in spots if it has been raining. Eventually you reach a track, marked by a park boundary sign, which enters the bush. Within 500m the track crosses a swing bridge to the true right (west) side of Rees River. The track continues on this side of the river, passes through **Clarke Slip**, over grassy flats, and then begins a climb through beech forest. Within 2km the track passes the site of the old Shelter Rock Hut, now used occasionally as a camp site. From here it's 1km

along the true right (west) bank of the Rees, through stands of stunted beech, before the track crosses a swing bridge back to the true left (east) bank to arrive at the new **Shelter Rock Hut** (22 bunks).

Day 2: Shelter Rock Hut to Dart Hut

4–6 hours, 9km, 487m ascent

The climb over the alpine pass of Rees Saddle begins by following the river on the true left (east) side for a short time, to pick up a well-marked track that rises through alpine scrub. The track gradually sidles up the valley until it reaches a tussock basin below the saddle, about 4km from the hut.

Rees Saddle is the obvious low point to the northeast, and you keep to the stream bed before climbing up the steep slope to the top. The final ascent is marked with orange poles and a well-beaten path, but is still a steep climb of 100m. As you would expect, **Rees Saddle** (1447m) provides good views of the surrounding peaks and valleys, making it the natural place for lunch if the weather is clear.

Follow the orange poles from the saddle towards Dart Hut. You quickly descend 90m to a terrace and a group of tarns above Snowy Creek. The track traverses steep, snowgrass slopes, which can be dangerous when wet or covered with snow.

The route stays on the true left (west) of **Snowy Creek**, then drops suddenly to a swing bridge and crossing to the true right (east) side. This steep-sided creek fills with so much snow during the winter that DOC must remove the bridge in advance, or risk losing it to an avalanche. The track climbs above the bridge, passes some good views of the upper Dart valley, and descends across broken slopes of rock and shrub.

Dart Hut is visible on the true left (south) bank of the Dart River during the final descent, which ends at a swing bridge across Snowy Creek. There are some camp sites just before you cross the bridge, but the hut is only five minutes away.

Dart Hut (32 bunks) was rebuilt and enlarged in 2003, partly because heavy snow falls were damaging the old 20-bunker but mostly because of the popularity of this spot. Many trampers spend two nights here so they can hike to Dart Glacier, following Day 2 (p280) of the Cascade Saddle Route in reverse. This has the tendency to create

a bottleneck at the hut at the height of the tramping season.

SIDE TRIP: WHITBOURN GLACIER

3–4 hours, 8km

If the hike up to Dart Glacier and Cascade Saddle is too much for you, another pleasant and much easier side trip is Whitbourn Glacier. From Dart Hut it begins by heading down the Dart River to its confluence with the Whitbourn River. Within 30 minutes you reach a bridge across the Dart and, on the other side, a track that skirts the Whitbourn River. Once beyond the bush, cairns will lead you to the snout of the small glacier.

Day 3: Dart Hut to Daleys Flat Hut

6–8 hours, 15.5km

The track climbs west, away from the hut and along a bluff above the **Dart River**, offering an occasional view of the rushing water below or the valley in front. In 2km you pass the junction to the swing bridge that crosses the river and leads to the track to the Whitbourn valley and Whitbourn Glacier (three hours). The main track continues along the valley through thick forest. You can often hear the river below but rarely get to see it.

About 4.5km from the Whitbourn bridge the track climbs sharply, but then drops into a rocky stream clearing near the eastern end of **Cattle Flat**. The track quickly emerges from forest onto the flat, an almost-endless grassy area where the trail appears as a path of trampled grass marked occasionally by a rock cairn. The Dart River is seen as you cross the flat, as is a portion of Curzon Glacier, high in the mountains across the river. The track follows the middle of the flat and in 3km passes a sign to a **rock bivvy**. The bivvy, a three-minute walk up a side track, is a huge overhanging rock that can easily hold at least six people. If it's raining this is an excellent place for lunch.

The track continues across Cattle Flat for another 1.5km and finally returns to the bush. From here it's another 1½ to two hours to Daleys Flat Hut. You begin with a steady drop towards the river, and reach the banks of the Dart in 2.5km. Along the way you pass another rock bivvy, much smaller than the one at Cattle Flat. Eventually the track breaks out at **Quinns Flat**, a beautiful

stretch of golden grass surrounded by mountains, and then returns to the bush.

The track crosses a few more streams and, in 30 minutes, arrives at Daleys Flat. Follow the trampled grass across the flat to reach **Daleys Flat Hut** (20 bunks).

Day 4: Daleys Flat Hut to Chinamans Flat

4–6 hours, 16km

This last leg of the journey is not as long or as difficult as it once was, thanks to extensive upgrading of the track in recent years and a new pick-up point. If you plan to catch afternoon transport to Glenorchy, it's still best to be out of the hut by 7.30am, allowing yourself a full six hours to reach the pick-up point at Chinamans Flat. Fast trampers can make it in four hours – but do you want to chance missing that van?

The morning begins in forest, but within 15 minutes the track comes to a small grassy flat, only to return to the bush on a high bank above the river. About 4km from the hut the track breaks out onto **Dredge Flat**. Use the markers to locate where the track re-enters the bush in the middle of the flat. At the lower end of the flat, Sandy Bluff looms overhead.

As soon as the track enters the forest it begins a gradual climb to **Sandy Bluff**. At one time, trampers used a ladder and steel cables to scale the rock face of this steep bluff, but in 2000 a new track was blasted out, and handrails and steps were added to make the climb considerably safer, not to mention easier. At the top you are rewarded with a fine view of Dredge Flat and the valley beyond.

The track immediately descends to a grassy flat, crosses it and then stays close to the river for the next 7km. Eventually the track enters an open flat, with Chinamans Bluff straight ahead and an impressive waterfall from Lake Unknown visible high in the mountains across the Dart River.

The track skirts the bluff, requiring only a fraction of the climbing endured at Sandy Bluff, and descends onto **Chinamans Flat**. Skirt yet another bluff, this one along a new segment of track that provides access around a washed-out area to a shelter and the start of a 4WD track. The shelter has an information board and toilets, and now serves as the pick-up point for Backpacker

Express. If you're not catching a bus out, then it's still another 6km to the end of Glenorchy Paradise Rd, a good two-hour tramp along the 4WD track through Dan's Paddock.

CASCADE SADDLE ROUTE

Duration	4 days
Distance	61.5km
Track Standard	tramping track & route
Difficulty	very demanding
Start	Raspberry Creek car park
Finish	Chinamans Flat
Nearest Towns	Wanaka (right), Glenorchy (p262)
Transport	bus

Summary Although it is a steep and challenging climb, this alpine crossing can – in good weather – be one of the most scenic in the country. It offers superb views of Mt Aspiring and the Dart Glacier, and joins the Rees-Dart Track.

Cascade Saddle is one of the most beautiful alpine crossings in New Zealand, and in good summer weather it can be tramped without the aid of mountaineering gear or climbing skills. It is still a very steep and difficult climb to the pass, and it should not be attempted in adverse conditions. If you have any doubts about your tramping ability or physical condition, pass up the climb to Cascade Saddle.

You should schedule an extra day (or more) to ensure good weather to cross the saddle. If the weather is fine the spare day can be spent at Dart Hut undertaking side trips, including a climb of Rees Saddle.

By hiking the route from the West Matukituki to the Dart valley, you can receive the latest weather report – via the hut warden in Aspiring Hut – on the morning before you attempt the steepest section, the climb from the hut to Pylon (1835m).

PLANNING When to Tramp

Cascade Saddle is a high alpine crossing and should only be done when the pass is free of snow, normally from December to March. Even then, sudden cold fronts can sweep through and bring snow at any time. Avalanche danger exists on this route during

winter and spring (June through November) and checking the **Backcountry Avalanche Advisory** (www.avalanche.net.nz) is highly recommended before any trip at this time.

Maps

The 1:150,000 Parkmap 273-02 (*Mount Aspiring*) now has the Cascade Saddle Route on the reverse side, at a scale of 1:80,000. It is more reassuring to have the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-E39 (*Aspiring*), as it covers the route over Cascade Saddle in greater detail.

Huts & Camp Sites

Aspiring Hut (\$20) is a New Zealand Alpine Club facility that is administered by DOC. The fee can be paid at the Mt Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre in Wanaka, or to the warden who is stationed at the hut from November through April. Built by the alpine club in 1949, and upgraded in recent years, the hut is an interesting place to spend a night. There are usually a number of climbers, with heaps of mountaineering gear, to give it an atmosphere of high adventure. Near the hut is a camping area. The huts on the Rees-Dart Track cost \$10; a warden is stationed at Dart Hut to collect hut tickets.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Glenorchy (p262).

Wanaka

☎ 03 / pop 3500

Presenting a sharp contrast to the hype of Queenstown, Wanaka offers an overdose of scenery and the outdoors.

INFORMATION

Lake Wanaka visitor information centre (☎ 443 1233; www.lakewanaka.co.nz; Ardmore St) General travel information.

Mt Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre (☎ 443 7660; wanakavc@doc.govt.nz; cnr Ardmore & Ballantyne Sts) At the eastern edge of town, with hut tickets, track information, informative displays and brochures for trampers. It also has books, maps and the latest weather reports. A handy brochure to pick up is the *Matukituki Valley Walks* pamphlet.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

At **Good Sports** (☎ 443 7966; 17-23 Dunmore St; ☎ 8am-7pm) you can buy or hire tramping

gear. For food on the track there's **New World Supermarket** (☎ 443 0048; Dunmore St).

SLEEPING & EATING

Wanaka Lakeview Holiday Park (☎ 443 7883; www.wanakalakeview.kiwiholidayparks.com; 212 Brownston St; sites for 2 \$24, dm/cabins \$16/40) offers a range of accommodation within a short walk of the town centre.

Wanaka has almost a dozen hostels, including **Matterhorn South Lodge** (☎ 443 1119; www.matterhornsouth.co.nz; 56 Brownston St; dm \$22-27, d \$50-85; ☑), a very relaxed place with a large kitchen, a cosy fire and a deck with a barbecue.

Wanaka Bakpaka (☎ 443 7837; www.wanaka.bakpaka.co.nz; 117 Lakeside Rd; dm/d \$24/58; ☑) has great views of the mountains and lake from its lounge area, which features music but not a TV.

For more upscale accommodation, **Te Wanaka Lodge** (☎ 443 9224; www.tewanaka.co.nz; 23 Brownston St; d \$190-205; ☑) is a superb place with alpine décor and lots of nooks to lounge in, a hot tub to soak in, and a small bar to enjoy your favourite beverage in.

Wanaka is surprisingly well equipped with restaurants, many of them on Ardmore St. **Relishes Cafe** (☎ 443 9018; 99 Ardmore St; ☎ 9am-2.30pm & 6-10pm) is a favourite with locals for its Japanese curries, fresh seafood and local wines. For a blackboard menu of something lighter, and good coffee, there's **Ritual Espresso Bar** (☎ 443 6662; 18 Helwick St; ☎ 9am-5pm).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

InterCity (☎ 443 7885; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has a daily bus from Queenstown (\$30, two hours) on the way to the glaciers via Haast Pass, as well as daily services from Christchurch (\$62, eight hours), which continue on to Queenstown.

Wanaka is well served by door-to-door shuttles. **Wanaka Connexions** (☎ 443 9122; www.wanakaconnexions.co.nz) arrives six times daily from Queenstown (\$25, 1½ hours). **Atomic Shuttles** (☎ 322 8883; www.atomictravel.co.nz) goes to Christchurch (\$50, seven hours), Grey-mouth (\$75, eight hours), Dunedin (\$35, four hours) and Te Anau (\$45, four hours). **Southern Link Shuttles** (☎ 358 8355; www.yellow.co.nz/site/southernlink) also goes to Dunedin (\$30, four hours) and Christchurch (\$45, six hours).

WARNING

Cascade Saddle should not be attempted by inexperienced trampers or during adverse weather. The snow-grass slopes on the Matukituki side are very steep in places, and become treacherous when wet or covered by fresh snow. Trampers have fallen to their deaths on this route.

The safest way to tramp the route is east to west, because you tackle the steepest, and potentially the most treacherous, segment in the morning after receiving the latest weather report at Aspiring Hut. Do not attempt to tramp the route from Dart Hut to Aspiring Hut, as you encounter the steepest slopes at the end of a long and tiring day of tramping.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

The tramp begins at a car park at Raspberry Creek, 54km from Wanaka. **Mt Aspiring Express** (☎ 0800-731 731, 443 8422; www.adventure.net.nz) makes the run from Wanaka to Raspberry Creek at 9.30am and 2.30pm, as does **Alpine Shuttles** (☎ 443 7966; www.good-sports.co.nz) at 9.15am and 2pm. Both operate from November to April, pick up at various Wanaka hostels and charge \$25 per person.

See p276 for details about transport out of the Dart valley.

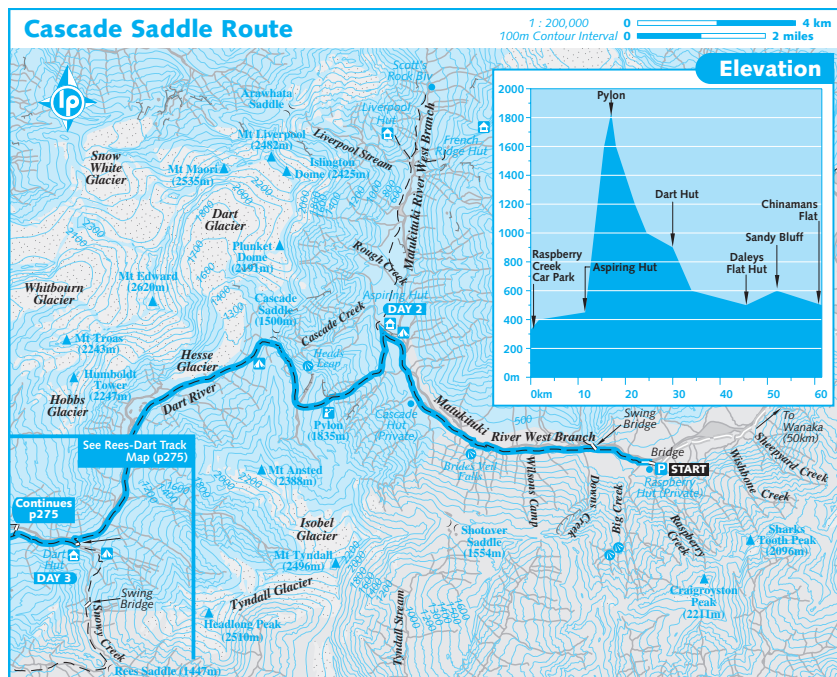
THE TRAMP

Day 1: Raspberry Creek Car Park to Aspiring Hut

2½–3 hours, 11.5km

Cross the bridge over Raspberry Creek to a 4WD track on the other side; the track cuts across the open valley of grassy flats on the true right (south) bank of the Matukituki River West Branch. The scenery up the river includes Shotover Saddle and Mt Tyndal to the left (south), Cascade Saddle straight ahead (west), and occasional sheep and cattle. Within 2km the track passes the swing bridge that provides access across the river to the Rob Roy Glacier Track (p285), and on a good day the hanging glacier can be clearly seen above it.

The 4WD track continues up the valley to Aspiring Hut on the true right (west) side of the river. At one point, near Wilsons Camp, the track climbs to the left to bypass a small bluff hidden in a clump of beech trees. Less than 4km from the bridge the



track climbs away from the river again, passing **Brides Veil Falls**. The private Cascade Hut can be seen from the ridge. At this point the track swings northwest, passes Cascade Hut, and in another 30 minutes reaches **Aspiring Hut** (38 bunks).

This stone-and-wood hut is a classic climbers' lodge. The views are impressive, especially of the mountains at the head of the valley, including Mt Aspiring/Tititea. A warden is stationed here in summer to collect fees and to receive weather reports every morning and evening. A designated camping area adjacent to Aspiring Hut is equipped with a shelter and toilet for campers.

Day 2: Aspiring Hut to Dart Hut

8–10 hours, 18.5km, 1375m ascent, 875m descent
The trip to Dart Hut is a long day, so an early start is important, although most trampers wait until 8.30am when the hut warden receives the morning weather report from the Mt Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre.

The track begins behind the hut and heads southwest into the trees, where it is

signposted. It climbs steeply through beech forest, and within an hour there are views of Mt Aspiring/Tititea to the north, and the rest of the valley to the east.

The track makes a steady ascent, goes through a large creek bed, and two to three hours from the hut breaks out above the bush-line. For most trampers this is a glorious moment. If the day is clear there will be stunning views the minute you leave the last few stunted beech trees.

The next section is very difficult. The route is marked by orange snow poles (metal standards) and follows a steep snow-grass and tussock ridge upwards. Sometimes you're on all fours working from one pole to the next, because the route sidles a few ledges and rocky outcrops, and at times becomes very steep. You are never more than 100m from the left of the spur. From the bush-line it's a good two hours before the track swings to the left and then, veering right again, climbs an easy slope to **Pylon**, the marker at 1835m. Take a break here – the views are wonderful.

From the marker, the track skirts the ridge to the south and then descends steadily through rock and scree to Cascade Creek (follow the standards). The route crosses the stream to its true left (west) side and climbs some easy slopes towards **Cascade Saddle** to the north. The route veers left just before the saddle, but you can continue to the low point (at 1500m), where you can look from its edge straight down a sheer 1000m rock face to a small valley below – but be careful! It's an incredible feeling looking at so much scenery, with Mt Aspiring/Tititea to one side and the Dart Glacier to the other.

When the route veers off the saddle and begins to head southwest, you cross a glacial bench overlooking Dart Glacier. This is the location of the only designated camp site in the Cascade Saddle area. You aren't allowed to pitch a tent anywhere else, in order to avoid damage to this fragile alpine area. If the day is clear and the weather holds, spending a night on the saddle can be an enjoyable experience, though most trampers push on to Dart Hut.

The second half of the tramp begins with more panoramic scenery. As soon as the route veers off the saddle you get your best view of **Dart Glacier**, from its beginnings among the peaks right down to the gravel-covered ice of its snout in the valley. If the weather is fine, lie down, enjoy lunch and study a wonder of nature.

The snow poles continue down the tussock slope to a ledge on the top of a moraine, then descend quickly along the ledge. The glacier is an impressive sight, but you are forced to keep one eye out for the next pole (or, when the poles run out, for the next rock cairn).

Steadily descend slopes of loose rock as you head for the valley floor, finally coming to it near the end of the glacier, where the ice is black. Continue down the true left (east) side of the **Dart River**, and 8km from the saddle pass the hanging ice of Hesse Glacier.

At this point the route departs from the rocky moraine hills and it's an easy tramp for the next 2km along the wide river bed.

Eventually the valley closes in, and the route is forced to climb around a few steep banks. It also fords several side streams, which roar down from the mountains. Be

cautious here, as these streams can rise quickly from afternoon snow melt. Eventually the Dart makes a wide swing to the west – a sign that you are only 30 minutes from the hut. Stay on the true left side of the river; the final 500m stretch to the hut has been rerouted, and now goes along a terrace above the river before emerging at the DOC camp site and the Snowy Creek swing bridge. Cross the swing bridge to reach the new **Dart Hut** (32 bunks), a wonderful sight at the end of a long day.

Day 3: Dart Hut to Daleys Flat hut

6–8 hours, 15.5km

From Dart Hut you can reach the road in two ways: either continue along the Dart River, or climb Rees Saddle and follow Rees River. The Dart is actually a longer tramp, but is the preferred choice of those who have seen its beginning at the glacier and want to follow it to Lake Wakatipu. For this route follow the Day 3 description (above) for the Rees-Dart Track.

Day 4: Daleys Flat Hut to Chinamans Flat

4–6 hours, 16km

Follow the Day 4 (above) description for the Rees-Dart Track.

WILKIN–YOUNG VALLEYS CIRCUIT

Duration	3 days
Distance	58km
Track Standard	tramping track & route
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	SH6
Nearest Town	Makarora (p282)
Transport	bus, boat, plane

Summary This semi-circuit gives you the opportunity to see splendidly scenic beech-forested valleys and superb views from an alpine pass at 1501m – but usually very few other trampers.

Wilkin valley offers two features that are difficult for most trampers to pass up once they 'discover' the Makarora region: the outstanding mountain scenery – easily rivalling that of the Matukituki valley near Wanaka and the tramps in the Glenorchy area – and the low number of trampers. While around 13,000 people walk the

THE SIBERIA EXPERIENCE

If all you have is a day, it is still possible to experience a portion of this track by joining the 'Siberia Experience' (adult/child \$238/178), a trip staged out of Makarora from mid-October to mid-April. This is one of New Zealand's great one-day adventures.

You begin the trip with **Southern Alps Air** (☎ 0800-345 666, 443 8666; www.siberiaexperience.co.nz), boarding its small plane for a 25-minute flight over glaciers, alpine lakes and hanging valleys, before landing at a remote airstrip by Siberia Hut. Once on the ground the Experience continues with a 2½-hour tramp along a well-marked track through the beech forest of the Siberia valley. The walk ends at Kerin Forks, where you rendezvous with a jetboat from **Wilkin River Jets** (☎ 0800-538 945, 443 8351; www.wilkinriverjets.co.nz) for the final leg – a thrilling 30-minute jetboat ride back to Makarora.

The wilderness has never been so easy, or so thrilling. The outing can be booked through Southern Alps Air or Wilkin River Jets.

Routeburn Track every year, probably only 1000 trampers use the huts and tracks of the Wilkin valley. The same is true of the forested valley of the Young River, another tributary of the Makarora River.

This tramp is described from the Young valley to the Wilkin valley, the easiest way to cross Gillespie Pass.

PLANNING When to Tramp

The track should be avoided in winter and early spring as part of the route is exposed to avalanches. There are relatively few people on the loop, except during the holiday periods around Christmas and Easter.

Maps & Books

The 1:150,000 Parkmap 273-02 (*Mount Aspiring*) covers the entire route but doesn't supply much detail. The 1:50,000 Topomap 260-F38 (*Wilkin*) is a far better map to carry.

The *Gillespie Pass & Wilkin Valley Tracks* brochure is available from the DOC visitor information centres in Wanaka or Makarora. Information on other tracks in the area is available in the *Makarora Region Tracks* brochure.

Huts

All huts in the Wilkin and Young valleys are Serviced (\$10) and have mattresses and potbelly stoves for heating.

Guided Tramps

Wild Walks (☎ 443 4476; www.wildwalks.co.nz) offers a four-day Wilkin–Young Valleys Circuit (\$1250) that ends with a jetboat

ride back to Makarora. Accommodation is in tents. The company also has a four-day Rabbit Pass tramp (\$1490), which it claims is the wildest guided walk in the country.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES Makarora

☎ 03 / pop 40
About 60km north of Wanaka, Makarora serves as the departure point for the Wilkin–Young Valleys Circuit, and as the southern gateway to Haast Pass. It's capable of accommodating about 140 people, most of whom will generally be trampers and adventure-seekers. There isn't much in the town, which is part of its charm. The **DOC Visitor Centre** (☎ 443 8365; SH6; ☎ 8am–5pm daily Nov–Apr, 8am–5pm Mon–Fri May–Oct) is 1km north of the township. You can purchase hut tickets here and register your intentions. Excess gear can be left for a small charge.

SLEEPING & EATING

Makarora Wilderness Resort (☎ 0800-800 443, 443 8372; www.makarora.co.nz; sites for 2 \$24, dm/d/cabins \$24/60/80; ☎) is a large complex that offers a variety of accommodation in a peaceful bush setting. The resort also operates a store with basic supplies, and the **Makarora Wilderness Café** (☎ 8am–8pm), which has light meals, snacks and groceries.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

InterCity (☎ 442 8238; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has a southbound bus from Franz Josef Glacier (\$66, five hours) and a northbound bus from Queenstown (\$44, four hours) that both stop in Makarora – at the DOC

Visitor Centre and the Makarora Wilderness Café.

Atomic Shuttles (☎ 322 8883; www.atomictravel.co.nz) also stops in Makarora on its Greymouth–Queenstown run.

DOC Camp Sites

There are three **DOC camp sites** (adult/child \$6/3) on SH6: Cameron Flat, 14km north of Makarora; Pleasant Flat, 45km east of Haast; and Boundary Creek, 15km south of Makarora.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

From Makarora you can easily hitch or walk to (and from) the tramp, or ask to be dropped off by one of the bus services through Makarora (see opposite). The confluence with the Young River is 3km to the north, while the Wilkin River is 6km to the south.

Wilkin River Jets (☎ 443 8351; www.wilkinriverjets.co.nz) offers jetboat transport on the Wilkin River, which can be useful if you are short of time or if the river is swollen. If rivers in this area are flooded, many trampers avoid

the dangerous ford of the Makarora near its confluence with the Wilkin by catching a jetboat from Kerin Forks back to Makarora (\$60). The jetboat will also drop trampers in the Young valley (\$25). You can arrange this service at the store in Makarora.

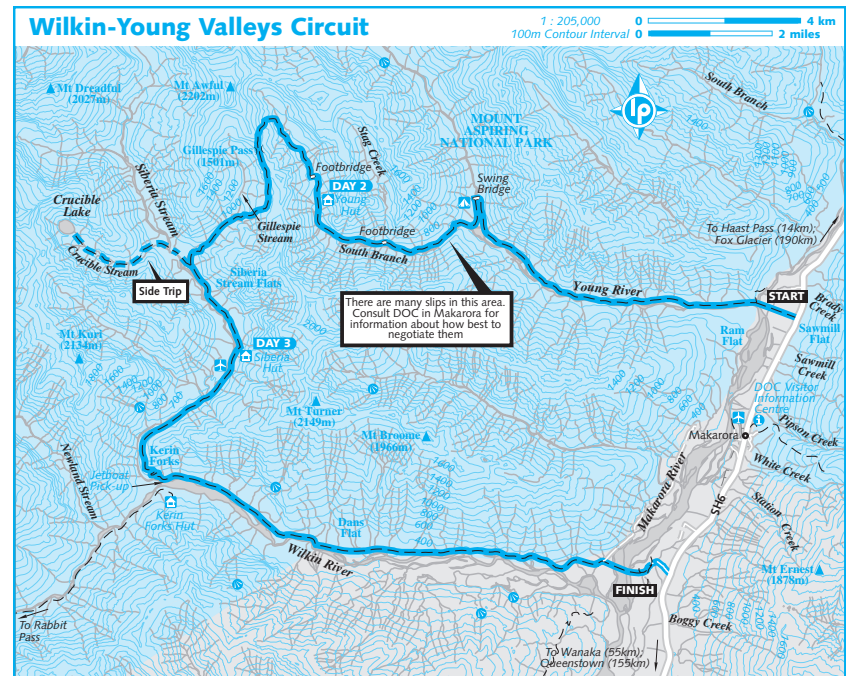
Another option is a charter flight with **Southern Alps Air** (☎ 0800-345 666, 443 8666; www.southernalpsair.co.nz), which will fly trampers in or out of the Siberia and Wilkin valleys. It's \$255 for the flight in a plane that holds three trampers plus gear.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: SH6 to Young Hut

7–8 hours, 20.5km

It is wise to ask at the DOC Visitor Centre about the best spot to ford the Makarora River to reach the Young valley. The river is generally forded at Sawmill Flat, about 3km north of Makarora, on SH6. Study the Makarora carefully, then choose the best ford between its confluence with Young River and Brady Creek. The crossing here is within the ability of most trampers when the water level is normal.



Once on the true right (west) side of the Makarora, you round the corner into the Young valley, where you will find a good track leading up the true left (north) bank of the **Young River**. There is also an emergency radio near the mouth of Young River, for trampers who are trapped by heavy rain and need to arrange transport across the Makarora River.

The track remains close to the river and makes for an easy stroll up the valley. Within three or four hours you enter the flats below the junction of the North and South Branches of Young River. Continue to just above the confluence, where a swing bridge allows you to safely cross the North Branch. A track here also leads up the North Branch to the Young Forks camp site, 200m from the confluence.

On the other side of the bridge a track crosses a small grassy flat and then enters the bush to continue on the true left (north) side of the South Branch. Ten minutes from the bridge the track crosses a large, unstable slip – it is well marked with rock cairns but exercise caution and remain at the same height above the river while crossing it. You then re-enter the bush and climb steeply for 100m before sidling a series of unstable slips, reaching Stag Creek two to three hours after crossing the North Branch.

After crossing a bridge over Stag Creek, the track makes a steady climb to the bush-line, reaching it within two hours of the bridge. The original Young Hut was another 1km up the valley, but in 2006 a new and larger **Young Hut** (20 bunks) was built within the bush to protect it from the avalanches that often occur here during winter.

Day 2: Young Hut to Siberia Hut

6–8 hours, 11.5km, 521m ascent, 861m descent
Leave the bush and continue up the valley, using a bridge to cross to the true right (south) side of the South Branch within 1km of Young Hut. Stay on this side of the river for the next 30 minutes, enjoying views of Mt Awful (2202m) framed by the valley walls, before reaching the start of the track to Gillespie Pass on your left. A large rock cairn and signs mark the start of the route, up a northeasterly facing slope of scrub and tussock. Make sure you fill your water bottles, because this is the last water until well over the pass.

It's a steep climb of 400m up the slope, alongside a rock bluff and then along the crest of a spur, where orange snow poles mark most of the route through snow grass. Just before reaching the pass, the route swings left up a small gully. It takes three to four hours to reach **Gillespie Pass** (1501m) from Young Hut, and for many trampers the alpine setting is a good spot for an extended break or lunch, with Mt Alba (2355m) dominating the skyline.

You leave Gillespie Pass by following the orange snow poles southeast along a ridge for 1km, until the route swings southwest. At times you are wandering down through snow-grass basins, which are very slippery when wet, so exercise caution. The track enters the forest on a small prominent spur and leads down to Gillespie Stream, a good spot for a rest. You continue down through forest, sidling above Gillespie Stream on its true left (south) bank, before descending steeply along a series of switchbacks to Siberia Stream and the track up to Crucible Lake (see the Side Trip, below).

Continue southeast beside Siberia Stream. The walk through Siberia Stream Flats is easy and the mountain scenery is spectacular. It takes about one hour to cross the grassy flats to **Siberia Hut** (20 bunks), on the true left (east) side of Siberia Stream. Plan on three to 3½ hours to reach the hut from the top of the pass. This part of the track has been marked with poles to keep trampers to a set path and minimise damage to the vegetation.

You can arrange to fly out from Siberia Hut (see p283) – the airstrip is on the other side of Siberia Stream from the hut, 400m downstream.

SIDE TRIP: CRUCIBLE LAKE

6–8 hours, 14km return, 532m ascent
An excellent day trip from Siberia Hut is a tramp up to **Crucible Lake**, a true alpine lake nestled beneath Mt Alba. It takes three to four hours to get there from the hut, and about the same to return. To reach the lake, backtrack through Siberia Stream Flats to Crucible Stream, where a track enters the forest on the true left (north) side of the stream. The track climbs steeply up a narrow spur to a snow-grass flat, which you cross to reach the lake.

Day 3: Siberia Hut to SH6

6–7 hours, 26km

Head to the southern end of **Siberia Stream Flats** to reach a marked track that enters the forest, about a 30-minute walk. The track remains on the true left (east) bank of Siberia Stream and gradually descends away from the flats through bush. It sidles around a shoulder, then follows a series of switchbacks over the final 450m to **Wilkin River** – a short distance upstream from **Kerin Forks**.

Kerin Forks Hut (10 bunks) is on grassy flats 400m downstream from the confluence of Siberia Stream and Wilkin River, on the true right (south) bank of the Wilkin. The hut cannot be seen from Kerin Forks, and the Wilkin River has to be crossed to reach it. It takes two to three hours to reach Wilkin River, where most trampers will have arranged to be picked up by jetboat.

To continue down the river, follow the well-marked track along the true left (north) bank. The walk is easy, and within three to four hours you come to the confluence with Makarora River. Caution has to be used when fording this river, which is best done upstream (north) from its junction with the Wilkin.

MORE TRAMPS

WILKIN–EAST MATUKITUKI ROUTE

This very challenging route – which is recommended for experienced alpine trampers only – takes you from Wilkin Valley, over the 1430m Rabbit Pass and into East Matukituki valley. A jetboat ride to Kerin Forks (in Wilkin valley) and then a lift back to Wanaka (at the end of the tramp) can be arranged. Plan on five to six days for this trip.

Pick up the brochure *Gillespie Pass & Wilkin Valley Tracks* from the Makarora **DOC Visitor Centre** (☎ 443 8365; SH6; ☎ 8am–5pm daily Nov–Apr, 8am–5pm Mon–Fri May–Oct) for a description of the route over Waterfall Face, a dangerous segment unless the weather is good. There are no huts in the East Matukituki valley.

Use two maps in the 1:50,000 Topomap 260 series, the F38 (*Wilkin*) and the F39 (*Matukituki*).

LIVERPOOL HUT

From the Raspberry Creek car park, tramp to Aspiring Hut for the first night (see p279). The next day it's a four- to five-hour tramp up the valley to Liverpool Hut (four bunks), with its majestic views of Mt Aspiring/Tititea and surrounding peaks. You can easily return to the road end on the third day to catch the van back to Wanaka. This trip is rated moderate during good conditions, but the tussock can be treacherous and slippery when covered in snow.

Use the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-E39 (*Aspiring*). For transport details, see p279). The best source of information is the **Mt Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 443 7660; wanakavc@doc.govt.nz; cnr Ardmore & Ballantyne Sts, Wanaka).

ROB ROY GLACIER

This is the most popular day tramp in Wanaka. It begins at Raspberry Creek car park and within 15 minutes crosses the Matukituki River West Branch on a swing bridge. On the other side, the track climbs through a small gorge and bush to the head of Rob Roy Glacier. The round trip takes three to four hours.

The best map is the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-F39 (*Matukituki*). For transport details, see p279). The best source of information is the **Mt Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 443 7660; wanakavc@doc.govt.nz; cnr Ardmore & Ballantyne Sts, Wanaka).

FRENCH RIDGE HUT

There are spectacular views from this 20-bunk hut, which is perched high on Mt French's flanks. The moderate three-day tramp up the West Matukituki begins with the walk to Aspiring Hut (see p279) and then a five- to six-hour climb to French Ridge Hut. On the second day you can enjoy a day walk up the ridge, returning to French Ridge Hut for the night, and then on the third day you backtrack to the car park. Keep in mind that the upper part of the route is very exposed in bad weather.

If you wish to venture beyond the hut to the Quarterdeck and Bonar Glacier, you will need to be an experienced climber and have the necessary equipment. If you are not, then enjoy the view you have from the hut or hire a guide. The view from the top of the Quarterdeck is one of the best in the

national park, with Mt Aspiring/Tititea, the 'Matterhorn of the South', as a backdrop.

Use the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-E39 (*Aspiring*). For transport details, see p279). The best source of information is the **Mt Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 443 7660; wanakavc@doc.govt.nz; cnr Ardmore & Ballantyne Sts, Wanaka).

BEN LOMOND TRACK

The Ben Lomond Track is a six- to eight-hour tramp that goes to the second-highest vantage point in the Wakatipu basin – Ben Lomond summit (1748m). Begin in Queenstown, with a 30-minute walk up Skyline Access Rd (at the western end of town, behind the Queenstown Motor Park). Ben Lomond Track departs from the road as a path in a Douglas fir forest and continues to climb, reaching the bush-line at 800m and Ben Lomond Saddle (1316m) in two hours. From the saddle you are rewarded with a view of sprawling Queenstown, Lake Wakatipu and the mountains that surround it. The last pitch to the summit is a very steep two-hour climb, but the views are inspiring. The peaks of Mt Earnslaw and Mt Aspiring/Tititea glisten to the east and Aoraki/Mt Cook is to the north, while at your feet is Shotover Gorge. A large metal compass embedded at the top of Ben Lomond points out what's what on the horizon of this 360-degree panorama.

A slightly easier tramp is to skip the climb to the peak, and continue north from the saddle on a bridle trail marked by steel poles. The trail is narrow and difficult to follow at times, but leads to a 4WD track at

Moke Creek, where you can see the remains of Sefferstown. Derelict copper mines can be seen in the gorge. Head right on the 4WD track and follow the signs to quickly pick up Moonlight Track, which parallels Moke Creek to Arthurs Point. From the saddle it's a two- to three-hour tramp to Arthurs Point, where you can still see dredges from Queenstown's gold-rush days.

Plan on six to seven hours to reach Arthurs Point from Skyline Access Rd, not including a climb of Ben Lomond summit. Once at Arthurs Point you're 6km from the pubs of Queenstown, on a road where it's easy to hitch a ride. Use the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-E41 (*Queenstown*). For further information about the tramp visit the **DOC Queenstown Visitor Centre** (☎ 442 7935; 37 Shotover St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Nov-Apr).

SUGARLOAF/ROCKBURN TRACK

No vacancy on the Routeburn? This two-day tramp, beginning and ending near the Routeburn Shelter, can be an alternative. The first day is a two- to three-hour tramp along Lake Sylvan to Rock Burn Hut (four bunks), which is nestled in the forest near a chasm in the Rock Burn, and has views up the Dart valley. The second day is spent climbing 1154m Sugarloaf Pass and then making a steep descent into the Route Burn valley, finishing at the Routeburn Shelter, a six- to eight-hour tramp. Use the 1:75,000 Trackmap 335-02 (*Routeburn & Greenstone*). For transport details see p262. For further information about the tramp contact the **DOC Glenorchy Visitor Centre** (☎ 442 9937; glenorchyvc@doc.govt.nz; cnr Mull & Oban Sts).