

# Clarence visitor information

## Ka Whata Tu o Rākihōia Conservation Park



### Introduction

Welcome to the Clarence in Ka Whata Tu o Rākihōia Conservation Park, a vast and rugged high-country landscape straddling the seaward Kaikoura Range. Endless vistas of convoluted mountains and twisted rock formations greet the visitor; small streams rush to the mighty Clarence River and gardens of alpine plants cling tenaciously to craggy slopes and pinnacles.

### About the area

This valuable conservation land has been managed by the Department of Conservation since its purchase by the Forest Heritage Fund in 1993. Within the Clarence sit some of the highest mountains in New Zealand outside the Southern Alps. It is nationally significant geologically and for its rare, interesting and unique native plants and animals.

Due to its relatively dry climate, the area escaped extensive glaciation during the Ice Age. Instead of glacial features, landforms above the original bushline are a result of mass movement of rock and debris. In places, it seems the very bones of the mountains are revealed – chalky white outcrops of limestone, contrasting vividly with deep-red remnants of ancient underground volcanic activity.

The vegetation forms a complex mosaic of tussock grasslands, shrublands, forest, flaxes, screefields and bare rock. Threatened plants, several species at their northern or southern limits and numerous plants endemic to the region are found here. These include the rare pink broom, New Zealand lilac, coral daisy and Marlborough rock daisy. Despite overgrazing, burning, spraying and damage by pests, the lower altitudes still support some important remnant communities. The many bluffs are goat-proof havens for plants, some of which live only on the limestone outcrops.

The Seaward Kaikoura Range is a very important area for a whole range of native animals. The world's only breeding colonies of Hutton's shearwaters are found on the cliff faces in the area. Eleven species of lizard have been recorded, including the threatened black-eyed gecko and scree skink. The New Zealand falcon occurs throughout the area, and kea live in the alpine zone. Blind Saddle is one of the most important areas for large invertebrates in New Zealand: two wētā species, a tussock butterfly and two speargrass weevil species survive there.

Introduced animals, including rabbits, pigs, stoats, hares and possums, threaten native wildlife and vegetation. Introduced weeds, such as hawkweed and briar, are also a major nuisance.

### History

Māori living at the mouth of the Clarence River used the river valley as a route through to Waiau for at least 750 years. In 1857 the first sheep runs were taken up in the Clarence by Joseph Ward and C. F. Watts. By 1890 no lessee could be found for the difficult runs. The area became part of the Crown's reserve of unoccupied pastoral lands.

Access was always a major obstacle. Horses were a valuable asset and the old pack track can still be seen in places. The modern vehicle track was only completed in 1969.

The leaseholders used materials at hand for building their homes and farm buildings. Trees, including introduced species like willow and elm, were used for framing. Cob was used for constructing walls; sometimes even the dog kennels and outside ovens were made from this mixture of mud and tussock.

## How to get there

The main access into the Clarence is over the Blind Saddle Road. From Kaikoura, follow SH1 south for five kilometres to the Waiiau/Mt Lyford turnoff, and head inland to the car park at Kahutara River bridge, 25 kilometres from Kaikoura. There is a locked gate here restricting horse and vehicle access.



## Activities in the Clarence



### Tramping/mountain biking

The Clarence offers excellent recreation opportunities for trampers making the walk over the range to Warden Hut. Trampers and mountain bikers do not need an access permit. Mountain bikers are requested to use roads and formed tracks only.



### Rafting/kayaking

Travelling the Clarence River by raft, canoe, or kayak is a great way to see the Clarence. There are four huts accessible to river users; Forbes, Palmer, Goose Flat and Snowgrass. Please see the map for locations.

The main river access point is at the Acheron bridge, accessible via Hanmer Springs and Jacks Pass Road. This is an isolated multi-day trip suitable for experienced or guided groups only.



### Horse trekking

Access for horse trekking is by permit only. Feed availability is unpredictable, so take supplementary feed. To reduce the spread of weeds only take grain feed. Please contact the DOC Wairau/Renwick Office for further information.



### Helicopter

There are a number of bivvies and huts which are not accessible by road or track. Helicopter operators must have a landing concession. Please contact the DOC Wairau/Renwick Office for further information on these huts and helicopter access.



### 4WD access

Limited vehicle access can be arranged by contacting Muzzle Station on (03) 319 5791.

**Note: the road is closed to vehicles over the winter months.**

Access to this area is 4WD only and is at your own risk. The section from Kahutara gate to Quail Flat is 30 km and will take at least 2 hours. The road is steep, rough and narrow in places, with several fords. Slips and floods are common; there is no guarantee of a safe vehicle passage. The road is suited to people with 4WD experience, drivers must be fully aware of their surroundings.



### Huts and camping

The Warden, Forbes, Goose Flat, Palmer, Alfred, Limestone, Jam and Snowgrass huts are all standard huts, requiring a Backcountry Hut Pass or one Backcountry Hut Ticket per night. They are equipped with bunks and wood fires, but it is best to take a portable cooker as firewood supplies are not guaranteed. Purchase of a hut pass/ticket does not entitle exclusive rights to any specific hut. Huts are managed on a 'first come, first served' basis.

The basic huts and bivvies are free of charge.

Camping within the Clarence is free, and is promoted at the hut sites. Take a portable gas cooker as open fires are not permitted.

The historic buildings are not to be used for accommodation for safety reasons.



**Standard huts** have mattresses, water supply and toilet. Wood heaters are provided at huts below the bush line. A Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Tickets are required.



**Basic huts** provide very basic shelter with limited facilities. No charge.



**Backcountry campsites.** Hut facilities may be used unless otherwise stated. Please follow minimal impact practice. Backcountry campsites at Standard and Basic huts are free.



### Fishing

The Clarence River provides ideal brown trout and salmon fishing. A licence from Fish and Game New Zealand is required. Didymo is present in the Clarence River so all fishing gear must be cleaned in accordance with Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) guidelines.



### Hunting

Hunting on public conservation land is by permit only. Hunting on the Muzzle Grazing Concession (MGC) requires a separate Clarence hunting permit; please contact the DOC Wairau/Renwick Office for further information. A licence from Fish and Game New Zealand is also required for game bird hunting.



### Dogs

Dogs are allowed by permit only from the Wairau/Renwick Office, and must have a current vet's certificate



showing they have been treated for *Taenia ovis* (sheep measles) less than 1 month and more than 2 days prior to entering the reserve. Certificates must be carried and shown on request.

## Route description/huts

### Kahutara car park to Warden Hut (12 bunks), 18 km

The vehicle track first crosses Kahutara River and then begins climbing through farmland. A fantastic panorama awaits the visitor at Blind Saddle (1190m), a good place to pause and check the weather. After Bushy Saddle (540 m), the track steepens; native forest clads the mountains on either side, gradually changing to shrublands then alpine vegetation near the top.

As the track descends from the saddle, incredible landforms can be seen on the surrounding mountains. Near the valley bottom is Tent Poles Hut (emergency accommodation only), an historic corrugated iron

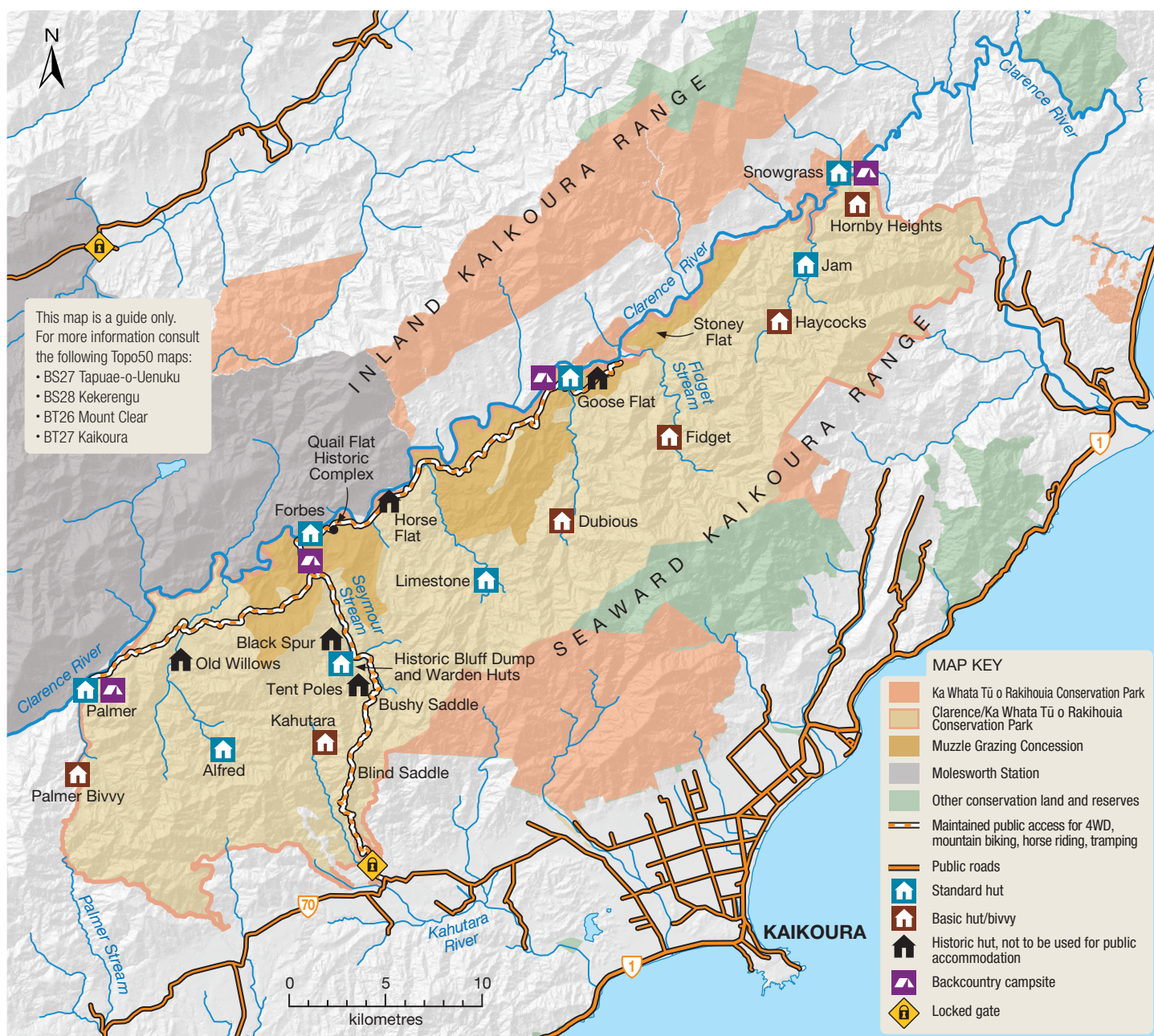
hut. Soon after, the track crosses Seymour Stream to Warden Hut (12 bunks). Nearby is historic Bluff Dump Hut, built in the 1920's. Warden Hut is a great base for weekend tramping, mountain biking and hunting – outside the Muzzle Grazing Concession (MGC) only.

### Warden Hut to Forbes Hut (10 bunks) via Seymour Stream, 9 km

Below Warden Hut, the track stays in the bed of Seymour Stream, and is rideable on a mountain bike. Historic Black Spur Hut is 2 km downstream from Warden Hut. Black Spur Hut was built in the 1920s out of slabs of poplar and is hidden behind a volcanic spur.

Further downstream you will reach a junction in the track. Beyond this junction, the land is part of the MGC – vehicles must keep to the track.

At the junction, follow the track downstream to the confluence of Seymour Stream and Clarence River, where you will find Forbes Hut (10 bunks). Forbes Hut



is a great base for fishing and exploring the historic Quail Flat area. As the hut is close to the river it also provides a stop-off for river users.

### Warden Hut to Palmer Hut (12 bunks), 26 km

Turning left at the junction and crossing Seymour Stream, leads over foothills to Palmer Hut (12 bunks), situated at the confluence of Palmer Stream and Clarence River. On the way you will find the historic Old Willows Hut, a slab hut from the early 1920s. From here an unmarked route, for experienced trampers only, crosses the Seaward Kaikoura Range via Palmer Saddle (970 m) to the Kaikoura–Waiau road.

### Forbes Hut (10 bunks) to Quail Flat Hut, 3 km

Follow the marked track over the flats to Quail Flat, the homestead area of Joseph Ward's run. The cob homestead dates from the 1860s or 1870s. Visitors are welcome to look around the historic buildings at Quail Flat but accommodation is not available for public use.

### Quail Flat to Goose Flat, 19 km

The marked track travels through scrubland and limestone country to Goose Flat Hut (10 bunks) at Goose Flat. This is a good place for river users to stop over or for a spot of fishing.

### Goose Flat to Stoney Flat, 6 km

Follow the track to the road end at the confluence of Fidget Stream and Clarence River. The road end at Stoney Flat is a good base for hunting and exploring.

### Snowgrass Hut (12 bunks)

Snowgrass Hut, at the confluence of Snowgrass Stream and Clarence River, is only accessible by river.

## Clarence Code of Conduct

### Please take care with fires

Fire risks damaging protected natural areas in the Clarence, exposing soil to erosion and destroying vegetation. It can also threaten critical winter feed for stock. No open fires. Use portable stoves for cooking.

### Leave gates as you find them

Part of the Clarence is a working farm. Please leave gates as you find them, ensuring they are properly latched. Failing to shut a gate can mean days of extra work in re-mustering blocks and separating mixed mobs of stock.

If there is no gate and you need to cross a fence, climb carefully through or over the fence at a post or stile.

### Keep vehicles to the formed roads

This is a vast area where weather and road conditions can change rapidly; it is important you can be found quickly if isolated. Off-road driving can damage fragile plants, spread weeds, and risks starting fires.

### No dogs without a permit

Dogs endanger native wildlife and can upset and transfer diseases to livestock. Hunters may apply for written consent to bring a dog into the Clarence.

### Protect native plants and animals

The Clarence supports unique and often rare plant and animal species. Damaging or removing native plants and animals destroys part of this special environment.

### Help reduce the spread of weeds

Care must be taken not to carry plant material into the Clarence. Check for seeds and aquatic weed plants on watercraft vehicles and equipment.

### Remove rubbish

Rubbish is unattractive, harmful to stock and wildlife, and can increase vermin and disease. Plan your visits to reduce rubbish, and carry out what you carry in.

### Bury toilet waste

Use the toilets provided. Otherwise, bury your toilet waste in a hole well away from waterways, tracks, campsites and huts.

### Keep streams and lakes clean

When cleaning and washing, take the water and wash well away from the water source. Soaps and detergents harm water life, so tip used water into the soil where it will be filtered. Water can be contaminated – boil it for at least 3 minutes before drinking or filter/chemically treat it.

### Respect our cultural heritage

The historic buildings on the Clarence are a reminder of our past. Treat these places with respect. Historic huts are not to be used for public accommodation.

### Enjoy your visit

Take a last look before leaving an area: will the next visitor know that you have been there? Protect the environment for your own sake, for the sake of those who come after you, and for the environment itself.

*Toitū te whenua* – leave the land undisturbed.



## Didymo

Didymo is present in the Clarence River.

### Check, Clean, Dry



Stop the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests. Didymo (*Didymosphenia geminata*) is an exotic alga which invades waterways.

To prevent the spread of freshwater pests such as didymo, always Check, Clean, Dry all footwear, bicycles, vehicles, fishing equipment and other items before entering, and when moving between, waterways.

For more information and specific cleaning guidelines go to [www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo) or [www.doc.govt.nz/stophespread](http://www.doc.govt.nz/stophespread).

To report a suspected find of didymo to Biosecurity New Zealand, contact the MPI Exotic Disease and Pest emergency hotline 0800 809 966.

## Safety

**Remember: your safety is your responsibility.**

Visitors should be prepared for all weathers; snow can fall at any time of the year and the sun can be relentlessly hot. It is important to carry water and be equipped with warm, waterproof clothing, adequate food and accurate maps. We recommend you tell family or friends of your plans.



To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call **DOC HOTline 0800 362 468**.

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable ground
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimise the effects of fire
- Respect wildlife and farm animals
- Be considerate of others



## Further information

To find out more contact:

**Department of Conservation  
Wairau/Renwick Office**

PO Box 51, Renwick 7243

Gee Street, Renwick 7204

Ph: (03) 572 9100

Email: [renwick@doc.govt.nz](mailto:renwick@doc.govt.nz)

Or visit [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)



Palmer Hut. Photo: Herb Christophers