

## Introduction

The Pyke – Big Bay Route is a low altitude, strenuous 60 km route (or 80 km as a loop with the Hollyford Track), suitable for experienced and well-equipped trampers. River-crossing and route-finding skills are essential. Although the route can be walked all year round, sections of it are prone to flooding and often become impassable in wet weather (and track markers could have washed away). The route traverses parts of Fiordland and Mount Aspiring national parks, and Pyke Forest, which are all part of the Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area.

## Human history

The Pyke – Big Bay Route shares a similar natural and social history to the Hollyford Valley. Martins Bay, known to Ngāi Tahu as Kotuku, was an important settlement between 1650 and 1800, with good access to food resources and pounamu (greenstone). Large trees on the riverbanks were felled to make canoes for use on the lakes. There is good archaeological evidence of Māori occupation at Big

Bay, including middens and ovens, and some artefact finds. It would have been an ideal location for seasonal camps or longer periods of occupation.

The latter half of the 1800s saw the exploration of the area by Europeans. In 1886, Martins Bay and Big Bay experienced a small gold rush, with 200 people arriving in the area. But by the following year only six remained, with the others leaving after poor returns of gold.

Rose bushes, apple trees and sycamore trees were planted by the early settlers and still survive at Big Bay, Jerusalem Creek and Jamestown.

### Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area



South West New Zealand is one of the great wilderness areas of the Southern Hemisphere. Known to Māori as Te Wāhipounamu (the place of greenstone), the South West New Zealand World Heritage Area incorporates Aoraki/Mt. Cook, Westland /Tai Poutini, Fiordland and Mount Aspiring National Parks, covering 2.6 million hectares.

World Heritage is a global concept that identifies natural and cultural sites of world significance, places so special that protecting them is of concern for all people.

Some of the best examples of animals and plants, once found on the ancient supercontinent Gondwana, live in the World Heritage Area.

## Natural history

The glaciated landforms that shape the area are an integral part of this large, remote mountainous region, which is in the heart of Te Wāhipounamu. A wet climate is typical of the West Coast and several wetlands are located along the Pyke Valley.

The lowland areas are dominated by podocarp forest, with silver beech dominating the slopes and kāmahī and rātā along the coast. The extensive forest provides habitat to many New Zealand native bird species, including kākā, kea, mohua (yellowhead) and New Zealand falcon/kārearea. The coast also hosts seal colonies, and the Fiordland crested penguin/tawaki which breeds there as well.

Each spring the juveniles of several native fish of the galaxiid family begin their annual migration up the river. These inanga (whitebait) were an important traditional food item and are still fished today.



Pyke River from the air. Photo: DOC



Coastline between Martins Bay and Big Bay. Photo: Sarah Thorne

## Your safety is your responsibility

Carry a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) and/or Mountain Radio or Satellite Messenger. Topographical maps covering the Pyke – Big Bay Route are recommended – Topo50 series CA09 Alabaster Pass, and BZ09 Awarua Point.

Plan your trip and ensure your group has an experienced leader. New Zealand's weather changes rapidly and can be very cold at any time of year. Check current track and weather conditions at [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) – or contact the Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre.

- **Be physically and mentally prepared for the conditions. Be ready to change your plans due to weather and flooding – sections of the route flood regularly, making travel impossible for days.**
- **There are several unbridged rivers to cross – river-crossing skills are essential. If the river is too high, wait until the level drops. Beware of tides in coastal areas.**
- **Route times vary depending on fitness, weather conditions and your ability. Take extra food in case you have to wait.**
- **Be aware of the causes and symptoms of hypothermia, and know how to treat it.**
- **Be self-sufficient: take at least two days extra food, clothing and equipment.**
- **Take a portable stove, fuel and a tent.**

Remember to leave your intentions with a trusted contact – return date and time, planned route, names of those in your group and vehicle details. Information on the Outdoor Intentions System is at [www.adventuresmart.co.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.co.nz), and the Outdoor Safety Code at [www.mountainsafety.org.nz](http://www.mountainsafety.org.nz).

Make sure you report back in when you return. Remember to fill in the 'intentions book' in each hut during your trip, even if you do not stay in the hut. This helps search and rescue operations and may save your life.

### Emergency Locator Beacon hire

Available from Mobil Service Station, and Bev's Tramping Gear Hire – Te Anau

### Mountain Radio hire

Te Anau – Ph (03) 249 8363

## Hunting and fishing

The Pyke – Big Bay Route provides good access to the Fiordland and Mt Aspiring national parks for fishing, deer hunting and climbing.

Anglers should hold a current fishing licence. To prevent the spread of didymo ensure your fishing gear is free of aquatic pests and is cleaned between catchments.

Hunting permits must be obtained online in advance for Fiordland National Park; if you hunt beyond Olivine Hut you will also need one for Mt Aspiring National Park.

## Further information

For further information contact:  
Te Rua-o-te-moko/Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre  
Department of Conservation  
Lakefront Drive  
PO Box 29, Te Anau

Tel: (03) 249 7924  
Fax: (03) 249 0257  
Email: [fiordlandvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:fiordlandvc@doc.govt.nz)  
Website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)



### Check, Clean, Dry

Stop the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests. Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all items before entering, and when moving between, waterways.



### leave no trace

NEW ZEALAND

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable ground
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimise the effects of fire  
*Check before you light a fire – a ban may be in place*
- Respect wildlife and farm animals
- Be considerate of others

Cover – Lake Alabaster/Wāwāhi Waka.  
Photo: DOC

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# Pyke – Big Bay Route

Fiordland National Park



## Huts and hut tickets

The Department of Conservation (DOC) provides and maintains the huts on the Pyke – Big Bay Route. Each hut has mattresses and a pit toilet.

Everyone who uses the huts must pay hut fees. All huts on the Pyke – Big Bay Route are 'standard' grade, requiring one blue Backcountry Hut Ticket per night, or a Backcountry Hut Pass. If your journey includes the Hollyford Track, note that most Hollyford Track huts are 'serviced', and are therefore more expensive. Tickets should be purchased in advance from a DOC office.

Please leave the huts clean and tidy. Carry portable stoves for cooking as there are no cooking facilities in any of the huts on the Pyke – Big Bay Route.

It is a good idea to carry a tent, due to long distances between huts.



Olivine Hut. Photo: DOC

### Pyke – Big Bay Route Huts

Hut	Bunks	Heating	Water	Toilet	Fees
Big Bay Hut	9	✓	Tank from roof	✓	Standard hut
Olivine Hut	6	✓	Tank from roof	✓	Standard hut

### Hollyford Track Huts

Hut	Bunks	Heating	Water	Toilet	Fees
Hidden Falls Hut	12	✓	Tank from roof	✓	Serviced hut
Lake Alabaster Hut	26	✓	Piped from stream	✓	Serviced hut
McKerrow Island Hut	12	✓	Tank from roof	✓	Standard hut
Demon Trail Hut	12	✓	Tank from roof	✓	Serviced hut
Hokuri Hut	12	✓	Tank from roof	✓	Serviced hut
Martins Bay Hut	24	✓	Piped from stream	✓	Serviced hut



Big Bay Hut. Photo: Grant Tremain



A cage is used to cross the Olivine River. Photo: DOC

## Access

Access to the Pyke – Big Bay Route is via the Hollyford Track, or by light aircraft or helicopter to Martins Bay or Big Bay. The Hollyford Track starts at the end of the Hollyford Road, 100 km from Te Anau. Turn off State Highway 94 (Milford Highway) at Marian Corner.

During the summer months, limited bus services are available to the start of the Hollyford Track. You should book all transport before departing on your trip.

Cabins and camping facilities are available at Gunn's Camp in the Hollyford valley, 9 km from the road end. There are also several DOC conservation campsites along the Milford Highway.

Trampers can combine the Pyke – Big Bay Route with the Hollyford Track, to create a round trip of about 10 days.

## Track description

### Hollyford Road end to Lake Alabaster Hut via the Hollyford Track



5–7 hr, 20 km

After crossing Humboldt Creek, follow the old road to the start of the track. Sections of raised boardwalk cross areas prone to flooding. At Hidden Falls Creek the track passes Sunshine Hut, run by Hollyford Valley Guided Walks, and continues upstream to a swing bridge. Hidden Falls can be viewed 2 min on from the bridge. Hidden Falls Hut (12 bunks) is reached in a further 10 min. Mt Madeline can be seen from here.

The track passes through a section of lowland ribbonwood/podocarp forest draped with colourful mosses and ferns, and then enters tall beech forest. A climb over Little Homer Saddle gives views of Mt Madeline and Mt Tutoko (2,723 m). The track continues to the Hollyford and Pyke rivers confluence, beyond which is the site of the Hollyford Valley Guided Walks' Pyke Lodge. Continue 20 min up the Pyke River to Lake Alabaster Hut (26 bunks).

### Pyke Crossing to Big Bay Hut



3–5 hr, 15 km

A crossing of the Pyke River can normally be made just downstream from Paulin Creek. However, after rain it becomes impassable.

The route follows Paulin Creek and through the forest to the Dry Awarua River, where an old prospecting road leads to the mouth of the river at Big Bay. In normal conditions this can be crossed at low tide, otherwise follow a track 15 min upstream to a swing bridge. Big Bay Hut (9 bunks) is at the southern end of the village area. Respect the private dwellings here.

### Big Bay Hut to Martins Bay Hut



4–5 hr, 16 km

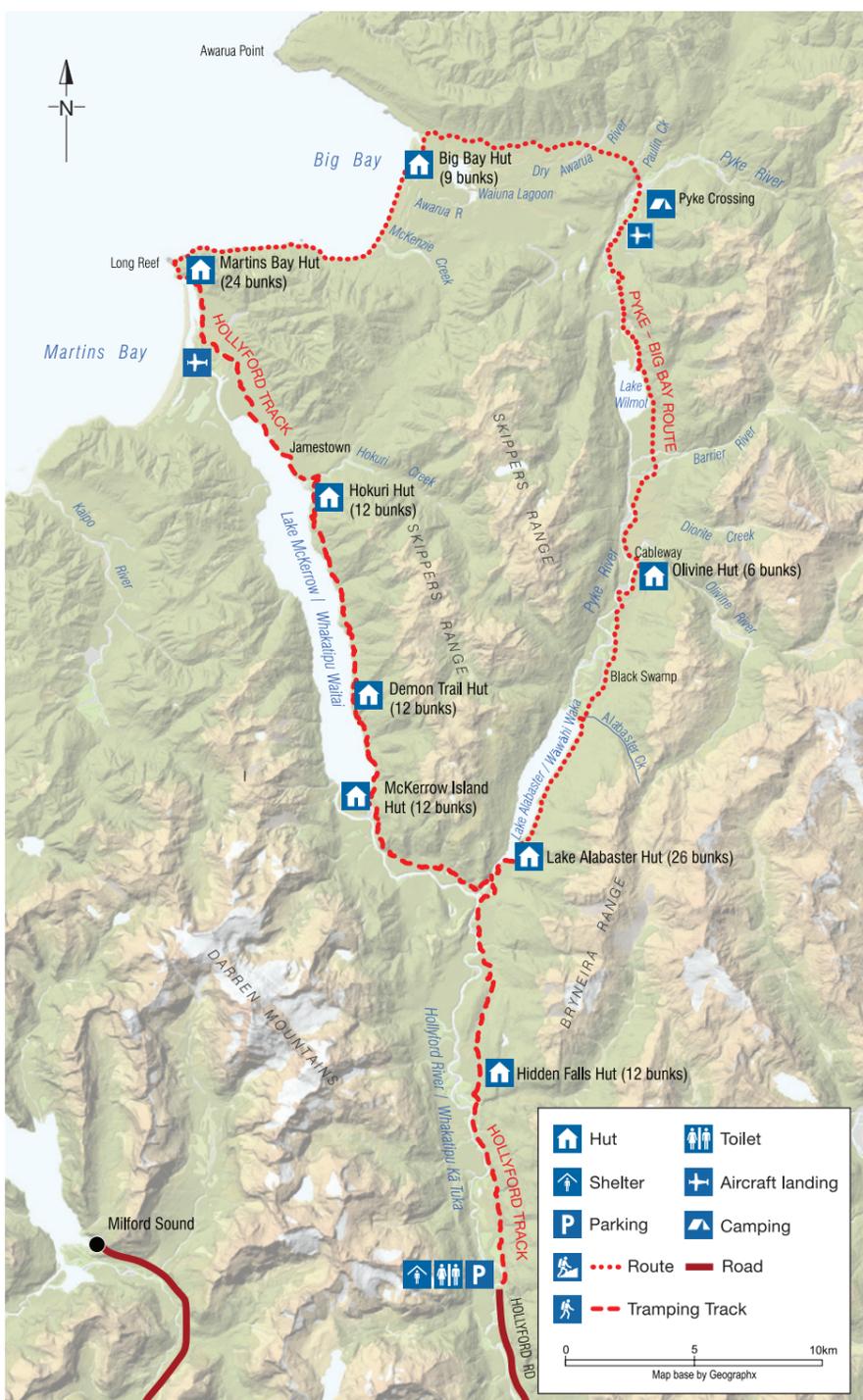
This section initially follows the sandy beach from Big Bay to McKenzie Creek, located at the southern end of the bay. After crossing the creek (take care as McKenzie Creek can often be impassable and extremely dangerous after rain), a short track leads to the coast. Follow the coastline to Long Reef, before joining the track to Martins Bay Hut (24 bunks) and the Hollyford Track. Note: the beach cannot be walked at high tide near Long Reef. Walk there 2 hr either side of low tide, or head inland. To walk inland you pass through thick flax vegetation; the track is rough and overgrown, so take a compass. The Hollyford Track then follows the true right of the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka and, after about an hour's walk, reaches private dwellings and two airstrips.

### Martins Bay Hut to Hollyford Road end (advanced backcountry tramping track)



The Lower Hollyford Road is reached via the Hollyford Track, which takes 4 days to complete. Refer to the Hollyford Track brochure, and Topo maps CA09, CA08, and CB09.

- Martins Bay to Hokuri Hut 4–5 hr, 13 km
- Hokuri Hut to Demon Trail Hut 5–6 hr, 9.6 km
- Demon Trail Hut to McKerrow Island Hut 1 hr 30 min, 4.2 km  
*McKerrow Island Hut is not accessible after heavy rain. No bridge.*
- McKerrow Island Hut to Lake Alabaster Hut 4 hr, 10.5 km
- Lake Alabaster Hut to Hidden Falls Hut 3–4 hr, 10.5 km
- Hidden Falls Hut to Hollyford Road end 2–3 hr, 9 km



### Lake Alabaster Hut to Olivine Hut



7–10 hr, 16 km

From Lake Alabaster Hut, follow the lake shore to Alabaster Creek at the head of the lake (2–4 hr, unmarked).

Note that you will encounter knee deep water towards the Alabaster Creek end of the lake at normal lake levels. After rain this becomes very difficult and slow to travel over tree debris.

Alabaster Creek is normally crossed via a gravel bar at its mouth. However, after rain this becomes a deep and dangerous crossing. From the head of the lake, follow the orange triangular pole markers through the open areas of flax and tussock until a marked route enters the forest. The route goes through the aptly named 'Black Swamp', then follows an overgrown track up the true left of the Pyke River, through beech forest, flax wetlands and river flats to Olivine Hut (6 bunks).

### Olivine Hut to Pyke Crossing



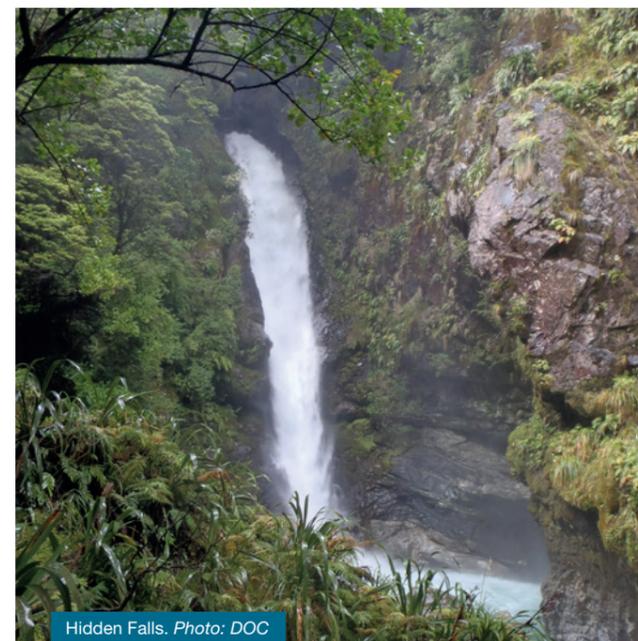
6–9 hr, 21 km

Use the cage to cross the Olivine River. The route follows the old stock route which, although marked, can be difficult to follow due to overgrown vegetation. Open areas of flax and tussock wetlands are encountered between the Diorite and Barrier rivers. Both rivers are unbridged and can be impassable after rain.

The route continues through tall beech forest to Lake Wilmot. Travel around the lake is difficult, especially if the water level is high. From here the route continues through beech forest, flax flats and along the river to the Pyke airstrip and the Pyke Crossing. Markers in the area can get damaged due to flooding, making the route difficult to follow. There are good areas to camp here.



The clearing between Olivine Hut and Lake Wilmot. Photo: DOC



Hidden Falls. Photo: DOC