

Routeburn TRACK GUIDE

➔ Duration: **2–4 days**
Distance: **33.1 km (one way)**



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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Care for the Routeburn Track



Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed kea. Feeding wildlife is harmful to them. Follow any rules restricting fires, vehicles or boats. No dogs or unpermitted drones allowed.



Keep New Zealand clean

Take all rubbish with you. Use toilets where provided. You can find them at all huts, campsites and shelters.



Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by planning and preparing for your trip. Share your plans and take a distress beacon.



Show respect

Respect others, respect culture. Keep common areas clean and tidy. Minimise noise when others are sleeping.

Welcome to the *Routeburn Track*, one of ten unforgettable journeys.

Be prepared for the ultimate alpine adventure as you traverse Mt Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks in Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Weaving through ice-carved valleys below the majestic peaks of the Southern Alps/ Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, you'll be rewarded with spectacular vistas over vast mountain ranges and valleys.



Plants and wildlife

The **blue duck/whio** is a vulnerable species of duck, at risk of extinction. They can be seen in cold, fast-flowing streams, such as the Route Burn (river). The male whistles a call of 'fee-o', which gives the duck its Māori name.

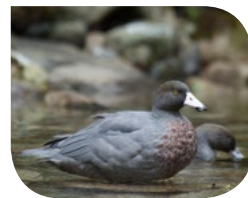


Photo: Sabine Bernert

Beech is the dominant forest tree, with red beech around the start of the Routeburn valley on sunny, frost-free sites. Mountain beech occurs at higher altitudes within the Routeburn valley. Silver beech competes best on the wetter Hollyford faces.



Photo: Herb Christophers

The **Mount Cook buttercup** is the world's largest buttercup. This giant can grow over a metre tall with leaves larger than the size of your hand. The cup-like leaves will hold water after a rainfall and walkers sometimes stop to slurp a drink from them.



Photo: Destination Fiordland

The **kea** is an endangered parrot found only in the Southern Alps of New Zealand. Considered to be one of the most intelligent birds in the world, the cheeky kea will often put on a show to distract you while his friends raid your pack! If you are lucky enough to encounter kea, please don't feed them.



Photo: Herb Christophers

The **South Island robin/kakarua** is found only in New Zealand. They are friendly and trusting, often coming to within a couple of metres of people. The people themselves are not always the attraction but the invertebrates disturbed by their activities.



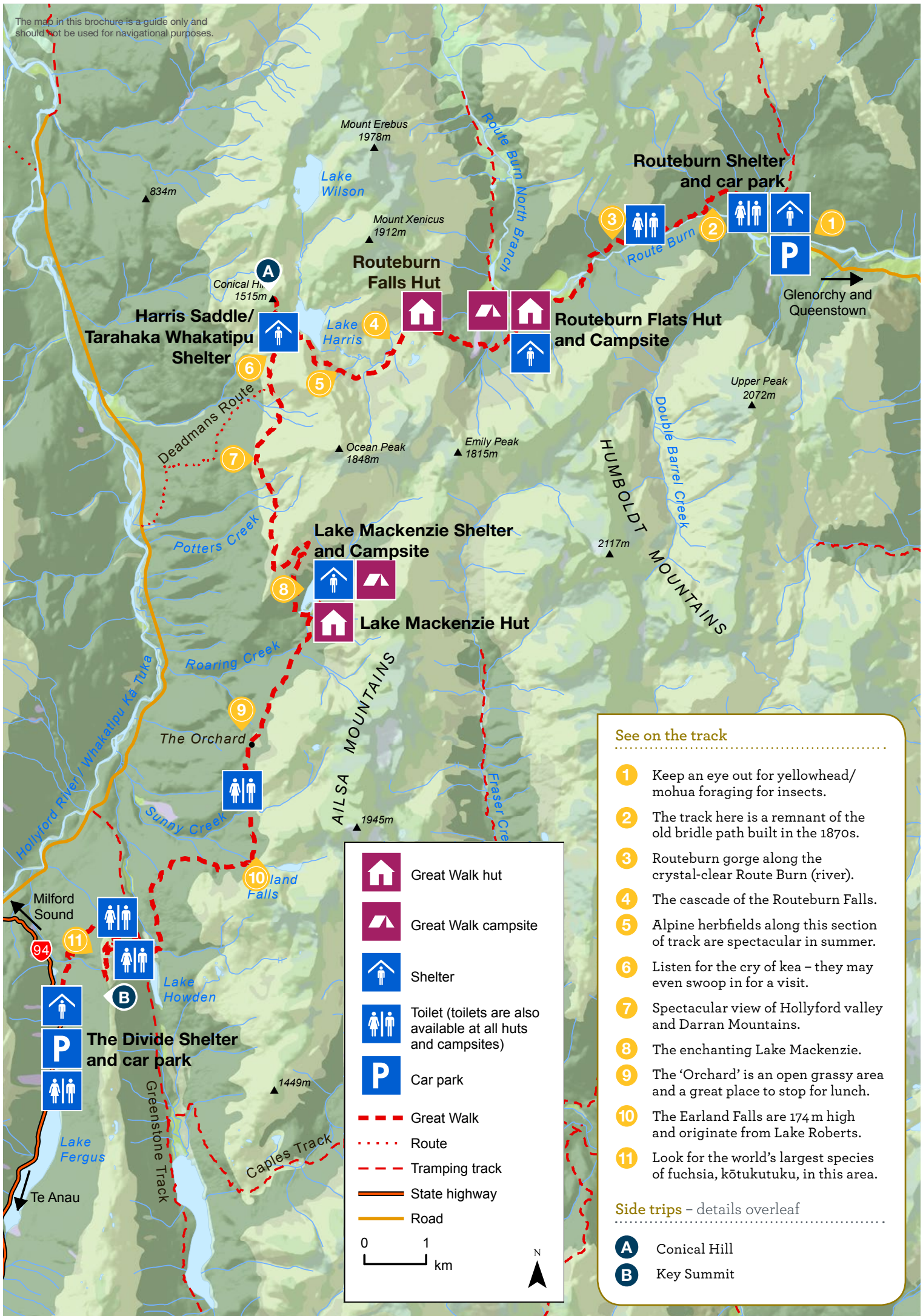
Photo: Herb Christophers

Tree fuchsia/kōtukutuku grows to a height of 15m and is the largest fuchsia in the world. It has eye-catching orange, peeling bark and was a valued herbal medicine for Māori, who also relished its black berries. Unfortunately, its leaves are amongst the possum's favourite foods.



Photo: Brent Tandy

The map in this brochure is a guide only and should not be used for navigational purposes.



See on the track

- 1 Keep an eye out for yellowhead/mohua foraging for insects.
- 2 The track here is a remnant of the old bridle path built in the 1870s.
- 3 Routeburn gorge along the crystal-clear Route Burn (river).
- 4 The cascade of the Routeburn Falls.
- 5 Alpine herbfields along this section of track are spectacular in summer.
- 6 Listen for the cry of kea – they may even swoop in for a visit.
- 7 Spectacular view of Hollyford valley and Darran Mountains.
- 8 The enchanting Lake Mackenzie.
- 9 The ‘Orchard’ is an open grassy area and a great place to stop for lunch.
- 10 The Earland Falls are 174 m high and originate from Lake Roberts.
- 11 Look for the world’s largest species of fuchsia, kōtukutuku, in this area.

Side trips – details overleaf

- A** Conical Hill
- B** Key Summit

TRACK GUIDE

The Routeburn Track is 33.1 km long and can be hiked in either direction. The following notes describe the track from east to west and what you can expect to see on your journey.

The times are approximate and will vary according to your fitness, direction of travel and the weather.

Routeburn Shelter to Routeburn Flats Hut

1 hr 30 min–2 hr 30 min, 7.5 km

From the car park at the Routeburn Shelter, cross a swing bridge to the well formed track that winds through beautiful beech forest. The track past Sugarloaf Stream is a remnant of the old bridle path built in the 1870s and climbs directly to Bridal Veil Stream. It then hugs the contours above the Routeburn gorge.

A third swing bridge takes you back across the Route Burn to open grassed flats. At the marked junction, turn right to Routeburn Flats Hut and camping area, or left to continue to Routeburn Falls Hut.

Routeburn Flats Hut to Routeburn Falls Hut

1–1 hr 30 min, 2.3 km

This is a steady climb through beech forest crossing two swing bridges. A recent slip allows excellent views of the valley below.

! Care should be taken crossing this slip, especially after heavy rain.

The Emily Creek Bridge is the halfway mark to Routeburn Falls Hut.

Routeburn Falls Hut to Lake Mackenzie Hut

4 hr 30 min–6 hr, 11.3 km

! Please note: The following subalpine section of track is exposed and can be hazardous in bad weather conditions – it is vital that you are prepared and have the right equipment.

The track climbs steadily from Routeburn Falls Hut to the outlet of Lake Harris.

Stop occasionally and look behind you for great views of the Routeburn valley. A side through moraine (glacial debris) and above Lake Harris leads to the high point of the track at Harris Saddle/Tarahaka Whakatipu (1255 m). Allow 1–2 hr for the climb from the hut to the saddle.

! Please keep to the track as vegetation in this subalpine area is very fragile.

Harris Saddle/Tarahaka Whakatipu is located on the boundary between Mt Aspiring National Park and Fiordland National Park.

A Side trip – Conical Hill

1 hr 30 min–2 hour return

A short, steep climb from Harris Saddle/Tarahaka Whakatipu up Conical Hill gives superb views of the Hollyford valley through to Lake McKerrow/Whakatipu Waitai and beyond to Martins Bay and the Tasman Sea. Be aware that snow and ice can sometimes make this trip hazardous.



Photo: Sadao Tsuchiya

From Harris Saddle/Tarahaka Whakatipu, the track descends and traverses the exposed Hollyford valley face – there are excellent views down to the valley below. Allow 3–4 hr to Lake Mackenzie Hut from Harris Saddle/Tarahaka Whakatipu. Lake Mackenzie is visible below at the end of the traverse, and a series of zigzags descends through bush to Lake Mackenzie Hut. The campsites are located 10 min from the hut.

Lake Mackenzie Hut to Lake Howden toilet stop

3–4 hr, 8.6 km

The track leaves Lake Mackenzie Hut, crossing a small flat before climbing steeply to the bushline. It then gradually descends past the 'Orchard', an open grassy area dotted with ribbonwood trees. The track continues

on to the magnificent Earland Falls (174 m). If the falls are in flood there is an emergency bridge downstream.

The track continues its gradual descent to Lake Howden toilet stop, situated at the junction of the Routeburn and Greenstone and Caples Tracks.

Lake Howden toilet stop to The Divide

1–1 hr 30 min, 3.4 km

The well-graded track climbs steadily for about 15 min to the Key Summit Track turn-off. From here, the gradual downhill walk is through silver beech forest to The Divide on the Milford Highway. At 532 m, The Divide is the lowest crossing of the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana.

B Side trip – Key Summit

1–1 hr 30 min return

This popular walk climbs above the bushline to an alpine wetland and, in good weather, offers magnificent views of the Darran Mountains and the Hollyford Valley. A self-guided trail leads through a range of native vegetation: beech forest, subalpine shrublands and alpine tarns and bogs. Birdlife is prolific and tomtits/miromiro, South Island robin/kakaruaui, New Zealand pigeons/kererū and bellbirds/korimako are commonly seen. Keep to the track to protect the very fragile alpine plants and soil.

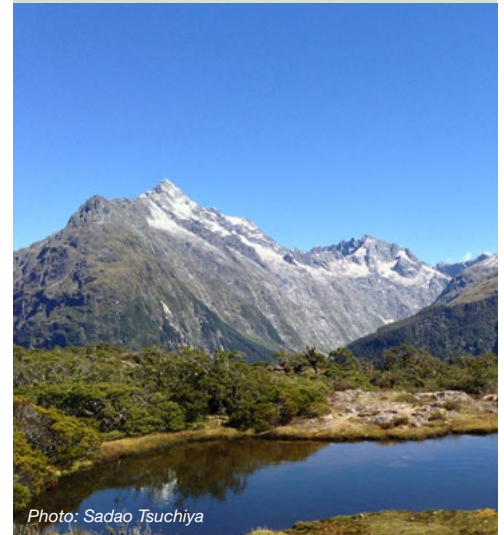
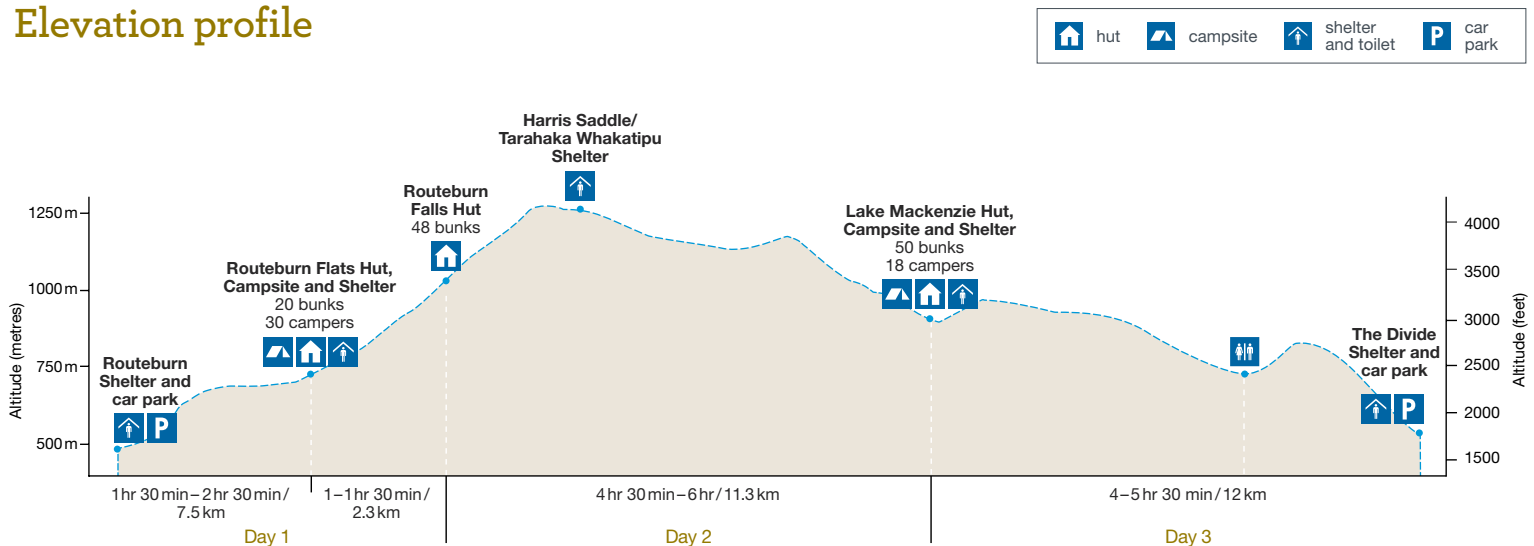


Photo: Sadao Tsuchiya

Elevation profile



hut
 campsite
 shelter and toilet
 car park

Track history

The Routeburn Track was an important route for both Māori and Europeans. A trail from Martins Bay, up the Hollyford valley and across to the Routeburn valley was often used by Māori in search of the precious pounamu (greenstone). Pounamu was much valued as a material for tools, weapons and ornaments.

Envisaging a well-used route for shipping gold, early Europeans started a bridle track to link the Routeburn Track with the new Martins Bay settlement in the Hollyford valley. However, failure of the isolated settlement meant track construction ceased after just four years.

Tourism began in the 1880s, with visitors taken into the Routeburn flats by horse and then guided on foot to the Harris Saddle/Tarahaka Whakatipu.



Routeburn Falls Hut. Photo: Keri Moyle (signsoflife.co.nz)

Staying safe on the Routeburn Track

STAY ON THE MARKED TRACKS

The track is well marked but if you become lost you should stop, find shelter and stay calm. Put on extra clothing to keep warm and assist rescuers should you hear them searching for you.

There is no cellphone coverage on the Routeburn Track.

BE PREPARED FOR ALL CONDITIONS

Fiordland and Mt Aspiring National Parks experience very high rainfall and changeable weather. Cold temperatures, snow, strong winds and heavy rain can occur at any time of the year.

Hypothermia (too cold)

During cold, wet and windy conditions, hypothermia (a drop in core body temperature) can become a serious problem. From initial stages to unconsciousness can take as little as 30 minutes.

- **Prevention:** wear warm and weatherproof gear. Eat and drink regularly during your walk.
- **Watch for symptoms:** people may shiver, be clumsy, confused, have slurred speech, and deny they have a problem.
- **Treatment:** immediately make or find shelter; get the person into warm, dry clothing, put them into a sleeping bag, give them warm, sweet drinks, monitor them and seek immediate medical help.

Heat exhaustion

This can be serious and is usually caused by physical activity in a hot environment and not drinking enough water.

- **Prevention:** carry and drink water regularly throughout your walk.
- **Watch for symptoms:** headaches, thirst, weakness, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.
- **Treatment:** move to a cool shaded area to rest, remove excess clothing and give water to drink.

River safety and track flooding

After heavy rain, flooding is common on sections of the track. However, stream and river levels will drop quickly once the rain stops. If caught between streams in flood, do not attempt to cross. Seek higher ground and wait for water levels to drop.

Strong winds

In alpine areas or exposed areas on any of the tracks, such as Harris Saddle and along the Hollyford Face between Harris Saddle and Lake Mackenzie, you can be caught in strong and/or gusty winds (e.g. over 80 km/h). Dress warmly as wind chill danger is worse at these times.

Avalanches

The Routeburn Track has a lot of complex avalanche terrain and the risk of avalanche can extend into December. Whenever snow rests on the slope there is an avalanche risk. There are 32 avalanche paths, some of which may bring avalanche debris to the valley floor and have the potential to cross the Routeburn Track – their start zones cannot be seen from the track. During the Great Walks season DOC manages this risk to a low level and walkers may be flown (at their cost) over dangerous sections.



Tracks are sometimes closed for safety reasons

Sometimes Great Walks tracks need to be closed for safety reasons (e.g. avalanche danger, flooding or high winds). If walkers are not able to proceed, options are available. You may be eligible for a refund, spend an extra night at a hut, change direction on the track or be transferred by helicopter across hazard areas. DOC staff will keep you informed of all issues and options. Please refer to the 'terms and conditions' for any extra transport and accommodation costs this may involve. Hut rangers are stationed at each hut along the track during the Great Walks season and have radio contact in case of emergency.

Be considerate of other hut users: be quiet when people are sleeping, don't shift others' belongings, remove all your rubbish and keep the hut clean and tidy. For more information, read the Hut Users Code or ask a ranger.

YOU can help to keep didymo off the Routeburn Track

Didymo (sometimes called rock snot) is an invasive alga that chokes our waterways. It is found in waterways near the Routeburn Track, and in the Hollyford, Greenstone and Dart rivers. It only takes ONE drop of contaminated water on your shoes or equipment to transfer it into a new area. If you're walking the track and you've been near a lake or river – Check your shoes for obvious pieces, **Clean** anything which has been in contact with the water or **Dry** your gear thoroughly 48 hours before walking the track. For more information, visit www.doc.govt.nz/didymo.

