

KRAIG ADAMS

New Zealand Hiking Guide

Rees-Dart, Kepler, Routeburn and Milford: 11 days on four South Island tracks

2026-27 season edition · updated September 2026

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Welcome

In November 2023 I went to New Zealand for the first time and walked four tracks on the South Island in three weeks: the Rees-Dart, the Kepler, the Routeburn and the Milford. I flew direct from New York to Auckland, one of the longest flights I've ever done, then on to Queenstown, and I stayed around Queenstown for most of the trip.



My tent at Lake Wilson, above the Routeburn Track, on Day 7.

It wasn't one long trail. Each track was its own trip, with shuttles, a bus and a boat in between, and a few days off. I walked the Rees-Dart with two friends, started the Kepler with a friend and finished it alone, did the Routeburn solo with a wild camp at Lake Wilson, and joined a big guided group for the Milford. In the film I called it 160 miles. My GPS says 154.8.

The Rees-Dart was one of the best. It's more rugged than the Great Walks you've probably heard about, quieter, and just as beautiful because it's remote. The Milford, the way I did it, was fancy and easy compared to what I normally do, and a nice send-off to New Zealand.

What's inside

- Straight answers to the questions people ask about hiking in New Zealand
- When to go, how the hut bookings work and what they cost for the 2026-27 season
- Getting there, and every shuttle, bus and boat between the trailheads
- All 11 days, track by track: my notes, the trail, where to get off, a map with an elevation profile, and links to that day in my films
- Other ways to do each track, including the independent Milford and the standard Kepler
- Food and water, what I paid, the gear for this route (what I carried and filmed with), weather and safety
- One page of things to check before you go, and a printable trip sheet

One thing first. The Rees-Dart circuit I walked can't be walked right now. A big slip in the Dart Valley closed the Dart Track until at least December 2026. The Rees-Dart section explains what's still open.

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps while you have Wi-Fi. There's no cell coverage on most of these tracks. Each day starts on a new page, so you can jump straight to it. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip. Hut, shuttle and price details change, so they're dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these.

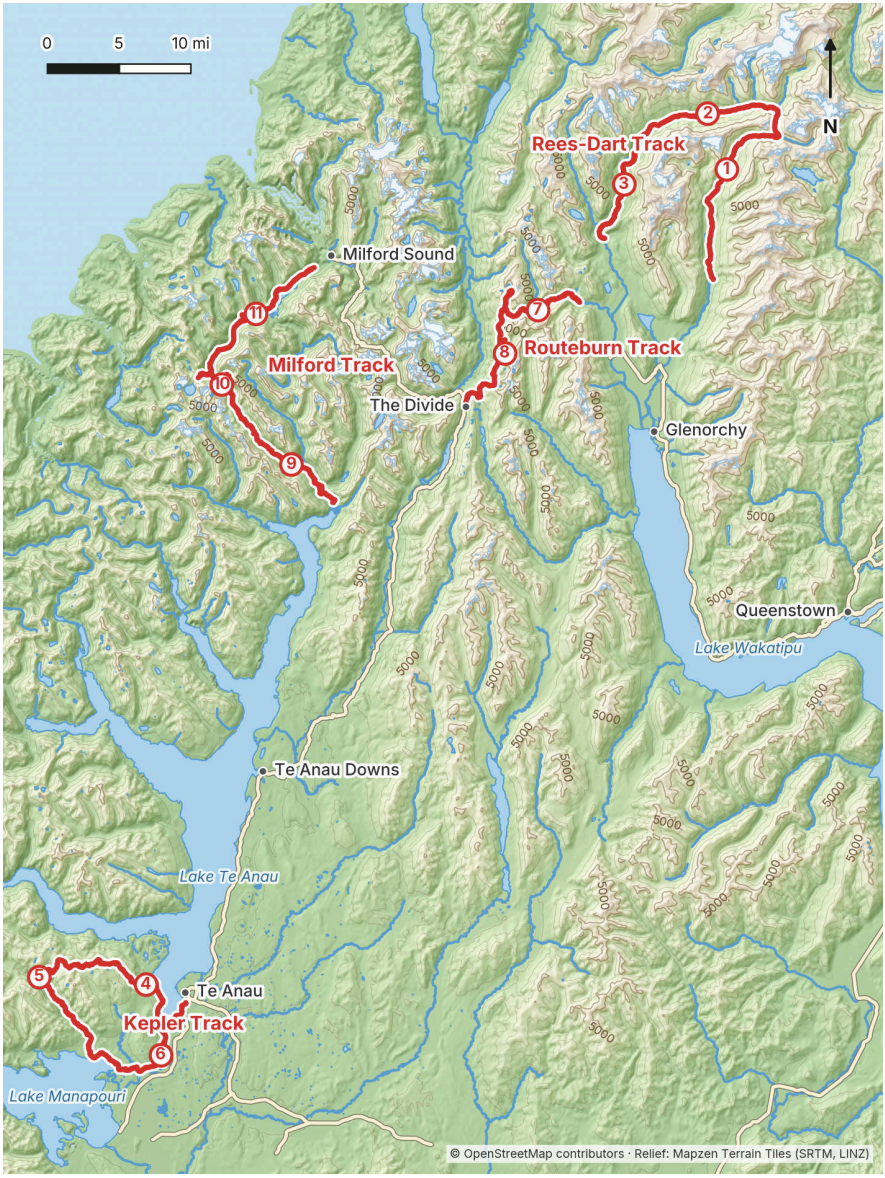
At a glance

QUICK FACTS

Distance	154.8 miles (249.1 km) of walking over 11 days
Climbing	about 23,400 ft (7,150 m) up and 24,000 ft (7,300 m) down
Tracks	Rees-Dart (3 days), Kepler (3), Routeburn (2), Milford (3 walking days)
Where	Fiordland and Mount Aspiring national parks, South Island
Hubs	Queenstown (Rees-Dart, Routeburn) and Te Anau (Kepler, Milford)
Nights on track	2 in DOC huts on the Rees-Dart, 2 on the Kepler, 1 in my tent, 3 in guided lodges on the Milford
When	November 10 to 28, 2023: early spring, the start of the Great Walks season
Difficulty	Easy to moderate on the Great Walks (I called the Routeburn pretty easy and the Milford easy); the Rees-Dart is rougher, with a snowy pass
Airport	Queenstown (flights from Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Australia)
Big catch	Great Walk huts book out within hours of opening in May

DAY	DATE	TRACK	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)
1	Nov 10	Rees-Dart	Muddy Creek to Dart Hut	18.8 (30.3)	3,902 / 2,582
2	Nov 11	Rees-Dart	Dart Hut to Daleys Flat Hut	12.1 (19.4)	871 / 2,388
3	Nov 12	Rees-Dart	Daleys Flat Hut to Chinamans Bluff	11.5 (18.6)	1,100 / 1,310
4	Nov 17	Kepler	Car park to Luxmore Hut	9.8 (15.8)	2,887 / 149
5	Nov 18	Kepler	Luxmore Hut to Moturau Hut	21.9 (35.2)	2,491 / 5,304
6	Nov 19	Kepler	Moturau Hut to Te Anau	12.3 (19.9)	787 / 748
7	Nov 20	Routeburn	Routeburn Shelter to Lake Wilson	11.4 (18.3)	3,782 / 482
8	Nov 21	Routeburn	Lake Wilson to The Divide	14.5 (23.4)	1,577 / 4,695
9	Nov 26	Milford	Glade House to Pompolona Lodge	13.1 (21.1)	2,183 / 1,475
10	Nov 27	Milford	Pompolona Lodge to Quintin Lodge	13.5 (21.7)	3,220 / 3,438
11	Nov 28	Milford	Quintin Lodge to Sandfly Point	15.9 (25.6)	653 / 1,405

The numbers come from my own GPS recordings, smoothed the same way for every day. On the flat forest days (6 and 9) the GPS adds climbing that isn't really there. My daily miles run longer than DOC's official figures because of side trips and, on the Kepler, walking back into Te Anau.



The four tracks, numbered by day. Queenstown is the base for the Rees-Dart and the Routeburn; Te Anau for the Kepler and the Milford. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Straight answers

Which track should I do? I think most people would really like the Routeburn: two or three days, and very well maintained. The Kepler is a loop from Te Anau with a long, high ridge. The Milford is the famous one, with the hardest bookings. The Rees-Dart was the most rugged and the quietest, but its circuit is closed for now.

What's a Great Walk? A set of eleven tracks, run by the Department of Conservation (DOC) or with it, with big huts, ranger-run campsites and a booked season. The Kepler, Routeburn and Milford are Great Walks. The Rees-Dart is not; its huts are smaller and simpler.

How do I get a hut? Book on the DOC website the day bookings open in May, at 9:30 a.m. New Zealand time. The Milford and the Routeburn go fastest. Cancellations come up during the year, so keep checking. I couldn't find any Milford hut space, so I joined a guided walk, and I had no Routeburn booking, so I camped off the track. See Booking the huts.

Can I just camp anywhere? No. On the Milford you can't camp at all. On the Kepler and the Fiordland side of the Routeburn, the park bylaws ban camping within 500 m (about 1,600 ft) of the track except at the official campsites. My Lake Wilson camp was about 1.2 miles (2 km) from the Routeburn Track. See Camping off the track.

How many days do I need for all four? I walked 11 days over 19 days, from November 10 to 28, with rest days and a side trip in between. Plan three weeks in New Zealand if you want all four, and more if you walk the Kepler and Milford at DOC's standard pace.

Am I fit enough? The Great Walks are well-built tracks. My longest days were 18.8 miles on the Rees-Dart (Day 1) and 21.9 miles on the Kepler (Day 5); DOC splits both into two days. If you can walk 10 miles with 3,000 ft of climbing and a full pack, two days in a row, you can do the Great Walks at DOC's pace.

Guided or independent on the Milford? Independent walkers stay in three DOC huts and carry everything. Guided walkers stay in private lodges with meals and showers. I would have done it solo and unguided at my own speed if I could have got huts. The guided walk meant I barely had to carry anything. See Milford Track.

What does it cost? For 2026-27, Great Walk huts cost international adults NZD 132 a night on the Kepler and Routeburn and NZD 152 on the Milford. New Zealand residents pay NZD 88 and 106. Shuttles between trailheads run NZD 60 to 120 each way. The guided Milford is NZD 2,925 in a shared room. See What I paid.

What about the sandflies? They're real. They're not mosquitoes and not midges, they're sandflies: small, they buzz around, they bite a little, and they're mostly annoying because they're all up in your business. They were worst in the Dart Valley and at the end of the Milford. Bring insect repellent and keep moving.

Will I see kea? Probably. Kea are alpine parrots and I love them. They woke me up by jumping on my tent at Lake Wilson and played around on the Kepler ridge and Mackinnon Pass. Never feed them, and don't leave boots or packs outside.

Is there phone signal? DOC says there's no cellphone coverage on the Milford, and I didn't count on it on any track. Carry offline maps and a personal locator beacon, which you can rent in Te Anau and Queenstown.

Do I need a visa? Most visitors need an NZeTA and pay the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL), NZD 100 in 2026. Use the official Immigration New Zealand app or website. See Getting there.

When to go

The season. The Great Walks season runs from late October or November 1 to April 30. For 2026-27 that's October 27 to April 30 on the Kepler and November 1 to April 30 on the Routeburn and the Milford (last Milford departure April 28). In season the huts have gas cookers, flush toilets, running water and a ranger, and the bridges are in.

Outside the season the tracks become alpine winter routes: gas, flush toilets and indoor water are taken out, some bridges are removed, and there are dozens of avalanche paths (DOC counts more than 57 on the Milford and 32 on the Routeburn). DOC says winter trips need alpine skills and gear such as an ice axe, crampons, and an avalanche beacon, shovel and probe.

What I got in November. It was early in the season, early spring in New Zealand, and the snow was melting. That was totally fine, but it was a bit boggy down low. There was snow on Rees Saddle and around Harris Saddle and Lake Wilson, and Conical Hill on the Routeburn was closed because of snow and ice. A seasonal bridge over Snowy Creek on the Rees-Dart had been put in a few days before we started. Many days were clear. Rain caught us on the last day of the Rees-Dart, and the last day of the Milford was rain and cloud.

Early season notes. Avalanche risk on the Milford, Routeburn and Kepler can run into December, and the upper Snowy Creek bridge on the Rees-Dart can go back in as late as December. If you go in early November like I did, check DOC's alerts for each track the week before.

Weather can turn any time. DOC warns that cold, snow, strong winds and heavy rain can happen in any month in Fiordland and Mount Aspiring national parks. Keep a spare day where you can.

Booking the huts

Great Walks: how booking works

All Great Walk huts and campsites are booked on the DOC website, bookings.doc.govt.nz. In season you can't stay without a booking, and the penalty for doing so is the normal fee plus the full adult fee.

When bookings open. For the 2026-27 season, bookings opened at 9:30 a.m. New Zealand time on May 13, 2026 for the Milford, May 15 for the Routeburn and May 19 for the Kepler. DOC uses a virtual queue: anyone in the waiting room before 9:30 gets a random place in line; anyone who arrives later goes to the back. The 2027-28 dates will be announced by DOC early in 2027.

How to give yourself the best chance.

- Make your DOC account weeks ahead and test the login. DOC says forgotten passwords are one of the main reasons people miss out.
- Be in the queue between 9:00 and 9:15 a.m. New Zealand time on opening day. Work out what that is in your time zone.
- Have two or three date options ready, and the hut order you want.
- If you miss out, check back. Cancellations come up all year, especially in the weeks before a date.

The Milford is one way, 4 days and 3 nights, starting at Glade Wharf, with a night each at Clinton, Mintaro and Dumpling huts on the nights you booked. There's no camping on the Milford. You also need to book the boats at both ends (see Milford Track).

Changes and cancellations (2026-27 DOC terms). Free on the booking day or the day after (if more than two days before arrival). A 10% fee from 48 hours after booking to 15 days before arrival, 50% between 14 and 4 days out, 75% from 3 days out, and no refund from the day before arrival. No refund if you leave early.

2026-27 prices

Per person per night, NZD, in the Great Walks season. "Resident" means New Zealand citizens and residents.

TRACK	HUT, INTERNATIONAL ADULT	HUT, RESIDENT ADULT	CAMPSITE, INTERNATIONAL ADULT	CAMPSITE, RESIDENT ADULT
Milford	152	106	no camping	no camping
Routeburn	132	88	42	28
Kepler	132	88	42	28

Children (5 to 17 for residents, 0 to 17 for international visitors) pay half. Outside the season huts are NZD 30 a night (NZD 35 at Luxmore Hut and on the Routeburn in May and June). International visitors have paid 1.5 times the resident rate since July 2021.

My booking story. I found the Kepler huts easy: I booked Luxmore Hut and Moturau Hut online on November 15, 2023, two days before I started, at NZD 102 a night. For the Milford I couldn't find any hut availability at all. It's a very popular trek and very competitive, so I signed up for a guided walk. On the Routeburn I looked for hut bookings and couldn't really find any, so I found a place to wild camp instead.

Rees-Dart huts

Shelter Rock, Dart and Daleys Flat huts are DOC "serviced" huts, and DOC says to book them online. There's one price for everyone. 2026-27 prices, adult per night, NZD: 28 on weekdays and 32 on weekends from October to April, 29 and 34 from December to February, and 25 from May to September. There are campsites at all three huts. Most of the hikes in New Zealand need hut nights, and when the Great Walks are booked up you go with what's left. The Rees-Dart was less popular, which is why we chose it.

The guided Milford

I joined an all-inclusive guided walk with Ultimate Hikes, the company that runs the private lodges on the Milford. 2026-27 prices, per person, NZD: 2,925 in a shared room (up to six, bunks, shared bathrooms), 3,750 each for two in a private room with a bathroom, 6,075 for one person in a private room. It includes transport from Queenstown or Te Anau, four nights in lodges, all meals, and a Milford Sound cruise on the last morning. You pay in full when you book, and cancelling within 30 days of the trip costs the full fare. Minimum age is 10.

My booking was nearly a disaster. A travel disruption and a late NZeTA meant I'd have missed my original departure. The company moved me to a later date at no extra cost, and I walked from November 25.

Getting there

Flying in. I flew direct from New York to Auckland, about 18 hours, then on to Queenstown. Queenstown has direct flights from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, and from Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. At the end I flew Queenstown to Auckland (NZD 172 on Jetstar) and home from there.

NZeTA and the levy. Most visitors, including Americans, need a New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority (NZeTA) before they fly. In 2026 it costs NZD 17 in the official app or NZD 23 on the official website, and you also pay the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy, NZD 100. Allow 72 hours. My NZeTA was still pending days before my flight, and I paid a third-party website to rush it. Don't: Immigration New Zealand says to use only its own app or nzeta.immigration.govt.nz. Apply weeks ahead.

Where to base yourself. Queenstown for the Rees-Dart and the Routeburn: the shuttles leave from town and go through Glenorchy, about 45 minutes away. Te Anau for the Kepler and the Milford: the Kepler starts at the edge of town and the Milford boats leave from Te Anau Downs, up the road toward Milford Sound. I stayed around Queenstown for most of the trip, including at a small retreat run by a subscriber's family, and went to Te Anau for the Kepler.

How I got to each track

TRACK	IN	OUT
Rees-Dart	Info & Track shuttle, Queenstown to Glenorchy, smaller bus to Muddy Creek (round-trip tickets)	Info & Track shuttle from Chinamans Bluff
Kepler	Driven to the Kepler Track car park by the friend I started with	Walked back into Te Anau
Routeburn	Shuttle from Queenstown through Glenorchy to Routeburn Shelter	Bus from The Divide back to Queenstown
Milford	Guided walk coach from Queenstown, boat across Lake Te Anau to Glade Wharf	Boat from Sandfly Point to Milford Sound, cruise and coach back the next day

The road from Queenstown to Glenorchy is a beautiful view but it's twisty, and I definitely felt sick.

Shuttles, buses and boats (2026-27)

Info & Track (Queenstown and Glenorchy, infotrack.co.nz), scheduled services November 2026 to May 1, 2027, adult one way:

- Queenstown to Routeburn Shelter: 8:00 a.m. (arrives 9:30) and 11:15 a.m., NZD 70. Back from Routeburn Shelter 9:45 a.m. and 2:15 p.m.
- Queenstown to Muddy Creek (Rees): 8:00 a.m., arrives 9:30, NZD 85. Back 9:30 a.m.
- Queenstown to Chinamans Bluff (Dart): listed at NZD 85 but with no scheduled times in 2026-27, because of the Dart Track closure.
- The Divide to Queenstown: 10:45 a.m. (arrives 2:25 p.m.) and 3:15 p.m. (arrives 7:45 p.m.), NZD 109.

Tracknet (Te Anau, tracknet.net), November 1, 2026 to May 1, 2027, adult one way:

- Te Anau to the Kepler Track car park: 9:00 and 10:00 a.m., 2:20 and 3:40 p.m. Rainbow Reach to Te Anau: 10:30 a.m., 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. The

timetable says NZD 13 and 23; Tracknet's Kepler web page says NZD 35. Check when you book.

- Queenstown to The Divide: 7:15 and 10:15 a.m., NZD 109. Te Anau to The Divide NZD 61.
- Milford Track package from Te Anau (bus to Te Anau Downs, both boats, bus back from Milford Sound): NZD 243. From Queenstown: NZD 348.
- Milford Sound to Te Anau: 10:00 a.m., 2:30 and 4:45 p.m., NZD 76. To Queenstown: 10:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., NZD 120.

Kepler Water Taxi (Fiordland Outdoors) runs from the Te Anau lakefront to Brod Bay in 15 minutes, which skips the first 3.5 miles of the Kepler. NZD 30 on the company's own page, NZD 50 on Tracknet's page. October 1 to April 30.

Milford boats. RealNZ runs the boats from Te Anau Downs to Glade Wharf (usually 10:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.) and from Sandfly Point to Milford Sound in the afternoon. Book them through a transport operator: DOC lists Tracknet, Fiordland Outdoors, Cheeky Kiwi and Easyhike. There's no road to either end of the Milford Track.

Rees-Dart Track

Three days, 42.4 miles (68.2 km), November 10 to 12, 2023, with two friends. A loop up the Rees Valley, over Rees Saddle (about 4,830 ft, 1,471 m) and down the Dart Valley, in Mount Aspiring National Park north of Glenorchy. It's not a Great Walk: the huts are smaller, the track is rougher, and there were fewer people.



Heading up the Rees Valley on the morning of Day 1.

The circuit is closed in 2026

DOC, checked September 26, 2026: "A large slip in Dart Valley between Daleys Flat Hut and Chinamans Bluff has made the Rees-Dart Track circuit impassable for trampers. Dart Track is closed until at least December 2026." The Waterfall Creek bridge between Clarke Slip and Shelter Rock Hut is also damaged and can't be used. Info & Track has no scheduled shuttles from Chinamans Bluff this season.

What DOC suggests instead: walk up the Rees Valley to Dart Hut and come back the same way; cross Cascade Saddle to Dart Hut; or pre-book a Heli Glenorchy helicopter over the slip (top of Dredge Flat to Surveyors Flat, about an hour's walk from Chinamans Bluff).

Why this one. My friends picked me up at Auckland airport and we planned exactly what we wanted to hike at a coffee shop nearby. The Great Walks were booked up, so we went with the Rees-Dart. We did it in 3 days, about 42 miles, and pushed a little faster than we wanted because we knew a rainstorm was coming on the last day. We skipped the side trip up to the Dart Glacier because of the rain.

How it went. We booked round-trip shuttle tickets with Info & Track from Queenstown to Glenorchy, changed to a smaller bus there, and started at the Muddy Creek car park. Day 1 was the big push: we skipped the first hut to reach the second one. Day 2 was our lazy day. Day 3 was easy, and the rain started just as we reached the car park at Chinamans Bluff.

Rees-Dart huts on my route. Shelter Rock Hut (22 bunks), Dart Hut (32) and Daleys Flat Hut (20). Takahe, a rare flightless bird, were released in the Rees Valley in 2025; if you see them, keep your distance.



Coming down from Rees Saddle toward the Dart Valley, Day 1.

DAY 1

Muddy Creek to Dart Hut

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
18.8 mi (30.3 km)	**3,902 ft** (1,189 m)	**2,582 ft** (787 m)	**10 to 14 hours** (DOC times; most people take two days)

HIGH POINT

Rees Saddle, 1,471 m (about 4,830 ft) by DOC; about 4,890 ft (1,492 m) on my GPS

TIME I TOOK

11.5 hours, 8 of them moving, 9:45 a.m. to 9:15 p.m.

SLEEP

Dart Hut (DOC, 32 bunks)

WATER

Streams all day and hut tanks. Treat it.

My day

This was my first hike in New Zealand and I was feeling fresh. It was kind of a big push for us, because we skipped a hut to get to the second hut on the track: almost 19 miles, and over 4,000 ft of gain by the app.

You're mostly in the valley, with beautiful views. The lower section is boggy, and you're walking through mud for some good stretches. It's not fun, but eventually you get higher and it dries out, and you have the view of the range for most of the way. The most strenuous part of the whole hike was the pass. There was a little snow, but once we got over it everything was easy going down to where we slept.



Snow on the climb to Rees Saddle.

Near the bottom, the Snowy Creek bridge had been put in a few days before we started. We weren't sure whether we'd do it without the bridge, but we fully committed once we learned it was in. The water was flowing pretty high, and it would not have been fun to cross that river in dangerous conditions and be wet and cold. It was a big day through mud and the high pass to reach a cozy hut.

The trail

From Muddy Creek the track follows the Rees River up a long, open valley, over open river flats at first and then into the national park. The lower valley is boggy in spring. DOC's stages: Muddy Creek to the park boundary, 4 to 5 hours (12 km); to Shelter Rock Hut, 2 to 3 hours (7 km); Shelter Rock Hut to Dart Hut over Rees Saddle, 4 to 6 hours (10 km). My GPS put Shelter Rock Hut at about 12 miles and the saddle at about 16.

The climb to Rees Saddle is steady, with snow near the top in early season. On the far side you drop steeply into the head of Snowy Creek and follow it down to Dart Hut. Snowy Creek floods, and its upper bridge is taken out every winter and put back when the snow clears, which can be as late as December. Avalanche terrain is active from about May to November between Shelter Rock Hut and Dart Hut.

DOC's stages split this day at Shelter Rock Hut. We didn't, and it made for a long day.



Snowy Creek, near Dart Hut, in the evening.

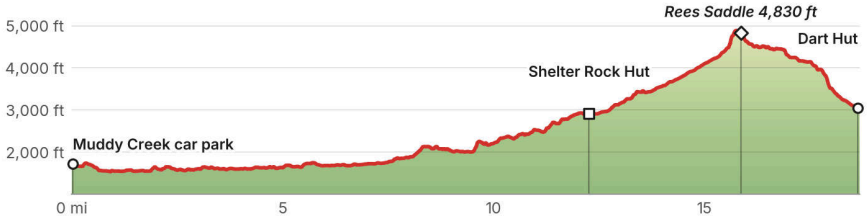
If you need to get off

Before the saddle, turn around and walk back down the Rees to Muddy Creek. Shelter Rock Hut is the place to stop. Once you're over the saddle, Dart Hut is closer than going back. Don't cross Rees Saddle in bad weather or cross a flooded Snowy Creek: wait at the hut.

Watch this day

Rees-Dart film, Day 1 · Getting to the trailhead · Day 1 breakdown · The Rees-Dart in the 160-mile film





Day 1 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



The Dart River in the afternoon of Day 2, near Daleys Flat.

DAY 2

Dart Hut to Daleys Flat Hut

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
12.1 mi (19.4 km)	**871 ft** (265 m)	**2,388 ft** (728 m)	**5 to 7 hours** (DOC)

HIGH POINT
Dart Hut, about 3,080 ft (940 m)

TIME I TOOK
7.5 hours, 5 of them moving, 9:00 a.m. to 4:40 p.m.

SLEEP
Daleys Flat Hut (DOC, 20 bunks)

WATER
The river and side streams. Treat it.

My day

Day 2 was our lazy day, because we only had to go 12 miles down to the next hut. It was mostly downhill and across some rivers. We took our time and even went in the freezing water at high noon to cool off.

It wasn't as muddy here, but the sandflies were out, especially near the end. It was really hard to be outside. You didn't want to be the person who accidentally left the hut door open, because the sandflies would come in and everyone would be mad at you. We shared the hut with a Dutch hiker who walked with us on and off for all three days.



The flats of the Dart Valley in the middle of Day 2.

The trail

From Dart Hut the track follows the Dart River down the valley, mostly on open flats and terraces with beech forest in between. It's easy walking and mostly downhill. The big hazard is flooding: DOC calls the rivers at Cattle Flat, in the lower Dart, particularly hazardous in flood. Side streams rise fast in heavy rain.

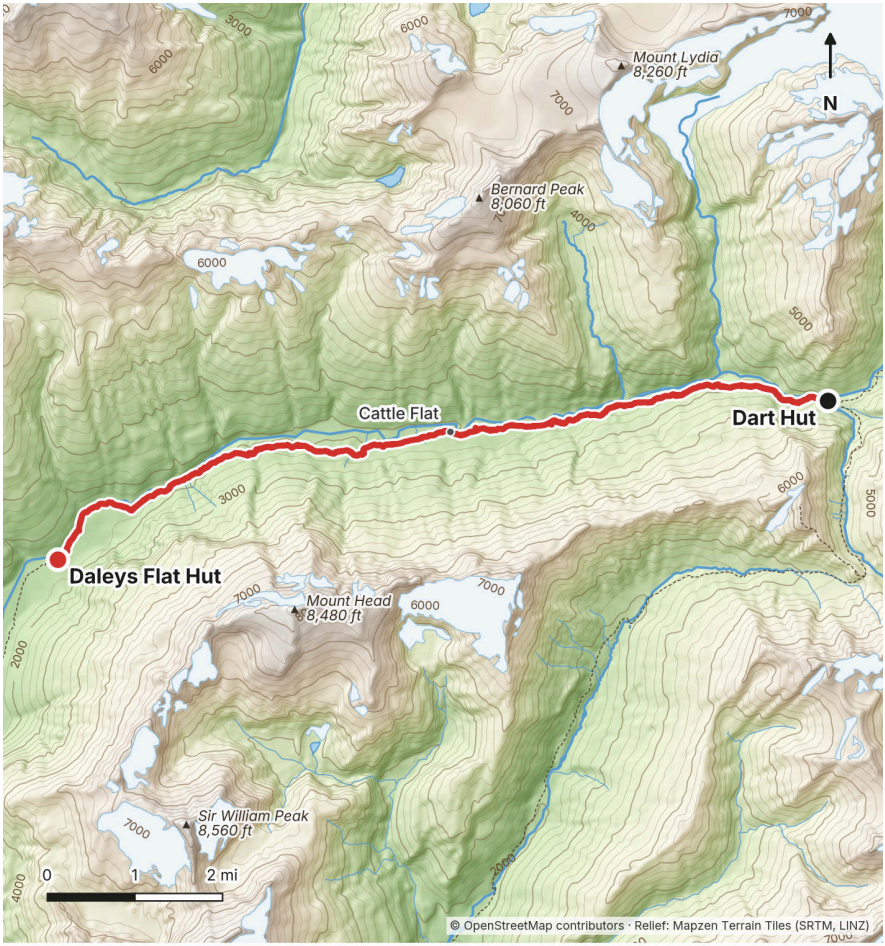
The Dart Glacier side trip. From Dart Hut you can walk up the Dart toward the Dart Glacier and Cascade Saddle. We skipped it because the rain was coming. Cascade Saddle is a serious alpine route, not a side stroll.

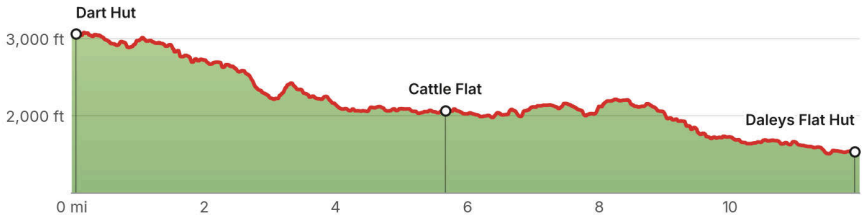
If you need to get off

Go back up the valley to Dart Hut and out over Rees Saddle. With the Dart Track closed below Daleys Flat Hut in 2026, that's also the way out unless you've booked the helicopter.

Watch this day

Rees-Dart film, Day 2 · Day 2 breakdown





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



The Dart River from the track on the morning of Day 3.

DAY 3

Daleys Flat Hut to Chinamans Bluff

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
11.5 mi (18.6 km)	**1,100 ft** (335 m)	**1,310 ft** (399 m)	**5.5 to 7.5 hours** (DOC)

STATUS IN 2026

Closed by a slip until at least December 2026

TRANSPORT

Info & Track shuttle from Chinamans Bluff (no 2026-27 times)

TIME I TOOK

6 hours, 4.5 of them moving, 7:30 a.m. to 1:20 p.m.

WATER

The river and side streams. Treat it.

My day

The last day was also quite easy, another 12 miles back down to the end. We were racing the rain to meet the shuttle. The clouds came in for the first time and it rained a little, with a nice stormy mood for most of the day. The sandflies were bad whenever we stopped. It started raining much harder as soon as we got to the car park, where we were safe under a roof. Really good timing.

It was the fastest I've ever had to hike to keep up with somebody. Of course I'm usually hiking alone, and alone it's a different vibe: you're not talking, you're not making jokes, it can be a bit lonely, and I focus on being efficient. So it was really nice to go on a different type of trip.



The shelter at the Chinamans Bluff car park, where the shuttle picked us up.

The trail

The track keeps to the Dart Valley, through beech forest and across open flats: Dredge Flat, Sandy Flat, Surveyors Flat. It's gentle, with short climbs around bluffs above the river. The slip that closed the track is in this section, between Daleys Flat Hut and Chinamans Bluff.

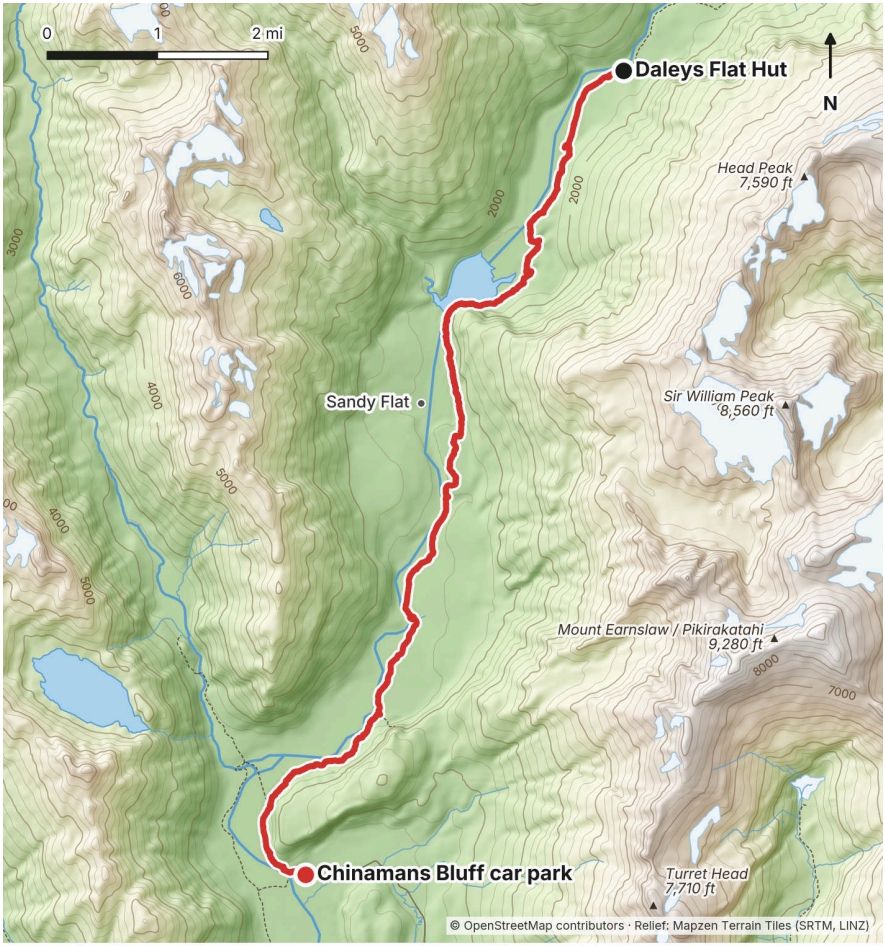
The road into Chinamans Bluff is a fine-weather road only. DOC warns about washouts and flooded creeks.

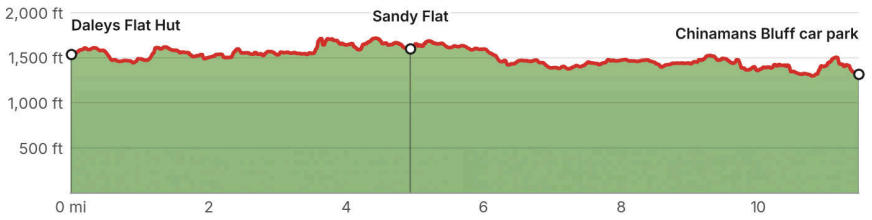
If you need to get off

In 2026 the only ways out from Daleys Flat Hut are back up the Dart and over Rees Saddle, or the pre-booked helicopter over the slip. In my year, the shuttle at Chinamans Bluff was the exit.

Watch this day

Rees-Dart film, Day 3 · Day 3 breakdown · Why hike the Rees-Dart





Day 3 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Kepler Track

Three days, 44.0 miles (70.8 km), November 17 to 19, 2023. A Great Walk loop from Te Anau: along the lake, up to Luxmore Hut, over a long ridge above the bushline, down the Iris Burn to Lake Manapouri and back through the forest. DOC's official loop is 60.1 km (37.3 miles), usually 3 to 4 days. My total includes the walk back into Te Anau.

How I did it. It was my first Great Walk in New Zealand. I started with a friend, who left after the first night, and continued the loop on my own. I booked Luxmore Hut and Moturau Hut and skipped Iris Burn Hut to make Day 5 a bigger day. On Day 5 I thought about hiking all the way out, but I decided to stay at the hut.

Kepler huts and campsites (DOC): Luxmore Hut (54 bunks, at 1,085 m, about 3,560 ft), Iris Burn Hut (50), Moturau Hut (40, on Lake Manapouri), Brod Bay campsite and Iris Burn campsite (30 each). The Forest Burn and Hanging Valley shelters on the ridge are for emergencies only: you can't stay overnight in them. DOC doesn't recommend the Kepler for children under 10.

The standard four days are in Other ways to do it.



Luxmore Hut at the end of Day 4.

DAY 4

Kepler Track car park to Luxmore Hut

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
9.8 mi (15.8 km)	**2,887 ft** (880 m)	**149 ft** (45 m)	**5 to 6 hours** (DOC)

HIGH POINT

Luxmore Hut, about 3,440 ft (1,049 m) on my GPS

TIME I TOOK

4.5 hours, 3.7 of them moving, 12:20 to 4:45 p.m.

SLEEP

Luxmore Hut (DOC, 54 bunks)

WATER

Hut tanks. Carry enough for the climb.

My day

We started midday, because we only had to hike up to Luxmore Hut. It was good weather. The track goes through the forest along the lake, then climbs through beech forest to the open tops, with nice views.

Near the hut I went into the cave, Luxmore Cave, about 10 minutes' walk from the hut. The hut is big: 52 bunks when I was there (54 now).



Brod Bay on Lake Te Anau, about an hour and a half into Day 4.

The trail

From the Kepler Track car park near the Waiau River control gates, the track follows the shore of Lake Te Anau through beech forest to Brod Bay: flat, about 3.5 miles (5.6 km), 1.5 hours. Then it climbs steadily through the forest to the bushline, and crosses open tussock to Luxmore Hut: 5.1 miles (8.2 km), 3.5 to 4.5 hours by DOC's times.

If you're starting from Te Anau, the Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre is about a 50-minute walk along the lakefront to the track entrance, or take the Tracknet bus, or the water taxi to Brod Bay.



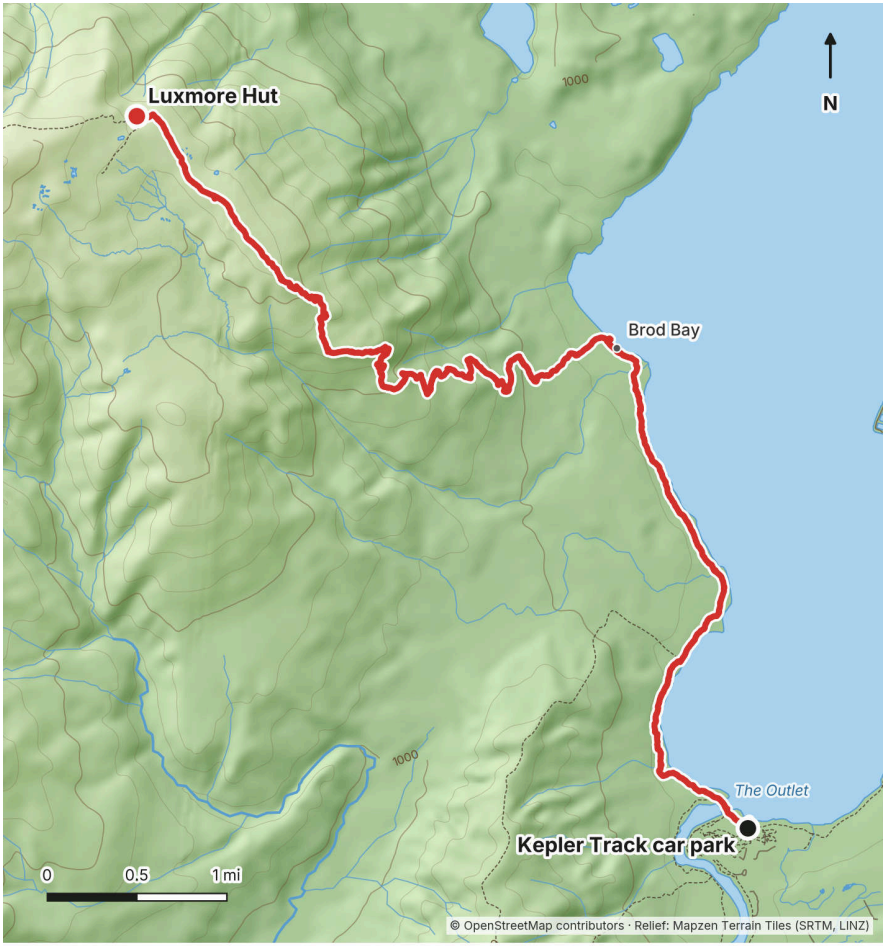
On the open tops before Luxmore Hut.

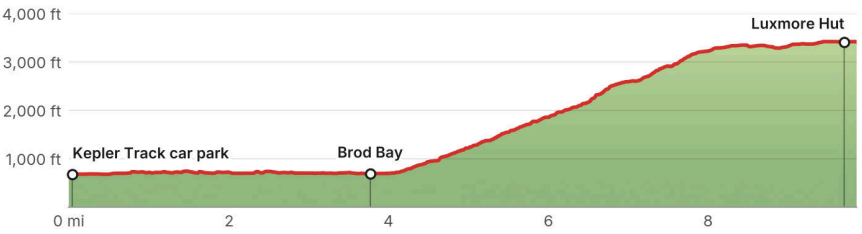
If you need to get off

Walk back down the way you came. From Brod Bay, the water taxi runs back to Te Anau in the afternoon (2:45 and 4:30 p.m. in 2026-27).

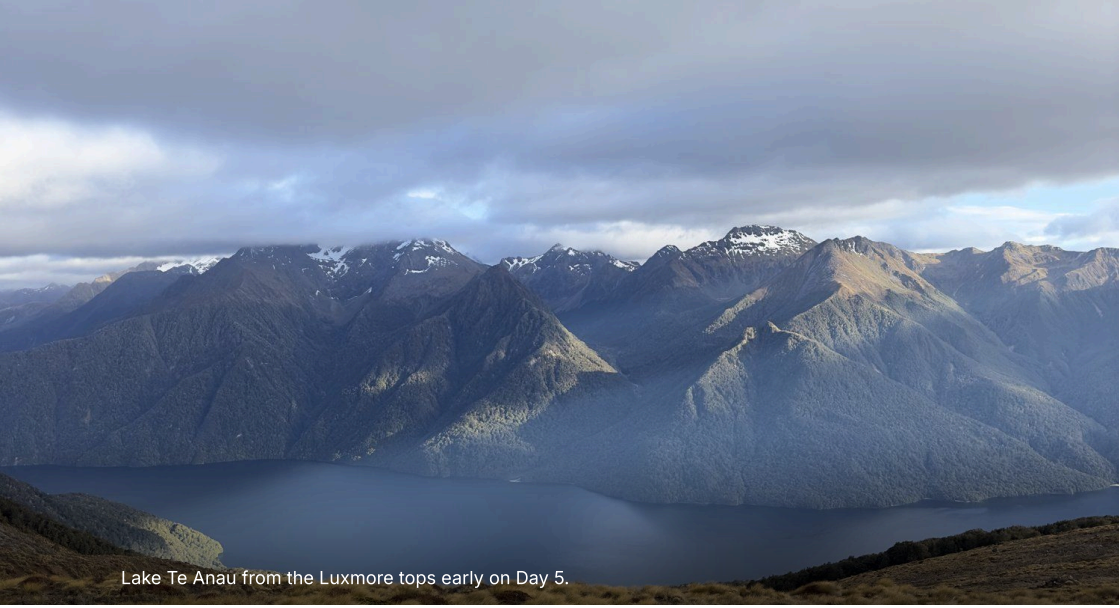
Watch this day

Kepler film, Day 1 · The Kepler in the 160-mile film





Day 4 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Lake Te Anau from the Luxmore tops early on Day 5.

DAY 5

Contents

Luxmore Hut to Moturau Hut

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
21.9 mi (35.2 km)	**2,491 ft** (759 m)	**5,304 ft** (1,617 m)	**10 to 12 hours** (DOC: two days)

HIGH POINT

The ridge below Mount Luxmore, about 4,560 ft (1,391 m)

SLEEP

Moturau Hut (DOC, 40 bunks)

TIME I TOOK

8.5 hours, 7 of them moving, 7:25 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

WATER

None on the ridge. Fill up at Luxmore Hut.

My day

I had to say goodbye to my friend in the morning before setting off into the cloudy weather. There were great views once the clouds let up a little here and there, and mostly nobody else was up this early. Kea were hanging out on the ridge.

I skipped Iris Burn Hut to make it a bigger day. The long flat section at the end was a bit boring.



A kea on the Kepler ridge.

The trail

This is the Kepler's big day, and DOC splits it in two. From Luxmore Hut the track climbs to just below the summit of Mount Luxmore (1,472 m) and then follows an exposed ridge for hours, above the bushline, past the Forest Burn and Hanging Valley shelters. Then it drops steeply through the forest to Iris

Burn Hut: 9.1 miles (14.6 km), 5 to 6 hours. From Iris Burn it's a long, gentle walk down the Iris Burn valley, past Rocky Point, to Moturau Hut on Lake Manapouri: 10.1 miles (16.2 km), 5 to 6 hours.

The ridge is the part to plan around. There's no water up there and no shelter from wind except the two emergency shelters. In bad weather, wait at Luxmore Hut.



The ridge in cloud, Day 5.

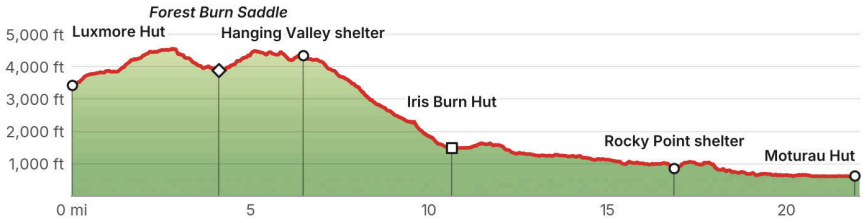
If you need to get off

On the ridge, go back to Luxmore Hut or on to Iris Burn Hut, whichever is closer. The emergency shelters are for emergencies only. From Moturau Hut, Rainbow Reach and its shuttle are 1.5 to 2 hours away.

Watch this day

Kepler film, Day 2





Day 5 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Boardwalk through the wetland on Day 6.

DAY 6

Moturau Hut to Te Anau

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
12.3 mi (19.9 km)	**787 ft** (240 m) by my GPS; it's flat	**748 ft** (228 m)	**5 to 6.5 hours** (DOC plus the lakefront)

HIGH POINT

About 810 ft (248 m)

TIME I TOOK

3 hours 40 minutes, almost all moving, 6:15 to 9:55 a.m.

SLEEP

Te Anau

TRANSPORT

Tracknet bus from Rainbow Reach if you stop there

My day

Flat in and flat out. I did a speed run back to pies and coffee in town. I didn't film anything for the YouTube video, so there's no Day 3 in my Kepler film. I listened to some podcasts.

The trail

From Moturau Hut the track crosses a wetland on boardwalk and runs through beech forest to Rainbow Reach, 3.7 miles (6 km), 1.5 to 2 hours. It follows the Waiau River back to the Kepler Track car park, 5.9 miles (9.5 km), 2.5 to 3.5 hours, and then the lakefront path into Te Anau. It's all low and easy.

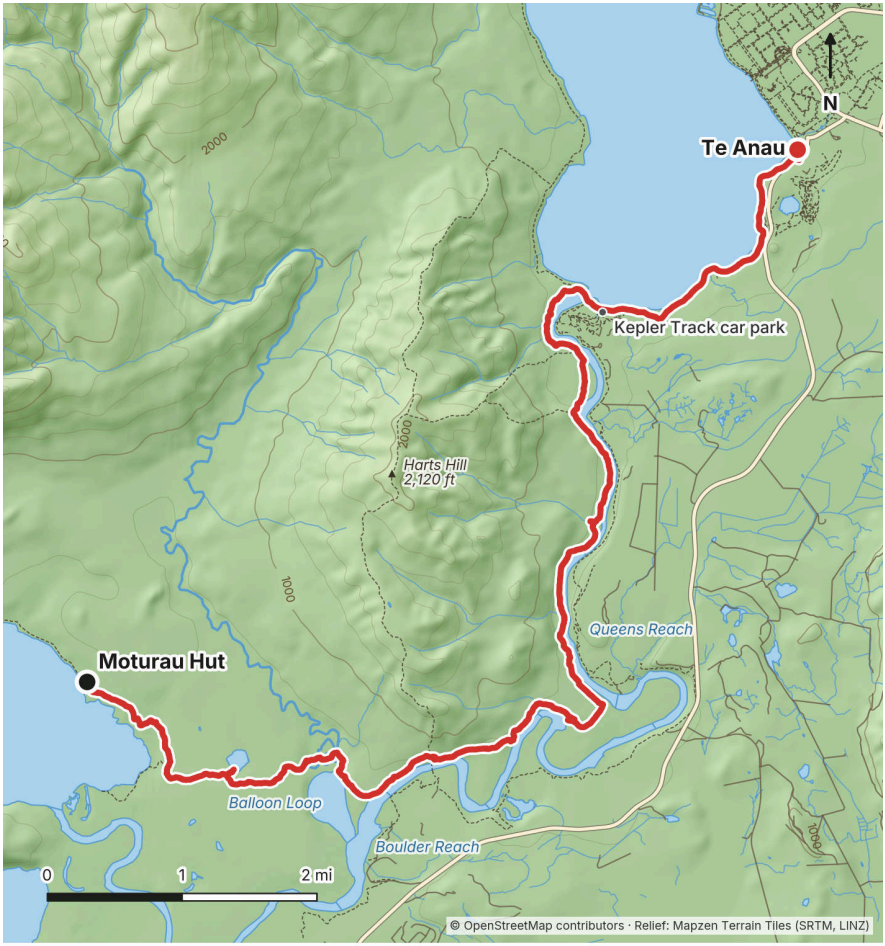
Many people finish at Rainbow Reach and take the shuttle; I walked the whole way back.

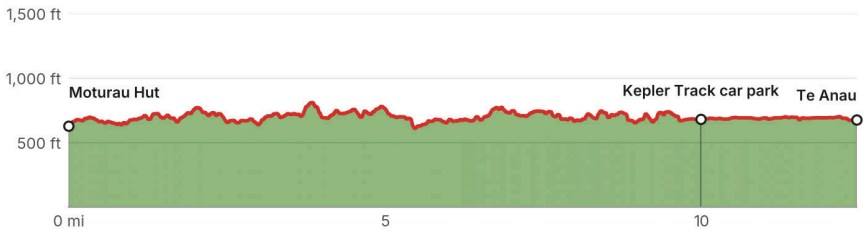
If you need to get off

Rainbow Reach has a car park and a shuttle to Te Anau (10:30 a.m., 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. in 2026-27).

Watch this day

I didn't film this day. Kepler film





Day 6 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Routeburn Track

Two days, 25.9 miles (41.7 km), November 20 to 21, 2023, solo. A one-way Great Walk from Routeburn Shelter, near Glenorchy, over Harris Saddle (1,255 m, about 4,120 ft) to The Divide on the Milford Road. DOC's track is 33.1 km (20.6 miles), usually 2 to 4 days. My total includes the climb to Lake Wilson and back.



Lake Harris on Day 7.

How I did it. It was the fourth hike of my trip and my first solo track in New Zealand. When I asked subscribers what to hike, a bunch of people recommended the Great Walks, and the Routeburn in particular. At this distance and difficulty I could have done it all in one day, but since I was making a video I wanted to take my time and spend a night out there. I

couldn't find hut bookings, so I searched a bit more and discovered the Valley of the Trolls, far enough away that I could wild camp and for sure not see anybody. I was alone the entire time I was up there.

What I think. Most people would really like the Routeburn. It's a Great Walk, so it's very well maintained, and there are lots of huts and campsites, but in the busy season it might be hard to get a space. If you're a bit more experienced and looking for something extra, an overnight wild camp up at Lake Wilson is the thing to do. Check the rules below first.

Routeburn huts and campsites (DOC): Routeburn Flats Hut (20 bunks) and campsite (30), Routeburn Falls Hut (48), Lake Mackenzie Hut (50) and campsite (18). Lake Howden Hut was destroyed by a storm and landslide in February 2020 and is gone. The Harris Saddle shelter is for day use only.

Camping off the track

- **Fiordland side** (Harris Saddle to The Divide, including Lake Mackenzie): the park bylaws say no camping on the Routeburn Track or within 500 m (about 1,600 ft) on either side of it, except at a campsite, and none within 100 m of a hut.
- **Mount Aspiring side** (Routeburn Shelter to Harris Saddle): the park plan says camping should not be allowed within 500 m of the track except at the Routeburn Flats campsite. In 2011 the park's bylaws didn't yet include that rule, and I couldn't confirm whether they do now.
- **My camp.** My tent at Lake Wilson was about 1.2 miles (2 km) from the Routeburn Track by my GPS, well outside the 500 m band. It's off-track, alpine ground with snow in November. If you want to do the same, ask at the DOC visitor centre in Queenstown first, carry everything out, and camp on durable ground away from the water.



Looking back down the Route Burn to Routeburn Flats, Day 7.

DAY 7

Routeburn Shelter to Lake Wilson

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
11.4 mi (18.3 km)	**3,782 ft** (1,153 m)	**482 ft** (147 m)	**6 to 8 hours**

HIGH POINT

About 5,000 ft (1,523 m), above Lake Wilson

SLEEP

My tent at Lake Wilson (off the track; read the camping rules)

TIME I TOOK

6.5 hours, 4 of them moving, 10:05 a.m. to 4:35 p.m.

TRANSPORT

Info & Track shuttle from Queenstown, 8:00 a.m.

My day

I took the shuttle from Queenstown with a bunch of other hikers, up through Glenorchy to the Routeburn trailhead. There were lots of people on this very maintained trail. The hike was pretty easy: about 11 miles for the day with about 4,000 ft of gain on the app.

Up near Lake Harris and the saddle, my AllTrails turned off for some reason, so I lost some tracking. I had lunch at a hut up there. I was hoping to do Conical Hill, but it was closed because of snow and ice. There was snow and ice going up to Lake Wilson, too, but I had nothing but time, so I made my way up slowly, got over the top and found a nice spot for my tent.

Camping at Lake Wilson was fantastic, worth the extra miles just for the isolation. I was the only one up there, with fantastic views, sunrise, sunset and kea. I expected wind in the night and built a small rock wall around the tent, but there was no wind.



My camp at Lake Wilson on the evening of Day 7.

The trail

From Routeburn Shelter the track climbs gently through beech forest beside the Route Burn to Routeburn Flats Hut: 4.7 miles (7.5 km), 1.5 to 2.5 hours. Then a steeper climb of 1.4 miles (2.3 km), 1 to 1.5 hours, to Routeburn Falls Hut at the bushline. Above the hut the track climbs through open alpine ground past Lake Harris to Harris Saddle. The alpine section is exposed to weather and avalanches: DOC counts 32 avalanche paths on the Routeburn, says the risk can run into December, and may close sections when there's avalanche hazard.

Lake Wilson is not on the Great Walk. There's no marked track and in November there was snow on the way up. My GPS line shows where I went; I lost the recording for a while near Lake Harris.

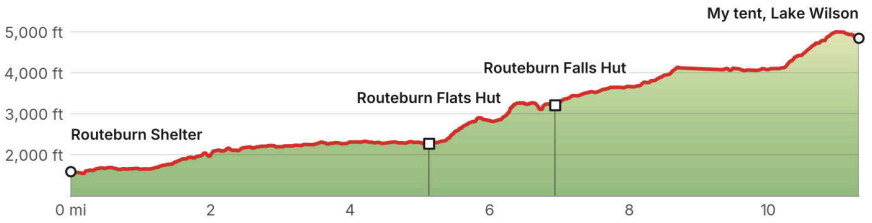
If you need to get off

Walk back down to Routeburn Falls Hut, Routeburn Flats Hut or the shelter. The shuttle leaves Routeburn Shelter for Queenstown at 9:45 a.m. and 2:15 p.m. (2026-27).

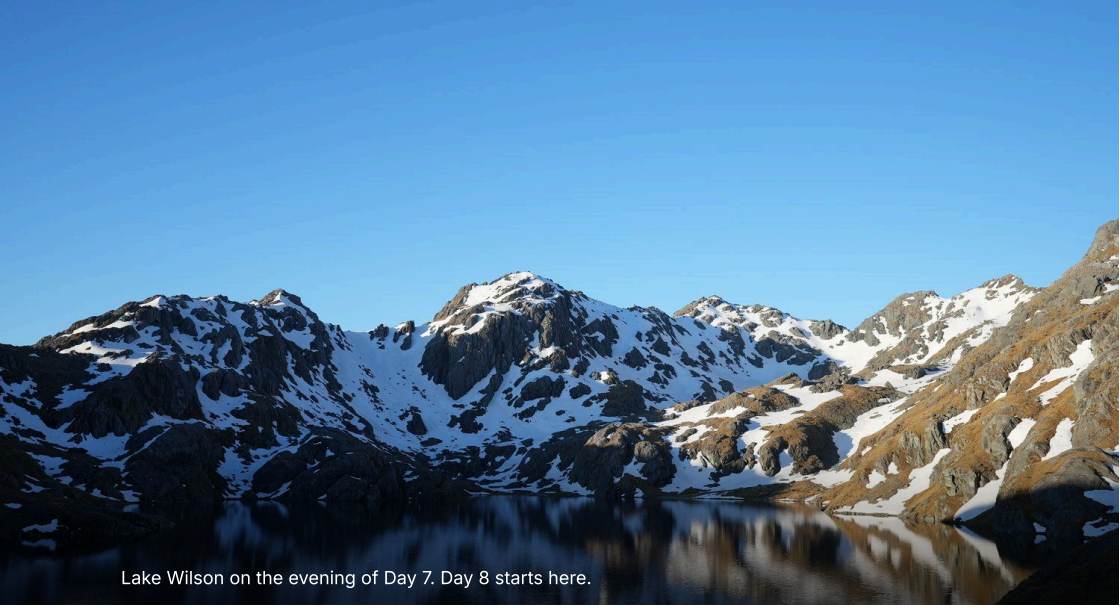
Watch this day

Routeburn film, Routeburn Shelter · Harris Saddle · Lake Harris · Lake Wilson · Campsite · The Routeburn in the 160-mile film





Day 7 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Lake Wilson on the evening of Day 7. Day 8 starts here.

DAY 8

Lake Wilson to The Divide

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
14.5 mi (23.4 km)	**1,577 ft** (481 m)	**4,695 ft** (1,431 m)	**7 to 9 hours**

HIGH POINT

About 5,020 ft (1,529 m), leaving Lake Wilson

TRANSPORT

Bus from The Divide (10:45 a.m. and 3:15 p.m. to Queenstown)

TIME I TOOK

6 hours 40 minutes, 5 of them moving, 6:45 a.m. to 1:25 p.m.

WATER

Streams and Lake Mackenzie Hut. Treat it.

My day

I woke up to kea jumping on my tent. They're very curious about people, they're so cute, they play, they fly around. I love the kea.

It was about half a day of hiking, mostly downhill, past some lakes. It was pretty quiet because I started early, except near Lake Mackenzie, where there were a few people. It was nice to step into the lake and eat an avocado, one of my favorite new trail foods. Then more downhill, past a waterfall, and a few subscribers said hello. I made it to the main road at The Divide and took a bus back to Queenstown.

The trail

Back down to Harris Saddle, then a long traverse along the mountainside and a descent to Lake Mackenzie Hut. DOC gives Routeburn Falls Hut to Lake Mackenzie Hut, over the saddle, as 7 miles (11.3 km) and 4.5 to 6 hours. From Lake Mackenzie the track rolls through forest past Earland Falls (174 m high) and Lake Howden to The Divide: 7.5 miles (12 km), 4 to 5.5 hours. The Key Summit side trip near the end is 1 to 1.5 hours return.

The Divide is on the Milford Road, 85 km from Te Anau. The road distance between the two ends of the Routeburn is 325 km, so book the bus before you start.



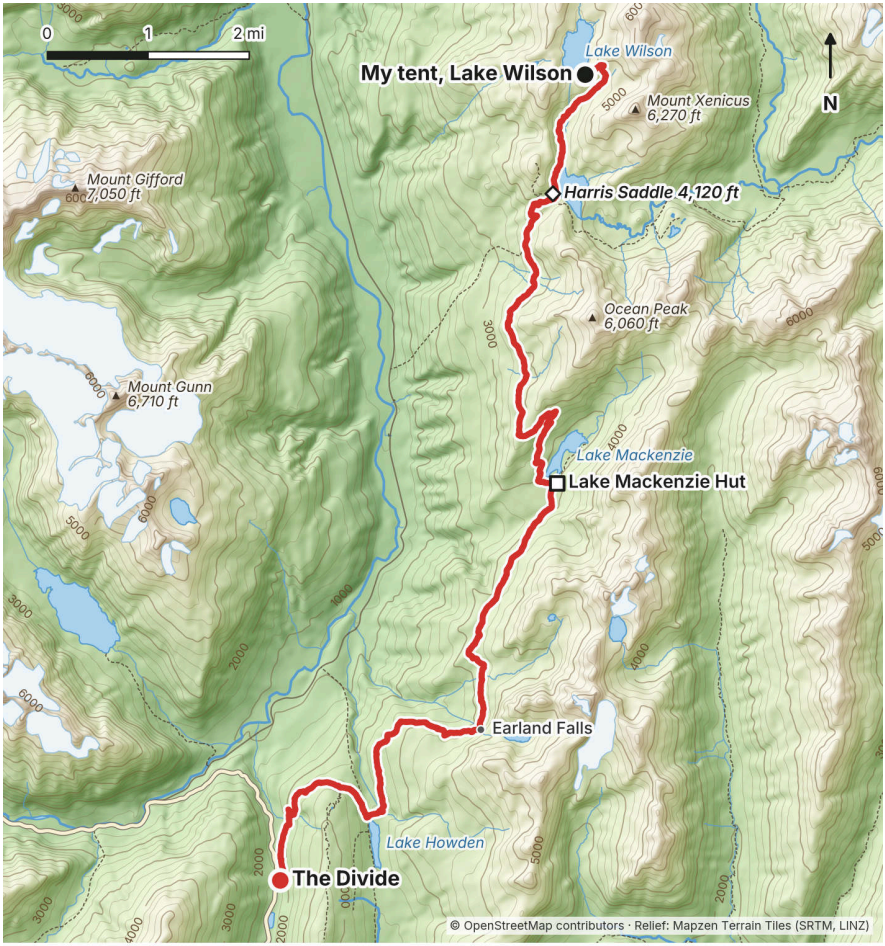
Earland Falls, on the way down to Lake Howden.

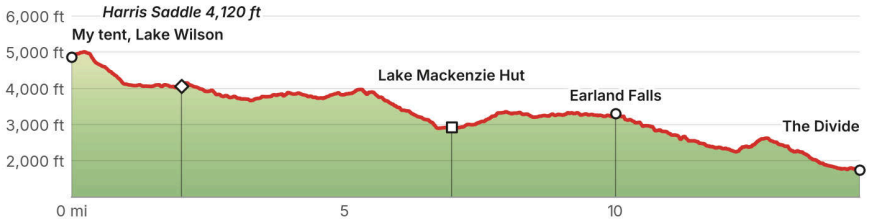
If you need to get off

Lake Mackenzie Hut is the halfway point. The Harris Saddle shelter is day use only. In bad weather on the alpine section, turn back to the nearest hut.

Watch this day

Routeburn film, kea · Lake Mackenzie to The Divide · Hiking guide and behind the scenes

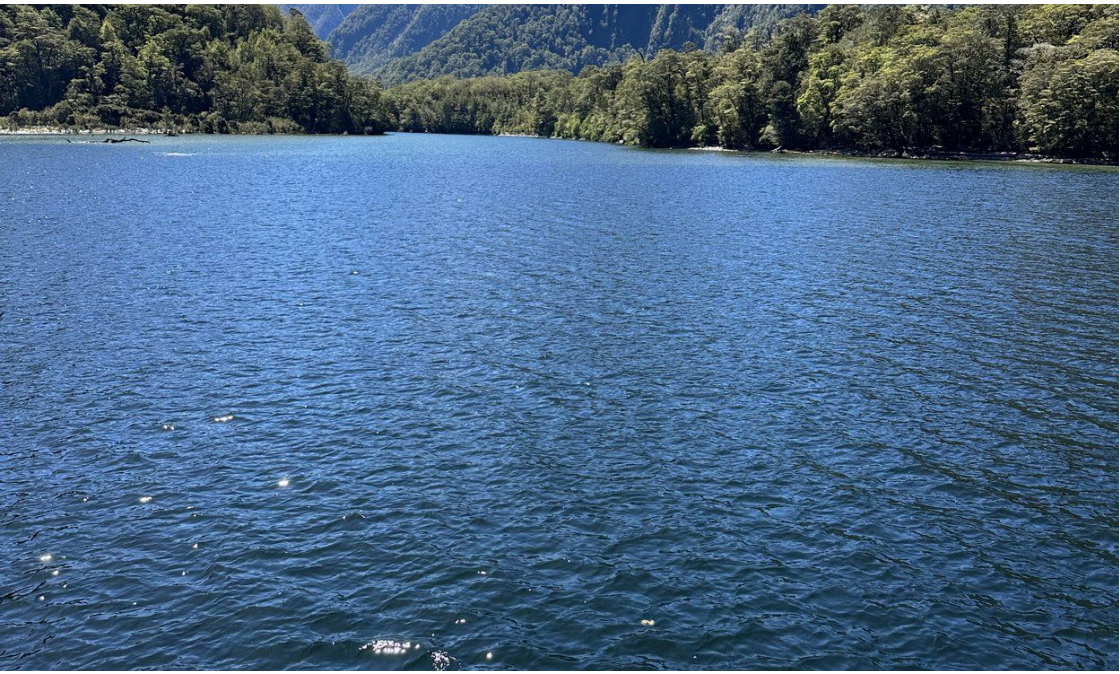




Day 8 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Milford Track

Three walking days, 42.5 miles (68.4 km), November 25 to 29, 2023, on a guided walk. A one-way Great Walk from the head of Lake Te Anau, up the Clinton Valley, over Mackinnon Pass (1,154 m, about 3,790 ft) and down the Arthur Valley to Sandfly Point on Milford Sound. DOC's track is 53.5 km (33.2 miles), 4 days and 3 nights. I tracked about 42 miles with all my side trips.



Lake Te Anau from the boat to Glade Wharf, November 25.

How I did it. I joined a group of about 30 other hikers on an all-inclusive guided walk through the heart of Fiordland National Park. The whole trip was 5 days and 4 nights, but the first and last days were mainly transport by bus and boat, so the three days in the middle were the hiking. On November 25 we took a coach from Queenstown and the boat up Lake Te Anau, walked about a mile from Glade Wharf to Glade House, and slept there.

The lodges. The huts were super nice, with lounge and dining areas and different rooms for different guests. For all four nights I had a four-person dorm room to myself, basically a private room upgrade, which was very lucky. Chefs cooked us really nice dinners every night, with a breakfast buffet in the morning, unlimited coffee and tea, and a station to make your own lunch. My go-to was a giant chicken pesto wrap, and the last two days I started making two. All the lodges had electricity, hot showers and bars. The miles per day weren't bad, so we had lots of downtime, and a few of us had a pretty aggressive game of euchre going each day.

Guided or independent. The guided walk stays at Glade House, Pompolona Lodge, Quintin Lodge and a lodge at Milford Sound. Independent walkers stay at DOC's Clinton, Mintaro and Dumpling huts (40 bunks each, no showers, no food) and carry everything: sleeping bag, food, cooking gear. The huts have gas cookers in season. The independent 4-day plan is in Other ways to do it. My daily stages below are the guided ones.

No camping anywhere on the Milford. Both valleys can flood in heavy rain and become impassable, and in season DOC may fly walkers (at their cost) over dangerous sections.



The Clinton Valley on Day 9.

DAY 9

Contents

Glade House to Pompolona Lodge

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
13.1 mi (21.1 km)	**2,183 ft** (665 m) by my GPS; the valley rises about 800 ft	**1,475 ft** (450 m)	**5 to 7 hours**

HIGH POINT

Pompolona Lodge, about 1,450 ft (442 m)

SLEEP

Pompolona Lodge (guided). Independent: Clinton Hut, then Mintaro Hut

TIME I TOOK

6 hours 45 minutes, 4.7 of them moving, 8:25 a.m. to 3:10 p.m.

WATER

Streams and the lodges or huts. Treat stream water.

My day

We had a boat ride and a bed at Glade House the night before this first walking day. It was sunny, with no rain, and I was hiking in a guided group of about 30 people.

If you love weird, strange, beautiful green plants and moss and big old trees, this valley has a lot of that. The birds in New Zealand are amazing. Honestly, that's one of the biggest reasons you should hike in New Zealand, just to see all the different birds.



A clear pool on the Clinton River, Day 9.

The trail

From Glade House the track follows the Clinton River upstream through beech forest, almost flat, past Clinton Hut. Higher up the valley opens out under steep walls with waterfalls coming off them. The guided walk's day is 16 km (10 miles) to Pompolona Lodge; my GPS says 13 miles. Independent walkers go from Glade Wharf to Clinton Hut on the first day (5 km, 1 to 1.5 hours) and from Clinton Hut to Mintaro Hut on the second (17.5 km, 6 hours).

The climbing figure on my GPS is high because the signal jumps around under the trees. The valley floor only rises about 800 ft (240 m) from Glade House to Pompolona.

If you need to get off

There's no road. Stay put at a lodge or hut and wait for the rivers to drop if it floods; the guides and DOC rangers organize anything else.

Watch this day

Milford film, arrival day · Day 2 (my Day 9) · The Milford in the 160-mile film



Day 9 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Looking back down the Clinton Valley on the climb to Mackinnon Pass, Day 10.

DAY 10

Contents

Pompolona Lodge to Quintin Lodge

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
13.5 mi (21.7 km)	**3,220 ft** (981 m)	**3,438 ft** (1,048 m)	**6 to 8 hours** plus the falls

HIGH POINT

Near the Mackinnon Pass shelter, about 3,700 ft (1,128 m) on my GPS; DOC says 1,154 m

TIME I TOOK

7 hours 20 minutes, 5 of them moving, 7:30 a.m. to 2:50 p.m.

SLEEP

Quintin Lodge (guided). Independent: Dumpling Hut

SIDE TRIP

Sutherland Falls, 1.5 hours return from Quintin

My day

The second walking day was the one up over Mackinnon Pass, the first and only pass on this hike and the high point. It was easy work, but mostly in cloud with no visibility. I drank coffee at the hut on the pass and waited for the weather to clear enough to shoot the views on both sides of the valley. There were a handful of playful kea hanging out up there.

In the afternoon I did the bonus walk to Sutherland Falls. I had to chop it off the recording, because AllTrails thought I went up and down the waterfall cliff.

The trail

From Pompolona the track climbs gently to the head of the Clinton Valley at Mintaro Hut, then zigzags up to Mackinnon Pass. The memorial is at 1,069 m; the track goes a little higher, past the Mackinnon Pass shelter at 1,154 m. The descent into the Arthur Valley is long and steep, down to Quintin (a guided lodge and a DOC day shelter). DOC's independent stage, Mintaro Hut to Dumpling Hut, is 13 km (8 miles), 6 to 7 hours: over 500 m up and about 1,000 m down.

Sutherland Falls is a side track from Quintin, 1.5 hours return.

The pass is the most exposed point on the Milford. In wind or heavy rain, wait.



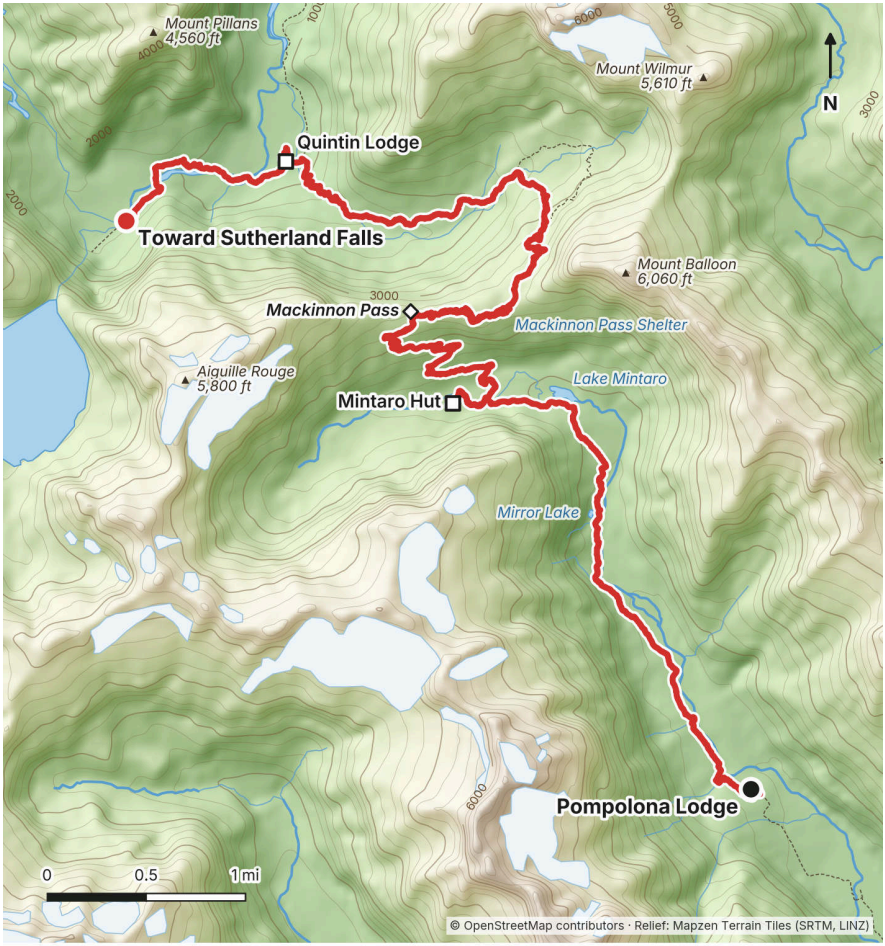
Sutherland Falls, Day 10.

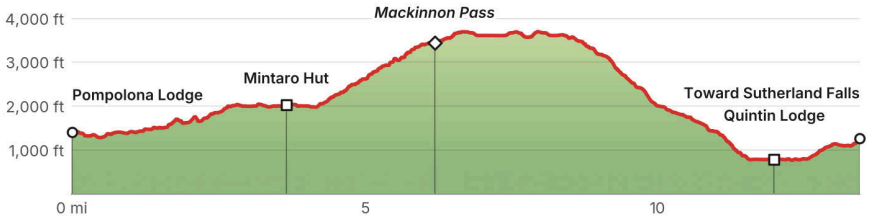
If you need to get off

Before the pass, go back to Mintaro Hut or Pompolona. On the pass, the shelter gives cover; decide there whether to go on. In season DOC may fly walkers over dangerous sections at their own cost.

Watch this day

Milford film, Day 3 (my Day 10)





Day 10 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Milford Sound on the evening of Day 11.

DAY 11

Quintin Lodge to Sandfly Point

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME TO ALLOW
15.9 mi (25.6 km)	**653 ft** (199 m)	**1,405 ft** (428 m)	**6 to 7 hours**

HIGH POINT
Quintin, about 850 ft (258 m)

TIME I TOOK
7 hours, 5.5 of them moving, 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

BOAT
Sandfly Point to Milford Sound, about 20 minutes (book ahead)

SLEEP
Lodge at Milford Sound (guided)

My day

The last day was cloudy skies and rain. I was super glad to have brought the umbrella to keep the rain off, but it also gave the sandflies a little safe haven to attack me. They were atrocious, especially toward Sandfly Point, which is appropriately named. I really couldn't stop or they'd eat me alive, so I didn't stop moving at all that day. I made it to Sandfly Point first and waited for enough people to fill the first boat over to our lodge at Milford Sound.

It was fantastic to hang out at the lodge with the view and sleep there, so we could be there for sunset and sunrise when there were no tourists around. There was a fancy hotel and a shower waiting.



Umbrella hiking on the last day.

The trail

The track follows the Arthur River down a wide, wet valley through rainforest, past Dumpling Hut, big waterfalls and the long shore of Lake Ada, to Sandfly Point. It's nearly flat and very well built. DOC's independent stage is Dumpling Hut to Sandfly Point, 18 km (11 miles), 5.5 to 6 hours. Rain makes for more dramatic waterfalls. Plan to reach Sandfly Point in time for your boat; in 2026-27 the boats leave between about 2:00 and 4:30 p.m.



Sandfly Point, the end of the Milford Track.

Getting home from Milford Sound

The guided trip included a boat cruise around Milford Sound in the morning, and we had perfect weather, bright blue skies and snow on the peaks around us. I recommend the cruise to anyone in the area, and try the hot chocolate on board if they have it. It was really good. Then the coach took us back to Queenstown. Independent walkers take a bus from Milford Sound to Te Anau (NZD 76) or Queenstown (NZD 120), or book it as part of a transport package.

Watch this day

Milford film, Day 4 (my Day 11) · Guide and behind the scenes





Day 11 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Other ways to do it

The independent Milford (4 days, 3 nights)

This is DOC's standard trip, and the only one you can book yourself. The stages are fixed: you stay in each hut on the night you booked.

DAY	ROUTE	KM (MI)	DOC TIME	HUT
1	Te Anau Downs boat, Glade Wharf to Clinton Hut	5 (3.1)	1 to 1.5 hours	Clinton (40 bunks)
2	Clinton Hut to Mintaro Hut	17.5 (10.9)	6 hours	Mintaro (40)
3	Mintaro Hut to Dumpling Hut, over Mackinnon Pass	13 (8.1)	6 to 7 hours	Dumpling (40)
4	Dumpling Hut to Sandfly Point, boat to Milford Sound	18 (11.2)	5.5 to 6 hours	

Add 1.5 hours on Day 3 for Sutherland Falls. 2026-27 cost for an international adult: three hut nights at NZD 152 (NZD 456) plus a transport package from Te Anau (NZD 243 with Tracknet).

The standard Kepler (4 days, 3 nights)

DAY	ROUTE	KM (MI)	DOC TIME	SLEEP
1	Kepler Track car park to Luxmore Hut	13.8 (8.6)	5 to 6 hours	Luxmore Hut
2	Luxmore Hut to Iris Burn Hut	14.6 (9.1)	5 to 6 hours	Iris Burn Hut
3	Iris Burn Hut to Moturau Hut	16.2 (10.1)	5 to 6 hours	Moturau Hut
4	Moturau Hut to Rainbow Reach (shuttle) or the car park	6 or 15.5 (3.7 or 9.6)	1.5 to 5.5 hours	

Take the water taxi to Brod Bay to shorten Day 1, or camp at Brod Bay and Iris Burn. My version merged Days 2 and 3.

The Routeburn in 3 days

Most people walk it in three days: Routeburn Shelter to Routeburn Falls Hut (9.8 km, 2.5 to 4 hours), Routeburn Falls Hut to Lake Mackenzie Hut over Harris Saddle (11.3 km, 4.5 to 6 hours), Lake Mackenzie to The Divide (12 km, 4 to 5.5 hours). Campers use Routeburn Flats and Lake Mackenzie. Add Conical Hill (1.5 to 2 hours return from Harris Saddle) if it's open, and Key Summit near the end.

The Rees-Dart in 2026

Until the Dart Track reopens, the choices DOC lists are: in and out from Muddy Creek to Dart Hut (two or three days each way, over Rees Saddle and back), the Cascade Saddle route to Dart Hut for experienced parties, or the pre-booked Heli Glenorchy flight over the slip. Check the DOC page for reopening news before you plan.

All four in about three weeks

My order worked: Rees-Dart from Queenstown, a few days off, the Kepler from Te Anau, back to Queenstown for the Routeburn, a few days off, and the Milford last. Book the Great Walk huts first, on the opening days in May, and fit the Rees-Dart and the rest days around them. The Milford is the hardest to book, so build the trip around the Milford dates you get.

Food and water

On the tracks there's nothing to buy. Great Walk huts have gas cookers in season, cold running water, toilets and heating, but no food, no cooking pots or utensils, and no showers. Bring everything, including a pot, a mug, a spoon and a lighter. Rees-Dart huts are simpler.

Water. DOC says hut water comes from rain or streams and Giardia may be present: boil it for 3 minutes if you're unsure. I treat it.

What I ate. On the Rees-Dart one of my friends is a great trail chef, and it was cool to learn a few things from how she cooks. At Lake Mackenzie I ate an avocado, one of my favorite new trail foods. On the Milford the lodges fed us, and I packed a chicken pesto wrap, or two, every day.

In town. Queenstown is full of places to eat. There's a really popular burger spot named Fergburger, and the chocolate chip cookies at Cookie Time are flawless. After the Kepler I did a speed run back to Te Anau for pies and coffee. Stock up at the supermarkets in Queenstown and Te Anau; Glenorchy is small.

What I paid

My receipts from this trip are incomplete. Here's what's on record, in NZD where I paid in NZD.

ITEM	WHAT I PAID
Luxmore Hut, Kepler, November 17, 2023	NZD 102
Moturau Hut, Kepler, November 18, 2023	NZD 102
Jetstar, Queenstown to Auckland, November 30	NZD 172

Not on record: the guided Milford walk, the Rees-Dart shuttles and huts, the Routeburn shuttle and bus, and my flights to Auckland and Queenstown.

What it costs in 2026-27 for my route

For an international adult, walking independently, per person, NZD. Not included: flights, the NZeTA and levy (NZD 117 to 123), rooms in Queenstown and Te Anau, and food. The guided Milford (NZD 2,925 shared) would replace the Milford huts and transport.

ITEM	COST
Rees-Dart: shuttles in and out (Info & Track)	170
Rees-Dart: Dart Hut and Daleys Flat Hut, weekday	56
Kepler: Luxmore and Moturau huts	264
Routeburn: shuttle in and bus out from The Divide	179
Routeburn: one night at Lake Mackenzie Hut (or campsite, 42)	132
Milford: three huts	456
Milford: transport package from Te Anau	243
Total on the tracks	**about 1,500**

Gear for this route

What a Great Walk hut trip needs

Bring a sleeping bag (huts have mattresses only), a stove only outside the season, a pot, mug, utensils and lighter, all your food, a headlamp (lighting is only in the kitchen), rain jacket and pants, warm layers and a hat, insect repellent, a water treatment method, a first aid kit, and a personal locator beacon.

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I walked four tracks in three weeks, mostly hut to hut, with one wild camp on the Routeburn and a guided Milford where I barely carried anything. Here's what I carried in 2023, what I'd take now, and what I filmed with.

What I carried in 2023

I don't have a full packing list from this trip. This is what my films and their gear lists show.

- **Pack:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear Southwest 2400 (Hyperlite)
- **Sun hoodie:** Amazon Essentials Quick-Dry Tech Hoodie (Amazon)
- **Shoes:** Salomon Speedcross (Amazon)
- **Water bottle:** Katadyn BeFree AC · 1L (Amazon). Hut water comes from rain or streams. I treat it.
- **Tent:** my tent. For the wild camp at Lake Wilson on the Routeburn.
- **Umbrella:** an umbrella. It was great on the last day of the Milford, except for the sandflies.
- **On the Milford:** hiking clothes, camp clothes, camera gear and a few snacks. I barely had to carry anything.

What I'd take now

My current kit for a Great Walk hut trip. All of it is on my gear page: kraigadams.com/gear.

- **Sleeping bag:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear 20° Quilt (Hyperlite). Huts have mattresses only.
- **Stove:** Jetboil Stash (Amazon). Only outside the season: Great Walk huts have gas cookers in season.
- **Mug:** Sea to Summit Frontier Camp Cup (Amazon). Huts have no pots or utensils.
- **Spoon:** TiTo Long Handle Spork (Amazon)
- **Headlamp:** Nitecore NU20 Classic (Amazon). Hut lighting is only in the kitchen.
- **Rain jacket:** Arc'teryx Beta AR Jacket (Arc'teryx)
- **Warm layer:** Arc'teryx Cerium Hoody (Arc'teryx). The Kepler ridge and Mackinnon Pass are exposed. Carry warm layers even in summer.
- **Hat:** PATH Projects Hoyt Merino Beanie (PATH Projects)
- **Umbrella:** Six Moon Designs Silver Shadow Carbon (Amazon)
- **Tent:** NEMO Hornet Elite OSMO 1P (Amazon). For a camp like mine at Lake Wilson.
- **Sleeping pad:** Therm-a-Rest NeoAir XLite NXT (Amazon). If you camp.
- **Navigation:** AllTrails+ (AllTrails, 30% off). Import my GPX files and download them offline. Offline maps need the paid plan.
- **Phone data:** Airalo eSIM (Airalo, $3 off). Data in Queenstown and Te Anau. There's no cell coverage on most of these tracks.

Filming kit

What I filmed these tracks with in 2023. My setup is smaller now (below). Check the drone rules in Weather and safety before you fly: conservation land needs a DOC permit.

- **Camera:** Sony a7S III (Amazon)
- **Lens:** Sony FE PZ 16-35mm f/4 G (Amazon)
- **Mic:** Rode VideoMic GO II (Amazon), now the GO II Helix

- **Tripod:** a tripod
- **Phone:** Apple iPhone 14 Pro

What I film with now

Since September 2026 I film with a smaller setup: the Pocket 4 and the Mic 3 on the trail, and the Mini 5 Pro in the air.

- **Camera:** DJI Osmo Pocket 4 (Amazon)
- **Mic:** DJI Mic 3 · 1 TX + 1 RX (Amazon). It pairs with the Pocket 4.
- **Drone:** DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon)

Weather and safety

Emergency: 111. There's no cell coverage on most of these tracks. Rent a personal locator beacon (PLB) before you go: in Te Anau at the Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre, Caltex Te Anau or Bev's Tramping Gear Hire; in Queenstown at the DOC Visitor Centre, Macpac, Small Planet Sports or Mobil Frankton. 2026 prices from the Southland Locator Beacon Trust: from NZD 30 for three days, NZD 40 for a week.

Forecasts. MetService has national park forecasts for Fiordland (with the Milford Track, Routeburn, Mackinnon Pass and Harris Saddle) and Mount Aspiring: metservice.com/mountains-and-parks. Check DOC's alerts on each track page the week before and the day before.

Tell someone. Leave your plans with a trusted contact. The AdventureSmart Outdoor Intentions form does this by email.

Rivers. Both Milford valleys become impassable in heavy rain. On any track, DOC's advice: don't cross a flooded river or stream, or if you can't find a safe way in and out, or if you're unsure. Turn back or wait for it to drop. On the Rees-Dart, watch Snowy Creek and Cattle Flat.

Avalanches and snow. Early in the season there's snow on Rees Saddle, Harris Saddle and Mackinnon Pass, and avalanche risk on the Milford can run into December. Outside the Great Walks season these are winter alpine routes.

Wind and cold. The Kepler ridge and Mackinnon Pass are exposed, with no water on the Kepler ridge. Carry warm layers even in summer.

Sandflies. Repellent, long sleeves, and keep hut doors shut.

Kea. Don't feed them. Put away loose clothing, food and gear. They're endangered.

Drones and dogs. Flying a drone on conservation land needs a DOC permit (NZD 180 for a recreational green-zone permit in 2026). No pets are allowed in national parks.

Using the GPX files

The download has a folder of GPX files: my own recordings, one per day, plus one file per track with all its days and waypoints for the huts, campsites, trailheads and passes. All timestamps have been removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
nz-day-01-rees-dart.gpx to nz-day-03-rees-dart.gpx	Days 1 to 3
nz-day-04-kepler.gpx to nz-day-06-kepler.gpx	Days 4 to 6
nz-day-07-routeburn.gpx and nz-day-08-routeburn.gpx	Days 7 and 8
nz-day-09-milford.gpx to nz-day-11-milford.gpx	Days 9 to 11
nz-rees-dart-all.gpx, nz-kepler-all.gpx, nz-routeburn-all.gpx, nz-milford-all.gpx	Each track in one file, with waypoints

Day 7 has a gap near Lake Harris, where the app stopped. Day 10 stops on the Sutherland Falls side track. Day 3 crosses the section of the Dart Track closed in 2026.

AllTrails. On a computer, sign in at alltrails.com, create a map and use Import to upload a file. It then shows up in the app. Offline maps need a paid plan.

Gaia GPS. Open the file on your phone and choose Gaia GPS, or use Import on gaiagps.com, then download the map area. **Garmin.** In Garmin Connect on the web: Training, Courses, Import. Save it as a course and send it to your watch.

Organic Maps. Download the free offline map for New Zealand's South Island, then open the GPX file on your phone and choose Organic Maps. It works fully offline. Before you leave home, check that each day shows up in your app.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

Bookings

- DOC's Great Walks booking opening dates for your season (May, 9:30 a.m. New Zealand time) and your DOC account login
- Hut and campsite prices (this guide uses 2026-27 prices)
- The guided Milford price and dates, if you go guided

Track status

- The Rees-Dart: whether the Dart Track has reopened, the Waterfall Creek bridge, and whether the Snowy Creek bridge is in
- DOC alerts for the Kepler, Routeburn and Milford the week before, and Conical Hill in early season
- The Mount Aspiring park bylaws on camping near the Routeburn, if you plan to camp off the track

Transport and entry

- Shuttle and boat timetables and prices for 2027-28 (Info & Track, Tracknet, RealNZ, Fiordland Outdoors)
- Whether Info & Track runs to Chinamans Bluff again
- NZeTA and levy fees, through the official Immigration New Zealand app or website only

Conditions and your stuff

- MetService park forecasts each evening, and river levels after rain
- A PLB, offline maps, insect repellent, and a pot and utensils for the huts

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	TRANSPORT
1	18.8 (30.3)	Rees-Dart: Muddy Creek to Dart Hut	Dart Hut	Info & Track from Queenstown
2	12.1 (19.4)	Dart Hut to Daleys Flat Hut	Daleys Flat Hut	
3	11.5 (18.6)	Daleys Flat Hut to Chinamans Bluff	Queenstown	Shuttle (closed 2026)
4	9.8 (15.8)	Kepler: car park to Luxmore Hut	Luxmore Hut	Bus, taxi or walk
5	21.9 (35.2)	Luxmore Hut to Moturau Hut	Moturau Hut	
6	12.3 (19.9)	Moturau Hut to Te Anau	Te Anau	Or bus, Rainbow Reach
7	11.4 (18.3)	Routeburn: Shelter to Lake Wilson	My tent	Info & Track
8	14.5 (23.4)	Lake Wilson to The Divide	Queenstown	Bus from The Divide
9	13.1 (21.1)	Milford: Glade House to Pompolona	Lodge	Boat from Te Anau Downs the day before
10	13.5 (21.7)	Pompolona to Quintin	Lodge	
11	15.9 (25.6)	Quintin to Sandfly Point	Milford Sound	Boat to Milford Sound
Total	**154.8 (249.1)**	**About 23,400 ft up**		

Huts. Independent Milford: Clinton, Mintaro, Dumpling. Kepler: Luxmore, Iris Burn, Moturau. Routeburn: Routeburn Flats, Routeburn Falls, Lake Mackenzie.

Book at bookings.doc.govt.nz, opening days in May, 9:30 a.m. NZT. **Transport:** Info & Track, Tracknet, RealNZ boats. **Weather:** MetService park forecasts. **Emergency:** 111, and carry a PLB.

About this guide

New Zealand Hiking Guide: Rees-Dart, Kepler, Routeburn and Milford, by Kraig Adams. 2026-27 season edition, updated September 2026.

I walked these four tracks between November 10 and 28, 2023, and made a film about each one, and a 45-minute film of all four: Hiking 160 miles Across New Zealand. The track films are Rees-Dart, Kepler, Routeburn and Milford. Everything in first person comes from that trip, my films, my GPS recordings and my receipts. Hut, booking, transport and safety facts were checked on official DOC and operator pages on September 26, 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

Paid links, no sponsors. The gear links in this guide are paid links: I earn a commission if you buy through them, at no extra cost to you. Nobody paid for a mention in this guide, and it isn't sponsored.

Safety. Hiking in New Zealand's mountains has real risks: weather, rivers, avalanches, cold and remote country. This guide describes my trip and what I found, not current conditions. Tracks, rules, prices and timetables change. Check DOC's alerts and the forecast, follow local rules and signs, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

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Credits. Photos are mine, from my trip. GPX files are my own recordings. Maps © OpenStreetMap contributors, openstreetmap.org/copyright (ODbL). Relief: Mapzen Terrain Tiles, from SRTM and the LINZ 8 m digital elevation model (Land Information New Zealand, CC BY 4.0). Hut, track and price facts: Department of Conservation, doc.govt.nz.