

Kopuwait Conservation Area



Vehicle access

Kopuwait has four vehicle entry points: the northern entrance via Nevis Road near Duffers Saddle, the eastern entrances (Symes Road and Waikaia Bush Road), and the southern entrance via Waikaia-Whitecoomb Road.

Nevis Rd to Old Woman Hut	7 km
Nevis Rd to Hyde Rock	28 km
SH8 to top of Symes Rd	9 km
Top of Symes Road to Obelisk	2 km
Top of Symes Road to Hyde Rock	6 km
Hyde Rock to Waikaia Bush Rd	7 km
Waikaia Bush Rd to Potters No. 2	5 km
Whitecoomb to Waikaia Bush Rd (not maintained, suitable for 4WD only in good conditions)	14 km

Vehicle use

Motorbikes and 4WD vehicles are permitted within Kopuwait on the formed roads marked on the map. Roads are unmetalled, rough and often wet, so drivers should have experience in tough conditions. Stay on the formed, marked roads and do not widen them. Travel in groups; if winching is necessary, use another vehicle rather than landscape features to avoid damaging the landscape.

- Share the track with other users – give way to walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- Fire restrictions apply to all conservation land. We recommend you fit spark arrestors to vehicle exhausts.
- Several access roads cross private land. Respect the landowner's livestock and property: leave gates as you find them.

Weather

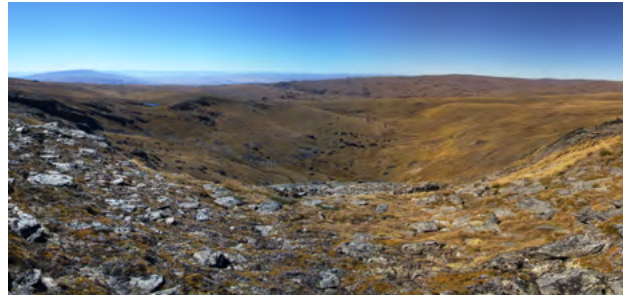
Extreme weather is common throughout the year in this area. In winter the ranges are blanketed in snow; in summer the warm, pleasant conditions can give way in minutes to freezing temperatures, high winds and severe, disorientating white-outs. Sensible clothing and footwear is essential. DOC's Alexandra Office can advise on current conditions.

Backcountry huts

- The 6-bunk Old Woman Hut, 7 km south of Nevis Road, near Duffers Saddle.
- The 3-bunk Boundary Hut and 5-bunk Nicholsons Hut, in the upper Fraser basin.
- The 6-bunk Junction Hut, at the junction of the Pomahaka and Little Pomahaka rivers.

The Old Woman and Junction huts are 'standard' huts – adults pay \$5 a night. Both huts have an honesty box, and hut tickets can be bought from DOC offices. Boundary and Nicholson huts are 'basic' huts, free of charge.

Note: *Junction Hut is jointly owned by DOC and the Gunn family and is closed for the autumn muster (1 April to the second week of May).*



▲ Old Woman Range – Cirque Basin Upper Fraser. Photo: Barry Wills

For more information and current conditions
Contact DOC's Alexandra Office or Wanaka Office:

DOC Alexandra

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43 Dunstan Road, Alexandra 9320
Phone: 03 440 2040
alexandra@doc.govt.nz

DOC Wanaka

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or conservation emergencies
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www.adventuresmart.co.nz



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

The legend of Kopuwai

A rapuwai pakiwaitara (story) recalls a time when hunting parties from coastal settlements venturing into the interior often disappeared without trace. A giant named Kopuwai, who lived near the Clutha/Mata-Au River and preyed on humans with a pack of ferocious two-headed dogs, was responsible. A party from the Kaitangata area came across Kopuwai, who killed all of them except for a young woman named Kaiamio – whom he took as his slave.

The fearsome Kopuwai had one weakness: warm, north-westerly winds made him sleepy. He knew Kaiamio would attempt to escape when he nodded off, so whenever he felt drowsy, Kopuwai tied a flax taura/rope to her arm; if either of them moved, he'd know that she was still there. Despite this, Kaiamio was able to outwit him and escape. She undid the taura and tied it to a nearby rush/wīwī – when the giant stirred, he felt the rope give and take as if Kaiamio was still tethered to him.

Kopuwai was enraged to find Kaiamio was gone when he woke. He picked up her scent in the wind along the Mata-Au. To recapture her, he swallowed up most of the river – living up to his name, 'water swallower' – leaving the riverbed dry for some time.

In the meantime, Kaiamio had escaped to her home on the coast. Seeking her revenge on Kopuwai, she returned with a party of warriors and waited for the north-westerly wind to put the giant to sleep. When the wind arrived, the warriors blocked the giant's cave with dry bracken and ferns, and lit them.

The smoke finally woke Kopuwai, who tried to escape through an opening in the cave's roof. As he emerged, Kaiamio's war party beat him to death. His dogs, away hunting, returned to find their master gone. The dogs eventually passed away and became the rocky outcrops on hilltops between the Old Man Range/Kopuwai and South Canterbury.

Today, Kopuwai lives on at the heart of the conservation area as the 26-m rock tor 'Kopuwai', also known as 'the Obelisk' or 'Old Man Rock'. The area around the rock is the Kopuwai Historic Reserve, a Ngāi Tahu Treaty settlement outcome. It is a wāhi taoka – a special place.



Obelisk-Kopuwai. Photo: Rob Brown

Kopuwai Conservation Area

Kopuwai Conservation Area includes the upper reaches of both the Old Woman and the Old Man ranges. A vast area of 20,000 ha dotted with distinctive schist rock tors, Kopuwai forms an imposing backdrop to the Clutha/Mata-Au valley. It runs from 800 m above sea level to 1,682 m at the Obelisk/Kopuwai on the Old Man Range. Due to the low average annual temperature (close to 0°C on the exposed summit crest), the ranges are bisected by fields of freeze-thaw hummocks and mounds, creating a wave-like effect across the slopes and basins.

History

European history in Kopuwai revolves around gold mining and farming. Extensive gold deposits were found in Potters No. 2, Fraser basin and Omeo Gully in the gold rush era. Many miners died in the harsh winters here.

Several stirring architectural features remain from the era. Mitchells Cottage, at the bottom of Symes Road, is one of the best examples of Central Otago dry stone architecture and gives an insight into domestic mining life. This modest miner's cottage survives in a splendid setting with stone-walled garden and sheep pen surrounded by massive schist tors.

Halfway up the Old Man Range and a 5-min walk from Symes Road is Whites Hut, a stone cottage built by Andrew Mitchell for his business partner James White. It sits among tussock in a landscape marked by gold mining of 'Whites Reef' in the 1880s. Its great views make it a popular picnic spot.

Recreation and hunting

The area's hummock fields, tops and valleys provide a wide range of recreation and wilderness experiences: 4WD on formed roads, mountain biking, horse riding, tramping, discovering gold diggings, cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing.

Nestled in the ranges are the headwaters and alpine basins of Campbell Creek and the Pomahaka and Fraser rivers. The ranges are bisected by steep gullies that add to the landscape's remarkable diversity.

Recreational deer hunting is encouraged in the conservation area – get permits, access and hunting area information from DOC's Alexandra Office, or online at www.doc.govt.nz/hunting

If you are hunting with a firearm you must:

- ▶ hold a current New Zealand firearms licence
- ▶ follow the Arms Code www.police.govt.nz/advice/firearms-and-safety/arms-code
- ▶ follow the Seven Basic Rules of firearm safety at www.mountainsafety.org.nz/resources/toolbox/firearms-safety

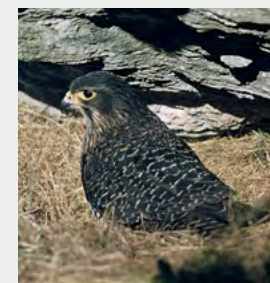
Plants and animals

Kopuwai has remarkably diverse flora and fauna. The ground cover is dwarf, tundra-like vegetation of wind-blasted cushion plants. Low-growing dracophyllum dominates these areas, along with several mountain daisies.



Hebeella caespitosa. Photo: Craig Wilson

At higher altitudes blue tussock is prevalent, with other small native grasses and occasional patches of taller and slim snow tussock. Narrow-leaved snow tussock dominates the landscape lower down. Snow can linger beyond winter for several months; wet snow banks host small cushion-forming herbs. There are extensive wetlands of bogs, seepages and tarns in the headwaters of Fraser River and Campbell Creek.



NZ falcon. Photo: James Reardon

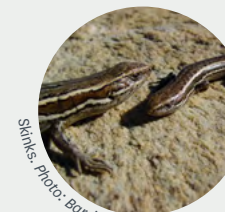
There is also a wealth of birdlife: grey warbler/riroriro, silvereye/tauhou, California quail and other introduced birds live among the lower-altitude shrubs. In open tussock you may see pipits/pīhoihoi, South Island pied oystercatchers/tōrea, banded dotterels/tūturiwhatu, skylarks, black-backed gulls, redpolls and yellowhammers. The Australasian harrier/kāhu is a common sight overhead, and you may also see the rare New Zealand falcon/kārearea.



Tiger moth larvae. Photo: Brian Patrick



Alpine grasshopper. Photo: Brian Patrick



Skinks. Photo: Barrie Wills

Kopuwai is also home to sub-alpine lizards, beetles, grasshoppers, weta, spiders and moths – many found nowhere else in the world – that help maintain the natural balance of this unique landscape.

Shek Harn Historic Reserve

1 hr, 3 km (return from Fraser Dam car park)



The road to Shek Harn, off the Fraser Dam Road, is for dry weather only. Shek Harn is Cantonese for 'big stone ditch', and the historic reserve has remains of early alluvial gold workings and Chinese dwellings. The most impressive is the Long House, about 2 km above Fraser Dam.

Obelisk Loop Track

3 hr, 10 km (complete loop from the Obelisk)



From Kopuwai, the Obelisk Loop Track joins the Omeo Gully and Prospect Hill tracks. It offers great views as it crosses the rolling and rocky Old Man Range.

Prospect Hill Track

6-8 hr, 20 km (return) from Fraser Dam Road to Obelisk Loop Track



A favourite mountain biking trip is to head up this track, then cross over and down the Omeo Gully Track. Omeo is steeper, so is better as the downhill leg of your journey. The rolling spurs, gullies, tussock and herbfields on the range tops are part of an extraordinary landscape. The view includes the Manuherikia basin and the Old Woman, Cairnmuir, Dunstan and Raggedy ranges.

In winter the Prospect Hill Track provides access to The Sisters for backcountry skiing.

Omeo Gully Track

6 hr, 19 km (return) from Fraser Dam Road to Obelisk Loop Track



One of Otago's most isolated, highest and least-known gold fields; the walk is signposted from the car park on Omeo Gully Road, 1 km up Fraser Dam Road. Omeo's gold workings are distinctive: high sluice faces, deeply revetted tail races, tall stacked tailings and remains of dwellings. The track is steep, so is best as the downhill leg of a bike ride. The track is closed for lambing between 15 October and 15 November.

The Sisters Track

2 hr 30 min, 12 km (one way) from Prospect Hill track junction to Kopuwai Ridge 4WD track Road



You reach this track via a big hill climb up Prospect Hill Track, the even steeper Omeo Gully Track or from the Kopuwai Ridge 4WD Road. There are herbfields and snow tussocks, and excellent views of the Alexandra basin, the Old Woman Range and The Remarkables beyond. This track is under snow in winter and is closed for lambing between 15 October and 15 November.

Nicholsons Hut via Nicholsons Track

30 min, 3 km (one way) from top of Symes Road



This steep track goes through herb fields, wetlands and tussock, and is under snow in winter.



Nicholsons Hut, upper Fraser basin. Photo by Barry Willis

Kopuwai/Obelisk

12 km (one way) from the bottom of Symes Road to the Obelisk



This distinctive rock tor in the heart of the Kopuwai Historic Reserve is the area's highest point (1,682 m). It offers a commanding 360° view of Stewart Island/Rakiura in the south, the Rock and Pillars to the east, Aoraki/Mount Cook to the north, and mountains Aspiring/Tititea and Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi in the west.

Drive up Symes Road from Fruitlands. At the top of the Old Man Range, turn right and continue along the ridgeline for about 2 km to the Obelisk viewpoint. This is recommended for 4WD vehicles only. Do not park near the transmitter building as its waves can affect vehicle electronics.

The Obelisk sits on an exposed range where temperature changes can be sudden – dress for the conditions. This area is not recommended in winter as it is blanketed in snow and can be very cold.

Alpine battery

30 min, less than 1 km (one way) from Kopuwai Ridge 4WD Road



In 1882 a 10-stamp battery and water wheel were erected here. There isn't a defined track; the descent on foot takes around 30 min.

Potters No. 2 Tramping Track – huts to grave

1 hr, 3 km (return) from end of Potters No. 2 4WD access road to grave site



Potters No. 2 is a protected historic site in the Campbell Creek catchment. Several alluvial gold diggings were worked here between the 1860s and 1900s, and interesting relics remain. You can get there from Waikaia Bush Road; it has always been difficult to reach and is inaccessible in winter – as many as 35 miners died in the 'great snow' of 1863 as they tried to retreat off the range to safety.

Your safety is your responsibility



Above 1,000 m, temperatures can drop quickly, even in mid-summer. Please take warm and windproof clothing, maps and GPS as fog can quickly roll in making navigation difficult. 4WD vehicles should travel in pairs, with recovery gear.



There is avalanche terrain in this area.

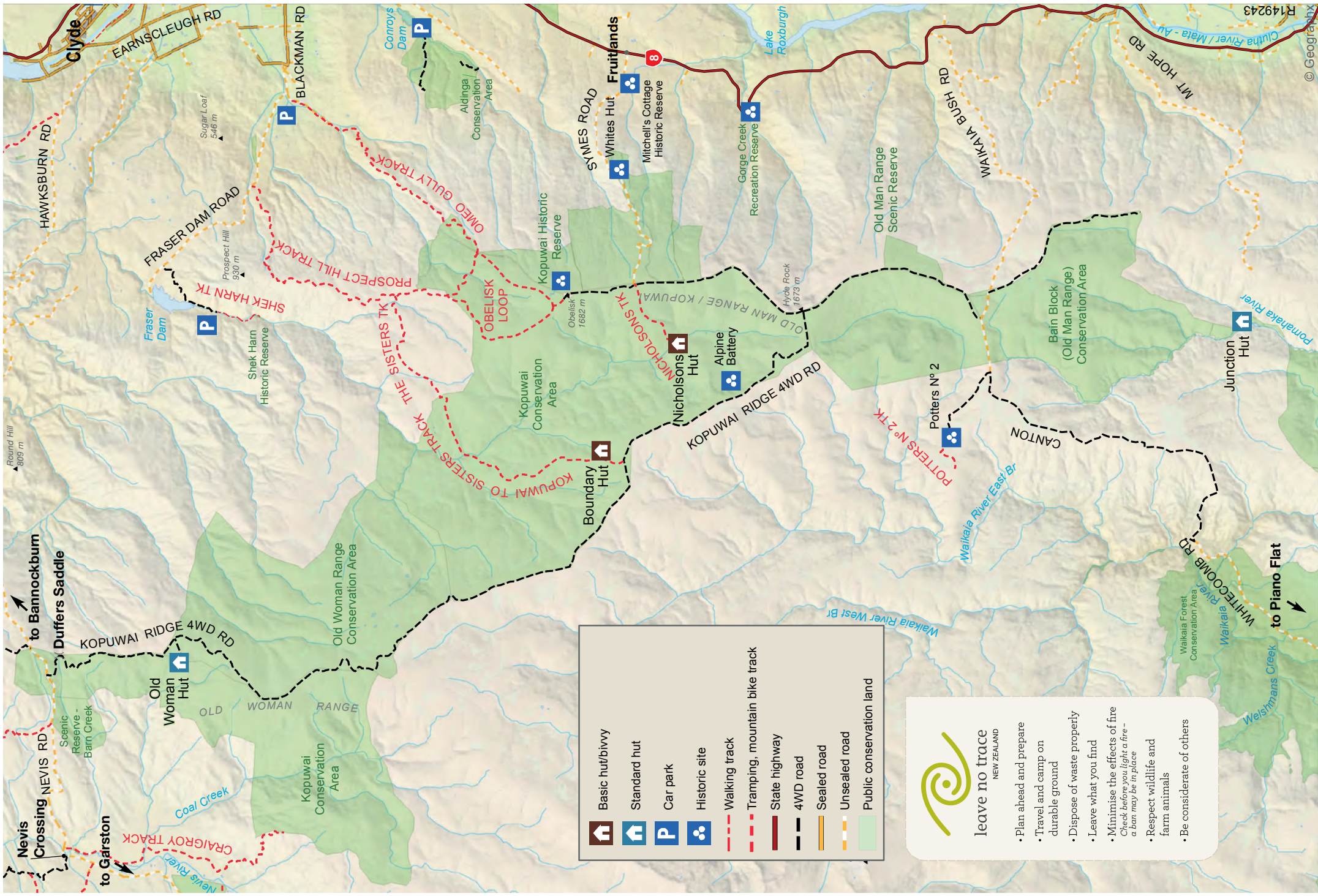
Be prepared. Visit www.doc.govt.nz/avalanche and www.avalanche.net.nz for specific information about Kopuwai.



5 simple rules to help you stay safe:

1. Plan your trip
2. Tell someone
3. Be aware of the weather
4. Know your limits
5. Take sufficient supplies

For more information visit: mountainsafety.org.nz



	Basic hut/bivvy
	Standard hut
	Car park
	Historic site
	Walking track
	Tramping, mountain bike track
	State highway
	4WD road
	Sealed road
	Unsealed road
	Public conservation land

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