How does ATES apply in Nelson Lakes National Park?

Nelson Lakes National Park contains a large amount of avalanche terrain.

There are an number of relatively easy accessible areas that contain **challenging** avalanche terrain while seasonal snow is present. There are some significant areas of **complex** terrain.

All visitors should consider carefully the class of avalanche terrain they are going into and check the avalanche-danger advisory prior to undertaking any trip.

Avalanche season

The avalanche season can extend from May into November. Most avalanches occur during winter storms, or in spring/ early summer when warmer temperatures or rain make the snow unstable. Even if you cannot see snow from the track there may be enough snow in the upper slopes to form an avalanche that could reach the track. Avalanches can also occur outside of these times on some of the higher mountains in the area. During winter and spring, avalanches can reach a number of tracks.

Travers Sabine and Blue Lake Tracks

The Travers-Sabine circuit and Blue Lake track cross many known avalanche paths.

Hopeless Hut

Hopeless Hut sits at the base of a known large avalanche path. Due to the risk of a major destructive avalanche, the area is monitored and the hut may be closed.

John Tait Hut

John Tait hut is located at the bottom of a large avalanche path that opened in 2008. Due to the risk of a major destructive avalanche, the area is monitored and the hut may be closed.

Be avalanche aware!

If you are going into places avalanches could occur, make sure you:

- have checked the ATES class for where you want to go and the BAA for the avalanche rating
- have the skills for the ATES class you are going into
- take an avalanche transceiver, a snow shovel and a probe. Know how to use these tools!

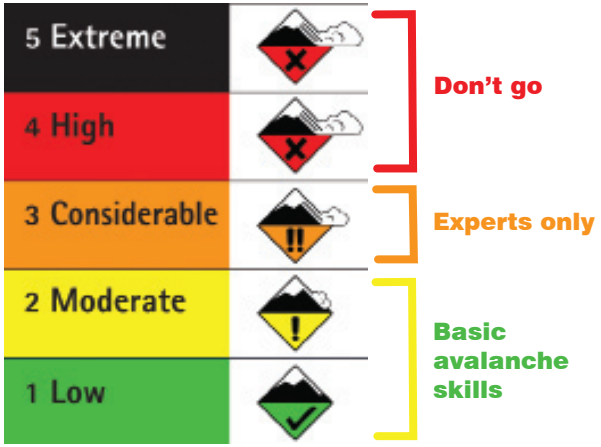
Risk statement

ATES and the BAA should be used together for evaluating hazards and managing personal risk in the backcountry.

There are inherent risks in backcountry travel, and most of the routes described here will at times be unsafe due to potential snow avalanches. The Department of Conservation has done its best to provide accurate information describing the terrain characteristics typical of each general region, based on its current knowledge. However, it is up to you to use this information to make your own risk-management decisions and learn the necessary skills for safe backcountry travel, to access additional trip-planning materials, and to exercise caution while travelling in backcountry areas. This information is no substitute for experience and good judgement.

BAA – Backcountry Avalanche Advisory

The Backcountry Avalanche Advisory is provided by the Mountain Safety Council, and is available at **www.avalanche.net.nz**



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be avalanche alert

AVALANCHE TERRAIN RATINGS

NELSON LAKES NATIONAL PARK

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Avalanches are part of life in the mountains. They can occur in any season, but are more common in winter and spring. Anytime that snow and steep slopes are combined there is potential for an avalanche.

Is it worth the risk??

If you travel through backcountry terrain exposed to avalanches, you must accept that you are taking a risk. You need to understand these risks before setting out.

What is the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale system (ATES)?

The traditional model for rating avalanche danger in New Zealand – the Backcountry Avalanche Advisory – is based on the stability of snow. The advisory may be updated on a daily basis as stability changes regularly through weather changes and storms. Terrain does not change with the weather. The angle and shape of the ground or the number of established avalanche paths do not vary. By using the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES), you can begin to measure your skills, experience and risk tolerance against the terrain you plan to travel in.

Do I still need to read the Backcountry Avalanche Advisory (BAA)?

Yes – if a BAA is available you should use it to help decide if your trip 'is worth the risk'.

When the avalanche advisory is rated 'moderate' or above, you should select very conservative terrain. Alternatively, when the avalanche advisory is rated 'low', it might be appropriate to consider that next level of terrain you have been contemplating.

The two scales should be used together to appropriately manage your risk in the backcountry.

The Backcountry Avalanche Advisory is provided by the Mountain Safety Council, and is available at www.avalanche.net.nz and at DOC visitor centres.

When should I use this system?

These ratings are intended as a supplement to your pre-trip planning material. When planning your trip, read the guidebook, study maps and photos, talk to friends, check weather and avalanche conditions, and refer to the ATES ratings. This combination will give you a better sense of the route you are choosing.

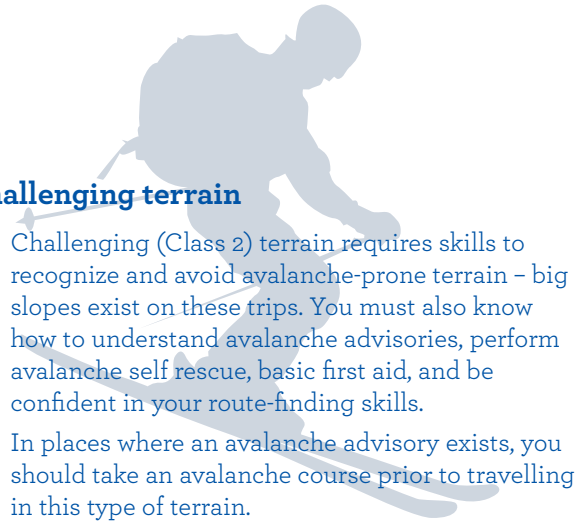
ATES – Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale

Description	Class	Terrain criteria
Simple	1	Exposure to low-angle or primarily forested terrain. Some forest or bush openings may involve the run-out zones of infrequent avalanches. Many options to reduce or eliminate exposure. No glacier travel.
Challenging	2	Exposure to well defined avalanche paths, starting zones or terrain traps; options exist to reduce or eliminate exposure with careful route finding. Glacier travel is straight forward, but crevasse hazards may exist.
Complex	3	Exposure to multiple, overlapping avalanche paths or large expanses of steep, open terrain; multiple avalanche starting zones and terrain traps below; minimal options to reduce exposure. Complicated glacier travel with extensive crevasse bands or icefalls.

How much experience do I need for the trip I am planning?

Simple terrain

- Simple (Class 1) terrain requires common sense, proper equipment, first aid skills, and the discipline to respect avalanche warnings. Simple terrain is usually low-avalanche risk, ideal for people gaining backcountry experience.
- These trips may not be entirely free from avalanche hazards. On days when the Backcountry Avalanche Advisory is rated 'considerable' or higher, you may want to re-think any backcountry travel that has exposure to avalanches, e.g. stay within the boundaries of a ski area.
- If there is no advisory, you or someone in your group should have done an avalanche-awareness course.



Challenging terrain

- Challenging (Class 2) terrain requires skills to recognize and avoid avalanche-prone terrain – big slopes exist on these trips. You must also know how to understand avalanche advisories, perform avalanche self rescue, basic first aid, and be confident in your route-finding skills.
- In places where an avalanche advisory exists, you should take an avalanche course prior to travelling in this type of terrain.
- If there is no advisory you or someone in your group should have done a four-day avalanche course.
- If you are unsure of your own, or your group's ability to navigate through avalanche terrain – consider hiring a professional guide, normally an NZMGA qualified guide.

Complex terrain

- Complex (Class 3) terrain demands a strong group with years of critical decision-making experience in avalanche terrain. There can be no safe options on these trips, forcing exposure to big slopes.
- A recommended minimum is that you, or someone in your group, should have taken a four-day avalanche course and have several years of backcountry experience. Be prepared! Check the avalanche advisory regularly, and ensure everyone in your group is up for the task and aware of the risk.
- If there is no advisory, then it is recommended that everyone in the group has done the four-day course. This is serious country – not a place to consider unless you're confident in the skills of your group.
- If you are uncertain, hiring a professional NZMGA qualified guide is recommended.