

CANTERBURY

# Walks in the Mount Somers area



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

## Nau mai, haere mai

Welcome to Mt Somers, one of the best climbing areas in Canterbury. The Mt Somers Track is a 1–2 day circuit around Mt Somers, linking the popular Pinnacles and Woolshed Creek huts. The track was created by the Mt Somers Walkways Society, which was established in 1983 and comprises both Mt Somers and Staveley locals. While the track is now managed by the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC), there is still a close association between the two organisations.

If you intend to walk only one way from Woolshed Creek car park and require vehicle transport, a local service is available (phone **03 303 0809** before you start your trip).



Approaching Woolshed Creek Hut. Photo Hilary Iles

## Getting there

Starting points for the Mt Somers Track are either from Staveley or Mt Somers township.

From Staveley, turn off Inland Scenic Route 72 at Staveley and follow the road to the Sharplin Falls car park, which has toilets and an information panel.

From Mt Somers township, follow Ashburton Gorge Road for approximately 10km before turning right onto Jig Road, which will take you to the Woolshed Creek picnic area. Here you will find a large grassy, sheltered picnic area with toilets and information.

## Hunting

Recreational hunting is allowed on public conservation land around Mt Somers, though hunting is not allowed in Sharplin Falls Scenic Reserve. A DOC permit must be carried at all times. Information on hunting on public conservation land and hunting permits is available at [www.doc.govt.nz/canterbury-hunting](http://www.doc.govt.nz/canterbury-hunting).

## Tangata whenua – first people of the land

Hine Paaka, a huge mataī, stood nobly on the edge of the inland foothills near an important north–south route between the hills and extensive swamps. Her great height and elevation made her stand out on the plains from a distance. She was a landmark of great importance.

Hine Paaka is named after the wife of Kāi Tahu chief, Maru, who lived in the late 1600s. For hundreds of year, bird-catching parties sought out this tree, travelling from as far away as Kaiapoi and Banks Peninsula. In the autumn and early winter when berries were ripe, rōpū (parties) would make the long journey to set snare perches or use birding spears to catch kākā, kererū and other birds in the surrounding forests. Hine Paaka finally blew down in 1945.

## European history

Sawmilling was a major factor in the development of the Staveley area. The first mill began operation in 1876 at Bushside and was closely followed by others.

Staveley was the economic centre of the foothills area and became a thriving business and industrial centre with a church, hall, butchery, bakery, general store, creamery, blacksmith shop, sawmill, lime quarry and kilns – a great contrast with the Staveley of today!

Mt Somers township grew with the development of good transport links and the exploitation of resources in the area. Coal was discovered in the Mt Somers area in 1856, with a commercial coal mine in operation by 1864. This was soon followed by a stone quarry and lime kilns.

Mining development was hampered by a lack of suitable transport. This was partially solved by the completion of a branch railway line in 1886 connecting Mt Somers to the South Island's main trunk line.

However, getting coal and limestone to Mt Somers was still a problem. This was resolved by the construction of tramways from the mines and quarries to the railhead. The route of one of these tramways follows the Woolshed Creek access road and can be seen from Ashburton Gorge Road near Buxton Kilns.



## Native plants

The forest along the track is a vestige of the extensive tracts that once covered the foothills. Catastrophic fires started accidentally or to clear the land for farming swept through, destroying the forest. Later, burning of alpine tussock reduced the height at which forest occurs, except for a band on Mt Somers.

The forest remnant is dominated by beech, especially tawhairauriki / mountain beech with some tawhai / silver beech occupying the most favourable sites. Other trees include southern rātā, māpou, pāpāuma / broadleaf, putaputawētā / marbleleaf, toatoa / mountain celery pine and houhere / mountain ribbonwood.

Above the treeline, subalpine scrub includes snow tōtara, mountain neinei, wharariki / mountain flax, snow tussock and snowberry.

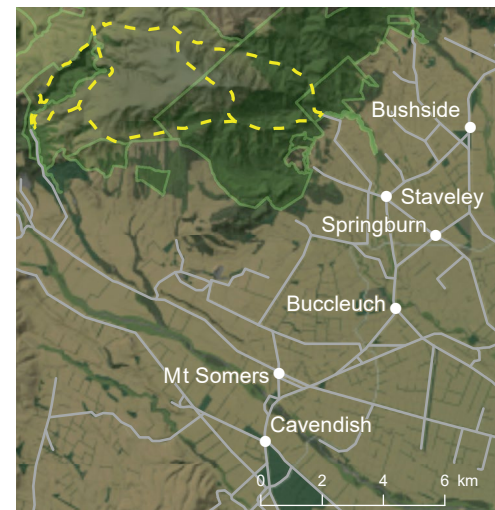
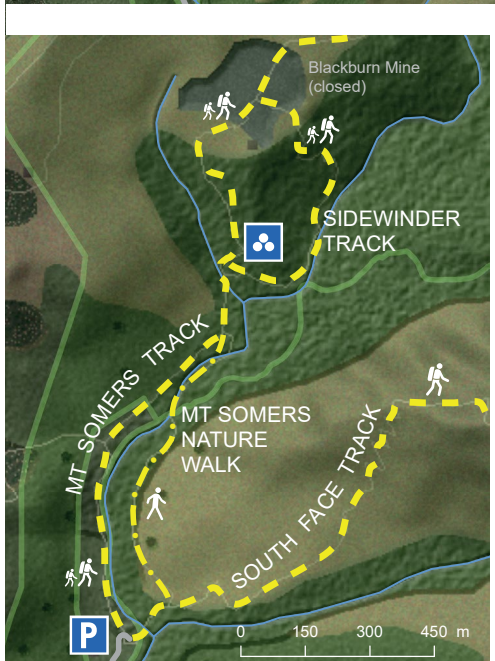
## Native animals

Korimako / bellbird and tauhou / silvereye are the most common native birds in the forested areas, although tītītipounamu / rifleman, pīwakawaka / fantail and miromiro / tomtit are also present. Above the bushline, kārearea / New Zealand falcon, pīhoihoi / New Zealand pipit and kāhu / Australasian harrier may be seen.

The Bluff wētā (*Deinacrida elegans*) is found in the Mt Somers area. With distinctive red, black and white banded legs, they can weigh up to 16 g or about half the weight of a mouse. This high-altitude giant wētā has only been found in the Kaikoura ranges and Mt Somers, and belongs to an ancient genus that is of similar antiquity to the rhyolite that makes up the mountain!



Bluff wētā. Photo: Samtheanimalman



	Car park		Served hut				
	Historic site		Shelter				
	Information		Toilet				
	Picnic area						

Note: Though both Pinnacles and Woolshed Creek huts are reached on tracks classified as easy tramping tracks, the route to Pinnacles Hut is considerably more challenging.

After a period of heavy rain, some side streams may be dangerous to cross. These include:

- ▶ Pony Stream between Sharplin Falls car park and Pinnacles Hut on the Mt Somers Track
- ▶ the unnamed stream between Woolshed Creek Hut and the Bus Stop on the Bus Stop Track
- ▶ Woolshed Creek on the Mt Somers Nature Walk.

The map in this brochure is a guide only and is not a substitute for a topographical map. Use map series NZTopo50 BX19 and BX20.

All track times and distances are one way

## MT SOMERS TRACK

**Sharplin Falls car park to Pinnacles Hut**  
3.5 hr, 5.8 km



From Sharplin Falls car park, the path follows Bowyers Stream through tawhairauriki/ mountain beech forest before climbing steeply up to Duke Knob (739 m). The track then drops back into Bowyers Stream. It eventually crosses a bridge to the true right bank and then continues on up to Pinnacles Hut.

**Pinnacles Hut to Woolshed Creek Hut**  
3 hr, 6.2 km



Pinnacles Hut is named after the rock formations on the northern face of Mt Somers, formed by the cooling of very hot, sticky lava flows some 90 million years ago.

From the hut, follow markers through tussock and subalpine scrub up to the Mt Somers saddle (1170 m). It is a steady climb to the saddle, where views of the Taylor and Old Man ranges dominate the scenery. On the descent towards Morgan Stream, a sign indicates a short side trip to view some interesting boulder features referred to as water caves. Returning to the main track, follow the markers across Morgan Stream and Woolshed Creek to Woolshed Creek Hut.



View from Mt Somers. Photo: Marcel Schuering

**Woolshed Creek Hut to Woolshed Creek car park**  
3 hr, 5.1 km



From Woolshed Creek Hut, walk downstream before climbing up to the high point (934 m), where you can enjoy superb views of the upper Ashburton Gorge. The track then descends to the Blackburn Mine before following the tramway back to the Woolshed Creek car park.

Note: It is easiest to follow the vehicle track from Woolshed Creek Hut and then rejoin the Mt Somers Track near Blackburn Mine.

## SOUTH FACE TRACK

**Woolshed Creek car park to Sharplin Falls car park**  
7 hr, 11.6 km



From Woolshed Creek car park, cross Woolshed Creek and climb steeply up a rocky ridge. The track then travels around the southern face of Mt Somers through a mix of open grassland and forest. This section of track eventually rises to its highest point (1080 m) near the Mt Somers Summit Track junction. The Acland Shelter provides welcome shelter and rest about 1.5 hr (4 km) before the junction. The shelter is not intended to be used overnight.

The final steep downhill section is through regenerating forest areas, but is open enough to continue to provide interesting views to the east.

## SIDEWINDER TRACK

45 min, 1 km



This steep track begins with a short walk through a small pocket of tawhai/ silver beech that survived the fires which swept through the Ashburton Gorge. The track then climbs steeply up to and through the tailings of the old Blackburn Mine, where it links with the Mt Somers Track to provide either a return trip back to the Woolshed Creek car park or a chance to continue on to Woolshed Creek Hut.

## MT SOMERS NATURE WALK

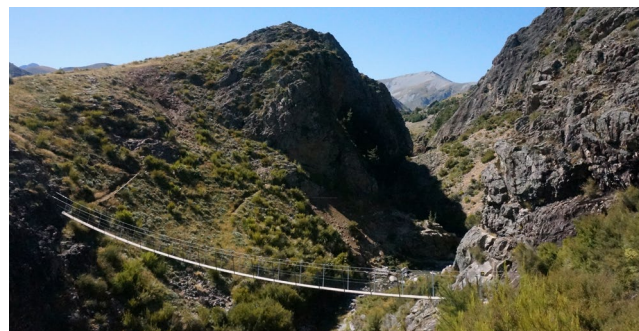
30 min, 1 km



Cross the bridge over Woolshed Creek before continuing along the true left bank. Then, ford the river to the right bank and climb out through the dross (old coal dust) screened from coal at the bottom of the jig. Return to the Woolshed Creek car park.



Take care fording the river.  
If in any doubt, return the way you came.



Swing bridge near Woolshed Creek. Photo: Julia Wells

## MT SOMERS SUMMIT TRACK

**Sharplin Falls car park to Te Kiekie/Mt Somers summit**  
3.5 hr, 5.7 km



The summit (1688 m) and surrounding plateau is worth a visit, with 360-degree views of the surrounding mountains and coastal plain.



In winter, the south face of Mt Somers gets very little sunlight, making the snow hard and icy. An ice axe, crampons and some mountaineering experience are required to safely reach the summit. The summit of Mt Somers is very exposed to southerly fronts.

## TE KIEKIE ROUTE



**From the junction with Mt Somers Track to Mt Somers summit**  
2 hr, 2.3 km

The Te Kiekie Route provides a link to the summit from the Mt Somers Track and provides a side trip option if walking this track. It is also a great day trip option if you are staying at Pinnacles Hut. During the winter months, an ice axe, crampons and some mountaineering experience may be required to safely reach the summit. The summit of Mt Somers is very exposed to southerly fronts.

## BUS STOP TRACK



**Woolshed Creek Hut to Mt Somers Track (south face)**  
2 hr, 4.6 km

This route takes in dynamic scenery, with regenerating tawhairauriki/ mountain beech forest within a landscape of waterfalls, deep icy pools and rocky tors. From the hut, the track climbs 330 m to a local feature known as the Bus Stop. From here, the track crosses the western face of Mt Somers, where it links with the South Face Track. The South Face Track can then either be followed to Woolshed Creek car park or to Sharplin Falls car park.

Note: The Mt Somers Track is the easiest way to get to and from Woolshed Creek Hut. The Bus Stop Track is the more challenging option but makes for a good round trip.

## Huts and campsites

There are two huts on the Mt Somers Track. Woolshed Creek Hut sleeps 26 on sleeping platforms, while Pinnacles Hut sleeps 19 on single and double bunks. Water is supplied from either a rainwater tank or directly from a stream. All drinking water should be boiled before use.

Both huts have solid fuel stoves for heating but cooking facilities and utensils are not provided.

Annual hut passes may be used for Pinnacles and Woolshed Creek huts but advance booking is essential.

Book online at [www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/online-bookings](http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/online-bookings).

There are also bookable camp sites close to the huts, though there is very limited opportunity near Pinnacles Hut (6 sites).



Woolshed Creek Hut (left), Pinnacles Hut (right). Photos: Brian Dobbie

## Care for Aotearoa



### Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Follow any rules restricting dogs, fires, drones or vehicles.



### Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by planning and preparing for your trip.



### Keep NZ clean

Take all rubbish with you and use toilets where provided.



### Show respect

Respect others, respect culture.



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tiaki  
THE NATIONAL TRUST

To learn more about staying safe in the outdoors, visit [www.adventuresmart.org.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.org.nz). In an emergency dial 111.

## Further information

### Raukapuka / Geraldine Office

13 North Terrace Road  
PO Box 33  
Geraldine 7956

**PHONE: 03 693 1010**

**EMAIL: [esienquiries@doc.govt.nz](mailto:esienquiries@doc.govt.nz)**

[www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**

**Report any safety hazards  
or conservation emergencies**  
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111



BETWEEN WATERWAYS

### Check, Clean, Dry

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

Cover: Looking into the Stour valley. *Photo: DOC*

This information was accurate at the time of printing. For the latest information on DOC's policies and facilities, visit [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz).

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o Aotearoa**  
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