

After about 4 hr the track drops into the Otehake 200 m above Whaiti Stream. This stream often rises rapidly to become impossible to cross. The track begins again 25 m below the stream; climb the steep bank on the left to enter thick bush.



**Major landslides in the lower Otehake valley area (1.7 km downstream of Whaiti Stream) require care.**

One hr 30 min of similar going brings you back to the river, 200 m upstream of an island in the riverbed.

There are good campsites on the island and a hot sulphur spring in the old riverbed on the far side. The spring is small but worth a visit if the river is fordable. **Do not immerse your head in the spring as there is a risk of contracting amoebic meningitis.**

From the island you will travel in or beside the riverbed for about 1.5 km. A steep track leaves the river on the true left just before a bluff. This section of the track climbs and descends steeply to avoid a gorge in the river. It is marked but not well defined. If the river is fordable it is quicker to stay in the riverbed until the site of the old footbridge; however a deep crossing (short swim!) may be necessary in the gorge.

Otherwise, follow the track, being careful on steep and slippery sections. At an easily-missed junction in the track you can either turn right to return to the river and the site of the old Otehake footbridge, or take the left track to continue climbing. Either way you will eventually join the Lake Kaurapataka track.

*Remember: Allow plenty of time for the Otehake.*

## Site of the old Otehake Footbridge – Lake Kaurapataka – Pfeifer Creek – Taramakau River – SH73

**Time: 5 hours**

From here the going is easier. For those who chose to travel down the river from the hot springs, a marked track enters the bush on the true left about 200 m below the site of the old footbridge. It climbs steeply for about 10 min to a track junction at the eastern end of Lake Kaurapataka. Follow the Lake Kaurapataka Track along the south side of the lake. The track follows the lake edge for the first 20 min, then winds its way through lush podocarp forest a little way back from the lake.

About midway along the lake, a short side-track on the right leads to a level grassy area beside the lake suitable for a lunch stop or camp site. The track then leaves the lakeside, winding through ancient tracts of forest, dropping gently to Pfeifer Creek. The track follows the true right of Pfeifer Creek to the Taramakau valley. Watch out for stinging nettle/ongaonga growing beside the track.

Time from the site of the old Otehake footbridge: about 2 hr 30 min.

Cross Pfeifer Creek to the true left, picking up a short section of track that leads to a 4WD road. Follow this road down the Taramakau valley through grass and gorse-covered flats. Where the road runs beside a small stream, look for a large track marker on the true left riverbank. Cross the stream and pick up the track (marked with stakes).

The track winds in and out of the bush edge for about 1 km, before meeting the Otira River flood track to the Morrison footbridge. Take the right-hand branch of the track to the Otira River. Cross the Otira River (if fordable) over to SH73 at Aickens. A large marker on the opposite bank marks the crossing point.

If Otira River is too high to cross, back-track to the flood track that travels up the true right of the river to Morrison footbridge. This is a marked track but is not well maintained; it will take 3–4 hours to reach the footbridge.

### Huts

**Edwards Hut:** Serviced, 16 bunks, heating, mattresses, radio

**Otehake Hut:** Standard, 6 bunks, heating, mattresses

#### Hut fees:

Serviced huts: Adult \$15 per night, youth (11–17 years) \$7.50 per night, child (up to 10 years) free

Standard huts: Adult \$5 per night, youth (11–17 years) \$2.50 per night, child (up to 10 years) free.

Basic huts: Free

*Purchase hut tickets or passes before you leave from any DOC office or selected i-SITES.*

### Further information

For information, maps, weather forecasts and track condition updates: **Arthur's Pass National Park Visitor Centre**  
SH 73, Arthur's Pass.

Phone 03 318 9211

8.00 am – 5.00 pm (summer), 8.30 am – 4.30 pm (winter)

arthurspassvc@doc.govt.nz

www.doc.govt.nz

www.adventuresmart.org.nz

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**0800 362 468**

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**New Zealand Government**

## ROUTE GUIDE

# Edwards– Otehake

Arthur's Pass National Park



Cover: Looking up Edwards valley. Photo: Pete Brady



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

## Summary

**Time:** 2–3 days (shuttle required)

**Grade:** Route and tramping track

**Experience:** Suitable for well-equipped and experienced backcountry trampers only

**Best season:** Summer and autumn, extreme avalanche danger in winter

**Required maps:** NZTopo50: Otira BV20, Cass BV21, Moana BU20, Haupiri BU21

**Hazards:** Flooded rivers, steep drop-offs and avalanches, unmarked route

**Safety:** This route guide must be read in conjunction with *Tramping in Arthur's Pass National Park*, a free brochure with important safety information, and New Zealand's *Outdoor Safety Code*. Before setting out, check the latest track conditions and avalanche advisory with the Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre (also online at [arthurspassvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:arthurspassvc@doc.govt.nz)).

## An easier eastern crossing into the wild west

This is a high-level crossing of the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana. While it is relatively straightforward tramping up the Edwards, it's extremely slow walking on a very rough unmarked route in the Otehake.

The route on the western side is infrequently maintained (expect overgrown routes, multiple fallen trees) and should only be attempted by experienced groups. Many groups find this route takes much longer than they expect.

Carefully consider the weather, state of the rivers and your group's fitness before attempting this trip.

**Note:** *The Otehake footbridge (which may be marked in older publications and maps) has been removed, and will not be replaced.*

## Getting there

The east-coast end of the track starts beside SH73, 5 km south of Arthur's Pass village, just after the Mingha bluffs. The west-coast end of the track starts beside SH73 at Aickens, where the Taramakau River meets the Otira River.

You can leave a vehicle at the eastern side, or catch a shuttle bus. Atomic Shuttles and West Coast Shuttles both run buses between Christchurch and Greymouth each day ([www.atomictravel.co.nz](http://www.atomictravel.co.nz); [www.westcoastshuttle.co.nz](http://www.westcoastshuttle.co.nz)).

## SH73 to Edwards Hut

**Time:** 4–5 hours

Cross the Bealey River just above its confluence with the Mingha River, 5 km south of Arthur's Pass village. **If the river is high**



**and not easy to cross here, you will have problems further on, so save the trip for another day.** The track begins at the bush edge, downstream of the Edwards-Mingha confluence.

Look for the orange markers and sign on the river flat that mark the start of a 20 min track to bypass the lower Edwards gorge.

When the track emerges onto the riverbed, travel upstream on the true left for 1 hr, climbing the bank once or twice as needed. Cross the east branch of the Edwards River (difficult when high) above where it joins the main river, and pick up the marked track 100 m up the east branch on the opposite bank. The track rises and falls several times to avoid steep side-gullies, and gives the odd glimpse of waterfalls in the Edwards River canyon. Take extreme care on this part of the track as there are large drop-offs and steep sections.

The track leads to a large upland valley, emerging finally among red tussocks on the upper river flats (take care as it is easy to lose your way in the maze of tussocks). The track leads back into the forest for a short section, before emerging on the river flats with a clear view to Edwards Hut. Total time from the road is 4–5 hr, with the junction with the Edwards River East Branch being a little under halfway.

Edwards Hut is on radio link to Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre, monitored during office hours. Some groups have had difficulty reaching the visitor centre on this radio so please read the instructions carefully. Edwards Hut has a log burner for heating but you will need your own cooker and utensils.

## Edwards Hut – Taruahuna Pass – Otehake Hut

**Time:** 5 hours

From Edwards Hut continue upstream, along the true left bank over tussock flats or in the riverbed, to the summit of Taruahuna Pass. Travel is slow but on easy gradients, and is sometimes helped by well-trodden paths. The pass itself is a huge pile of mountain debris, the result of landslides from Falling Mountain triggered by a large earthquake in 1929.



**This area is subject to avalanche activity during the winter. Do not travel this route during heavy snow conditions.**

Veer right on the landslide debris towards the bottom of the slopes below Tarn Col. Scramble down through rocky terraces, moving towards the true left side of the valley, to pick up the cairned route that continues down several streams.

If the river is low, it is easier to follow the river through the shingle bluffs to its junction with Lake Sally stream.

Alternatively, where the river begins to drop away between high shingle bluffs, climb the scree spurs to gain the high terrace on the true left (look for marker poles on the crest). Follow the

terrace using a defined (but overgrown) track through the bush. The route rejoins the riverbed where the Lake Sally side river joins the Otehake. This is about 2 hr from the summit of the pass.

Ford this side river and continue down the riverbed on the true left for about 15 min, toward where bush-clad banks draw together. Pick up the marked track on the true left. Follow it through bush for about 30 min to Otehake Hut on a small bush-covered flat, just above the point where the East Branch of the Otehake joins the West Branch.

## Otehake Hut to Lake Kaurapataka track junction

**(Note: Footbridge showing on some maps has been removed)**

**Time:** 7–9 hours

Travel down the Otehake is much slower than the map suggests. The river itself cannot be followed and should be used only where the route leads to it. If you plan to travel out to the main road in one day down the Otehake, you need to be very fit and leave early.



**There are no further huts or shelters on this route, so be prepared to stay overnight if this section takes longer than expected.**

While this unmarked route does not cross over the Otehake itself, you will need to enter the stream to get around a bluff to reach the section of track that bypasses the last gorge.

There are also several side streams that can rise rapidly and become uncrossable. Consider the weather, state of the river and fitness of your group before venturing down the Otehake.

From the hut, the route sets off through bush on the true left, travelling for a short distance along a river flat but soon moving into much steeper country – characteristic of the route from here to Lake Kaurapataka. The track weaves its way above gorges and bluffs, usually 90–250 m above the river, crossing ridges and steep side streams. Much of the going is slippery with moss-covered rocks and greasy tree roots. Be careful – particularly where the ground falls away steeply towards the river.

A hand-line (15 m) may be needed to safely climb and haul packs up the northern bank of the final creek, before you descend towards Whaiti Stream. Again, take care – do not trust any hand lines left here.

From here the route is occasionally marked, but not well maintained and not always clearly defined. A large slip before Whaiti Stream is dangerous to cross. Travel off the track is very difficult so if you have not seen track markers for 100 m, you should back-track to the last known marker and look around to find the track.