

Minchin Pass to Taramakau River

Time: 3–5 hours (depending on boulder-hopping skills)

Descend into Townsend Creek along the marked route. Once in the creek bed it is difficult to get out again through the thick scrub, so you will need to boulder-hop. The large boulders and low waterfalls make travel slow and difficult.

About 1 hr from Minchin Pass, look for markers on the left to a small (approx 300 m) bypass to avoid a waterfall. Once past this the route drops back to Townsend Creek. Follow the creek to a confluence with two creeks on the true left and true right. Make sure you stay in the middle creek.

If travelling up Townsend Creek from Taramakau River, be careful not to miss the route at this junction. Here Townsend Creek becomes a secondary side-creek and seems to disappear under low bush cover, while the main stream continues up a more open course towards Koeti Pass. The point is easy to recognise by a third small creek dropping in from the west - making Townsend Creek the middle one of the three.

Beyond this confluence, travel down a steep, open creek bed; this narrows to a tight gorge where bluffs and bush hang closely overhead. The creek continues its steep descent but the gorge is fairly easy to travel when the stream is low. When the stream is high it becomes impassable.

Below the gorge the stream swings west, then north to join the Taramakau, descending more gently from the mouth of the gorge to an open L-shaped stretch of streambed. If travelling up Townsend Creek you can verify you are on the right route - the first 15 min to the gorge is in a broad open bed, turning east at right angles a few minutes from the Taramakau.



Travel in Townsend Creek can be difficult, particularly for less-experienced trampers. The trip could take longer than 3 hr, and should not be attempted after heavy rain.

Townsend Creek to Otira River

Time: 4–5 hours (route only)

From where Townsend Creek enters the Taramakau River, it is about 1 hr either upstream to Locke Stream Hut or downstream to Kiwi Hut.

To reach Locke Stream Hut, travel on river flats on the true right of the Taramakau River to Locke Stream. About 50 m up Locke Stream on the true right, a short bush track leads to the hut. Refer to the Harper Pass route guide for the trip over Harper Pass from here.

To go to Kiwi Hut, travel down the Taramakau River, taking advantage of stable, grassy flats by crossing and re-crossing the river where necessary. Kiwi Hut is on the true right of the

Taramakau, about 1 hr below Townsend Creek. A signposted track leads from the riverbed into the bush for 100 m and across a large clearing. The hut stands in bush on the terrace at the far side of the clearing.

From Kiwi Hut, continue following the Taramakau River downstream, picking the best places to cross. Below Pfeifer Creek on the true left of the Taramakau, markers lead the way across the grassy flats to pick up a track through gorse and shrubland. The track ends at the Otira River.

Note: *The shelter marked on some maps and publications has been removed.*

Select the best place to cross the Otira River, aiming for the big orange triangle that indicates the track across farmland to SH73.

If Otira River is too high to cross, back-track to the flood track travelling 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

Trust/Poulter Hut: Standard, 6 bunks, mattresses

Poulter Hut: Standard, 10 bunks, mattresses

Minchin Bivvy: Basic, 2 bunks

Locke Stream Hut: Standard, 18 bunks, mattresses

Kiwi Hut: Basic, 6 bunks, 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 i-SITE.

Further information

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

SH73, 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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New Zealand Government

ROUTE GUIDE

Minchin Pass

Arthur's Pass National Park



Cover: Looking up Minchin Stream towards Minchin Pass. Photo: Pete Brady



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Summary

Time: 3-4 days (shuttle required)

Grade: Route and tramping track

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

Best season: Summer and autumn

Required map: NZTopo50: Moana BU20, Haupiri BU21, Cass BV21

Hazards: Flooded rivers, avalanche, unmarked route

Note: True left and true right refer to the side of the valley or river when facing and looking downstream.

Safety: Read this route guide in conjunction with *Tramping in Arthur's Pass National Park*, a free brochure with important safety information. 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).



Your safety is your responsibility. Before you go, know the **Outdoor Safety Code** – 5 simple rules to help you stay safe:

1. **Plan your trip properly** – Ensure that you have a capable leader.
2. **Tell someone** – Leave your trip details with a trusted contact and at www.adventuresmart.org.nz.
3. **Check the weather** – Including www.avalanche.net.nz and the latest information on hazards and facilities before you start.
4. **Know your limits** – Physical fitness and good equipment will make all the difference.
5. **Take sufficient supplies** – Carry a sleeping bag, cooking utensils, enough food, a raincoat, over-trousers, gloves, hat, and several layers of warm clothes.

Traversing the alps

This route travels the eastern and northern flanks of the park. Travel to the old Casey Hut site (camping only) is possible without having to ford a major stream; after that there are several crossings that may become impassable if rivers are up.

The sections through upper Minchin Stream and Townsend Creek are significantly more difficult. In particular, the gorge of Townsend Creek is impassable when the creek is running high, as descent through the bush is not possible on either side.

Getting there

The track starts at Andrews Shelter on Mount White Road, which turns off SH73, 24 km east of Arthur's Pass. The western end is at the Taramakau River valley, which meets Otira River

at Aickens beside SH73, 25 km west of Arthur's Pass. There are limited options to leave a vehicle here; Atomic Shuttles and West Coast Shuttles both run bus shuttle services between Christchurch and Greymouth. (www.atomictravel.co.nz; www.westcoastshuttle.co.nz).

Note: Casey Hut burnt down in October 2015. The first section from Andrews Shelter to the old hut site takes 6 hr. Unless you wish to camp at the old hut site (toilet is still there), be prepared for a further 1 hr 30 min to the Trust/Poulter Hut.

Andrews Shelter to Trust/Poulter Hut

Time: 7 hours 30 minutes

Just upstream of the bridge near Andrews Shelter, a marked track begins on the true left and climbs steeply through open scrub to the beech forests above. It continues its climb then meanders across regular side creeks while generally keeping to the same contour. Eventually it rejoins Andrews Stream at Hallelujah Flat (about 2 hr 30 min from the shelter).

From the start of Hallelujah Flat, follow the grassy flats over Casey Saddle. An obvious worn track with limited marking crosses the open flats, with a few sections in the stream and bush.

Beyond the saddle, keep to the terrace immediately above Surprise Stream. After a few minutes, the reasonably well-worn track crossing the saddle drops into the streambed below a small swamp. The forest track to Casey Hut begins a few minutes below the confluence of Trinity Stream, Surprise Stream, and Pampas Stream. The track marker is tucked under the forest canopy on the true right through scrub, just past a bit of rough track.

About 50 m downstream from the marker on the opposite side, a steep, treeless, eroded gravel bank drops into the stream. If you get as far as this bank, you have overshot the track. From the stream the track climbs a little, sidles along a ridge, then descends to emerge from the bush on a large grass flat near Casey Stream.

The old Casey Hut site stands back from the stream at the bush edge, midway down the flat. Time from Casey Saddle to the hut is around 2 hr.

From the hut site, follow the old vehicle track west to the ford in Casey Stream, close to where the track to Casey Saddle enters the bush. Casey Stream is dangerous to cross when running high. The old vehicle track continues north over a low forested spur, emerging onto a scrub terrace. It then drops 6 m to the main flats of Poulter River, just upriver from a long, curving, shingle cliff. From here, continue over gentle grass flats to Trust/Poulter Hut at the edge of the bush on the true right, a few hundred metres before the Poulter bends westward.

Note: The toilet at the Trust/Poulter Hut was destroyed by a tree falling on it. Please dispose of your toilet waste responsibly.

Mountain bikers are permitted on the section of route from the old Casey Hut site (having cycled up the Poulter), as far as the Trust/Poulter Hut.

Trust/Poulter Hut to Poulter Hut

Time: 1 hour

Beyond here the vehicle track turns the corner and fades out. Continue on the true right of the Poulter for a few minutes, then head diagonally across the riverbed to a point about half a kilometre below the outlet of Minchin Stream, on the true left. Follow the marker poles through high matagouri shrubs to the start of the track to Lake Minchin and Poulter Hut. The hut is on the bush edge, on the true left bank of the Poulter River.

Poulter Hut to Lake Minchin

Time: 1 hour

A further hour of well-marked track leads to the old hut site at Lake Minchin – pleasant walking on easy gradients through beech forest. With light packs it makes a pleasant day excursion. The northern end of the lake is best for camping as there are now no huts by the lake.

Lake Minchin to Minchin Pass

Time: 3 hours

Follow the well-formed track around the eastern side of the lake, and travel up the river flats for about half an hour.

A track marked by a large orange triangle begins on the true right, just beyond the broad shingle fan of a side creek opposite – a few minutes before the river narrows to an impassable gorge. This track bypasses the gorge, climbs high to rocky outcrops above precipitous bluffs, and then drops steeply through bush to rejoin Minchin Stream at its junction with Linwood Creek.

Above the gorge the route follows Minchin Stream, constantly crossing and re-crossing to the next significant junction about 1 km upstream. Minchin Bivvy stands a little above the river in the 'V' of this junction. Minchin Pass is an hour further on from the bivvy. Above the bivvy, the track continues on the true right through scrub and across a flat tussock terrace, before climbing to the left to the low tussock saddle of Minchin Pass.



This area is subject to avalanche activity during the winter. We advise visitors not to travel this route during heavy snow conditions.