

# The head of Whakatipu Waimāori (Lake Wakatipu)



## Further information

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Cover: View of Rees valley from the Invincible Mine Track.  
Back: Bridal Veil Falls, Routeburn Track. *Photos: R Orpin*

This information was accurate at the time of printing.  
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For safety hazards and conservation emergencies



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## 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 New Zealand clean

Take all rubbish with you and use toilets where provided.



### Show respect

Respect others, respect culture.



## Nau mai, haere mai – welcome to Glenorchy

Just 48 km from Queenstown, this small settlement at the head of Whakatipu Waimāori (Lake Wakatipu) is a gateway to some of the best-known multi-day tracks in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as many spectacular day and short walks.

The Māori name for Glenorchy is Tāhuna, which means shallow sandbank or sandy shore and describes the area around the wharf at Glenorchy on the northeastern edge of Whakatipu Waimāori.



Glenorchy Lagoon. Photo: R Orpin

### History

The Ngāi Tahu people first travelled to the head of Whakatipu Waimāori to collect the highly valued, pearly grey-green inaka variety of pounamu or greenstone that can be found here.

Te Komama (Route Burn) and Te Awa Whakatipu (Dart River) were part of the well-known ara tawhito or travel route connecting Whakatipu Waimāori with Whakatipu Waitai (Martins Bay), where one of the largest Ngāi Tahu kāinga (settlements) in South Westland was situated. Numerous pounamu artefacts and the remains of several kāinga nohoanga (seasonal settlements) have since been discovered at the head of Whakatipu Waimāori.

Arriving in 1860, runholder William Rees and his family were the first European settlers in this area. By 1862, the lure of resources such as gold, scheelite, grazing land and timber brought many more settlers here, and tourists followed not long after. Commercial mountain guiding began on Pikirakatahi (Mount Earnslaw) in 1882, and within 7 years there were six hotels and guesthouses at the head of the lake.

Tourists relied on pack tracks and boats such as the *TSS Earnslaw* to get to this area until 1962, when Glenorchy Road was opened. Two years after this, Mount Aspiring National Park was formed. By 1990, this National Park was virtually twice its original size and became part of Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area, a classification that recognised the region's significance to global landscape conservation.

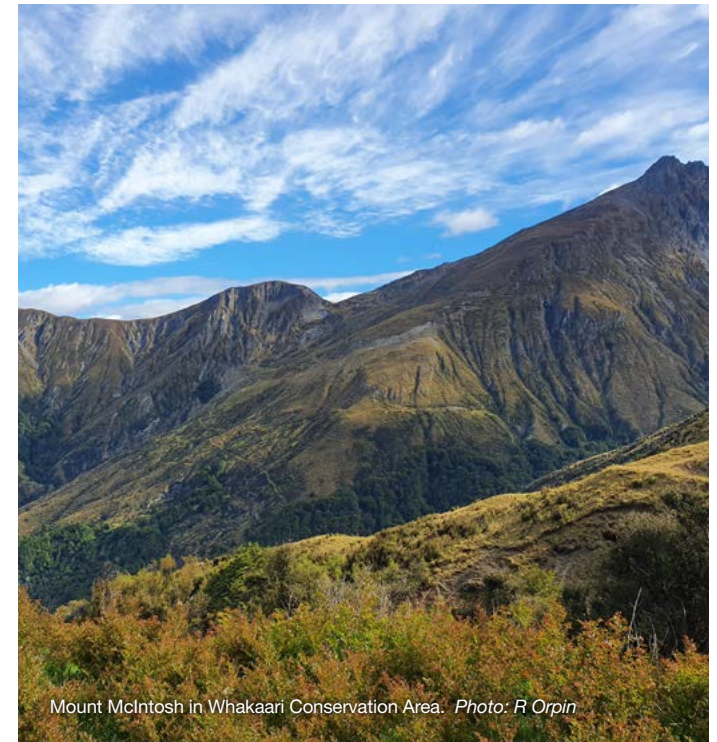
More recently, film and advertising companies have taken advantage of this area's magical scenery, with *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, *Mission Impossible: Fallout*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy all being filmed here.

### Natural history

Glaciers once sculpted this mountainous landscape until ice melt started to fill Whakatipu Waimāori some 15,000 years ago as the ice-age glaciers retreated. Today, tectonic uplift and weathering still shape the beech forest and subalpine shrubland, as well as the schist rock that is not covered by tussock.



Jean Hut, Whakaari. Photo: Jim Crowwell



Mount McIntosh in Whakaari Conservation Area. Photo: R Orpin



Lake Sylvan. Photo: Stephanie Jones





Invincible gold mine. Photo: Yvette Ridley



Routeburn Flats. Photo: R Orpin

## Rākaihautū and Whakatipu Waimāori

Whakatipu Waimāori was dug out by Rākaihautū, an ancestor of the Waitaha iwi who travelled over Te Waipounamu (the South Island) with his kō (digging stick), using it to create the freshwater lakes of the island. After digging the Hāwea, Wānaka and Whakatipu Waimāori lakes, he travelled through the Greenstone and Hollyford valleys before digging up Whakatipu Waitai (Lake McKerrow).

Whakatipu Waimāori is the original name for Lake Wakatipu. Waimāori means fresh water, but the meaning of Whakatipu is unknown, although it clearly has regional significance as several geographical features in the wider region use the name, including Te Awa Whakatipu, Kā Mauka Whakatipu (Ailsa Mountains), Whakatipu Kā Tuka (Hollyford River) and Whakatipu Waitai (Lake McKerrow).

## Whakatipu Waimāori islands

Mātau (Pig Island) and Wāwāhi Waka (Pigeon Island) are located at the northern end of Whakatipu Waimāori and are both accessible to the public by boat. Wāwāhi Waka has several walking tracks of varying lengths, ranging from 30 min to 2 hr long. Camping is permitted, and a basic 10-bunk hut managed by Queenstown Lakes District Council is also available for public use. To book this hut, visit [qldc.govt.nz](http://qldc.govt.nz).

Both islands are free of predators, so the native bird life is thriving, and their mild microclimates allow podocarps to grow, as well as southern rātā, kōwhai and a small patch of tawhairaunui / red beech. Some of the vegetation on Wāwāhi Waka was destroyed by fire in 1996 but is now recovering thanks to the hard work of engaged community groups.

A joint project between Ngāi Tahu and the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) has seen buff weka become reestablished in Otago. These birds became extinct on the mainland during the 1920s due to habitat loss and predators, but fortunately some had been released on the Chatham Islands, where they thrived. In 2002, 30 buff weka were transferred to Te Peka Karara (Stevensons Island) on Lake Wānaka, and after several successful breeding seasons there, the project was extended to Whakatipu Waimāori, with birds being released on Wāwāhi Waka and Mātau in 2006 and 2008, respectively.



To help protect these islands and the buff weka that call them home:

- do not bring any dogs onto the islands
- do not light any fires
- do not feed the weka
- take your rubbish away with you when you leave.

## Huts and campsites

Two DOC campsites are accessible along the Glenorchy-Queenstown Road – the Twelve Mile Delta and Moke Lake Campsites. There are three additional campsites to choose from at the head of the lake.

### Sylvan Campsite



This campsite is nestled on the edge of Mount Aspiring National Park and the Route Burn and provides a tranquil camping experience with views of the surrounding mountains and sounds of native birds. Bookings are required and can be made at [bookings.doc.govt.nz](http://bookings.doc.govt.nz).

### Kinloch Campsite



Located opposite the historic Kinloch Lodge on the banks of Te Awa Whakatipu (Dart River) and Whakatipu Waimāori, this campsite is a beautiful spot to pitch a tent and watch the sun set over the Richardson Mountains, or listen to kererū flying across the campsite to the beech-clad hillside nearby. Bookings are required and can be made at [bookings.doc.govt.nz](http://bookings.doc.govt.nz).

### Diamond Lake Campsite



On the way to Paradise and situated on the edge of Mount Aspiring National Park, this campsite looks out across Diamond Lake. It is only suitable for campervans and caravans.





## Know before you go

### Windfall

Large trees or tree limbs that have fallen on the track can affect tramping times and navigation, especially on the more remote backcountry tracks. If you come across fallen trees on the track, contact the Whakatipu Waimāori/Queenstown Visitor Centre or call the 0800 DOC Hot on **0800 362 468**.

### Weather

Always check the forecast before heading out as the weather in this area can change quickly at any time of the year. Avalanches and snow can occur in any season.

### Drones

A permit is required to use drones on public conservation land for recreational or commercial purposes. To find out more or to apply for a permit, visit [doc.govt.nz/drones](http://doc.govt.nz/drones).

### Dogs and other pets

Dogs and other pets are not allowed in Mount Aspiring National Park – this includes the Sylvan Campsite and the Routeburn shelter. The dog friendly walks in this area are the Glenorchy Walkway, Diamond Creek Walk and Bennetts Bluff Viewpoint.

### Private land

Some of the tracks in this brochure cross over private land. Respect the landowner's property by staying on the track, keeping your distance from livestock, leaving gates as you find them and not camping or hunting on this land.

### Mobile phone coverage

Mobile phone coverage is restricted to the Glenorchy township – carrying a distress beacon is always recommended.

### Water safety

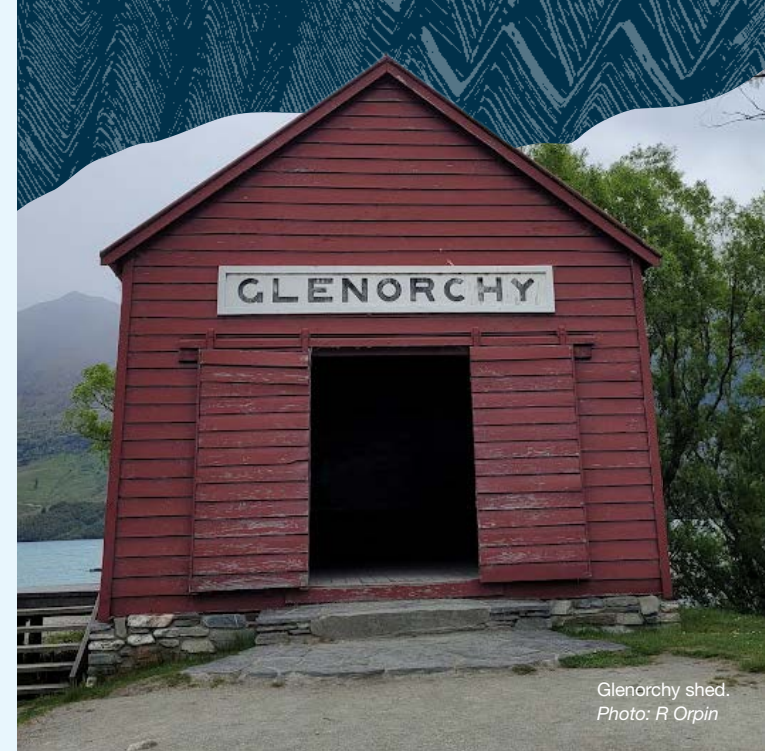
Be aware that the head of the lake is a challenging place for swimming and can be dangerous. There are strong currents where the river meets the lake, and the lake is very cold.

### Rivers

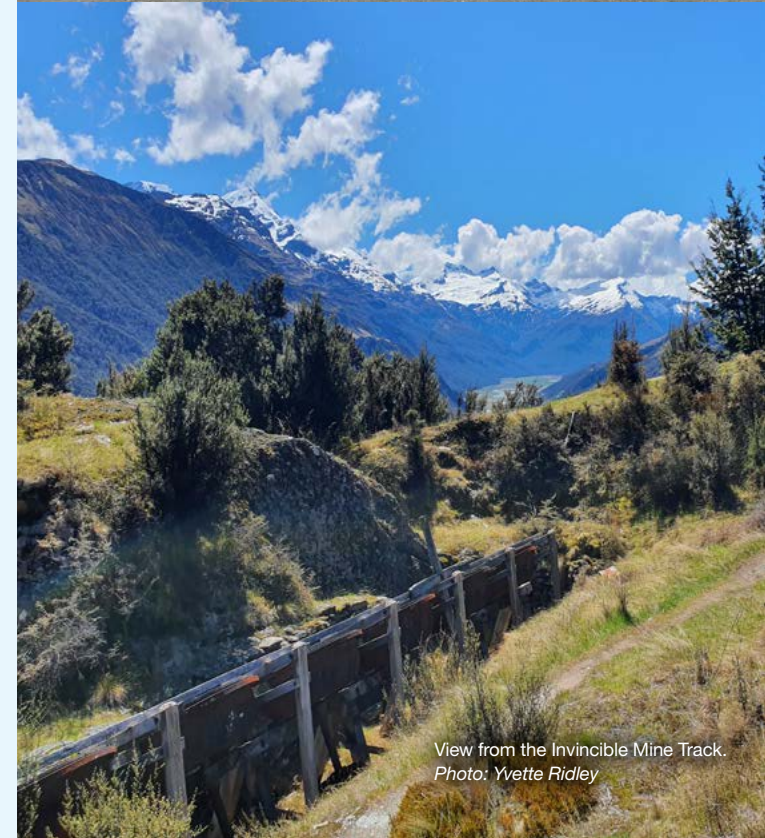
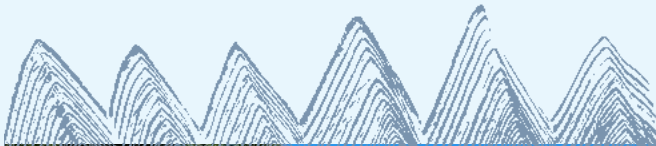
Rivers are affected by the weather and snow melt and can rise and fall very quickly in the Glenorchy area. If you are not experienced in river crossings or identifying unsafe rivers, avoid crossing and use the bridged tracks instead. Always be prepared to change your plans if necessary to avoid unsafe river crossings.

### Fires

Public conservation land is always in either a restricted or prohibited fire season. To check what rules apply, visit [checkitsalright.nz](http://checkitsalright.nz).



Glenorchy shed.  
Photo: R Orpin



View from the Invincible Mine Track.  
Photo: Yvette Ridley



## Track grades



### Easiest – Easy access short walk

Suitable for people of all abilities, wheelchairs and baby buggies. Walking shoes required.



### Easiest – Short walk

Well-formed track offering easy walking for up to an hour. There may be steps or slopes. Suitable for most abilities and fitness levels. Walking shoes required.



### Easy – Walking track

Mostly well-formed track offering easy to moderate walking from a few minutes to a day. Some track sections may be steep, rough or muddy. Walking shoes required.



### Intermediate – Easy tramping track

Comfortable multi-day tramping/hiking. Track is mostly well formed; some sections may be steep, rough or muddy. Suitable for people with limited backcountry (remote area) experience. Light tramping/hiking boots required.



### Advanced – Tramping track

Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking. Mostly unformed track that may be rough and steep with unbridged stream and river crossings. Suitable for fit, experienced people with moderate to high-level backcountry (remote area) navigation and survival skills. Tramping/hiking boots required.

## Short walks

### 1 Bennetts Bluff Viewpoint Walk

15 min, 630 m (return)

Start / finish: car park located halfway between Queenstown and Glenorchy



This track travels through natural shrublands up to a high rocky knoll where iconic views of Whakatipu Waimāori, Pīkarakatahi and the Glenorchy area can be enjoyed.

### 2 Glenorchy Walkway

1–2 hr, 4.4 km (loop)

Start / finish: signposted from the Glenorchy waterfront



A perfect walk for the family, this boardwalk track crosses over wetlands and provides plenty of opportunities to view native birdlife such as poaka / pied stilt, tōrea / South Island pied oystercatcher, matuku-hūrepo / Australasian bittern, kuruwhengi / Australasian shoveler, tētē-moroiti / grey teal, pāpera / grey duck and pāpango / New Zealand scaup. You may even see a kārearea / New Zealand falcon soaring above the wetland hunting for prey.

Picnic tables along the way provide a great spot to sit and take in the impressive views of Pīkarakatahi, Ari (Mount Alfred) and the surrounding ranges.



Be aware that the Glenorchy lagoon section of the walkway becomes flooded in heavy or prolonged rain – care is required.

### 3 Diamond Creek Walk

45 min, 2.7 km (one way)

Start: Glenorchy-Routeburn Road, 15 min from Glenorchy  
Finish: Lake Reid



This track follows the true left bank (looking downstream) of Diamond Creek, which is a popular trout fishing spot and leads to Lake Reid, where there are opportunities for viewing waterfowl, the Paradise area and the Dart valley.

### 4 Lake Sylvan Track

1 hr 40 min, 5.3 km (return via the tramline loop)

Start / finish: Lake Sylvan car park, 30 min from Glenorchy (gravel road)



This well-defined track passes through old moraines, river terraces and tall tawhairaunui / red beech trees before arriving at a picturesque viewing platform overlooking Lake Sylvan, which is home to brown trout and numerous small native fish.



Returning via the 1920s tramline loop, you can compare the regenerating beech in the cutover area to the original forest. Keep an eye out for native birds such as kakarua / South Island robin, pīwakawaka / fantail and tītīpounamu / rifleman along the way.

## Day walks

### 5 Invincible Mine Track

3 hr, 4.6 km (return)

Start / finish: Rees Valley Road, 30 min from Glenorchy (gravel road with fords)

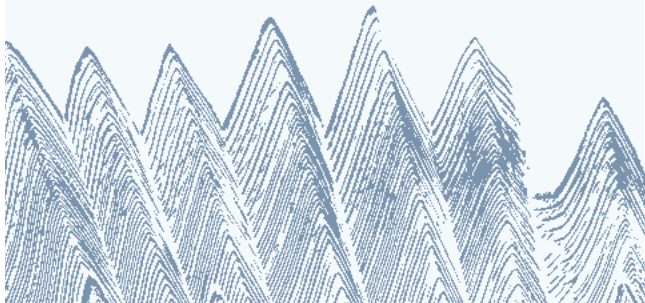


This track was built by miners in the 1800s and climbs steadily through beech forest and mānuka trees before arriving at the highest point of the track, where you are rewarded with stunning views over the Rees valley and Pīkarakatahi.

Along the way, you will pass well-preserved historic mining equipment, including the remains of a water wheel and a unique set of seven Berdan pans (large, slowly revolving cast iron bowls that ground the ore).

For your safety and to protect the historic heritage, do not climb on the mining equipment or behind the mesh barrier closing off the old mine shaft as there is a deep vertical shaft behind it.

**Note:** This track passes through private land. Camping is prohibited in the Invincible Mine Historic Reserve.





Glacier Burn Track. Photo: Eiji Kitai

## 6 Glacier Burn Track

4 hr, 6.4 km (return)

Start/finish: signposted off Glenorchy-Kinloch Road, 25 min from Glenorchy (gravel road)



Starting at the small roadside car park, follow the track alongside the creek until you reach a marker indicating the crossing to the true left (looking downstream). Paths that were once used for hauling logs can be seen near the start of the track. After crossing the creek, the track climbs through beech forest to reach Glacier Basin. From here, you can continue up the creek to view the Humboldt Mountains. There is abundant birdlife along this track.



Do not go above the bushline in winter and spring as the area is prone to avalanches.

## 7 Lake Rere walk

4–6 hr, 14 km (loop)

Start/finish: Greenstone car park, 1 hr from Glenorchy (gravel road with fords)



Travelling clockwise from the car park, cross the bridge and follow the marked route through the farmland of Greenstone Station for about an hour until you reach Elfin Bay. From here, climb steeply through tawhairaunui/red beech forest until the track eases before reaching the picturesque Lake Rere – a popular tourist destination in the 19th century. From the lake, pockets of mountain beech and grassland lead to a second bridge, followed by a brief climb to join the Greenstone Track, which leads back to the car park.

**Note:** This track can be muddy and passes through private farmland that can be occupied by livestock.



There are unbridged stream crossings on this track – take care and avoid crossing the stream in heavy rain.

## 8 Judah Track

4–6 hr, 13.4 km (return)

Start/finish: Whakaari Conservation Area car park (3 km before Glenorchy)



From the car park on the Queenstown-Glenorchy Road, it is an easy climb up to the old Mount Judah Road, which sidles around the northern side of Mount Judah. The track then passes the remains of the Glenorchy Scheelite Battery and the State Mine, both of which were last operated in the 1960s. Bonnie Jean Hut (day-use only) is a 30 min climb up a marked track from the end of the old Mount Judah Road. A short, signposted track 10 min before the hut leads to Boozer Hut, which was relocated and restored in 2011.

## Routeburn Track day walks

The Routeburn Track is one of the Great Walks of Aotearoa New Zealand and can be enjoyed not only as a multi-day track but also as a day hike.

## 9 Routeburn Nature Walk

20–30 min, 1.2 km (one way)

Start: Routeburn Shelter, 35 min from Glenorchy (gravel road)

Finish: Sugarloaf Stream



From the Routeburn Shelter car park, cross the swing bridge and follow the Routeburn Track for about 10–15 min. A marked turn-off on the left takes you down a winding path onto the valley floor, where you will pass through beautiful forest that is dominated by tawhairaunui/red beech. Meander through this flat area for 10–15 min before rejoining the Routeburn Track at Sugarloaf Stream. From here, you can either carry on across the Sugarloaf swing bridge up the Routeburn Track or turn back and follow the main track to the car park.



Route Burn on the way to Routeburn Flats. Photo: R Orpin

## 10 Routeburn Flats

1 hr 30 min – 2 hr 30 min, 7.5 km (one way)

Start: Routeburn Shelter

Finish: Routeburn Flats Hut



From the car park at the Routeburn Shelter, cross the swing bridge and follow the well-formed track, weaving through beech forest until you reach Sugarloaf Stream. The track then follows the old bridle path that was built in the 1870s, climbing up to a small waterfall and sidling above the Routeburn gorge. A second swing bridge takes you back across the Route Burn, where the track follows the forest edge to a marked junction. From here, continue to Routeburn Flats Hut or turn left towards Routeburn Falls.

## 11 Routeburn Falls

2 hr 30 min – 4 hr, 9.8 km (one way)

Start: Routeburn Shelter

Finish: Routeburn Falls Hut



From the marked junction on the track at Routeburn Flats, turn left and begin a steady climb through beech forest towards Routeburn Falls. A recent slip allows excellent views over the valley below, but take care when crossing it, especially after heavy rain. The impressive Routeburn Falls are situated on the edge of the bushline next to Routeburn Falls Hut.

## 12 Tarahaka Whakatipu (Harris Saddle)

4 hr – 6 hr 30 min, 13 km (one way)

Start: Routeburn Falls

Finish: Tarahaka Whakatipu Shelter



From Routeburn Falls, the track climbs steadily to the outlet of the river at Lake Harris. Make sure you stop occasionally and look behind you to enjoy the great views of the Routeburn valley. A sidle through moraine and above Lake Harris leads you to the highest point of the track at Tarahaka Whakatipu (1,255 m). The vegetation in this subalpine area is very fragile, so it is important that you keep to the track at all times. Tarahaka Whakatipu is located on the boundary between Mount Aspiring National Park and Fiordland National Park, and a day shelter and toilet are located here.

## Longer day walks and overnight tramps

### 13 Sugarloaf and Rockburn Tracks

**Routeburn car park to Rockburn shelter: 6–8 hr, 9 km**

**Rockburn shelter to Sylvan Campsite: 2–3 hr, 7 km**

**Routeburn car park to Lake Sylvan: 8–11 hr, 21 km**

Start/finish: Routeburn Shelter



Follow the Routeburn Track for 10 min until you reach the junction, then turn left onto the Sugarloaf Track. From here, climb through beech forest to the fragile and muddy Sugarloaf Pass, where you can enjoy great views of the Rockburn and Routeburn valleys. Cross over the Sugarloaf Pass, and when you reach the junction take the track along the true right of the Rock Burn (looking downstream) towards the Rockburn shelter, which is located at the Rock Burn and Te Awa Whakatipu (Dart River) confluence. The shelter is operated by Dart River Adventures and is available for public use and overnight camping. Explore the nearby chasm, river beaches and pools before traversing down moraine and through beech forest to Lake Sylvan. To make this track a loop, follow the gravel road between the Sylvan Campsite and the Routeburn Shelter.

## Whakaari Conservation Area

Whakaari Conservation Area showcases historic huts and mining relics surrounded by stunning mountains covered in tussock. The walks and tramps in this area offer grand views towards Whakatipu Waimāori, Te Awa Whakatipu and the Humboldt Mountains.

This area can be accessed from a car park 2 km south of Glenorchy on the Glenorchy-Queenstown Road.

### 14 Judah and Heather Jock Loop Tracks

**7–8 hr, 17 km (return)**

Start/finish: Whakaari Conservation Area car park



Follow the Judah Track until you reach Bonnie Jean Hut (day-use only). From here, the track becomes more difficult and is only suitable for experienced trampers as it zigzags up an old mining road to Heather Jock Hut. The track then sidles down and across to the historic Jean Hut, before dropping back down to the Judah Track.



The tracks in this alpine area are exposed – changeable weather, extreme temperatures, strong winds, snow and ice are possible at any time of the year. These tracks are not recommended during the winter months or in unfavourable conditions.



Rain and snow melt may cause streams to flood at any time of the year – do not cross when the water is high.



There are dangerous mine tunnels in this area that may be hidden by vegetation. Do not enter the tunnels.



Water from any streams, rivers or creeks in the Whakaari Conservation Area should not be used for drinking, cooking or washing as it is contaminated. Visitors to the area should bring their water with them or use the water from the huts or water tanks.

### 15 Mt McIntosh Loop Track

**8–10 hr, 18 km (loop)**

Start: Whakaari Conservation Area car park

Finish: Queenstown-Glenorchy Road beside the Buckler Burn (10 min walk from the car park)



Follow the well-formed track for around 1 hr 30 min until you reach the junction. From here, take the steep marked track down to Buckler Burn (a river that needs to be crossed on foot) and then follow an old mining road as it zigzags up to McIntyre Hut. After a further 1 hr 30 min and a 30 min climb from the Long Gully saddle, you will reach McIntosh Hut on the flanks of Mount McIntosh. From the hut, the track drops back down to the Long Gully saddle, before a steep climb leads along a ridge offering superb views over Whakatipu Waimāori, Pīkarakatahi and the Dart valley. The track, which passes through overgrown bush in some sections, then drops steeply alongside a fence line down to the Queenstown-Glenorchy Road beside Buckler Burn.



Buckler Burn can rise rapidly and become impassable due to heavy rain or snow melt. River-crossing experience is essential.

### 16 Earnslaw Burn Track

**4–6 hr, 8.3 km (one way)**

Start: true left bank of the Earnslaw Burn part way along Lovers Leap Road

Finish: bush edge at the end of public conservation land



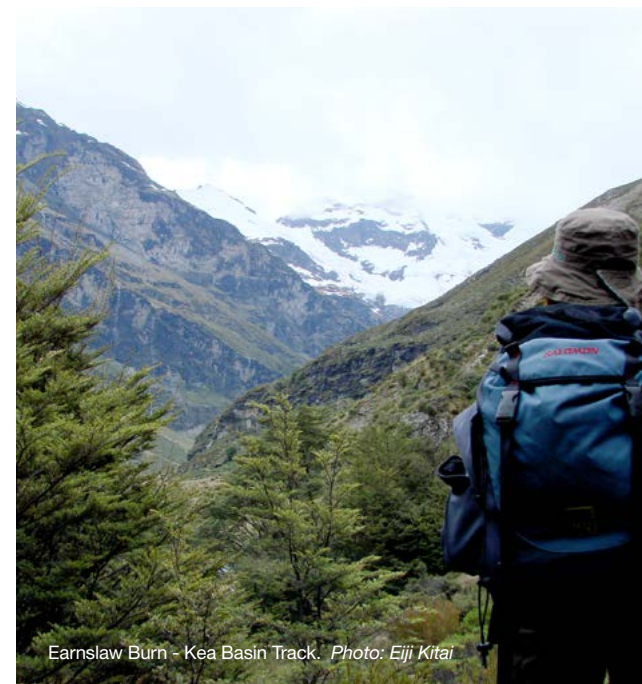
This track travels through bush to a tussock basin and a viewpoint that offers impressive views of an icefall on Pīkarakatahi. An overhanging rock just within the forest on the true right (looking downstream) of Earnslaw Burn can be used for shelter. For access through the tussock basin to the head of the valley, you will need to go through a marginal strip that extends 10 m either side of Earnslaw Burn. The land outside this marginal strip is private property.



This is a challenging track – it is not recommended for young children. River-crossing and route-finding skills are essential. Extensive windfall along this track may slow your progress and the river crossing to get to the bivvy is dangerous in heavy rain.



There is no toilet on this track – take a shovel or packable toilet with you.



Earnslaw Burn - Kea Basin Track. Photo: Eiji Kitai



## 17 Kea Basin Track

8–10 hr (return)

Start/finish: Muddy Creek car park on Rees Valley Road, 30 min from Glenorchy (gravel road with fords)



Follow the Rees Track up to Twenty Five Mile Creek, then cross the Rees River and journey over the valley floor. The zigzag track starts on the low terrace north of Lennox Falls, where the bush edge meets the terrace. Follow this track for about an hour as it gently climbs up through the bush before taking the turn-off to Earnslaw Hut. From this four-bunk hut, it is a further 15 min to a rock bivvy that sits just above the bushline. When you reach the tussocked Kea Basin, you are rewarded with stunning views up the Rees valley towards the Rees Saddle. The basin connects to Pikirakatahi, which has Tōpuni status in recognition of its historic and cultural importance to Ngāi Tahu.

*Note: This track passes through private land.*



Take care when crossing the Rees River and its tributaries – the water becomes dangerously swift when it is high. River-crossing experience is essential.

## 18 Scott Creek Track

5–7 hr, 7.3 km (return)

Start/finish: signposted near Scott Creek bridge on the Glenorchy-Routeburn Road, 20 min from Glenorchy (gravel road)



Follow the marked track up through beech forest to Scott Basin, which sits at just over 1,000 m altitude. In some places, you must follow the creek bed. From the basin, access can be gained to Kay Creek, which leads to the Caples valley.



This track has river crossings and is irregularly marked, steep, and obscure and washed out in places. It is not recommended for young children. River-crossing and route-finding skills are essential.

This map should be used as a guide only and not for navigational purposes. It is strongly recommended that you purchase the following topographical maps from the Whakatipu Waimāori/Queenstown Visitor Centre: NZ Topo50 CA10, CB09 and CB10.

