

# Hollyford Track

| Fiordland National Park

## Safety

Plan properly for your trip and ensure that your group has a capable and experienced leader. Fiordland's weather can change rapidly – it can become wet and cold suddenly at any time of the year. Before departing, check the current track and weather conditions at Te Rua-o-te-moko / Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre.

It is strongly recommended that you carry a personal locator beacon and/or a mountain radio.

## 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.

### Further information

**Te Rua-o-te-moko /  
Fiordland National Visitor Centre**

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Te Anau 9640

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

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Photo: Christine Officer

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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## Introduction

The Hollyford Track is a major low altitude track in Fiordland National Park that can be walked all year round. This 56-km, 4-day (one way) tramping track starts at Lower Hollyford Road and leads to the old port of Martins Bay. Situated among the sheer rock walls of the Darran Mountains, the track follows the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka on its journey to the Fiordland coastline.

Features of this track include Lake Alabaster/Wāwāhi Waka and Lake McKerrow/Whakatipu Waitai, as well as the site of the now abandoned Jamestown, which was established on the shore of Lake McKerrow/Whakatipu Waitai.

## Natural history

The U-shaped Hollyford valley was carved by a huge glacier about 20,000 years ago, leaving behind the Donne Glacier on the eastern face of Mount Tūtoko. Lake McKerrow/Whakatipu Waitai was originally a fiord which was cut off from the sea by sedimentary deposits at Martins Bay.

The lowland forests, rivers, lakes, estuary and coast of the valley provide habitats for birds and other animals. The majority of the forest is tawai/ silver beech, mixed with kāmahī, kahikatea, mataī and rimu. The forested areas have a rich understorey of coprosma, makomako/wineberry, fuchsia and pepperwood, with abundant ferns, mosses and lichens.

Small birds such as miromiro/tomtit, kakaruai/ South Island robin, pīpīpi/ brown creeper, korimako/bellbird, riroriro/ grey warbler, pīwakawaka/fantail, tītītipounamu/rifleman and tauhou/silver eye are still common in many areas, despite the presence of introduced predators. Kākā frequent the valley, often calling at dusk and tawaki/ Fiordland crested penguins and seals can be found around the Martins Bay coastline.

Each spring, the juveniles of native galaxiid fish begin their annual migration up the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka. Commonly known as whitebait, they were an important traditional Māori food and are still sought after by recreational fishers today.

## Human history

Martins Bay, known to Ngāi Tahu as Kotuku, was an important Māori settlement between 1650 and 1800 because of the easy access to food resources in the nearby lakes, sea and forests – as well as pounamu (greenstone) which was used to make tools, ornaments and weapons. Large trees on the river banks were felled to make canoes and ancient Māori middens (ovens) have been found on the sea side of the estuary.

David McKellar and George Gunn were the first explorers to view the Hollyford valley, after traversing the Greenstone valley in 1861 and climbing up to Key Summit to look down on the long valley far below. Patrick Caples followed in 1863 while prospecting for gold at the head of Lake Wakatipu, after continuing up the Routeburn valley and crossing over the Harris Saddle/Tarahaka Whakatipu to the Hollyford valley. He then followed the valley all the way to the sea at Martins Bay, becoming the first European to do so.

Dr James Hector, the first provincial geologist of Otago, visited that same year and travelled from Martins Bay up the Hollyford valley, crossing to the Greenstone valley, Mavora lake and then on to Queenstown. He reported favourably on timber and indications of gold, iron, copper and zinc in the area. He also suggested that a road could be built to provide better access. For financial reasons, the road never came to fruition and it continues to be a controversial issue today.

Jamestown was surveyed in 1870 with the hope of enticing pioneers to the West Coast. Several families initially settled but the settlement was doomed from the outset due to its isolation, with only a few settlers remaining in the area. Today, the Jamestown site is marked by ancient rose bushes and apple trees planted by the early pioneers.

Among the early farmers of the region were Hugh and Malcolm McKenzie, who raised cattle at Martins Bay and drove them over 250 km away to saleyards at Mossburn. In 1926, the McKenzie brothers sold out to David Gunn, who continued running cattle and also started guiding tourists from the Hollyford camp further up the valley. After David's death in 1955, his son Murray continued to manage the camp, which had been renamed Gunns Camp, until 2005, when the Hollyford Museum Charitable Trust took over its management. Unfortunately the camp was destroyed during a flooding event in February 2020.

## Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area



South West New Zealand is one of the great wilderness areas of the Southern Hemisphere. Known to Māori as Te Wāhipounamu (the place of greenstone), this World Heritage Area incorporates Aoraki/ Mount Cook, Westland/Tai Poutini, Fiordland and Mount Aspiring national parks, covering 2.6 million ha.

World Heritage is a global concept that identifies natural and cultural sites of world significance – places so special that protecting them is of concern for all people.

Some of the best examples of animals and plants that once lived on the ancient supercontinent Gondwana live in this World Heritage Area.

## Hunting and fishing

This area has good access to deer hunting and trout fishing.

Hunting permits are required and can be obtained online at [www.doc.govt.nz/hunting](http://www.doc.govt.nz/hunting).

Anglers should hold a current fishing licence. Please ensure that your fishing gear is free of didymo and clean it between river catchments – be aware that didymo is found in the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka and Lake McKerrow/Whakatipu Waitai.

## Packrafting

The Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka is an increasingly popular river which, when combined with the Pyke River, creates a great 5–6 day packraft circuit.

Despite its popularity, this trip requires prior research as the paddling is quite varied and there are lots of log hazards from past flood events, eddies and rapids.

There are hut options located along the Hollyford Track and the Pyke – Big Bay Route, or you can camp beside the huts. Be sure to plan your trip during a good weather window as flooding is quite common in this area.

Access is at the Hollyford Road end (about 2 hr from Te Anau), and the recommended rafting direction is from the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka to the Pyke River, as most of the Pyke River is still didymo free.



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

## Hollyford Track access

The Hollyford Track starts at the end of Lower Hollyford Road, about 2 hr from Te Anau off State Highway 94 (Milford Road).

There is limited public transportation available. For more information, contact Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre.

## Huts

The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) provides and maintains huts on the Hollyford Track. Each hut has heating, mattresses and a toilet (non-flush).

All huts require one Serviced Backcountry Hut Ticket or three Standard Backcountry Hut Tickets per person per night, except McKerrow Island Hut, which requires one Standard Backcountry Hut Ticket per person per night. Hut tickets should be purchased in advance from the Visitor Centre. Alternatively, a Backcountry Hut Pass (valid for 6 or 12 months) may be used, which can be purchased online at [www.doc.govt.nz/backcountry-hut-pass](http://www.doc.govt.nz/backcountry-hut-pass).

Camping is permitted next to the huts and requires one Standard Backcountry Hut Ticket per person per night. Please avoid camping on the helicopter pads.

Portable stoves for cooking must be carried as there are no cooking facilities supplied in any of the huts. Users are expected to leave the huts clean and tidy.



The water at these huts is not treated or tested. Boil water before use.

Hut	Bunks	Heating	Water	Toilet	Fees
Hidden Falls Hut	12	Yes	Tank, from roof	Yes	Serviced
Lake Alabaster Hut	26	Yes	Piped from stream	Yes	Serviced
McKerrow Island Hut	12	Yes	Tank, from roof	Yes	Standard
Demon Trail Hut	12	Yes	Tank, from roof	Yes	Serviced
Hokuri Hut	12	Yes	Tank, from roof	Yes	Serviced
Martins Bay Hut	24	Yes	Tank, from roof	Yes	Serviced

## Track guide

The Hollyford Track is a multi-day tramping track (4-8 days) suitable for people with a good level of fitness. Some sections of the track are rough and muddy and not well defined – orange markers will guide the way. There may be unbridged stream and river crossings that may become impassable during heavy rain.

### Track grade



**Tramping track:** Mostly unformed track with steep, rough or muddy sections; has directional markers, poles or cairns.



### Lower Hollyford Road to Hidden Falls Hut 2-3 hr, 9 km

Cross the swing bridge over Humboldt Creek to the start of the track, which initially sidles along bluffs, with swampland to the left. Sections of raised boardwalk cross the areas that are prone to flooding. Swamp Creek has a bridge over the waterway, but there is a dry flood channel that can be impassable during or after heavy rain. Where Swamp Creek joins the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka, the track follows the riverbank, with occasional views of the Darran Mountains. At Hidden Falls Creek, the track passes Sunshine Hut (managed by Hollyford Track Guided Walks) and then continues upstream to a swing bridge. Hidden Falls Hut is about 15 min from here.



### Hidden Falls Hut to Lake Alabaster Hut 3-4 hr, 10.5 km

The track passes through a section of lowland ribbonwood/podocarp forest draped with colourful mosses and ferns. It then enters tall beech forest before climbing to Little Homer Saddle, with views of Mount Madeline and Fiordland's highest mountain, Mount Tūtoko (2723 m). From here, the track descends to Little Homer Falls (60 m) and continues to the confluence of the Hollyford and Pyke rivers. Beyond this is Pyke River Lodge (managed by Hollyford Track Guided Walks) and 15 min further on is Lake Alabaster Hut.



Tramping near Demon Trail Hut. Photo: Lyn Trewella



### Lake Alabaster Hut to Demon Trail Hut 4.5-5.5 hr, 13.4 km

*This section of the track is maintained to a much lower standard than the Lower Hollyford Road end to Lake Alabaster Hut section.*

*Use the orange markers on the trees to guide you. It can be muddy, rocky and wet underfoot, and tree falls may obscure the track. Unbridged streams or rivers may become impassable during and after heavy rain.*

Backtrack from the Alabaster Hut for 15 min and cross the Pyke River swing bridge. After 2 hr of relatively level walking, the track meets the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka again. Some long sections of mud will be encountered. Follow the eastern side of Lake McKerrow/Whakatipu Waitai for about 1.5 hr to reach Demon Trail Hut.

### Side Trip: Turn off to McKerrow Island Hut 30 min, 1.2 km

Follow the track about 40 m down the true right side of the Hollyford River (facing downstream) and then cross to the true left. The track travels through a small section of bush to the lake edge – the hut is located near the river mouth in the bush.

*As there is no bridge over the river, be aware that the river can flood after heavy rain, and you may be stranded in the hut until the river level lowers and it is safe to cross.*



## Demon Trail Hut to Hokuri Hut

5–6 hr, 9.6 km

Demon Trail is a historical cattle track. This section of the track is both rocky and undulating but there are long sections of formed, flat track in between. Loose rocks can make it difficult underfoot, and the track can become slippery in wet weather. Some of the creek crossings can be dangerous, so extreme care is required – using the three wire bridges is recommended. Some creeks may become impassable after heavy rain.



## Hokuri Hut to Martins Bay Hut

4–5 hr, 13 km

Walk for 30 min from Hokuri Hut to reach Hokuri Creek. In low river conditions, you can cross near the creek mouth, but otherwise should use the three-wire crossing 20 min upstream. After crossing the creek, follow the lake shore past the bay where the settlement of Jamestown once stood.

After a further 1.5–2 hr walk, the track leaves the lake and continues for another hour to the Hollyford Airstrip and Martins Bay Lodge, managed by Hollyford Track Guided Walks.

Martins Bay Hut, situated at the mouth of the Hollyford River/Whakatipu Kā Tuka, is a further 1.5–2 hr from Martins Bay Lodge turn off. Take care when crossing Jerusalem Creek as it is prone to flooding after rain.

The track continues on to Long Reef through wind-shorn forest and provides views of the river mouth and sand spit. From July to November, seals and tawaki / Fiordland crested penguins can be seen around the coast close by.

**Note:** Beyond Long Reef, the track becomes the Pyke – Big Bay Route. This route is not as well defined and is only suitable for well-equipped and experienced walkers. More information can be found in the *Pyke – Big Bay Route* brochure available from the Visitor Centre or the DOC website ([www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)).



Hidden Falls. Photo: Thomas Utting

This map is a guide only and should not be used for navigation. The NZTopo50 series maps for this area are:

- CB09 Hollyford Track
- CA09 Alabaster Pass
- CA08 Milford Sound/Piopiota.

These maps are available for purchase from Te Rua-o-te-moko / Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre.

## Hollyford Track elevation profile

