

Access

The Rees track begins 68 kilometres from Queenstown. There is a car park at Muddy Creek. It is possible but not advisable to take 4WD vehicles over the creek as the creek is prone to sudden washouts.

The Dart track begins 76 kilometres from Queenstown. A fine-weather-only road extends to Chinamans Bluff but is subject to washouts and flooding.

The access roads to either the Rees or Dart valleys require vehicles to cross a number of fords that can become difficult to navigate in wet weather. Parts of these roads are gravel and should be traversed with care.

Jet boats service the lower Dart section of the track, and buses service both tracks. Topographical map references are for the New Zealand Topo50 map series: sheets CA10 and CB10. Track maps are also available from DOC visitor centres.

Tōpuni

As part of the Deed of Settlement between the Crown and Ngāi Tahu, two areas, Mount Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi and Te Koroka (Dart/Slipstream), have been given the status of Tōpuni. These are areas of special significance to Ngāi Tahu. A Tōpuni does not override or alter the existing status of the land but ensures that Ngāi Tahu values are recognised and acknowledged. Access to Te Koroka (Dart/Slipstream) requires a special permit.

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), the *South West New Zealand* World Heritage Area incorporates Aoraki/Mount Cook, Westland/Tai Poutini, Fiordland and Mount Aspiring National Parks, covering 2.6 million hectares. 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, once found on the ancient supercontinent Gondwana, live in the World Heritage Area.

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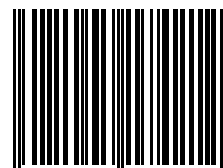
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www.doc.govt.nz

Published by
Department of Conservation
Whakatipu-wai-Māori/Queenstown VC
PO Box 811, Queenstown 9348
New Zealand
November 2015

Editing and design:
Publishing Team, DOC National Office

New Zealand Government

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Cover: Descent to Dart Hut. Photo: DOC

The Rees-Dart Track

4 to 5-day tramping track

MOUNT ASPIRING NATIONAL PARK



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



The Dart Valley Track between Bedford Bridge and Sandy Bluff is closed as it is impassable. People wanting to walk to/from the Dart Hut can still do so via the Rees Valley Track.

The Rees-Dart Track is a moderately demanding 4- to 5-day tramp of 6 to 8 hours walking per day. It follows the Rees and Dart rivers through leasehold farmland and the southern part of Mount Aspiring National Park. Spectacular mountain scenery, forest and alpine vegetation, glacier-fed rivers and the Dart Glacier are significant features of the walk.

History

The Rees (Puahere) and Dart/Te Awa Whakatipu river valleys were well known to the Kāi Tahu people of Murihiku/Southland and Otago. They came to collect the highly valued, pearly grey-green, inanga variety of pounamu/greenstone.

West Coast Kāi Tahu crossed the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana for the same reason. Today, ownership of all pounamu in situ within the takiwā/tribal boundary of Kāi Tahu and the adjacent seas are vested in Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.

The Glenorchy and Kinloch areas were a meeting and resting place for Māori travelling to and from the West Coast. More than 30 historic Māori sites occur within 20 kilometres of Glenorchy (known as Kotapahau, the place of a revenge killing). The best known is by the Dart Bridge. Excavations there show that this site was used continuously from about 500 years ago. Moa were hunted, cabbage tree/tī rakau stems were cooked in deep ovens, and pounamu tools were made.

The first Europeans to explore the Rees-Dart area were surveyors, prospectors and run holders looking for grazing land. By the time surveyor James McKerrow finished his reconnaissance in 1863, a large number of gold prospectors and miners were based at the head of Lake Wakatipu. A mining party led by Patrick Caples was the first to record the Dart Glacier. The Rees Valley, Dart and Earnslaw sheep runs were all established during the 1860s.

From 1899 until 1902, a gold dredge operated on the Dart River, and the remains of its pontoon can still be seen at Dredge Flat.

Natural history

The Rees and Dart valleys are made of green and grey schist shaped by glaciation. The Dart Glacier is now a small valley glacier, but at its peak, it was part of an enormous system that terminated at Kingston, 135 kilometres away at the southern end of Lake Wakatipu. Huge moraine walls beyond Dart Hut show the previous extent of the glacier and how much it has receded in the last few hundred years.

Southern beech/tawhai (*Nothofagus* spp.) dominates the forest. Red beech/tawhairaunui (*N. fusca*) is found along the warm valley floor of the Dart, while mountain/tawhairauriki (*N. solandri* var. *cliffortioides*) and silver beech/tawhai (*N. menziesii*) dominate the rest of both valleys. Cold air from the Dart Glacier has lowered the tree line in the Dart to 900 metres, 200 metres lower than elsewhere in the region.

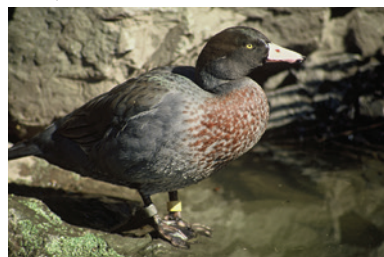
Above the treeline, tussock grasslands dominate, interspersed with flowering spikes of the aptly named speargrass or spaniard and spring and summer flowering herbs like mountain buttercups and daisies.

The Dart Valley is notable for its populations of the endangered mohua/yellowhead, kākā and long-tailed bats/pekapeka. Other forest birds such as kākārīki/parakeet, robin/kakaruai, tomtit/miromiro, fantail/pīwakawaka and brown creeper/pīpīpi thrive in both valleys.

Two significant valley inhabitants are the cheeky alpine kea, and on the river flats, paradise shelduck/pūtakitaki. Rock wren/mātuhituhi can be heard, if not seen, on the Rees Saddle and whio/blue duck may be seen in the turbulent upper reaches of the rivers.

Invertebrates are abundant, especially the ubiquitous sandfly, in the beech forest and grassy flats and energetic grasshoppers in the alpine areas. Alpine wētā are found at the Rees Saddle and in the upper Dart.

Whio/blue duck. Photo: C S Robertson, DOC



Kea. Photo: S Philipson, DOC



Safety

- **Read** the DOC brochure *Planning a Trip in the Backcountry*.
- **Plan** properly for your trip—ensure you have a capable leader and are challenging yourself within your limits.
- **Advise** someone you trust of your planned trip and expected return date via the ‘Outdoors Intentions’ process on the Adventure Smart website: www.adventuresmart.org.nz.
- **Before your trip**, check the latest weather forecast and track conditions at the Queenstown Regional Visitor Centre. Topographic maps of the track and personal locator beacon hire are available at the visitor centre.
- **Carry** a sleeping bag, cooking utensils, sufficient food, a raincoat, overtrousers, gloves, a hat and several layers of warm clothes. Physical fitness and good equipment will make all the difference to how much you enjoy your trip.
- **Keep to the track.** If you get lost, find shelter, stay calm and try to think of ways you could help searchers find you.
- **In winter**, the tracks can become impassable due to heavy snow, especially the upper Rees and Snowy Creek area. Refer to the Mount Aspiring National Park alerts on the DOC website at: www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/plan-and-prepare/alerts/otago/mount-aspiring-national-park/.
- **Water** is generally safe to drink, but hut users may wish to boil or sterilise it for their own protection.
- **Your safety is your responsibility.**



Fires

Fires should only be lit in recognised fireplaces and kept small. Do not cut or use live vegetation. Have containers of water close by for controlling fires that get out of hand and make sure the fire is out before leaving the area. Gas cookers should be used for cooking.

Track guide

Track grades



Tramping track: mostly unformed but has track directional markers, poles or cairns.



Route: unformed, suitable only for people with high-level backcountry skills and experience.



Warning: The Rees-Dart circuit option is no longer available.



Warning: Throughout this circuit, there are river and stream crossings that become hazardous in heavy rain or snowmelt. Make sensible decisions about river crossings, and have alternative plans. Pay particular attention to Muddy, Arthurs and Twenty Five Mile creeks in the Rees, unbridged creeks between Dart Hut and Daleys Flat Hut, and Surveyors Creek in the lower Dart.



Muddy Creek to park boundary

4–5 hr, 12 km

Take the vehicle track from Muddy Creek and follow the marker poles across the boggy section beyond Arthurs Creek. A side trip to the Kea Basin (see *The Head of Lake Wakatipu* brochure) begins on the other side of the Rees River north of the picturesque Lennox Falls. Continue up the grassy flats to the swing bridge on the national park boundary.

This track crosses private land. Please respect the landowner's property and leave all gates as you find them.



Park boundary to Shelter Rock Hut

2–3 hr, 7 km



Warning: Avalanche paths between the upper bushline and Shelter Rock Hut can make travel hazardous from winter to early summer.

There is a marked track through the bush and a swing bridge crossing to the west bank of Rees River. The track continues through beech forest past Clarke Slip to the bush edge. Above the bush, the track crosses several gullies that are avalanche paths. Take care crossing these gullies in spring and early summer when late snow may still pose a risk. Half an hour up from the bush edge, cross a bridge to the river's east bank to reach the 22-bunk Shelter Rock Hut.



Shelter Rock Hut to Dart Hut

4–6 hr, 10 km



Warning: The upper Snowy Creek swing bridge is removed each winter and is returned when the snow clears, which can be as late as December. This creek can be hazardous so extreme care must be taken if crossing it. Avalanche paths between the bushline and Dart Hut can make travel hazardous from winter to early summer.

The track between Shelter Rock Hut and Dart Hut is narrow with a number of steep drop-offs, particularly in the upper Snowy Creek. Follow the true left of Rees River as the track goes through scrub then rises about 100 m above the river.

The track sidles into the tussock-filled upper basin and follows the river's bed. On the final steep climb to the 1471-metre Rees Saddle, there is a lightly marked track close to the bluff on the left.

From the saddle, follow the orange markers as the track drops and passes tarns to a tussock bench well above Snowy Creek. From here, the track traverses steep slopes that can be dangerous when wet or snow covered.

A bridge crosses upper Snowy Creek, (see box above) and the track sidles across broken slopes before descending sharply. The 32-bunk Dart Hut is on Snowy Creek's true left and can be reached via another bridge.



Dart Hut to Dart Glacier

2–3 hr, 7 km (one way)



Dart Hut to Cascade Saddle

4–5 hr, 10 km (one way)

The Dart Glacier and Cascade Saddle make for a challenging but rewarding day trip from Dart Hut. Cross the Snowy Creek Bridge and follow the metal poles and rock cairns northward along the Dart River and the edge of Dart Glacier.



Dart Hut to Aspiring Hut via Cascade Saddle

8–10 hr, 17 km



Warning: Multiple fatalities have occurred on this route – make sure that you have the right skills and equipment and be prepared to turn back if conditions are unfavourable. Failure to make good decisions while attempting this traverse may result in serious injury or death.

If you want to reach the Matukituki valley by this route, carry a copy of the brochure *Cascade Saddle Route* but be aware that the route is recommended in the reverse direction, starting from the Matukituki. This alpine crossing only suits experienced trampers with alpine skills and should not be attempted in adverse weather. Steep snow-grass slopes on the Matukituki side become treacherous when wet or snow covered. Even in summer, snow may affect this area.



Dart Hut to the Whitbourn Glacier

2–4 hr, 7 km (one way)



Warning: The swing bridge across the Dart River has been removed due to flood damage and will be replaced in the near future. Trampers wishing to access the Whitbourn Valley must now ford the river. This could be extremely hazardous in heavy rain or snowmelt—we recommend you talk to a DOC ranger before attempting this crossing.

The Whitbourn Glacier can be visited as a day trip from Dart Hut. The Whitbourn River joins the Dart River half an hour downstream from Dart Hut. A track, currently not signposted while the bridge is under repair, leads through and above the bush, and cairns lead onto the glacier's snout.



Dart Hut to Daleys Flat Hut

5–7 hr, 18 km

From Dart Hut, it is an easy 2–3 hour sidle and descent through beech forest to Cattle Flat. A faint track marked by metal poles leads across the 4 km of Cattle Flat, crossing terraces and gullies and is followed by a well marked track through beech forest to 20-bunk Daleys Flat Hut.



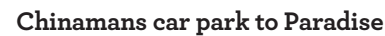
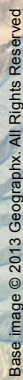
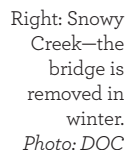
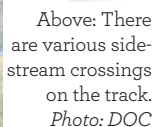
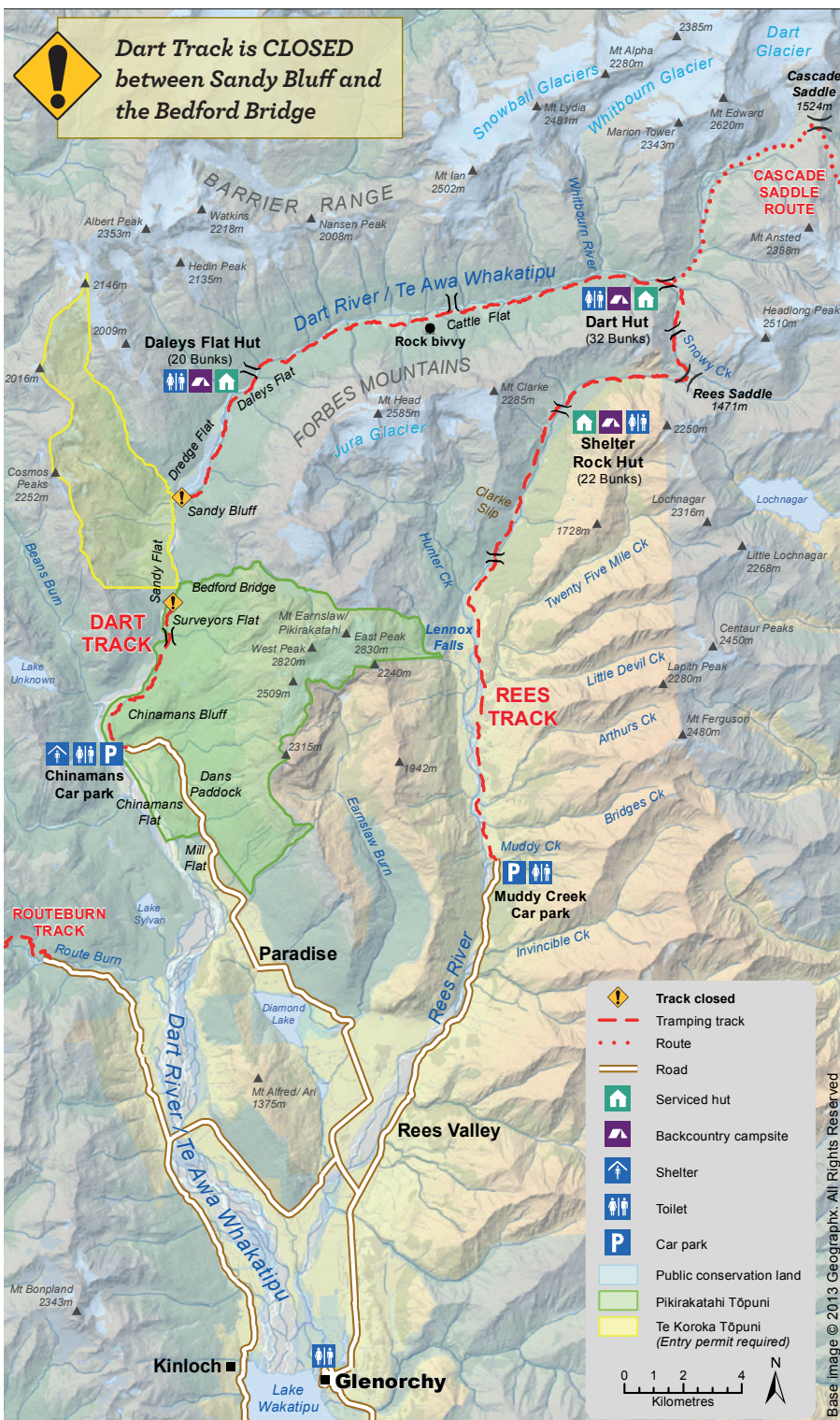
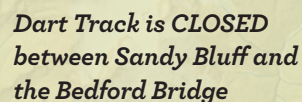
Daleys Flat Hut to Chinamans car park

5 hr 30 min – 7 hr 30 min, 16 km



Warning: Currently impassable

Landslides in 2014 created a lake over Dredge Flat and parts of the Dart Track, and the Dart River has changed course. The Dart Track is now **CLOSED** between Sandy Bluff and the Bedford Bridge, about 7 km north of Chinamans car park. The Rees-Dart circuit option is unavailable. This closure is monitored closely – please contact the Queenstown VC for updates on 03 442 7935. Day walks from Chinamans car park to Bedford Bridge are possible.



2 hr, 6 km

A 6 km fine-weather road leads to Paradise, crossing Chinamans Flat, forests and Dans Paddock before entering forests again and descending to farmland at Mill Flat. During heavy rain, the road floods, preventing vehicle access beyond Paradise. Trampers may need to walk to Paradise to meet transport.

Huts and camping

The three DOC huts in this area have solid fuel fires for heating and mattresses and water. Trampers must carry their own cookers. Hut wardens are present from November until late April.

Backcountry Hut Tickets or a Backcountry Pass must be purchased in advance from DOC visitor centres or approved outlets. Please leave huts clean and tidy. There are no rubbish disposal facilities on the track—carry out what you carry in.

Camping is permitted, except in the fragile alpine and subalpine areas between Shelter Rock Hut and Dart Hut. Camping on the Cascade Saddle Route is only permitted near Cascade Creek where there is a toilet – this is to limit the impact on this fragile alpine area.

There is a fee of \$5 per night per adult and \$2.50 per night per child to camp by any of the huts—if camping here, please use the hut toilet. If camping elsewhere, please bury all human waste carefully.

Hunting and fishing

There are limited opportunities for trout fishing in the mid-Rees and in some tributaries and parts of the Dart. Fishing licences can be obtained from Fish & Game New Zealand (for more information see www.fishandgame.org.nz).

Deer hunting is allowed in parts of both valleys though a hunting permit is required: contact the DOC Wakatipu Area Office, 1 Arthurs Point Road, Queenstown, phone (03) 442 7933.



Didymo is an invasive weed found in rivers and streams that can form massive blooms that adversely affect freshwater fish, plants and invertebrates by reducing their habitat. It can be carried on equipment, clothing and vehicles. Please 'check, clean and dry' all equipment, apparel and vehicles that have entered waterways.