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The Motatapu Track

Alpine tramping track
Wānaka to Arrowtown



Cover photo: *Stef Cotteret* ©

This information was accurate at the time of printing. For the latest information on DOC's policies and facilities, visit www.doc.govt.nz.

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**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



History

The Motatapu valley was used extensively by Māori from coastal settlements, travelling between lakes Wānaka and Wakatipu. Wānaka was important for māhika kai – gathering food in summer, including eel/tuna, weka and other items.

Māori also had large gardens near the Motatapu rivermouth, now the Mātakitaki Conservation Area. The hills and the river had particular significance for the local Māori. The river's early name was Mate-tapu, because of the urupā/cemetery in the hills nearby. The urupā was near Nehenehe, a small, semi-permanent kāika/village. It was important until 1836, when the settlement was devastated by a war party sent south by Ngāti Toa chief Te Rauparaha to subdue South Island Māori. The residents of Nehenehe were taken by surprise and few escaped with their lives. Wānaka's seasonal settlements, like Nehenehe, were then abandoned.

The first European to see Lake Wānaka was Nathaniel Chalmers in 1853. Together with Kāi Tahu guides Reko and Kaikoura, he walked from Tuturau in Southland via the Kawarau River and returned by a daring raft ride down the Clutha/Mata-Au River. In 1859, two surveyors, Jollie and Young, climbed a peak (probably Mount Motatapu) and saw Mount Aspiring/Tititea gleaming in the distance. It is alleged that at the top, Jollie said 'I think we'll call this mountain, Perspiring'. Mount Aspiring received its English name 2 years earlier when J.T. 'Mr Surveyor' Thomson climbed Mount Grandview in the Upper Clutha Valley.

By 1861, there were several sheep stations at the southern end of Lake Wānaka, and gold mining was in full swing. By the mid-1860s, gold mining had expanded, particularly in the Macetown and Arrow areas, where alluvial gold was recovered with relative ease. As a result, a government-funded pack track was formed to link Arrowtown with Lake Wānaka, and the Motatapu Track follows sections of that route.



Tree daisies. Photo: Rosalind Cole

Flora and fauna

Highlights include a significant, remnant stand of red beech/tawhairaunui along the Fern Burn, and other pockets of regenerating mixed beech forest and high country tussockland.

The tree and shrub species include three beech species, tree daisies (*Olearia* spp.), mountain ribbonwood/houhi, broadleaf/kāpuka, koromiko, kōwhai and occasionally the threatened yellow mistletoe/pirita.

Higher up, the open tussock country provides plenty of marvellous vistas. At your feet, there are tiny cushion plants and alpine flowers, along with by a host of invertebrate life.

The New Zealand falcon/kārearea is often seen circling the higher ridges. Lower down, the forest species include fantail/pīwakawaka, korimako/bellbird, grey warbler/riroriro, rifleman/tītītipounamu, tomtit/miromiro and brown creeper/pīpīpi.



Kōwhai flowers. Photo: Alex Schwab





Fern Burn Hut. Photo: Stef Cotteret ©

The Motatapu Track

This demanding 49km 3–4 day journey for experienced trampers crosses Motatapu and Soho stations, passing through remnant beech/tawhai forest and golden tussocklands. This track is part of the Te Araroa trail.

The Motatapu Track can be completed in either direction. Access to either end is by foot, shuttle or vehicle. The Fern Burn car park is located on the Motatapu Road, 15 km away from Wānaka. Parking in Arrowtown is available near the Chinese Settlement. Alternatively, 4WD vehicles can be driven to Macetown (15 km up the track). This involves 22 river crossings and should only be attempted by experienced drivers.

In 2004, the Motatapu and Soho station leases were sold to Soho Property Ltd, who agreed to create a public tramping track linking Wānaka with the Arrow valley. The tracks and facilities were built by Soho Properties and gifted to the Crown in their entirety – the Motatapu Track. In 2015 Soho Properties protected much of the landscape surrounding the track through a covenant with the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust. This is the largest private land covenant in New Zealand, covering 53,000 ha of the iconic natural landscape. The protection of this large tract of magnificent high country would not have been possible without the vision and generosity of the land's owner, Robert 'Mutt' Lange.

Fern Burn car park to Fern Burn Hut

3–4 hr, 7 km

The track meanders along the true right of Fern Burn, passing shrubland and grassy flats. It then climbs into remnant beech forest, including: mountain/tawhairauriki, silver/tawhai and red/tawhairaunui beech. Here the Fern Burn narrows, featuring cascades and waterfalls. An hour from the car park, the track briefly enters the 4144 ha Stack Conservation Area then continues to the bush edge, then on to upland tussock country and the Fern Burn Hut (720 m).

Fern Burn Hut to Highland Creek Hut

3–5 hr, 6 km

This more arduous leg continues along Upper Fern Burn through tussock before reaching Jack Halls Saddle at 1275 m—the saddle and nearby creek were named after a local shepherd. Next is a steep descent into a creek bed, before navigating another two ridges and descending to Highland Creek. Highland Creek Hut (850 m) nestles in a spectacular, upland basin.



Highland Creek Hut. Photo: Ayako Nakamishi

Highland Creek Hut to Roses Hut

6–8 hr, 11 km

After crossing Highland Creek, the marked track sidles and climbs above another unnamed creek onto a prominent spur. A highlight of this section is the stunning view across Motatapu valley. Continue up this spur before negotiating several long sidles over steep, tussock-covered terrain; care and concentration is necessary on this section. Descend steeply into a gully, cross the creek, pass through a patch of remnant beech forest, and climb out onto the leading southwest ridge of Knuckle Peak. The terrain climbs steeply again before sidling and dropping down another ridge to the Motatapu River. The Roses Hut (681 m) is a short tramp across the open flats.



Roses Hut to Macetown

4–6 hr, 10 km

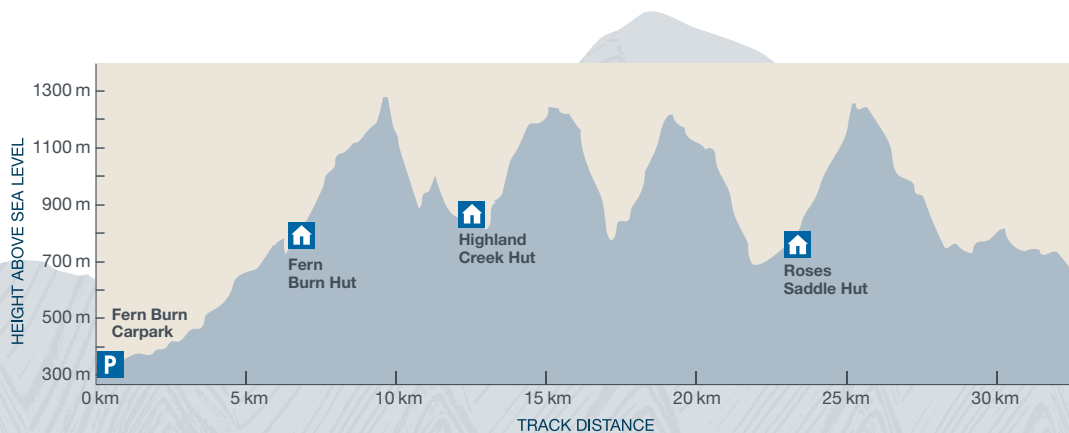
Cross the small creek to the old pack track that climbs the main 1270 m ridge above Roses Saddle (1188 m). At the crossover point between the Motatapu and Arrow catchments, the ridge descends to the Arrow River. During low river levels it's quicker to wade in and out of the river down to Macetown passing the remains of old gold workings along the way. For those with limited river crossing skills or if the river is too high/coloured, a track sidles above the river to join an old water race to Macetown, passing several small dams and other relics. You will have to cross the Arrow River to access Macetown.

Macetown to Arrowtown

3–4 hr, 15 km

From Macetown, a 15 km 4WD track winds its way down to Arrowtown. There are multiple river crossings along the way - negotiate with care. If the river is running high, you are advised to wait.

Alternatively, you can avoid most of the river crossings by following the miner's trail to Eight Mile Creek then the Big Hill Track to Arrowtown (4–5 hr). This route is steep and exposed and is not recommended in adverse weather. In fine conditions, you'll get great views over the Wakatipu basin.



Huts and camping

All three huts have 12 bunks, mattresses, a water supply and toilets. Hut tickets must be pre-purchased from DOC offices. The huts do not have fireplaces and you will need to carry your own cooker. You should leave huts clean and tidy with windows and doors closed securely. There are no rubbish disposal facilities – please carry out all rubbish.

Camping is permitted in the vicinity of the huts and at Macetown. No camping or fires are permitted in the historic buildings. Camping is not permitted at the Fern Burn car park – the Glendhu Bay Motor Camp is the closest campground (3.5 km from trailhead).

GENERAL SAFETY – WARNING

- The Motatapu Track is suitable for experienced trampers only, due to its exposed and challenging terrain.
- Several steep sidles require care–increase your travel times if not confident in this type of country.
- Rivers and streams can rise rapidly. Never cross a flooded river, wait or turn back if conditions are unsafe for crossing.
- In summer, carry plenty of water as water sources are limited, and have adequate sun protection.
- Wintry conditions can occur at any time of the year, with higher country subject to snow especially during winter.
- Carry NZTopo50 maps: CB11 Arrowtown and CB12 Cardrona.



NO DOGS.



NO FIRES.



UNTREATED WATER. Water at huts is not treated or tested, and may not be suitable for drinking, food preparation, tooth brushing or washing dishes. Boil water before use.



NO UNAUTHORISED DRONES.



AVALANCHE RISK. There is complex avalanche terrain on the Motatapu Track. Refer to www.avalanche.net.nz if planning a trip between May and November.



The Motatapu track. Photo: Ayako Nakanishi



Motatapu track in winter. Photo: Ayako Nakanishi

Care for Aotearoa



Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Follow any rules restricting dogs, fires, drones or vehicles.



Keep NZ clean

Take all rubbish with you and use toilets where provided.



Show respect

Respect others, respect culture.



Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by following the Land Safety Code.

- ▶ Choose the right trip for you.
- ▶ Understand the weather.
- ▶ Pack warm clothes and extra food.
- ▶ Share your plans and take ways to get help.
- ▶ Take care of yourself and each other.



BETWEEN WATERWAYS

CHECK, CLEAN, DRY

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



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

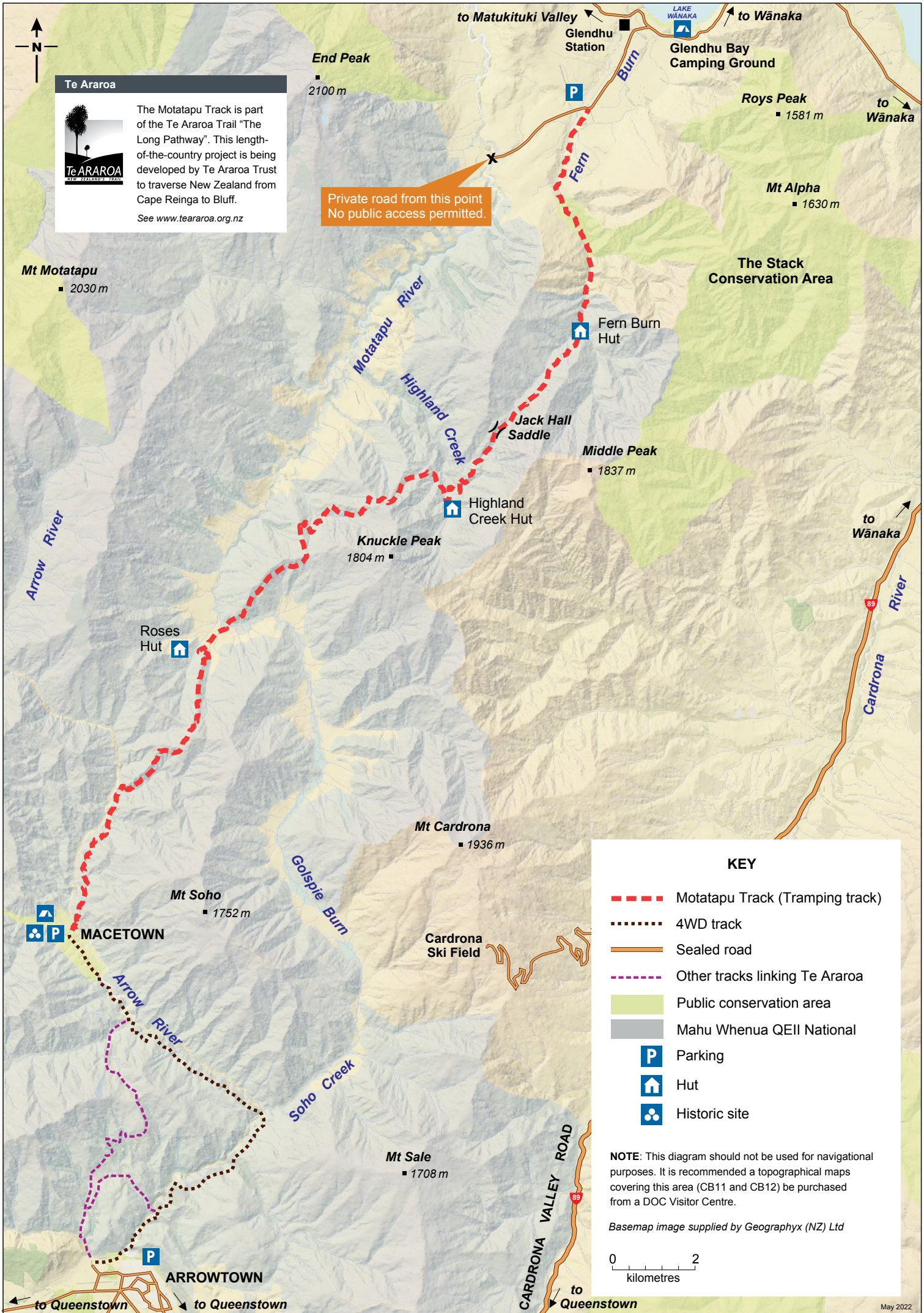


DOC HOTline
0800 362 468

Report any safety hazards
or conservation emergencies
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111



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Te Araroa

The Motatapu Track is part of the Te Araroa Trail "The Long Pathway". This length-of-the-country project is being developed by Te Araroa Trust to traverse New Zealand from Cape Reinga to Bluff.

See www.teararoa.org.nz

Private road from this point
No public access permitted.

KEY

- - - - - Motatapu Track (Tramping track)
- 4WD track
- — — — — Sealed road
- - - - - Other tracks linking Te Araroa
- Public conservation area
- Mahu Whenua QEII National
- P Parking
- H Hut
- ⊗ Historic site

NOTE: This diagram should not be used for navigational purposes. It is recommended a topographical maps covering this area (CB11 and CB12) be purchased from a DOC Visitor Centre.

Basemap image supplied by Geographyx (NZ) Ltd

0 2
kilometres