

# Alpine Route

## Mt Richmond Forest Park



### Introduction

The Alpine Route is a challenging trip above the bushline in Mt Richmond Forest Park, which offers outstanding views over the Waimea Plains, towards Kahurangi and Abel Tasman National Parks, and to the rugged hills of South Marlborough and the Inland Kaikouras.

It is only suitable for experienced and well-equipped groups. There is little or no formed track in many places, the terrain is steep and rugged, and good fitness and navigation skills are needed. A compass, the relevant 1:50,000 Topo50 maps (BQ26 Nelson, BQ27 Rai Valley, BR25 Tophouse, BR26 Mount Patriarch) and the Mt Richmond Forest Park map should be carried.

The Alpine Route runs from Starveall Hut through to Tarn Hut, and is mostly above the bushline, ranging from 1000–1700 metres above sea level.

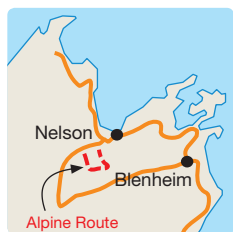
The Route is well sign-posted and is supported by a network of five standard DOC huts. All visitors are required to have either a Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Tickets to stay in the huts.

### How to get there

There are a range of tracks that offer access on to the Alpine Route.

Most trampers start from the Hackett road end, 29 km south of Nelson, and walk through to Starveall Hut to begin the Alpine Route. From Tarn Hut, they complete the trip by descending to either the Wairoa road end, inland from Wakefield, or to the Goulter road end, on the north bank of the Wairau River. This trip usually takes four days.

The Alpine Route is also accessible on tracks from the Goulter River, Lake Chalice, or via the Pelorus River. Trampers wanting to use these tracks should refer to DOC's 'The Northbank' and 'The Pelorus Track' recreational publications.



### Track description

#### Hackett road end to Starveall Hut (6h)

The track starts at the picnic area just past the junction of the Hackett Creek and Roding River. It crosses a wooden footbridge across the Roding River and, after 1 km, a suspension bridge across the Hackett Creek. The track follows the creek through private land before reaching a picnic area at the junction of the Miner River. A further 30 minutes upstream, at the junction of the Browning Stream, a sign-posted track leads to Browning Hut. Walkers should continue on the right-hand track to Hackett Hut (6 bunks). From the hut the track continues upstream, crossing the creek a number of times, before sidling up towards the impressive Pyramid Rock. It then climbs steadily before zig-zagging the final steep stretch to Starveall Hut (6 bunks). The hut is located at the edge of a large clearing on a spur below Mt Starveall.

#### Starveall Hut to Slaty Hut (2h 30 min)

The Alpine Route begins from Starveall Hut and is marked with poles, leading up to the summit ridge of Mt Starveall. Halfway along the ridge, the route drops off to the left and descends to a distinct forested ridge that leads towards Slaty Peak. The route sidles across the northern face of Slaty Peak to Slaty Hut (6 bunks), located just above the bushline.

It is possible to detour to the Mt Starveall summit (1511 m) en route to Slaty Hut, which provides magnificent views over Nelson and Tasman Bay.

#### Slaty Hut to Old Man Hut (5h)

The Alpine Route sidles around the basin below Slaty Peak before climbing gradually back onto the main ridge, which is followed right through until Old Man Peak. The route is entirely above the bushline, except when it descends into forested saddles before Ada Flat and at the base of Old Man Peak.

There is a sign-posted junction at the summit of Old Man Peak (1514 m), with the left-hand route leading down to Lake Chalice or to the Forks/Top Valley.

Refer to DOC's 'The Northbank' publication for more information on this option.

The Alpine Route continues along the main summit ridge. Old Man Hut (5 bunks) is located on a natural grassy clearing 200 m below the ridge, and is reached on a sign-posted access track.

### **Old Man Hut to Rintoul Hut (5 h)**

A sign-posted access track leads back to the main ridge, from which the Alpine Route climbs up blocky scree to the summit of Little Rintoul (1643 m). The route descends 250 m down a rocky ridge to a saddle, then climbs steeply again to the Mt Rintoul summit (1731 m). It is possible to climb along the very sharp and rugged ridge, or to sidle on the southern side below the ridge. This is the highest point of the Alpine Route and is also the most difficult part of the trip. The terrain is steep and broken and can be treacherously icy during winter. Particular care should be taken.

From the summit, the route descends the summit ridge before dropping down scree slopes to the bushline. A short track then leads to Rintoul Hut (6 bunks). Both the hut and Mt Rintoul summit offer magnificent views, particularly over the Waimea Plains and Tasman Bay.

From Old Man Hut, it is also possible to head directly down to the Goulter River. Refer to DOC's 'The Northbank' publication for more information on this option.

### **Rintoul Hut to Tarn Hut (5 h)**

From Rintoul Hut the Alpine Route leads through mountain beech forest to climb the scree and rock faces of Purple Top (1532 m), before descending down the main summit ridge. The route then sidles across the southern face of Bishops Cap (1425 m) to join the main forested spur to the south. Tarn Hut (5 bunks) is located at the edge of a small tarn, to the east of the main ridge, and is reached on a sign-posted access track.

### **Tarn Hut to Wairoa road end (5–6 h)**

A sign-posted access track leads back to the main ridge, from which the track leads down the ridge to a sign-posted junction shortly before Bushy Top, with the right-hand track leading to the Wairoa road end.

The track sidles on the western side of the ridge, eventually reaching a prominent spur which is followed to the left branch of the Wairoa River.


The final descent to the river is particularly steep. A swingbridge crosses the river just downstream from the Mid Wairoa Hut (6 bunks).

### **Tramping track**

- Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking.
- Track is mostly unformed with steep, rough or muddy sections.
- Suitable for people with good fitness. Moderate to high-level backcountry skills and experience (including navigation and survival skills) required.
- Track has markers, poles or rock cairns. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Tramping/hiking boots required.

### **Route**

- Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking.
- Track unformed and natural, rough, muddy or very steep.
- Suitable for people with above average fitness. High-level backcountry skills and experience (including navigation and survival skills) required.
- Complete self-sufficiency required.
- Track has markers, poles or rock cairns. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Sturdy tramping/hiking boots required.

 **Standard huts** have mattresses, water supply and toilet. Wood heaters are provided at huts below the bush line. The Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Tickets are required.

The track follows the Wairoa River before opening out onto a forestry road, which must be followed for about 4 km, right down to a locked gate.

Walkers should allow an extra one to two hours if starting the trip from the Wairoa.

### **Tarn Hut to Goulter road end (5–6 h)**

At the sign-posted junction shortly before Bushy Top (see above), the left-hand branch leads to the Goulter road end.

The track climbs over Bushy Top (1257 m) before descending down a prominent spur to the Goulter River opposite the Lower Goulter Hut. The river is not bridged and no attempts should be made to cross it while in flood.

From the hut, the track carries on for 45 minutes to a 4WD road end. It is a further two hours to Tiphead Stream, which is generally accessible to two-wheel drive vehicles.

Walkers should allow an extra one to two hours if starting the trip from the Goulter.

## Please remember

**Safety:** The Alpine Route is suitable for experienced and well-equipped trampers only. Weather conditions can change rapidly, with snow possible throughout most of the year. During winter, the route will be very cold and icy.

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**

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

Remember your safety is your responsibility. To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call  
**DOC HOTline 0800 362 468.**

**Access information:** All the roads that provide access onto the tracks leading to the Alpine Route pass through private land, and may occasionally be closed or have restricted access due to forestry operations. Walkers should check with DOC visitor centres for any access restrictions when planning their trip.

**Wasps** are a known hazard and are particularly common from December until April. Carry antihistamine if you are allergic to their stings.

**Rubbish:** No rubbish facilities are provided. All visitors should carry their rubbish out of the park.

**Fires:** Please carry your own stove for cooking. Fires should only be lit in hut fireplaces.

**Drinking water:** Water should be carried along the route, especially during the summer, as there is little flowing water on the tops.

The purity of drinking water cannot be guaranteed. If in doubt, you should boil, filter or chemically treat it before drinking.

**Hunting:** DOC encourages recreational hunting in Mt Richmond Forest Park. However, hunters must first obtain a permit from DOC to hunt in the park.

Hunters must also obtain permission from the relevant land managers if intending to hunt in the forestry areas on the fringes of the park.

**Dogs:** A permit is required from DOC to bring dogs into the park. A maximum of four dogs per party is allowed.



**NEW ZEALAND  
environmental  
CARE CODE**

- Protect plants and animals
- Remove rubbish
- Bury toilet waste
- Keep waterways clean
- Take care with fires
- Camp carefully
- Keep to the track
- Consider others
- Respect our cultural heritage
- Enjoy your visit
- *Toitū te whenua* (leave the land undisturbed)

## Further information

For more information visit [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) or contact:

**Department of Conservation  
Nelson Regional Visitor Centre**  
Millers Acre/Taha o te Awa  
79 Trafalgar Street, Nelson 7010  
PO Box 375, Nelson 7040  
Ph: (03) 546 9339  
Email: [nelsonvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nelsonvc@doc.govt.nz)

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