

Huts and Camping

DOC's huts on the tracks have coal fires for heating only. Trampers need their own cookers as gas stoves are not provided. All huts have mattresses and water (indoor running water in summer, outside tank water in winter). Hut wardens are present from late October until mid-April. A Back Country Pass or Back Country tickets must be purchased in advance from a DOC office or approved outlet.

Trampers should leave huts clean and tidy, and pack out what they pack in. There are no rubbish disposal facilities.

Camping is permitted along the bush edge and 50 metres from the track. Camping on McKellar Saddle is not permitted because of the fragile sub-alpine environment or on the privately owned Caples and Greenstone valley floors.

To camp by any of the four huts there is a fee of \$5 per night for adults and \$2.50 per night for children – if camping here please use the hut toilet. If camping elsewhere please bury all human waste carefully.

General Information

The grassy river flats of the Caples and Greenstone Valleys are private farmland. Please stay on the tracks following the forest edge. Do not disturb stock.

The forest is managed by the Department of Conservation. Fiordland National Park begins at the southern end of Lake McKellar.

In areas without toilets, bury your waste at least 50 metres from tracks, huts, camping sites, popular areas and water sources.

Further Information

For further information please contact:

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Web: www.doc.govt.nz



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Report any safety hazards or
conservation emergencies
For fire and search and rescue call 111



The Greenstone Caples Track

Easy tramping track

LAKE WAKATIPU / FIORDLAND



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Introduction

Tramping the Caples and Greenstone Valleys, by crossing the sub-alpine McKellar Saddle, is an excellent four- to five-day round trip in superb surroundings. The Greenstone Valley is wide and open with tussock flats and beech forest. The Caples is narrower and more heavily forested, interspersed with grassy clearings. Both tracks can link with the Routeburn Track and can be walked either way, starting or finishing at either The Divide or the Greenstone Shelter.

History

The Greenstone and Hollyford Valleys were the easiest access routes between the West Coast and Central Otago, and widely used by Māori from Otago and Murihiku/Southland. West Coast Kāi Tahu also used the route to reach the Dart Valley to collect the highly valued, pearly grey-green inanga variety of pounamu (greenstone). No Māori archaeological sites have been found within the Greenstone and Caples Valleys, but about 20 sites have been identified beside the Dart/Te Awa Whakatipu and Rees/Puahere Rivers, and on Pigeon Island/Wāwāhi Waka, opposite the Greenstone Valley.

The first Europeans here included Southland runholders, David McKellar and George Gunn in 1862, looking for grazing land, and a year later a prospector, Patrick Caples, was the first to cross from Lake Wakatipu to the West Coast. For a long time the pack track up the Greenstone Valley was the only route to Martins Bay on the West Coast. Farming began in the Caples Valley in 1880 – the original Birchdale homestead still stands – and the Greenstone Valley and the Pass Burn, were used as stock routes by early runholders. By the late 1800s Lake Rere was a popular destination. The steamers stopped at the Elfin Bay Wharf, and the tourists walked to the lake.

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/Mt. 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.

Natural History

The dominant rock of both valleys and the surrounding mountains is Caples Sandstone. This is a tough, erosion resistant rock which has been tilted and now virtually stands on end. A band of blackish serpentine – the Greenstone Melange – is found in the lower reaches of both river valleys.

In its heyday, the once enormous Hollyford Glacier reached Martins Bay on the coast, flowed over Key Summit on the main divide and branched into the Eglinton and Greenstone Valleys. It then split at the Sly Burn and reached Mavora Lakes and Lake Wakatipu, in the south and east respectively.

The forests in both valleys are beech, *Nothofagus* spp. The larger leaved red beech prefers lower altitudes and alluvial fans, small smooth-leaved mountain beech prefers higher altitudes, and silver beech occurs throughout the valleys. In summer, bands of the different beech species can be seen on the valley sides.

The forest under-storey is populated by ferns and small shrubs and trees such as horopito with its peppery tasting leaves.

The open, grassy river flats have always been clear of forest, as frequent frosts prevent encroachment. As a result of farming, native grass and tussock has mostly been replaced by introduced grasses, though extensive tussock remains in the mid and upper Greenstone.

There are prominent patches of celery and bog pine on the river flats and on the McKellar Saddle, inaka or *Dracophyllum*, tussocks and stunted mountain beech.

Beech forests are rich in invertebrate life and insect-eating birds such as tomtit/miromiro, fantail/piwakawaka, rifleman/titipounamu, brown creeper/pipipi and South Island robin/kakaruaui thrive. Kākāriki/parakeet, mōhua/yellowhead and kākā can be seen in the Greenstone and Caples forests.

Kea are sometimes seen at the upper end of the Caples track, and New Zealand falcon/kārearea soar above the valley flats and forest edges. Whio or blue duck inhabit fast flowing streams and the noisy paradise duck/pūtakitaki are conspicuous on the river flats.

Operation Ark

Operation Ark was established to preserve and increase populations of four New Zealand species, including the mōhua (yellowhead/bush canary). One of its goals is to reverse the degradation of the forest ecosystem.

The Upper Caples Valley is one of only a few forest areas where mōhua survive. Predator monitoring and control to protect the mōhua population is ongoing and has also assisted other species such as the pekapeka/long-tailed bat and kākāriki/parakeet.



Hunting and Fishing

The Caples and Greenstone Valleys are rainbow and brown trout fisheries of national importance. Both a Whole Season and Backcountry Licence are required – fly fishing only with a daily, one fish, bag limit. Anglers must agree to Didymo cleaning procedures before obtaining a Backcountry Licence. A controlled fishery will be established on the upper Greenstone River, from its source to the Sly Burn confluence from 1st February to 31st March. To apply for licences, visit the Fish & Game NZ website: www.fishandgame.org.nz

Didymo is an invasive weed of rivers and streams that can form massive blooms. These can adversely affect fish, plants and invertebrates by reducing their habitats. Please “Check, Clean and Dry” all equipment, apparel and vehicles that have entered waterways.

The Wakatipu Recreational Hunting Area covers both the Greenstone and Caples catchments. Black fallow deer are the most common, though white fallow deer are present. Chamois are frequently seen among the tops in Fiordland National Park and in the Recreational Hunting Area. Red deer may also be seen.

There is a balloted restricted shooting season and shooting is not allowed 100 metres either side of the main valley tracks or on farmland. A hunting permit is required - contact the DOC Wakatipu Area Office, 37 Shotover St, phone (03) 442 7933.

Safety

- Read the DOC Publication “Planning a trip in the backcountry”.
- Plan properly for your trip - ensure you have a capable leader and are challenging yourself within your limits.
- Before you start, register your intentions with someone reliable or use the Mountain Safety Council intentions system, and sign out when you return.
- Check the weather forecast and the latest information on hazards and facilities before you enter the area.
- Carry a sleeping bag, cooking utensils, sufficient food, raincoat, over trousers, gloves, hat and several layers of warm clothes. Physical fitness and good equipment will make all the difference to the enjoyment of your trip.
- Keep to the track. If you get lost, find shelter, stay calm and try to assist searchers

Track Guide

Warning: Unbridged side streams on these track systems may flood due to heavy or prolonged rain. Care is required. Make sensible decisions about river crossings, and have alternative plans.

Greenstone Road end to Mid Caples Hut

2 - 3 hours, 9 km



Follow the Greenstone/Caples Track from the car park. After 2-3 minutes a stock bridge gives access to the Lake Rere Track. Don't cross the bridge but keep to the true left – the river's left bank, looking downstream. The track continues past the confluence of the Caples and Greenstone Rivers. Another swing bridge provides access to the Greenstone Track. The Caples Track continues on the Caples River's true left. Along the valley floor it mainly follows the bush edge, but crosses the occasional grassy clearing. Just before the 12-bunk Mid-Caples Hut, the track crosses a spectacular gorge.

Mid Caples Hut to Upper Caples Hut

1.5 - 2.5 hours, 7 km



Travel up the valley through bush and grassy clearings is easy - beware however of side streams on this section after heavy rain. Where the valley begins to narrow, you'll find 12-bunk Upper Caples Hut in a bush clearing.

Upper Caples Hut to McKellar Hut

5 - 8 hours, 13 km



From Upper Caples Hut the track climbs through beech forest and is quite rough with exposed tree roots and rocks. Take care during heavy rain, as crossing the Caples River and side streams may become hazardous. The track steepens as it approaches the sub-alpine zone and after about three hours the open tussock of McKellar Saddle is reached, giving great views. The saddle track has been board-walked to protect the fragile sub-alpine vegetation.

West of the saddle the track enters the bush and drops steeply over rocks and roots, to come out on the open valley floor, upstream from Lake McKellar – there may be flooding after heavy rain. The track crosses the valley to a junction – 12-bunk McKellar Hut lies to the left, and 28-bunk Howden Hut to the right. Both huts are about an hour from here. The McKellar Hut track skirts the lake then follows the Greenstone River down to the hut.



Mōhua/yellowhead. Photo: M Eckstaedt

Greenstone Hut to road end

3 - 5 hours, 12 km



To continue down the valley to the Greenstone car park return to the junction via the gorge bridge.

On the Greenstone Track the valley narrows sharply as the river enters a long gorge section. About halfway down the gorge is Slip Flat, a large open area. If the creek across the flat is in flood, there's an emergency bridge upstream. Below Slip Flat may be avalanche prone in winter. Where the track re-enters the bush it follows the Greenstone to its junction with the Caples. Parts of the track cross private land and stock may be present. At the confluence of the two rivers take the swing bridge that leads to the Caples' left bank, and join the Caples Track, a 30-minute walk downstream to the car park.

Other Options

McKellar Hut to Lake Howden

1.5 - 2.5 hours, 7 km



From McKellar Hut the track skirts to the left of Lake McKellar and through forest to the 28-bunk Howden Hut on the Routeburn Track – bookings are essential, late October to late April.

Upper Caples Hut to Greenstone Hut via Steele Creek 10 - 12 hours



This track is suitable for experienced trampers only.

- Although the tracks are not closed in winter, avalanche danger may be present, and snow may make travel very difficult, even on the valley floors.
- 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.**

Ngāi Tahu Land Settlement – Kā Whenua Roimata

As part of the Crown's settlement of Ngāi Tahu's historic land claims, three high country stations at the head of Lake Wakatipu have been transferred to Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. In turn, Te Rūnanga has transferred 4100 hectares of mountain land in the southern Ailsa and Humboldt Mountains back to the Crown, as a gift to the people of New Zealand. This land is now known as Kā Whenua Roimata, which translates as "the land of tears".

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu is also to lease back to the Crown in perpetuity other significant portions of the stations as conservation areas. These are mainly in the Mararoa catchment. In addition, covenants for public foot access now exist around Lake Rere, to Scott Basin, and through freehold parts of the properties in the Greenstone and Caples Valleys.

Access

The Caples and Greenstone Tracks start from the car park at the end of the Greenstone Road, 86 kilometres from Queenstown. From Glenorchy to the Greenstone Shelter takes an hour on a gravel road, with a number of fords that can flood in heavy rain and become difficult to negotiate. In summer, both ends of the tracks are serviced daily by transport companies, and a boat service operates from Glenorchy to the Greenstone Wharf. Both tracks can be started at Howden Hut on the Routeburn Track; an hour's walk from The Divide (Milford Road, 80km from Te Anau).

Topographical map references are NZTopo50 - Sheets CB9 Hollyford, CB10 Glenorchy and CC9 North Mavora Lake.

Track Classification



Easy tramping track: generally well formed track for comfortable overnight tramping/hiking trips.



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

McKellar Hut to Greenstone Hut

4.5 - 6.5 hours, 18 km



Cross the swing bridge in front of the hut and go down river on the true left. Take care crossing side streams which may become hazardous during heavy rain - particularly Jean Batten Creek south of McKellar Hut. Travel is easy, alternating between tussock flats and bush, until reaching a gorge through an old landslide. Then cross Steele Creek over a swing bridge. The track veers right to pass the privately owned Steele Creek Lodge and the 20-bunk Greenstone Hut is 1-2 hours from here.

The track stays on the true left and meanders down past a large white, terraced bank. It continues down the open valley before entering the bush. A junction in the track is reached soon after; turning right leads to a bridge over a gorge to the Greenstone Hut and the Mavora Walkway.

Mavora-Greenstone Walkway

From Greenstone Hut this is a 2-3 day walk to Mavora Lakes, forming part of Te Araroa/The Long Pathway. A track guide for this walkway is available.



**NEW ZEALAND
environmental
CARE CODE**

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

