

## Natural history

The existing vegetation is very different from the original patchy cover of mountain beech/tawhai and shrubland, thanks to fires, grazing, gold mining and settlement.

Above 900 metres, snow tussock is predominant. Subalpine shrubs include dracophyllum, hebes and olearia. The shady gullies shelter mountain beech, broadleaf, coprosma, mountain wineberry and bush lawyer. Berry plants and herbs were part of the early settlers' attempts to supplement their meagre diets.

Introduced wilding conifers spread rapidly and threaten slower growing native plants. DOC and the Wakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group (WCG) are controlling wildings in Skippers to minimise their impact on the area's landscape and ecology. The aim is to halt their spread and allow the natural landscape and habitat to recover. To restore the character of the area some locations around the township will be replanted with non-spreading species. You will notice dead pine trees – these have been deliberately sprayed as part of the control programme. Their remains will eventually break down. To find out more about the battle against wildings go to [www.wakatipuwilding.co.nz](http://www.wakatipuwilding.co.nz).

Bird species such as the harrier hawk/kāhu, falcon/kārearea, kea, rifleman/tītītipounamu, tomtit/piropiro and bellbird/korimako are in the gully forests and low scrubland. Pipits/pihoihoi can be seen in the alpine grasslands.

Rabbits, hares, stoats, possums and goats, all introduced by early settlers, have drastically affected native vegetation and bird life. DOC controls goats in this area and encourages recreational hunting – a permit is required from the DOC Queenstown Office, 1 Arthurs Point Road, Queenstown, phone 03 442 7933.



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

Cover: Pleasant Creek Terrace. Inset: Skippers bridge.

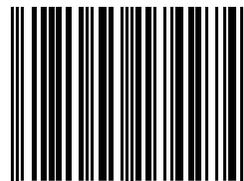
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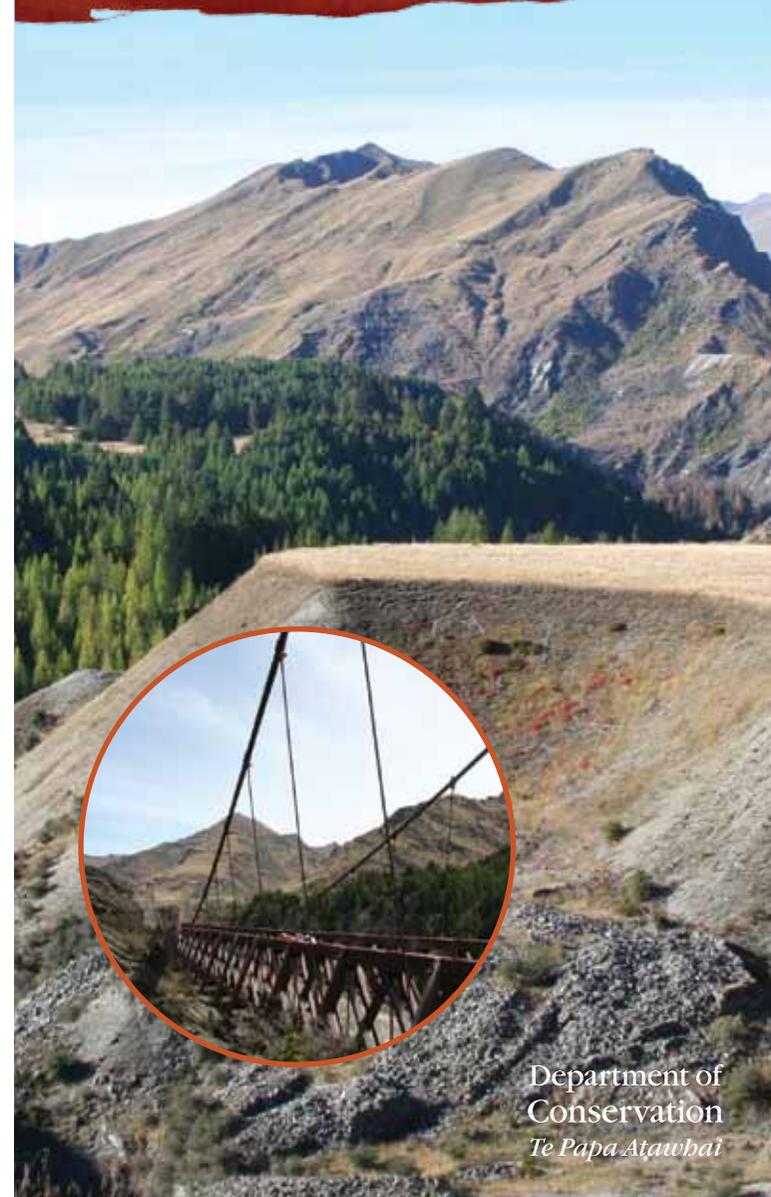
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# Skippers

Walks and tracks in  
the Shotover valley



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

## Skippers

Skippers is part of Mount Aurum Recreation Reserve in the hills and valleys that fed much of Wakatipu's 1860s gold fever. The 9100-hectare reserve was established in 1985 from Mt Aurum Station and annually attracts tens of thousands of visitors, despite the challenges of getting there.

Packed with history, Mount Aurum Reserve offers dramatic views and opportunities to walk, tramp, camp, paint, kayak, mountain bike, picnic and raft . . . you can even take your dog.

### Access

From Queenstown, travel along Gorge Road to Arthur's Point and turn left up to Coronet Peak. After about 4 km, Skippers Road is signposted. From Skippers Saddle, the road is unsealed, narrow and winding - 4WD is recommended. It is about 13 km to Skippers Bridge and Mount Aurum Recreation Reserve. The drive takes from 1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes.



*Please note: Only experienced drivers should attempt the challenging journey along Skippers Road with its very steep drops. Rental cars are generally prohibited beyond Skippers Saddle. The road is administered by the Queenstown Lakes District Council.*

## Introduction

Cross the historic Skippers suspension bridge to enter the reserve. Opened in 1901, the bridge is the most spectacular of its kind in New Zealand. On the terrace above are the remnants of Skippers Township, once the largest gold settlement on the Shotover River and now a ghost town.

It's believed that Skippers was named after Malcolm Duncan. Known as 'the Skipper', he had served on American ships and led a party of explorer/prospectors into the area at the beginning of the gold rush.

The historic Mt Aurum Homestead and Skippers Point School have been restored. Please leave all artefacts and plants for others to enjoy.

To protect the historic mining remains, please keep 4WD vehicles, motorbikes and mountain bikes off formed roads.

## Human history

Early Māori knew the Shotover River as Kimi Ākau, meaning 'looking for the coast', perhaps referring to their search for a route to the West Coast. Although they knew of Central Otago's gold, they had no use for it. Their gold was pounamu (greenstone), used for weapons and jewellery.

The 1862 gold rush lured thousands of miners to Skippers canyon, closely followed by packers, blacksmiths, butchers and bankers.



Skippers Point School. Photo: Lakes District Museum and Gallery, Arrowtown



Skippers Point School today.

At its peak, the settlement boasted a post office, hall, hotel, stores and a school. When the school closed in 1927, it became a woolshed and later was left derelict for about 20 years. In 1992 it was restored by the Department of Conservation.

One of the richest gold-bearing beaches on the Shotover was discovered by two North Island Māori, Raniera (Dan) Ellison and his colleague Hakaria Haeroa. A very promising-looking beach on the river's west bank was inaccessible because of high cliffs and none of the miners were game to swim the river from the east bank, except Ellison and Haeroa. They plunged in and reached the other side but their dog had difficulties and was carried some distance downstream to a rocky point. Ellison went to its assistance and in pulling the animal to safety, noticed gold dust glistening in its hair. He and his friend set to work and by nightfall had gathered 300 ounces of gold, worth well over \$100,000 today. Maori Point became a famous name on the Shotover and the story of its riches lives on.

Unfortunately Raniera Ellison and Hakaria Haeroa were separated from their riches. In those days Māori were not allowed to bank and Ellison entrusted a friendly assay clerk with their booty. The clerk, alas, promptly disappeared and both he and the gold were never seen again! Ellison returned to Skippers and amazingly, managed to recoup his losses.

Chinese miners arrived in 1866 and re-worked small claims along the Shotover's tributaries. However only one of Skippers' 300-strong Chinese population is buried there - A.H. Quay. He starved to death in April 1904.

The easy gold in what was then known as 'the richest river in the world' was quickly won. Miners then formed companies to work river bank and terrace claims together.

You can still see water races and sluicing scars where pipes and canvas hoses were used to sluice the alluvial terraces in the 1870s. As the gold dwindled, so too did the population; from around 700 in the 1860s to just 92 in 1901.

Sheep farming on Mount Aurum Station began before the gold rush in 1860. The terrain made it difficult and unprofitable and the run changed hands many times. The last change was in 1985 when the station became a recreation reserve. Since then the homestead has been restored by DOC with a lot of input from volunteers.



This map is a guide only and should not be used for route finding. We strongly recommend purchasing a topographical map from a DOC visitor centre.

### Track classification

 **Short walk** – well formed track with easy walking. There may be steps or slopes. Suitable for most abilities and fitness levels. Walking shoes required.

 **Walking track** – easy to moderate walking. Track is mostly well formed; some sections may be steep rough or muddy. Walking shoes required.

 **Tramping track** – challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking. May have steep grades. Suitable for fit, experienced and adequately equipped groups. Tramping boots required.

 **Route** – Unformed; suitable only for people with high-level backcountry skills and experience.

Choose a track that suits your level of fitness and experience and follow the Outdoor Safety Code –

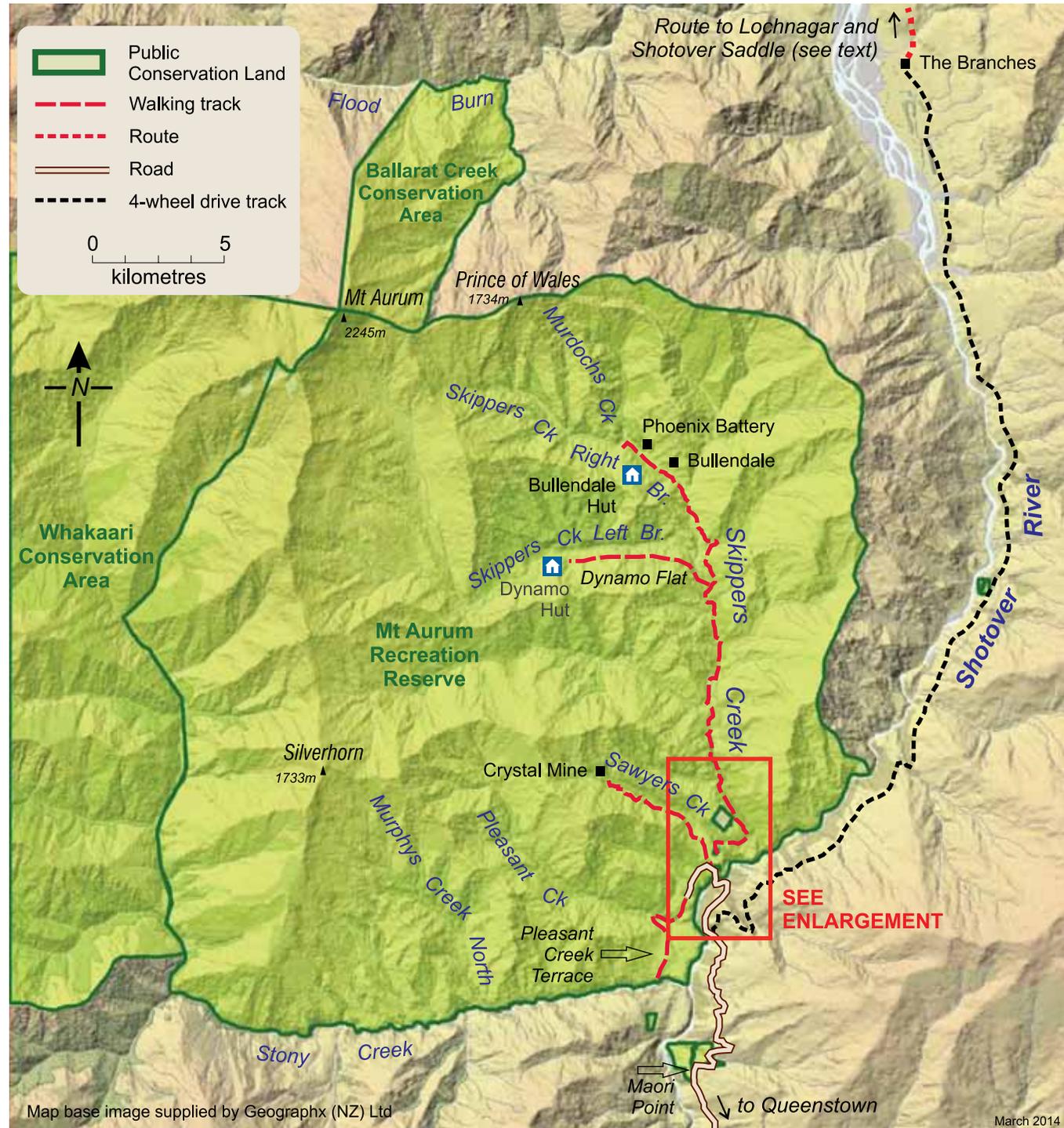
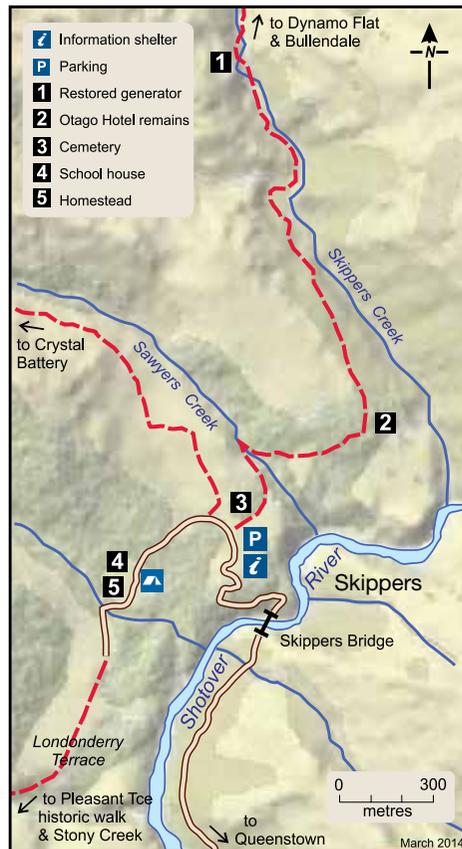
5 simple rules to help you stay safe:

- Plan your trip
- Tell someone
- Be aware of the weather
- Know your limits
- Take sufficient supplies

Leave your trip details with a trusted contact. For more information see [www.adventuresmart.org.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.org.nz).

More information can be found at [www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/](http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/)

plan-and-prepare/safety-in-the-outdoors



Map base image supplied by Geographx (NZ) Ltd

March 2014

## Short walks

### Skippers Cemetery **3**



*Time: 5 minutes one way*

Start/finish: follow the road to the left of the information shelter and turn right at the first junction.

This silent, stone-fenced record of Skippers' pioneers contains 20 marked graves and headstones.

### Johnston's Otago Hotel **2**



*Time: 5 minutes one way*

Start/finish: Skippers Cemetery

Near the cemetery are the stone ruins of Skippers' only pub, Johnston's Otago Hotel, the centre of many social activities at Skippers.

### Skippers Schoolhouse **4**



*Time: 10 minutes one way*

Start/finish: follow the road to the left of the information shelter.

The Upper Shotover Public School, later known as Skippers Point School, was open from 1879 to 1927. DOC restored it between 1989 and 1992, and installed interpretation panels to provide an insight into the school, gold mining and life at Skippers.

### Mt Aurum Homestead **5**



*Time: 10 minutes one way*

Start/finish: follow the road to the left of the information shelter.

One of only two timber buildings remaining from Skippers' gold mining era, it features information inside on the homestead and its run.

### Pleasant Creek Terrace Historic Walk



*Time: 30 minutes one way*

Start/finish: Skippers Schoolhouse.

Follow the 4WD track across Londonderry then Pleasant Creek Terrace to panels describing mining and the sluicing scars in front of you.

Beyond Pleasant Creek Terrace, experienced trampers can make their way up Stony Creek to the junction with Murphys

Creek North and pass more gold mining relics along the way. *Note: the track up Stony Creek is unmarked and is not maintained.*

## Longer tracks

It is recommended that you carry topographical map NZTopo50, sheet CB11 Arrowtown.

### Crystal Battery Track



*Time: 1 hour one way*

Start/finish: Behind Skippers Cemetery.

Retrace the miners' daily walk from their homes at Skippers to the Crystal Mine, their 1930s to 1940s work site. A zigzag journey to Crystal Hut passes the remains of the Leviathan Mine. Scattered relics of the quartz stamping battery lie in the creek bed and the aerial tramway can be traced 200 m to the blocked Crystal Mine entrance above you. Like many mines, Crystal showed early promise but proved disappointing.

### Bullendale Track



*Time: 2-3 hours one way*

Start/finish: Skippers Cemetery.

This journey to the heart of Skippers' quartz reef mining history has numerous creek crossings up to the junction of Skippers Creek's two branches. Take the old pack track above the right branch. Your arrival at Phoenix Mine is marked by the old rock breaker perched high on the riverbank, above the site of the massive 30-head stamper battery. Nearby Murdochs Creek is littered with mining relics and the remains of Bullendale's cottages are scattered on the tussock flat above the creek. Bullendale Hut is located well above the creek.



**WARNING:** heavy metals continue to leach from the old mine workings here – **DO NOT** drink water from Murdochs Creek.

### Dynamo Hut Track



*Time: 3 hours one way*

Start/finish: Skippers Cemetery.

Cross rugged Skippers Creek several times to see the remains of New Zealand's first industrial hydro power scheme, built in 1886 for the Bullendale battery 2.5 km away. Imagine going this way lugging the two solid steel, 2-metre Pelton wheels and other equipment that the scheme used.

The track heads northeast from the cemetery to Skippers Creek then sidles upstream to the hydro dam that was part of the Mount Aurum Homestead's power scheme. Further on, the track switches to Skippers Creek's left branch before climbing the left bank to a terrace where the restored tin Dynamo Hut holds a wealth of stories. Behind the hut are parts of the restored power plant.

### Branches Road



The Branches Road provides scenic views and river access on its way to the private Branches Station. If prior permission is obtained from the station, experienced parties can tramp to Lochnagar and the Shotover Saddle Route, which crosses over to the Matukituki valley.

*Prior permission by Branches Station HAS to be obtained before entering the property. Please keep to the routes and respect the landowner's property.*

## Huts and camping

Bullendale and Dynamo are standard huts with tank water supply and mattresses. Crystal is a basic hut; there is a stream nearby. All three huts have a fireplace. Be aware that water in the streams might be contaminated from old mine workings, so it is advisable to carry your own water.

Backcountry hut tickets or a backcountry pass must be purchased in advance from DOC visitor centres or approved outlets.

Skippers Point is a self-registration standard campsite. A picnic shelter, water tank and flush toilets are supplied in summer; there are pit toilets in winter. Please don't camp adjacent to the homestead/school area.

Please leave huts and campsite clean and tidy. There are no rubbish facilities – carry out what you carry in. Fires are not allowed. Help preserve the landscape and use a camp stove for cooking.



Bullendale Hut. Photo: DOC

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

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