

Mt Owen

Kahurangi National Park



Introduction

Glacier-scoured and eroded by water, the unique alpine karst landforms of the Mt Owen massif are unusual and spectacular. At 1875 m Mt Owen is the highest peak in Kahurangi National Park and on a fine day the views from this peak are spectacular.

There are several ways to reach the summit of Mt Owen. You will need the Topo50 maps (1:50,000) BQ23 Wangapeka Saddle, BR23 Murchison and BR24 Kawatiri and a compass. The northern access to Mt Owen is easier than the southern access, which is more demanding.

How to get there

Northern access

From Tapawera, 62 km from Nelson, follow the signposts west to the Wangapeka Valley. At the Dart River is a concrete ford, and a swingbridge in case of flooding. The ford can become impassable after heavy rain. After crossing the ford, continue 7 km up the valley to Prices Clearing where there is an information shelter with public telephone and intentions book. Continue past the Rolling Junction turn off, the start of the Wangapeka Track and on to Courthouse Flat where there are camping sites, toilet, and water, from Granity Creek.



The track follows Blue Creek for approximately 20 minutes then heads up through beech forest and joins the other track.

Where these tracks join there is a climb to a clearing offering views to the north and west. Cross the clearing and head down through the forest to a saddle with Billies Knob rising steeply above. The next section, called 'The Staircase' descends steeply before sidling around marble bluffs and down into Blue Creek. From here it is not long to Granity Pass Hut (12 bunks); follow the usually dry marble creek bed through sub-alpine vegetation to the hut situated on a moraine on the true left bank of the stream.

There are limited sites in the tussock around the hut for camping but camp near the hut to minimise the impact on the mountain.

Granity Pass Hut to Mt Owen, 7 h return

From Granity Pass Hut follow the route through a large area of tussock grassland. There are no track markers or snow poles from this point onwards. Keep to the east of Sentinel Hill, and then walk through a saddle past several small tarns. From the other side of this saddle, a series of rock cairns lead uphill through the glaciated marble landscape and alpine herb fields to the summit. This route will be difficult and dangerous to follow in snow, misty or bad weather. On a fine day and with good visibility the views are absolutely breathtaking, south to the Southern Alps and north to Golden and Tasman Bays. Having a map is advantageous for identifying the landmarks as well as essential for navigation. Return to Granity Pass Hut the way you came.

Walking the track/route

Courthouse Flat to Granity Pass Hut, 6 h

There are two options for the first section of this track. Both are well signposted and take a similar amount of time. The first option is to walk up the ridge between Granity and Blue Creeks. This is a very open track that can be hot on a summer's day. Ensure you carry plenty of drinking water.

The second option is to walk up Blue Creek Track taking you past old gold mining relics and workings.

Southern access

This is the most difficult approach to Mt Owen, challenging and requiring a high level of fitness and experience.

The Owen Valley East Road is accessed from State Highway 6, 16 km east of Murchison, near the Owen River Tavern. Follow this road for approximately 13 km until you get to the track signposted to Sunrise Peak.

Alternatively turn left down the side road to access the route to Branch Creek Hut (6 bunks) via Frying Pan Creek and Frye River.

The road crosses private land, please respect the property and leave gates as you find them. If you are planning to camp or driving up the road at night contact the landowners for permission. Contact DOC Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre for details.

Owen Valley East Road to Mt Owen summit—Sunrise Peak Route, 7 h

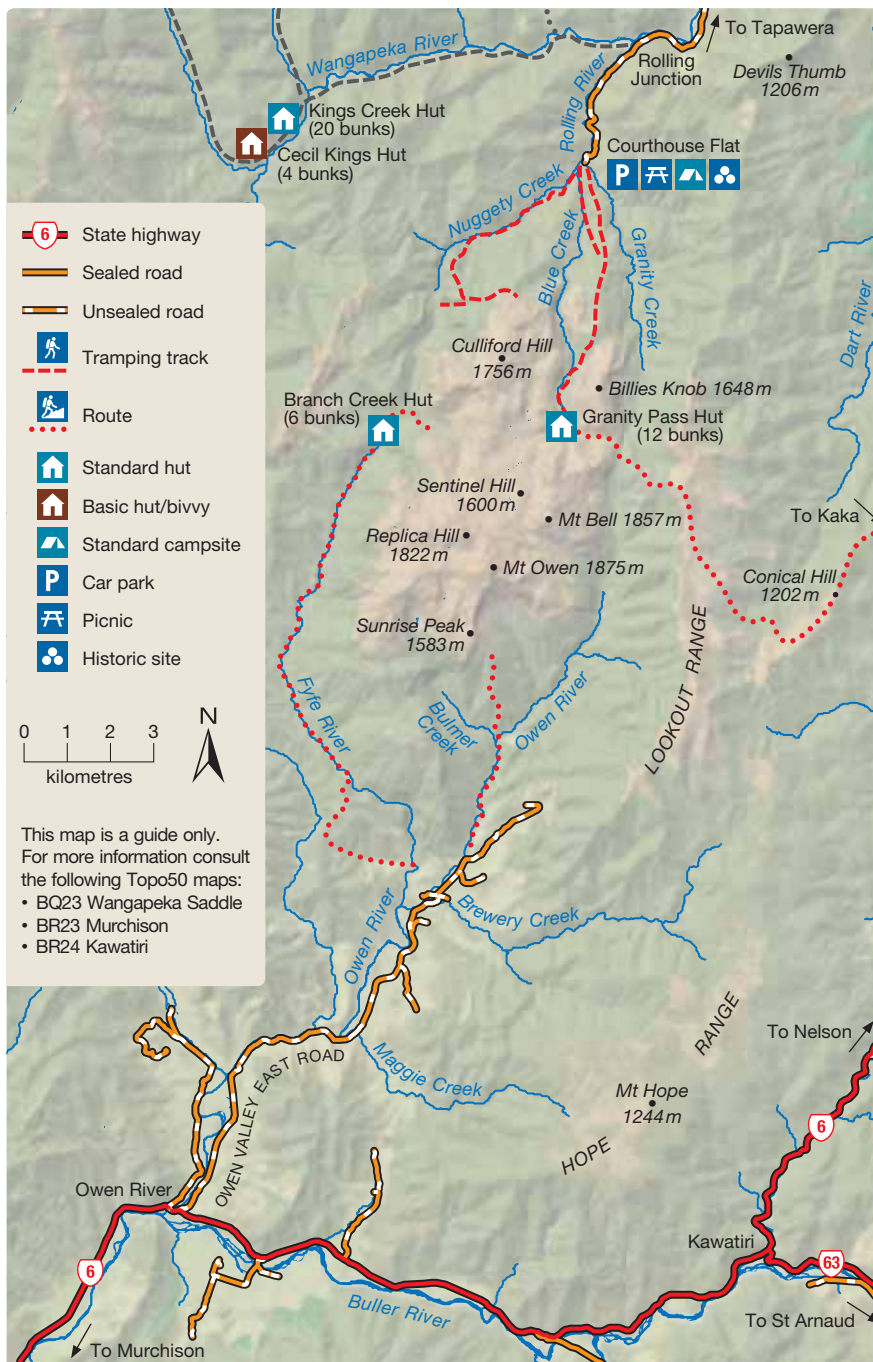
The track crosses farmland for approximately 2 km before entering the forest. The river is crossed several times before the track climbs steeply up Sunrise Ridge to the bushline. Please note, once you leave the Owen River there is no readily available water.

Above the bushline, scramble up through the thick tussock and steep scree fields to the ridge below Sunrise Peak. Continue northwards towards Mt Owen, picking your way carefully through the marble formations. Good visibility is essential for route finding. There are no markers or rock cairns above the bushline. Bushline to Mt Owen summit is 3 hours.

Alternative routes in the area

Billies Knob

From the saddle before ‘The Staircase’ (see Northern Access) there is an optional side trip up Billies Knob. Ascending Billies Knob from Courthouse Flat, return, is a long day trip.





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.

 **Basic huts** provide very basic shelter with limited facilities. No charge.

 **Standard campsites** have a limited range of facilities and services. Toilets (usually composting or pit variety) water supply (tap, stream, or lake) and vehicle or boat access. Wood barbecues and fireplaces, showers (cold), picnic tables, a cooking shelter and rubbish bins may be provided.



- 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)

Alternatively from Billies Knob you can descend south to Granity Pass via a steep tussock gully to the bed of Blue Creek and Granity Pass Hut. None of these routes are marked.

Lookout Range to Granity Pass Hut, 8 h

From Kaka drive approximately 1.5 km southwest along Tadmor Glenhope Road until you reach the signpost for the Lookout Range. Walk past farming sheds up a forestry skid site just short of Hodgkinson Road end. From the roadend the track is well marked until Conical Hill, approximately 4 hours.

Continue southwest along the ridge about 1.5 km before turning northwest down the major spur. Cross the Dart River and follow an old animal trail north up to the main Lookout Range ridge. Sidle around the headwaters of the Owen River catchment to the saddle between Owen River and Granity Creek. Tramp through the scrub and head west to Granity Pass Hut (12 bunks). From the roadend to Granity Pass Hut will take a minimum of 8 hours.

Fyfe River Route to Branch Creek Hut, road end to hut 6–8 h

A marked route leads to Branch Creek Hut (6 bunks). Get permission and directions to cross the farmland, from the land owners, to the ford across the Fyfe River, below the junction with Frying Pan Creek. On the other side of the Fyfe River a DOC sign indicates the start of the route. Follow the markers up the true right of Frying Pan Creek onto the saddle, then down the ridge in the Fyfe River Valley. Follow the river upstream through beech forest to Branch Creek Hut, situated on the valley floor. The bushline is a further hour climb from the hut. From here you make your own way onto the Mt Owen massif.

Please remember

- A Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Country Ticket is required to stay in the huts.
- Trampers need to be experienced, well equipped, fit and self-sufficient. Carry and confidently know how to use a map and compass, or GPS for navigation.
- Poor visibility can make route finding and orientation difficult.
- There are no track markers above the bushline.
- Some rivers do not have bridges and may become impassable after heavy rain.
- The karst landscape is full of shafts.
- Snow may linger on the mountain well into summer.
- Climbing skills and equipment may be necessary.
- Wasps are a known hazard and are particularly common from December until April. Carry antihistamine if you are allergic to their stings.

This is a remote area; leave your intentions with a responsible person. It's not recommended trampers travel alone.



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

To find out more

Contact:

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