

Introduction

The Cascade Saddle Route links the West Matukituki and Dart valleys in Mount Aspiring National Park. It's a popular and spectacular alpine crossing, recommended for experienced trampers as a fine weather, summer route. Along the route there are great views of the Dart Glacier, Mount Aspiring/Tititea and the West Matukituki valley.

The route doesn't cross the Cascade Saddle itself, which is impassable from the Matukituki side. Instead it climbs a spur behind Aspiring Hut and then crosses back above Cascade Saddle before descending into Dart valley.

History

In 1939, from the Cascade Camp in the West Matukituki valley, C.E. Smith and A.P. Harper pioneered the Ernie Smith Route to the Tyndall Ridge. Nearly 20 years later a metal pylon was placed on the ridge to guide trampers safely around the bluffs. The 'Cullers Route' was later established from Cascade Hut. The lower section fell into disrepair after a new route was cut from Aspiring Hut, which meets the Cullers Route midway up the bush-clad slopes.

Access

From Wanaka it is 54 km to the Raspberry Creek car park – the last 30 km is unsealed. The route is then accessed from the West Matukituki Valley, which is the recommended starting point.

Although much more difficult in reverse, the route can be accessed via the Rees-Dart Track (www.doc.govt.nz/reesdart).

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/Mount 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.

You should check the road conditions prior to commencing your trip. Public transport is available to and from all the connecting tracks.

Huts

Aspiring Hut (38 bunks)

Facilities **November – mid-April:** Gas cookers, tap water, flush toilets, solar lighting, wood burner, resident hut warden.

Mid-April – October: tank water, toilets, wood burner.

General Owned by New Zealand Alpine Club (NZAC) and managed by DOC – pay fees to a hut warden or at the Visitor Centre. Backcountry tickets and backcountry passes cannot be used at this hut.

Dart Hut (32 bunks)

Facilities **November – April:** Flush toilets, water, coal burner, resident Hut Warden.

May – October: Toilets, coal burner, water.

General Backcountry hut tickets or backcountry passes may be used. No gas cookers or lighting. DOC Backcountry Serviced Hut.

Camping

A designated camping area adjacent to Aspiring Hut provides a shelter and toilet for campers (*Note: hut facility is not available to campers.*) You can also camp at Dart Hut – if camping here please use the hut toilet. The fee at either of these sites is \$5 per night for adults and \$2.50 per youth (11 – 17 years).

Along the route the only suitable camping site is near Cascade Creek where there's a toilet. This is to limit the impact on this fragile alpine area.

Further information

Tititea/Mount Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre
Department of Conservation
Ardmore St, WANAKA 9305 (PO Box 93)
Ph: +63 3 443 7660 Fax: +64 3 443 8777
Email: mtaspiringvc@doc.govt.nz

Published by: Tititea/Mount Aspiring
National Park Visitor Centre
Department of Conservation
PO Box 93, Wanaka 9343,
New Zealand
www.doc.govt.nz
November 2014



New Zealand Government

Cascade Saddle Route

Mount Aspiring National Park

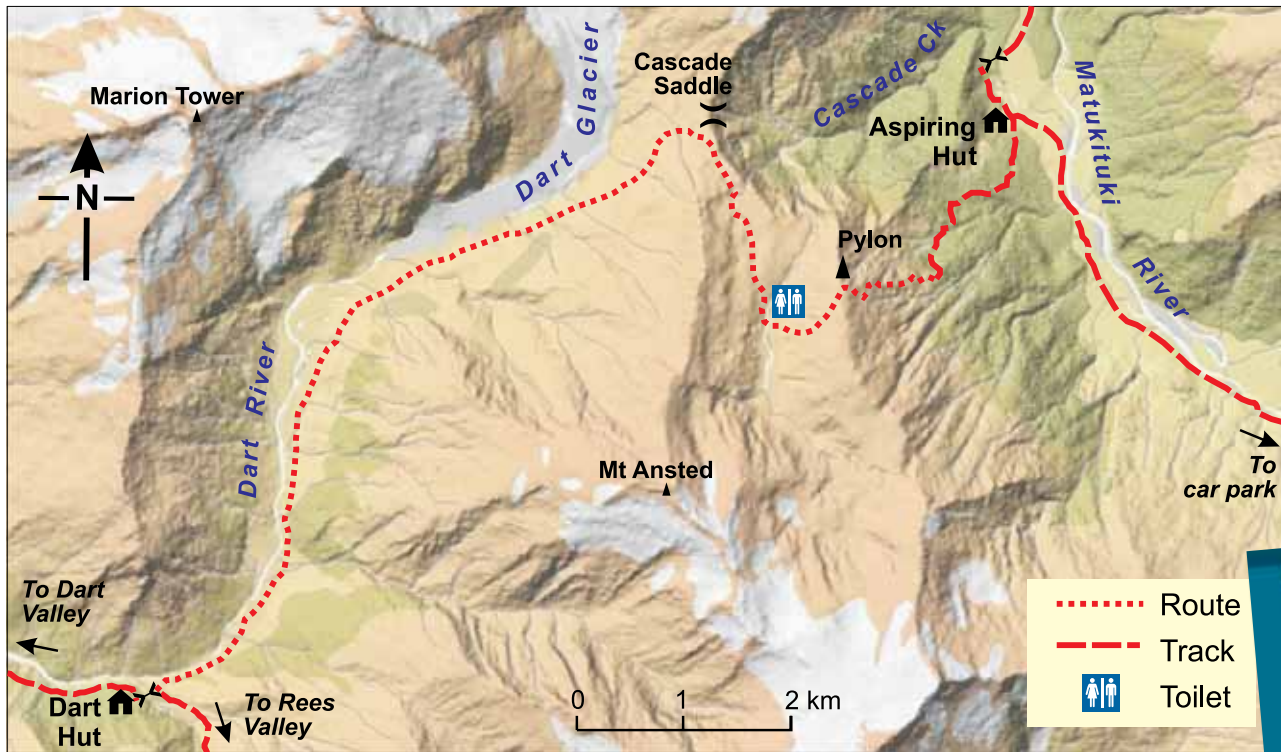


Cover: Descent into West Matukituki Valley from Pylon in good weather conditions. Photo: John Barkla



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai





Map base by Geographx (NZ) Ltd



WARNING



Cascade Saddle is an alpine crossing and should not be attempted in adverse weather. Steep snow grass slopes on the Matukituki side become treacherous and slippery when wet or covered with snow and ice. Sudden cold storms with snow affect this area, even during summer. In early summer, crampons and ice axes may be required.

Multiple fatalities have occurred on this route; make sure you have the right skills and equipment and be prepared to turn back if conditions are unfavourable – failure to make good decisions while attempting this traverse may result in serious injury or death.

There is also avalanche danger from June to November. Check the backcountry avalanche advisory website of the New Zealand Avalanche Centre at www.avalanche.net.nz before starting your trip.

Remember—your safety is your responsibility.

Leave your intentions with a trusted contact. Information on the Outdoor Intentions system can be found at www.adventuresmart.co.nz

Route description

This route is suitable only for people with navigation and high level backcountry skills and experience. It can be accessed from the Dart, Rees and West Matukituki valleys. For safety reasons it is recommended that trampers begin from the Matukituki side.



The track is signposted from Aspiring Hut and climbs steadily up through mixed beech forest. Above the bushline the track becomes a route and is marked with orange poles. It follows a steep snow grass and tussock ridge with some rocky outcrops and ledges to negotiate.

The route reaches the pylon at the top of the ridge (1835 m) via a steep and narrow gully that holds snow for much of the year.

If the route is attempted in reverse (from the Dart) the pylon and orange-poled route MUST be located before descending into the Matukituki Valley. This section of the route is much more difficult to go down than up.

After the pylon follow the poles down to Cascade Creek, cross it to the easy slopes and flats leading to Cascade Saddle (1524 m). The route to both the Dart and Rees valleys veers off to the left, just before you reach Cascade Saddle.

Follow the orange poles along the ridge, then the rock cairns through the steep and unstable slopes down to the valley floor and lateral moraines of the Dart Glacier. The traverse from the ridge to the valley floor is above 1500 metres and very exposed to the weather.

Stay on the true left bank of the Dart River/Te Awa Whakatipu – the left side looking down river. You will need to ford several side streams. The water level rises quickly with either rain or afternoon snow melt, take care in particular with streams further down the valley, close to Dart Hut.

Slightly upstream from the confluence of the Dart and Snowy Creek, a bridge over the creek leads to Dart Hut.

Track times

Raspberry Creek car park to Aspiring Hut	2–3 hr 9 km
Aspiring Hut to Cascade Saddle	4–5 hr 6 km
Cascade Saddle to Dart Hut	4–5 hr 10 km

Maps and publications

You should carry topographical maps NZTopo50 – sheets CA10 and CA11. The map in this pamphlet is a guide only and should not be used for navigational purposes.



The DOC track brochures *Matukituki Valley Tracks* and *The Rees Dart Track* describe the connecting tracks on either side of this route.

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468

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