

## Haast Pass / Tioripatea Highway

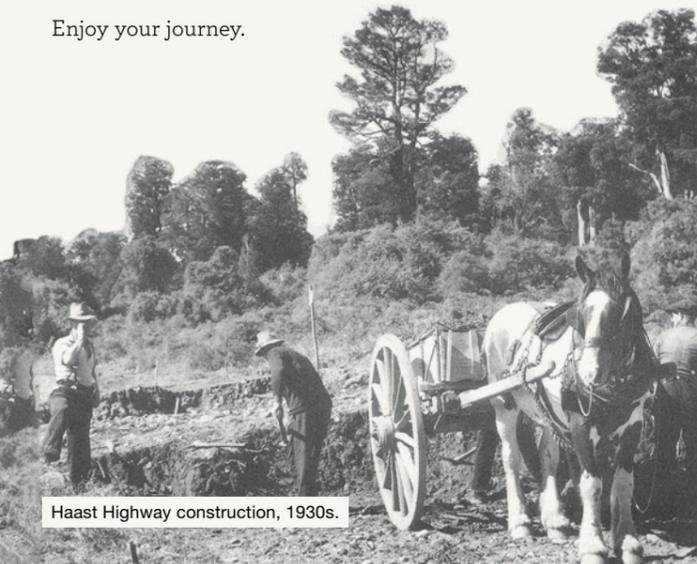
This 140-km section of State Highway 6 is a spectacular and scenic road linking Wānaka and Haast. It reaches beyond wind-whipped lakes Wānaka and Hāwea, through golden tussock-covered hills, to wind among steep mountains cloaked in lush rainforest and cross tumbling rivers. It then skirts undulating forests that seemingly float in tea-stained swamps, to finally reach the foaming surf of the Tasman Sea.

The forested section of the highway passes through the mountain ranges of Mount Aspiring National Park, and provides a spectacular backdrop to much of the road. Formed in 1964, the park is the third largest of New Zealand's national parks.

The road gives a good insight into Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Established in December 1990, Te Wāhipounamu covers 10% of New Zealand, from Westland Tai Poutini and Aoraki/Mount Cook National Parks in the north to Fiordland National Park and Waitutu Forest in the south.

Department of Conservation Visitor Centres at Wānaka and Haast can provide up-to-date information on what to see and do along the road, along with displays on the region's natural and historic features.

Enjoy your journey.



Haast Highway construction, 1930s.

## Historic journeys

Haast Pass / Tioripatea has always been an important route between Central Otago and the West Coast. Māori from the West Coast, Foveaux Strait and Coastal Otago crossed the pass to trade pounamu (greenstone) and food, and named it Tiori-patea, meaning 'the way ahead is clear'. They had camps around lakes Wānaka and Hāwea and in the Makarora valley, which they called Kaika Paekai, 'the place of abundant food'. Some journeys weren't as peaceful: Te Puoho, a northern chief, brought his warriors through the pass in 1836 to raid the southern Kāi Tahu and Kāti Mamoe tribes. Initially, Te Puoho's raid was successful, winning an early skirmish near Wānaka, but further south all of his party were either killed or taken prisoner and used as slaves.

Charles Cameron, an explorer and gold prospector, is generally acknowledged as the first European to cross the pass, in 1863. A short time later, Julius Haast, Canterbury's provincial geologist, led a party of four over the pass and on to the West Coast where they 'stood in the surf giving three hearty cheers'.

By 1876 there was a narrow pack track over Haast Pass / Tioripatea. In the following decade a government grant paid for the first construction work to be carried out on what some hoped would be a railway as well as a road, as it was cleared to as much as 10 m wide. Prospectors and early settlers at Haast were the first to use the route. Next were our earliest tourists – on horseback – then livestock being moved to and from Haast on the coast.

Most of the work on the Haast Pass / Tioripatea road was carried out during the 1930s Depression when up to 400 men were employed. They lived in temporary camps and spent long, hard days with pick, shovel and horse-drawn carts. The onset of World War II stopped this and the road to Haast was finally completed in 1960. The last stretch, north of Haast, (that linked the rest of Westland with Otago), wasn't finished until 1965.

At 563 m above sea level, Haast Pass / Tioripatea is virtually an all-weather road and the lowest of the three road passes that link Westland with the east coast.

### Further information:

#### Tititea / Mount Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre

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1 Ballantyne Road (PO Box 93)  
Wānaka 9343

PHONE: +64 27 269 6871  
EMAIL: [mtaspiringvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:mtaspiringvc@doc.govt.nz)

#### Awarua / Haast Visitor Centre

State Highway 6, Haast  
PO Box 50, Haast 7844

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

Cover: Crossing the swing bridge over the Makarora River on the Blue Pools Track. Photo: Shellie Evans

Back: Mount Brewster from Haast Pass Lookout. Photo: Lake Wanaka Tourism

This information was accurate at the time of printing.  
For the latest information on DOC's policies and facilities, visit [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz).

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## A natural journey

Most of the rock along the Haast Pass / Tioripatea road is schist, formed under intense heat and pressure. An important geological feature, the Alpine Fault, which runs the length of the Southern Alps / Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, crosses the road just east of Haast, though unseen by travellers.

During the Ice Ages, huge glaciers scoured and shaped the landscape, including the pass, to leave U-shaped and hanging valleys in their wake and ice-smoothed granite outcrops such as Mosquito Hill near Haast. Silt and gravel spread by rivers since then, now cover the valley floors, creating the classic wide terrace flats of both the Haast and Makarora valleys.

Rainfall varies considerably in the area: 3800 mm a year at Haast to more than 8300 mm on the low western slopes, to drop to 4500 mm at Haast Pass / Tioripatea itself, and only 2000 mm at the head of Lake Wānaka. Combined with altitude, this has a significant effect on vegetation.

West of the pass, kāmahī is the most common tree, with swamp forests of rimu, kahikatea and silver pine thriving on the boggy lower slopes and terraces. From Thunder Creek to Makarora, silver beech / tawhai dominates, with remnants of mataī, miro, kahikatea and rimu in places such as Makarora Bush. At the drier, lower end of the Makarora valley a few pockets of mountain beech / tawhairauriki survive among the scrub and pasture.

Insect-eating birds such as pīwakawaka / fantail, miromiro / South Island tomtit and tītīpounamu / rifleman thrive in the invertebrate-rich forest. Mohua / yellowhead and kākārīki / yellow-crowned parakeet, are locally common. The striking pūtakitaki / paradise shelduck is a familiar sight on the open river flats.

Introduced brown and rainbow trout are found in the Makarora, Young and Wilkin rivers and provide excellent fishing – with the required licence.

Pīwakawaka / fantail.  
Photo: Leon Berard



## Walks along the Haast Highway

Mount Aspiring  
National Park



Department of  
Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai

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.

## Care for Aotearoa



**Protect nature**  
Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Follow any rules restricting dogs, fires, drones or vehicles.



**Be prepared**  
Stay safe in the outdoors by following the Land Safety Code.  
► Choose the right trip for you.  
► Understand the weather.  
► Pack warm clothes and extra food.  
► Share your plans and take ways to get help.  
► Take care of yourself and each other.



**Keep NZ clean**  
Take all rubbish with you and use toilets where provided.



**Show respect**  
Respect others, respect culture.

Department of  
Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai

tiaki



Didymo is an exotic alga that invades waterways. This microscopic pest can be spread by a single drop of water. Even if you can't see it, you could be spreading it.

Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all footwear, bicycles, vehicles, fishing equipment and other items before entering, and when moving between, waterways. For more information and cleaning guidelines, go to [doc.govt.nz/stophespread](http://doc.govt.nz/stophespread).



**1 Haast Visitor Centre**  
 Just off the main highway at Haast, the centre has an interesting display on South Westland's natural and human history. There's also plenty of information available on the many walks between Fox Glacier in the north and Jackson Bay/Okahu in the south.



**2 Roaring Billy**  
**25 min return (1 km)**  
 This gentle walk through a beautiful podocarp and silver beech forest to the Haast River ends with a great view of the Roaring Billy waterfall. The forest is lush with tree ferns, a special feature of the walk.



**3 Pleasant Flat**  
**5 min return (200 m)**  
 Starting from the car park, this is an enjoyable, short bush walk beside a tranquil mountain stream. Pleasant Flat is an attractive picnic and camping area with impressive views of Mount Hooker. Overnight camping is permitted: a small charge applies. Bookings required through [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)



**4 Thunder Creek Falls**  
**5 min return (200 m)**  
 An easy walk along a sealed track that passes through kāmahi and silver beech to the 28-metre, spectacular and aptly named, Thunder Creek Falls.



**5 Fantail Falls**  
**5 min return (200 m)**  
 From the car park the short bush walk leads to a beautiful fan-shaped waterfall at the foot of Fantail Creek.



**6 Haast Pass Lookout Track**  
**1 hr return (1.5 km)**  
 This well-maintained gravel track climbs 150 m in elevation through beech forest to a viewpoint above the trees with a stunning vista of the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o Te Moana. Mount Brewster is prominent to the northeast.



**7 Bridle Track**  
**1 hr 30 min one way (3.5 km)**  
 Walkers can begin from either Davis Flat or Haast Pass/Tioripatea. It is a well-graded track and follows a section of the old Bridle Track, the first link between Otago and Westland. We recommend walkers use two vehicles (one at each end) or walk back the same way. Avoid walking back along the state highway as it is narrow and very busy.



**12 Makarora Bush Walk**  
**15 min loop (1 km)**  
 Starting from the car park, just north of DOC's Makarora Base, this looped nature walk passes through podocarp and silver beech forest with good specimens of mataī, miro, kahikatea and rimu. Another feature is a pit-saw display that illustrates this pioneering timber-milling technique.



**13 Kiddy's Bush**  
**Nature Walk: 30 min loop (1 km)**  
 Kiddy's Bush is an attractive picnic and camping area with toilets, tap water and day shelter. Overnight camping is permitted; a small charge applies. Bookings required through [www.doc.govt.nz/camping](http://www.doc.govt.nz/camping)



The nature walk that starts from the campsite entrance is an easy loop track through mountain beech forest.

**14 Sawyer Burn Track**  
**2 hr return to bushline (3.5 km)**  
 Providing superb views of Lake Hāwea and the surrounding mountains, the Sawyer Burn Track veers off the Kiddy's Bush Nature Walk and zigzags steeply through forest to the bushline.



For information on advanced and overnight tramping tracks along the Haast Highway, please refer to the *Tramping in the Makarora region* brochure.

**Key**

- Short walk – well formed, easy walking for upto an hour.
- Walking track – well formed easy walk from a few minutes to a day.
- Tramping track – mostly unformed but has track directional markers, poles or cairns.
- Wheelchair access
- Information
- Toilets
- Picnic area
- Camping
- Shelter
- No open fires

**Dogs and other pets are not permitted in national parks.**  
 Our national parks have been preserved for their recreation values and to protect significant native flora and fauna. It is vital that the habitat of threatened species is properly protected.

**No unauthorised drones**  
 An authorisation is required from DOC to use drones on public conservation land. To apply, visit [www.doc.govt.nz/drones](http://www.doc.govt.nz/drones)

