

Milford Track winter tramping

During the winter season (May to October), the Milford Track remains open but with reduced facilities. Weather, track and avalanche conditions need to be carefully considered, so it is important to contact the Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre before departure to check the current situation.

Weather

During the winter months Fiordland can be very wet and cold. Daylight is limited and the high mountains let little sunlight into the valleys. Alpine areas are usually covered in snow. Track conditions during this time can change daily, as can the weather. Check the latest weather forecast at weather.niwa.co.nz/parks before you depart.

Topo maps

Topographical maps covering the Milford Track are strongly recommended for navigation. NZTopo50 map CBo8 – Homer Saddle is available for purchase from the Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre.

Track information

Many of the bridges across side streams are removed over winter to avoid damage from avalanches. These side streams can rise very quickly, so you must be competent at crossing large, swift, icy rivers. The track over Mackinnon Pass is not marked and is often covered in deep snow. You will need to have navigation and alpine skills to traverse this section of the track.

For up-to-date track information, check the DOC Track Alert at www.doc.govt.nz/milfordtrack. The most current information is available from the DOC visitor centre nearest the area where you want to go.

Hut facilities

All huts have bunks, mattresses and a wood burner.

During the winter season (May to October), the hut facilities are reduced.

- ▶ Gas is not provided – you will need to bring your own cooking stove.
- ▶ Flush toilets are replaced with pit toilets.
- ▶ Running water is turned off inside the huts. Water can be obtained from the outside water tank; if this is frozen, then from the nearest water course or by melting snow.
- ▶ There are no rangers based at the huts.

Safety information

For current track conditions, please seek advice from the Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre.

You will need to be confident that you and your party have the necessary skills, fitness and equipment for winter tramping. Navigation and alpine skills are essential for your survival. For more information about these visit www.mountainsafety.org.nz. When going into the backcountry in winter, remember to leave details of your trip (return date and time, planned route, party names, vehicle details) with a responsible person. Intention forms are available from the Adventure Smart website www.adventuresmart.org.nz.

Your safety and the decisions you make while on the track are your responsibility. Know the outdoor safety code. Check out www.doc.govt.nz/safety.

It is strongly recommended that you take a personal locator beacon with you. A two-way satellite communication is an optional extra.

Flooding

The Milford Track is **not** an all-weather track. Both the Clinton and Arthur Valleys become impassable due to flooding during heavy rain. Heavy rain increases the risk of landslides and avalanches. In spring (September–November) the snowmelt makes the rivers and side streams come up even faster.

There is no monitoring of weather forecasts and river levels outside of the Great Walk season. Before setting out, trampers should check for severe weather warnings at www.metservice.com/warnings for heavy rain in the Fiordland area.

If there is a heavy rain warning for Fiordland during your scheduled tramp dates, then you should make alternative plans, as the track will become flooded/impassable.

If the heavy rain warning is:

- ▶ for one day only – schedule an extra day / another night in a hut, so you are not walking on the track that day
- ▶ for more than one day – postpone your tramp until the weather improves.

Avalanches

The Milford Track is mainly complex avalanche terrain. Avalanches are frequent. There are over 57 avalanche paths, which may bring avalanche debris to the valley floor. Some of these have the potential to cross the Milford Track – their start zones cannot be seen from the track.

If you are going into places avalanches could occur, be sure you:

- ▶ Have checked the Backcountry Avalanche Advisory at www.avalanche.net.nz/region/12 and the Avalanche Terrain Exposure scale system (ATES) for the area where you want to go.
- ▶ Have the skills for the ATES class you are going into.
- ▶ Take an avalanche transceiver, a snow shovel and a probe. Know how to use these tools!



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Contact

Te Rua-o-te-moko / Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre
1 Lakefront Drive, Te Anau 9600
Phone: 03 249 7924 Email: fiordlandvc@doc.govt.nz
www.doc.govt.nz

Hut tickets

Fees are charged per person per night and hut beds are on a first come, first served basis only. All huts require Backcountry Hut Tickets, which must be purchased in advance. Alternatively, a Backcountry Hut Pass (valid for 12 months) may be used.

Transport

All transport must be arranged before starting the track. During winter transport operators require minimum numbers and do not always operate a daily service. Transport arrangements can be affected by bad weather. You must discuss an alternative option with transport operators before you begin your walk.

What to take

You need to be totally self sufficient. Having the correct food, clothing and equipment is essential.

- Food – allow for at least two extra days
- Warm and waterproof clothing
- Warm sleeping bag
- Survival blanket
- Stove and gas for cooking
- Lighter or matches
- Ice axe
- Crampons
- Toilet paper
- Torch
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- First aid kit
- Personal locator beacon
- Satellite messenger (optional)
- **Avalanche safety/rescue equipment: avalanche beacon, snow shovel and avalanche probe.**

Left and below: Trampers make their way to the Mackinnon Pass. Photos: Stef Braaksm (top), DOC (bottom)

