

Sustainable Destinations Aoraki



Sustainable Destinations - Aoraki Programme newsletter

August 2026

Nau mai, haere mai

With a very chilly winter taking temperatures down well into the negatives, it's a pleasure to bring some very positive updates from the work DOC have been undertaking in and around Aoraki/Mt Cook in this, the very first newsletter from the Sustainable Destinations – Aoraki team.

Sustainable Destinations - Aoraki is a DOC led project funded by the International Visitor Levy. It's designed to respond to current and future visitor pressures while setting a clear long-term vision for visitor experiences at Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, as part of a wider visitor journey.

Expressions of Interest have been sent out to stakeholders and partners for the Sustainable Destinations – Aoraki External Advisory Board and a Stakeholder Reference Group. We look forward to these advisory bodies taking shape and feeding into the work of the Sustainable Destinations – Aoraki project.

We'll be bringing you updates as we work hard to deliver improvements on the ground, while working with our mana whenua partners and stakeholders to implement long-term practical solutions. We know conversations on managing this area have been happening for a long time and really appreciate all the discussion and support in shaping this kaupapa.

Ngā mihi maioha

Sustainable Destinations - Aoraki Programme
Team

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Hooker Valley Bridge no.2. Photo: DOC

New Hooker Valley Bridge no.2 open

One of the biggest drawcards to the National Park has always been the Hooker Valley Track. It's a truly iconic day walk, and one of the most visited tracks in the entire country. With over a million visitors to Aoraki/Mt Cook each year, a significant chunk of those visitors place the Hooker Valley Track firmly in their itinerary. That's why the opening of the epic new bridge on the track was cause for a special celebration.

DOC staff, mana whenua, contractors and members of Aoraki/Mt Cook's community came together on 28 July for a special gathering at the Hermitage Hotel, before making their way up the Hooker Valley track to the 189-metre suspension bridge, where the bridge was blessed and officially opened to the public.

Construction of the new bridge began in August 2025 on the upper section of the popular Hooker Valley track, replacing an existing swing bridge which had to be closed due to riverbank erosion near the bridge supports.

Spanning 189-metres across the Hooker River, this new bridge is the longest suspension bridge in the country.

Aoraki/Mount Cook district operations manager Sally Jones said it was a significant milestone and a testament to the dedication, skill and commitment of everyone involved.

"Building something of this scale in such extreme conditions is no small achievement, and I am incredibly proud of what our contractors, partners and staff have achieved together," she said.

"They have created a safer, more resilient crossing that will enhance the visitor experience for generations to come. I hope we haven't put them off bridge building!"



The Hooker Valley Bridge no.2 on opening day. Photo: DOC



An aerial view of the decontamination site. Photo: DOC

Decontamination work completed

A remediation project to clean up two former landfill sites in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park was completed in June. The \$3.32 million remediation project removed about 2500 cubic metres of waste from the sites that had been used as landfills between 1950 and 1980, around 3 km from Aoraki/Mount Cook Village.

This saw 6000 tonnes of total landfill removed in 200 truckloads and driven all the way to Taiko landfill, near Fairlie.

DOC and the Ministry for the Environment each contributed \$1.66 million to the project, undertaken in response to the increased vulnerability of the site to erosion and flooding. In 2022 waste from one of the landfills spilled into the Hooker River, which flows into Lake Pūkaki.

Representatives from Ngāi Tahu were on hand to bless the site of the completed work in July.



Work underway at the decontamination site. Photo: DOC

Paid parking to continue at Aoraki/Mt Cook

Following a seven-month paid parking ‘pilot’ period, the revenue raising scheme at Aoraki/Mt Cook – is set to continue at the White Horse Hill carpark.

Following implementation at three of the country’s most popular sites - Punakaiki, Franz Josef and Aoraki/Mount Cook – the total revenue reached \$1,511,574 across all sites from 161,163 transactions. It was Aoraki/Mt Cook’s White Horse Hill carpark that saw the most revenue generated over the pilot period with \$826,739 from 56,438 transactions.

DOC is now looking at a few other sites where paid parking might work, with potential new sites to be announced before Christmas.

Paid parking will continue as usual at White Horse Hill carpark, however, there are a few changes as the process takes onboard feedback gathered during the pilot period. The changes include:

- Car park charges will now be in half-hour rather than hourly increments.
- Improved signage and information clarifying that paying for a single day's parking allows multiple entries and exits within that day and clearer guidance on how to top up payments.
- The \$10 annual permit for locals will now apply to two vehicles rather than one.



Paid parking station at White Horse Hill carpark. Photo: DOC

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Newsletter

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