



12 December 2025

Car park fees begin for three South Island locations

As the busy summer season starts, the Department of Conservation (DOC) will begin charging for car parking at three South Island sites: Punakaiki, Franz Josef and Aoraki/Mt Cook.

“We are running a paid car parking pilot programme over the next seven months at these popular sites as a way for visitors to contribute to nature experiences they enjoy”, said Director of Heritage and Visitors, Cat Wilson. “The programme includes car park upgrades and the introductions of paid parking systems.”

The parking prices were set after a two-phase consultation process with Treaty Partners, local residents, businesses, and tourism operators. Car park charges begin on 15 December and continue until the end of June 2026.

Details of the car park fees are:

- Free parking period for 20 minutes to allow for drop-offs/pick-ups or staying a short time.
- Hourly rate of \$5 per hour
- Daily rate of \$20 per day in Punakaiki and Franz Josef; \$25 a day in Aoraki/Mt Cook
- Annual pass for locals (within District boundaries) of \$10 per vehicle per site per year, which allows for unlimited access during the year
- Annual pass for other visitors for \$60 per vehicle per site per year
- Commercial tourism operators who hold a valid concession will be granted a parking fee exemption for the duration of the pilot.

Locals and regular visitors can apply for an annual pass through the paid parking web page on the DOC website [link]. Volunteer groups and educational groups can apply online for exemptions to the parking charges.

Payment machines will be installed at the sites and cameras will record the entry and exit of vehicles. Non-payment of parking fees will incur breach notices, which will be enforced by Stellar, the hardware supplier.

DOC's estimated combined revenue from the three pilot sites of Punakaiki, Franz Josef and Aoraki/Mt Cook is expected to be approximately \$1.5 Million over the 7-month pilot period (December 2025 to June 2026 inclusive).

Once the pilot is completed and the outcomes have been reviewed, a decision will be made whether to continue with paid parking at the three sites, and if it should be extended to other busy sites.

The introduction of a paid parking programme enables visitors to contribute to the conservation facilities and naturing experiences they enjoy," says Catherine. "This is standard practice at many national parks overseas, and most international visitors accept this as a necessary contribution to support amazing nature sites."

For more information visit DOC's website: [Paid parking pilot programme](#)

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Contact: media@doc.govt.nz

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