

MARLBOROUGH

# Molesworth Recreation Reserve



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



Photo: Steve Bagley

## Preface

Welcome to Molesworth Recreation Reserve, the biggest farm in New Zealand, where conservation, farming and recreation go hand in hand.

The 180,787-hectare Molesworth Station (about the size of Stewart Island/Rakiura) unites original high-country stations: Tarndale, Molesworth and St Helens. Molesworth reverted to the Crown in 1938 when the runholders walked off; St Helens, including the Dillon Run, was added in 1949. The combined stations once ran around 95,000 sheep, but when the Crown took over, the land was suffering from loss of vegetation and severe erosion caused by overgrazing by sheep and rabbits and repeated burning of tussocklands. The land was gradually restored to good health under careful management that included rabbit control, revegetation and the replacement of sheep with cattle.

Today, Molesworth is administered by the Department of Conservation, with Landcorp Farming Limited responsible for farming operations under a lease agreement that respects the property's outstanding conservation and recreation values as well as the working farm.

To ensure a safe and enjoyable Molesworth experience, travel only on roads that are open to the public. As well as being potentially dangerous, off-road driving can damage fragile plants, spread weeds and start fires.

Check any signs along the route; these may warn of road closures, which can occur at any time. Roads may be closed due to slips, washouts or snow; to allow stock movement; or (on Rainbow Station) for Defence Force exercises. The Acheron Road status can be checked 24 hours a day by contacting DOC Wairau/Renwick Office on (03) 572 9100 or online at [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) (type 'Molesworth' in the search bar). Fill your fuel tank before setting out and carry a good quality spare tyre.

Travel through Molesworth is at your own risk. Be aware that there is no mobile phone coverage. Automobile Association breakdown services may not be available and some vehicle insurance policies do not apply.

Driving through Molesworth is a unique high country experience. We wish you an enjoyable trip.

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## The land

To the traveller, the rounded mountains and broad valleys of Molesworth appear vast and timeless. Yet this is a place of constant change wrought by geological movement, an extreme climate and, more recently, by human endeavour to farm this most challenging environment.

What we find today is a land of shifting screes, wide grasslands and steep hillsides, supporting hardy plant communities adapted to survive in one of New Zealand's harshest environments.

### Landforms

Molesworth's history of glaciation can be read in the landscape. Terminal and lateral moraines, glacial outwash plains, hanging valleys and waterfalls, cirque basins, tarns and arêtes are all reminders of the region's past ice ages.

The headwaters of the Clarence, Wairau and Acheron Rivers were all formerly glaciated.

Several major, active fault lines transect the property, causing mountain uplift and more recent horizontal jolts, which trigger landslides and rockfalls.

The underlying rocks are mostly greywacke and argillite mudstone, dating back 135–235 million years to the Triassic and Jurassic eras. Valley floors and major basins are filled with glacial and outwash gravels, in places covered with river-borne gravel and silt. Soils are generally greywacke-derived, with relatively infertile, older soils generally found in the

higher rainfall, western areas, and more fertile, younger soils on terraces and flood plains in the lower rainfall, eastern areas.



Photo: Shannel Courtney





Lake Tennyson. Photo: Neil Deans

## Climate

Molesworth endures a continental climate of extremes. Hot and generally dry summers are followed by harsh winters. Snow may fall at any time of the year, some years covering the entire property for up to eight weeks in winter. Average annual rainfall ranges from 670 mm in the east to 3,000 mm in the west, which is reflected in the varied soils and vegetation.

## Vegetation

Molesworth is an area of national ecological significance. Over 70 threatened plant species grow here, a quarter of which are acutely threatened. These are mostly herbs and include two native mistletoes, five daisies, a hairy mountain cress, a buttercup, a gentian, a plantain and a hebe.

More than 60 endemic plant species are found in South Marlborough (the area south of the Richmond Ranges to the Conway River); close to half of these grow on Molesworth.

A Protected Natural Areas (PNA) survey of the station in 1987–88 identified 25 recommended areas for protection (RAPs), totalling nearly 30% of the station's total area. Progress is being made on fencing and protecting ecological values at these sites.

Vegetation reflects the east–west rainfall gradient from 670 mm in the east to 3,000 mm in the west. At the dry end of the scale, you will see gravelfield and scree communities as well as shrublands, where native species include matagouri, hebe, tauhinu and mountain flax. On lower-altitude riverbeds, basins, terraces and mountain footslopes, exotic grasslands are common. Introduced sweet briar and the invasive flatweed hieracium are evident. Short tussock grasses grow on valley floors and lower mountain side-slopes; tall tussocks grow in upper catchments and on mountain slopes.

In wetter country, patches of red tussocks can be found on lower-altitude river terraces, fans, old flood plains and moraines. Shaded gullies and valley floors that have escaped burning host remnants of mountain beech. Mānuka and kānuka shrubland communities have in some areas risen from the ashes of burned beech and are nursing regenerating forests.

Lakes, wetlands and kettlehole bogs provide a treasure trove of moisture-loving plants, especially around Lakes Tennyson and Sedgemere on the Hanmer–Rainbow route.

## Wildlife

Molesworth supports one of New Zealand's most diverse lizard faunas. The nationally threatened scree skink and spotted skink are found here, as well as more common species.

The New Zealand falcon, banded dotterel and black-fronted tern are among threatened bird species found on Molesworth.

Land-locked native fish species, including members of the bully and galaxiid families, occur in lakes and tarns, some unique to Marlborough. Rivers and streams are populated by native fish species and trout.

There is still much to learn about New Zealand native insects, but several species of spectacularly large giant wētā occur within Molesworth, as do speargrass weevils.



Scree skink. Photo: Gregory Sherley







Molesworth Cob Cottage. Photo: Shellie Evans

## The people

*Despite its isolation, Molesworth has a long human history*

### Early explorers

Māori are likely to have explored this area and unlocked its routes over 600 years ago. Established trails were used by Ngāi Tahu for food gathering and access between the west coast, an important source of pounamu (jade), and the east coast.

In 1830, a splinter group from a northern war party travelled south via the Upper Wairau, Tarndale and Hanmer to attack the Ngāi Tahu pā at Kaiapoi, while the main party travelled the east coast by canoe.

Māori described interior routes to early European settlers and guided explorers, including Thomas Brunner and William Travers.

In 1850, explorers Mitchell and Dashwood found a derelict Māori whare (building) in the lower Acheron. Travers recorded finds of Māori artefacts on his run at remote Lake Guyon.

In the late 1850s and 1860s, Nelson and Marlborough pastoralists were supplying newly established Canterbury runs with stock more cheaply and efficiently via Molesworth than by importing animals from Australia. During the 1857–58 season, some 24,000 sheep were driven south from Nelson; drovers and travellers followed stock routes through Molesworth well into the 20th century.

The most popular route from the Awatere to Canterbury crossed Barefell Pass, following the Guide River into the Acheron Valley, over Jollies Pass to Hanmer and beyond. Nelson and Wairau stock were taken via Tophouse and the Upper Wairau, over Island Pass, down the Clarence Valley and across Jacks Pass to Hanmer. An alternative route was to cross from the Waihopai into the Acheron via Canterbury Spur.

The accommodation houses at Tophouse, Rainbow, Tarndale and Acheron were part of a chain of dwellings placed to service travellers using ‘the Canterbury Track’. These were built from cob, a mixture of wet clay reinforced with dung and tussock, which sets hard when dry. The Acheron Accommodation House and Molesworth Cob Cottage at the eastern entrance to Molesworth are registered with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.

Both the Molesworth roads were built to enable the construction and maintenance of power lines. The Hanmer to St Arnaud Road was built in the 1950s to supply the Nelson and Buller regions; the Acheron Road was built in the late 1960s to enable installation of the high-voltage cable that connects the North and South Islands.

## Farming

Molesworth brings together the best traditions of New Zealand high country farming and modern agriculture. The farm calendar follows the cycle of the seasons, with cattle grazed on warm valley floors in the cold winter months then ranging free on the higher altitude back-country during summer. A team of stockmen are employed, camping out with their dogs and horses for days at a time in remote huts.

Up to 10,000 Angus and Angus/Hereford-cross cattle are run as these are considered the most resilient breeds for the prevailing conditions. Despite the harsh climate and the fact that stock are largely left to fend for themselves, the station uses modern genetic selection and rigorous culling to achieve a calving rate of around 92% in October/November, which is quite outstanding for the conditions.

Calves stay on their mothers through their first winter, then are weaned in spring, just before the cows drop their next season's calf. All yearling cattle are carried through, with surplus heifers sold as two-year-olds and steers as three-year-olds.

About 10,000 hectares of the property, particularly lower slopes and valley floors, have been aerially oversown with pasture species, including clover, cocksfoot and lotus, and topdressed with superphosphate plus sulphur, applied to blocks one year in three. Burning has not been used as a management tool since the 1940s.



*Hieracium. Photo: Sylvia Sassen*

Weed control requires a significant investment, with briar, broom and wilding pines the main targets. The invasive flatweed hieracium is a farming and ecological headache, spreading slowly but surely, especially in the mid-altitude country.

Possums and ferrets are a significant threat to animal health because of their ability to transmit bovine tuberculosis, which is present on the station.

Five permanent farm staff, including the station manager, are employed, plus five stockmen and a general hand (mostly involved with weed control) for all but the winter months. For all stock work, staff use horses, bred and broken in on the station. About 80 horses and up to 45 working dogs may be on the station during the season.

An aircraft is hired for spotting cattle prior to mustering and to locate stragglers afterwards, saving days of riding.



Molesworth Station. Photo: Shellie Evans

## Travelling through Molesworth

### The Acheron Road

During the summer season, the Acheron Road is open 7 am–7 pm from the 1st of October to Easter Monday or the second Sunday in April (whichever is the later date), but may be closed without warning due to weather conditions or fire danger. The Acheron Road status can be checked 24 hours a day by contacting DOC Wairau / Renwick Office (03) 572 9100 or online at [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) (type Molesworth in the search bar). The road is unsealed and suitable for 2-wheel-drive cars. **Caravans, buses or vehicles over 7 m long are not permitted. You will need a permit to tow a trailer.**

The 207-kilometre journey from Blenheim to Hanmer Springs follows the Awatere River, then crosses Wards Pass to follow the Acheron to its confluence with the Clarence River. After 100 kilometres of travel up the Awatere Valley, you reach the Molesworth Cob Cottage. The main section through Molesworth between Cob Cottage and Acheron Accommodation House is 59 kilometres, taking a minimum of two hours of driving. There are several shelters and information panels along the way.

**NOTE** – there are no petrol stations along the way, so fill up before leaving.

Distances in brackets are provided firstly from Blenheim and secondly from Hanmer.

### Awatere turn-off (22 km/185 km)

From Blenheim, follow State Highway 1 south, then turn right at the Awatere Valley intersection just north of Seddon and the Awatere Valley Bridge. A sign here will indicate whether the Acheron Road is open.

Driving up Awatere Valley Road, picnic and toilet facilities are offered at the Marlborough District Council's Blairrich Recreation Reserve (37 km/161 km) and the Hodder Bridge Picnic Area (76 km/132 km). The latter is where trampers set out to climb Mount Tapuae-o-Uenuku (2,885 m), New Zealand's tallest mountain outside the southern divide. The Awatere Valley is known for fine-woolled merino sheep and distinctive wines.

### Molesworth Cob Cottage (122 km/85 km)

For visitors who have travelled up the Awatere Valley, the original cob homestead built by John Murphy in 1866 is the gateway to Molesworth, and is where the Acheron Road begins. If the road is closed, please go no further.

Camping is available near the cottage (fees apply). Toilets, water and information panels are provided.

The existing Molesworth homestead (closed to the public) replaced Molesworth Cob Cottage in 1885 and still houses the farm manager and his family. Please respect residents' privacy by staying away from this area. The homestead, historic woolshed, staff accommodation and various outbuildings, including a blacksmith shop for shoeing the 80-odd horses on the station, can be viewed from a low hill behind the cottage. The Molesworth Homestead Lookout Track (10 min) starts behind the cottage.



## Wards Pass (131 km/76 km)

Crossing the flats from the cottage, look south towards the triangular-shaped Dillon Cone (2174 m) and straight ahead to Barefell Pass, recorded by Frederick Weld in 1850 and still used for moving stock from the Awatere to the Acheron catchment. The road then climbs to Wards Pass (1,145 m), the highest point of the journey.

As you drop from Wards Pass, you cross a section of Muller Station, courtesy of the runholders.

## Isolated Flat (132 km/75 km)

The 250-hectare expanse of Isolated Flat is an outwash plain, bounded by the Awatere Fault.

From January until April, masses of tall, white gentian flowers can be seen growing amongst clumps of short tussock and pasture grass. Introduced blue borage (*Echium vulgare*) also grows profusely, the blue flowers attracting bees, which produce delicately flavoured honey for sale throughout New Zealand and are important pollinators for pasture plants, including clover.

The flood-prone, braided bed of the Acheron River is a habitat for numerous bird species, including the nationally threatened banded dotterel and black-fronted tern that breed in the area, as well as native fish species and trout.

In 1850, explorers Mitchell and Dashwood wrote of Isolated Flat: *'The soil and the grass here were much improved and good cattle stations might be farmed but I fear the immense quantity of speargrass and other prickles would prove an obstacle for sheep.'*

Leaving the flat, the road climbs up and over Isolated Saddle down to the junction with the Tarndale track.

## Red Gate (145 km/62 km)

Here, the Severn River, which has a significant catchment starting on the Molesworth boundary, meets the Acheron River.

On your right (travelling west) is a stand of pines and willows marking the grave of Ivanhoe Augarde, who shot himself here on 29 January 1868. Augarde, a worker at St Helens Station, was courting Miss Kate Gee, who lived in the Upper Wairau. He had written her a letter and given it to 'German Charlie', who worked at Tarndale, to deliver. Charlie, however, opened the letter en route and entertained various groups of men along the way with its contents. Learning of this, Augarde rode to Tarndale and shot Charlie (who died shortly afterwards) then carried on to Red Gate where he shot himself. Mount Augarde, to the right of Alma Valley, was named in his memory.

From here, looking down the Alma Valley you can see the routes to the upper Wairau and Tarndale, where cattle spend summer after calving. The Tarndale turn-off (no public access up this track) leads to the historic Tarndale Homestead, built from cob in 1874 and still used by stockworkers.

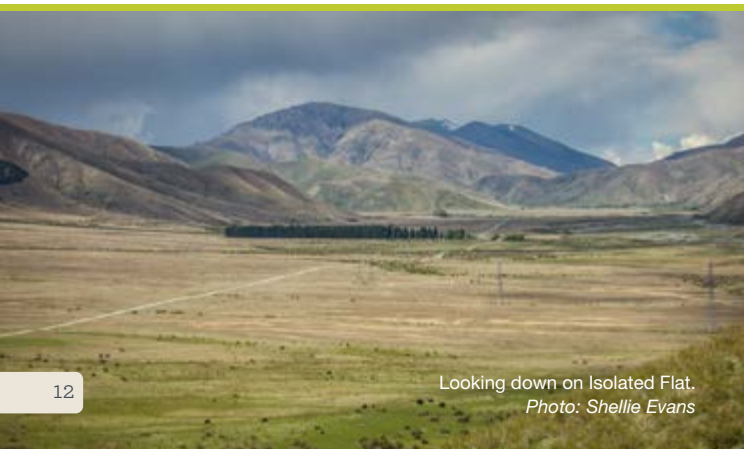
This building replaced an older cob accommodation house, built in the early 1860s near Sedgemere, which was described by traveller J. C. Richmond in 1863 as *'the very minimum of an accommodation house. The bedroom to which I was consigned with my two travelling companions was about as weathertight as a four-rail fence. The best thing about the house was the excellent boiled beef. The nobblers of rum are liberal.'*

## Severn to Sedgemere 4WD Road (145 km/62 km)

*The Severn to Sedgemere 4WD road starts/ends here. Please see page 20 for more details.*

## Severn Rock Shelter (149 km/58 km)

A toilet and a shelter are located here. Information panels about historical access routes and accommodation, and the life of packmen, stockmen and musterers are inside the shelter.



Looking down on Isolated Flat.  
Photo: Shellie Evans

### Guide River (161 km/46 km)

On the opposite side of the Acheron is the confluence with the Guide River, important for stock movement between the Awatere and Acheron Valleys leading up to Barefell Pass.

Hieracium – the flatweed that is invading much of New Zealand's hill and high country – is evident here, smothering grass species and reducing grazing areas. Since first recorded on Molesworth in the 1950s, hieracium has spread rapidly to cover 60–65% of the grazeable part of the property. The sweet briar you see here is also a weed, introduced as an ornamental around homesteads. Briar fruit was reportedly made into rosehip jam, used to mask the flavour of poison when controlling rabbits.

### Pig Trough Suspension Bridge (167 km/40 km)

Pig Trough Suspension Bridge is one of four built by the New Zealand Electricity Department in the early 1960s to provide access to towers where the high-voltage direct current line crossed the river away from the road. The other three bridges have been washed away in floods. The unusual name comes from the wild pigs often seen around a wet soak near the head of the gully named Pig Trough Gully. A toilet, shelter and information panels are located here. Research has recently identified Pig Trough Bridge as being one of only two bridges of this design left in the country.

### Lower Acheron Suspension Bridge (180 km/27 km)

The Lower Acheron Suspension Bridge is a historic stock bridge built in 1945 by students from Canterbury University's Engineering School. It was built to replace an older, dilapidated bridge. It is a remnant of the old sheep farming days when St Helens Station had to periodically move up to 15,000 sheep safely across the Acheron River. It is now maintained by the Department of Conservation as a historic bridge.

### Acheron Accommodation House (181 km/26 km)

At the confluence of the Acheron and Clarence Rivers, the Acheron Accommodation House is the oldest building on Molesworth. Constructed in 1862 by cob builder Ned James, it features a tussock-thatched roof with beech rafters tied with flax, still visible from inside the building.

This was an overnight stop for travellers and stockmen moving through the inland route between Nelson and Canterbury until 1932. Two shillings and sixpence (25c) bought a bed, meal and stabling for horses.

This building was badly damaged by the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake, but has been restored to give this important Molesworth landmark a new lease on life.

Camping is available here (fees apply) with toilets and water provided. Accommodation is not permitted in the house. Information panels about Māori trails, explorers, past runholders, the building and history of the accommodation house, and St Helens Station are located here.

### Acheron Confluence Shelter (182 km/25 km)

This is also at the confluence of the Acheron and Clarence Rivers. A toilet, a shelter and information panels on modern cattle musters, the Clarence River and historic runs (stations) of the area are located here. Multi-day Clarence River rafting trips launch from here (see page 30).



Acheron Accommodation House.  
Photo: Markus Baumann

### Jollies Pass junction (193 km/14 km)

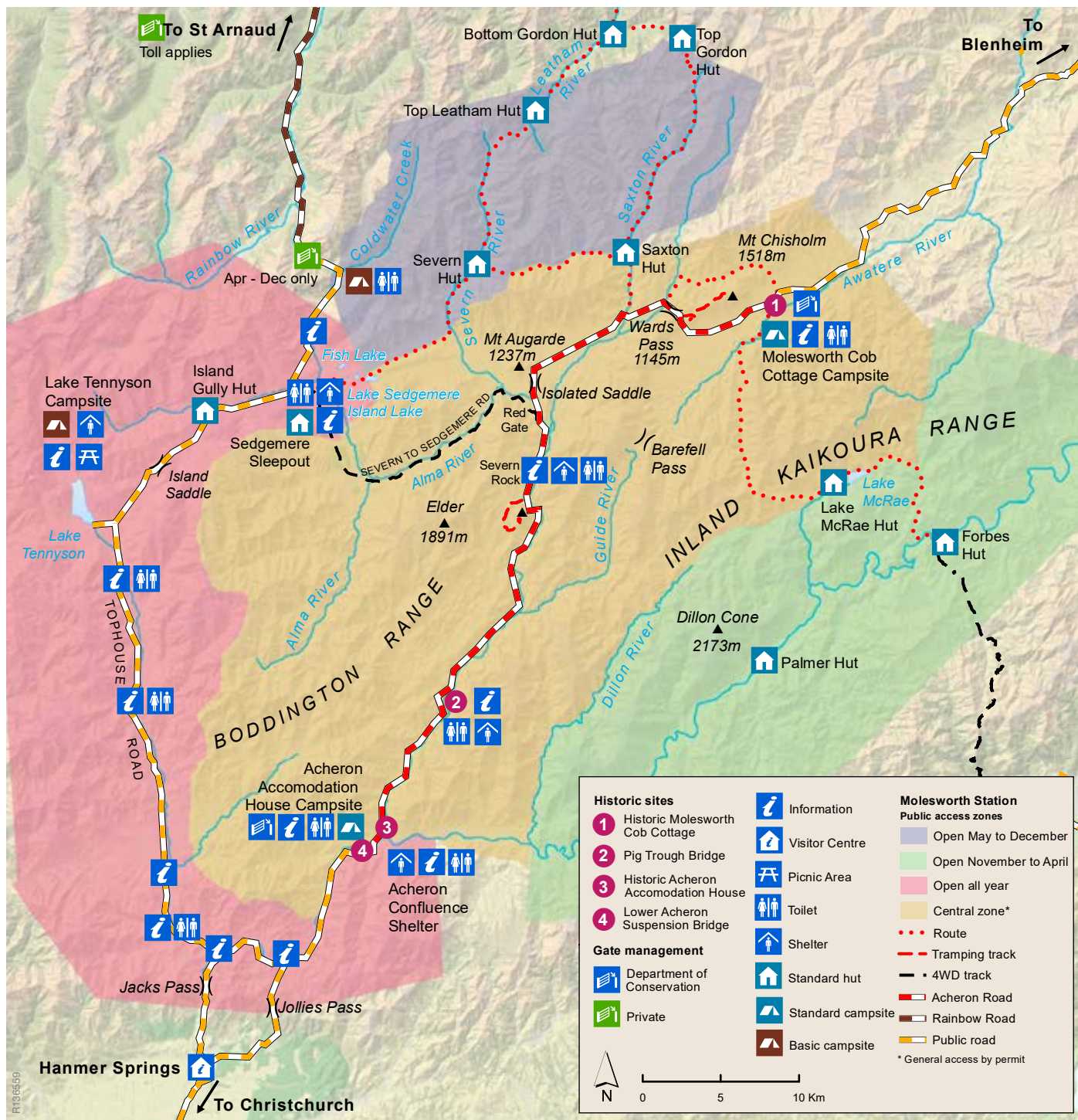
This original road to Hanmer is now suitable only for 4WD vehicles. Cattle leaving Molesworth from the southern end are driven over Jollies Pass from the Clarence Valley and trucked from Landcorp's bull farm at Hanmer.

Jollies Pass was once the social centre of the district, boasting a store, unofficial Post Office and hotel.

Vegetation, including mountain beech forest remnants on the west side of the Acheron River between the Accommodation House and Jollies Pass reflects a slightly higher rainfall than on the rest of the route. Unfortunately, pines and exotic broom are abundant.

### Jacks Pass/Rainbow junction (199 km/8 km)

Here, the main route to Hanmer turns left, heading over Jacks Pass and into town. The Hanmer to St Arnaud Road turns off to the right.





## Hanmer to St Arnaud

The 112-kilometre road from Hanmer to St Arnaud (via Tophouse Rd and Wairau Hanmer Springs Hydro Rd) is accessible by 4WD vehicles only (2WD to Lake Tennyson). Combined with the Acheron Road, this makes a good round trip.

The route is remarkable for the landscape's transition from wide tussocklands and screes along the Clarence River to craggy, beech-covered mountains in the Wairau catchment.

Allow at least three hours to drive from Hanmer to State Highway 63, on a road which crosses Rainbow Station courtesy of the runholder. This is a wilderness driving experience and travellers must be self-sufficient and prepared for sudden weather changes.

From Hanmer, the route follows the Clarence River along Molesworth's boundary with St James Conservation Area to its origin at Lake Tennyson. After crossing the alpine Island Saddle (1,347 m), it follows the Wairau River through Molesworth and then through Rainbow Station to State Highway 63 near St Arnaud (85 km from Nelson/131 km from Picton via Blenheim).

From 26 December until 1 May the road through Rainbow Station is a toll road; visit [www.rainbowstation.co.nz](http://www.rainbowstation.co.nz) for more information. The toll is collected at the Rainbow cob homestead. Outside this season, two gates are locked; at Hell's Gate (76 km/36 km, near the Molesworth boundary) and at Six Mile. Access permission to 4WD, tramp, hunt, fish or mountain bike must be obtained from Rainbow Station before taking the journey. There are two shelters and several information panels along the way.

*Distances in brackets are provided firstly from Hanmer and secondly from St Arnaud.*

### Jacks Pass/Rainbow junction (8 km/104 km)

Jacks Pass opens the main route between Hanmer and St Arnaud, with Jollies Pass accessible only to 4WD vehicles (see page 15).

### Lake Tennyson (32 km/80 km)

On the boundary between Molesworth and St James Conservation Area, Lake Tennyson's combination of water, forest, high mountains, tussock and scree creates a scenic highlight. The 239-hectare lake is dammed behind

glacial moraines. The lake is within the headwaters of the Clarence River, with the river flowing through the lake. The vegetation is a mosaic of moraine communities including open red tussockland and low shrubland with patches of tall tussockland. A large area of mountain beech forest grows on surrounding slopes. To the west is Mt Una (2,301 m), the highest point in the Spenser Range, where many peaks are named after characters in Edmund Spenser's classic 17th century poem, 'The Faerie Queene'.

This is a popular area for camping, with a shelter and toilets available. Information panels about the history of rabbits and their management on Molesworth are located in the shelter.

### Island Saddle (44 km/68 km)

At 1,347 metres, this alpine pass is the highest point on the Hanmer to St Arnaud route and is claimed to be the highest publicly accessible road in New Zealand. The pass straddles the boundary between Marlborough and Canterbury and is the watershed between the Wairau and Clarence Rivers.

Island Gully Hut sleeps 4 and has a toilet; accommodation is on a first-come-first-served basis.

Short and tall tussocklands occur on mountain slopes, with a mosaic of carpetgrass turflands and alpine plants on mountain crests.

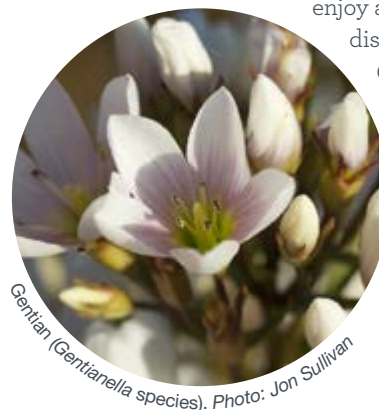
### Sedgemere Lakes (55 km/57 km)

Turk Ridge, Mt Balaclava, and the Crimea Range are among the names that date exploration of this area to the Crimean War in the 1850s.

The Sedgemere Lakes can be viewed from a short track off the road (walking/bicycle access only). Here you may

enjoy an incredible summer display of the native gentian *Gentianella corymbifera* in flower.

The Sedgemere Sleepout is a comfortable 6-bunk hut; accommodation is on a first-come first-served basis.



There is also a shelter and toilet located here. Information about sheep and beef farming on Molesworth, Māori trails and explorers is displayed on panels in the shelter.

In the Sedgemere Protected Area, a range of landforms over a relatively small area has resulted in diverse vegetation types, with the wetlands including over 100 indigenous species of flowering plants. Bog pine and mountain toatoa stands are remnants of once larger shrub communities.

The lakes are regularly frequented by waders and waterfowl: pied stilt, pied oystercatcher, black-fronted tern, banded dotterel and grey duck. This is an important moulting area for paradise shelduck.

### **Severn to Sedgemere 4WD Road (55 km/57 km)**

The Severn to Sedgemere road starts/ends here. This is a 4WD-only road that takes you through Tarndale to the Acheron Road. The road is open from 5 January until mid February. It is 24 km long and approximately a 1 hour drive/2 hour 30 minute cycle, joining the Acheron Road at Red Gate (Severn-Acheron River confluence). There is no camping along the road – please ensure you allow enough travel time to reach the designated campgrounds.

Please keep to the marked route. Drivers must be experienced at river crossings and should not attempt the drive during heavy rain or flooding. The road may be closed due to weather conditions or fire danger.

### **Coldwater Creek camping area (66 km/46 km)**

After crossing the bridge over Coldwater Creek (where a toilet is provided), the road enters Hell's Gate, a narrow gorge.

### **Rainbow Ski Area turn-off (86 km/26 km)**

Outside the ski season, the 8 km skifield road is closed for vehicle access but open for walking. Alpine flowers, tarns and views are the summer attractions.

### **St Arnaud (112 km/0 km)**

This is the front door of Nelson Lakes National Park. Food, petrol and a range of accommodation are available.

## **Recreation options**

### **Open periods**

The open periods for public access vary across Molesworth with restrictions in place to protect the working farm. The Upper Clarence/Wairau river area in the western part of the station is open throughout the year. The Acheron Road through the station is open from 1st of October to Easter Monday or the second weekend in April (whichever is the later date). Two large areas – in the north-west and east – are open for seasonal access.

A permit is required for access to the central part of the station, essential to the farming operation. However, permits are not required to drive through the station on the Acheron Road during the period when the road is open.

Those seeking access permits should contact the DOC Wairau/Renwick Office, ph (03) 572 9100 or online at [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) (type 'Molesworth' in the search bar).

See the Molesworth map on page 16 for more details on areas open for public access. Open areas may be temporarily closed due to weather-related conditions and for short periods due to farming operations.

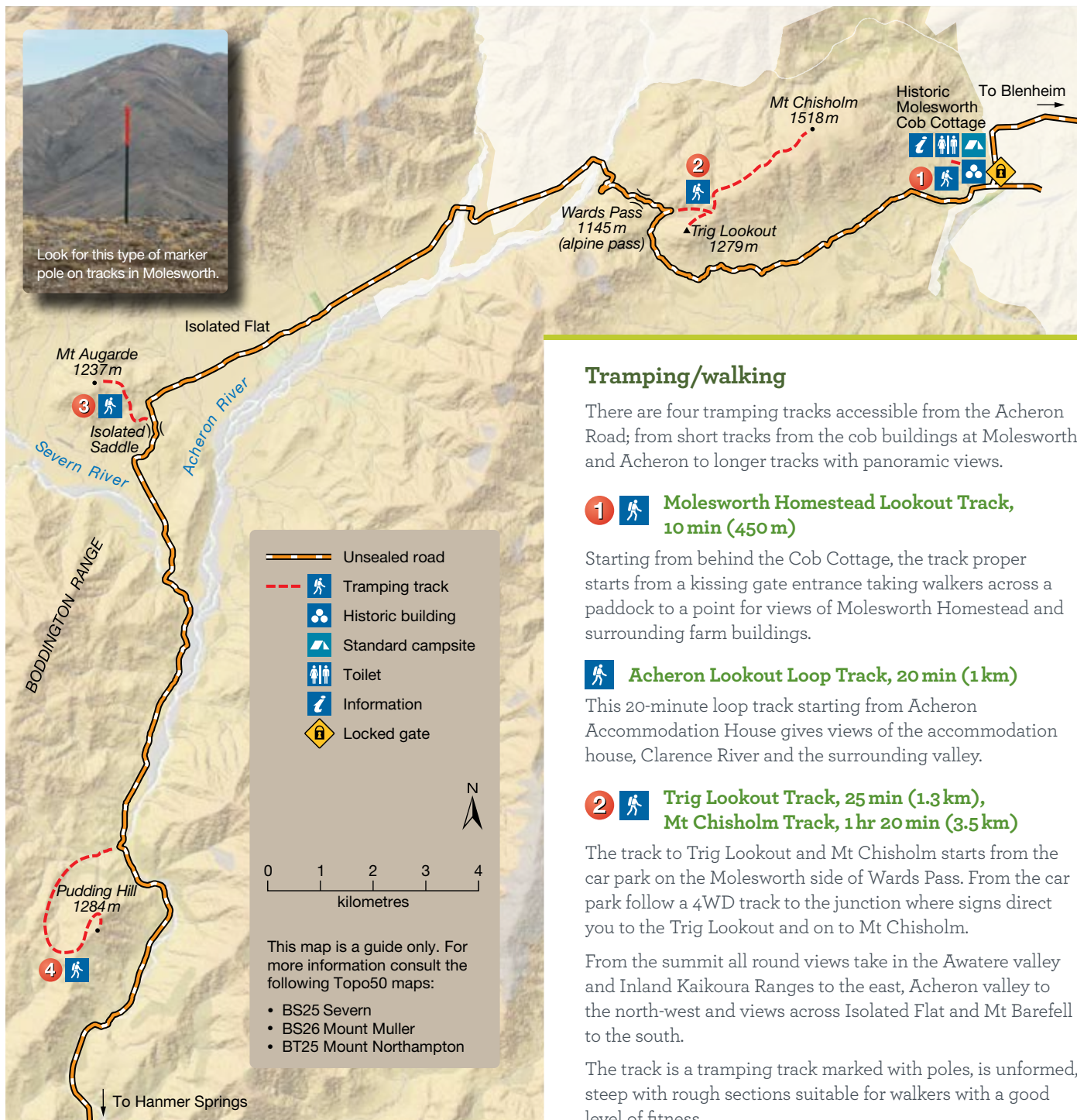
### **Guided tours**

DOC grants concessions for a number of reputable tour operators, who offer visitors to Molesworth the option of being driven through the property by a knowledgeable guide. Special interest tours include cycling, rafting, kayaking and horse-trekking.

For more information, contact the i-SITE in Blenheim or Hanmer.



Pudding Hill – looking towards Isolated Flat in the distance. Photo: Jim Herdman



## Tramping/walking

There are four tramping tracks accessible from the Acheron Road; from short tracks from the cob buildings at Molesworth and Acheron to longer tracks with panoramic views.

### 1 **Molesworth Homestead Lookout Track, 10 min (450 m)**

Starting from behind the Cob Cottage, the track proper starts from a kissing gate entrance taking walkers across a paddock to a point for views of Molesworth Homestead and surrounding farm buildings.

### **Acheron Lookout Loop Track, 20 min (1 km)**

This 20-minute loop track starting from Acheron Accommodation House gives views of the accommodation house, Clarence River and the surrounding valley.

### 2 **Trig Lookout Track, 25 min (1.3 km), Mt Chisholm Track, 1 hr 20 min (3.5 km)**

The track to Trig Lookout and Mt Chisholm starts from the car park on the Molesworth side of Wards Pass. From the car park follow a 4WD track to the junction where signs direct you to the Trig Lookout and on to Mt Chisholm.

From the summit all round views take in the Awatere valley and Inland Kaikoura Ranges to the east, Acheron valley to the north-west and views across Isolated Flat and Mt Barefell to the south.

The track is a tramping track marked with poles, is unformed, steep with rough sections suitable for walkers with a good level of fitness.



### 3 **Mt Augarde Track, 1 hr (1.5 km)**

From a car park at the southern end of Isolated Flat is where the track to Mt Augarde starts. Parts of the track are unformed, steep, and rough. Follow the ridge to the summit.

At the beginning of the track is a plaque in memory of Rangi Gill, a bulldozer driver who worked on many roads in the area.

From the summit of Mt Augarde are views north across Isolated Flat and the distant tops of the Severn, Saxton and Acheron Ranges. To the south lays the Waima River where it joins the Severn River flowing past Red Gate towards the Acheron confluence in the east.

The track is marked with poles and is suitable for walkers with good fitness.

### 4 **Pudding Hill, 2 hr (4 km)**

Pudding Hill summit is reached after a two-hour walk. From here looking south the Acheron River winds its way towards its confluence with the Clarence River. Looking due north the Boddington Range separates Isolated Flat from the Acheron River. The track follows an old road and is suitable for mountain biking.



## Routes



### East–West Route and Leatham Molesworth Route

The East West Route and Leatham Molesworth Route is suitable for people with a high level of back country experience including navigation and map reading skills. Most of these routes are unmarked and follow natural features such as streams, rivers and ridges. You will need to carry and know how to use a topographic map. The relevant 1:50,000 Topo50 maps are: BS25 Severn, BS26 Mount Muller, BT25 Mount Northampton, BT26 Mount Clear, BS27 Tapuae-o-Uenuku, BT27 Kaikoura.

More information is available at:  
[www.doc.govt.nz/solesworthroutes](http://www.doc.govt.nz/solesworthroutes).



### East–West Route, 5–6 days (115 km)

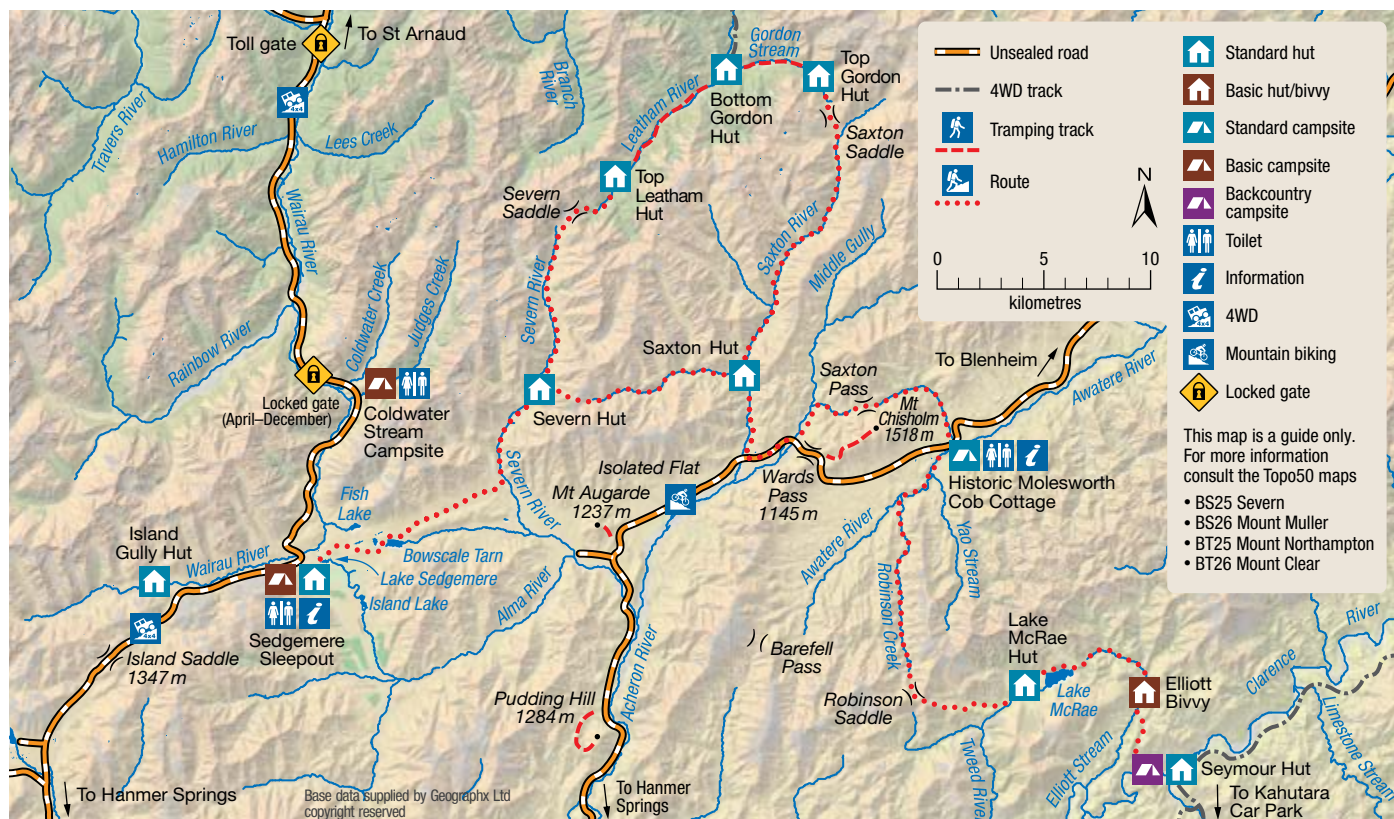
The East–West route (open all year) links the Kahutara River in Ka Whata Tu o Rakihouia (Clarence) Conservation Park with the Sedgemere Lakes Area in the Molesworth Recreation Reserve. At least 5–6 days should be allowed for the East–West Route. This unmarked route is suitable only for trampers with a high degree of off-track experience and fitness.



### Molesworth Leatham Route, 4–5 days (56 km)

There is also a route that is mainly unmarked from Bottom Gordon Hut in the Leatham Conservation Area. This route travels via Severn and Saxton Hut\* in Molesworth, round to Top Gordon Hut and back to Bottom Gordon Hut. At least 4–5 days should be allowed for the Leatham Molesworth Route.

\*A permit is required from DOC for all access above Saxton Hut from 1 January to 30 April each year. A condition of this access across the adjoining Muller Station is that visitors **only travel upstream** to avoid moving stock out of the valley.





## Other recreation options



### Horse trekking

At all times of the year, permission is required to horse trek through Molesworth. Routes and logistics need to be carefully planned. Trails have not yet been developed, however a guide of potential routes is available from [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) (type 'Molesworth' into the search bar). Alternatively, contact DOC Wairau/Renwick Office, on (03) 572 9100, for advice on necessary permits and potential routes, including overnight stops.



### Mountain biking

Keep to roads and marked routes. These are high-altitude routes where weather conditions can change rapidly. Always carry wind- and water-proof clothing.

The distance from Blenheim to Hanmer via the Acheron Road is 207 km. Open dates are the same as for motorists. Outside the open season mountain bikers must apply for a permit from Wairau/Renwick Office.

Along the Awatere Road, toilet facilities are provided at the Marlborough District Council's



Severn Valley. Photo: Jim Herdman

Blairich Recreation Reserve (37 km from Blenheim/161 km from Hanmer) and Hodder Bridge Picnic Area (76 km from Blenheim/132 km from Hanmer).

Allow a full day to cycle the 59 km section through Molesworth, camping a night at the Molesworth Cob Cottage before setting out the next morning or – if you are beginning your journey in Hanmer – by the Acheron Accommodation House, 27 km from the township (fees apply – cash only). These are the only sites along the Acheron Road where camping is permitted.

Allow two days to ride from St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs. Check the dates you have in mind with Rainbow Station (03 522 4413, 8.30 am to 4.00 pm) or [www.rainbowstation.co.nz](http://www.rainbowstation.co.nz). Basic camping is available at Lake Tennyson, Sedgemere or Coldwater Creek.



## Rafting

Rafting the Clarence River is a multi-day wilderness experience offered by a number of adventure tourism companies employing qualified guides. Trips are generally 4 nights and 5 days.

Rafts are launched where the Acheron River meets the Clarence River and the journey ends 214 kilometres later where the Clarence meets the sea. Rapids are a moderate grade two and three. October to December is the main rafting season, when water levels are sufficiently high.

For information about guided rafting trips, contact the i-SITE in Hanmer or Blenheim. Anyone thinking of an independent trip should contact DOC Wairau/Renwick Office to obtain the required hut tickets.

## Fishing

Good trout fishing is available in rivers and streams close to the Acheron and Hanmer to St Arnaud Roads, especially in the Clarence and upper Wairau River areas. Please park your vehicle and walk, as off-road driving is prohibited. Walking access is possible on the margins of rivers and major streams.

Salmon can be caught by walking downstream from where the Acheron River meets the Clarence. Brown trout are abundant in Lake Tennyson and common in the Sedgemere Lakes, Island Lake, Fish Lake and Bowscale Tarn. Small boats can be launched from the beach at Tennyson but the other lakes and tarns are accessible only by walking or mountain bike.

Fishing is only permitted during the fishing season (1 October to 30 April) and requires a licence from Fish & Game New Zealand.

Anyone wanting access when the road is closed must apply for an access permit from DOC Wairau/Renwick Office.

## Hunting

Among hunters, Molesworth is best known for its Canada geese hunts. Organised shoots are held throughout the year, with as many as 250 hunters spending up to four days on the property. Usually between 400 and 1,500 birds are bagged, depending on the time of year.

Goats, chamois, pigs and deer are also hunted at Molesworth. Hunting on Molesworth requires a permit which will cover specified dates and areas. Apply online or with the DOC Wairau/Renwick Office. If intending to hunt on Rainbow Station, seek their permission.

Further information on hunting is available from the DOC Wairau/Renwick Office or the DOC website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

## Camping and huts

The Molesworth Cob Cottage and Acheron Accommodation House are the only camping sites along the Acheron Road, located at either end of the Acheron Road through Molesworth Station. Fees apply.

**No camping is allowed in the Acheron Road corridor.**

On the road between Hanmer and St Arnaud, the four-bunk Island Gully and the six-bunk Sedgemere Hut are available to the public. While a woodburning stove is provided for heating, hut users should bring their own firewood and it is recommended that gas stoves be carried in for cooking. A DOC hut pass is required for each person overnighing here. Camping is allowed at Lake Tennyson, Coldwater Creek and Sedgemere, adjacent to the access way to the tarns. Non-vehicle-based freedom camping is permitted in Public Access Zones during the periods that they are open.



Photo: Neil Deans

## Molesworth fact file

- ▶ At 180,787 hectares, Molesworth is home to New Zealand's biggest farm, supporting the country's biggest herd of beef cattle numbering up to 10,000 over winter.
- ▶ The property ranges in altitude from 549 metres to over 2,100 metres.
- ▶ At 900 metres Molesworth is the highest occupied (year round) homestead in New Zealand. Tarndale at 1,000 metres is occupied by stockmen, but not during the winter.
- ▶ The 1,347-metre Island Saddle is considered to be the highest point on a publicly accessed road in New Zealand.
- ▶ Over 60 endemic plant species are found in South Marlborough with almost half of these growing on Molesworth.



## Please remember



### Dogs

Dogs **MUST** remain in vehicles for the entire journey and are not permitted at the campgrounds. For more information on dogs refer to the Molesworth Care Code on page 34.

### Check, Clean, Dry

Stop the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests. Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all items before entering, and when moving between, waterways. To report a suspected find of didymo, please call the Ministry for Primary Industries on 0800 80 99 66. More information is available at [www.biosecurity.govt.nz](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz).



## For your safety

Trampers should be well equipped, fit and self-sufficient. Poor visibility due to mist on the tops can make route finding and orientation difficult. The terrain is often rough. Rain and flooded streams can alter your plans and freezing conditions can occur at any time of year. It is recommended that you leave your intentions with a friend or relative prior to the start of your trip. Notify your intentions at [www.adventuresmart.co.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.co.nz), and notify the site when you have completed your trip. It is advisable to carry a GPS and an emergency beacon (hire outlets are listed on [www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz)).

Remember: your safety is your responsibility.

To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call: DOC HOTline 0800 362 468.

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**

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

# Molesworth Care Code



## Fires are prohibited

Fires damage protected natural areas in Molesworth, destroying vegetation and exposing soil to erosion. Fire can also threaten critical winter feed for cattle. Open fires are not allowed, even in cottage fireplaces. Use portable stoves for cooking.



## Leave gates as you find them

Molesworth is a working farm. Please leave gates as you find them, ensuring they are properly latched. Failing to shut a gate can mean days of extra work in re-mustering blocks and separating mixed mobs of cattle.

If you need to cross a fence and there is no gate, climb carefully through or over the fence at a post or stile.



## Keep vehicles to the formed roads provided for public access

This is a vast property where weather and road conditions can change rapidly; it is important that you can be found quickly if isolated. Off-road driving can damage fragile plants, spread weeds and risk starting a fire. Leave intentions on your dashboard if you are leaving a vehicle roadside overnight.



## Dogs are prohibited

Dogs endanger native wildlife and can upset and transfer diseases to livestock.



## Protect native plants and animals

Molesworth supports plant and animal species that are unique and often rare. Damaging or removing native plants and animals destroys part of this special environment.



## Help reduce the spread of weeds

Care must be taken not to carry any plant material onto Molesworth; check for seeds and for aquatic weed plants on water craft and vehicles.



## No unauthorised drones on Molesworth Station

Drones can:

- ▶ interfere with helicopters for search and rescue, fire and operational needs
- ▶ disturb our native birds and our visitors.



## Remove rubbish

Rubbish is unattractive, harmful to farmed animals as well as wildlife and can increase vermin and disease. Carry out any rubbish that you carry in.



## Bury toilet waste

Use the toilets provided. Otherwise, bury your toilet waste in a hole well away from waterways, tracks, campsites and huts. Campervans are not permitted to discharge waste on Molesworth.



## Keep streams and lakes clean

When cleaning and washing, take the water in a bucket and wash well away from the water source. Soaps and detergents are harmful to water life, so tip used water into the soil, where it will be filtered. Water may be contaminated; filter, chemically treat or boil it for at least three minutes before drinking.



## Respect our cultural heritage

The historic buildings on Molesworth are a reminder of our past. Treat these places with consideration and respect.

## Enjoy your visit

Take a last look before leaving an area; will the next visitor know that you have been there? Protect the environment for your own sake, for the sake of those who come after you and for the environment itself.

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable ground
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimise the effects of fire
- Respect wildlife and farm animals
- Be considerate of others



leave no trace  
NEW ZEALAND



## Further information

### Department of Conservation

Wairau/Renwick Office

Ph: (03) 572 9100 (24-hour Acheron Road Information)

Email: [renwick@doc.govt.nz](mailto:renwick@doc.govt.nz)

Rotoiti/Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre

Ph: (03) 521 1806

Email: [nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz)

### Fish & Game New Zealand

Marlborough office

Ph: (03) 578 8421

Nelson office

Ph: (03) 544 6382

[www.nelson.fishandgame.org.nz](http://www.nelson.fishandgame.org.nz)

### i-SITE visitor information centres

Hurunui i-SITE, Hanmer

Ph: (03) 315 7128/0800 442 663

Email: [info@alpinepacifictourism.co.nz](mailto:info@alpinepacifictourism.co.nz)

Blenheim i-SITE

Ph: (03) 577 8080

Email: [blenheim@i-SITE.org](mailto:blenheim@i-SITE.org)

### Molesworth Station

The Manager

Ph: (03) 575 7043

Email: [molesworth@landcorp.co.nz](mailto:molesworth@landcorp.co.nz)

### Rainbow Station

Ph: (03) 522 4413

Email: [info@rainbowstation.co.nz](mailto:info@rainbowstation.co.nz)

[www.rainbowstation.co.nz](http://www.rainbowstation.co.nz)

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