Getiing there
Starting points for Mt Somers Track are either from Staveley or Mt Somers township.
From Staveley – turn off Inland Scenic Route 72 at Staveley and follow the road to the Sharplin Falls car park, which has toilets and an information panel.
From Mt Somers township – follow Ashburton Gorge Road for approximately 10 km before turning right onto Jig Road which will take you to the Woolshed Creek picnic area. Here you will find a large grassy, sheltered picnic area with toilets and information.

Further information
If you need further information or to report any incidents, issues or sightings of conservation interest, contact the DOC office at either Twizel or Geraldine.
Te Manahuna/Twizel Office
Phone +64 3 435 0802
Raukapuka/Geraldine Office
Phone +64 3 693 1010

Huts
Woolshed Creek Hut sleeps 26 on sleeping platforms, while Pinnacles Hut sleeps 19 on single and double bunks. Water is supplied from either a rainwater tank or directly from a stream. All drinking water should be sterilised, filtered or boiled for 3 minutes before use. Both huts have a wood or coal burner for heating but cooking facilities and utensils are not provided.

Backcountry hut tickets should be bought in advance from Mt Somers or Staveley stores, i-SITEs or any DOC office. Annual hut passes (available from DOC offices) may also be used. Huts cannot be booked and they sometimes become overcrowded; please be considerate of other users.

Acland Shelter provides a rest point but is not to be used for overnight stays.

Note: If you are spending one night at Woolshed Creek Hut before returning to Woolshed Creek car park then we suggest you walk in on Miners Track. Either return the same way or along Mt Somers Track (south face), before descending on the Rhyolite Ridge Track to the car park.

Take care visiting natural areas.
The map in this brochure is a guide only and is not a substitute for a topographical map. Use map series NZTopo50 BX19 and BX20.

Remember – your safety is your responsibility
Before you go, know the Outdoor Safety Code – 5 simple rules to help you stay safe:
1. Plan your trip
2. Tell someone
3. Be aware of the weather
4. Know your limits
5. Take sufficient supplies
Visit www.adventuresmart.org.nz to learn more and log your intentions with your trusted contact.

In an emergency dial 111.
In 1983 Mt Somers and Staveley locals formed the Mt Somers Walkways Society, which led to the creation of what is now known as the Mt Somers Track. The track officially opened in 1987, the year that management of the area passed to the Department of Conservation (DOC). Since then a close association has been maintained between the two organisations.

Mt Somers Track is a 1–2 day circuit around Mt Somers linking the popular Pinnacles and Woolshed Creek huts. If you intend to walk only one way from Woolshed Creek car park and require vehicle transport, a local service is available (phone Marilyn Gray on 03 303 0809 before you start your trip).

Columns of rhyolitic basalt make this one of the best climbing areas in Canterbury. There are other walks from 30 minutes to 4 hours among impressive volcanic rock formations, historic mines and shady forest trees.

**Hunting**

Recreational hunting is allowed on public conservation land around Mt Somers, though hunting is not allowed in Alford Forest Scenic Reserve and Sharplin Falls Scenic Reserve. A DOC permit must be carried at all times. There are opportunities to hunt red deer, chamois and goats. Information on hunting on public conservation land and hunting permits is available at www.doc.govt.nz/canterbury-hunting.

**Tangata whenua – first people of the land**

Hine Paaka, a huge mataī, stood nobly on the edge of the inland foothills near an important north–south route between the hills and extensive swamps. Her great height and elevation made her stand out on the plains from a distance. She was a landmark of great importance.

Hine Paaka is named after the wife of Kāi Tahu chief, Maru, who lived in the late 1800s. For hundreds of years bird-catching parties sought out this tree, travelling from as far away as Kaiapoi and Banks Peninsula. In the autumn and early winter when berries were ripe, rōpū/parties would make the long journey to set snare perches or use birding spears to catch kākā, kererū and other birds in the trees and surrounding forests. Hine Paaka finally blew down in 1945.

**European history**

Sawmilling was a major factor in the development of the Staveley area. The first mill began operation in 1876 at Bushside, closely followed by others.

Settlers on the Canterbury plains used Alford Forest, which had a railhead, as one of their few sources of timber. Kahikatea, beech, mataī and tōtara, were dragged by bullock teams to saw-pits to become timber for houses in mid Canterbury.

Staveley was the economic centre of the foothills area and became a thriving business and industrial centre with a church, hall, butchery, bakery, general store, creamery, blacksmith shop, sawmill, lime quarry and kilns. A great contrast with the Staveley of today!

Mt Somers township grew with the development of good transport links and the exploitation of resources in the area. Coal was discovered on the Mount Somers Run in 1856 with a commercial coal mine in operation by 1864. This was soon followed by a stone quarry and lime kilns.

Mining development was hampered by a lack of suitable transport. This was partially solved by the completion of a branch railway line in 1886 connecting Mt Somers to the South Island’s main trunk line.

However, getting coal and limestone to Mt Somers was still a problem. This was resolved by the construction of tramways from the mines and quarries to the railhead. The route of one of these tramways follows the Woolshed Creek access road and can be seen from the Ashburton Gorge Road near the Buxton Lime Kilns.

**Native plants you might see**

The forest along the track is a vestige of the extensive tracts that once covered the foothills. Catastrophic fires started accidently or to clear the land for farming swept through destroying the forest. Later, burning of alpine tussock reduced the height at which forest occurs except for a band on Mount Somers/Te Kiekie.

The forest remnant is dominated by beech, especially mountain beech/tawhairauriki with some silver beech/tawhai occupying the most favourable sites. Other trees include southern rātā, māpou, broadleaf/pāpāuma and putaputaweta, mountain celery pine/toatoa and mountain ribbonwood/houhere.

Above the treeline, subalpine scrub includes snow tōtara, dracophyllum/neinei, mountain flax/wharariki, snow tussock and snowberry.

... and native animals

Bellbird/korimako and silveryeye/tahou are the most common native birds in the forested areas, although rifleman/tititopoumaru, fantail/piwakawaka and tomtit/miromiro are also present. Above the bushline the New Zealand falcon/kārearea, New Zealand pipit/pīhoihoi and Australasian harrier/kāhu may be seen.

The Bluff wētā (Deinacrida elegans) is found in the Mt Somers area. With distinctive red, black and white-banded legs they can weigh up to 16 gm or about half the weight of a mouse. This high altitude giant wētā has only been found in the Kaikoura ranges and Mt Somers. It is an ancient genus of similar antiquity to the rhyolite that makes up the mountain!
Track classifications

- **Walking track** – well formed easy walk from a few minutes to a day.
- **Easy tramping track** – well formed track for comfortable overnight tramping/hiking.
- **Tramping track** – challenging day or multi-day tramping, backcountry skills and experience required.

MT SOMERS TRACK

*All track times and distances are one way.*

**Sharplin Falls Track**

45 minutes, 1.2 km

Walk through mountain beech forest/tawhairauriki alongside Bowyers Stream to Sharplin Falls. The falls, which drop several metres over the Mount Somers southern fault system, are named after an early Staveley sawyer.

**Sharplin Falls Track junction to Pinnacles Hut**

3 hours, 5.2 km

From Sharplin Falls Track junction the path climbs steeply through mountain beech forest/tawhairauriki to Dukes Knob before following Bowyers Stream to the hut.

**Pinnacles Hut to Woolshed Creek Hut**

3 hours, 6.2 km

Pinnacles Hut is named after the rock formations on the northern face of Mt Somers, formed by the cooling of very hot sticky lava flows some 90 million years ago. From the hut follow markers through tussock and subalpine scrub up to the Mt Somers saddle (1170 m). It is a steady climb to the saddle where views of the Taylor and Old Man ranges dominate the scenery. On the descent towards Morgan Stream a sign indicates a short side-trip to view some interesting boulder features referred to as ‘caves’. Returning to the main track, follow the markers across Morgan Stream and Woolshed Creek to Woolshed Creek Hut.

**Woolshed Creek Hut to Woolshed Creek car park via Miners Track**

3 hours, 5 km

From Woolshed Creek Hut the track rises to a high point (trig R, 934 m) with superb views of the upper Ashburton Gorge, before descending to the old Blackburn Mine. The track then runs alongside the hand-built jig that transported coal from the Blackburn Mine to the railway wagons waiting below. At the bottom of the jig the track follows the route of the tramway to Woolshed Creek car park.

**Woolshed Creek Hut to Rhyolite Ridge Track junction via Mt Somers Track (south face)**

2 hours, 4.6 km

The route takes in dynamic scenery with regenerating mountain beech forest/tawhairauriki within a landscape of waterfalls, deep icy pools and rocky tors. From the hut the route climbs some 500 metres to a local feature known as the Bus Stop Overhang. From here the track crosses the face of Mt Somers to link with Rhyolite Ridge Track.

**Rhyolite Ridge Track junction to Mt Somers Summit Track junction**

3 hours 30 min, 6 km

Passing around the southern face of Mt Somers through a mix of open grassland and forested catchments, this section of track eventually rises to its highest point (1080 m) at the junction of the Mt Somers Summit Track. Acland Shelter provides welcome shelter and rest after about 4 km (1 hour 30 minutes) from the junction.

**Mt Somers Summit Track Junction to Sharplin Falls car park**

2 hours 30 minutes, 2.7 km

The final steep downhill section is through regenerating forest areas but is open enough to continue to provide interesting views to the east.

OTHER TRACKS

As well as being popular picnic spots, Woolshed Creek and Sharplin Falls car parks are the starting points for a number of day walks.

**Nature trail**

30 minutes, 1 km

Cross the bridge over Woolshed Creek before continuing up the true left of Woolshed Creek. Then ford the river crossing to the right bank, ending with a climb out through the dross (old coal dust) screened from coal at the bottom of the jig. Return to Woolshed Creek car park.

*Take care fording the river. If in any doubt, return the way you came.*

**Rhyolite Ridge Track**

1 hour, 1.8 km

This track follows a rocky ridge linking Mount Somers Track (south face) with Woolshed Creek car park.

**Sidewinder Track**

45 minutes, 1 km

This steep hill track begins with a short walk through a small pocket of silver beech that escaped the fires that swept through Ashburton Gorge. The track then climbs steeply up and through the tailings of the old Blackburn Mine where it links with Miners Track. Return to the Woolshed Creek car park or continue on to Woolshed Creek Hut.

**Mt Somers/Te Kiekie summit**

The summit (1687 m) and its surrounding plateau is worthy of a visit, with 360 degree views of the surrounding mountains and coastal plain.

From Sharplin Falls car park it is a 5-hour one-way trip to the summit (4.7 km). From Woolshed Creek car park follow Rhyolite Ridge Track to the junction with Mt Somers Summit Track at Staveley Hill, then follow the track poles along the high plateau.

*In winter this face gets very little sunlight making the snow hard and icy. An ice axe, crampons and mountaineering experience are required to reach the summit.*