

Dusky Track

Fiordland National Park



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Further information

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Deep lake above Lake Roe. Photo: Crystal Brindle

Cover: View from the Dusky Track. Photo: Lyn Trewella

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visit doc.govt.nz.

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Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa
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History

Tamatea / Dusky Sound is one of the largest fiords in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Māori name, Tamatea, is after the legendary explorer who travelled the full length of the North and South Islands in his waka (canoe), the *Takitimu*. The English name came from Captain James Cook, who did not enter the fiord in 1770 during his first voyage to New Zealand because it was getting dark and so named it Dusky Bay.

In 1773, during his second voyage to New Zealand, Cook spent several weeks exploring the fiord and met several Māori family groups belonging to Ngāti Māmoe iwi. These people lived in Tamatea and other remote fiords as fugitives of northern tribal battles and formed the basis for legends of a 'lost tribe'.

The first attempt to map an overland route to Tamatea was made by explorer Sir Thomas Mackenzie between 1894 and 1896. Then, in 1903 when jobs were scarce, about 50 West Coast miners were set to work building a track from Supper Cove to Lake Manapouri. Living in tent camps, these men endured the sandflies and rain for a reward of 12 shillings and sixpence a day plus food.

The track, which is still clearly evident along much of its length, was cut 6 feet wide with a drain on one side and extended to a point just past where Loch Maree Hut stands today. Picks, crowbars and a hefty anvil still lie at the side of the track, just above Loch Maree, where the men left them when work came to a halt.

In 1909, 10 moose were brought from Canada for liberation at Supper Cove. The harsh environment and competition from red deer make it unlikely that any moose survive today, although there have been unconfirmed reports of moose sightings over the years.



View through mossy trees on the Dusky Track. Photo: Graham Dainty

Natural history

The Dusky Track crosses exceptionally mountainous country rising to 1,600 metres above sea level. The U-shaped valleys were carved by deep glaciers during the ice ages, the last of which ended some 14,000 years ago. The glaciers and sheet ice have left behind hanging side valleys, horned peaks and high basins now filled by lakes.

The forest is predominantly tawhai / silver beech standing up to 25 metres tall with a lush subcanopy of horopito / pepper tree, kāpuka / broadleaf, kōtukutuku / fuchsia, coprosmas and mamaku / tree-fern, and with mānatu / ribbonwood, makomako / wineberry, kōtukutuku and piupiu / crown fern surrounding the clearings. At about 900 metres, beech forest gives way to subalpine shrubland containing bog pine, hebe, dracophyllum and coprosmas, and short tussock grassland.

A wide variety of forest birds may be encountered, including mohua / yellowheads and kākāriki / yellow-crowned parakeets. Weka and kea usually visit the huts, and kiwi can be heard calling at dusk. The Seaforth and Spey valleys provide good habitat for waterfowl, including native pāpera / grey ducks, introduced mallards and rare whio / blue ducks, which are found in the fast-flowing headwaters.

Introduced animals including red deer, stoats, rats, mice and possums can be found in the Spey valley.

Kopukopu / blue cod and hāpuku / grouper are often caught by hand line at aptly named Supper Cove. Trout fishing is also possible in the Hauroko Burn, Spey River and Seaforth River below Loch Maree. A fishing licence and Clean Gear Certificate are required – for more information, visit doc.govt.nz/prevent-the-spread-of-freshwater-pests.



Mohua / yellowhead.
Photo: Leon Everett



Kea.
Photo: Andrew Walmsley



Kōtukutuku / fuchsia.
Photo: Shellie Evans



Kākāriki / yellow-crowned parakeet.
Photo: Leon Everett



Horopito / pepper tree.
Photo: Crystal Brindle



Whio / blue duck.
Photo: Leon Everett



Kāka.
Photo: Jonathan Astin



Kopukopu / blue cod.
Photo: Brian Mackie

About the track

The Dusky Track is a challenging but rewarding 84 km long advanced tramping track through Fiordland National Park. It takes 8 to 10 days to complete and links stunning Lake Hauroko with Lake Manapouri, including a 2-day optional detour to Supper Cove in Tamatea/Dusky Sound.

The track traverses three major valley systems and crosses two mountain ranges, and there are 21 three-wire bridges to cross. Although the track is reasonably well marked, you can expect to encounter tree falls, knee-deep mud, river crossings, tree roots and some rough terrain. Be prepared for sections to become impassable due to flooding after heavy rain – this is not uncommon and **will cause delays**.

The Dusky Track is recommended only for **experienced, well-equipped groups with high levels of fitness**.

Before heading out on the track, please contact Te Rua-o-te-moko/Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre in Te Anau or visit doc.govt.nz to obtain current information on current track conditions, the weather and any alerts.

Access

The Dusky Track can be walked in either direction but starting from Lake Hauroko is preferred due to transport logistics. Therefore, the track guide provided below is for this direction.

If starting from Lake Hauroko, there is a scheduled boat service leading to the start of the track at the head of the lake that runs once or twice per week, or it is possible to fly to the start of the track or to Supper Cove by float plane or helicopter. If starting from Lake Manapouri, there is a launch service across the lake that operates daily.



Huts and hut tickets

The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) provides and maintains the huts on the Dusky Track. Each hut is supplied with mattresses and a pit toilet, but no cooking facilities are provided in any of the huts, so a portable stove for cooking must be carried. Users are expected to leave the huts clean and tidy.

West Arm Hut is a basic 6-bunk hut that is free to stay in. All other huts are standard huts and require one Backcountry Hut Ticket per person per night or a Backcountry Hut Pass (valid for 12 months). Tickets should be purchased in advance from a DOC visitor centre or Backcountry Hut Ticket retailer. For further information, visit doc.govt.nz/backcountry-hut-tickets.

Note that the Dusky Track is not suitable for camping.



Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand is one of the great wilderness areas of the Southern Hemisphere.

Known to Māori as Te Wāhipounamu (the place of greenstone), this World Heritage Area covers 2.6 million hectares and incorporates Aoraki/Mount Cook, Westland Tai Poutini, Fiordland and Mount Aspiring National Parks.

World Heritage is a concept that identifies natural and cultural sites of global significance – places so special that they should be conserved for future generations. Some of the best examples of animals and plants that were once found on the ancient supercontinent Gondwana live in this World Heritage Area.

Stop the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests. Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all items before entering and when moving between waterways.

mpi.govt.nz/cleaning



Care for Aotearoa



Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Follow any rules restricting dogs, fires, drones or vehicles.



Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by following the Land Safety Code.

- ▶ Choose the right trip for you.
- ▶ Understand the weather.
- ▶ Pack warm clothes and extra food.
- ▶ Share your plans and take ways to get help.
- ▶ Take care of yourself and each other.



Keep New Zealand clean

Use toilets where provided. Take all rubbish with you.



Show respect

Respect others, respect culture.



Safety

The Dusky Track is difficult, physically challenging and remote, so it is important to plan, prepare and equip yourself well before heading out. Trampers need to be completely self-sufficient and have the skills and experience to make decisions around safety and risks on the track – your safety choices are your responsibility.

1. Plan your trip

Plan properly for your trip and ensure that your party has a capable, experienced leader.

There is no cell phone reception on the Dusky Track. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you carry a distress beacon and/or a satellite communication device – these have saved lives. You should also carry topographical maps covering the Dusky Track for navigation (CE05 Cooper Island, CE06 Lake Roe, CD06 Deep Cove). Before departing, check the weather and current track conditions by contacting Te Rua-o-te-moko/Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre in Te Anau or visiting doc.govt.nz.

2. Tell someone your plans

Leave details of your trip (return date and time, planned route, names of party members, and vehicle licence plate numbers) with a trusted contact and let them know when you return. Remember to fill in hut books during your trip, even if you do not stay in the hut, as this can assist search and rescue operations and may help save your life.

3. Check the weather forecast

Fiordland National Park lies in an area with high rainfall and changeable weather patterns. Cold temperatures, snow, strong winds and heavy rain can occur at any time of the year, and flooding can also occur, so river crossing skills are required. The track also traverses two alpine passes that are often impassable during winter due to snow, ice and avalanches.

For more information on current weather conditions and outdoor safety, visit weather.niwa.co.nz, metservice.co.nz and mountainsafety.org.nz.

4. Know your limits

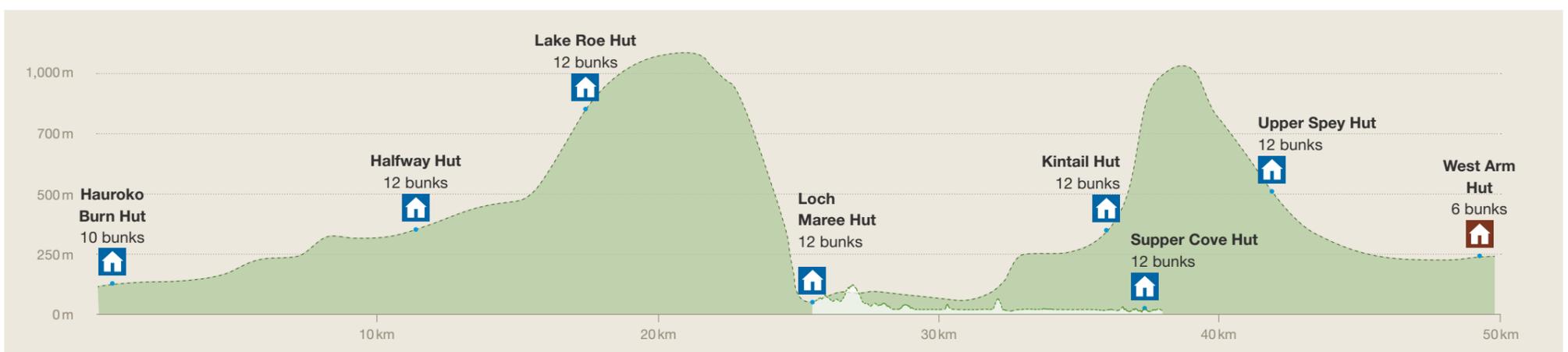
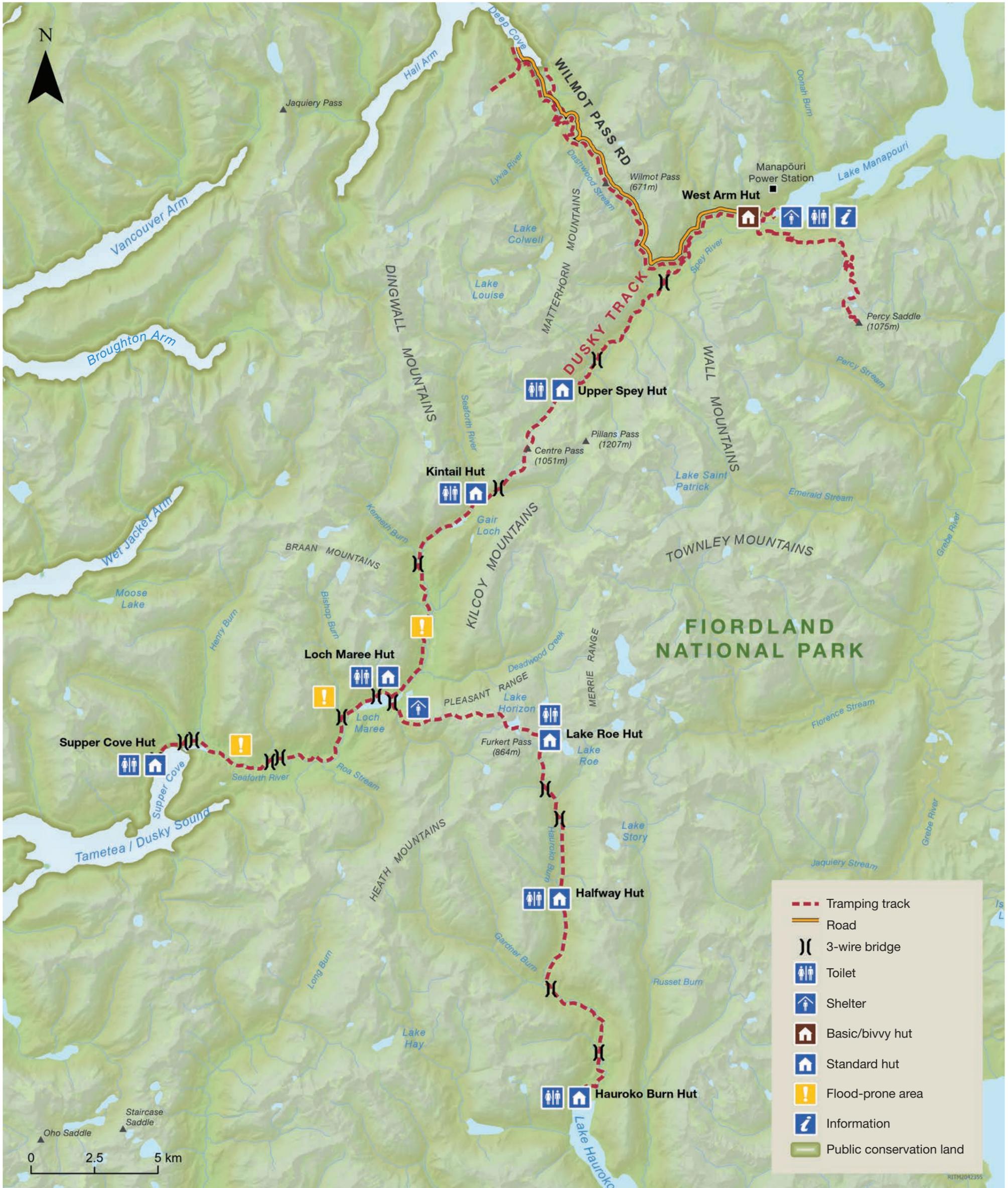
Always be physically and mentally prepared for the worst. Be aware of the causes and symptoms of hypothermia and know how to treat it.

5. Take sufficient supplies

You need to be self-sufficient with extra food, adequate clothing and equipment, including a portable stove and fuel. Be ready to change your plans due to weather conditions and flooding, which can frequently cause delays on this track.

Distress beacon hire

Available from Te Rua-o-te-moko/Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre, Caltex service station and Bev's Tramping Gear Hire in Te Anau. For other locations, visit locatorbeacons.co.nz.



Track guide



Advanced tramping track: Mostly unformed track for challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking trips. The track has directional markers, poles or rock cairns for wayfinding. The track may be rough and steep with unbridged stream and river crossings. Suitable for people with moderate to high fitness who have backcountry (remote area) and river crossing skills and experience. Tramping/hiking boots required.

Note that the following description is from Lake Hauroko to Lake Manapouri. All times and distances are one way and could be affected by the weather and track conditions.

Lake Hauroko to Halfway Hut

4–6 hr, 10.5 km

Lake Hauroko is the deepest lake in Aotearoa New Zealand (462 m) and the boat journey across it provides a spectacular start to the trip.

The first 40 minutes from Hauroko Burn Hut (10 bunks) is flat, with attractive views of the river. If there has been heavy rain, there is a three-wire bridge about 100 m downstream from the track that is signposted as an emergency crossing. The track climbs at a gentle grade to a gorge and then descends to a three-wire bridge over the Hauroko Burn before it meets the Gardner Burn. The track gets steeper and then descends to the river, with flat terrain to Halfway Hut (12 bunks).

Halfway Hut to Lake Roe Hut

3–5 hr, 7 km

From Halfway Hut, the track follows an easy grade, crossing the Hauroko Burn just before the top forks. Keep an eye open for mohua/yellowheads and kākā along this section. From the forks, the track climbs steeply to above the bushline. Snow poles show the direction to Lake Roe Hut (12 bunks), sited at the northern end of Lake Laffy on Furkert Pass. Lake Roe is set among massive granite outcrops 20 minutes due east, above the hut.



Loch Maree. Photo: Lyn Trewella

Lake Roe Hut to Loch Maree Hut

5–7 hr, 8.5 km



Warning: If there has been continual rain, it is recommended that you wait for more favourable conditions before completing this section, as the Seaforth River may be impassable due to flooding.

Snow poles mark the track in a westerly direction around the outlet of Lake Horizon and along the open tops of the Pleasant Range. This section is the scenic highlight of the track, with spectacular views of Tamatea/Dusky Sound and the surrounding mountains. From the end of the Pleasant Range, the track descends very steeply to Loch Maree.

Trampers can usually cross the Seaforth River just downstream of the three-wire bridge, which is provided for use only when the river is running high. Loch Maree Hut (12 bunks) is a few minutes from the bridge. If river levels restrict access to the bridge, there is an open shelter adjacent to the track where trampers can wait until it is safe to cross.

Loch Maree Hut to Supper Cove Hut

6–8 hr, 13 km

To reach Supper Cove Hut (12 bunks), follow the track up around Loch Maree and then descend to the Bishop Burn. Be aware that low-lying parts of this section can flood after heavy rain. The section from the Bishop Burn to the Henry Burn is flat and follows a track that was cut by West Coast miners in 1903. From the Henry Burn, the track gets rougher as it sidles along the slopes overlooking Supper Cove. Supper Cove Hut is visible on a small terrace just south of the Hilda Burn.



Check the tide times before you go, as the high-tide route is scrubby and rough and slippery on rocky sections. The low-tide option can be too deep to cross at high tide.



Kintail Hut. Photo: Lyn Trewella

Loch Maree Hut to Kintail Hut

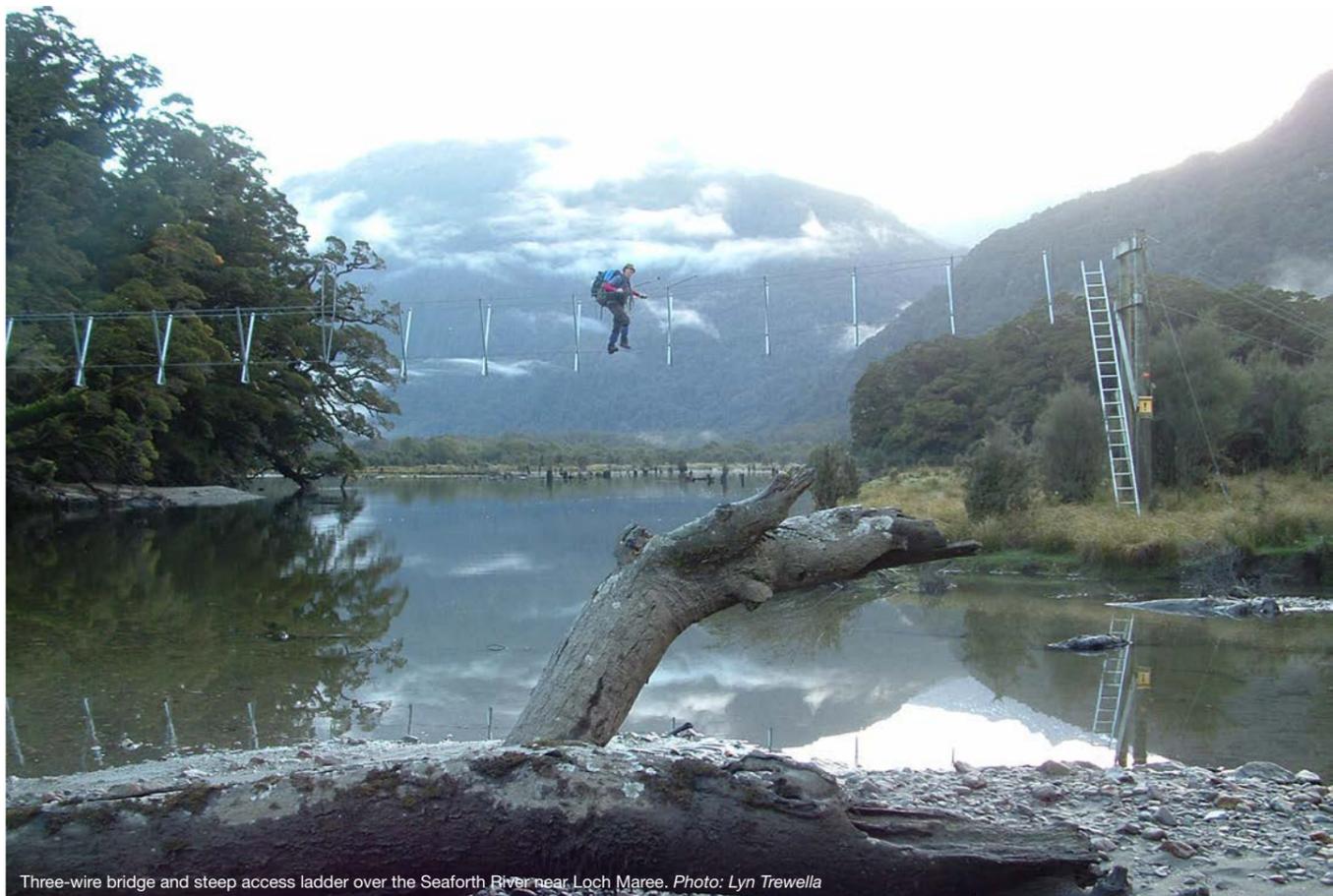
6–8 hr, 11 km

To reach Kintail Hut (12 bunks), take the track along the Seaforth River to Deadwood Creek. Between Deadwood Creek and the Kenneth Burn, the track gets easier as it passes through several clearings. Look out for track markers on the opposite sides of the clearings.

After crossing the three-wire bridge over the Kenneth Burn, the track becomes rough as it climbs through the gorge to the outlet of Gair Loch. From here, the track leads upriver to another three-wire bridge across the Seaforth River. This section is relatively easy apart from a swampy area at the top of Gair Loch. Kintail Hut is 5 minutes away along a side-track, signposted just before the three-wire bridge.



The first section along the Seaforth River is rough underfoot and prone to flooding and so can be very difficult in wet weather. The section to the Kenneth Burn also crosses several deep guts, which can fill with water and are difficult to cross if river levels are high.



Three-wire bridge and steep access ladder over the Seaforth River near Loch Maree. Photo: Lyn Trewella



Flood-prone track. Photo: Graham Dainty

Kintail Hut to Upper Spey Hut

5–7 hr, 7 km

From Kintail Hut, backtrack for 5 minutes to the three-wire bridge over the Seaforth River. From here, orange markers indicate the route from the three-wire bridge up the true right of the Kintail Stream.

The steep climb to Centre Pass (1,051 m) traverses forest and then herb fields and provides breathtaking views of Gair Loch, Tripod Hill and the Seaforth valley. If the weather is fine, it is worth leaving your pack at the pass and climbing to the summit of Mount Memphis for some spectacular views (2 hours return).

From Centre Pass, the track is marked by snow poles as it descends steeply through tussockland and alpine shrubland to the head of the Warren Burn. It is a short, steep descent from here to Upper Spey Hut (12 bunks).

Upper Spey Hut to Wilmot Pass Road

4–5 hr, 9 km

The track crosses a large, swampy clearing and descends to a three-wire bridge over the Spey River, about 40 minutes from the hut. It then follows the true left of the river through beech and mānatu/ribbonwood forest to the Dashwood Stream. Although there is a three-wire bridge spanning the main Dashwood Stream, one branch is no longer bridged and so may become impassable in heavy rain. Therefore, river crossing skills are essential. From here, it is a short walk to the Wilmot Pass Road.

Wilmot Pass Road to West Arm, Lake Manapouri

45 min, 2.5 km

From the track end (signposted on the left-hand side of the road, 20 minutes past the Mica Burn), follow the Wilmot Pass Road to West Arm, Lake Manapouri. West Arm Hut (6 bunks) is sited 30 minutes along the road.