

Kepler TRACK GUIDE



Duration: **3–4 days**
Distance: **60 km (loop)**



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

For in-depth local knowledge, visit:

Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre
Lakefront Drive, Te Anau 9600
Phone: +64 3 249 7924
Email: greatwalksbooking@doc.govt.nz
www.doc.govt.nz/great-walks

Share your experience – facebook.com/docgovtnz

This information was accurate at the time of printing. For the latest information on DOC's policies and facilities, visit www.doc.govt.nz.

Published by: Department of Conservation, Customer and Brand Team
PO Box 10420, Wellington 6143, New Zealand | December 2021 | R214045

This publication is produced using paper sourced from well-managed, renewable and legally logged forests.

Care for the Kepler Track



Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Feeding wildlife is harmful to them. Follow any rules restricting fires, vehicles or boats. No dogs or unpermitted drones allowed.



Keep New Zealand clean

Take all rubbish with you. Use toilets where provided. You can find them at all huts, campsites and shelters.



Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by planning and preparing for your trip. Share your plans and take a distress beacon.



Show respect

Respect others, respect culture. Minimise noise when others are sleeping.

Welcome to the Kepler Track, one of ten unforgettable journeys.

Set out on a wilderness adventure above the clouds, high in the mountains above Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri in Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. The drama of these vast tussock-covered ridgelines and spectacular alpine vistas contrasts with the peaceful lakes and beech forest of the Iris Burn valley.



Plants and wildlife

Cool temperatures, high rainfall and shallow nutrient-poor soils mean that Fiordland's forests are mostly beech. **Beech** trees flower in spring and are wind-pollinated. In a heavy-flowering year, the forest canopy turns red and clouds of yellow pollen rise over the forest.



Photo: Sara Redwood

Fiordland kiwi/tokoeka can be heard, and occasionally seen, on the Kepler Track. The kiwi is an unusual bird – it cannot fly, has loose, hair-like feathers and long whiskers. Largely nocturnal, it lives in burrows in the ground and is the only bird known to have nostrils at the end of its very long bill.



Photo: James T Reardon

Tussock grasslands are a spectacular feature of the alpine areas of the Kepler Track, providing a flowing foreground to expansive views. These hardy grasses thrive in the harsh alpine environment and originally provided shelter, nesting cover and food for takahē, which were once widespread in the area.



Photo: DOC

Capable of flying at speeds over 100 km/h and catching prey larger than itself, the **falcon/kārearea** is one of New Zealand's most spectacular birds. Often nesting in small rimu along the Waiau River, the birds will fearlessly defend their patch and it is not uncommon for walkers to be dive-bombed.



Photo: Barry Harcourt

Bats/pekapeka are New Zealand's only native land mammals and are now critically endangered because of introduced predators. A small colony of the rare long-tailed bat was discovered in the Iris Burn valley in 2011 with some roosting trees just 500 m from the Kepler Track.



Photo: James T Reardon

Takahē, once thought to be extinct, were rediscovered in 1948 just one mountain range away from the Kepler Track. This unique flightless bird is a conservation icon. While you're very unlikely to see takahē on the Kepler Track, you can see them at Punanga Manu o Te Anau/Te Anau Bird Sanctuary.



Photo: Helen Dodson



See on the track

- 1 Limestone bluffs.
- 2 Alpine tussock grasslands and views of Lake Te Anau.
- 3 Zigzag ridgelines and extensive alpine views.
- 4 Views of the Iris Burn valley.
- 5 Watch for native bats/pekapeka at dusk and listen for kiwi.
- 6 The 'big slip'.
- 7 Kepler marshes.
- 8 Keep an eye out for New Zealand falcon/kārearea.
- 9 Views of the Waiau River.

Side trips – details overleaf

- A Luxmore Cave
- B Luxmore Summit
- C Iris Burn Waterfall

Fiordland National Park

Lake Manapouri

Lake Te Anau

Great Walk hut

Great Walk campsite

Shelter

Visitor Centre

Car park

Great Walk / Tramping track

Walking track

Boat Transport

State Highway

Other road

0 1 km

N

The map in this brochure is a guide only and should not be used for navigational purposes.

TRACK GUIDE

This 60 km circular track is easily accessed on foot, or via short transport options from Te Anau. It can be hiked in either direction. The following notes describe the track and what you can expect to see on your journey.

The times are approximate and will vary according to your fitness, direction of travel and the weather.

Te Anau to Kepler Track car park 50 min, 3 km

Start your journey on the lakeside path outside the Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre. Passing the Punanga Manu o Te Anau/Te Anau Bird Sanctuary, continue around the shores of Lake Te Anau to the Kepler Track car park near the Lake Te Anau control structure, where there are toilets and picnic facilities.

Kepler Track car park to Brod Bay 1 hr 30 min, 5.6 km

The track follows the lakeshore through a forest of mountain and red beech, with kāmahi and some scattered rimu and miro. After passing an attractive grove of hard tree ferns and crown fern, you reach Dock Bay. Cross Coal Creek Bridge and follow the lakeshore to Brod Bay, a delightful place to swim and camp if you have had a late start. There is a toilet and shelter here.

A Side trip – Luxmore Cave

20 min return

The track from the hut is clearly signposted. Please indicate your intention to visit the cave in the visitors' book in the hut. Take a **minimum** of two light sources per person.



Photo: Stokedforsaturday.com

Brod Bay to Luxmore Hut 3 hr 30 min–4 hr 30 min, 8.2 km

The track climbs steadily for about 2 hr to limestone bluffs. Another hour's climb reaches the bushline providing panoramic views of the Te Anau basin, Takitimu Mountains and the Snowdon and Earl Mountains. Luxmore Hut (1085 m) is about a 45 min walk from the bushline. This part of the track is marked by orange-topped snow poles, which are helpful in poor weather conditions. Before settling in you can visit Luxmore Cave.

B Side trip – Luxmore Summit

2 hr – 2 hr 30 min return from Luxmore Hut 30 min return from the turn-off

Follow the sign at the turn-off along the track between Luxmore Hut and Iris Burn Hut to the Luxmore Summit (1472 m).



Photo: Lyn Trewella

Luxmore Hut to Iris Burn Hut 5–6 hr, 14.6 km

! In heavy rain, strong winds or wintery weather, wait at Luxmore Hut until the weather improves.

The track climbs gradually from the hut to a ridge just below the summit of Mount Luxmore – you can head up to the summit before continuing.

The track then descends to a shelter close to Forest Burn saddle. Watch out for the cheeky kea, our alpine parrot.

! Beware of wind gusts when crossing the saddle.

The track sidles, climbs and follows a ridge system for about 2 hours to Hanging Valley Shelter. It then follows a long, open ridge toward the Iris Burn and descends through a series of zigzags into a hanging valley. The track winds its way through beautiful forest, with good views of a large natural landslide. Iris Burn Hut (497 m) is in a large tussock clearing. You can go for a dip at Iris Burn Waterfall.

C Side trip – Iris Burn Waterfall

40 min return

From Iris Burn Hut a side track leads to the beautiful falls and swimming hole for the brave. Keep a look out for the rare blue duck/whio.



Photo: Keri Moyle (signsoflife.co.nz)

Iris Burn Hut to Moturau Hut 5–6 hr, 16.2 km

Today is a steady tramp through beech forest and a gorge, generally following the Iris Burn. The track climbs over a low saddle and wanders through mixed species forest to a large slip, formed during heavy rain in January 1984. About 2 hr 30 min from Iris Burn Hut is a work camp for track maintenance. Rocky Point Shelter is located just around the corner and is a good place for a lunch stop.

Below Rocky Point the track climbs around a gorge, coming out on river flats near the mouth of the Iris Burn. Nearing Lake Manapouri, the track turns left through lowland beech and podocarp forest. Follow the lakeshore to Moturau Hut, situated beside a beautiful beach, with panoramic views of Lake Manapouri.

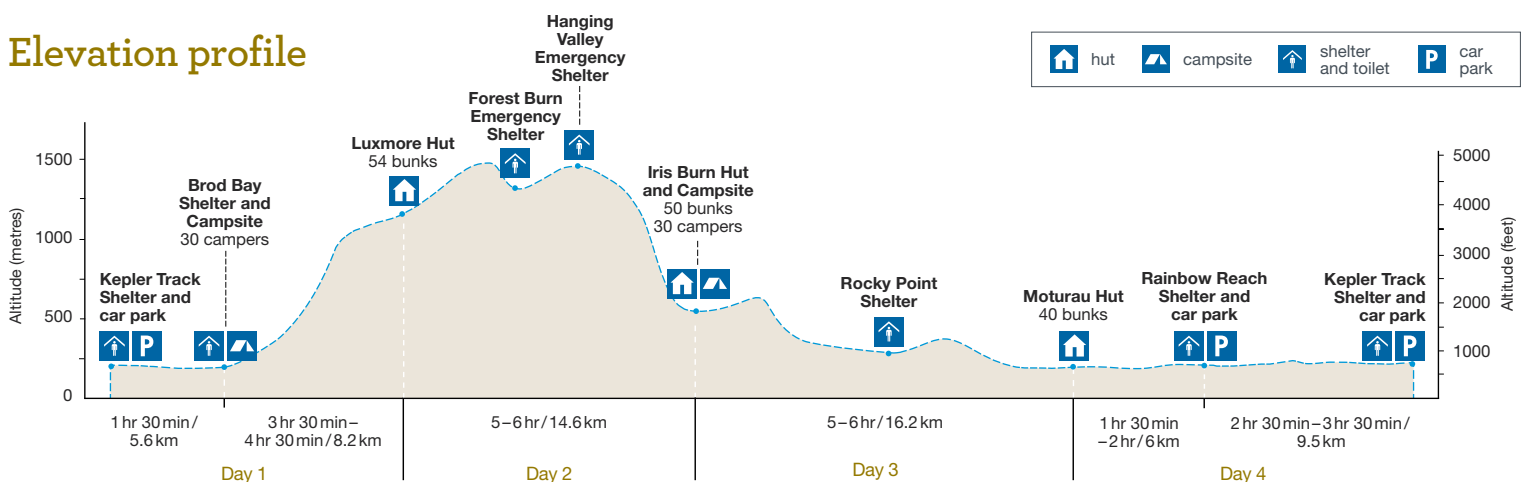
Moturau Hut to Rainbow Reach 1 hr 30 min–2 hr, 6 km

The last day is a moderate stroll through beech forest to Rainbow Reach. The track crosses a wetland and the meandering Forest Burn, just above its outlet into Balloon Loop, an old part of the Upper Waiau River. It then follows the Waiau River terrace to the swing bridge at Rainbow Reach. Walkers can catch a shuttle bus service to Te Anau from here.

Rainbow Reach to Kepler Track car park 2 hr 30 min–3 hr 30 min, 9.5 km

The track up river from Rainbow Reach is well worth walking for the variety of forest and river views. This section provides good opportunities for trout fishing and leads back to the Kepler Track car park.

Elevation profile





Hanging Valley Shelter. Photo: DOC

Track geology

The foundations of the Kepler Mountains are metamorphic and plutonic rocks, formed deep in the earth's crust. Resting on this basement material are younger sediments like limestone, which formed when the area subsided below sea level before being raised again. Impressive limestone bluffs can be seen on the Kepler Track just below the bushline on Mount Luxmore.

Glacial deposits dating from the last Ice Age cover the lowlands around lakes Te Anau and Manapouri.

Glaciers scoured the Fiordland landscape for tens of thousands of years, carving the fiords, lakes and deep U-shaped valleys so typical of the area.

Staying safe on the Kepler Track

STAY ON THE MARKED TRACKS

The track is well marked but if you become lost you should stop, find shelter and stay calm. Put on extra clothing to keep warm and assist rescuers should you hear them searching for you.

Cellphone coverage on the track cannot be guaranteed.

BE PREPARED FOR ALL CONDITIONS

Fiordland National Park experiences very high rainfall and changeable weather. Cold temperatures, snow, strong winds and heavy rain can occur at any time of the year. The alpine section of the Kepler is prone to very high winds and up to 3m of rain per year. You must be well equipped and prepared for all weather conditions.

Hypothermia (too cold)

During cold, wet and windy conditions, hypothermia (a drop in core body temperature) can become a serious problem. From initial stages to unconsciousness can take as little as 30 minutes.

- **Prevention:** wear warm and weatherproof gear. Eat and drink regularly during your walk.
- **Watch for symptoms:** people may shiver, be clumsy, confused, have slurred speech, and deny they have a problem.
- **Treatment:** immediately make or find shelter; get the person into warm, dry clothing, put them into a sleeping bag, give them warm, sweet drinks, monitor them and seek immediate medical help.

Heat exhaustion

This can be serious and is usually caused by physical activity in a hot environment and not drinking enough water.

- **Prevention:** carry and drink water regularly throughout your walk.
- **Watch for symptoms:** headaches, thirst, weakness, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.
- **Treatment:** move to a cool shaded area to rest, remove excess clothing and give water to drink.

River safety and track flooding

During and after rain, flooding can occur in the Iris Burn valley. Stream and river levels will rise and become dangerous. Water levels will drop once the rain stops. If caught between streams in flood, do not attempt to cross. Seek higher ground and wait for water levels to drop.

Strong winds

Strong winds, which can blow walkers off their feet, can occur in the section of track between Luxmore Hut and the descent to the Iris Burn valley.

Avalanches

The Kepler Track contains complex avalanche terrain and the risk of avalanche can extend into December. Whenever snow rests on the slope there is an avalanche risk. There are 9 avalanche paths, some of which may bring avalanche debris to the valley floor and have the potential to cross the Kepler Track – their start zones cannot be seen from the track. During the Great Walks season DOC manages this risk to a low level and may close the alpine section of the track between Luxmore Hut and Iris Burn Hut if avalanche conditions exist.



Tracks are sometimes closed for safety reasons

Sometimes Great Walks tracks need to be closed for safety reasons (e.g. avalanche danger, flooding or high winds). If walkers are not able to proceed, options are available. You may be eligible for a refund, spend an extra night at a hut, change direction on the track or be transferred by helicopter across hazard areas. DOC staff will keep you informed of all issues and options. Please refer to the 'terms and conditions' for any extra transport and accommodation costs this may involve. Hut rangers are stationed at each hut along the track during the Great Walks season and have radio contact in case of emergency.

YOU can help to stop the spread of didymo in the Iris Burn

Didymo (sometimes called rock snot) is an invasive alga that chokes our waterways. It is present in Lakes Te Anau, Manapouri and the lower Iris Burn. It only takes ONE drop of contaminated water on your shoes or equipment to transfer it into a new area. If you have had any contact with lake water – **Check** your shoes for obvious pieces, **Clean** anything which has been in contact with the water or ensure it has been thoroughly **Dry** for 48 hours before walking the track. For more information, visit www.doc.govt.nz/didymo.



BETWEEN WATERWAYS