Haast Pass/Tioripatea Highway

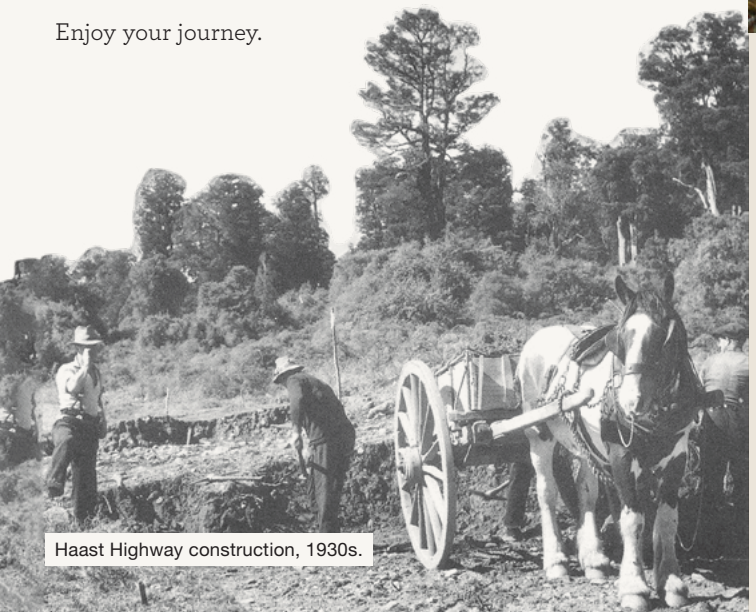
This 140-km section of State Highway 6 is a spectacular and scenic road linking Wanaka and Haast. It reaches beyond wind-whipped lakes Wanaka and Hāwea, through golden tussock-covered hills, to wind among steep mountains cloaked in lush rainforest and cross tumbling rivers. It then skirts undulating forests that seemingly float in tea-stained swamps, to finally reach the foaming surf of the Tasman Sea.

The forested section of the highway passes through the mountain ranges of Mount Aspiring National Park, and provides a spectacular backdrop to much of the road. Formed in 1964, the park is the third largest of New Zealand's national parks.

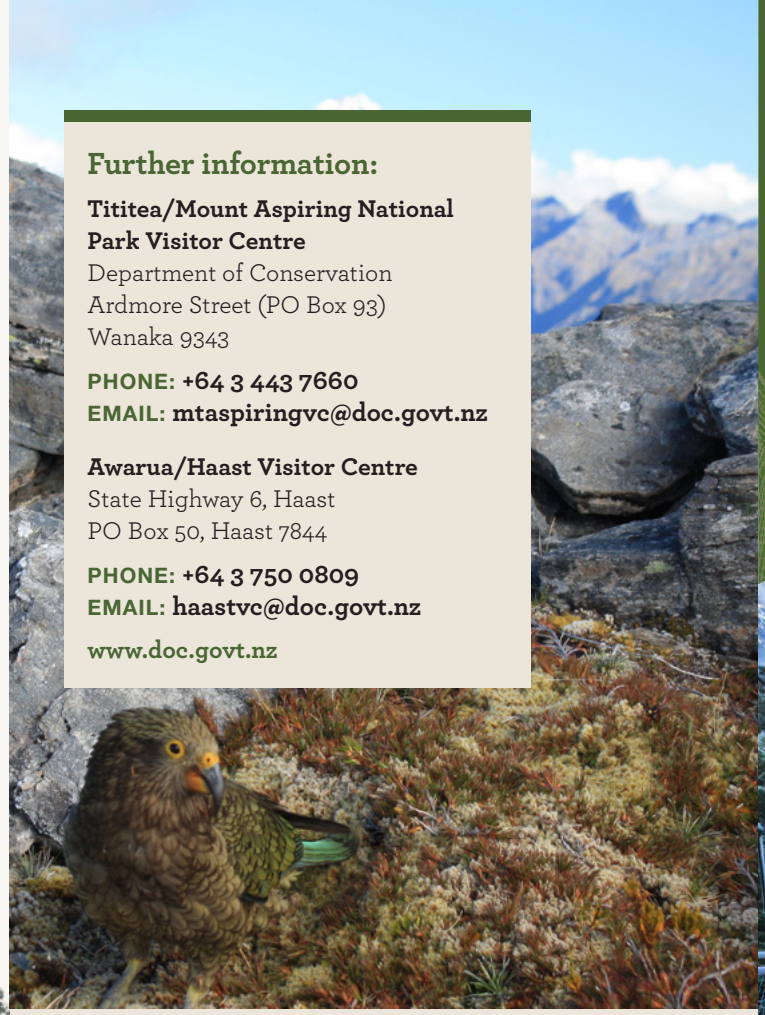
The road gives a good insight into the Te Wāhipounamu – South-West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Established in December 1990, Te Wāhipounamu covers 10% of New Zealand, from Westland Tai Poutini and Aoraki/Mt Cook National Parks in the north to Fiordland National Park and Waitutu Forest in the south.

Department of Conservation Visitor Centres at Wanaka and Haast can provide up-to-date information on what to see and do along the road, along with displays on the region's natural and historic features.

Enjoy your journey.



Haast Highway construction, 1930s.



Further information:

Tititea/Mount Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre
Department of Conservation
Ardmore Street (PO Box 93)
Wanaka 9343

PHONE: +64 3 443 7660
EMAIL: mtaspiringvc@doc.govt.nz

Awarua/Haast Visitor Centre
State Highway 6, Haast
PO Box 50, Haast 7844

PHONE: +64 3 750 0809
EMAIL: haastvc@doc.govt.nz

www.doc.govt.nz

Cover: Crossing the swing bridge over the Makarora River on Blue Valley Track. *Photo: Shellie Evans*
Back: Kea in Haast range. *Photo: Kerry Weston*

Published by:
Department of Conservation
Tititea/Mount Aspiring
National Park Visitor Centre
PO Box 93, Wanaka 9343
New Zealand

November 2019

Editing and design:
DOC Creative Services,
Conservation House, Wellington

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

New Zealand Government

R174686

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468
Report any safety hazards or conservation emergencies
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111

WEST COAST | OTAGO

Walks along the Haast Highway

Mount Aspiring National Park walks – 5 minutes to 5 hours

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Historic journeys

Haast Pass/Tioripatea has always been an important route between Central Otago and the West Coast. Māori from the West Coast, Foveaux Strait and Coastal Otago crossed the pass to trade pounamu (greenstone) and food, and named it Tiori-patea, meaning 'the way ahead is clear'. They had camps around lakes Wanaka and Hāwea and in the Makarora valley, which they called Kaika Paekai, 'the place of abundant food'. Some journeys weren't as peaceful: Te Puoho, a northern chief, brought his warriors through the pass in 1836 to raid the southern Kāi Tahu and Kāti Mamoe tribes. Initially, Te Puoho's raid was successful, winning an early skirmish near Wanaka, but further south all of his party were either killed or taken prisoner and used as slaves.

Charles Cameron, an explorer and gold prospector, is generally acknowledged as the first European to cross the pass, in 1863. A short time later, Julius Haast, Canterbury's provincial geologist, led a party of four over the pass and on to the West Coast where they 'stood in the surf giving three hearty cheers'.

By 1876 there was a narrow pack track over Haast Pass/Tioripatea. In the following decade a government grant paid for the first construction work to be carried out on what some hoped would be a railway as well as a road, as it was cleared to as much as 10 m wide. Prospectors and early settlers at Haast were the first to use the route. Next were our earliest tourists – on horseback – then livestock being moved to and from Haast on the coast.

Most of the work on the Haast Pass/Tioripatea road was carried out during the 1930s Depression when up to 400 men were employed. They lived in temporary camps and spent long, hard days with pick, shovel and horse-drawn carts. The onset of World War II stopped this and the road to Haast was finally completed in 1960. The last stretch, north of Haast, (that linked the rest of Westland with Otago), wasn't finished until 1965.

At 563 m above sea level, Haast Pass/Tioripatea is virtually an all-weather road and the lowest of the three road passes that link Westland with the east coast.

A natural journey

Most of the rock along the Haast Pass/Tioripatea road is schist, formed under intense heat and pressure. An important geological feature, the Alpine Fault, which runs the length of the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, crosses the road just east of Haast, though unseen by travellers.

During the Ice Ages, huge glaciers scoured and shaped the landscape, including the pass, to leave U-shaped and hanging valleys in their wake and ice-smoothed granite outcrops such as Mosquito Hill near Haast. Silt and gravel spread by rivers since then, now cover the valley floors, creating the classic wide terrace flats of both the Haast and Makarora valleys.

Rainfall varies considerably in the area: 3800 mm a year at Haast to more than 8300 mm on the low western slopes, to drop to 4500 mm at Haast Pass/Tioripatea itself, and only 2000 mm at the head of Lake Wanaka. Combined with altitude, this has a significant effect on vegetation.

West of the pass, kāmahi is the most common tree, with swamp forests of rimu, kahikatea and silver pine thriving on the boggy lower slopes and terraces. From Thunder Creek to Makarora, silver beech/tawhai dominates, with remnants of mataī, miro, kahikatea and rimu in places such as Makarora Bush. At the drier, lower end of the Makarora valley a few pockets of mountain beech/tawhairauriki survive among the scrub and pasture.

Insect-eating birds such as fantail/pīwakawaka, yellow breasted tit/miromiro and rifleman/tītipounamu thrive in the invertebrate-rich forest. Mohua (yellowhead) and kākāriki (yellow-crowned parakeet), are locally common. The striking Australasian or paradise shelduck/pūtakitaki is a familiar sight on the open river flats.

Introduced brown and rainbow trout are found in the Makarora, Young and Wilkin rivers and provide excellent fishing – with the required licence.

Pīwakawaka/fantail.
Photo: Leon Berard

Te Wāhipounamu—
South West New Zealand
World Heritage Area

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), the South West New Zealand World Heritage Area incorporates Aoraki/Mount Cook, Westland/Tai Poutini, Fiordland and Mount Aspiring National Parks, covering 2.6 million hectares.

World Heritage is a global concept that identifies natural and cultural sites of world significance – places so special that protecting them is of concern for all people.

Some of the best examples of animals and plants once found on the ancient supercontinent Gondwana live in the World Heritage Area.

Dogs and other pets are not permitted in national parks. Our national parks have been preserved for their recreation values and to protect significant native flora and fauna. It is vital that the habitat of threatened species is properly protected.

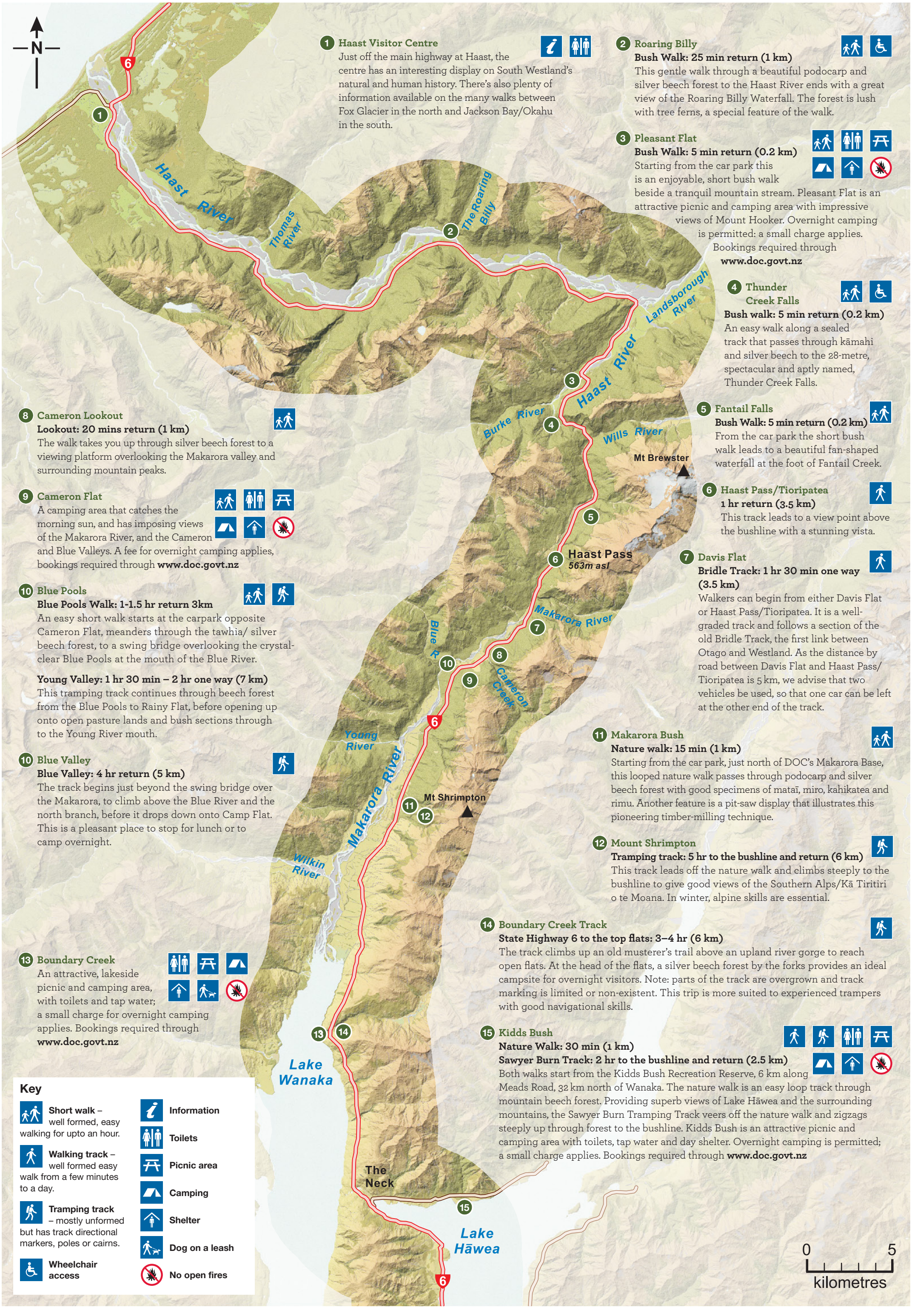
Camping
Four campsites are provided along the Haast Highway and all have picnic tables, toilets and shelters. Bookings are required for all campsites through **www.doc.govt.nz**

No unauthorised drones
An authorisation is required from DOC to use drones on public conservation land. To apply, visit **www.doc.govt.nz/drones**

Didymo is an exotic alga that invades waterways. This microscopic pest can be spread by a single drop of water. Even if you can't see it, you could be spreading it.

Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all footwear, bicycles, vehicles, fishing equipment and other items before entering, and when moving between, waterways. For more information and cleaning guidelines, go to **doc.govt.nz/stopthespread**.

Haast landscape. *Photo: DOC*



1 Haast Visitor Centre

Just off the main highway at Haast, the centre has an interesting display on South Westland's natural and human history. There's also plenty of information available on the many walks between Fox Glacier in the north and Jackson Bay/Okahu in the south.

2 Roaring Billy

Bush Walk: 25 min return (1 km)

This gentle walk through a beautiful podocarp and silver beech forest to the Haast River ends with a great view of the Roaring Billy Waterfall. The forest is lush with tree ferns, a special feature of the walk.

3 Pleasant Flat

Bush Walk: 5 min return (0.2 km)

Starting from the car park this is an enjoyable, short bush walk beside a tranquil mountain stream. Pleasant Flat is an attractive picnic and camping area with impressive views of Mount Hooker. Overnight camping is permitted: a small charge applies. Bookings required through **www.doc.govt.nz**

4 Thunder Creek Falls

Bush walk: 5 min return (0.2 km)

An easy walk along a sealed track that passes through kāmahi and silver beech to the 28-metre, spectacular and aptly named, Thunder Creek Falls.

5 Fantail Falls

Bush Walk: 5 min return (0.2 km)

From the car park the short bush walk leads to a beautiful fan-shaped waterfall at the foot of Fantail Creek.

6 Haast Pass/Tioripatea

1 hr return (3.5 km)

This track leads to a view point above the bushline with a stunning vista.

7 Davis Flat

Bridle Track: 1 hr 30 min one way (3.5 km)

Walkers can begin from either Davis Flat or Haast Pass/Tioripatea. It is a well-graded track and follows a section of the old Bridle Track, the first link between Otago and Westland. As the distance by road between Davis Flat and Haast Pass/Tioripatea is 5 km, we advise that two vehicles be used, so that one car can be left at the other end of the track.

8 Cameron Lookout

Lookout: 20 mins return (1 km)

The walk takes you up through silver beech forest to a viewing platform overlooking the Makarora valley and surrounding mountain peaks.

9 Cameron Flat

A camping area that catches the morning sun, and has imposing views of the Makarora River, and the Cameron and Blue Valleys. A fee for overnight camping applies, bookings required through **www.doc.govt.nz**

10 Blue Pools

Blue Pools Walk: 1-1.5 hr return 3km

An easy short walk starts at the carpark opposite Cameron Flat, meanders through the tawhia/ silver beech forest, to a swing bridge overlooking the crystal-clear Blue Pools at the mouth of the Blue River.

Young Valley: 1 hr 30 min – 2 hr one way (7 km)

This tramping track continues through beech forest from the Blue Pools to Rainy Flat, before opening up onto open pasture lands and bush sections through to the Young River mouth.

10 Blue Valley

Blue Valley: 4 hr return (5 km)

The track begins just beyond the swing bridge over the Makarora, to climb above the Blue River and the north branch, before it drops down onto Camp Flat. This is a pleasant place to stop for lunch or to camp overnight.

11 Makarora Bush

Nature walk: 15 min (1 km)

Starting from the car park, just north of DOC's Makarora Base, this looped nature walk passes through podocarp and silver beech forest with good specimens of matai, miro, kahikatea and rimu. Another feature is a pit-saw display that illustrates this pioneering timber-milling technique.

12 Mount Shrimpton

Tramping track: 5 hr to the bushline and return (6 km)

This track leads off the nature walk and climbs steeply to the bushline to give good views of the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana. In winter, alpine skills are essential.

13 Boundary Creek

An attractive, lakeside picnic and camping area, with toilets and tap water; a small charge for overnight camping applies. Bookings required through **www.doc.govt.nz**

14 Boundary Creek Track

State Highway 6 to the top flats: 3–4 hr (6 km)

The track climbs up an old musterer's trail above an upland river gorge to reach open flats. At the head of the flats, a silver beech forest by the forks provides an ideal campsite for overnight visitors. Note: parts of the track are overgrown and track marking is limited or non-existent. This trip is more suited to experienced trampers with good navigational skills.

15 Kidds Bush

Nature Walk: 30 min (1 km)

Sawyer Burn Track: 2 hr to the bushline and return (2.5 km)

Both walks start from the Kidds Bush Recreation Reserve, 6 km along Meads Road, 32 km north of Wanaka. The nature walk is an easy loop track through mountain beech forest. Providing superb views of Lake Hāwea and the surrounding mountains, the Sawyer Burn Tramping Track veers off the nature walk and zigzags steeply up through forest to the bushline. Kidds Bush is an attractive picnic and camping area with toilets, tap water and day shelter. Overnight camping is permitted; a small charge applies. Bookings required through **www.doc.govt.nz**

Key

- **Short walk** – well formed, easy walking for upto an hour.
- **Walking track** – well formed easy walk from a few minutes to a day.
- **Tramping track** – mostly unformed but has track directional markers, poles or cairns.
- **Wheelchair access**
- **Information**
- **Toilets**
- **Picnic area**
- **Camping**
- **Shelter**
- **Dog on a leash**
- **No open fires**