

West Coast

The west coast of New Zealand's South Island is wild and free; free of development, free of crowds, free of the demands of commercialisation that tourism puts on so many other regions of the country. You can tramp almost anywhere along this coast – from the end of the Heaphy Track down to the Te Wahipounamu-Southwest New Zealand World Heritage Area – because it is almost all wilderness.

The region's main access road (SH6) hugs the Tasman Sea, and small tracts of farmland act as a buffer against the relentless regrowth of the beautiful forests. Three of the four tracks described in this chapter depart or end directly on the highway.

The Inland Pack Track is a two-day tramp past intriguing limestone formations, including the Ballroom, possibly the largest rock bivvy in New Zealand. The famed Copland Track ends at SH6, but most trampers turn its western half into an overnight tramp to Welcome Flat Hut, where they spend a memorable evening soaking in the nearby hot springs. Also ending at SH6 is the Croesus Track, a two-day tramp past the intriguing remains of a gold rush and across the tussock tops of the Paparoa Range. Rounding out the tramps described here is an overnight climb to Mueller Hut in Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, for an evening spent high among the peaks and glaciers of the Southern Alps.

Only four tramps are included in this chapter, but look eastwards at the powerful bulk of the Southern Alps and you'll realise that tramping is a way of life here. Just leave the road.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Spending a night in the **Ballroom** (p244), one of New Zealand's largest rock bivvies, on the Inland Pack Track
- Listening for kiwis at **Ces Clark Hut** (p247) along the Croesus Track
- Soaking in the hot springs and swatting sandflies at **Welcome Flat** (p253)
- Admiring the icy crown of Aoraki/Mt Cook from the deck of the new **Mueller Hut** (p256)

TELEPHONE CODE: 03

www.greymouth.co.nz

www.glaciercountry.co.nz

GATEWAY Greymouth

☎ 03 / pop 13,500

This former gold-mining settlement is the largest town on the west coast. Situated at the mouth of the Grey River – hence its name – Greymouth is a pleasant town and a good place to spend a night.

INFORMATION

The **Greymouth visitor information centre** (☎ 768 5101; www.greymouth.co.nz; Art Deco Regent Theatre, cnr Herbert & Mackay Sts; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; 📄) sells DOC brochures, hut tickets and maps.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

For tramping gear there's **Coll Sports World** (☎ 768 4060; 53 Mackay St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat). There are several supermarkets, including **Fresh Choice** (☎ 768 7545; 60 Guinness St). There is also a bulk food market, **Bin Inn** (☎ 768 0330; 35 Guinness St).

SLEEPING & EATING

Right on the beach, **Greymouth Seaside Holiday Park** (☎ 768 6618; www.top10greymouth.co.nz; 2 Chesterfield St; sites for 2 \$26; cabins \$45-65; 📄), 2.5km south of the town centre, is a clean, well-kept place with a spa, communal kitchen, laundry and TV lounge.

There are a handful of backpacker lodges, including **Kainga-Ra YHA** (☎ 768 4951; yha.greymouth@yha.org.nz; 15 Alexander St; dm \$25, d \$55; 📄); **Neptune's Backpackers** (☎ 768 4425; 43 Gresson St; dm/s/d \$22/48/50; 📄), a restored pub near the river; and **Global Village Travellers Lodge** (☎ 768 7272; www.globalvillagebackpackers.co.nz; 42-54 Cowper St; dm/s/d \$22/40/54; 📄), with great facilities, free bikes and free kayaks for use on Lake Karoro.

Cafe 124 on Mackay (☎ 768 7503; 124 Mackay St; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun) has the best deals in Greymouth for light meals, sandwiches and salads, as well as a pleasant, jazzy atmosphere. **Bonzai Pizzeria** (☎ 768 4170; 31-33 Mackay St; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8.30pm Sun) has pizzas loaded with toppings, but also pasta, steaks and soups.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The majority of buses, as well as the *TranzAlpine* train, all depart from the **Greymouth Travel Centre** (☎ 0800-767 080, 768 7080; 164 Mackay St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm



Sat & Sun). **InterCity** (☎ 768 7078; www.intercity.coach.co.nz) operates daily bus services to Westport (\$31, 2½ hours) and Fox Glacier (\$56, five hours). There are a number of shuttle-bus companies that make the run to Arthur's Pass and then go on to Christchurch (\$30 to \$35). They include **Coast to Coast** (☎ 0800-800 847; www.coast2coast.co.nz) and **Atomic Shuttles** (☎ 322 8883; www.atomictravel.co.nz).

The *TranzAlpine*, which is operated by **Tranz Scenic** (☎ 0800-872 467; www.tranzscenic.co.nz), is considered to be one of the great train journeys of the world. It travels daily between Greymouth and Christchurch (\$99), stopping at Arthur's Pass (\$44) along the way.

PAPAROA NATIONAL PARK

Like the first explorers 150 years before them, most tourists travelling along the isolated west coast between Westport and Greymouth are totally enthralled by the rugged seascape. Most famous are the Pancake Rocks – limestone rocks at Dolomite Point that look like stacks of pancakes.

But it took trampers longer to discover the rugged granite peaks of the Paparoa Range, and all the wonderful tramps so rich in the gold-mining history of New Zealand. Not until the creation and development of Paparoa National Park in 1987 did tracks such as the Inland Pack Track and the Croesus Track catch the attention of trampers.

HISTORY

Middens (mounds of discarded shells and bone fragments) have been recorded at Barrytown, suggesting that Maori must have made many seasonal excursions to the nearby bays and rivers to gather food. The coastline, as rugged as it appears, was a trade route for Maori carrying Arahura River greenstone north.

The first European explorers through the area were probably Charles Heaphy and Thomas Brunner, who were led by Maori guide Kehu on a five-month journey down the coast in 1846. They passed 23 Maori heading north, but the first settlement seen was Kararoa, 20km south of Punakaiki.

Heaphy was impressed by the Paparoa region and devoted 12 pages of his diary to it. He also wrote about the ‘incessant rain’, delays caused by swollen rivers, and of climbing rotting rata and flax ladders up the steep cliffs of Perpendicular Point. Later that year Brunner and Kehu returned to the area. It was an epic journey, lasting 18 months, in which they completely circum-navigated the Paparoa Range, traced the Buller River from source to mouth and travelled as far south as Paringa.

Gold was discovered on the west coast as early as 1864, but the hunt for the precious metal only really gained momentum two years later when famed prospector William Fox chartered the SS *Woodpecker*

and landed it on the lee side of Seal Island. The area just south of where the Fox River empties into the Tasman Sea became known as Woodpecker Bay, and miners by their thousands stampeded to this stretch of coast.

Reaching the areas along the ‘beach highway’ was extremely challenging for miners. Despite the Nelson Provincial Government replacing the Maori flax ladders at Perpendicular Point with chains, miners still looked inland for a safer route. In 1866 work began on the Inland Pack Track, which avoided the hazardous Perpendicular Point. It was cut through the western lowlands of the Paparoa Range, and in 1868 was used to extend the Christchurch–Greymouth telegraph line north to Westport.

After the miners left, tourism became the region’s main activity. A coastal track being cut by the early 1900s eventually became SH6.

The Paparoa Range and lowlands were thrust into the consciousness of the nation in the 1970s, when there was interest in logging the area. This sparked a heated conservation campaign that led to the establishment, in 1987, of the 305-sq-km national park.

ENVIRONMENT

The Paparoa Range is composed mainly of granite and gneiss peaks, which have been carved by glaciers and weathered by rain, snow and wind into a craggy chain of pinnacles and spires. This is a low but very rugged set of mountains, between 1200m and 1500m in height. Routes through the alpine areas of the Paparoas are only for experienced trampers willing to endure the impenetrable bush, the consistently cloudy weather at the top, and the rough terrain of a true wilderness area.

The western lowlands, which lie between the ocean and the mountains, are totally different in character. This is a karst landscape – a limestone region where the soft rock has been eroded by rivers and underground drainage. What remains are deep canyons and gorges, with limestone walls that rise up to 200m above the river. There are blind valleys, sinkholes, cliffs, overhangs, numerous caves and streams that disappear underground.

The nikau palms that line the beaches and cliffs along the coast, giving SH6 its tropical character, also extend inland. The palms combine with a profusion of black mamaku tree ferns, smaller ferns and supplejack vines to form a jungle-like canopy. Still further inland, the lowland forest becomes a mixture of podocarp, beech and broad-leaved trees, with rimu and red beech often the most dominant species.

The size of the forest, and the fact that it’s been left relatively untouched by humans, has led to the park’s profusion of bird life. Commonly spotted along the tracks are bellbirds, tomits, fantails, grey warblers, NZ pigeons (*kereru*), tuis and the tiny rifleman. One of the favourites encountered is the western weka, a brown flightless bird often spotted in the Fossil Creek area along the Inland Pack Track, as well as in many other areas of the park. There are also many great spotted kiwis, but you’ll hear them at night more often than you’ll see them.

CLIMATE

Trampers must be prepared for the rainy weather which the west coast is renowned for – when gentle streams can quickly turn into raging rivers. The park’s lowlands are a lush, almost subtropical forest because of the warm ocean current that sweeps past the coast and the moist westerlies that blow in off the Tasman Sea. The effect is a wet, but surprisingly mild climate.

Average annual rainfall in the western lowlands is between 2000mm and 3000mm, much of it falling in late winter and spring. Midsummer to autumn, however, can be exceptionally sunny, with long spells of settled weather. Westport and Punakaiki average almost 2000 hours of sunshine annually.

PLANNING Maps

The 1:50,000 Parkmap 273-12 (*Paparoa National Park*) covers the park in detail, and can be used for tramping.

Information Sources

Paparoa National Park Visitor Centre (☎ 731 1895; punakaikivc@doc.govt.nz; SH6), opposite the entrance to the Pancake Rocks, has a series of displays devoted to the park’s

natural history, and sells maps, books and hut tickets. You can leave your intentions here and, most importantly, receive daily reports on weather conditions and river levels. Many of the inland tramps are subject to river flooding, so check at the visitor centre before setting out.

INLAND PACK TRACK

Duration	2 days
Distance	27km
Track Standard	tramping track & route
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Punakaiki (p242)
Finish	Fox River bridgep40
Transport	bus

Summary This historic track, carved by gold miners in 1866 so they could avoid travelling around the rugged west coast, features an unusual landscape of steep gorges and interesting caves, as well as one of New Zealand’s largest rock bivvies.

This track explores Paparoa National Park’s otherwise hidden treasures, including river valleys lined by nikau palms and spectacular limestone formations. Another highlight is spending a night at the Ballroom, one of the largest rock bivvies in New Zealand. While there are no alpine passes to negotiate, nor any excruciating climbs above the tree line, the tramp is no easy stroll. There is plenty of mud to contend with, and at least five major river fords.

Dilemma Creek flows through a gorge so steep and narrow that trampers just walk down the middle of it. Occasionally you can follow a gravel bank, but much of the tramp involves sloshing from one pool to the next. When water levels are normal the stream rarely rises above your knees, and if it’s a hot sunny day this can be the most pleasant segment of the trip, but during heavy rain and flooding you should avoid this track at all costs. If the forecast is poor, wait another day or move down the coast to find another tramp. To be trapped by rising rivers with no tent makes for a very long night.

If you have a tent you can break the tramp more evenly over two days, or extend it to a leisurely three-day walk.

PLANNING

When to Tramp

The Inland Pack Track is best walked from December through March, when the rivers are at their lowest, but it is also possible in spring and autumn.

What to Bring

It is best to carry a tent as a precaution against rapidly rising streams, which can delay trips or prevent you from reaching the Ballroom.

Maps

You can use either the 1:50,000 Parkmap 273-12 (*Paparoa National Park*) or the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-K30 (*Punakaiki*).

Huts

There are no huts on this tramp, and the Ballroom is free.

NEAREST TOWN

Punakaiki

☎ 03 / pop 70

Stretched out along SH6 on the edge of the national park, and almost halfway between Westport and Greymouth, this small settlement has good accommodation but lacks many other services. There is no bank, dairy or petrol station.

SLEEPING & EATING

Punakaiki Beach Camp (☎ 731 1894; SH6; sites for 2 \$22, cabins \$36-45) is a short walk from everything in Punakaiki and an even shorter walk to the ocean.

Te Nikau Retreat (☎ 731 1111; Hartmount Pl; dm \$23, d \$46-51) is a small hostel in a lovely bush setting on the sea side of the road, 3km north of Punakaiki.

Punakaiki Beach Hostel (☎ 731 1852; www.punakaikibeachhostel.co.nz; 4 Webb St; dm \$23-25, s/d \$39/56; 📺) is a converted motel overlooking the Tasman Sea, 300m north of Pancake Rocks.

Punakaiki Rocks Hotel & Villas (☎ 0800-786 2524, 731 1168; www.punakaiki-resort.co.nz; SH6; d \$160-295) offers upscale accommodation only 400m from Pancake Rocks. Every room overlooks a windswept beach or lush forest, while on-site there's a licensed restaurant.

Wild Coast Cafe (☎ 731 1873; SH6; 🕒 7.30am-6pm), next to the park visitor information centre, is the best place for a meal, coffee or

beer, if there aren't three tour buses parked outside of it. The café also sells a few food items, but it is extremely limited.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

InterCity (☎ 789 7819; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has daily services north to Nelson (\$67, 4½ hours) and south to Greymouth (\$16, one hour). **Atomic Shuttles** (☎ 322 8883; www.atomictravel.co.nz) also stops at Punakaiki in each direction on its Nelson-Fox Glacier route.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

You can begin the track from the Pororari River bridge on SH6, just north of the beach camp, or at a farm road near the Punakaiki River, 1.2km south of the Paparoa National Park Visitor Centre. The finish is at the Fox River bridge on SH6, 12km north of the visitor information centre.

You can use the bus services listed above to get to and from both ends of the track. Check with the companies for advice on the best times to be waiting at Fox bridge.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Punakaiki to the Ballroom

7-8 hours, 19.5km

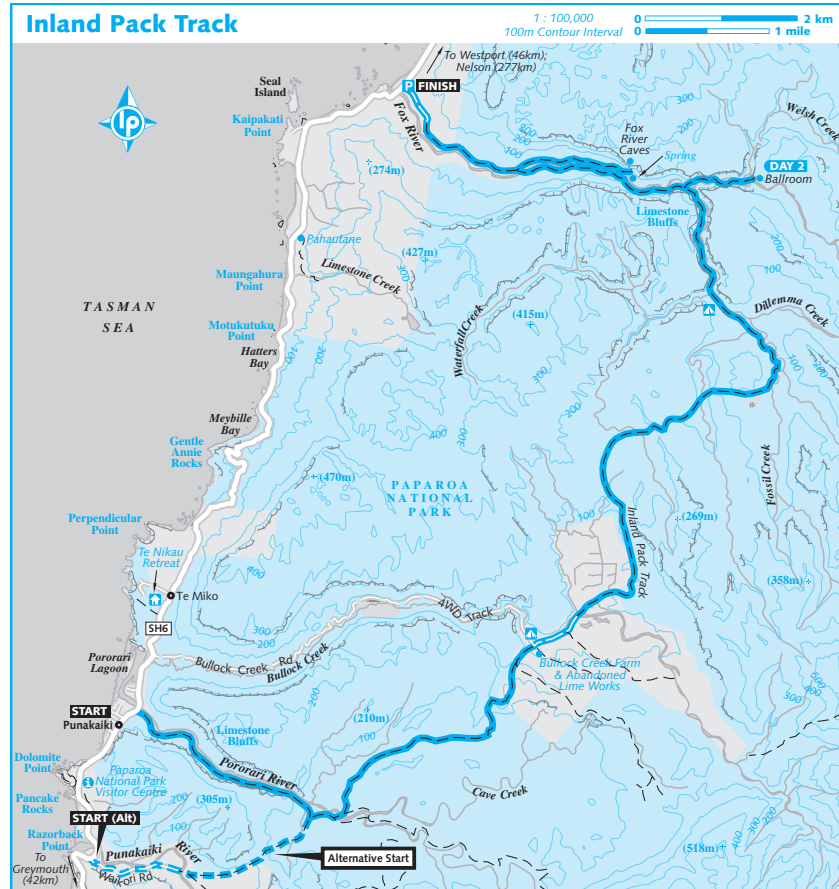
Although Punakaiki River is part of the original track (see the Alternative Start on p244), many feel the route along Pororari River is more scenic. From the bridge on SH6 the track follows the river closely along its true left (south) bank, through a spectacular landscape of towering limestone cliffs graced by nikau palms and tree ferns. Keep an eye on the river's deep green pools, because you can often spot trout or eels in the morning.

WARNING

It cannot be stressed enough that during heavy rain and high water the Inland Pack Track is a dangerous tramp. There are four major river crossings on the tramp, and during the 1½ hours spent walking down Dilemma Creek you may cross it as many as 50 times.

Before departing, check with the Paparoa National Park Visitor Centre, which posts daily weather forecasts and river levels. If a major storm is on its way, do not attempt the track.

Inland Pack Track



After 3.5km the track comes to a junction (on the right) with the track back to Punakaiki River and SH6. In another 300m you reach a signposted ford across the Pororari River. In normal conditions it's an easy crossing to the other side. Head north and for the next 4km work your way through a silver beech forest. The track can become muddy in places, with little to look at except the surrounding bush and an occasional signposted sinkhole, but it is easy to follow.

After 1½ hours you enter a clearing and join a 4W track. To the east are views of the rugged Paparoa Range, while to the north, pairs of green and yellow posts direct you through Bullock Creek Farm,

now owned by DOC. The route passes the shacks of an **abandoned lime works** and a signposted farm road (left) along Bullock Creek to SH6, before arriving at the creek itself. This is the first decent camp site for those who got a late start.

Large orange markers indicate the best place to ford Bullock Creek. Once across the creek, the track follows a farm road for almost 1km and then re-enters bush. The track stays in beech and rimu forest, but sidles an open area and passes some immense flax patches. After 2km the track begins ascending to a low saddle (200m) on the main ridge dividing Bullock Creek and the catchment formed by Fox River. There's lots of mud here but the climb is easy, and

views of Mt Fleming and flat-topped Mt Euclid are possible on a clear day. The descent on the other side is rapid.

The track remains fairly level until it emerges at Fossil Creek, 2½ hours from Bullock Creek, marked by a large rock cairn and a small sign. There is no track at this point – you simply follow the creek downstream. You may want to change into tennis shoes or sport sandals to follow the creek, although if your boots are already caked in mud this is a good way to clean them. The tramp – under a thick canopy of trees – lasts for 1km and takes you through pools that are an easy wade in normal conditions.

It takes 30 minutes to reach the confluence with Dilemma Creek, marked by another rock cairn and a small sign. There are grass flats around this area – good places for camping. There are also larger flats a few hundred metres up the Dilemma.

The next stretch is a tramp downstream through **Dilemma Gorge**, which is the most spectacular part of the trip. You follow the creek bed beneath massive limestone walls, with no room for a track of any kind. You make at least 18 fords to avoid deep pools or to follow short gravel bars. *Keep in mind that if the first ford is a problem, the rest will be even more difficult.* Fox River can be reached in well under an hour, but most trampers, overwhelmed by the stunning scenery, take 1½ to two hours to cover this short stretch through the gorge.

A signpost on the true left side of Dilemma Creek, just before the confluence with Fox River, indicates where the track resumes. The confluence is easy to recognise because a sharp rock bluff separates the two canyons.

If your destination is the Ballroom you need to assess the river levels carefully to judge if it's safe to ford Fox River. There are deep pools at the confluence of Fox River and Dilemma Creek, and during high water this is not a good place to ford. If you follow the track west for 400m you come to a signposted junction for an alternative river crossing. This track drops to Fox River at a place where it can be forded. Again, assess the crossing – sometimes the safest crossing of Fox River is upstream from here.

Once on the true right (north) side of the Fox, follow it back past the confluence to reach the **Ballroom**. The bivvy is about

1km up the river, not far upstream from where Welsh Creek enters Fox River, and is easy to spot. It takes about 30 minutes, and at least two fords from the Fox River crossing, to reach it.

The rock overhang is appropriately named. It's about 100m long, with a cavern and a towering arched ceiling, which is 20m high in the middle. The roof is a hanging garden of sorts, with grass, vines, rows of ferns and even small trees growing from it. Its popularity has led to benches and a fire pit being built, but there is little firewood in the area. There is good swimming in Fox River.

ALTERNATIVE START: PUNAKAIKI RIVER TRACK

2 hours, 4km

For the purists, head up Waikori Rd (east) to the ford, 1.2km from SH6. Cross the river, leave the logging road at the signpost and head northeast. The track passes through logged swamps to the base of the hill that separates the Punakaiki from the Pororari. A well-benched track climbs to a low saddle and then drops gently 80m to the Pororari. It levels off as it approaches the signposted branch track down the Pororari, one hour from the saddle. The ford is about 300m upstream.

Day 2: The Ballroom to Fox River Bridge

2–2½ hours, 7.5km

Return to the track on the true left (south) side of Fox River. A benched track here follows the Fox west. It's a pleasant walk along the **gorge**, high above the river, and you pass scattered nikau palms and tangled kiekie. The track follows the valley for 3km before dropping to Fox River, where a wide ford to the true right (north) bank is marked.

On the other side is a junction, and the track heading east (right) goes to **Fox River Caves**. The 35-minute climb to the caves is gentle, with the exception of the final 100m. The entrances to the two impressive caves are inside a huge rock overhang. Only the upper, left (as you face them) cave can be entered. It is accessible on stone steps, and it's possible to walk 200m inside the main cave if you have a torch handy. If not, just a few metres inside will reveal some interesting stalagmites and stalactites.

After returning to the main track at the Fox River ford, stay on the true right (north) side and follow the track west along the river, crossing numerous gravel bars, and using the green and yellow trail markers designed to keep wandering trampers on course. This section takes about 45 minutes. You emerge at the car park off SH6 at Fox River bridge.

CROESUS TRACK

Duration	2 days
Distance	18km
Track Standard	tramping track & route
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Smoke-Ho Creek car park
Finish	Barrytown
Nearest Towns	Blackball (right), Barrytown (right)
Transport	bus, helicopter

Summary This goldfields route links the Grey valley with the west coast at Barrytown. It takes in a variety of sights and surroundings, including bushland, the tussock tops of the Paparoas and some abandoned reminders of the area's mining past.

The history of the Paparoas is inextricably interwoven with the search for gold, and these mountains are crisscrossed with tracks made by miners. You have to admire their tenacity in crossing the rugged barrier of the Paparoas between the Grey River valley and the Tasman Sea near Barrytown, 29km north of Greymouth.

This track is a pleasing blend of scenery and history, and is a great introduction to the windswept tops of the Paparoas. The views from the tramp's high points – Croesus Knob (1204m) and Mt Ryall (1220m) – are superb, with bald tussock tops stretching north and south. The track is also littered with gold-mining sites.

The tramp can be completed in one long day, but it is far more enjoyable with a stop-over at a hut above the bush-line.

PLANNING When to Tramp

Being an alpine crossing, this tramp is best done from November through March, but trampers do undertake it year-round, depending on weather conditions.

Maps

The track is covered on the 1:50,000 Park-map 273-12 (*Paparoa National Park*), even though it lies outside the park. The track is also covered on the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-K31 (*Ahaura*).

Huts

There are three huts along the track: **Ces Clark Hut** (\$10) is Standard, while **Basic Top Hut** (free) and **Garden Gully Hut** (free) are historic huts in sound, usable condition.

NEAREST TOWNS Blackball

☎ 03 / pop 324

The nearest town to the start of the track is Blackball, 25km north of Greymouth. Established in 1866, the town was a service centre, first for gold diggers and then coal miners, up until 1964. Now it's a quirky place to spend a night before hitting the trail.

Full of character and artefacts from Blackball's colourful mining past, the historic **Formerly the Blackball Hilton** (☎ 0800-452 2252, 732 4705; www.blackballhilton.co.nz; Hilton St; dm/s/d \$22.50/35/70, dinner, bed & breakfast s/d \$90/180) offers rooms with breakfast in its restaurant and pub. For limited supplies there's **Blackball General Store** (☎ 732 4859; Hilton St).

If you ring **Formerly the Blackball Hilton** (☎ 0800-452 2252, 732 4705), staff will organise a lift from Greymouth if a local is headed that way. Otherwise it's \$15 if they have to make a special run to pick you up.

Barrytown

☎ 03 / pop 192

Tiny Barrytown is 16km south of Punakaiki and across the highway from the western end of the Croesus Track.

The **All Nations Hotel** (☎ 731 1812; SH6; dm/s/d \$22/32/64) is the only place in town offering beds, but is conveniently located by the end of the track and has a restaurant and pub on site. For chowing down after the tramp, head to the highly recommended **Rata Café** (☎ 731 1151; SH6; ☎ 11.30am-7.30pm), which combines a great atmosphere with good food.

Any of the bus companies headed for Punakaiki (see p242) can provide transport to/from Barrytown.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

The 5km access road to Smoke-Ho Creek is rough in spots but is well signposted and easily managed by most vehicles. It leaves the main road to Roa 1km north of Blackball.

At Barrytown the track is clearly signposted at the side of SH6, directly opposite the All Nations Hotel.

The most practical way to do the tramp is to be dropped off at Smoke-Ho Creek and to pick up a bus to Greymouth or Westport when you reach Barrytown. For \$10, staff at **Formerly the Blackball Hilton** (☎ 0800-452 2252, 732 4705) will run you to the Smoke-Ho Creek car park. Another way to reach the car park is with **All Nations Hotel** (☎ 731 1812),

which charges \$25 per person for the 55km trip. This is especially handy if you have a vehicle, as you can leave it in the tavern's secure parking while you are tramping.

The most unusual way to get to the Smoke-Ho car park is with **Coastwide Helicopters** (☎ 762 6117, 027-433 6792). This company will fly you across the Paparoas from Barrytown to the start of the Croesus Track (two people \$400).

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Smoke-Ho Creek Car Park to Ces Clark Hut

3–4 hours, 8km, 640m ascent

At the car park you can climb the hill near the exposed coal seam for good views of

the area, and then descend in a northwesterly direction through a lush podocarp-hardwood forest towards the creek. The trail, an old pack track for horses, is an easy walk and within 10 minutes you pass the first set of mining artefacts – a pile of rusting rails. Within 1km you reach Smoke-Ho Creek, crossing it on a swing bridge.

The track then winds above Blackball Creek, before descending to cross Clarke Creek on a swing bridge and arriving at a grassy clearing signposted as '**First Hotel Site**' – it was the location of a hotel in the late 1800s. The clearing is about 30 minutes from the car park. The track to Ces Clark Hut continues north, but you can backtrack slightly on the signposted south (right fork) track to the **Minerva Battery site**, where a stamper battery was used to crush quartz during gold-mining operations. This side track has not been maintained for years, and at best is an unmarked route for the adventurous.

The main trail continues north for 30 minutes to another junction. The path to the northwest leads across Blackball Creek to **Perotti's Mill site** (five minutes) and the **Croesus Battery site** (25 minutes). Again, this is an unmarked route that has not been maintained for years. The main track quickly reaches the signposted '**Second Hotel Site**', and if the weather permits you will be greeted with great views of the Paparua Range.

Follow the true left (east) bank of Blackball Creek as the track zigzags for one hour. At Garden Gully junction a side trail heads north to the last remaining battery (see the Side Trip on right). The Croesus Track heads west, climbing steadily towards Ces Clark Hut. You will get glimpses of Lake Margaret below as you pass through an area that is still regenerating from bushfire.

During the hour-long climb the track heads roughly west, then south, emerging through the bush-line at **Top Hut** (two bunks), where you are greeted with fine views of the Grey valley, past Lake Brunner to the Main Divide. You then round a spur to head north and quickly reach **Ces Clark Hut** (16 bunks). This hut has mattresses, a potbelly stove with coal supplied, a water supply and a wonderful location – it's well worth a night's stopover.

LISTENING FOR KIWIS

A night at Ces Clark Hut is not only a feast for the eyes, with its mountainous scenery, but also has a treat for the ears. Such good numbers of the great spotted kiwi (*roa*) live in the alpine areas above the hut that DOC bans dogs (which have been known to harm the bird) on the Croesus Track. Occasionally kiwis can be heard from the hut, particularly the male, whose 'ki-wi' call is almost a shrill whistle. For those really keen to hear the flightless bird, follow the track for 10 minutes above the hut to a small spur overlooking the Roaring Meg catchment. Kiwis are more active on dark nights than moonlit ones, and on such evenings it would be unusual not to hear a few calls from this spot in the first hour after sunset.

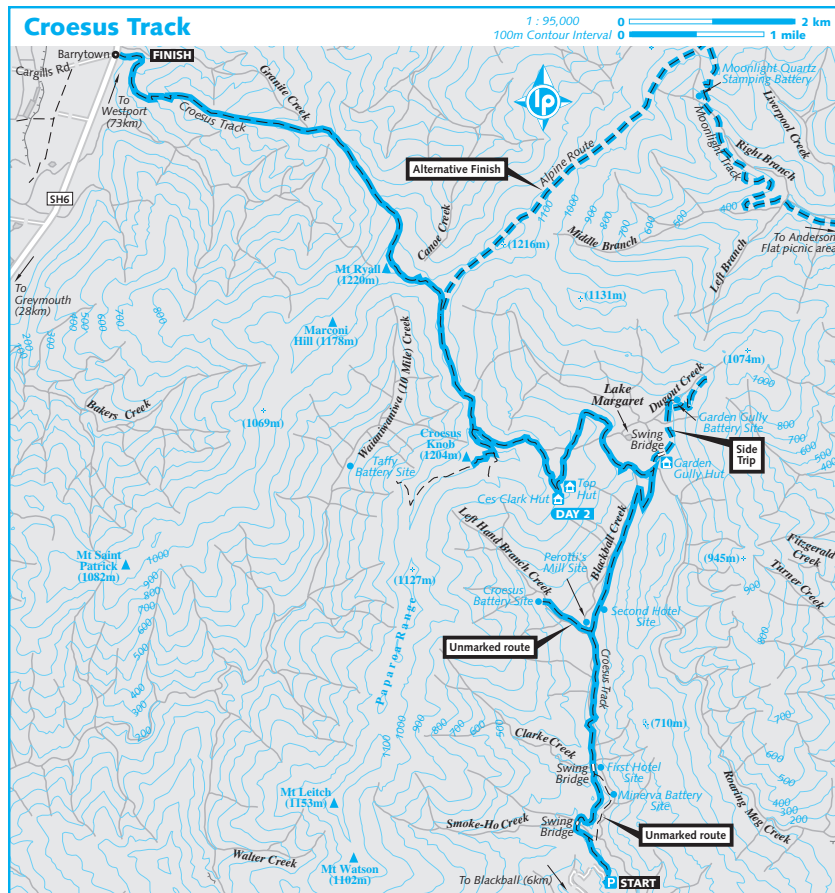
SIDE TRIP: GARDEN GULLY BATTERY TRACK 1 hour, 3km return

From the signposted Garden Gully junction, continue north to see **Garden Gully Hut** (two bunks) near the headwaters of Roaring Meg Creek (five minutes). Garden Gully is an old miners' hut dating from the 1930s that has been recently restored. Cross the creek on a swing bridge and the track soon forks. To the left, after 10 minutes, is the **Garden Gully Battery site**, the only one in the area still standing. To the right, a route climbs for 15 minutes (or 30 minutes from Garden Gully junction) to the collapsed entrance of a mine.

Day 2: Ces Clark Hut to Barrytown 4–4½ hours, 10km, 1160m descent

The rough path heads northwest through tussock to the main ridge of the Paparua Range; it is poled all the way to the bush-line on the western side. It is hard to resist the climb to rocky **Croesus Knob** (1204m), which gives the track its name. The path to the knob strikes off southwest from the main track along a distinctive ridge.

Return to the main path and follow the poles to the northwest as they round the headwaters of Waianiawaniwa (10 Mile) Creek. Along the way there are views down the valley to Point Elizabeth, with Aoraki/Mt Cook and Mt Tasman visible further south on the horizon on especially clear



days. You will pass a sign marking the alpine route to the Moonlight valley (see the Alternative Finish on below) and then come close to the summit of **Mt Ryall** (1220m). From Ces Clark Hut to this point, near the bush-line, takes two hours – including the climb to Croesus Knob.

The well-marked track then plunges into the bush, which is predominantly subalpine species and beech, and drops steeply towards the west coast. Further down, the gradient eases as you join an old miners' benched track, and the vegetation changes to nikau palms and other warm-climate species found along the Paparoa coast.

About 2½ hours after reaching the bush-line you emerge onto SH6 across the highway from the All Nations Hotel. At this point nothing sounds better for most trampers than pulling up a stool at the bar and enjoying a pint of golden ale.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: MOONLIGHT TRACK

5–6 hours, 15km

If the alpine areas and gold-mining artefacts of the Croesus Track intrigued you, give serious consideration to turning this tramp into a semi-loop by returning via the Moonlight Track. If you plan to spend the night you'll need a tent, as there are no huts along the track. Also keep in mind that the trailhead leaves you in a somewhat remote picnic area.

From Ces Clark Hut, continue northwest along the Croesus Track around Croesus Knob. Just before Mt Ryall is a poled alpine route that continues northeast along the open tops of the Paparoa Range. Follow the poles along the tussock ridgeline and enjoy the spectacular views of both the Grey valley and the Tasman coast. Within two to three hours poles direct you off the ridge towards the bush and a steep track that descends to the Right Branch of Moonlight Creek.

This is Moonlight Track, a three- to four-hour walk to Andersons Flat picnic area at the end of Moonlight Valley Rd. You follow Moonlight Creek into the valley, and along the way pass a variety of historic artefacts, including tailings from gold claims, parts of the **Moonlight quartz stamping battery** dating to 1868, and the remains of a number of miners' huts. From Andersons Flat, it's 10km along Moonlight Valley Rd to the village of Atarau.

AORAKI/MT COOK & WESTLAND/TAI POUTINI NATIONAL PARKS

Even in a country as rugged and mountainous as New Zealand, where towering peaks are commonplace, the Southern Alps are mind-boggling. This great range, revered by climbers throughout the world, stretches along the South Island, forming a backbone of greywacke and granite from Fiordland to the Nelson Lakes.

The heart and soul of the Southern Alps is a pair of national parks that straddle the Main Divide. Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park comprises 699 sq km of peaks, sub-alpine scrub, tussock, rivers and permanent snow. The 117-sq-km Westland/Tai Poutini National Park rises dramatically from the Tasman Sea at Gillespies Point and extends to the Main Divide.

The two national parks form a bastion of towering peaks and glaciers, capped by Aoraki/Mt Cook (3754m). Surrounding the famous mountain are 18 other peaks higher than 3000m. Glaciers, including the 29km-long Tasman Glacier, cover 40% of Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park. Westland/Tai Poutini National Park contains 60 named glaciers, two of which – Franz Josef and Fox – are among the west coast's best-known tourist attractions.

It's not surprising that, with so much rock and ice, these national parks are not ideally suited for trampers. Although the scenery is phenomenal and the day walks to viewpoints are numerous, this is really a haven for climbers.

Most valleys west of the divide are extremely rugged, with steep gorges and thick bush, while to the east they inevitably lead to glaciers requiring extensive experience and special equipment to traverse. Crossing the passes between the valleys is a major climbing feat.

Copland Pass was historically the most famous crossing of the Main Divide, and possibly the best-known crossing in the South Island. But in 1995 a fierce storm gutted the track to Hooker Hut at Stewart Stream, resulting in a steep gorge with 70m walls. Before the track was gouted, more

than 500 people made the crossing annually. Now it is done by only a trickle of trampers experienced in mountaineering. A much more popular choice for a high alpine crossing is Ball Pass (see the boxed text on p250).

HISTORY

Only a small group of Maori and a handful of European explorers lived or travelled in south Westland before the 1865 gold rushes brought miners to Okarito and Gillespies Beaches. Maori knew of New Zealand's highest mountain, and called it Aoraki (Cloud Piercer). Abel Tasman and James Cook remarked on the rugged land as they sailed by, but it's doubtful that they ever saw the towering peaks that now bear their names.

The first European to mention Aoraki/Mt Cook was Charles Heaphy. Traveling with Thomas Brunner along the west coast in 1846, Heaphy made sketches of the mountain after learning about it from his Maori guides. In 1862, Julius von Haast and Arthur Dobson spent four months exploring the rivers, valleys and glaciers of what is now the park. Haast prepared a colourful account of their findings for the Canterbury Provincial Government. 'Nothing can be compared with the scenery, which certainly has not its equal in the European Alps,' he wrote.

Climbers soon staged a race to its peak. The first serious attempt was made in 1882 by Reverend William Green. He had seen photographs of Aoraki/Mt Cook and was so inspired that he convinced two Swiss guides to help him attempt the summit. Their first attempts, up an ice ridge from the south and then up a route along Ball Glacier, were unsuccessful.

They then turned their attention to the northern side and, following Haast Ridge, came within several hundred metres of the top before bad weather forced them back. The three men spent a long night clinging to a narrow rock ledge at 3050m, listening to the boom of avalanches around them, and the next morning retreated to their base camp. They never reached the top themselves, but encouraged others to climb the peak.

In 1894, Edward Fitzgerald, a famous English climber, announced his intention

to scale Aoraki/Mt Cook. He left Europe with an Italian guide, Mattias Zurbriggen, but soon after he arrived he found three New Zealanders – Tom Fyfe, George Graham and Jack Clarke – had beaten him to it (at 3am on Christmas Day 1894). Fitzgerald, infuriated, didn't climb the mountain at all. Instead, he made first ascents of the surrounding peaks – Sefton, Tasman and Haidinger.

In 1892, the Canterbury Provincial Government sent explorer and surveyor Charles Douglas to search for a pass over the Main Divide that would be suitable as a bridle trail. From the west coast Douglas ventured up the Copland valley and explored several passes, finally deciding that Copland Pass offered the best possibilities.

Fitzgerald and Zurbriggen made the first recorded east-west crossing in 1895, when they climbed what is now Fitzgerald Pass. They then spent three arduous days without supplies trying to find a way down the Copland valley. Construction of the existing Copland Track began in 1910, and by 1913 the first Welcome Flat Hut was built. Its hot springs quickly made it a popular spot.

One by one the faces and ridges of Aoraki/Mt Cook were climbed – including the South Ridge in 1948, by a team of three headed by Edmund Hillary. The last major approach, the hazardous Caroline Face, was finally ascended in 1970 by New Zealanders Peter Gough and John Glasgow.

ENVIRONMENT

The Aoraki/Mt Cook and Westland/Tai Poutini National Parks are both part of the Te Wahipounamu South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. On the Westland/Tai Poutini side there are primeval rainforests – rata high up, and a profusion of ferns, shrubs and trees lower down. There are many lakes to explore on the narrow coastal plain, and the soaring ice-covered mountains provide a dramatic backdrop. Two glaciers, Fox and Franz Josef, appear to slice the forest in two as they push towards the sea.

If weather permits, the scene on the eastern side of the Southern Alps is even more spectacular. Aoraki/Mt Cook and Mt Sefton dominate the skyline around Aoraki/Mt Cook village, and the Hooker

and Tasman Glaciers virtually reach the settlement.

The distinctive flora of the subalpine and alpine regions includes the Mt Cook lily, the New Zealand edelweiss and the mountain daisy. Bird life is prolific, especially on the Westland side, and includes the rare white heron (*kotuku*), crested ghebe, morepork (*ruru*), kaka, parakeet, tui and both the South Island brown and great spotted kiwi. Many keas hang around Aoraki/Mt Cook village and in the Fox and Franz Josef valleys.

CLIMATE

As might be expected, the weather in this region is harsh and extremely volatile. The Southern Alps form a major barrier to prevailing westerly winds and create their own climate.

Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park does experience spells of fine weather, but it is long periods of foul weather for which it is most noted; visitors often leave disappointed at not having seen 'the mountain'. The annual rainfall in Aoraki/Mt Cook village is 4000mm and it rains an average of 149 days a year. Come prepared for strong winds, heavy rain and even snow in any season, then rejoice if the skies clear and Aoraki/Mt Cook comes into view.

Westland/Tai Poutini has a much wetter climate than its eastern neighbour. The prevailing westerly weather pushes storms laden with huge amounts of moisture across the Tasman Sea, and when they hit the high peaks of the Southern Alps the resulting storms and rainfall can be impressive. At the foot of the mountains the rainfall

averages 5000mm a year, but it exceeds 11,000mm a year above 1200m – the reason flash floods can be such a danger in the park. Altitude also affects temperatures, but typically they average from 20°C to 25°C during summer.

PLANNING Maps

Both parks are included on the 1:100,000 Parkmap 273-10 (*Aoraki/Mount Cook & Westland/Tai Poutini*).

Books

For those wishing to explore the natural history of the region in greater depth, *The Alpine World of Mt Cook* by Andy Dennis and Craig Potton is an excellent resource.

COPLAND PASS & BALL PASS CROSSINGS

The Copland Pass is one of New Zealand's best-known alpine crossings – a high-altitude tramp from Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park to the west coast, with a night spent soaking in Welcome Flat thermal springs along the way. But severe erosion of Stewart and Copland Gullies in the mid-1990s made Hooker Hut almost inaccessible, and turned the traditional route into an extremely challenging adventure for experienced mountaineers only. The number of people making the crossing plummeted, with most guiding companies no longer offering the trip.

Plans call for relocating Hooker Hut and then rerouting portions of the route, but until then trampers who arrive in Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park looking for a high alpine crossing should consider Ball Pass.

The 2121m pass is a demanding, two- to three-day alpine route, crossing Mt Cook Range between the Hooker and Tasman valleys. The tramp can be undertaken from either valley, but for safety reasons and to enjoy the best views, DOC recommends beginning at White Horse Hill camping area and travelling up East Hooker valley. You then climb Ball Pass, sidling under Mt Rosa (2161m), and down Ball Ridge to the Tasman valley and Ball Shelter.

Like Copland Pass, the Ball Pass Crossing is a route, not a marked track. You must be a fit and strong trumper, capable of tramping nine hours a day, and have good route-finding skills. The route involves steep snow slopes, so the use of crampons and an ice axe are necessary. Many parties also carry tents to break the trip into three days by camping either on a shingle fan above East Hooker valley or along Ball Ridge. There are two huts along the route: Ball Shelter and Caroline Hut, which is private and cannot be used for overnight accommodation.

The highlights of the crossing are the challenge itself, and the spectacular alpine scenery. Few tramps in New Zealand have such a dramatic backdrop as this one, overlooked by the 2400m Caroline Face of Mt Cook.

Alpine Recreation (☎ 0800-006 096, 680 6736; www.alpinerecreation.co.nz; Lake Tekapo) offers a three-day, guided Ball Pass Crossing (\$695). The first day is a six-hour tramp beside Tasman Glacier to Caroline Hut. The second day is spent learning how to use crampons and an ice axe, and the third day is the nine-hour crossing of Ball Pass, ending in Aoraki/Mt Cook village.

If you want to tackle the Copland Pass, **Southern Alps Guiding** (☎ 435 1890; www.mtcook.com; Aoraki/Mt Cook Village) offers a four-day climb to the west coast via the 2150m pass with transport back to Aoraki/Mt Cook Village on the fifth day (\$1800). It bypasses the severely eroded area by tramping along the east side of Hooker Lake and then crossing Hooker Glacier to reach Hooker Hut. The cost includes guides, all mountaineering equipment, food, hut fees and transport.

WELCOME FLAT

Duration	3 days
Distance	48km
Track Standard	easy tramping track
Difficulty	easy–moderate
Start/Finish	Karangarua River bridge
Nearest Towns	Fox Glacier (right), Franz Josef (p252)
Transport	bus

Summary A tramp along the Karangarua and Copland Rivers to the open alpine area around Douglas Rock Hut, including a soak in the thermal springs at Welcome Flat.

For trampers lacking the mountaineering skills and the funds to hire guides, or who simply don't have the desire to undertake a major alpine crossing, this tramp up the western half of the Copland Track is an ideal substitute.

The 17km tramp to Welcome Flat Hut is along a well-benched and well-marked track, with flood bridges at most streams. The next leg to Douglas Rock Hut involves steeper climbs and many unbridged streams, but is still within the capabilities of most fit trampers.

The only real drawback of this tramp is that you must eventually turn around and backtrack over your outgoing footsteps to SH6. While some trampers detest having to backtrack under any circumstances, the amazing scenery on this route can genuinely make it well worthwhile.

PLANNING When to Tramp

This half of the Copland Track can be tramped year-round if the creeks are fordable. The high season is from October through April. In recent years Welcome Flat has become an extremely popular tramp, and during the high tourist season of December and January there is a very good chance that the hut will be full.

What to Bring

You will need a stove as there is no fuel in Welcome Flat or Douglas Rock Huts. If tramping during the high tourist season, a tent will allow you to escape the overflowing hut at Welcome Flat.

Maps

The 1:100,000 Parkmap 273-10 (*Aoraki/Mount Cook & Westland/Tai Poutini*) is sufficient for the tramp to Welcome Flat. If you plan to continue on to Douglas Hut and beyond, you should invest in the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-H36 (*Aoraki/Mount Cook*).

Huts

Welcome Flat Hut (\$15) is a Serviced hut, while **Douglas Rock Hut** (\$5) is Standard.

NEAREST TOWNS Fox Glacier

☎ 03 / pop 258

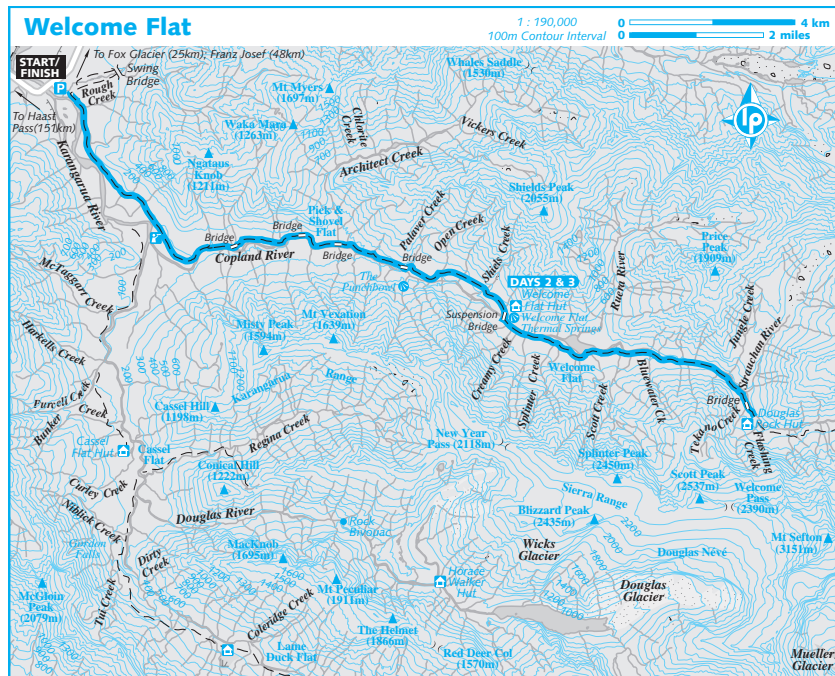
Fox Glacier is located halfway between Franz Josef and the start of the track. At the **DOC South Westland Weheka Area Office** (☎ 751 0807; SH6; ☎ 9am–noon & 1–4.30pm Mon–Fri) you can purchase maps, trail brochures and hut tickets, and receive the latest weather forecast.

SLEEPING & EATING

About 400m from the town centre, **Fox Glacier Holiday Park** (☎ 0800-154-366, 751 0821; www.foxglacierholidaypark.co.nz; Kerrs Rd; sites for 2 \$26, d \$45-99; 📶), off Cook Flat Rd, is a well-equipped park with a range of cabins and units to suit all budgets.

Ivory Towers (☎ 751 0838; www.ivorytowers.lodge.co.nz; Sullivan Rd; dm/s/d \$23/45/55; 📶) is a well-equipped and tidy backpacker lodge with a range of dorms and rooms, and a spa for after the tramp.

Fox Glacier Inn (☎ 751 0022; www.foxglacier.inn.co.nz; 39 Sullivan Rd; s & d \$70-105) has a great bar and café, and recently updated motel units.



There are also a handful of motels in Fox Glacier, including **Mount Cook View Motel** (☎ 0800-828 814, 751 0814; Cook Flat Rd; r from \$125).

Café Neve (☎ 751 0110; SH6; ☞ 8am-10pm) has good vegetarian food in a pleasant outdoor setting. Popular **Cook Saddle Saloon & Café** (☎ 751 0700; cnr SH6 & Cook Flat Rd; ☞ 11am-9pm) serves big plates of stylish Tex-Mex. If it's sunny, head to the **Plateau Café & Bar** (☎ 751 0058; cnr Sullivan Rd & SH6; ☞ 11am-9pm) to whittle away the afternoon at its outdoor tables. Some food supplies are available at **Fox Glacier General Store** (☎ 751-0829; SH6; ☞ 8am-8pm).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

InterCity (☎ 768 7078; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) buses pass through Fox Glacier daily. In summer these buses can be heavily booked, so plan well in advance. From Fox Glacier there are northbound buses to Greymouth (\$56, five hours) and southbound buses to Queenstown (\$94, seven hours).

Atomic Shuttles (☎ 768 5101; www.atomictravel.co.nz) has a daily Greymouth-Queenstown run that stops at Fox Glacier for \$30. From Queenstown it's \$50.

Franz Josef

☎ 03 / pop 320

Located 48km north of the track, Franz Josef is the larger of the twin glacier towns. Stop at the **DOC Westland/Tai Poutini National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 752 0796; westlandnpvc@doc.govt.nz; SH6) to purchase maps, trail brochures, books and hut tickets, or to receive the latest weather forecast.

WARNING

Heed the weather warnings before departing on a tramp to Welcome Flat! Although the track is well benched, with flood bridges at major streams, DOC officials strongly discourage undertaking this tramp before, during and after heavy rain – a common occurrence on the west coast. During such storms, even small streams can quickly turn into raging torrents and become impassable with or without flood bridges. Check the latest weather forecast at a DOC office and leave your intentions before heading off for the hot springs.

SLEEPING & EATING

Mountain View Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 0800-467 897, 752 0735; www.mountainview.co.nz; SH6; site for 2 \$26/30, cabins \$62-79; ☑) is 1.4km north of the village, and has a barbecue and spa.

Franz Josef Glacier YHA Hostel (☎ 752 0754; yha.franzjosef@yha.org.nz; 2-4 Cron St; dm/d \$27/64; ☑), just off SH6, has what you need after a long tramp – laundry, drying room and a sauna.

Next door is **Chateau Franz Backpackers** (☎ 0800-728 372, 752 0738; www.chateaufranz.co.nz; 8 Cron St; dm/d \$20/50), while also on Cron St is **Glow Worm Cottages** (☎ 0800-151 027, 752 0172; www.glowwormcottages.co.nz; 27 Cron St; dm/d \$21/50; ☑), a pleasant place with a spa, free storage and an outdoor dining area.

Cheeky Kea Cafe (☎ 752 0139; SH6; ☞ 7am-8pm) is a good place for country fried chicken, while just down the street is **Beeches** (☎ 752 0721; SH6; ☞ 8am-9pm), which has a café and takeaway section. Wine-bar culture arrived in Franz Josef with the revamping of the **Landing** (☎ 752 0229; SH6; ☞ 3-9.30pm), a casual tile-floored café with outdoor tables. Supplies are available from **Fern Grove Foodcentre** (☎ 752 0177; SH6) in the heart of town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Fox Glacier buses (opposite) also serve Franz Josef.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TRAMP

A daily southbound **InterCity** (☎ 768 7078; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) bus leaves Franz Josef at 8am and Fox Glacier at 8.45am, passing Karangarua River bridge at 9.20am, and travelling on to Queenstown (six hours). A northbound bus also passes by around 2.45pm daily, reaching Fox Glacier at 3.45pm and Franz Josef 40 minutes later.

THE TRAMP

Day 1: Karangarua River Bridge to Welcome Flat Hut

6 hours, 17km

From the bus shelter, just northeast of the bridge on SH6, a vehicle track leads 200m to Rough Creek and a car park. The tramp begins by fording Rough Creek – a swing bridge 30 minutes upstream is only needed during floods. You can usually rock-hop across the creek without getting your feet wet. Remember, if you need to use the flood bridge, you're going to encounter impassable rivers further up the valley.

WARNING

Caution is required above Architect Creek, where there is major hillside instability. It's a large, active slip that should not be crossed during wet weather because of the risk of landslides.

Beyond Rough Creek the track stays in the bush, out of view of the river most of the time, until it breaks out onto an open river flat within 1km. Orange triangle markers lead you across the flat and back into the totara and rimu bush. About 4km from the car park the track passes the confluence of the Copland and Karangarua Rivers, where there is a five-minute side track (right) to a **scenic overlook** of the rivers.

The track then swings almost due east to head up the Copland valley. Eventually you descend to the water and begin boulder-hopping along the banks of the Copland River. Trail markers direct you back into the forest to cross a bridge over an unnamed stream, which drains the Copland Range to the north. Within 2km you cross another bridge over McPhee Creek, and then arrive at the long bridge over Architect Creek. On the western side of the creek is **Pick & Shovel Flat**, 9km from the car park and generally considered the halfway point to Welcome Flat Hut.

At Architect Creek you begin an ascent (totalling 300m) to the hut. About 30 minutes beyond the creek is a landslide area. If conditions are wet, use caution and care when traversing these unstable slopes. At first the climb is gradual, and within 2km you reach the flood bridge over Palaver Creek. After Open Creek it becomes steeper until you ford Shiels Creek and reach the day's high point (500m). You're now 1km from the hot springs, with most of the tramp a descent through ribbonwood forest.

Welcome Flat thermal springs were first noted by Charles Douglas in 1896, and are now so popular that there's a changing shed. The water emerges from the ground at 60°C and flows through a series of three shallow pools towards Copland River. The hottest pool – knee-deep and the size of a tennis court – is still 55°C, so most bathers prefer the second pool. Sandflies can be thick here in the day, but a midnight soak on a clear

evening is a trip highlight; lie back in the warm water and count the falling stars.

Welcome Flat Hut (31 bunks), just upstream, is an excellent facility. It has a pot-belly stove, coal and a radio. In summer there is usually a warden stationed here.

Day 2: Welcome Flat Hut to Douglas Rock Hut (Return)

5 hours, 14km

The track to Douglas Rock Hut is a 7km tramp, often done in less than three hours. Without a heavy backpack you can reach it even quicker, making this bush-line hut an ideal day trip from Welcome Flat.

From Welcome Flat Hut, cross the suspension bridge to the south side of Copland River. Head east along the river, and after 30 minutes you break out at the open tussock of **Welcome Flat**. This pleasant area along the river is surrounded by peaks and snowfields, including Mt Sefton (3151m), the Footstool (2764m) and Scott Peak (2537m). The flats are marked with rock cairns that lead more than 2km to Scott Creek at their eastern end. Scott Creek is not bridged, but under normal conditions is easy to ford.

From Scott Creek the track climbs out of the flats and sidles above the **Copland River Gorge**, crossing two major stream washouts. The well-defined track can be slippery, so be careful if it's wet. The track crosses a suspension bridge over Tekano Creek, 1½ hours from Scott Creek, then immediately arrives at **Douglas Rock Hut** (eight bunks) in the first patch of forest below the bush-line, at 700m.

If you can do without a soak in the hot springs, this classic hut is an intriguing place to stay. Built 1931–1932, it originally had two rooms (one for men, one for women). In 1979 it was modified to one room, and platforms replaced the bunks. The only shelter between Copland Pass and Welcome Flat, the hut has a radio link to the Westland/Tai Poutini National Park Visitor Centre, providing weather reports each summer eve at 6pm.

Mt Sefton towers over Douglas Rock Hut, and beyond the hut a track continues up the Copland valley to 1100m. There, a cairned route leads up to a stream and **water-fall** at 1400m; about 3½ hours from the hut.

Return to Welcome Flat Hut, reversing the day's route.

Day 3: Welcome Flat Hut to Karangarua River Bridge

6 hours, 17km

Retrace your Day 1 steps to the Karangarua River bridge on SH6.

MUELLER HUT

Duration	2 days
Distance	10km
Track Standard	tramping track & route
Difficulty	demanding
Start/Finish	Aoraki/Mt Cook village (opposite)
Transport	bus

Summary This is a difficult climb, but it is well worth the effort for the reward of spectacular views and an overnight stay high in the Southern Alps.

Mueller Hut offers trampers an opportunity to spend a night in the high alpine area of Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, enjoying stunning views of Aoraki/Mt Cook, Hooker Glacier and the surrounding peaks.

The tramp is a stiff climb – and it's an equally difficult and knee-bending descent back – but for most trampers it's the only way to escape the bustling Aoraki/Mt Cook village and venture into the mountains unencumbered by mountaineering equipment and without the many complications of a high alpine pass.

PLANNING

When to Tramp

This tramp should be done during the traditional Aoraki/Mt Cook climbing season, from mid-December to late March. Avoid tramping if heavy rain or snow is forecast, or if there are high winds.

What to Bring

Some trampers take an ice axe, although crampons and rope are usually unnecessary during summer. Trekking poles are recommended and may be hired from the Aoraki/Mt Cook Visitor Centre.

The new Mueller Hut now features gas cookers, but you still need to bring cooking equipment, matches or a lighter, toilet paper and, of course, suitable clothing for a night at high altitude.

Maps

The best maps are either the 1:50,000 Topomap 260-H36 (*Aoraki/Mount Cook*) or the 1:50,000 Terralink *Aoraki Alpine Area* topomap.

Huts

The only hut on this tramp is **Mueller Hut** (\$35). Annual hut passes are not valid. There is no booking system, but you need to sign into the intentions system at the Aoraki/Mt Cook Visitor Centre.

NEAREST TOWN

Aoraki/Mt Cook Village

☎ 03 / pop 234

This small hamlet is the access point for most visitors into Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park. Most accommodation options here are expensive because rooms are limited.

INFORMATION

The **DOC Aoraki/Mt Cook Visitor Centre** (☎ 435 1186; mtcookvc@doc.govt.nz; 66 Bowen Dr) is the place to check the weather (recorded every day at 9am) and pay hut fees. Take the time to enjoy its excellent displays and a 20-minute audiovisual presentation on the natural and mountaineering history of the park.

SLEEPING & EATING

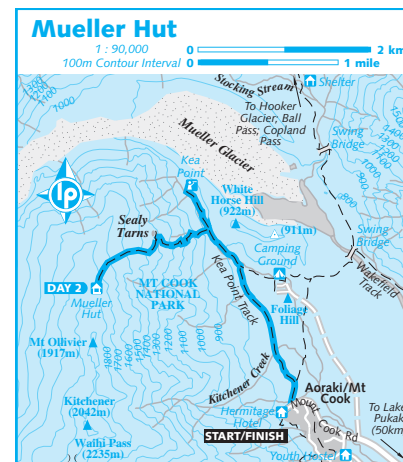
The **White Horse Hill camping ground** (sites for 2 \$12) at the old Hermitage site, almost 2km from the village, lets you pitch a tent to a view of New Zealand's highest peak.

The excellent **Mt Cook YHA Hostel** (☎ 435 1820; yha.mtcook@yha.org.nz; cnr Bowen & Kitchener Drs; dm \$27, d \$66–70) gets crowded in the high season (December to April) so its best to book a few days in advance.

MUELLER HUT

For nearly a century there has been a Mueller Hut in the vicinity of Mt Ollivier. The original was built between 1914 and 1915, just 90m above Mueller Glacier, but by the late 1940s it was badly deteriorated. It was replaced in 1950, but Mueller Hut II lasted only four months until it was destroyed by an avalanche in its first winter. The scattered debris from the hut was hauled back up from the glacier and used to piece together temporary quarters (Mueller Hut III) until a totally new hut could be constructed in 1953. Mueller Hut IV was located higher on the Sealy Range and was the first alpine hut in New Zealand built with materials air-dropped onto the site, rather than packed in.

In 2003, Mueller Hut V was built – 300m southwest of its predecessor. It required 130 helicopter flights to haul in the necessary building materials, and Sir Edmund Hillary officially opened it. Air-dropping materials is a quick and easy way to build an alpine hut, but it's not cheap – the current Mueller Hut required a budget of more than \$400,000.



The new **Aoraki/Mt Cook Alpine Lodge** (☎ 435 1860; www.aorakialpinelodge.co.nz; Bowen Dr; dm/d \$36/144; ☑) has a variety of rooms, a fireplace in the lounge and storage for all the gear you don't want to haul up the mountain.

More basic, and 3.5km before the village, is **Unwin Hut** (☎ 435 1100; www.alpineclub.org.nz; SH80; dm \$25), a lodge operated by the New Zealand Alpine Club. Non-members are welcome to stay.

Hermitage Aoraki/Mt Cook Hotel (☎ 0800-686 800, 435 1809; www.mount-cook.com; Terrace Rd), has several restaurants and bars. There's also a coffee shop for cheap, cafeteria-style meals and a small store with limited groceries.

Old Mountaineers Café Bar (☎ 435 1890; Bowen Dr; ☎ 10am-midnight), a cosy restaurant next to the visitor information centre, has outdoor seating, views of the mountains and good affordable food.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

InterCity (☎ 768 7078; www.intercitycoach.co.nz) has a daily Christchurch–Queenstown run, with a one-hour stop at Aoraki/Mt Cook (\$79 from Christchurch, 5½ hours). Buses stop at the Mt Cook YHA Hostel and the Hermitage, which both handle bookings.

There are other bus companies that service Twizel, 70km (one-hour drive) from the village, and shuttles that connect to the national park. **Atomic Shuttles** (☎ 322 8883; www.atomictravel.co.nz) has a daily Christchurch–Queenstown run that will drop you at Twizel (\$30). **High Country Shuttles** (☎ 0800-435 050, 435 0506) or the **Cook Connection** (☎ 0800-266 526, 021-583 211; www.cookconnect.co.nz) will provide transport to the village (\$20).

THE TRAMP**Day 1: Aoraki/Mt Cook Village to Mueller Hut**

4–5 hours, 5km, 1040m ascent

The tramp begins at the Hermitage Hotel (near the DOC Visitor Centre) on Kea Point Track, a very level and well-maintained path that heads up the open scrub of Hooker valley towards White Horse Hill. Within 30 minutes you pass Foliage Hill; you'll see two lodges and the camping-ground shelter near the base of White Horse Hill. The track begins to climb gently, moves into bush and comes to a signposted junction with Sealy Tarns Track. **Kea Point** is to the north (right fork), a 15-minute walk away. The side trip is worthwhile because the viewpoint is on an old lateral moraine above Mueller Glacier, with Mt Sefton looming overhead.

The route to Mueller Hut heads west (left fork) on the Sealy Tarns Track. It's a two-hour climb to the tarns, which is still a knee-bender at times, even though the track has been recently improved. As soon as you begin climbing you are greeted with excellent views of the lower Hooker valley to the south, including Aoraki/Mt Cook Village. Higher still, there are views of the upper portions of the valley and Mueller Glacier. **Sealy Tarns**, a series of small pools, make a natural rest stop because they are on the ridge in a narrow meadow of alpine shrubs, grasses and herbs. They are also the only sight of water you are likely pass during the climb.

Just south of the tarns, look for a huge rock cairn that marks the continuation to

Mueller Hut. It begins as a well-worn track in tussock that involves a lot of scrambling, then eventually fades out altogether in a large boulder field. Follow the orange markers (every 200m) through the boulders, and finally up a steep and loose scree slope to the ridge. Take your time hopping from one boulder to the next to avoid any mishap.

The ridge line is marked by a large orange and black pole – impossible to miss on a clear day – and once you reach it there are views of the upper portion of Mueller Glacier as it flows past smaller hanging glaciers, with the peaks of the Main Divide in the background. Simply magnificent.

At this point, the route turns south and follows the ridge for 20 minutes to **Mueller Hut** (28 bunks), a bright red and orange structure that's easy to spot on a fine day. The boulder-and-scree slope here is very steep, and is often covered by snow all the way to the hut. This is where an ice axe may be useful, but whether or not you have one, extreme care is required.

The new Mueller Hut, the fifth to be built here, is an alpine gem – big and roomy, with viewing decks and benches looking out towards the mountainous scenery. Inside are platform bunks in two bunkrooms, while in between is a large communal area with gas cookers, solar-powered lights and locker space for storing gear. During summer a warden is stationed here, and at 7pm each night there's a radio call with a ranger providing weather and avalanche forecasts, and asking for the names of all the parties in the hut.

Needless to say, the views from the hut are excellent, including not only the namesake glacier below but, if you are blessed with clear weather, also the peaks of the Main Divide, crowned by Aoraki/Mt Cook. From Mueller Hut it's a 30-minute rock scramble to an outcropping (marked by a large cairn) just below **Mt Ollivier** (1917m). This was the first peak Sir Edmund Hillary climbed, and from the outcropping you are rewarded with an even better panorama of the area.

Day 2: Mueller Hut to Aoraki/Mt Cook Village

3 hours, 5km, 1040m descent

Retrace your steps from Day 1.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'