

**ROUTE**

The trailhead for the Routeburn Track is located at “the Divide” on New Zealand 94 (the Milford Sound Highway), approximately four hours from Queenstown and one hour from Te Anau. A parking lot and restroom facility beside the highway mark the start of the wide, rocky track as it ascends through a silver-beech rain forest heavily hung with moss and fern. The track gains elevation from the start, reaching within an hour the turnoff for Key Summit, an hour-long side trip up to the view from a 3,000-foot (900 m) plateau. The route then descends to Lake Howden (and the Department of Conservation hut) at 2,250 feet (680 m), and the junction

with the Greenstone Track, before climbing again for two hours to the base of spectacular 250-foot (75 m) Earland Falls at 3,200 feet (970 m). The trail continues traversing along the flank of the Ailsa Mountains above the Hollyford River, with the first views to the Darran Range. The trail passes through a picturesque grove of ribbon-wood trees known as the Orchard and, a little later, another magical forest of silver beech before arriving in the hanging valley that holds Lake Mackenzie (and the lodges) at 2,700 feet (820 m), 8 miles (13 km) from the trailhead. In clear weather, 6,000-foot (1,830 m) Emily Peak reflects in Lake Mackenzie, which is surrounded by huge granite boulders and thick stands of emerald green dragon-leaf shrubs.

Day two, and the Routeburn leaves the side valley of Lake Mackenzie via steep switchbacks through a wildflower garden to Ocean Peak Corner, an unforgettable landmark where the route begins a long, ascending traverse up the Hollyford Face. Views open up to Key Summit and the Darran Range all the way to Lake McKerow, even a glimpse way down the Hollyford Valley to Martin’s Bay on the Tasman Sea. A long, gradually ascending traverse leads up toward Harris Saddle. This exposed section can be glorious on a fine day but treacherous on a snowy, stormy one. Two hours or so on the Hollyford Face ends with a short, steep section leading to the emergency shelter at Harris Saddle (4,200 feet, 1,280 m), a welcome place in bad weather. From the small summit hut, a strenuous but popular side trip leads to Conical Hill, at nearly 5,000 feet (1,520 m) the high point on the route but a problematic summit given the fickle nature of New Zealand weather. From Harris Saddle, the Routeburn continues beyond Lake Harris before descending into the headwaters of the Routeburn Valley and into Mount Aspiring National Park. The track passes through a series of high and wild basins of tussock grass and snow daisies, ringed by waterfalls pouring off nearby mountains. This area below Harris Saddle can be a highlight of the trip regardless of conditions. From the high basins, the track quickly drops down to Routeburn Falls, a complex series of dramatic waterfalls. Just below the falls are the hikers’ lodges, at 3,300 feet (1,000 m), 10 miles (16 km) from Lake Mackenzie.

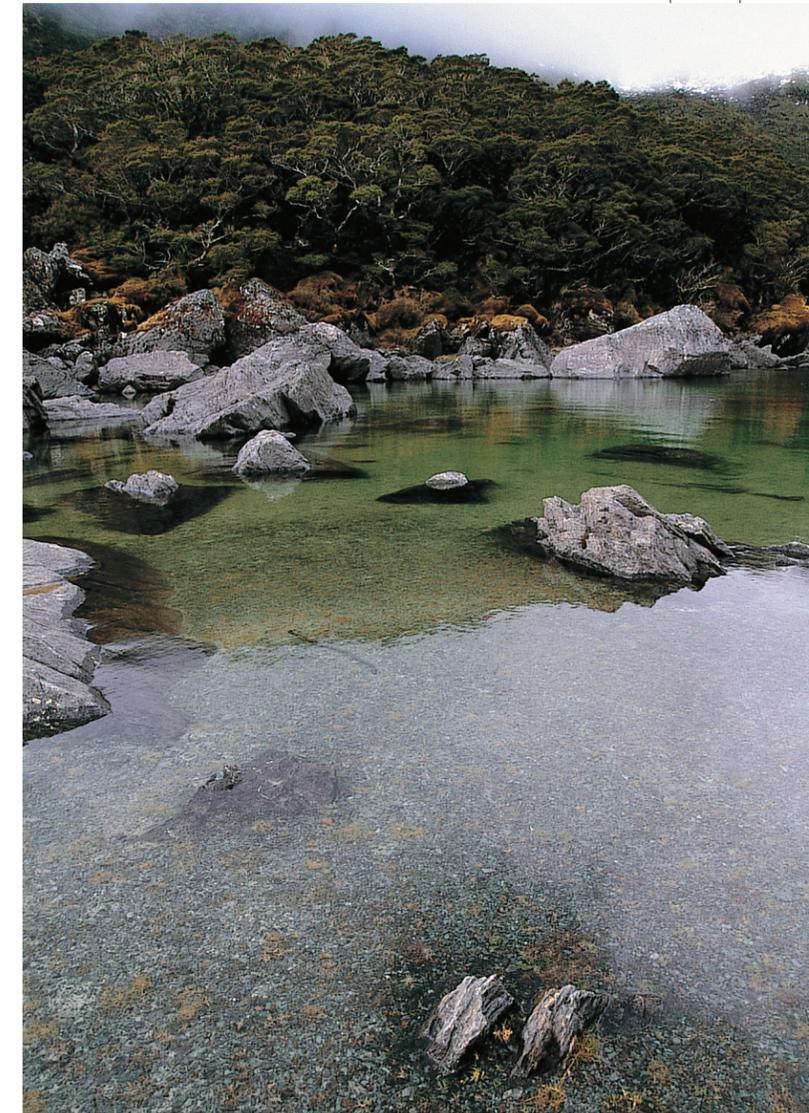
On the final day of the Routeburn the trail drops steeply down from the falls through a pleasant, even stately mixed beech forest, crossing the path of a huge landslide that closed the track for months in 1994. The track reaches the wide expanse of Routeburn Flats, and another Department of Conservation hut, within two hours. From the flats, the Routeburn finishes with a flourish. The track enters a gorge that features surging whitewater and beautiful clear pools of jade green water. Ferns hang in lush bunches from the sidewalls as the trail meanders down beside the river until the flow vanishes into a chaos of rock and deadfall known as The Sump. The final 4 miles (6 km) of the track follow an ever-widening valley floor as the Routeburn flows toward the Dart River. The trail crosses the Routeburn River a final time on a long suspension bridge before reaching the car park at the Dart River trailhead, 10 miles (16 km) from the lodge at Routeburn Falls, and 28 miles (45 km) from the Divide. Wait here for the bus back to Te Anau or your car; guided parties are picked up in a private van.

**Information**

**Huts and Permits**

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
Great Walks in New Zealand  
[www.doc.govt.nz/Explore/002-Tracks-and-Walks/Great-Walks/index.asp](http://www.doc.govt.nz/Explore/002-Tracks-and-Walks/Great-Walks/index.asp)

QUEENSTOWN DISTRICT DOC  
37 Shotover St.  
Queenstown, New Zealand  
64-3-442-7933, 64-3-442-7932 (fax)



Serene Lake Mackenzie nestles in the Ailsa Mountains, where the calls of bellbird and tomtit emanate from the weird dragon leaf shrubs. PHOTO BY PETER POTTERFIELD.

**Guide Services**

ROUTEburn WALK LTD.  
P.O. Box 568  
Queenstown, New Zealand  
64-3-442-8200  
[www.routeburn.co.nz](http://www.routeburn.co.nz)  
[www.ultimatehikes.co.nz/Routeburn\\_Track](http://www.ultimatehikes.co.nz/Routeburn_Track)

**New Zealand Tourism**

[www.purenz.com](http://www.purenz.com)  
[www.travelplanner.co.nz](http://www.travelplanner.co.nz)