

# MACKENZIE & MT COOK



Mount John  
Lake Alexandrina  
Lake Pukaki Kettle Lake

Hooker Valley  
Sealey Tarns  
Red Tarns  
Ball Hut Road



Ben Ohau Ascent  
Mt Sutton  
Freehold Creek

Quail Burn Saddle  
Clay Cliffs



# Mount John

Alpine hill with great views

Cafe on top!

Great for families

Maybe see a chukar (its a bird)

2 hours direct return from summit; 3–4 hours (8 km) for full circuit.

Pine track then tussock trails

3 kilometres return

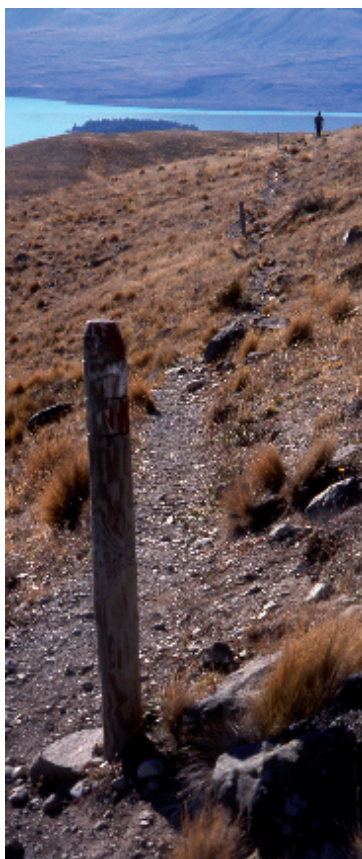
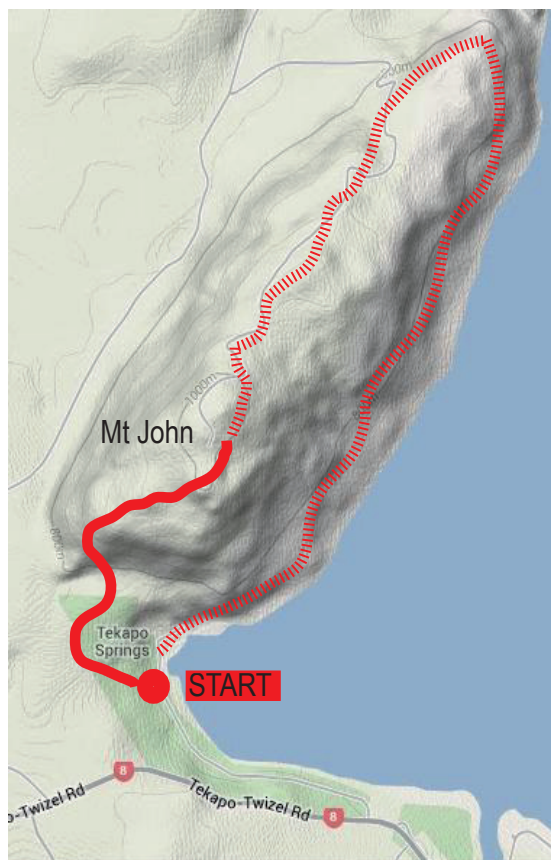
From Lake Tekapo township take the road to the lakeside motor camp and continue to the carpark just before the hot pools and ice-skating rink

Mount John sticks up above the Mackenzie plain acting as a marker post for Lake Tekapo. Perfect panorama from the summit, from Mount Cook to Lake Alexandrina and Lake Tekapo. It's about 250 metres to climb, and there's an astronomical observatory and a café on top! Area now known as a starlight reserve.

From the carpark the track climbs steadily through the dark larch forest and reaches a junction with a loop track that circles the summit. Already the views are good. Mount John summit is at 1031 metres.

Head on up to the summit café for your well deserved treat. Mount John is surprisingly flat on top and Himalayan chukar (introduced as a game bird) are sometimes spotted on the top slopes.





**Longer walk option:** A longer walk return option, is to continue on the summit loop then take the track north down the long easy spur some 2 km to where it drops sharply down to Lake Tekapo itself.

Staying 50 metres above the lake, the track sidesles around the base of Mount John, back to the skating rink and carpark.



**Cafe:** Astro, on top of Mt John



# Lake Alexandrina

Easy walk on lakeside

Interesting kiwi baches

Crested grebes and fishing

Good picnic spots

1–2 hours one way; 2–3 hours

Anglers and tussock trails

4 kilometre one way

From Highway 8 (6 km south of Lake Tekapo) take the Godley Peaks Road 3 km to a turn-off to the south end of Lake Alexandrina, or 8 km to the middle of the lake and Lake McGregor.

Subtle and silky, Lake Alexandrina sits in an old glacial gouge alongside its much bigger sister. Power boats are not allowed, and the crested grebes patrol the willowy edges in calm, persistent ripples. This is a land that takes many seasons to appreciate, and the colours are harsh: blue-grey waters, yellow shores, black mountains.

From the Lake McGregor baches and road-end, a trail wanders south alongside the lake. However, the best plan is to climb straight up from the carpark about 50 metres to a flat-top hill. A stile crosses the fenceline, whose main purpose seems to be to stop four-wheel-drivers trashing the tussock.







Along here the unmarked trail wanders down to the lakeside again, and the footpath settles into some definition as it rounds the point and goes down to the baches at the south end of the lake. This is another feast of bach architecture, and unless you have had the foresight to organise transport, you will have to wander back the same way.



**Camp:** tent sites, toilets and information boards at Lake McGregor.

# Lake Pukaki Kettle Lake

Views of Pukaki and Mt Cook

Easy family walk

High country landscape

Space and solitude

1 hour return

Tussock trail

2 kilometres return

Just north of the Pukaki slipway, a gravel side-road leads 1 km to the carpark.

This is an interesting 1 hour stroll along tussock terraces with great views of Lake Pukaki and Lake Benmore. A poled track leads from the carpark past ephemeral ponds, crosses two stiles and reaches seats overlooking the dry kettle lake depression.

Superb views all round, and when the nor'wester blows these could be the windiest seats in New Zealand.









# Hooker Valley

Famous walk up a dramatic valley

Gorge and two swingbridges

Shelter and Mt Cook lillies

Ice lake at end

3-4 hours return

Tramping track, two swingbridges

8 kilometres return

From Highway 80 turn off just before Mount Cook village and go to the large carpark and camping area under White Horse Hill. Picnic tables, public shelter and toilets.

The Hooker Valley is the perfect frame for Mount Cook, and this short walk is packed with interest and drama. Walkers have been making this mountain pilgrimage for over a hundred years, so you will not be lonely on the track, unless you go early in the morning.

The track passes the original Hermitage site and an alpine memorial, and groves of matagouri with some spectacular *Aciphylla* (or spaniard) plant, with their huge, prickly, flowering stalks. Then the track zigzags down to the first swing bridge across the milky-blue Hooker River. Good views continue upvalley, past the Mueller Glacier terminal lake, and the track cuts along a gorge with a spectacular swing bridge. You can often find native edelweiss in the cliffs here.

After the bridge you turn a slight corner of the valley and get some photogenic views of Mount Cook, and in summer there can be a profusion of Mount Cook lil-





ies (or properly buttercups). Stocking Stream shelter was named for walkers in the nineteenth century who would take off their shoes and stockings here. Toilets and plane table.

After some boardwalks the track crests a slight rise and you reach the ice lake, the terminal lake of the Hooker Glacier. There might be small icebergs drifting in the lake. Mount Cook was named after the explorer Captain James Cook, but to the Maori the peak is Aorangi (or Aoraki to South Island Maori), translated as 'cloud piercer'.

**Cafe:** The Old Mountaineers, Mt Cook





# Sealey Tarns

Superb views and reflections  
Steep climb but improved track  
Alpine plants

2-3 hours return

Tussock trails and 4WD

3 kilometres return

Drive to the White Horse camping area, and the track starts from near the far toilet block.

From the White Horse carpark follow the track to the junction with the Hermitage Track and continue onto the signposted Sealey Tarns track. This track is steep and uncompromising, and suitable for fitter people. Although it has been recently upgraded it is a steep 400 m climb, zig-zagging past alpine shrubs and gullies.

After a while the track eases off, and sidles across to the tarns. One tarn captures an image of Mt Cook. They also provide the only water on the climb, although you might be wise to carry your own, since people swim in the tarns.



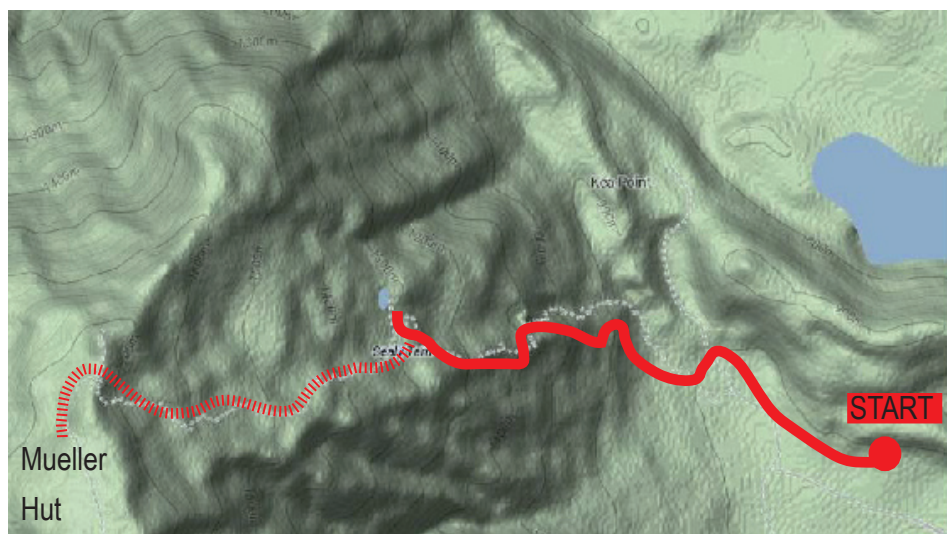


## Mueller Hut

This daytramp is a hard, steady slog of 700 m up a steep hill, and this is a summer trip only. Allow 8-9 hours return from carpark. DOC provides a detailed pamphlet *Mueller Hut Route*, well worth getting from the Visitor Centre.

From Sealey Tarns the route eases through tussock basins and rock fields for the next 300 m. Stick to the marked route at all times, the final 50 m climb to the ridgeline is up a loose crumble of rock and scree.

Then it's a short distance along the ridge to the large 30 bunk hut (mt radio) which sits at 1790 m in a tangle of rocky bulges on top of the ridge. The site is magnificent, with striking views of Mt Cook, the toy-like village, and icefalls off Mt Sefton.



**Camping:** DOC White Horse camping area, toilets, shelter.

# Red Tarns

Quiet escape and good views

Forest and alpine plants

Restful tarns

2 hours return

Gravel path then boulder route

2 kilometre return

Start from the public shelter on the Mount Cook village loop road, not far from the shop and beside Governors Bush. Toilets and information panels here.



The Red Tarns are a quiet escape from the tourist hubbub of Mount Cook village — a crystal sprinkling of ponds, like two clear eyes in the stony face of Sebastopol. In summer the waft of flax, turpentine wood and totara berries can be quite heady, and soothing — a meditative refuge.

At the public shelter, signs direct you along a gravelled path beside a bubbling creek, then out of the village to a long footbridge over the Black Birch Stream. The track then starts to climb steeply through the alpine scrub, crossing occasional gullies on its way to the lip of the basin. It is a 500-metre climb to the tarns, where there is a seat and a plane table.





The tarns get their name from the red pondweed that grows in them. On a still, sharp day you get a perfect reflection of Mount Cook.

A rough track continues onto the Sebastopol ridge-line, and cairns lead up to Mount Sebastopol itself at 1468 m. On the ridge it becomes quite a scramble, the trail disappears, and this is a route for experienced trampers with good nerves.

Allow another 2 hours return from the tarns.

**Camping:** White Horse camping area, toilets, shelter.





# Ball Hut Road

Popular mt bike trail

Big mountain country

Shelter at end

Tasman glacier and moraine

5-6 hours return

Gravel road then tramping track

16 kilometre return

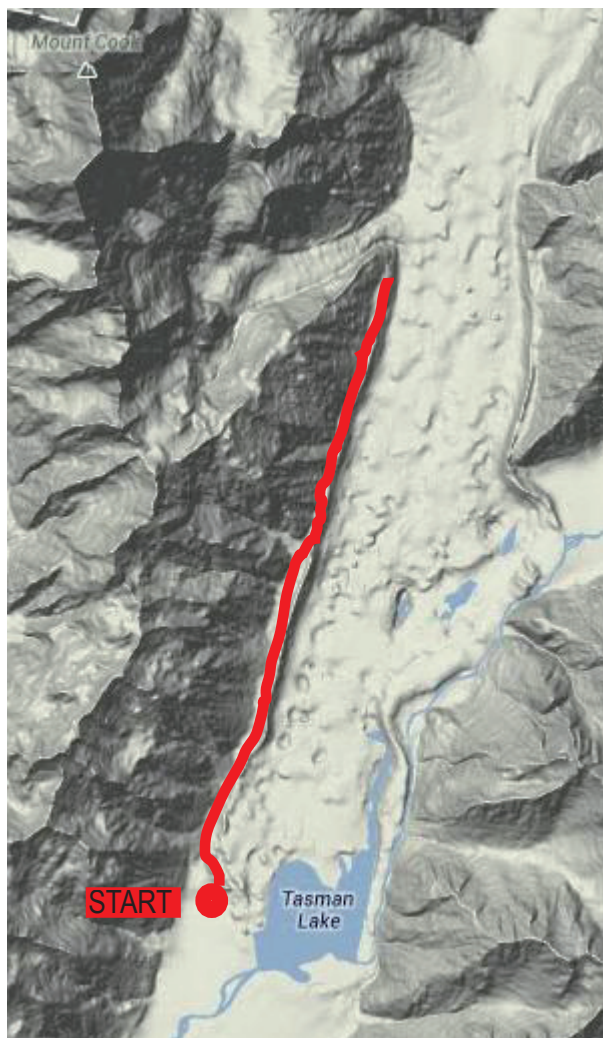
From Highway 80 just past Mount Cook airport, turn onto the Tasman Valley Road and drive to the Blue Lakes carpark, shelter and toilets. A chain blocks any further access up the road.

An unusual walk but great for mt bikers. A long bash up a four-wheel-drive road, with steep, rotten hillsides of the Mount Cook range on one side and the huge, grinding rock factory of the Tasman Glacier on the other.

But you are following in the footsteps of history. In February 1882 the Reverend W.S. Green and his Swiss guides Emil Boss and Ulrich Kaufmann slowly trekked along this moraine wall, camping by the streams and searching for a route to the unclimbed peak of Mount Cook. They almost made it too, but for 'a mere matter of detail', a lack of daylight and 10 metres short of the summit.

The Ball Hut road was built in the early 1890s and a climbers' hut (one of several) was established at the far end, with parties in the early part of the twentieth

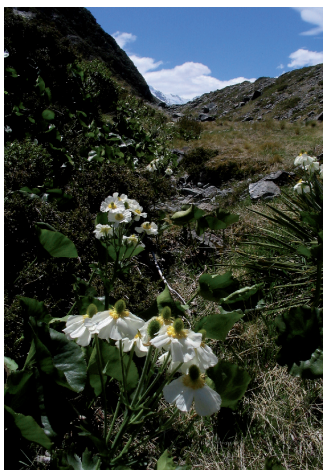




century having to walk up onto the glacier. The Tasman Glacier retreated and shrank under its mantle of rock, and the moraines' walls crumbled and took away the hut and parts of the road.

The road now peters out into nowhere, some 6 km from Blue Lakes at Husky Flat. Then there is a worn foot trail that threads along the terrace and reaches an unexpected oasis of grass and alpine shrubs beside the small Ball Hut shelter.

About 500 metres further on the moraine wall itself ends at the top of a nasty eroded access valley nick-named 'Garbage Gully' by generations of climbers. But the view is anything but rubbish.





# Ben Ohau Ascent

Well marked track to top

Big climb of 1000m up 4WD

Views of four lakes

Off the beaten track, take water

4-5 hours return

4WD and tussock trail

6 kilometres return

From Highway 8 north of Twizel look for 'Glen Lyon Station' signs, and follow the Pukaki and Ohau Canal roads to Lake Ohau. A narrow road twists alongside the lake to a DOC sign.

In Scotland 'ben' means mountain, and Ben Ohau sits beside giants on the edge of the Mackenzie basin. At 1550 metres it's a 1000 metres or so to the top. Suits the dedicated hill-walker. Fit mountain bikers could get 90% up the hill, then walk the last stretch to the summit.

Follow the farm road past an old rabbiters hut, and the rustling beech forest by Gretas Stream. This is the last of the shade, the road then zigzags powerfully up the mountainside spur and up to a small basin. A brief reprieve from climbing then the vehicle track gets steep again as it slices across the face of Ben Ohau to a high saddle.







The unmarked route leaves the road and cuts up the scree and tussock slopes to the high point rocks covered with a curious hairy lichen.. Expect a breeze — ‘O hau’ means wind. But the reward is a view of four lakes — Ohau, Pukaki, and the artificially-made Benmore and Lake Ruataniwha.



# Mt Sutton

Big mountain, exposed country  
Amazing views and alpine plants  
Well off the beaten track

3-4 hours return

Scree route

6 kilometres circuit

From Highway 8 take the Lake Ohau Road 16 km to Ohau Lodge and ski-field road. Gate key available from Ohau Lodge, follow the steep skifield road to top carpark.

This is high alpine country but in fine weather can be enjoyed by most keen walkers and trampers. You need a good topographical map and compass, for it is easy to get lost in the mist up here. Don't go in poor weather!

You need to get a key from Ohau Lodge first, \$5 per vehicle, and sign a permission form. The Ohau Snow Field Road does get rocks on it, and should be treated with respect, but take it slowly and it has wonderful views. Upper skifield buildings and toilets are kept locked.



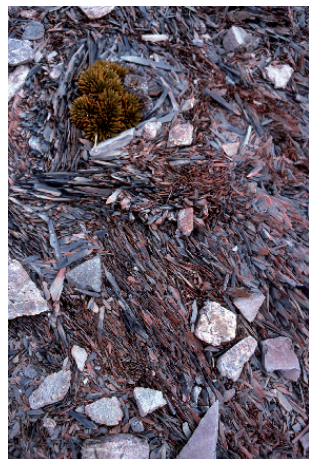
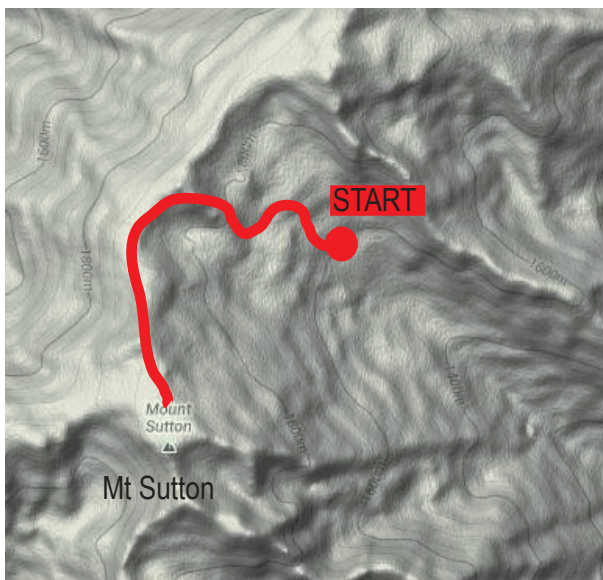
**Cafe:** Ohau Lodge





At the top carpark the easiest route to Mt Sutton is to follow the skifield roads under the chairlift into the top basin and walk up to the low point of the ridge. Then turn south and follow the broad easy ridge to Mt Sutton (2007 m). Strange shattered screes all along the ridge and vivid alpine plants somehow survive in this harsh landscape.

From the summit there are superb views of Mt Cook, Lake Dumb-bell, Mt Barth etc. From the ridge you can even spot the tiny Maitland Hut.





# Freehold Creek

Easy trails along tussock benches

Peaceful beech forest

Excellent mt biking to Qualiburn

Option of harder track to tops

4-5 hours return

Gravel paths, forest track and alpine route

12 kilometres return

From Highway 8 take the Lake Ohau road to the Parsons Creek carpark. Signposted.

From the carpark at Parsons Creek, follow the well-marked track up through beech forest and through tussock and matagouri terraces to a well-signposted junction with the main track from the Ohau skifield road. This is also a mt bike track now, that goes all the way to the Quailburn.

The track ambles across open landscapes, with Lake Ohau dominating the view, and the Ben Ohau Range across the way. The track crosses the footbridge over Sawyers Creek and follows tussock terraces to the beech forest at Freehold Creek.

Cross a footbridge over the creek, then follow poles uphill in tussock and then through the forest, and onto the sudden fringe of the bushline. If you are game enough, a cairned trail leads quite clearly into the alpine basins to the top forks, with waterfalls gushing down the side-creeks, and well-fed alpine plants in every cranny.

If you are still keen (and within your time budget) it is not that far up to a large, broad saddle, but there is no track up to here. You have strayed into wilderness.





Cafe: Ohau Lodge

# Quail Burn Saddle

Historic woolshed and campsite

Beech forest and mistletoe

Easy track to saddle

Good for families

2 hours return

Bush track and tussock trails

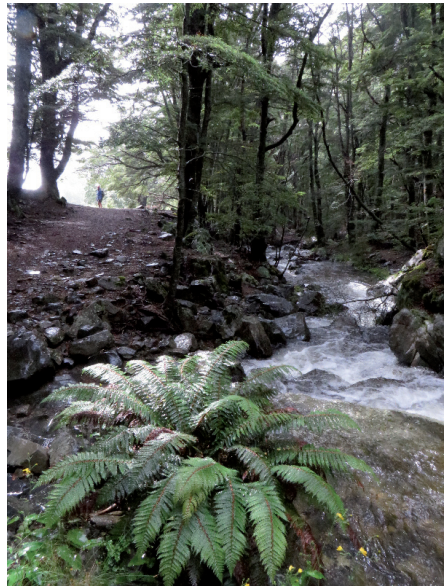
3 kilometres return

The Quailburn Road is 4 km north of Omarama. Then drive 16 km (past the Clay Cliffs turn-off) as the road gets narrower, past the A20 cycle trail, and ends beside the historic woolshed.

At the end of the Quail Burn road is the old Quail Burn station, including an historic woolshed. DoC has made secure boardwalks into the shed, and provided information boards.

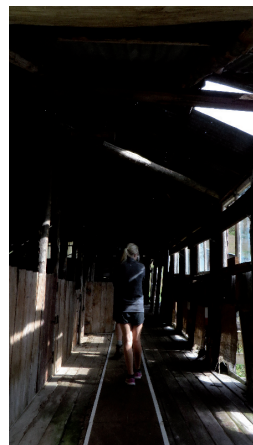
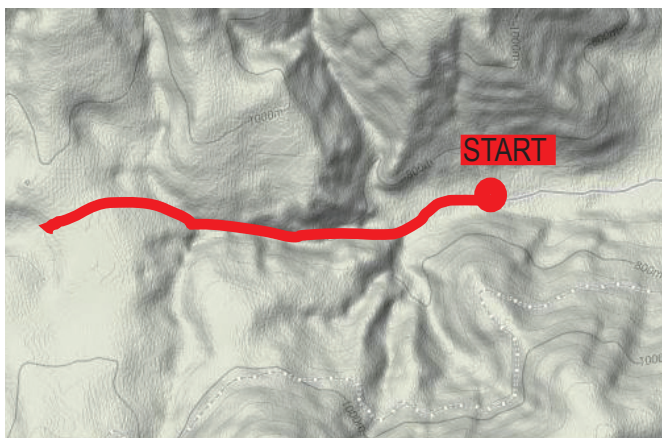
Slightly further up the road (a bit rougher but most cars should make it) is a picnic and camping area by the stream and beech forest. A pleasantly sequestered place on a hot day, and kids will love the stream. There's another old hut on the edge of the forest.

A good track wanders up through the dark grotto of beech forest, water cascades and massive boulders up to a stream fork. Here, a poled track leads up a short spur and out into the tussock country. After a while the poles stop but it is easy walking up onto the broad flat pass. Great views all round.



**Camping:** beech forest, stream water, toilet, historic buildings at Quail Burn





**Longer Walk:** to reach the East Ahuriri Hut (built about 1890's) a good topo map is useful but it's a cruisey day-tramp to the hut in lovely open country. From the pass stay at roughly the same height and sidle across several shallow gullies, and climb up onto a side spur until you are overlooking the East Ahuriri River. You should be able to see the old hut by now, so wander down the spur and up the river flats. The hut is on a bit of lean but reeks of character. Not useable to stay in.



# Clay Cliffs

Badlands and hoodoos

Strange geologic formations

Interesting for kids

Watch for falling rocks

1 hour return

Farm road then scrambly paths

2 kilometres return

Access is 3 km north of Omarama off Highway 8, turning onto Quailburn Road, then Henburn Road. Currently there's a \$5 per person charge. There's a box here or you pay at the Omarama information centre. The gravel road continues three kilometres to another gate, and onto a '4WD only' sign and carpark beside the clay cliffs.

These cliffs are not really 'clay', and the Maori called them 'Paritea', which means 'white or coloured cliffs'. Erosion of the soft sediments and shingles by water, has left deep ravines, with striking pinnacles wearing little caps of turf.

The cliffs are 30–50 metres high in places, and just crumbling away. Some tracks have been made, but these all get undermined by the constant movement of the rocks.

On a hot, glaring day there is something spooky about the shady silences inside these chasms, with the tinkling sound of pebbles bouncing and falling off the sides, and the unexpected whoosh of pigeons in the air. You often come away with a distinct sense of relief, and there is something unnerving about seeing geological processes in such an accelerated form.





