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Welcome



View from Luxmore Hut, Kepler Track — Matthew / Wakahi

The floatplane banks low over Lake Te Anau and for a moment you see it whole — the dark mirror of the southern hemisphere's largest lake, the ragged skyline of the Kepler Mountains rearing up from the western shore, and somewhere in that wilderness of beech forest and alpine tundra, a thin thread of track looping sixty kilometres back to where it began. Then the plane is gone, the silence rushes back in, and you are standing at the trailhead with a pack on your shoulders and three days of New Zealand's finest backcountry stretching out ahead of you.

Welcome to the **Kepler Track** — one of New Zealand's nine **Great Walks**, and by many measures the most dramatically varied of them all. Within a single loop, this trail threads through ancient podocarp lowlands, climbs to exposed limestone ridgelines above the clouds, descends through one of Fiordland's most pristine beech forests, and follows the braided margins of a glacially carved river valley back to civilisation. Sixty kilometres. Roughly 1,350 metres of cumulative elevation gain. Three to four days of walking. And a concentration of landscapes that would take a lifetime to fully absorb.

There is a particular quality to the light in Fiordland that photographers chase and writers struggle to describe. It arrives sideways in the early morning, filtering through the canopy of *Nothofagus* — the ancient southern beech — and catching the moisture that hangs perpetually in this corner of the South Island. Everything glitters. The mosses that drape every rock and root glow an almost radioactive green. The lake surface, visible in flashes through the trees, shifts between pewter and cobalt depending on the mood of the sky. You are walking through a landscape that has been fundamentally unchanged for millions of years, one that drifted away from Gondwana before mammals arrived, and whose evolutionary isolation produced some of the strangest and most beautiful wildlife on earth.

Average Monthly Rainfall — Te Anau / Kepler Region

Month	Te Anau Rainfall (mm)	Ridge Elevation Rainfall (approx. mm)	Rainy Days (avg)
October	95	145	14
November	85	130	12
December	80	125	11
January	75	115	10
February	70	110	10
March	80	125	11
April	95	145	13

Average Temperature Ranges — Kepler Track Walking Season

Month	Te Anau Day Temp (°C)	Te Anau Night Temp (°C)	Ridge Day Temp (°C)	Ridge Night Temp (°C)
October	14–16	4–6	6–10	0–3
November	16–18	6–8	9–13	2–5
December	18–21	8–10	12–16	4–7
January	20–23	10–12	14–18	6–9
February	20–22	10–11	13–17	5–8
March	17–20	8–10	10–14	3–6
April	14–16	5–7	7–11	1–4

One pattern worth noting is the **diurnal wind cycle** on the exposed ridgeline. On summer days with stable pressure systems, winds are typically lightest in the early morning and build through the afternoon as the land heats up. Starting your ridge crossing early — departing Luxmore Hut by 8:00 am rather than 10:00 am — can mean the difference between a sublime alpine stroll and a punishing slog into a 40-knot headwind. Fiordland weather moves fast, and the ridgeline offers nowhere to hide once conditions deteriorate.

the distant sound of a car, a power line cutting through the bush edge, a smell of mown grass from a farm property to the east. None of this should be mourned; it is simply the natural grammar of a loop track returning to its origin, and the contrast only deepens your appreciation of what you've come from.

The track re-enters Te Anau through the **Kepler Track Control Gates** on the southern edge of town, depositing you back within walking distance of every comfort the small but well-equipped township has to offer: hot showers, cold beer, an extraordinary quantity of food that you will consume with the unself-conscious appetite of someone who has genuinely earned it. Te Anau's main street — modest by most standards but richly welcoming to anyone arriving on foot after three nights in the mountains — runs along the lakeshore with a directness that feels almost symbolic: you began beside this lake, and you end beside it, but the person arriving at the finish is not quite the same as the one who left.

Take a moment at the lakeshore before doing anything else. Set your pack down, face the water, and look southwest toward the mountains across the lake — toward the high ridgeline you crossed on Day 2, now reassembled into its proper perspective as a distant, unbroken wall of grey and green. The summit of Luxmore is visible on a clear day, a rounded profile above the treeline. You were up there. You were above those clouds, or in them. You walked from here to there and back again, through everything Fiordland chose to offer. That is not a small thing, and the lakeshore is precisely the right place to acknowledge it, in whatever private way feels appropriate, before the world of hot showers and cold beer reasserts its very legitimate claims.

Every great loop track ends where it began, but it takes you back a different way — and the Kepler's final kilometres, with the mountains behind you and the lake ahead, make sure you know exactly what you've done and exactly where you've been.