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Welcome



Lake Harris from the Routeburn Track — Keri Moyle

There is a moment, somewhere on the second day of the Routeburn Track, when the world as you know it simply stops. You are standing on an exposed alpine ridge above the treeline, the wind carrying the faint mineral bite of snowmelt, and in every direction the landscape performs something close to the impossible. To the west, the Tasman Sea catches the afternoon light beyond ranges so ancient they seem to predate the concept of distance. To the east, the braided silver threads of glacial rivers unravel across the floor of the Hollyford Valley far below. Underfoot, a narrow path of pale gravel winds along the edge of everything, and you are on it — pack on your back, lungs full of the clearest air you have ever breathed, completely and utterly present. This is the Routeburn Track, and it has been producing moments exactly like this one for generations of walkers.

The Routeburn is not simply a hiking trail. It is one of New Zealand's nine **Great Walks** — a designation that carries genuine weight in a country that takes its wilderness with uncommon seriousness. Stretching **33 kilometres** through the heart of two of the world's most spectacular national parks, **Fiordland** and **Mount Aspiring**, the track connects the Dart Valley in the north to the Hollyford Valley in the south, threading through terrain that shifts from dense, dripping podocarp rainforest to open alpine tussock to sheer rock faces draped in waterfalls. It crosses a mountain pass at **1,255 metres** above sea level. It traverses a hanging valley that appears to have been sculpted by a god with an eye for drama. It takes most walkers **three days** to complete, and many of them describe it as one of the finest experiences of their lives.

The track's reputation arrives well ahead of the walk itself. You hear about it from the couple at the hostel in Queenstown who did it three years ago and still bring it up unprompted. You read about it in expedition memoirs and travel essays, always described with a particular reverence usually reserved for



Key Summit alpine wetland, Routeburn Track — Sadao Tsuchiya

When Bookings Open

Bookings for each upcoming Great Walks season open in **May each year**. DOC announces the precise opening date a few weeks in advance, typically via their website and social media channels, so it pays to follow DOC's communications if you're planning ahead for a popular summer period. The Routeburn is one of New Zealand's most sought-after Great Walks, and peak-season dates — particularly the December–January window — can sell out within hours of the booking portal opening. Setting a calendar reminder for early May and checking the DOC website regularly from mid-April onwards is strongly recommended.

What Your Booking Covers

Each booking covers a single night at a single accommodation point — one hut bunk or one campsite pitch per person per night. You will need a separate booking for each night of your walk. The standard Routeburn itinerary requires **two or three nights** depending on your pace, so most walkers will need

Day 3 Key Waypoints

Waypoint	Distance from Start	Elevation	Notes
Lake Mackenzie Hut	0 km	940 m	Day start
High traverse begins	1.5 km	1,080 m	Contour above Hollyford Valley
Earland Falls viewpoint	4 km	1,020 m	174m waterfall, spray zone
Upper Hollyford descent	6 km	870 m	Forest enriches, birdlife intensifies
Lake Howden Hut	8 km	780 m	28-bunk hut, junction, water
Key Summit junction	9.5 km	840 m	Optional detour, allow 45 mins return
Key Summit summit (detour)	10.5 km	1,170 m	Alpine bog, panoramic views
The Divide	14.5 km	532 m	Track end, bus stop, SH94

"Three days, thirty-three kilometres, and somewhere between the falls and the saddle and the forest and the lake, the mountain had done what mountains do to people who pay attention — it had rearranged something fundamental, quietly and without ceremony, so that the world at the roadside looked subtly, permanently different from the world you had left behind."