



# NEW ZEALAND: SOUTH ISLAND HIGH



*This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.*



*Mt Owen's Limestone Pavements*

- **Four expeditions into New Zealand's 'great outdoors'**
- **Sample some classic but less busy multi-day tracks**
- **Kayaking interlude in Abel Tasman National Park**
- **Independent hiking the famous Routeburn Track**
- **Overnight cruise on Milford Sound**
- **Ball Pass crossing on Mt Cook finale**

## **High Places in New Zealand**

'High Places' have been specialists in mountain travel and adventure activities in New Zealand since 1995. In 1999, 'High Places' directors Bob and Mary Lancaster moved from Sheffield, UK to New Zealand and set up the 'High Places NZ' office near Nelson at the top of South Island. Nelson is ringed by mountains and has a sunny 'Mediterranean' micro-climate and golden beaches. It is a stylish and relaxed place and a great place to visit during any trip to New Zealand!

### **The trip 'South Island High'**

This exciting trip is tougher than our long-running 'Contrasts' trip and will appeal to fitter walkers who are keen and able to backpack on NZ multi-day tracks, which is really what the New Zealand 'Outdoors' is all about. You get much further into the mountains over several days. The guided Ball Pass crossing (not full backpacking) on Mt Cook is tremendous. So many people wanted to do the independent Routeburn Track option that we have included it in the main trip.

Mt Owen (1875m) is one of the highest summits in the Kahurangi National Park, a limestone monolith and stunning scenery which featured in 'Lord of the Rings'. The Angelus hut under Mt Angelus (2084m) is considered one of the finest hut locations in the whole of NZ. Your packs will need to be big enough for your personal gear plus share of food, tents, stoves etc. (65-75 litre packs - around 15kgs) The trip starts easily with a 2 day shakedown in Kaikoura – whale watching and an overnight trip up the easy coastal peak, Mt Fyffe.



*Kea – alpine parrot*

Whale watching in Kaikoura and sea kayaking in the Abel Tasman are included in the cost of the trip, but you can opt out of them if you wish.

The itinerary has some independent elements. The 10 day hiking safari is guided throughout and the Ball Pass crossing will be led by a guiding company using fully qualified Alpine Guides. Arrival in Queenstown and the connecting journey to and from the Ball Pass/Mt Cook area however will be arranged by us but you will not be accompanied. We will also book you on to the Routeburn Track and make all transport arrangements but won't come with you! New Zealand is a refreshingly easy country in which to travel and this mixture of support and independence should add to the enjoyment.

### **Mt Cook alpine crossing**

Ball Pass (2130m) crosses a snow/glacier shoulder on the south ridge of Mount Cook, New Zealand's highest mountain (3750m) to link the Tasman and Hooker valleys. It offers a thrilling alpine experience suitable for fit walkers. You stay in the private Caroline Hut high on the mountain for two nights, spending the middle day on the snowfields and surrounding rock ridges. The Ball Pass hut on Mt Cook is a fully equipped private refuge with sleeping bags and most food, so you need only carry your own clothing and gear plus a small share of the food. All equipment is provided and a good range of mountain wear including boots is available for free loan. You are accompanied by New Zealand Mountain Guides with usually a 1:4 ratio. Although you may be using crampons if the snow is hard, previous mountaineering experience is not essential but it will still be quite a demanding trip with a long descent and walk out on the final day. Some of the descent route is over rocky ground and requires good balance.

### **Grade - Tough**

This trip is graded 'tough' simply because of the backpacking required on the four multi-day mountain trips. The self-sufficient nature of the group on this part of the trip will be more or less demanding depending on the weather. On Ball Pass the load carrying is much less because the private hut is fully stocked and the grade here is more like 'steady' for the first two days. However the final day crossing the pass is long and could take up to 10 hours and on the descent good balance and confidence on rocky ground is needed.

### **Accommodation**

In Christchurch, Queenstown and Tekapo we stay in comfortable hostels, backpackers or guesthouses in single or twin rooms. On the Ball Pass trip we stay in a private mountain hut with

bunk bed accommodation (sleeping bags provided). On the guided 10 day safari we mainly camp (up to 8 nights), either close to the mountain huts with toilet and cold water washing facilities or at campgrounds. On the Routeburn Track you will have a reserved mattress/bunk in the National Park huts.

### **Food**

On the 10 day safari, all the food is included and everyone will be involved in the planning, buying and cooking of the food/meals. On Ball Pass, the guiding team prepare most of the meals but help with the chores is welcomed. On the Routeburn Track, gas cookers are provided but you will need to take all your food, pans, dishes cutlery etc. In towns where breakfast is not provided at your accommodation you can buy it in a nearby café or make it in a self catering kitchen. There are plenty of lively and inexpensive places to eat out.

### **Health and Hygiene**

New Zealand generally has a high standard of health and hygiene and much of the outdoors is pristine. However on some of the more popular trails warnings about giardia are appearing. Either bring an iodine based water purifying agent (available locally) or carry enough water for hiking days, normally 1.5 to 2 litres on hot days. The only 'bug' to concern us are sandflies, a cross between mosquitoes and midges. Whilst walking they are not a problem but when stationary e.g. lunch stops etc., they can be irritating. Carry a good ozone friendly repellent, available locally, and some 'Anthisan' or similar, to stop bites itching.

### **Climate**

New Zealand is known for its stimulating clear air, powerful skies, and abundant sunshine. The summer months (mid Nov – mid April) have a good record for lengthy periods of fine weather. Be warned however that rainfall when it does fall tends to be heavy. Mountain weather can change quickly but local forecasting is excellent and is readily available.

### **Transport**

On the 10 day safari and between Tekapo and Mt Cook we travel in our own private bus or minibus. The journey from Queenstown-Tekapo (Ball Pass) and onward to Christchurch is made on an Intercity type coach. A flight from Christchurch to Queenstown in the middle is included.

### **Longer in New Zealand?**

If you are staying longer after the trip (or arriving early) our High Places NZ Office will be pleased to suggest and design itineraries & book walking tracks, hotels, buses, flights, arrange campervan or car hire. They offer a friendly service which is more reliable and personal than websites and usually less expensive than booking in your own country. Contact them direct:

Email: [pyo@highplaces.co.nz](mailto:pyo@highplaces.co.nz)



*Milford Sound*

### **Pacific Island stopover**

Our favourite is the Cook Islands, with very much a New Zealand style, NZ\$ currency, relaxed living etc. The main island, Rarotonga, is a classic Pacific island, 35kms circumference, with palm fringed beaches, coral lagoons and a rugged mountainous interior. If you are interested, see our website for Pacific Islands extension details, check out your international flight options then contact our NZ office for accommodation options.

## DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

*This daily description will always need to remain flexible. Times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals inclusive in the tour, i.e. breakfast, lunch, dinner.*

**This trip is 23 days ex NZ. The first and last days refer to the days of arrival and departure from New Zealand and are not necessarily the days you depart from or arrive back home.**

DAY 1 Arrive Christchurch. We stay close to the centre of town, near the museum, Art Gallery, Hagley Park and cafes. Since the 2010 earthquake there has been a spate of rebuilding and some of the city may still be shut off. If you are arriving from overseas you may succumb to jet lag but try not to go to sleep too soon. Hostel.

DAY 2 And we are off! We meet our guide and after a quick briefing we drive north to the wild and rocky Kaikoura coast. (Approx 2 hours) After a picnic lunch we pack up for an overnight hike and walk to Mt Fyffe hut in the seaward Kaikoura range. These spectacular mountains rise steeply from sea level providing a stunning backdrop to coastal views. A chance to get to know everyone in the cosy atmosphere of a 'Kiwi' mountain hut! 6 hours backpacking (10km). Camp/hut. (L,D)

DAY 3 Up early to climb to the summit of Mount Fyffe (1765m) and watch the sunrise over the Pacific Ocean. Superb views of the Kaikoura Peninsula below and the coastline stretching northwards. We descend back to the Mt Fyffe hut, then follow a track down the ridgeline to the carpark and a short drive out to the coast. This area is rich in marine wildlife due to the up welling of nutrients from deep underwater canyons and Kaikoura is arguably the key location for whalewatching in the entire southern hemisphere. Sperm whales live here feeding on the giant squid which inhabit the Hikurangi trench. A whale watching boat trip provides a thrilling opportunity to see whales, dolphins and seals in their natural environment. We then drive up the coast and camp at Marfells Beach. 4 hours backpacking (10km). Camp. (B,L,D)



*Kaikoura Peninsula with Seaward Kaikouras in winter*

DAY 4 Lake Rotoiti is a beautiful forest fringed glacial ribbon lake penetrating into the Nelson Lakes mountains which rise to over 2000m. This is the sub-alpine start of the immense mountain chain running the whole length of the South island, the Southern Alps. We skirt the edge of the lake passing through beautiful beech forest, the forest floor carpeted with bright green mosses. We branch off the main valley following Hukere Stream with its enchanting cascades. A wild campsite in a clearing beside the stream with views of high mountains all around. 6 hours backpacking (16km). Camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 5 A steep but rewarding climb upstream, passing waterfalls takes us into the Angelus Basin and a descent to the trappers hut at Lake Angelus, a large alpine

lake perched on a tussock covered saddle, surrounded by mountains. It is one of the finest mountain settings in New Zealand. If the weather is good we plan to follow the thin path onto the rocky summit of Mt Angelus (2084m) or there are other nearby trails. Entertainment may be provided by the kea, New Zealand's alpine parrot, an intelligent and inquisitive bird whose curiosity often leads to destructive behaviour. Normally we camp in the vicinity of the hut. 3 hours backpacking plus optional 2-3 hours for Angelus climb (9kms). Camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 6 Our walk-out is superb as we traverse the rocky and airy Robert ridge enjoying spectacular mountain scenery on all sides with views down to both Lake Rotoiti and it's sister lake, Rotoroa. On either side of the ridge, emerald tarns sparkle in alpine basins. When we reach the vehicle, there is time for a swim in the lake and some lunch before heading towards our peaceful coastal campsite in Marahau, gateway to the Abel Tasman National Park. 4 hours backpacking. (12kms). (B,L,D)



*Descending from Angelus*

DAY 7 Enjoy a whole day sea kayaking – the best way to explore the golden sand beaches, islands and sea caves of the park. Time to swim and lay back in the sun. If the conditions are right we may join the kayaks together and sail home on the gentle sea breeze. In the late afternoon we drive to Tapawera where we stay in a “classic Kiwi” camping ground. 6 hours kayaking. Camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 8 Today we pack-up for a 3-day hike in New Zealand’s second largest national park, Kahurangi, a vast uninhabited range of mountains just under 2000m and spread across much of the western side of the top of the South Island. After a steep climb through beech forest, we emerge out of the bush in the alpine shrub zone and stay in a hut or camp nearby. 6 hours backpacking (8km). Camp/hut. (B,L,D)

DAY 9 We hope for fine weather today to climb Mt Owen and visit one of the most recognisable of all the ‘Lord of the Rings’ locations – the caves of Moria. The geology here is fascinating – a glaciated karst landscape where the limestone has largely been metamorphosed into marble and is riddled with caves (where dwarves may dwell), the longest known system has over 36 km of passages. As we reach the sculptured marble maze of Mt Owen, some scrambling and route finding take us up and across the numerous limestone ‘pavements’ and edges (where the brave hobbits emerged from the mines of Moria). A tenuous track leads towards Mt Owen summit (1875m), too remote to be often visited, where a panorama of mountains give the first inkling of the vastness of the Kahurangi and Nelson Lakes ranges. Return to hut or campsite for another night in this incredible place. 6 hours hiking (10km). Camp/hut. (B,L,D)

DAY 10 Pack up camp and descend back down through beech forest to our vehicle. The road skirts the mountains to enter the rich wooded scenery of the upper Buller River. We retire to our overnight character cottage overlooking the Buller and Maruia Rivers. Enjoy a home-cooked meal, made from local organic produce. 5 hours backpacking (8km). Cottage. (B,L,D)

DAY 11 After sorting out our gear we head back to Christchurch via the Lewis Pass. Just before the pass we stop to dip into the roadside Maruia hot pools - welcome relief for any aching muscles and/or have an option of doing a short hike if the weather and time permits. We then continue on to Christchurch. Driving time approx 5 hours. 2 hours hiking (4km). Hostel. (B,L)

DAYS 12-13 Fly to Queenstown. **Queenstown:** The self-styled 'adrenalin capital of New Zealand' (the world?) – love it or hate it's a lot of fun for a day or two. 'Go for it!' River rafting, mountain biking, jetboating, hangliding, alpine and glacier flights, tandem parachuting, rock climbing, canyoning, river running, bungee jumping and much more! Or relax in one of the café/bars by the lakeshore. The choice is yours. Also time to buy food, get your hut tickets and prepare for the Routeburn Track. Hostel.

DAY 14 **Routeburn Track Day 1:** Leave Queenstown on the shuttle bus for the 90min drive along the side of Lake Wakatipu to the start of the track at Routeburn Shelter. The track begins easily, rising through beech forest and crossing several streams on swing-bridges to reach Routeburn Falls Hut. 3-4.5 hours backpacking (9km). Hut.

DAY 15 **Routeburn Track Day 2:** A classic mountain day beginning with a steady climb around Lake Harris to Harris Saddle (1255m). A viewpoint on top of Conical Hill reveals the distant Tasman Sea and the soaring alpine peaks of the Darran Mountains across the Hollyford Valley. The track continues now along an exhilarating high-level traverse, quite exposed in bad weather, before the final zig-zag descent down to Lake Mackenzie and the Mackenzie Hut – an idyllic location. 5-6 hours backpacking (11km). Hut.



*Lake Mackenzie, Routeburn Track*

DAY 16 **Routeburn Track Day 3 and Milford Sound:** An easier walkout traverses around rainforest clad hillsides and occasional clearings. The track passes a high and narrow waterfall, Earland Falls, with a good opportunity for a refreshing shower on a hot day! A short diversion to Key Summit for last views before emerging on the road to Milford Sound. Meet the shuttle bus and complete the dramatic journey, beneath towering granite walls, through an unlikely tunnel into a solid cliff, for a final 1000m swoop down to one of the world's great locations. The overnight motor-sailer leaves late afternoon to sail down the Sound beneath the vertical walls of Mitre Peak. There are kayaks on board or the intrepid can dive off the boat for a memorable swim before supper. The boat anchors for the night in a sheltered cove. 4-5½ hours backpacking (12km). Shared quad cabin. (D)

DAY 17 Usually another morning sail back down the Sound to the open sea with a look out for dolphins, seals and possibly penguins, before returning past sheer waterfalls to disembark. A ride back on the coach (5 hours) to Queenstown. Hostel. (B)

DAY 18 An easy transition day taking the morning bus from Queenstown towards Mt Cook (approx 4 hours) to Lake Tekapo township. Take a walk up Mt John to the Observatory? Hostel or guesthouse.

DAY 19 **BALL PASS:** Meet the guides and check gear and clothing at their base in Lake Tekapo. The drive to Mt Cook village along the shores of Lake Pukaki is full of anticipation as Mt Cook, known here as Aoraki, gradually fills the windscreen until it totally dominates the view. The first day starts with a steady climb up the Ball Ridge reaching Caroline Hut by the late afternoon (6 hours). (L,D)

DAY 20 Today is spent practicing snow and *Ball Pass Crossing* ice skills on the glacier and climbing up to the surrounding rock ridges. (B,L,D)

DAY 21 On the final morning you make an alpine start, crossing Ball Glacier to reach the pass soon after dawn. The descent is quite steep with fantastic views of the Hooker and Mueller Glaciers, Mt Sefton and the Copland Pass (9-10 hours). It is a long but tremendous day. Return to Lake Tekapo township. Hostel or guesthouse. (B,L)



*Ball Pass crossing*

DAY 22 In the early afternoon we catch a bus ride (4 hours) to Christchurch. Hostel.

DAY 23 What a trip! Depart Christchurch or continue with your own arrangements.

JL/ML 12/12