

WILDERNESS LODGE LAKE MOERAKI

TO WILDERNESS LODGE ARTHUR'S PASS

Trip notes for your journey

This is a journey of 372km (about 200 miles) involving 5½ to 6 hours of driving time. However, with magnificent scenery and numerous interesting places to stop along the way, we recommend that you allow as much time as possible. Key features along the route include: beautiful rainforest from the mountains to the sea; six large forest-fringed lakes; glistening snowy mountains; wild glacier rivers; the famous Fox and Franz Josef glaciers and tourist centres; the thriving West Coast town of Hokitika; the ascent to Arthur's Pass through the dramatic cleft of the Otira Gorge; and glorious alpine herbfields and shrublands across the summit of the pass itself.

The first place to buy petrol north of the Lake Moeraki Wilderness Lodge is at Fox Glacier. You should also fill up at Hokitika before setting out for Arthurs Pass. Note that the times given are driving times only.

Lake Moeraki Lodge to Fox Glacier (92kms – 1¼ hrs)

An easy drive through avenues of tall forest and lush farmland on mainly straight flat roads. Key features along this leg of the journey include Lake Paringa (20km), the café and salmon farm beside the Paringa River bridge (32km), a brief return to the coast at Bruce Bay (44km), and the crossing of three turbulent glacier rivers – the Karangarua (66km), Cook (86km) and Fox (90km) – at the point where they break free from the confines of their mountain valleys.

In fair weather, striking views are available of the Sierra Range from the Karangarua River bridge (66km), Mt La Perouse (3079m) from the bridge across the Cook River (88km) and Mt Tasman (3498m) from the bridge over the Fox River (91km). The long summit ridge of Mt Cook (3754) is also briefly visible from just south of the Ohinetamatea River (15km north of the Karangarua River) and again 4km further north on the approach to Bullock Creek. Magnificent panoramas of these highest peaks of the Southern Alps are also available a few kilometres down valley from Fox Glacier village on the road to Lake Matheson and Gillespies Beach.

Fox Glacier to Franz Josef (26km – 30 mins)

A winding road, which climbs and descends through forest three times as it crosses the forested moraine hills between these two famous West Coast glacier villages. At both Fox Glacier and Franz Josef access roads into the glacier valleys take less than ten minutes to drive, followed by a walk of about 30 minutes to the terminal faces of the

glaciers themselves. Guided glacier hikes, scenic flights, and easy forest walks are available at both locations, with the scenic gem of Lake Matheson (and striking views of Mt Cook and Mt Tasman) 6km down-valley from Fox Glacier village. There are also excellent Department of Conservation Visitor Centres at both Fox Glacier and Franz Josef villages.

Franz Josef to Hokitika (144km – 2 hours)

Generally easy flat driving through forests and farmland except for the short climb and descent of Mt Hercules between Whataroa (31km) and Harihari (64km). Striking vistas of the Southern Alps enhance this leg of the journey as do beautiful lakes Mapourika (14km), Wahapo (20km) Ianthe (82km) and Mahinapua (136km). Other attractions include the picturesque coastal settlement of Okarito (turn off 18km north of Franz Josef); the White Heron craft shop at Whataroa (31km) and white heron sanctuary on the Waitangiroto River (accessible only through tours from Whataroa between September and February); the Bushmans' Centre and cafe with it's giant sandfly at Pukekura (88km); and the historic gold-mining town of Ross with it's museum, mining relics and huge pit still being mined at the edge of the town (112kms).

The former goldfield's town of Hokitika is also a major attraction of this part of the West Coast and along with its splendid river-mouth location features excellent cafes, craft-shops, jade (pounamu) factories, historical buildings and museums and a bookshop specialising in new and second-hand West Coast books.

Hokitika to Arthur's Pass (96km – 1¼ hours)

From Hokitika the road continues north beside the Tasman Sea for 19 km to Kumara Junction where the road to Arthur's Pass (SH73) heads inland up the broad valley of the Taramakau River. (Greymouth, the largest town on the West Coast, is a further 19kms north from this junction). The small settlement of Kumara, 6km inland from this junction, provides the last opportunity to buy petrol this side of Arthur's Pass. From Kumara the road winds easily through farmland and forested flanks of mountains to the railway settlement of Otira (81km from Hokitika).

Beyond Otira the valley narrows and the road steepens although recent major highway reconstruction now make the climb to the pass from the western side very much less daunting than it used to be – although it is still dramatic. The ascent levels out among the subalpine shrublands and tussock grasslands on the summit of the pass (961m) from where the road descends gently through beach forest for a further 5km to the alpine village of Arthur's Pass and visitor centre for Arthur's Pass National Park.

Arthur's Pass Village to Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass (14km – 15 mins)

The narrow winding road through beech forest requires extra care for the first 8kms beyond Arthur's Pass before it emerges from the confines of the Bealey Valley into the expansive valley of the Waimakariri River. Peaks to the west at the head of the valley still retain a few small glaciers while down-valley to the east the beach forested hillsides quickly give way to a landscape of tawny tussock grasslands and scattered shrublands. From the bridge across the Waimakariri River it is about 3km to the entry to Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass, clearly signposted on the right-hand (south) side of the road midway between the bridges over Bruce and Broad streams.

Enjoy your journey. Drive safely. And remember KEEP TO THE LEFT.