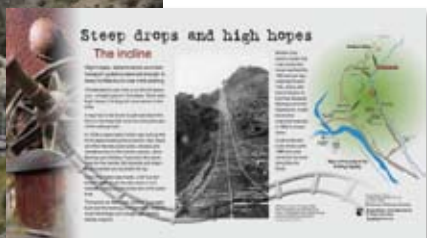


In 1983 Mt Somers and Staveley locals formed the Mt Somers Walkways Society. This led to the creation of what is now known as the Mt Somers Track. The track officially opened in 1987, the year the management of the area passed to the Department of Conservation (DOC). Since then there has been a close association between the two organisations.

Mt Somers Track; a 1–2 day tramp links the popular Pinnacles and Woolshed Creek huts and provides a circuit around Mt Somers. If you are intending to walk only one way and require vehicle transport, contact the Staveley Store (phone: 03 303 0859) before you start your trip.

There are other walks from 30 minutes to four hours amongst impressive volcanic rock formations, historic mines and shady forest trees.

Columns of rhyolitic basalt make this one of the best climbing areas in Canterbury. Over 60 routes have been developed on the fluted crags behind Pinnacles Hut. There are hunting opportunities for red deer, chamois and pig. All hunters must have a hunting permit, obtainable from any DOC office. Also check [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)



One of the information panels telling the mining stories—this one near the historic Blackburn Mine site

## Takata whenua – first people of the land

Hine Paaka, a huge matai, stood nobly on the edge of the inland foothills near an important north-south route between the hills and extensive swamps. Her great height and the elevation made her stand out on the plains from a distance. She was a landmark of great importance.

Hine Paaka is named after the wife of Kāi Tahu chief, Maru, who lived in the late 1600s. For hundreds of years bird-catching parties sought out this tree; travelling from far as way as Kaiapoi and Banks Peninsula to visit her. In the autumn and early winter when berries were ripe, rōpū parties would make the long journey to set snare perches, or use birding spears to catch kākā, kererū and other birds in the tree and surrounding forests. Hine Paaka finally blew down in 1945.

## European history

Saw milling was a major factor in the development of the Staveley area. The first mill began operation in 1876 at Bushside and this was closely followed by others.

Settlers on the Canterbury plains used Alford Forest, which had a railhead, as one of their few sources of timber. Kaikahikatea, beech, matai and tōtara, were dragged by bullock teams to saw pits where they were cut into timber for houses in mid Canterbury.

Staveley was the economic centre of the foothills area and became a thriving business and industrial centre with church, hall, butchery, bakery, general store, creamery, blacksmith shop, sawmill, lime quarry and kilns. A marked contrast with the Staveley of today!

Mt Somers township grew with the development of good transport links and the exploitation of resources in the area. Coal was discovered on the Mt Somers Run in 1856 with a commercial coal mine being operated by 1864. This was soon followed by a stone quarry and lime kilns.

Mining development was hampered by a lack of suitable transport. This was partially solved by the completion of a branch railway line in 1886 connecting Mt Somers to the South Island Main Trunk Line.

However, getting coal and limestone to Mt Somers was still a problem. This was resolved by the construction of tramways from the mines and quarries to the rail head. The route of one of these tramways follows the Woolshed Creek access road and can be seen from Ashburton Gorge Road near the Buxton Lime Kilns.

## Native plants you might see

The forest is only a vestige of the extensive tracts that once covered the foothills. Catastrophic fires, started accidentally or to clear the land for farming, swept through destroying the forest. Later burning of alpine tussock reduced the height at which forest occurs, except a band on Mt Somers/Te Kiekie where the timber line is at 1200 m.

The forest remnant is dominated by beech, especially mountain beech/tawhairauriki with some silver beech/tawhai occupying the most favourable sites. Other trees include southern rata, māpou, broadleaf/pāpāuma and putaputāweta, mountain celery pine/toatoa and mountain ribbonwood/houhere.

Above the tree line, subalpine scrub includes snow tōtara, *Dracophyllum*, mountain flax/wharariki, snow tussock and snowberry.

## ... and native animals

Bellbird/korimako and silvereye/tauhou are the commonest native birds in the forested areas though rifleman/tititipounamu, fantail/piwakawaka, and tomtit/miromiro are also present. Above the bush line the New Zealand falcon/kārearea, New Zealand pipit/pihoihoi and Australasian harrier/kāhu may be seen.

The Bluff wētā *Deinacrida elegans* (right) is found in the Mt Somers area. With distinctive red, black and white-banded legs they can weigh up to 16 grams or about half the weight of a mouse. This high-altitude giant wētā has only been found in the Kaikoura ranges and Mt Somers. It is an ancient genus of similar antiquity to the rhyolite that makes up the mountain!



Photo: Warren Chinn

## Take care visiting natural areas

**Map.** This pamphlet is a general guide but is not a substitute for a topographical map. Use map series NZTopo50 BX19 and BX20.

**Equipment.** Bad weather is possible regardless of the season. Carry warm clothing and include water-proof jacket and over-trousers. A sleeping bag, food, cooking stove, utensils and fuel are required for overnight stays.

**Wasps.** Introduced wasps feed on beech honey dew and during the summer there can be very high numbers. Be aware that wasp nests may be close to the track.

**Waterways.** It is not recommended to drink directly from main waterways. Water should be treated chemically or by boiling or filtration due to the risk of Giardia.

**Emergency Dial 111.**



NEW ZEALAND  
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CARE CODE

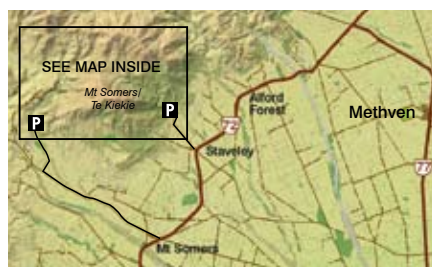
- Protect plants and animals
- Remove rubbish
- Bury toilet waste
- Keep streams and lakes clean
- Take care with fires
- Camp carefully
- Keep to the track
- Consider others
- Respect our cultural heritage
- Enjoy your visit
- Toitu te whenua (Leave the land undisturbed)

## Getting there

Starting points for Mt Somers Track are either from Staveley or Mt Somers township.

**Staveley** – turn off Inland Scenic Route 72 at Staveley and follow the road to the Sharplin Falls car park, which has a shelter, toilets and an information panel.

**Mt Somers township** – from the township, follow Ashburton Gorge Road for approximately 10 km before turning right onto Jig Road which will take you to the Woolshed Creek picnic area. Here you will find a large grassy, sheltered picnic area with toilets and information.



## Further information

Contact a DOC office, an i-SITE or see [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

Department of Conservation  
Raukapuka Area office  
North Terrace, Geraldine.  
Phone (03) 693 1010

Suggestions for corrections or improvements should be emailed to: [recreation@doc.govt.nz](mailto:recreation@doc.govt.nz)



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# Mt Somers Track



MID CANTERBURY



Approaching Woolshed Creek Hut on Miners Track. Photo: G. Iles






## Check, Clean, Dry

Stop the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests. Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all items before entering, and when moving between, waterways.



Map background model by Geographix

**Track classifications**

-  **Walking track** – well-formed easy walk from a few minutes to a day
-  **Easy tramping track** – well-formed track for comfortable overnight tramping/hiking
-  **Tramping track** – backcountry skills and experience required

**Mt Somers Track**

All track times and distances are one way

**Sharplin Falls Track 45 minutes, 1.2 km**

This track passes through beech forest. Sharplin Falls, named after an early Staveley sawyer, drop several metres over the Mt Somers southern fault system.

**Sharplin Falls Track junction to Pinnacles Hut 3 hours, 5.2 km**

From Sharplin Falls Track junction the path climbs steeply up to Duke Knob before following Bowyers Stream to the hut.

**Pinnacles Hut to Woolshed Creek Hut 3 hours, 6.2 km**

Pinnacles Hut is named after the rock formations on the northern face of Mt Somers, formed by the cooling of very hot sticky lava flows some 90 million years ago.

From the hut follow markers through tussock and sub-alpine scrub to Mt Somers saddle. It is a steady climb to the saddle, from which views of the Taylor and Old Man ranges dominate the scenery.

On the descent towards Morgan Stream a sign indicates a short side-trip to view some interesting boulder features referred to as 'caves'.

Returning to the main track, follow the markers across Morgan Stream and Woolshed Creek to Woolshed Creek Hut.

**Mt Somers Track (south face)**

All track times and distances are one way

Note: From Woolshed Creek Hut, Woolshed Creek picnic area can be reached via Miners Track or Rhyolite Ridge Track.

**Woolshed Creek Hut to Woolshed Creek car park via Miners Track 3 hours, 5 km**

From the hut the track rises to a high point (934 m) with



superb views of the upper Ashburton Gorge, before descending to the old Blackburn Mine. You will see the hand-built jig that transported coal from the mine to the railway wagons waiting below. At the bottom of the jig the track follows the

route of the tramway to Woolshed Creek car park.

**Woolshed Creek Hut to Rhyolite Ridge Track junction via Mt Somers Track (sth face) 2 hours, 4.6 km**

The route takes in dynamic scenery with regenerating mountain beech forest/tawhairauriki within a landscape of waterfalls, deep icy pools and rocky tors. From the hut the route climbs some 500 metres to a local feature known as the Bus Stop Overhang. From here the track crosses the face of Mt Somers to link with Rhyolite Ridge Track.

**Rhyolite Ridge Track junction to Mt Somers Summit Track junction 3 hours 30 min, 6 km**

Passing around the southern face of Mt Somers through a mix of open grassland and forested catchments, this section of track eventually rises to its highest point (1080 m) at the junction of Mt Somers Summit Track. Acland Shelter provides welcome shelter and rest after about 4 km (1 hour 30 min) from the junction.

**Mt Somers Summit Track junction to Sharplin Falls car park 2 hours 30 min, 2.7 km**

The final steep downhill section is through regenerating forest areas but is open enough to continue to provide interesting views to the east.

**Other tracks**

As well as being popular picnic spots, Woolshed Creek and Sharplin Falls car parks are the starting points for a number of day walks.

All track times and distances are one way

**Nature Trail 30 minutes, 1 km**

Cross the bridge over Woolshed Creek before continuing up the true left of Woolshed Creek. The river is then forded\* before climbing out through the dross (old coal dust) screened from coal at the bottom of the jig before returning to Woolshed Creek car park.

\*Take care fording the river, if in doubt return the way you came.

**Rhyolite Ridge Track 1 hour, 1.8 km**

Follows a rocky ridge linking Mt Somers Track (south face), with Woolshed Creek car park.

**Sidewinder Track 45 minutes, 1 km**

This steep hill track begins with a short walk through a small pocket of silver beech/tawhai that escaped the fires that swept through Ashburton Gorge. The track then climbs steeply up to and through the tailings of the old Blackburn Mine where it links with Miners Track to provide either a return trip back to the Woolshed Creek car park or a chance to continue on to Woolshed Creek Hut.

**Mt Somers/Te Kieke summit**

The summit (1687 m) and its surrounding plateau is worthy of a visit, with 360-degree views of the surrounding mountains and coastal plain.

From Woolshed Creek car park follow Rhyolite Ridge Track then along the high plateau (unmarked).

From Sharplin Falls car park it is a 5-hour one-way trip to the summit (4.7 km).

*In winter this face gets very little sunlight making the snow hard and icy. An ice axe, crampons, and some mountaineering experience are required to reach the summit.*

**Huts**

Woolshed Creek Hut sleeps 26 on sleeping platforms while Pinnacles Hut sleeps 19 on single and double bunks. Water is supplied from either a rainwater tank or directly from a stream. All drinking water should be sterilised, filtered or boiled for three minutes before use.

Both huts have a wood or coal burner for heating but cooking facilities and utensils are not provided.

Back country hut tickets should be bought in advance from Mt Somers or Staveley stores, i-SITES or any DOC office. Annual hut passes (available from DOC offices) may also be used. Huts cannot be booked and they sometimes become overcrowded; please be considerate of other users.

Acland Shelter provides a rest point but is not to be used for overnight stays.

**Note:** If you are intending to spend one night at Woolshed Creek Hut before returning to Woolshed Creek car park then we suggest you walk in on Miners Track. Either return the same way or along Mt Somers Track (south face), before descending Rhyolite Ridge Track to the car park