

TE ANAU TO MILFORD

TE ANAU TO MILFORD SOUND - SCENIC ROUTE

119km of sealed road; about 2.5 hours driving time, not counting stops to look at the view, or to take walks. There's no petrol available and no accommodation en route, except at Te Anau Downs (30km from Te Anau) and Gunns Camp (8km down the Hollyford Valley). DOC has provided several basic campsites/picnic sites in picturesque settings, especially in the Eglinton Valley. Set out early to avoid most of the tourist coaches.

This is, we believe, the most stunning scenic route in New Zealand. The road winds through farm land with views of Lake Te Anau and mountains beyond to the broad expanse of the Eglinton Valley. Gradually the valley narrows; dense beech forests flank the road which passes Lakes Gunn, Fergus and Lochie, climbs up to the Divide (530 metres) and descends to the Hollyford Valley. Awesome granite walls tower around you as the road climbs again to a massive rock face. Penetrating this great wall is the 1.2 km Homer Tunnel.

William Homer, who climbed the saddle now named after him, proposed the tunnel as early as 1889. A few workers excavating with hand tools began its construction in 1935, but it was not until 1954 that it opened for the first private car. Three men died while working on the tunnel, and avalanches destroyed the tunnel entrance and a number of machines during its construction. In winter and spring, avalanches remain a threat and sometimes cause the closure of the road approaching the tunnel.

As you make the steep zigzag descent from the tunnel between sheer rock walls, look out for a view of Fiordland's highest mountain. Mt Tutoko (2723m) is a challenge to mountaineers because of difficult access and its exposure to bad weather.

WALKS ON THE TE ANAU - MILFORD HIGHWAY

Allow plenty of time to do some of the short signposted walks as you drive towards Milford Sound. At the Divide, you can walk the first part of the Routeburn Track, branching off to Key Summit for a splendid panoramic view of the Darran and Humboldt Mountains and the Hollyford Valley. Our pick of the day walks in the area, though, is the Lake Marian Walk which puts you in the heart of the mountains.

❖ Mirror Lakes Walk - 10 minutes return

A boardwalk takes you through beech trees to a lookout over the lakes which provide beautiful reflections on a calm day.

❖ Lake Gunn Nature Walk - 40 minutes return



On our most recent visit we encountered a film crew making an episode for a world series called 'Sacred Planet'. We were amused to see them using a smoke machine - admittedly, it was a lovely, sunny day - to add atmosphere to a

forest whose trees swathed with moss have their own magic. The track winds through forest with buttressed red beech trees and other natives, identified by plaques, to the lake outlet. It takes you beside a delightful stream before returning in a loop to the carpark. Further along the carpark road is a DOC camping and picnic site.

❖ Key Summit Walk - 3 hours return

The Routeburn Track starts at the Divide where there's a shelter and toilets. You follow the track up through silver beech to above the bushline where you turn off for a steep 20 minute climb to Key Summit. A plane table identifies the surrounding, spectacular snow-capped peaks. A boardwalk takes you across the summit on a nature walk with more great views.

❖ Lake Marian Walk - 3 hours return

Signposted 1km down the Hollyford Road.



You start by crossing the rock-strewn Hollyford River on a new swingbridge - a great improvement on the old, daunting wire contraption! As you climb steadily through the forest, you leave the sounds of the river behind, but the roar of a turbulent mountain stream soon takes over. An impressive boardwalk around a bluff provides a grand view of water cascading over huge, mossy boulders. If time is limited, it's worthwhile walking this far only (about 30 minutes return). Eighty minutes later, after a fairly steep climb, you emerge from the bush into a stunning hanging valley with beautiful Lake Marian as its centrepiece. What makes you catch your breath, though, is a feeling of awe at being surrounded by the massive peaks of the Darran Range.

❖ The Chasm - 15 minutes return

On the Milford side of the tunnel.

A sealed path and boardwalk take you to where the Cleddau River is forced into a deep ravine and passes under a rock bridge before plunging down another narrow chasm.

The concentrated power of the water and pebbles grinding on boulders have created fascinating rock formations.