

Mount Fyffe and the Seaward Kaikoura Range Ka Whata Tū o Rakihouia Conservation Park



Introduction

Summer-bare or plastered with winter's snowy coat, Mount Fyffe and the Seaward Kaikoura Range dominate the Kaikoura skyline. These little-known mountains safeguard some unusual natural inhabitants, and provide recreation opportunities ranging from a family stroll to a serious backcountry journey.

How to get there

Kaikoura is on State Highway 1 along the South Island east coast. It is 154 km south of Picton and 183 km north of Christchurch. Regular bus and train services pass through the town.



Mount Fyffe car park is about 15 km from town via Ludstone, Swamp and finally Postman's Roads. To get to Fyffe-Palmer Scenic Reserve drive out of town on Ludstone Road; turn right onto Mt Fyffe Road and follow it to its end. The Hapuku road end is 3 km along Parson's Road which leaves State Highway 1 10 km north of town. An on-demand shuttle service is available to these places.

About the mountains

Geologically this area is young and unstable. In many places the bedrock has been exposed by slips and the layered, once horizontal rocks can be seen, twisted incredibly by massive upheaval over millions of years. Huge volumes of rock have spewed out of the mountains to create the short plain that connects the mainland to Kaikoura Peninsula.

The vegetation varies greatly with the terrain, from riverbed and flat to mountain slope and alpine basin. Diversity is also added as vegetation recovers from slips of different ages.

The original river flats vegetation would have been podocarp forest (mataī, miro, tōtara and rimu). Beech forest is largely absent; instead Hall's tōtara and mountain celery pine dominate the mountain slopes below a fringe of sub-alpine shrubs. So steep and unstable are the mountains, that above this level many

barren screes occur where elsewhere mini-forests of tussock would grow.

A number of shrubby plants such as pink broom, Marlborough rock daisy and New Zealand lilac occur in Southern Marlborough but nowhere else. Vulnerable to browsing by goats and helicopter spraying for farming, these plants find a refuge in the bluffy and uninhabited Kaikoura mountains. Retirement from grazing and animal control have helped the natural revegetation process and previously unstable slopes are slowly stabilising.

Uwerau Nature Reserve protects the world's largest colony of Hutton's shearwater. Each early summer, when snow still lies on the ground, thousands of them fly to their tussock 'city in the sky' to mate. During this time they are often seen feeding near the coast.

Other birdlife in the mountains includes the brown creeper, tomtit, robin, bellbird, rifleman, wood pigeon, falcon and kea. The large areas of regenerating forest provide a rich supply of insect food for the smaller birds.

The high ranges are also home to some animals usually associated with much warmer habitats: a native snail, three species of giant wētā and the endemic Kaikoura black-eyed gecko.

The riverbeds are generally bouldery with few expansive flats. Floods occur frequently; the 1993 flood swept away entire communities of 3–5 metre-high tutu in some valleys, replacing the usual bouldery beds with a metres-thick mass of sediment.

History

Little record exists of Māori knowledge of the Kaikoura Range. It is likely that the Waitaha, followed by the Ngāti Māmoe and Ngāi Tahu tribes explored the range to hunt favoured birds and journey to the West Coast in search of greenstone.

In 1843 Scottish-born Robert Fyffe started the first whaling station at Kaikoura. Six years later he introduced the first sheep and milking goats to Kaikoura. In 1854 he was joined by his cousin George who leased an area north of Kaikoura known as the 'Mt Fyffe Run'—thus Mt Fyffe was named.

What to do

Mt Fyffe (1602 m), 8 h return

Superb views over the Kaikoura plains and peninsula reward those who climb on Mt Fyffe. On a clear day the view at higher levels includes Banks Peninsula and the North Island. From Mount Fyffe car park follow the 4WD road up the mountain's long south-west ridge.

The road goes right to the summit; a return journey of about 8 hours.

Those with less time or energy could go as far as Mt Fyffe Hut (8 bunks) (5 hours return) or the lookout point near a firepond, which is just an hour above the car park. The Spaniard Spur route offers a steeper alternative route to the upper mountain via the Kowhai River.



Hinau Track, 45 min loop

This track also starts at the Mount Fyffe car park. It is a 45-minute loop through an unusual forest with a number of large hīnau trees. There are also many māhoe, putaputawētā, broadleaf, tree fuchsia and pigeonwood. For a contrast in vegetation the track passes through a stand of kānuka. Classified 'walking track', the Hinau Track is well formed and suitable for families.

Kowhai-Hapuku circuit, 2-3 days

This rugged 2-3-day trip over Kowhai Saddle is typical Kaikoura country. It is classified as a route and in places is not marked at all; there are no bridges. Boots and experience at backcountry route-finding are recommended.

Mt Fyffe car park to Kowhai Hut (6 bunks) (4 hours). Most of the route is in the Kowhai riverbed; in places rock cairns mark short sections across the few riverflats.

Kowhai Hut to Hapuku Hut (6 bunks) (6 hours). Kowhai Saddle (1153 m) is visible from Kowhai Hut, to the north-east. Just above the hut follow cairns beside a side stream leading directly to the saddle. On the Hapuku side the route descends to the riverbed. Follow the river to Hapuku Hut, mostly on the true left through scrub.

Hapuku Hut to Grange Road (4 hours). Follow the Hapuku valley bed and banks for about 30 minutes. Look out on the true right side for a track which skirts the deep Hapuku Gorge. The forest around the gorge is both beautiful and interesting: montane species like celery pine, hebe shrubs and Hall's tōtara occur among lowland species like tawa, hīnau, tītoki, pigeonwood and ngaio. New Zealand lilac and Marlborough rock daisy grow on the bluffs and riverflats near the gorge. Below the gorge a combination of route and track follows the riverbed down to Grange Road.

Fyffe–Palmer Track, 1 h 45 min return

This track leads from the end of Mt Fyffe Road, initially following poles across farmland to the regenerating forest of Fyffe–Palmer Scenic Reserve. There is a picnic area along the track with excellent views. The forest of the Forest Loop Track is dominated by mataī, tōtara and rimu. There are many other shrub and tree species. Walking time, including the loop track, is 1 h 45 min (return).

Barratts Bivvy–Manakau

Manakau (2610 m) is a popular climb and Barratts Bivvy (3 bunks) is a good starting point for the ascent. To reach the bivvy you need to follow the marked route up the Hapuku River to the junction of the North and South Branch, and from here, the unmarked riverbed of the North Branch. Allow a full day's climbing from the bivvy for a return trip. Hapuku car park to Barratts Bivvy 5 hours.

Mountain biking

Mountain bikes are permitted on the Mount Fyffe Track. It is very steep; both the ascent and descent will challenge those who try it. Please stay in control of your bike and give way to walkers.

Climbing

Manakau (2610 m) and Te Ao Whekere (2590 m) are the most rewarding climbs. A winter traverse on foot or skis is a major undertaking.

Although the routes are not difficult, they are very long and remote. Climbers should be fit and well equipped, prepared to camp out or snow cave, and must seek permission from landowners for access to some areas.

Hunting

Red deer, chamois and pigs are found in the mountains. Hunters must seek permission for access in places and carry a hunting permit from the Department of Conservation.



Standard huts have mattresses, water supply and toilet. Wood heaters are provided at huts below the bush line. The Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Tickets are required.



Walking track

- Easy-to-moderate walking from a few minutes to a day.
- Track is mostly well formed, some sections may be steep, rough or muddy.
- Suitable for people with low-to-moderate fitness and abilities.
- Clearly signposted. Stream and river crossings are bridged.
- Walking shoes or light tramping/hiking boots required.



Tramping track

- Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking.
- Track is mostly unformed with steep, rough or muddy sections.
- Suitable for people with good fitness. Moderate to high-level backcountry skills and experience (including navigation and survival skills) required.
- Track has markers, poles or rock cairns. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Tramping/hiking boots required.



Route

- Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking.
- Track unformed and natural, rough, muddy or very steep.
- Suitable for people with above average fitness. High-level backcountry skills and experience (including navigation and survival skills) required.
- Complete self-sufficiency required.
- Track has markers, poles or rock cairns. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Sturdy tramping/hiking boots required.





Mountain biking grade 4 (advanced)


A mixture of long, steep climbs, narrow track, poor traction and obstacles that are difficult to avoid or jump over. Generally exposed at the track's outside edge. Most riders will find some sections easier to walk.



Please remember

 **Backcountry huts:** A Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Tickets are required to stay in the Mt Fyffe, Kowhai and Hapuku huts. Hut Tickets are available at Kaikoura i-SITE and Backcountry Hut Passes are available from DOC offices.

 **Weather:** The weather is prone to sudden change, particularly easterly and southerly storms. Snow can fall in any season and the rivers are very flood-prone.

 **Safety:** The Seaward Kaikouras and Mt Fyffe should not be taken lightly. Even for a short walk to the lookout on Mt Fyffe on a fine day, a windbreaker is necessary.

All backcountry visitors should seek detailed advice and leave their intentions with someone reliable. Always carry warm, waterproof clothing and plenty of food.

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468
Report any safety hazards
or conservation emergencies
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111

Remember your safety is your responsibility. To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call
DOC HOTline 0800 362 468.



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

Further information

To find out more call into Kaikoura i-SITE:

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West End

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