

Alpine Guides

Aoraki/Mount Cook, New Zealand

Across the Main Divide

Summer 2010/11



Jem at the top of the Rudolf Glacier. Photo by Trev Streat

Cross the Main Divide of New Zealand's Southern Alps

An 8-day high-alpine mountain journey
Flexible date options - to suit your travel plans
Low guide to participant ratio

Leading New Zealand Guiding Since 1966

Across the Main Divide

Few mountain journeys rival the adventure of crossing a high-alpine mountain pass. This is especially true of a trip across the Main Divide of New Zealand's Southern Alps.

The mountain landscape changes dramatically across the north-south watershed that makes up the backbone of the South Island.

From your high vantage point on Graham Saddle (2,635 metres) on one side are the high nevé's of Westland National Park, with breath-taking views of the Tasman Sea and temperate forest. On the other, the steep glaciers and tumbling icefalls leading to braided river valleys, and the dry grasslands of the Mount Cook and Mackenzie Region.

The trip was first made by George Graham (after whom the pass is named) and Tom Fyfe in 1894. These hardy types walked in from the West Coast via the Franz Josef Glacier and Almer Hut (1,700 metres)

The journey, now

Alpine Guides' trip involves flying from Mount Cook to Pioneer Hut (2,360 metres) at the head of the Fox Glacier.

From there we traverse Explorer Glacier through West Hoe Pass (2,501 metres) and across the Davis Snowfield to Centennial Hut (2,400 metres) at the head of the Franz Josef Glacier.

The Main Divide is crossed through Graham Saddle, descending the Rudolf Glacier, and over-nighting at De la Beche Hut (1,450 metres) before the final walk out.



Pioneer Hut

Along the way your guide will provide instruction where needed, and you will have the opportunity to climb one or two peaks - as time and weather allow.

Season: November to mid-February

Crevassing around Graham Saddle increases during late summer and can eventually 'cut off' the route. In late summer (after mid-February) an alternate descent route is possible - for appropriately experienced participants - via climbing The Minarets (3,027 metres) and walking down De la Beche Ridge.

We recommend booking your trip to finish by the end of February to have the best chance of success.

Experience Required

Crossing the Main Divide, and particularly the trip through Graham Saddle, is not for beginner mountaineers. It is an achievable goal for those with a basic alpine climbing background.

A high level of fitness is required. Some days may involve more than 8 hours on foot carrying all your equipment. Confident cramponing, through sometimes exposed areas (in hard conditions), is required, along with good abseiling technique and confidence in crossing crevassed terrain.

Minimum experience required:

- High Level of aerobic fitness
- Basic rope/rock climbing skills
- Previous crampon/ice axe use

As a minimum prerequisite our [Mountain Experience Course](#) offers a perfect introduction to the skills of mountaineering.

Previous participants from a [Technical Mountaineering Course](#) will find this trip a great extension to their climbing resumés.

Some instruction will be given to maintain a high safety standard.

This will focus on:

- Glacier travel and crevasse rescue
- Abseiling, belay techniques, and anchor systems
- Snow and Ice Climbing

2010/11 Pricing

Across the Main Divide is an 8-day package

- One or 2 participants per guide
- You can choose the dates

Across The Main Divide uses the same flexible format as our [Ascents Program](#) and [Private Instruction & Guiding](#) packages. The length of 8 days allows time for access and egress, some instruction, and to work around changing weather and snow conditions.

1 person rate: NZ\$5550

2 person rate: NZ\$3350 per person

- The maximum guide to client ratio is [1 guide to 2 participants](#)
- For trips with [3 or more participants at least 2 guides](#) will be required

The price includes all of the following:

- Guiding fees
- All meals (including snacks and energy bars)
- Aircraft access to Pioneer Hut
- Hut fees & local accommodation
- Local transport
- Some technical equipment (see the equipment checklist, [page 8](#))
- Local accommodation

We buy in fresh produce for every program we run so you are guaranteed to eat well. Most dietary regimes can be catered for. Please make a note of what you like to eat on your booking form.

How to Book

We will provide a guide to work around your travel plans (subject to availability). [The first step is to contact us with your proposed dates.](#)

Please note that we do not have guides standing by waiting for work. “Walk-in” and short-notice enquiries generally cannot be filled. We recommend making reservations well in advance for Private Instruction.

[For our most popular period \(December through February\) at least 2 months advance booking is recommended.](#)

Reporting Details

Unless otherwise arranged, the program is designed to start at **08:30** on the first day in Mount Cook Village and **finish at 17:00** on the final day. A morning start makes most effective use of time, allowing you to fly into the mountains by lunch time.

Alternatively, we can arrange to start at 13:30, and finish at 12:00 noon on the last day, to better fit in with public bus services.

If you take the later start option it is less likely that you will be able to fly into the mountains on the first day. Ensure you choose the right start time on your booking form.

If you arrive in Aoraki/Mount Cook on the day before your trip begins, your guide will probably not be available. Our office staff will be happy to answer any questions you have. Your guide will look after equipment rental, and other gear requirements at the start of your trip. This takes on average 2 hours.

[See the “Pre-trip Information Notes” for more details on transport options.](#)

Trip Organisation

When dealing with the dynamic mountain environment it is not realistic to plan rigidly fixed itineraries. We take a flexible approach and work around the prevailing weather and conditions to get the most from your time available.

At the start of your trip your guide will discuss an initial outline of the plan and carry out an equipment check. You then head into the mountains at the first possible opportunity.

We aim to have you back in Mount Cook Village by late afternoon on the final day.



High on Fox Glacier neve.

Proposed Itinerary

The mountains keep to no human agenda. We must be flexible and realistic with objectives, to work around the weather and snow conditions that are encountered

The following is a proposed time-line for crossing the Main Divide given ideal weather. 'Climbing days' allow us to tackle some of the many peaks enroute, work around the weather, or simply relax and take a day out to enjoy and contemplate the mountains.

Day 1: Meet your guide, sort your gear, fly to Pioneer Hut. Familiarisation with area, practice roping up for glacier travel.

Day 2: Refresher for skills - including crampon footwork and crevasse rescue.

Day 3: Climbing day.

Day 4: Travel to Centennial Hut - this journey involves crossing Explorer Glacier through West Hoe Pass. The typical trip to Centennial is about 5 hours, but may be longer due to snow/route conditions.

Day 5: Climbing day.

Day 6: Climbing/skills refresher in preparation to cross Graham Saddle.

Day 7: Cross Graham Saddle and descend to De la Beche Hut. This is a big day with a 1,200 descent over moderately difficult terrain. Some route-finding and abseiling is required. This section can only be done with good weather.

Day 8: Walk from De la Beche Hut to a 4WD pick-up at the road end, and a cold beer. This is another long day involving 6-8 hours of travel over glacial moraine

What You Will Carry

When the trip travels into the mountains you will have to carry with you all your clothing, equipment, and a share of the group gear and food. Possessions you do not need will be stored at Alpine Guides base.

Only when you move between huts or travel out of the mountains will it be necessary to carry everything. This means your pack's weight will vary from about 5-7 kg for a normal day, and up to 15 kg when you travel between huts or walk out.

Try to keep your personal and non-essential items to a minimum to allow room for important items like food, and to reduce the weight of your load. This is particularly important if your group walks out at the end of the trip.

Check the equipment list (on [page 8](#)), and talk to us before the trip begins if you have any questions.

You will not require a daypack in the mountains. If you choose to bring one it will be useful for village-based activities.

Aircraft Access & Egress

The cost of air access to Pioneer Hut is built into the price. When possible we try to combine flights with other climbers to minimise aircraft use and impact on the mountain environment.

Egress from the mountains

Crossing the Main Divide is designed as a walk-out trip.

Flying Out:

Although we will try to avoid this, in some cases it may be necessary to fly out. This could be due to changing weather, snow conditions, or if your guide is concerned with your fitness or ability.

Your guide is the sole arbiter of whether you need to fly out - safety is our most important priority.

Flying out is an extra cost that is not included in the fee. Please budget for this.

The possible options are as follows:

Option 1. Fly back to Mount Cook. This cost can vary from \$490 to \$1,100, depending on flight logistics on the day. This cost can be reduced through sharing with other parties.

Option 2. (Requires 2 days) Fly to Fox Glacier Township from Pioneer Hut by helicopter (\$450) then travel by bus to Wanaka, where you will be picked up by Alpine Guides staff.

Option 3. Walk down to Chancellor Hut and fly to Fox Glacier Township via helicopter (\$250) then travel by bus to Wanaka, where you will be picked up by Alpine Guides staff.

Option 4. On the final day travel 1 hour on foot to a helicopter pick-up point on the Tasman Glacier white ice below De la Beche Hut - avoiding the final 6 to 8 hour walk out over glacial moraine. Cost is approx. NZ\$700, depending on flight logistics on the day.

Local Transport

Road transportation in the local area is included in the pricing. This covers any driving trips that need to be made in the course of your trip. For trips where longer drives (exceeding 75 km) are required (in addition to air access) we will discuss possible additional costs involved prior to booking.

Equipment Checklist

Refer to the [equipment check-list on page 8](#) for the specific gear list for this program and the items of clothing and personal kit you will need.

Please use your discretion when selecting clothing. Plan for colder conditions through November to mid-December, and warmer conditions from December through late-February.

Check the "Notes on Equipment and Clothing" for more details. Contact us if you have any questions.

Optional items

Not compulsory. Feel free to bring along any of the items optional listed, if you wish.

The rest of the details...

You'll find answers to most questions in our additional detailed notes: [Pre-trip Information Notes](#), and [Equipment and Clothing](#).

These are designed to help you plan and prepare for your Alpine Guides trip. Download from our website using the links below.

Pre-trip Information

Includes details on bus travel to Mount Cook, insurance, personal fitness, accommodation, and more...

http://www.alpineguides.co.nz/download/notes/pretrip_info.pdf (600 Kb)

Equipment & Clothing

What to look for when choosing clothing and equipment for mountaineering in New Zealand

<http://www.alpineguides.co.nz/download/notes/equipment.pdf> (750 Kb)



Himalayan Thar, near De la Beche Hut. View across last section of the journey, the Tasman Glacier moraine. Photo by Trev Streat

Equipment & Clothing Checklist

Across The Main Divide

Use the check list below to ensure you bring along the gear specifically for your trip. Please try to let us know what you need to rent as soon as possible **before** you arrive. Get in touch if you have any questions.

	Bring ✓	Borrow ✓
1. Equipment provided free of charge		
Ice Axe		
Ice Hammer		
Crampons - 12 point, semi automatic		
Belay Device		
Ice Screw x 2		
Snow stake		
Prusiks x 3 (1 long, 2 short), Sling x 2 (1 long, 1 short)		
Karabiners: large screw-gate x 3, snap-link straight gate x 5		
Avalanche Transceiver (provided if required)		
Snow Shovel (provided if required)		

Use our gear free of charge, or bring your own

Calculate your approx. rental cost below.

2. Equipment and Clothing for rent	Bring ✓	Rent ✓	Cost/day	x # days	Total
Mountaineering Boots			15		
Sleeping Bag - 3 season bag			15		
Backpack, 55-65 litres			7		
Helmet			3		
Harness			5		
Hiking Poles / each (optional)			5		
Storm Jacket			10		
Overtrousers (full length leg zip if possible)			10		
Gaiters			5		
Total estimated rental cost					

3. Required Personal Equipment (not available to rent)

- Headlamp
- Sunglasses - good quality wrap-around
- Ski Goggles (for white-out conditions)
- Water Bottles 2 x 1 litre widemouth (Nalgene)
- Waterproof pack liner
- Plastic survival bag (or bivouac bag)
- First Aid Kit - basic kit, incl blister tape
- Toiletries, including toothbrush sun screen and lip cream
- Leatherman or Swiss tool

4. Required Personal Clothing (not available to rent)

- Underwear (2 sets)
- Socks (3 pairs)
- Thermal underwear: 2 x tops, 1 x pants
- Mid-weight fleece jersey
- Warm jacket: down or fleece
- Warm hat / balaclava
- Climbing trousers: soft-shell are ideal. Light weight trekking pants (worn over thermals) are okay - they must be quick drying
- Waterproof warm gloves x 1 pair - leather gloves are good for rope work
- Light-weight (polypro) gloves x 1 pair
- Sun Protection: baseball cap or legionnaire hat scarf / neck gaiter (buff) and "glacier shirt"
- Hut footwear - running shoes or sandals / holey soles (must be lightweight)

5. Optional Gear - not required - but recommended

- Day pack approx 20 litre, useful for non-mountain activities
- Telescopic hiking pole - bring one
- Drinking mug. Supplied in huts - but you can bring your own
- Soft-shell jacket
- Shorts - worn over long johns is okay in summer