



The Milford Track is located in the southern region of New Zealand's South Island. With around 14,000 people walking it every year, it's one of the most popular tracks in the world. Recently my wife Linda and I had the opportunity to walk this iconic track for the second time. Also along was my wife's two sisters Donna and Tracey plus another friend Leanne. This would be their first long distance walk.

Distance of the track, and time it takes to complete

The track starts at the headwaters of Lake Te Anau and finishes at Sandfly Point on Milford Sound. It is 53.3 kilometres long and takes 4 days to complete. You can either walk with a tour group or do it independently. Huts are provided by the Department Of Conservation (commonly called DOC) and are located a day's walk apart. Camping is not allowed on the track – you must stay in the DOC huts.



The sign pointing us the beginning of the walk. Photo: Kevin Leslie

Preparation and gear to take

It is important you come on this walk properly prepared. Having the right boots that are waterproof and not too small is a must. Also, don't take a pack that is too big as you are only carrying extra weight. Consider carefully what gear you bring, as unnecessary items just add weight to your pack.

There is no power in the huts, so make sure your camera and any other devices are fully charged before you start. We took one change of clothes, (no jeans) plus some extra underwear and socks, a good waterproof jacket with hood, jumper and hat. Even in summer, it can get cold at night, so a good sleeping bag is required. You will also need a head torch.

Food we took for the hike

We took a mixture of freeze-dried dinners and packet food. We also took some bread rolls and cured meats. Remember it must be able to be stored unrefrigerated. And we had some treats for the evenings in the huts.

Starting off on the track

The first day you need to catch the fast ferry from the wharf at Te Anau Downs which takes you to Glade Wharf where the track starts. For the guided walkers it is only about 20 minutes to their hut with hot showers, proper beds and a cooked meal. We had about a 2-hour hike to our hut called Clinton hut.



The light penetrating the beech forest. Photo: Kevin Leslie



Comfort and facilities of the huts

The huts are comfortable and clean, with bunks and mattresses provided. There is also a kitchen hut with running water, gas stoves, sinks, and wood heater. There are flushing toilets and hand basins as well in the toilet block.

The first day

We caught the morning ferry so were in the first group to arrive. This meant we had a good choice of bunks. Bookings have to be made in advance to hike (or as the New Zealanders say "tramp") the Milford Track, and you have to sign in at each hut as you arrive. This way, the hut rangers know if anyone is missing.

"With 3 metres annual rainfall, you will probably experience at least one rainy day on the Milford track..."

We had a relaxing few hours that afternoon with beautiful sunny skies, so we decided to head back a short distance where there was easy access to the river. Here we braved the snow-fed waters of the Clinton River. It was a very cold, quick, and refreshing dip.



Crossing a bridge along the way with the beautiful scenery around us. Photo: Kevin Leslie

The second day

Next day we headed up the valley along the river passing through dense mossy forests that were hemmed in by towering peaks each side. Snow was visible in patches on the tops of some of the peaks.

With 3 metres annual rainfall, you will probably experience at least one rainy day on the Milford track, this was our rainy day. Although not heavy, it was necessary to put raincoats and pack covers on. However, the dozens of waterfalls that were plummeting down the sides of the mountains made it worthwhile.

The terrain changes regularly along this section. From dense forest to river flats, suspension bridges that cross side creeks, and areas of spectacular landslides. There are shelters along the track at various intervals and we stopped at one for lunch with some of the other walkers. It was a nice spot, except for the hundreds of sandflies. These blood-sucking little pests pounced on any exposed skin, and only the strongest repellent seemed to keep them at bay. This track is a photographer's paradise, with lots of opportunities for some great photos. We had regular stops and enjoyed the day's walk without the need to push hard.

Arriving at Mintaro Hut

Getting to the end of the day the trail starts climbing as you near Mackinnon Pass. Arriving at Mintaro Hut, which is surrounded by more dense forest, it was good to take our boots off, sit down and have a hot cuppa.

The atmosphere in the huts is warm and friendly as you chat with the other walkers about your day. So far we were all holding up quite well, but the next day would be the hardest as we had to go over Mackinnon Pass which at 1154m would be our most difficult day.



Wondering how Kevin's hike over Mackinnon Pass went? Read part two of his trip [here.](#)