



If you didn't catch Part 1 you can [read up here](#). Kevin and Linda Leslie and friends were enjoying the warm, friendly atmosphere at Mintaro Hut and preparing for the hardest day of the track – crossing Mackinnon Pass.

## Onward and upward

The day started under a thick cover of cloud so we were concerned that we would miss out on the magnificent views from the top of the pass. The track, while not particularly steep, climbs steadily as it zig-zags its way up the side of the pass. Each side of the track, the forest is dense and moist with bright green mosses and ferns through which small birds flutter. One side of the track the valley dropped down steeply through misty treetops, while the other side the cliffs towered above us. Eventually, we reached the top of the tree line and started climbing through grassy slopes. Luckily for us, the clouds started to part. We were rewarded with views to die for as we looked right back along the valley we had just walked.



*The incredible views to be had from the walk. Photo: Kevin Leslie.*

At the top, there is a cairn dedicated to Quinton Mackinnon who cut the trail along the Clinton River in 1888. From here we could see the other side of the pass to where the Arthur River heads out to Milford Sound.

## Snow-capped mountaintops and cascading waterfalls

All around us were snow-capped mountaintops where the melting snow formed hundreds of small waterfalls cascading down the cliff faces. Clouds were being pushed up over the pass



with light winds to form long extended streaks of mist interspersed with rays of sunlight. As you sat and looked around you any aching limbs or sore feet were forgotten. It was just breathtaking.

Amongst this was a couple of Kia. These are a native parrot that has a large curved beak that's very good at tearing apart things like hiking boots, backpacks, even car windscreen wipers! They are about as big as a galah and are very animated as they hop around looking for any unguarded pack that they can break into. You have to keep an eye on them as they were pretty determined.

## Reaching the highest peak of the track

A little further on you come to the highest part of the track, at a day hut where there is a loo with a view that is unmatched. This is a good spot for lunch and thank goodness there are also no sandflies. You will rarely find them above the tree line. It is tempting to linger here, but we still had a long descent down to the valley floor, then onto our final night's stop at Dumping Hut.

This was the hardest part of the track as you make your way around the side of a deep gully. Then it's across a bridge then into the tree line again and then it's down, down, down. There are beautiful spots to stop and rest as you make your way along the cascading creek. But there are lots of steps and tree roots and rocks you have to negotiate. It is better to take your time, as a slip here can be painful.



*The amazing scenery from the top of McKinnon pass. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

After thinking we would never make it to the bottom, we finally got onto level ground. We were all starting to feel stiff and sore by now. At this point, you can turn off the track and





head past the guided walker's hut and onto Sutherland Falls. Or as we did, stayed on the main track and went on to our last stop.

We were amongst the last to arrive that day but it was a sunny afternoon so we once again decided on a swim. Lots of others in the group were doing the same. No one stayed in for long, but we all felt better after our dip.

## The last night

That night everyone in the kitchen hut chatted about their walk and compared experiences. It was a shame this was our last night. We had been carrying a bladder of wine with us and were rationing it out until now. We finished it off with the last of our chocolate and had an enjoyable evening. However, no one was staying up late as we still had 18k to the finish the next day.

Following the Arthur River, we headed off in the morning along the valley floor. As usual, there are lots of opportunities to photograph sections of the river with its beautiful clear waters that have large trout just lazing along with the current. Huge tree trunks that have been washed down by floods or avalanche are easily seen sitting on the river bottom even though there were some very deep holes.



*A snapshot of Dumpling hut along the track. Photo: Kevin Leslie*

The valley started to widen along this section, as we were now walking beside Lake Ada. The track wound its way over a mixture of forests and grassy river flats as we made our way to the end. All along the way, there are regular distance markers and now we were counting them down.



## Nearing the end of the track

As you near the end you find you are slowing your pace, wanting to savour the last stretch. All too soon you see the sign up ahead that says you have finished. Your Milford experience is over. A characteristic small ferry is there to take you on a short ride to the terminal at Milford Sound. Here you are suddenly thrust into the modern world of people, buses, and civilisation. But your memory lingers of the last 4 days. Of the thick mossy forests, green ferns, and the snow-capped mountains that tower beside you every day. Of the beautiful clear waters of the Clinton and Arthur Rivers. Of the bird life and the evenings spent in the huts. And of the wonderful experience that is the Milford Track.

***What's your favourite hiking track in Australia or New Zealand?***