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Introduction



Tourist numbers are rapidly increasing throughout New Zealand, but particularly in the central southern South Island, from the Mackenzie Country down through Queenstown Lakes and across to the Waitaki and Central Otago.

These increasing numbers, combined with population growth in the Queenstown Lakes and Central Otago districts, are bringing unique pressures to the people who live, work and play in these areas, and to the central and local government agencies that support them.

The Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa is the Crown entity responsible for public access to the outdoors, and in particular for access across private land, and access that crosses multiple land tenures (e.g. mixes of private, Government, local authority and/or Māori land).

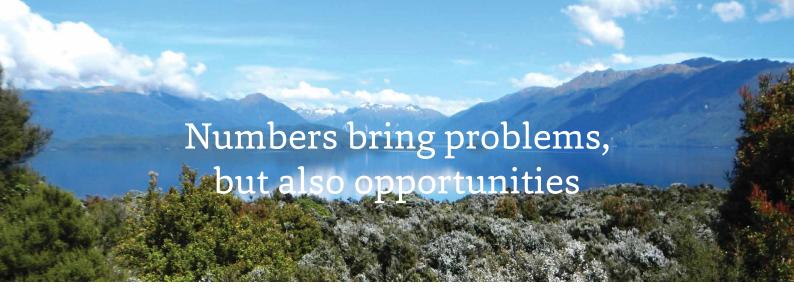
Through its work on the ground helping to create new access and resolving access disputes, the Commission began to hear concerning messages about the potential for withdrawal of access to private land by landholders due to problems and pressures created by these increasing numbers.

As part of working towards solutions to these issues, the Commission decided to investigate exactly what was going on for the people who live, work and play in these regions. This report is the first step in this process, based on 36 hours of meetings with 55 people, from May – August 2017.

The people interviewed, whose thoughts, hopes and fears are noted throughout this document, range from newcomers to the area to long time locals. They include landholders and farmers; central and local government staff; recreationalists; community groups building, maintaining and using tracks and trails; tourism operators and agencies, and others.

The Commission would like to thank all those who have spoken with us throughout this project for so generously giving their time and their thoughts. We hope this report does you justice, and we look forward to working alongside you to implement solutions to many of the issues raised.

Asher Wilson-Goldman Communications Manager NZ Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa



Everywhere we met people, they talked about numbers. In the Queenstown Lakes district, these numbers were dominated by international tourists, while in the other areas, domestic tourists were still the largest group. No matter where people were coming from, however, the impact was widely felt.

One landholder, who has a popular walkway that crosses his property, spoke of the numbers of people increasing from approximately 30,000 per year in 2013 to an expected 70-100,000 people in 2017.

While most private landholders, the Department of Conservation and local authorities all agreed that the percentage of poorly behaved visitors wasn't getting worse, the number increases mean the impact of poor behaviour is still growing.

One noted issue was the impact of the internet making it harder to predict which walks/areas will become popular – one viral Instagram post or YouTube video can result in thousands more people coming to a place previously only known to locals.

The internet means areas that were only known to locals become more widely known, but the etiquette doesn't go with it – we used to get away with a lot because of low numbers but increasing numbers mean more impact on people, farmers, and the environment

- Tourism operator, Mackenzie District

Increased numbers and unpredictability are also making landholders warier of opening new

access points. A farmer happy to have a track with 1000 people per year might be less willing to do so if they are fearful they will instead have 20,000 people per year.

Over 30 years, increased tourist numbers and more demand for access has made some farmers less willing.

- Tourism operator and landholder, Mackenzie District

Many interviewees pointed out that numbers in themselves are not necessarily a bad thing, but rather it is the unpredictability and the lack of control over where people go that can cause problems. Positives of increased numbers include more money flowing into regions, and more opportunities for farmers to diversify their income streams to help subsidise bad years in their core operation – such as accommodation on trails, concessions for guided tours, and more.

There can be a large fixed overhead to provide access / a service – without numbers it all becomes uneconomic.

- Tourism operator and landholder, Mackenzie District

The challenge of how to manage visitors is one that a number of agencies are grappling with. Tourism New Zealand is putting into place new digital marketing strategies to target particular types of tourists with different messages, while the Department of Conservation has set itself the challenge of using their communication channels to direct visitors around their network of conservation land to where they want people to go.



The lack of appropriate infrastructure to go along with tracks and trails was noted repeatedly, in particular a lack of toileting facilities and the impact that has on the environment.

Human waste on our walkway is huge issue – we don't handle it at the moment, but we'll need to put toilet blocks on soon, whose responsibility is it? Who cleans it? It should be a central government responsibility – we lease to farm, any other cost outside that should sit with the crown.

- Private landholder with popular public walkway on land he farms

As well as toilets, the availability of adequately sized carparks or effective public transport options, and shelters on longer trails, was also noted by a number of interviewees.

The infrastructure deficit was particularly hard to deal with for councils with smaller ratepayer bases like Mackenzie District, and for councils like Central Otago District who are often serving as a camping location for visitors who are spending their money in the neighbouring Oueenstown Lakes District instead.

Mackenzie has tiny ratepayer base but high volume of tourists, so it's hard to find money to do stuff.

- Trail builder in the Mackenzie District

Who is responsible for providing infrastructure is also difficult to determine. Where a trail is on private land, or crosses multiple land tenures, there is often an assumption that the Department of Conservation will take responsibility, however the Department struggles to find money for this purpose and has no statutory responsibility for tracks and trails on private land. Similarly,

local authorities can be wary of investing in infrastructure that may be entirely used by tourists rather than the locals who pay rates that fund them.

We've got a track where people camp but DOC won't put toilets as it's not the head of the track, QLDC won't because it's not their ratepayers using it – who will? There needs to be a fund for that.

- Queenstown Lakes District landholder with public access on their land

Volunteer groups willing to undertake maintenance on tracks and trails can still find it difficult to fund this. While fundraising for small-scale capital expenditure (e.g. signage, equipment) can be done, the ongoing costs are typically trickier to find sponsorship for.

Some roadblocks around funding – most places won't fund maintenance, so they'll buy us a weedeater but won't fund fuel or repairs.

- Council liaison officer

Another challenge for infrastructure planning is the funding models used by central and local government agencies. These models often require showing existing need prior to building of new or expanded infrastructure. When combined with rapid growth and the time-lag of consenting and building processes, this can mean capacity forever playing catch-up to need.

More visitors mean we need more toilets, but our process requires showing evidence of problem before funding new infrastructure, which isn't always helpful when we know numbers are increasing and will keep doing so before the new infrastructure is even built.

- Department of Conservation staff

Too many places to look, not enough reliable information

A number of recreational walkers, cyclists, mountain bikers and horse riders we spoke with discussed the need for a single point of information on where people can go in the outdoors and what they can do there.

I'd love it if there was a central database where you can say 'I'm in this area', and then you can see tracks for horses, click on them and see time they take, level of difficulty, parking availability, etc.

- Horse rider, Waitaki District

The status quo, where agencies limit their information to their own areas – e.g. tracks on public conservation land are listed by the Department of Conservation, while tracks on council land are available on the relevant local authority's website, private land trails may be on the Walking Access Commission's site or nowhere at all – is needlessly complicated and makes it hard for people to get a complete picture of their options. It also makes it tricky for volunteer groups involved in creating new access opportunities to identify where the gaps are in their area, both geographically and in terms of use type.

Additionally, information is listed in different formats and with significant differences in detail between different agencies and their websites, and the usability and functionality is often poor.

Our communications is really poor, our mapping is poor, we don't know how to send people where there's good infrastructure.

- Local government parks and recreation staff member

The lack of a single trustworthy source of information is not just a hassle, but it can pose a safety risk, particularly in the high country where weather changes can be rapid and severe. Even on lower altitude tracks, visitors who come without adequate clothing or sufficient fitness and preparation can be putting themselves at risk.

Our environment can be deadly – if people don't get the right information.

- High Country Landholder, Queenstown Lakes District

This information on what people can do and where they can do it could be easily combined with a behaviour improvement programme as well, teaching people how to behave responsibly in the outdoors. Integration between track and trail listings and the Mountain Safety Council's new Plan My Trip tool will be crucial to helping to inform people about what they need to bring when going into the outdoors.



Bad behaviour: a small minority, but a significant impact

Most people are well behaved in the outdoors, but a small minority are not, whether through ignorance or a lack of caring about how their behaviour impacts on others.

Our waters are pristine here, but at risk with tourists bringing giardia etc., s***ing in waters, dumping campervan buckets. There has to be other ways to stop this.

- Landholder, Mackenzie District

A dual focus on systemic and individual solutions is needed to minimise the impact of this. Better infrastructure is part of a systemic solution – the availability of rubbish bins and bathrooms makes it less likely that people will litter or toilet on or near tracks and trails, for example.

Equally, improved signage is often needed to educate those about what is and isn't appropriate. In many areas, this signage will need to be multi-lingual to accommodate international tourists who don't speak English – local data will dictate which languages are best in which areas.

There's a need for not only signage on where to go, but also on how to behave – multi lingual too – if we're going to try to fix this problem.

- Landholder, Mackenzie District

Behaviour change through education is another route than can have an effect here. Suggestions from interviewees included a booklet that could be given to all overseas arrivals along with their customs forms when they fly in, to brochures in i-Sites and at tourist accommodation, to digital information that could be distributed through the same places tourists look for where to go (e.g. the Department of Conservation website, TripAdvisor, etc.)

Domestic tourists also need education around behaviour. There was a feeling that New Zealand's population is becoming increasingly stratified between urban and rural, and many city-dwellers are no longer having the same farm or back country tramping experiences that their counterparts had decades ago.

You get a lot of scary stories about people getting trapped in the news. In the 1970s people would join a tramping club straight out of school, now they join in 40s or 50s after kids.

- Tramping club President, Otago

Education for primary and secondary school aged children was seen as key by many of the people spoken to. By reaching children, you can have an impact that goes through their whole lives, and you can also reach their parents at the same time. The Walking Access Commission's Both Sides of the Fence digital education resource was seen as one way of doing this.

The Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club also runs a bushcraft course each year that runs over a few months and teaches basic skills you need to do multi-day tramping and cope with problems that might come up. This was regarded positively by several people we talked to, who thought it could be a model for other tramping clubs to take up in different parts of the country.

The increase in numbers, while posing some behavioural problems, can also help to solve others – people are much less likely to misbehave if everyone around them is behaving well, and so expectations are easier to set on busy tracks than places where visitors can expect to be alone.

If people go somewhere on their own, they're much more likely to break the rules / cut the fence etc, but increasing popularity helps improve behaviour through peer pressure.

- Department of Conservation staff



Connections – turning isolated tracks into networks of trails

A lack of coordination between the various bodies involved in creating new trails was brought up a number of times. A lack of interconnectivity between Department of Conservation trails, local council tracks, and those created by other groups such as NZ Cycleways, and community groups, places an artificial limit on what people can do in the outdoors.

Interconnected trails give agencies the ability to move people towards routes that are under capacity, and give users the option of mixing and matching trails to create longer routes.

Our (DOC) network isn't connected that well yet, both with our other tracks and with [the local] council. For example, we have a good track at Leith Saddle that's built to handle lots of traffic, but [the council] has a busy network just next door (Burns/Rustler's Ridge) and there's no connection between them.

- Department of Conservation staffer

People also talked about the appeal of properly networked tracks and trails for overseas visitors, using the examples of Germany, Switzerland and the USA where well-developed and connected trails networks are destinations for tourists in and of themselves.

One trail is nothing globally. But a network of trails appeals to big communities of visitors.

- Department of Conservation staffer

An agency with oversight across the creation of tracks and trails, regardless of land ownership, was seen as necessary by many people we spoke to. This agency would be responsible for providing the bigger picture, working alongside the Department of Conservation, local authorities, iwi, and private landholders to ensure that no matter who was building trails, they were linked with other nearby

opportunities and to local communities.

Landholders we spoke to talked about the advantages of being a part of something bigger. Where a farmer might be reluctant to allow public access across their land, it was easier to do so if that access was just a small part of a larger project – a multi-day trail network that traverses several farms, in addition to public conservation land or a council reserve. These longer experiences were also seen as more likely to be able to provide additional income streams to the landholders.

Being part of a network of trails – as long as there was a commercial gain for the farmers – would be useful. 5 or 6-day walks, crossing multiple stations, DOC land etc., would be great. The commercial aspect makes it attractive, and helps to provide infrastructure for users.

- Landholder, Mackenzie District

Connections do not only need to be made between trails. Connecting local communities to outdoor amenities, and to each other, is also vital. Cycle trails in particular are playing a key role in many parts of this community, with the Alps2Ocean Cycleway connecting towns and villages in the Mackenzie and Waitaki District, and the Queenstown Cycle Trail and related cycleways connecting communities within the Queenstown Lakes District.

These trails can become commuter routes between population centres, provide a way for children to get to school off the busy main roads, and give locals an easy way to enjoy the outdoors in the evenings or on weekends.

Our future vision? We want user-friendly networks of trails in each population centre, linked together, and also linked to multi-day back country adventures.

- Mountain bike club members and trail builders, Queenstown Lakes District

Cycling



Cycling in this part of New Zealand is doing relatively well, aided significantly by the funding associated with the NZ Cycleways project. Alps2Ocean cycleway runs through the Mackenzie and Waitaki districts and appeals to both domestic and international tourists, as well as linking a number of the small communities to each other and to the lakes and conservation lands that are within the two districts. A number of locals spoke of a desire to create a network of walking and cycling tracks with Alps2Ocean as a central spine. These new tracks would link together at various points, and would be a resource for locals' day trips as well as providing alternate options for visitors doing the full Alps2Ocean route.

In Queenstown, the Queenstown Trails Trust is an integral part of walking and cycling planning in and around the area. With 120km of trail already built, the Trust is playing a key role in providing recreation opportunities for locals and tourists, and also has a vision to

connect Queenstown with satellite communities throughout the basin such as Arrowtown and Arthurs Point. The Trust is now starting to work more closely with the local mountain bike club on areas of shared interest.

On the other side of the Crown Range, the Upper Clutha Tracks Trust is working hard to build new walking and cycling opportunities in it's part of the Queenstown Lakes District. The Trust is also working to link Wanaka with Cromwell, and from there to the rest of Central Otago.

The strength of cycleway development in recent years has been matched with a corresponding increase in use – by locals, and by domestic and international tourists. Challenges in the coming years include looking at infrastructure on some of the longer trails such as toilets and shelters/picnic areas, and ensuring that the large number of cycleways are adequately linked in to each other and to the main centres, to better allow for cycle-touring and long-distance rides.



The mountain biking community is largely selforganised and very motivated. Each of the major parts of the region has their own mountain bike club, and each made serious claims as to why their area offers the best mountain biking experience in New Zealand.

The Clubs are often responsible for building and maintaining their own tracks, often on land (particularly plantation forestry) owned by their local council, and sometimes on Department of Conservation land. Some of the tracks they build are open for walking as well, although they are built for mountain bikers to have priority, and there can be the occasional clash between the two user groups.

As well as the downhill tracks, mountain bikers want to develop single and multi-day cross-country routes, which are more difficult to find. While some longer trails have recently opened up in the northern South Island (the Heaphy Track, Old Ghost Rd), there are currently limited opportunities in the southern central South Island.

Some mountain biking clubs have negotiated with landholders for access to private or crown pastoral lease land, and this generally has worked well, though mountain bikers noted that

it was getting harder to negotiate new access, particularly where land ownership had changed (resulting in a loss of relationships) or where farm type had changed to more intensive use such as dairying.

Challenges in the near future for mountain bikers include maintaining relationships with the Department of Conservation and local councils to ensure they can take up any new opportunities, and continuing to find funding to supplement volunteer labour for construction and maintenance. Mountain bikers can find it hard to get funding from councils, who are more likely to fund walking and cycling projects, and work will need to be done to address this. This work can build on what has already been done, such as the Queenstown Mountain Bike Club's report on economic benefits for the region from mountain bike tourism.

Lastly, a perception exists amongst a number of landholders and other outdoor users of behaviour problems amongst mountain bikers. This perception will need to be countered, and where behavioural issues exist, they will need to be dealt with, in order for mountain biking to continue to thrive.

Day walking

The growth in cycle trails also provides opportunity for day walkers, as these are generally multi-use trails and can enable shorter walking experiences. However, day walking is a much more casual hobby and therefore there are a lack of advocates for what day walkers need in planning discussions.

Outside of the main centres, day walkers are generally using infrastructure which has been in place for decades. Thanks partly to social media, some tracks are becoming crowded, such as Mt John near Tekapo and Roys Peak near Wanaka. Additionally, landholders have closed off access to some tracks that cross private land due to issues caused by numbers and/or behaviour, such as the Mount Alfred Track.

The creation of new tracks for day-walking will

likely be on private land, or on access created through the Overseas Investment Act or Tenure Review processes. For the former, it will require considerable volunteer effort backed by the Walking Access Commission, while the latter will require a focus on enabling track creation by a range of Government agencies including Land Information New Zealand, the Department of Conservation and the Walking Access Commission.

Day walking is perhaps the most accessible way to get into New Zealand's outdoors, and as such, is perhaps the most susceptible to tourism pressures. While domestic and international tourist day walkers bring significant money into an area, they don't have the same direct spend on equipment and experiences that many other modes of accessing the outdoors do, and therefore it can be hard to get the focus required on their needs when planning for new public access.





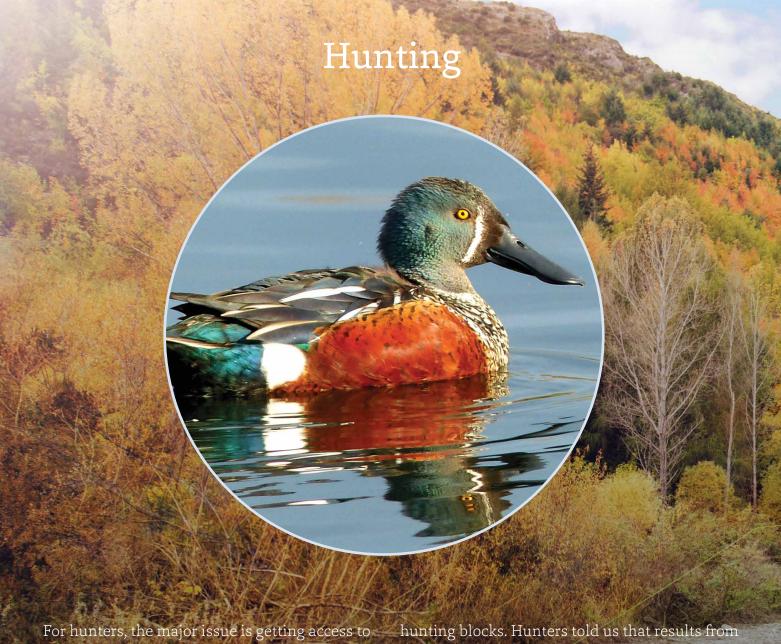
Nearly every person we asked the question "Are there any specific types of outdoor access you think are most poorly served in this area?" gave the same answer: horse riding.

Horse riders have probably been the group most negatively impacted by the growth in cycleways due to the perception that bikes and hooves don't mix. Because of this, most of the new cycleways constructed have been built to a standard that means horse-riding cannot occur on them, and this includes some areas where horses have been ridden for some time.

To make matters worse, horse riders have some

of the same issues that mountain bikers have with the changing nature of farming – increased intensification and changes in ownership – meaning that long term access on handshake agreements is increasingly being denied.

The horse riders are starting to organise themselves into groups, like cyclists and mountain bikers have, to try to address these issues collectively and this is a positive step that may help with the creation of new bridle paths and ensuring that horse riders needs are thought of in central and local government planning processes.



For hunters, the major issue is getting access to conservation land where that involves crossing private land. The traditional methods of phoning the farmer and asking for permission are proving trickier as ownership changes and relationships are lost, and farmers are (understandably) cautious about allowing people onto their land with firearms.

The Walking Access Mapping System has been useful for hunters, however, to identify where legal public access already exists to enable them to reach their destination.

For duck hunters, one unexpected problem has been the rise of freedom camping. More people are staying alongside waterways for more of the year than previously, and this has resulted in traditional hunting areas being lost due to the risk to human life if people were to hunt in them.

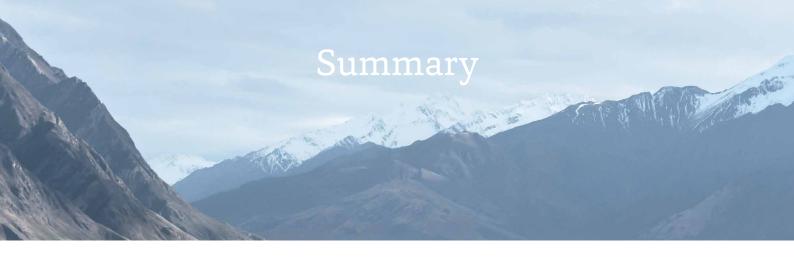
The Tenure Review and Overseas Investment Act processes are seen as having a key role to create new access for hunters to cross farms and reach

hunting blocks. Hunters told us that results from these processes have thus far fallen short of expectations (as they have for trampers, walkers and cyclists for the most part).

Landholders spoke to us of often finding hunters on their property without permission, and the fear it put into them that if they confronted them, something bad might happen. Relationships between local hunting groups (NZ Deerstalkers Association, NZ Fish and Game) and landholders will need to be improved in order to change things.

Additionally, the creation of formalised access can assist significantly. Some landholders we spoke to had formalised public access on their property not necessarily because they wanted to as a matter of principle, but because it made their lives easier – instead of having to answer phone calls or knocks on the door, they had clearly marked and well known public access with conditions, and it meant they didn't have to worry about it any longer.





A focus on public access, and the associated infrastructure, is necessary to ensure that locals and domestic tourists can experience and enjoy New Zealand's great outdoors, and that tourists have a positive experience that turns them into ambassadors for our tourism industry. As well as economic development opportunities, easy and enjoyable public access opportunities can benefit public health through increased exercise and active transport methods.

In order to achieve the full benefits, the areas that need to be addressed area:

Numbers

Create new access opportunities through the area, with a focus on opportunities that will prove attractive to people currently using tracks and trails that are over or near capacity. Also focus on activities that are currently under catered for, such as horseriding.

Pilot new methods of digital and other communication to help direct tourist traffic to areas that have capacity, and away from areas that are over capacity.

Find solutions to manage access, in particular on working farms and in sensitive conservation areas, to ensure negative impact is minimised.

Infrastructure

New funding streams, in particular for lowratepayer base councils, to enable central and local government agencies to build appropriate public access infrastructure such as toilets and carparks.

Clarify who is responsible for access infrastructure where private landholders have gifted secure access, and on tracks and trails that cross multiple land tenure types.

Explore funding options for 'less sexy' maintenance and infrastructure that volunteer groups currently find it difficult to fundraise for.

Collect better data that allows for more reliable future modelling, so infrastructure can be built ahead of or alongside increasing demand, rather than always playing catch-up.

Information

Creation of a single, trustworthy digital source of information on where people can go in the outdoors and what they can do there, regardless of land ownership.

Integration of safety information where necessary in this information source.

Behaviour

Funding to address systemic behaviour issues, such as rubbish bins, multi-lingual signage etc.

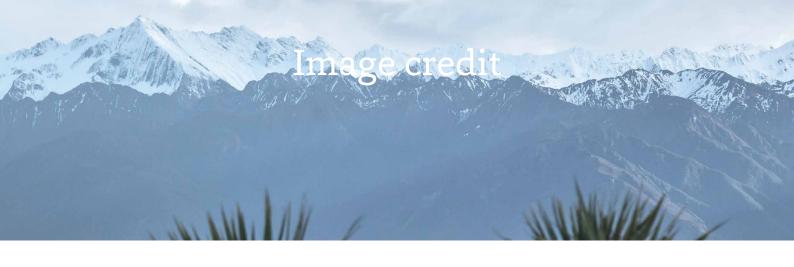
Explore resources targeted at international tourists on appropriate behaviour – perhaps in conjunction with airlines or rental car companies.

A focus on education at a school and university level to teach people about how to behave in the outdoors from a young age so it stays with them for life.

Connections

Coordination between agencies to do landscapelevel planning for tracks and trails, to connect existing ones to each other, to local amenities and to population centres, with the authority to work alongside the Department of Conservation, local government, iwi and community groups to coordinate planning and activities.

A role for this agency in Tenure Review and Overseas Investment Act processes, as key ways of creating new access.



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