



The pier at Jackson's Bay; Top right: The sumptuous view of Mt Campbell, Lopside Knob and Mt Diomedea overlooking Haast Valley

If my recent experiments with meditation are anything to go by, being peaceful and still is surprisingly tricky. It sounds simple enough in theory: sit down, relax and empty your mind. But in practise, whirling thoughts tend to win the battle for attention. Where could I go, I wondered, to get some peace and quiet? I found the answer in Haast.

It's a long, windy but majestic drive to the 'end of the world' feel West Coast town whichever way you approach – either skirting the Tasman Sea or climbing the Haast Pass. Perhaps it's the remoteness that lends the area such serenity (the area was inaccessible by road until 1965), or perhaps it's because luxuriant forests, jungles, rivers, lakes and wetlands still reign supreme over human development.

Whatever the reason, I found tranquility everywhere I went. Peace enveloped me in gold as a beautiful sunset put the day to bed, harmony surrounded me as I slowly embossed my footprints on Haast Beach and an inner quietness stole over me as I gazed over the Cascade Valley and Red Hills. In these and other places, with no effort on my part, my body seemed to melt away as my soul took a medicinal bath in nature.

Travellers tend to view Haast as a one night stopover – a handy place to get some kip on their drive to Wanaka or the glaciers. Some locals are happy with this status quo, but others are keen to share their corner of paradise. John and Sarah Duberly, who run the Heartland World Heritage Hotel, fall into the latter category and as well as being a rich source of information on tramping,

kayaking, canoeing, surfcasting and whitebaiting, their particular interest lies in fossicking: "We're proud rock lovers!" they cried – and they certainly aren't shy about showcasing their collection or revealing the best spots.

John told me the rule was "If you can carry it, you can keep it" so with rare greenstone occasionally washing up in the Haast River just a couple of hundred metres from the hotel, I couldn't resist a morning's fossick. My beginners luck didn't get above rock bottom that day and not one of the samples I lugged back to show John and Sarah turned out to be jade, but the thrill of the chase was definitely worth it.

The DoC-run Haast Visitor Centre is the best place to start your explorations. It highlights the natural significance of the area through interactive displays and explains why 26,000km<sup>2</sup> of the surrounding landscape was designated a UNESCO World Heritage area in 1990. Named Te Wahipounamu (or 'the place of greenstone') the World Heritage area incorporates Aoraki/Mt Cook, Fiordland, Mt Aspiring and Westland National Parks and preserves many natural wonders including some excellent modern representations of Gondawana-land's flora and fauna. As well as being knowledgeable about local activities, the centre's staff are also up to date with current weather and track conditions – essential information to gather before going anywhere on the notoriously weather-beaten coast.

If you're approaching from Wanaka, it is worth stopping at a couple, if not all, the Haast

Pass walks which are well-signposted off SH6. They range from five to 30-minutes, are all easy and include: Roaring Billy Falls Walk, Pleasant Flat, Thunder Creek Falls Walk and Fantail Falls Walk.

The most famous tramp in Haast is the Historic Haast to Paringa Cattle Track. The track was cut in 1875 by the farmers at Haast who drove nearly 50,000 stock from the Landsborough and Cascade Valleys to the sale yards at Whataroa until 1961. What used to be a two week journey is now a three-day tramp starting about 40km north of Haast. More tracks ranging from 20 to 90min can be found at Jackson's Bay and north of Haast in Westland/Tai Poutini National Park.

Whitebaiting takes centre stage in Haast for the two-and-a-half month season in spring. Locals boast South Westland as being the only part of New Zealand which can still support a substantial whitebait fishery due to the forested valleys, undrained swamps and estuaries. Sea fishing and fly fishing are also popular beachside activities and bird watching is good at Lake Moraki which is located 30km to the north-east of Haast.

Up to grade 5 canoeing and kayaking opportunities are available on the Haast and Turnbull Rivers and a pick up/drop off service can be organised with the visitor centre in advance.

As for accommodation, look no further than the Heartland World Heritage Hotel for its friendly welcome and tasty whitebait fritters. With over 60 years of hospitality experience between them, John and Sarah can pre-empt your needs well before you know what they are!

My only not so serene moment in Haast was a tussle with the coast's most infamous residents: a sandfly ambush at Jackson's Bay – but when all was said and done I left the town wishing I could linger much longer. 📍

## WILD FILE

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