

# Driving to Milford Sound?

Tips for a safe and enjoyable trip

**TRANSIT**  
NEW ZEALAND  
ARARAU AOTEAROA

New Zealand Government

## Introduction

Climbing through the Southern Alps, State Highway 94 is one of the highest and most scenic state highways in New Zealand. The Milford Road, part of SH94, takes you from Te Anau through Fiordland National Park to the major tourist gateway – Milford Sound.

Over one million people visit Fiordland every year and Milford Sound is one of their favourite destinations. A part of UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is no wonder that Milford Sound was described by Rudyard Kipling as the 'eighth wonder of the world'.

One of the most incredible and frequently overlooked features of Milford Sound is the journey to get there.

The road passes through unspoiled mountain landscapes and rain-forest carpeted valleys.

Transit New Zealand looks after the Milford Road which provides the only road access to Milford Sound. It is therefore essential for Transit to keep this road safe and open all year round. In winter season (May to September) snow, ice and risk of avalanches make safe driving critical.

This brochure helps you with information that will make your Milford Road experience safer and more enjoyable.



## General information on Milford Road

### Times and distances

The journey from Te Anau to Milford Sound and back is 240km (144 miles) long. If you plan to stop at the many scenic sights along the way, do short walks and a boat cruise in Milford Sound, you need to set aside a whole day. If you have limited time a non-stop direct drive from Te Anau to Milford Sound takes at least two hours depending on weather conditions.

### How to avoid congestion?

Many visitors plan their arrival in Milford Sound to coincide with boat cruises' departure times. This can result in congestion at some scenic stops along the road, especially in summer.

Most buses depart from Te Anau between 9am and 10am, and stop along the way at Mirror Lakes around 10.30am, Knobs Flat at around 11am, and the Chasm at 12.30pm. Plan your journey around these times to avoid the heavy bus traffic and high numbers of visitors, and your Milford Road experience can be more relaxed.

### Before setting out

Make sure you have a full tank of fuel before leaving Te Anau as there are no fuel stations until Milford Sound. You can get petrol only at Gunns Camp in Hollyford Valley which is a detour from Milford Road. Otherwise you can get petrol and diesel in Milford Sound, although the service is limited to certain credit cards.

### Toilets

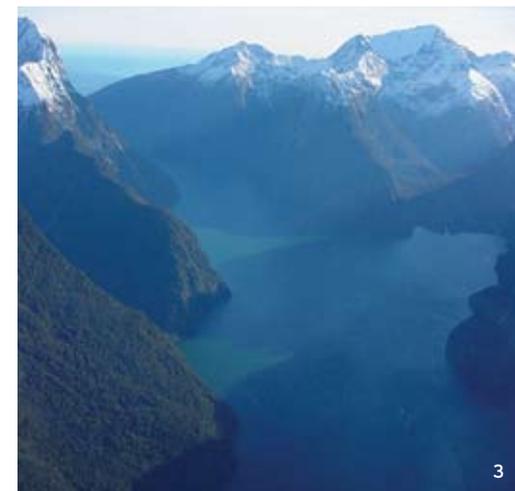
While there are portable toilets along the Milford Road you can find proper flush toilet stops only at Knobs Flat, The Divide and Milford Sound.

### Telephones

Telephone services are available at Knobs Flat (card phone), Homer Tunnel (satellite phone for emergency use only) and Milford Sound (card phone). There is no cell phone coverage between Te Anau and Milford Sound.

### Dump sites for discharging waste

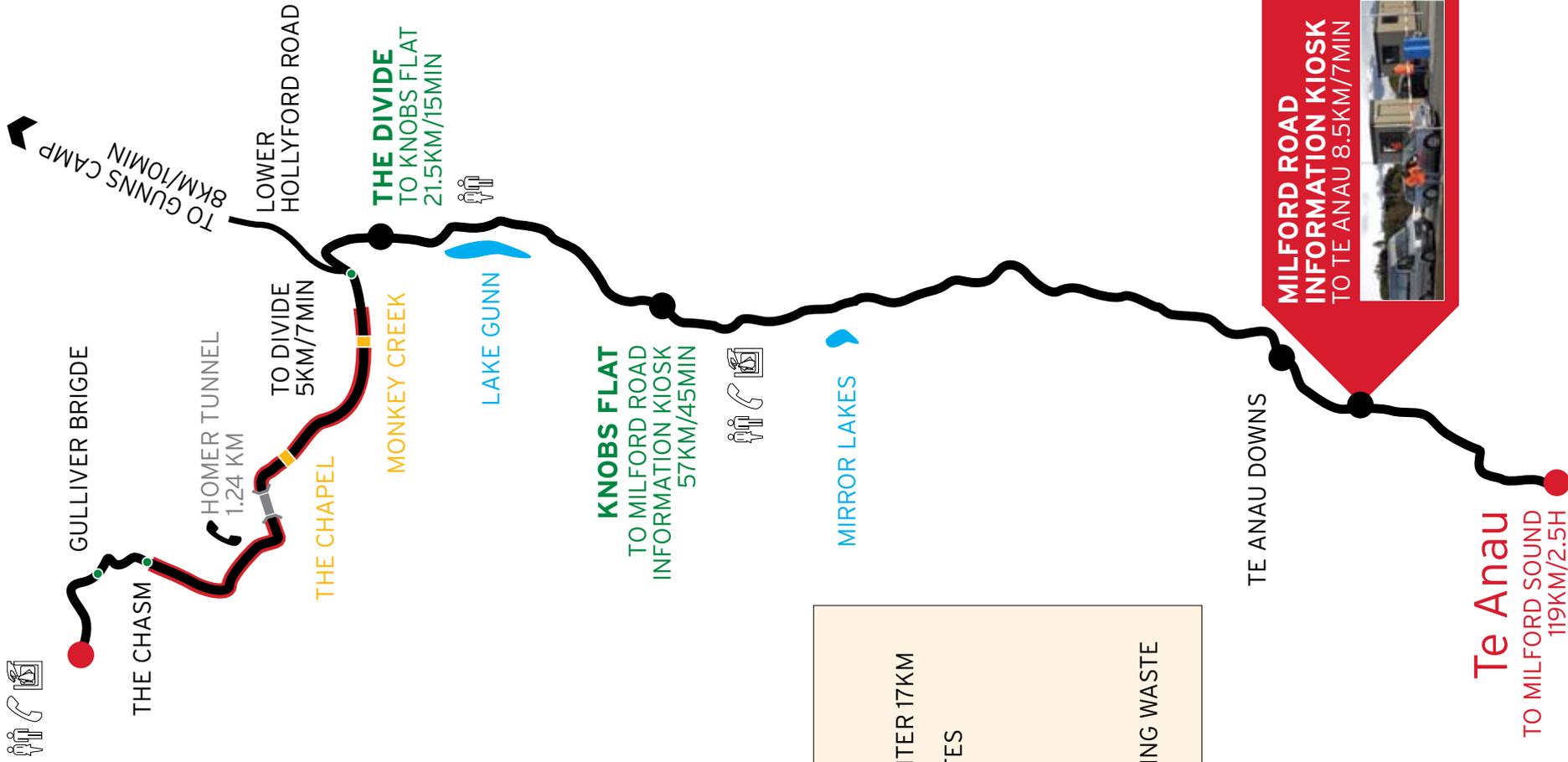
If you are driving a campervan please do not discharge waste in the national park. Use the facilities provided at your camping ground before you depart. There are dump sites at Knobs Flat and Milford Sound that you can use.





## Milford Sound

TO TE ANAU 119KM/2.5H



- SAFE STOPPING AREA
- NO STOPPING AREA IN WINTER 17KM
- AVALANCHE CONTROL GATES
- 🚻 FLUSH TOILET STOPS
- ☎ PHONE
- ☎ EMERGENCY PHONE ONLY
- 🗑 DUMP SITE FOR DISCHARGING WASTE

## Knowing the road signage



Make sure you keep left when driving on Milford Road and take extra care when pulling out of rest or scenic sights stops.



Check road condition information signs to see whether the road is open and what the conditions are. The signs are located in Te Anau (1km north of township), Knobs Flat (65 km north of Te Anau) and Milford Sound (5 km east of Milford Sound).

When a **LOW** avalanche hazard is posted, the road is open. When a **MODERATE** avalanche hazard is posted there is a risk of avalanches reaching the road and the road could be closed at short notice. When a **HIGH** avalanche hazard is posted the road is closed.

**Avalanche Area**  
**Next 17km**  
**Observe**  **signs**

This sign is posted at the beginning and end of the avalanche area. When driving through this area make sure you stop only in one of the two signposted safe stopping areas (The Chasm and Monkey Creek).

**AVALANCHE AREA**  
 **NO STOPPING**

These signs are posted near the most active avalanche paths. Make sure you obey them and do not stop in the avalanche area.

**CHAINS MUST**  
**BE FITTED**

These signs mark the last safe stopping place to fit chains before road conditions become too dangerous for vehicles without chains.

## Keeping safe on Milford Road during winter

During wintertime (May to September), driving on the Milford Road can be extremely challenging as the weather can change rapidly. The road can often be covered in snow and ice, and there is a risk of avalanches.

### Milford Road information kiosk

Transit has an information kiosk 8.5 km north of Te Anau on the way to Milford Sound. The kiosk is open during winter when vehicles travelling the road need to be fitted with chains. This is usually around 20 days a year between June and November.

Kiosk staff provide road users with information on safe driving during winter and check that you are carrying the rights chains and can fit them correctly.

The kiosk has two lanes, with one of them being only for accredited drivers who have completed the Bus and Coach Association Programme to improve bus safety on the Milford Road.

### Avalanche control programme

Being an alpine highway – at the highest point the road reaches 940 metres above sea level – avalanches can seriously affect Milford Road during avalanche season (usually June to November). The avalanche area covers 17 km, starting at Falls Creek, above Hollyford Road junction (91km north of Te Anau), and ending at the Chasm on the Milford Sound side of the Homer Tunnel.

The avalanches start so high up in the mountains that they cannot be seen from the road itself. The impact pressure of avalanches can be up to 5,000 kilopascals. For example, only 15kPA is needed to break a car's windscreen.

To keep the road safe and open as much as possible during the avalanche season, Transit operates an internationally recognised avalanche control programme which predicts and controls avalanches. A specialist avalanche control team, contracted by Transit, uses high tech equipment to manage avalanches. The equipment is based at road and mountain level weather stations and is monitored 24 hours a day.

Besides predicting avalanches, a crucial part of the programme is also controlling the avalanche hazard by either not allowing traffic to stop inside the avalanche area or closing the road and using controlled explosives in an avalanche area to release avalanches before they occur naturally.

## Summary of travel tips for road users



### Not experienced winter driver?

Be aware that you can always take a coach from Te Anau instead of driving yourself. Before you choose a coach check that they have accredited drivers which means that the drivers have been through training on how to drive on Milford Road in winter conditions.

### Carry chains

During the winter season always carry chains that are the correct size for your vehicle and know how to fit them. Chains can be hired in Te Anau from Hirepool and local services stations. Please note that if you do not follow the warning signs requiring chains you could be fined \$750.

### Obey the "Avalanche Area No Stopping" signs

It is important that traffic keeps moving through the avalanche hazard area as the risk of accident is then reduced to only a moving vehicle.

### Never stop outside the Homer Tunnel road entrance

The tunnel is open for two-way traffic during avalanche season but outside this season, road users need to follow traffic signals at each end of the tunnel. The signals operate from 9am to 5pm and are there to help prevent any traffic congestion.



## Road condition information



For the latest road condition information:

- > Visit Transit's Milford Road website at **[www.milfordroad.co.nz](http://www.milfordroad.co.nz)**
- > ring Transit's freephone number **0800 4 HIGHWAYS (0800 444 449)** available 24/7.

