



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

02 August 2019

The President
Federated Mountain Clubs
Po Box 1604
Wellington

Dear Sir/Madam

Re Online Booking for Pinnacles and Woolshed Creek Huts on Mt Somers Track

The Mt Somers Track with its two huts is a popular walking track in mid Canterbury. Over the last two summers the Department has had hut wardens at both serviced huts for the main season from October through to the end of April.

The track is promoted as an easy track for less experienced trampers to use. It is also popular with overseas visitors. For January this year at Woolshed Creek Hut 38% of total users were youth/children and 15% of total users were from overseas.

Overcrowding occurs on a regular basis especially when school or other large groups use the huts. We have had reports of people walking back out on finding the hut too full. The design of the platform bunks does not help with some users "spreading out". The difference in bunk numbers (19 vs 26) between the two huts is also an issue for users.

The Department is planning to put both huts onto the national booking system for the summer season 1st October to 30th April.

Of the 94 Serviced standard huts in New Zealand 27 are currently in the online booking system. Making these huts bookable gives the less experienced users certainty in planning their trip. It also makes it simpler for our wardens, they don't have to process bookings on site.

Ultimately, we want to see both huts and the walk well utilised and users having a positive experience. One of our key objectives at an entry level sits such as this is to provide a high quality "easy" experience. Overcrowding and lack of certainty do not meet this objective.

Evidence of increasing usage will help the Department formulate business cases for future upgrading of the facilities.

The online booking system is now available for many of the Department's facilities and we are finding that usage at these facilities is increasing.

Department of Conservation *Te Papa Atawhai*

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Trampers can still use their Annual Hut Pass but they would need to make the booking through our office in Geraldine or any of the other offices that process online bookings. The wardens at the huts will accept hut tickets or Eftpos payment for any spaces that are still available.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

Duncan Toogood
Operations Manager

Additional clarification points regarding Woolshed Creek hut, Pinnacles hut and Mt Somers tracks:

The two huts being placed onto the booking system is not intended to be a first step towards increasing services provided at these huts or sites. The Department is not planning to upgrade the 'service standard' of this site, which is currently a 'Gateway' site in DOC speak.

The two huts are currently pitched at offering an easy over night tramping experience. This experience is characterised as being suitable for a range of ages/fitness/experience levels. The idea is that virtually anyone can have a safe overnight experience in the NZ back country. There shouldn't be any technically challenging track/route to face and the hut experience will be 'easier' in the sense that firewood and in some cases, cookers will be provided.

One issue that has been popping up around the country with these huts (and is definitely of note for Woolshed Creek hut) is over crowding and lack of certainty around planning a trip. While experienced users of the back country/huts generally accept that bunks are available on a first in basis (referred to in the hut use code) and that overcrowding is something that happens at times, this is not the case for first time users. DOC regularly receives complaints about overcrowding, often where there is one large group that 'takes over' the hut. We also get a number of queries from people about whether they can 'reserve' a bunk ahead of time, in some cases people claim they won't go because they can't make a booking (I cannot quantify this as it is from personal or anecdotal evidence). The booking system and a warden system should address both of these issues.

Huts that have been placed on the booking system have all proven to be successful in that they have addressed overcrowding and have not significantly reduced use (when compared to bunk availability, obviously reducing overcrowding does have an overall reduction in total numbers of overnights) over time. I believe in all cases use has increased over time.

The benefit of having these huts on the booking system to the district are twofold. Firstly, the hut ticket fees come directly into the district budget which allows for reinvestment into that site and secondly provides a credible dataset of use to inform management of the site (instead of current systems such as extracting figures from hut books). This helps us direct our day to day management and importantly allows us to gain capital investment for replacement or enhancement (enhancement in this case meaning addressing capacity issues which are often hard to judge) of facilities.

Duncan Toogood

Operations Manager