

# THE SKYLINE ROUTE

## A STUNNING HIKE OVER WANAKA

This is the time of the year when the mountains are getting their white blanket and the temperatures are dropping. The views from Wanaka are even better than usual with those white peaks as a background.

There is a ridge you can't miss when you are in Wanaka, as it is right by the lake, and wherever you are in town, you can see it. It's the Skyline. Starting on Cardrona Valley road, the Skyline goes through Mt Alpha and ends at Roys peak.

I remember sitting on my couch one day with the view on Mt Alpha and thinking, there must be a cool hike going along this ridge... A few days later, after some quick research online I realised that there was a route going all over the ridge. I started to plan an adventure and gathered some friends, Bridger and Geraint, to join me. (This track is not recommended during the winter as there are a few dangerous cliffs and slippery ice areas). With our normal hiking gear, some water bottles and plenty of sunscreen we were ready to go. A few people told us that we needed snowshoes but since it was the end of winter, we decided to go without.



**Before you go:** We planned to spend the night on the summit of Mt Alpha where it's gets very cold. To keep warm and adjust my temperature during the hike, it is best to use multi layers. That way you can add or remove clothes quickly depending on your activity and the weather condition.

To hike, I wear a base layer of merino wool at all times. I always have a second one in my backpack in case the first one is wet when arriving at camp! If it's windy, I use a windproof mid layer on top to keep in the extra warmth. In very cold conditions, I will add a puffer jacket and if it's snowing or raining, I use my rain jacket, which is waterproof and windproof as well. With those 4 layers I'm confident going anywhere that I will be warm or cool enough while hiking. They are easily packable and lightweight which still leaves enough space in the backpack for the other gear, mainly food and camping supplies.

To camp, I use a 3 season tent, an insulated sleeping pad, and a really warm sleeping bag rated -42°C. With those 3 things, I've felt comfortable in every weather condition I've come across in New Zealand.

To cook, I use a lightweight camping stove with a gas canister. It's not as efficient since gas doesn't do very well in cold temperatures but a stove is definitely your best friend in cold conditions to keep you warm with hot tea and food.

Once everything is packed, and the weather forecast looks good, it's time to go and explore the area.

**It feels like summer:** Even though we started the hike early, the temperature was already really warm. Hard to believe that in a few hours we will be walking on snow...

The track starts 10km from Wanaka, there is a car park and on Cardrona Valley Road and the track is well marked. You can't really get lost from the beginning to the end.

Down the valley we crossed Timber creek a few times. The really cold water from the glaciers was a refreshing feeling in this heat. In a couple of turns, we finally started to see a white peak. The hard sun on the snow creates some beautiful reflections and the smooth clouds as the backdrop were like being in a photo studio. Our motivation to reach the ridge increased as we continued to hike up the mountain. The view over Wanaka is stunning! And the wind here can get really strong!

We start to hike the ridge, and the snow is hard and getting deeper. A few times I fell into deep holes. By walking slowly and carefully we made it through. We even enjoyed to penguin slide on the slopes. Maybe a week before we would have needed snowshoes. We keep hiking up to Mt Alpha where we decide to spend the night. The wind is getting stronger and some clouds are covering the stars... I'm afraid we won't be able to see any stars tonight.. but no matter what it will be a beautiful sight.

**Cold night:** Both tents are set up, Bridger and Geraint chose a sheltered spot from the wind, and I've chosen a spot where I can hopefully get some great nighttime photographs.

After we set up, we started melting some snow for the tea but with the cold temperature the gas stove doesn't work very well. It's taking ages and wasting a lot of gas.

Alas, the night has finally come and it's time to take some photographs. Luckily, the sky cleared up and I was able to get some great shots!

In the morning I woke up after a cold and windy night. My tent never stopped shaking all night and the stakes didn't stay in the snow very well. Bridger and Geraint also had a cold night and they almost didn't sleep. They even cooked more tea during the night to keep warm.

I discovered in the morning that I had put my tent just over the Mt Alpha summit sign which was under a good layer of snow. The sunrise was beautiful and it's crazy to see from up there the town waking up. After an hour of watching the sunrise and getting warmer, it's time to pack and head towards Roys Peak.

---

*PREVIOUS PAGE:  
Hiking up the ridge*

*THIS PAGE MAIN PIC:  
Crossing the Timber creek*

*INSERTS LEFT TO RIGHT:  
A great view over all Wanaka  
Penguin slides on the snow  
A night on snow under the stars*

*FOLLOWING PAGE:  
Astonishing view over Wanaka Lake*

---





**A great hike with stunning views:** This is definitely the best part of the hike! Wanaka Lake in the background is beautiful with Mou Waho and Mou Tapu islands floating in the midst of it. The view from here is 360°. You can see all the mountain ranges, the lake below and Wanaka in the distance. It's a delight for photography especially since no one hiked up here before us and the snow goes almost all the way to Roys Peak, still clear of any footprints. The photographs are only a small portion of the beauty of this place.

There are a few areas though where the track is above very steep cliffs and the snow here is very slippery as it is constantly in the shade of big rocks. Once we've gotten through this hard part, the shape of the hills was amazing! Layers going up and areas covered with untouched snow created amazing stark and minimalistic pictures.

We finally climbed the last part to reach Roys Peak where we had a much deserved lunch and hot tea. A lot of hikers were starting to join us at Roys Peak as it is internationally famous for it's view.

We took a few more pictures on the ridge then headed down to the car park where we would hitch hike back to town.

**About the Skyline track:** It is a gorgeous couple of days hiking, even in the cold. If you are in Wanaka and want a great adventure, this is the one you should do. Be aware that during the winter the snow is deep and you might need to use snowshoes and a shovel to dig a hole so your tent has a flat surface. If you are extra adventurous you could take a snowboard or skis with you as there are some parts you could get some really cool aerial jumps. If I had to do it again I would take one!

As well, if you are lucky, you might enjoy a great spectacle of southern lights over the mountains ranges.

The track is 23km long. During the summer you can hike it up in a day, during the winter it will take a bit longer due to slippery areas and thigh deep snow. It's an all year round paradise for photographers. Be aware that Roys Peak is closed for lambing from the 1st of October to 10th of November.

I hope you enjoy this area as much as I did and be a good kiwi by only leaving footprints behind.

Check out this track on NZ Topo website: <http://www.topomap.co.nz/>