

May 2026

Bathurst Resources Ltd
Buller Plateaux Continuation Project
Recreation and tourism assessment



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Recreation and tourism assessment

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Final

Contents

1	Summary	6
2	Introduction.....	10
2.1	Method	11
2.2	Tourism and recreation	12
3	Existing environment	14
3.1	Rochfort Stewardship Area (ESE and UWHR).....	18
3.1.1	2020 visitor intercept survey.....	20
3.1.2	Strava data and cycling and walking route maps	22
3.1.3	Visitor counts.....	30
3.1.3.1	Assumptions and limitations	31
3.1.3.2	Vehicles.....	32
3.1.3.3	Cycles.....	38
3.1.3.4	Pedestrians	42
3.1.4	Four-wheel drive	43
3.2	Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area (MFS).....	46
3.3	Plover Stream Conservation Area (Stockton)	50
3.4	Land Information New Zealand Administered Lands (UWHR, MFS).....	53
3.5	In-river recreation	58
3.6	Areas not assessed.....	59
4	Consultation findings	60
5	Effects assessment and recommendations	65
5.1	Rochfort Stewardship Area	69
5.2	Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area	70
5.3	Plover Stream Conservation Area.....	71
5.4	LINZ Administered Lands.....	71
5.5	Public roads, and general visitor satisfaction	72
5.6	Analysis and summary	73
5.7	Conservation Management Strategy review	78
6	Conclusion	80
	References.....	81
	Appendix 1: Author qualifications and experience.....	82
	Appendix 2: Marshall Day Acoustics Noise Memo	88
	Appendix 3: 2020 Visitor Intercept Survey	91

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of consent requirements for BPCP	10
Table 2: Vehicle counts for four sites, annual totals and monthly averages.....	33
Table 3: Cycle counts for Whareatea Mine and Burnetts Face Rds, annual totals & monthly averages.....	38
Table 4: Scale of impact on recreation opportunities and values considering recreation significance and magnitude of effect	73
Table 5: Significance of recreation activities on the Buller Plateaux at the regional level	74
Table 6: Proposal effects and mitigation summary	75
Table 7: Summary of expectations for Kawatiri Place and effects	78

List of Figures

Figure 1: Proposed Project footprint and components	13
Figure 2: Public 'protected' areas in green, public roads in red. LINZ Landonline data	14
Figure 3: DOC CMS Kawatiri Place area definition	16
Figure 4: Rochfort Stewardship Area and DOC recreation advice (DOC Maps)	18
Figure 5: Rochfort Stewardship Area (green) and Project boundary (red)	19
Figure 6: Strava heatmap data for all activities, central Buller District, 12 months of data to May 2026	23
Figure 7: Strava heatmap data for all cycle activities, Denniston, 12 months of data to May 2026	24
Figure 8: MTB Trails Trust trail names for Denniston Plateau	25
Figure 9: Strava heatmap data for 'footsports', Denniston, 12 months of data to May 2026	26
Figure 10: DOC Denniston Plateau walks	26
Figure 11: Strava heatmap data for cyclists, Denniston area, 12 months of data to May 2026	27
Figure 12: Strava heatmap data for pedestrians, Denniston, 12 months of data to May 2026	27
Figure 13: Trailforks trail maps for Denniston Plateau (ESE and UWHR overlaid red dash)	28
Figure 14: Entrance to Whareatea Mine Site walkway off Whareatea Mine Road	29
Figure 15: Strava heatmap for Whareatea mine walk, showing walking route in dashed yellow	29
Figure 16: DOC and Bathurst Resources counter locations, activity and direction	30
Figure 17: DOC 2015 <i>Denniston Plateau Mountain-bike tracks</i> brochure map	31
Figure 18: DOC 2015 <i>Denniston Plateau Mountain-bike tracks</i> brochure map key	32
Figure 19: Four vehicle counters Denniston Plateau – monthly totals one-way April 2018 to Jan 2026	33
Figure 20: Average hourly vehicle counts by season 2025, Denniston Road entry	35
Figure 21: Average hourly vehicle counts by season 2025, Burnetts Face Road entry	35
Figure 22: Average hourly vehicle counts by season 2025, Whareatea Mine Road entry	35
Figure 23: Average hourly vehicle counts by week day 2025, Denniston Road entry	36
Figure 24: Average hourly vehicle counts by week day 2025, Burnetts Face Road entry	36
Figure 25: Average hourly vehicle counts by week day 2025, Whareatea Mine Road entry	36
Figure 26: Directional average hourly vehicle counts by day type 2025, Denniston Road	37
Figure 27: Directional average hourly vehicle counts by day type 2025, Burnetts Face Road	37
Figure 28: Burnetts Face & Whareatea Mine Rds cycle counts – two-way April 2018 to Mar 2026	38
Figure 29: Average hourly cycle counts by season 2025, Whareatea Mine Road both directions	39
Figure 30: Average hourly cycle counts by season 2025 Burnetts Face Road both directions	39
Figure 31: Average hourly cycle counts by week day 2025, Whareatea Mine Rd both directions	40
Figure 32: Average hourly cycle counts by week day 2025, Burnetts Face Rd both directions	40
Figure 33: Directional average hourly cycle counts by day type 2025, Whareatea Mine Road	41
Figure 34: DOC pedestrian counts at Brakehead and vehicle counts at Gillies Rd, 2012 - 2022	42
Figure 35: Average DOC pedestrian count by day and season at Brakehead 2012 – 2022	42
Figure 36: Average DOC pedestrian count by time of day and season at Brakehead 2012 – 2022	43
Figure 37: 4WD routes Mt Rochfort CA. DOC West Coast CMS 2010-2020 Appendix 8. Names added	43
Figure 38: Four-wheel drive routes recommended online	44
Figure 39: 4WD routes Orikaka. DOC West Coast CMS 2010-2020 Appendix 8. Names added	45
Figure 40: Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area and DOC recreation advice (DOC Maps)	46
Figure 41: Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area (green) and Project boundary (red)	47
Figure 42: Strava heatmap for all activities, 12 months of data to May 2026	49
Figure 43: Plover Stream Conservation Area and DOC recreation advice (DOC Maps)	50

Figure 44: Plover Stream Conservation Area (green) and Project boundary (red) over Topo 50.....	51
Figure 45: Strava heatmap for all activities, 12 months of data to May 2026	52
Figure 46: LINZ administered lands, Stockton to Denniston Plateau, showing UWHR and MFS.	53
Figure 47: LINZ administered lands Cedar Creek area showing UWHR	54
Figure 48: Strava heatmap, all sports, 12 months of data to May 2026. Cedar Creek area.....	54
Figure 49: Cycle trail signs for Mackley Track.....	55
Figure 50: NZ Cycling Network, Buller area. Waka Kotahi / Nga Haerenga	55
Figure 51: Waimangaroa River 4WD crossing.....	56
Figure 52: Extent of four-wheel drive access beyond Waimangaroa River on LINZ lands.....	57
Figure 53: Areas not assessed near Plover Conservation Area.....	59
Figure 54: ESE, UWHR and MFS boundaries (red) overlaid on blue Strava heatmap for all activities	67
Figure 55: ESE and UWHR boundaries (red) and southern pest free exclosures over Strava heatmap	68

1 Summary

This assessment reviews the effects of Bathurst Resource's Buller Plateaux Continuation Project on the recreation and tourism¹ opportunities and values on relevant publicly accessible areas. These form the study area and are the:

- Rochfort Stewardship Area (Department of Conservation (DOC)), which includes the main visitor settings in the study area, with the Denniston Brakehead visitor experience, the historic features and walking opportunities at Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale, the Friends of the Hill mining museum, a mountain bike and trail running track network, four-wheel drive access to Mount Rochfort and several other four-wheel drive tracks, and casual motorbike access. Informally, the area is visited by the likes of photographers and botanists. There is good information to describe the recreation and tourism values of this area, which is a key focus of this assessment.
- Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area (DOC). This area currently has low recreational use due to very little formed access and difficult terrain. There is limited four-wheel drive use on its eastern periphery, some motorbike exploration (small trial bikes and trail bikes mostly), and some walking access. Although it is difficult to quantify, this area clearly has low use.
- Plover Stream Conservation Area (DOC). This area has very poor access – mostly via the Stockton Mine area which is closed to the public. The area will support low levels of hunting and trekking.
- Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) administered land. The affected block lies to the east of the Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area. Its main recreational use is as a thoroughfare from Denniston to the Mackley Track, which leads through the adjacent (and unaffected) Orikaka Ecological Area. Mackley Track supports mountain biking, four-wheel driving and some walking. There are also low levels of four-wheel driving and motorbiking within the LINZ block.
- Public roads, specifically the Denniston Road and SH67 (Buller District Council). The impact of the Project on public use of the roads is assessed separately in the Traffic Report. This assessment identifies baseline data describing the user experience of Denniston Road, and makes a number of recommendations to manage potential effects.
- Waterways draining the Plateaux. Of interest to recreation are the Waimangaroa, Ngakawau and Whareatea Rivers. These have very low levels of recreational use, confined to rare kayaking on the Ngakawau River, some local freshwater angling at the estuaries of each for mostly vagrant 'estuarine' trout, and low levels of whitebaiting. Local swimming is likely wherever there is an opportunity.

This assessment is based on visitor counter data, a visitor survey (Appendix 3), stakeholder interviews and workshops, literature review and the analysis of relevant DOC planning documents. The author has been also engaged in recreation assessments on the Denniston Plateau since 2010 (credentials in Appendix 1). The assessment considers both recreation *opportunities* (the physical ability to carry out an activity) and recreation *values* (the enjoyment of those opportunities). To assist with the latter, reference is made to visual amenity effects reported in the Rough Milne Mitchell Landscape Architects Landscape Assessment (the 'Landscape Assessment'), and a review of noise and vibration effects on the Coalbrookdale and Myra's Tracks by Marshall Day Acoustics (the 'Noise Memo') (see Appendix 2).

¹ 'Recreation' is an encompassing term for recreation and tourism.

Without mitigation, the Project has the potential for adverse effects on recreation opportunities due to:

- The occupation of recreation settings on the Denniston Plateau via the development of the Escarpment Extended mine (**ESE**), which will include impacts on mountain bike and motorbike trails, running trails and four-wheel drive access to Mount Rochfort. While many opportunities will remain on the Plateau for the life of the mining activity, some recreational use has the potential to be limited, most particularly four-wheel drive access to Mount Rochfort, with the current road passing through the mine footprint. The Landscape Assessment reports the potential for high adverse visual effects from Mount Rochfort, several locations on the Whareatea Mine Road and at Mount William, and these will have adverse effects on recreation values for the mine life (settling to low or no effect post mine closure and rehabilitation). Noise, light and vibration effects are likely to be very slight or absent at the main recreation settings.
- Impacts on access to the Mackley Track via development of the Upper Waimangaroa Haul Road (**UWHR**). Without mitigation, this would prevent four-wheel drive, motorbike, mountain biking and walking access to the Orikaka Ecological Area from the west.

There is very little potential for recreation impacts on the Plover Conservation Area and the Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area. Both have low levels of use, and for the latter, mitigations relating to managed four-wheel drive and motorbike access on the UWHR will also benefit.

Objectives for mitigation are to:

- Maintain ongoing input from the recreation and tourism sectors and the Department of Conservation into the management of recreation and tourism opportunities on the Plateaux for the full mine life.
- Manage, where practicable, effects on recreation values from noise, lighting, dust, vibration and the perception of some that there is now an industrial activity adjacent to various visitor settings.
- Maximise the potential for continued use of the recreation and tourism opportunities on the Plateaux which are not directly affected by the proposal. These include the main visitor attractions at the Denniston Brakehead, Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale areas, and the unaffected mountain bike, walking, trail running, four-wheel drive and trail and trial bike routes on the Denniston Plateau.
- Respond to the staged development and rehabilitation of mine areas over time to redevelop recreation opportunities when opportunities arise.
- Allow managed four-wheel driving access to Mount Rochfort and Mackley Track.
- Ensure open pedestrian and cycle access to Mount William and the Mackley Track.
- Respond to the potential for some displacement of walking, running and cycle access to the Denniston Plateau by supporting regional recreation developments off-site.

Recommended mitigations are:

- The development of a Recreation User Group (RUG) made up of representatives of the Buller (and potentially wider) community, including representation from regional recreation interests, such as mountain biking, cycle touring (bike packing), trail running, heritage tourism, four-wheel drive and trail and trial biking, and land managers if they are interested (DOC and LINZ). The RUG's role would be to liaise with Bathurst regarding options for recreation access development as mining and rehabilitation stages progress, and to consider wider recreation and tourism management issues on the Plateaux. The

RUG would also work with Bathurst to ensure that there is appropriate communication with recreational users and land managers about the opportunities for linking unaffected access trails on the Denniston Plateau to maximise their use.

- Bathurst appointing an employee with responsibility for community engagement, including liaison with, and facilitation and participation in, the RUG, and subsequent reporting.
- Bathurst periodically commissioning an independent review of recreation access and development opportunities on the Buller Plateaux to ensure access for recreation is optimised over time, and that all information services are up-to-date. This should include periodic repeats of the 2020 visitor survey. The 2020 survey provides a benchmark against which changes in recreation and tourism values on the Plateau can be measured, and responded to. The results should be reported to appropriate landowners and regulators. The RUG may recommend that the findings be published on the Bathurst website, with corresponding agreed recreation management actions. It is recommended that the 2020 visitor survey be repeated immediately prior to new work commencing on the Plateaux to re-establish the data baseline, again within two years of work starting, and potentially biennially thereafter until the RUG and Bathurst are comfortable that ongoing effects of the Project are being effectively managed, and then five-yearly thereafter.
- Ongoing formal liaison with the NZ Four Wheel Drive Association and the Combined 4WD Clubs Inc by Bathurst regarding the maintenance of four-wheel access to Mount Rochfort for club members and members of the public. Off-road vehicle access opportunities – particularly to Mount Rochfort and the Mackley Track – are likely to vary over the mine life, but a basic level of access will need to be established with a specified minimum number of access days annually, and the ability to apply for additional days for specific events – for both the public and club members. This will require online information about access applications and safety protocols.
- Bathurst to provide information online and on the Plateau (via signs) about unaffected recreation opportunities including, especially four-wheel driving, mountain biking and trail running, and public access generally.
- Consider an on-call commercial such as that currently provided by Outwest Tours at Stockton.
- Maintaining public access to the established walking and cycle tracks within the Coalbrookdale predator exclosure. The other three proposed exclosures currently have no developed recreation tracks within their boundaries and no further access provisions are required for recreation purposes.
- Site rehabilitation when practicable to include consideration of progressive trail reinstatement – in consultation with the RUG and landowners.
- Reinstatement of Mount Rochfort Road and the UWHR to the public for activities such as four-wheel driving to be a priority on mine closure, in consultation with the landowners.
- Management of potential blasting effects (from fly rock) on users of relevant publicly accessible areas, particularly the Coalbrookdale Walk, including temporary access closure and signs, and any other safety protocols required by Bathurst safety planning.
- Support by Bathurst for the development and maintenance of additional recreation opportunities off-site in recognition of the likely displacement of some trail-based recreation from the Mount Rochfort Conservation Area.

There are no indications of adverse recreation effects on the Waimangaroa, Ngakawau and Whareatea Rivers.

With these recommended mitigations in place, significant adverse effects on recreation in the study area will be avoided or mitigated. Critically, access to a wide range of recreation opportunities will be retained. While there will be new restrictions on, especially, 4WD access to the likes of Mount Rochfort and Mackley Track, the recreation opportunities will largely remain within a new management framework (reviewed over time by the RUG). All other main activity opportunities will be retained, but with some limits to their current scale, and the potential for up to a 'Moderate' scale of effect for 4WD activities.

Effects on recreation values near the ESE and UWHR relate to visual amenity, noise, vibration and light effects. As stated, High to Very high visual effects are described in the Landscape Assessment from several publicly-accessible locations within the Rochfort Stewardship Area, and these translate to the potential for High adverse effects on recreation values in those locations. These do not include the key visitor settings of the Brakehead, old township area, Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale. Effects at these sites are either Low or do not persist post-mine closure and rehabilitation. Noise, vibration and light effects are very limited.

2 Introduction

This assessment reviews the effects of the Buller Plateaux Continuation Project (**BPCP** or **the Project**) on the recreation values of the Project area between Stockton and Mount Rochfort. The components of the study area are listed in Table 1 and Figure 1. Table 1 also shows the existing consenting status of each and the current consenting requirements. Mining activities are expected to continue for approximately a further 20+ years, excluding rehabilitation monitoring, maintenance, and ongoing active/passive water treatment.

The Project covers areas on both the Stockton Plateau and the Denniston Plateau (collectively referred to as the **Buller Plateaux**). The purpose of the Project is to re-consent the existing infrastructure and mining operations associated with the Stockton Mine and provide access to additional coal mining areas across the Buller Plateaux, as the coal resource in the current Stockton operations are close to depletion, and further coal resources for blending are required. The Project comprises five Project sub-areas as set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of consent requirements for BPCP	
Project Area	Project Scope within Sub-Area
Stockton	Completion of mining of existing pits and remaining coal resources. Extension of activity in the A-Drive Borrow Pit. Ongoing use of existing infrastructure at Stockton, including the Aerial Ropeway and Ngakawau Rail Loadout.
Cypress	Ongoing mining is authorised under existing consents. The only element for inclusion in the Project is the renewal of Wildlife Act authorities and a variation to the compensation provisions to integrate with the broader compensation work across the BPCP.
Upper Waimangaroa Haul Road (UWHR)	Road connecting Stockton mine with Mount Frederick South and the Escarpment Extended operations. Avoids using the public road network for transport of coal to the processing facilities and then to the existing rail loadout at Ngakawau. The UWHR will be a combination of upgrades to existing roads and the development of a new section through the Waimangaroa Valley.
Mount Frederick South (MFS)	A new opencast mining area with initial mining through old underground workings, and extension into unmined areas to the northwest, along with the extension of the UWHR into the MFS mine area. Coal will be transported via the UWHR to Stockton.
Escarpment Extended (ESE)	Mining is a combination of an existing pit (Escarpment), underground workings (Whareatea), and an extension into unworked areas (West Whareatea). Coal will be transported to Stockton via the UWHR.
Predator exclusion areas - fenced sanctuaries	Four predator exclusion areas are proposed as part of the consent package as mitigation for ecological effects from the UWHR, MFS and ESE.

This assessment's primary focus is on those new activities with the most potential for affecting recreation opportunities and values² at two existing recreation settings:

² 'Opportunities' refers to the physical ability to undertake an activity, and 'values' relate to the enjoyment of those opportunities.

1. Escarpment Extended (**ESE**). This has the potential to alter recreation opportunities and values on the Denniston Plateau, primarily mountain biking, trail running and four-wheel driving, but also general recreational exploration of the Plateau for a wide range of interests, including scenic and natural history, and perceptual effects on visitors to the Brakehead, old township area, Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale considering the potential for awareness of an operating coal mine nearby, as well as additional heavy traffic activity on access roads..
2. The Upper Waimangaroa Haul Road (**UWHR**), which has the potential to affect mountain biking access and four-wheel driving on, particularly, the Mackley Track between the Denniston Plateau and Lyell, and motorbike access (including trial and trail bikes) and limited four-wheel drive access into the Mount Frederick area.

The remaining areas have little potential for adverse effects on recreation opportunities and values:

3. Mount Frederick South (**MFS**), which has little access for recreation – limited to, for example, motorbike exploration, some four-wheel drive activity, and some exploration by foot.
4. The Stockton and Cypress activity areas will largely continue within their existing footprints, with very minor potential for adverse effects on recreation. The affected areas currently have very low levels of recreational use. Existing recreation and tourism values in the study currently occur – and are considered compatible with – the existing consented activities for continued operation of the Stockton Mine including the aerial ropeway and Ngakawau Rail loadout area . These are also reviewed in this assessment, but there is no indication that their continuance will diminish existing recreation activities and values, considering effects are largely limited to vehicle movements from mine operations on public roads.

Four pest free exclosures are proposed on the Plateaux to mitigate ecological impacts of the Project. All but one do not have any developed recreation tracks within them, but the southern two – North Denniston and Coalbrookdale – have mountain bike, trail running and four-wheel drive routes on some of their boundaries. The Coalbrookdale exclosure has established walking and mountain biking tracks within it, which will be maintained. The fence boundaries will inevitably be used as mountain biking and running routes, and potentially by four-wheel drivers and trail and trial bikers. These developments are not adverse for recreation (and are highly likely to increase recreation and tourism opportunities on the Plateau) but will require management of recreation use and impacts.

Managing the effects of acid mine drainage is covered in a number of other technical assessments, including the Water Management Assessment, Groundwater Hydrology Assessment, Ecotoxicity Assessment and the Freshwater Ecology Assessment, and this recreation assessment relies on those reports to identify the potential for effects on in-river recreation. The latter amounts to some white water kayaking on the Ngakawau and Waimangaroa Rivers, low levels of freshwater angling on river estuaries, low-level local swimming options, and some whitebaiting.

The Denniston to Stockton transport route on State Highway 67 has the potential to affect, primarily, recreational cycling on the road. The Traffic Assessment is the main reference for managing relevant effects.

2.1 Method

This assessment is based on:

- Site visits from 2010 to 2025;
- Literature review and reference to Strava data;
- Stakeholder interviews and group engagement;

- A visitor survey completed in 2020 (Appendix 3 to this report);
- A network of pedestrian, cycle and vehicle counters; and
- Reference to other parallel technical reports, particularly the:
 - Rough Milne Mitchell Landscape Architects Landscape Assessment (the '**Landscape Assessment**')
 - A review of noise and vibration effects on the Coalbrookdale and Myra's Tracks by Marshall Day Acoustics (the '**Noise Memo**' – Appendix 2 to this report)
 - LDP Leading Design Professionals Assessment of Environmental Effects – Lighting (the '**Lighting Assessment**').

2.2 Tourism and recreation

Tourism is a subset of recreation, whereby a tourist is defined as someone who has spent at least one night away from home. Tourists generally carry out the same activities which are available to locals. Many New Zealanders on a weekend away would not consider themselves to be tourists, especially if they were visiting what might have originally been home territory. Where this report uses the term 'recreation' it is also referring to recreational activities undertaken by tourists (i.e. 'tourism').

The 2020 Denniston Plateau visitor survey (see section 3.1.1) indicated that just over 85% of respondents (visitors to the Plateau) were New Zealanders with 58% of all respondents from the South Island and 27% from the North Island. Twelve percent of all respondents were from the West Coast. Fifteen-percent of those surveyed were international visitors.

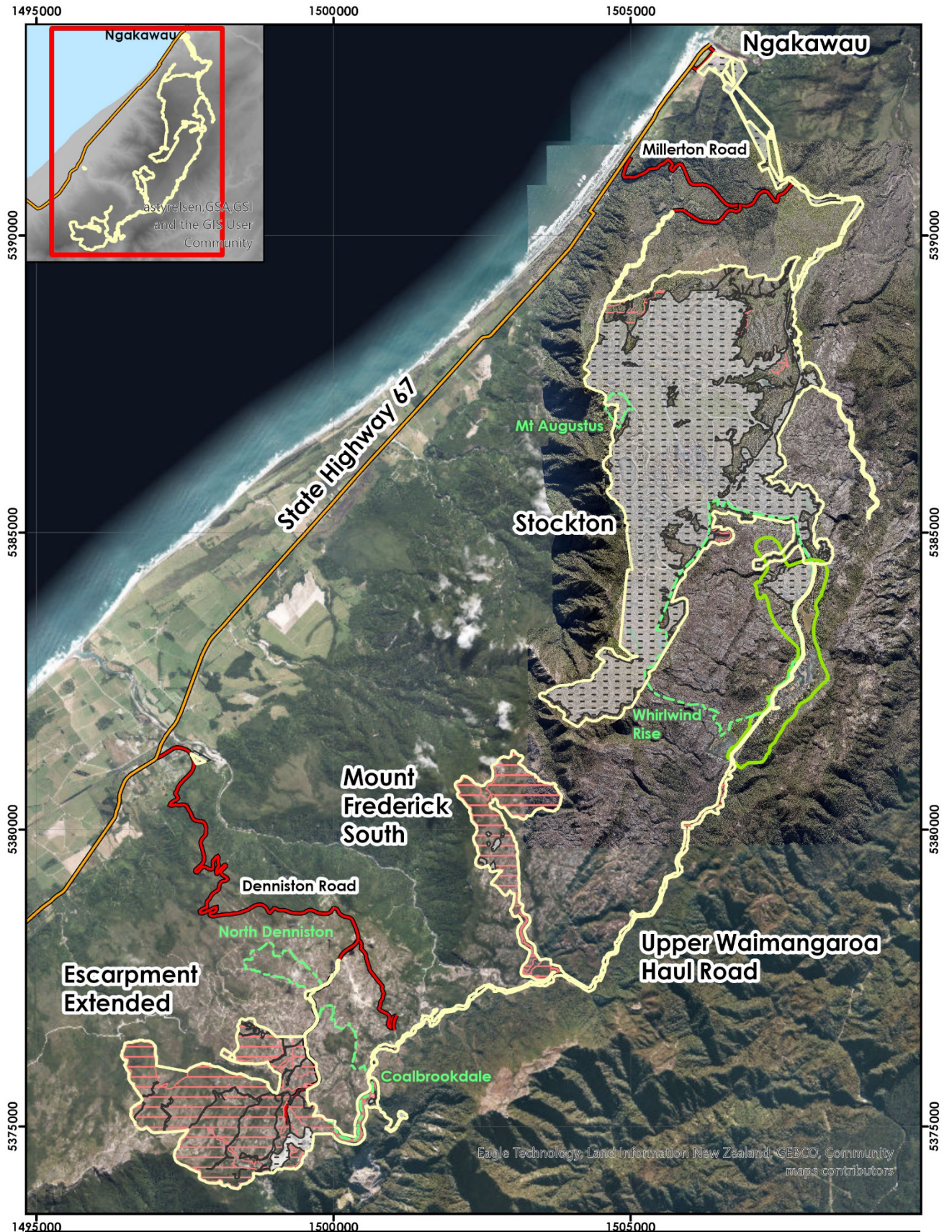
The Ministry of Business and Innovation administers various data collection exercises for domestic and international tourism.³ The Domestic Travel Survey was discontinued in 2012, and the historic data are no longer relevant post-Covid and due to the passage of time generally. International Visitor Survey (IVS) data are insufficiently detailed to provide anything relevant to the study area. National parks and Great Walks are some of the smallest tourism assets to feature individually, and extrapolations from small response sets endanger any conclusions made for less-visited settings. The Denniston Plateau is not identified in the IVS as a standalone destination, and these data are therefore not referenced here.

The main relevant tourism operator on the Denniston Plateau is Outwest Tours, who were interviewed for this report.⁴

³ See: <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/immigration-and-tourism/tourism-research-and-data/tourism-data-releases/>

⁴ <https://outwest.co.nz/>

Figure 1: Proposed Project footprint and components



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Legend

- Public Road
- State Highway
- Cypress (RC030164 and RC03175)
- Existing Disturbance Area
- Proposed Disturbance Area
- Proposed Predator Exclusion Fence
- Proposed Land Use Consent Boundary

Buller Plateaux Continuation Project
Proposed and Existing Disturbance Areas
and Proposed Land Use Consent Boundary
SCALE: 1:80,000 A4
DATE: 14 January 2026
DRAWING NUMBER: 057_7_1



3 Existing environment

This section describes the public access options on Denniston Plateau, and particularly access for driving, walking, mountain biking and four-wheel driving.

Figure 2 shows the publicly accessible areas in the study area as defined by the Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) Landonline dataset, excluding LINZ-administered land.⁵ Legal roads are shown in red and 'protected areas'⁶ in green. There is often disagreement between public land information datasets available online, but the LINZ set appears to be the most correct version in this case. Both the Herenga ā Nuku outdoor access mapping system⁷ and the Department of



⁵ <https://data.linz.govt.nz/>

⁶ The LINZ mapping term for all council and DOC areas of classified reserve.

⁷ <https://www.herengaanuku.govt.nz/maps/outdoor-access-maps/>

Conservation (DOC) online GIS system⁸ omit Conns Creek Reserve which is just north of the Plateau on Conns Creek immediately south of the Denniston Incline.⁹ Figure 2 omits land administered by LINZ which is available for public use, and which is described in Section 3.4.

The legal roads shown in red include all formed and unformed public roads.

The three areas of public conservation land potentially directly affected by the proposed activities – the Mount Rochfort Stewardship, Waimangaroa – Granity Stewardship and the Plover Stream Conservation Areas – are within the Kawatiri Place, as defined by DOC's operative *West Coast Conservation Management Strategy 2010 – 2020* (CMS). The CMS defines most of the Kawatiri Place (and virtually all of the study area) as a 'backcountry-remote' recreation setting (Figure 3), with the definition:¹⁰

The 'backcountry-remote' zone provides opportunities to access extensive natural settings where facilities are provided but a considerable degree of physical challenge, self-reliance and isolation is involved. Although users of these areas usually travel in groups for company and safety, the expectation is that groups will generally be small and that encounters with other groups will be infrequent, except on a limited number of high-use tracks and rivers. Huts and tracks that see relatively little use provide the opportunity for solitude for those who seek a greater sense of isolation and challenge but still need the security of some facilities, especially with the topographical difficulties and climatic extremes regularly encountered on the West Coast Te Tai o Poutini. Overnight use is more intensive at some sites and at certain times of the year.

Within the backcountry-remote zone an extensive network of backcountry facilities (such as roads, routes, tracks, huts, bridges, cableways and signs) and road-end facilities (car parks, shelters, track information) provide access to a wide range of backcountry experiences. Many of these facilities pre-date the establishment of the Department of Conservation (1987) and were originally provided by the New Zealand Forest Service for their wild animal control operations. As a result, many of the huts, tracks and bridges were not designed primarily as a recreational resource, although from the outset they were available for recreational use. Trampers, climbers, hunters and fishers have traditionally used these facilities and, in the past, access has been largely on foot. However, in some places these patterns are now undergoing change as new activities (e.g. kayaking, rafting, mountain biking) create demands for access to areas in the backcountry-remote zone. Increased use is also now being made of air access for both new and traditional forms of backcountry recreation.

This is an inaccurate description of the study areas within the Rochfort Stewardship and Plover Stream Conservation Areas, considering their existing levels of use for mining, and, for the Rochfort Stewardship Area, a very high level of access development for 4WD and mountain bike activities, and extensive roading access for electricity transmission. Easy motorised access is incompatible with a backcountry-remote recreation setting definition.

Seven frontcountry sites are defined in the Kawatiri Place. These are, as per Figure 3:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Chasm Creek walk | 5. Conns Creek Yards |
| 2. Charming Creek walkway | 6. Denniston – Coalbrookdale walkway |
| 3. Millerton Dam and Bathhouse track | 7. Lyell campsite and walkway |
| 4. Britannia track | |

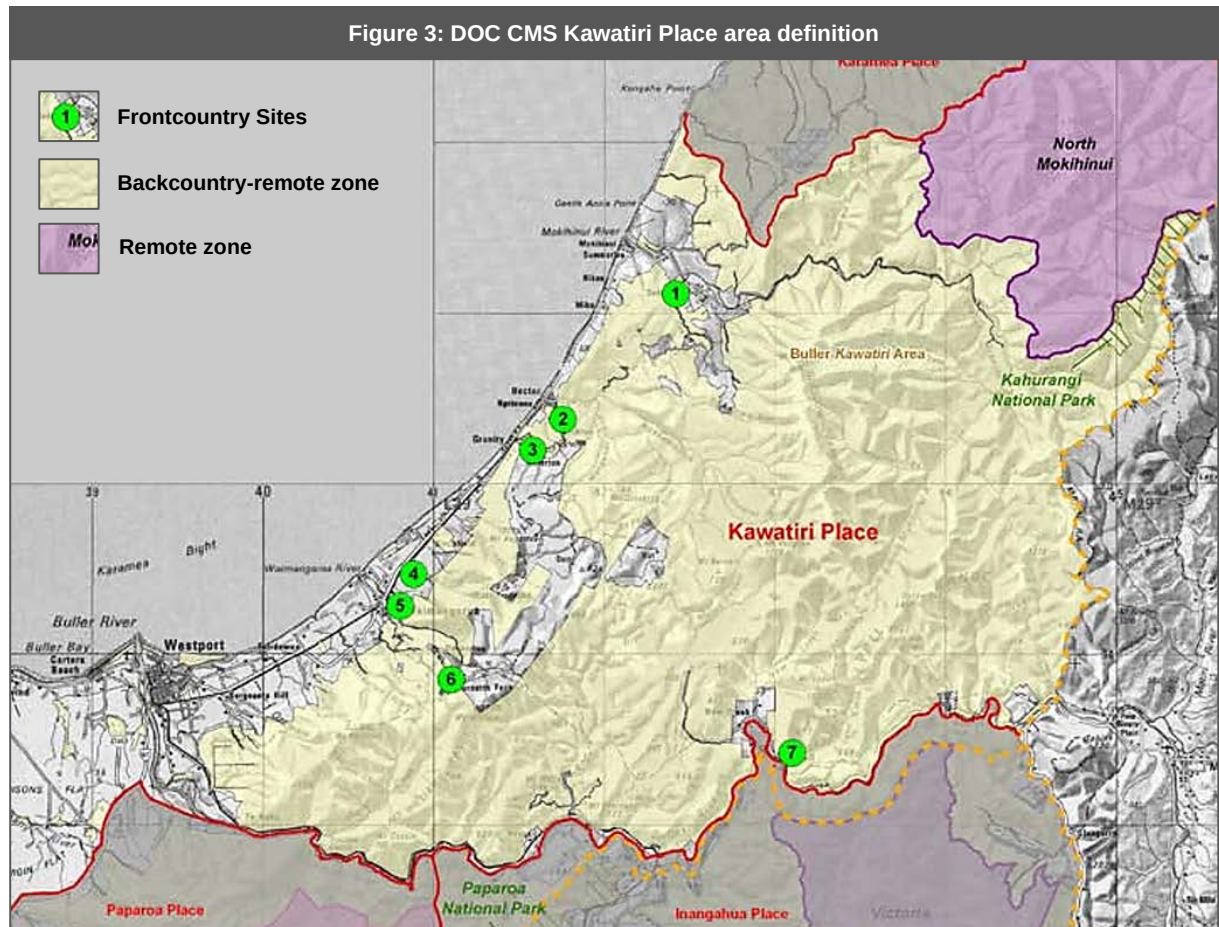
The majority of the recreation activities of interest to this assessment occur within the Mount Rochfort Stewardship Area (ESE), Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area (Mount Frederick)

⁸ <https://maps.doc.govt.nz/externalmaps/index.html?viewer=docmaps>

⁹ CMS Land Unit No. K29102 in the DOC West Coast CMS 2010-2020. A local purpose reserve.

¹⁰ CMS section 3.6.1.4

and the Plover Stream Conservation Area (Stockton). Amongst these, the Mount Rochfort Stewardship Area has the highest level of recreational use, and is the main focus of this assessment. The existing recreation environment of each area is described in the following three sections.



Expectations for recreation development in the study area are defined in the CMS as preferred outcomes for 2020. This is quoted extensively as it informs expectations for the delivery of recreation opportunities during the proposed mine-life and at mine closure for the Kawatiri Place:¹¹

People are particularly encouraged to experience Kawatiri's mining history, with a focus on the Denniston and Millerton coal plateaux. The Department works with the local community and other people and organisations to develop and implement a concept plan for the Denniston coal plateau. Site management ensures that the protection of historic values takes priority over recreational use, with the emphasis on low-impact facilities and activities, such as walks and interpretation, which encourage people to learn about and understand the history of the site. In recognition of the area's significant values, the Department investigates the possibility of gazetted public conservation land on the Denniston coal plateau as an historic reserve....

People are attracted to the wide range of recreational opportunities which Kawatiri Place offers and are able to use a variety of access methods to explore natural areas and discover historic treasures. Key features include Denniston, Mokihinui River, with its white-water rafting opportunities, and the Tauranga Bay seal colony 'intense interest' site. Concessionaires provide recreational opportunities that complement those provided by the Department and/or enhance people's enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of natural, historical or cultural values. Concession activities are generally of low impact

¹¹ DOC CMS sections 4.2.2.4 and 4.2.2.6

and are sympathetic to, and in keeping with, the conservation values of the particular site. Intense interest sites and frontcountry sites recreational opportunities in this zone are dominated by the Tauranga Bay seal colony, Denniston and a range of other sites associated with the industrial heritage of Buller Kawatiri. These opportunities are safe and easily accessible....

The historic coalfields, communities and industrial heritage of the Buller Kawatiri plateaux are a popular recreational focus, where the emphasis is on day walks. Mount Rochfort is an easily accessible place to experience the coal measure ecosystems and landscapes of the coal plateaux. An outstanding opportunity for historic heritage appreciation is available at Denniston....¹² The historic bridle track provides walking access to the brakehead and Denniston township. People can also drive up to the brakehead car park. Several walking opportunities are available within the township and across the plateau. A new track, incorporating above-ground sections of the old roperoad and Denniston Incline, provides access through to Burnetts face and Coalbrookdale areas and links to the town walk at Denniston. Interpretation on the plateau informs people about historic heritage values as well as natural heritage. A four-wheel drive loop track on the Denniston plateau provides a challenging journey across a spectacular sub-alpine environment, offering dramatic views of mountain and coastal landscapes. Due to the fragile nature of the area, access is restricted, and controlled by a locked gate. Formed roads also provide access to paragliding launch sites on the Denniston and Stockton Plateaux. The Charming Creek track through the Ngakawau Gorge is a major attraction, where people are able to experience distinctive natural, historical and recreational values. the site is managed to protect both its historic integrity and maintain the daywalking and mountain biking opportunities the track provides. These values are not compromised by other activities. At Lyell, in the upper gorge of the Buller Kawatiri river, facilities for camping, picnicking and walking are provided. Tracks on either side of Lyell Creek provide access to the historic cemetery and 19th century alluvial and hard rock gold mining remains. Recreational gold fossicking opportunities are available at Lyell Creek and Britannia Stream). Other frontcountry tracks include the short Chasm Creek track near Seddonville and an old benched miners' track to the historic Britannia Mine in the coastal hills between Granity and Waimangaroa. Within Kawatiri, four-wheel driving, mountain biking and horse riding are possible on some roads (e.g. four-wheel drive roads at Denniston and Rochfort). Additional mountain biking opportunities are also available on some tracks or routes (e.g. in the Denniston area and on the Charming Creek track)....

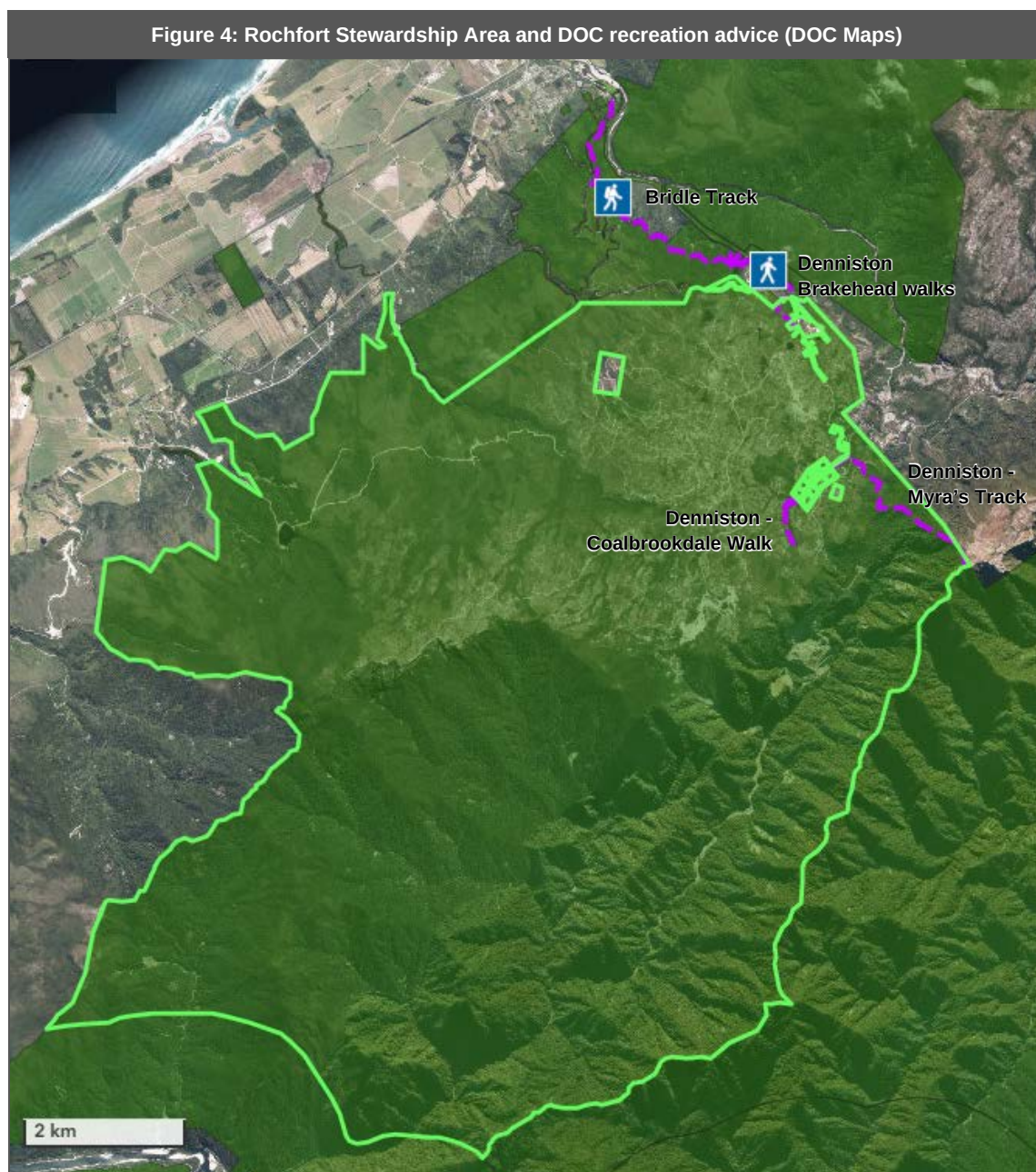
Mountain biking is increasingly popular on the Buller Coal Plateaux and along the pylon line maintenance tracks between Denniston and new Creek in the lower Buller Kawatiri gorge.

The proposed haul road between Stockton and ESE lies largely within land administered by Land Information New Zealand (LINZ). The location and values of this area is described in Section 3.4 of this report.

¹² The review refers here to the now-closed underground mine experience at the Banbury mine.

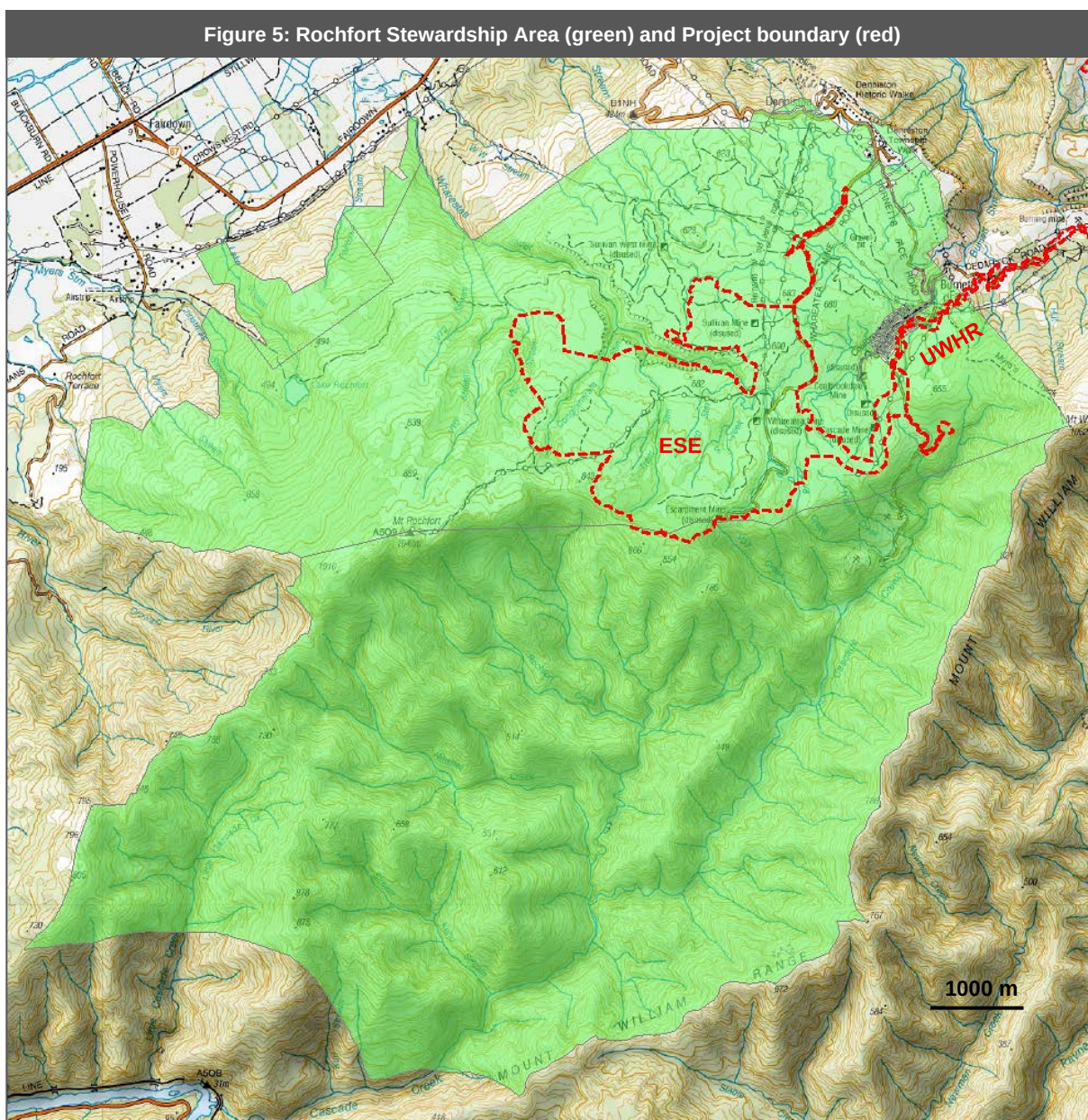
3.1 Rochfort Stewardship Area (ESE and UWHR)

There are multiple small reserves in the immediate Denniston township area (largely within its rectangular frame of legal roads), including local purpose, recreation, scenic and historic reserves – whose primary purposes are defined by the Reserves Act 1977 – and more areas of stewardship land subject to the Conservation Act 1987 (such as the Old Denniston School Site just south-east of Denniston township). These are not directly affected by the proposal. Figure 4 shows the Rochfort Stewardship Area as defined by the online DOC Maps service¹³ with DOC's recommended recreation opportunities (tracks in mauve, titles added).



¹³ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/map/index.html>

Figure 5 shows the Project boundaries within the 7562.3 ha Stewardship Area, of which the ESE would occupy 584.7 ha, and the UWHR 31.7 ha (8.2% in total).



DOC's 2022 conservation values report on the Rochfort Stewardship Area – prepared to assist with consultation for review of West Coast stewardship land status – gave the following summary of its recreation values:¹⁴

This area is in a Backcountry-remote zone and has Frontcountry sites that include the historic Denniston Town Walk and the Coalbrookdale Walk and Burnett's Face. Myra's Track is a tramping track providing access to Mt William. The Buller Cycling Club manages and maintains an extensive network of mountain bike tracks across the Denniston Plateau and there are 4WD roads to Mt Rochfort and the historic Sullivan Mine. A concessionaire also maintains a walking track to Lake Rochfort as part of their hydro scheme.

¹⁴ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/managing-conservation/stewardship-land/documents-supporting-stewardship-land-reclassification/>

Visitor type and activities typically undertaken *The area is used by people doing short walks, day walks, mountain biking and 4WD.*

Access *via Denniston Road as well as the 4WD track to Mt Rochfort, Mackley Road goes through to the Buller River via the Orikaka. This area includes the Denniston Plateau biodiversity enhancement area funded by compensation from the Escarpment Mine. The assessment area includes access to the Escarpment, Cascade and Sullivans Mines and to a telecommunication tower on Mt Rochfort. The old school site includes a boiler associated with a neighbouring dwelling and hot house.*

The Department of Conservation's *West Coast Conservation Management Strategy 2010-2020* (CMS) broadly describes the recreation opportunities on the Plateau (p204). (Deleted sections of the quote referred to the 'underground museum experience' at Denniston which is now closed.)

The historic coalfields, communities and industrial heritage of the Buller Kawatiri plateaux are a popular recreational focus, where the emphasis is on day walks. Mount Rochfort is an easily accessible place to experience the coal measure ecosystems and landscapes of the coal plateaux. An outstanding opportunity for historic heritage appreciation is available at Denniston. ... The historic bridle track provides walking access to the brakehead and Denniston township. People can also drive up to the brakehead car park. Several walking opportunities are available within the township and across the plateau. A new track, incorporating above-ground sections of the old roperoad and Denniston Incline, provides access through to Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale areas and links to the town walk at Denniston. Interpretation on the plateau informs people about historic heritage values as well as natural heritage. A four-wheel drive loop track on the Denniston plateau provides a challenging journey across a spectacular sub-alpine environment, offering dramatic views of mountain and coastal landscapes. Due to the fragile nature of the area, access is restricted, and controlled by a locked gate (see Section 3.6.4.17 [referenced in section 3.1.4 in this report]). Formed roads also provide access to paragliding launch sites on the Denniston and Stockton Plateaux.

3.1.1 2020 visitor intercept survey

An intercept survey of visitors to the Denniston Plateau was carried out for Bathurst over 13 days between 30 December 2019 and 17 March 2020. The objective of the survey was to describe the broad recreation patterns on the Denniston Plateau. The full report is attached as Appendix 3. A summary of the results is presented here. Visitor counts to the end of 2025 show that visitor levels to the Denniston Plateau have not changed markedly since 2020 (see section 3.1.3).

The survey period was intended to extend from late-December to Easter with a target of 400 respondents, but was truncated due to Covid-19 – although 384 responses were ultimately gained.

Three survey sites – considered gateway areas to the Denniston Plateau – were used:

- The Denniston Brakehead and visitor centre area, with 305 respondents.
- Burnetts Face Road near the intersection of Whareatea Mine Road, with 49 respondents, focusing on visitors accessing the Coalbrookdale and Mackley areas. This required, in the main, waving down passing vehicles.
- The Quarry carpark on Whareatea Mine Road, with 30 respondents.

The survey had six main focus areas:

1. **Demographics.** Just over 85% of respondents were New Zealanders with 58% of all respondents from the South Island and 27% from the North Island. Twelve percent of all respondents were from the West Coast. Fifteen-percent of those surveyed were international visitors, and 4% of all respondents were Australian. Compared with the 2018

Census data for New Zealand, respondents were more likely to be in the 50+ age groups. Those aged under 15 were not interviewed and were treated as non-responses.¹⁵

2. **Activity.** The majority of respondents identified sightseeing as their main activity (78%), while almost all (94%) described sightseeing as one of the activities that they were doing on their visit. Just under 11% named walking as their main activity, and 22% stated they were going for a walk as part of their visit combined with other activities. The respective figures for mountain biking were 5% and 7%. All other activities were undertaken by fewer than 2% of respondents as a main activity, and included photography, four-wheel driving, motorbiking, quad or dirt-biking and cycle touring. The survey site and respondent's origin did not influence the choice of main activity.
3. **Features of interest.** Respondents were asked to rank the features of the Plateau that they were most interested in from a pre-set list of eight options, but were not required to rank the full list if a feature was of no interest to them. The results were, in order of total responses per feature: The mining and social history (363); The views to the coast or inland (285); The landscape of the Plateau (251); Natural environment – the local plants and animals (206); The walking tracks (164); The mountain biking tracks (64); A personal or family connection to the area (50); It was just part of the itinerary or I just accompanied family and friends (23). The mining and social history was most likely to be ranked the most important feature.
4. **Area knowledge.** Respondents were asked where they were visiting 'today' and about their awareness of all visitor locations on the Plateau. A map showing ten locations was provided, and for each location respondents were asked if they had visited it or were visiting it today, didn't know about it, or knew about it but were not visiting it today. The Brakehead and old township area were most likely to be visited 'today'. There was low awareness about the Miners area mountain bike tracks, Sullivans area mountain bike tracks, Mackley Track area, Mount Rochfort, Mount William and Myra's Track, with more than 60% of respondents not knowing about these destinations at all. Just over 56% of respondents did not know of the Coalbrookdale Walk.
5. **Change over time.** Respondents were asked if, in their opinion, the Denniston Plateau was better, worse or the same as the first time they had visited it. They were also asked how many years they had been visiting the area. Those who were on their first visit (n=225, or 58%) were not included in this response set. The majority of respondents with experience – 95% – considered the setting to be better than or the same as when they first visited, while 5% (n=255) considered it to be worse. The longer the experience, the more respondents felt that the Plateau had changed for the better, with a dip for those with the longest experience (41+ years), who were a little more likely to think it was unchanged. There was little difference across the periods of experience for those who thought the Plateau had changed for the worse. Reasons for improvement related mostly to 'More interpretation panels / more to see'. There was no consistency in the reasons for changes for the worse, but they included wayfinding and signs, access limits and the lack of a mine tour.
6. **Best and worst aspects.** Respondents were asked to name their best and worst aspects of the Plateau via an unprompted open question. There were approximately 2.3 times more best aspects compared with worst. Best aspects were dominated by the history, views and the interpretation panels. The main worst aspects were the weather and the wayfinding signage, with many respondents stating it was hard to know where to park and how to navigate the Plateau generally.
7. **Travel and safety.** Respondents were asked about how they travelled to the Plateau and if they felt safe on the access road. Most were in a private or rental vehicle as a driver or

¹⁵ Standard survey etiquette requires permission from a guardian or parent for potential respondents aged under 15.

passenger and 83% considered the access to be no different to an average rural road, while 14% considered it 'a little unsafe' and 2% 'moderately unsafe'. None considered it 'extremely unsafe'. Motorcyclists were more likely to consider the experience 'a little unsafe', but this was a very small sub-sample.

8. **Mining awareness and effects on visiting.** Respondents were asked if they were "aware that there is still mining on the Denniston Plateau?" The response was split nearly 50% yes and no. Those who responded yes (n=194) were asked if their awareness influenced their decision to visit the Plateau, and 4% responded 'yes', most of whom had an interest in mining. All respondents were asked if mining on the Plateau would influence their decision to visit again in the future. Just under a third (30%) responded yes, and the remainder (70%) responded no. Those who responded yes (n=122) were asked in what way mining on the Plateau would influence their decision to visit again. Respondents were able to give more than one answer, and many gave a combination of negative, positive and mixed answers. Forty-six percent of this subgroup (n=122) gave a generally positive response (they would be interested in seeing an active mine or they supported economic activity, for example), 44% gave an equivocal answer (their decision would depend on how mining was done and what it affected) and 20% gave a generally negative response (opposed to open cast mining, mining generally and/or its environmental impact). Twenty-one respondents (17% of this subgroup) were opposed to mining in general and gave no positive or equivocal comment. This represents just over 5% of all respondents (n=385).

3.1.2 *Strava data and cycling and walking route maps*

This section helps identify where cyclists and walkers are recreating on Denniston Plateau, and provides some relative activity levels.

Strava¹⁶ is increasingly becoming a useful tool for identifying the relative levels of interest in various recreation activities by setting. Strava is a social media platform where users record their GPS activity via their smartphones and other devices while recreating. The data are uploaded to a central database, allowing speed and time comparisons with other cyclists, runners, kayakers, surfers and swimmers (for example), and the monitoring of individual activity or training targets. Water-based users rely on waterproof smartwatches rather than phones. While the service is popular with professional athletes, its membership is dominated by casual recreation participants. Strava indicates that it had 95 million international users in 2022 (80% outside the United States) with nearly an additional two million joining per month.¹⁷ It is now popular amongst regular cyclists, mountain bikers and runners, and is also used by the likes of walkers, waka ama and swimmers.¹⁸

International comparisons between different forms of data gathering show a degree of reliability for Strava data with a range of 1% to 12% of users recorded on-site that are connected to the service; and this is growing. The author of this report has recorded participation in a 2026 intercept survey (unpublished at this report date) with 60% of runners, 43% of cyclists, 13% of walkers and 10% of dog-walkers recording their activity on Strava. Strava is therefore a little like a tag and release programme. Strava essentially tags several thousand active people in an area and monitors where and how they recreate. Its greatest strength is in showing the relative value of settings for different forms of recreation. However, it must be noted that Strava data are biased to a sector of the population which is more likely to be physically active and reasonably tech-savvy. Some Strava data are also recorded while users are driving from their activity (they forget to turn tracking off), and some users miscode their activities (marine cyclists for example). There is also inaccuracy in GPS recording from some devices, with some recorded routes offset.

¹⁶ See: <https://www.strava.com/maps/global-heatmap>

¹⁷ <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/strava-statistics/>

¹⁸ In the Stuff online daily general knowledge quiz for 15 January 2025, a question was, "You can use the app Strava to track" 56% answered correctly 'The route of a bike ride'. 10% chose 'Your sobriety journey', 21% 'Your fertility cycle' and 13% 'A lost digital device'.

A very rough calculation based on cycle counter data for the Old Ghost Road and Strava segment data suggests that approximately 10% of cyclists on the track record their rides on Strava.¹⁹ Recording levels for pedestrians will be much lower and are hard to calculate considering users splitting activity records on the Strava app between the options of 'walk', 'trek' or 'run'.

Figure 6 shows the Strava heatmap for all activities for the central Buller District based on 12 months of cumulative data to May 2026. The darker lines indicate higher levels of recorded activity. This indicates the relative popularity of the Old Ghost Road track and activity on the network of tracks on the Denniston Plateau.

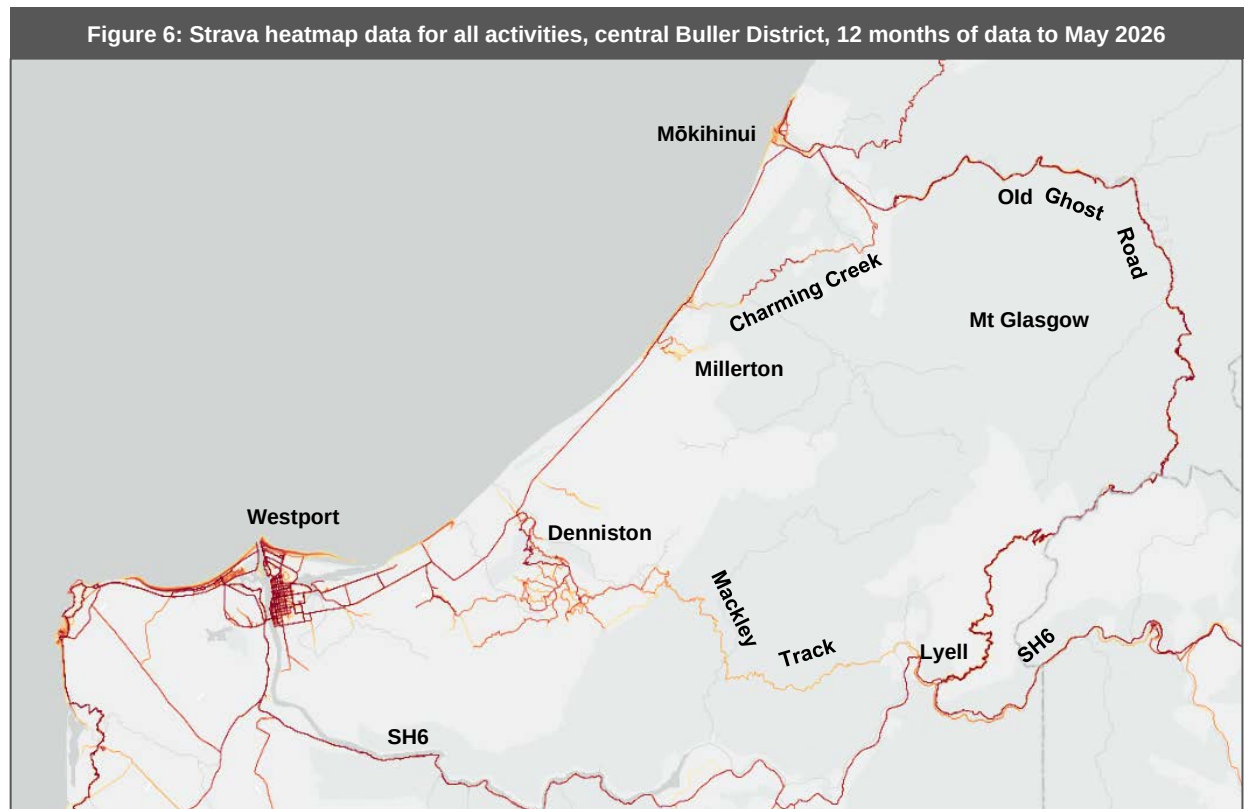


Figure 7 shows the heatmap for cycling on the Denniston Plateau, indicating the relative levels of activity on each cycle track for the 12 months period to May 2026. Figure 8 shows the names and locations of most trails according to the MTB Trails Trust.²⁰ The Strava data show the relative popularity of Whareatea Mine Road (marked as 'Mt Rochfort Rd' in Figure 8) and Burnetts Face Road. The main popular routes leading off these roads are Sullivans Circuit, Pig Route, Aerial and Miners Track. The heatmap shows more tracks in use than indicated in Figure 8, such as that north of Loopy and near Miners Track. Taxman is shown on the heatmap to terminate at the same point as Pig Route on Denniston Road.

Unfortunately, Strava users occasionally leave their GPS recording live as they drive away from their recreation setting – evidenced by, for example, runners recorded on motorways. Roads are therefore over-represented in the heatmaps.

Advance Northern West Coast maintains detailed route maps for nine mountain bike tracks on the Plateau on its 'Welcome to Westport' website, with detailed, albeit somewhat outdated, route descriptions.²¹

¹⁹ Based on 5,173 unique cycle trips over 12 months on the Old Ghost Road (Kennett & Northcote 2020) and 540 annual segment records for a section of the track for Strava (<https://www.strava.com/segments/11346451>) over a 12-month period (author calculation based on Strava segment analysis).

²⁰ See <https://www.mtbtrailsrust.org.nz/Denniston-Plateau>

²¹ <https://westport.nz/cycling/>

Figure 7: Strava heatmap data for all cycle activities, Denniston, 12 months of data to May 2026

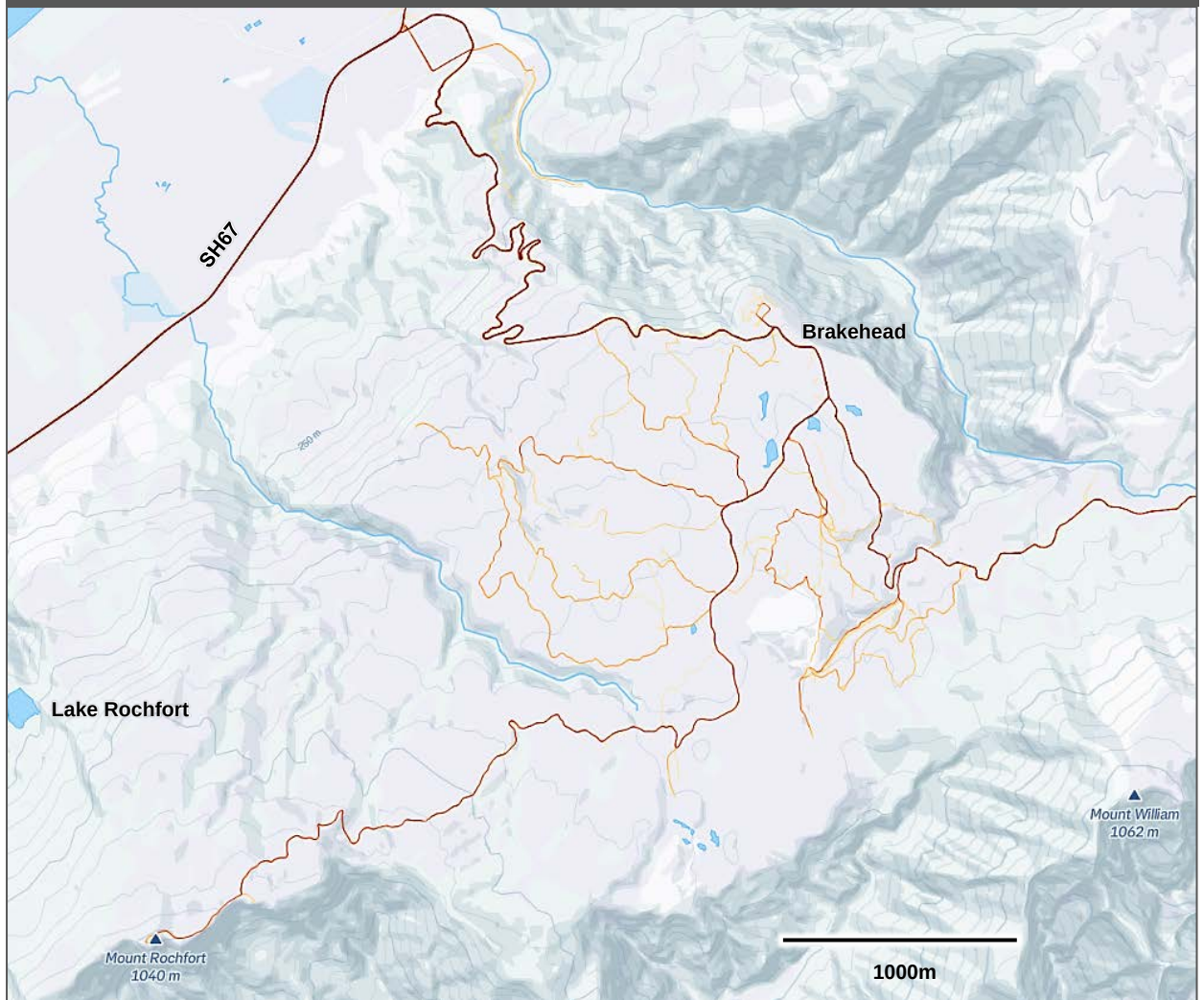


Figure 8: MTB Trails Trust trail names for Denniston Plateau

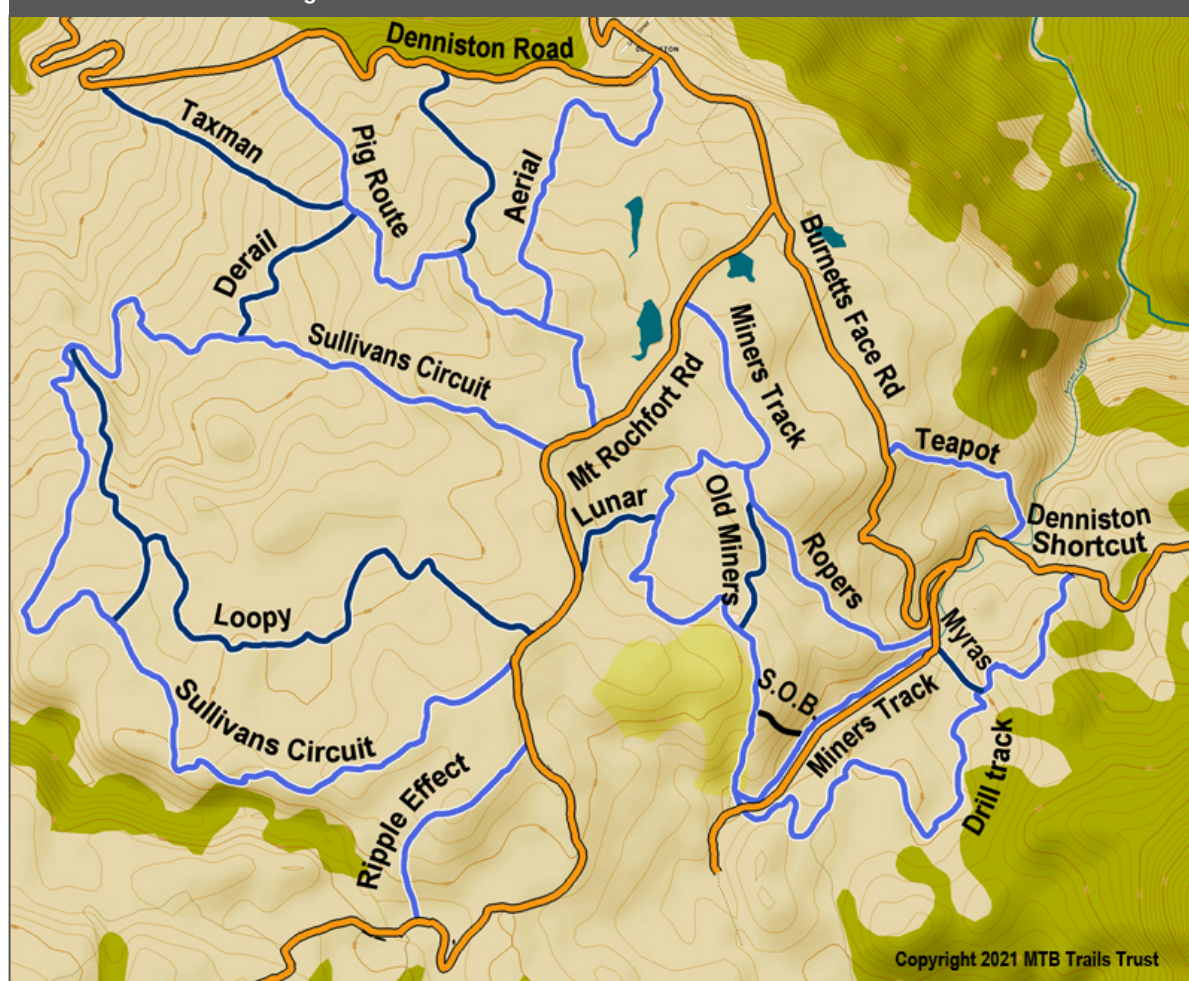


Figure 9 shows Strava heatmap data for pedestrians on the Plateau for the 12 months to May 2026. This includes, primarily, trail runners and walkers. Figure 10 shows the local walkways promoted by the Department of Conservation in its 2018 'Walks in the Westport area' brochure.²² These are the Denniston Bridle Path (1), Brakehead Walk (2), and Coalbrookdale Walk (3). For the latter, the brochure states:

A good gravel road behind Denniston (still used by coal trucks) leads to the start of the walkway that follows part of the cable-car rope road that carried coal from the mines to the top of the Denniston Incline. Relics include tunnels, foundations, a haulage winch and the country's best remaining example of a mine fanhouse.

The heatmap shows the popularity of these three walks, but also part of Sullivan's Circuit and an unnamed route north of Loopy, as well as Derail and Pig Route, and Whareatea Mine Road west of the Escarpment Mine access. Myra's Track leading to Mount William, and Mackley Track east of Burnetts Face, are also relatively popular.

At March 2026, the Department of Conservation did not promote any of the Denniston Plateau walks on its online portal for walking and tramping in the Westport area.²³

²² See: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/parks-and-recreation/tracks-and-walks/west-coast/buller-walks-in-westport-and-buller.pdf>

²³ See: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/westport/>

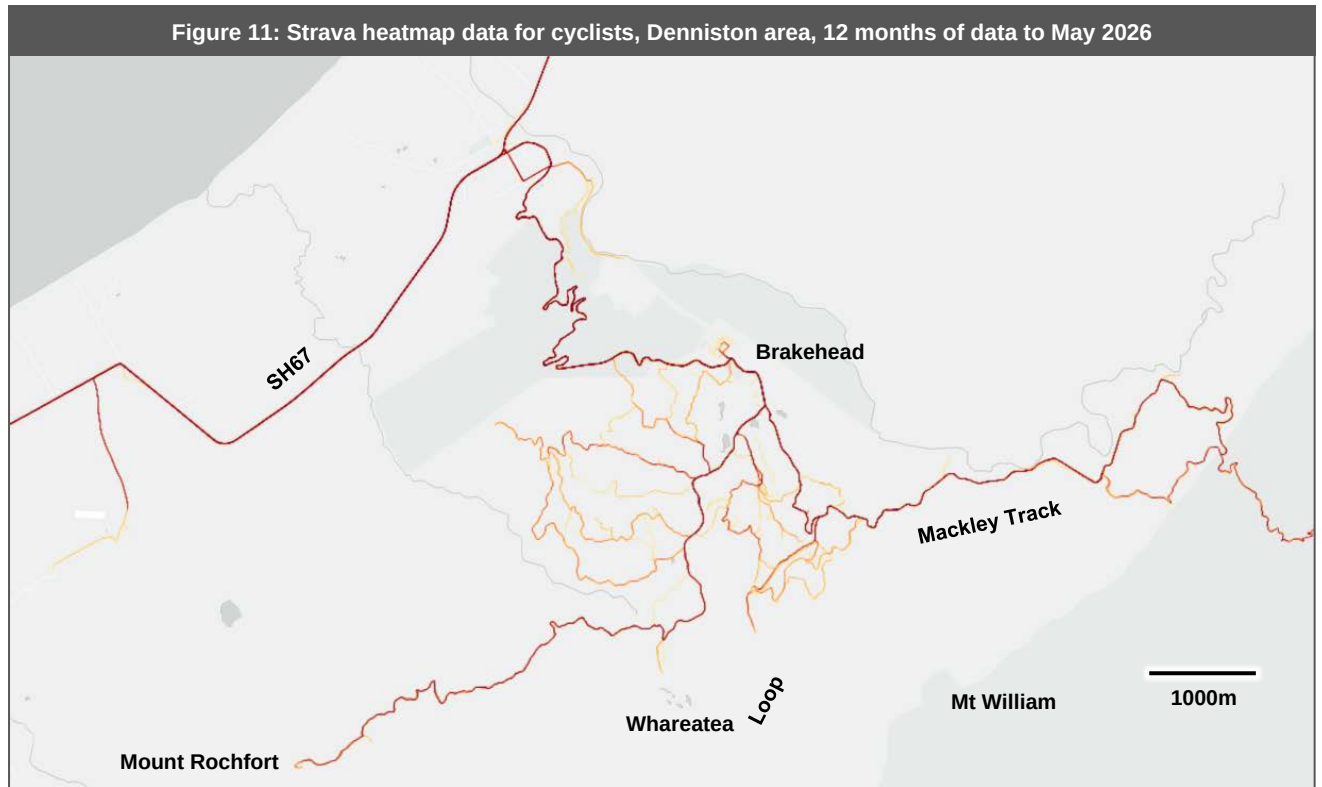
Figure 9: Strava heatmap data for 'footsports', Denniston, 12 months of data to May 2026



Figure 10: DOC Denniston Plateau walks

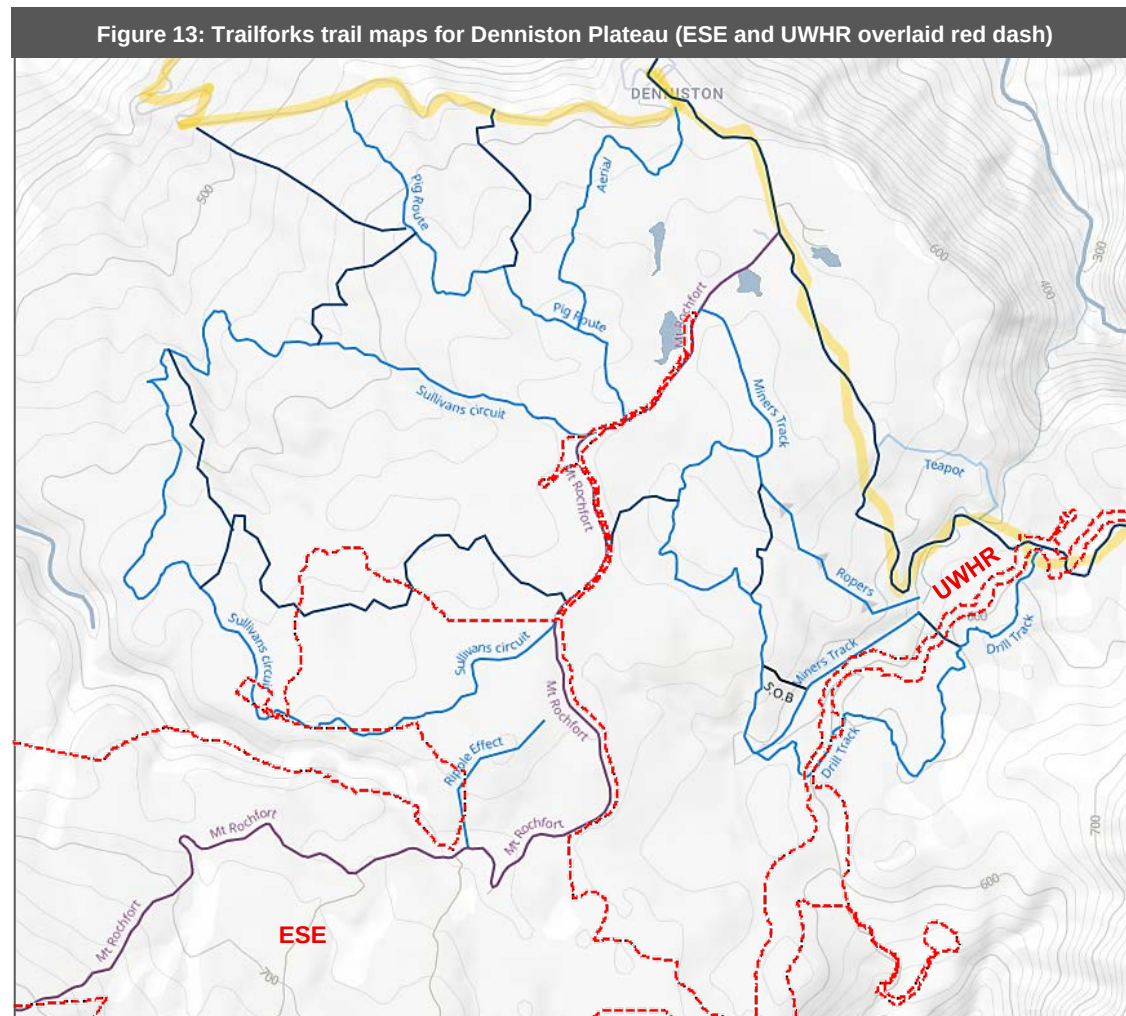


Figure 11 and Figure 12 compare Strava heatmap cycling and pedestrian activities over a wider area, showing pedestrians accessing Mount Rochfort via Powerhouse Road and Lake Rochfort in addition to via Denniston Road, while cyclists are shown accessing the area from Denniston Road and Mackley Track. The Whareatea Loop track appeared in older iterations of Figure 11 (at least up to January 2025) and was mentioned in interviews (Section 3.6). It is not shown on other maps since it is considered to be closed – and now appears to not be used. Darker colours indicate the more popular routes.



Trailforks is another social media recreation platform focused on providing definitive map guides for a variety of recreation activities. It is relied upon to indicate the status of trails, in terms of surface quality or whether they are closed for maintenance or due to logging (for example). Local authorities in New Zealand often use this site to provide trail status updates.

Figure 13 shows the Trailforks map for the Denniston Plateau as at February 2025 (with the ESE and UWHR boundaries approximately overlaid). This is similar to Figure 8 with the same naming conventions, but with the route to Mount Rochfort shown accurately (Figure 8 has a route error). The Denniston Road and Burnetts Face Road are shown as part of the 500km 'West Coast Bike Packing Trip (Heaphy, Old Ghost Road, Paparoa)' route or 'Old Ghost Road Roundabout' – shown in yellow in Figure 13.²⁴ This route, relying on the Mackley Track, is discussed further in Section 3.4 considering its reliance on land administered by LINZ. However, the use of Denniston Road and Burnetts Face Road for this longer route should be noted.



As per the requirements of the original concession granted to Bathurst for access to the Escarpment Mine (34684-OTH), a walkway was developed to view mining relics (the historic Whareatea Mine Site) immediately north of the mine area. Public access here will not be possible during the currently proposed ESE mine life.

²⁴ See <https://www.trailforks.com/route/west-coast-bike-packing-trip-heaphy-ogr-paparoa/?activitytype=1&z=7.4&lat=-41.61798&lon=171.89245&content=trails,labels,nst,poi,directory,polygon,waypoint>

Figure 14 shows the vehicle barrier on the Whareatea Mine Site walking track. Figure 15 shows the location of the track and some activity recorded on the Strava heatmap (12 months of data to May 2026).

Figure 14: Entrance to Whareatea Mine Site walkway off Whareatea Mine Road



Figure 15: Strava heatmap for Whareatea mine walk, showing walking route in dashed yellow



3.1.3 Visitor counts

Six visitor traffic counters have been installed on the Denniston Plateau. Four are operated by Bathurst Resources (since March 2018 in red x in Figure 16, and from December 2024 in blue) and two by the Department of Conservation (since December 2010 – yellow x in Figure 16). The counters were installed to quantify the various means of accessing the Denniston Plateau including mountain bikers, vehicles and pedestrians.



The **Denniston Road** vehicle counter is located prior to the turn-off to the main visitor car park. It consists of one pair of inductance loops, positioned over each traffic lane to record the total number of vehicles entering and exiting the Denniston Plateau.

The **Burnetts Face Road** counter is located past the turn-off to Whareatea Mine Road. This site consists of two sets of inductance loops; one pair positioned over each traffic lane to record the total number and direction of vehicles, and a set across the width of the road to record the total number of bikes passing in either direction.

The **Whareatea Mine Road Sealed** counter is located prior to the mountain bike car park. This site consists of two sets of inductance loops; one loop over the left hand traffic lane to record the total number of vehicles (this road has no exit so a second loop was not required), and one set across the width of the road to record the total number and direction of bikes. This captures all mountain bike riders who use Whareatea Mine Road to access any of the six established mountain bike circuits or Mount Rochfort.

The **Whareatea Mine Road Gravel** counter is located south-west of the mountain bike car park and was installed in 2024. This site relies on a radar which differentiates between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, and reports their direction of travel. The intention of the counter is to indicate the number of vehicles which travel towards Mount Rochfort beyond the Quarry car park, and to support the wider description of pedestrian and cycle activity on the Plateau. Unfortunately, the new technology has proven unreliable, and the data collected up to at least June 2025 has not been accurate (wildly inaccurate in fact) – despite replacement of the radar unit. It is hoped that the system will be sorted by the supplier or replaced with an alternative technology in 2026.

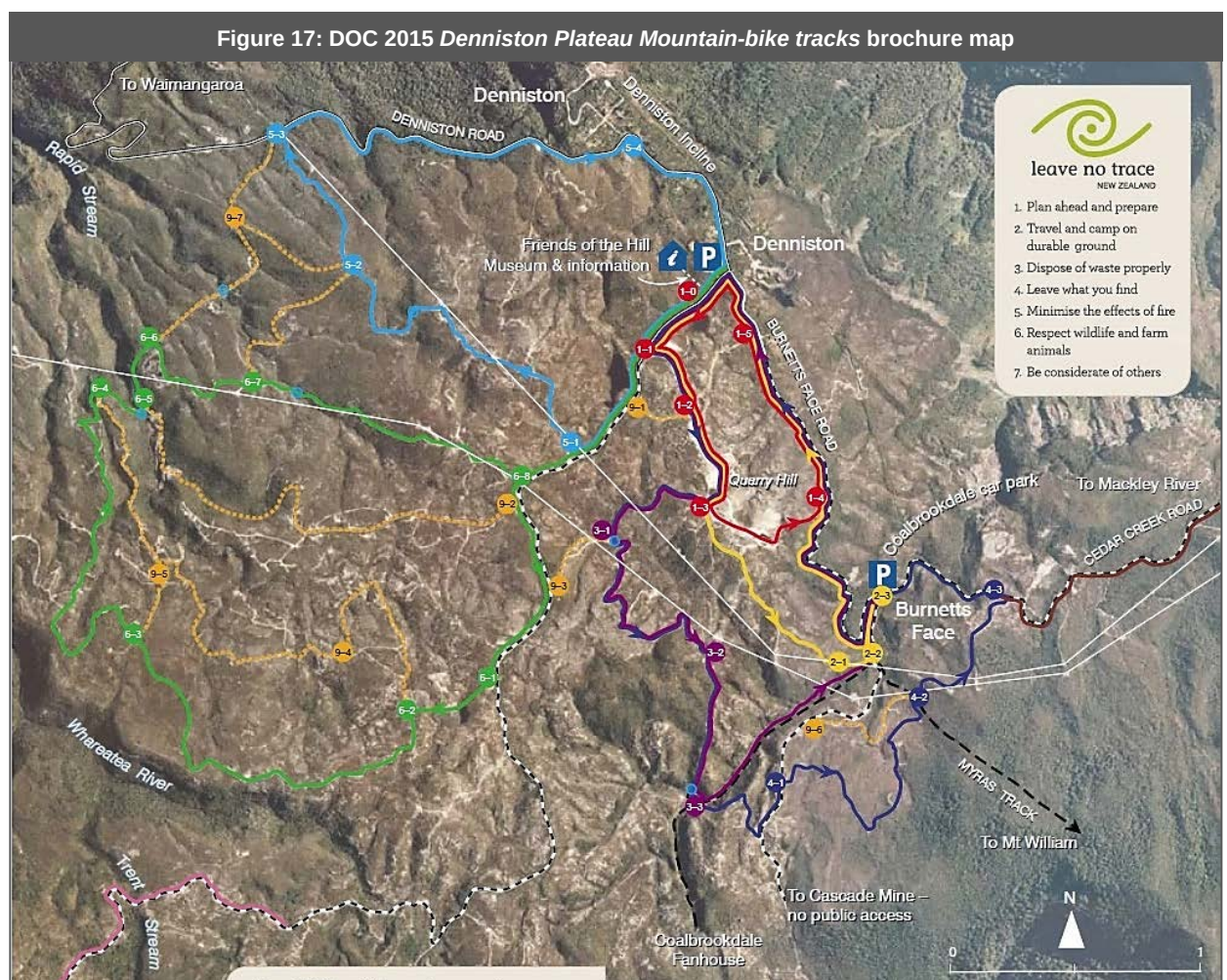
The installation of the first three counters was designed by traffic engineer and (at the time) Nelson Tasman Cycle Trials Trust Project Manager [REDACTED]. The system was installed by Be Counted Technology Ltd relying on the same system adopted for the national cycle trail network.

The Department of Conservation counters count:

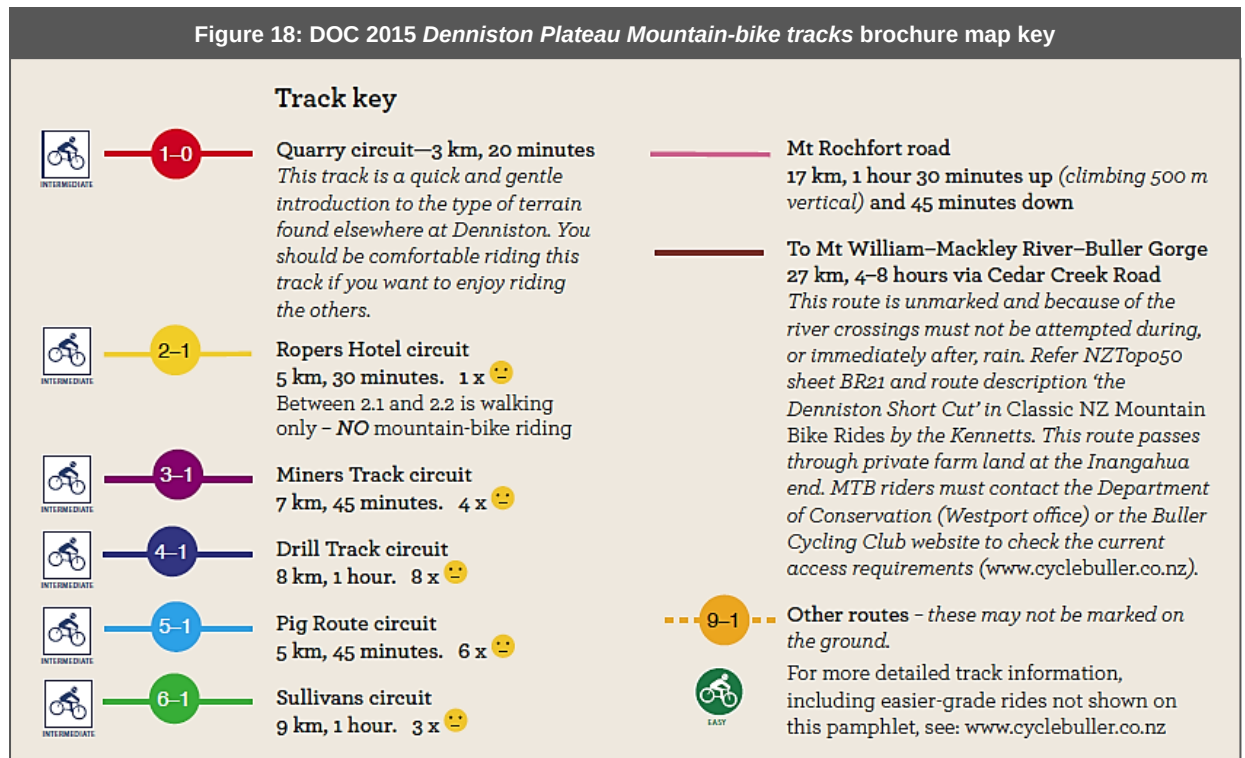
- Pedestrians accessing the **Denniston Brakehead**, a non-directional two-way counter (counts visitors a second time when they return on the same route);
- Vehicles entering the Denniston Brakehead carpark via **Gillies Road**. This is a non-directional counter, but the flow of traffic on Gillies Road is predominantly one-way.

3.1.3.1 Assumptions and limitations

Achieving a perfect count of mountain biking activity on the Plateau is a challenge considering the many options for both parking a car and riding circuits. The cycle counters have been located based on the cycle and parking options recommended by the Department of Conservation and



promoted online by both the Department²⁵ and the MTB Trails Trust²⁶ and the Department's 2015 *Denniston Plateau Mountain-bike tracks* brochure – the map from which is shown in Figure 17, with the key below.



The mountain bike counts assume that the majority of riders park at the site indicated in Figure 17 – the Friends of the Hill Museum car park. However, there is an alternative carpark located just west of the Whareatea Mine Road (and the counter there), and some use originating from the alternative carpark and only accessing the Sullivans Circuit would be missed. However, their vehicle movements would be recorded.

The focus of the counters is to:

- Provide an estimate of total activity on the Denniston Plateau,
- Define the times that recreational activity occurs,
- Identify where on the Plateau certain activities occur,
- Define a baseline against which change can be measured,
- Provide data to advise (and be advised by) other research methods, such as Strava data (section 3.1.1) and interviews (Section 3.6).

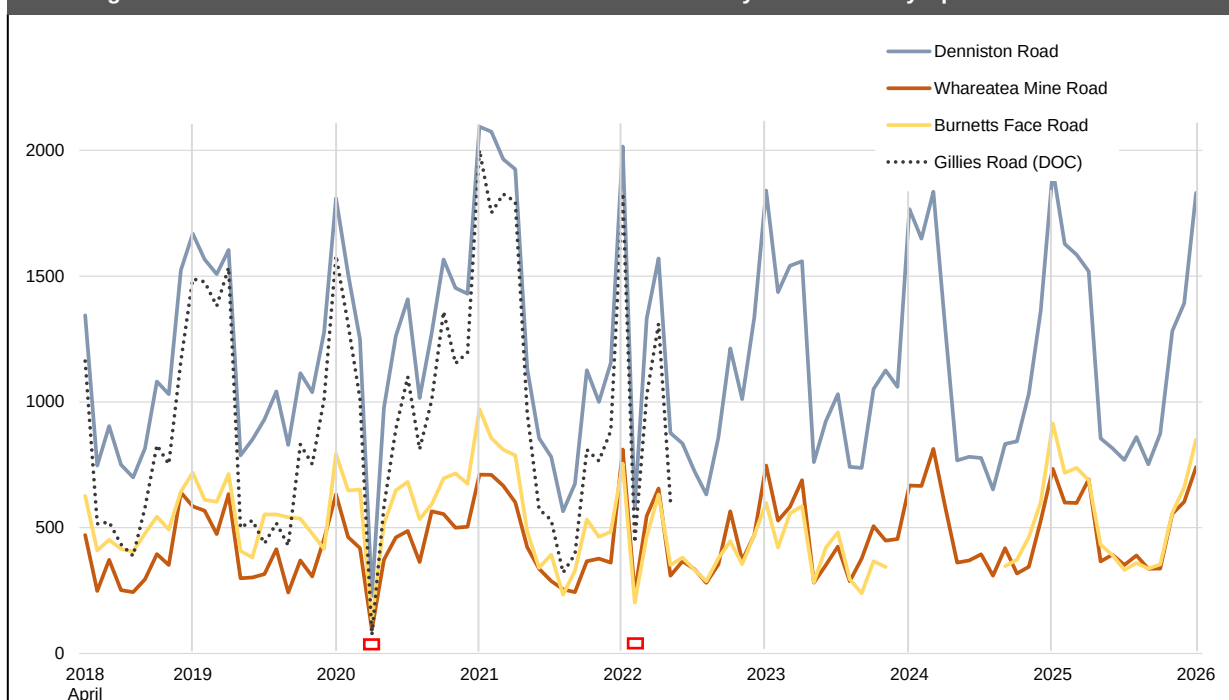
3.1.3.2 Vehicles

Figure 19 shows the vehicle counter monthly tallies from April 2018 to January 2026 for the three Bathurst traffic counter sites, and up to May 2022 for the DOC Gillies Road traffic counter site (later data have not been published). Vehicles include motorbikes. This shows common patterns in activity at all four sites, with marked obvious events during the Covid lockdown in April 2020 and the rain event and temporary closure of Denniston Road in February 2022 (marked with red boxes). The counter on Burnetts Face Road failed for nine months over 2024/25 due to water ingress, hence the data gap. All data are one-way entry only (entry and exit counts are similar).

²⁵ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/denniston-area/things-to-do/tracks/denniston-plateau-mountain-biking-tracks/>

²⁶ <https://www.mtbtrailstrust.org.nz/Denniston-Plateau>

Figure 19: Four vehicle counters Denniston Plateau – monthly totals one-way April 2018 to Jan 2026



Visitor activity levels were quite volatile, but with summer peaks to the Plateau generally. Traffic levels are more consistent on Whareatea Mine and Burnetts Face Roads, although their relative popularity has changed over time. Table 2 summarises data for the full years of available counts for one way traffic (that is, the total number of vehicles). Trends suggest steady patronage over the period, and with some recovery in 2025. The annual average for Burnetts Face Road in 2024 is based on only five months of data, and its total for 2023 is based on incorporating the December data for 2022.

Table 2: Vehicle counts for four sites, annual totals and monthly averages

	Denniston		Gillies		Whareatea		Burnetts	
	<i>Annual total</i>	<i>Monthly average</i>	<i>Annual total</i>	<i>Monthly average</i>	<i>Annual total</i>	<i>Monthly average</i>	<i>Annual total</i>	<i>Monthly average</i>
2019	14,216	1184	10,890	907	4968	414	6512	543
2020	15,183	1265	12,083	1007	5417	451	7826	607
2021	15,349	1279	12,611	1050	5341	445	6687	557
2022	12,982	1081			5305	442	5508	421
2023	13,807	1150			5679	473	5063	421
2024	13,594	1132			5773	481	Aug-Dec	539
2025	14,256	1188			5958	496	6486	540

For the three years 2019 to 2021, an average of 3054 vehicles per year accessed the Plateau via Denniston Road (one-way count only) and were not recorded on the Gillies Road counter (also one-way) – an average of 254 per month. This is 20% of the traffic recorded at the Denniston Road counter and will include a mix of recreational visitors, work traffic and residents.

By comparison, the visitor count for the Pancake Rocks was over 500,000 in 2018²⁷ and over 74,000 for the Cape Foulwind Walkway in the 12 months to February 2019²⁸. If an average vehicle occupancy of three people per car (see Ross 2005) is applied to the vehicle count for Denniston Road, the total visitor count for the Brakehead area in 2025 would be less than 45,000.

A pilot study to identify the primary purposes of visitors at the Gillies Rd, Whareatea Mine Rd and Burnetts Face Rd traffic count sites was carried out over four days in March 2019 (two week and two weekend days) (Aldridge 2019). The results are merely indicative due to the short survey periods, although a reasonably healthy count of 138 visitors were interviewed at the Brakehead carpark, 41 at Burnetts Face and 53 at Whareatea Mine Rd. If the weekday results are factored by 2.5 to represent a full week, the results suggest 5% of visitors at the Brakehead were work-related or residential, compared with 22% at Burnetts Face Road and 13% at Whareatea Mine Road. These results will clearly be heavily influenced by the work activities underway on the Plateau at the time of the survey. For example, only 1% of respondents to the 2020 visitor survey with 384 respondents were working, although nine of the 13 survey days occurred over the December/January holiday period (Greenaway 2020).

An average figure of 17% for work or residential vehicles for Burnetts Face and Whareatea Mine Roads can be derived from Aldridge (2019). If the resulting count is applied to the total for the Denniston counter for the year 2021, then 13% of Denniston traffic would have been work-related or residential. This is not far off the 20% difference between the Denniston and Gillies Road counters, considering that 20% figure will also include recreational visitors who do not go to the Brakehead (mostly walkers, mountain bikers and four-wheel drivers with an alternative destination in mind). This implies (very provisionally) that 7% of visitors to the Plateau are recreationally-focused and do not visit the Brakehead.

Figure 20, Figure 21 and Figure 22 illustrate the average hourly activity (one way – entry – only) for each counter by season for 2025. Nothing unexpected appears (more activity over summer, for example, and less activity on Whareatea Mine Road and Burnetts Face Road than on Denniston Road).

Figure 23, Figure 24 and Figure 25 show the same data by day of the week, with very similar patterns of activity for all week days, and more activity over weekends.

Figure 26 and Figure 27 show hourly average directional data for Denniston Road and Burnetts Face Road by weekend and week days for 2025. These indicate a peak arrival time at Denniston Road of 11am on weekends and peak departure at 2pm (so perhaps a three-hour stay), and a peak arrival at 10am on weekdays with 12pm and 3pm peak departures. Weekend and weekday activity are different, but not remarkably so, with approximately 1.5 more vehicles per hour in each direction on weekends. Burnetts Face Road has a similar but lower activity profile, and slightly delayed.

Both the Burnetts Face and Denniston Roads had slightly more vehicles exiting than entering. Over 2025, at Denniston Road 301 more vehicles exited than entered (2% – 0.8 per day on average), and at Burnetts Face Road 796 more vehicles exited than entered (10% – an average of just over two per day). This will include some errors in operation of the counters, but perhaps may also be a result of four-wheel drive vehicles travelling west on Mackley Track, therefore only being counted as they exit.

Note the different vertical scales on these figures, with more than double the amount of activity on Denniston Road compared with Burnetts Face Road.

²⁷ See: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/oia/2023/july/oia-3189-response.pdf>

²⁸ See: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/role/visitor-research/visitor-sites-data-2018-2019.pdf>

Figure 20: Average hourly vehicle counts by season 2025, Denniston Road entry

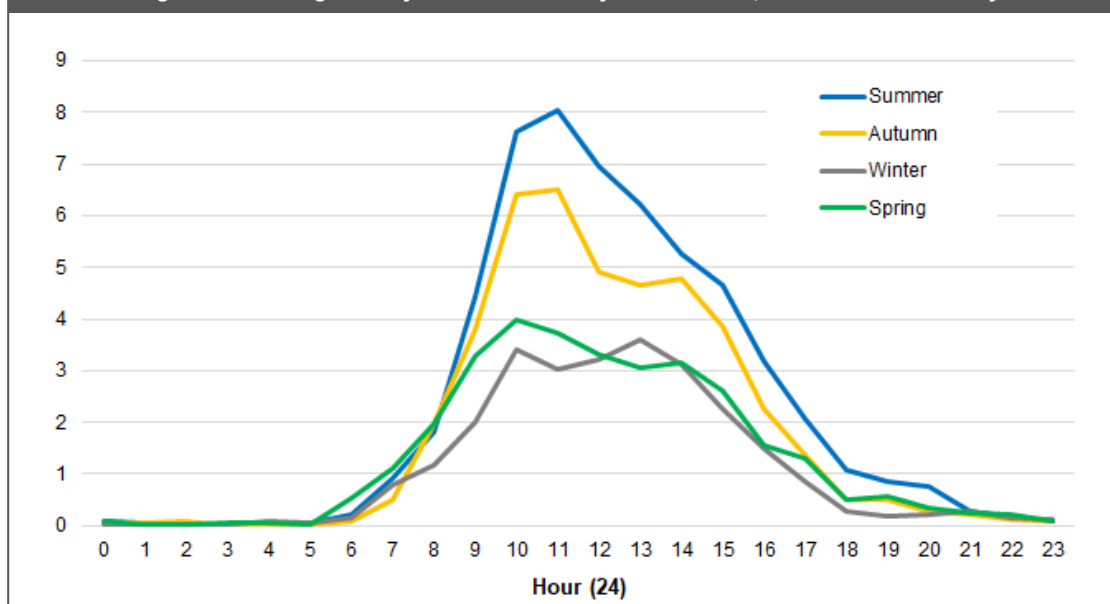


Figure 21: Average hourly vehicle counts by season 2025, Burnetts Face Road entry

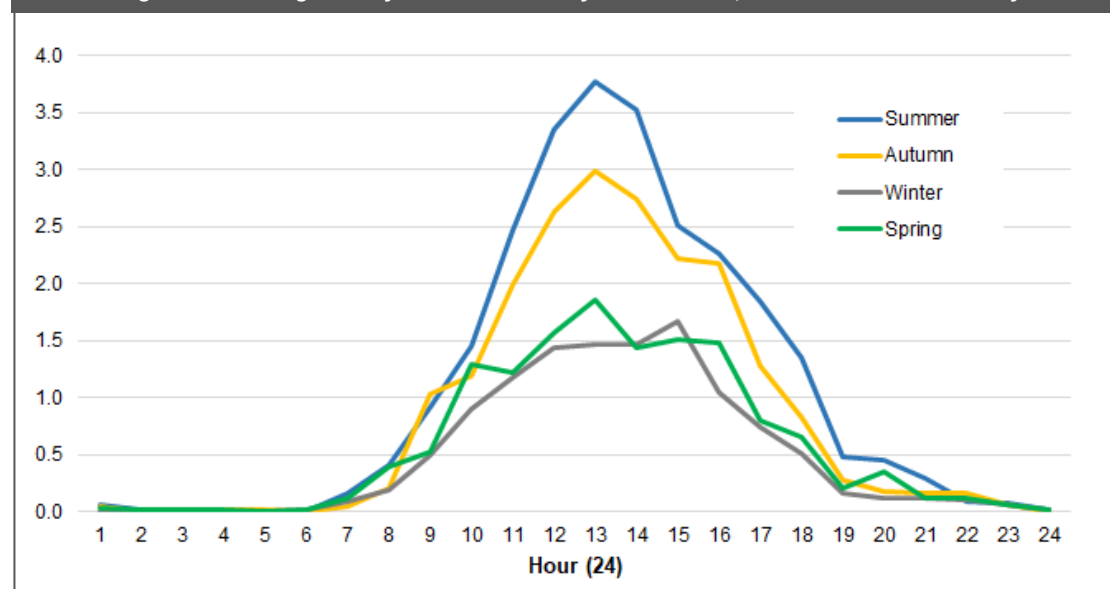


Figure 22: Average hourly vehicle counts by season 2025, Whareatea Mine Road entry

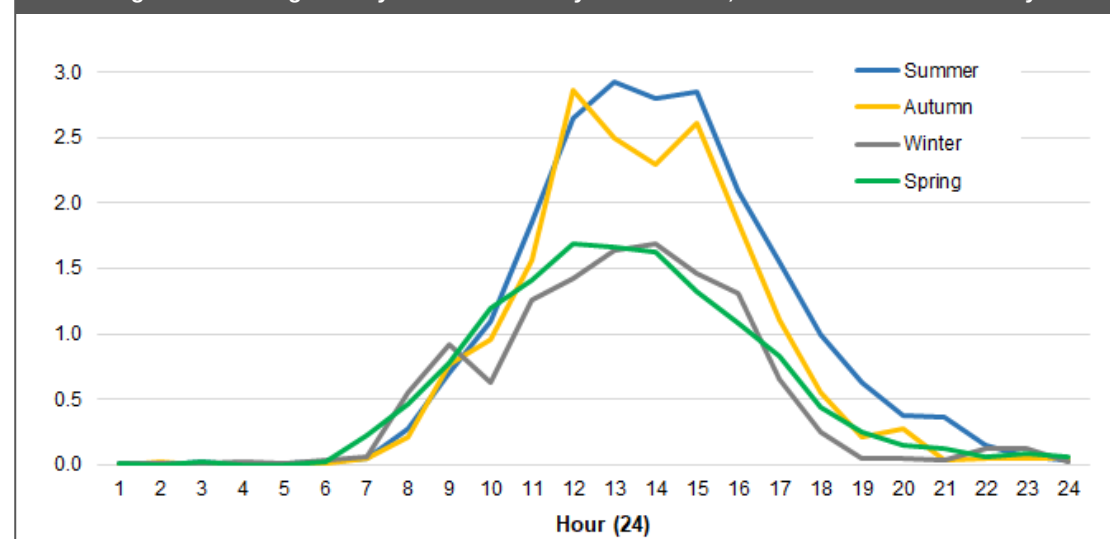


Figure 23: Average hourly vehicle counts by week day 2025, Denniston Road entry

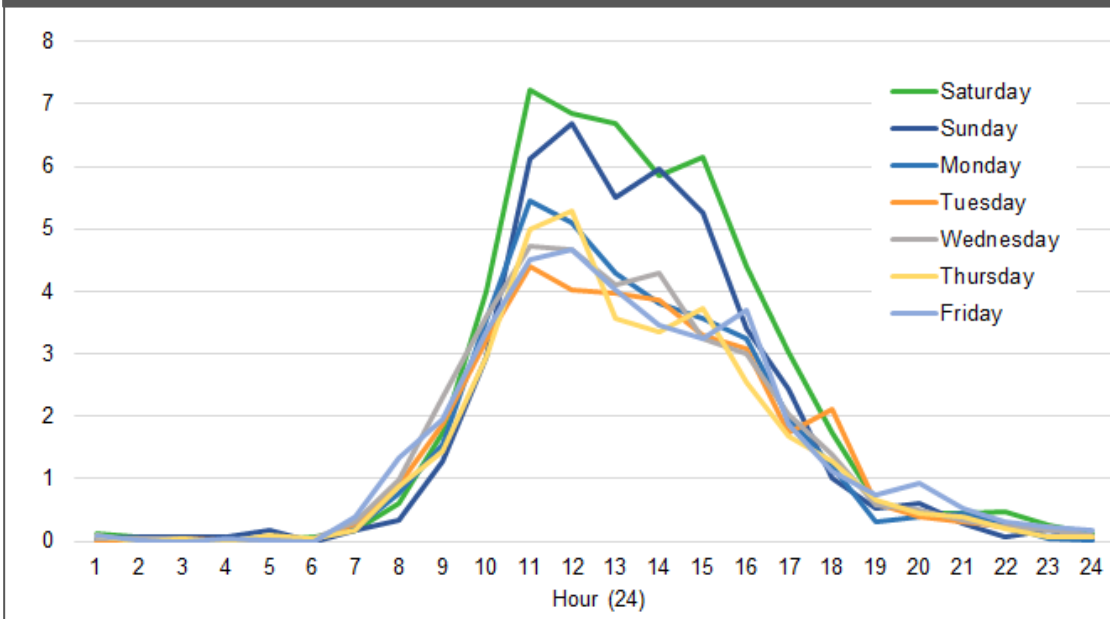


Figure 24: Average hourly vehicle counts by week day 2025, Burnetts Face Road entry

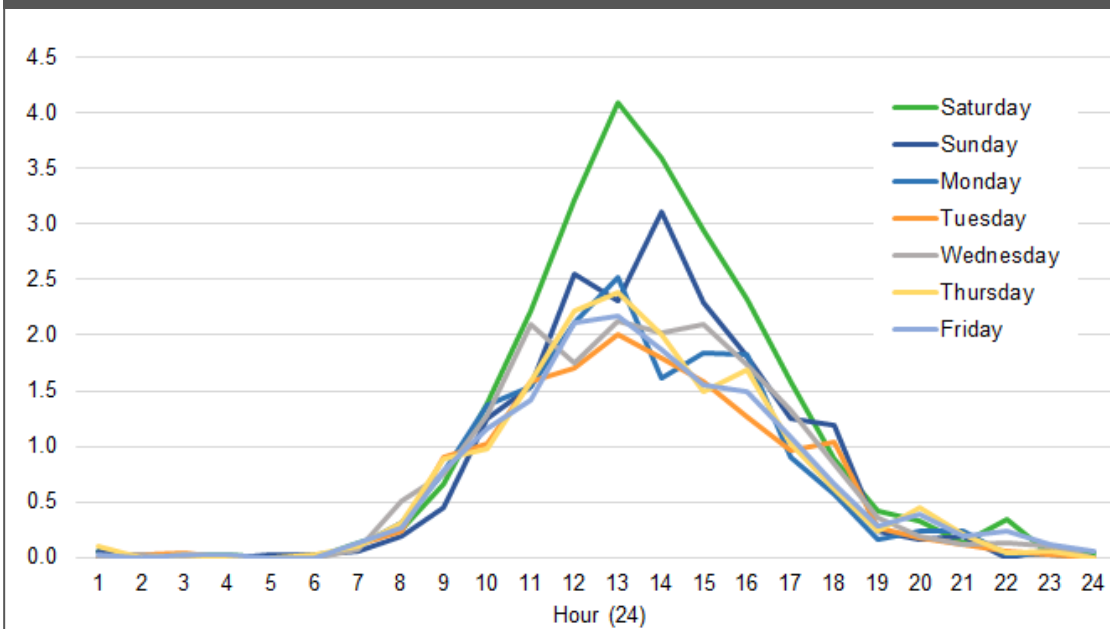


Figure 25: Average hourly vehicle counts by week day 2025, Whareatea Mine Road entry

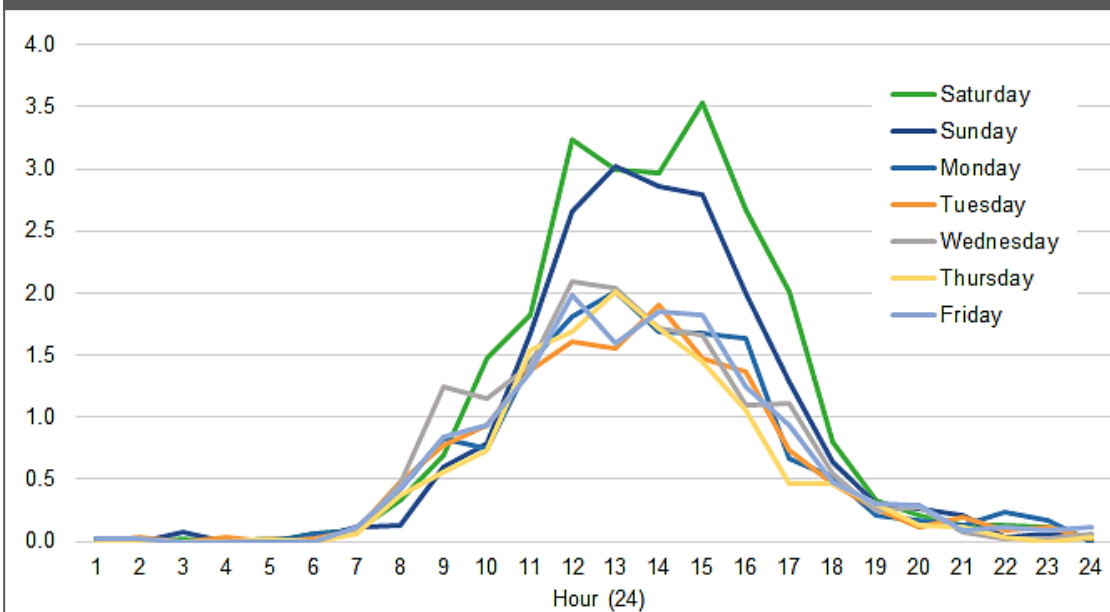


Figure 26: Directional average hourly vehicle counts by day type 2025, Denniston Road

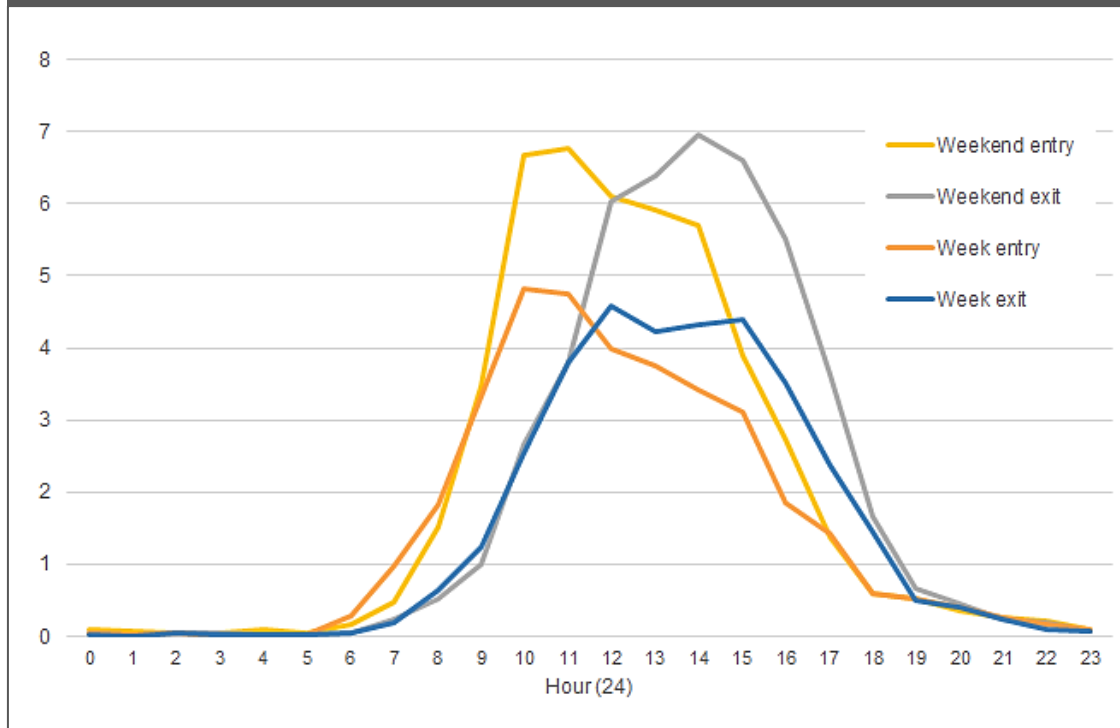
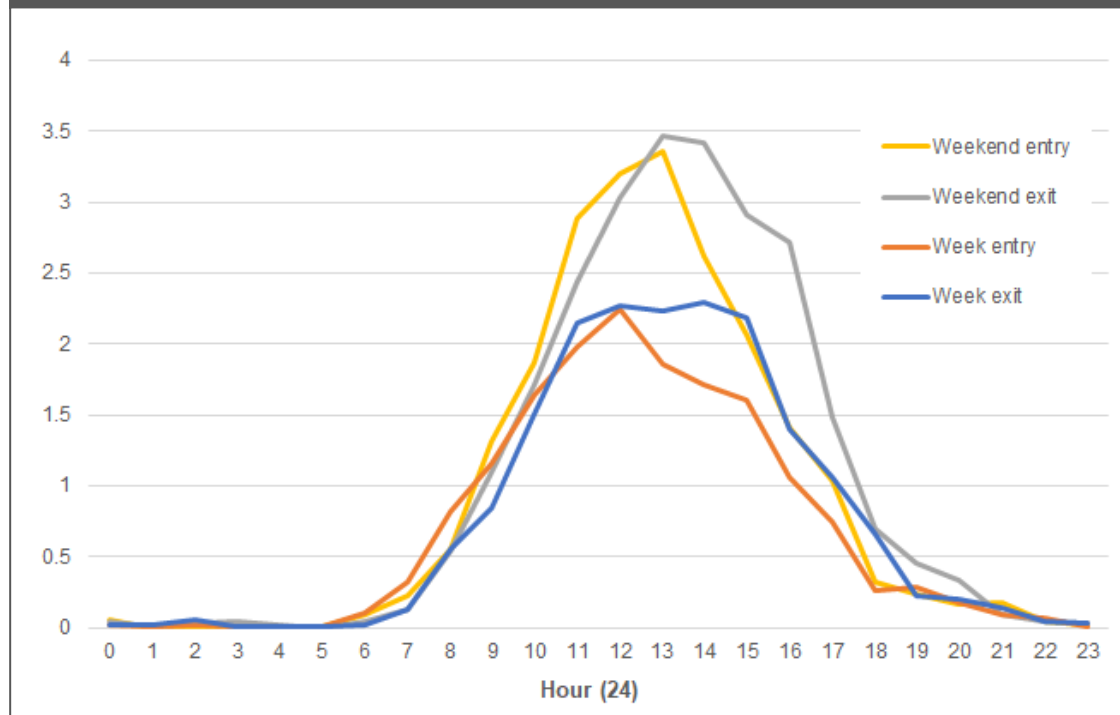


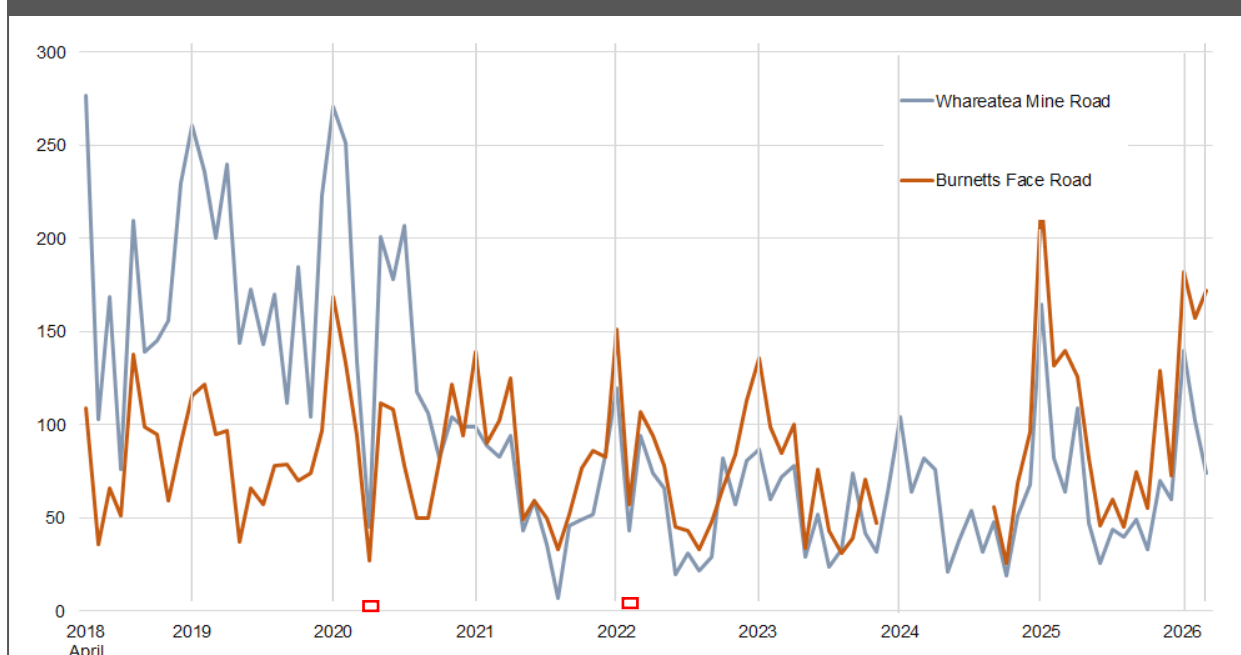
Figure 27: Directional average hourly vehicle counts by day type 2025, Burnetts Face Road



3.1.3.3 Cycles

Figure 28 shows the cycle counter monthly tallies from April 2018 to March 2026 for the Bathurst counter sites on Whareatea Mine Road and Burnetts Face Road (both directions for each). This shows a decline in activity at Whareatea Mine Road in the spring of 2020 where, thereafter, patterns at Burnetts Face Road were similar. The marked events (red boxes) during the Covid lockdown in April 2020 and the rain event which caused the temporary closure of Denniston Road in February 2022 are apparent, although mid-2021 appears to show a more significant decline in activity compared with both those events. Missing data for the Burnetts Face Road is apparent in nine months over 2023 and 2024 due to counter failure (as for the vehicle counts). January 2025 shows a busy month, although almost 50% of recorded activity for the month at Burnetts Face was over the first three days of the year. Activity over that January at Whareatea Mine Road was more consistent over the month.

Figure 28: Burnetts Face & Whareatea Mine Rds cycle counts – monthly totals, two-way April 2018 to Mar 2026



Visitor activity levels are variable, but with summer peaks. Table 3 summarises data for the full years of available counts for counts in both directions, with a marked decline in activity at Whareatea Mine Road after 2020. By comparison, the Old Ghost Road (see Figure 50) recorded 9,534 total users in 2023.²⁹ Denniston is likely to feature more repeat visits from the same cyclists compared with the Old Ghost Road with its stronger national reputation. The annual average for Burnetts Face Road in 2024 is based on only five months of data, and its total for 2023 is based on incorporating the December data for 2022 as a surrogate. Data for 2025 show a return to the high count of 2020 for Burnetts Face, but remaining low for Whareatea Mine Road.

Table 3: Cycle counts for Whareatea Mine and Burnetts Face Rds, annual totals & monthly averages

	Whareatea		Burnetts	
	<i>Annual total</i>	<i>Monthly average</i>	<i>Annual total</i>	<i>Monthly average</i>
2019	2191	183	988	82
2020	1796	150	1118	93
2021	741	62	945	79

²⁹ Mōkihinui-Lyell Backcountry Trust Statement of Service Performance for YE 31 March 2024

2022	719	60	919	77
2023	647	54	874	73
2024	657	54	Aug-Dec	56
2025	789	66	1185	99

Figure 29 and Figure 30 illustrate the average hourly activity (both directions, so there is likely to be some double-counting of cyclists) for each counter by season for 2025. Similar to the vehicle counters, nothing unexpected appears (more activity over summer). It appears that there was an overnight event over Easter 2025.

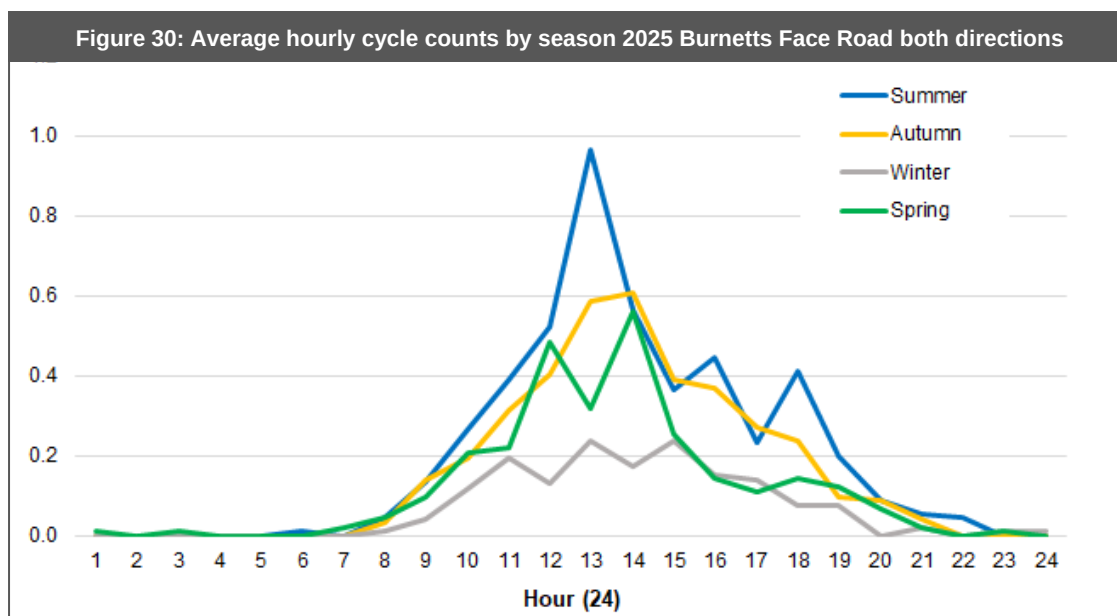
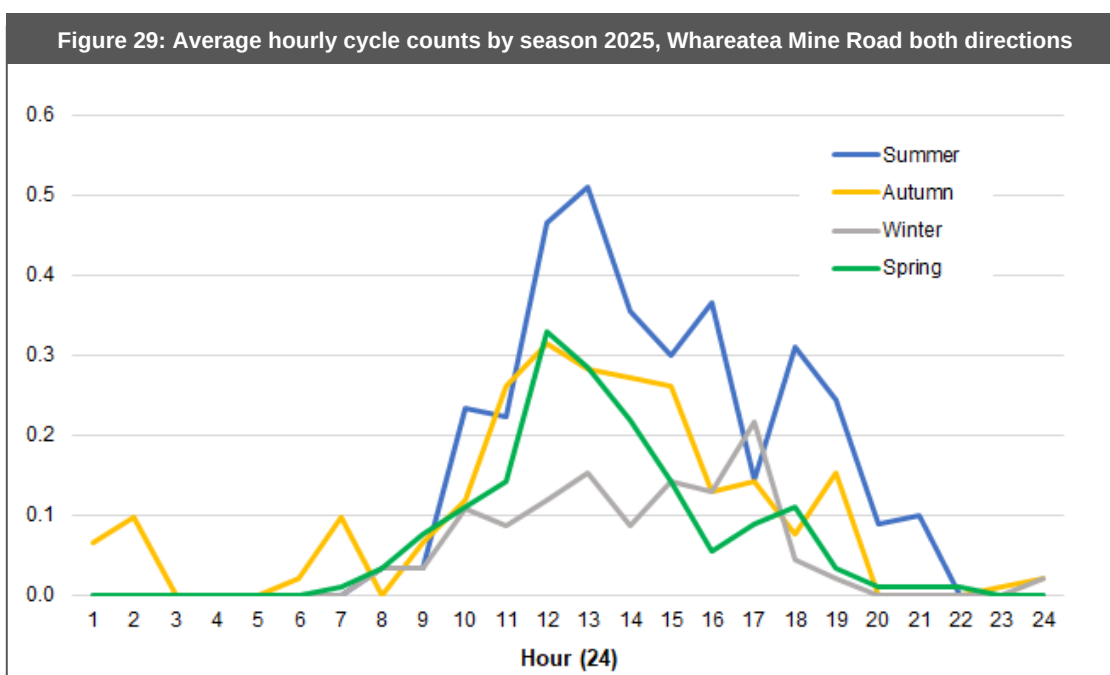


Figure 31 and Figure 32 show the same data by day of the week, with very similar patterns of activity for all week days, and more activity over weekends (and the Easter night-time activity).

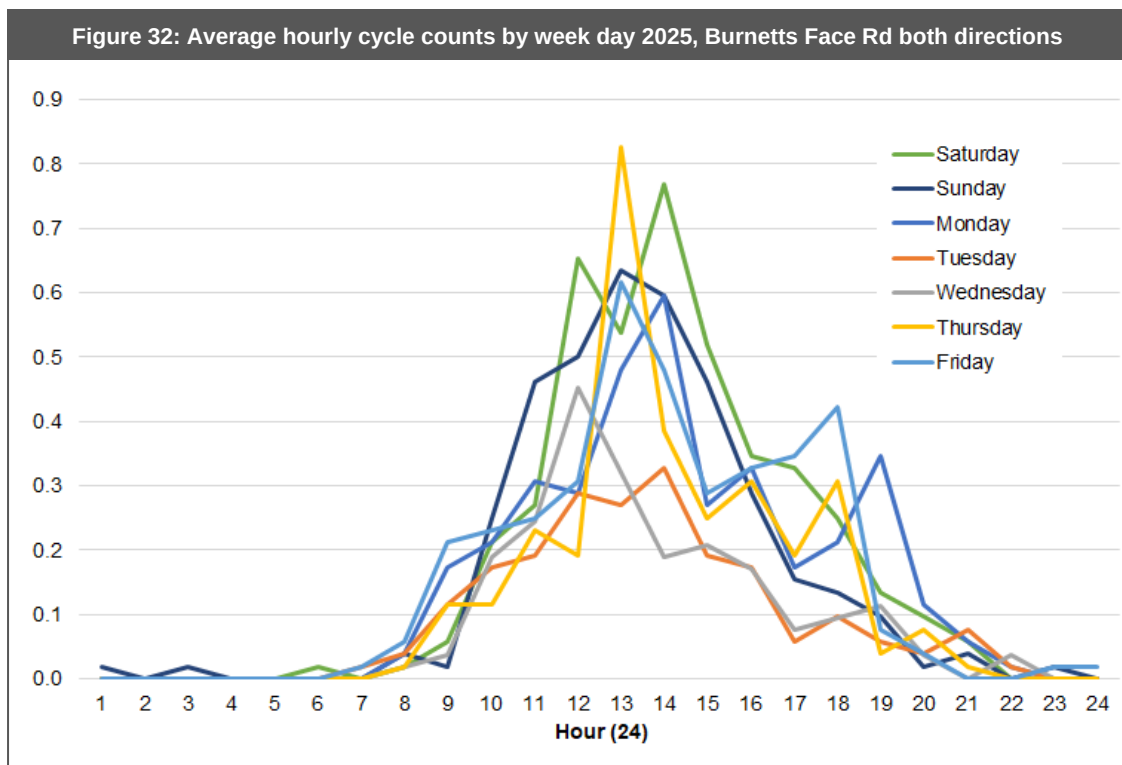
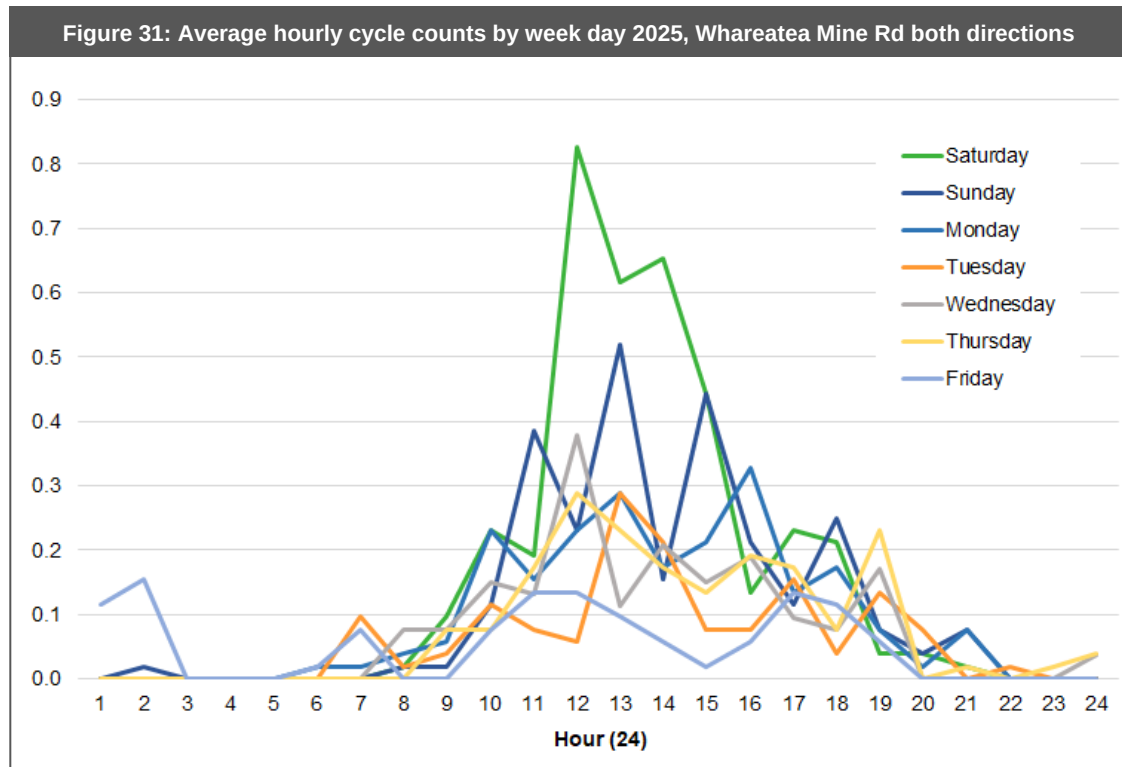
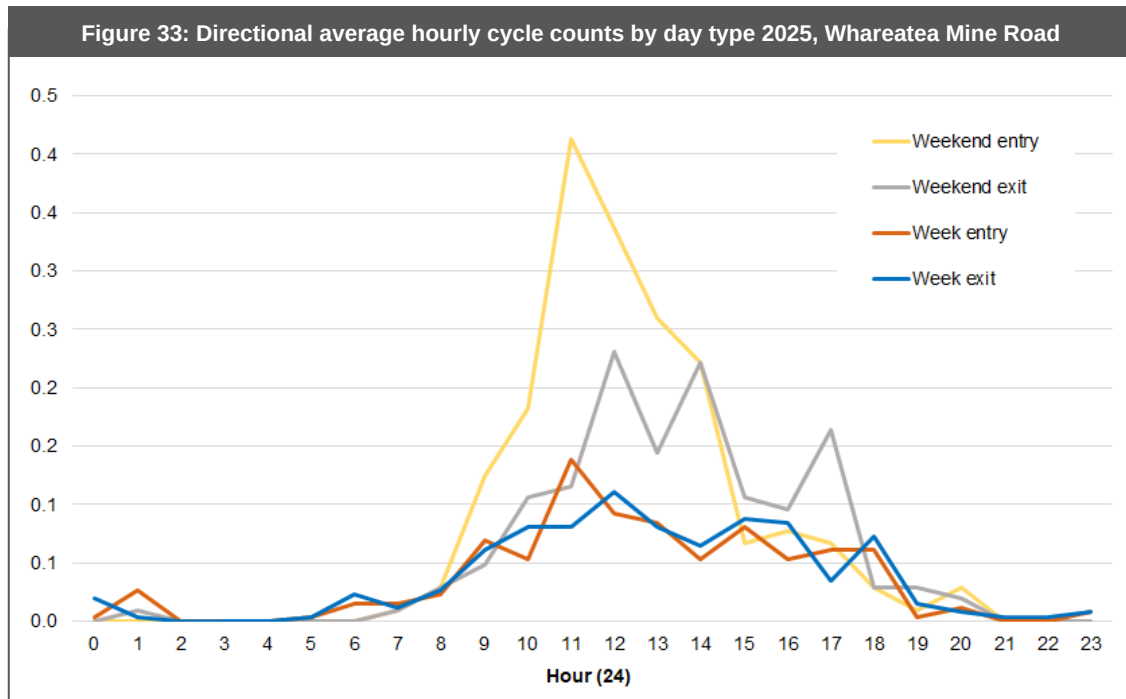


Figure 33 shows hourly average directional data for Whareatea Mine Road by weekend and week days. This indicates an even pattern of activity over the day, but with a slightly greater count during the weekend for cyclists heading towards Mount Rochfort.



3.1.3.4 Pedestrians

Figure 34 compares the total counts for the Department of Conservation's counters at the Brakehead walk³⁰ for pedestrians and at Gillies Road³¹ for vehicles. There are no other pedestrian counters on the Plateau. These data are raw and uncalibrated and include periods of missing pedestrian counts in 2016 and 2017 (reported on the DOC portal) and something odd in 2020 with the Covid lockdown period appearing a month apart in the pedestrian and vehicles counts. The data indicate the seasonality of the visitor pattern and a post-Covid peak in the summer of 2021, with another potential peak in the summer of 2022 disrupted by rain and temporary road closure. Pedestrian counts in winter tend to match vehicle counts, whereas in summer pedestrians far outweigh vehicles. This could be the result of larger family groups and tour buses in summer, and the effects of resident vehicles being recorded as a greater percentage of visitors in winter.

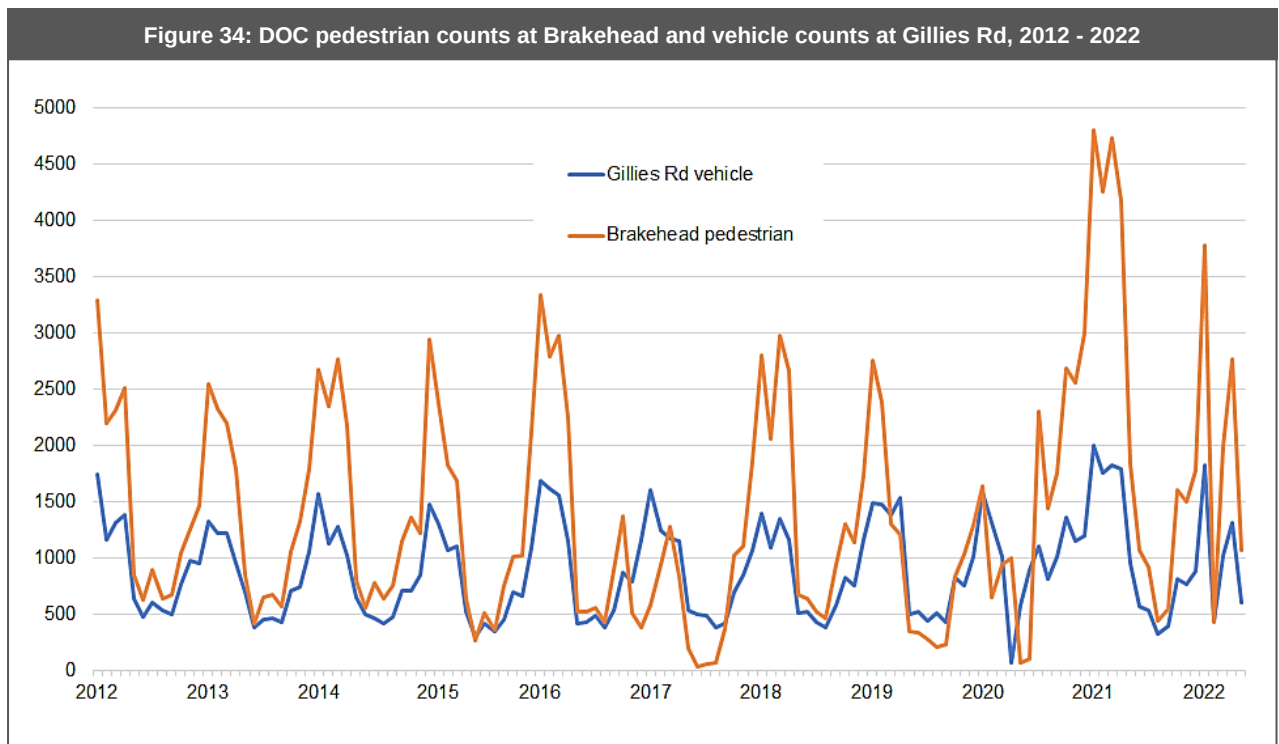
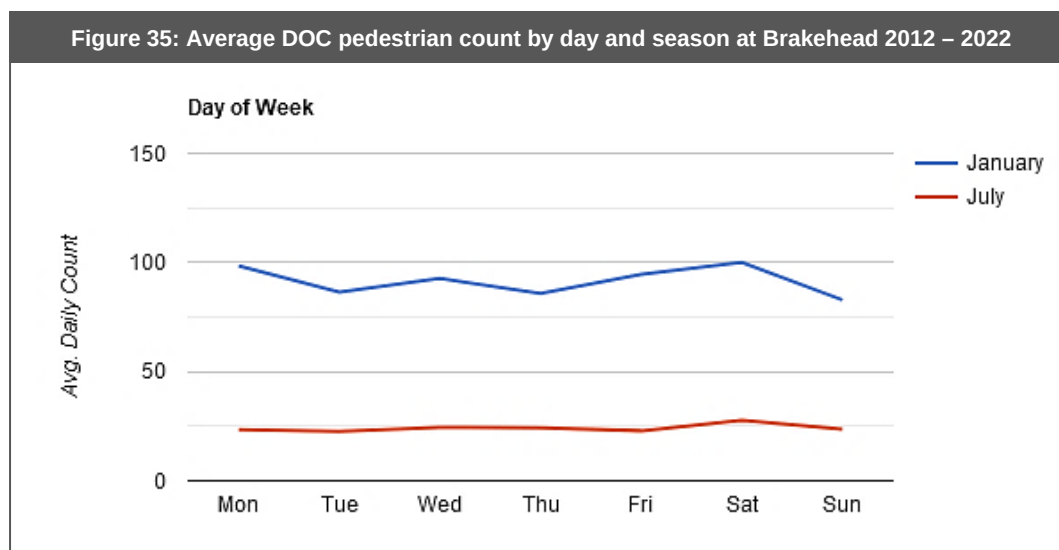


Figure 35 shows calibrated data for pedestrians at the Brakehead walk as prepared by DOC showing average daily activity by season, with approximately 25 people per day in mid-winter with

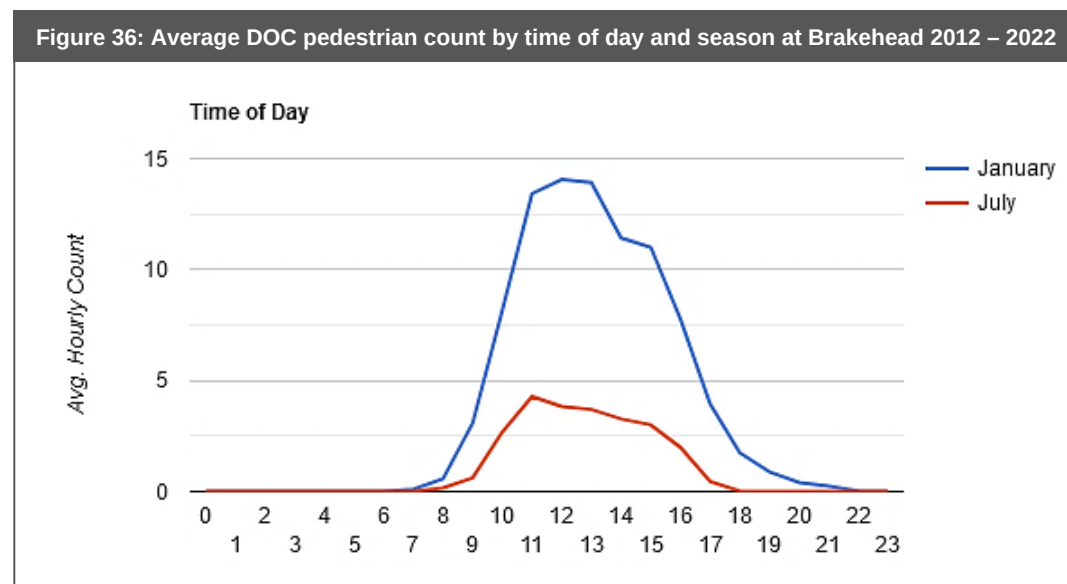


³⁰ Available at: <http://counterreports.doc.govt.nz/var/100092087.html>

³¹ Available at: <http://counterreports.doc.govt.nz/var/100086214.html>

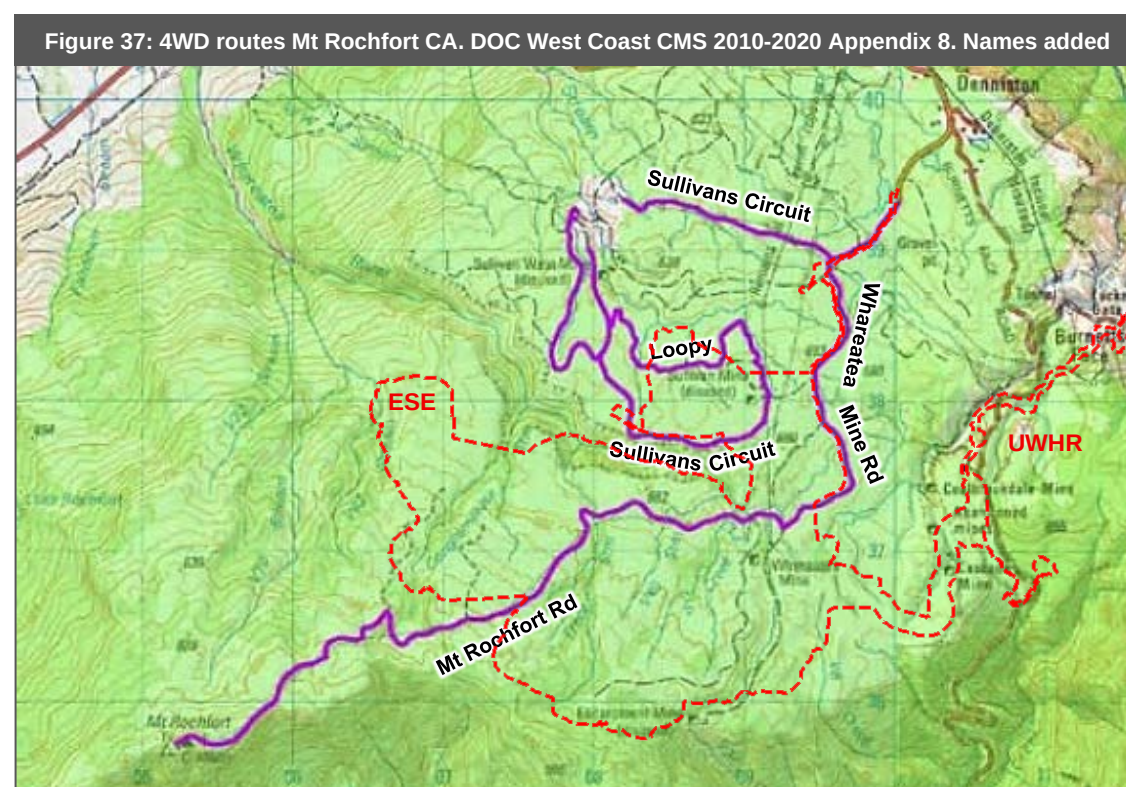
little variation over the week, and between 75 and 100 in summer, with Saturdays and Mondays tending to be the more popular.

Figure 36 shows the same data by hour of day and season, with a peak in summer of approximately 14 people per hour at midday, and 4 people per hour at 11am in winter.



3.1.4 Four-wheel drive

The Department of Conservation West Coast CMS defines the permitted four-wheel drive routes within the Mount Rochfort Conservation Area (Figure 37, with the ESE and UWHR approximately overlaid in dashed red) and the Orikaka Ecological Area (Figure 39). Section 3.6.4.17 of the CMS refers to policies controlling four-wheel drive access on Conservation land, but has nothing specific to each conservation area. Policy 2 of section 3.6.4.17 merely states:



Use of four-wheel drive vehicles may be allowed on the formed roads identified in Appendix 8. Permission may be required from land owners to access roads that cross private land/land managed by other agencies.

Policies also allow for negotiation with user groups to amend Appendix 8 of the CMS.

Online social media indicate other routes are used (Figure 38).³² Interviews and stakeholder engagement (Section 3.6) indicates wide exploration of the Waimangaroa Creek area (largely on LINZ land), and Mackley Road route between Cedar Creek Road and New Creek (Figure 39, overpage).

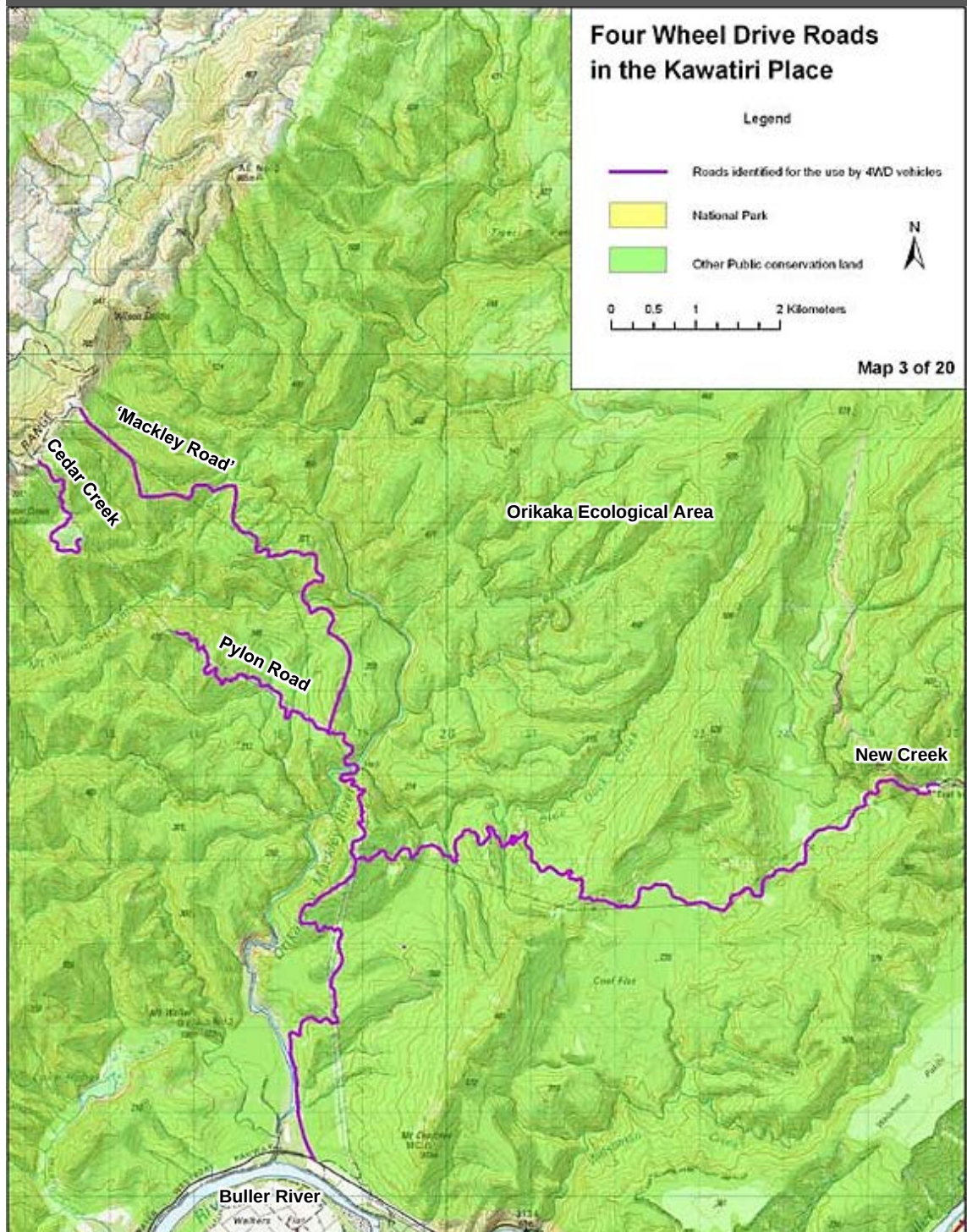
Interviewees indicate that four-wheel driving on Mount Rochfort Road is associated with enjoying a range of values, including scenery, reestablishing family associations and visiting in memory of deceased relatives.

Figure 38: Four-wheel drive routes recommended online



³² <https://www.wikiloc.com/trails/offroading/new-zealand/west-coast/denniston>

Figure 39: 4WD routes Orikaka. DOC West Coast CMS 2010-2020 Appendix 8. Names added



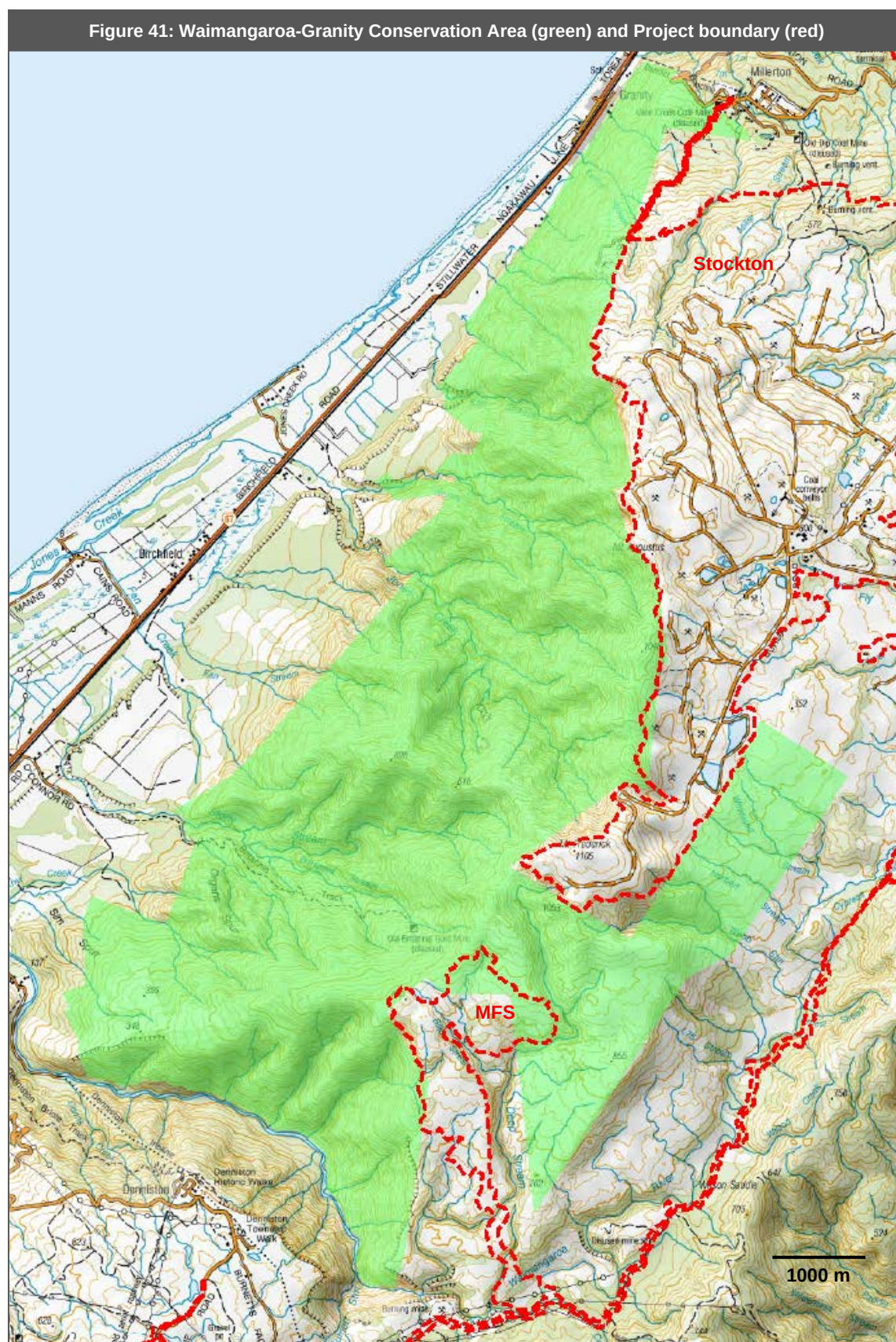
3.2 Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area (MFS)

Figure 40 shows the Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area as defined by the online DOC Maps service³³ with DOC's recommended recreation opportunities (tracks in mauve, titles added). The only recommended access is the Britannia Track, which was closed in March 2023 due to a slip and remains closed at the time of preparing this report.



³³ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/map/index.html>

Figure 41 shows the Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area with the proposed Project boundaries. The Stockton boundary is the existing operational area. The MFS area would cover 46.1 ha of the 3776.1 ha Conservation Area (1.2%).



DOC's 2022 conservation values report on the Area – prepared to assist with consultation for review of West Coast stewardship land status – gave the following summary of its recreation values:³⁴

This large complex area covers most of the western slopes of the Stockton Plateau and includes all or part of two Recommended Areas for Protection in the Ngakawau Ecological District, as well as part of Buller Coal Plateau Biodiversity Priority Site.... It has a long history of both coal and gold mining during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is used by visitors to historic mining sites as well as by hunters and trappers. DOC manages the Britannia Track and a Recreational Gold Fossicking Area in Britannia Stream. Parapenting occasionally occurs from the plateau. There are three active permissions for open cast coal mining. ...

The area is in a Backcountry-remote zone. The Britannia Track is managed as a Frontcountry site and passes through the southern part of the area to the disused historic Britannia Gold Mine, although this track is currently closed. A Recreational Gold Fossicking Area is in Britannia Stream. No other tracks or facilities are managed by the Department in this area.

There are multiple historical mining sites. The Ngakawau Ecological Area is located immediately to the north and Stockton Mine to the south. The conservation area is adjacent to Waimangaroa township in the south and Granity and Millerton townships in the north.

Visitor type and activities typically undertaken

The area may be used by hunters, trappers or visitors to historic mining sites. The Britannia Track (when open) is used by walkers, mountain bikers and gold fossickers. Parapenting occasionally occurs from the plateau.

Access

The area can be accessed directly from State Highway 67 and the Britannia Track (closed) in the west, Waimangaroa township in the south and Granity and Millerton townships in the North. Access to the east is from Burma Road.

Burma Road is located within the Stockton Mine on private land and is not publicly accessible.

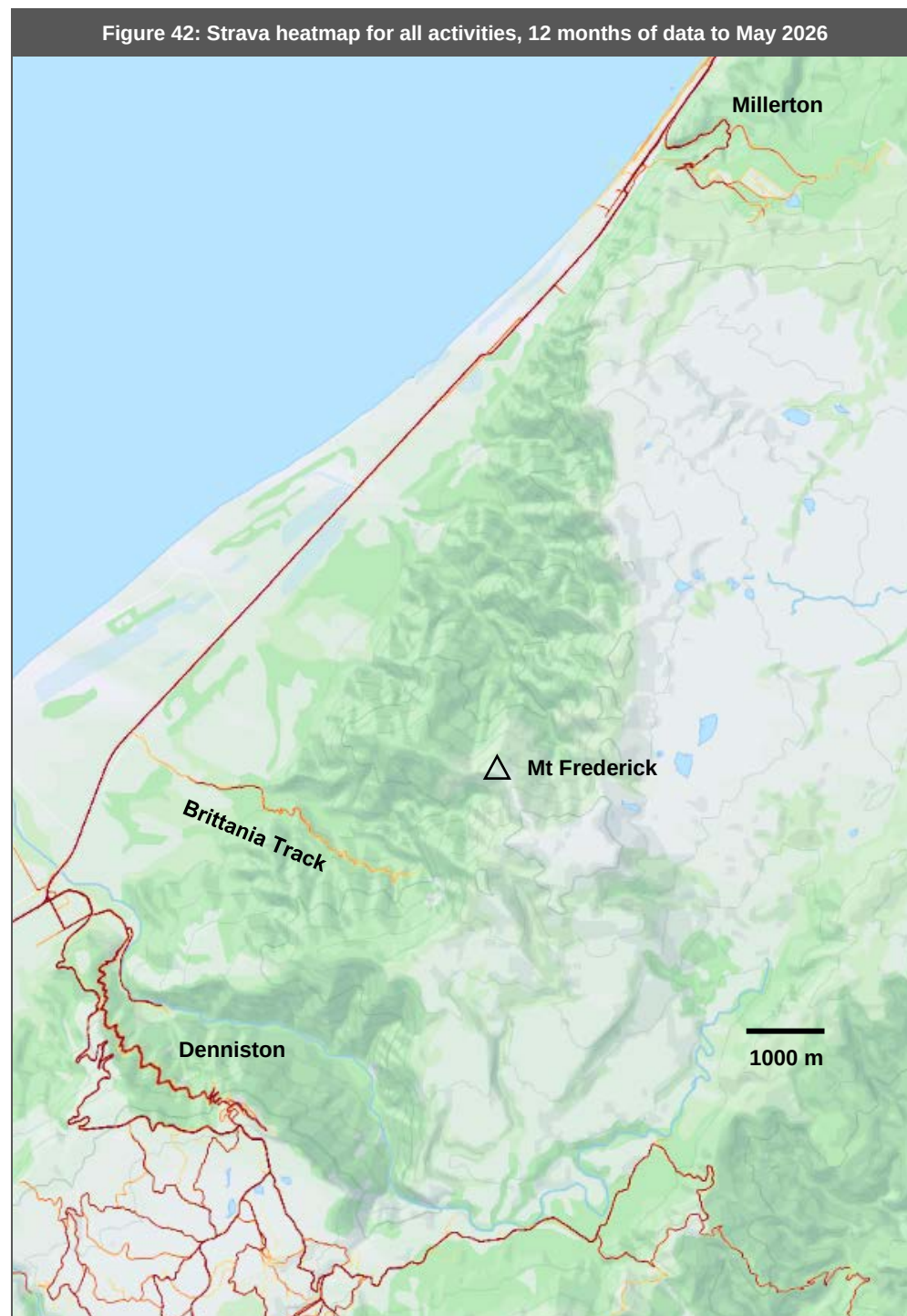
Four-wheel drive access routes cease within the neighbouring LINZ-administered land and do not extend into the conservation area.

There is currently no active mining within the Conservation Area, beyond the existing borders of the Stockton mine.

³⁴ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/managing-conservation/stewardship-land/documents-supporting-stewardship-land-reclassification/>

Strava heatmap data shown in Figure 42 show almost no recorded activity – apart from at Millerton in the north – over the 12 month period to May 2026. During this period the Britannia Track has been closed, and is described as permanently closed,³⁵ and in earlier iterations of this figure (up to January 2025 at least) no use of this track was apparent, but there appears to be some activity subsequently (see Section 3.1.2 for a description of Strava. Darker lines indicate the more popular routes).

Interviewees report limited motorbike access to the Mount Frederick area – mostly small and nimble trial bikes and trail bikes. There is undoubtedly some foot access, but none reported in the consultation for this report. The retention of the many mining relics in the area is partly attributed to the lack of easy access.



³⁵ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/permanently-closed-facilities/>

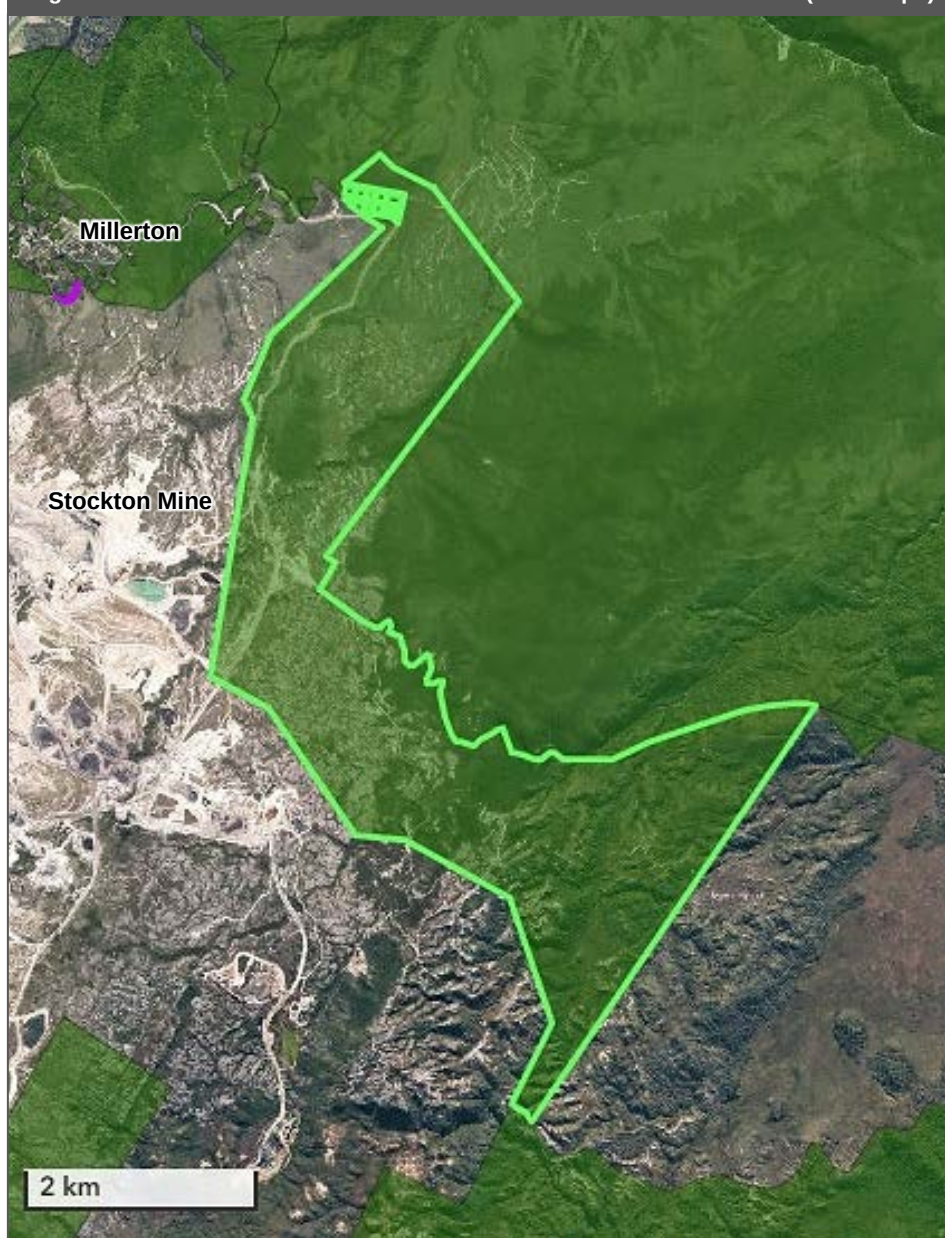
3.3 Plover Stream Conservation Area (Stockton)

Figure 43 shows the 1210.64 ha Plover Stream Conservation Area as defined by the online DOC Maps service³⁶ with DOC's recommended recreation opportunities (none in this case, titles added). Figure 44 shows the Project boundary within the Conservation Area, all of which are existing operational areas, occupying 113.5 ha (9.4%).

DOC's 2022 conservation values report on the Area – prepared to assist with consultation for review of West Coast stewardship land status – gave the following summary of its recreation values:³⁷

This assessment area includes intact and modified forest and wetlands as well as active and historic mine infrastructure including Stockton Mine road, but has no tracks or facilities managed by the Department....

Figure 43: Plover Stream Conservation Area and DOC recreation advice (DOC Maps)



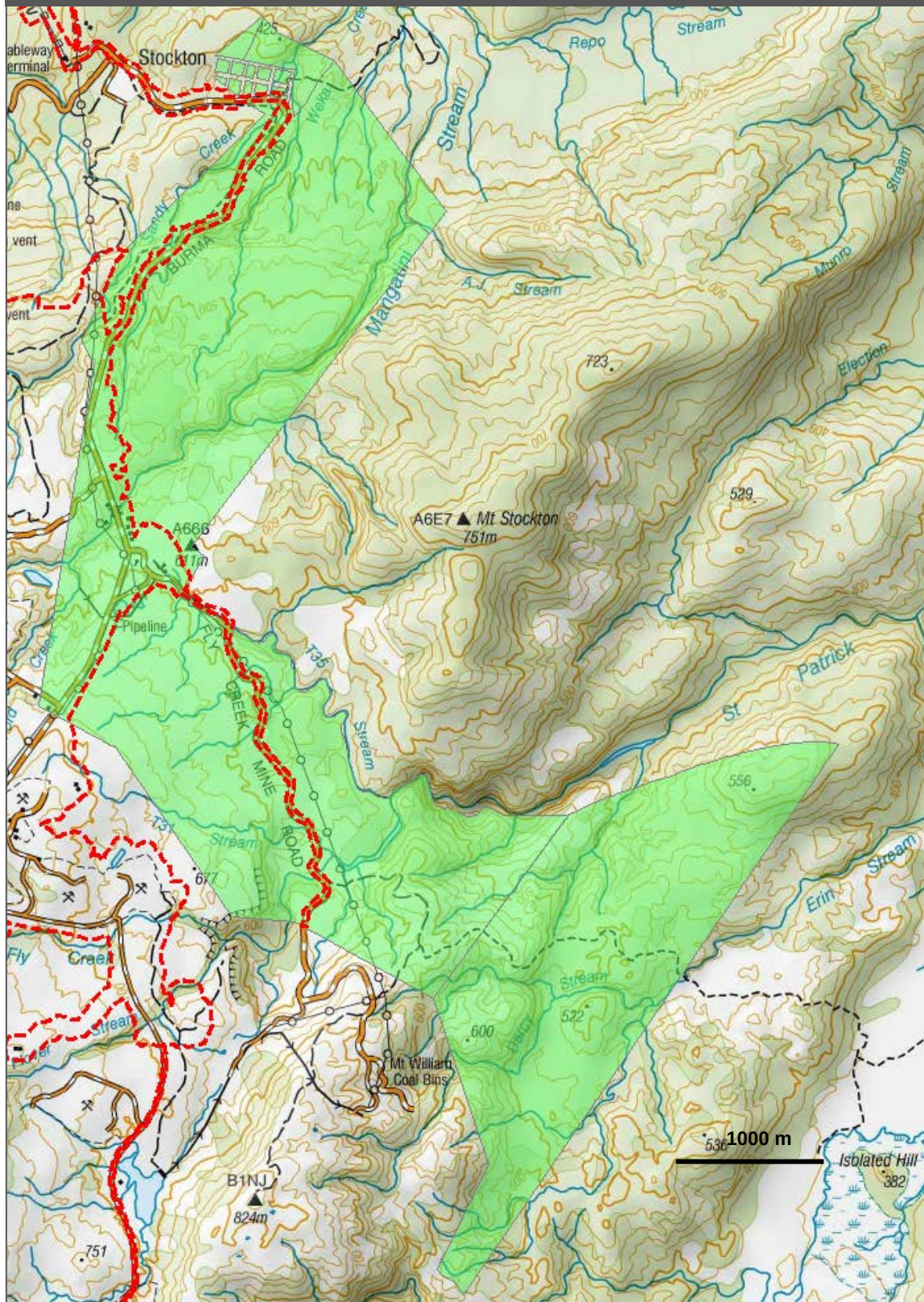
³⁶ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/map/index.html>

³⁷ <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/managing-conservation/stewardship-land/documents-supporting-stewardship-land-reclassification/>

Guided mine tours to the Stockton Mine occur. This conservation area contains heritage values and sites associated with coal mining and has little recreational use....

These areas are in a Backcountry-remote zone. There are no tracks or facilities managed by the Department. The Ngakawau Ecological Area is immediately to the north and Stockton Mine to the south.

Figure 44: Plover Stream Conservation Area (green) and Project boundary (red) over Topo 50



Visitor type and activities typically undertaken This area is likely to receive little recreation use. Guided mine tours to the Stockton Mine occur.

Access The Fly Creek Mine Road passes through the area.

Fly Creek Mine Road is accessed via the Stockton Mine on private land and is not publicly accessible.

Strava heatmap data shown in Figure 45 show no recorded activity in the conservation area over the 12 month period to May 2026 (see Section 3.1.2 for a description of Strava). The nearest activity is shown at the Charming Creek walkway in the lower section of the Ngakawau Gorge. The Charming Creek walkway was affected by slips in 2021 and the bridge originally crossing the Ngakawau River has been removed. The track is now in two parts – the Charming Creek South Walkway – a 15 minute walk from near Ngakawau, which is closed³⁸ – and the 5.5 km Charming Creek North Walkway, which is accessed by driving 10 km from Seddonville.³⁹ The change in colour of recorded activity in Figure 45 just south of the Ngakawau Gorge (from red to orange) shows the southern end of the Charming Creek North Walkway. Users of the walkway to the west of the old bridge site have been negotiating a closed track.



³⁸ See: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/westport/things-to-do/tracks/charming-creek-south-walkway/>

³⁹ See: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/west-coast/places/westport/things-to-do/tracks/charming-creek-walkway/>

3.4 Land Information New Zealand Administered Lands (UWHR, MFS)

The proposed UWHR between Stockton and ESE will pass through 4,613 ha of land administered by LINZ as shown in Figure 46, of which the MFS would occupy 170.1 ha and the UWHR 49.4 ha (4.75%).

Figure 46: LINZ administered lands, Stockton to Denniston Plateau, showing UWHR and MFS. Topo 50 basemap

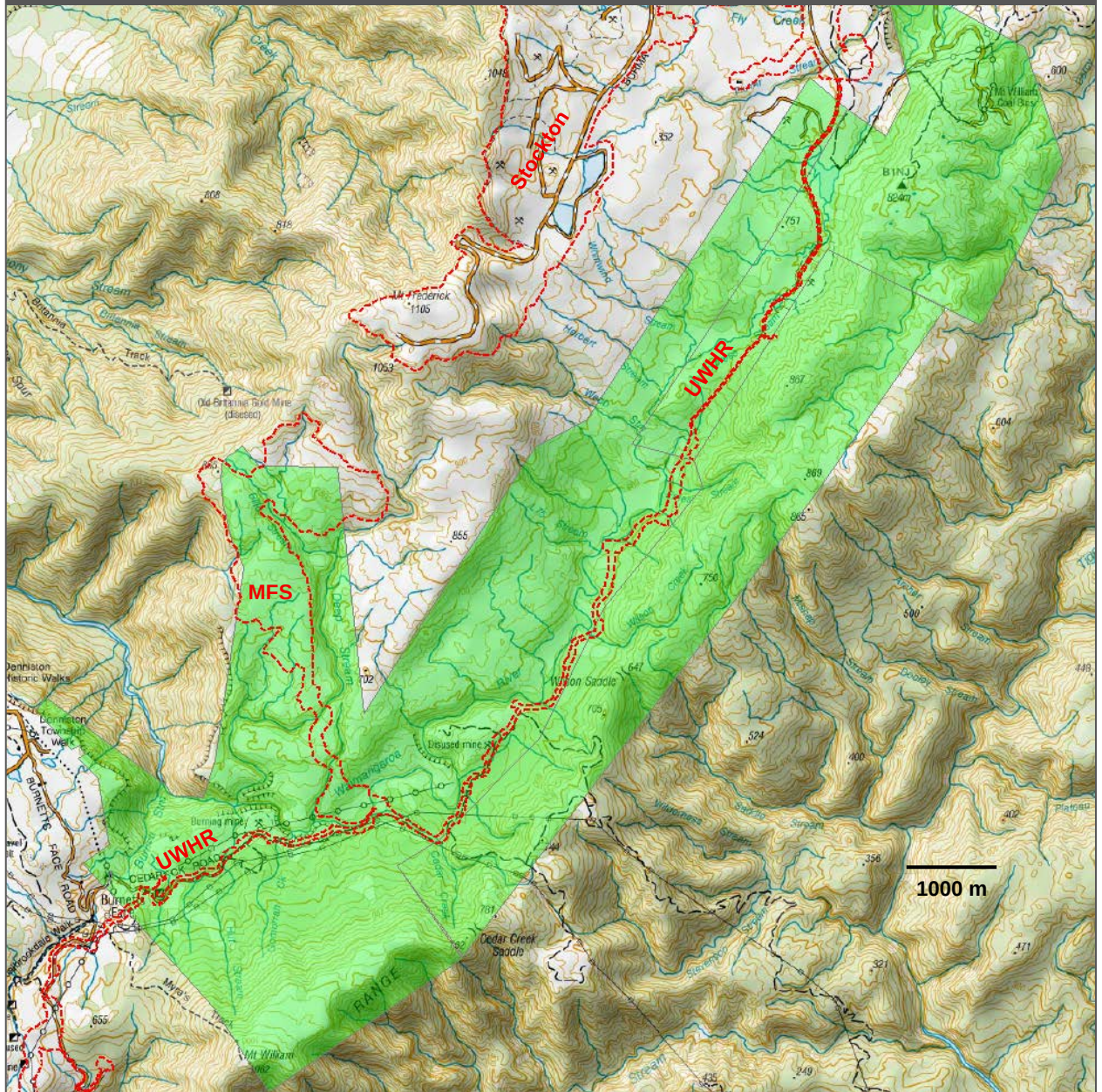


Figure 47 shows the Cedar Creek area in more detail – which is the focus of recreational use in the LINZ area. Figure 48 shows the Strava heatmap data for its recreational use (see Section 3.1.2 for detail about Strava). The use shown in the heatmap is predominantly cycling, with some pedestrian activity on the circuit from Myra's Track to Mount William and back (or to) via Cedar Creek Road. The heatmap shows two routes used to access the Mackley Track. Onsite these are both marked as options when travelling from the west, but only the northern option is indicated for those travelling from the east (Figure 49). The northern option is the easier.

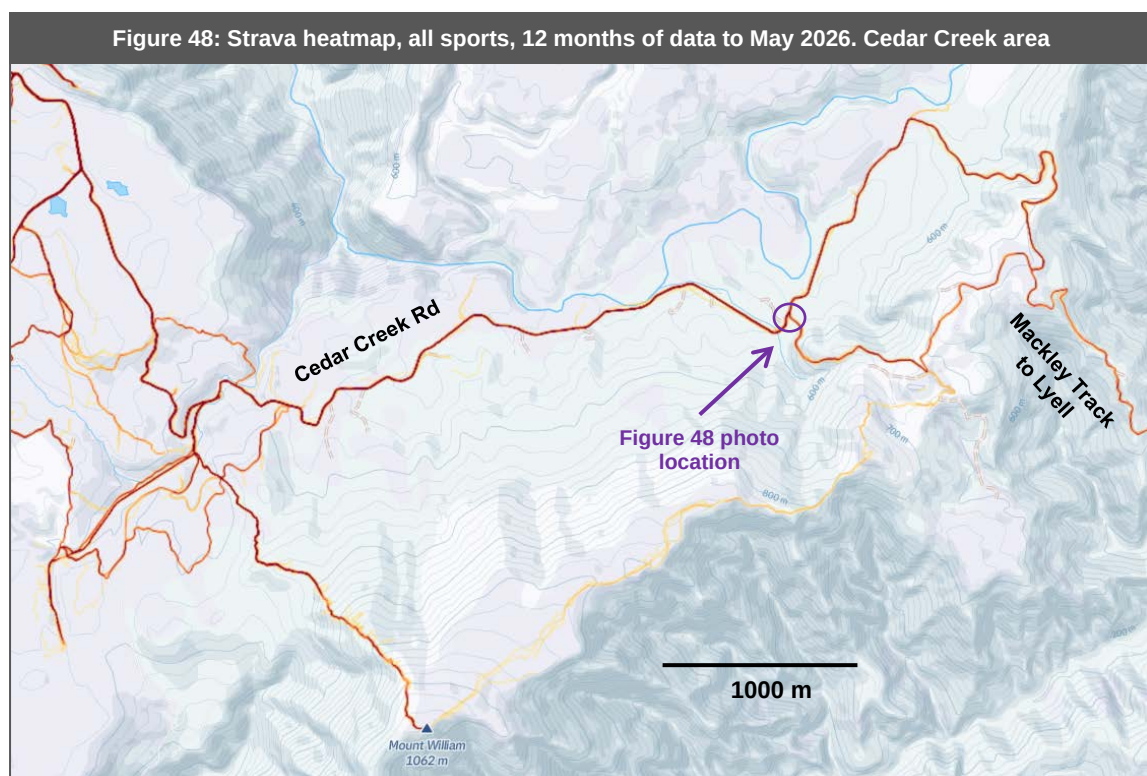
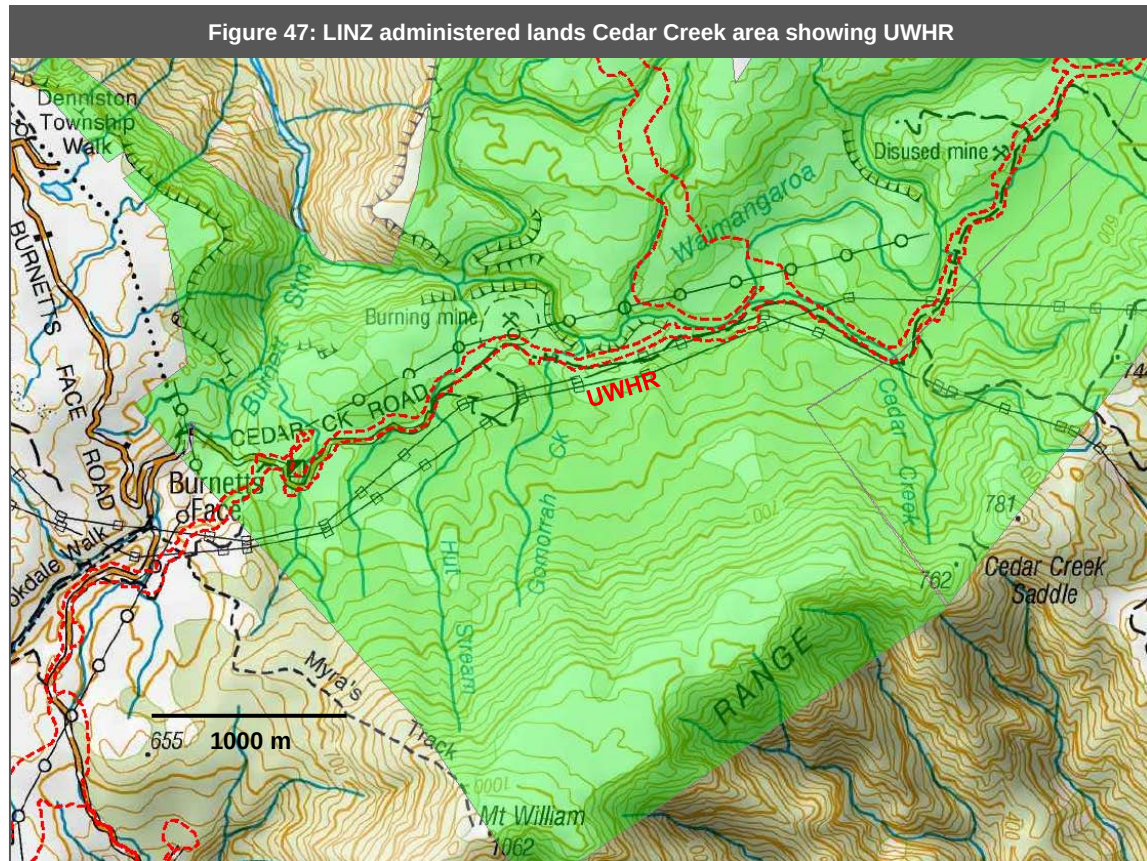


Figure 49 shows the use of Ngā Haerenga NZ Cycle Trail signage, and the route is promoted by Ngā Haerenga has a 'Heartland Ride' called the *Old Ghost Road Roundabout: Denniston to Iron Bridge*, shown online on the Nga Haerenga NZ Cycling Map (Figure 50).⁴⁰ Heartland Rides, by Waka Kotahi's definition:

*allow you to explore New Zealand on scenic back roads while enjoying stunning scenery and local hospitality. They follow the safest on-road route available and provide a link between the Great Rides, urban rides, and towns and cities.*⁴¹

Figure 49: Cycle trail signs for Mackley Track



Figure 50: NZ Cycling Network, Buller area. Waka Kotahi / Nga Haerenga



⁴⁰ <https://www.nzcycletrail.com/find-your-ride/new-zealand-cycling-map/>

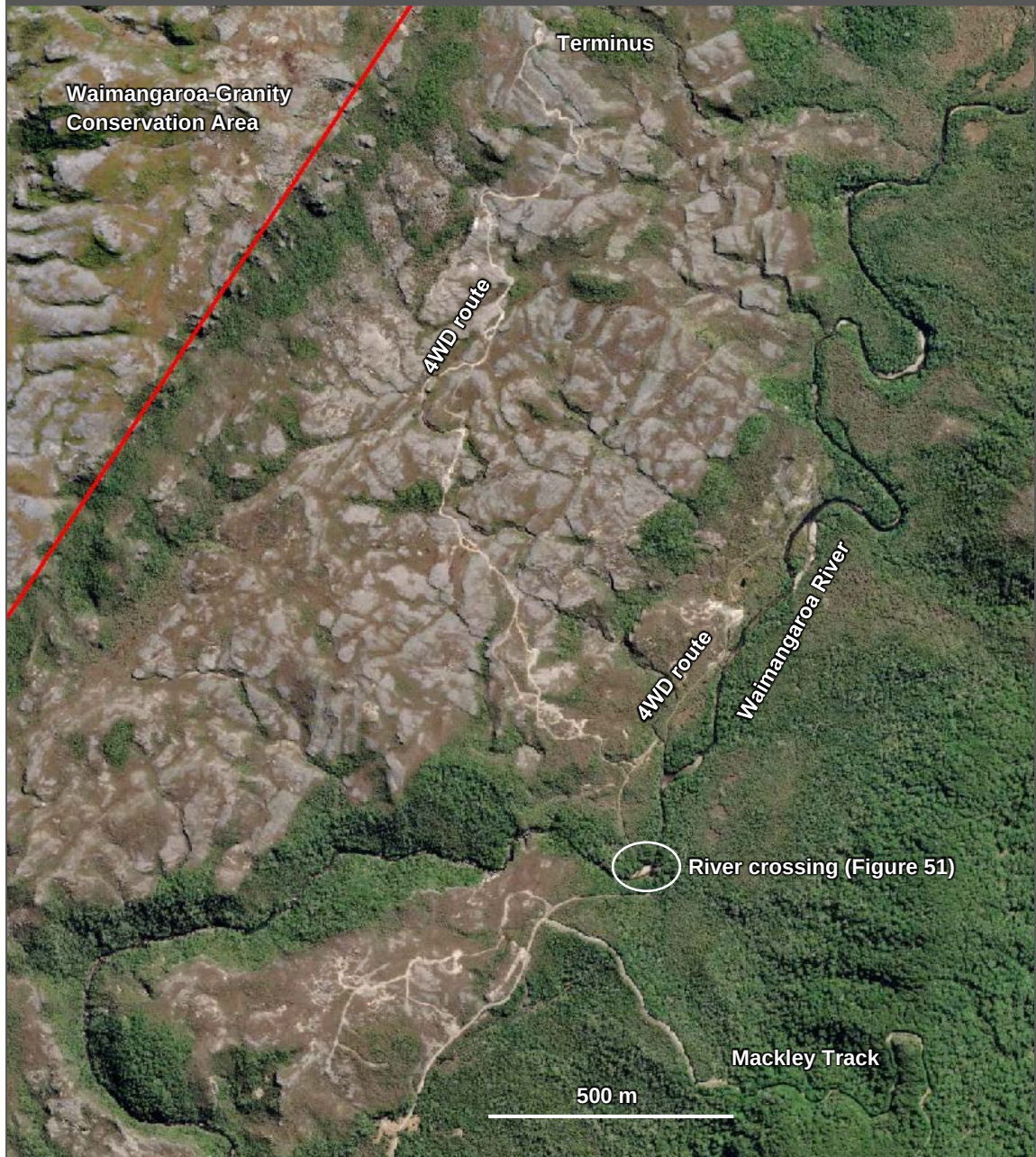
⁴¹ <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/walking-cycling-and-public-transport/cycling/cycling-in-new-zealand/cycle-touring/>

Cedar Creek Road is a 4WD route, with use waning where the gravel road crosses the Waimangaroa River immediately north of the eastern turn on the Mackley Track, as shown in Figure 51, with the route and road on the northern riverbank indicated. The 4WD route continues for approximately 2 km from the river crossing via two options leading north, both terminating within the LINZ block (Figure 52, overpage). The latter routes are used as 'rock climbing' settings for more skilled drivers with the appropriate vehicles.

Figure 51: Waimangaroa River 4WD crossing



Figure 52: Extent of four-wheel drive access beyond Waimangaroa River on LINZ lands



3.5 In-river recreation

Trout and salmon fishing activity in New Zealand is reliably described by the National Angler Surveys (NAS) carried out periodically for the NZ Fish & Game Council by NIWA. The NAS is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and reliable survey of any recreational activity in Aotearoa, with the latest survey completed for the 2021/22 fishing season, which includes summary results for four previous survey periods (1994/95, 2001/02, 2007/08 and 2014/15) (Stoffels & Unwin 2023). This reports no recorded angling between the Buller River and the Mokihinui River catchments on the West Coast for all five surveys.

The *Fish and Game Council Sports Fish and Game Management Plan for West Coast Region* (2024) notes the presence of brown trout in the Ngakawau, Whareatea and Waimangaroa Rivers and classes them as of local significance for angling. This reflects the presence of relatively small (under 3 lb) 'estuarine trout' in the lowest reaches of the three rivers. These are mostly vagrant fish which follow smelt entering from the sea late in year, targeted by the occasional local angler.⁴²

Charles (2013) in *New Zealand White Water – 180 Great Kayak Runs* describes the Ngakawau and Waimangaroa Rivers as class 4 to 5 kayak runs (difficult to very difficult). Both are noted as requiring recent rainfall to meet the minimum necessary flows.

Booth et al (2010) in a multi-criteria analysis of all West Coast kayaking rivers rated the Ngakawau River as of 'low' kayaking value (with the lowest score of any West Coast river), and the Waimangaroa River as of 'medium' kayaking value, but in the lowest nine scored rivers on the Coast (out of 58 kayaking runs).

There are no references to kayaking on the Whareatea River.

There are no consented whitebait stands reported on the Ngakawau, Whareatea or Waimangaroa Rivers by the West Coast Regional Council, with the nearest on the Orowaiti Lagoon to the south and the Mōkihinui River to the north.⁴³ Kelly (1988) reported some whitebaiting on the Waimangaroa River ("fished occasionally by up to 10 whitebaiters") – noting the adverse effects of coal mining on water quality – but did not refer to the Ngakawau or Whareatea Rivers. Watson et al (2025) updated Kelly (1988) and reported no change in the recreational importance of the Waimangaroa River (i.e. still of low value) with up to seven whitebaiters observed on the River in the 2022 season, and with no reference to activity on the Ngakawau or Whareatea Rivers. Elder et al (2016) reported the recovery of inanga in the Ngakawau River subsequent to management of acid mine drainage and turbidity by Solid Energy, "with some good catches being recorded". Orchard (2020) reported inanga spawning habitat on tributaries of the Whareatea River.

The West Coast Regional Council does not monitor the Ngakawau, Whareatea or Waimangaroa Rivers for contact recreation.⁴⁴ There are no data available to indicate the relative value of waterways in the Buller District for swimming, but any accessible and safe site is likely to have some local use.

In summary, in-river recreation in the Buller Plateaux catchment is confined to low levels of kayaking on the Ngakawau and Waimangaroa Rivers, low levels of whitebaiting on the Waimangaroa River and very little whitebaiting on the Ngakawau and Whareatea Rivers (noting none was reported in Watson et al (2025)), with some local trout angling for estuarine fish on the three rivers. Local swimming activity on all waterways is highly likely. Effects on these activities all relate to the management of water quality from catchments on the Buller Plateaux and are described in the relevant technical reports.

⁴² Dean Kelly, Regional Manager, West Coast Fish & Game Council, pers comm Oct 2025

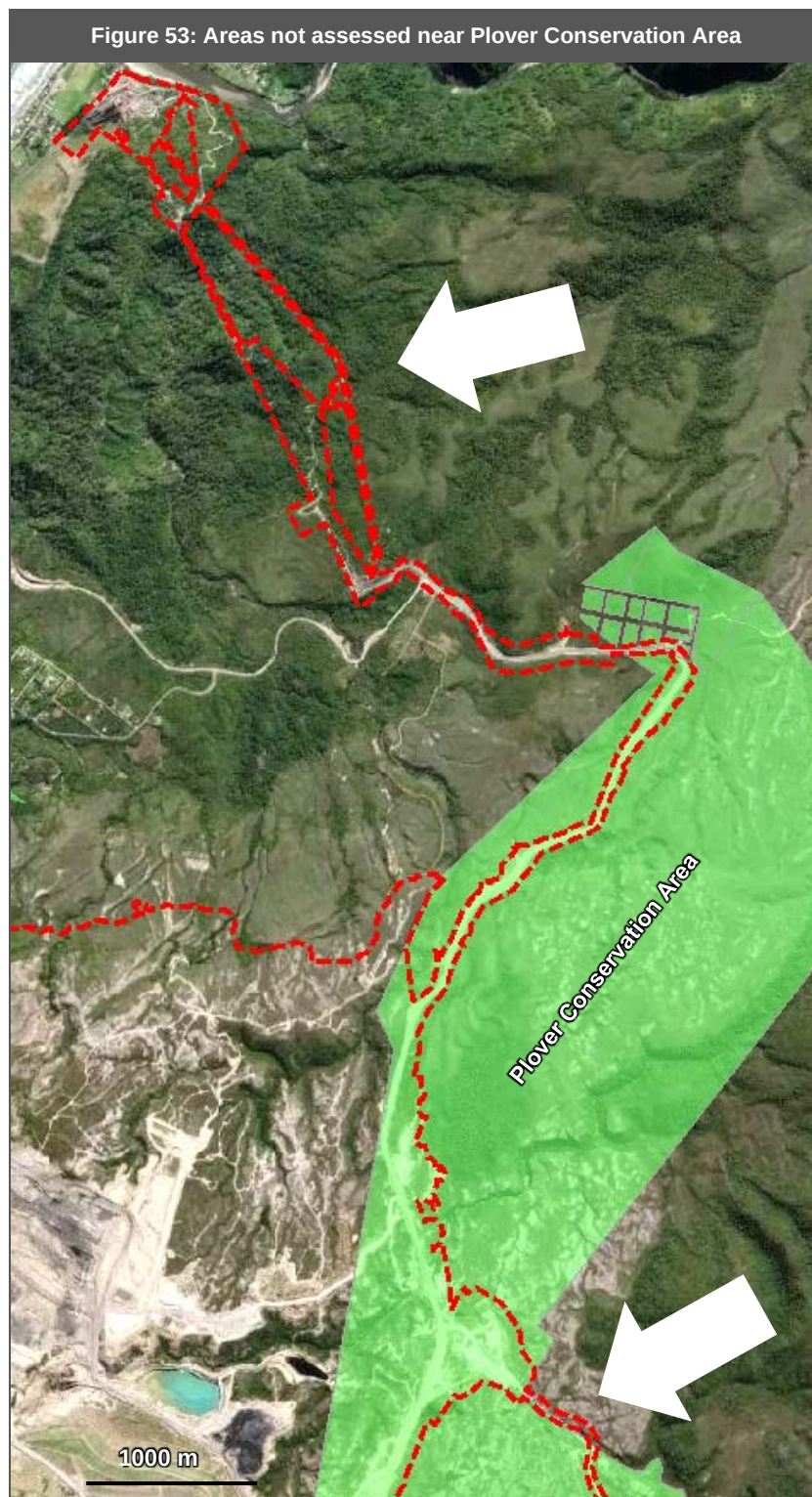
⁴³ See: <https://www.wcrc.govt.nz/environment/water/whitebaiting/whitebait-stands-location-map>

⁴⁴ See: <https://www.lawa.org.nz/explore-data/swimming> and <https://www.wcrc.govt.nz/environment/water/contact-recreation>

3.6 Areas not assessed

Two components of the Project area on public conservation land near the Plover Conservation Area have not been considered in this assessment. These are shown in Figure 53, indicated by the white arrows, with the Project boundary in red. The northern area is the roading and cableway leading to the coal transfer station at Ngakawau. This is within the Stockton Conservation Area with public access restricted for safety management, and there are no changes proposed compared with the status quo. The southern area is a short section of four-wheel drive track within the Ngakawau Ecological Area with access controlled by Bathurst. This is a component of the existing roading network within the Plover Conservation Area. There is also no change in use proposed.

The Waimangaroa Storage Yard is also not reviewed. This has the potential to be used as a project laydown area. The land is an industrial site in the Waimangaroa township bounded by Banbury Street and Conns Creek Road to the south and a gravel processing area on the banks of the Waimangaroa River to the north. The site includes a largely unformed legal road and Crown land in the form of a disused railway corridor. The site has no existing recreation value.



4 Consultation findings

Telephone interviews were conducted in 2022 and repeated and augmented in 2025 with recreational users with various roles in local clubs or who are regular visitors to the Denniston Plateau, based on Strava accounts and local recommendations. These included: [REDACTED] (mountain biker), [REDACTED] (trail running), [REDACTED] (Buller Cycle Club, high user generally), [REDACTED] (Buller Cycle Club), [REDACTED] (trail running), [REDACTED] (Outwest Tours), [REDACTED] (four-wheel driver) and [REDACTED] (high user, all activities). A workshop with recreational stakeholders was held in Westport in May 2025 to review the proposal and to consider potential mitigations for effects. The latter contributed to the setting description, but is discussed in more detail in Section 5. Further conversations were held with representatives of the NZ Four Wheel Drive Association⁴⁵ and the Combined 4WD Clubs Inc⁴⁶ ([REDACTED]) to describe four-wheel drive values and to consider potential mitigations, and the Fish & Game Council West Coast ([REDACTED]).

Trail running

- Trail running is an important activity regionally, with routes including Mount William, Mount Rochfort, the Old Ghost Road, and loops joining Sullivans and Lake Rochfort. Runs also extend to the Denniston museum area.
- The Plateau is mainly accessed from Lake Rochfort, the Incline or Denniston Road. Whareatea Mine Road often forms part of a long loop from Powerhouse Road past Lake Rochfort and onto the Whareatea Mine Road and either down the Incline or Denniston Road (about a 2.5 hour run), or joining loops on (for example) Sullivans Circuit or the Pig Route (the Pig Route being rockier and more technical). There is therefore a 3.5km section where runners might interact with vehicles from Escarpment Mine between the Mine and Burnetts Face Road.
- Runners participate solo, with family, or in groups (6–16 people), often organised through the West Coast Trail Runners group on Facebook. Frequency of use is high in summer (weekly) and lower in winter (1–2 times per month).
- There are few places near Westport with the necessary climbs for all-terrain training purposes, so the Plateau is an important destination for trail running.
- The attraction for trail running is the climb and the technical nature of the terrain. Sullivans Circuit is ideal. Some find running on the roads is not attractive – boring and flat, and they do not offer the training opportunities sought. Others see the roads as an important focus of their run.
- The Plateau is generally very quiet, with few interactions between vehicles and other users.
- When there has been more mining activity in the past – with blast and vehicle warning signs in place – there weren't really any more obvious interactions with vehicles.
- Runners on the road tend to follow the vehicle ruts where there is no loose gravel – so run near the middle of the road. There aren't too many potholes. However, the road is generally quite wide with passing room for two vehicles and ample space to avoid them. A clean shoulder would be a suitable running location.
- Vehicles can be heard from quite some distance and there a very good sight-lines. Four-wheel drive vehicles can be heard from across the Plateau and sometimes sound close but are actually a long way away.

⁴⁵ Representing 2100 individuals in 60 member clubs nationally

⁴⁶ Representing 500 members in 10 member clubs, based in Canterbury

Mountain biking

- The trails on the Plateau are challenging and require a reasonable level of skill. Unlike most formed mountain bike trails nationally, the Plateau trails are almost all based on pre-existing routes and therefore do not have, for example, banked corners and other features which make for fast riding. The technical nature of the rides is a large part of the attraction, with skill development always possible regardless of a rider's level of experience.
- The rocky nature of the trails mean they are useable in all weather conditions, not becoming boggy.
- There has been a strong local contingent who regularly use the trails and probably make up the majority of users. However, the trails do have good interest from visiting riders.
- The Plateau has low levels of use, and riders can bike all day without meeting any other riders – even when parked cars indicate that other riders are there. There are many routes and some long distances between them, which spreads everyone out. This is real appeal of the setting. The area presents a rare combination of raw, rugged terrain and a sense of remoteness, which is of great appeal.
- The death of a well-respected local rider on the Plateau in October 2020 somewhat subdued local mountain biking participation around Denniston.
- The Plateau has many formal and informal tracks, is often foggy with low cloud, online information services and on-site track markers are not great, and there has been some theft of signs, and so visiting riders can very easily get lost. Locals take wayfinding for granted since it is their regular riding area.
- The Buller Cycle Club has recently renewed its agreement with the Department of Conservation for maintenance of the mountain biking trails for the next five years. Five year periods are preferred by the Club to ensure ongoing dialogue with the Department. There is, however, little Club activity at the moment.
- There has been quite a lot of trail development closer to Westport – particularly for family and beginner riders – and this may have drawn some activity away from the Plateau.
- Prior to 2020 most riders would park at the museum carpark and ride along Whareatea Mine Road to complete loops on, for example, Sullivans Circuit (and so be captured by the cycle counter on the road north of the Quarry carpark). Since then, the Quarry carpark has been developed with a map and other signage, with a focus on reducing the potential for crowding of other Plateau visitors at the museum. Riders are generally heading south from the Quarry carpark on Whareatea Mine Road and are therefore not being picked up by the counter – although their vehicles are. The Quarry carpark is now the main focus for mountain bike parking.
- The 2014 closure of the Whareatea Loop south of the Quarry carpark would have also reduced activity a little in the area (although Figure 11 shows it still having some activity).
- The Quarry carpark is also popular with trail bike riders (cross-country motorbikes), with trail bikes being decanted from trailers (ramps for this purpose are often stored at the carpark). There is some conflict with trailbikes damaging mountain bike trails and natural areas, although most riders respond positively when directed away from sensitive sites. Some do not care. Four-wheel drivers also damage trails.

- The vast majority of riders on the Burnetts Face trails – such as the Miners and Drill Tracks – return via Burnetts Face Road and are therefore captured by the counter on Burnetts Face Road. It is possible to return to the Quarry carpark via the Ropers trail, but this is a slog and not a common option.
- Trail grades were reviewed early this decade for DOC by Nick Sutcliffe, with indications that the original gradings were on the light side (suggesting they were easier than the reality).
- Whareatea Mine Road is generally considered a route to trails rather than a route in itself – being ‘rather long, flat and boring’. The technical riding on the trails is the focus.
- Gravel riding is growing in popularity generally (bikes with no suspension but large tyres suited to mixed ‘all-road’ terrain) and these would focus on the ‘main’ roads on the Plateau, avoiding the mountain bike trails, but these are not yet commonly seen.
- There is the potential for conflict with heavy vehicles on Whareatea Mine Road. Riders are currently accustomed to very low levels of vehicle and visitor activity on the Plateau, and so regular vehicle passes would be a change from the norm, considering their proximity on the road, dust and noise.
- However, the distance of road over which riders would interact with vehicles is relatively short – the separation between the Quarry carpark and the entry and exit to Sullivan’s Circuit for example, or the return section from Pig Route or Burnetts Face Road – so the likelihood is for few interactions per ride.
- Maintaining the shoulder of the road clear of potholes and thick gravel would encourage riders to stay on the shoulder, rather than finding the clearest route anywhere on the road, meaning the rider’s location would be more predictable and separated from traffic.
- There is growing demand for long-distance riding, with the potential for better linking the Old Ghost Road and the Heaphy Track with the Mackley Track.
- There have been recent changes in some recreation patterns by locals in Westport, being drawn to other areas such as the Old Ghost Road and the Kawatiri Coastal Trail for cycling. However, the Plateau is still popular.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- T [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

Four-wheel driving

- The two prime settings for four-wheel driving are the Mackley Track and the access to it along Cedar Creek Road and Mount Rochfort Road. The 'play' routes on the Denniston Plateau are also popular (Sullivan Circuit, Levey/Maple). Some more skilled drivers cross the Waimangaroa River to access the rock climbing areas on the eastern flank of Mount Frederick. The latter requires advanced skill and the correct vehicle.
- The scenery and the challenge of routes like the Denniston Chain Grader and Mackley River crossing are major attractions for both locals and visitors.
- Estimates for use of the Mackley Track range from 'over 100' people annually to approximately 200 – with several people per vehicle.
- The unrestricted nature of the four-wheel drive access is very attractive.
- Access along the full Mackley Track once depended on the permission of landowners at Iron Bridge, and getting a key to a locked gate where the road deviates onto private land. This requirement appears to have been relaxed, although the route still passes over private land. Similarly, access to the Buller River via the Orikaka River route relies on access over private land.
- The four-wheel drive opportunities on the Plateau are considered unusual nationally.

Angling

- Trout angling on the Whareatea, Ngakawau and Waimangaroa Rivers relies on vagrant 'estuarine trout' which visit the lower reaches of the waterways in pursuit of smelt (not so much whitebait) late in the year (around November). They are not large – 2 to 3 lb – and are occasionally targeted by locals, or perhaps by a visitor who is looking for any scenic fishing opportunity with no expectations of success.
- Twenty years ago Fish & Game received lots of complaints about water quality in the Ngakawau River, but these seem to have disappeared.
- The Buller River and its tributaries are of far more interest for fishing. The Cascade River has very poor access and no records of angling activity.

Other activities

- Interviewees noted the use of the area for day tramping, camping, school visits, search and rescue practice, rogaining (trail running orienteering), and as a link for multi-day tramps linking the Old Ghost Road and the Heaphy Track with other routes.
- A common theme is that the Plateau is valued for its challenging terrain, unique landscape, historic mining features, panoramic views over Westport, and unique

vegetation. It offers a 'front country' experience, with backcountry features close to town, being accessible but rugged.

- Mount Rochfort is popular for stargazing and viewing aurora.
- Parapenters/paragliders have launched from a point south west of Millerton, requiring access across Bathurst land.

5 Effects assessment and recommendations

This assessment has been informed by, primarily, the data in the description of the existing environment (Section 3, consultation findings (Section 3.6), and a workshop with a selection of user group representatives (albeit operating in a personal capacity). The latter was held in Westport in May 2025 and included:

- [REDACTED], Denniston Heritage Trust
- [REDACTED], Department of Conservation
- [REDACTED], Department of Conservation
- [REDACTED], Community, outdoor recreation
- [REDACTED], West Coast Trail Runners
- [REDACTED], Northern Buller Museum
- [REDACTED], Denniston Heritage Trust
- [REDACTED], Denniston Heritage Trust
- [REDACTED], Museum of Kawatiri
- [REDACTED], Clough and Associates Ltd (heritage specialist)
- [REDACTED], Bathurst
- [REDACTED], Bathurst
- [REDACTED], Bathurst
- [REDACTED], Bathurst
- [REDACTED], Bathurst
- Rob Greenaway (report author)

Further discussions were relied on to frame a mitigation package for four-wheel driving with representatives of the NZ Four Wheel Drive Association and the Combined 4WD Clubs Inc.

The impact assessment focuses on:

- The loss of some recreation opportunity on the Denniston Plateau due to ESE, particularly unfettered access on the Mount Rochfort Road, but also noting that most of the recreation tracks on the Plateau are outside the mining footprint.
- Impacts on cycle, four-wheel drive and motorbike access between Cedar Creek Road and the Mackley Track.
- Opportunities to compensate for the onsite effects on recreation amenity by the development of alternative off-site recreation access.
- Mine rehabilitation, noting that the affected DOC and LINZ land is not owned by Bathurst and will remain administered by LINZ and the Department of Conservation at mine closure. Stockton is currently owned by Bathurst, but on mine closure (and completion of rehabilitation) will transfer back to the Crown and there will be public access opportunities at that time. Proposals for post-mine recreation development are therefore described in broad terms, enabling appropriate decisions considering recreation demand at the time of mine closure activities, and recognising the role of the statutory land managers.

- Effects of increased mine traffic on the Denniston Incline and other local roads on the Denniston Plateau, noting that relevant issues are primarily addressed in the Traffic Assessment.
- The development of four predator proof fenced areas on the Plateaux are described separately in the Ecological Assessment. These have the potential to contribute to the suite of visitor attractions and are a positive addition for recreation and tourism. The fencelines of the North Denniston and Coalbrookdale exclosures are likely to attract use by mountain bikers, trail runners and potentially four-wheel drivers and trail and trial bikes, and the fencelines follow in part routes already developed for some or all of these activities, which will require management. Only the Coalbrookdale exclosure currently includes developed (and popular) tracks for cycling and walking, and this access will need to be maintained.

The prime visitor settings in the study area – the Denniston Breakhead and the Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale areas – are largely unaffected by the proposal, apart from increased mine traffic and periodic closures of some public access areas beyond the mine footprint – particularly the Coalbrookdale Walk – when blasting occurs. A noise assessment for the recreation areas is attached to this report as Appendix 2.

Figure 54 shows the footprints for the ESE, UWHR and MFS areas overlain on a Strava heatmap for all activities (activity records are shown in blue to contrast with the red consent boundaries, with the darker blue showing the most popular routes). This indicates the key issues of the UWHR and ESE overlying existing recreation settings – as well as the recreation routes which will remain accessible beyond the consent boundaries. There are no Strava records for the MFS and the Stockton mine area beyond the boundaries in Figure 54.

Figure 55 shows similar data as Figure 54 in more detail for the ESE, with the addition of the two proposed southern fenced sanctuaries. The fencelines generally overlie existing tracks, although most of the Coalbrookdale Valley and settlement – the destination of the Coalbrookdale Walk – will be located within a sanctuary area.

The following report sections consider each activity area separately, and propose relevant mitigation measures. Effects are considered in terms of both recreation *opportunities* (the physical ability to carry out an activity) and on recreation *values* (the enjoyment of those opportunities). Table 6 in section 5.6 of this chapter summarises these effects by land unit, activity, effects on opportunities and values, and assigns an assessment scale to un-mitigated and mitigated effects.

The development of an additional recreation opportunity off-site is recommended in recognition of the likely displacement of some walking, mountain biking and trail running from Denniston Plateau.

Figure 54: ESE, UWHR and MFS boundaries (red) overlaid on blue Strava heatmap for all activities

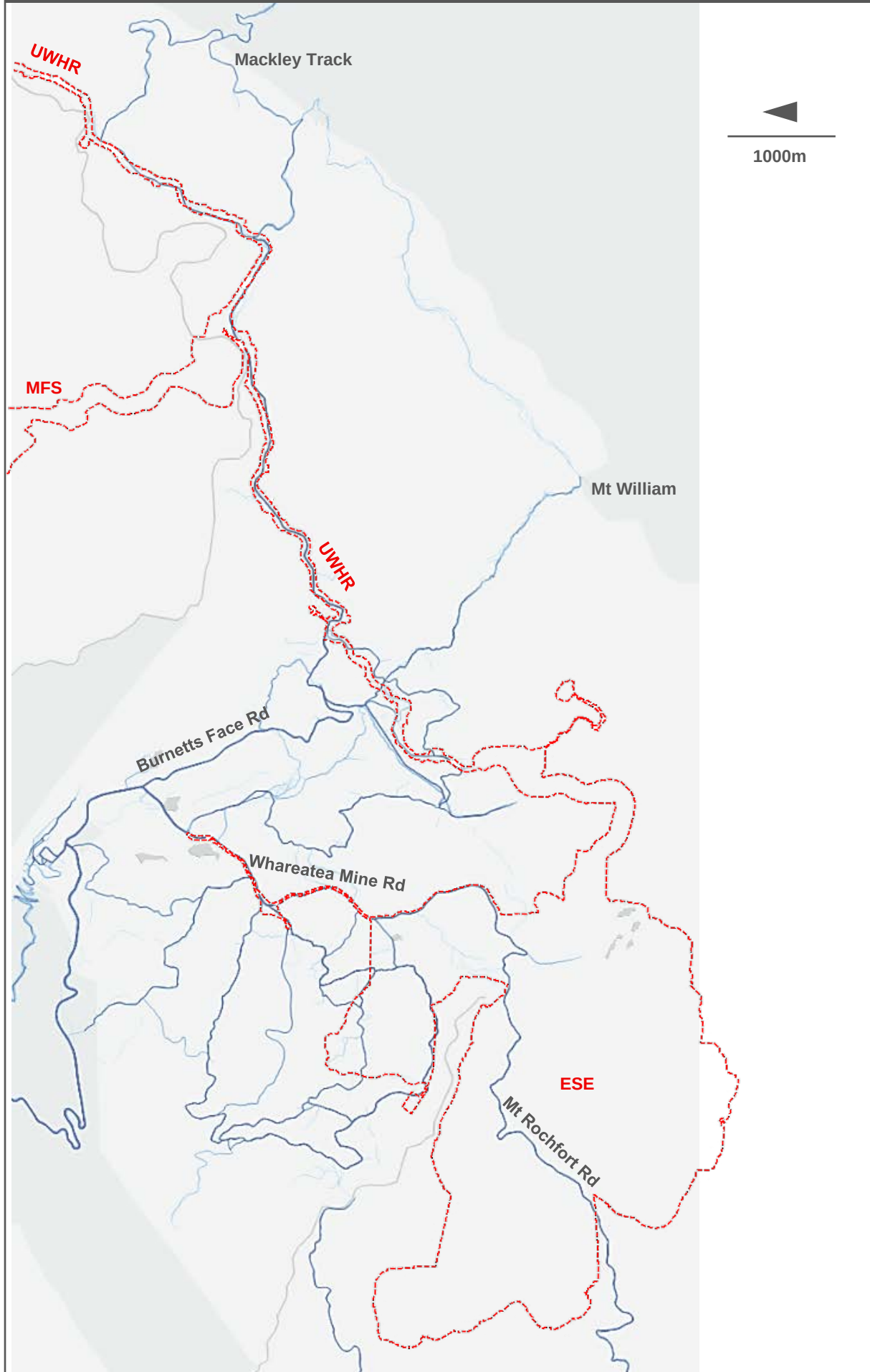
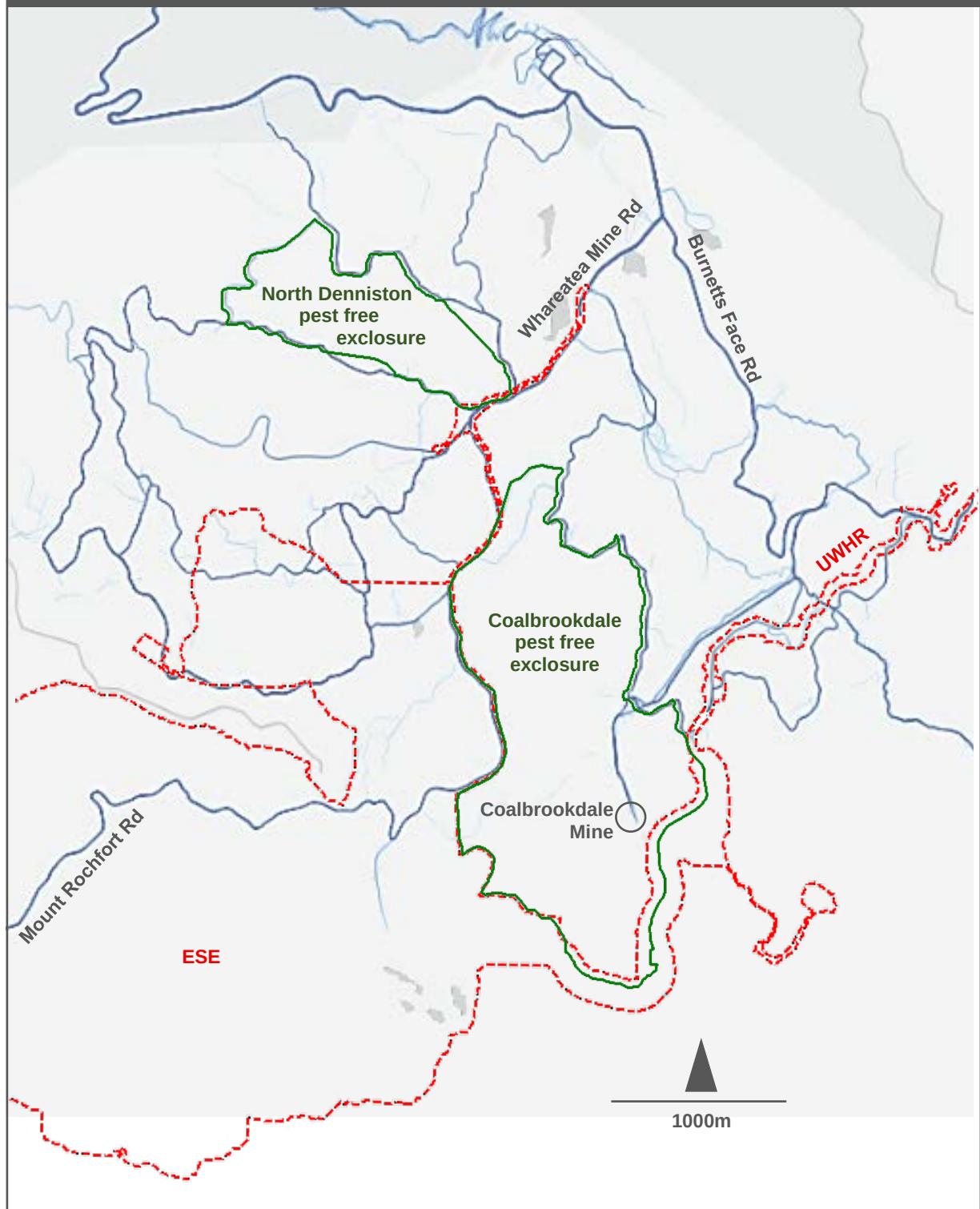


Figure 55: ESE and UWHR boundaries (red) and southern pest free exclosures (green) over Strava heatmap



5.1 Rochfort Stewardship Area

In the Rochfort Stewardship Area, recreation **opportunity** effects are potentially:

- Very high adverse effects on 4WD access to Mount Rochfort and general recreation at that site due to the potential closure of several loop 4WD tracks.
- A risk to walkers on Myra's Track to Mount William crossing the UWHR.
- High adverse effects on mountain biking, trail running and motor biking on Denniston Plateau due to the loss of specific trails, noting that many will remain.
- Some limitation on current vehicle access to an occasionally used carpark for easy access to the mine heritage sites on the Coalbrookdale Walk.
- Periodic and temporary short-term closures (15min – 1hr) of public access areas within 500m of blasting activity, most likely to affect use of the Coalbrookdale Walk, but potentially other running and mountain biking tracks on the Plateau.
- Effects arising from the installation of pest free exclosures, although those in the Rochfort Stewardship area could also potentially operate as visitor attractions and, at least in the case of the Coalbrookdale pest free exclosure, include provision for public entry.
- General effects on existing open recreation access to all areas of the Denniston Plateau for the likes of photography and botanising.

Potential effects on recreation **values** are:

- The potential for effects on the quality of the nationally significant visitor experience at the Brakehead and old township area, as well as Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale. Some survey respondents noted a concern over continued mining activity on the Plateaux and their decision to visit the Brakehead area, although this will not necessarily translate to an actual drop in visitor numbers.
- Effects on all other activities relying on deeper access within the Conservation Area due to obvious changes to the setting characteristics for the period of the mine life, with more commercial traffic, noise, light and vibration effects, and visual amenity effects as described in the Landscape Assessment.

Due to the location and scale of the proposed activities, these effects cannot be avoided. Recommended recreation management options are:

- The formation of the RUG as described in Section 1.
- Ongoing formal liaison with the NZ Four Wheel Drive Association and the Combined 4WD Clubs Inc by Bathurst regarding the maintenance of four-wheel access to Mount Rochfort for club members and members of the public. Off-road vehicle access opportunities – particularly to Mount Rochfort and the Mackley Track (the latter on LINZ lands and discussed below) – are likely to vary over the mine life, but a basic level of access will be established with a specified number of access days annually, and the ability to apply for additional days for specific events – for both the public and club members. This will require online information about access applications and protocols around their approval by Bathurst.
- Education online and on the Plateau about remaining four-wheel drive opportunities. A stand-alone website would be preferred, with a requirement for Bathurst to maintain it with up-to-date data and minimum response times to queries.
- Consider enabling a commercial four-wheel drive access option to Mount Rochfort, if practical, as is currently provided by Outwest Tours at Stockton.

- Continued access to Mount William for walkers maintained by the provision of a marked crossing where the UWHR and walking track intersect. Effects will be minor if this crossing is provided.
- Communication with mountain biking, trail running groups and the Department of Conservation about opportunities for linking unaffected access trails to maximise their use (including via the RUG).
- Online and onsite education about the remaining recreation trails on the Denniston Plateau and their potential for use.
- Site rehabilitation when possible to include consideration of progressive trail reinstatement – in consultation with trail users and the Department of Conservation. For example, see the recently-opened (2025) recreation access to the Globe Progress Mine near Reefton, which is under rehabilitation.⁴⁷
- Reinstatement of Mount Rochfort Road to public four-wheel driving as a priority on mine closure.
- Development of additional recreation opportunities off-site in recognition of the likely displacement of some walking, mountain biking and trail running from the Mount Rochfort Conservation Area.

Implementing these recommendations will avoid significant adverse effects on recreation opportunities on the Denniston Plateau.

The Landscape Assessment reports the potential for High adverse visual effects from the ESE and/or MFS at Mount Rochfort, several locations on the Whareatea Mine Road and at Mount William, and these will have corresponding adverse effects on recreation values for the mine life, ranging from Moderate to Very High (settling to Low or No effect post mine closure and rehabilitation). Noise and vibration effects are likely to be very slight or absent at the main recreation settings. The Lighting Assessment finds that views from the southern slopes of Mount Rochfort, which presently enjoy a completely dark vista at night, would remain unaffected. Views from the western slopes will also remain as they are at present, receiving minor effects from the existing lighting at Westport and coastal settlements. Since views of aurora occur to the south, they will not be affected by the BPCP. Views from the northern and eastern slopes could be slightly degraded.

5.2 Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area

There is low potential for significant adverse impacts on recreation opportunities and values in the Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area, limited to hunting and walking (there are no formed trails and no evidence that it is a significant hunting area) and motor biking (trial and trail bikes mostly). The majority of the conservation area is unaffected, but access on established four-wheel drive routes will be limited by the development of the UWHR.

As for mitigations proposed for the Mount Rochfort Stewardship Area, recommended recreation management options are:

- The formation of the RUG as described in Section 1.
- Maintenance of programmed four-wheel access along the UWHR for a specified number of days annually, with the ability to apply for additional days for specific events.
- Education online and on the Plateau about remaining four-wheel drive opportunities.

⁴⁷ See: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2025-media-releases/remediated-mine-becomes-new-reefton-attraction/>

- Online and onsite education about the remaining recreation trails on the Plateau and their potential for use.

5.3 Plover Stream Conservation Area

There is low potential effects on tramping and hunting opportunities and values considering existing mine activities in the conservation area and the proposed future mine activities.

There may be the potential for developing recreation access through this area on mine rehabilitation to develop a walking and cycling connection between the Mackley Track and the Old Ghost Road via a reinstated Charming Creek Walkway. Such a consideration is beyond the scope of this assessment, but a consideration for mine rehabilitation outcomes.

5.4 LINZ Administered Lands

Recreation activities on LINZ-administered lands will be affected by the construction and operation of the UWHR. This has the potential to affect physical access to Mackley Track for walkers, mountain bikers, four-wheel drive and motorbikes. The recreation values of the setting will be affected by the loss of unfettered access, and noise and vibration effects on the natural quiet via encountering heavy vehicles.

Beyond the UWHR, other effects are the same as for the Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area (that is, very low potential for recreation effects).

Continued access to Mackley Track between Cedar Creek Road and Mackley Track for walkers and cyclists could be maintained by the construction of an access path parallel to the UWHR, with marked crossings where required. This will extend to both of the Mackley Track sections leading from the current road alignment (see Figure 48) to enable cyclists to use the easier incline when heading east (uphill), and potentially the steeper when heading west (downhill), and either option for walkers.

Considering the length of the public access track parallel to the UWHR, track users would have periodic interactions with passing coal haulage trucks. With a maximum of nine truck units operating on a 70 minute cycle, a truck would pass any one location every 8 minutes approximately. Approximately 5 km of walking and cycle path will be required parallel to the UWHR to reach the first exit onto the Mackley Track. A walker at 5 km/hr would spend an hour on this route and encounter eight trucks. A cyclist at 10 km/hr would likely encounter four trucks.

As for effects on the Rochfort Stewardship Area, due to the location and scale of the activity, effects on uncontrolled four-wheel drive and motorbike access cannot be avoided.

Recommended recreation management options are the same:

- The formation of the RUG as described in Section 1.
- Ongoing formal liaison with the NZ Four Wheel Drive Association and the Combined 4WD Clubs Inc by Bathurst regarding the maintenance of four-wheel access to Mount Rochfort for club members and members of the public. Off-road vehicle access opportunities – particularly to Mount Rochfort (as discussed above) and the Mackley Track – are likely to vary over the mine life, but a basic level of access will be established with a specified number of days annually, and the ability to apply for additional days for specific events – for both the public and club members. This will require online information about access applications and protocols around their approval by Bathurst.
- Education online and on the Plateau about remaining four-wheel drive opportunities. A stand-alone website would be more easily found and accessed by users, with a

requirement for Bathurst to maintain it with up-to-date data and minimum response times to queries.⁴⁸

- Online and onsite education about the remaining recreation trails on the Denniston Plateau and their potential for use.
- Reinstatement of the UWHR to public four-wheel driving as a priority on mine closure (subject to landowner agreement and approval).

5.5 Public roads, and general visitor satisfaction

The Traffic Assessment describes the use of public roads – including the Denniston Incline and SH67 – for heavy vehicle movements. Reference in that report is made to the management of effects on recreation vehicle traffic and cyclists on those roads (the recreation opportunity), with relevant mitigations.

The 2020 visitor survey (Section 3.1.1) found that 83% of respondents considered the access to the Denniston Plateau to be no different to an average rural road, while 14% considered it 'a little unsafe' and 2% 'moderately unsafe'. None considered it 'extremely unsafe'. Motorcyclists were more likely to consider the experience 'a little unsafe', but this was a very small sub-sample. These data provide a baseline for visitor experiences (a recreation value) of the road access.

Bathurst has the opportunity to periodically repeat the visitor survey, relying on the 2020 data as a baseline, to better understand the impact of mine traffic on visitor enjoyment. Repeating the survey will provide an ongoing monitor of perceptions of road safety and enjoyment of the main visitor assets on the Plateau. Survey findings would be reported to the Buller District Council, DOC and LINZ.

It is recommended that the 2020 visitor survey be repeated immediately prior to new work commencing on the Plateaux to re-establish the data baseline, again within two years of work starting, and potentially biennially thereafter until the RUG and Bathurst are comfortable that ongoing effects of the Project are being effectively managed, and then five-yearly thereafter.

The RUG would otherwise have the general opportunity to report to Bathurst regarding the management of heavy traffic issues.

⁴⁸ Examples include, for the Rainbow Road: <https://www.rainbowstation.co.nz/get-access>, and for Kaingaroa forest: <https://www.firstsecurity.co.nz/forestry-permit/> - the latter being quite hard to find.

5.6 Analysis and summary

This section reviews the significance of the recreational uses of the Plateaux, scales the likely adverse effects on recreation potentially caused by the proposal, and reviews the proposed mitigations and management responses, with a final scaled assessment of effects.

Effects on both recreation values and opportunities are considered. An opportunity, in this assessment,⁴⁹ is the physical ability to undertake an activity, such as the ability to 4WD to Mount Rochfort. Recreation values refer to the quality of the experience and the motivations of the participant, such as the desire for quiet enjoyment of a backcountry setting with few other visitors and no infrastructure. The proposal will largely retain the existing activity opportunities, but will more-so affect recreation values.

Effects on recreation opportunities and values are assessed according to the matrix in Table 4. This considers the magnitude of the effect and the significance of the setting for recreation.

Table 4: Scale of impact on recreation opportunities and values considering recreation significance and magnitude of effect					
		Recreation significance			
		Very high	High	Moderate	Low
Magnitude of effect	High or severe	Very high	High	Moderate	Low
	Moderate or medium	High	Moderate	Low	Low
	Low or minor	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

A 'significant' adverse effect on a recreation opportunity is likely to displace⁵⁰ many or most users from a setting for prolonged periods, but not necessarily for all activities which occur there; although it is likely that amenity for all activities will be degraded. A 'moderate' adverse effect will periodically displace some activities and users, but the amenity will not be degraded for all activities. A 'minor' adverse effect will displace a small number of users for short periods, but amenity will almost always be preserved for the majority of activities and users. The scale of effect may be reduced if the area affected is confined and there are ample suitable alternative opportunities for relevant activities. The scale of effect on recreation values will rely partly on the interpretation of the findings of parallel technical reports, such as those for landscape, noise and vibration. High adverse effects on recreational values might not necessarily result in direct displacement, but they will affect the quality of the experience, and visitors might subsequently choose to avoid the setting or report diminished enjoyment.

Table 5 summarises the recreation activities undertaken as identified via literature review and interviews, and their significance at the regional level, which takes into account the scale of availability of alternative locations for each activity. However – considering the findings of the 2020 visitor survey and other literature – tourism activity at the Brakehead is assessed as of national significance, while the Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale visitor areas are assessed as having 'Very high' regional significance. Significance and effects are assessed by publicly accessible area, as per the previous section headings in this chapter. As stated in Section 3.5, low levels of in-river recreation have been identified in several waterways with catchments extending onto the Buller Plateaux, with effects relating to water quality as assessed in other relevant technical reports.

⁴⁹ Other assessment tools, such as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, often concatenate these two aspects.

⁵⁰ Force people to recreate in other settings, at different times, or not at all.

Table 5: Significance of recreation activities on the Buller Plateaux at the regional level			
Very high	High	Moderate	Low
Rochfort Stewardship Area			
- Visitor activity (sightseeing, walking) at the Brakehead and old township area – Nationally significant. - Visitor activity at Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale (sightseeing, walking)	4WD and cycling to Mount Rochfort, and sightseeing from there	4WD in Stewardship Area generally - Mountain biking - Trail and trial bikes - Trail running - Walking on Myra's Track	- Walking - Paragliding - Botanising - Photography
Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area			
		- Trail and trial biking 4WD	Hunting
Plover Stream Conservation Area			
			- Tramping - Hunting
LINZ Administered Lands			
	4WD and motorbike access to Mackley Track - Cycling access to Mackley Track	- Trail and trial biking 4WD	Walking and running access to Mackley Track
Public roads			
- Visitor access to Brakehead and old township – Nationally significant - Access to all other recreation resources on the Plateaux		Road cycling	

In an assessment of this type, both construction and operational effects are considered separately. However, the mining operation is essentially an ongoing construction process. The UWHR will, however, have separate construction and operational phases. It is expected that during construction, public access will be largely maintained in the UWHR area in the same manner as proposed for during operation. However, some temporary additional restrictions are likely, with their management to be determined in consultation with the proposed Recreation Users Group.

A summary of potential effects with and without mitigation, and the mitigation recommendations, is summarised in Table 6. The scales of effect identified rely on the assessment matrix in Table 4 and the significance assessment for each activity in Table 5.

Table 6 considers both recreation *opportunities* (the physical ability to carry out an activity) and recreation *values* (the enjoyment of those opportunities).

Table 6: Proposal effects and mitigation summary			
Activity	Unmitigated level of effect	Potential mitigation	Residual level of effect
Recreation opportunities			
Rochfort Stewardship Area			
Nationally significant tourism activity at Brakehead and old township (sightseeing and walking)	Low – Moderate: While there will be minimal interruption to these activities – considering the separation of the mine areas – there will be additional commercial traffic in the area. Effects will be limited to the roads themselves and not, for example, the Brakehead visitor area. The nationally significant status of the activity and the assessment matrix applied, requires the application of a potentially moderate scale of effect, although this is unlikely to translate into a reduction in visitor numbers.	▪ Traffic management ▪ Visitor interpretation ▪ Management responses consequent to periodic visitor survey results	Low – Moderate
Visitor activity at Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale (sightseeing, walking)	Moderate: As for the Brakehead and old township, effects are mainly associated with mine traffic, with additional changes to access to the Coalbrookdale Walk (within the Coalbrookdale enclosure) and temporary closure of the track due to blasting activity during the construction of the UWHR (a temporary effect).	▪ Open entry to the Coalbrookdale enclosure ▪ Limiting track closure requirements and timing blasting activities for low use periods ▪ Management responses consequent to periodic visitor survey results	Low
4WD and cycling to Mount Rochfort, and sightseeing from there	Very high: Potential for closure of public access	▪ Recreation Users Group liaison ▪ Liaison with 4WD clubs ▪ Managed access by agreement	Moderate (loss of unfettered access)
Walking on Myra's Track	Moderate: Potential for UWHR to close access	▪ Provision of safe crossing point on UWHR and standard operating procedures for vehicle operators considering the potential for encountering walkers	Low
4WD in Stewardship Area generally Mountain biking Trail and trial bikes Trail running	Moderate: Potential for mine area and UWHR to significantly limit access for recreation	▪ Recreation Users Group liaison and reinstatement of access and mine progresses ▪ Liaison with 4WD clubs ▪ Limited managed access by agreement ▪ Maintenance and promotion of remaining access opportunities ▪ Management responses consequent to periodic visitor survey results	Moderate
Walking Paragliding Botanising Photography	Low: Low levels of use and large scale of remaining activity options	▪ Recreation Users Group liaison and reinstatement of access and mine progresses ▪ Managed access by agreement ▪ Maintenance and promotion of remaining access opportunities	Low

Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area			
Trail and trial biking 4WD Hunting	Low: Low levels of use and large scale of remaining activity options	- Recreation Users Group liaison and reinstatement of access and mine progresses - Liaison with 4WD clubs - Managed access by agreement - Maintenance and promotion of remaining access opportunities	Low
Plover Conservation Area			
Tramping Hunting	Low: Low levels of use and large scale of remaining activity options	None required, but Recreation Users Group liaison will assist if any issues arise	Low
LINZ Administered Land			
4WD and motorised bike access to Mackley Track	High: Potential for loss of access	- Liaison with 4WD clubs - Managed access by agreement	Moderate (loss of unfettered access)
Cycling access to Mackley Track	High: Potential for loss of access	Shared path construction by UWHR	Low – negligible (access maintained)
Trail and trial biking and 4WD in wider area	Moderate: Potential for loss of access	- Recreation Users Group liaison - Liaison with 4WD clubs - Managed access by agreement	Low (some access retained, restrictions will apply, low use activity with alternatives)
Walking and running access to Mackley Track	Minor: Potential for loss of access	Shared path construction by UWHR	Low – negligible (access maintained)
Public roads			
Visitor access to Brakehead and old township – Nationally significant Access to all other recreation resources on the Plateaux Road cycling	Moderate: Commercial traffic may displace some visitors	- Traffic safety management and standard operating procedures for commercial drivers - Signs - Management responses consequent to periodic visitor survey results	Objective for a low level of effects based on adaptive management approach and traffic safety management

Recreation <u>values</u>			
<i>Rochfort Stewardship Area</i>			
Nationally significant tourism activity at Brakehead and old township (sightseeing and walking) Visitor activity at Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale (sightseeing, walking)	Low – Moderate: Some survey respondents noted a concern over continued mining activity on the Plateaux and their decision to visit the Brakehead area. This will not necessarily translate to an actual drop in visitor numbers. Mining activity beyond some commercial traffic on the access will not be noticeable from these areas.	▪ Visitor interpretation ▪ Management responses consequent to periodic visitor survey results	Low – Moderate
All other activities relying on deeper access within the Conservation Area	High – Moderate: Obvious changes to the setting characteristics for the period of the mine life, with more commercial traffic, noise, light and vibration effects, and visual amenity effects as described in the Landscape Assessment.	▪ Visitor interpretation ▪ Management responses consequent to periodic visitor survey results	High – Moderate (see Landscape Assessment)
<i>Waimangaroa-Granity Conservation Area</i>			
Trail and trial biking 4WD Hunting	Low: Obvious changes to the setting characteristics for the period of the mine life, with more commercial traffic, noise, light and vibration effects.	▪ Visitor interpretation	Low
<i>Plover Conservation Area</i>			
Tramping Hunting	Low: Largely business as usual in this setting	▪ None required	Low
<i>LINZ Administered Land</i>			
4WD and motorised bike access to Mackley Track	Moderate: Access will rely on controlled access, and freedom of access is a core element of the experience	▪ Liaison with 4WD clubs ▪ Managed access by agreement	Moderate
Cycling access to Mackley Track	Low: High likelihood of encountering heavy vehicles beside shared path, but the affected section is a minor component of the Mackley Track experience	▪ Visitor interpretation	Low
Trail and trial biking and 4WD in wider area	Low: Access will rely on controlled access, and freedom of access is a core element of the experience	▪ Recreation Users Group liaison ▪ Managed access by agreement	Low
Walking and running access to Mackley Track	Low: Minor potential for encountering heavy vehicle at road crossing. Noise and vibration	▪ Visitor interpretation	Low
<i>Public roads</i>			
Visitor access to Brakehead and old township – Nationally significant Access to all other recreation resources on the Plateaux Road cycling	Moderate: Increased encounter rates with vehicles generally	▪ Traffic safety management and standard operating procedures for commercial drivers ▪ Signage ▪ Management responses consequent to periodic visitor survey results	The objective for a low level of effects based on adaptive management approach and traffic safety management

5.7 Conservation Management Strategy review

The relevant components of the DOC West Coast Te Tai o Poutini Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) are described in Section 3. Although the CMS defines almost all of the Kawatiri Place as a backcountry-remote recreation setting, it was adopted prior to the consenting of the existing Escarpment Mine and – when prepared and now – does not reflect the existing recreation setting of the Denniston Plateau, which features two coal mines (although neither currently in operation), telecommunication infrastructure and extensive areas of disturbed ground. It is also well-tracked by motorised recreation, including trail and trial bikes and 4WD. This assessment has been made considering this reality. That is, while the development would appear inappropriate (as a baseline) for a backcountry-remote setting, such a finding is not helpful from a recreation effects perspective considering the reality of the existing recreation setting.

Key recreation opportunity expectations for the Kawatiri Place (as reviewed in Section 3, and p204 of the CMS) are listed in Table 7, with the effects of the proposal reviewed for each.

Table 7: Summary of expectations for Kawatiri Place and effects	
CMS expectation (section 4.2.2.6)	Proposal effects
<i>The historic coalfields, communities and industrial heritage of the Buller Kawatiri plateaux are a popular recreational focus, where the emphasis is on day walks.</i> <i>An outstanding opportunity for historic heritage appreciation is available at Denniston.</i>	Effects on recreation and tourism values and opportunities on the majority of the visitor population are largely avoided by the limited potential for effects on the main visitor settings of the Brakehead, old township area, Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale. These are limited to a view of part of the MFS from parts of the sealed road between the Brakehead and Burnetts Face, and an increase in commercial traffic on public roads.
<i>Mount Rochfort is an easily accessible place to experience the coal measure ecosystems and landscapes of the coal plateaux.</i>	Access is limited by the location of the ESE with managed access coordinated via consultation with 4WD clubs and via the RUG.
<i>The historic bridle track provides walking access to the brakehead and Denniston township. People can also drive up to the brakehead car park. Several walking opportunities are available within the township and across the plateau.</i>	Unaffected in the Brakehead and old township area beyond additional commercial traffic on the public road.
<i>A new track, incorporating above-ground sections of the old roperoad and Denniston Incline, provides access through to Burnetts face and Coalbrookdale areas and links to the town walk at Denniston. Interpretation on the plateau informs people about historic heritage values as well as natural heritage.</i>	There is no impediment to future developments, although consideration of the location of the Coalbrookdale pest exclusion area will be necessary.
<i>A four-wheel drive loop track on the Denniston plateau provides a challenging journey across a spectacular sub-alpine environment, offering dramatic views of mountain and coastal landscapes. Due to the fragile nature of the area, access is restricted, and controlled by a locked gate.</i>	The ESE will interrupt several 4WD tracks on the wider Denniston Plateau in addition to the Mount Rochfort Rd including Loopy and Sullivans Circuit (see Figure 37). Miners and Lunar will remain, and Pig Route and Derail and part of Sullivans Circuit around the North Denniston pest exclusion area (Figure 38). The only locked gates on the Plateaux are for consented mining areas.

<i>Formed roads also provide access to paragliding launch sites on the Denniston and Stockton Plateaux.</i>	No changes to the existing opportunities (rarely used).
<i>The Charming Creek track through the Ngakawau Gorge is a major attraction, where people are able to experience distinctive natural, historical and recreational values. the site is managed to protect both its historic integrity and maintain the daywalking and mountain biking opportunities the track provides.</i>	The Charming Creek Walkway – as a through-route – has been closed since 2021 due to a landslip. Support for reinstating the connection between Hector and Charming Creek is the type of off-site mitigation opportunity suggested in this assessment.

6 Conclusion

The Buller Plateaux includes a wide range of recreation and tourism settings, ranging from the broadly popular Denniston Brakehead, Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale areas to the more specialised mountain biking, trail running, motorbiking and four-wheel drive opportunities in the Mount Rochfort Conservation Area and the block of LINZ-administered land. The Project largely avoids direct impacts on the most popular tourism settings, but has several unavoidable effects on those other recreation opportunities, largely via the development of the UWHR and ESE.

While there will remain many recreation tracks in the Mount Rochfort Conservation Area for the mine life, recreation and tourism access to Mount Rochfort will be interrupted. This is a popular setting for four-wheel drive, motorbikes, cycling and trail running. Similarly, the UWHR will disrupt four-wheel drive access within the LINZ land and to the Mackley Track. Access for cyclists and walkers to the Mackley Track is relatively easily maintained by the addition of a shared (cyclist/walkers) path adjacent to the UWHR.

A suite of mitigation measures are proposed in this assessment. The most important of these are (with more detail in Section 1):

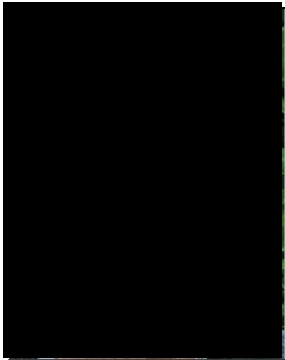
- Establishment of a Recreation User Group to meet periodically to review the ongoing management of recreation (and other) opportunities in the affected areas. The RUG should include representation from agencies with general interest in tourism and recreation in the Buller District, considering the potential for off-site mitigation options.
- Off-site mitigation for the likely displacement of trail running, walking and cycling from the Mount Rochfort Conservation Area.
- Ongoing formal liaison with the NZ Four Wheel Drive Association and the Combined 4WD Clubs Inc – direct with Bathurst – regarding the maintenance of four-wheel access to Mount Rochfort and the Mackley Track for club members and members of the public.
- Education online and on the Plateau about remaining recreation opportunities for all visitors, including access to the Coalbrookdale pest free enclosure.
- Site rehabilitation to include provision for all existing activities, in consultation with the RUG and landowners. There is the potential for some substantial opportunities linking the Old Ghost Road with Lyell for walkers and cyclists, for example.
- Monitoring of visitor activities and satisfaction over time, as directed by Bathurst and the RUG, with reporting to the Buller District Council, DOC and LINZ, and the public.

With these and the other mitigations proposed, the Continuation Project will avoid significant adverse effects on recreation and tourism opportunities in the Buller District. Effects on recreation and tourism values and opportunities on the majority of the visitor population are largely avoided by the limited potential for effects on the main visitor settings of the Brakehead, old township area, Burnetts Face and Coalbrookdale. These are limited to a view of part of the MFS from parts of the sealed road between the Brakehead and Burnetts Face, and an increase in commercial traffic on public roads.

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Appendix 1: Author qualifications and experience



ROB GREENAWAY • CURRICULUM VITAE

Recreation and Tourism Research and Planning

Rob Greenaway has an academic and practical background in recreation, tourism and conservation management. He is experienced in planning and managing for public, community and commercial facilities and services in parks and reserves, and in urban and protected areas. His strong skills in formal and informal data gathering, research analysis and journalism have been demonstrated in hundreds of project reports, management plans, publications, evidence, submissions and research papers over the past 30 years. Rob has published extensively in New Zealand, Australia and Asia (examples of articles and papers are available on www.greenaway.co.nz).

Core work is recreation and reserve management planning, and comprehensive and robust assessments of effects of large-scale infrastructure proposals. Rob has presented expert evidence at over 120 hearings, with experience in hydro, irrigation, wind, forestry, subdivision, roading, cycleways, mining, marine farming, discharges and coastal and tourism developments.

Work History from 1990	1997 - current:	Director, Rob Greenaway & Associates (R&R Consulting (NZ) Ltd) , Nelson.
	1995 - 1997:	Consultant in Recreation and Tourism, Boffa Miskell Limited , Christchurch.
	1990 - 1995:	Consultant in Recreation and Tourism, Tourism Resource Consultants , Wellington.

Appendix 2: Marshall Day Acoustics Noise Memo

Project:	Buller Plateaux Continuation Project	Document No.:	Mm 001		
To:	Bathurst Resources Ltd	Date:	3 February 2026		
Attention:	██████████	Cross Reference:			
Delivery:	email	Project No.:	20240962		
From:	Jon Farren	No. Pages:	2	Attachments:	No
Subject:	Noise on Coalbrookdale Walkway and Myra’s track				

Following discussions with the Department of Conservation, we have been asked to comment on the noise (and vibration) that may be experienced on the Coalbrookdale Walkway and Myra's track.

In summary, we expect recreational users of these tracks to hear vehicle engine noise for a relatively brief period as they pass through the activity area. While noise will be audible, it is expected to be at relatively low levels, and much of the time will remain below users' own self-noise and the natural sounds present along the track.

Noise Predictions Near the Tracks

The Project's Assessment of Noise Effects report included predicted noise levels in the vicinity of these tracks, based on the conservative assumption that all mining stages are in progress simultaneously and trucks are travelling along the haul road.

Figure 1 shows an enlarged version of the noise contour plots that were included as Appendix F to the Noise Report. We have superimposed the approximate location of the tracks onto the noise contour plots which indicate that average noise levels of approximately 50 dB $L_{Aeq,15min}$ could be experienced within about 100 metres of the Upper Waimangaroa Haul Road (UWHR), and will reduce to ambient sound levels of 40 dB $L_{Aeq,15min}$ within a few hundred metres. While machinery noise will be audible, these levels are very low in the context of published guidance for noise amenity and will generally be lower than the self-noise generated by recreational users' own footsteps, clothing rustle, etc., as they move along the track. As a point of reference, the World Health Organization recommends 45 dB L_{Aeq} outside dwellings to support an appropriate sleeping environment. Against this benchmark, 40 to 50 dB L_{Aeq} during daytime is considered very low.

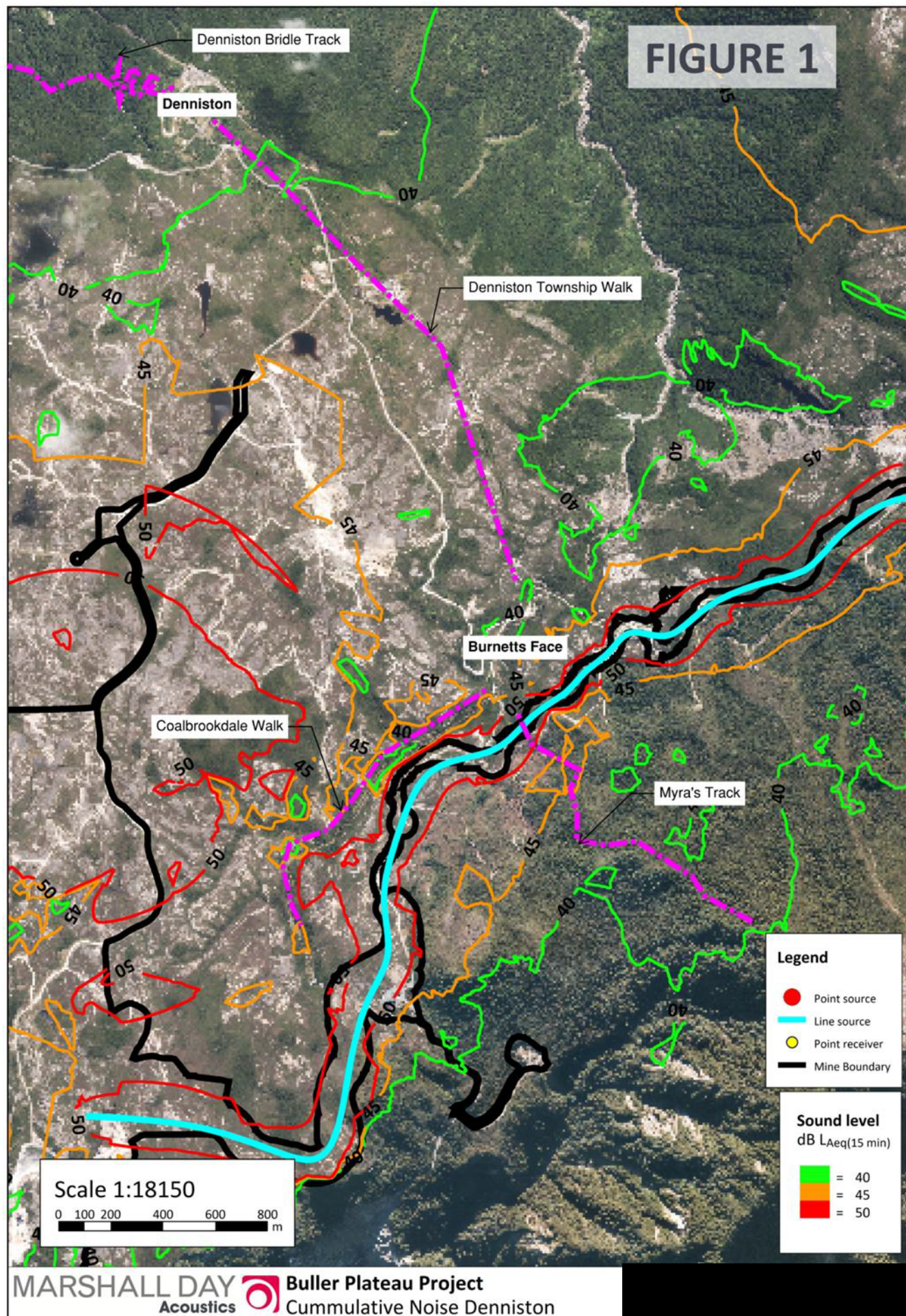
Recreational User Noise Experience

We note that the contour plots describe 'average' noise levels for a moment in time during mining activity. Walkers using the tracks will transit through the area over a relatively short period and the noise level they experience will vary from day to day depending on where mining equipment is operating at the time.

For example, a walker or runner approaching the UWHR at the same time as a vehicle passes will hear engine noise for a relatively short period. Noise will reduce as the vehicle moves away or as the user continues along the track and increases their separation from the source.

Vibration will be imperceptible

The mechanical equipment used for coal extraction and transportation generate low levels of vibration and will be imperceptible at a distance of approximately 10 metres from the UWHR.



Appendix 3: 2020 Visitor Intercept Survey

June 2020

Denniston Plateau Visitor Survey 2020

Prepared for Bathurst Resources Ltd



www.greenaway.co.nz

Denniston Plateau Visitor Survey 2020

June 2020

Prepared for:

Bathurst Resources Ltd

By:

Rob Greenaway & Associates
www.greenaway.co.nz

Version status:

Final

Acknowledgments: The survey contract was administered by C [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. The surveyors were welcomed to stay overnight near the museum by
Friends of the Hill. This report was written by Rob Greenaway. All thanks go to the respondents, of
course.

Contents

1	Summary	5
2	Introduction.....	7
2.1	Method.....	7
2.2	Error and bias	8
2.3	Non-responses – refusals and repeats.....	9
2.4	Survey days, vehicle counts and weather	10
3	Demographics and origin	12
4	Activities.....	13
5	Features of interest	15
6	Area knowledge	17
7	Change over time, best and worst aspects	19
8	Travel and safety	23
9	Mining awareness and effects on visiting	24
10	Reflections on the method	26
10.1	Timing and sampling.....	26
10.2	Questions.....	28
10.3	Intercept method.....	29
10.4	Coding, grouping and analysis	29
10.5	Health and Safety	29
	Appendix 1: Best and worst aspects - full tables	30
	Appendix 2: Questionnaire	35

Figures

Figure 1: Survey sites	8
Figure 2: Denniston weather and number of responses by survey day	11
Figure 3: Denniston Road vehicle count by day and number of responses	11
Figure 4: Survey age group and gender compared with NZ 2018 Census	12
Figure 5: Most important features by priority order (darkest = highest priority) - count.....	15
Figure 6: Area knowledge – percent.....	17
Figure 7: Visitor locations – showcard for respondents	18
Figure 8: Change over time – percent (n=152).....	19
Figure 9: Change over time (better, same, worse) by experience in years	20
Figure 10: Counter locations.....	26
Figure 11: Cycle counts, Denniston Plateau for January 2020 by day, weekends dark blue.....	27
Figure 12: Cycle counts, Denniston Plateau for March 2020 by day, weekends dark blue	28

Tables

Table 1: Non responses, reasons by activity - count	9
Table 2: Responses by survey day.....	10
Table 3: Origin – percent.....	12
Table 4: Main and all activities – percent.....	13
Table 5: Main activity by site surveyed – count	14
Table 6: Main activity by origin – count.....	14
Table 7: Most interesting features of the Plateau by priority order	16
Table 8: Area knowledge – percent	17
Table 9: Reasons for change – count.....	20
Table 10: Best aspects.....	21
Table 11: Worst aspects	22
Table 12: Travel method and perceptions of safety – row percentages.....	23
Table 13: Travel method and perceptions of safety – count.....	23
Table 14: Mining influence on decision to revisit – counts.....	24
Table 15: Respondents' origin – 'all' of those who gave a generally negative response to mining..	25
Table 16: Best aspects, sorted by theme.....	30
Table 17: Worst aspects, sorted by theme	32

1 Summary

This is a report on the results and method of an intercept survey of visitors to the Denniston Plateau, with 384 respondents. The survey was carried out over 13 days between the 30th of December 2019 and the 17th of March 2020. The survey target was 400 respondents. The survey period was intended to extend from late December to Easter, but was truncated due to the Covid-19 crisis – although there is very little difference in data reliability between 384 and 400 respondents. Three survey sites were used:

- The Denniston Brakehead and visitor centre area, with 305 respondents.
- Burnetts Face Road near the intersection of Whareatea Mine Road, with 49 respondents, focusing on visitors accessing the Coalbrookdale and Mackley areas. This required, in the main, waving down passing vehicles.
- The Quarry carpark on Whareatea Mine Road, with 30 respondents.

The survey had six main focus areas:

1. **Demographics.** Just over 85% of respondents were New Zealanders with 58% of all respondents from the South Island and 27% from the North Island. Twelve percent of all respondents were from the West Coast. Fifteen-percent of those surveyed were international visitors, and 4% of all respondents were Australian. Compared with the 2018 Census data for New Zealand, respondents were more likely to be in the 50+ age groups. Those aged under 15 were not interviewed and were treated as non-responses.¹
2. **Activity.** The majority of respondents identified sightseeing as their main activity (78%), while almost all (94%) described it as one of the activities that they were doing on their visit. Just under 11% named walking as their main activity, and 22% stated they were going for a walk as part of their visit combined with other activities. The respective figures for mountain biking were 5% and 7%. All other activities were undertaken by fewer than 2% of respondents as a main activity, and included photography, four wheel driving, motorbiking, quad or dirt-biking and cycle touring. The survey site and respondent's origin did not influence the choice of main activity.
3. **Features of interest.** Respondents were asked to rank the features of the Plateau that they were most interested in from a pre-set list of eight options, but were not required to rank the full list if a feature was of no interest to them. The results were, in order of total responses per feature: The mining and social history (363); The views to the coast or inland (285); The landscape of the Plateau (251); Natural environment – the local plants and animals (206); The walking tracks (164); The mountain biking tracks (64); A personal or family connection to the area (50); It was just part of the itinerary or I just accompanied family and friends (23). The mining and social history was most likely to be ranked the most important feature.
4. **Area knowledge.** Respondents were asked where they were visiting 'today', and about their awareness of all visitor locations on the Plateau. A map showing ten locations was provided, and for each location respondents were asked if they had visited it or were visiting it today, didn't know about it, or knew about it but were not visiting it today. The Brakehead and old township area were most likely to be visited 'today'. There was low awareness about the Miners area mountain bike tracks, Sullivans area mountain bike tracks, Mackleys Track area, Mt Rochfort, Mt William and Myra's Track, with more than 60% of respondents not knowing about these destinations at all. Just over 56% of respondents did not know of the Coalbrookdale Walk.
5. **Change over time.** Respondents were asked if, in their opinion, the Denniston Plateau was better, worse or the same as the first time they had visited it. They were also asked how many years they had been visiting the area. Those who were on their first visit (n=225, or 58%) were

¹ Standard survey etiquette requires permission from a guardian or parent for potential respondents aged under 15.

not included in this response set. The majority of respondents with experience – 95% – considered the setting to be better than or the same as when they first visited, while 5% (n=255) considered it to be worse. The longer the experience, the more respondents felt that the Plateau had changed for the better, with a dip for those with the longest experience (41+ years), who were a little more likely to think it was unchanged. There was little difference across the periods of experience for those who thought that the Plateau had changed for the worse. Reasons for improvement related mostly to ‘More interpretation panels / more to see’. There was no consistency in the reasons for changes for the worse, but they included wayfinding and signs, access limits and the lack of a mine tour.

6. **Best and worst aspect.** Respondents were asked to name their best and worst aspects of the Plateau via an unprompted open question. There were approximately 2.3 times more best aspects compared with worst. Best aspects were dominated by the history, views and the interpretation panels. The main worst aspects were the weather and the wayfinding signage, with many respondents finding it hard to know where to park and how to navigate the Plateau generally.
7. **Travel and safety.** Respondents were asked about how they travelled to the Plateau and if they felt safe on the access road. Most were in a private or rental vehicle as a driver or passenger, and 83% considered the access to be no different to an average rural road, while 14% considered it ‘a little unsafe’ and 2% ‘moderately unsafe’. None considered it ‘extremely unsafe’. Motorcyclists were more likely to consider the experience ‘a little unsafe’, but this was a very small sub-sample.
8. **Mining awareness and effects on visiting.** Respondents were asked if they were ‘aware that there is still mining on the Denniston Plateau?’ The response was split nearly 50% yes and no. Those who responded yes (n=194) were asked if their awareness influenced their decision to visit the Plateau, and 4% responded ‘yes’, most of whom had an interest in mining. All respondents were asked if mining on the Plateau would influence their decision to visit again in the future. Just under a third (30%) responded yes, and the remainder (70%) responded no. Those who responded yes (n=122) were asked in what way mining on the Plateau would influence their decision to visit again. Respondents were able to give more than one answer, and many gave a combination of negative, positive and mixed answers. Forty-six percent of this subgroup (n=122) gave a generally positive response (they would be interested in seeing an active mine or they supported economic activity, for example), 44% gave an equivocal one (their decision would depend on how mining was done and what it affected) and 20% gave a generally negative response (opposed to open cast mining, mining generally and/or its environmental impact). Twenty-one respondents (17% of this subgroup) were opposed to mining in general and gave no positive or equivocal comment. This represents just over 5% of all respondents (n=385).

2 Introduction

Bathurst Resources operates two coal mines on the Denniston Plateau and has licences to explore additional areas nearby. The survey was designed to:

- Sample visitor use through descriptive data collection during busy visitor periods over 'summer' 2019/2020 at three sites;
- Understand visitor intention, recreational use and knowledge; and
- Understand if mining activities influence recreational activities and use.

These data will enable the effects of existing and any future mining activities on visitors to the Plateau to be better understood.

2.1 Method

The research method relied on a surveyor-administered intercept survey of visitors at three sites on the Plateau (Figure 1):

- The Denniston Brakehead and visitor centre area, with 305 respondents.
- Burnetts Face Road near the intersection of Whareatea Mine Road, with 49 respondents, focusing on visitors accessing the Coalbrookdale and Mackley areas. This required, in the main, waving down passing vehicles.
- The 'Quarry carpark' on Whareatea Mine Road with 30 respondents.

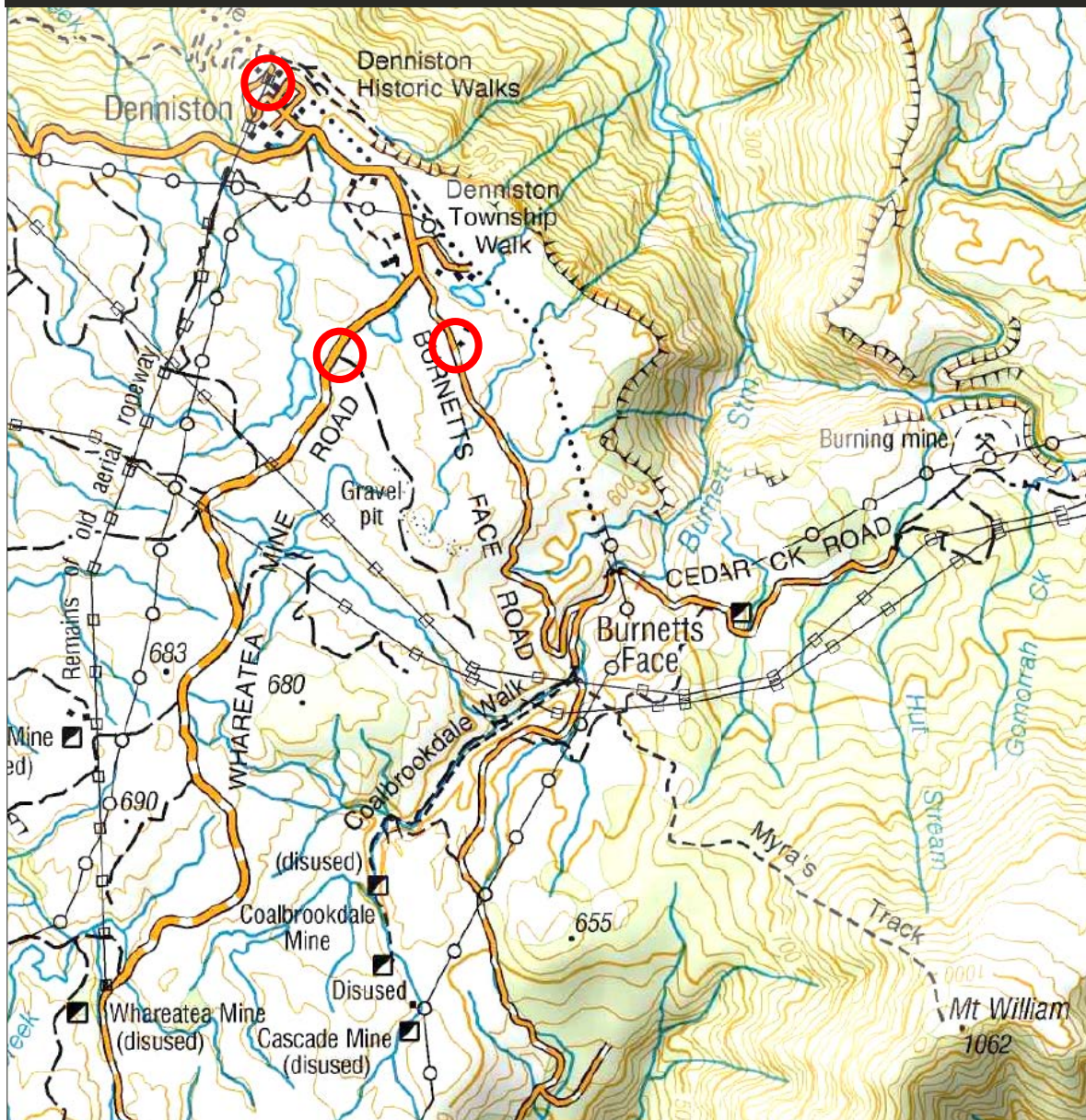
The survey target was 400 respondents, with 384 gained. The survey period was intended to extend from early January to Easter, but was truncated due to the Covid-19 crisis. Until international tourism resumes, future responses will be dominated by domestic visitors, and, if additional survey work is carried before the tourism industry stabilises, trend analysis could be difficult.

If 384 respondents were randomly selected from any sized population, the margin of error would be $\pm 4.9\%$ where there was a 50 / 50 split in response to an either / or question (greater agreement or disagreement to a question means lower error). For 400 respondents the margin of error would be only slightly reduced (by 0.05%). Note, however, that this sample is not random, as discussed in the following section. Further discussion of survey sampling strengths and weaknesses appears in Section 10.1.

The aim of the selection method was to gain the maximum number of respondents, rather than to collect a truly representative sample of all visitors – which would require a stratified sampling method over a full year. Survey days therefore focused on dry weather during relatively busy visitor periods (counter data indicates that there are more visitors to the Plateau when there is no rain). Almost all visitors encountered at all sites (one per group) were interviewed and so little respondent selection was required.

The questionnaire was designed by Rob Greenaway of RG&A based on questions used in similar questionnaires implemented in other outdoor recreation settings. The questionnaire is appended.

Figure 1: Survey sites (red)



2.2 Error and bias

An error in a survey is defined as a difference between the data gained through research (usually in average values) and the true characteristics of the study's target population. Bias is one cause of error, and can be caused by strategic responses from respondents, poor or inconsistent interviewing techniques, and leading or unclear questionnaire design. An example of bias in this survey is its focus on relatively high-use periods (there is a bias against visitors who prefer using sites when no-one else is around). There is no way of compensating for or measuring this type of bias with the results gained, as the scale of its effect is unknown.

Some other forms of error, such as sampling error, can be quantified, but only if the sampling technique relies on the random selection of respondents. While this survey targeted most users encountered, the sample periods were not randomly selected; and so the sample is neither the population nor is it randomly selected from the population (it is a form of 'non-probability' sampling).

With those errors in mind, surveys of this type can be considered in two ways. At one level they are merely the collection and presentation of a large number of opinions and the provision of descriptive data (a qualitative piece of research). At another level, they are a quantitative representation of the likely use patterns and recreation values of a resource. This survey is largely the former due to the

targeted survey method – that is, survey days were not randomly selected and therefore do not show truly representative use patterns. Consequently, the level of statistical error in the results is not known (because the selection method was not truly random). More discussion of sampling issues is provided in Section 10.1.

The author of this report agrees with Ziliak & McCloskey² in relation to the danger and irrelevance of applying tests of statistical significance to survey samples which are clearly non-random, and as result, none are used in this report.

Some missing data are evident in several data tables (where *n* is less than the total number of responses).³ These gaps result largely from several questionnaires being only partly completed during the interview, with the respondent running out of time or interest. Where enough of the questionnaire was completed, the available data were coded.

Rounding results in a few data sets not adding to 100%.

2.3 Non-responses – refusals and repeats

Table 1 shows the reasons by activity for a questionnaire not being completed when a potential respondent was available. A total of 39 non-responses or refusals was recorded, 74% of whom did not want to participate – either ‘too busy’ or ‘not interested’, while one refusal was because they did not want to give information to a mining company. Seven respondents in vehicles did not stop when waved to. Four respondents approached stated that they had already participated in the survey and were not surveyed for a second time (the result of having two interviewers working at the same time).

Refusals who were wandering around the setting on foot were assumed to be ‘sightseeing’. At Burnetts Face and Whareatea Mine Road, cars occasionally arrived coincidentally. Vehicles which passed while the surveyor was busy interviewing were not counted as non-responses since they were not able to have been targeted. The same applies to pedestrians at the Denniston Brakehead.

Table 1: Non responses, reasons by activity - count	Sightseeing	Mt biking	Car / 4WD	Motorbike / quad	Total
Refusal	25	1	1	1	28
Already surveyed	4				4
Did not stop			5	1	6
Total	29	1	6	2	38

² Ziliak, S.T., McCloskey, D.N. 2008. *The Cult of Statistical Significance*. University of Michigan

³ ‘n’ describes the number of completed responses (the ‘sample’) of relevance to the analysis being described. Where a table describes only percentage figures, n describes the size of the sample (or number of ‘observations’) the percentage figures refer to. Where n is low and those data are being used in a cross-tabulation, there is likely to be a high level of error. In mathematical terms, ‘n’ is any indefinite number.

2.4 Survey days, vehicle counts and weather

Table 2 shows the number of completed questionnaires gained from each site by day. Visitor numbers to the Whareatea carpark site were very variable, with long periods having no visitors. More time was planned here in March to gain a target of 50, but the number of visitors to the Plateau dropped by mid-March as the Covid-19 crisis emerged.

Table 2: Responses by survey day. Days with two staff operating asterisked	Brakehead	Burnetts Face	Whareatea	Total
30.12.19*	40			40
31.12.19*	52			52
01.01.20*	57			57
02.01.20*	37			37
03.01.20		20		20
04.01.20			13	13
05.01.20		6		6
07.01.20	33		0	33
08.01.20	11	9		20
14.03.20*		8	17	25
15.03.20*	26	6	0	32
16.03.20*	20			20
17.03.20*	29			29
Total	305	49	30	384

Figure 2 shows the weather during the survey period (rainfall, maximum temperature and maximum windspeed (not gusts)) as recorded at Bathurst Resources' weather station in Denniston, and the number of respondents interviewed per day. While the chart appears to show some correlation between, at least, temperature and the daily number of respondents, the correlation is actually based on the number of staff operating on any day and where they were working. From the 3rd to the 8th of January, only one interviewer was on site, and from the 3rd to the 5th, all effort was directed to sites 2 and 3 which had much lower levels of activity than site 1 (see Table 2). Rainfall was steady on the 6th and no surveying was carried out. On other days with rain, it was confined to only parts of the day.

Figure 2: Denniston weather and number of responses by survey day

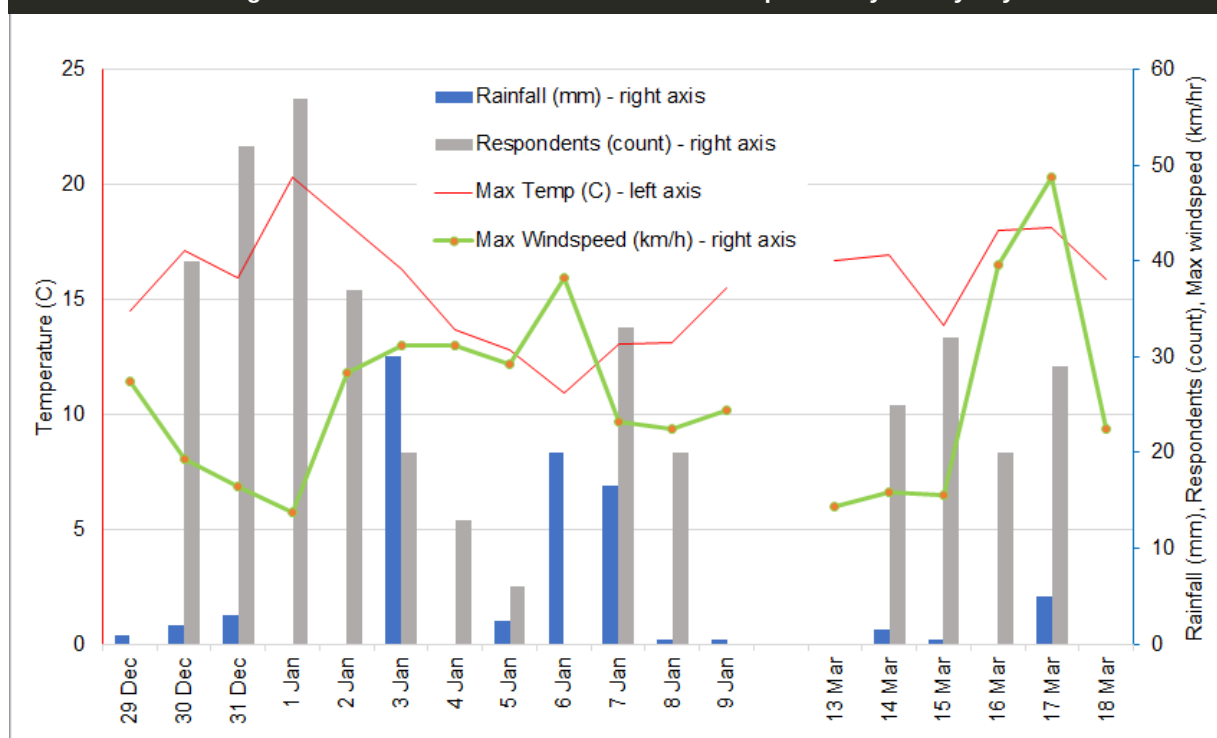
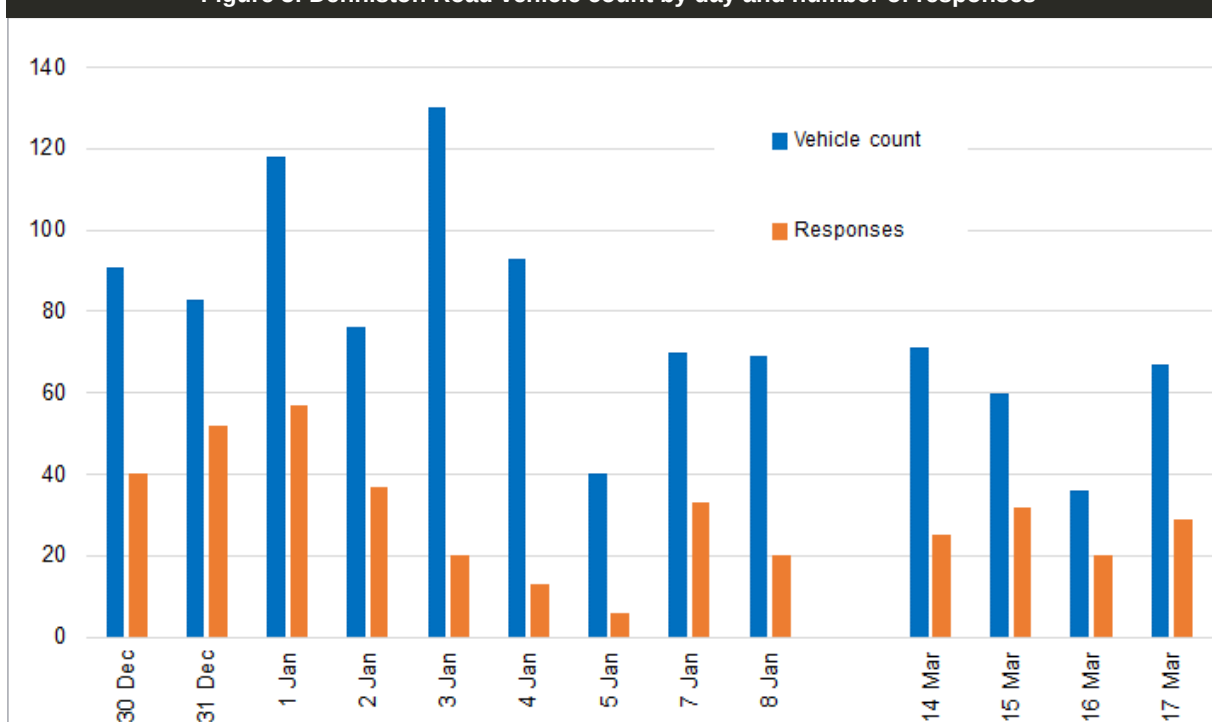


Figure 3 shows the number of responses gained per day compared with the number of vehicles counted exiting Denniston Plateau. Several vehicle and cycle counters have been located on Denniston Plateau since March 2018 in addition to two counters operated by the Department of Conservation (see Section 10.1). The records for these counters are reported on separately. A directional counter on the entrance to the Plateau (Denniston Road) records all vehicles entering and exiting. Only exiting vehicles are shown in Figure 3 to avoid double-counting. In common with Figure 2, low response days related to surveying away from site 1. Survey staff were not able to be in all locations where all potential respondents went, and so the number of responses and non-responses cannot add to the total number of vehicles. Just over 1000 vehicles were recorded on the survey days, and the total number of responses represent 38% of those.

Figure 3: Denniston Road vehicle count by day and number of responses



3 Demographics and origin

Figure 4 shows the age groups of respondents compared with 2018 Census data for New Zealand (where 85% of respondents were from). Those aged under 15 were not interviewed and that age group has also been deleted from the Census data for this comparison. The age groups were quite well-represented in the survey results compared with the national population, but with an over-representation of people aged 50 years or over.⁴ Men made up 55% of respondents and 49% of the national population (the surveyors noted that on some cooler days, there were a few couples where she stayed in the car and he browsed the site, which may have skewed the results a little towards men).

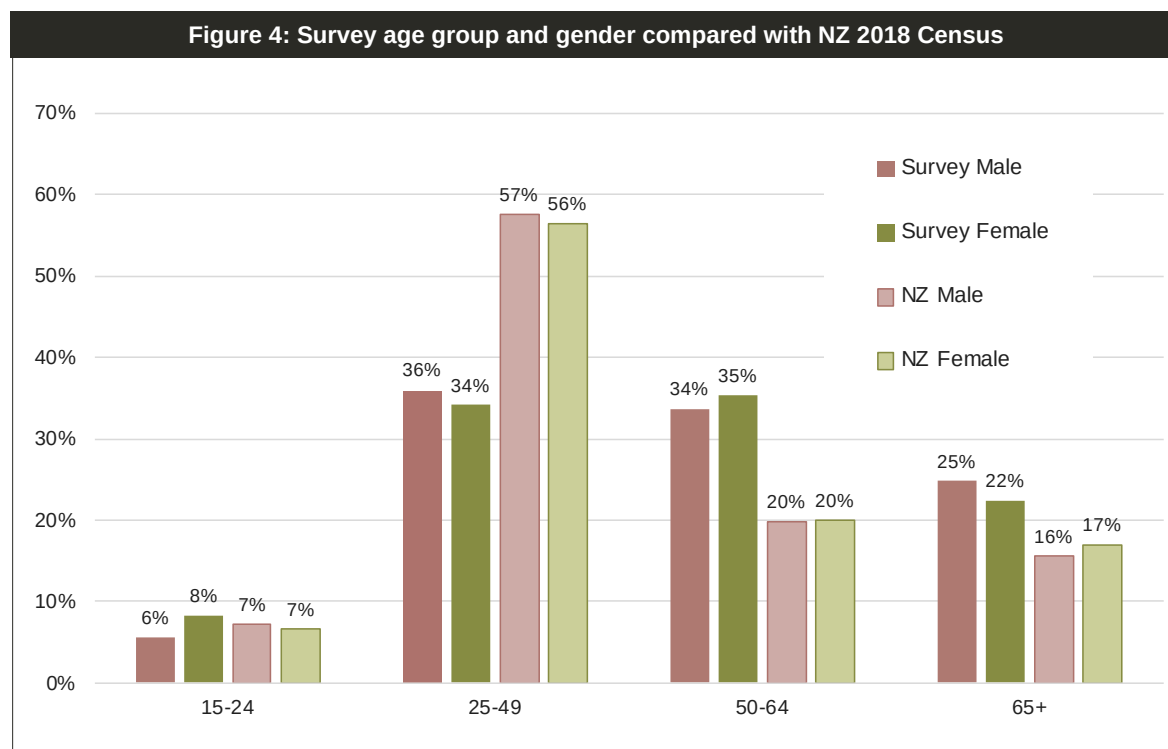


Table 3 shows the origin of respondents. Just over 85% were New Zealanders with 58% from the South Island and 27% from the North Island. Thirteen percent were from the West Coast. Australians were the largest international group at almost 4% of all visitors. Other international visitors originated mostly from the UK, North America and throughout Continental Europe. Only one respondent was from Asia – Singapore.

Table 3: Origin – percent	n=384
South Island other	25
Christchurch	21
North Island other	13
West Coast	13
International other	11
Wellington	8
Auckland	7
Australia	4
Total	100%

⁴ Over-representation does not mean that the results are biased and therefore skewed towards a group that is over-represented. It just means that, in comparison with some benchmark (such as Census data) there are more of a sub-group in the data-set. This is a reality of the survey sample and not necessarily a sampling problem. Although it could be if, for example, the survey sample was 80% male, and this was considered unlikely in reality.

4 Activities

Table 4 lists the main activity undertaken by respondents on the day they were interviewed, and all other activities undertaken during their visit. For example, Table 4 shows that for 78% of respondents, sightseeing was their main activity on the day of the interview, but that 94% of respondents were sightseeing at some stage on the day.

Table 4: Main and all activities – percent	Main (n=384)	All as % of respondents (n=384)
Sightseeing	78	94
Walking	11	22
Mountain biking	5	7
Four wheel driving	2	2
Photography	1	4
Motorbiking	1	1
Motorhome	1	1
Dirt / quadbike riding	1	1
Cycle touring	1	1
Geocaching	<1	<1
History / learning	<1	<1
Running	<1	<1
Botany		1
Camping		1
Dog walking		1
Driving		1
Exploring		1
Picnicking		1
Socialising / relaxing		1
Working		1
Birdwatching		<1
Cleaned memorial		<1
Coal collecting		<1
Hunting		<1
Relatives		<1
Totals	100%	

Table 5 shows that the interview locations were not dominated by any single main activity. For example, it was expected that mountain bikers were most likely to be encountered at the Whareatea carpark, from where most of the mountain bike tracks on the Plateau converge, but they were as likely to be encountered during the survey at the Brakehead and visitor centre (with their bikes still on their cars). Similarly, respondent origin did not influence participation in any particular main activity (Table 6). For example, mountain bikers came from almost all locations.

Table 5: Main activity by site surveyed – count	Brakehead	Burnetts Face	Whareatea	Total
Sightseeing	253	30	18	301
Walking	29	10	2	41
Mountain biking	10	3	5	18
Four wheel driving	2	4	2	8
Motorbiking	4		1	5
Cycle touring	2			2
Dirt / quadbike riding			2	2
Motorhome	2			2
Photography		2		2
Running	1			1
History	1			1
Geocaching	1			1
Total	305	49	30	384

Table 6: Main activity by origin – count	South Island Other	Canterbury	North Island Other	West Coast	International	Wellington	Auckland	Total
Sightseeing	63	66	43	30	51	26	22	301
Walking	13	6	6	10	3	3		41
Mountain biking	4	7	1	3	2		1	18
Four wheel driving	4	4						8
Motorbiking	2	1		1			1	5
Cycle touring	2							2
Dirt / quadbike riding		1		1				2
Motorhome				1			1	2
Photography	1			1				2
Running				1				1
History		1						1
Geocaching					1			1
Total	89	86	50	48	57	29	25	384

5 Features of interest

Respondents were asked, “What features of the Denniston Plateau are you most interested in, if anything?” They were presented with a predetermined list to rank their preferences, with the request, “Rank the following from most to least interesting with 1 being the most interesting for you – and you don’t need to rank them all.”

The features were presented to respondents on a card with the following options:

- The mining and social history
- The views to the coast or inland
- The landscape of the Plateau
- Natural environment – the local plants and animals
- The walking tracks
- The mountain biking tracks
- A personal or family connection to the area
- It was just part of the itinerary or I just accompanied family and friends
- Other

Two versions of the card were used, with ‘The mining and social history’ at the top of the list on one card and at the bottom of the second (and all options in reverse order). The card version used for each respondent was coded alongside their responses to check the potential scale of presentation order bias. For the card with mining and social history at the top of the list, 57% of respondents named it their first priority, and for those with mining and social history at the bottom of the list, 43% named it their first priority – so some response bias is likely.

Figure 5 shows the responses in order of frequency of mention and showing respondents’ priority ranking by colour, with priority one ratings shown dark and lesser priorities in progressively lighter colours.

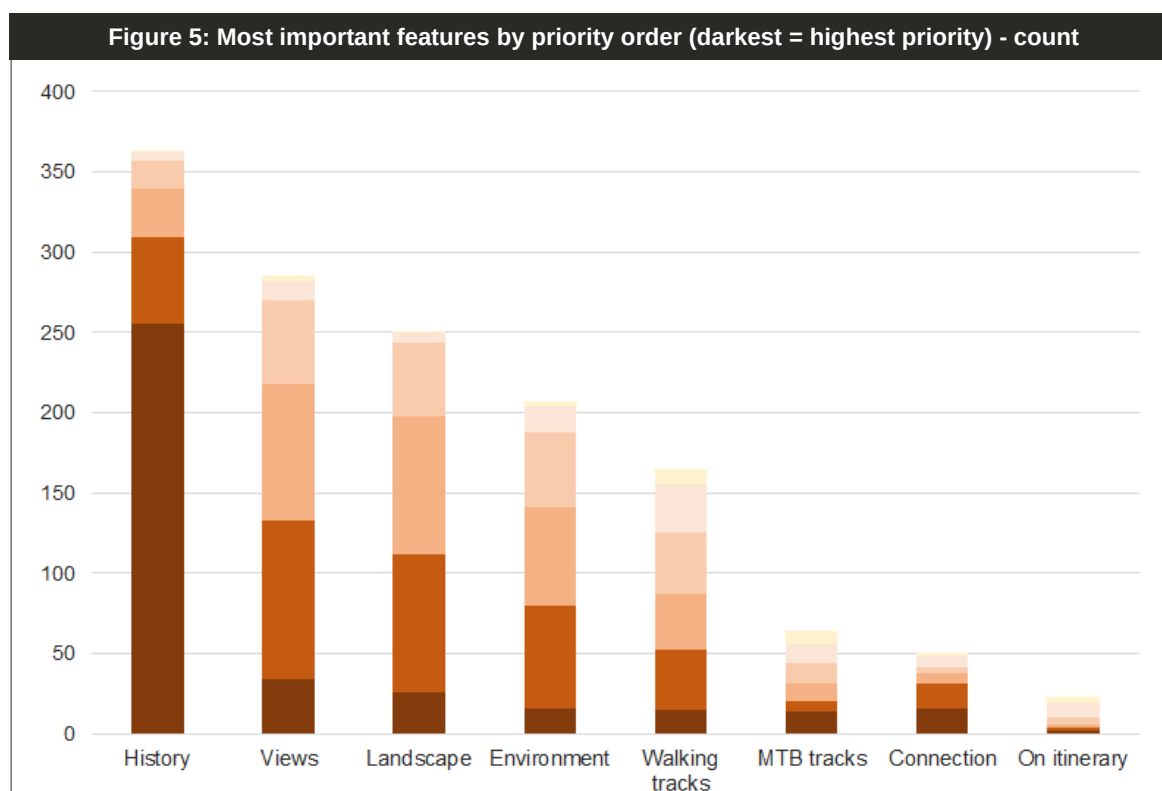


Table 7 shows the same data as counts. The mining and social history had both the most mentions and was most frequently referred to as the most interesting feature of the Plateau. Views to the coast or inland was rated similarly to the landscape of the Plateau, but as of slightly higher interest.

Table 7: Most interesting features of the Plateau by priority order								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
The mining and social history	255	54	30	18	5	1		363
The views to the coast or inland	34	99	85	52	12	3		285
The landscape of the Plateau	26	86	86	45	7	1		251
Natural environment – the local plants and animals	16	64	61	47	16	1	1	206
The walking tracks	15	37	35	38	31	7	1	164
The mountain biking tracks	14	6	11	13	12	7	1	64
A personal or family connection to the area	16	15	7	3	8	1		50
It was just part of the itinerary or I just accompanied family and friends	2	2	2	4	9	3	1	23
Other	6	4	3	3	1	1		18

'Other' interesting features included:

- The *Denniston Rose* book (the majority of 'other' references)
- Four wheel driving
- Mining engineering
- Motorbiking
- Showing friends around
- Tangata whenua origins

6 Area knowledge

Respondents were asked where they were visiting 'today' and about their awareness of all visitor locations on the Plateau. A map showing the locations was provided (Figure 7), and for each location respondents were asked if: they visited it or were visiting it today, didn't know about it, or knew about it but were not visiting it today. Figure 6 and Table 8 present the results as percentages, and respondents could name more than one setting (so the totals sum to more than 100%). For example 95% of respondents were visiting the Brakehead and visitor centre on the day of their visit, while five respondents (mostly surveyed at Burnetts Face Road) did not know about it. Conversely, eight respondents were visiting the Mt William or Myra's Track area on the day of the survey and 79% were not aware of it. The Bridle Path was closed due to a slip during the survey period, but six respondents used it nonetheless.

Figure 6: Area knowledge – percent

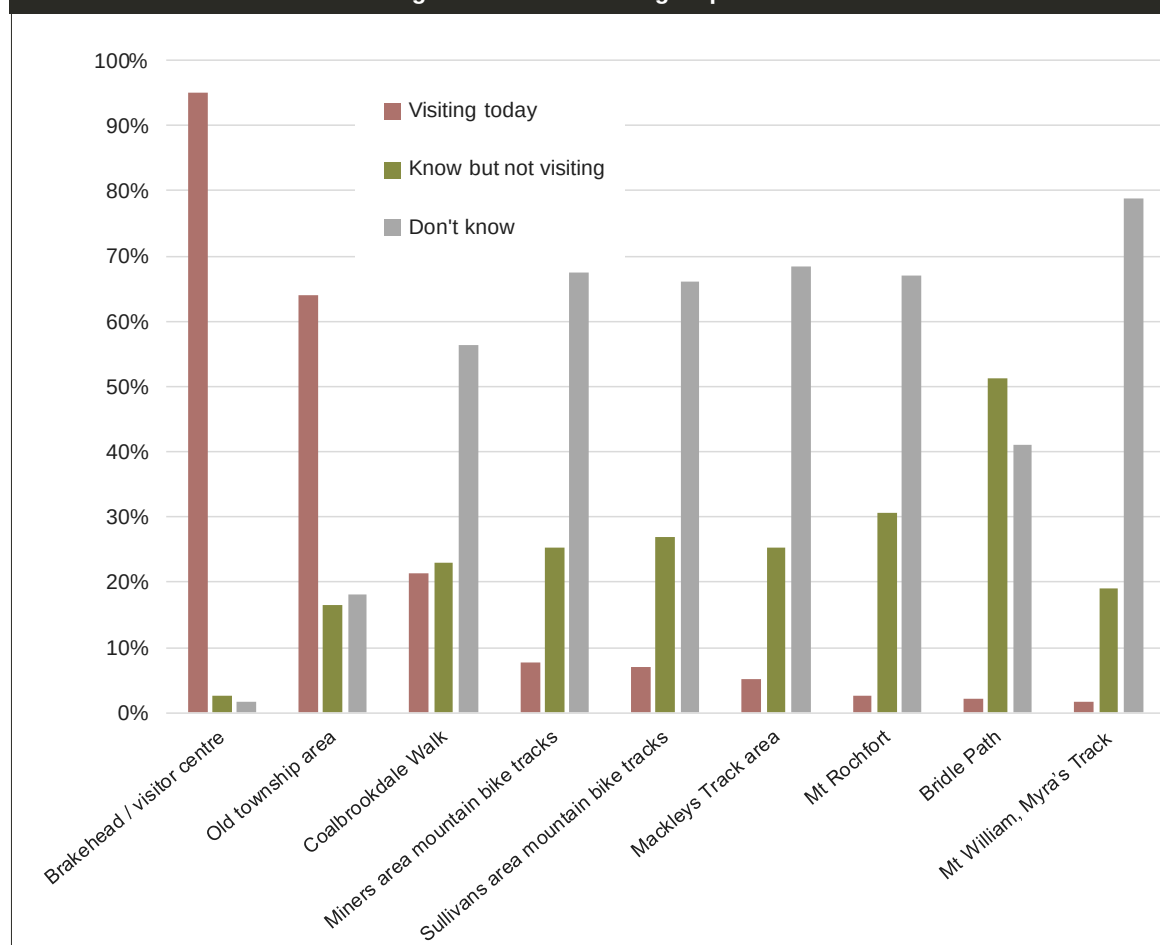
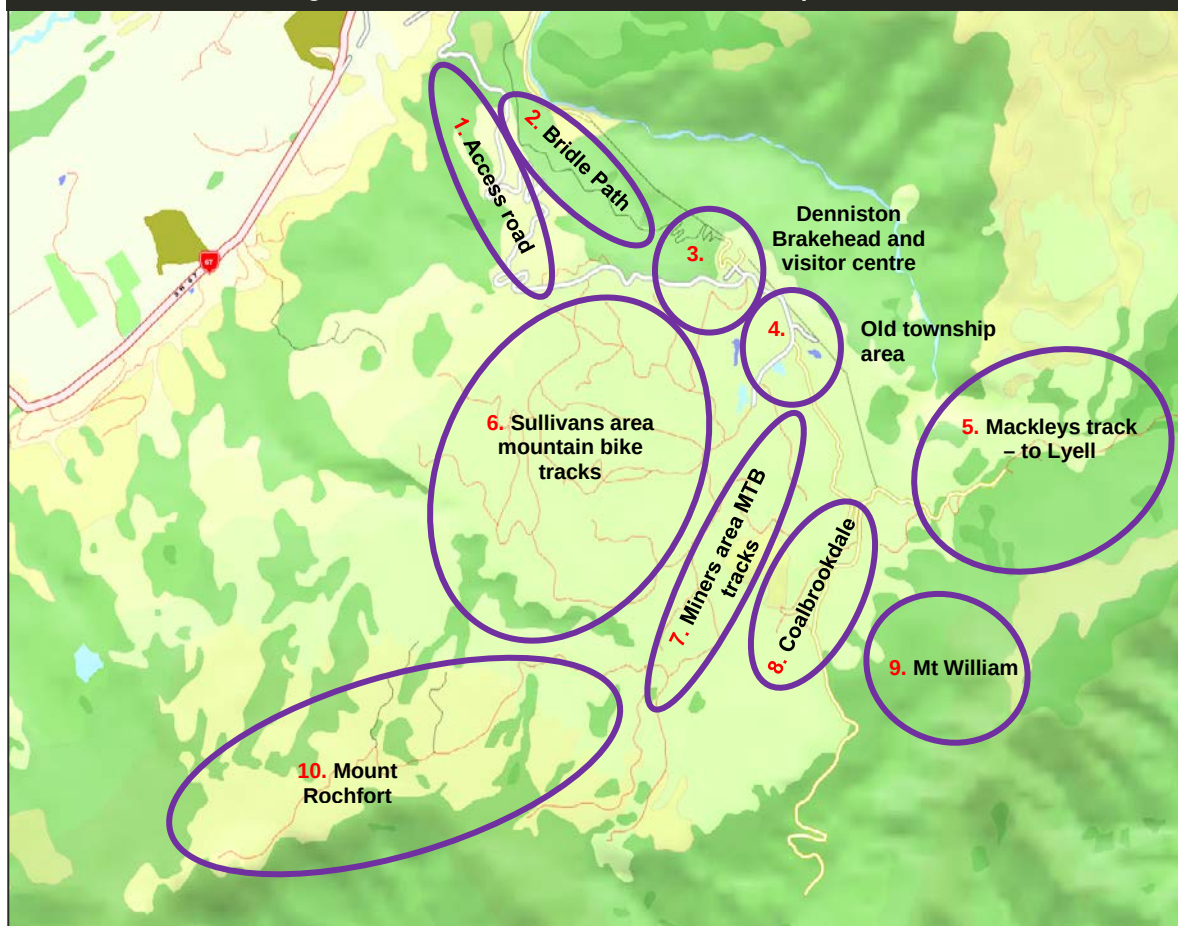


Table 8: Area knowledge – percent	Visiting today (n=384)	Know of but not visiting (n=384)	Don't know of (n=384)
Brakehead / visitor centre	95	3	2
Old township area	64	16	18
Coalbrookdale Walk	21	23	56
Miners area mountain bike tracks	8	25	67
Sullivans area mountain bike tracks	7	27	66
Mackleys Track area	5	25	68
Mt Rochfort	3	31	67
Bridle Path	2	51	41
Mt William, Myra's Track	2	19	79

Figure 7: Visitor locations – showcard for respondents



7 Change over time, best and worst aspects

Respondents were asked if, in their opinion, the Denniston Plateau was better, worse or the same as the first time they had visited it. They were also asked how many years they had been visiting the area. Those who were on their first visit (n=225, or 58%) were not included in this response set.

As a check on the scale of recent experience on the Plateau, respondents were also asked how many times they had visited in the past 12 months, with 66% (n=152) of those who had visited more than once on their first visit over that period, while 25% had visited two or three times, and the remainder four or more times in the past 12 months. Six of the seven who thought the Plateau was worse than when they first visited were on their first visit in 12 months, while one had visited 10 times in that period (and was concerned that more visitor areas were now fenced from access).

Figure 8 shows the majority of respondents in this subset (n=152) – 95% – considered the setting to be better than or the same as when they first visited, while 5% considered it to be worse.

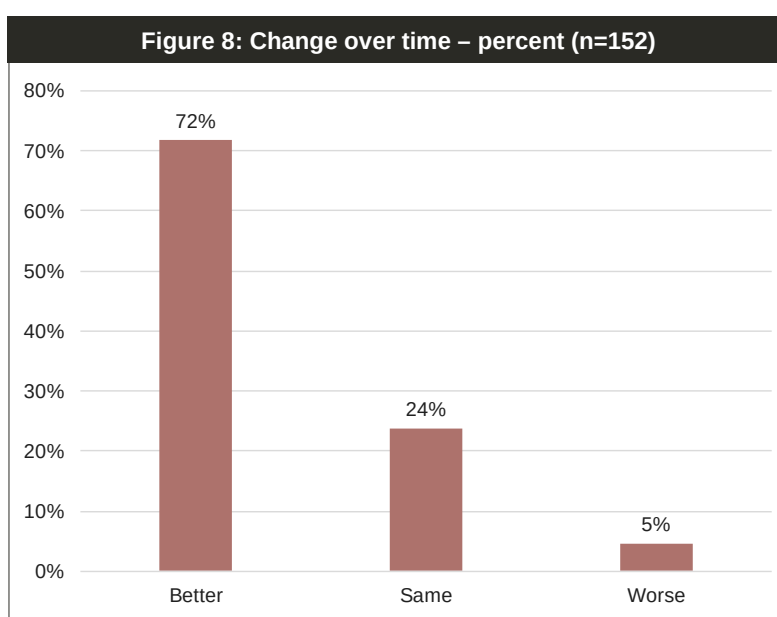


Figure 9 shows the opinions about change over time compared with the period since the respondents' first year of experience at the Plateau (grouped by year period). The longer the experience, the more respondents felt that the Plateau had changed for the better, with a dip for those with the longest experience, who were a little more likely to think it was unchanged. There was little difference across the periods of experience for those who thought the Plateau had changed for the worse.

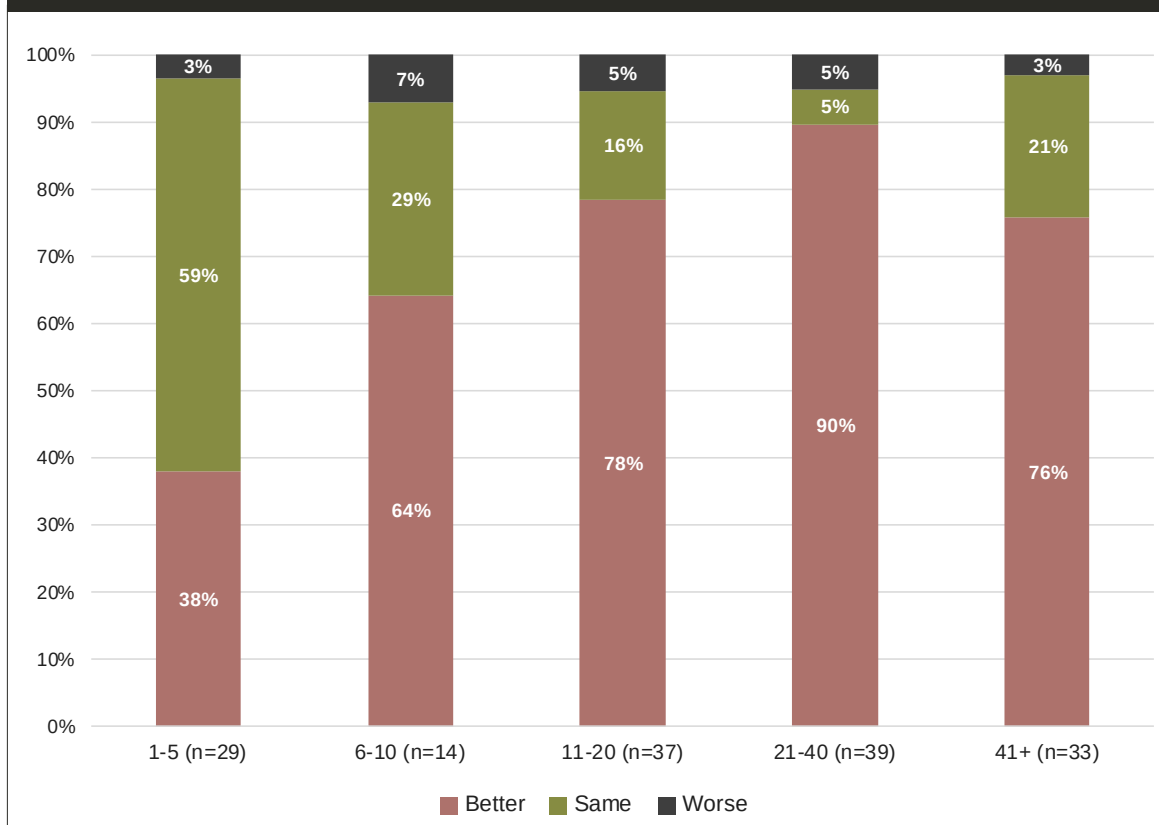
Figure 9: Change over time (better, same, worse) by experience in years

Table 9 shows the main reasons for opinions about change. Respondents could name more than one reason. Several of the same reasons were considered a rationale for both negative and positive comments. For example, one respondent who had first visited in 1969 recalled abandoned homes and was saddened by that at the time. Their removal for her was an improvement. While for another respondent the absence of houses was a negative.

Again, these data exclude those respondents who were on their first visit.

Table 9: Reasons for change – count	Better	Same	Worse
More interpretation panels / more to see	60	1	
Mountain bike tracks	8		
Signage has improved	5		
Timber planking repaired at Incline	4		
Access road better	4		
Mountain bike tracks	4		
Set up for tourists	4		
Walking tracks	3	1	
Weather better	2		
Toilets	2		
Buildings deteriorated/gone	1	2	1
Tidier / well maintained	1	1	
More people in off-road recreation	1	1	
Safer for walking around	1		
Set up more for tourists	1		
Different	1		
Used to be able walk through mine, dark tunnels	1		
Historical value recognised	1		

Table 9: Reasons for change – count	Better	Same	Worse
Parking	1		
Infrastructure great	1		
Promotion of Plateau	1		
No board walks	1		
Different activities - sightseeing, motorbiking		1	
Mine tour not operating			1
More areas fenced off			1
Remember when people lived here			1
Confusing interpretation - better how used to be			1
Having trouble finding way around			1
Not as good - not sure why			1
Totals	108	7	7

Respondents were asked to describe the best and worst aspects of the Denniston Plateau. Table 10 lists the 'best aspects'. Respondents were able to name more than one. The history of the site was clearly the most important aspect.

Table 10: Best aspects	Count
History	211
Views	110
Interpretation panels	62
Brakehead / incline	43
Environment / nature / landscape	23
Mining items	22
Scenery	14
Bush / plants / vegetation	14
Mountain bike tracks	12
Accessibility	12
Not many tourists / quiet	12
Atmosphere	11
Walking tracks	10
Beautiful / unique	9
Toilets	9
Recreation opportunities	7
Wild / remote / untouched	5
Fauna	5
Family connection	4
Museum	3
Denniston Rose book	3
4WD tracks	2
Weather	2
Meeting locals	1
Total	606

Table 11 list the 'worst aspects' of the Plateau. The weather was the main issue, followed by signage and particularly wayfinding, with many respondents unable to easily find their way around the Plateau and the Brakehead site, which also related to some of the parking issues.

Table 11: Worst aspects	Count
Weather	70
Signage / wayfinding	52
Access road (steep, windy, long, tedious)	30
Tracks closed / poorly maintained	23
No working structures / houses	19
Maintenance / rubbish	17
Mine tour not operating	10
Tour services – lacking	8
No Cafe	8
Parking – full, lack of directions	6
Poor people who had to live / die here	5
Sandflies	5
Safety	3
Like to see industry go ahead	2
1080	2
Mining company activity	1
Too much history being lost	1
DOC interfering and stopping jobs for locals	1
Loss of general access – areas fenced off	1
Answering a questionnaire	1
Total	267

Approximately 2.3 times as many 'best aspects' were named in comparison with 'worst aspects' (606 best compared with 267 worst).

The survey question for best and worst aspects asked respondents to name their 'aspects' and to give a reason why they thought of that aspect. The 'reasons' were less frequently given than the 'aspects' and were only used to ease grouping of this response set. Full responses for worst and best aspects are in Table 16 and Table 17 in Appendix 1.

8 Travel and safety

Respondents were asked about how they travelled to the Plateau and:

On a scale of 1 to 4, how safe did you feel while travelling on the road from Waimangaroa (at the bottom of the road to the Plateau) to Denniston, and around the Plateau, with 1 being no different to an average rural road experience, to 4 for feeling very unsafe compared with an average rural road experience.

This question provides baseline data if any changes are made to how the access road is used in the future.

The four-scale for perceptions of safety included those in the header in Table 12, plus 'extremely unsafe'. No respondent chose the latter. Eighty-three percent of all respondents considered the driving experience to be 'no different', while 14% considered it 'a little unsafe' and 2% 'moderately unsafe'. Motorcyclists were more likely to consider the experience 'a little unsafe', but this was a very small sample. Table 12 shows the results as row percentages.

Table 12: Travel method and perceptions of safety – row percentages	No different	A little unsafe	Moderately unsafe	n
The driver of a private or rental car or van	83	15	2	208
A passenger in private or rental car or van	86	12	2	161
Motorbike	43	57		7
Cycled	100			3
Walked / ran (not applicable to this question)				2
A passenger in commercial passenger vehicle	100			1
Bus driver (18 seater)	100			1
Total	83	14	2	383

Respondents were also asked the reasons for their response, which are shown in Table 13 as counts.

Table 13: Travel method and perceptions of safety – count	No different	A little unsafe	Moderately unsafe
Good / OK / well maintained	74	3	
Used to NZ roads / Better than many other roads	40	2	
Driver careful / experienced	35	2	
Mountain road / blind corners / steep / narrow	8	23	6
Sealed	24	2	
Other drivers	6	6	2
Lack of traffic	11		
Need barriers / more signs	3	3	1
Signed well	5	1	
Visibility		5	
Other	4	1	
Two lanes / wide	5		
Gravel	1	3	
Driving a motorhome		2	

9 Mining awareness and effects on visiting

Respondents were asked if they were 'aware that there is still mining on the Denniston Plateau?' The response was split nearly 50% yes and no. Those who responded yes (n=194) were asked if that awareness influenced their decision to visit the Plateau, and 4% (n=7) responded 'yes'. Reasons they gave were:

- *Need to keep visiting to make sure it is valued - feels like a 'use it or lose it' experience. Would be keen to see an active mine.*
- *See what Bathurst have been up to.*
- *Curious.*
- *Interested in mining.*
- *Watched a fascinating Youtube interview with Nick Smith and Green Party - had opposing views - made me grumpy about further mining.*
- *Double edged – sword. Interested in mining engineering but not keen on mining here.*
- *Father lived here as a miner.*

All respondents were asked if mining on the Plateau would influence their decision to visit again in the future. Just under a third (30%) responded yes and the remainder - 70% - responded no. For the latter, that was their last survey question.

Those who responded yes (n=122) were asked in what way mining on the Plateau would influence their decision to visit again. Respondents were able to give more than one response, and some gave a mix of negative, positive and mixed answers. Grouping these responses has been a challenge, but three response sets have emerged with sets of common themes (Table 14). Considering the equivocal nature of some responses, each respondent has not been classified with a clear individual preference. Rather, the grouped themes are allowed to speak for themselves.

Forty-six percent of this subgroup gave a generally positive response, 44% gave an equivocal one – their decision would depend on how mining was done – and 20% gave a generally negative response. Twenty-one respondents (17% of this subgroup) were opposed to mining in general and gave no positive or equivocal comment. This represents just over 5% of all respondents (n=385).

Table 14: Mining influence on decision to revisit – counts	Positive	Depends	Negative
Good to see a working mining operation	59		
Employment/economic benefit	14		
Positive other	11		
Depends on scale / location / effects		48	
If the environment is restored		13	
If access to Plateau maintained		15	
Mining traffic		2	3
If viable / well justified		2	
If coal used in NZ		1	
If political / national decision made to mine		1	
If preserves mining history		1	
If mine is open to the public		1	
If for thermal coal, opposed		1	
Opposed to further mining			17
Environmental impact			11
Opposed to open cast mining			5
Totals	84	84	37

There was little difference in the origin of respondents who held a generally negative attitude to the effects of mining on their likelihood of visiting again compared with all respondents (Table 15). There was also very little difference between the age groups.

Table 15: Respondents' origin – 'all' compared with those who gave a generally negative response to mining	All – percent (n=384)	Negative – percent (n=67)
South Island other	25	32
Christchurch	21	27
North Island other	13	6
West Coast	13	7
International other	11	7
Wellington	8	9
Auckland	7	7
Australia	4	3
Total	100%	100%

Full comments made by those who were only negatively influenced by mining in their likelihood of returning to the Plateau (they gave no additional positive or equivocal comment) were:

- *Accessibility lost if mining occurs (Stockton locks people out)*
- *Would only visit as a protestor*
- *Would only come up more often to keep an eye on things - take photographs etc*
- *Denniston important for snails*
- *Don't want more mining - should be using alternatives*
- *Fossil fuel a thing of the past - should be looking forwards and at alternatives e.g. solar*
- *If expansion of open cast mining I would protest against it*
- *Less inclined to visit as I don't think it is something for today - alternative energy should be used*
- *Might not come back if mining*
- *Mining kills snails*
- *Mining should be phased out*
- *Mining will dig up plants and bush*
- *Mining would alter landscape*
- *Need to leave some things alone, plus consider carbon footprint, plants and snails*
- *Need to stop coal mining*
- *Should use other resources for energy, rather than disturb delicate ecosystems*
- *Shouldn't be mining coal because of climate change. Coal should stay in ground*
- *Wouldn't come because of big trucks*
- *Wouldn't like to see open cast mining as spoils landscape*
- *Wouldn't want to encourage coal mining as old technology*

10 Reflections on the method

This section considers possible improvements to the survey method. This section is particularly important if the survey is to be repeated and a trend analysis carried out.

10.1 Timing and sampling

Four road counters and one pedestrian counter have been installed on the Denniston Plateau by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Bathurst Resources (BR) (Figure 10). Counters on Whareatea Mine Road and Burnetts Face Road also record bicycles. Data from these counters are reported in full separately. The results show quite consistent activity throughout the first four months of the year and little difference between weekends and weekdays. Choices of which day to survey were therefore based on reasonable weather⁵ and what would most likely be relatively busy periods,

Figure 10: Counter locations



⁵ The Plateau is naturally a harsh weather environment, and waiting for perfect conditions for survey effort is not very efficient. Only in heavy rain and cold, dense cloud were visitor numbers depressed.

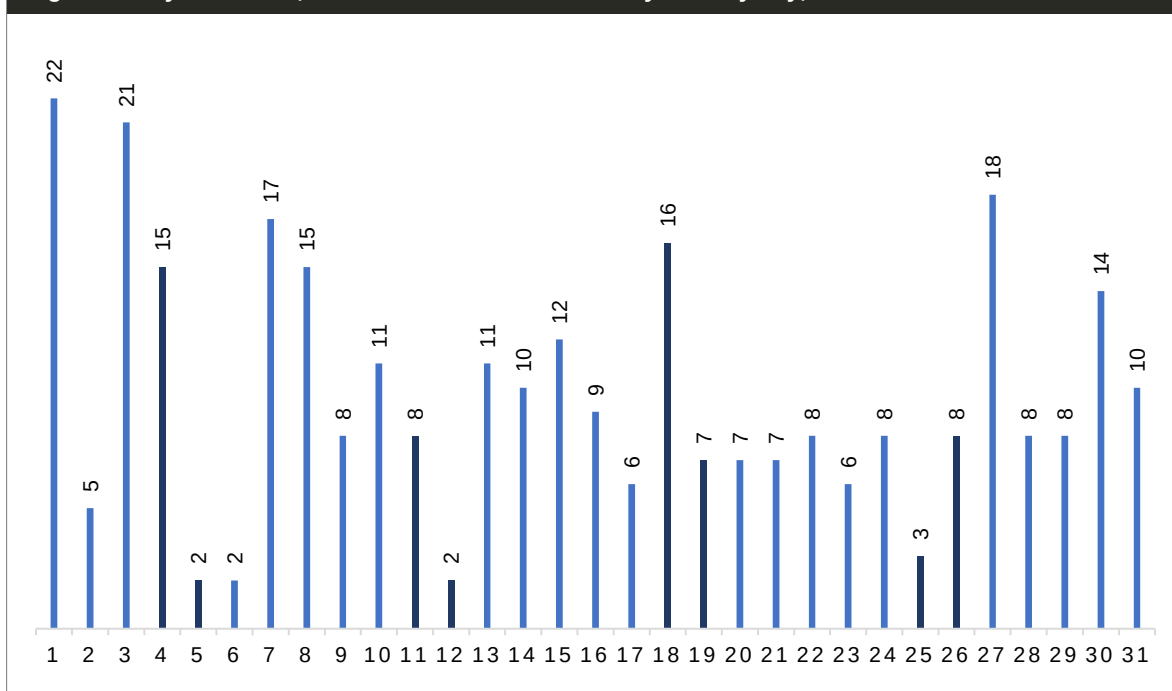
such as the school holidays. Even in quite cold conditions – as they were in January – visitor numbers were reasonably consistent at the Brakehead and visitor centre. Rain and low cloud appeared to be the main deterrants to visitors.

Numbers were less consistent at the other two survey sites, particularly the Whareatea Road carpark where the intended focus was on mountain bikers. Gaining a high number of recreational users at this site would require a high level of survey effort. Figure 11 and Figure 12, for example, show the total number of cycles recorded over January and March at the cycle counters on Burnetts Face Road and Whareatea Road combined (which are located to record most mountain bikers completing circuits of the various mountain bike tracks on the Plateau). These counts are likely to include some double-counting, as individual riders can complete more than one loop per day, and include riders who do not park at Whareatea. A surveyor might be able to interview only three or four active mountain bikers per day, and, over time, will more frequently encounter the same locals. Picking a good survey day in advance would be a challenge, as use is inconsistent. Focusing a disproportionate amount of time on mountain bikers will also skew the results towards this user group.

Detailed data about mountain biking on the Plateau are most likely best gained by qualitative interviews with local riders; and an assessment of the broad values and opinions of visitors to the Plateau generalised from the survey data as presented in these results.

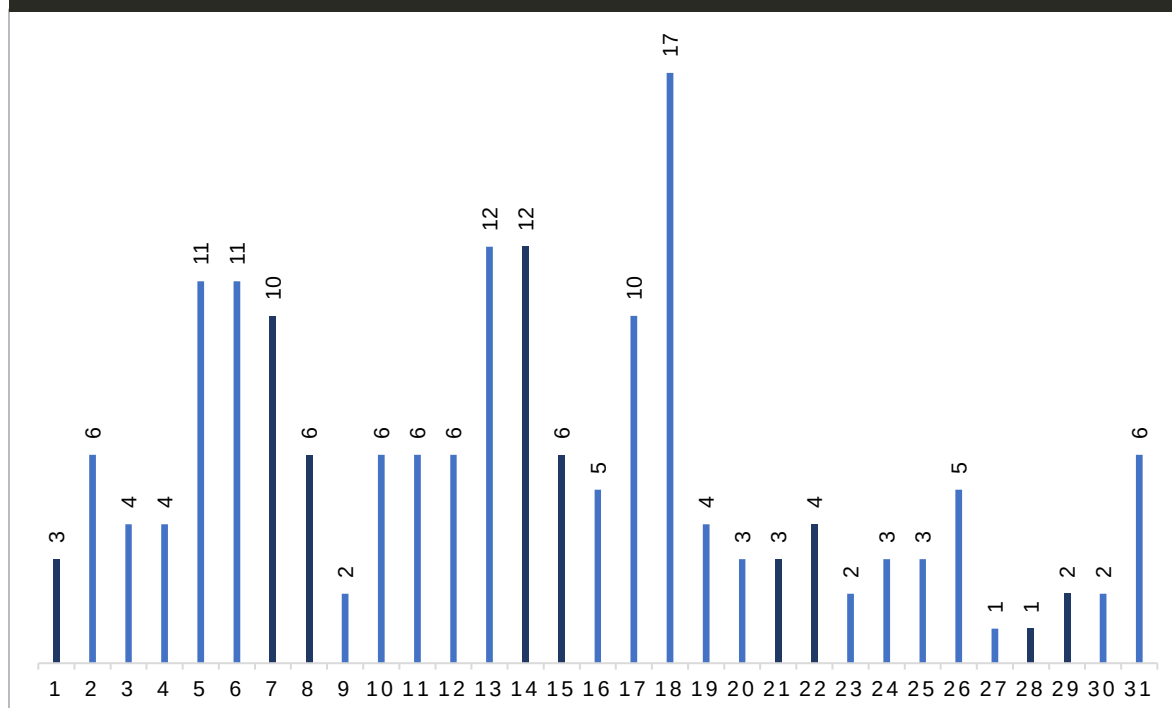
Some consideration was given to gaining representative samples from each of the three survey sites based on historic vehicle counter data from Denniston Road, Burnetts Face Road and Whareatea Road.⁶ For December 2019 to March 2020 inclusive, one-direction vehicle counts for each were, respectively, 5,799, 2,501, and 1,961. As percentages of total traffic, these were 57% (Denniston Road entrance), 24% (Burnetts Face) and 19% (Whareatea Road). The traffic counts at Burnetts Face Road and Whareatea Road include almost all the vehicles which pass the counter for Denniston Road, and some respondents interviewed at the Brakehead will also be met at the other two sites. Survey response percentages for each site were 79% at the Brakehead, 13% at Burnetts Face and

Figure 11: Cycle counts, Denniston Plateau for January 2020 by day, weekends dark blue



⁶ Counts for vehicles from the Denniston Road Counter and the counter on Gillies St are comparable, although those at Gillies St include some double-counting from drivers who are not sure of their directions. As indicated in the survey results, wayfinding at Denniston is poor. Counts for pedestrians on the Brakehead walkway tend to be similar to the vehicle counts for Gillies St and Denniston Road, but also include some double-counting as pedestrians often return the same way. The DOC pedestrian counter also failed in March 2020.

Figure 12: Cycle counts, Denniston Plateau for March 2020 by day, weekends dark blue



8% at Whareatea Road. Adding non-responses gives survey encounter percentages for each site of 77% at the Brakehead, 14% at Burnetts Face and 9% at Whareatea Mine Road. Vehicles often arrived coincidentally at both road sites, and a vehicle passing while the surveyor was busy was not counted as a non-response, as they could not have been targeted.

To gain a more representative sample from all three sites according to the counter data, survey time at the two road sites would need to be at least doubled.

Choosing a preferred sample size is always fraught. As Gardner⁷ says, “We might as well ask: ‘How long is a piece of string?’ or ‘How thick is a rope?’ It depends what you want to do with it, in each case. The same is true of a sample. How much strain must the sample bear?”.

As this is essentially a piece of qualitative research, we can ask if the collective opinions of 384 people who have direct experience of visiting the Plateau represents a meaningful output (it does). The data are not to be used to decide, for example, whether a medication may be having an effect and where a double-blind randomised control trial would be required; but to indicate the general preferences of visitors to the Plateau. By avoiding significance tests we ensure that we do not lead readers to assume more accuracy than exists.

The best way of confirming the relevance of the results is to repeat the survey over the same period a year or two later, *ceteris paribus* (all other things remaining equal). However, not all things will remain equal, and even year-long stratified and randomly sampled surveys carried out over different periods are likely to result in different outputs, and it will often be difficult to identify if the differences are sampling artifacts or the results of trends over time (including weather, changing tourism patterns or on-site resource changes). Improving wayfinding at the Plateau for drivers and walkers would also change vehicle counter data outputs and therefore probably alter any stratified sampling targets.

10.2 Questions

None of the questions appears to have been superfluous. The final suite of questions discussed in Section 9 required careful recording and often took some time to code as respondents often engaged in a personal debate (arguing with themselves aloud). This is reflected in the similar number of respondents having positive and equivocal answers. Some order presentation bias was evident when

⁷ Gardner, G. 1976. *Social surveys for social planners*. The Open University Press.

ranking features of interest (Section 5) but this is unavoidable with such a list, and the use of two presentation orders makes this bias explicit.

10.3 Intercept method

The intercept method appears to have worked well, but its success is entirely dependent on the quality of staff used, and their training. In this process, the first weekend's completed forms were coded and any errors by staff quickly addressed (there were none, since the team used here have plenty of experience and very similar questionnaires have been used elsewhere in the past). For trend analysis to be valid, the intercept method is unavoidable. In this setting it was easy to select respondents as the majority could be surveyed without having to randomly choose participants from a within a crowd. Waving down respondents at Burnetts Face Road requires a confident surveyor, and an advice sign and cones were used to slow traffic.

10.4 Coding, grouping and analysis

Microsoft Excel is the preferred tool for coding and analysing these data. There are a few necessary tricks with this software for surveys of this type, but it is quite achievable; and pivot tables are an excellent tool.

Another benefit of Excel is that we are not tempted to over-analyse the data. As discussed in Section 2.2 of this report, the sampling method should not encourage significance tests. In the opinion of this report's author, much data of this ilk are treated as having a level of accuracy (as in, being 100% representative of all users of the study area) that does not exist; and unnecessary and misleading analyses of confidence and significance are often completed – because it is too easy via many statistical analysis packages, and not because it is useful.

Grouping responses is always a challenge. Respondents give multiple responses to many questions, and there are often only shades of difference between similar concerns. Grouping of responses is necessary, otherwise this report would be three times as long and be just a collection of the likes of Table 16 in Appendix 1 (the full list of 'best aspects' comments). Grouping choices are never perfect, and some errors will have been made. However, the effects of these errors should be very slight and not affect the ordering of the main issues.

In future surveys, if trend analysis is desired, an attempt should be made to group responses using the same or similar terms applied in this report. As in any survey where trend analysis is sought, researchers need to very carefully make the same mistakes.

10.5 Health and Safety

The main health and safety concerns related to vehicle travel to and within the site, and stopping vehicles on the side of Burnetts Face Road to conduct interviews. Permission from the Buller District Council was obtained for the latter and appropriate signage used. Staff stayed in a campervan onsite during the survey period to reduce local vehicle trips. Surveyors worked mostly as a team and were in constant contact. For several days one surveyor operated solo and had a regular contact schedule with the rest of the team, carried a personal locator beacon and was almost always near other people, which were the main solutions for minimising personal risk. Local residents were advised of the presence of the survey staff. No safety issues arose during the survey period.

Appendix 1: Best and worst aspects - full tables

Table 16: Best aspects, sorted by theme	Count
History	211
History	210
Ruins	1
Views	110
Views	110
Interpretation panels	62
Interpretation panels	61
Signage	1
Brakehead/incline	43
Brakehead/incline	43
Environment/nature/landscape	23
Environment/nature/landscape	16
Environment/nature	2
Landscape	2
Kiwi Guardian site	1
Can touch and explore nature	1
Kiwi Guardian post	1
Mining items	22
Mining items	19
Coal gathering	1
Coal	1
Coal and wagons	1
Bush/plants/vegetation	14
Bush/plants/vegetation	14
Scenery	14
Scenery	13
Sightseeing	1
Not many tourists/quiet	12
Quiet	5
Not too many tourists	2
Lack of people	2
Quick drive to top of Plateau	1
Quadbike tracks	1
Photos	1
Accessibility	12
Accessible	9
Close to Westport	1
Access road	1
Accessibility	1
Mountain bike tracks	12
Mountain bike tracks	11
Motorbike tracks/4WD tracks	1
Atmosphere	11
Atmosphere	11

Table 16: Best aspects, sorted by theme	Count
Walking tracks	10
Walking tracks	10
Toilets	9
Toilets	9
Beautiful/unique	9
Unique	4
Beautiful	2
It's cool	1
Good	1
Interesting to explore	1
Recreation opportunities	7
Recreation	2
Recreation opportunities	1
Motorcycling on road	1
Dog friendly	1
Dirt biking	1
Driving up old ghost track	1
Fauna	5
Birds	2
Snails	1
Snails saved in the area	1
Insect diversity	1
Wild/remote/untouched	5
Remote	2
Untouched	1
Wilderness	1
Rugged	1
Family connection	4
Family connection	3
Worked here for a long time	1
Denniston Rose book	3
Denniston Rose book	3
Museum	3
Museum	3
Weather	2
Weather	2
4WD tracks	2
4WD tracks	2
Meeting locals	1
Socialising with locals	1

Table 17: Worst aspects, sorted by theme	Count
Weather	70
Views – can't see	1
Weather	69
Signage/interpretation	52
Can't find burning mine	1
Confusing signage e.g. DR flower logos	1
DOC brochure	1
Finding out what is currently open	1
History	1
Info information about walks at Incline	1
Information	1
Information on geology	1
Interpretation confusing	1
Interpretation emphasis	1
Iwi – no information about	1
Need more stories about people	1
Not enough information about starting point	1
Signage	4
Signage around Denniston Rose app	1
Signage of area	21
Signage of Denniston area	4
Signage of visitor centre area	5
Signs on actual items	4
Roads/traffic	30
Access road	12
Back roads along plateau	1
Car race in February	1
Hill	1
Other drivers on access road	1
Quadbikers	1
Rental vehicles on gravel road	1
Road	9
Road between top and bottom carpark could be improved	1
Shingle roads	1
Traffic	1
Tracks closed / poorly maintained	27
Closed tracks	18
Mountain bike track	2
Track slips	1
No working structures/houses	19
No working structures/houses	18
Used to be more old stuff	1
Maintenance/rubbish	17
Been let go/overgrown/untidy	2
Old machinery and rubbish	1
Overgrown scrub	3

Table 17: Worst aspects, sorted by theme	Count
Pollution potential from industrial activity	1
Rocks	1
Rubbish	8
Rubbish bins	1
Mine tour not operating	10
Mine tour no longer happens	10
Tourism attractions/activities	8
Example of mining walking around from mess and leaving debris	1
Interactive tourism activities	1
Museum	1
Not well promoted	2
Person to provide a tour	1
Under-developed as tourist experience	1
Visitor Centre	1
No Cafe	8
Café	5
Café/vending machines	1
No café/coffee cart	2
Parking	6
Parking	6
Sandflies	5
Sandflies	5
Poor people who had to live / die here	5
Imagine living here	1
People who died here	1
People who died many years ago	1
Poor people who had to live here	1
Realisation of what it was like to live here	1
Safety	3
Health and safety risks	1
Not safe for children	1
Number deaths when mining operational	1
Like to see industry go ahead	2
Like to see industry go ahead	2
1080	2
1080 signs	2
Access to Millerton Plateau	2
Lack of access to Millerton Plateau	2
DOC interfering and stopping jobs for locals	1
DOC interfering and stopping jobs for locals	1
Answering a questionnaire	1
This survey	1
Loss of general access	1
Locked off areas	1
Too much history being lost	1
Too much history being lost	1

Table 17: Worst aspects, sorted by theme		Count
Mining company activity		1
Mining company activity		1

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Denniston Plateau Visitor Survey

Site	Interviewer	Date	Time	
Notes:				

Hello, I am doing a survey for the Bathurst Resources about the recreation and tourism values of the Denniston Plateau. Do you have a few minutes to answer some questions?

Q1. Have you been surveyed about your use of this site in the past month?

¹ ☐ No (CONTINUE) ² ☐ Yes ➔

THANKS FOR STOPPING BUT WE WON'T BOTHER YOU AGAIN

Q2. What age group are you in? **(SHOW CATEGORIES ON CARD)**

- ¹ ☐ Under 15 (CLOSE WITH THANKS)..... ➔
- ² ☐ 15-24
- ³ ☐ 25-49
- ⁴ ☐ 50-64
- ⁵ ☐ 65 years and over

THANKS FOR STOPPING BUT WE'RE JUST TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO ARE 15 YEARS OR OLDER TODAY

Q3. Where do you normally live? **(RECORD NZ CITY or TOWN; BUT ONLY COUNTRY IF INTERNATIONAL)**

Q4a. What activities are you doing on the Denniston Plateau today? **(ENTER ALL BELOW)**

Q4b. What is your **main activity** on the Denniston Plateau today? **(TICK ONE ACTIVITY)**

Q4c. IF WALKING, RUNNING, MTB OR CYCLING (main or other): Do you normally use Strava to record your activity on the Plateau? ¹ ☐ Yes ² ☐ No

Q5. Which parts of the Plateau are you visiting or planning to visit today, and which visitor areas do you know about? **(SHOW MAP AND TICK SECTIONS)**

		Visiting / used	Don't know of	Know of but not visiting
Access road	1			
Bridle Path	2			
Denniston Brakehead and visitor centre	3			
Old township area	4			
Mackleys Track area	5			
Sullivans area mountain bike tracks	6			
Miners area mountain bike tracks	7			
Coalbrookdale Walk	8			
Mt William, Myra's Track	9			
Mt Rochfort	10			
Other:				

Q6. What was the first year you visited the Denniston Plateau? _____ First time ☐ **(GO TO Q9)**

Q7. How many times have you visited the Plateau over the past 12 months? _____

Q8a. In your opinion do you think the Denniston Plateau is better, worse or the same for **RECREATION or TOURISM** as the first time you visited?

¹ ☐ Better ² ☐ Worse ³ ☐ Same (**IF SAME GO TO Q9**)

Q8b. How do you think the Denniston Plateau has changed since you first visited?

Q9. Can you describe the **BEST ASPECTS** of the Denniston Plateau and **WHY** you think that?

Best aspects	Reasons

Q10. Can you describe the **WORST ASPECTS** of the Denniston Plateau and **WHY** you think that?

Worst aspects	Reasons

Q11a. How did you travel to the Plateau today? (**TICK ONE**)

- ¹ ☐ I am in a private or rental car or van and I was the **DRIVER**
² ☐ I am in a private or rental car or van and I was a **PASSENGER**
³ ☐ I am a passenger in a commercial bus or other commercial passenger vehicle
⁴ ☐ I cycled
⁵ ☐ Other: _____

Q11b. On a scale of 1 to 4, how safe did you feel while travelling on the road from Waimangaroa (at the bottom of the road to the Plateau) to Denniston, and around the Plateau, with 1 being no different to an average rural road experience, to 4 for feeling very unsafe **compared with an average rural road experience**.

☐ 1. No different to normal ☐ 2. A little unsafe ☐ 3. Moderately unsafe ☐ 4. Extremely unsafe

Q11c. What influenced your feelings of being safe or unsafe on the road to the Plateau?

Q12. What features of the Denniston Plateau are you most interested in, if anything? Rank the following from most to least interesting with 1 being the most interesting for you – and you don't need to rank them all **(SHOW CARD)**

A		The mining and social history
B		Natural environment – the local plants and animals
C		A personal or family connection to the area
D		The landscape of the Plateau
E		The views to the coast or inland
F		It was just part of the itinerary or I just accompanied family and friends
G		The walking tracks
H		The mountain biking tracks
I		Other:
J		Other:

Enter card
version:

Q13a. Are you aware that there is still mining on the Denniston Plateau?

¹ ☐ Yes ² ☐ No

Q13b. Did that awareness influence your decision to visit the Denniston Plateau today?

¹ ☐ Yes ² ☐ No **(IF NO GO TO Q14)**

Q13c. If yes, in what way?

Q14a. Would mining on the Plateau influence your decision to visit again in the future?

¹ ☐ Yes ² ☐ No **(IF NO GO TO Q15)**

Q14b. If yes, in what way?

Q15. (RECORD GENDER)

¹ ☐ Male ² ☐ Female

Thank you very much. (Give contact card to anyone who asks further questions)