MOUNTAIN HORSES OUTFITTERS

Cow Stream Hot Springs
Two Days, One Night

Safety information, hazards and what to expect · St James Conservation Area

Please read this document before you book, and again before you ride. It is not written to frighten you. It is written so that you arrive understanding what this trip actually involves, because the country we ride into is remote, the weather makes its own decisions, and horses are large animals with minds of their own. **You will be asked to confirm that you have read and understood it before we ride out.**

What this trip is

You ride out from the road end with your gear behind the saddle, climb out of the valley and over the tops, and come down to a camp beside hot water that rises straight out of the ground in the middle of nowhere. You sleep under canvas. The next day you ride home the way you came.

There is no road to where we camp. There is no shuttle, no boardwalk, no ticket office, no gate, and nobody else in sight. That is the whole point of it, and it is also the thing that shapes everything in this document.

> **There is no phone reception**
>
> From the moment you pass Jacks Pass there is **no cell coverage at all**. Not patchy — none. There is none at camp, none on the ride, and none at the pools.
>
> Please tell whoever needs to know at home that you will be uncontactable for two days, and give them our office number rather than your mobile. If someone needs to reach you urgently, they call us and we reach your guide by satellite.

There are no facilities

This is worth stating plainly, because guests occasionally arrive expecting something closer to a lodge.

- **No toilets of any kind.** There are no huts and no long-drops anywhere on this route. It is a trowel, well away from water.
- **No shower and no washing facilities.** The hot pools are for soaking, not for washing — no soap, shampoo, toothpaste or detergent goes anywhere near the water.
- **No power and no charging.** Bring a power bank if your camera matters to you.
- **No tap water.** Drinking water is drawn from moving water above camp and treated.
- **No shelter** beyond the canvas we carry in and put up.
- **No rubbish collection.** Everything we carry in comes out again — food scraps, packaging, orange peel, cigarette butts. Nothing is buried or burnt.
- **No shop, no road, no vehicle at camp**, and nothing you forgot can be fetched.

Our camp is not freedom camping

Mountain Horses Outfitters operates in the St James Conservation Area under a **Department of Conservation concession**. That concession is what makes it lawful for us to take paying guests, horses and an overnight camp onto public conservation land. It covers this trip, on these dates, with your guide present.

It does not extend to you. It does not cover guests camping independently, arriving a day early, staying on afterwards, or bringing extra people, dogs or vehicles onto the land.

Under the Freedom Camping Act 2011, freedom camping means camping within 200 metres of a road, vehicle access or waterway other than at a designated campsite — and it covers tents and bivvies, not only vehicles. It is permitted across much of New Zealand's public conservation land, but it is restricted or prohibited in places and breaching those restrictions carries an infringement fee. If you would like to come back to the St James on your own, please check the current DOC rules for the area first. Do not assume that where we camp together is somewhere you may camp alone.

While you are in our camp

Pitch and sleep only where your guide places you. Sites are chosen for drainage, for distance from the water, and for the horses.

No open fires unless your guide lights one. Fire restrictions apply across the St James for much of the season and a total ban can come into force at short notice.

Toileting: there is no toilet on this route. Go at least 50 metres from any water, camp or track, bury it and the paper at least 15 cm deep, and carry out all other hygiene products. Your guide will give you a trowel and show you which direction to walk.

Keep noise down after dark. Other parties use these pools, and the quiet is a good part of the point.

How we manage your safety

Everything below happens whether or not you ever notice it.

Your guide. Experienced, assessed as competent against our written procedures, and holding a current outdoor first aid qualification appropriate to remote country.

The horses. Every horse is checked for soundness before it leaves the yard, and any horse that is lame, unwell or not right simply does not come. Horses are matched to your declared and demonstrated riding ability, and we treat every rider as a beginner until they show us otherwise in the yard.

The weather and the water. Forecasts, river levels and the fire danger rating are checked before departure and again by satellite each day. The route is shortened, changed or abandoned as conditions require.

Turn-back triggers are agreed before we leave, not invented on the hill. Your guide may change the route, turn back, delay or cancel at any time on safety grounds — that decision is final, and it is made for you and for the horses.

Communications. Your guide carries a personal locator beacon and a satellite communication device, on their person, and will show you where they are and how they work on the first day.

Ground support. A member of our team is on duty for the whole trip, holding your route, your expected return time and your emergency contacts, and in contact with your guide. If we do not check in when we said we would, a written procedure starts without anyone waiting to see.

Before you ride you will be briefed in person on the hazards for this trip, and asked to confirm you have understood them.

If something goes wrong

Please read this part properly. It is the honest version.

Medical help is not immediate. Realistically, a response looks like this:

- **4WD extraction from camp (summer months only)** — generally achievable within three to four hours, depending on conditions.
- **In winter** the 4WD track is closed, and the most likely way out is riding out (three to four hours) or a helicopter.
- **Nearest medical care:** Hanmer Springs Health Centre, roughly an hour and a half's drive from the road end. It is a small-town service, but it runs a 24/7 emergency response.
- **Nearest hospital:** Christchurch, about 135 km and an hour and forty minutes' drive beyond Hanmer Springs.

Helicopter, for a serious injury. Air rescue is well established here with a base at Hanmer Springs and a helicopter can often be overhead within minutes. It is by far the fastest way out — but it cannot fly in every condition, so low cloud, poor visibility or high wind may mean waiting for a window, or falling back to the 4WD in summer or riding out in winter.

What this means for you. A twisted ankle or a bad graze is managed in camp with the first aid kit and the trip usually carries on. Anything more serious means a wait, and possibly a long one. That is the trade you accept for being somewhere with no road, no fence and no one else in sight.

Three things we ask of you before you ride

Tell us about your health. Any injury, back or joint problem, heart condition, pregnancy, allergy, dietary requirement or medication. Nothing you disclose gets you cancelled without a conversation first. A surprise on the trail is a different matter entirely. If you carry an adrenaline auto-injector or an inhaler, your guide needs to know where it is.

Wear proper boots — this is not negotiable. Sturdy hiking boots or riding boots only. Fabric sneakers, trainers, gym shoes and open footwear are not accepted in any weather, and a rider who arrives without suitable boots does not ride.

Take out travel and medical insurance. We strongly recommend it. In New Zealand, ACC covers emergency rescue and treatment for accidental injuries, including for overseas visitors. It does not cover illness, cancelled or disrupted travel, getting you home, or treatment once you are back home, and visitors who are not eligible for public health care may be charged for an ambulance or treatment.

Natural hazards

These hazards are inherent to the trip. We manage them; we cannot remove them.

Hazard	How we manage it	What you must do
Creek crossing on foot, in the dark	There are no major river crossings on this route. The creek between camp and the hot pools is chosen by your guide and walked with you in daylight on arrival. After rain it rises and runs fast, and your guide decides whether crossing is sensible at all — and may close it for the night.	Use the crossing your guide shows you. Take it slowly; the water is cold and the rocks are slippery. Carry a head torch — the return crossing is in the dark. Wear sandals or old shoes, not bare feet and not your riding boots. Do not cross alone at night.
Rapidly changing weather	Forecast checked before departure and by satellite each day. Route and timings adjusted, or the day abandoned, as required.	Carry your full warm and waterproof layers every day, even on a clear morning. Tell your guide early if you are cold.
Cold, wet and wind — hypothermia	Regular stops, hot drinks, shelter carried, and an eye kept on both riders throughout. Wind chill does more harm here than temperature. Riding chills you faster than walking does.	Eat and drink at every stop. Change into dry socks when your guide suggests it. Speak up at the first sign of shivering, clumsiness or feeling muddled — in yourself or in your riding partner.

Hazard	How we manage it	What you must do
Sun, heat and dehydration	Rest stops in shade where shade exists — often it does not. Water carried.	Sunhat, sunglasses and high-factor sunscreen, reapplied through the day. Long sleeves are easier than burning. Drink at every stop, not only when thirsty.
Snow, ice and the tops	Conditions on the tops checked before departure and again on the day. Snow lies well outside winter. The route is changed rather than forced, and we do not cross in high wind, poor visibility or fresh snow.	Take extra care on frozen ground in the morning shade. Dismount and lead when asked, without debate.
Steep and unstable ground, slips and rockfall	Routes kept to formed tracks and known lines. Riders dismount and lead on ground the guide judges unsuitable to ride. Steep ground below bluffs is avoided, or crossed one rider at a time.	Dismount when asked. Keep the spacing your guide sets. Do not ride ahead or take your own line. Do not stop under a face — move through when told to move through.
Holes, bogs, matagouri, speargrass and old fencing	Known bog and rabbit-warren country avoided; pace dropped where the ground is broken. Broken fencing wire and old waratahs, left from the St James's farming days, lie hidden in the tussock in places; known spots are avoided and your guide points them out.	Watch the ground ahead of your horse, including for wire and waratahs in the grass. If your horse catches a leg in wire, stop, keep still and let your guide free it. Long trousers and long sleeves.
Thermal water — scalding	Your guide checks pool temperatures on arrival and identifies which pools are safe on the day. Pools are not assumed to be the same as last visit, and are not used after dark unless cleared in daylight the same day.	Test with a hand before entering. Enter slowly. The bottom is silty and can be very hot in patches. Never enter a pool your guide has not cleared.
Untreated thermal water	Every guest is briefed on the risk of amoebic meningitis before entering any pool. No head immersion is permitted in any pool, on any trip, without exception.	Keep your head above the water at all times. No diving, no ducking, no putting your face under, and do not let water go up your nose. Do not drink it, cook with it or clean your teeth with it.
Untreated drinking water	Drinking water drawn from moving water above camp; treatment provided.	Fill only from the source your guide points out. Do not drink from the pools or from stagnant water.
Fire	Fire danger rating and restrictions checked before every departure. Cooking on contained stoves; fires only where permitted and supervised, and fully out before sleep.	No cigarettes on the ride, ever; vaping is fine. Smoke only where your guide nominates at camp. No fires of your own.
Sandflies and wasps	Repellent carried; camp sited away from the worst of it where possible.	Use repellent, especially at the pools. Tell us before departure if you carry an adrenaline auto-injector for stings.
Wildlife, stock and other people on the land	Your guide reads the country ahead for deer, pigs, hares and stray cattle that may startle horses.	Stay in formation. Do not shout or point suddenly. Let your guide handle any animal encounter, and give way courteously to trampers, hunters and cyclists.
Earthquake	If one occurs, horses are calmed and secured, the party regrouped clear of bluffs, slips and rivers, and the route reassessed before we move. Ground support is contacted by satellite.	Drop, cover and hold if you can. Then stay where you are and wait for your guide's instruction.
Remoteness	Locator beacon and satellite communications carried. Trip intentions, route and expected return lodged with ground support before departure, with agreed check-in times.	Accept that help is hours away, not minutes. Follow instructions without delay in an emergency.

Horses, equipment and camp

Hazard	How we manage it	What you must do
Falling from a horse	Horses matched to declared and demonstrated ability. Certified helmets required and inspected. Pace set to the least confident rider. We start at walk and change pace only on the guide's instruction.	Wear your helmet, correctly fitted, whenever you are mounted. Ride within your ability and say so if the pace is too much. Keep at least one horse-length between horses and never pass the guide without permission.
Bolting, spooking, bucking or rearing	Known-quiet stock used; no green or untested horse carries a guest. Hazards called ahead and passed down the line; riders spaced.	No sudden movements, no umbrellas, no flapping gear. Secure everything you carry. Dismount to put on or take off a jacket.
Being kicked, bitten or trodden on	Horses handled, tied and tethered by the guide. Safe-distance briefing before you go near a horse. Guests kept clear of the tacking area and out of the horse lines after dark.	Never walk directly behind a horse. Keep clear of other horses' hindquarters. Do not hand-feed, and do not approach a horse that is not yours.
Mounting and dismounting	Assistance and a mounting block or bank offered every time. Horses never mounted on hard ground.	Ask for help. Never mount or dismount without telling your guide.
Tack failure or poor fit	All tack inspected before departure, fitted to the individual horse, and girths re-checked at every stop and after any climb.	Tell your guide immediately if anything feels loose, slipping or uncomfortable. Do not adjust tack yourself while mounted.
Riding ability and horse matching	Experience collected at booking and confirmed in person. Every rider demonstrates in the yard before we leave, and we may re-horse you or change the route on the day.	Be honest about your riding. Overstating it puts you on the wrong horse in the wrong country, and we would far rather know in the yard than find out on the hill.
Riding among a pack string	Pack horses travel in a set order and the guide positions riders around them. Loads checked at every stop and after every crossing and climb.	Never ride up alongside or through the pack string. Keep the position your guide gives you. A loaded horse takes more room than you think and cannot step out of your way.
A horse that is unwell or unable to continue	Every horse checked before departure and daily on the trip. A horse showing distress or overwork is rested immediately. Equine first aid carried, and veterinary advice obtained by satellite if needed.	Tell your guide straight away if your horse feels tired, sore, reluctant or unsettled. You are the person closest to it for six hours a day, and you will notice before anyone else.
Loose horses	Horses secured whenever they are not being ridden. Head count at every stop and at first light.	If a horse gets loose, stand still and stay quiet. Do not chase it, shout at it, or try to catch it. Let your guide deal with it.
Tether lines, gates and electric fencing	Tether and nightlines placed by the guide, marked, and pointed out to you on arrival. Gates handled by the guide.	Do not touch tether lines or electric fencing, day or night. Leave gates to your guide and do not ride through until told.
Camp environment	Camp sited on level, drained ground, clear of dead trees, riverbeds and unstable slopes. Guy ropes, pegs, steps and the toilet route pointed out on arrival. Night checks for rising water and wind.	Use your head torch after dark. Guy ropes and tent pegs are invisible at night and are the most common way people hurt themselves in camp.
Camp cooking, gas and hot liquids	Cooking done by the guide, on a contained stove, in a set cooking area clear of the tents. Food kept in closed containers.	Keep out of the cooking area. Take care around billies, hot water and knives.
Camp hygiene and toileting	Hand washing and sanitiser provided. Eating area kept away from the horse lines. There is no toilet on this route — your guide provides a trowel and directs you well clear of water, camp and track. All rubbish carried out.	Wash your hands before eating and after handling horses. Bury waste and paper at least 50 m from water and 15 cm deep. Nothing goes in the creek or the pools — not soap, not shampoo, not toothpaste, however biodegradable the label says it is.

Hazard	How we manage it	What you must do
Fatigue over two days	Days paced to the riders, and the guide watches for tiredness on the ride out.	Be honest about soreness and tiredness on the morning of day two. Day two takes you home, so it is not the day to be running on empty.
Alcohol	Alcohol at camp is managed by your guide. No one rides having been drinking.	You are welcome to bring a bottle for the evening — tell us in advance so it is packed properly. No alcohol before or during riding, on either day.
Gravel road access	Vehicle transfers driven at speeds appropriate to unsealed road.	Seatbelts on. If you are driving yourself to the meeting point, allow extra time and drive to the surface.

Your acknowledgement

I have read and understood this document. I understand that this trip takes place in remote country with no phone reception and no facilities, that medical help is hours away rather than minutes, and that the hazards described above are inherent to the trip and cannot be removed. I have disclosed any injury, medical condition, pregnancy, allergy or medication that could affect my safety or that of the party, and I agree to follow my guide's instructions at all times.

Each rider signs on a separate line.

1. Name _____ Signed _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____

2. Name _____ Signed _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____

3. Name _____ Signed _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____

4. Name _____ Signed _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____

Mountain Horses Outfitters · Bespoke adventurous horse trekking · St James Conservation Area, New Zealand
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