

The Finest Walk in the World.

Deep in the south-west corner of New Zealand, far away from all familiar scenes of travel, lies the celebrated Milford Sound, an inlet of the sea surpassing in magnificence even the fjords of Norway. Of late years a track has been made overland to the Sound, and this track anyone possessing feet to walk with, eyes to see with, and the love of nature at her loneliest and fairest, could scarce do better than essay. It is but some three and thirty miles in length – traversable, therefore, by the practised walker in one day, though very much more profitably allotted two or three : it can be negotiated at any time between the early summer and late autumn : a paternal Government has provided it with all necessary accommodation for travellers, and, from the variety, the beauty, and the scale, of the scenes through which it passes, it must certainly be accounted one of the most glorious natural wonders of the world.

The track starts at the head of beautiful Lake Te Anau, and leads at once up a gradually ascending mountain-valley, filled with Bush. Before, behind, to the left and right, the forest come unbroken – vista after vista, lofty hall past hall, of glorious, living green, pillared by the green brown limbs and boles of beech-like “birches.” Half-a-hand deep with velvety moss, embroidered with lichens, dripping with ferns and orchids, the immense branches zigzag mazily in an out of the leafy layers they support. The sun looks like a splintered star, up there between the tree-tops, and each ray falls like a splash of cool brightness through the green equable gloom – yonder, high up, striking into sudden glinting gold the bronze-velvet surface of a bough ; a little lower, singling out against its background of dark mid-air foliage some shower of pendent silvery moss ; lower yet, pelting as with the sparkle and dazzle of wet light the glossy, oleaginous leaves of the undergrowth, and falling, finally - to earth? There is not a speck of earth to be seen ; the very track itself is inches thick with brown beechmast, with fallen leaves and twigs. No! it is upon cushions of many-hued mosses – apple-green, emerald-green, rufous, russet, silver, red-gold, and gold-green, that the bright shaft comes to rest ; or upon surges, knee-deep, waist-deep, soaring, arching, exquisitely falling, of the marvellous New Zealand ferns. As you walk up this enchanting forest-aisle, parroquets, in colour so like the foliage that they are hard to distinguish, herald you, we will hope inappropriately, with cries of “Per-etty bad! Per-etty bad!” The dainty little fantail – a kind of fly-catcher – comes, friendly and inquisitive, to flirt his pretty fan of brown-and-white, and tumble aerially for his dinner, full in the stranger’s face ; and somewhere in the green deeps overhead you are sure to hear a *tui* fluting, or the rush of a *kaka*’s wings. You may even see the latter – he is a parrott, all dark-brown in the distance – walking warily, with toes turned in, along a branch ; and you can scarcely fail somewhere to meet the long, inquisitorial, ruby-coloured eye of a *weka* (wood-hen), as she stalks among the fern in her suit of pheasant-brown, almost wingless, but perfectly self-possessed, because justly sure of her swift red legs. Moreover, few men come here, no dogs, and no guns ; everything is fearless. In turn, there is nothing in the forest for man to fear – no snakes, not even a poisonous spider.