

CRUISING LAKE TE ANAU

Te Anau is the largest lake in the South Island, and this, together with its remote feeling and dramatic scenery, provides a magnificent sailing experience. Te Anau township is the centre of Fiordland National Park, and there is a huge range of outdoor activities to be enjoyed in the vicinity. A cruise on Te Anau therefore can be the centrepiece of a varied family holiday – although the lake itself is so extensive that two weeks is barely enough to explore every corner. And, of course, there is nearby Lake Manapouri – which some people think is the “queen” of South Island lakes – and Doubtful Sound, accessible to a trailer yacht via the weekly barge across West Arm and the climb over Wilmot Pass.



The Middle Fjord of Lake Te Anau, with a nice 10 knot breeze carrying a group of five trailer yachts round Rocky Point (on the right) towards North Fjord.

SOME BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE LAKE AND ITS WEATHER

Te Anau is New Zealand's second largest lake, 60 km long, up to 8 km wide, and with a surface area of over 350 square kilometres. It is a glacial lake, scoured out by glacial action to a depth of over 200 m below sea level at its deepest point (417 m, in South Fjord).

The four main arms – South Fjord, Middle Fjord, North Fjord, and the northern lake up to the Clinton and Worsley Arms – have very steep mountain sides along the shoreline, and the lake bed drops away steeply in most places. Consequently, anchorages can be rather widely spaced, although there are enough that a boat is never more than a few miles from a refuge.

Rainfall in the mountains to the west of the lake is as much as 8,000 mm per year, so there can be huge inflows of water to the lake during wet weather. Many inflowing rivers have built deltas, like that of the Eglinton River, or are building river flats out into the deep waters of the lake. Many of Te Anau's anchorages can be found just offshore of such flats and deltas.

Lake Te Anau lies in the lee of the Fjordland mountains, and there is a strong rain shadow effect. The three main arms reach to within 40-50 km of the coast, and rainfall is heavier, more frequent, and more prolonged than on the main lake. Data for Te Anau are hard to come by, but figures for Manapouri give an idea of what to expect. Annual rainfall at West Arm is around 4,000 mm, and at Manapouri airport is around 1,200 mm – which suggests that when a southwesterly is forecast things are likely to be a lot more pleasant in the marina at Te Anau than anchored at the head

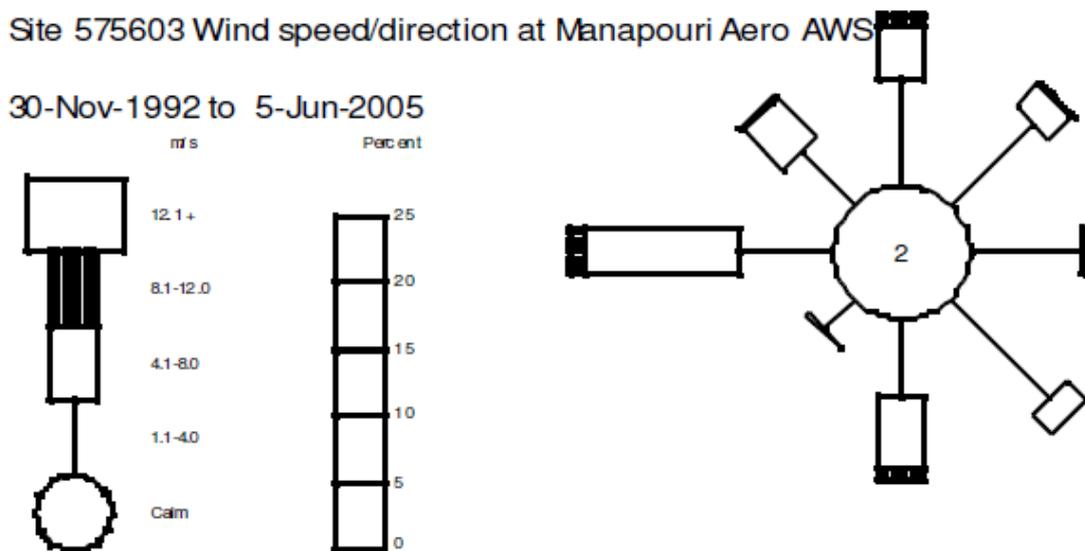
of Middle Fjord! Rainfall is pretty much evenly spread throughout the year, with a tendency for winters to be drier.

There are around 1,600 hours of sunshine at Te Anau, and fewer still in the west and north of the lake – maybe a cruise along the Abel Tasman coast (over 2,400 hours) would be a better bet, if sunshine is something the crew demands! January and February are the warmest months – the mean daily air temperature at Te Anau is 15-16°C in these months, ranging between 8°C and 20-21°C during a mid-summer day, on average. The coldest month is July, with a mean daily temperature at Te Anau of 4°C.

The predominant airflow over Fjordland is from west-northwest. However, winds on the lake are strongly influenced by topography, because moving air tends to go round rather than over obstacles. Hence, generally speaking winds blow either up or down the fjords and northern lake, and only in the main body of the lake, from Te Anau township to the Eglinton delta, are wind conditions controlled by synoptic (medium scale) weather conditions. Even here, wind patterns are influenced by the winds blowing out of the fjords. So, for example, a passage from an anchorage at the Clinton River (north end of the lake) might experience:

1. light, shifty headwinds from the Clinton River mouth to the junction with Worsley Arm;
2. a gentle and reasonably steady following breeze down to about Safe Cove;
3. increasingly strong winds through the wind funnel past Lee Island;
4. an area of no wind, turning to a headwind, past Camp Bay;
5. a screaming gale blowing out of North Fjord, turning into:
6. a moderate following wind past Welcome Point and the Eglinton;

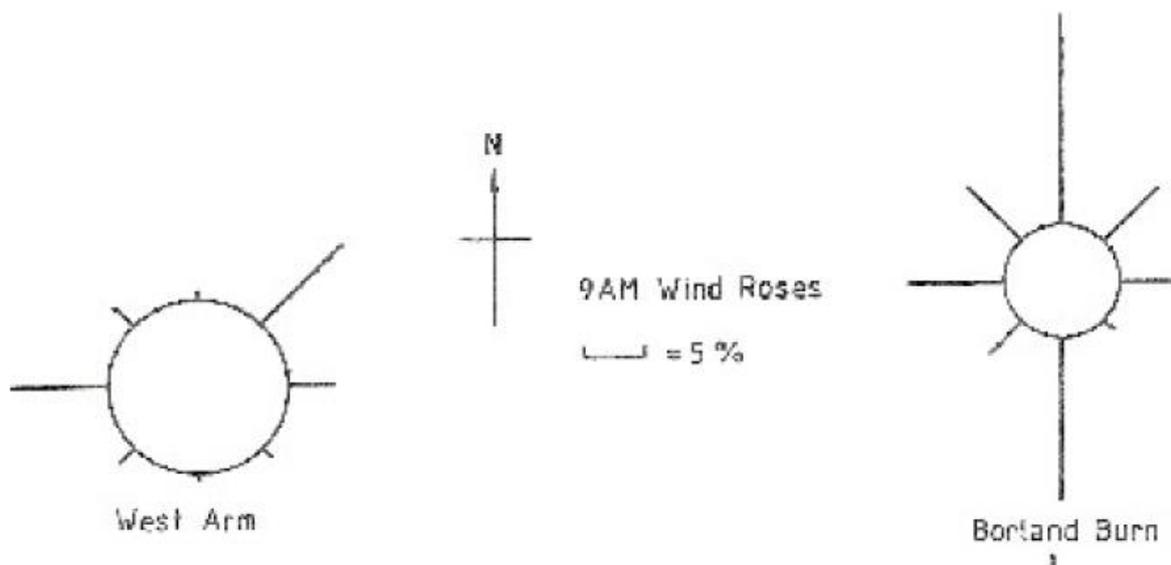
Then the same pattern repeated again past Middle Fjord and South Fjord. The wind rose for the summer months at Manapouri airport gives an idea of the proportion of winds from different directions that might be expected on the main body of Lake Te Anau (wind rose kindly provided by the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research).



As a rule, with synoptic winds from southwest through to north, the wind blows down the fjords, often rather strongly. (The wind can blow up the fjords in some locations, if it is funnelled in from a side valley, and there frequently are areas of shifty or light winds in the lee of points). When picking the best route along a fjord, it helps to think of the wind as a liquid flowing down the valley, just like water running down a gutter, slopping from side to side in response to bends and eddying around behind obstructions. Perhaps the most important caution is to treat with great respect the westerly wind coming out of the fjords into the main lake. It can strengthen remarkably quickly, and out in the middle of the lake is no place to be putting a reef in the main. Silmarillion's speed record of over 12 knots was achieved leaving Middle Fjord with a following wind that mercifully died away by the time we'd passed Centre Island.

Southerly and southeasterly winds can offer good sailing on the main lake, although waves can get quite large further north. The side fjords tend to be relatively sheltered in southerlies, as the airflow diverges around the Kepler, Murchison and Stewart Mountains (which form transverse barriers to the wind) and follows the sea coast, the wide Waiau valley, and the Southland Plains.

There is a very strong diurnal influence on winds, with calm conditions commonly experienced in the morning, a breeze blowing up from mid to late morning, and rather robust conditions through the afternoon. This is neatly shown by the 9 a.m. wind roses for West Arm (Manapouri), which shows a large proportion of calms. Observations taken in the afternoon would show a rather different picture. Notice, too the preponderance of westerly and northeasterly winds at West Arm and southerly or northerly winds at Borland Burn (in the Waiau valley south of Manapouri), all strongly influenced by the local topography. Like Wakatipu, Lake Te Anau is large enough to create diurnal "lake breezes", which are equivalent to sea breezes along the coast. The article *Cruising Wakatipu in Self Tacker 2005(3)* describes these more fully.



Wind roses taken from 9 a.m. weather observations at West Arm (Manapouri) and Borland Burn (in the Waiau valley south of Manapouri). Note how the winds are affected by the local topography, and the frequency of calms – observations taken

in the afternoon would show a different picture. (Data from Climate and weather of Southland (NZ Met. Service Misc. Pub. 115(5), 1984)

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A couple of cruising guides have been produced, by Kevin Brown and I. R. Costain, and this one draws on and updates their information. The lake is covered by LINZ 1:50,000 topographic maps D41, D42, D43, C42 and C43 (the latter also covering Manapouri), and Fish and Game Southland have published a useful sketch map of the lake. A 1:250,000 boating map is available from the outdoors shops in Te Anau. It shows 28 anchorages and gives details of direction of wind shelter, how many boats they can accommodate, and the type of shoreline. Several of the spots that it shows don't strike us as very useful or safe anchorages for Silmarillion, and it omits a number of others that we did use.

BOAT RAMPS AND OTHER FACILITIES

There are three boat ramps suitable for launching and recovering a Noelex 25. The one at Te Anau Downs is favoured by crews who like the northern half of the lake. It is an excellent spot, with good parking, a toilet, and good anchorage in Boat Harbour suitable for late arrivals. The ramp faces west, but the westerly wind has lost much of its strength by the time it reaches Te Anau Downs, so launching and recovery are not usually a problem. The nearby backpackers sells very minimal provisions – don't rely on their having what you've forgotten, and they don't do meals for casual visitors.



Te Anau Downs. The jetty is used by the large launch that goes up to Glade House, but tie-ing up is fine on the shore-side of the pontoons. Although the jetty and ramp seem to be very exposed to the west, the inlet is generally quite protected.

There are two good ramps at Te Anau, the public ramp at the north end of the shore, and the ramp in the Marina. (There is also a narrow ramp at the southern end, near the DoC visitor centre and yacht club, but it is rather exposed to wind and waves, and not generally used by trailer yachts). The public ramp is fine, but very busy with power boats and with rather limited space for rigging and parking. The

ramp in the marina is excellent, with jetties to assist in launching and recovery, an extensive rigging and parking area, and better security. A key for the gate to the marina can be obtained (2007) from the Caltex station on the way into town; there is a daily launching fee and arrangements for leaving a vehicle/trailer for several days are negotiable. Silmarillion's crew has a strong preference for the marina ramp.

Te Anau has all the services that you're likely to need (hardware store, two supermarkets, three garages, angling/outdoor equipment shops, Te Anau Marine, lots of restaurants for a treat, etc.). There is a commercial secure parking area, in case you want to leave the boat and trailer for a few days and go off to Milford or wherever. And, of course, there is the Department of Conservation visitor centre at the south end of the lake shore, for information about the area, weather forecasts, maps, etc. (phone 03-249-7924)

Water everywhere in the lake is of high quality and can be used for cooking and drinking with no concerns. Didymo has become established, unfortunately, in the Eglinton River, and no doubt is spreading throughout the lake, as boats carry it around.

THINGS TO DO

Well, obviously a Noelex crew is going to Te Anau for some sailing! To explore the main lake from the Waiau River outlet up to the Clinton River, and the three main arms, takes a good two weeks. The entire lake is worth visiting. Some crews seem to regard the South Arm as less interesting, but Silmarillion's begs to differ – in fact, we think the scenery up the South Arm is perhaps the finest anywhere on the lake, and there are many beaches along both shores that are well worth a visit. We'll consider the details later.

The Department of Conservation visitor centre is the obvious place to go for information on other things to do. While you're there, walk along the shore to the yacht club, and check the notice board for up-coming events, and the contact details for club officials. Taking part in one of the weekend events could be a highlight of the cruise!

If you're keen on walking, the Kepler Track from the control gates up to Mt Luxmore is do-able in a day, especially if you anchor in Brod Bay, thereby cutting out the section around the lake shore (which, however, is itself well worth the walk!) At the other end of the lake, it is possible to walk for half a day up the Milford Track from the anchorage at the Clinton River mouth. This gets you up past the Clinton River Forks, and into the part of the valley where avalanches have cleared openings, and fine views, in the forest.



Gorge Falls. The fall is reached via a good track from a derelict jetty on the delta of Gorge Creek, in the South Fjord. The track used to lead all the way through to Bradshaw Sound, and can still be followed, with some bush-bashing

The walk from Northwest Arm across to Lake Hankinson is worthwhile. So is the walk from the remnants of an old jetty at Gorge Burn (at the end of the South Fjord) up to the magnificent Gorge Falls – and onwards along an old tourist trail to a series of tarns, but this involves a bit of bush-bashing, as the trail hasn't been maintained for years.

There are some nice walks to tarns and beaches from a jetty on the south shore of South Fjord, near Dome Island, a lovely walk to a tarn from just near the Te Anau Downs ramp, and of course walks along the shore around Te Anau township.

Te Anau and the inflowing rivers offer good angling – the further away from Te Anau the better. The best fishing is where rivers and streams flow into the lake, bringing food and creating conditions in which macro-invertebrates and small fish flourish, providing food for trout. Several rivers, like the Doon River and Worsley Stream, can be entered by a Noelex, or by a dinghy. Experienced anglers regard them as a prime place for trout, with the fish lurking under the river banks and logs in the channel. Always be careful when in rivers or offshore from river deltas and beaches, because there are a lot of logs, the water may be murky with peat, and logs don't show up on the depth sounder until it's too late.

Many beaches around the lake are suitable for lunch stops, swimming, barbecues, etc. Those on the north and south shores of South Fjord are deservedly popular (but hardly crowded) – try Garden Point, Moonlight Beach, Garnet Bay, or the beaches on the south shore opposite Moa Pt. Several of the marked anchorages have nice beaches, too, but the sandflies can be a discouragement. The eastern shoreline of the lake has drier and sunnier weather, afternoon sun, and perhaps fewer sandflies (?) – the beaches along here may be worth a look for an afternoon stop, before heading for an anchorage in Middle Fjord, say.

ANCHORAGES

The main features of the lake are shown on the key map, with more detail on the six larger scale maps that follow. Pay particular attention to the hazards marked on the map; out on the water, most are marked by poles, but the skipper is responsible for the safety of his/her boat, so keep a good lookout, especially around island shores and off points!

We haven't provided the level of detail for anchorages that is found in a coastal cruising guide because, somehow, identifying the right spot to anchor in a bay in a lake seems to be easier than in a tidal bay, and is very dependent on the direction and strength of wind on the day. In most places we've marked, it's possible to tie the stern back into the shore, but in some spots swinging on anchor is preferable, because the wind is shifty or there is dense or overhanging vegetation along the shoreline.

There are several places, particularly beaches where side streams have built deltas, that are not marked as anchorages but would be usable in settled weather. In the end, the crew of a cruising boat must make its own decisions on the suitability of a possible anchorage, taking account of the likely weather conditions over the next few hours. Often, the wind on Te Anau drops during the night – but it can blow up, or shift around to exactly the opposite direction, so don't trust anybody, including this guide!

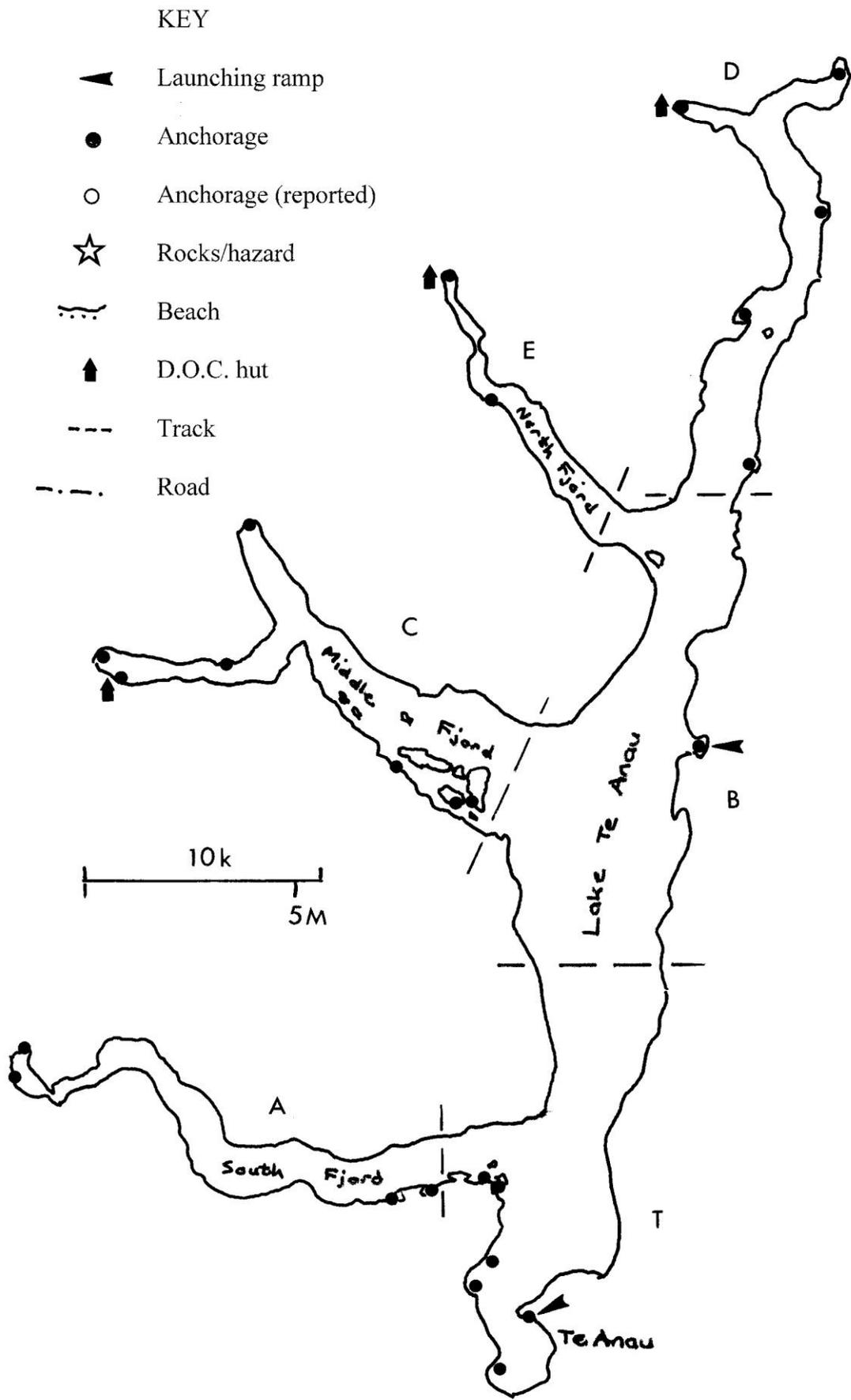
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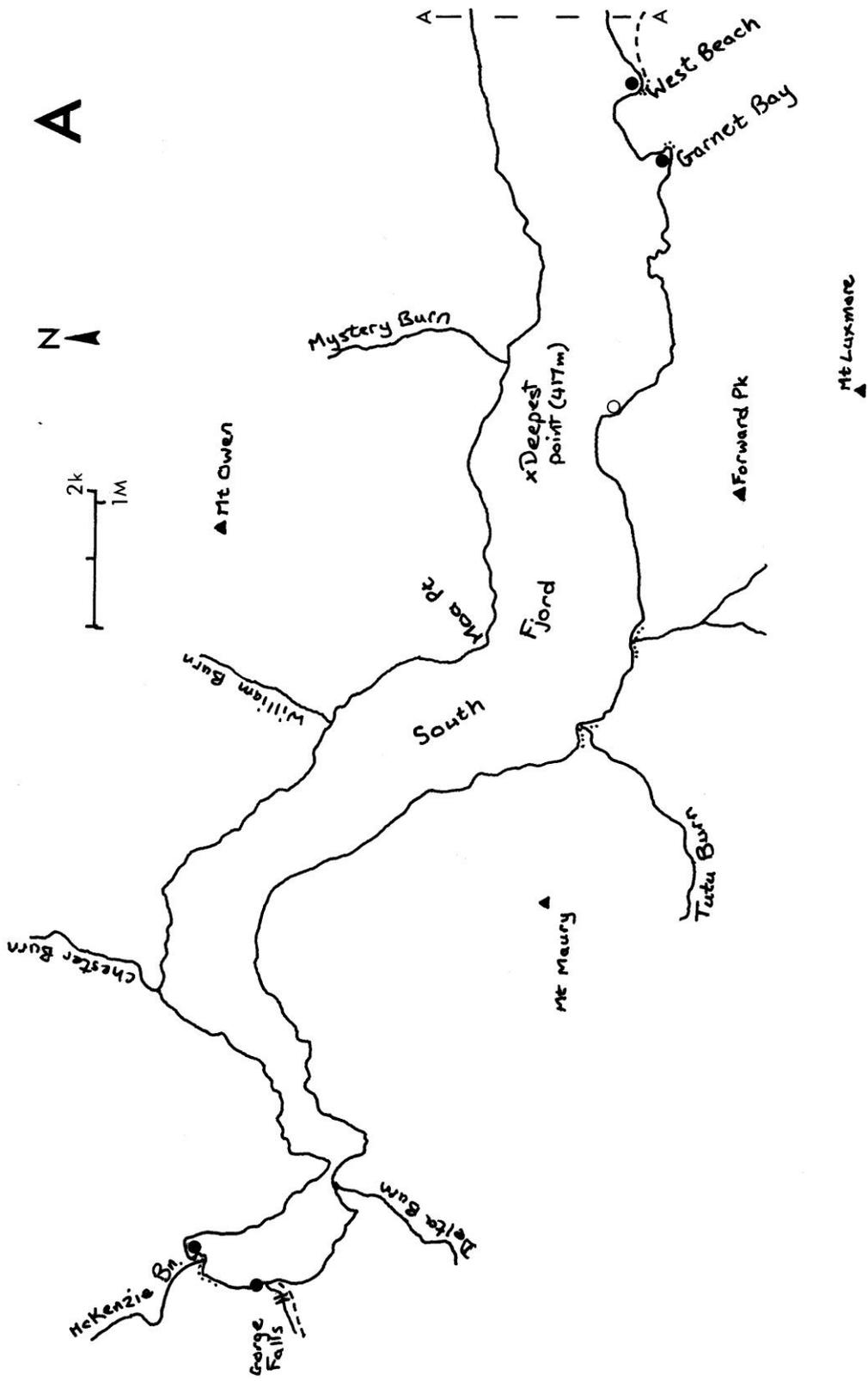
Lake Te Anau is a big lake, and the weather can turn rugged rather quickly. So, Te Anau warrants the caution that a prudent skipper pays to coastal waters. Water temperatures during summer generally are around 16°C – a “man overboard” will get pretty cold if not picked up smartly, and in strong winds 1 to 2 m waves are quite possible, making a rescue potentially quite tricky.

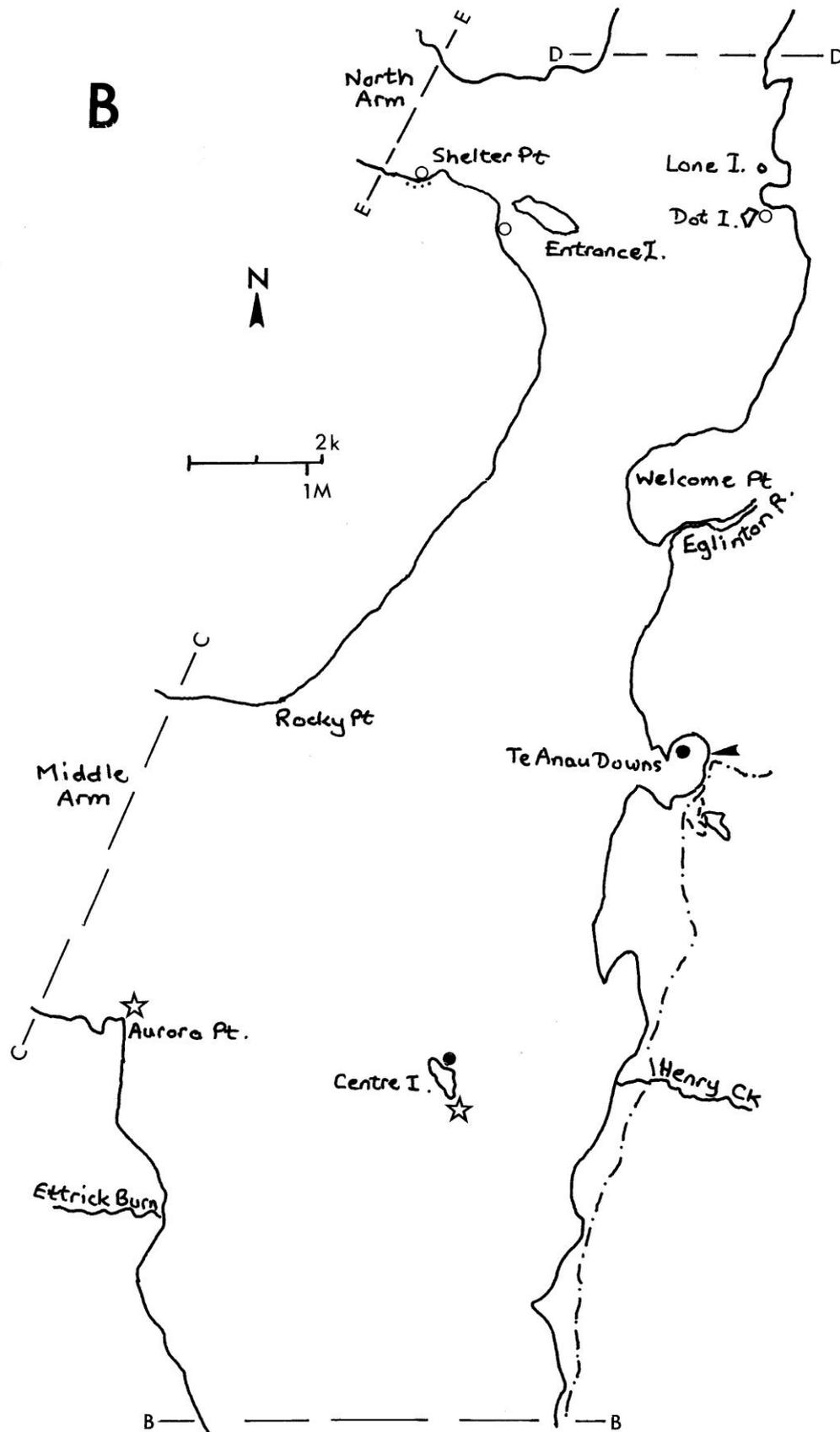
It's a good idea to advise the DoC visitor centre of your intentions, but sign back in when you return. There are quite a few power boats around in the southern part of the main lake and South Fjord, but generally only on nice days in the holiday period. There are a lot fewer folk around further north; in fact, you can have the lake to yourself for days on end, apart from the launch to the Clinton River jetty. Once away from Te Anau township, there are no supplies, so take everything you need for the intended trip – including 30 litres of fuel, if you're intending exploring the whole lake.

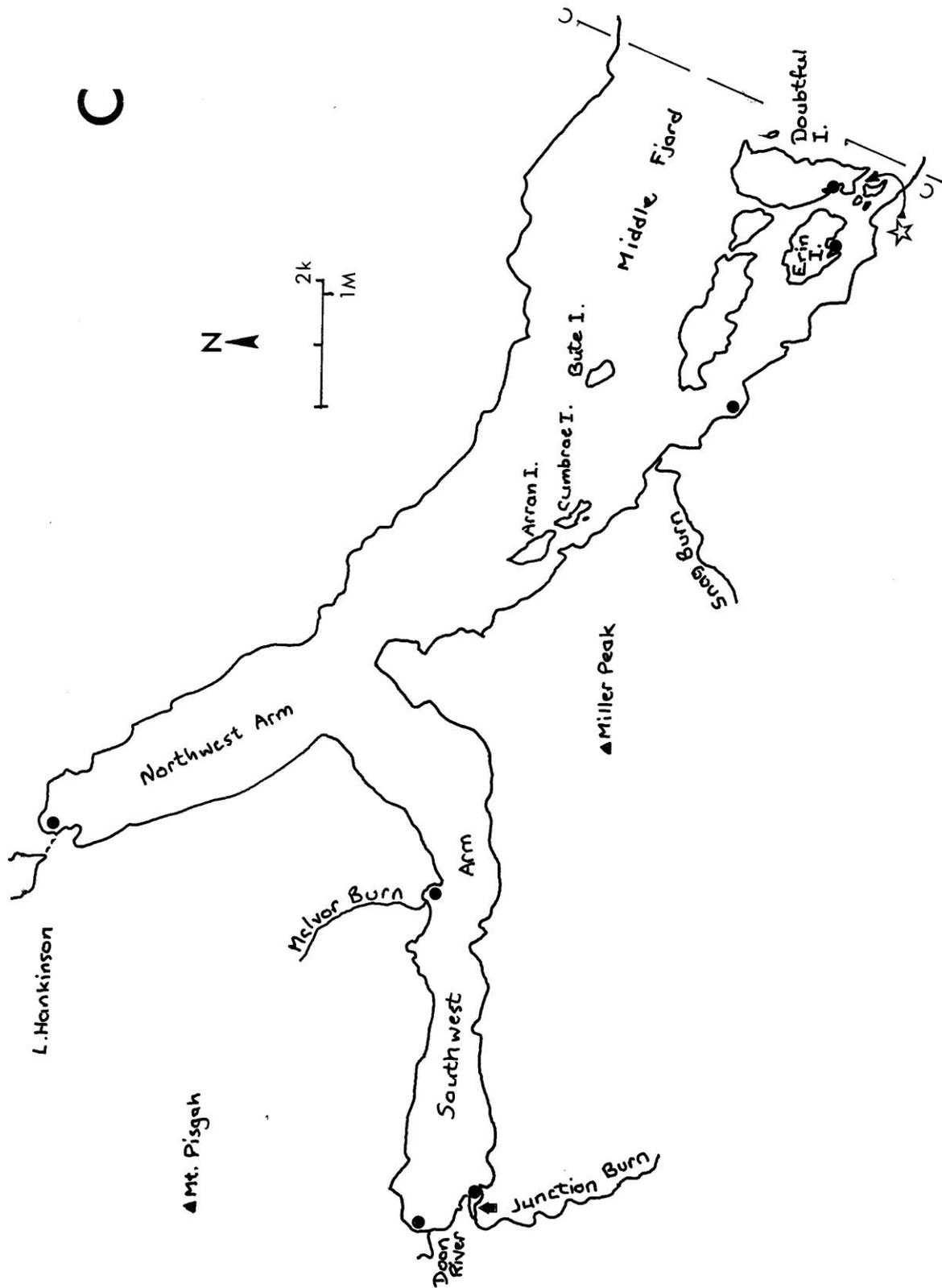
As for sandflies, we recommend a mosquito net for the cockpit, and nets to cover the hatches into the cabin – sandflies can push through a standard mosquito net, so you'll need to make your own, from fine curtain net. Sandflies seem to be unfazed by mosquito coils. Swinging at anchor is definitely better for avoiding the little beasts, if there's an off-shore breeze, and the islands at the entrance to Middle Fjord are delightfully sandflyfree! But don't let us put you off the place – Te Anau is a magnificent lake for a cruise!

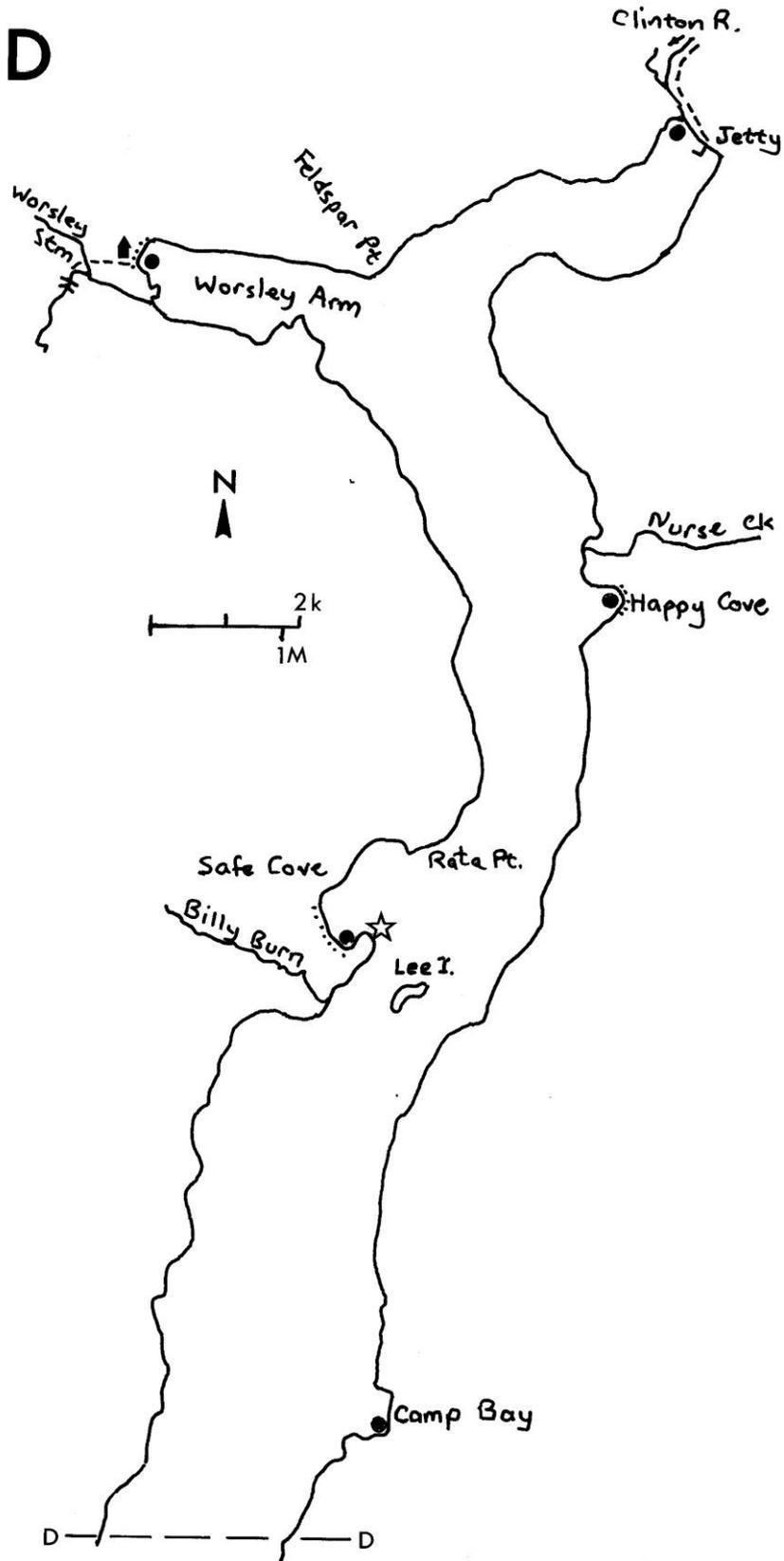
Paul Mosley
Silmarillion

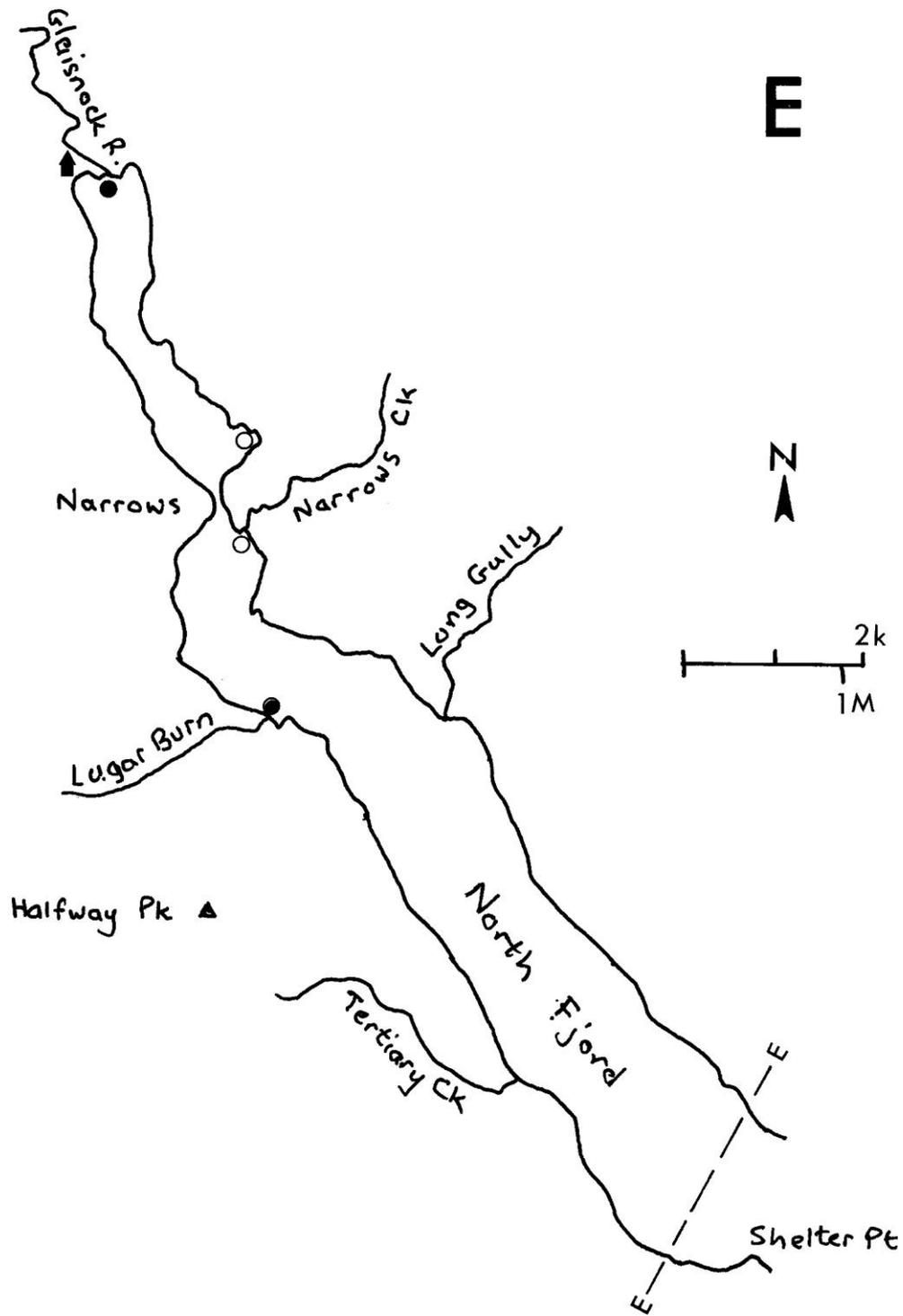












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