

Driving from Blenheim, there are two routes to Grasmere Lodge – via the east coast or the west coast. If you want to try the whale watching at Kaikoura, take the eastern route, but be aware the whale trip takes about two hours, if the whale boats are running, and should be pre-booked.

An alternative is a flight over the whale area, which would be shorter but not as close to the whales, if they're there. If you want to see how close mountains can come to the sea, this is a good route.

From Kaikoura, follow State Highway 1 south to a little place called Woodend, about 25km north of Christchurch, and turn inland on SH 72, through Rangiora and Oxford, then over the Waimakariri River to Sheffield, where you turn right onto SH 73, heading for the mountains.

Stay on SH 73 for another 70km to reach us, but be aware Springfield is the last gas station for about 100km. (You could stay on SH 1 all the way into Christchurch and then get straight onto SH 73 there, following signs for Darfield and Arthur's Pass, if you want to see the city before you come up into the hills, but obviously this is more driving.)

Coming the other way from Blenheim, head 'out the back,' initially southwest on SH 6, then onto SH 63. It continues on southwest, up the Wairau Valley with some lovely straight roads. This route goes into the Nelson Lakes area and its mountains.

Rejoin SH 6 further on at Kawatiri Junction, then go through Murchison and the Buller Gorge, and at Inangahua Junction turn left onto SH 69 to Reefton. There turn right onto SH 7, heading for Greymouth, and you can either go all the way to the coast or take a short cut at Stillwater, via Moana and Inchbonnie, meeting up with SH 73 at a place called Jacksons and following the signs for Arthur's Pass.

If you go into Greymouth, you may like to stop at the Jade Boulder Gallery to see the work of one of the country's best greenstone artists. Sometimes the Left Bank Gallery further on Mawhera Quay has some good exhibitions by local artists too. From Greymouth, head south on SH 6 and turn on to SH 73 at Kumara Junction.

Kumara, a little village seven kilometres along, has a very good craftsman called The Woodworker, who makes beautiful large wooden bowls from heart rimu. This is a good place to top up your petrol tank if it's looking low, as there's not much further on.

Further on, the old pub on the right at Jacksons used to be a Cobb and Co stagecoach stop, in the days of the West Coast goldrush. Inside on the walls are some pictures showing what it was like then.

After Otira you will be driving up the Otira Gorge, known for its dramatic scenery (and one-way bridges). Over the summit is Arthur's Pass village, our nearest piece of civilisation. Continue on and you will pass the Bealey Hotel, made famous by the publican's *reported* sighting of a moa bird in 1993. The previous last sighting was at the turn of the century.

Grasmere is 30km past the village, over the wide Waimakariri River and the Cass, on the edge of the Arthur's Pass National Park. Don't take the turn on the left to the village of Cass. Grasmere Lodge is two km further on, on the right of State Highway 73.

Either way, it's about a 4-5 hour drive from Blenheim. The directions sound pretty complicated but it's straightforward when you're actually driving it and have a map in front of you.