



**Benje
Patterson**
People & Places

January 2024

Economic impacts of The WILD on the Queenstown Lakes economy



Prepared for: The Wild For Nature Charitable
Trust

Prepared by: Benje Patterson
Benje Patterson | People & Places
www.benjepatterson.co.nz
January 2024

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1. Contents

2. Overview	2
3. About the participants and their supporters	3
4. Economic impacts of The WILD	4
5. Legacy and reputational effects of The WILD	6

2. Overview

This report has been prepared for The Wild For Nature Charitable Trust by Benje Patterson. Its purpose is to estimate the economic impacts on the Queenstown Lakes economy from spending by trail runners who attended the WILD's inaugural 2023 pioneers' edition.

The WILD is a multi-day trail and mountain running celebration, which includes a variety of events centred on New Zealand's trail running mecca, Arrowtown. Events range from the 9km Beast of Beetham to the 85km V5000.

At its heart, this report helps answer the following questions:

- How many people visited Arrowtown and the rest of Queenstown Lakes because of The WILD?
- How long did participants stay and what did they spend in the Queenstown Lakes economy while attending The WILD?
- What legacy effects will the event leave that boost Arrowtown's reputation and could lead to repeat visitation?

Modelling has been primarily informed from race entrant lists and responses from visiting athletes who completed the post-event survey of participants conducted by The Wild For Nature Charitable Trust¹.

This report's author, Benje Patterson, is an Arrowtown-based economist and Chair of the Arrowtown Promotion and Business Association. Benje has over a decade of experience analysing economic activity within regions and within the past couple of years has been involved in more than a dozen projects related to tourism, sport and recreation. These have included projects quantifying the economics of [skiing](#) in Queenstown-Lakes, as well as biking in [Queenstown-Lakes](#) and [Rotorua](#). Outside of his professional work in the economics of sport and recreation, Benje is one of [New Zealand's top ultra runners](#) and competed in The WILD (2nd male in the V5000).

2.1. Key findings

- There were 591 people who participated in The WILD, with 80% (470 people) visiting from outside of Queenstown Lakes District.
- In addition to the 470 visiting athletes, there were 460 supporters who travelled to the district.
- Visitors for The WILD stayed an average of 3.4 nights and spent \$316 per day. In comparison, the average visitor to Queenstown Lakes is estimated to stay 2.7 nights and spend \$279 per day.
- Around 85% of WILD visitors stayed in paid accommodation.
- Two thirds of participants (66%) stayed in Arrowtown, with the remainder staying elsewhere in the district.
- It is estimated that total expenditure across all visiting WILD participants and their supporters during their time in Queenstown Lakes was \$1.0 million.
- The participants' survey showed that 90% of visiting WILD participants intend to return to Arrowtown again in the next few years, while 98% will recommend to friends and family to visit.
- When asked whether The WILD influenced their perception that Arrowtown is an adventure destination, 63% of visitors agreed that the event had influenced that perception, with a further 35% saying they already loved Arrowtown and nothing had changed.

¹ The Survey is highly representative of event participants as it was completed by 332 of the 591 individuals who competed in at least one trail running event at The WILD. Of the 332 participants who completed the survey, 246 surveys were completed by athletes who were visitors to Queenstown Lakes.

3. About the participants and their supporters

This section introduces baseline understandings about the participants in The WILD and their supporters.

3.1. How many people participated in The WILD?

There were 591 people who participated in at least one trail running event as part of The WILD. Most of these participants travelled from outside of Queenstown Lakes to participate.

Visitors from outside Queenstown Lakes represented 80% (470 people) of all competitors in The WILD. Of these visitors, 86% (405 athletes) were from other parts of New Zealand, while 14% (65 athletes) travelled from overseas.

Figure 1 – Overview of participants in The WILD 2023



3.2. How many supporters travelled to The WILD?

The post-event survey of participants in The WILD highlighted that just over half (54%) of visiting athletes were accompanied by supporters.

On average each visiting athlete brought with them about one supporter on their visit to Queenstown Lakes². In total there were approximately 460 supporters who accompanied visiting athletes participating in The WILD.

Figure 2 – Overview of supporters who accompanied visiting athletes at The WILD 2023



² The post-event survey showed that there were on average 0.98 supporters for every visiting athlete.

4. Economic impacts of The WILD

This section introduces the economic impacts from spending by The WILD participants and their supporters. The analysis focusses on spending by athletes and supporters visiting from outside of Queenstown Lakes because their spend represents fresh money into the local area that would not have existed in the absence of The WILD. Spending by local athletes from Queenstown Lakes is not factored into core economic impacts as many would spend their budget on other things in the local area had they not participated in The WILD³.

4.1. Characteristics of the average stay by WILD attendees

The average participant in The WILD visiting from outside of Queenstown Lakes stayed in the district for 3.4 nights. Two thirds of participants (66%) stayed in Arrowtown, with the remainder staying elsewhere in the district.

These visitors for The WILD stayed longer than the typical visitor to Queenstown Lakes, with data from the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (MBIE) showing that the average visitor to Queenstown Lakes stays 2.7 nights in each place⁴.

Participants generally stayed in commercial accommodation instead of with friends and family, with the participants' survey highlighting that 85% of WILD participants stayed in paid accommodation. In total, factoring in their supporters, it is estimated that there were 2,651 commercial guest nights booked across 397 stay units because of The WILD⁵.

4.2. Spending characteristics by WILD attendees

The average daily spend was \$316 for each visiting WILD participant and their supporters.

Spending by visitors to The WILD was slightly higher than the average visitor to Queenstown Lakes. Previous research shows that average spending by visitors to the district is about \$279 per day⁶.

Spending by WILD participants was heavily weighted towards hospitality. On average, 44% of participants' spending was on accommodation, with a further 25% on food and drink. The remainder of their daily budget was on transport and retail (13% each respectively) and excursions or other entertainment (5%).

³ Economic impacts calculated in this report are conservative as they do not consider money from entry fees flowing back into the local economy due to the event organisers' procurement of local goods and services. The economic impacts also do not make any provisions for estimated spending associated with future visitation by athletes who return to visit Arrowtown again as a result of a positive experience associated with The WILD.

⁴ Source: MBIE's Accommodation Data Programme, November 2023 year.

⁵ Guest nights are defined as total number of guests (visiting participants plus supporters) staying in each commercial accommodation stay unit multiplied by their average stay length.

⁶ Updated and inflation adjusted averages calculated from visitor spending insights contained in Benje Patterson (2021), "The Contribution of skiing to the Queenstown-Lakes economy" (available here: https://www.benjepatterson.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-contribution-of-skiing-to-Queenstown-Lakes-economy-and-people_V2.pdf).

Table 1

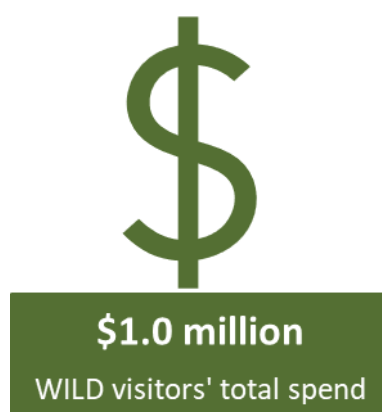
What did participants in The WILD spend their money on?		
<i>Daily spending per visitor on each category, calculated from TheWILD participants' survey</i>		
	Daily spend (\$)	Share of spending
Accommodation	\$139	43.9%
Food and drink	\$80	25.4%
Transport	\$40	12.7%
Spend in local shops	\$40	12.7%
Excursions and other entertainment	\$17	5.3%
Total	\$316	100.0%

4.3. Total economic impact of spending by WILD attendees

It is estimated that total expenditure across all visiting WILD participants and their supporters during their time in Queenstown Lakes was \$1.0 million⁷.

This total expenditure represents economic impacts on the Queenstown Lakes economy attributable to The WILD – in the absence of the race, these people would not have been in the district spending money.

Figure 3 – Total spending in Queenstown Lakes from visiting athletes and supporters of The WILD



⁷ Total expenditure in Queenstown Lakes from visiting WILD participants and their supporters was calculated as the total number of athletes and supporters who travelled to Queenstown Lakes for The WILD multiplied by their average stay length and daily spend. In unrounded terms, total spending equated to \$991,000.

5. Legacy and reputational effects of The WILD

The economic impacts calculated in the previous section focussed on spending that occurred by visitors to The WILD. In addition to these spending benefits, The WILD also influenced perceptions of Arrowtown as a destination. This section investigates the potential legacy and reputational benefits of The WILD.

5.1. Legacy effects of The WILD

The WILD participants' survey asked respondents about their intentions to return to Arrowtown again in future.

The participants' survey showed that 90% of visiting WILD participants intend to return to visit Arrowtown again within the next few years.

This intention to return is much higher than among the general visitor population in Queenstown Lakes, for example the Destination Queenstown Q1 2023 Queenstown Visitor Survey update showed that 51% of domestic visitors intend to return to Queenstown in the next year.

Participants were also asked about whether they would recommend to friends and family that they visit Arrowtown.

Some 98% of visiting WILD participants said they would recommend that their friends and family visit Arrowtown.

The high proportion of WILD participants who intend to return to Arrowtown and encourage friends and family to visit means that there is likely to be a significant amount of future visitor spending in the district that occurs as a result of a positive experience related to The WILD.

5.2. Reputational benefits of The WILD

The Arrowtown Promotion and Business Association (APBA) and its partners have invested significant time over recent years into raising awareness of Arrowtown as New Zealand's trail running mecca and a premier access point to the backcountry⁸. The WILD, alongside other major running events that pass through Arrowtown⁹, further build on this reputation.

In The WILD participants' survey, some 99% of visiting respondents agreed that Arrowtown provides world-class access to backcountry trail adventures.

When asked directly whether The WILD influenced their perception that Arrowtown is an adventure destination, 63% agreed that the event had influenced that perception, with a further 35% saying they already loved Arrowtown and nothing had changed.

⁸ For example, in 2021 the APBA hosted Kamala Hayman of Stuff on a trail running media famil. The article is available here: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/destinations/nz/central-otago-lakes/300465221/exploring-arrowtowns-hidden-treasures>.

⁹ In addition to The WILD, Arrowtown is fortunate to host The Motatapu, The Arrowtown Backyard Ultra, and the Queenstown Marathon.



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