Peel Forest area
Peel Forest Park Scenic Reserve and Mt Peel Waikari Hills Conservation Area
SOUTH CANTERBURY

Track grades

**Short walk** – easy walking for up to an hour.
Track is well formed, with even surface. There may be steps or slopes.
Suitable for people of most abilities and fitness.
Stream and river crossings are bridged.
Walking shoes required.

**Walking track** – easy to moderate walking from a few minutes to a day.
Track is mostly well formed, some sections may be steep, rough or muddy.
Suitable for people with low to moderate fitness and abilities.
Clearly sign posted. Stream and river crossings are bridged.
Walking shoes or light tramping/hiking boots required.

**Tramping track** – challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking.
Track is mostly unformed with steep, rough or muddy sections.
Suitable for people with good fitness.
Moderate to high-level backcountry skills and experience, including navigation and survival skills required.
Track has markers, poles or rock cairns.
Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
Tramping/hiking boots required.
Dogs

Dogs are not permitted in either Peel Forest Park Scenic Reserve or Mt Peel Waikari Hills Conservation Area.

Hunting

Peel Forest Park Scenic Reserve hunting block has a restricted hunting season. Hunting is not allowed from 1 October to 1 April (inclusive of Easter and Anzac weekends). Red deer, chamois and pig are present, as well as the occasional tahr.

Mt Peel Waikari Hills Conservation Area hunting block is open for hunting all year. Tahr, red deer, chamois and pig can be found.

All hunters must have a hunting permit obtainable from any DOC office or online. Check www.doc.govt.nz/hunting

Weather you can expect

The climate of the high-country areas of Peel Forest Park is quite different from that of the lowland areas. The rainfall increases with increasing distance from the coast, and the winds influence the climatic cycle. Peel Forest’s diverse rainfall distribution is particularly influenced by the dry northwest winds.

Average rainfall is 1160 mm per annum. Snow may fall at any time of the year and short-duration heavy snowfalls are often experienced between June and September.

Before You Go

Your safety is your responsibility

Peel Forest Area is a varied environment, with weather conditions becoming more extreme as you climb out of forested areas onto the open tops.

- Be prepared for the worst at all times.
- Take clothing for all weather conditions regardless of the forecast, as well as extra food and water.
- Leave your intentions with a trusted contact.
  Information on the Outdoor Intentions system can be found at www.adventuresmart.co.nz
- Cellphone coverage in this area is poor. You are on your own unless you take or hire a satellite phone, mountain radio or personal locator beacon (hire outlets are listed at www.beacons.org.nz).
- This pamphlet is a general guide but is not a substitute for a topographical map. Use map NZTopo50 series, Arundel BY19.
- Check with your closest DOC office, visitor centre or the website at www.doc.govt.nz for the latest information and any alerts before leaving.
Clarke Flat

1. Kahikatea Walk
1 hour return, 1.9 km
This track offers flat easy walking, with board walks over wetter areas. Saw pits are a reminder of the fate of most of this forest, with just a remnant of kahikatea swamp forest remaining.
The track can be accessed from near the camping ground at Clarke Flat or the roadside at Te Wanahu Flat.

2. Acland Falls
30 minutes each way, 600 metres
The track climbs steeply and then drops into a small stream. The falls (14 m), a short walk up the stream bed, are named after J B Acland of Mt Peel Station.
The sunnier and drier aspect of this northern flank of the park has produced vegetation strikingly different from that found elsewhere, dominated by fuchsia, māhoe, kōwhai and kānuka.

A loop walk can be made by coming back along the western section of Allans Track to Te Wanahu Flat. Then, either cross the road and walk down steps to Kahikatea Walk and turn left back to Clarke Flat, or walk back down the road to Clarke Flat.
5. Allans Track
2–3 hours return via Fern Walk, 5 km
Follow Acland Falls Track from Te Wanahu Flat and turn left onto Allans Track after about 500 metres. Allans Track then joins Deer Spur before dropping steeply to Fern Walk, which can be followed back to the starting point. This track passes through a range of botanical communities from the tall podocarp forest near the valley floor to the subalpine and alpine vegetation on the higher slopes. The track is named after H H B Allan (1882–1957), a pioneer botanist best known for his Volume One of the *Flora of New Zealand*. In 1924 he wrote a book on the vegetation of Mt Peel Forest.

3. Fern Walk
1 hour 30 minutes each way, 3.3 km
The early part of the track passes through Mills Bush, 16.2 hectares of virgin podocarp forest containing giant lowland tōtara, mataī and kahikatea trees, many of them probably 1000 years old. Their roots are spread across the path. In 1881 these were saved from the axes and saws thanks to the efforts of a visiting English MP (Arthur Mills) who bought the land to protect the forest. Ferns abound along the walk – most of the 68 species of ferns in Peel Forest can be seen along the way. Look out and listen for bellbirds/korimako, riflemen/tītitipoumanu, grey warblers/riroriro, tomtits/miromiro and silvereyes/tauhou.

Big Tree Walk
15 minutes each way, 870 m
There are large mataī, kahikatea and lowland tōtara along the track, some of which are thought to be 1000 years old. The largest tree, a huge lowland tōtara, is almost three metres across.
Look out for the remains of a bush tramway route running alongside this track. These tramways had wooden rails and were used for hauling out logs. At the top of the embankment you can see the original width of the tramway, marked by wooden edging.

6. Acland Falls Track
25 minutes each way, 800 m
Follow the track from Te Wanahu Flat, turning right after about 500 m where Allans Track joins on the left. Once in the stream bed, a short walk upstream takes you to Acland Falls.
Blandswood

7. Dennistoun Bush 🚶
1 hour return, 1.8 km
This is a flat, easy walk – though some sections can be muddy – through 40 hectares of magnificent ancient forest with huge kahikatea, lowland tōtara and mataī. Near Brake Road look out for a hollow tōtara stump large enough to encircle a family. There is a short side trip to one of the historic saw pits in the area.
The bush is named after G J Dennistoun of Peel Forest Run.
Parking for Emily Falls, Rata Falls and Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere is at the start of Blandswood/Lookout Road near Kowhai Stream.

8. Emily Falls 🚶
45 minutes each way, 1.6 km
The track starts on the left a little way up the steep Blandswood/Lookout Road. After a steeper section the track forks left down to Rata Stream. Follow the stream down for 100 m then exit right back onto the track. This track crosses another small stream before descending steeply to Emily Stream at the base of the falls. The stream and falls are named after Emily Acland, wife of J B Acland and daughter of Bishop Harper, the first bishop of Christchurch, and a keen mountaineer.

9. Rata Falls 🚶
1 hour each way, 1.5 km
Start on the Emily Falls Track but turn right at the fork. Continue along this track until Rata Stream is reached. Expect to get wet feet as it is a short 10-minute or 500-metre walk upstream to reach the falls. An alternative return to Blandswood is to walk down Rata Stream. This route involves travelling down the stony riverbed, including a short section of gorge.
When travelling along streams be aware of water levels and slippery rocks and wear appropriate footwear.

10. Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere via Deer Spur 🚶
2 to 3 hours each way, 4.6 km
This is one of the most popular peaks in Canterbury. From the car park at Blandswood, walk up the steep Blandswood Lookout Road to the top. Follow Fern Walk for about 350 m before turning left onto Deer Spur Track. The track follows a ridge up to the summit (1311 m). There are magnificent views to Mt Somers, Mt Hutt and across the plains to the coast. Tristam Harper Memorial Shelter is just below the summit.
Note: This is an alpine summit. Here the weather can be very different from at road level. Ensure you take appropriate clothing and equipment.
11. South Ridge Track

3 hours 30 minutes each way, 3.5 km
An alternative to climbing or descending Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere from Deer Spur is to use the South Ridge Track. The South Ridge is steep and involves a couple of rocky scrambles.
South Ridge Track connects with Deer Spur at the top of the mountain and Emily Falls Track near the bottom.
When descending from Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere it is important to keep to the ridge until the track sign shows the route down a tussock-covered spur to the bushline and Emily Stream.

12. Middle Mt Peel

Unmarked
1 hour 45 minutes each way from Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere, 4.5 km
Middle Mt Peel can be reached by fit and experienced trampers from Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere.
The route follows the ridge line from Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere. Though this track is not marked in most places, it is quite well worn and easy to follow in good weather.

13. Lynn Stream

Unmarked
30 minutes to public conservation land, 1.5 km
Follow Lynn Stream from the sign to the public conservation land boundary. Access up the stream is impeded after about 2 km by a waterfall. The public conservation land is on the true right of the stream.

14. Mackenzie Stream

Tramping track marked to public conservation land boundary
15 minutes to public conservation land, 660 m
The public conservation land is on the true left of the stream; a steep climb following deer trails gives access to easier ground following the boundary fence. Access up the stream is impeded after about 1.5 km by a double waterfall.
Fit and experienced trampers can reach Coal Hill and the mountain tops to the south. There are three public access easements into the area. Coal Hill (1617 m) at the northern end is the highest point on the Tara Haoa Range.

15. **Raules Gully** Tramping track marked to public conservation land boundary
40 minutes to public conservation land, 1 km
The marked public access easement follows Raules Gully from the Rangitata Gorge Road. The route is marked up the stream bed, before heading steeply up on the true left to the public conservation land.

16. **Boundary Stream** Tramping track marked to public conservation land boundary
1 hour to public conservation land, 2 km
The public access easement is marked from a car park just to the south of Rangitata Gorge Road Bridge. The route crosses the stream before gaining a vehicle track on the true left; this track is then followed up stream to the public conservation land.

17. **Coal Hill** Tramping track marked to public conservation land boundary
3 hours to summit, 3 km
The public access easement, which is marked from the Rangitata Gorge Road, crosses paddocks before climbing steeply up the eastern face of Coal Hill to public conservation land.

On Little Mt Peel/Huatekerekere. 
*Photo: G Iles*

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**Takata whenua – first people of the land**

*Te ārai Te Uru* set sail from Tauranga in *Te Ika a Maui* (North Island) on a trading trip. Along the Canterbury coast the waka started listing and became waterlogged. At the Waitaki rivermouth a number of crew were jettisoned to lighten the load. When the waka hit Waianakarua, they threw off *te kai hinaki* (food baskets) which became the Moeraki boulders. The waka finally ran onto *Te Taki o Maru* / the reef of Maru and started to break up. At low tide you can see the shape of *Te ārai Te Uru* in the rocks of the reef. Most of the crew got to shore safely; those that did not were burnt and their ashes hidden. The crew started the whakapapa (genealogy) of the landscape, naming it as they walked the land.

Tarahaoa and Huatekerekere were part of the crew. When they walked through this part of the country they decided to stay and live in the Rangitata rohe (region). They had two children Aroarokaihe and Kirikirikatata and, as was customary then, these high-born children married and had four children.

When Tarahaoa and Huatekerekere died they were turned into mountains and became Mt Peel and Little Mt Peel (below); their tamariki (children) are the mighty tōtara of Peel Forest and their mokopuna (grandchildren) are the Four Peaks.
Then came the Europeans

The first European to explore the foothills was Charles Torlesse. He was sent to report on the land south of the Rakaia River in 1849, in the hope of discovering coal. He called the forest ‘Gurdon Forest’. This was changed to Peel Forest as a memorial to Sir Robert Peel, an English politician most famous for establishing the Metropolitan Police Force – London policemen became known as ‘Peelers’ or ‘Bobbies’ after their founder.

In 1853 Francis Jollie was granted licence for his Peel Forest run east of the forest. He built the homestead where it stills stands on the edge of the forest, as far as possible from the sheepyards as his wife did not like the sound of bleating sheep. On Jollie’s death the run passed to Edward Cooper and later to George Dennistoun.

In 1855 John B A Acland and Charles G Tripp, in partnership, obtained a pastoral lease on the north-western side, with the Rangitata the northern boundary and Forest Creek the far western.

They set out to explore their new land, burning the vegetation to improve access and to allow grass-seed sowing in anticipation of the arrival of sheep the following year. Within 3 days they had burnt over 20,000 ha with a fire strip of 16 kilometres.

The bush in between the Jollie and the Acland/Tripp runs was not allocated, but the settlers took timber from the edges for their requirements. By 1860 Surveyor Cass was shocked to see how many big trees had been removed.

This destruction gained momentum in 1864 when 186 hectares of bush were freeholded. In 1865 a period of milling that extended out to 1908 began. Kahikatea was the first timber tree extensively targeted and was used mainly for building. Mataï was used as a secondary building timber and tōtara as fencing material.

Initially milling was done by pit sawing. The pit-saw men worked with long cross-cut saws felling the tree. They then had to dig the pit, cut the huge trunk into workable lengths and manoeuvre them into position over the pit, ready for cutting lengthwise into planks. Pit sawing was soon superseded by mechanical means, with at least five mills operating at various times. Both Te Wanahu and Clarke Flat were sawmill sites.

Bullock teams pulled logs to the pit sites for many years. Later steam-driven saws arrived and steam engines and winches took over from the bullock teams. Once tramways into the bush were set up, hauling out logs became much easier. The remains of a bush tramway route can be seen running alongside the track from Te Wanahu to Big Tree.

In 1881 a visiting British MP, Arthur Mills (John Acland’s brother-in-law), was so horrified by the forest devastation he bought 16 hectares of uncut forest. On his death this became the embryo of the present Peel Forest Park. This forest remnant of outstanding trees is at the start of the Fern Walk.
The flora and fauna of Peel Forest Park are rich and abundant. The three largest trees in Peel Forest belong to the family Podocarpaceae, a very ancient family going back in time more than 100 million years. The three large trees are kahikatea (white pine), tōtara, and mataī (black pine).

Peel Forest has a graduation of vegetation from mature forest to exposed tussock and herb-field communities. The forest, predominately podocarp and broadleaf rain forest, covers the mountain slopes to about 360 metres. Most of the big trees – lowland tōtara, kahikatea and mataī – had been felled by 1908.

Some have survived and ancient giants can been seen along Fern Walk and at Dennistoun Bush.
Smaller trees include broadleaf/kāpuka, tree fuchsia/kōtukutuku, cabbage tree/ti kōuka, kōwhai, southern rātā and pōkākā.
Visit in spring and summer for a continuous array of beautiful flowering shrubs. Southern kōwhai (*Sophora microphylla*) enjoys the conditions on the northern slopes overlooking the Rangitata River.

The moist climate is good for the growth of podocarp forest and ideal for ferns; 36% of all the native ferns growing in New Zealand can be found in the area.
... and native animals

Peel Forest terrain and vegetation is diverse and supports a wide variety of wildlife.

At least ten species of native bird occur in the forest including bellbird/korimako, silvereye/tauhou, tomtit/miromiro, rifleman/tītitipounamu, grey warbler/riroriro, kererū/native wood pigeon, fantail/pīwakawaka, silvereye/tauhou, shining cuckoo/pīpīwharauroa and long-tailed cuckoo/koekoeā. You may see New Zealand pipits/pīhoihoi and the New Zealand falcon/kārearea above the bushline.

In contrast, the Rangitata riverbed provides habitat for a number of waders and coastal visitors such as the black-billed gull/tarāpuka and the pied oystercatcher/tōrea.

Look carefully for native spiders and beetles. Take a night stroll and look for wētā – there are cave, ground and tree wētā.

One interesting inhabitant is peripatus (below), also called the walking worm or velvet worm. These small animals are considered to be the evolutionary link between segmented worms and insects, unchanged in form over some 570 million years. You may find peripatus in moist places such as the forest floor and in rotting logs. They are nocturnal and carnivorous, feeding on small live insects like springtails and also crustaceans and carcasses of larger insects.

Jewelled gecko male... and female. Photos: D Busbridge

Look out for lizards/mokomoko like the jewelled gecko in the forest and shrublands, and McCann’s skink in more open dry and rocky places.
1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable ground
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimise the effects of fire
6. Respect wildlife and farm animals
7. Be considerate of others

**Check, Clean, Dry**

Stop the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests.

Remember to Check, Clean, Dry all items before entering, and when moving between, waterways.

**Further information**

For additional information or to report sightings of conservation interest, contact:

Department of Conservation
Raukapuka/Geraldine Office
13-15 North Terrace
Geraldine 7930
Phone: (03) 693 1010

www.doc.govt.nz

**Emergency dial 111**