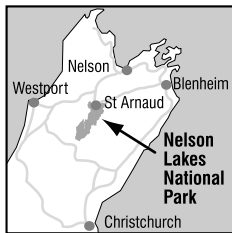


# South Marlborough



## Rainbow Road and the Upper Wairau Valley



Locality

### Introduction

The Rainbow Road is a 'wilderness driving' experience across private land between St Arnaud and Hanmer Springs. It is remarkable for the transition from craggy, beech-covered mountains to flowing tussock lands, where vast screes spill from ridge crest to valley floor in a lonely landscape.

Passes in the Upper Wairau Valley were part of overland routes used by Maori. Later, high country graziers moving mobs of sheep between Canterbury and Nelson/Marlborough built a chain of cob houses. The road was built in the 1950s when the electricity pylons were built through this area to supply electricity to the Nelson and Buller regions.

### How to get there

St Arnaud is the main gateway to the Upper Wairau Valley, 85 km from Nelson or 131 km from Picton via Blenheim. Access is also possible from Hanmer Springs, 134 km north of Christchurch.

### Accommodation

Along the Rainbow Road a campsite is provided on private land at Coldwater Creek and DOC campsites at Lake Sedgemere and Lake Tennyson, with toilets and a water supply. Connors Creek Hut (6 bunks), Island Gully Hut (4 bunks) and Sedgemere Sleepout (6 bunks) are within easy walking distance of the road.

In the back country, huts provide a base for hunters and climbers, and stopping points for trampers. Please purchase Back Country Hut Tickets before your trip.

### The Rainbow Road

The Rainbow Road connects St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs via Rainbow and Molesworth Stations. Rainbow Station is leasehold land and access is with the consent of the station owner. The road is open from 27 December 2009 to 5 pm Monday 5 April 2010. A \$25 toll per vehicle (\$15 motorbikes, gold coin for trampers/mountain or push bikes) is collected at the Old Rainbow Homestead. A return trip costs \$50. Outside the open period there are locked gates just beyond Rainbow Ski Area turn-off and just before Coldwater Creek campsite (heading south). Please call Star Holdings Ltd phone (03) 545 7600 to arrange access through the station to 4WD, tramp, hunt, fish or mountain bike outside the open period.

For your safety we advise that the Rainbow Road is a wilderness driving experience. Drivers need to be self-sufficient and prepared for sudden changes in weather. You drive at your own risk. The road is only suitable for high-clearance 4WD vehicles; there is no cell phone coverage, and breakdown services may not operate on the private road. Unseasonal snows, slips or elevated fire risk may close the road without notice. The 112 km journey takes at least three hours. The guide below starts at St Arnaud, distances in brackets are for the reverse journey.

#### St Arnaud, 0 km (112 km)

This is the front door of Nelson Lakes National Park. A network of short walks allows exploration of the glacial landforms, forests and mountains around Lake Rototoi. There is also a general store which sells petrol and diesel, and a range of accommodation.

#### Rainbow Road turn-off, 9 km (103 km)

#### Rainbow Station turn-off, 12 km (100 km)

A short side road leads to the homestead where hunting permission can be obtained. Please leave the gates as you find them.

#### Rainbow Ski Area turn-off, 26 km (86 km)

#### Old Rainbow Homestead toll gate, 36 km (76 km)

#### Coldwater Creek camping area, 46 km (66 km)

Beyond the toll gate the Rainbow experience really begins. The road fords several streams, crosses the Wairau on a bridge and then enters Hell's Gate, a narrow gorge. Coldwater Creek is just above the gorge.

#### Lake Sedgemere, 57 km (55 km)

Soon after Coldwater Creek the road crosses the Wairau and arrives at the boundary between Rainbow and Molesworth stations. The road enters that classic South Island landscape of rounded, tawny-coloured hills, scrawny matagouri, long screes and azure skies. The road re-crosses the Wairau River and a short side-road leads to Sedgemere Sleepout (standard hut, 6 bunks). From the car park is a route to a viewpoint over several beautiful lakes supporting fragile wetland communities.

Some of the place names here—Turk Ridge, Mt Balaclava, Crimea Range—date the area's European exploration to the Crimean war in the 1850s.

#### Island Saddle, 68 km (44 km)

At 1347 metres above sea level, this is the highest point on the Rainbow Road. It is also the watershed between the Wairau and Clarence rivers, and a boundary between Marlborough and Canterbury.

#### Lake Tennyson, 73 km (39 km)

This scenic gem was formed behind a glacier-deposited dam of rubble. The lake shore is a lovely place for a picnic. To the west is Mt Una (2301 m), highest point in the Spenser Range. Many of the peaks in this range are named after women, all characters in Edmund Spenser's classic 17<sup>th</sup> century poem "The Fairie Queene". It is 1.5 km from the road to the lake.

#### Molesworth turn-off, 104 km (8 km)

The Molesworth Experience, a 191 km drive from Hanmer to Blenheim leaves the Rainbow Road here. The road is open between 28 December and 1 April each year. There is a separate DOC brochure available for this area.

#### Hanmer Springs (via Jacks Pass Road), 112 km (0 km)

This resort town, famed for its hot springs, has all the facilities travellers will need: accommodation, eating places, information, fuel and activities.

### In the back country

For the experienced back country traveller, options for trips in the upper Wairau are only limited by imagination! Good fitness and self reliance are required as there are few bridges or tracks; most travel is along marked or unmarked routes.

#### Rainbow Ski Area (Six Mile Creek basin)

Outside of the ski season, the 8 km skifield road is closed for vehicle access, but open for walking. Alpine flowers, tarns and views are the summer attractions. A ridge traverse to St Arnaud via Parachute Rocks will take 5–7 hours.

#### Lees Creek

Cross the Wairau River by swingbridge and follow a marked route into Lees Creek. The narrow valley gives no hint of the beautiful open flats further upstream where Lees Creek Hut (4 bunks) sits. High passes allow for trips over the Raglan Range. The road toll for Lees Creek access is half the full cost.

#### Hamilton River

A marked route starts 100 m past the road bridge over the Hamilton River, reaching the bush edge in about



### NEW ZEALAND environmental CARE CODE

Protect plants  
and animals

Remove rubbish

Bury toilet waste

Keep streams  
and lakes clean

Take care with fires

Camp carefully

Keep to the track

Consider others

Respect our cultural  
heritage

Enjoy your visit

Toitu te whenua  
(Leave the land  
undisturbed)

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Nelson/Marlborough Conservancy  
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New Zealand Government



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

#### Walking times from the road:

Rainbow Ski Area	2h
Lees Creek Hut	3h 30min
Connor's Creek Hut	20min
Rainbow Hut	2h 30min
Paske Hut	6h
Begley Hut	6h
Tarndale Lakes	30min
Island Gully Hut	5min
Sedgemere Sleepout	1min

1 hour 30 minutes. The eastern pass gives the quickest route to Begley Hut (8 bunks).

#### Connors Creek

Connors Creek Hut (6 bunks) is about 1 km from the Rainbow Road at the end of a 4WD track. A marked route climbs steadily to the bushline in about 3 hours. A saddle above leads over to Begley Hut (8 bunks).

#### The Rainbow Valley

A route up the valley starts under the pylons, just before the Wairau River bridge. After about 2 km it crosses the Rainbow and follows a 4WD track up the true right bank to Rainbow Hut, nestled in a patch of willow trees just before a gorge. Rainbow Hut is owned by Rainbow Station and requires their permission to use.

Beyond the gorge are plenty of options for exploring remote mountains and the high passes leading to the Sabine and Travers Valleys. There are 6-bunk huts in the Paske and Begley Valleys.

### Other activities

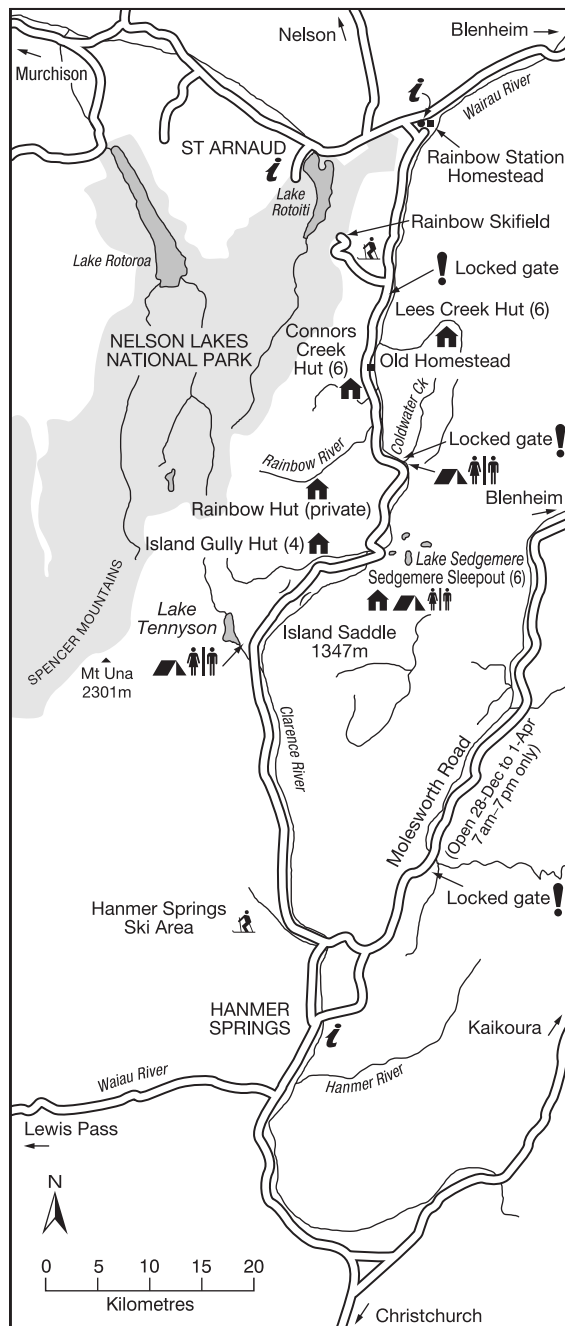
#### Hunting

Deer and chamois are the main game animals. Hunters each require permits from **both** the Department of Conservation and Rainbow Station.

This map is a guide only. For more information consult the following Topo50 maps:

- BR25 Tophouse
- BS24 Mount Robert
- BS25 Severn
- BT24 Ada Flat

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**  
Report any safety hazards or conservation emergencies  
For fire and search and rescue call 111



#### Mountain-biking

Permission is required for mountain bike access. Touring cyclists with gear should allow two days to ride from St Arnaud to Hanmer Springs.

#### Skiing

Rainbow Ski Area generally opens from July to September each year. For more information visit [www.skirainbow.co.nz](http://www.skirainbow.co.nz). Information on Hanmer Springs Ski Area can be found on [www.skihanmer.co.nz](http://www.skihanmer.co.nz). There is scope for ski touring to the north and south in basins and along the St Arnaud Range.

#### Kayaking

The Wairau is well suited for less experienced kayakers.

#### Climbing

Fine peaks ring the Rainbow Valley, providing enjoyable climbing in summer and challenging winter conditions for the adventurous.

#### Fishing

The upper Wairau waterways provide excellent trout fishing. The fishing season is from 1 October to the end of April. Each angler must carry a Fish and Game New Zealand licence.

### Please remember

#### Back-country safety

Snow and freezing conditions can occur at any time of the year and flooded rivers may extend your trip. Back-country travellers should have adequate food, equipment and experience for their planned trip, and good avalanche awareness. Remember your safety is your responsibility. To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call **DOC HOTline 0800 362 468**.

#### Road safety

Rain can make the many unbridged streams along the Rainbow Road impassable. There are no petrol stations, telephones or mobile telephone coverage for most of the journey. Check your spare tyre. On-coming traffic is difficult to see and stock wander freely—please drive carefully.

#### Private land

The floors of the Wairau, Rainbow and Paske Valleys are farmed. Leave gates as you find them and respect stock and property.

#### Domestic animals

Please leave dogs and domestic pets at home. Hunting dogs and horses may be taken on to private land with permission from Rainbow Station.

#### Fire

Fire is a major threat to vegetation in this area. We recommend portable cookers are used.

### To find out more

For further information visit the DOC website [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) or contact:

#### Department of Conservation

Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre  
PO Box 55, St Arnaud 7053  
Ph: (03) 521 1806 Fax: (03) 521 1896  
Email: [nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz)

#### Department of Conservation

Nelson Regional Visitor Centre  
Millers Acre/Taha o te Awa  
79 Trafalgar Street, Nelson 7010  
PO Box 375, Nelson 7040  
Ph: (03) 546 9339  
Email: [nelsonvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nelsonvc@doc.govt.nz)

#### Hurunui i-SITE

Amuri Avenue, Hanmer Springs 7334  
Ph: (03) 315 7128 Fax: (03) 315 7658

For hunting permission contact the Department of Conservation in St Arnaud and:

#### Rainbow Station (Star Holdings Ltd)

PO Box 1242, Nelson 7040  
Ph: (03) 545 7600 Fax: (03) 545 7601