

Nelson Lakes National Park

visitor information



Welcome

Nelson Lakes National Park is situated in the northernmost ranges of the Southern Alps. Although best known for its lakes, both large and small, this 101,733 hectare park offers tranquil beech forest, craggy mountains, clear streams, open tussock lands and river-edge clearings.

During the last Ice Age, massive glaciers gouged out troughs in the mountainous headwaters of the Buller River. Today these troughs are filled by Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa, which are the largest lakes in the area.

The Department of Conservation looks after the park and provides tracks and walks, picnic areas, campsites and huts to help you enjoy and explore it. Nelson Lakes retains a semi-wilderness feeling with uncrowded tracks and huts, perfect for exploration and relaxation.

How to get here

Private transport

The gateway to Nelson Lakes National Park is St Arnaud, 1 hour 30 minutes from Blenheim or Nelson, on sealed roads all the way. Allow a further 30 minutes if travelling from Picton.

St Arnaud is about 5 hours from Christchurch or 2 hours 30 minutes from Westport.

To visit Lake Rotoroa, turn off State Highway 6 at Gowan Bridge. An 11 km sealed side road takes you up the Gowan valley to the lake.



Public transport

Nelson Lakes Shuttles operates an on demand shuttle service to and from St Arnaud.

Services for visitors

Visitor Centre

DOC's Visitor Centre at St Arnaud is open daily from 8 AM to 4:30 PM (winter weekends 9 AM to 4 PM). It is closed on Christmas Day.

Services include: interpretation of the national park, information, maps, hut tickets, campground and hut bookings, fishing licences, hunting permits, weather information and bag storage.

Accommodation

St Arnaud has a hotel, motels, backpackers, and rental baches (holiday homes). There are two campgrounds:

- **Kerr Bay** has powered and tent sites, flush toilets, cooking shelter with gas and a dump station. In summer (mid December to Easter) the campground offers hot showers, a washing machine and a dryer. Bookings are essential in summer.
- **West Bay** has two camping areas, each with tent sites, flush toilets, cold showers and a cooking shelter. West Bay is open mid December to March, and over Easter. Bookings are essential.

See DOC's factsheet 'Kerr Bay and West Bay camps' for details.

Lake Rotoroa has a self-registration camping area. Bed and breakfast and lodge accommodation is also available.

Murchison is well-served by camping grounds, motels and hotels.

Transport

Water taxis operate on demand at Lake Rotoiti and Lake Rotoroa. A shuttle bus runs year-round from St Arnaud to all entry points of the park (on demand).

Other services

A shop at St Arnaud (open 7 days a week) provides tramping supplies, groceries, petrol, EPIRB (emergency locator beacon) hire, and Wi-Fi. Lake Rotoroa does not have a shop.

Fishing guides are available at St Arnaud, Rotoroa and Murchison.

Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project

Although native flora and fauna are protected in the park, introduced pests are a threat. Native species, such as roa/great spotted kiwi, tīeke/saddleback and mohua/yellowhead, have disappeared from the region. Others are in decline, including kea, kākā, rifleman, gecko and the giant land snail.

The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project is one of six 'mainland island' projects established by DOC. From Kerr Bay, the project extends south along the eastern lake shore and up to the St Arnaud Range. Most of the project's area can be seen from the viewpoint of Mount Robert Car Park.

With the assistance of a voluntary group, the Friends of Rotoiti, DOC manages over 5,000 hectares of native honeydew beech forest. These forests can support large numbers of native birds because the honeydew scale insect provides an energy source for nectar-feeding birds, and 'masting' (mass seed production that occurs every 2-6 years) provides food for seed-eating birds.

Reducing the numbers of introduced pests such as possums, stoats, ferrets, weasels, rats, mice, wild cats and wasps has allowed native species to recover. Roa have recently been returned to the area with the hope that they will be able to build a viable population.

Long finned eels are protected in lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa - you may see them congregating at the jetties. They grow very slowly in the cold water so females may be up to 90 years old before they migrate back to Tonga for breeding.

Volunteering

The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project has volunteer rangers from far and wide, who help check and clear traps, monitor species, and assist with kiwi health checks.

During the summer there are also volunteer opportunities for hut wardens and camp hosts in the Nelson Lakes National Park.

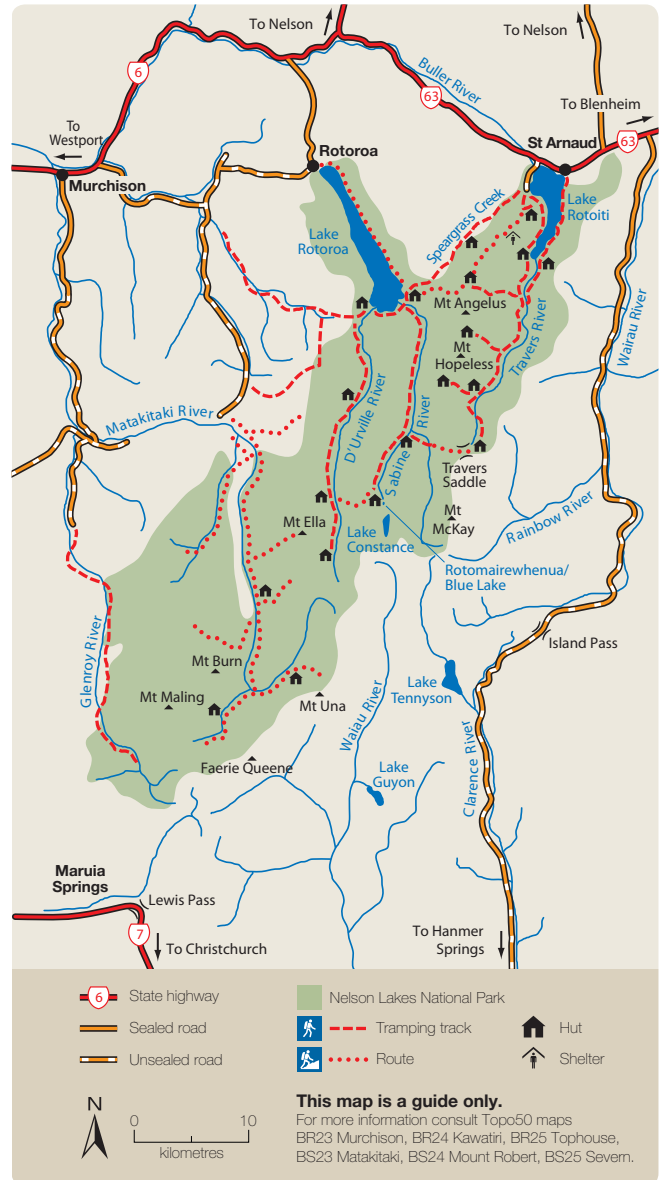
Information and application forms for all positions are available at www.doc.govt.nz

What to do

Walking

There are a variety of walks and tracks to suit all levels of fitness and experience, from gentle lakeside strolls to steep climbs and backcountry tramping.

See DOC's 'Walks in Nelson Lakes National Park' brochure for details.



Track Grades



Walking track

Gentle walking from a few minutes to a day.



Tramping track

Mostly unformed but with track directional markers, poles or cairns. Bankcountry skills and experience required.



Route

Unformed, suitable only for people with high-level backcountry skills and experience.



St Arnaud walks

A variety of short and long walks extend into the park from the village. Your choice may be a gentle, lake-edge stroll on the Brunner Peninsula Nature Walk or a climb to view the spectacular panorama from the Mt Robert Circuit or the St Arnaud Range. All walks are sign-posted and well marked. Firm footwear and warm waterproof clothing is recommended.

Lake Rotoroa

A couple of walks at this picturesque lake explore the tall forests and the lake shore.

Travers-Sabine circuit

This 80 km circuit reaches deep into the national park among 2,000 m high mountains, remote lakes and fields of tussock. A highlight of the journey is the alpine pass Travers Saddle (1,780 m above sea level).

This tramping track is well-marked, with bridges over most streams. There are seven huts along the way. Sturdy boots and a good standard of fitness are recommended. Warm, waterproof clothing is essential. Rotomairewhenua/Blue Lake, the 'clearest freshwater lake in the world', is a popular side trip. Some side trips are classified as routes.

See DOC's 'Travers-Sabine Circuit' brochure for details.

Robert Ridge/Lake Angelus

Sharp ridges contrast with gentle alpine meadows, while in the Angelus Basin, the welcome refuge of Angelus Hut nestles beside mountain lakes. There are various access points and path choices.

See DOC's 'Angelus Hut Tracks and Routes' brochure for details.

Te Araroa (The Long Pathway)

The 113 km Waiau Pass section of Te Araroa connects the Travers-Sabine Circuit and Blue Lake track with the St James Walkway. This section requires good backcountry skills, maps and a high standard of gear. On the high passes in the park the snow may linger well into summer.

Matakitaki and Glenroy valleys

If you want a more remote experience, these valleys provide access to the far corners of the park.

Other activities

Hunting

Red deer and chamois are the main game animals; hunting them is encouraged. Each hunter requires a permit, available from: the Visitor Centre; any DOC office in the Nelson/Marlborough region; and the DOC website. Only high velocity, centre-fire rifles are permitted – no shotguns or .22 rifles.

Skiing and climbing

In good snow years excellent ski touring opportunities are available along the Robert Ridge. Adjacent to the National Park, Rainbow Ski Area offers a variety of slopes for ski enthusiasts.

The park has many peaks 2,000 metre or higher that offer a challenge to climbers.

On the water

Water sports are very popular on both lakes; jetties and launching ramps are provided. Kayaks and canoes can be hired from Rotoiti Water Taxis all year round. Power boating on the rivers in the park and water-skiing at Lake Rotoroa are not permitted. Jet skis and similar personal watercraft are prohibited on both lakes.

Swimming


Swimming is allowed in all of the park's lakes. During the summer there is a swimming raft located between the two jetties at Kerr Bay.

Four wheel driving

There are a number of 4WD options in the nearby areas: Beebys Knob, Porika Road, Rainbow Road.

Mountain biking

Close to the park are some excellent mountain bike tracks: Teetotal Flat with tracks available for all abilities, the Rainbow Road (112 km to Hanmer Springs), Porika Track, Braeburn Road and Beebys Knob.

 Mountain bikes are not permitted in the national park itself.

Plan and prepare

Your safety is your responsibility. Before you go, know the **Outdoor Safety Code** – 5 simple rules to help you stay safe:


1. **Plan your trip properly** – Ensure that you have a capable leader
2. **Tell someone** – Leave your trip details with a trusted contact and at www.adventuresmart.org.nz
3. **Check the weather** – Including www.avalanche.net.nz and the latest information on hazards and facilities before you start
4. **Know your limits** – Physical fitness and good equipment will make all the difference
5. **Take sufficient supplies** – Carry a sleeping bag, cooking utensils, sufficient food, raincoat, over trousers, gloves, hat and several layers of warm clothes


For specific warnings relating to the individual Nelson Lakes National Park tracks, see the alerts on the DOC website or in the Visitor Centre.


- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable ground
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimise the effects of fire
- Respect wildlife and farm animals
- Be considerate of others




Please remember

 **Domestic animals:** Please leave your pets at home when visiting the park – no domestic animals are allowed.

 **Rubbish:** Facilities are only provided for campers. There are none around St Arnaud village and in the backcountry. Please pack out what you pack in.

 **Water:** Please protect the park's clean waters. Use toilets where provided and keep soap out of rivers and lakes.

 **Huts:** A Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Ticket is required to stay overnight in the park huts. The main huts are serviced (three standard/one serviced hut ticket). They are equipped with mattresses and heating; take your own cooker and utensils. Most of the D'Urville and Matakaitaki valley huts, and the high huts, are standard (one standard ticket).

From late November to 30 April bookings are essential for Angelus Hut and Campsite.

Sandflies: There are sandflies in the park all year, particularly during the summer. To minimise the chance of bites, cover up and apply good quality insect repellent to exposed skin.

Wasps: Wasps are particularly common from December until April. Carry antihistamine if you are allergic to their stings.

Further information

We hope you enjoy your trip to Nelson Lakes National Park. For more information visit the DOC website www.doc.govt.nz or contact:

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DOC HOTline
0800 362 468

**Report any safety hazards
or conservation emergencies**
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111