

NELSON/TASMAN

# Walks in Nelson Lakes National Park

| Nelson Lakes National Park



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

## Contents

Safety information	4
St. Arnaud and Lake Rotoiti	8
Short walks around St. Arnaud and Lake Rotoiti	10
Day walks around St. Arnaud and Lake Rotoiti	16
Lake Rotoroa	22
Walks around Lake Rotoroa	24



Lake Rotoiti. Photo: Kathrin and Stefan Marks

Nau mai, haere mai,

welcome to

## Nelson Lakes National Park

This alpine area sits at the northern limit of Kā Tiritiri o te Moana / the Southern Alps, where ancient glaciers have shaped the dramatic landscape, leaving behind loose scree slopes, tarns and hanging U-shaped valleys.

The park contains two major lakes, five extensive valley systems and a series of mountain ranges measuring up to 2,340 m high. The Alpine Fault, which runs the length of Te Waipounamu / the South Island, cuts through the northern boundary of the park, crossing Lake Rotoiti, the head of Lake Rotoroa and then continuing down the Wairau Valley.

Beech forests cover the mountain slopes up to 1,400 m, where they give way to snow tussocks and alpine herbs. The beech forests are rich in honeydew, which provides food for kākāriki / parakeets, kākā, tūi and korimako / bellbirds.

The gateway to the park is St. Arnaud, a small and picturesque alpine village on the northern shores of Lake Rotoiti. From St. Arnaud, a network of tracks enables you to explore the lake edge, the park's glacial features and tranquil beech forests.

A 40 min drive from St. Arnaud along State Highways 63 and 6 takes you to Lake Rotoroa, the largest lake in the park. Here, the forest is a mix of beech and podocarp, with stands of kahikatea.

The park offers both day and short walks, making it an ideal place for visitors of all ages and abilities to explore. The walks are well signposted and graded, with bridges across most streams and rivers.

### Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre

The visitor centre is well worth a visit before setting out to explore the park. Managed by the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC), it is located in the village of St. Arnaud, off State Highway 63. The centre is filled with interesting information and visual displays of the area's history, geology and wildlife. It also offers distress beacon hire, up-to-date weather forecasts, information on track conditions, and a retail shop selling mementos, backcountry food, t-shirts, books and other outdoor equipment.

## Safety information



### Weather

Nelson Lakes National Park is in an alpine area. Freezing conditions can occur at any time of year. Be prepared with warm and waterproof clothing.



### Water quality

Water supplies in the Travers and Sabine valleys are generally of high quality, but this cannot always be guaranteed. You may wish to consider boiling, filtering or treating drinking water.

Water from the huts must be boiled before use. Be aware that there is no water source on Robert Ridge, so you will need to bring your own water.



### Fragile environment

Although it appears harsh, the alpine environment is very fragile.

- Do not wash utensils or use soap in the lakes – use the hut facilities.
- Use firewood at the huts sparingly – the fireplace is only for heating.
- Use the toilet facilities provided.



### Wasps

Wasps are a known hazard and are particularly common from December until April. Carry antihistamines if you are allergic to their stings.



### Sandflies

There are sandflies in the park all year round, but they are particularly common during the summer (December–March). To minimise the chance of bites, cover up and apply good quality insect repellent to exposed skin. The visitor centre has sandfly repellent for sale.



### Cooking

No cooking facilities are provided in the huts. All visitors should carry portable cookers and fuel.



### Bikes

Bicycles are not permitted on any day walk tracks in Nelson Lakes National Park. More information on mountain biking in the area is available at the visitor centre.



### Drones

Drones are not permitted in Nelson Lakes National Park.



### Dogs

Dogs and other domestic animals are prohibited in Nelson Lakes National Park. Dog owners convicted of bringing a dog into the park face a maximum fine of up to \$800 under the National Parks Act 1980.



### Rubbish

No rubbish or recycling facilities are provided in the park, including at campsites. Take all rubbish away with you.



### Fishing

Eels are fully protected in the park's lakes and rivers – fishing for them is not permitted.

Trout fishing is only permitted in the rivers in the park between 1 October and 30 April the following year. You must have a licence from Fish and Game – visit [fishandgame.org.nz](http://fishandgame.org.nz).



### Camping

Bookings are required at Kerr Bay Campsite and West Bay Campsite all year round. To book, visit [doc.govt.nz/online-bookings](http://doc.govt.nz/online-bookings). For payment information about Teetotal, Kawatiri and Lake Rotoroa Campsites, visit the relevant campsite page on [doc.govt.nz](http://doc.govt.nz).



Lake Rotoiti. Photo: Gabi Czoma

## Track grades

Tracks are developed to different standards to cater for a variety of experiences. Make sure you choose a track that matches your skills and level of fitness.



**Wheelchair-accessible short walk:** Even, well-formed track suitable for people of all abilities, wheelchairs and baby buggies.



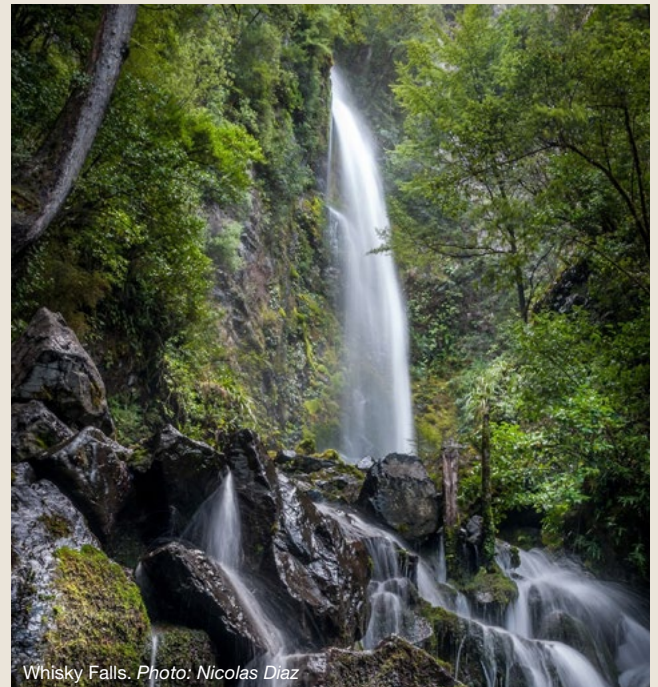
**Easy short walk:** Well-formed track; easy walking for up to an hour.



**Easy to intermediate walking track:** Mostly well-formed track; easy to moderate walking for up to a day.



**Advanced tramping track:** Mostly unformed track with steep, rough or muddy sections; has directional markers, poles or rock cairns.



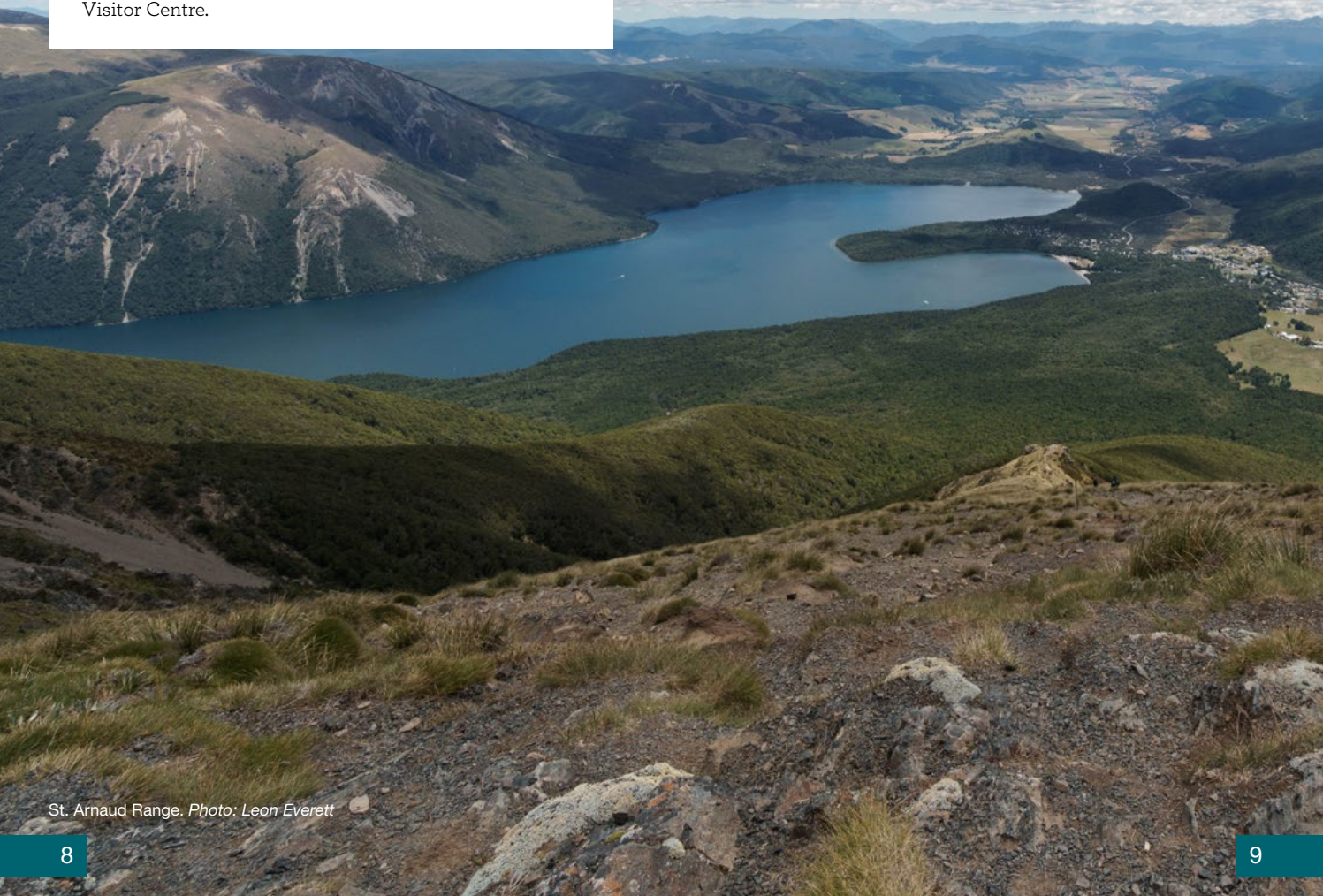
Whisky Falls. Photo: Nicolas Diaz

## St. Arnaud and Lake Rotoiti

### Getting there

**Private transport:** St. Arnaud is 1 hr 30 min from Nelson or Blenheim, 2 hr from Westport and 5 hr from Christchurch.

**Public transport:** There is no scheduled bus service to St. Arnaud. A water taxi operates on the lake all year round. For more information, visit the Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre.



## Short walks around St. Arnaud

### and Lake Rotoiti



## 1 Bellbird Walk

15 min / 400 m loop

This short walk begins at the car park near the east jetty at Kerr Bay and provides an introduction to the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project area.

The large tawhairaunui / red beech trees that dominate this sheltered corner of the lake attract nectar-feeding birds, such as tūi and korimako. Listen out for their enchanting calls as you walk and keep an eye out for other insect-eating forest birds, such as pīwakawaka, miromiro/tomtits and kakaruai/robins. The deciduous kōtukutuku / tree fuchsia, which is rare in much of the forest due to browsing by possums, may be seen in several places along this walk.

The track travels through a small wetland area where sedges, rushes, ferns and mosses thrive. This type of wetland is common in the park, having formed in the wake of receding glaciers, where pockets of ice and moraine rubble settled in glacial hollows.



You may see toxic bait stations and/or traps along the track. Do not touch these as they may contain poison or cause injury.

## The creation of Lake Rotoiti

Lake Rotoiti was formed by the activity of the Travers glacier, which last occupied the valley between 20,000 and 12,000 years ago. A succession of glaciers carved out the valley floor creating a deep depression that the lake now occupies. The continuing erosion of the surrounding mountains is slowly filling the lake with sediment brought down by rivers and streams. This slow yet constant erosion will eventually see the mountains levelled and the lake filled.

Pīwakawaka/fantail.  
Photo: andrewwalmsleyphotography.com

Lake Rotoiti. Photo: Cornelia Vervoorn

## 2 Honeydew Walk

45 min / 1.7 km loop

This walk begins as an offshoot of the Bellbird Walk, which starts at the car park near the east jetty at Kerr Bay. There are several information panels along this walk providing information on the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project.

The blackened trunks and branches of the red and mountain beech trees along the walk are caused by scale insects that bury themselves within the bark of the trees. Scale insects feed on the sugar-rich sapwood of the trees and excrete any excess sugar as liquid drops, known as honeydew. The black sooty mould that coats these trees, without harming them, thrives on the sticky honeydew. Many nectar-feeding birds, insects and lizards rely heavily on collecting these nutritious honeydew droplets for food.

Korimako and tūi are common in this area, and you may see toutouwai, miromiro and pīwakawaka. You may also glimpse kākā or hear kākārīki chattering as they fly through the canopy.

This well-maintained track is suitable for wheelchairs (although assistance may be needed on steeper sections).

## 3 Loop Track

1 hr 30 min / 4.5 km loop

Start the track by taking the Bellbird Walk and Honeydew Walk before turning left to follow the St. Arnaud Range Track. From here, the track climbs a series of terraces to a junction at a creek and then loops back down to the lake shore and joins the Lakehead Track, which returns to the car park.

Three species of beech mistletoes are present along the track – you may see their red and yellow flowers in December/January. This is testament to the effectiveness of the possum control work being carried out in the recovery project area.

Kākā.  
Photo: Leon Everett

## 4 Black Valley Walk

30 min / 800 m one way

This short walk starts near Kerr Bay Campsite and follows the Black Valley Stream through majestic beech forest. The walk runs parallel to State Highway 63 and has three entry/exit points along the way that lead to the Lake Rotoiti Chapel and Bridge Street.

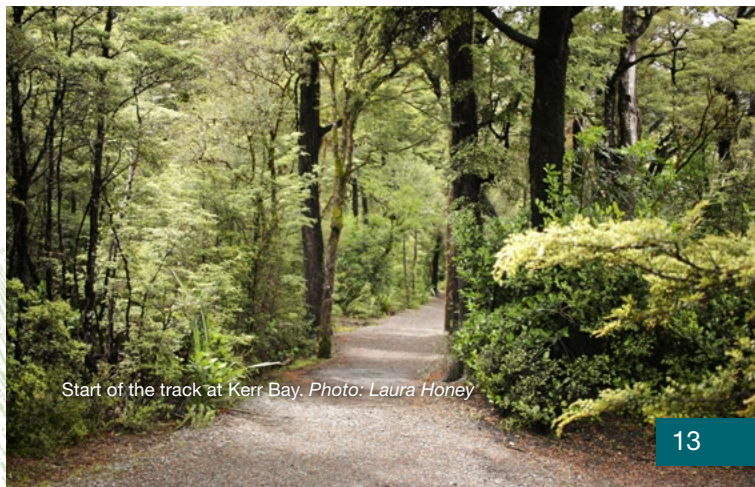
The Black Valley Stream has cut its way through deposits of rubble dumped by past glaciers. Evidence of this past glacial action has been exposed in the steep banks of the stream. Unlike typical river terrace deposits, which contain layers of gravel, sand and silt, the glacial deposits contain a mix of assorted rocks and sand.

Some trees along this walk are banded with metal strips that prevent possums from climbing them and destroying the beech mistletoes that grow in their branches.

## 5 Brunner Peninsula Nature Walk

1 hr / 3.7 km loop

Beginning on the western side of Kerr Bay below the visitor centre, this walk follows the peninsula around into West Bay, crossing the Alpine Fault twice. As you walk, interpretation panels share the area's history, and the track is lined with diverse native plants and multiple easy spots to reach the lake shore. For a longer walk (1 hr 30 min), continue to the next junction and turn right, returning to Kerr Bay via the Rotoiti Lodge and Ward Street. Otherwise, return via Baxter Street or Cotterell Place and View Road.



Start of the track at Kerr Bay. Photo: Laura Honey

## 6 Black Hill Walk

1 hr 30 min / 3.2 km return

Beginning at the Rotoiti Lodge, this walk climbs towards Black Hill through beech forest and stands of mānuka and kānuka. Black Hill is a 'roche moutonnée' (French for 'rock sheep'), a volcanic rock shaped by glacial ice flowing over it. There is a clearing near the top of the hill from which the St. Arnaud village and Big Bush Conservation Area can be viewed. From here, the track descends steeply to the highway and follows it back to Lodge Road. This walk can easily be linked to the Brunner Peninsula Nature Walk or Moraine Walk to make a half-day excursion.

## 7 Moraine Walk

1 hr 30 min / 4 km return

This walk begins at the junction of State Highway 63 and Lodge Road. It then winds around the base of Black Hill, over piles of moraine debris and past kettle ponds that were created when blocks of ice surrounded by glacial gravel melted away. The forest along this walk is predominantly mānuka and kānuka. The walk passes through the back of West Bay Campsite and on to the Buller River.

## 8 Anglers Walk

1 hr / 2.4 km one way

The walk begins by the bridge over the Buller River on Mount Robert Road, just below the river's lake source. The track follows the northern riverbank, offering several good trout fishing spots and passing through stands of mānuka and kānuka that line the Buller River. This kind of forest is usually a sign of earlier fire damage, highlighting the resilience and regeneration of beech forest.

This walk makes a pleasant extension to the Moraine Walk, and the circuit can be completed by returning along State Highway 63.



Mānuka. Photo: Jeremy Rolfe

## The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project

Introduced pests have ravaged the natural ecosystems of mainland Aotearoa New Zealand. Some native species, such as roa / great spotted kiwi, tīeke / South Island saddleback and mohua / yellowhead, have disappeared from the region, while others, including kākā, tītīpounamu / rifleman, geckos and *Powelliphanta* snails, are in decline.

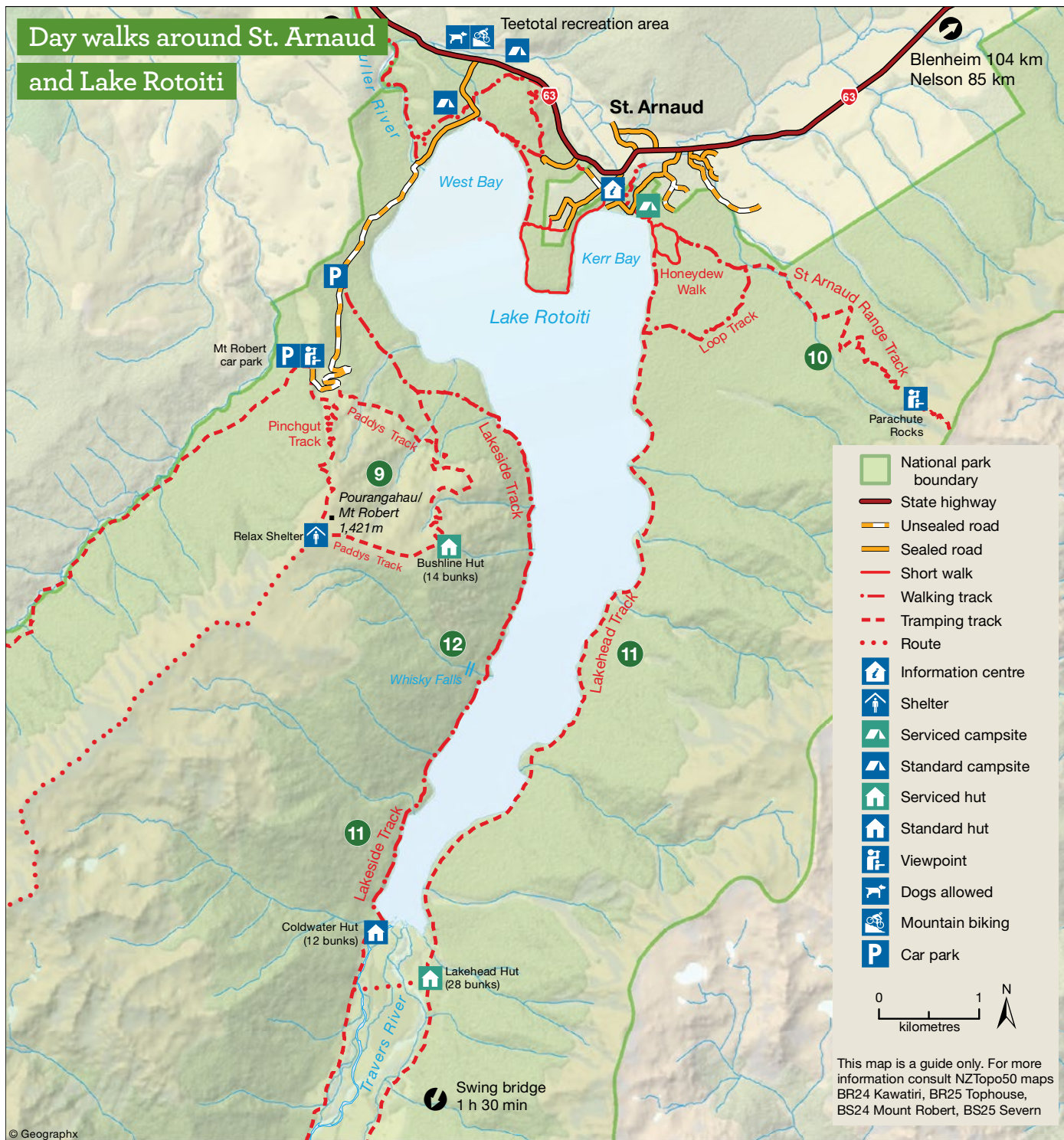
The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project is one of six mainland island projects established by DOC. The project area spans over 5,000 ha of honeydew beech forest and is managed with the help of a volunteer group, the Friends of Rotoiti. Through intensive trapping and the use of poisons, the numbers of pests such as possums, stoats, ferrets, weasels, rats, mice and wasps have been reduced and native species have recovered. In recent years, roa have been returned to the area with the hope that they will be able to build a viable population.

From Kerr Bay, the project area extends south along the eastern lake shore and up to St. Arnaud Range. Most of the project area can be seen from the viewpoint at Mount Robert car park.

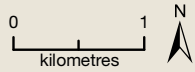


Juvenile tītīpounamu. Photo: Leon Everett

# Day walks around St. Arnaud and Lake Rotoiti



- National park boundary
- State highway
- Unsealed road
- Sealed road
- Short walk
- Walking track
- Tramping track
- Route
- Information centre
- Shelter
- Serviced campsite
- Standard campsite
- Serviced hut
- Standard hut
- Viewpoint
- Dogs allowed
- Mountain biking
- Car park



This map is a guide only. For more information consult NZTopo50 maps BR24 Kawatiri, BR25 Tophouse, BS24 Mount Robert, BS25 Severn

## 9 Mount Robert Circuit

4 hr / 9 km loop

This track loops around the northern face of Pourangahau / Mount Robert and offers spectacular views over Lake Rotoiti. Choose to start this walk from either the Pinchgut Track, which begins at Mount Robert car park, or from Paddys Track, which starts 100 m before the Pinchgut Track on Mount Robert Road.

The Pinchgut Track zigzags up the steep, bare face of Pourangahau on a well-graded track before entering beech forest. After climbing for 1 hr 30 min, you reach the treeline where forest gives way to alpine herbs and shrubs. From here, the track continues across the open ridge top and reaches Relax Shelter a few minutes on. At a junction just past this shelter, Paddys Track begins and heads east to Bushline Hut, which is a great place to stop for lunch.

Alternatively, you can begin the walk along Paddys Track, which cuts across the mountain's open face and crosses several scree-filled gullies before climbing to Bushline Hut. To complete the circuit, take the track across the ridge top to return to Mount Robert car park via the Pinchgut Track.

The slopes of Pourangahau, once held stable by beech forest, became active with erosion scarps and scree slopes from the loss of trees by fire in 1887. For many years afterwards, early settlers kept the northern face of Pourangahau free of trees by grazing sheep and occasionally using controlled burns to maintain the grass cover.

It could take many centuries for the forest cover to fully return. Fortunately, the beech forest on the upper Pinchgut Track escaped the ravages of fire and red tussock, home to native tussock butterflies, flourishes around Bushline Hut and across the ridge top.

## 10 St Arnaud Range Track

5 hr / 10 km return

Beginning in the eastern corner of Kerr Bay, this walk climbs steadily through beech forest to a height of over 1,650 m. The lower section of the walk crosses moraine terraces that were deposited by past glaciers. As you climb through the beech forest, notice how it adapts to suit the changing elevation.

The lower slopes are dominated by large tawhairaunui, with a healthy subcanopy of other species, such as kāpuka/broadleaf and putaputawētā/marbleleaf. Higher up, tawhai / silver beech and the hardy tawhairauriki / mountain beech take over – note how tawhairauriki becomes progressively stunted as you climb higher to the bushline.

Above the bushline at 1,400 m, there are spectacular views from Parachute Rocks, which gained their name from parachute-shaped gravel scree located just to the north.

As you travel higher up the mountain, trees give way to snow tussock, subalpine shrubs and alpine herbfields. In late spring and early summer, these herbs flower, creating a glorious display of gold and white.

The track keeps climbing up to the ridgeline, where you are rewarded by spectacular views of the surrounding area: east down the Wairau Valley, north to Mount Richmond Forest Park, west towards Kahurangi National Park and the Buller valley, and south to the rest of Nelson Lakes National Park.

The truncated spurs of St. Arnaud Range are evidence of further glacial action at higher elevations. Advancing rivers of ice cut off the ends of the ridges and, on the eastern side, gouged out the many small basins where tarns now fill the hollows left by the melting ice.

St. Arnaud Range. Photo: Kate Salmon

## 11 Lake Rotoiti Circuit

7 hr / 23 km loop via river crossing

10 hr 30 min / 31 km loop via swing bridge

As this is a long walk to complete in one day, you may choose to halve it by taking the water taxi to Lakehead Hut or Coldwater Hut and walking back to Kerr Bay.

Beginning in Kerr Bay, take the Lakehead Track around the eastern shore and reach Lakehead Hut after about 3 hr. If the Travers River is low, you can cross it opposite the hut to get to the main Travers Valley Track and Coldwater Hut. Otherwise, there is a swing bridge located 1 hr 30 min further up the Travers valley. From Lakehead Hut to Coldwater Hut via the swing bridge is 3 hr.

From Coldwater Hut, the Lakeside Track heads north along the western lake shore. An hour from the hut, it passes by a short side track to Whisky Falls. After another hour, the track turns away from the lake and climbs to Mount Robert Road. To complete the circuit, travel along the road to West Bay and follow the tracks to Kerr Bay for another hour.

For much of the walk, dense beech forest towers over a carpet of vivid green mosses and ferns. In summer, red rātā flowers provide a brilliant contrast to the predominant greenery. A rare stand of rimu trees in the area can be seen on the eastern shore, about two-thirds of the way to Lakehead Hut. On the western side of the lake, beech forest and regenerating forest of mānuka and kānuka clothe the lower slopes of Pourangahau.

The most numerous and vocal birds encountered along this walk are the nectar-feeding tūī and korimako. Keep an eye out for the native forest birds that feed on insects, such as the pīwakawaka, miromiro and toutouwai. If you are lucky, you may also hear or see the noisy kākā along the way.

Kakaruai / South Island robin  
Photo: [andrewwalmisleyphotography.com](http://andrewwalmisleyphotography.com)



## 12 Whisky Falls via Lakeside Track

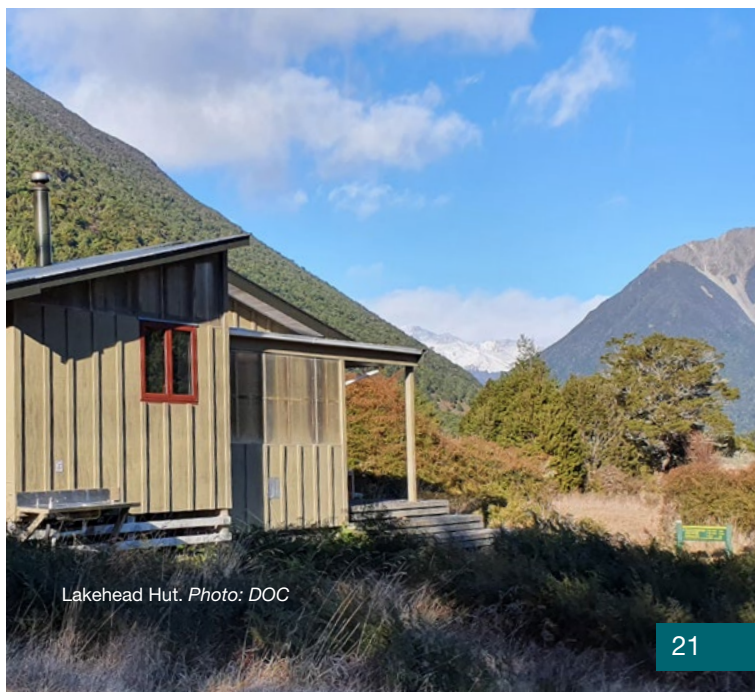
3 hr / 10.8 km return

From Mount Robert Road, take the Lakeside Track along the western shore of the lake. The track passes through mānuka, kānuka and beech forests, crossing several shingle fans and a wide unbridged stream before reaching Whisky Falls. Almost 40 m high, the falls provide a damp atmosphere for the thick walls of mosses and ferns. The remains of an illicit whisky still were found here in the 1880s, giving the falls their name.

When the Travers glacier filled the valley, its tributary glaciers entered from higher elevations. After the glaciers retreated and eventually disappeared, they left the side valleys hanging above the main valley. At first, most side valleys would have had dramatic vertical waterfalls, but these have since reduced in height as a result of erosion from the top of the falls and the deposition of fans at the bottom.

Evidence of this process was apparent as recently as 1995, when a large area of rock face fell from the hanging valley of Whisky Falls and plummeted to the base of the falls below.

As the Travers glacier retreated, it left the carved-out valley with a U-shaped landform, a typical feature of once-glaciated valleys.



Lakehead Hut. Photo: DOC

## Lake Rotoroa

### Getting there

**Private transport:** Lake Rotoroa is a 15–20 min drive from State Highway 6, 40 min from St. Arnaud, 2 hr from Nelson or Blenheim, 1 hr 30 min from Westport and 4 hr 30 min from Christchurch.

**Public transport:** There is no scheduled bus service to Lake Rotoroa. A water taxi operates on the lake all year round. For more information, visit the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre.

## Walks around Lake Rotoroa



Sealed road	Information	Car park
Unsealed road	Shelter	Boat ramp
Walking track	Standard campsite	Four-wheel driving
Tramping track	Toilet	Mountain biking
Route	Viewpoint	

0      500      1,000  
metres

N

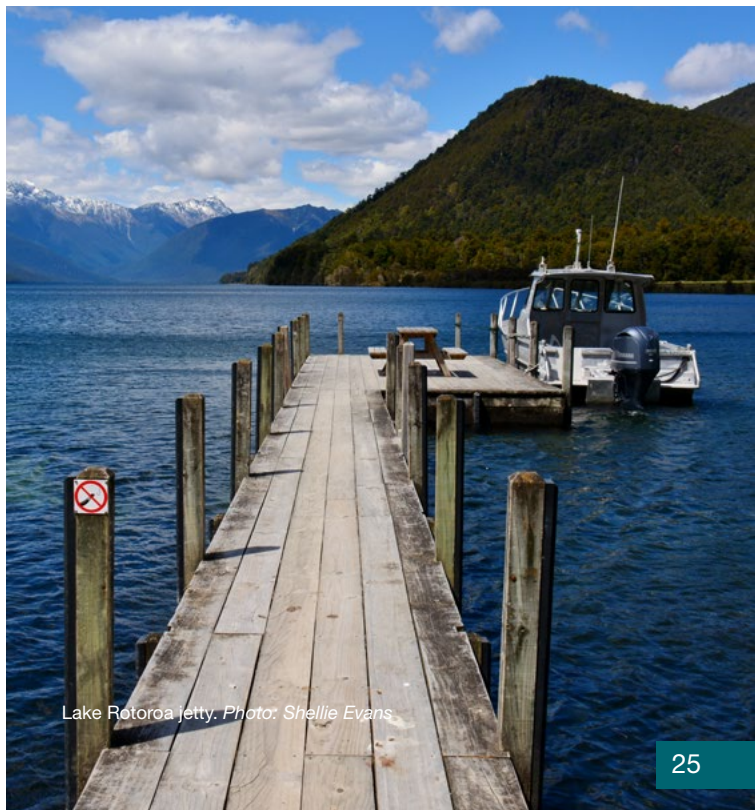
### 13 Flower Brothers Walk

15 min/500 m one way

Named in memory of two early settlers at Lake Rotoroa, Cyril and Hubert Flower, the Flower Brothers Walk is located at the northern end of the lake, between the lake foreshore and the outlet.

The walk begins to the right of the car park and jetty, then passes through a stand of mixed podocarp and beech forest that is dominated by kahikatea. The track then follows the lake to the beginning of Te Kauparenui/the Gowan River, emerging on the road near Lake Rotoroa Lodge.

Pure stands of kahikatea were once common in swampy areas of alluvial flood plains and on the margins of lakes, rivers and estuaries throughout New Zealand. The clearance, drainage and conversion of these areas to farmland have resulted in the widespread loss of kahikatea forest. Kahikatea is New Zealand's tallest native tree, often reaching 60 m in height. While preferring wetter, low-lying areas, kahikatea will also grow in forests on drier sites up to 600 m in elevation.



Lake Rotoroa jetty. Photo: Shellie Evans

## 14 Rotoroa Nature Walk

25 min / 1 km loop

The Rotoroa Nature Walk starts at the picnic area near the lake. At the picnic area, an information panel and a small carved wooden canoe reveal the livelihood of an early resident of the area. The track proceeds along the Lakeside Track for about 10 min before branching off to the left onto the loop section. It returns to the picnic area via the start of the Porika 4WD Track.

The gentle nature of this track is a botanist's delight. Of all the short walks in the park, this one contains the greatest variety of tall forest trees, shrubs, climbing vines, mosses and ferns. Here, the beech and podocarp forest around the lake is at its most diverse.

Near the beginning of the walk on the forest floor and along the edge of the stream are many different fern species. The large size of the attractive hen and chicken fern indicates a very favourable growing site. This fern derives its name from the tiny plants or bulbils that sprout from the fronds. The bulbils are capable of growing into new plants if they make contact with the ground. It is likely that the hen and chicken fern was once more widespread around Lake Rotoroa, but severe browsing has eliminated it from other areas.

## 15 Braeburn Walk

2 hr / 2.5 km loop

The Braeburn Walk leads along a wide track through diverse remnant beech and podocarp forest that is rich in bird life, then zigzags up to a picturesque mossy waterfall.

The track starts 400 m west along Braeburn Road from the Gowan bridge. Initially, the track follows the remains of a road constructed in the 1950s during the hydroelectric investigations. Flanking the flat section at the beginning of the walk is a grove of distinctive kōtukutuku forming a natural avenue.



Photo: Lotty Baumann

These trees are recognised by their flaky, paper-thin, red bark, which peels away from the often gnarled and twisted trunks. Kōtukutuku is unique to New Zealand, the world's largest fuchsia species and one of the country's few native deciduous trees.

In spring, the lifeless-looking trees produce new leaves, followed by green flowers that change to an attractive, deep burgundy. The flowers occur in two forms: a hermaphrodite flower (containing male and female parts), distinguished by its very unusual blue pollen, and a female flower. Both occur in the same area, but not on the same tree. Kōtukutuku often grows alongside tracks and streams where there has been human or natural disturbance of the forest. Its presence also indicates relatively low numbers of introduced browsing animals, such as possums and deer, which have been responsible for the loss of this species in many forests elsewhere.

## Care for Aotearoa



### Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Follow any rules restricting dogs, fires, drones or vehicles.



### Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by following the Land Safety Code.

- ▶ Choose the right trip for you.
- ▶ Understand the weather.
- ▶ Pack warm clothes and extra food.
- ▶ Share your plans and take ways to get help.
- ▶ Take care of yourself and each other.



### Keep NZ clean

Use toilets where provided. Take all rubbish with you.



### Show respect

Respect others, respect culture.



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



## Further information

### Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre

View Road

St. Arnaud 7072

**PHONE: 03 521 1806**

**EMAIL: [nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz)**

**[doc.govt.nz](http://doc.govt.nz)**

**0800 DOC HOT  
362 468**

**For safety hazards and  
conservation emergencies**

COVER: Lake Rotoiti

Photo: Gabi Czoma

This information was accurate  
at the time of printing.

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Te Kāwanatanga  
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