

Heaphy Track Repair Updates

Newsletter 3 – 23/03/2022

Kia ora koutou

This is the third newsletter in an ongoing series to keep affected businesses, locals and other organisations in the loop about DOC's work to get the Heaphy Track fully operational again as a Great Walk.

Heaphy Bridge Salvage Complete

Contractors Edifice Structures have now finished the salvage work on the Heaphy Bridge. They flew in on Friday 11th March and completed the salvage on Thursday 17th March. It's great to have this first big piece of work done.

Images from Edifice Structures (left to right): the bridge when they arrived, nearly done, the salvaged materials ready to be flown out.



This was a big job. The bridge had over 2000 fixtures, main cables which were 148m long and weighed 360kg each plus a whole lot of wood. The combined weight of material is approximately 12 tonnes (excluding the towers and bridge anchors). All of this was entangled with debris in the river after the storm. Wherever possible, materials will be reused in the new bridge, but regardless, every little piece must be taken out to ensure no waste pollutes the area or endangers wildlife.

What happened to the Heaphy Bridge?

While no one was there to see exactly what happened to the bridge, engineers can make a good guess from the debris and evidence left behind. Swing bridges are designed to sit above the high-level of a river (this one was normally 6.4m above the river in the middle) and cannot withstand the extreme lateral forces of a debris-laden river in flood. Debris lines on the riverbanks suggest that the middle of the bridge should have been 1.4m above the high flood mark so it is most likely that

a large tree (and other debris) snagged on the bridge and the force and velocity of the flooded river ripped it downstream.

Before investing in a new structure, DOC planners need to be confident that they are investing responsibly and that it is as future-proofed as possible. Of course, the reality of future weather events will always be a bit of a guessing game, but climate change means the intensity and frequency will only increase. Accordingly, engineers are waiting on a Heaphy River hydrology report from NIWA that will give more information about future flood levels and the likely impacts of climate change.

Using the Track

Understandably, the main question we are hearing is: “When will the Heaphy Great Walk be fully open?”. Unfortunately, we don’t have an answer to that just yet, but please be reassured we are working hard to get one and will let you know as soon as possible. Hopefully this email will give a bit of insight into some of the work that is going on behind the scenes.

In the meantime, a reminder that it is only the section between Mackay and Heaphy huts that is closed, so visitors can still have a great experience by walking in and out from each end.

More information and links for booking can be found in the Alert section on the Heaphy Track Page on the DOC website: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/heaphytrack>

Other work

While the Heaphy Bridge is the single most major repair required on the track, the storm also caused significant damage to several sections of track. The DOC Karamea team is hard at work repairing the coastal section of track between Kohaihai and Heaphy Hut (clearing slips and rebuilding washed out sections), to get it back up to mountain bike standard for the winter season. A digger has also been flown to Mackay Hut so that work can commence on repairing the track down from there towards the Lewis Shelter/ Heaphy River. This section of the track has been impacted by several large slips.

Please feel free to share this with anyone else who may be interested.

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Ngā mihi,

Scott Freeman

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