

# Wakamarina Track

## Mt Richmond Forest Park



### Introduction

The Wakamarina Track, an old goldminers' trail, crosses the Richmond Range from the Wairau Valley to the Wakamarina Valley.

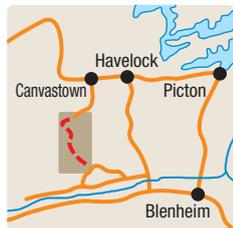
It is popular with experienced, beginner and family trampers, and mountain bikers; an easy weekend trip with an overnight stay at Devils Creek Hut. Mountain bikers could complete the trip in one day. The track is best walked or ridden as described below, from south to north.

The track is classified as a tramping track. It is steep and rough in places, particularly between Devils Creek Hut and Fosters Clearing; boots are recommended.

### How to get there

#### Blenheim side

Turn off State Highway 6 on to Northbank Road, 6 km north of Renwick (16 km from Blenheim). Follow Northbank Road for 5 km, then Onamalutu Road for 11 km, past Onamalutu Domain, to Flowers Creek ford. A final 5 km up Kiwi Road leads to the car park at the start of the track.



Road access is also possible from Bartletts Valley. This route to the track is longer and recommended for 4WD vehicles only.

#### Havelock side

Access to the track is via a road from Canvastown, 9 km west of Havelock on the Nelson-Blenheim Highway. The road leads 15 km up the Wakamarina Valley to Butchers Flat car park. A road suitable for 4WD vehicles only continues a further 1.5 km to a small car park just before Doom Creek.

### History

Gold was first discovered in the Wakamarina River in 1860. However, it was not until 1864, after a reward

was offered by the Superintendent of Marlborough for the discovery of a 'workable goldfield', that it was prospected and found to be one of the richest goldfields in New Zealand.

A number of tent towns sprang up in the valley and by July 1864, there were about 2800 miners working between Doom Creek and Canvastown. By the beginning of 1865, the boom was over and most of the miners had left for other fields.

Most of the side valleys were profitable, with Doom, Foster, Deep and Mountain Camp Creeks all being intensively worked. For the few who remained after 1865, there were still occasional rewards and many minor rushes occurred. For example, in 1869, Mountain Camp Creek attracted 200 miners but yielded only 450 grams of gold and two days work.

In the early 1870s, a series of gold-bearing quartz reefs was discovered near Deep Creek and a number of companies began prospecting and tunnelling, most with little success. One of the more successful was the Golden Bar Claim, worked intermittently by a variety of companies from 1888 to 1926. In this time over 100,000 tonnes of quartz were crushed, yielding both gold and scheelite.

Many other companies were formed and used a variety of methods to extract the alluvial gold. One of the most ambitious schemes was that of the Ravenscliff (later Caledonian) Goldmining Company in 1883. It involved damming the Wakamarina Gorge and diverting the whole river through a 150-metre race and tunnel so that the lower bed, below the dam, could be worked. However, the scheme was almost a complete failure as very little gold was found.

During the 1930s about 150 miners worked the goldfield under a Government subsidy scheme, but their numbers declined sharply after the Depression. More recent attempts (including using diving suits in 1960) have been quite successful in working deeper stretches of the river which were out of the reach of the early miners. Today there has been renewed interest in mining and virtually the whole of the Wakamarina River is staked for claims.

The Wakamarina Track was cut under contract by two miners, Proudfoot and Lyons, in 1871, following representations made by miners to the Superintendent of Marlborough. The contract was for 'the cutting of a track through the bush and scrub over the ranges from the Forks to Bartletts Creek, forming water places at intervals for use of travellers'. Part of the present track (at the southern end) was an offshoot of this original track.

## In the forest

Tall red and silver beech trees, rimu and kāmahi form the forest canopy, with a pepperwood shrub layer and an understorey of dense crown fern. The range of

altitudes, particularly on the Wakamarina side, affects temperature, the forest structure and tree size markedly.

Birdlife is varied and abundant and includes large numbers of tomtits and weka. Pigeons and tūi are more common at lower altitudes, while rifleman and brown creepers tend to be more obvious higher up.

You may also see the carnivorous native land snail *powelliphanta*. These ancient animals feed on worms at night but are themselves eaten by weka and introduced possums and pigs. Observant walkers may see, hear or even smell the pigs, or the goats which also live in the forest along the track. *Powelliphanta* are completely protected; it is illegal to remove them or their empty shells which provide a source of all-important calcium for these unique giants.

## Walking the track

### Kiwi Road to Fosters Clearing, 2 h

From the car park on Kiwi Road a well-graded track follows the eastern side of Bartletts Ridge before crossing the head of Bartletts Creek and climbing to the Foster Creek–Bartletts Creek saddle, known as Fosters Clearing. A short side track leads east up the ridge to Fosters Hut (4 bunks).

### Fosters Clearing to Devils Creek Hut, 3 h

Below Fosters Clearing the track descends into the head of Foster Creek, skirting around its headwaters and crossing a series of slaty schist creeks. It then climbs, in a series of steep zigzags, to a saddle between Foster and Devils Creeks.

From this saddle the track climbs along the Devils Creek–Foster Creek ridge to a knob. At this point, 1066 metres above sea level, you are nearly 800 metres above Devils Creek Hut (6 bunks). The track now descends, in a series of broad zigzags, to the benched track of the main Wakamarina Valley. The hut is just five minutes away, in a large clearing on a terrace above the Wakamarina River.

There were once a number of huts here, served by a water race from a nearby stream to a pond. All that remains of the pond is a large depression, but the overgrown water race can easily be traced back to the source stream. At the southern end of the clearing is an old shingle roofed slab hut, thought to have been built in 1930. Due to vandalism this hut is now in a sad state of repair.

### Devils Creek Hut to Butchers Flat, 2 h

From Devils Creek Hut a benched track sidles high above the river, eventually leaving the beech forest and crossing a burnt-over face to Doom Creek. Forest



regeneration here is progressing nicely as the fire-prone bracken gives way to kānuka and small trees.

A bridge crosses the narrow rocky gorge of Doom Creek before a short climb up to the benched track that leads to the road end at Butchers Flat.

## Side trips

### Stone Huts Track

A side trip may be taken from Devils Creek Hut to the remains of some old miners' huts (1 h 30 min). About 5 minutes from Devils Creek Hut, where the main track rounds a major spur, a track leads off to the right, following the contour up Devils Creek for about 30 minutes before dropping steeply into the Creek. It then continues on the opposite side, up-river for about 300 metres to a terrace, and the remains of two stone huts thought to have been built during the 1880s. The outline of the opening of a vertical shaft can be seen between them.

### Doom Walk, 2 h return

This wide, benched and historically significant tramping track leaves the main track near Doom Creek. It follows the old water race which delivered water from Foster and Doom Creeks to the quartz crushing battery of the Golden Bar Claim at Deep Creek.

Doom, or Dome Creek as it was originally known (from the appearance of the boulders and hills in the area), was very rich in gold. Extensive works were carried out in both branches, although the immense boulders deterred most miners from settling there permanently.

The junction of Doom Creek and the Wakamarina River was known as the Forks and the terrace above the bridge was the site of a small settlement. Little evidence of it remains today, except for isolated stacks of rocks.

## Mountain biking

### Onamalutu Reserve to Canvastown grade 3 (intermediate)/grade 5 (expert) 45 km, 1–2 days

This is a challenging ride with steep sections, particularly during or after wet weather. If choosing to spend a night, there is Fosters Hut on the main ridge of the Richmond Range, and Devils Hut in the Wakamarina Valley is around halfway.



## Track categories

### 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.

### Mountain biking grade 3 (intermediate)

Steep slopes and/or avoidable obstacles possibly on narrow track and/or with poor traction. There may be exposure at the track's outside edge.

### Mountain biking grade 5 (expert)

Technically challenging. Giant climbs, narrow track and numerous hazards including dangerous drop-offs, sharp corners and difficult obstacles. Expect walking and possibly bike carrying.

## Hut and campsite categories

 **Standard huts** have mattresses, water supply and toilet. Wood heaters are provided at huts below the bush line. The Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Tickets are required.

 **Standard campsites** have a limited range of facilities and services. Toilets (usually composting or pit variety) water supply (tap, stream, or lake) and vehicle or boat access. Wood barbeques and fireplaces, showers (cold), picnic tables, a cooking shelter and rubbish bins may be provided.



## Please remember

 **Mountain biking:** The Wakamarina Track is open for mountain biking and best ridden from south to north. Mountain bikers must stay in control of their bikes and give way to walkers.

 **Dogs** are allowed in this area under permit. A maximum of four dogs per party is allowed.

 **Safety:** The track is rough in places and care must be taken. The weather is changeable, especially at high altitudes, so take warm, waterproof clothing and plenty of food.

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**

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

Remember your safety is your responsibility. To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call **DOC HOTline 0800 362 468**.

 **Historic sites** remind us of our past. Please do not disturb them.

## Further information

We hope you enjoy your walk or ride on the track. For further information visit [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) or contact:

**Department of Conservation**  
**Nelson Regional Visitor Centre**  
Millers Acre Centre/ 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)



**NEW ZEALAND**  
**environmental**  
**CARE CODE**

- Protect plants and animals
- Remove rubbish
- Bury toilet waste
- Keep waterways clean
- Take care with fires
- Camp carefully
- Keep to the track
- Consider others
- Respect our cultural heritage
- Enjoy your visit
- *Toitū te whenua* (leave the land undisturbed)

### Picton i-SITE

The Foreshore, Picton

Ph: (03) 520 3113

Email: [picton@i-site.org](mailto:picton@i-site.org)

### Department of Conservation South Marlborough Area Office

Gee Street, Renwick 7204

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