

The Queen Charlotte Track experience and attitudes towards giving back to nature

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Cover Queen Charlotte Track

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Research highlights

Semi-structured interviews with 24 visitors to the Queen Charlotte Track (QCT) during the 2020-2021 summer explored the QCT experience, visitors' feelings of 'connection to nature' and attitudes towards 'giving back to nature'.

The visitors

The interview sample included a diversity of visitors (i.e., embodying a range of demographic and experiential characteristics):

- Age: 20s ($n=11$), 30s ($n=4$), 40s ($n=4$), over 50s ($n=5$)
- Gender: female ($n=19$), male ($n=5$)
- Home location: All interviewees were resident in New Zealand. In total, 14 lived in the North Island and ten lived in the South Island (with three of these 'local')
- Walking group size and composition: Solo walkers ($n=4$), couples ($n=12$), adult family groups ($n=1$), family group including children ($n=3$), larger mixed groups ($n=4$)
- QCT experience: Whole track ($n=14$), part track (including overnight) ($n=4$), day walk ($n=6$)

Most interviewees had some previous walking/tramping experience with many having done one or more of the Great Walks. The accessibility and ease (in respect of wayfinding, logistics) of the QCT made it attractive as a 'starter track' for those with less tramping experience. Nine interviewees had no previous experience of the QCT or the Marlborough Sounds, while nine had been on the track before, and six been to the Marlborough Sounds before.

The QCT experience

Motives – Being recommended the QCT by others, the suitability of the QCT for walkers with a variety of experience and fitness, being able to select part of the track only, and convenience (associated with the visitor services) were the key pull factors. The push factors included spending time with family and friends, wanting to have an active holiday and to explore new, or less familiar, parts of New Zealand.

Most liked facets of the QCT – A wide array of features were reported including: aspects of the natural environment (including views, vegetation and birdlife as well as emotive qualities such as tranquillity, serenity and peacefulness); particular aspects of the track itself (including the quality of the track and the diversity of natural environments it traversed); logistical and service features of the track experience; social aspects of the experience and personal experience factors.

Dislikes – The few dislikes reported related to expectations not being met, the provision and placement of toilets and encounters with other users (both on the track and in the surrounding environment).

Perceptions of the QCT

Dimensions of the QCT – The *historic and cultural* facets of the QCT (and its surrounds) were often introduced to visitors by the water taxi operators. The amount of attention given to both this information, and to interpretation encountered along the QCT, was impacted by the weather, uncertainty about walking times, the length of the planned days' walk, previous knowledge and personal interest. The 'uneven' distribution of interpretation (relating to the mix of private and DOC land traversed by the QCT) attracted some commentary.

The 'unique' juxtaposition of land and seascapes – and perceptions of vastness – was the stand-out feature of the *natural environment* of the QCT. Within this, the colour of the water and the ridgeline

views into both the Queen Charlotte and Kenepuru Sounds were of particular note. The diversity of the vegetation and the birdlife was also enjoyed.

The *social* dimension of the QCT encompasses interactions between different walkers and walking groups, as well as between walkers, cyclists, the various transport service providers, accommodation providers, hospitality business owners and their staff, other holiday makers, local residents and DOC staff.

The *built (and service) environment* of the QCT emerged as an important dimension of the QCT experience. While the majority reported encountering evidence of settlement (and visitor services) as a positive (enjoyed because it was ‘different’) for some, this was a negative (and ‘jarring’) facet of the QCT environment.

In respect of *environmental issues*, most visitors were reported to be well-behaved and only a small number of issues – common to natural environments in New Zealand were noted (e.g., wilding opines, predator control). To some extent, the presence of human settlement and commercial activity contributed to lowered environmental expectations. There was some commentary around broader environment issues associated with travel, including in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on international tourism (and the knock-on effect on the QCT experience for these visitors).

The essence of the QCT was represented by the land- and seascapes of the Marlborough Sounds. This encompassed the expansive vistas and a perception of vastness, as well a sense of remoteness, isolation and timelessness. The ‘tropical’ nature of the vegetation and the human dimension, which connected the current QCT visitor experience to the past and also served to highlight the significance of the human ‘journey’ and of personal ‘discovery’ in a natural environment which remains significantly modified.

The wilderness of the QCT – while the QCT and its surrounds were perceived by some to be ‘less wild’ than many other walking/tramping settings this did not detract from the QCT experience, with wildness balanced against the diversity of scenery and the accessibility and ease of the QCT experience (compared to more remote wilderness locations).

Telling the QCT story – Most of the QCT stories aligned with the ‘most liked’ features reported by interviewees (i.e., they contained a mix of track description (about the scenery, track logistics, etc) and details of the interviewee’s own personal experience. Recommending the track to others was a key feature of these stories with many interviewees emphasising the holiday aspect and the suitability – and manageability – of the walk for people of all ages, abilities and experience.

Connecting to place (and to nature)

While spending time in the natural environment was a key component of many interviewees’ motives for visiting – and ‘nature’ was a ‘most liked’ feature for many – only a few specifically referenced a natural feature when asked about connecting to place. Instead, having a personal (and often historical) connection to place fostered a sense of connection for many. The retention of these feelings of connection were also more often related to the activity effect, disconnecting from ‘life’ and being on holiday, albeit underpinned by being in a natural environment. These findings suggest that, although being in nature underpins the type of experience sought, the experience itself is impacted by engagement with the multiple dimensions of place.

The visitor role – The role of the visitor in natural environments was reported to involve respect (including for other visitors and with the DOC rules), responsibility (identified as common to visitors to natural environments), being a guest (which involved not changing the environment in any way), having no impact (i.e., leaving no human traces), stewardship (recognising future visitors) and appreciation (for the track and for the natural environment). The visitor role was also perceived to extend to passing information about the track and the experience to others.

Relationship with the natural environment – The relationship between the natural and human environments was described by three worldviews: holistic thinkers (people who enjoyed the human dimensions of their experience), separate thinkers (who preferred experiences with fewer people and talked about the negative impacts of human on the natural environment) and those for whom humans residence on earth was only ‘temporary’ and came with it the responsibility to look after and preserve the natural environment for future generations.

Giving back to place (and to nature)

While giving back to nature was perceived positively, attitudes towards giving back were underpinned by each interviewees ‘worldview’ and – within this – their underlying philosophies of nature (i.e., some were nature-centric, some were people-centric, and some expressed a more balanced attitude which sought equitable distribution of both impacts and benefits). Giving back was perceived to represent more than simply paying for the services used (including the user fee for the QCT) and was primarily discussed in respect of making a financial contribution, rather than contributing through environmental action.

Contributing financially to nature was widely reported as the easiest way to give back, although a number of issues were noted, including the fact that as taxpayers they already contributed to DOC, the logistical challenges of giving money via donation boxes (in a cashless society) and a desire for transparency around what any donations or contributions would be used for. Engagement with the natural environment – including giving back – often did not extend beyond the actual experience. Likewise, *contributing through action* during an experience was tempered by time constraints, experiential expectations and a perceived lack of expertise. Tree planting, wilding pine mitigation, pest control and bird monitoring were the most widely reported (potential) conservation actions.

Promoting the QCT to others was also reported as a way to give back to place, although the benefits of this were primarily reported in respect of the tourism businesses or for improved visitor facilities, rather than in respect of conservation or benefits for the natural environment.

Environmental awareness and conservation education – The majority of interviewees did not observe any environment issues during their QCT visit and, as a consequence, were unsure of what might need to be ‘fixed’. Most visitors were also reported to be environmentally well-behaved (both while visiting ‘nature’ and in their lives, more generally) with some referencing a strong environmental ethos (including support for ‘think global, act local’ behaviours and support for both DOC and international environmental organisations).

Broadly speaking, support for conservation action is underpinned by transparency, including having a clear understanding of the purpose of such action (i.e., why it needs to be done), what issue it is addressing it and what such action will achieve (i.e., ‘what it was and what it could be’).

Giving back and the importance of place

Perceptions of the QCT and connecting to place findings represent two key aspects of activities occurring in natural settings: one the one hand, there is the QCT experience and how it is enabled, while the other focuses on activity outcomes (e.g., how people connect to the place, what they take away with them). A key question asks if ‘giving back’ to place (and to nature) enhances the spectrum of outcomes?

The QCT experience revisited – Understanding the QCT experience must necessarily take account of a wide array of both visitor and track characteristics. The broad appeal of the QCT was illustrated by the comments which described its suitability (and attraction) for people who would not normally go tramping and the significance of its geographic location in respect of early settlement by both Maori and European, as well as for modern day Te Araroa walkers and visitors more generally.

Unexpected enjoyment of the historic and human dimensions of the QCT experience, and of the natural environment of the Marlborough Sounds, led some interviewees to suggest that not only did it the QCT miss out on the ‘accolades’ it deserved, but that both the QCT and its surrounding environs could be better promoted as tourism destinations.

The QCT is a manageable, but still challenging, walk/tramp on a well-developed and well-maintained track which traverses a diversity of land- and seascapes. Walking the track is facilitated by easy accessibility via water taxi and the option to walk (cycle, kayak) the whole track, or selected sections (on overnight or day walks). The visitor experience is further facilitated – and enhanced – by an array of visitor services. The ‘QCT experience’ is encapsulated by enjoyment of ‘pizza, beer and coffee’, of a ‘‘glamping’ tramping’ experience and ‘the complete package’ of the QCT.

Giving back’’ Despite spending time in the natural environment being identified as both a key motive, and most liked feature of the QCT experience, ‘connection to place’ varied considerably. Some interviewees described how immersion in (and focus on) the natural environment fostered a sense of connection, while others described connections that were significantly moderated (and sometimes fostered) by engagement with the historical and social (i.e., human) dimensions of the QCT environs. Retaining feelings of connection post-visit was related to an activity effect, to having disconnected from ‘life’ and enjoying a holiday feeling, rather than to an enduring sense of connection to nature.

Despite the identification of a variety of entrenched attitudes towards nature (as evidenced by different worldviews) these did not necessarily appear to have a significant impact on visitors’ QCT experiences. In this respect, these research findings suggest that ‘experience’ of place encompasses a much broader suite of setting/environmental dimensions than those which simply align with – or champion – either nature or humanity. Of particular note is the temporal dimension, which underpins understandings of the relationship between nature and human activity and the ways in which this has changed over time, and which – importantly – serves to imbue settings with meaning and foster connection.

While the majority of interviewees supported the notion of giving back to nature, many had no idea of how they might do this beyond making a financial contribution of some sort. The logistics of ‘donating’ to nature, however, was generally not well articulated, with interviewees talking in the abstract about ‘perhaps’ supporting a variety of environmental actions or giving money to DOC and other organisations. A number of barriers to taking environmental/conservation action (both in situ and more generally) were identified, including lack of time and lack of expertise (with some suggesting that many actions that could be taken were better left to the ‘experts’).

This research has shown that visitor experience on the QCT is enhanced by engagement with the historic, cultural and social dimensions of place, with these dimensions also providing a unique set of lens through which that landscape and natural environment can be interpreted. From a visitor perspective, giving back to nature requires not only understanding of how the environment has changed over time, but also education around what it could potentially look like in the future and education around the role – as visitors – they can play in this.

1 Introduction

The objective of this research project was to understand how tourism can make a difference in giving back to the places people visit. The study was designed to explore visitor experiences and how visitors connect to and relate with the places they visit in order to understand how connectedness to place might lead to interest in participating in environmental action or restoration.

The Queen Charlotte Track (QCT) (Figure 1) provided a Department of Conservation (DOC) case study setting for the research. The QCT traverses both private and public land and is managed as a partnership between DOC, Marlborough District Council and private landowners. The 70-kilometre QCT track can be walked in its entirety (3-5 days) or can be enjoyed for shorter overnight and day walks. There are also a number of short side-trips accessible from the main track. The track can be accessed at a variety of points by water taxi and walkers are able to have their gear transferred by boat to overnight locations. A range of DOC campsites and private accommodation are available along with food and beverage services. The track forms the northern most South Island section of the *Te Araroa – The Long Pathway*, a hiking trail which traverses the length of New Zealand. The track is also one of New Zealand's Great Rides as part of the *Nga Haerenga The New Zealand Cycle Trail* although cycling is not permitted between Ship Cove and Kenepuru Saddle during summer.

The interview sample was drawn from visitors surveyed on the track (at Furneaux Lodge) during the 2021-2022 summer. In total, 24 visitors were interviewed by either phone or video call. Interviews collected data describing these interviewees' visitor experience and perceptions of the QCT, feelings of connection to place (and to nature) and attitudes towards giving back to nature. The Covid-19 border closure (to non-New Zealand citizens and residents) meant that all interviewees were resident in New Zealand. The QCT – along with many of the Great Walks – would normally attract a considerable number of international visitors.

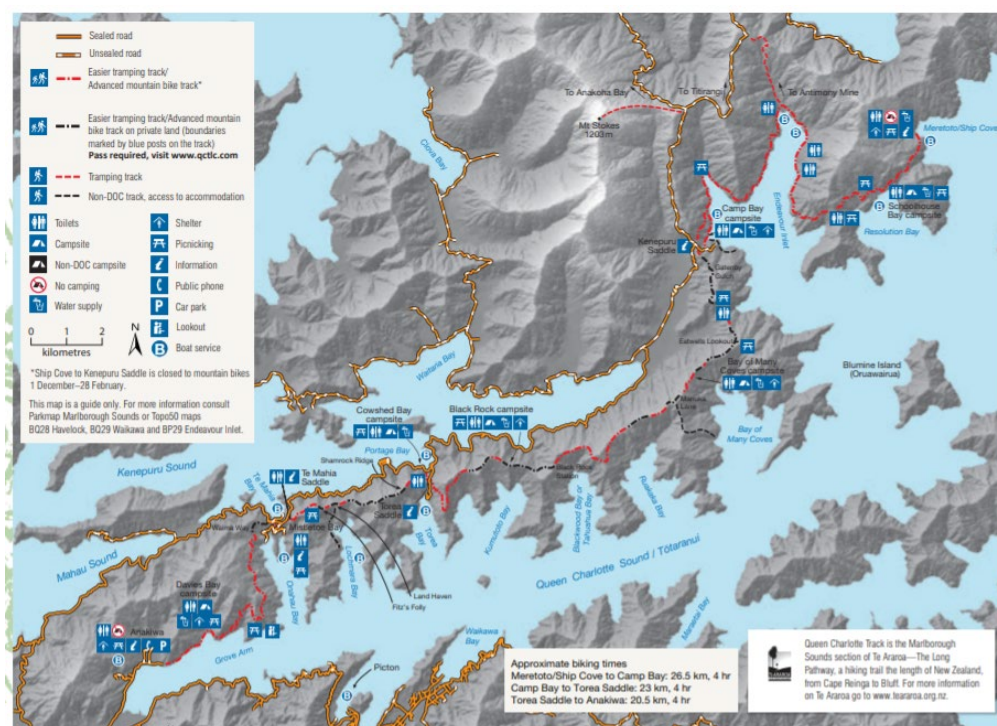


Figure 1 Map of the Queen Charlotte Sound.

2 Methods

Visitors who completed a DOC visitor survey at Furneaux Lodge over the 2020-2021 summer were asked to provide an email address if they were interested in participating in additional research. Table 1 shows the number of email addresses collected by survey date(s), and the number of those visitors who were subsequently contacted to participate in this research. There was considerable inconsistency in the percentage of survey participants who provided emails at each survey period (i.e., a range of between 18% and 83%). Altogether, 60 of the visitors who provided an email address were contacted, with 23 of these visitors (38%) responding and agreeing to be interviewed. In total, almost half of the emails sent ($n=29$) received no response at all, five emails failed to send, two people responded and arranged interviews, but were unable to be contacted further, and one person declined participation. The 23 interviews completed were with 24 people.

Table 1 Sampling overview

Sample group	Email addresses	Surveys completed	Emails sent	Failed emails	Declined	No response	Lost contact	Interviews completed*
27/28 Dec	26	65	26	1	-	14	1	10
06/07 Jan	8	44	8	3	1	3	-	1
18/19 Jan	18	34	15	1	-	6	1	7
06/07 Feb	30	36	8	-	-	5	-	3
19/20 Feb	11	25	3	-	-	1	-	2
TOTAL	93	204	60	5	1	29	2	23

* 1 interview was with 2 people

Interviews were completed between January 14 and 5 March with the elapsed time between being surveyed (i.e., on the QCT) and being interviewed ranging between 11 and 35 days (average 21 days). This elapsed time was impacted by a number of factors, including the timing of the delivery of email addresses from the surveyor, the length of time taken by interviewees to respond to the email request and their subsequent availability.

The email request for participation was accompanied by a formal research information sheet (see Appendix 1) which provided an explanation of the research. Participants were offered a \$50 Prezzy Card as recompense for their time. More than half of the interviews were undertaken by phone ($n=13$) with the remainder undertaken by FaceTime ($n=7$), a combination of FaceTime/phone ($n=1$), Skype ($n=1$) and in person ($n=1$). At the beginning of each interview, respondents were asked verbally for their consent to be recorded. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis.

2.1 Interview content

An interview script was prepared which asked each interviewee about their QCT experience and their perceptions of place in relation to the QCT, and in relation to the Marlborough Sounds more generally. Interviewees' QCT experience was explored via questions about their motive for visiting and aspects of the experience enjoyed the most. A prompt sheet was used to explore the different dimensions (e.g., nature, history, culture) of place, with discussion commonly extending to consider the QCT and the Marlborough Sounds in comparison to other places they had visited. Additional data relating to perceptions of the QCT was elicited through questions which asked about the 'essence of the QCT' and about interviewees' post visit 'QCT stories'.

A further set of questions asked about how, as visitors, they connect with – or relate to – nature and to places like the QCT and its surroundings. This included discussion around their role as a visitor in the natural environment and how they conceptualised the relationship between humans and nature. The final set of questions explored the concept of people giving back to place (and to nature). The interview script and prompt sheet can be found in the Appendices (Appendix 2 and Appendix 3).

2.2 The sample

While there is no way of knowing how representative the visitors interviewed are, they can be described by a variety of key features which are relevant in respect of understanding QCT visitors' profiles and activity (e.g., demographics, type and scope of activity, previous experience of place and of tramping/walking and motives for visiting). The interviewees are described according to their previous experience on the QCT and in the Marlborough Sounds more broadly, as well as in respect of their tramping-walking experience. Their motives for being on the QCT are also described.

The key features of the interview sample ($n=24$) are shown in Table 2. Most respondents were female (80%, $n=19$), with almost half aged in their 20s (46%, $n=11$), and a third originally from overseas (33%, $n=8$). Of these, seven were migrants to New Zealand (originally from the UK (4), Germany (1), Italy (1) and China (1)) and the other one was a working holiday maker from Canada whose stay in New Zealand had been extended because of Covid-19. Almost 60 percent ($n=14$) of interview respondents lived in the North Island – the full range of locations is shown in Appendix 4.

Table 2 Key characteristics of interview sample

Sample characteristics	Demographics and activity	Number ($n=24$)
Gender	Male	5
	Female	19
Age	20s	11
	30s	4
	40s	4
	Over 50s	5
Origin	New Zealander	16
	Migrant	7
	International visitor (WHM)	1

New Zealand location	Local (Picton/Blenheim)	3
	Other South Island	7
	North Island	14
Queen Charlotte Track	Whole track	14
	Part track	4
	Day walk	6

3 Results

The interview data are presented in the same order as the interview script (i.e., a description of ‘visitors to the QCT’ and their ‘perceptions of the QCT’, followed by ‘connecting to place (and to nature)’ and ‘giving back to nature’). The final discussion section presents an overview of the QCT experience and reflects on the key findings in respect of visitors’ interest in giving back to nature.

To provide context to the interview data presented throughout the report, longer quotations include the interviewee number¹ (Appendix 4 on interviewees’ characteristics) and, when relevant, individual interviewees are identified by a particular demographic or activity characteristic (e.g., age, track activity, walking experience). The Appendices contain the full set of responses to:

- Motives for visiting the QCT (Appendix 5)
- What did you like most about the QCT? (Appendix 6)
- The essence of the QCT (Appendix 7)
- Telling the QCT story (Appendix 8)

3.1 Visitors to the QCT

3.1.1 *QCT activity and logistics*

As Table 2 shows the majority of interviewees were walking the whole of Queen Charlotte Track ($n=14$). Three of the part track walkers were walking from Ship Cove to Punga Cove; the other was walking from Resolution Bay to Portage. Three out of the six day walkers were walking from Ship Cove to Furneaux Lodge; of the others, one was walking from Furneaux Lodge to Punga Cove, one was walking the Miners Track (from Furneaux Lodge) and the other did some walking in the area surrounding Furneaux Lodge (in conjunction with a visit to Motuara Island). These shorter walks were more likely to be undertaken by older people (see Appendix 4).

The whole track walkers represented an array of group size/types (Table 3). One of those walking the whole track was doing so as part of the Te Araroa. There were no larger family groups or family groups with children walking the whole track (see also Appendix 4 for details of group size and ages).

¹ The couple interviewed (#15) are differentiated by reference to whether the male (m) or female (f) was speaking

Table 3 Track experience by group size

	Alone	Two people	Family (adult only)	Family (w. children)	Larger groups	Total
Whole track	3	7			4	14
Part track		3		1		4
Day walk	1	2	1	2		6
Total	4	12	1	3	4	24

Table 4 shows the type of accommodation used by the whole track and part track walkers. Camping was a popular option for those walking the whole track and was facilitated by the availability of gear transfer services. In total, 12 of the whole track walkers and three of the part track walkers used the gear transfer services provided by the water taxi companies. While the majority of whole track walkers (and all of the part track ones) walked the entire track, one person cycled a section, one was driven a section and one did a combination of walking, cycling and boat travel.

Table 4 Services used and activity on the QCT

Services and activity		Whole track (n=14)	Part track (n=4)
Accommodation	Camping	8	
	Lodges	5	3
	Camping/Lodges	1	1
Gear transfer	Gear transferred	12	3
	Carried own gear	2	1
Activity	Only walked	11	4
	Cycled one section	1	
	Drove one section	1	
	Walked-cycled-boat travel	1	

3.1.2 Previous experience of place

Interviewees were also asked if they had previous experience on the QCT, or previous experience of the Marlborough Sounds more generally (Table 6). Those who had only visited the area whilst travelling across the Cook Strait were included in the ‘no previous experience’ group.

As Table 5 shows, nine interviewees had previous experience of the QCT. Both of the day walkers with previous experience were local (i.e., Blenheim and Picton). One of these had walked the Ship Cove to Furneaux Lodge section of the track 15 years previously, while the other had done the whole track multiple times, but was revisiting to explore adjacent tracks (e.g., Miners Track from

Furneaux). Other reasons for revisiting the QCT included filling in time before another tramp, introducing it to new companions, and visiting the QCT for the first time as a solo trumper. Many of these interviewees had also spent time in the Marlborough Sounds doing other activities.

Table 5 Previous experience of the QCT or the Marlborough Sounds

	Queen Charlotte Track	Marlborough Sounds	No previous experience	Total
Whole track	4	4	6	14
Part track	3	1		4
Day walk	2	1	3	6
Total	9	6	9	24

Six others had some experience of the Marlborough Sounds but had not been on the QCT previously. One interviewee had been to a friend's bach in another part of the sounds while another had been on a day cruise in the sounds as part of a business trip to the Marlborough area. The remainder had spent family holidays in the sounds as children. Two interviewees had strong family connections to the sounds. In total, nine interviewees had no previous experience of either the QCT or of the Marlborough Sounds.

Many interviewees were doing the QCT as part of a longer holiday which also included other activities (including other walking/tramping experiences). The majority were holidaying in either the Marlborough Sounds or in locations in Marlborough/Nelson region. It was common to combine the QCT with visits to the Abel Tasman and, to a lesser extent, Nelson Lakes. Other activities undertaken in the Marlborough Sounds included the walking the Nydia Track, short walks closer to Picton and day trips on the water.

Three interviewees did the QCT as part of a more extensive holiday/tramp. This included one person who did the QCT as part of the Te Araroa, one person who after the QCT 'did the Abel Tasman, Heaphy, Sabine Circuit and the Kepler' Tracks and one who was on a three month holiday and had also done the Milford Track in January.

3.1.3 Walking/tramping experience

Interviewees could also be described by their previous walking experience. Tramping was generally considered to involve overnight trips and for some interviewees the QCT was their first experience of this. The walking experience of interviewees can be broadly classified into four groups:

- Extensive tramping experience, multiple multi-day and day walks and multiple Great Walks (#1 #5 #8 #12 #21 #23)
- Moderate tramping experience, significant walking experience, multiple day walks, at least one Great Walk, mixed experience/confidence (#2 #4 #6 #14 #15 #19 #20)
- Minimal tramping experience, but starting to do more – QCT perceived to be a good 'starter/early' track to do in tramping career (#7 #9)
- Limited tramping experience, but some (mostly local) walking experience (#3 #11 #13 #18 #22), more MTB than tramping (#16), did a lot in the past and getting back into it (#10), school trips (#17)

While most of the interviewees were habitual walkers/trampers, some had mostly walked in local areas while others had done overnight tramps, including the Great Walks. Progression through a walking and tramping career (based on experience) was evident with, for example, those who primarily did local walks gradually extending their walking distances (and locations/environments visited) and others undertaking solo tramps for the first time, then doing one or more of the Great Walks before undertaking other multi-day tramps. One interviewee described their introduction to tramping through doing some of Great Walks:

I like walking – so just any sort of New Zealand walk – the first few it was actually really nice to do Great Walks because there was a little bit more information about the equipment you needed, and it was a lot easier to find [the tracks] and to do, but now you just go down to the DOC place and talk to the warden who had definitely done the walk before and they will tell you what you need to know #21

Most interviewees talked about their walking experience (capability) in terms of their ‘confidence’ to take on a particular walk, as this interviewee explained:

I think some of it for me is about confidence – apart from Abel Tasman we have never done any of the Great Walks, and to go off for five days and to be sure that you are well enough equipped and won’t get lost – I am not sure we would have the confidence to do that #15(f)

The perceived ease of the QCT – in respect of wayfinding, access, logistics (including having gear transferred) – was a significant part of its appeal, particularly for groups which included novice walkers/trampers, those undertaking a solo tramp for the first time (e.g., ‘[it is] an easy track to do and easy to follow’; ‘very well-established track and easy to follow’; ‘appealing as a first big solo walk’; ‘don’t need to be as well-prepared as for other – more remote/less accessible tracks’).

Some of the more experienced trampers were apologetic for having had their gear carried (e.g., ‘at first, I thought getting your bags carried was silly – but then it was part of the deal and I thought OK – take it – it is quite nice’ #8). Others stressed that the QCT was still a physical challenge (especially because of its length), and that the experience was more enjoyable as a result of not carrying gear. Having one’s gear transferred also enabled people to camp which was considered to be a more enjoyable experience than staying in the huts found on other tracks.

The part track walkers ‘excused’ their use of the gear transfer services because of age and fitness and the type of walking experience they were seeking (e.g., ‘we tend to be walkers who are not “hard out” – we wanted to have a holiday and enjoy doing some walking – there is an exhilaration in terms of having achieved something, but it is about the experience and the views, rather than just bowling from a to b’). They went on to add:

It was interesting actually, because we were talking to someone when we were at Punga Cove and we said we were going home now, and they said ‘what do you mean you are not doing the whole walk? Are you injured? But we didn’t plan to do the whole walk and I don’t feel that we have to do the whole of these walks – for some people it is really important that they do all of each walk, whereas I would be happy to do part of several walks #15(f)

Others simply noted that a longer walk had no appeal for them or attributed their choice to being with children as one of the day walkers – who walked the relatively flat section from Furneaux Lodge to Punga Cove – explained:

We could have done the slightly harder walk (from Ship Cove to Furneaux Lodge), but we didn't want to put the kids off, although we knew that they would be fine once they did it – it was selling this to them and that this made it sound easy' #17

Some of the day and part day walkers also 'talked up' the challenge of walk they had done. This included constant references to having walked a considerable distance (the Ship Cove to Furneaux Lodge section is 17.5kms), the rough water taxi trip they had experienced, and being given a warning to take care on the top sections of the track in high winds. A number of day walkers were also stressed about making it to the water taxi pick up in time; the same applied to whole track walkers in respect of their final day pick-up at Anakiwa. Some of the whole track walkers worried about not being able to pre-book some of the campsites (which was especially 'nerve-wracking' because gear transfers were pre-booked). Most were happy with the smooth operation of these support services.



Photo 1 Water taxi in Anakiwa (Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sidm/3277380824/>).

3.1.4 Motives for visiting the QCT

A wide array of motives for visiting the QCT were reported with many interviewees describing a combination of both push (i.e., personal factors) and pull (i.e., relating to the attraction of the QCT itself) motives. Being recommended the QCT by others, the suitability of the QCT as a 'starter track' or being able to select part of the track only, and convenience (associated with the visitor services) were the key pull factors. The push factors included spending time with family and friends, wanting to have an active holiday and to explore parts of New Zealand that they were less familiar with. While one interviewee was doing the QCT as part of the Te Araroa, some were simply 'ticking off' another track, and others were revisiting a track/location they had not been to for some time or had not fully explored previously. As one local interviewee noted:

I wanted to do something over the summer holidays – when you live in Picton you don't always get that much time or opportunity to get out into the sounds an awful lot - I have done the whole track [before] but I hadn't gone up to where the mine tailings are – so I thought I would do a bit of a walk and have a nosey around there #18

Overall, a complexity of motives were reported, including some relating to the Covid-19 border closure. Several interviewees, for example, talked about wanting to support the New Zealand tourism economy whilst others were travelling in New Zealand – and doing walks like the QCT – because their overseas travel plans had been curtailed by Covid-19 (with the lack of international tourists also perceived to be a bonus):

We were originally meant to be travelling around Europe last year and that obviously didn't go ahead so we sort of planned a different trip – I always wanted to do the QCT and the Abel Tasman and so we thought we may as well do it while there are no tourists here #20

The complete list of motives reported can be found in Appendix 5.

3.2 Perceptions of the QCT

Interviewees were first asked what they liked most about the QCT and if there was anything they did not like as a preamble to exploring their perceptions of the QCT in more depth. This was followed by questions which asked if they had been told much about the QCT before starting their walk and then explored the different dimensions of the track experience. These dimensions included: the track's historic, cultural and natural features, social aspects of the track experience, the built (and service) environment of the track and any negative environmental features.

After exploring perceptions around these individual dimensions interviewees were asked what they thought the essence of the QCT was. They were then asked how the QCT compared to other places they had been and what – for them – would be an ideal nature experience. A final question in this section asked what their 'story of the QCT' had been.

3.2.1 What did you like the most?

Responses to this question varied considerably with some interviewees 'liking' aspects of the natural environment (including emotive qualities such as tranquillity, serenity and peacefulness), some liking particular aspects of the track itself, some relating to the logistical and service features of the track experience, some describing social aspects of the experience and some describing personal impacts of the experience. Many interviewees reported combinations of these features:

It was super easy to navigate, it wasn't too hard or too long or anything, it helped that the scenery is beautiful – I loved that, everyone along the way was so friendly – I guess you meet a lot of like-minded people on the overnight hikes, so that was good too #6

It's a package really – it's very serene – there were very few people – we probably passed one or two couples and had one pass us in the whole time we were on it – huge periods with just being together, out in beautiful scenery – the peace, the tranquillity – seeing some of the birds – we saw some native birdlife and just getting away from it all really – in nature #10

The most liked natural features were the views with several interviewees specifically mentioning the colour of the water and the juxtaposition of land and water (e.g., '*the green ocean and the hills coming out if it*'). Others particularly liked the bird life, with a number of interviewees enjoying

seeing wekas. The multiple facets of the QCT's natural environment was liked, especially that *'it wasn't all forestry all the time'*. Being by the water also offered the opportunity to swim (e.g., *'it's very nice to be able to walk or go for a hike and then have a swim to cool off at the end or in the middle as well'*). The vagaries of the weather were also noted.

As noted, the services available enhanced the walking experience for many interviewees and was reported frequently as a most liked feature. For one interviewee this made the QCT one of New Zealand's 'best' walks:

Normally I would carry most of my stuff, so it allows you to go tenting – which I really enjoy – without having to carry your tent, so I really think the QCT is one of the best multi-day walks in New Zealand #1

The interviewee who was walking the Te Araroa – and who had the most extensive tramping experience of the interviewees – summed up their most liked aspects, highlighting two key features of the QCT (i.e., services and equitable access) that made it different to most other South Island tramping tracks:

I loved the viewpoints – a lot of views along the way, and obviously the track is beautifully maintained and it's a cool ... it's different to the other tracks in the South Island because it is more civilised, and people of all tramping abilities are able to do it #23

The complete list of 'most liked' responses can be found in Appendix 6.

3.2.2 Dislikes

Interviewees were also asked if there was anything that they didn't like about the QCT experience. Some of the dislikes reported related to expectations not being met, including that the *'track was not as well formed as I expected'* and not realising that the water taxi *'would take so long to return at the end of the day'*. One of the moderately experienced trampers noted that *'I would have liked more of a challenge – maybe I'm not the target market for QCT – it is for people who want something easy and accessible, but I was with a less experienced friend'*. One interviewee *'didn't like the resorts – [they were] poor versions of resorts'*. Overall, encountering less than perfect weather appeared to have limited impact on the QCT experience with cooler temperatures making walking 'pleasant' and bad weather reducing the number of other walkers on the track (which was perceived to be a positive).

Encountering people doing other recreational activities also attracted mixed reports. One interviewee, for example, noted that it was *'very noisy with music coming from boats'*, while for another this was acceptable because *'it is a holiday area'*. Another interviewee recalled that there had been a question about boat noise in the DOC survey they had done, which actually made them more *'conscious of the boat noise'* although it did not bother them. For another interviewee seeing all the boats was a *'point of difference'* and, as such, was *'interesting'*. Encountering cyclists on the track also had mixed reviews, with one interviewee reporting that they *'enjoyed seeing cyclists on the last day'*, while another *'felt we were in the way of bikers on the last day – that was probably a negative'*. Crowding on the track when cyclists were present was also flagged as a potential issue.

Several interviewees commented that there were some areas where more toilets along the track would be appreciated (e.g., *'from Furneaux Lodge to Punga Cove there are no toilets'*). One of the interviewees, who biked a section of the track, suggested that there were *'a couple of places with steep track that could be improved from a mountain biking perspective'*. Two of the most experienced trampers commented on encountering private land alongside the track, and on the diversity of 'tramper' types encountered, both of which contrasted with their normal (and preferred) tramping experience:

Everyone was out mowing their lawns at their back while you were doing a hike and a lot of signage for private accommodation and some of it is a bit excessive that kept bringing you out [of the track experience] #5

Usually, tramping is a bit of an equaliser and everyone is equally sweaty and yucky and on the QCT I found it a bit weird maybe that there were lots of brushed-up people in the lodges and things – especially if you pick up your pack and you are really grubby and everyone else has just had a massage #8

3.3 Dimensions of the QCT

When initially asked about their QCT experience many interviewees focused on its logistics (easy access, gear transfer, accommodation), the features of the track itself (surface, difficulty) and on the natural environment through which it traversed. These and other place dimensions/environments (e.g., historic, cultural, social) of the QCT experience were explored through a series of targeted questions (see Appendix 3 for the dimensions ‘prompt sheet’).

3.3.1 History and culture

As preamble to the history and culture dimension questions relating directly to being ‘on the track’ interviewees were asked if they had been introduced to these dimensions of the QCT during their water taxi transfer. The majority of interviewees recalled being given some information on their water taxi, although the amount and type of information varied by company (e.g., ‘*I think it was very much just a water taxi – there are ones that are eco tours, but this was just taking us to the walk*’). Others reported mixed experiences in respect of being given information with some recalling being told ‘stuff’ but not what it had been about. Exposure and attention to information was also dependent to some extent on where people were sitting on the water taxi, the prevailing conditions and their own level of interest (e.g., ‘*[my] friend was sitting inside and heard information by water taxi people – but I was sitting outside looking at all the views*’).

Those who recalled the most information talked about it positively (e.g., ‘*they gave us pamphlets that told us how long things would take, and a bit of history and that – it was definitely nice to be able to hear the history and origins and things*’). Two interviewees (who were walking together) travelled with a company who held a formal pre-trip information session in which they were told about the history, culture and natural environment on the QCT. Another interviewee – who had travelled from the North Island on the interislander – recalled looking at ‘*a big map that was interesting [with historic information about the Marlborough Sounds]*’. Only five interviewees reported that they had not been given any information at all on their water taxi transfer.

Ship Cove was the water taxi terminus and marked the start of the walk/tramp for most interviewees (the exceptions were one interviewee who went to Motuara island and then to Furneaux, one who started their part track walk from Resolution Bay and one who did a day walk from Furneaux). Ship Cove is an historic site with a number of interpretation boards and interviewees were asked if they had taken any time to read these and other interpretation signage along the track. Taking time to read these signs was impacted by the weather, uncertainty about walking times, the length of the planned days’ walk, previous knowledge and personal interest:

I think we just wanted to get going because we were pretty cold when we came off the boat and we just wanted to start walking and warm up a bit. To be honest I am not a big history person – I am more just a scenery person – so all the history doesn’t interest me too much – I don’t think the other guys read much either #20

One Picton-based interviewee (walking with her husband who had not been before) recalled that:

We did stop – I knew it already because I had been to Ship Cove on day trips several times before, but my husband stopped and read it all. I really liked the other boards along the first part of the track because they were new since the last time I was there, and it was really cool to read the different information – the other days on the track I missed having those boards – it was quite cool #19

Many interviewees were vague about the content of the Ship Cove and subsequent track signage (e.g., ‘maybe it was about Captain Cook, maybe wildlife’) while some paid more attention to the ‘information boards along the way, but not at Ship Cove’. One interviewee stopped and looked at all the signs after Ship Cove once they realised that they had enough time to do so. One part track walker (who was with her children) took a side trip to explore the area around Miners Camp during their overnight stop there and recalled the signage they had looked at:

We were not looking in ‘teacher detail’, but we stopped and had a nosey. It was quite fascinating that they were mining what was that for ... some kind of lead or something like that ... lithium or something and I thought ‘what the hell’ #17



Photo 2 Interpretation panel (Photo: S. Becken).

Most interviewees enjoyed seeing and reading the information boards along the track, although a few noted that after Punga Cove most of the signage related to commercial services and private land rather than interpretation of the surroundings. There were also differences in interviewees’ recall of – and interest in – the historical and cultural content of signage (including whether it related to European or to Maori settlement) and the balance between human and natural history:

I think the info boards would be great if they had anything relating to Maori culture or history or just native animals or birds. I saw a couple of those, but it is quite inconsistent when you are on the track #2

I am not interested in the European history of the area – ‘the logging and all that is very destructive’ and am more interested in Maori history than in European settlement history.

All the placards and that are about the colonial history and even what we got described about it in our briefing, or maybe on the ferry, and it was always about where Cook landed and I get that that is also momentous, but it definitely didn't really touch on the Maori side of things #5

We were told some Maori history by the water taxi people but there wasn't much once we got going – mostly about birdlife and pest species #10

I thought every sign had Maori stuff on it – I can't remember specifically (laughs) – but one of the things that I remember is how they used to carry the waka from one side until another and how that freaked out people #12

I thought that Maori history was prominent and there was a balance of the Europeans coming in and engaging with the original Maori tribes – they were both spoken to #16

When asked specifically about reading about cultural history on signage, one interviewee recalled 'I can just remember two signs ... maybe ... and I think they were more for the international tourists who would get a lot out of it rather than for New Zealanders like me'. One interviewee – who was originally from China – was on a nature tour (to Motuara island) and recalled:

There was a little island beside the bird island and a sign said about the history of the Maori people, and how they kept food in the caves, and it was interesting to read about those stories and the history – we quite enjoyed that #13

3.3.2 The natural environment

When asked about natural dimensions of the QCT, and what aspects of nature stood out for them, many interviewees focused on the wider landscapes rather than on the more intimate natural features (e.g., bush, birds) of the QCT. A highlight for many was being on the ridgeline and being able to see into both Queen Charlotte and Kenepuru Sounds:

Obviously, the sounds – particularly the main view that I seem to have in my mind is being on the ridge and being able to see down both the Kenepuru Sound and the main sound (Queen Charlotte) down into Picton – definitely that sort of 'dual sounds view' was really cool #16

The water, the view at the top – just before the Bay of Many Coves campsite and looking down both sides and just the native bush as well was really impressive, and it's quite impressive how the many areas have regenerated #21

One interviewee commented that they 'didn't realise there were so many bays', while they and others noted that their enjoyment of these was facilitated by the number of clearings (viewpoints), park benches and picnic tables provided. As one day walker noted:

That's another thing we talked about actually – when you are on a tramp like that you spend a lot of time looking at your footing, and you can miss a bit of it, so when you get to a hilltop or an opening you can see the sounds and you really have to take it in and take a photo #22

As noted previously, the colour of water was mentioned by many interviewees and four interviewees mentioned marine life, with two seeing dolphins from the water taxi, one who saw stingrays while in Picton and one for whom swimming with bioluminescent plankton during their night at Lochmarra

was ‘*an unforgettable experience*’. The combination of beech forest and water views was also commented on by a number of interviewees.

There were several comments about the ‘vastness’ of the sounds and ‘*being able to look out and see for miles*’. The uniqueness of the landscape (including ‘*the shape of the bays*’), the juxtaposition of water and land – noted by some as a ‘most liked’ feature – and the landscape variety were also mentioned as notable features of the natural environment of QCT. As one interviewee noted, ‘*it is all the different sections – you passed through quite a different variety of types of forest and farmland – you cover quite a lot of different ecosystems in that period of time*’. One of the older Picton-based walkers was able to recall (and appreciate) changes in the landscape and, particularly in the vegetation, during her lifetime:

I prefer the natural bush – I love seeing it growing back – the pines trees are especially noticeable, but because we are locals we know that they are an industry, but they look yucky and they always talk about the programme where they are putting the position into them and you can see the ones that are dying off, and I don’t think they look that nice on the hills – I do prefer the bush and it’s interesting where ... say at the head of Endeavour Inlet where it has been cleared and it is all long grass that has grown back and so it looks kind of interesting, but the grassy hillside is OK and people are still growing things, or have sheep on their farms. Around Ship Cove where it is still the original bush you can tell how glorious it is, compared to other areas where it has come back really well, but it hasn’t got that density yet, or that height #18

The diversity of the Marlborough Sounds vegetation was reported by many interviewees with tree ferns, punga, native bush, beech forest (towards Anakiwa) and Pohutakawa specifically mentioned. One interviewee commented that the variety of bush they had seen was not commonly encountered in the South Island (e.g., ‘*definitely the bush and how it’s ... like it seems super similar to the North Island in the variety of the trees, and from what I have seen in the South Island nowhere else is really like that there*’) while another reflected on how different the bush was to what they were used to (in Auckland). The combination (and variation) of vegetation, bird and insect life encountered along the track were also noted:

The changing flora – the changing trees – we noticed that from one part to later on there were different varieties of trees – the crickets, the birdlife ... um ... obviously, sometimes you are high up and sometimes you are closer to the water – just the changing flora and fauna and probably – although we only saw some of the birdlife occasionally – the different sounds #10

The birdlife attracted mixed comments with some ‘*not seeing as many birds as expected – I had my bird book with me*’ and others, as noted previously, enjoying seeing weka. For some, the ‘*birdsong was a highlight*’ and was particularly noted in relation to camping.

The interviewees who were given a pre-trip briefing were told about the age (and location) of some of the vegetation along the QCT and knowing what to look for while on the walk enhanced their experience. Another recalled being told about what was happening on small islands in the Sounds in terms of conservation. The day walker was not overly interested in the natural environment of the QCT, referring to it as ‘*just a general average bush walk*’. One of the part track walkers – who enjoyed exploring the Miners Camp area because it ‘*felt more isolated and untouched by people*’ – was also not all that interested in some aspects of the natural environment:

The actual bush in the track is not that appealing to me I have to say – we were trying to name all the different plants as we went through, and we weren’t great at that – but I can’t say that I am really into them. We did see loads and loads of tuis which I love – but the

kids again are not as keen as me. I heard moreporks, but obviously didn't see any – I thought there would be more of some birds that I didn't see – I saw some kereru, but not that many – I thought there would be a lot more #4

3.3.3 The social environment

The developed and highly serviced nature of the QCT track fosters more diverse social interactions than occur in other walking/tramping settings (e.g., regional and national parks). As such, the social dimension of the QCT encompasses interactions between different walkers and walking groups, as well as between walkers, cyclists, the various transport service providers, accommodation providers, hospitality business owners and their staff, other holiday makers, local residents and DOC staff.

While most of those interviewed enjoyed meeting and talking to other walkers, the level of interaction with others was impacted by group size and composition, and the type of accommodation used. As one of the part track walkers noted, *'what was nice about the walk was that at various times we got talking to different people – and that was just lovely having these conversations with people – and these were just random conversations'*.

Others *'enjoyed being in busy campsites – meeting other people and meeting them again over multiple days'* and with *'other walkers going at same pace we hung out when at camp'*. One interviewee commented that they enjoyed *'connecting with fellow New Zealanders on the trail'*. An increase in New Zealanders travelling domestically (as a result of Covid-19) was evidenced for one interviewee by seeing *'some inexperienced people struggling to put up their tents'* adding that *'my son went to give them a hand eventually'*.

For solo walkers, the presence of other people in the campsites made them feel safer, while one commented that *'I'm not really worried about animals or anything, but sometimes I worry about what if there is a crazy person out here'*. Some campsites more enjoyed than others with assessment based on their location (including in relation to lodges – with 'close' rating highly), the services available, pricing and being able to be pre-booked. There were a number of comments around not enjoying the 'road access' campsite at Cowshed Bay as much as the walker-only campsites such as Camp Bay.

Those visiting with family groups, or with more than one other person, tended to not mix with others as much, while for one of the couples interviewed the experience *'provided couple time'* rather than an opportunity to interact with other people. An interviewee from the largest group (which included 9 people) talked about the dynamic of walking in such a big group:

Being in a big group was slightly different, but still nice – we would just walk in twos during the day – if it was a big corporate group, I think that would be a different vibe, but because we are all really old friends it was nice #21

Overall, most interviewees reported seeing *'more people closer to resorts'* and talking to people at night around accommodation settings. One interviewee suggested that *'at the lodges you interact with the staff, but not with other walkers – probably not as much as if I was staying in a tent'*, while another added that they *'tended to interact with other walkers more than holidaymakers at the lodges'*. One Aucklander who stayed at the lodges commented that:

I didn't really know what I was expecting from the accommodation and I didn't realise that a lot of people go and holiday there as well – I kind of thought it was just a walking track – so that was quite cool to see that a lot of the places had their regulars in – people who come in for two weeks at a time. It definitely had a vibe about it – there were lots of families and at dinner time it could be quite social – not that we would maybe talk to

people, but there were heaps of people around and sitting in front of the water and having dinner #11

Meeting locals and people with local connections or personal history of the Marlborough Sounds added to the experience for a number of interviews. As one interviewee noted *'if you have someone who knows the place and the history and can talk – you get that insight – it comes to life a bit more'*. The 'passion' of the person giving the pre-walk information briefing stood out for one interviewee and made them *'wonder what a guided walk would be like'*. For several others, the captain on the water taxi was *'really funny and I think that adds to your trip'* while another interviewee enjoyed hearing the personal stories of life in the Marlborough Sounds on their water taxi.

While most interviewees enjoyed switching off from their cellphones and from social media for a few days one couple, who were originally from the UK, admitted to connecting to a friend in the UK during their walk via social media:

We took photos during the day and you did have internet access at night – the posting of the photos was actually sharing – I mean I had a wonderful day and I wanted to show people – it wasn't work emails or anything like that. We were taking photos and posting them on Facebook and were a little bit apologetic to our friends who are in the UK in lockdown, and we were having this beautiful walk #15(f)

3.3.4 The built (and service) environment

The built (and service) environment of the QCT emerged as an important dimension – which had not been included on the dimension prompt sheet in Appendix 3 – in the interviews. The built environment of the QCT includes campsites (with varying facilities), an array of commercial accommodation (from basic lodges offering backpacker accommodation to more luxurious resorts) lodges, resorts), private rental properties, private permanent dwellings and holiday homes/baches. The concentration of houses, lodges and baches in some areas impacted on many interviewees experience of 'nature'. While for some seeing signs of settlement was a negative and was 'jarring', others enjoying seeing something 'different' (see Table 6).

Table 6 Impact of seeing signs of settlement

Negative 'jarring'	<p>In some ways it [the settlement] maybe detracted from it a little bit because you felt like you weren't really in the wild wilderness – we were kind of camping and one of my friends wanted to go and get food and drinks from the lodge at night and I thought 'well that's not camping' – I guess it depends what type of person you are, and what you are looking for when you go out for a walk #14</p> <p>What we found is on the second day, as you got towards Punga Cove – what was almost jarring was suddenly coming across houses and civilisation, whereas the first day you felt completely like you were in the middle of nowhere, but by the second day you were almost in a suburban place – before that it was the middle of nowhere #15(m)</p>
Positive 'different'	<p>Seeing the baches there was all part of it – I guess that my parents have a bach up at Coromandel at a beach with 10,000 other people and you can see it as an attraction for people ... for that kind of remoteness. And really the fact that one of the kids said that it was just like on country calendar – you see these things on those shows that people have to catch a boat to get there – we are in quite an urban part of the world and that actually is a different life #17</p> <p>I found it quite cool that ... especially that first day when you walk from SC and see not a lot of civilisation or locals or residents along the way, and then you come across all the baches at Furneaux – that was quite cool, because it doesn't come with the feeling of roading, or of walking back into town or anything like that #16</p>

As noted previously, many visitors enjoyed the services provided on the track, with some planning to take full advantage of what was on offer (e.g., *'I had pre-booked a spa and planned an extra day at one lodge'*). Others commented that the level of services did not necessarily detract from having a nature experience (e.g., *'it's not too civilised – not like you have power points everywhere and you don't have to go into the lodges'*) while others noted that *'I think that is a benefit of the QCT – that there are places where you can stop and have a bite to eat, and there are different activities you can do rather than being totally in the bush'*. Another of the day walkers, who was doing a different walk from Furneaux, found the signage 'confusing' with signage to the various lodges distracting from the track signage while another thought the amount of signage for private accommodation 'excessive'.

3.3.5 Environmental issues

When asked if they had noticed any environmental issues, most interviewees were very positive about the lack of litter and the condition of the track. Other walkers were reported to be environmentally well-behaved, although one interviewee *'saw people feeding the wekas which wasn't great'*. There were more mixed reports about the adequacy of toilet provision with some people being surprised at the number of toilets and others reporting the placement of these to be somewhat uneven.

Several interviewees commented on seeing predator traps (e.g., *'I noticed that there was some trapping and stuff going on'*). While these were expected in this type of environment, one of the more experienced trampers also mentioned wasp stations commenting that *'I thought the new wasp traps (poison stations) were interesting – I haven't seen those before'*. Another added that *'there are still quite a few invasive species – there is still quite a lot of work to do – there is still a lot of evidence of pigs in the environment and things like that'*.



Photo 3 Furneaux Lodge (Photo: S. Becken).

Wilding pines were mentioned by only a few interviewees, usually because they had been told about them by water taxi operators. One of the Picton-based walkers, who was well-informed about wilding pine mitigation efforts, talked about the success of ‘wilding pine tree programme’ and the impact on the Marlborough Sounds environment – *‘that’s the biggest difference for me – they are starting to fall and the bush coming up has changed the landscape because growing up in the Marlborough Sounds those pine forests took up large areas’*. Another interviewee (who taught environment management), however, suggested that *‘even wilding pines are not a very concerning issue from a walker perspective’*. One interviewee also recalled that *‘the driver of the water taxi the other day said there has been no dolphins this year because there are so many boaties this summer’*. A number of interviewees reflected on the broader environmental impact of their travel and QCT visit:

I don’t think people doing the QCT can be neutral on the environment – I took a giant boat and I drove to the Marlborough Sounds and I walked and damaged the land – and even just walking the track and using the toilet I know I had an impact, even it is small – but definitely not a positive impact on that environment #12

To some extent, the presence of human settlement and commercial activity contributed to lowered environmental expectations – as one interviewee explained, *‘every bay in the Marlborough Sounds either has a campsite or lodge or a house – it’s humans that are highly impactful there, but in terms of environmental concerns it is a populated area like anywhere else’*. One interviewee was very environmentally aware/informed and mentioned issues they had observed (i.e., *‘the amount of pine forest and farming on marginal productive land in the Marlborough Sounds’*), as well as issues – such as the sustainability of aquaculture (particularly salmon farming) – that they had read about. One of the walkers who had a pre-trip briefing remembered being told about the salmon and mussel farms, but could not recall any issues being raised, while another interviewee added that, visually *‘the mussel and salmon farms are too small to notice really’*. One of the Picton-based walkers had a ‘local’ perspective of economic activity in the Marlborough Sounds:

I guess in a way we don't like the forestry either, because they truck the big trees through the town and that puts silt in the water ... um ... I like the mussel industry because I think they clean the water, but the salmon farms we are not so sure about – I think they need to be out where there is a better current to clean it, but we would worry that the sounds could be deadened by too many salmon farms #18

While several interviewees had broad concerns about the impact of visitors in natural environments some also reflected on how it may have been busier with visitors were it not for the Covid-19 border closure and the lack of international tourists (e.g., ‘*I do wonder what Picton and the QCT would have been like had it been normal times in February walking those tracks – with international tourists around*’). While one interviewee described a suite of broader environmental concerns associated with human activity, they considered the Marlborough Sounds to be relatively unscathed:

People have done an awful lot of damage to the natural environment – you thankfully hear the climate change proposals that came out a few days ago and that we are going to start cleaning up our act, but it's a bit too late really – I am really passionate about there being more public transport in Auckland and frustrated that everybody drives everywhere, and so the environment – people have to look after it and we haven't, and places like the Marlborough Sounds thankfully, to a large extent, have been looked after #15(f)

3.4 The essence of the QCT

3.4.1 What makes the QCT

After discussing the various dimensions of the QCT interviewees were asked to describe the ‘essence of the QCT’. While a similar range of features were highlighted as in the ‘most liked’ question, individual’s responses to these two questions were sometimes quite different. As the examples in Table 7 show, the ‘most liked’ responses were both more pragmatic and more personalised (in respect of the QCT experience), whereas the essence question attracted more effusive descriptions of the natural environment of the QCT and its surrounds.

Table 7 Comparison of ‘most liked’ and ‘essence of the QCT’ comments

Most liked	Essence of the QCT
Track was easy to follow – didn't require much navigation #9	I just think it's stunning – there are so many good views – I felt like I just wanted to stop every five minutes sometimes and just take pictures – the scenery throughout is just spectacular #9
I don't know – [it is] beautiful – it's not too hard – it's got nice places to stop along the way – decent accommodation that's not too expensive – I'm not really a camper and I didn't have to worry about taking my gear with me #18	I guess it's the sea – it's the bush – the beautiful bush and it's more a warmer [environment] ... it's not the alpine ... it's a coastal, but enclosed [environment] ... a peaceful, warm coastal walk – not an exposed, bracing coastal walk and it's a nice bush [walk] ... and the sea and the sort of beautifully-coloured green or turquoise sea – depending on the weather, of course #18
Obviously, the stunning scenery – the track is well developed – the fact that, even though the walk was 17.5 kms and took us just over 4 hours, the climbs were gradual – we did a walk of a similar distance a month ago and it was almost vertical #22	I think the essence is that it's ... I imagine that it's quite a bountiful harbour – there were fishing boats dotted throughout – and I think that it's ... as a sales pitch to the Gateway to the South Island – it's beautiful – yeah – I think it's a bit of a – hidden gem is not the right word – but when you talk to people [about it] I think there is so much more to do [that you can tell them about] #22

For the majority of interviewees, the essence of the QCT was represented by the land- and seascapes of the Marlborough Sounds. This encompassed the expansive vistas and a perception of vastness (noted previously), as well a sense of remoteness, isolation and timelessness:

It was quite remote – it felt remote, even though we were only a boat ride from somewhere, and so it felt quite isolated – rugged is probably a cheesy word but ... untouched – like I know there are 10,000 people walk that track, but when you are looking around the hills you could see it looking like that 200 years ago and then in another 200 years' time [it would be the same] #17

Most of the time you were quite close to the water and the views of Endeavour Inlet were always there and that really was – I wouldn't say overpowering, but it was dominating – the bush was beautiful, but always you were coming back to the actual sounds #15(m)

While the 'water' took prominence in respect of the natural environment of the QCT, references to the native bush often focused on the tropical nature of the QCT environs:

You get some spectacular views down the sounds – you can see the vistas for a long way – in many directions you see good views – you have all the different plant life and bush life around you ... um ... even parts of it are more tropical as well – so, it's just the heart of it is being back in the centre of nature #10

For a number of interviewees, the human dimension represented an important facet of the essence of QCT, particularly in respect of the early settlement history (e.g., 'straight away what comes to mind is the history as far as Ship Cove goes – so that's an important thing'). In addition to connecting the current QCT visitor experience to the past, it also serves to highlight the significance of the human 'journey' and of personal 'discovery' in a natural environment which remains significantly modified:

I would say it's ... in the sense that you are not necessarily following the coast, but you are going from the edge of the sounds back to ... civilisation ... and there's a degree to which it's a natural path that people would have followed I guess, and I think that link with the water is a key thing #15(f)

I guess the essence is that I found we didn't bump into that many people, so you kind of felt like you were the only ones there experiencing it, which was quite cool – so, it kind of feels like it's your discovery #11

The complete list of 'essence of the QCT' responses can be found in Appendix 7.

3.4.2 Comparison with other places/walks/experiences

When describing the QCT (and their experience on the track) many interviewees compared the QCT to other walks/tramps they had done. These comparisons included discussion around the facilities and services of the QCT, which were commonly presented in the context of broader consideration of perceptions of wilderness associated with the environs of the QCT. Perceptions of wilderness varied considerably and encompassed the presence of 'development', as well as feelings of remoteness and isolation. Being 'less wild' was not necessarily a negative aspect as many interviewees enjoyed seeing evidence of human occupation (e.g., 'it was cool seeing all the baches dotted around and to see them in a place that looks quite remote'). Table 8 illustrates some of the comments describing the QCT as being 'less wild' (as a result of) and 'still wild' (in spite of) the quality of the track, availability of services and evidence of human settlement.

Table 8 The wilderness of the QCT

Less wild	<p>I'd say definitely less wild – that's just the people, the houses, the lodges – you don't normally get civilisation when you are on other walks #21</p> <p>QCT is a bit more domesticated [than tramping tracks in national parks] ... #18</p> <p>Probably less wild because the track was so well managed – made for international tourists and probably for people of average fitness #10</p> <p>It feels a little bit more of an environment where people have been ... it's mostly an environment that has been highly managed both in terms of infrastructure and landscape itself #12</p> <p>Felt less wild because there were roads and all the lodges #14</p> <p>Having lodges and baches makes it less wild – also much more accessible #7</p> <p>I was surprised by how many houses and baches [there were] and so it was less wild than other places, but I enjoyed seeing the baches #6</p>
Still wild	<p>It didn't feel less wild, but it definitely felt established and accessible #22</p> <p>I think it felt more in the wild because of how quiet it was to be honest, and even having the lodges at night didn't really change that – you are just there and then you move on again #20</p> <p>When you are walking it is still very much in the wilderness, but then there is beer and chips #1</p>

The QCT environs were noted as being '*very different to national parks*' and having some experience of more remote tramps, or of at least one Great Walk, provided a useful point of comparison for interviewees (e.g., '*the QCT had everything a Great Walk has (except huts) but offers more services – you can stop and buy food in the cafes and lodges and don't have to carry the same amount of food*'; '*it's not in a national park like the other walks, and I know it's not a Great Walk, but if you were to compare it to other Great Walks it is much more accessible, but much less natural*'). One interviewee noted that '*the bush on the QCT was less dense than some of the bush at other places [Nelson Lakes, Abel Tasman]*'. While most interviewees equated 'wilderness' with the absence of settlement or services and with being less accessible, the degree to which this was apparent during periods of walking, and how well the track was maintained, also provided measures of 'wilderness' (e.g., '*on the track you are as immersed in nature as you are anywhere else*').

The Abel Tasman Coast Track was often posited in comparison to the QCT – in part because many of the people interviewed had also been on this track, but also because of its similarity to the QCT (i.e., a multi-day coastal bush walk). Table 9 presents a summary of some of these comparisons grouped according to whether they simply described the Abel Tasman and QCT as being 'different places', presented 'mixed views' (i.e., with each attributed with both positive and negative features), or expressed a 'preference for the QCT'.

Table 9 Comparison of the QCT and the Abel Tasman Coast Track

Different places	<p>Abel Tasman was beachy – just ducking in and out of beaches that all look the same – QCT felt more like a hike and went up high #11</p> <p>The Abel Tasman is nice as well, but the sounds are just special and quite different to other coastal scenes #9</p> <p>We probably saw more wildlife in Abel Tasman – we did see some weka and we saw a goat [on the QCT] – the kids were quite excited about that – but that’s not exactly good wildlife to see – we just enjoyed it – just quite liked being out in the place – and each environment is unique, isn’t it? #17</p> <p>The walk felt quite a lot different – the Abel Tasman felt a lot more – not commercial – but the paths were a lot more even and easy to walk on, whereas the QCT felt a little bit more untouched I guess #20</p>
Mixed views	<p>I liked QCT more because of the open views along the track itself, but preferred the Abel Tasman to the QCT because of the beaches #4</p> <p>Less wild than Abel Tasman because you can step outside to a resort – and the children loved that, but for me not so much #4</p> <p>What I did really enjoy about the Abel Tasman that we didn’t really have so much on the QCT was the camping spots on the beach – the camping spots on the QCT were back a bit from the beach – but the AT was quite a busy track [compared to the QCT] #21</p>
Preference for the QCT	<p>Compared with Abel Tasman, the Marlborough Sounds view is nicer because you can see the bushes and also the sea at the same time – because normally you can’t see both #13</p> <p>The QCT was less crowded – hut experience in Abel Tasman was too congested #4</p> <p>They are also quite different because of the lodges – I guess it depends what you are after as to what you prefer, but I think that even though we only did a day on the Abel Tasman I think I liked the QCT more #20</p>

Tramping in national parks was perceived to offer more homogenous landscapes and a more immersive experience, in respect of both the natural environment and interaction with other trampers (e.g., ‘*there was probably more interaction in the DOC hut [on the Abel Tasman Coast Track] especially when it was raining*’). The remoteness (in respect of geography and accessibility) of national park tramps also made them more challenging:

That is really different, particularly the non-Great Walks I have done – you are so immersed when you get there [to the hut] and there is usually only you and one or two other people and like the fire and the drying room – so it is part of the experience – but that being said it does make it a little bit more complicated because no one is there, and the only person who knows you are there is the person you have told where you were going – it does really feel different – even doing walks where you tend to not stay in huts
#21

In contrast, the QCT felt less remote than other tramping environments although, as noted above, remoteness was not perceived uniformly (e.g., ‘*the QCT part of the Marlborough Sounds doesn’t feel like it’s “off the beaten” track – because of all the access points*’; ‘*the first day felt quite remote – the second day felt less remote*’). The QCT also offered a greater diversity of scenery, activity options, and social interactions than most national park tramping experiences:

Compared to other hikes you didn't really feel like you were alone, or that you were that far out from any returning people ... and you were getting away from it a little bit, but not that much, and especially that campsite near The Portage where people can drive to as well, and a lot more people had just driven up there and camped and not had to hike there – it was kind of nice just being where the only other people have also hiked – and you can share that experience #2

These comparisons also highlighted the interconnected – and sometimes contradictory – perceptions of wilderness and of remoteness. For many, wilderness was a more straightforward concept in that it simply described the natural environment (including how modified it was and, sometimes, containing a measure of remoteness). In contrast, perceptions of remoteness were strongly related to feelings of 'isolation' and described in respect of distance from civilisation, the number of other people present and accessibility:

I don't think the Marlborough Sounds is [all that wild] ... while you are quite a long way from places, and it is relatively isolated, but now that we have done it, I have realised that we were never that far from anything, so I think that while it's still kind of remote, it's actually not far from services and that sort of stuff, and it's still fairly civilised – it's a good mixture I think of still being way out in nature, but also still being accessible #16

Several interviewees commented on enjoying activities other than walking/tramping in natural environments such as the QCT and the Abel Tasman (e.g., 'mountain biking for a day added to the experience'; 'we loved that – the different perspective from the water in Abel Tasman – we thought that was a really cool thing to do – we were kayaking and camping'). One interviewee (who was more of a mountain biker than a trumper) 'enjoyed the biking more than the walking on the QCT' although each activity had its positives. For some, the QCT walking/tramping experience was also impacted by their group size (with a large group engendering an easier trip). The commercial activity and creature comforts of the QCT, more typical of walking in Europe (and noted as being unusual in the New Zealand setting) was appreciated by older walkers/trampers:

Just not seeing any commercial activity – that is one thing that really sets New Zealand apart from Europe I think – because every mountain has a gondola or huts somewhere that are hosted. It is monetised whenever they can, and I really enjoy that that is not the case here. It's two different experiences I guess, and I can see the appeal of the QCT for a lot of people – the creature comforts – and surely when my knees give in, I will want those (laughs) #8

3.4.3 Ideal nature experience

As a follow up question, interviewees were asked what their ideal nature experience would be. While environmental diversity was a popular feature, preferences were also influenced by previous walking experience (and experiences) and the level of knowledge and interest in particular aspects of the landscape:

A lot of diversity – like different plants and different rock formations, views, waterways and things like that – Kahurangi National Park (where I did a five day hike) was very diverse and much more interesting. Maybe it depends on how much hiking experience you have because these other places were quite remote #2

I am tempted to say diversity – if all we were seeing was native bush for a week I would get really bored, but you go from one to the other – I mean this weekend we are going

down to do Tongariro which is again very different and that will be great, but it's a mixture that is good #15(m)

Overall, responses to this question varied between those focused on the type of environment (and sometimes a specific location) (e.g., '*I do prefer alpine environments*'; '*probably something a bit more [unmodified] ... without the roads and without the baches I think*') and those which focused on the type of experience sought including the previous experience, characteristics and motives of the people involved. Describing one's ideal nature experience was, however, challenged by balancing a variety of experience dimensions, as one of the moderately experience trampers (who concluded that they preferred the QCT to the Abel Tasman) explained:

I think I quite like more of a challenge when it comes to fitness – a bit more of an up and down, but also good balances of steady terrain as well, but I also quite like a wine at night as well – and at night you had the bars and the lodges [on the QCT] #20

3.4.4 Telling the QCT story

The final question about the QCT experience asked each interviewee what their post-QCT story had been. Most of these stories were positive and contained a mix of track description (about the scenery, track logistics, etc) and details of the interviewee's own personal experience:

I have been telling people that it is worth doing ... that it was a good mixture of activity and still relaxing ... definitely worth doing for the scenery ... the way we did it with the biking on the second day was quite a big day out biking ... so as long as people are aware of that ... but definitely 'worth doing' has been my summary #16

Recommending the QCT to others was a key feature of many QCT stories with many interviewees emphasising the holiday aspect and the suitability – and manageability – of the walk for people of all ages, abilities and experience:

I just started back at work a week ago and I have told people I went to the QCT and it was beautiful – and I asked my workmates if they had done it – and told them that they should do it – it's only 4 days – it's close and I would say that even if they are not a massive outdoorsy or walker type it's actually quite manageable – like the walk definitely has some hard sections, but there was all sorts of fitness levels on that track and that is quite nice as well – it feels accessible – like we could potentially take our parents, and I said to them as well that it was a nice balance of exercising and kind of having that nature experience, but also like a nice holiday as well #7

Some stories reflected the personal challenges faced by interviewees – and perhaps provided an opportunity to debrief and rationalise their experience – while also enabling them to consider ways that they might change their approach to future walks/tramps:

I guess that it was really beautiful, and it wasn't that diverse in the scenery, and that it was easy, and there was actually one option that some other people were doing which would be more like what me and my friends would like, which was walking some of it and then having bikes dropped off, and biking some of it, and then kayaking the last section – that would make it more interesting for me. It does not cost all that much more than what you have to pay for just walking #2

Often, the QCT 'story' aligned with the 'most liked' aspects of the QCT with a focus for many on the availability of services and facilities on the track and how these made the track an 'easy walk'. Not having to carry a pack, seeing marine wildlife (dolphins and bioluminescent plankton), and the

‘fancy lodges’ made the QCT a ‘unique’ experience. For most, the focus of their QCT story was on the unexpected or unique features experienced, rather than on its nature setting, which – along with the features of the track itself – were taken as a ‘given’ in respect of walking/tramping experiences.

For several interviewees, their story was about other places they had visited on the same trip/holiday (rather than the QCT) – one of these focused on their preferred walk (e.g., ‘*I guess I haven’t really talked about it, but I have been telling people about the Nydia Track*’) which was a ‘better experience’ as it was ‘*much quieter and a bit more isolated and had wonderful accommodation*’. Another admitted that their holiday story had been about an ‘unexpected’ walking experience at Nelson Lakes, while one talked about how the QCT was easier than Great Walks to plan:

We have talked about the Abel Tasman and the QCT – the QCT was a nice ... like a doable track ... and that it was easily accessible – like you don’t have to book a whole year in advance like the Great Walks – you can just decide to do and still do it, which is nice and that there are really pretty views #14

The complete list of ‘telling the QCT story’ responses can be found in Appendix 8.



Photo 4 Lochmara lodge jetty (Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/canolais/3281576635/>).

3.5 Connecting to place (and to nature)

3.5.1 Reflections on connectedness

Interviewees were asked how connected to place (and to nature) they felt while on the QCT, how long that connection lasted and if they had expected such as connection (i.e., experienced it before). While spending time in a natural environment setting was a key component of many interviewee's motives for visiting – and 'nature' was a 'most liked' feature for many – only a few specifically referenced a natural feature when asked about connecting to place (e.g., '*felt connected by hearing the birdsong*'). The Te Araroa trampler, who had been walking for several months, talked about connecting to the natural environment on a daily basis:

I think it takes time [to connect] and you have to really be very aware of it – like it's so easy to just get lost in your mind when you are on multi-day hikes – not get bored, but kind of wishing that the day was over – I think you have to tune in, and breathe, and notice the bush, and take notice of the birdsong and how the bush is changing – because it can even change so much in a day. When you are walking for a long time, you become less sensitive to the environment, which is annoying because most places are so gorgeous #23

One of the local Picton interviewees talked about her 'local' connection to the Marlborough Sounds, noting that '*even though you are not out there all the time, it is part of the view of your daily life – the weather, and the atmosphere, and the business of people coming and going – the air you breathe*'. The same interviewee went on to describe the positive personal impact of a connection fostered by spending time in the QCT environs:

It's like a nice ... it feels like I am doing something good with my day... something positive ... I am doing something worthwhile... I am seeing the area and I've achieved something ... or even like over a couple of months you feel like you have achieved something by getting around that particular area – I guess I feel connected – like this is the area I'm from, this is the area I have grown up – this is my place [not like I own it] but where I am from #18

Table 10 contains a selection of answers given in response to this question which highlight the importance – for many – of having a personal (and often historical) connection to place and how immersion in (and focus on) the natural environment fostered a sense of connection. Meeting people who lived and worked there, or reading about the history of settlement, also fostered a sense of connection for some (e.g., '*I think for me often it is the history and the people that have been there before, and you may be read about someone who lived there, and that sort of thing tends to be meaningful for me*'). Another interviewee reflected on their overnight lodge experiences which fostered connection via both the 'natural setting' and through learning about the lodge's history.

Those who reported being less connected tended to have limited personal connection to the QCT and its surroundings or found that the connection to the natural environment was interrupted by encounters with 'the human aspect' and, in particular, the built environment. For one of the solo walkers (who was carrying her own bags), the desire to complete each day's walk was an overriding focus and impacted on the amount of time they spent absorbing the natural environment around them adding that they had '*expected the experience to be much more serene and calm and reflective*'.

Table 10 Connecting to nature and place

Connection	<p>Because I have spent time here before I had that connection – definitely – and seeing some of the places I have been before, and I was trying to point them out to my sister because she wasn't always with us – it was a lot easier to relate to [than other places I have been] #6</p> <p>You feel very kiwi there – you feel like 'this is New Zealand' – I don't really know how to describe it – when I am out there – and particularly [in a place like the] Marlborough Sounds – I feel like I am at home and I do feel connected to it – because it's home #4</p> <p>I think there was a good connection – I think you just feel ... once you get going ... after that first 20 minutes of walking everything else switches off – and you are just connected, and you think this is my environment for the next 5 hours and then you are checking on your partner, your equipment and you are taking in the environment and you are nowhere else #22</p> <p>I think you feel really connected and I guess that's the beauty of it because even with the water activity and other people nearby the track and views maintains your focus #19</p> <p>I would say I was completely absorbed in it, but I am like that when I walk anyway – for me walking is quite therapeutic – like I don't walk with headphones and even if you are with someone else it's not like you walk side by side #1</p> <p>Felt connected because at every stop got to know the people working there and learned a bit of history – those people had often been there for a long time and had very strong connections to the place – but then also feeling like the track was yours #11</p>
Limited connection	<p>Not particularly connected – I mean there are some nice patches, but with the amount of activity and as I mentioned the private advertising along the walk, I keep getting pulled out of it #5</p> <p>A light connection – compared with other places because of the human aspect – felt more connected at Abel Tasman where there were more people but there was more interruptions with seeing a shop and resorts [on the QCT] #8</p> <p>I felt probably like a 4 out of 10 – like I said I was quite focused – my main concern was getting to the campsite in enough time every night to get myself sorted, so in that respect I was head down most of the way, rather than stopping to take things in #9</p> <p>I have a strong connection to places that my family have a family connection with, and I still feel connected to there because it's very much part of my heritage, whereas the QCT was beautiful, but I was just visiting there I guess so I didn't feel a great connection #15</p>

Seeing signage along the track – which provided information about the natural environment and the changes it had been subject to – helped to foster a sense of connection for some:

The signs definitely helped to just not see it as just a bunch of trees and a track, but to kind of get an idea as well of the place – I teach environmental management, so having an understanding of what that landscape has meant for previous generations, and the changes it has gone through and to know of the efforts that have been put into making it ... to bringing it back to what it used to be ... or to be attractive – it was quite interesting for me – I think I read all of the signs that I could find (laughs) – that care definitely stood out for me #12

When asked what aspect of this connection to nature was clearest in their mind, interviewees described being in and enjoying the natural environment (e.g., 'just being surrounded by nature'; 'walking through the bush is a calm, peaceful thing, and I was not as exhausted as on other walks';

‘birdsong from the tent, the punga, the views’; ‘that the birds weren’t scared of people, they just walk beside you – and that we saw some birds we hadn’t seen before’; ‘going for a swim in the cold sea after a long day of walking’).

Interviewees were also asked how it had affected them at the time. One interviewee recalled that it *‘put me in a good mood’* while several others described a social dimension as a key facet of their feelings of connection (e.g., *‘I was feeling pretty happy because the kids weren’t fighting, and everybody was enjoying it – it was peaceful – a peaceful feeling and no stress or anything’; ‘being in tranquillity and serenity and being together and being able to enjoy it together – and there are not many people’*).

When asked if these feelings stayed with them after they had left the QCT, some described an ‘activity effect’ (e.g., having enjoyed a walk), some describing a feeling of ‘disconnecting from life’ (and especially technology) and others having ‘a holiday feeling’ (away from the normal stresses of life) (see Table 11). One interviewee (who completed several other tramps after the QCT) recalled that these feelings of connection stayed with them *‘through my entire holiday, and I came back here sparkling’*.

Table 11 Retaining feelings of connection to nature

Activity effect	Usually come away with some positive aspect of enjoyment – just from walking – can be ‘luck of the draw’ experiences (e.g., seeing dolphins) #1
Disconnecting from ‘life’	<p>Felt really relaxed at the end of the walk and for the whole of the next couple of days I felt very chill – I just think being in nature – there is no cellphones, nobody was connected to anything – it was just walking – we carried our water and bit of lunch, and even if we didn’t talk, we were just together #3</p> <p>It was nice just having a couple of weeks away from home and not really using our cell phones and checking emails – so that was the big thing – we didn’t have phone chargers and so you had to be in wilderness for that to be forced upon you #14</p>
A holiday feeling	<p>If you go on a nice long holiday to somewhere lovely in the outdoors and then everything stressful melts away until you get back to work #4</p> <p>Getting out in the bush like that makes it feel like you’ve had a real holiday as opposed to being stuck around the town #19</p>

All of these feelings were underpinned – and reinforced – by being in nature and by being away from home (urban life, work) and on holiday. For one of the day walkers, the feelings of immersion in nature, and satisfaction fostered by their day out on the QCT, were both more significant and longer lasting they expected:

I wanted to be there and nowhere else and we were planning to ... we thought we would probably have a cold drink at Furneaux Lodge, get the boat back, have a shower and then go out for dinner to make a whole day of it, but by the time we decided to eat at Furneaux Lodge, and then it was then an hour and half back on the boat ... we got back to our accommodation and didn’t feel the need to go out – that was a brilliant day out – we were pleasantly tired, and we didn’t need anything else #22

However, one interviewee commented that for them these feelings only *‘lasted until I got back on the ferry’*. Several others also described how quickly they returned to normal once back in the urban environment:

We felt privileged that we had the opportunity to visit an incredibly beautiful part of New Zealand and it's actually a very quiet still place, and you are just relaxing – just winding down by being here, and that was really really good – that feeling stayed with us – I think the way we had framed the whole trip – it was a very low-key relaxed trip – I don't think I wound up again until we got off the plane in Auckland #15(m)

Telling their QCT story provided some interviewees with an opportunity to revisit their QCT experience. One interviewee, for example, noted that the feelings of connection they felt '*keep coming out when I talk to people about it – then you reflect on it again*'. For one interviewee this included doing the interview for this research which helped them to rationalise the struggle they had experienced on the track when they pushed themselves unnecessarily hard in order to get to the end of each day's walk:

It stressed me out a bit – this [interview] is great – really helpful – self-reflection – because I have been thinking about this (laughs) – be careful what you ask for – it certainly did feel stressful and I felt like I was giving myself a hard time, which when I look back now was completely unnecessary, because I was on holiday and I had heaps of time, but at the time it didn't feel like that #9

3.5.2 The visitor role

The 'connecting to place and nature' discussion was primarily focused on human perspectives of the benefits of nature (i.e., what nature gave them) and this discussion was then reversed to address the role of the visitor in nature (i.e., what they did for nature). The examples in Table 12 describe a visitor role involving respect, responsibility, being a guest, having no impact, stewardship and appreciation.

Table 12 The visitor role

Respect	<p>Definitely to respect the place and respect other trampers – you know – let them go by – acknowledge them – like leave no trace – follow DOCs rules #23</p> <p>I feel like that whole sense of not wanting to make a mark from being there, but I have my experience without taking away anything from the environment, and not causing any disruption to anybody else who is out there enjoying it as well #9</p>
Responsibility	<p>Responsibility to leave it as I found it #1</p> <p>I think you are almost a guardian for that time you are there right – so you do nothing wrong, you protect the environment – I think Kiwis are very good at looking after the environment – 99% of people on tracks like that are very like-minded so I think if you saw something ... whether it was an injured bird or something broken, I think you would go back and report it #2</p>
Guest	<p>You are a guest – I feel that we are very fortunate to have this on our doorstep and you feel like a guest, you feel like you sort of merge into it almost and you enjoy it #10</p> <p>Probably that you are like a guest and it's something you can enjoy while you are there, but you are not to change anything while you are there #17</p>
No impact	<p>Hopefully my role is being invisible – I don't want to impact – I don't want to leave a footprint #3</p> <p>On that walk we were careful where we walked – we stuck to the path, didn't break any of the surrounding trees or bushes, didn't leave any rubbish lying around #6</p>

Stewardship	<p>You have to look after it – obviously – follow all the rules and don't leave rubbish – keeping it OK for everybody else and not touching plants or breaking them off #4</p> <p>I guess it's to look after the area and to preserve it because it is such a beautiful place you don't want anything to happen to it – so that's part of it – help with the conservation of the area #6</p>
Appreciation	<p>Just one of appreciation of the beauty to be fair – connecting with the businesses that are on the trail as a business (i.e., spending money) which is a positive as far as the tourism sector goes, and spending money on the boat, the pack transfers and then at Picton before and after as well ... so that is community benefits and the providers of the trail itself #1</p> <p>Because of all the work they have done on the QCT you want to take extra care – be a good citizen #12</p>

It is of note that, as well as looking after the natural environment, respect also included relationships with other visitors (e.g., one interviewee suggested that she might impact negatively on other visitors because she could be 'loud') and with 'the DOC rules'. Acting responsibly in the natural environment was mentioned by most interviewees, with many noting that visitors to these places were usually 'like-minded'. The key underlying feature of being a guest was not changing the environment, while having no impact suggested a stronger sense of leaving no human traces. Concern for future visitors (and users) was important part of stewardship, whilst appreciation included reference to the makers of the track, the natural environment and sharing these things to attract and offer similar experience to potential visitors. Many people talked about a combination of these things:

I think we do have a role – we have a role to ... be aware that we got a lot out of it ... and we have to respect where we are and to make sure it is available for people who come after us because it's not just for us – it's a shared space for other people to be able to use either at the same time or after us – that's our role to be stewards of these places – particularly the DOC ones because they are nationally owned – we have a responsibility to look after them #15(m)

When asked if they changed their own behaviour when they were in natural environments several interviewees replied that while they might not behave differently, they were definitely more 'conscious' or 'mindful' of their behaviour. One interviewee described a difference in her behaviour at home 'yeah – definitely – like in the city I put my coffee grounds in the garden and just toss things outside if they will biodegrade, but I wouldn't do that in natural places'. Another commented that they 'would not litter in the city either but would be more likely to pick up litter in natural areas', while another suggested that 'out there if I see rubbish, I pick it up – actually I probably wouldn't do that in town ... I guess it's not as obvious, whereas when you are in the bush you know that a piece of rubbish shouldn't be there'. The Te Araroa tramper also noted that her interactions with other people were different when she was walking in natural environments (compared to being in the city).

3.5.3 Relationship with the natural environment

When asked specifically if they were the sort of person who had a holistic view of the world (i.e., including humans when they thought of the natural environment) responses broadly represented three 'worldviews', as illustrated by the examples in Table 13.

Table 13 Thinking holistically

Holistic	<p>I think I do think of both – I am conscious of the environment – my wife and I both come from farming backgrounds, so we are used to the outdoor life and what that means – there is a bit of responsibility to keep things the same, or as they are #16</p> <p>I definitely include people because – especially in New Zealand there is not really any place that is untouched anymore, so humans affect everywhere and if you want to change the environment it is usually humans that have that effect – all the animals in that environment are just doing their own thing – it is humans that are actively changing the environment #23</p> <p>I think we are all in it together – I see us all as one – in with the environment and with the universe, so what we do has an effect on the environment and the environment has a wider effect on us and the bigger picture so I would like to think that it is all combined #1</p> <p>We are part of the environment, full stop – we are not separate from it – we can either be a good or a bad influence or impact on the environment – you can't separate us from it – we can either choose to be destructive or we can choose to care for it #15(m)</p>
Separate	<p>Sort of separate I think – maybe (hesitates) ... like where I live, we are surrounded by trees, but I don't feel like that environment is a natural one – it feels like part of the town #21</p> <p>I think in the UK the national parks are a bit more in harmony with everyday life rather than an isolated space almost with an imaginary boundary that says 'right we are in a national park now' – I think we could probably have a bit more of that here #22</p> <p>Good question – in other countries I do [think holistically], but I feel like New Zealand is different because fundamentally, even if you include Maori history in the area, New Zealand has not evolved with humans as part of the landscape – when I am in England, I feel like humans are part of the natural landscape, but there are genuine wild spaces in New Zealand, so I feel a little different about this country – so that would be a resounding no #5</p>
A temporary residence	<p>I kind of see it as that area having been there for a lot longer than we have, and it will be there for a lot longer than us, and we need to do what we can to take care of it – we wouldn't want it to get populated more and that would impact on the serenity of it as well #6</p> <p>I think the natural environment is going to be here a lot longer than I am – I am just passing through – the Marlborough Sounds are going to be there after I am gone – I don't think of myself as being an important part of it – I just think that you are just lucky enough to experience it #22</p> <p>I think we are part of the environment by the fact that we are being there, but that doesn't necessarily mean that – if you think about down there – it's quite isolated and we aren't going to take over – there is a time and place and there is also a respect for it. I think it's been there long before us, and it's going to be there long after us, so it's not just necessarily just ours to do things with now – it's like the house we live in – we need to preserve it, so we are not wasting it #17</p>

Broadly speaking, holistic thinkers tended to be those who included – and enjoyed – the human and settlement dimensions of their visit and experience in their responses to the most liked and QCT story questions. This included a number of interviewees who commented on not wanting to impact negatively on other people around them. As the responses in Table 13 show, many of those who thought holistically expressed concerns around the impact of human activity on the natural environment. Holistic thinkers also varied in respect of their underlying 'philosophies of nature' which determined whether they gave priority to the human or the natural aspect of the environment. Those with a nature-centric philosophy, for example, highlighted the value of nature for its own sake,

whereas those with a people-centric philosophy primarily value nature as the setting for human activity. Between these two groups are those who recognise these different philosophies and, rather than aligning with one or the other, suggest a need for a balanced approach (see also Table 14 for examples of this).

In contrast, those who saw the natural and human environments as separate had talked more about enjoying the fact that there were few other people around during their QCT visit. These people also talked about the impact of human settlement on the natural environment, including the example in Table 13 who thought that having trees in the urban environment was not enough to make it ‘natural’ and the (very environmentally aware) interviewee who commented that New Zealand *‘has not evolved with humans as part of the landscape’* and elsewhere in their interview added that, *‘for me looking on farmland makes me sad because I know what it used to be like’*. While a number of the migrant interviewees – and New Zealanders who had travelled overseas – also suggested that the human and natural environments of New Zealand were more separated than in the UK, one of the New Zealanders also noted that they felt more connected to nature in New Zealand.

Those whose worldview focused on the ‘temporary residence’ of humans on earth highlighted the need to look after and preserve the natural environment (despite its perceived resilience), particularly in respect of future generations. A few had clearly thought about the human relationship with the natural environment and appreciated the need to *‘have these types of conversations’* in order to not only recognise the impacts of human activity on the natural environment, but also to consider what actions might be needed to protect the natural environment.

3.6 Giving back to place (and nature)

The final set of questions asked interviewees what they thought of the idea of people ‘giving back to nature’ (i.e., through contributing to, or giving back in some way to places such as the QCT). As Table 14 illustrates, attitudes towards giving back to nature were underpinned by each interviewee’s worldview (and, within this, their underlying philosophy of nature).

Table 14 Philosophies of nature

Nature-centric	I think that’s a great idea – we can’t just take – you have to respect it and look after it and show your gratitude and like I think help it to be there for future generations, but you want it to be there for its own sake – not just for humans – it’s also for itself #18
A balancing act	Well, I guess it depends on what state we want that nature to be in – whether or not there’s pest eradication or other things we can do to preserve things, but it depends on that why. Does nature benefit from thousands of people walking these tracks and the answer is no – we are being selfish, and we are disturbing the flora and fauna with tracks, but there kind of needs to be a balance doesn’t there? #17
People-centric	I think that’s a really great idea and I think also if there was something set up at the end of the track – even if there was a survey (how did you enjoy it, would you like to contribute to the regeneration of the forest, to the hunting, would you like to help DOC) – then I think because you have had a great experience you would get people wanting to do that #1

While overall the concept of ‘giving back to nature’ was perceived positively, some interviewees questioned how visitors might do so, with several asking if the question related to giving back financially or to contributing in some other way. One interviewee, for example, commented that *‘it is definitely a good thing to do, but I don’t know how I would personally do it – aside from donating money to DOC for conservation perhaps’*. One of the more experienced trampers commented that *‘I can’t say I have contributed when I have visited [natural environments], but I definitely wouldn’t be*

opposed if there was something in place than meant you had to do more to give back if you want to visit a place'. When asked more broadly if visitors can make a positive difference to, contribute to, or benefit nature another interviewee reflected:

I don't know if I am a pessimist, but the first thing that comes into my head is 'no'. It's hard because I think in order to do that you would have to up the price, or ask people to give more money – like DOC or the private land owners would have to have a good stance on where that money is going and why you would have to pay for a track like the QCT versus any other track in New Zealand – like why are the Marlborough Sounds more vulnerable than Nelson Lakes, for example? #23

As a precursor to the giving back to nature discussion many interviewees talked about 'paying for the QCT' before going on to discuss contributing to place (and to nature) more generally either financially and/or through action. Within this, broader discussions around giving back to place (i.e., to community, business and to the local economy) also encompassed 'promoting the QCT' and its environs (via their own 'QCT stories') to attract more visitors. Attitudes towards giving back were influenced by each interviewee's 'environmental awareness and conservation knowledge'.

3.6.1 Paying for the QCT

QCT walkers are required to pay a private land fee (the QCT Land Cooperative Pass) if they walk on the sections that cross private land. One interviewee commented that they did not know where the money goes to from the track pass, '*but I am hoping that it would be able to go to maintaining the land – I don't think anyone would mind if track passes were introduced everywhere – just to help maintain the land*'. When asked specifically what they thought about paying this fee many considered the fee to be 'too cheap', those with national park tramping experience considered the cost of the QCT in 'comparison to other walks', while some noted that the various services and facilities available on the QCT – as well as the travel costs associated with getting to the Marlborough Sounds from elsewhere in New Zealand – meant that the 'costs add up' (Table 15).

Table 15 The cost of visiting the QCT

Too cheap	<p>Not an issue – cheap and QCT camping is much cheaper than Great Walk huts – they could charge more #1</p> <p>The pass was really cheap – it was like nothing for a year (maybe only \$25) – and if that is going to help it's hardly anything – for keeping it clean and tidy, and to have toilets on the way, and pay the wages for some of the staff – you could easily pay \$100 for a season pass for that #18</p>
Comparison to other walks	<p>Paying for the QCT is maybe more of an issue for a trampers used to more remote back country areas (i.e., not Great Walks) where huts are very cheap #2</p> <p>I guess I have a selfish point of view – the only way that I am really contributing is by money – so the \$25 fee to walk it and then paying for accommodation on the trail which seems incredibly cheap ... um ...so the only way I would be giving back is by money and it seems like we didn't really pay enough to contribute – I would be comfortable paying more – like Great Walks and stuff always seem very cheap to me #5</p>
Cost adds up	<p>I think for me it is an expensive walk ... to be completely honest ... to do, just because it's logistically hard. It is very hard not to take the boat in and out, and then you have to pay the fee to cross private land, so I guess coming in I was like thinking 'is it going to be worth it?' – I think altogether it was \$120 or \$130, plus the accommodation, so I definitely had doubts coming in in that regard. Afterward it kind of feels like it is a different experience from just casual hiking to a hut, but it is kind of well-managed ... to a point that justifies</p>

what it is – and even reading the history and how they got it together ... you then don't mind paying this \$25 to step on private land – it kind of makes sense #12

We talked about this as well – if you think about it, we drove to the airport, flew to Blenheim, rented a car, two nights' accommodation, food and drink and parking, the water taxi – you are looking at over \$1500 just to go for a walk – that's a lot of money – for some people it is out of reach, for others it's nothing ... but if those costs were less commercially, then you could invest more in the DOC part – none of it has gone to DOC #22

Most interviewees understood that the QCT fee was used for ongoing track maintenance and, as such, did not represent 'giving back to nature'. Likewise, as these interviewees noted, money spent on camping sites was a very basic cost and was not really giving back to DOC, while much of the money spent doing the QCT went to private business:

Other than collecting the occasional piece of plastic on the track I haven't really seen a lot of opportunities to give back – I don't think paying this \$25 does offer an opportunity to give back – maybe the pass makes you think that maybe in this sense I am helping maintaining the track because I feel that the money to the boat just goes to the boat company, and definitely \$8 worth of campsite is not helping DOC (laughs) ... even if I would like to at least make my impact neutral by doing something positive I haven't really seen a lot of opportunity #12

We are all visitors, so we don't really have time to go and help with conservation or activities there, but also I think ... um ... in terms of money you do sort of end up having to pay quite a bit for the water taxi and the passes and everything like that, and so I feel like in order to ask you to pay more money and give back to it detracts from the fact that it is nature and people want to go and have an affordable holiday – like if they are taking their families it needs to be affordable. It would be nice if the water taxis gave something (back) – because you have to use their services to do the QCT – they [the water taxi companies] could use that as a selling point #14

3.6.2 Contributing financially to nature

In respect of contributing to nature more generally, most interviewee's immediate response was either in relation to making financial contributions or they sought to clarify the question itself. One interviewee, for example, asked if the question meant 'what people could do to enhance a place?', before going on to add 'I guess one question is what needs doing and is it for things that fall within the DOC remit – or is it a visitor contributing to maintenance and things that are already being done?' Some debated the various ways in which money could be collected and distributed, with several noting that, as taxpayers, New Zealanders already contribute DOC. One interview commented that 'for someone like DOC or the government they are already paying wages of staff so I should pay for extras over and above that'. Another interview noted that 'it would be good to know what it has been used for – if it is part of a bigger programme – I wouldn't necessarily need to know the specific location of where it has been happening'.

When asked if they had a preference for giving back to a specific place or giving back more generally (to the environment), one interview noted that 'wherever it is used in New Zealand is good' while another noted that, 'it wouldn't matter where the money went [if giving back] because DOC does such good work, and I am likely to go on another walk [somewhere]'. A number of others, however, suggested that having a connection to place could impact on one's propensity to want to give back to that place. One of the Picton-based interviewees, for example, commented that 'it could be anywhere I suppose, but I also feel like ... more attached to a place that I know ... and so that

makes a difference ... you feel like you have more of a connection to it while another talked about the importance of having this connection to places they visited, but also being able to take action from their home. One interviewee, however, noted that as a visitor *'you often don't think about a place once you have left'*.

The Te Araroa trumper – who was happy to pay a Te Araroa donation and the QCT fee – commented on the perceptions towards nature and towards paying to visit places of some other trumppers they had encountered:

There was this French couple who were hiking, and they said that in France no one pays for nature and it was almost a sense of entitlement that they had that nature should be accessible to everyone, and in their minds, it was ridiculous in New Zealand that there was a fee to do the Te Araroa and the QCT, but they just couldn't see it whereas I understand that the maintenance costs money and it's people's jobs and it's private land – people have these mindsets #23

While many interviewees commented that they would be happy to contribute to the natural environment more generally (i.e., not in relation to a specific place) some noted that they would like to know where their money was going and what it would be spent on. As two interviewees explained:

Look I think there would have to be transparency about where your donations are going – if someone says your donations are protecting wildlife in one of the parks, or developing new tracks, or pest eradication – I am cool with that, but I don't want to make a donation to DOC, and they say 'right we are building a new long drop in a campground' – that's what my tax money pays for #22

There was also general agreement that donating was more appealing if those giving money had some input into where the money would be used or what it would be used for, as well as knowing that their contributions would be of some use. Other suggestions were for there to be *'a short list of things that it could be used for – to have a general idea of what is going to be done with the money would be good'* and that *'maybe you could pick an option you liked [from a list]'*, although one interviewee added that *'the only problem with that is that DOC probably have things that need to be prioritised and it would be better to put the money towards the things with the highest priority'*. Another interviewee suggested that some people might not want to know the explicit details of what their money was being spent on (e.g., some environmental actions may be more appealing than others).

The logistics of contributing financially also attracted some commentary and, while one interviewee suggested *'probably just park fees – I don't know another way'* a number of others talked about the logistics of making donations in an age when many people do not carry cash (e.g., *'people don't have money but could donate via text'*; *'[I] don't mind making a donation but I don't carry money'*). These responses suggest that the majority of interviewees would be happy to pay park or track fees and even on the QCT would have been happy to contribute more than the fee they had paid. One interviewee, for example, suggested that there could be *'interpretation boards which could include requests for donations – people have paid in advance [for the QCT] and will have forgotten and may be happy to contribute more'*. Another interviewee suggested that a *'small proportion of bookings fees for all DOC tracks could go towards the conservation of that track'*.

3.6.3 Contributing through action

When asked about giving back in other ways (i.e., other than financially) most interviewees struggled to suggest options – as one interviewee noted *'money is part of it, but it almost is the easy*

answer'. While planting trees was suggested by a number of interviewees this was not considered particularly easy to action. One interviewee, for example, replied that '*I don't know – because I mean most people are visitors, so they are not there to help out – to do plants or anything like that to do with nature*' while another suggested that '*if we have time, we can plant trees – especially my daughter it is a good opportunity for her to learn and to be involved in those kind of activities – it's quite a good educational opportunity*'. One interviewee, however, asked '*what could people easily do as they walk the track?*' Several interviews reflected on ways in which they could actively contribute to nature:

Giving back would be nice, but I don't know to what capacity – I know there is a problem with wilding pines, but I am not quite sure [what people could do] – just pulling out weeds or setting up volunteering opportunities maybe #12

I have talked to so many Kiwis about the pest problems in New Zealand and there are some places that you can buy a trap, for example – if you did something like that – like adopting a trap kind of thing and then you know that your money is going towards something, that it is helping – or to volunteer – like I've seen signs everywhere to volunteer with trapping or with trail maintenance, or putting in the wasp things, or help planting trees in order to help one species of animals – on the Escarpment Track they were looking for volunteers to help with the population of a particular bird species and they had a list of what they would do and some people had time to volunteer – that is a way to give back #23

Maybe again, just because of my personal interest, it would be nice to do some bird call reporting or having the stations where you could stop and maybe record what you have seen and heard, which I think couldn't involve too much (effort) – it seems like an activity that a lot of people could be doing and enjoying or again just ... because I think anything else that I can think about like trapping or weeding requires a set of skills and are not very family-friendly #12

One interviewee suggested that, given their lack of expertise, there are potentially greater benefits gained through financial contributions (to support organisations which are already engaged in environmental and conservation activities), while another also noted the impact of personal interest on people's propensity to contribute:

Well I think there is often local groups on the ground that know the land and know what is needed locally, and I think often with volunteers there is a lot of goodwill involved in trying to volunteer, but often just cash is the answer – I think a lot of these things [are taken care of] – like you have the civil service like DOC and you also have the Janszoon Project and what not – charities where they don't need an inexperienced person coming in and mucking in for a day – they just need money for equipment, or to pay professionals to do it – I think there is a lot of goodwill wrapped up in volunteering, but I think money is the answer #5



Photo 5 Restoration project in the Queen Charlotte Sound (Photo: J. Roberts).

While the likelihood of engaging in the various conservation activities described by interviewees is influenced by personal interest and expertise there appears to be limited opportunity to engage in activities during the course of a visit due to constraints and their experiential expectations. It was also of note, however, that while many interviews talked about ways in which – as visitors, or more broadly as citizens – they might contribute to nature this was generally discussed in the abstract (i.e., with many not actually having done any of the things they suggested), as the ‘contributing financially’ and ‘contributing through action’ examples in Table 16 illustrate. A number of ‘barriers to giving back’ were also noted, including being ‘time poor’ (as a result of work and family commitments) and lacking in the requisite skills to be able to make an effective contribution.

Table 16 Contributing to nature

Contributing financially	<p>Definitely paying money, but ... not that I have done a lot – but you could go out and help clearing weeds or help with trapping – not that I have ever done that #18</p> <p>I guess it depends on if it's just international visitors and things – making donations as a way of contributing, but I think for people who are more local if there are opportunities to get involved and volunteer with DOC or go out and plant or whatever might be needed #19</p>
Contributing through action	<p>I guess I probably wouldn't personally do any pest control stuff (laughs) – I think it's a great idea – it's just logistically it might be a little bit difficult – I guess if there was a set of expectations somewhere, or ideas of what you could do and you could pick what suits #8</p> <p>I have done some tree planting before, but I feel like that would also be ... it might be harder because time is a lot harder to arrange than money #21</p>
Barriers to giving back	<p>I don't know – like adding a day to volunteer might be a bit of a hard ask ... um ... I don't know off the top of my head what you could do other than having the donation boxes around – but it would definitely be something that I could think about more #20</p>

To me that would be things like helping out with predator control, or planting some natives, or getting rid of all those pines ... so we would be getting involved with a project like that, but that's the sort of thing where you need a bit of expertise and skill in some cases #15(f)

My wife and I have thought of tree planting, but if someone had said on your walk you spend half an hour doing something like painting the side of something or repairing a bench – absolutely we'd do it. I think to be volunteering on certain parts of whatever they need – again it comes down to cost and effectiveness – you might have 10 volunteers, but you need to send 5 DOC staff with them #22

At the moment we are ridiculously time poor – like everyone I would say – but with 3 almost teenage children we are racing around with sport and school and everything else, and the idea of going away for a weekend to cut bush or plant trees or shoot goats is like impossible – I don't even have time to sit and read a book for ½ an hour #17

3.6.4 Promoting the QCT

Talking to others about the natural environment of the Marlborough Sounds and about their own walking experience in a positive way was also perceived by some as a way of giving back to nature (and place). While some talked about the financial benefits of attracting more visitors to the QCT these 'benefits' were sometimes promoted in respect of improved visitor facilities or as benefits for businesses, rather than for conservation. For one interviewee, however, '*improving or developing it [the track] more might attract more people and compromise the experience*' while another reflected on the impact of further development on different types of users (with varying experiential motives):

Potentially it might compromise the track experience, but for some it might really be an asset for the track experience – there are lots of creature comforts that a lot of people are seeking potentially, but I think for me personally it wouldn't really tick my boxes for wanting to immerse myself in nature and be away from [it all] #8

The environmental impact of attracting increasing numbers of visitors to natural environments more generally was described as a 'balancing act', with several interviewees noting the potential for negative impacts if 'new visitors' had less environmental awareness. The impact of visitor activity on destinations was also talked about in interviews in the context of tourism more generally, with a number of interviewees referring to the Covid-related absence of international visitors on the QCT, and reflecting on what difference that made to their own experience. One interviewee also talked about their concerns around over-tourism in New Zealand and the current levels of development within the natural environs of the QCT:

I already have those concerns – I think Covid has put a stoppage to this, but New Zealand is moving towards more of a tourism industry than an agriculture industry, but I think the QCT and the Marlborough Sounds area is just too far gone – it is never going to be affordable to buy the land back for DOC – commercial activities aside, I think too much of it has been chopped up for baches and maybe there is a message there about this kind of development in other areas – I don't think it's what we want really. I think New Zealand needs to be careful because our 100% Pure, clean green is just marketing and it's not true in the slightest and I think promoting that very strong brand and then presenting walks that are not that – I think we need to be very careful #5

3.6.5 Environmental awareness and conservation knowledge

For many interviewees, answering the ‘giving back to nature’ question was difficult as they had not observed any particular environmental issues during their QCT visit and were therefore unsure what might need to be ‘fixed’. As noted, those who mentioned wilding pines had been told about them on their water taxi transfer or were locals, while the only interviewees to describe environmental issues associated with production activity in the Marlborough Sounds (e.g., salmon farming, forestry) appeared to have a strong environmental ethos which impacted on their attitudes and behaviour across all aspects of their life (and not just when they were walking in natural environments).

There was universal agreement that people visiting places like the QCT are ‘like-minded’ in respect of looking after the environments (as described in ‘the role of the visitor’, Table 12). Environmental concerns and environmental action (which may manifest at the local scale) was, however, sometimes discussed in the context of global scale issues and action (e.g., climate change). A number of interviewees described their own ‘environmental ethos’ while others identified ‘barriers to taking environment action’ (see Table 17). As the examples in Table 17 illustrate, ‘thinking’ globally is underpinned by acting ‘locally’ and by minimising ones’ individual impact on the environment. Taking environmental ‘action’, however, is compromised by personal factors (e.g., life stage, age).

Table 17 An environmental ethos

Environmental ethos	I have a strong sense of responsibility – so think global, act local – have been a local volunteer for a decade (bird monitoring etc) #5
	I guess I just try to purchase locally – like seasonal, regional, local – do my best to have a small footprint and contribute #8
	... if we are in a town would rather go to a small or apparently locally-owned establishment, than to one of the big franchises #16
	I am probably one of those people who takes a reusable coffee cup everywhere, so that’s par for the course anyway. In fact, I made the kids chase a little piece of paper that floated away down the track and that was the size of a 10 cent coin. We can only do so much as individuals, but if we all do a little bit, then life is a bit easier on everyone #17
Barriers to environmental action	My mother in law is very involved in conservation, but I feel like we don’t have the time for that at our stage of life – with work and stuff #14
	When I was at high school I did quite a lot of that sort of stuff but as an adult I haven’t because I have lived in Wellington #19
	Many years ago, I did a week as a volunteer at a conservation area in Britain but at the moment in my life I don’t have time to do things like that – but it is something that I would certainly consider doing #15(f)

Interviewee’s environmental awareness and conservation knowledge was also illustrated through reference to a variety of organisations engaged in conservation work. This included, for example, awareness of the broad responsibilities of DOC, reference to projects such as Project Janszoon and to the global Greenpeace organisation. Some expressed concerns around the degree to which financial contributions to global organisations were used for administration rather than for action. As such, support for any conservation action is underpinned by transparency, including having a clear understanding of the purpose (i.e., why it needs to be done), what issue it is addressing it and what such action will achieve. The examples shown in Table 18 suggest a need for more education around environmental awareness and conservation action. Table 18 also illustrates how greater engagement with DOC (either in person or via technology) can offer ‘an enhanced experience’ for visitors.



Photo 6 School group listening to a DOC ranger (Photo: S. Becken).

Three interviewees talked about giving back by participating in this research. One noted that they had enjoyed doing the interview and *‘learned even more about the QCT – that’s why I wanted to do this as well just to see what DOC does and to help’*. The interviewee who taught environmental management also commented that *‘with the students we ask them to do a lot of surveys and so we like to give it back by doing ones like this – to give back and to help – it’s good karma’*.

Table 18 Transparency and conservation action

Why it needs to be done	I would like that – and it’s important to know why it is important to do these things – a lot of us maybe don’t know the reasoning why a lot of the work or upkeep needs to be done – so maybe educate all of us better as well #11
What it was and what it could be	<p>It seems to be well tended to and that ... um ... so I can’t really imagine what there would be – obviously there are ongoing costs, but other than in that sense I am not sure what else [there would be] ... maybe there could be boards that show what it could or should be like #7</p> <p>You could give a donation maybe – but to know what it used to look like, or what it could look like, would be good to know – or maybe planting one cabbage tree when you go for a walk somewhere #17</p> <p>When you see areas that have been farmed previously and then have had that change to more native coming up, and that is quite interesting history, and it is important history for the people to see, and [to see] that transition is possible and what it can be like #19</p>
An enhanced experience	I don’t know if DOC could have some sort of annual subscription where you paid an annual fee and that gave you access to benefits; why couldn’t the Ship Cove to Furneaux Lodge walk have a hut or a small station where you can talk to a DOC employee – the walk is 4.5 hours, but after 2 hours you can spend 30 minutes with these guys having an experience within the experience – for us talking to the DOC guy added a little bit of something to the walk – because you had some interaction with someone who was part of that park – would I be the first person to say to you that I can’t believe that DOC doesn’t have an App? #22

4 Discussion

The following discussion section presents an overview of the research findings, firstly in respect of ‘the QCT experience’ (drawing on the description of visitors and their perceptions of the QCT) and then more broadly in respect of ‘giving back to place’ (including the ways in which – as visitors – they relate to, connect with, and potentially contribute to nature). As such, the perceptions of the QCT and connecting to place sections represent two sides of activities occurring in natural settings: one the one hand, there is the QCT experience and how it is enabled, while the other focuses on activity outcomes (e.g., how people connect to the place, what they take away with them). A key question asks if ‘giving back’ to place (and to nature) enhances the spectrum of outcomes?

4.1 The QCT experience

Understanding the QCT experience must necessarily take account of a wide array of both visitor and track characteristics. Visitors to the QCT can be described by personal characteristics, their track activity, their prior knowledge of both the Marlborough Sounds and the QCT, their previous walking/tramping experience and specific motives for visiting the QCT. While there is no way of knowing how representative of visitors to the QCT the interview sample were, a wide range of ages, group types and home locations were represented. The interview sample also included a number of migrants who provided different cultural perspectives. In terms of walking/tramping experience there were two outliers (one person with limited experience on the QCT for a family-oriented (social) day walk and one Te Araroa trampler) with the majority people having at least some walking/tramping experience. The QCT was notable for being able to cater to a heterogenous array of visitors (of different ages, with different levels of walking/tramping experience, from different backgrounds and home locations, and with a wide range of motives).

The QCT track can – and was – described according to what these visitors liked the most and according to a variety of place dimensions (including historical, cultural, natural, social, and the built and service environment). The majority of interviewees were able to distil an essence of the QCT, which was often presented in comparison to other places visited, and which was sometimes included in the QCT stories told to others. From an analysis perspective, however, these characteristics often combined in different ways with each interviewee’s experience presented according to a complex and sometimes idiosyncratic selection of components/facets. One interviewee, who did the whole track (walking one day, transferring by water taxi one day and mountain biking one day), described the multiple facets of their experience:

Although I am complaining about the undulations, the ups and downs were quite good, and I liked the mixture – that some of it was sheltered in the bush and there was still lots of opportunities to get the great views that are around – for the most part the condition of the track was really good – so that was nice – generally just the place you are in – the Marlborough Sounds are a pretty amazing place and just being in there and having a well-maintained track – that whole overall experience was good, including the distance between the stopping points – like the lodges along the way and having the water taxi #16

Taken together, the feedback on the QCT experience – collected via discussion of the most liked features, exploration of the various dimensions, the essence of the QCT, comparison to other walking tracks and experiences, and the story of the track told to others – is overwhelmingly positive. The QCT is a manageable – but still challenging – walk/tramp on a well-developed and well-maintained track which traverses a diversity of land- and seascapes. Walking the track is facilitated by easy accessibility via water taxi and the option to walk (cycle, kayak) the whole track, or selected sections (on overnight or day walks). The visitor experience is further facilitated – and enhanced – by the

availability of an array of accommodation options (including camping, lodges and private rental accommodation), hospitality and gear transfer services. The natural environment of the QCT and the Marlborough Sounds also offers an easy escape from the tedium and pressures of normal life, even for visitors who lived in relatively close proximity.

The majority of interviewees had some prior tramping and/or walking experience and assessed the QCT against other locations and walks/tramps they had done. The inclusion of a number of migrants (and one international visitor) in the research sample facilitated reflections on the differences between walking/tramping in New Zealand and in their original/home countries. In the first example below, for example, the Canadian trampler liked the fact that people of all abilities could do the QCT whereas the second speaker (who was originally from the UK) suggested that there could be more tracks like the QCT:

Compared with Canada tramping-wise, I think the hut systems make New Zealand really unique and not everyone tramps in Canada, whereas here it kind of seems like the lifestyle thing and lot of the Kiwis I have met here know about the QCT – they might have done it in school or as a family vacation – which is cool because people of all different abilities are able to do it #23

I think that's something that's missing here – and I know it's scalable, but there is a pub on every corner of the UK – if you could do more of that and have something at the end of it, I think it would pull in a lot more people #22

A number of New Zealand interviewees also commented on the uniqueness of the QCT (particularly in respect of its service environment) which compared favourably against other walking/tramping experiences. In this respect, the QCT was commonly reported to have 'exceeded their expectations', although the speaker in the first example below noted that this was not the case for everyone in their group. The second speaker also questioned whether their experience might have been different if there had been international tourists in the country:

We went to drop someone off at their bach or jetty, and we dropped some food off somewhere – that did my 10 year old's head in, because he was not prepared for that and just thought we would go on the boat to start the walk ... um ... but [for me] that was part of the fun, because you got to see all those different places and the different bays and that #17

I think everything just exceeded my expectations – even just like the toilets along the way were all very clean and had toilet paper and then the accommodation at Punga Cove was amazing ... um ... and I think just not having all the tourists – I am not sure how busy it normally is, but I felt like we were the only people on the track most of the time #20

While the QCT stands out in respect of the scenic beauty and diversity of the Marlborough Sounds, the QCT experience it is also lauded in respect of the accessibility and provision of accommodation, food and beverage services which are not commonly associated with multi-day tramping or more remote 'wilderness' walking experiences. Broadly speaking, interviewees' enjoyment of 'pizza, beer and coffee', of a 'glamping' tramping' experience and 'the complete package' of the QCT encapsulates 'the QCT experience' (Table 19).

Table 19 The QCT experience

Pizza, beer and coffee	<p>Anyone could do it – it’s handy – it has a bit of everything, so there is something for everyone to enjoy – you do the hard work and then you get back to a lodge and have a pizza and a beer and a spa (laughs) #7</p> <p>That was the other attraction – that the boat company was selling their package for that walk as being able to ‘start your day with a coffee at Furneaux Lodge and finish with pizzas at the end’ and we thought our kids can walk that distance and we can just take some snacks and water and we’ll be fine – so we made a conscious decision to spend money at either end – but that also made it easy, because you don’t have to think about how much to pack, or have to make a lunch, and the food at Punga Cove was amazing – well beyond what I expected to get #17</p> <p>In the South Island most of the tramping tracks are in the middle of nowhere and it is just hut-based, and you don’t see anyone, and you have to carry all of your food and on the QCT you can buy pizza and have a beer #23</p> <p>Getting a coffee was a really nice thing – there are some creature comforts – I probably wouldn’t have been able to walk the third day without a rest day if I had to carry the pack with me #8</p>
‘Glamping’ tramping	<p>What stood out for me was the semi-luxury feel of the QCT with the cafés and the lodges – so for me it’s an up-market version of any walk you can do #1</p> <p>I guess what I really like about the QCT is that it kind of caters to a wider audience – like you can get your bags dropped off each day and you can stay in the campgrounds, but then go and have a drink at the resorts and it is a bit – like I guess – the glamping equivalent #19</p>
The complete package	<p>Our friends in the UK love coming here to visit us and they haven’t done that [the QCT] so we told them about it – it’s about the complete package right? #22</p> <p>I think that’s the great thing about the QCT – there are options, and it caters to a wide variety of people #19</p>

The broad appeal of the QCT was also illustrated by the comments which described its suitability (and attraction) for people who would not normally go tramping and the significance of its geographic location in respect of early settlement by both Maori and Europeans, as well as for modern day Te Araroa walkers. Unexpected enjoyment of the historic and human dimensions of the QCT experience, and of the natural environment of the Marlborough Sounds more generally, led some interviewees to suggest that not only did it the QCT miss out on the ‘accolades’ it deserved, but that both the QCT and its surrounding environs could be better promoted as tourism destinations.

4.2 Giving back to place (and to nature)

While the collection of data describing the QCT experience was relatively straightforward, that relating to attitudes towards nature was more challenging. In part, this related to the types of questions asked which – in comparison to more pragmatic ‘experiential’ questions – were open to considerable interpretation and which examined more complex and subjective facets of experience. Visitor characteristics also impacted on the ways in which – and the depth to which – individual interviewees engaged with these questions. While some people were much more pragmatic in their approach to these questions (e.g., the QCT story – *‘we went on a walk, this is where we went’* and the essence of the QCT – *‘I think the views – does that answer the question?’*) the responses of others were, to some extent, influenced by their type of QCT activity and their motives. It was, for example,

challenging to engage in conversation about perceptions of – and connection to – nature with interviewees whose motives were not necessarily focused on the natural environment (e.g., they were reconnecting with family, wanting to exercise). It was also much easier to talk about ‘connecting to nature’ with interviewees who had more extensive walking/tramping experience and those who were spending more than a day on the QCT (these were often the same people). These findings suggest that – along with a tramping career developed over time – people also learn to engage and connect with the natural environment settings they visit.

Despite spending time in the natural environment being identified as both a key motive, and most liked feature of the QCT experience, ‘connection to place’ varied considerably. Some interviewees, for example, described how immersion in (and focus on) the natural environment fostered a sense of connection, while others described connections that were significantly moderated (and sometimes fostered) by engagement with the historical and social (i.e., human) dimensions of the QCT environs. Those interviewees with personal connections to the QCT or the Marlborough Sounds reported the strongest connection to place. Retaining feelings of connection post-visit was related to an activity effect, to having disconnected from ‘life’ and enjoying a holiday feeling, rather than to an enduring sense of connection to nature.

Interviewee’s relationship with nature was explored via questions about their perceived role as a visitor and, more specifically, whether or not they thought holistically (i.e., included people as part of the natural environment). The visitor role – in regard to nature – involved respect, responsibility, being a guest, having no impact, stewardship and appreciation. It was of note, however, that many interviewees also included relationships with other visitors and with ‘the DOC rules’ when describing these attitudes and behaviours. These findings support the identification and importance of the human dimension which, for some, underpinned their ‘connection to nature’ and was further evidenced by data describing their ‘worldviews’.

While many interviewees struggled to articulate the degree to which they thought ‘holistically’, it was often possible to distil their ‘worldview’ from their responses to other interview questions. ‘Holistic’ thinkers included humans in the environment and were more accepting of other visitors, and of encountering human settlement, than those who thought of the human and natural environments as ‘separate’ entities. A third ‘worldview’ described those who focused on the ‘temporary residence’ of humans on earth and contained elements of both these environmental conceptualisations. Holistic thinkers also varied in respect of whether they prioritised the human or natural environment. Given that the QCT presents visitors with a unique setting for walking/tramping activity (in respect of its intertwined human and natural environments) it would be interesting to explore visitors’ worldviews in relation to the (more common) wilderness settings which present a more differentiated human and natural environment.

Whilst the ‘connecting to nature’ questions were focused on what nature did for visitors, the ‘giving back to nature’ questions reversed this and asked what they – as visitors – could do for nature. The three broad philosophies of nature (nature-centric, people-centric and a balanced view) described by interviewees aligned with the ‘worldviews’ identified in the connection to nature data. Although many of those with a nature-centric philosophy (who highlighted the value of nature for its own sake) thought holistically, this group included those people with the most divisive conceptualisation of nature and humanity. In contrast, those with a people-centric philosophy (who primarily value nature as the setting for human activity) were potentially the most holistic thinkers. The balanced approach thinkers were those who had reflected on whether the human or natural environment should be prioritised. It was interesting that while these attitudes are potentially entrenched, they did not necessarily appear to have a significant impact on visitors’ QCT experiences. In this respect, these research findings suggest that ‘experience’ of place encompasses a much broader suite of setting/environmental dimensions than those which simply align with – or champion – nature and

humanity. Of particular note is the temporal dimension, which underpins understandings of the relationship between nature and human activity and the ways in which this has changed over time, and which – importantly – serves to imbue settings with meaning and foster connection.

Exploring attitudes towards giving back to nature, and the ways in which visitors could – or would – be prepared or able to do so, was a key research interest. While the majority of interviewees supported the notion of giving back to nature, many had no idea of how they might do this beyond making a financial contribution of some sort. The fees that many had paid for walking the QCT, and the money they had spent on transport, accommodation and hospitality were not generally considered to be giving back to nature. The logistics of ‘donating’ to nature, however, was generally not well articulated, with interviewees talking in the abstract about ‘perhaps’ supporting a variety of environmental actions or giving money to DOC and other organisations. A few interviewees did, however, specify that if they were to donate to DOC, they would prefer the money to go towards clearly identifiable environmental/conservation projects, rather than simply into the ‘business-as-usual’ DOC accounts (i.e., they would want to pay for the icing on the cake rather than the cake itself). There was no real preference for where in New Zealand their donations would be spent with some trusting DOC to allocate financial and human resources to where they were most needed.

Although some interviewees were also able to describe ways in which they could – potentially – give back to nature via environmental/conservation action, the majority of these suggestions were also presented in the abstract. A number of barriers to taking environmental/conservation action (both in situ and more generally) were identified, including lack of time and lack of expertise (with some suggesting that many actions that could be taken were better left to the experts). Tree planting, pest control work and assisting with conservation monitoring projects (e.g., bird surveys) were the most commonly suggested activities and attracted a number of comments around the ‘attractiveness’ of each in terms of its appeal as an activity for visitors to engage in and its value in respect of the environment.

For most interviewees, ‘transparency’ – around the need for action, the type of action deemed most effective, and the perceived results of that action – was an important determinant of their potential support for conservation. Given that relatively few environmental issues were reported by these QCT visitors, and that they therefore could also not identify any ways in which the QCT and its environs could be ‘improved’, it was perhaps not surprising that they were also unable to identify ways in which they could contribute. Those who had been told about the wilding pine problem – and the mitigation efforts – were interested and knowing this information enhanced their experience. In order to involve visitors in conservation activities in situ it would perhaps be beneficial to provide more conservation education (in advance of a visit) around issues specific to that location, and about the potential for visitors to participate in conservation efforts and – importantly – schedule environmental action into their visit. Despite the majority of visitors to places like the QCT having a high degree of environmental awareness, these findings underpin the importance of conservation education.

5 Conclusion

This research was designed to understand how tourism can make a difference in giving back to the places people visit. An exploratory interview approach was used to collect data via phone and video calls from a small sample of visitors to the QCT in the Marlborough Sounds during the 2021-2022 summer season. The interview sample was drawn from visitors to the QCT who – when surveyed in situ – voluntarily provided an email address under the understanding that they would be prepared to participate in additional research. There was a surprisingly poor interview completion rate from these ‘volunteers’. While phone (and video) interviews offer a convenient and cost-effective way to collect

data, a number of issues arose with this methodology. Firstly, the majority of interviewees appeared reluctant to arrange video interviews (e.g., via Zoom, Skype), with the key exceptions being those who had access to FaceTime. One possible reason for this may be that phone calls (without video) are less intrusive and easier to action than pre-arranged video calls (in this respect FaceTime offers the least complicated video technology and is readily compatible with mobile phone devices). Overall, mobile phone devices were also preferred over using fixed PCs or larger devices, again perhaps because of convenience.

The second issue was that, from a researcher's perspective, phone (voice-only) interviews are more challenging to do. Voice-only interviews do not allow the researcher to respond to facial expressions, or to explore in more depth topics that appear to have either particular interest or emotive appeal for an interviewee. One interviewee who did a FaceTime interview, for example, had a big smile on their face when talking about some aspects of their day out on the QCT, while the sole interviewee who did their interview in person closed their eyes and seemed to be imaging themselves back on the QCT when talking. Another issue with voice-only (mobile phone) interviews was that they enabled people to do the interview whilst doing other things (e.g., one person was driving home, another was baking a cake throughout) which meant they did not give their full attention to the interview questions.

Notwithstanding these methodological challenges, the research provided comprehensive insight into a small sample of visitors and into the visitor experience on the QCT. Feedback on the natural environment of the Marlborough Sounds and the QCT track experience was overwhelmingly positive. The more developed and modified nature of the QCT – in respect of the various facilities and visitor services – were also perceived positively and welcomed as an alternative tramping experience even by experienced trampers/walkers used to more remote and more 'wilderness' experiences. The accessibility of the QCT – in both functional and experiential senses – and its potential to appeal to (and cater for) a wide array of visitor types was a key feature in respect of the QCT standing out in comparison to many other walks and tracks. Overall, the QCT offers visitors an enjoyable walking/tramping experience in a unique natural environment, which can easily be tailored to suit different motives, level of skill and fitness, and interests.

Spending time in natural environments such as the QCT and its environs offers visitors a chance to escape the stresses of urban life and to connect with nature. While the track elements were generally accepted as a 'given', the provision of viewpoints and benches served to facilitate engagement with and enhance enjoyment of the natural environment. Exploring perceptions of nature and attitudes towards 'giving back to nature' highlighted the scale at which many visitors experience nature. The attraction of the expansive land- and seascapes of the QCT stood out much more than the minutiae of nature, including any observable environment issues. While the majority of visitors are environmentally aware (and environmentally responsible visitors) and are supportive of the notion of giving back to nature, they are considerably less certain of how they might do so. This research has shown that visitor experience on the QCT is enhanced by engagement with the historic, cultural and social dimensions of place, with these dimensions also providing a unique set of lens through which that landscape and natural environment can be interpreted. From a visitor perspective, giving back to nature requires not only understanding of how the environment has changed over time, but also education around what it could potentially look like in the future and education around the role – as visitors – they can play in this.

6 Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1 – Research Information Sheet

Who is conducting the research?

Dr Susanne Becken, Principal Science Investment Advisor (Visitors), Department of Conservation, Email: sbecken@doc.govt.nz Phone: +64-27 305 1012

Dr Jude Wilson, Researcher, Email: jude@judewilson.co.nz Phone +64 21 123 5032

Why is the research being conducted?

The objective is to understand how tourism can make a difference in giving back to the places people visit. The Queen Charlotte track represents a Department of Conservation case study to explore visitor experiences and how visitors connect to and relate with the places they visit.

What you will be asked to do and why are you selected?

You are being asked to participate in an online/phone interview to talk about your experience at the Queen Charlotte Track in summer 2020/21. The interview will take up to 60 minutes. Participants were selected randomly from track users who completed the Day Hike survey and who expressed willingness to share their experience in a follow up interview.

The expected benefits of the research

The Department will benefit from improved understanding of how visitors experience the Queen Charlotte Track and how connectedness to places like this might lead to interest in participating in environmental action or restoration.

Your confidentiality/ Privacy statement

The conduct of this research involved the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information (i.e., your email address to arrange for the interview). This information will remain confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. Your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. The files of your recorded interview will be erased after transcription is completed. If you choose not to be recorded, manual notes will be taken.

The ethical conduct of this research

Your participation is completely voluntary. This research project is conducted in accordance with the Department's ethics and privacy policies (<https://www.doc.govt.nz/footer-links/privacy-and-security/>). If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical conduct of this research, you are welcome to contact the Privacy Team at privacy@doc.govt.nz

Questions/ further information

The results of the study will be shared with the Department and will also be published in a peer reviewed international journal. You are welcome to contact the researchers listed above if you have any questions at any time during the research through the provided contact details.

Thank you for your cooperation.



6.2 Appendix 2 – Interview Script

I am interested in people's experiences on the QCT and how they relate to places like the QCT

If it is OK with you, I would like to record our conversation – obtain verbal consent – after I have transcribed the interview, I will delete the recording and any personal information you provide will remain confidential

Experience on the QCT (context)

To start can I just get a bit of background about your track experience

- What were your reasons for visiting the QCT? (e.g., could cover motivations, such as visiting nature, as well as more pragmatic drivers, such as being in the area, wanting a walk)
- What did you do on the track? (e.g., short walk, day walk, part of track, all of track)
- Had you been on the track before?
 - If yes, was there anything different this time?
- Had you been to the Marlborough Sounds before? (e.g., get a measure of familiarity with the sounds, attachment, family history etc)
- What did you like the most about the walk (e.g., social aspect, scenic views, nature, the track itself, water taxi ride, etc)?
- What did you like the least?

Exploring place (the QCT and beyond)

You have already talked about some of the things you enjoyed about your QC track visit – now I'd like to ask you a bit more about some of the different aspects of the QCT, the surrounding areas and other places like this (e.g., things like its physical, social and cultural environments – prompts for these 'dimensions' are in box at end).

- What would you describe as being the essence of the QCT and its surroundings? (taking it back to the QCT initially)
- Was there any particular aspect of this that stands out in your mind?
 - Was this a positive feature?
 - What about any negatives?
- If you were talking to someone in your life about your experience of the walk, what would you say? (explores the story they would tell)
- Explore dimensions already mentioned in more detail, prompt for ones not mentioned
 - (e.g., landscape, nature, scenic views, water, track features, history, human settlement, culture (Maori), culture (pakeha), facilities, etc – see Dimensions box)
- Do you have any concerns about the environment in these surroundings? (interesting to see if they refer to any human/people concerns)
- How does the QCT, its surroundings and your experience of it all, compare to other similar experiences you have enjoyed in NZ?
 - (e.g., perceptions of wilderness, remoteness, uniqueness, degree of modification, historic remnants, regeneration)

Connecting to places (like the QCT)

You have already described the QCT (and its surroundings) in some detail and I now have some questions about how visitors connect with – or relate to – places like the QCT and its surroundings

- How connected did you feel to this place and its surroundings during your visit?
- Thinking back on your visit, what aspect of this connection is clearest in your mind? (e.g., the look, the colours, the bush, the sounds, smells, people, signs, etc)
- Do you remember how that affected you at the time? (e.g., could be an effect on their thinking, feeling, behaviour, etc)
- Did that effect and/or feeling of connection stay with you after you had left the QCT and its surrounds?
 - If yes, in what way did the effect/feeling of connection remain?
 - Did you expect this effect/feeling of connection to continue?
- Do you recall feeling this type of connection in other places?
- What, if anything, was different (to the QCT) in that experience? (or connection)

Relationship between people and place

We have been talking about you felt connected to the place, and we talked earlier about how much you enjoyed being in those surroundings. Now, I'd like you to think about what you bring to the place and its surroundings

- How would you describe your role as a visitor? (i.e., do you have any sense of obligation or responsibility towards this kind of place)
 - If yes, does that influence your behaviour in any way?
- Would you say that you think holistically – in the sense that you also include yourself – when you think of the QCT environment?

On other parts of the QCT people do contribute through the Visitors Pass (required for the sections that cross private land) which according to the website “contributes to the sustainability of the track and assists with maintenance, enhancements and access”.

- What do you think about the idea of people contributing or giving back in some way to these places?
- Do you consider that you already give back in some way where you live?
 - If yes, how? (what do you do, how come you've decided to do that?)
 - Thinking back to the QCT and its surrounds can you imagine what might be possible? (actions or results)
 - In that location – how easy or difficult might that be? (e.g., logistics and mechanisms unknown, possible options unknown, not practical)

That's all I wanted to talk to you about – are there any other thoughts you have about what we have been talking about?

6.3 Appendix 3 – Prompts for place dimensions

Prompts for dimensions (if not mentioned) with possible follow up questions to explore connection/relationship to place (not sure where these might be used in interviews but expect that they will become relevant at different times during each interview, depending on what responses I get to other questions)

Familiarity – been before, family history/connection, attachment, done track/parts of track before, been to sounds before

- Anything new/different about this visit?

History and culture – Maori, European exploration, European settlement, current day occupation, tourism

- Did you stop and look at the information at Ship Cove before you started walking?
- Did you look up/get any information about the QCT or its surroundings (either before, during or after)?

Nature – specific aspects (vegetation, wildlife)

- When you think about the natural aspects of the QCT what things stand out?
- What would the ideal (in terms of connection/uplift) nature outing for you?

Landscapes – views, landforms, land use, the sea

- Do you think of the sounds as being less ‘wild’ (more modified) than other places you have been?
- Does that make a difference to how you feel about it?

Activity – familiar with type of activity, new activity, new place, new opportunity

- Maybe ask something about appropriate activity?

Social – own visitor group, other visitors, others you meet

- Do social aspects of an experience like this make it more memorable?

Environmental concerns – biodiversity, climate change, climate emergency

- What do think about the future of places like this?

6.4 Appendix 4 – Interviewee details

#	Gender	Age	Home	QCT	Prev exp.	Visit group	Stay/Gear	Other
1	F	50s	Christchurch	All	QCT	Partner	Camp-Trans	Biked last day
2	F	30s	Nelson	All	MS	Friend	Camp-Trans	
3	F	50s/60s	Blenheim	Day	QCT	Family (7)	-	Adults, SC-FL
4	F	30s/40s	Dunedin	Part	MS	Family (3)	Lodge-Camp-Trans	2 days, kids 13/17 (SC-PC)
5	M	30s	Wellington	Part	QCT	Partner	Lodge	2 days (RB-Port)
6	F	24	Lower Hutt	All	MS	Sister	Lodge-Trans	With #7
7	F	29	Lower Hutt	All	MS	Sister	Lodge-Trans	With #6
8	F	20s	Christchurch	All	-	Alone	Camp-Trans	1 day w friend, 8km car, German
9	F	29	Paekakariki	All	QCT	Alone	Camp	English
10	M	57	Christchurch	Day	-	Partner	-	SC-FL
11	F	25	Auckland	All	-	Friend	Lodge-Trans	
12	F	34	Invercargill	All	-	Alone	Camp-Trans	Italian
13	F	30s	Tauranga	Day	-	Family (3)	-	Motuara I & RB Chinese, kid 8
14	F	28	Auckland	All	-	Partner/friends (4)	Camp-Trans	
15	F/M	50s	Red Beach	Part	QCT	Partner	Lodge-Trans	2 days (SC-PC) English
16	M	27	Cambridge	All	MS	Partner	Lodge-Trans	2 days Walk-boat-bike
17	F	41	Lower Hutt	Day	-	Family (5)	-	FL-PC, kids 15, 12, 10
18	F	46	Picton	Day	QCT	Alone	-	FL-Miner track-FL
19	F	29	Picton	All	QCT	Partner	Camp-Lodge-Trans	Tent broke (1 st night)

20	F	28	Wellington	All	QCT	Friends (3)	Lodge-Trans	
21	F	27	Wellington	All	-	Friends (9)	Camp-Trans	
22	M	46	Auckland	Day	MS	Partner	-	SC-FL, English
23	F	25	Wanaka	All	-	Friends (3)	Camp	Te Araroa, Canadian

QCT Queen Charlotte Track MS Marlborough Sounds Trans – gear transferred	SC – Ship Cove PC – Punga Cove FL - Furneaux Lodge RB – Resolution Bay Port – Portage
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6.5 Appendix 5 – Motives for visiting the QCT

Int.#	Motive
1	Purely for leisure, for exercise, just my holiday
2	I wanted to do a multi-day hike where I could be confident navigating by myself, as a step up to doing more difficult walks
3	Family party spending time together after Christmas – to have a picnic and do something nice in the bush
4	The scenery, spending time with children, (attraction was being able to do smaller section only)
5	Filling in time while waiting for Nydia Track booking
6	Something always wanted to do
7	Heard it was beautiful, logistically easy, luxury options (food & accommodation), got last minute booking
8	Marlborough Sounds part of New Zealand had not really visited
9	Wanted to do a solo walk and the QCT was familiar – knew how it worked logistically
10	On holiday for wedding anniversary week
11	Wanted to do a walk – was recommended QCT by a friend
12	Recommended by a friend
13	Had seen photos on the tourism New Zealand website – and saw that there were lots of birds (of interest to daughter)
14	Because we wanted to do a multi-day walk and that was what was available at the time – but also we hadn't really been there and we thought it looked beautiful, and wanted to go and explore the area
15 (f) (m)	We had done a little bit of the walk when our daughters were at primary school (2006 or something) and we just thought that this was a bit of New Zealand we hadn't been to for a long time ... um ... we had enjoyed the little bit we did [previously] and thought 'let's do it a little bit more properly'
16	We were down in Blenheim for a family wedding, but wanted to go and do something else and had heard of the QCT through other people
17	It was literally that we had a few days [to fill in] – we live in Wellington now – and we should get out and spend money in New Zealand and just do something different with the kids that we hadn't done before – thought of going to the Abel Tasman, but the QCT was easier to organise
18	I wanted to do something over the summer holidays – when you live in Picton you don't always get that much time or opportunity to get out into the sounds an awful lot – I have done the whole track

	[before] but I hadn't gone up to where the mine tailings are – so I thought I would do a bit of a walk and have a nosey around there
19	We were supposed to have gone overseas but are travelling around New Zealand for three months instead – I wanted to introduce my husband to the QCT
20	We were originally meant to be travelling around Europe last year and that obviously didn't go ahead so we sort of planned a different trip – I always wanted to do the QCT and the Abel Tasman and so we thought we may as well do it while there are no tourists here
21	Just catching up with some friends and I hadn't been before
22	(1) partner was training for a longer charity walk (2) we really enjoy it [walking] and (3) there is only so many times you can go out for dinner on your anniversary
23	Doing the Te Araroa, and QCT is part of that

6.6 Appendix 6 – What did you like the most about the QCT?

Int. #	Liked the most
1	The hill climbs – the ups and downs ... [that] it's not a flat track – it's challenging ... and I like the beaches and the views. Normally I would carry most of my stuff, so it allows you to go tenting – which I really enjoy – without having to carry your tent, so I really think the QCT is one of the best multi-day walks in New Zealand
2	Just the views – they were spectacular – the green ocean and the hills coming out of it
3	Just being together and being away from the town – being out in nature, just walking ... after the big Xmas dinner and stuff
4	A particular place [on the track] would be Camp Bay – I liked the fact that the walk was easy, and my favourite part was the views
5	The bird life and the native beech
6	It was super easy to navigate, it wasn't too hard or too long or anything, it helped that the scenery is beautiful – I loved that, everyone along the way was so friendly – I guess you meet a lot of like-minded people on the overnight hikes, so that was good too
7	It was so peaceful and so quiet ... and the water ... and seeing all the sounds and that was just beautiful ... even though we didn't actually get the best weather – it was just crazy that we have such stunning scenery in our own back yard, and I think it was – you know there are a lot of bush walks in New Zealand – but this had those views – it wasn't all forestry all the time
8	The views, the smell of the bush, the birds – fun with the wekas

9	Track was easy to follow – didn't require much navigation
10	It's a package really – it's very serene – there were very few people – we probably passed one or two couples and had one pass us in the whole time we were on it – huge periods with just being together, out in beautiful scenery – the peace, the tranquillity – seeing some of the birds – we saw some native birdlife and just getting away from it all really – in nature
11	I loved that it was up in the mountains – so it was amazing views, and then when we would come down to stay obviously there was the waterfront, and every place that we stayed the people were so lovely and just be able to hire things and go out on the water and it was warm and lovely
12	I liked the landscape ... um ... its very nice to be able to walk and go for a hike and then have a swim to cool off at the end or in the middle as well
13	The view is very nice and also there are lots of lodges along the track
14	I liked that the scenery was pretty, and the path was well-maintained and easy to follow – that was probably it – the scenery was probably the highlight – and it wasn't as overcrowded as other walks can get
15 (f)	I was very grateful that we were able to do such a beautiful walk
15 (m)	I'm going to say the views that you get – you get to the top and you just get these outstanding views across the sounds and particularly at the Ship Cove end it's very quiet in the background, apart from the birds which is a nice sound – it's just a really tranquil place and that's what really stood out for me and also the native forest at the beginning was really nice
16	Obviously, the scenery and that ... but just the sort of the peacefulness, and that sort of thing, and the track was in nice condition and things like that, and that it was easy
17	We were surprised at how wide the tracks were and how easy it was – the ones in the hills behind our house are in worse condition – you could comfortably walk 2-3 abreast and you didn't have to be super careful where you were putting your feet – it was easier than we expected and while 12.5kms needs a reasonable level of fitness most people could do it without breaking a sweat
18	I don't know – [it is] beautiful – it's not too hard – it's got nice places to stop along the way – decent accommodation that's not too expensive – I'm not really a camper and I didn't have to worry about taking my gear with me
19	I think just the nature really – like getting out and seeing the birdlife
20	I think just the quietness, and I guess living in a city it's nice to get out of that and the views were stunning, and we just had perfect weather – probably the serenity was what I liked the most
21	Just being there – it was so beautiful – the water was so blue, and the views were so nice
22	Obviously, the stunning scenery – the track is well developed – the fact that, even though the walk was 17.5 kms and took us just over 4 hours, the climbs were gradual – we did a walk of a similar distance a month ago and it was almost vertical
23	I loved the viewpoints – a lot of views along the way, and obviously the track is beautifully maintained and it's a cool ... it's different to the other tracks in the South Island because it is more civilised, and people of all tramping abilities are able to do it

6.7 Appendix 7 – The essence of the QCT

Int. #	Essence of the QCT
1	Straight away what comes to mind is the history as far as Ship Cove goes – so that’s an important thing
2	Just those emerald-green waters and the rolling hills
3	Water in the bays
4	Panoramic views around all the little coves and bays that you can see – it is the nice blue water and usually nice temperatures (but not when we were there – laughs) – and Pohutukawa
5	It’s a very picturesque walk – you get to look at two different sounds, and go through a lot of native bush, but I would warn anyone – like it’s very accessible as well is one of its benefits – but I would warn friends that there is a lot of farmland that you look out on, and you are walking through people’s baches on a lot of sections of it
6	It almost felt like you were (being from Wellington, a big city) somewhere completely different and like you were essentially in the middle of nowhere, in the wilderness, and just away from real life and a bit of society, so it was nice to just be remote and be in the moment out in the beautiful walk
7	The tranquillity and that, and also the nature and I guess it’s just that it feels really serene, and everyone is so lovely – even though you are walking with a group you will only pass them for like a minute and then you are on your own again
8	Majestic, calm, beautiful
9	I just think it’s stunning – there are so many good views – I felt like I just wanted to stop every five minutes sometimes and just take pictures – the scenery throughout is just spectacular
10	You get some spectacular views down the sounds – you can see the vistas for a long way – in many directions you see good views – you have all the different plant life and bush life around you – parts of it are more tropical as well – so, it’s just the heart of it is being back in the centre of nature
11	I guess the essence is that I found we didn’t bump into that many people, so you kind of felt like you were the only ones there experiencing it, which was quite cool – so, it kind of feels like it’s your discovery
12	I mean it is very fancy – it’s a fancy walk – I like it (laughs) – because the environment as well is pretty fancy – I like all the signs that there are on the track – that kind of explain a little bit of the history – the animals and the plants – it’s quite interesting and a good excuse to stop as well
13	When I saw those photos [on the Tourism New Zealand website], I thought this looks like Milford Sound [and was unable to go there because of the weather] but [now] I think that compared to Milford Sound I would prefer Marlborough Sounds
14	I think the views – does that answer the question?

15(f)	I would say it's ... in the sense that you are not necessarily following the coast, but you are going from the edge of the sounds back to ... civilisation ... and there's a degree to which it's a natural path that people would have followed I guess, and I think that link with the water is a key thing
15(m)	In the part we did, the essence was the fact that most of the time you were quite close to the water and the views of Endeavour Inlet were always there and that really was ... I wouldn't say overpowering, but it was dominating – the bush was beautiful, but always you were coming back to the actual sounds
16	I'm not sure what the right word is – the scenery and the serenity I suppose
17	That's a big word isn't it? It was quite remote – it felt remote, even though we were only a boat ride from somewhere, and so it felt quite isolated – rugged is probably a cheesy word but ... untouched – like I know there are 10,000 people walk that track, but when you are looking around the hills you could see it looking like that 200 years ago and then in another 200 years' time [it would be the same]
18	I guess it's the sea – it's the bush – the beautiful bush and it's more a warmer [environment] ... it's not the alpine ... it's a coastal, but enclosed [environment] ... a peaceful, warm coastal walk – not an exposed, bracing coastal walk and it's a nice bush [walk] ... and the sea and the sort of beautifully-coloured green or turquoise sea – depending on the weather, of course
19	I think getting to walk alongside the water and just being on the edges and seeing so many different varieties of it – and the bit where you can see into both Queen Charlotte and Kenepuru Sound – that bit was really the essence – I think on a lot of the other walks you are in the bush – you are not really walking along the water and I think that's the real essence, and you can stop off and have a dip if you want to
20	I think just like the blue water and the stunning views, and just looking out and not seeing any houses or anything, and having that 'in the wilderness' feel
21	I'm not sure
22	I think the essence is that it's ... I imagine that it's quite a bountiful harbour – there were fishing boats dotted throughout – and I think that it's ... as a sales pitch to the Gateway to the South Island – it's beautiful – yeah – I think it's a bit of a – hidden gem is not the right word – but when you talk to people [about it] I think there is so much more to do [that you can tell them about]
23	I think it's a really cool place because it feels so tropical, whereas then you get to the Richmond Ranges there is nothing tropical about them, and yet it is the section of the Te Araroa right after [the QCT] – and with the blue and the emerald sea – the really blue sea and how they come together – that is what makes it really special

6.8 Appendix 8 – Telling the QCT story

Int. #	Your QCT story
1	I was just saying to my family that it was something we could all do – even my mum, and we have always done big family trips before, but it's a trip where if you don't want to walk you can take the boat – so it suits everyone – even my friends who aren't great walkers could spend longer on it – so I have really talked it up to most of my friends – that it is one they should consider doing – especially in the summer
2	I guess that it was really beautiful, and it wasn't that diverse in the scenery, and that it was easy, and there was actually one option that some other people were doing which would be more like what me and my friends would like, which was walking some of it and then having bikes dropped off, and biking some of it, and then kayaking the last section – that would make it more interesting for me. It does not cost all that much more than what you have to pay for just walking
3	I have just said we went on the walk and this is where we walked to and from and this is how we got there
4	The views, that it was easy to walk (particularly because of the luggage transfers and accommodation options)
5	I guess I haven't really talked about it, but I have been telling people about the Nydia Track
6	I tell them about the scenery and how it's a good level of walk – like it's quite long, but it's not very hard – not like a draining walk – it's a lot easier than the likes of Waikaremoana and Tongariro which are quite strenuous – and we managed to walk it quite a lot faster than we anticipated
7	I just started back at work a week ago and I have told people I went to the QCT and it was beautiful – and I asked my workmates if they had done it – and told them that they should do it – it's only 4 days – it's close and I would say that even if they are not a massive outdoorsy or walker type it's actually quite manageable – like the walk definitely has some hard sections but there was all sorts of fitness levels on that track and that is quite nice as well – it feels accessible – like we could potentially take our parents, and I said to them as well that it was a nice balance of exercising and kind of having that nature experience, but also like a nice holiday as well
8	The aspect of the fancy lodges next to the DOC campground was part of my story because it was so unique in my New Zealand tramping experience, I guess ... but ... yeah ... the long distance I walked was part of my story – the beauty of it, the photos I shared
9	I can give it to you – a part of the story has been that I don't feel as much of a buzz from walking – like sometimes I would get to the top of a hill and it would be a sense of relief to get there – I didn't feel overly enthusiastic for much of the walk – I realised on the last day – coming to the end, and I had 10km to go, and I was ready to be done – and people were on bikes coming past me and I realised how much of a buzz it would be to do the track on a MTB. I certainly enjoyed it for the views, but it felt like quite a physical challenge for me, because I was doing it by myself and quite quickly compared to how I did it last time – so I was quite focused on just finishing to be honest by the end
10	When we came back on the water taxi it was very rough for inside the sounds – lots of white caps – it was enough that my wife and some other people were uncomfortable – I wasn't too phased – that was good at the end of it ... the track itself ... oh, and we saw some of the birdlife – some of

	the flightless birds – not sure if it was a weka – we might have seen weka a couple of times and there was another bird that we saw – not the tui – it might have been another flightless one
11	I said that the walk was challenging for the first two days, but very cool views and places to stop and so I said I maybe would have changed up the first day – maybe stayed at Furneaux – and then carried on a little bit – because I think the 30km just killed us a little bit – but the views were amazing and every place that we stayed the people were just lovely and it was awesome just to get out in the water – it was warm enough for me, and it was just so clear and you just float – it was just awesome
12	My main thing was that I didn't have to carry a pack and it was really fancy and that made a big difference in the way I experienced the track itself – and I guess other things would be that I saw dolphins on the trip in on the boat, so that made it a little bit of a different experience
13	I said we went to the sounds and they thought that we went to Milford Sound. I recommend them to maybe stay one or two nights in those lodges – that they look like Fiji
14	We have talked about the Abel Tasman and the QCT – the QCT was a nice ... like a doable track ... and that it was easily accessible – like you don't have to book a whole year in advance like the Great Walks – you can just decide to do and still do it, which is nice and that there are really pretty views
15(f)	We told people while we were there – by Facebook
15(m)	Ironically to be honest our story is not about the QCT – it is about Mt Robert, simply because we went to the DOC office and asked what we could do, and they told us to drive to the Mt Robert viewpoint and then we unexpectedly did the whole track – we walked around the mountain
16	I have been telling people that it is worth doing ... that it was a good mixture of activity and still relaxing ... definitely worth doing for the scenery ... the way we did it with the biking on the second day was quite a big day out biking ... so as long as people are aware of that ... but definitely 'worth doing' has been my summary
17	I don't know ... um ... probably it depends on who you are talking to how you frame it – I hope it's been a good story – a positive experience – it certainly was that we were glad to have done it – it was everything really – but some of it was oversold because of the weather we got, but we are not naïve enough to worry about that ... I said to my parents who are in their 70s that it would be perfect for them to do, and certainly I recommended it to people
18	Just that I had gone down the sounds and went for a bit of a walk – it wasn't much of a story (laughs) – but I encourage people and tell them about that pass [for the water taxi] so they know they can use that to get out there
19	I guess that we had a really positive story – we came back and even though I had done it before we talked about how that section had been done up from Ship Cove around to Furneaux – because a lot of people we were talking to I had grown up with and they had also done it before ... um ... but it was that we had such a great time and even though you are close to boats buzzing around and there are other people, you still do feel like it's a real escape
20	I'd say it was that it was a much needed break to be honest, because it's just been a very busy year at work and I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to get out of the city and have an active holiday, but also it has the niceties of having a drink at night – and it is also just a ferry trip away from Wellington

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- 21** Just that it was really beautiful and really enjoyable – there's no hiccup stories – everything was easy – it was really nice, a good holiday – especially to some friends of mine who have never done walks I said that they should do it
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- 22** Obviously, the walk and the beauty of it and nature and I think – our accommodation [in Picton] was lovely, the woman who rented the house to us was fun, people were really nice and it's definitely the Marlborough Sounds and QCT that are memorable
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- 23** That it took us 3 days to do it so it's a nice cruisy 3 day tramp – obviously beautiful and also when we were staying at Lochmarra we actually swam with bioluminescent plankton at night, and it was so cool, and I can't stop talking about how cool that was, and also thinking about the Irish girl I was tramping with and she was always looking forward to the QCT because she thought it would give her Moana vibes – more of a tropical holiday destination
-