Plan and prepare

HEAPPHY TRACK

Duration: 4–6 days
Distance: 78.4 km (one way)
Mountain biking: 2–3 days
Distance: 78.4 km (one way)

Great Walks season
Walking: All year
Mountain biking: 1 May – 30 November
HEAPHY TRACK

If it’s varied and rugged landscapes with mountain views you’re looking for, you’ll be spoilt for choice on the Heaphy Track. Retrace the steps of early Māori seeking pounamu (greenstone) and 19th century gold prospectors. You’ll pass through expansive tussock downs, lush forests and nikau palms before reaching the roaring seas of the West Coast.

Tackle the track in 4 or 5 days, or take your time and soak up the views over 6 days. There is a popular 2-day, overnight return trip on the western side from Kōhaihai to Heaphy Hut. You can also mountain bike the track during the mountain biking season (1 May to 30 November), which takes 2–3 days.

The Heaphy Track in Kahurangi National Park can be hiked in either direction. The track is well marked and signposted, but some sections may be steep and rough and the track could be muddy. This brochure describes a 4-day hike for independent, non-guided walkers travelling from Brown Hut to Kōhaihai.

Duration: 4–6 days
Distance: 78.4 km (one way)
Mountain biking: 2–3 days
Distance: 78.4 km (one way)

Great Walks season
Walking: All year
Mountain biking: 1 May – 30 November

Elevation profile & track guide

Day 1: Brown Hut to Perry Saddle Hut
5 hours, 17.5 km
As you wind your way through bush you’ll climb gradually, following a route once surveyed for a road. It’s 4 hours to Aorere Shelter, which affords views of Aorere valley and, on clear days, Mount Taranaki/Egmont. At Flanagans Corner, about 30 min before Perry Saddle Hut, a short side track takes you to the highest point on the Heaphy Track (915 m) and some stunning views.

Day 2: Perry Saddle Hut to James Mackay Hut
6 hours 30 minutes, 24.2 km
Start your day walking through tussock clearings and patches of beech. Where the valley widens, the expansive tussocklands of Gouland Downs are revealed. Takahē, which are rare, flightless native birds, have been released here – you may be lucky enough to see one.

On your way to Gouland Downs Hut, you’ll pass the famed pole where hikers have tied their old boots. West of the hut, you can visit an area of mossy beech formations. The track continues through tussock trees and through the forest. It then takes you on to James Mackay Hut, which offers views of the Tasman Sea and Heaphy River mouth 750 metres below.

COVER: Swing bridge over Wekasara Creek, DOC/90 Seconds
ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Monster Valley; stokedforsaturday.com; stokedforsaturday.com; Baptiste Maryns
MAIN PHOTO: Heaphy Hut, Baptiste Maryns
Day 3:
James Mackay Hut to Heaphy Hut

Beech forest gives way to nikau palms as you descend to the Heaphy River and Lewis Hut, where you’ll encounter the infamous West Coast sandflies. The 148.8 m-long Heaphy River bridge is the largest suspended deck bridge built by the Department of Conservation. The track then takes you through a forest of kahikatea, rimu and rātā – be aware that in heavy rain, especially at high tide, sections of the track may be prone to flooding. Towards the river mouth, nikau palms become more common, and the roar of the ocean on the wild West Coast grows louder. Do not swim at the Heaphy River mouth as there are rips and you may get washed out to sea.

Day 4:
Heaphy Hut to Kōhaihai River mouth

On your final day, the track south to Kōhaihai follows the rugged coastline of the West Coast, and passes through forests of rātā and karaka trees, vines and groves of nikau palms. Soon Scotts Beach appears. The clearing here is a good spot to rest before climbing over Kōhaihai Bluff. The track follows the bank of the Kōhaihai River for 400 metres to the car park. At Crayfish Point there is a track high above the beach well away from the sea. Take care crossing Crayfish Stream, particularly after or during rainfall, as it can flood quickly.

There is a risk of wave surge at high tide between Heaphy Hut and Kōhaihai. Be prepared to wait for up to 2 hours until the tide retreats. Check tide tables in Heaphy Hut or Kōhaihai Shelter.
1 **Fantastic flora!** See huge podocarps and giant northern rātā in the lowland forest, a huge variety of alpine and subalpine species on the Gouland Downs, and karaka, ngaio and nikau palms in the coastal forest.

2 Try to spy the nocturnal carnivorous land snail *Powelliphanta* around Heaphy Hut on a damp night. These native snails are the largest carnivorous snails in the world, some growing as big as a man’s fist. They eat earthworms, sucking them up like spaghetti!

3 Listen out for the **great spotted kiwi/roroa** calling to each other at night from the Perry Saddle, Gouland Downs and Saxon huts. Male great spotted kiwi make a shrill, repeated, drawn-out whistle of ‘kiwi’. The females make a low ‘churr’ sound.

4 West of Gouland Downs Hut, walk through the **enchanted forest**, moss-covered beech forest set in a limestone outcrop of arches and old caves.

5 Keep an eye out for the **endangered takahē** on Gouland Downs. DOC, in partnership with local iwi and Fulton Hogan, released 30 takahē in 2018. They are protected by a 6,400 hectare predator control network, supported by DOC’s National Partner for Conservation, Air New Zealand. In late 2018, the takahē laid their first eggs!
Places to stay

DOC operates 7 huts and 9 campsites along the Heaphy Track, which must be booked in advance all year round. Campers are not permitted to use hut facilities.

Kōhaihai is a Standard campsite and does not need to be booked in advance. See www.doc.govt.nz/campsites for details.

Great Walks huts
$34 per adult per night; 17 years and under free (booking required).

Huts have bunks, mattresses, a water supply, toilets, hand-washing facilities and heating with fuel. All huts have cooking fuel, except Brown Hut and Gouland Downs Hut. A DOC ranger may be present.

Great Walks campsites
$14 per adult per night; 17 years and under free (booking required).

The campsites offer basic facilities including toilets, a sink and a water supply. Some also have picnic tables and cooking shelters.
What do I do next?

Start off at greatwalks.co.nz/heaphy for more information. Consider transport options before booking huts/campsites.

Consult tide timetables and book your huts and campsites online at bookings.doc.govt.nz.

Book your transport to and from the track.

Buy your food and pack your bags – download the Great Walks packing list and make sure you have everything you need for a 6 day independent unguided walk.

Read up on safety and make sure you’re well prepared for your journey and changeable weather at greatwalks.co.nz/heaphy.

Check the weather, and make sure you’ve downloaded and printed your ticket and official track guide. You can also pick up a track guide and get the latest weather updates from the Nelson Visitor Centre.

All set! Lace up your boots and get hiking. Don’t forget to share your experience on facebook.com/GreatWalks.

Getting there

You can start the Heaphy Track from the following locations:

→ Brown Hut, Golden Bay: from Collingwood take the road up Aorere valley to Brown Hut (28 km).
→ Kōhāhāi, West Coast: from Karamea, head north to the car park and campsite at Kōhāhāi River (15 km).

The ends of the track are 463 km apart by road, so you will need to arrange transport at each end.

Bus, taxi, and vehicle relocation services are available from both ends of the track. (Limited bus services operate in winter.)

Know before you go

It is important to plan your trip thoroughly to make sure you stay safe. Before you go, know the Outdoor Safety Code – 5 simple rules to help you #MakeItHomeNZ.

1. Plan your trip. Choose a trip that fits your abilities. Make sure you have enough time to do your walk, plus extra time. Book accommodation, transport and transfers to the start/ end of the track early.

2. Tell someone your plans. Tell someone where you are going and when you’ll be back. Ask them to call emergency services if you haven’t returned on time. Consider carrying a personal locator beacon, as there is no cellphone reception on most tracks.

3. Be aware of the weather. New Zealand weather is very changeable. Even if it’s summer or the forecast is good, you should always carry a rain jacket and warm clothing.

Safety on the Heaphy Track

→ Weather on the Heaphy Track changes quickly and annual rainfall averages over 4,000 mm. It rains heavily with little warning, and even small streams are dangerous in flood. Be prepared for rain, snow and wind, especially on the exposed sections of the track.
→ Bad weather can damage the track during winter. These areas will be marked by signs and warning tape, although you should check with the Nelson DOC Visitor Centre before your walk.
→ There are sometimes large floods in the Heaphy valley (between Lewis Hut and Heaphy Hut). It is not safe to proceed when the track is flooded – you should wait in either Lewis Hut or Heaphy Hut.
→ Do not swim at the Heaphy River mouth as strong currents may wash you out to sea.
→ Large waves can wash over parts of the coastal track when the tide is high and the sea is rough. This can mean the track is not safe to walk. When planning your trip, check tide charts and allow extra time in case you are delayed.

→ The Heaphy Track will take 4–6 days to walk and some of the track is over stony ground. Wear sturdy footwear that is broken in, well-cushioned socks and carry blister supplies.
→ Hunting (including bow hunting) is not permitted on the track.
→ Walkers and mountain bikers share the track between 1 May and 30 November. These areas will be marked by signs and warning tape, although you should check with the Nelson DOC Visitor Centre before your walk.
→ There are sometimes large floods in the Heaphy valley (between Lewis Hut and Heaphy Hut). It is not safe to proceed when the track is flooded – you should wait in either Lewis Hut or Heaphy Hut.
→ Do not swim at the Heaphy River mouth as strong currents may wash you out to sea.
→ Large waves can wash over parts of the coastal track when the tide is high and the sea is rough. This can mean the track is not safe to walk. When planning your trip, check tide charts and allow extra time in case you are delayed.

→ The Heaphy Track will take 4–6 days to walk and some of the track is over stony ground. Wear sturdy footwear that is broken in, well-cushioned socks and carry blister supplies.
→ Hunting (including bow hunting) is not permitted on the track.
→ Walkers and mountain bikers share the track between 1 May and 30 November. Bikes must give way to walkers. Check www.doc.govt.nz/mountain-bikers-code for safety information.
→ Go to greatwalks.co.nz/heaphy ‘Know before you go’ section for detailed safety information, and ‘What to take’ section for a full gear list.

Published by:
Department of Conservation, Marketing Team
PO Box 10420, Wellington 6143, New Zealand
September 2019

Editing and design:
Creative Services, DOC National Office

* Prices are accurate at the time of publication.
This publication is produced using paper sourced from well-managed, renewable and legally logged forests.