



Duration: 4-6 days  
Distance: 78.4 km (one way)

# Heaphy TRACK GUIDE

Great Walks

Swingbridge over Wekakura Creek, Photo: DOC/90 Seconds

## Plan and prepare

It is important to plan your trip thoroughly to ensure you stay safe, and have a great time. Before you go, know the **Outdoor Safety Code** – 5 Simple rules to help you #makeithome

1. Plan your trip
2. Tell someone
3. Be aware of the weather
4. Know your limits
5. Take sufficient supplies

## TELL SOMEONE YOUR PLANS

Tell someone you trust your plans and when they should hear from you next. Include the national/international emergency service numbers: 111-Police for points of contact in New Zealand, +64-4-381-2000 for international. Find more information at [mountainsafety.org.nz](http://mountainsafety.org.nz).

## Further information and booking

Visit the Great Walks website or contact your nearest DOC Visitor Centre.  
Nelson Visitor Centre, 79 Trafalgar Street, Nelson  
Phone: +64 3 546 8210  
Email: [nmbookings@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nmbookings@doc.govt.nz)

▶ [Book online greatwalks.co.nz](http://greatwalks.co.nz)

Share your experience – [facebook.com/greatwalks](https://facebook.com/greatwalks)

Published by: Department of Conservation, Marketing Team  
PO Box 10420, Wellington, New Zealand | August 2018 | R140498

This publication is produced using paper sourced from well-managed, renewable and legally logged forests.

New Zealand Government



## Welcome to the *Heaphy Track*, one of ten unforgettable journeys.

If it's varied and rugged landscapes with mountain views you're looking for, you'll be spoilt for choice on the Heaphy Track. Travel through expansive tussock downs, lush forests and nīkau palms to the roaring seas of the West Coast.



## Plants and wildlife

**The kea** is the world's only alpine parrot, and one of the most intelligent birds. To survive in the harsh alpine environment, kea have become inquisitive and nomadic social birds. You may meet the infamous gang of kea near James Mackay Hut.



Photo: Herb Christophers

**Blue ducks/whio** inhabit clean, fast-flowing streams in the forested upper catchments. You might spot whio at Blue Duck Creek/Saxon River, and at Cave Brook, Shiner Brook or Big River near Goulard Downs Hut. Nesting along the riverbanks, they are at high risk of attack from stoats and rats.



Photo: Herb Christophers

**Takahē**, a large, highly colourful, flightless bird, thought to be extinct until 1948, was reintroduced in 2018 and can sometimes be seen and heard during the day alongside the track through the Goulard Downs.



Photo: Jake Osborne

**Great spotted kiwi/roroa** is the largest of our kiwi species. It lives only in the higher parts of the northern South Island, which may give it partial protection from predators. You may hear kiwi calling at night at the Perry Saddle, Goulard Downs, Saxon and James Mackay huts.



Photo: Rod Morris

**Powelliphanta snails**, the largest carnivorous snails in the world, can grow as big as a man's fist. They suck up earthworms like spaghetti but are among our most threatened invertebrates. They are nocturnal creatures and you may find them around the Heaphy Hut on a damp night.



Photo: Chris Pugsley

**Nīkau palms** usually grow to about 10-15 m tall. They are easy to recognise in the bush with their circular trunks, which are ringed with evenly-spaced scars from fallen leaves. The fronds are up to 3 m in length. The bright red nīkau fruits are an important food source for native birds.



Photo: 90 Seconds

# Track guide

You can walk the track in either direction starting from Brown Hut in Golden Bay or from Kōhahai on the West Coast.

The times are approximate and will vary according to your fitness, direction of travel and the weather.

## Brown Hut to Perry Saddle Hut 5 hr, 17.5 km

About 180 m upstream from the hut, cross the bridge over the Brown River, then a grass flat, before winding up a well-defined track and into the bush. The track climbs gradually.

After 4 hours, you will reach Aorere Shelter. From here, the Aorere valley extends northwards and on clear days it is possible to see Mt Taranaki/Egmont. Continue to Perry Saddle Hut.

## A Side trip – Flanagans Corner

**10 min return**  
At 915 m this is the highest point of the track and a great viewpoint. Take a short track 30 minutes before Perry Saddle Hut.

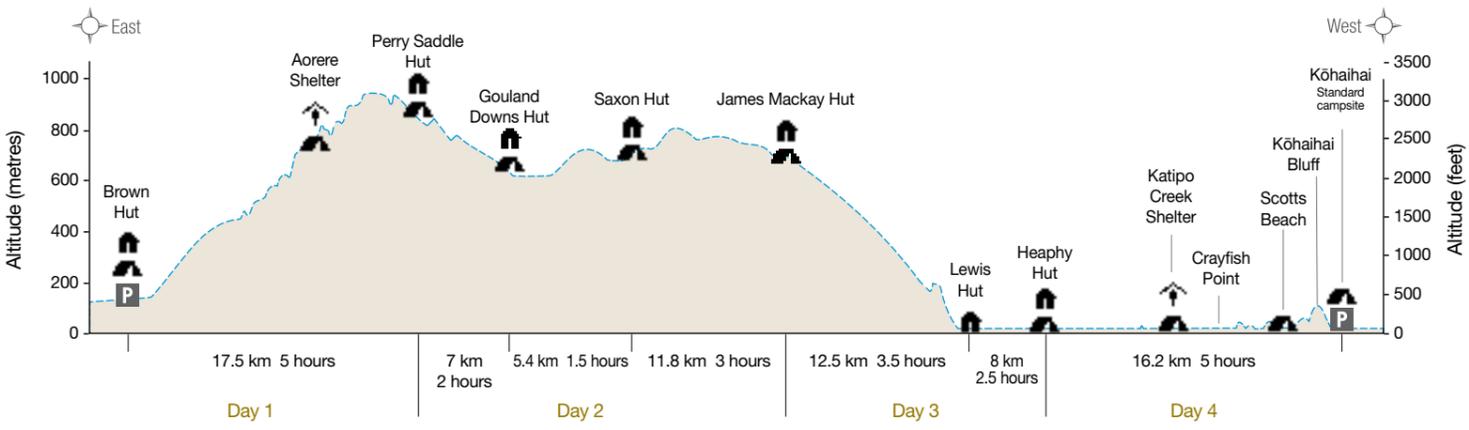


Photo: Chantelle Taylor

## Perry Saddle to Goulard Downs Hut 2 hr, 7 km

Cross Perry Saddle and sidle above Perry Creek through tussock clearings and patches of beech. Soon the valley widens and the track climbs a small rise to where the Goulard Downs, an open tussock area, is revealed, stretching out to the west. The track meanders easily down to Cave Brook. Just beyond the brook is Goulard Downs Hut.

# Elevation profile



## Goulard Downs Hut to Saxon Hut 1 hr 30 min, 5.4 km

Beyond Goulard Downs Hut the track is reasonably level as it crosses the northern part of Goulard Downs. The tussock country and riverbeds make for good exploring, but when the mist lowers, the featureless downs can be confusing and it is easy to become disorientated. Saxon Hut, nestled near the end of the downs, is named after John Saxon who surveyed the track in 1886.

## B Side trip – The ‘enchanted forest’

**30 min return**  
The track crosses one of several limestone arches, where beech trees grow amid the remains of old caves. Nearby a small waterfall flows out of a cave passage which is worth exploring with a torch.



Photo: Peter Black

## Saxon Hut to James Mackay Hut 3 hr, 11.8 km

From Saxon Hut the track drops slightly to tussock flats beside the Saxon River and then climbs gently up to a broad ridge, which joins Goulard Downs to Mackay Downs.

**!** A section of Mackay Downs floods in extremely wet conditions. This 70 m part of the track across a wetland and a bridge becomes impassable and quite dangerous. Walkers should wait for the water to recede.

The track now skirts the edge of Mackay Downs to James Mackay Hut. Small creeks dissect the landscape and the pink granite sparkles and crunches beneath your feet.

James Mackay Hut is sited just above the track on an open terrace, which offers views of the Tasman Sea and Heaphy River mouth 750 metres below.

## James Mackay Hut to Lewis Hut 3 hr 30 min, 12.5 km

Beyond James Mackay Hut, you'll begin a gradual descent to the Heaphy River. The track

passes through beech forest at first, but soon the richer and taller forest typical of the West Coast becomes dominant. The sounds of rushing water grow louder and the hut suddenly appears at the junction of the Heaphy River with the smaller Lewis River.

## Lewis Hut to Heaphy Hut 2 hr 30 min, 8 km

From Lewis Hut, head back up the track for a short distance to cross the Heaphy River via a suspension bridge, the longest built by DOC. The track continues along the left riverbank to the river mouth through a forest of kahikatea, rimu and rātā.

**!** At times of heavy rain (around high tide) sections of the track and bridges get flooded. About 15 min before Heaphy Hut an area of limestone and karst floods after heavy rain. Extra care is required in flood conditions and walkers should wait for the water to recede.

Towards the river mouth, nīkau palms become more common and the roar of the sea grows louder. Heaphy Hut is situated far enough back from the sea to be spared the worst of the winds.

**!** Do not swim at the Heaphy River mouth as you may get washed out. You should only swim in the river itself, upstream.

## Heaphy Hut to Kōhahai River mouth 5 hr, 16.2 km

The track south to Kōhahai is through forest, although beach walking is possible in some places. Some small streams are not bridged and can be dangerous after heavy rain.

**!** Visitors are no longer required to traverse the beach and plan around high tide at Crayfish Point as 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.

Soon you'll reach Scotts Beach. The clearing here is a good spot to rest before climbing over Kōhahai saddle and down through wind-blasted shrubs to a bridge across the Kōhahai River. The track follows the riverbank for 400 m to Kōhahai car park where there is a shelter.

**!** The track can be flooded when the mouth of the Kōhahai River is blocked. An alternative track is available.

Key hut campsite shelter parking

# Track history

For many generations, Golden Bay Māori travelled to central Westland, where they sought pounamu (greenstone) for tools, weapons and ornaments. They followed a trail over Goulard Downs from the Aorere to the Whakapoai (Heaphy River) and also travelled the treacherous coast north of the Heaphy River mouth, risking wave-swept beaches and rounding huge bluffs using flax ladders.

The track is named after Charles Heaphy, a draughtsman with the New Zealand Company. In 1846 he and Thomas Brunner, a surveyor with the company, were the first Europeans to traverse the coastal part of the modern track. At the time they were on an exploratory trip along the West Coast with a Māori guide, Kehu.

Heaphy Track. Photo: © Baptiste Maryns

# Heaphy Track safety

## STAY ON THE MARKED TRACKS

The Heaphy Track is well formed and well marked. All major stream and river crossings are bridged.

If you become lost you should stop, find shelter and stay calm. Put on extra clothing to keep warm and assist rescuers should you hear them searching for you.

## BE PREPARED FOR ALL CONDITIONS

Weather on the Heaphy Track is changeable. Rain, snow and wind are possible at all times of the year, especially on the exposed sections of the track.

## HYPOTHERMIA (TOO COLD)

**Watch for symptoms:** people may shiver, be clumsy, confused, have slurred speech, and deny they have a problem.

**Treatment:** immediately make or find shelter; get the person into warm, dry clothing, put them into a sleeping bag, give them warm, sweet drinks, monitor them and seek immediate medical help.

## HEAT EXHAUSTION

**Prevention:** carry and drink water regularly throughout your walk.

**Watch for symptoms:** headaches, thirst, weakness, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.

**Treatment:** move to a cool shaded area to rest, remove excess clothing and give water to drink.

## FLOODING ON THE TRACK

Heavy rain can occur with little warning, and even small streams are dangerous in flood.

The Heaphy valley (between Lewis Hut and Heaphy Hut) can experience severe flooding events.

Do not attempt to cross. Take shelter in either Lewis or Heaphy huts and wait.

## MOUNTAIN BIKING

Mountain biking is permitted on the track from 1 May to 30 November during daylight hours only (from half an hour before sunrise to half an hour after sunset), to protect two nocturnal species found on the track.

It is suited to riders with advanced skills (Grade 4) and can increase to expert (Grade 5) when factoring in distance, remoteness, and the technical skills riders require in wet and/or cold weather. See [www.doc.govt.nz/mtb-grades](http://www.doc.govt.nz/mtb-grades). Walkers and bikers share the track during the mountain biking season.

## WAVE SURGE AT HIGH TIDE

Sections of the coastal track between Kōhahai and Heaphy Hut may also be affected by large wave surges during high tides and rough seas, which can cause the track to be temporarily impassable. Sections affected are clearly signposted.

Track users must make their own safety assessment and be prepared to wait up to 2 hours until the tide retreats, as there are no alternative tracks available. Check tide tables in the Heaphy Hut or Kohahai Shelter before walking through this section.

## REMEMBER

There is a small risk of giardia – we recommend you treat water before using it.

## TIDAL INFORMATION

To get the correct tide times for the Heaphy Track coastline, subtract 30 minutes from the Land Information Westport Port tide timetables:

[www.linz.govt.nz/sea/tides/tide-predictions](http://www.linz.govt.nz/sea/tides/tide-predictions).