

Heaphy TRACK GUIDE



Duration:

4–6 days hiking (all year)

2–3 days mountain biking (1 May to 30 November)

Distance: 78.4 km (one way)



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

For in-depth local knowledge, visit:

Nelson Visitor Centre

79 Trafalgar Street, Nelson 7010

Phone: +64 3 546 8210

Email: nmbookings@doc.govt.nzwww.doc.govt.nz/great-walks

 Share your experience – facebook.com/docgovtnz

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Care for the Heaphy Track



Protect nature

Don't feed weka – even if they ask. Feeding wildlife is harmful to them. Follow any rules restricting fires, vehicles or boats. No dogs, unpermitted drones or night riding allowed.



Show respect

Walkers and mountain bikers share the track between 1 May and 30 November. Bikers must give way to walkers. Minimise noise when others are sleeping.



Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by planning and preparing for your trip. Share your plans and take a distress beacon.



Keep New Zealand clean

Take all rubbish with you. Use toilets where provided. You can find them at all huts, campsites and shelters.

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 nikau 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. If you are lucky enough to encounter kea, please don't feed them.



Photo: Herb Christophers

Blue ducks/whio inhabit clean, fast-flowing streams in forested upper catchments. You might spot whio at larger creeks and rivers along the track. Nesting along the riverbanks, they are at high risk of attack from stoats and rats.



Photo: Herb Christophers

Takahē are large, highly colourful, flightless birds and until 1948 they were thought to be extinct. Takahē were 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/rorua 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 all huts along the track!



Photo: Rod Morris

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



Photo: Chris Pugsley

Nikau palms usually grow to about 10–15m 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 3m in length. The bright red nikau fruits are an important food source for native birds.

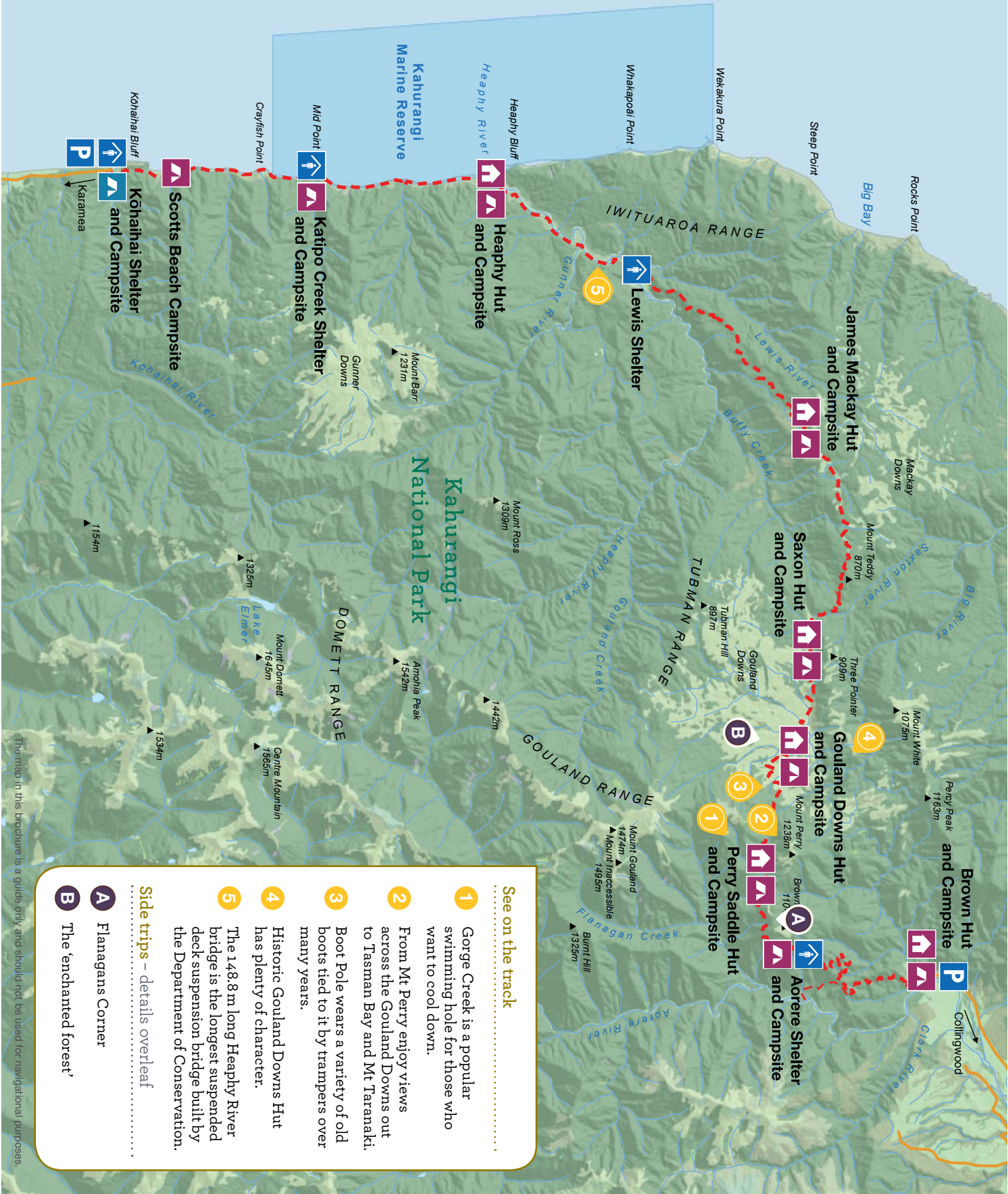


Photo: 90 Seconds

Great Walk hut
 Great Wa k campsite
 Standard campsite
 Shelter
 Car park
 Toilets are available at all huts and campsites
 Great Walk
 Tramping track
 Road

0 1 km

N



See on the track

- Gorge Creek is a popular swimming hole for those who want to cool down.
 - From Mt Perry enjoy views across the Goulard Downs out to Tasman Bay and Mt Taranaki.
 - Boot Pole wears a variety of old boots tied to it by trampers over many years.
 - Historic Goulard Downs Hut has plenty of character.
 - The 148.8 m long Heaphy River bridge is the longest suspended deck suspension bridge built by the Department of Conservation.
- Side trips – details overleaf
- A Flanagans Corner
 - B The ‘enchanted forest’

Potential for wave surge at high tide between Heaphy Hut and Kohahai. Be prepared to wait for up to 2 hours until the tide retreats. Check tide tables in Heaphy Hut or Kohahai Shelter.

The map in this brochure is a guide only and should not be used for navigational purposes.

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

5hr, 17.5km

About 180m 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. Continue to Perry Saddle Hut.

A Side trip – Flanagans Corner

10min return

At 915m, this is the highest point of the track and a great viewpoint. Take a short side track 30 minutes before Perry Saddle Hut to visit it.



Photo: Chantelle Taylor

Perry Saddle to Goulund Downs Hut

2hr, 7km

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 Goulund 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 Goulund Downs Hut.

Goulund Downs Hut to Saxon Hut

1hr 30min, 5.4km

Beyond Goulund Downs Hut the track is reasonably level as it crosses the northern part of Goulund 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’

30min 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. Take care when exploring the forest, as it is possible to lose your way – to be safe, stay near the track.



Photo: Peter Black

Saxon Hut to James Mackay Hut

3hr, 11.8km

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 Goulund Downs to Mackay Downs.

 A section of Mackay Downs floods in extremely wet conditions. This 70m 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 Shelter

3hr 30min, 12.5km

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 Shelter is an emergency shelter. No overnight stays.

Lewis Shelter to Heaphy Hut

2hr 30min, 8km

From Lewis Shelter, 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 15min 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, nikau 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 to sea. You should only swim in the river itself, upstream.

Heaphy Hut to Kōhahai River mouth

5hr, 16.2km

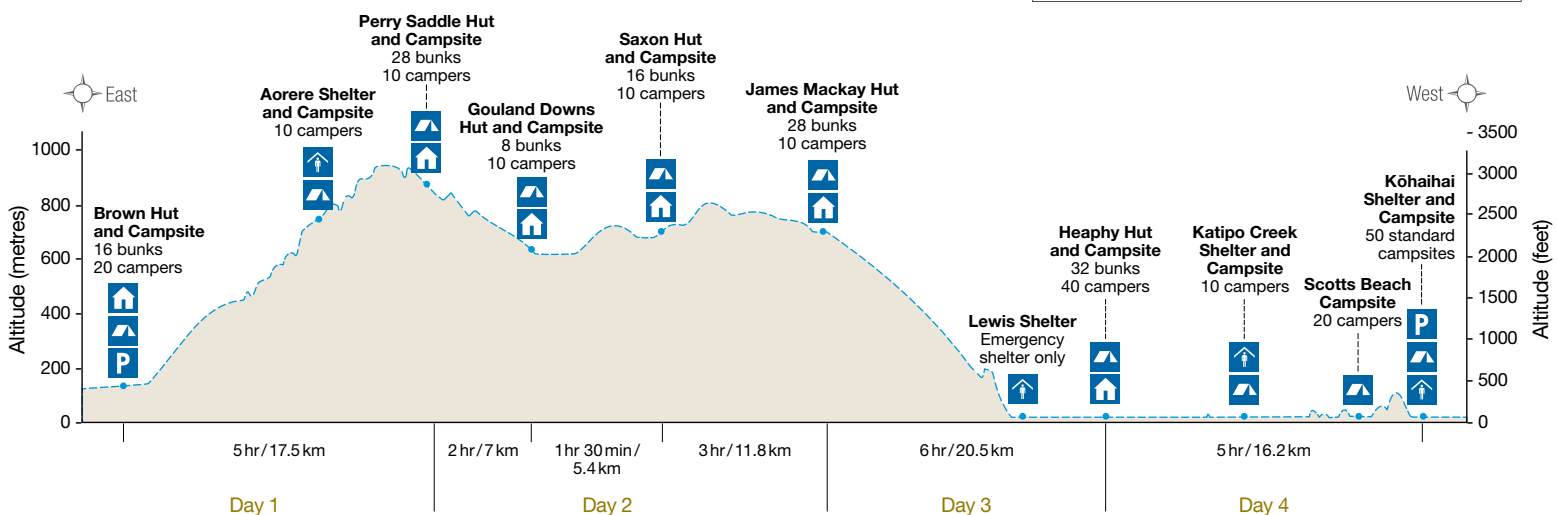
The track south to Kōhahai is through forest, although beach walking is possible in some places. Some small streams are not bridged and can be dangerous after heavy rain.

 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 400m 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.

Elevation profile



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 Goulund 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

Staying safe on the Heaphy Track

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)

During cold, wet and windy conditions, hypothermia (a drop in core body temperature) can become a serious problem. From initial stages to unconsciousness can take as little as 30 minutes.

- **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

This can be serious and is usually caused by physical activity in a hot environment and not drinking enough water.

- **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 Shelter and Heaphy Hut) can experience severe flooding events.

Do not attempt to cross. Take shelter in either Lewis Shelter or Heaphy Hut 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. 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 Kōhahai Shelter before walking through this section.

REMEMBER

There is a small risk of giardia, a food- and water-borne disease. 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.