

BEST DAY WALKS IN THE SOUTH ISLAND



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MARLBOROUGH & KAIKOURA

The Snout — Picton
Queen Charlotte Walkway
Wakamarina Gold Track



Kaikoura Peninsula
Mount Fyffe
Haumuri Bluff



Red Hills Hut
Wairau Lagoon
Sawcut Gorge



The Snout

Delightful ridge walk

Views of the sounds and ferries

Lookouts and information signs

3 hours return (headland)

Graded bush paths

6 kilometres return (headland)

From Picton drive to Waikawa, and down Sussex Road into Victoria Domain. Mapboard here. A one-way sealed road climbs onto ridge past lookouts 1 km to The Snout carpark.

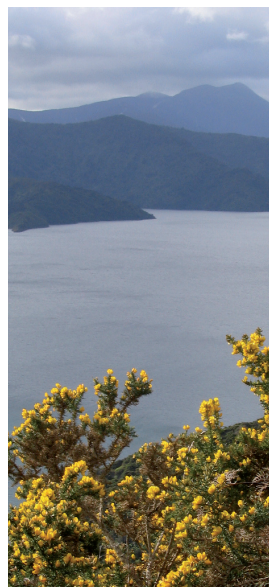
As you look up Queen Charlotte Sound from Picton wharf, The Snout is the ridge on your right. It points a long finger into the sound, and has several good walking tracks, with particularly impressive views of this labyrinth of waterways.

At the carpark walk past the locked gate along the wide unsealed road till it reaches a saddle and the bush track starts a gentle zig-zag up the hill. The shrub forest is a mix of ake ake, kawakawa (heart shaped leaves), five finger and mahoe, whose leaves turn skeleton-like on the ground.

The track eases into an old bridleway, and sneaks around the high point, with views of the bright waterways and dark silhouetted headlands. After a slight descent you pop out onto a fine lookout overlooking Queen Charlotte. Toilet here.

The actual headland is another 30 minutes further one way, and when you reach the rocky shore you can practically touch the huge white ferries as they glide by like stately dames, making a grand entrance to the ballroom arena of Picton.





Cafe: Seabreeze, in Picton

Queen Charlotte Walkway

Sea views on an open ridge walk

Shelters and lookouts

Popular for mt bikes

3 hours one way

Well marked bush tracks

6 kilometres one way

Off Queen Charlotte Drive at Linkwater, take the the Kenepuru Road to just before Portage, and the Torea Road to the saddle.

The Queen Charlotte Walkway is rapidly becoming one of New Zealand's most popular tracks. It offers almost 55 km of ridge and coastal walking overlooking the glittering turquoise waters and endless peninsulas of the Marlborough Sounds. This walk is a snippet of the overall track, from Portage to Te Mahia, with swinging views on both sides of the ridge. Take plenty of water.

Obviously having transport arranged is useful, or a car swap, or else a mountain-bike hidden at one of the road-ends. The carparking is miserly at Torea Saddle, and non-existent at Te Mahia Saddle, though 300 metres down the road there is a large carpark.

From the stone war memorial the track from Torea Saddle (Portage) is steep, following a bulldozed line that has been softened by manuka forest as it zigzags up the ridge, with extensive views once you get higher.

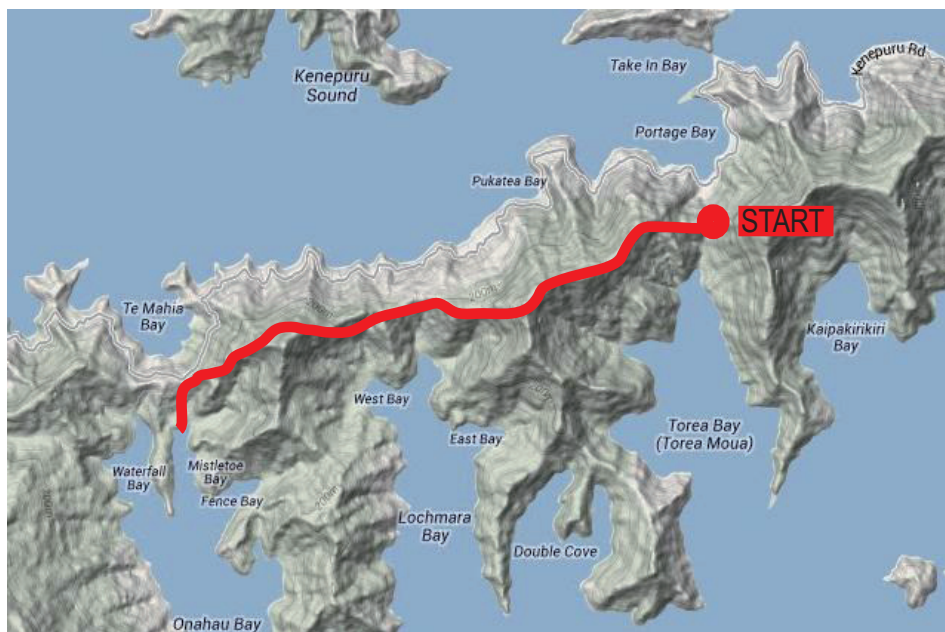
After this the track settles down into a rolling pattern along the ridge tops. You are about 400 metres above sea level here. It can often be hot and dry, but as you near the peak of Te Mahia the track slips through pockets of bush.

Before you drop down to Te Mahia Saddle there is an excellent viewpoint from Mount Onahau (417 metres, with a picnic table) overlooking the complicated wa-





terways of the sounds. Allow 30 minutes return. A fast bush descent down to the junction with the James Vogel track. This is a pretty bush walk that goes down to Mistletoe Bay, otherwise follow the main track directly down to Te Mahia saddle.



Campsite: Mistletoe Bay is one of the most sheltered harbours in the sounds, camping area and three DOC lodges that can be hired.

Wakamarina Gold Trail

Historic miners' pack-track

Deep beech forest valley

Historic huts

Picnic area at road end

3-4 hours return

Benched pack track

12 kilometres return

The Wakamarina valley is 10 km west of Havelock off Highway 6, and it is 15 km to the road-end, past the Dead Horse Creek ford, and finishing at the Butchers Flat carpark and sheltered picnic area.

The ripe language of the goldminers is evident right from the picnic area — dead Horse Creek, Doom Creek, Devils Creek. Many hopeful nationalities crowded into the Wakamarina in the brief goldrush glory days of 1861. What they left behind were some colourful names and an excellent pack-track that climbs all the way to the top of the Richmond Range.

From the picnic area the route follows a good vehicle track through pine trees some 2 km to the footbridge at Doom Creek. There's a circuit track up Doom Creek for people who want a shorter walk option.

A pleasant miners' pack-track now meanders upvalley, crossing from scrubby slopes into dappled beech forest, and after 4 km reaching Devils Creek Hut, which sits high above the river gorge on an attractive terrace. Just behind the hut is the original Devils Creek hut, built of slab timber and still standing — just.

From Devils Creek Hut you have a couple of interesting options. You can explore the deep river gorge, which is off a side track from the footbridge, or there is also an interesting side-track that negotiates up Devils Creek itself to the ruins of some historic stone huts. Allow 30 minutes return for the latter.





Red Hills Hut

Graded track to tops hut

Beech forest and alpine tussucks

Historic cobb farm buildings

Good for families

4-5 hours return

Graded forest track

8 kilometres return

From Highway 63 (10 km east of Lake Rotoiti) a carpark is sign-posted.

A great wee hut on the bush edge, and fine views everywhere. This track is part of the long distance Te Araroa Trail, and is actually an old road from the historic Rainbow Station. Many of the 1860 buildings are built of compressed mud (cobb) and are still standing.

The track ambles through lovely beech forest for a kilometre, then crosses a small stream to emerge behind the old station buildings. Pick up the broad road as it climbs 400 metres, weaving out of bush and scrub gullies. Views are good and you pop out on the ridge at 900 meters altitude with the hut right on top.

It's an extra 300 m climb to the top of the main Red Hills plateau itself, a strange desolate landscape of red rocks and stunted trees. These rocks were once part of the Red Hills in Aspiring National Park, and were dragged north 1000 km by the grinding of the alpine fault.





Wairau Lagoon

Large lagoon and estuary

Historic wreck

Salt flats and glasswort

Many wading birds

2-3 hours circuit

Firm packed earth and boardwalks

7 kilometres circuit

From Blenheim drive 2 km south on Highway 1 to Harding Road, then 1 km to the carpark and information sign (beside the oxidation ponds).

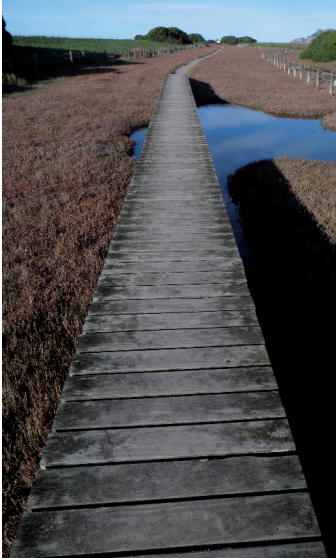
A luminous lagoon and estuary, permeated with textures as intricate as a Persian carpet. Dozens of subtle colours along the sinuous gentle tidal waterways. Over 70 bird species have been recorded at Wairau, including nesting royal spoonbills. So much of the pleasure in this walk is in the morning or late evening light. A low tide is useful but not essential. No water, except of the salty kind.

Shortly after leaving the carpark the track divides, and the right fork crosses side channels and wanders along the fringe of the estuary to opposite Budes Island. After an hour when you reach the beached wreck of the Waverley, 30 metres long and built in 1883. It was scuttled and later pushed by a flood up this side channel, where it provides a sculptural site for roosting shags.

A short side-trail leads to a view of the Wairau bar, and there are information boards that tell the story of the Maori moa-hunter culture that lived in camps around the lagoon. European settlement began on the Wairau bar in 1847, when an inn was built to cater for the coastal trading ships that had access up the Opawa River to 'Beavertown', the terrible name then given to Blenheim. Apparently the early settlement used to flood regularly.

The return trail cuts across the flat marsh meadows, and in late evening the colours in the sedge turn into a rich rug of reds and yellows.





Sawcut Gorge

Narrow gorge and limestone cliffs

Many river crossings

Adventurous and remote

Need fine weather

3-4 hours return

River travel, 15-16 crossings

4 kilometre return

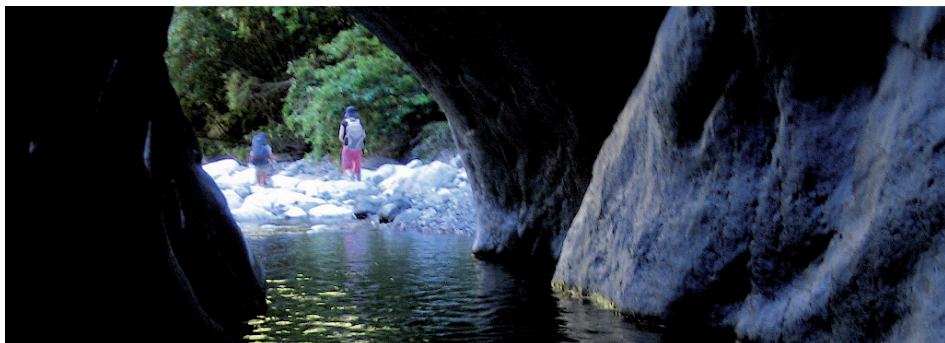
From Highway 1 turn off to the Waima or Ure River, then it is 12 km of winding road to the Blue Mountain station. Please inform the landowners of your presence by signing the logbook.

Sawcut Gorge is a strange feature, 50 metres long, 50 metres high, barely 3 metres across, it looks as if a giant's circular saw simply ran through the limestone. The route up the Waima is short, but has lots of river crossings, great on a hot day, but some people find them awkward. It would be dangerous after rain, for this area floods rapidly in a brutal brown gush.

From the carpark follow the vehicle track down to the Waima River to a good and wide ford. DOC has now marked the route with large orange triangle markers and the route keeps to the shingly river, crossing several times past Blue Mountain Stream.

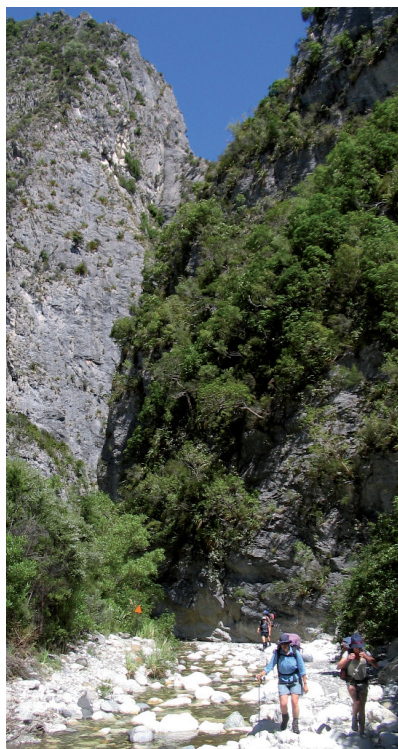
Gradually the river is squeezed between steep walls, and the huge limestone face of the Waima gorge looms over the river. A well-marked track dodges in and out of big boulders and bluffs past Headache Stream. The top river crossing can be awkward, but a good track continues on the south bank past some splendid totara trees to Isolation Creek.





Around a few bends in Isolation Creek and the Sawcut appears, a thin slit in the band of rock, the opposite walls almost close enough to be touched by outstretched arms. The creek bed is shingle and it is easy to walk up the length of the gorge.

At the other end of the Sawcut, Isolation Creek continues to wind narrowly and impressively (with some waterfalls) between high cliffs for just over 1 km to the top forks and a wide shingle flat, and there is a 6-bunk hut. Add another 2-3 hours return for this extra section, which is well worth doing if you have the time.



Kaikoura Peninsula

Peninsula and tide pools

Seal and gull colonies

Extensive tidal platforms

Low tide useful

2-3 hours circuit

Tidal platforms and farm trails

5 kilometre circuit

From Kaikoura township drive to Point Kean carpark, information boards, and shelter. There are toilets 1 km before the carpark. Also good access to South Bay carpark, toilets and impressive information shelter.

A feature of this walk is that the wildlife is visible, and unavoidable, and at low tide you have to take care not to step on a sleeping seal. There are over 12,000 red-billed gulls (tarapunga) nesting around the peninsula and they can get pesky in spring, with raids on intruders. Shags congregate on offshore rocks, and there are extensive roosting colonies of white-fronted terns. When you include the remarkable tidal platforms (higher since the 2016 earthquake!) and the dazzling white cliffs, it is little wonder the Kaikoura Peninsula walk is a must-do for many travellers.

At Point Kean seals can be sleeping only 30 metres away from the carpark, and at low tide you can wander around the base of the cliffs, exploring small bays and peninsulas on the way to Whalers Bay. There is a shortcut track up onto the clifftop track, but at low tide you can keep following the dramatic shoreline almost to the finger-like Atia Point.

The track crosses the narrow peninsula and follows more extensive tidal platforms (with 'tramlines' running across them) back to South Bay. A track climbs up onto the clifftop and lookout and follows the crumbling cliff edges back to the carpark at Point Kean. Welcome views, and a walk that never gets boring.





Cafe: Beach House, in Kaikoura

Mount Fyffe

4WD track to hut and summit

Big climb of 1000 m

Great alpine views all round

Hut has 8 bunks and woodstove

4-5 hours return

4WD track

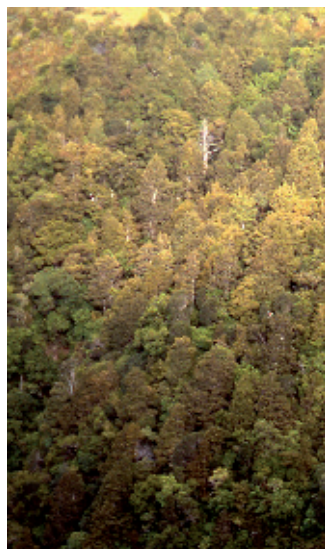
9 kilometres return

From Kaikoura township take Ludstone Road 8 km to the junction with Postmans Road, then follow Postmans Road 6 km to the bush carpark, picnic area and toilets.

This is a big sweat of 1000 metres to a hut perched on the summit ridge of Mount Fyffe. The slog is hard but the rewards are majestic views. Up here the Kaikoura Peninsula looks squashed and small, but the Kaikoura mountains are massive, especially when covered with snow.

The walk description is easy. Walk up the road, and keep going until you give up, or get up. Several seats on the way up, and the hut is a little oasis after the slog uphill. The view is spellbinding. For summiters, the vehicle track continues up the barren slopes and rises another 500 metres onto the large beacon on top of Mount Fyffe itself. Add two hours return.





Haumuri Bluff

Remote coast and sea arch

Low tide essential

Old railway ruins

Seals and shags

6-7 hours return

4WD track and beach scrambling

11 kilometres return

From Highway 1 at Oaro, turn off on the south bank of the Oaro River and park in the large area just before the small settlement.

The sea arch at Haumuri Point is a brilliant white outcrop of fretted limestone. It is a boulder scramble, and its further than it looks, and you need a low tide at Haumuri bluff. Haumuri probably means 'wind at your back'.

From the carpark walk through the pretty Oaro settlement to the locked gate. Then cross the railway line and follow the access road beside it. Some derelict rolling stock helps form a melodramatic sea wall here.

Further on there is a disused railway tunnel on the right-hand side, blocked up, and in the small bays there are stands of karaka trees that were probably planted by Maori as a food source. Many of the shallow bays have attractive areas for pausing or picnicking, and interesting tidal platforms to explore.

At the Haumuri railway tunnel (about 4 km from Oaro) a steep track goes down to the beach, and from here on it is rock-hopping along to the bluff. Seals often come ashore here for a midday doze because they mostly feed at night, and even elephant seals have been seen.



The archway was called Te Pupaki, the crab hole, and it is a wild place, with extensive offshore reef platforms. You can climb above the archway onto the bluff itself, and enjoy a panoramic view of this lovely coast.



