

# Nelson Lakes National Park

## VISITOR INFORMATION

### Welcome

Nelson Lakes National Park is situated in the northernmost ranges of the Southern Alps. Although best known for its lakes, both large and small, this 101,733 hectare park offers tranquil beech forest, craggy mountains, clear streams, open tussock lands and river-edge clearings.

During the last Ice Age, massive glaciers gouged out troughs in the mountainous headwaters of the Buller River. Today these troughs are filled by Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa, the largest lakes in the area.

The Department of Conservation (DOC) looks after the park and provides tracks and walks, picnic areas, campsites and huts to help you enjoy and explore it. Nelson Lakes retains a semi-wilderness feeling with uncrowded tracks and huts, perfect for exploration and relaxation.

### How to get here

#### Private transport

The gateway to Nelson Lakes National Park is St Arnaud, 1 hour 30 minutes from Blenheim or Nelson, on sealed roads. Allow a further 30 minutes if travelling from Picton. St Arnaud is about 5 hours from Christchurch or 2 hours 30 minutes from Westport.

To visit Lake Rotoroa, turn off State Highway 6 at Gowan Bridge. An 11 km sealed side road takes you up the Gowan valley to the lake.

#### Public transport

On-demand shuttle services are available to and from St Arnaud. Contact Rotoiti/Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre for details.

Water taxis operate on demand at Lake Rotoiti and Lake Rotoroa.



### Services for visitors

#### Visitor Centre

DOC's Visitor Centre at St Arnaud is open daily from 8.00 AM to 4.30 PM (winter 9.00 AM to 4.00 PM). It is closed on Christmas Day.

Services include: interpretation of the national park, information, maps, hut tickets, campground and hut bookings, fishing licences, hunting permits, personal locator beacon hire, weather information and bag storage.

#### Accommodation

**St Arnaud** has a hotel, motels, backpackers and rental baches (holiday homes). There are three campgrounds:

- **Kerr Bay** has powered and tent sites, flush toilets, cooking shelter with gas and a dump station. The campground offers hot showers, a washing machine and a dryer all year round. Bookings are required year-round.
- **West Bay** has two camping areas, each with tent sites, flush toilets, cold showers and a cooking shelter. West Bay is open early-December to end of April, and over Easter. Bookings are required year-round.  
*See DOC's factsheet 'Kerr Bay and West Bay camps' for details.*
- **Teetotal** is a standard campsite with non-powered/tent sites open all year round. There is no water during the winter months. Dogs are permitted.

**Lake Rotoroa** has a self-registration camping area. Bed-and-breakfast and lodge accommodation is also available.

**Murchison** is well served by camping grounds, motels and hotels.

#### Other services

A shop at St Arnaud (open 7 days a week) provides tramping supplies, groceries and petrol, and has Wi-Fi. Lake Rotoroa does not have a shop.

Fishing guides are available at St Arnaud, Rotoroa and Murchison.

## Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project

Although native flora and fauna are protected in the park, introduced pests are a threat. Native species, such as roa/great spotted kiwi, tīeke/saddleback and mohua/yellowhead, have disappeared from the region. Others are in decline, including kea, kākā, rifleman, gecko and the giant land snail.

The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project is one of six 'mainland island' projects established by DOC. From Kerr Bay, the project extends south along the eastern lake shore and up to the St Arnaud Range. Most of the project's area can be seen from the viewpoint of Pourangahau/ Mount Robert car park.

With the assistance of a voluntary group, the Friends of Rotoiti, DOC manages over 5,000 hectares of native honeydew beech forest. These forests can support large numbers of native birds because the honeydew scale insect provides an energy source for nectar-feeding birds, and 'masting' (mass seed production that occurs every 2-6 years) provides food for seed-eating birds.

Reducing the numbers of introduced pests (such as possums, stoats, ferrets, weasels, rats, mice, wild cats and wasps) has allowed native species to recover. Roa have been returned to the area with the hope that they will build a viable population.

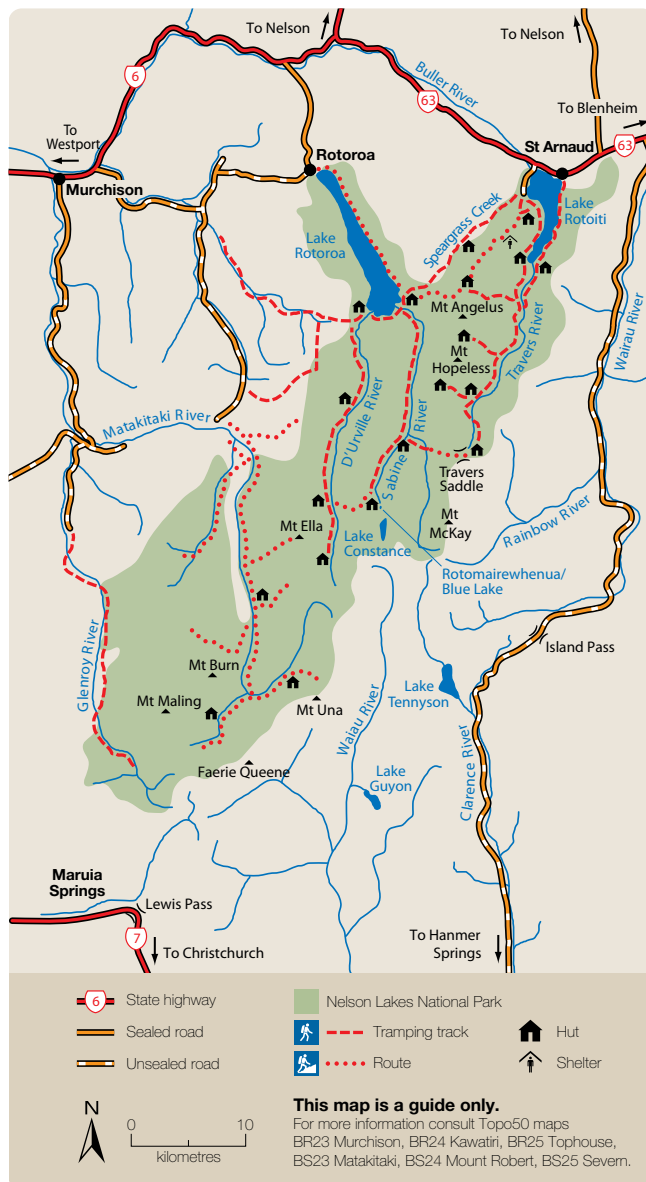
Longfin eels are protected in Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa – you may see them congregating at the jetties. They grow very slowly in the cold water, so females may be up to 90 years old before they migrate back to Tonga for breeding. Do not feed the eels.

## Volunteering

The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project has volunteer rangers from far and wide, who help check and clear traps, monitor species and assist with kiwi health checks.

During the summer there are volunteer opportunities for hut wardens and camp hosts in the Nelson Lakes National Park.

Information and application forms for all positions are available at [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)



### Track grades



#### Walking track

Gentle walking from a few minutes to a day.



#### Tramping track

Mostly unformed but with track directional markers, poles or cairns. Backcountry skills and experience required.



#### Route

Unformed, suitable only for people with high-level backcountry skills and experience.

# What to do

## Walking

There are a variety of walks and tracks to suit all levels of fitness and experience, from gentle lakeside strolls to steep climbs and backcountry tramping.

See DOC's 'Walks in Nelson Lakes National Park' brochure for details.

### St Arnaud walks

A variety of short and long walks extend into the park from the village. Your choice may be a gentle, lake-edge stroll on the Brunner Peninsula Nature Walk or a climb to view the spectacular panorama from the Mt Robert Circuit or the St Arnaud Range. All walks are signposted and well marked. Firm footwear and warm waterproof clothing are recommended.

### Lake Rotoroa

A couple of short walks at this picturesque lake explore the tall forests and the lake shore.

### Travers–Sabine circuit

This 80 km circuit reaches deep into the national park among 2,000 m-high mountains, remote lakes and fields of tussock. A highlight of the journey is the alpine pass Poukirikiri/Travers Saddle (1,780 m above sea level).

This tramping track is well marked, with bridges over most streams. There are seven huts along the way. Sturdy boots and a good standard of fitness are recommended. Warm, waterproof clothing is essential. Rotomairewhenua/Blue Lake, the 'clearest freshwater lake in the world', is a popular side trip. Some side trips are classified as routes.

See DOC's 'Travers–Sabine Circuit' brochure for details.

### Robert Ridge/Lake Angelus

Sharp ridges contrast with gentle alpine meadows, while in the Angelus Basin, the welcome refuge of Angelus Hut nestles beside mountain lakes. There are various access points and path choices.

See DOC's 'Angelus Hut Tracks and Routes' brochure for details.

### Te Araroa (The Long Pathway)

The 113 km Waiiau Pass section of Te Araroa connects the Travers–Sabine Circuit and Blue Lake Track with the St James Walkway. This section requires good backcountry skills, maps and a high standard of gear. On the high passes in the park the snow may linger well into summer.

### Matakītaki and Glenroy valleys

If you want a more remote experience, these valleys provide access to the far corners of the park.

## Other activities

### Hunting

Red deer and chamois are the main game animals; hunting them is encouraged. Each hunter requires a permit, available from the Visitor Centre, any DOC office in the Nelson/Marlborough region, and the DOC website. Only high velocity centre-fire rifles are permitted – no shotguns or .22 rifles.

### Skiing and climbing

In good snow years, excellent ski touring opportunities are available along the Robert Ridge. Adjacent to the National Park, Rainbow Ski Area offers a variety of slopes for ski enthusiasts.

The park has many peaks 2,000 metres or higher that offer a challenge to climbers.

### On the water

Water sports are very popular on both lakes; jetties and launching ramps are provided. Kayaks and canoes can be hired from Rotoiti Water Taxis all year round. Power boating on the rivers in the park and waterskiing at Lake Rotoroa are not permitted. Jet skis and similar personal watercraft are prohibited on both lakes.

### Swimming


Swimming is allowed in all of the park's lakes. During the summer there is a swimming raft located between the two jetties at Kerr Bay.

### Four-wheel driving

There are a number of 4WD options in the nearby areas: Beebys Knob (bookings required), Porika Road and Rainbow Road.

### Mountain biking

Close to the park are some excellent mountain bike tracks: Teetotal Flat with tracks available for all abilities, the Rainbow Road (112 km to Hanmer Springs), Porika Track, Braeburn Road and Beebys Knob.

 Mountain bikes are not permitted on the Nelson Lakes National Park tracks.



## Plan and prepare

Your safety is your responsibility. Before you go, know the Outdoor Safety Code – 5 simple rules to help you stay safe.

- 1. Plan your trip properly** – Ensure that you have a capable leader.
- 2. Tell someone** – Leave your trip details with a trusted contact and at [www.adventuresmart.org.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.org.nz)
- 3. Check the weather** – Including [www.avalanche.net.nz](http://www.avalanche.net.nz) and the latest information on hazards and facilities before you start.
- 4. Know your limits** – Physical fitness and good equipment will make all the difference.
- 5. Take sufficient supplies** – Carry a sleeping bag, cooking utensils, sufficient food, raincoat, over trousers, gloves, hat and several layers of warm clothes.

For specific warnings relating to the individual Nelson Lakes National Park tracks, see the alerts on the DOC website or in the Visitor Centre.

## Further information

We hope you enjoy your trip to Nelson Lakes National Park. For more information, visit the DOC website [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) or contact:

Department of Conservation  
Rotoroiti/Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre  
PO Box 55, St Arnaud 7053  
Ph: (03) 521 1806  
Email: [nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz)




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## Please remember

-  **Domestic animals:** Leave your pets at home when visiting the park – no domestic animals are allowed.
-  **Rubbish:** There are no rubbish facilities around St Arnaud village and in the backcountry. Pack out what you pack in.
-  **No unauthorised drones.** Drones can:
  - interfere with helicopters for search and rescue, fire and operational needs
  - cause noise – disturbing native birds and other visitors.

 **Water:** Please protect the park's clean waters. Use toilets where provided and keep soap out of rivers and lakes.

 **Huts:** A Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Ticket per person is required to stay overnight in the park huts. The main huts are 'serviced'. Seasonal restrictions and pricing apply. Huts are equipped with mattresses and heating; take your own cooker and utensils. Most of the D'Urville and Matakītaki valley huts, and the high huts, are 'standard' (one standard ticket). Bookings are essential all year round for Angelus Hut and Campsite, and Bushline Hut. Book at [www.bookings.doc.govt.nz](http://www.bookings.doc.govt.nz).

**Sandflies:** There are sandflies in the park all year, particularly during the summer. To minimise the chance of bites, cover up and apply good quality insect repellent to exposed skin.

**Wasps:** Wasps are particularly common from December until April. Carry antihistamine if you are allergic to their stings.

**Biosecurity:** The invasive microscopic algae didymo and lake snow diatom, Lindavia are significant threats to freshwater in the park. It sticks to fishing gear, boats, motors and people, but is not toxic to humans or animals.

Please Check Clean Dry all clothing, footwear and equipment before arriving. Unfortunately Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroia have been infected with lake snow. Any clothing or equipment that comes into contact with water in Rotoiti or Rotoroia can spread lake snow to other tarns or lakes. The best way to treat gear in the backcountry is to make sure it is thoroughly dry for 48 hours, or soak in 10% detergent solution for 10 minutes.

## Care for Aotearoa



**Protect nature**  
Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Follow any rules restricting dogs, fires, drones or vehicles.



**Be prepared**  
Stay safe in the outdoors by planning and preparing for your trip.



**Keep NZ clean**  
Take all rubbish with you and use toilets where provided.



**Show respect**  
Respect others, respect culture.



Department of Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa  
New Zealand Government



BETWEEN WATERWAYS

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**  
Report any safety hazards or conservation emergencies  
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111