

NELSON/TASMAN

Multi-day hikes in Nelson Lakes National Park

| Nelson Lakes National Park



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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Raoulia eximia (vegetable sheep).
Photo: Markus Baumann



Lake Rototiti. Photo: Gabriella Czorna

Nau mai, haere mai

Welcome to

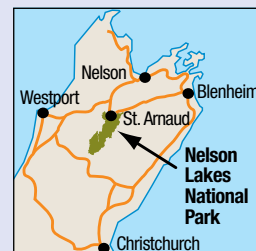
Nelson Lakes National Park

High mountain peaks reflected in the waters of Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa are part of the splendour of Nelson Lakes National Park. This alpine region is at the northern limit of the Southern Alps / Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, where ancient glaciers have shaped the dramatic landscape, leaving in their wake loose scree slopes, tarns and hanging, U-shaped valleys.

The park contains a series of mountain ranges up to 2,340 m high, five extensive valley systems and two major lakes. The Alpine Fault, which runs the length of the South Island, cuts through the northern boundary of the park, swinging east-northeast across the head of Lake Rotoroa, across Lake Rotoiti, and then down the Wairau Valley.

Beech forests clothe the mountain slopes up to the 1,400 m treeline, where they give way to snow tussocks and alpine herbs, which are the home of the kea / mountain parrot. The beech forests are rich in honeydew, food for kākārīki / New Zealand parakeet, kākā, tūi and korimako / bellbird.

The gateway to the national park is St. Arnaud, a small and picturesque alpine village on the shores of Lake Rotoiti. From St. Arnaud, a network of tracks enables you to explore the lake edge, the park's glacial features and tranquil beech forests. St. Arnaud is easily accessible from Nelson and Blenheim.



Multi-day hikes in the park

Angelus Hut sits on the shores of Rotomaninitua / Lake Angelus surrounded by spectacular mountain views. At 1,650 m in altitude, the weather can change very quickly. Snow, frost and freezing winds can occur even in midsummer. In most years from May to October, the lake is frozen, snow blankets all four routes, and you may have to dig your way to the hut.



The 80-km Travers-Sabine Circuit reaches deep into the heart of the mountains of Nelson Lakes National Park. Tranquil beech forests, fields of waving tussocks, 2,000 m-high mountains and clear rushing streams are highlights of the journey.

PHOTOS:

TOP: Tramping in Nelson Lakes. Photo: Janette Asche

BELOW: Angelus Hut in winter on Rotomaninitua / Lake Angelus.

Photo: Lukas Marek

RIGHT: Winter dawn at Lake Rotoiti. Photo: Ray Salisbury hotpixels.co.nz



Getting there

Private transport: St. Arnaud is 1 hr 30 min by sealed road from Nelson or Blenheim, 2 hr from Westport and 5 hr from Christchurch.

Public transport: There is no scheduled bus service offered to St. Arnaud. A water taxi operates on Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa.

More information is available at the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre in St. Arnaud.



No domestic animals are permitted within Nelson Lakes National Park.



No bikes – foot, pedal or motorised – are permitted on walking or tramping tracks in the Nelson Lakes National Park.

Commercial transport operators

For information about commercial transport and water taxi operators, please contact the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre.

Phone: **03 521 1806**

Email: **nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz**



Nelson Lakes National

Park Visitor Centre

The Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre, managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC), is in the village of St. Arnaud off State Highway 63. Well worth a visit before setting out to explore the park, the centre has interesting information and visual displays of the area's history, geology and wildlife.

Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre staff are able to provide up-to-date information on tracks and weather conditions. Retail items for sale at the visitor centre include gas cannisters and backcountry food as well maps, mementos and bag storage facilities. Check www.doc.govt.nz for opening times or call the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre on **03 521 1806** (closed Christmas Day).

Upper Travers Hut.

Photo: Gabriella Czoma



Biosecurity

Rotomaninitua/Lake Angelus and other alpine lakes and tarns are at risk of permanent damage from the invasive algae *Lindavia*, which causes lake snow. *Lindavia* is present in Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa, and is a white or murky suspended slime that hangs in the water column of the lake, changing the appearance of the water and creating a nuisance for swimmers and for water-pumping equipment. Clothing or equipment that comes into contact with water in Lakes Rotoiti or Rotoroa can spread lake snow to other tarns or lakes.

Please **Check Clean Dry** all clothing, footwear and equipment before arriving.

Any clothing and equipment that has been in Lakes Rotoiti or Rotoroa needs to be completely dry for at least 48 hours. To be safe, if you are swimming, wear completely different clothes to those used in the main lakes.



Detergent treatment is effective for gear that has not dried within 2 days. A 10% solution of detergent in contact with the material for 10 minutes will kill the algae. The detergent solution needs to be disposed of down the outside sink at a hut. Do not dispose of detergents or soaps into any lake or tarn (drinking water at Angelus Hut comes from the lake).

Never empty your drink bottle into a lake or river if the water was collected from a different lake or river. It presents a huge risk to the new water body.

Rotomairewhenua/Blue Lake.
Photo: Bruce McKenzie





History

Legend tells the story of Rākaihautū, chief and explorer, who came to Aotearoa and travelled with his people to the great mountains. With his kō (digging stick), Rākaihautū dug enormous holes that filled with water. He then placed kai (food) in the lakes that had formed, for those who followed him.

Māori knew Lakes Rotoiti (little lake) and Rotoroa (long lake) well, but due to the harsh winter climate, their occupations were mostly seasonal. The first Europeans to settle in the area were sheep farmers in the late 1840s, followed closely by accommodation house owners and gold miners. It was not until the 1920s that permanent houses started to be built at Lake Rotoiti, forming the township.

By employing Māori guides, the early European explorer-surveyors were able to use Māori knowledge of pathways and bushcraft to journey to the interior of the Nelson province.

The New Zealand Company, having pre-sold more land for farming than existed in Nelson, needed to find more pastoral land. Māori talked of a large plain to the southwest, so in November 1842 John S Cotterell set off with a Māori guide and located the Wairau Pass (Tophouse Pass), then turned east to view the fertile Wairau Plains. Returning to the area in January 1843 he set eyes on Lake Rotoiti, the first recorded European to do so, before continuing on up the Travers valley.

It was not until 1846 that Thomas Brunner, Charles Heap and William Fox returned to the area. Guided by Kehu, a highly competent and respected guide, they followed the route to Lake Rotoiti taken by previous explorers, journeyed on down the Buller River, up the Howard River and over the Porika trail to Lake Rotoroa.

The lakes, Rotoiti and Rotoroa, remain today. From their arrival in the 1840s, Europeans rapidly occupied open land close to Rotoiti for grazing sheep. By 1900, people were holidaying on the shores of the lake, and in the 1920s a fishing lodge was built at Rotoroa.

Soon cottages were being built at Rotoiti and people began to explore the mountains. In 1956, the scenic values of the mountains and lakes were recognised nationally with the creation of Nelson Lakes National Park.

Perched high on the ranges between Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa in Nelson Lakes National Park is Rotomaninitua / Lake Angelus. It is really a large alpine pond or tarn – a legacy of recent ice advances and typical of the many tarns in the national park. During successive major ice advances, which ended about 10,000 years ago, glaciers and permanent snowfields covered much of the Southern Alps / Kā Tiritiri o te Moana. Erosion by ice has left its characteristic mark: steep valley walls, bluff-ringed side creeks, sharp ridges and peaks and round, lake-filled basins.

The trip along Robert Ridge to Rotomaninitua / Lake Angelus is one way to enjoy the alpine environment. The first recorded person to scramble along Robert Ridge was Julius von Haast in 1860, but it is unlikely he was the first.

The lake was previously known as Rangimārie (a Māori name meaning ‘peaceful’ given by a European). Later, a group climbing the obvious peak to the south named the peak, and by association, the lake ‘Angelus’ after a devotional prayer. They also named nearby Hinapouri Tarn (dark waters), and Hukere Stream (cascading waters).

Lake Rotoroa.
Photo: Shellie Evans

Traveller's Rest

Many accommodation houses were built along the route to the Wairau Pass to aid travellers on their arduous journey. The most well known in the area were the Tophouse hotels.

Nathaniel Morse and Dr John Cooper drove the first flock of sheep through to the upper Wairau Valley from the Motueka area in November 1846. Their homestead was on a terrace above the Wairau River and the station was named Top House, as it was higher and further inland than any other.

By 1856, the homestead was an accommodation house, a welcome stop on the journey from Nelson to the Wairau Valley or North Canterbury. In 1859, Adolph Wiesenharvern had a hotel built on the south side of the road down the Wairau Valley and he presided at this Top House Hotel until 1882.

In 1876, the Tophouse telegraph station was established to the north of the Wairau Road, about three miles from Wiesenharvern's hotel. It became a major telecommunications link, having circuits to the Wairau and the Buller, and still stands today.

In 1887/1888, Nathaniel Longney bought land near the telegraph station and built the present Tophouse Hotel. He commissioned master cob house builder, Ned James, to erect the hotel. People danced all night at a mid-winter party celebrating the opening of the hotel, and next morning found themselves snowed in with two miles of telegraph line down.

A post office opened at the Tophouse telegraph station in 1891, when Tophouse was standardised as one word. It closed in 1931.

In the 21st century, guests are again welcomed to the 1880s mud cob hotel.



Goldmining

Gold prospectors followed the routes of the sheep farmers to the goldfields in the 1860s. The Howard goldfields – the Maggie, Maud, Louis and New Creeks – were not opened until the 1910s. During the 1930s depression, under the Gold Prospecting Subsidy Scheme, 300 unemployed men and their families made their homes in the Golden Hope Village situated on a terrace on Lake Station.

Lake Station. Photo: J Newport – Footprints



By 1918 the township of Rotoiti had been surveyed. In 1921, approval was given by the Minister of Lands to change its name to St. Arnaud to avoid confusion with Rotoiti in the North Island, although it would take decades for the name to come into common usage.

From 1926, the population increased for a short period during the construction of State Highway 63, with public works camps in the area. The first shop was built in 1931 on land where the Alpine Lodge stands today. The shop was the centre of the small community.

It was not until 1957 that electricity arrived in the township and even then, very few people were permanent residents. Although the village continues to support a primary school, the majority of dwellings are still holiday homes.

Rotoiti Domain Board

With the aim of safeguarding land at Lake Rotoiti for all to enjoy, outdoor enthusiast F G Gibbs and his friends W Andrews, R Catley, T Field, H Kidson, F Ledger, A Stratford, and E Thomson officially formed the Rotoiti Domain Board in 1929. They asked the public to help buy sections, by way of subscriptions. As land became available for purchase, they often had to use money from their own pockets. One example was in 1934 when two sections of about 100 acres came up for sale. The Board was given one week to raise the funds.

By Wednesday afternoon, the Board had secured £120. They went ahead with the purchase, using their own money to make up the shortfall.

The culmination of the work of these early conservationists was the gazetting of Nelson Lakes National Park on 6 September 1956.

Nelson Lakes National Park's first chief ranger (1959–1980), George Lyon, was one of the original members of the Nelson Lakes National Park Board. He came to live at the lake in 1946 when he owned and operated the Lake Rotoiti Mail Service. On his appointment as chief ranger by the National Parks Authority, George converted the front lounge of the family home into an office before it was purchased in 1961 as the official park headquarters.

George was dedicated to providing a high-quality service to the public. He was at the forefront of environmental education, promoting outdoor education and conservation. He was also one of the first people to encourage work with community members and volunteers. George guided the development of the first recreation facilities for the national park, including 11 backcountry huts. In 2003, he was honoured with a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for his services to conservation.

It is due to the efforts of early conservationists and recreationalists that the beauty of Nelson Lakes National Park has been preserved for all to enjoy. Volunteers continue to make a significant contribution to the park, under the guardianship of the Department of Conservation.

Natural history

Landform

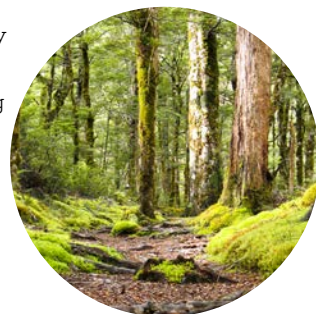
The mountains have been thrust up by continental collision along the Alpine Fault, which crosses the track in places between Sabine Hut and Lake Rotoiti.

Extensive glaciation, erosion and weathering have left a characteristic landscape of steep valley sides, scree slopes, sharp 'arête' ridges and many tarn-filled basins. The forested valleys once cradled glaciers, which excavated the hollows now filled by the waters of Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa.



Vegetation

The park's forests are dominated by beech trees. Along the valley floors, tawhairaunui/ red beech and tawai/ silver beech prevail; on the higher slopes where the soil is thinner, the small-leaved tawairauriki/ mountain beech takes over. A wide diversity of small trees and shrubs make up the rest of the forest, including red-flowered southern rātā and yellow-flowered kōwhai around the lake edges. Altitude is the main driver of forest type and diversity in the park.



TOP: Trampers on the Speargrass Creek Route. *Photo: Luka Marek*
BOTTOM: Nelson Lakes National Park. *Photo: Stefan and Kathrin Marks*

Ferns, mosses and lichens proliferate on the forest floor and tree trunks, where the light is subdued. At the bushline, forest gives way to shrubland, where white-flowered hebe, wharariki / mountain flax, rust-red dracophyllum, and the spiky flower heads of speargrass plants pepper the landscape. Beyond the shrubland, tussocks soften the harsh texture of broken rock.

Throughout the alpine tops in summer, yellow buttercups, white mountain daisies and many species of small, specialised plants flourish in the brief growing season. Most alpine herbs are very slow growing and sensitive to disturbance like trampling, so please keep to the marked routes.

Honeydew

The honeydew scale insect has the longest anal filament of any insect. This is the thread you see hanging from the beech tree trunks. The honeydew droplet at the end of the thread is the remaining waste product after the insect has drawn its food from the sap of the tree.

The beech scale insects that produce honeydew are found mostly in the upper South Island where they affect around a million hectares of forest known as honeydew beech forest. The distribution of the infected trees is patchy and generally limited to mid-sized beech. It is thought that the bark of the young trees is too smooth for the insects to be able to attach while the bark of older trunks is too thick for the insects to penetrate.

Fungi

Nelson Lakes National Park is renowned for the many varieties of fungi that can be found at different times of the year. Walking through the beech forest, you may come across *Cortinarius porphyroideus* (purple pouch), strawberry fungus, and *Clathrus archeri* (devil's fingers), *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail), to name a few.



Purple pouch fungus.
Photo: Stefan and Kathrin Marks

Fish species

High alpine tarns, wetlands, mountain streams, main rivers and smaller lakes form a supporting network for freshwater life such as insects, small fish, introduced brown trout and endemic tuna / long-finned eels.



The higher alpine tarns and streams provide for the larval stages of many insects, such as dragonfly and caddisfly. They are also home to the native whitebait species, koaro, which are spectacular climbers, using their fins as legs to scramble up the margins of waterfalls.

Brown trout were introduced for sport fishing from the 1870s. Until 1946, the Nelson Acclimatisation Society had a trout hatchery at the northern end of Lake Rotoiti to stock local rivers. Trout compete with native fish for food such as aquatic insects and sometimes feed directly on endemic fish.

The tuna of the Nelson Lakes are likely to be the longest lived in New Zealand, if not the world. The cold waters slow their growth, with many females not reaching maturity until 90 years of age. In the lakes, the largest tuna reach lengths of up to 1.2 m but the average length of a mature tuna is 0.7 m. Fully protected in the waters of Nelson Lakes National Park, tuna were once harvested over the summer months from both Rotoiti and Rotoroa and dried for later consumption.

Tuna are the top predators in freshwater environments, so any living or dead animals are fair game. Young tuna feed on insect larvae, worms and water snails. As they get larger, they feed on bigger things like other fish (including young tuna), trout, koura / freshwater crayfish, ducklings and mice.



TOP: Tuna/longfin eel. Photo: Judy Campbell
BOTTOM: Kapokapowai / Chilton's giant dragonfly.
Photo: Stefan and Kathrin Marks

Animals

The park land encompassed by the Travers-Sabine Circuit is subject to landscape-scale predator control aimed at stoats, rats, possums and feral cats.

The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project (RNRP) is a long-term, multi-pest control programme that maintains reduced predator numbers along the eastern side of Lake Rotoiti and effectively protects kākā, rorua/ great spotted kiwi and kea during the time intervals between aerial predator control events. The Friends of Rotoiti also maintain a trapline for stoats and other pests in the Sabine and Travers valleys.

Rorua can be heard at night at Rotoiti (but are hardly ever seen). The raucous call of kākā can often be heard, and visitors enjoy the friendly toutouwai/ South Island robin and ngirungiru/ tomtit that will venture close. Korimako, tūi and pīwakawaka/ fantail are common and noisy in the forest, and the tiny tītīpounamu/ rifleman can often be heard before it is seen. Pekapeka/ long-tailed bats live in the lower altitude forests, but as they are nocturnal it is very hard to spot them.

Whio/ blue duck are sometimes seen in Lake Rotoiti and the upper Sabine River, and extremely rare geckos are present in some alpine areas of the park.



Kea can often be seen and heard in the alpine areas and will sometimes be keen to investigate huts and areas where people congregate. **Please, never feed the kea, and keep your belongings contained! Human food harms them.**

TOP: Kākā.
BOTTOM: Male tītīpounamu/ rifleman.
Photos: Leon Everett



Huts and backcountry campsites

At Lake Rotoiti, the serviced Kerr Bay Campsite is open all year round. The standard West Bay Campsite is open during the peak summer months. **Both campsites require bookings at all times**, which can be made at www.doc.govt.nz/online-bookings. No camping is permitted within 200 m of a formed road or within 200 m of Lake Rotoiti or Lake Rotoroa.

All serviced huts within the Nelson Lakes National Park **must be booked online before you head into the park**. This includes Angelus Hut and Campsite.

Please refer to the DOC website or contact the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre for fees and booking information on standard huts (Coldwater, Cupola, Hopeless and the huts in the D'Urville Valley).

Always check the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz/hut-bookings for booking information, to check whether a Backcountry Hut Pass is valid or whether you need to buy a Backcountry Hut Ticket.

To camp outside any serviced hut (except for Angelus, which must be booked online), you must purchase a blue hut ticket.

There is also a range of accommodation options in St. Arnaud and Rotoroa.



Hut tickets. Photo: DOC

Hut categories



Serviced huts have mattresses, a water supply, toilets, hand-washing facilities and may have wood fireplaces. Firewood may be supplied. A warden may be present during summer.

You must book all year round to stay in any serviced hut within Nelson Lakes National Park, including Angelus Campsite. For more information, refer to the DOC website www.doc.govt.nz/online-bookings.



Standard huts have mattresses, a water supply and toilets. Wood fireplaces may be provided at huts below the bushline. Backcountry Hut Passes or Backcountry Hut Tickets are required.



Basic huts provide very basic shelter with limited facilities at no charge.



Upper Travers Hut. Photo: Stefan and Kathrin Marks



Coldwater Hut



Photo: Shellie Evans



Lakehead Hut



Photo: DOC



Hopeless Hut



Photo: Sarah Wilcox



John Tait Hut



Photo: Gabriella Czoma



Cupola Hut



Photo: Daryl Stephens



Sabine Hut



Photo: Gabriella Czoma



Upper Travers Hut



Photo: Brendan Clough



Speargrass Hut



Photo: Gabriella Czoma



West Sabine Hut



Photo: DOC



Angelus Hut



Photo: Brian Dobbie



Blue Lake Hut



Photo: Daryl Stephens



Bushline Hut



Photo: DOC

Hut etiquette

1. Keep huts clean and tidy. A broom, brush and pan are provided – please use them, and leave muddy boots outside.
2. During cooking, always open a window or door to allow fumes to escape. Keep an eye on boiling water or food.
3. Take care using wood burners, keep the fire contained and never leave it unattended. Only burn dead, dry wood and be careful with hot ashes. Make sure the fire is extinguished before leaving. Use wood sparingly and replace any you use for the next visitors. Do not burn rubbish in the wood burners.
4. Share huts with others by being considerate, making room for late comers and keeping quiet if others are sleeping.
5. Carry it in, carry it out – take out ALL your rubbish. Bring two bags, one for recycling and the other for rubbish/ food scraps to carry out with you to dispose of responsibly.
6. No smoking in huts; take your cigarette butts out with the rest of your rubbish.
7. No dogs or other domestic animals are permitted in Nelson Lakes National Park.
8. Before leaving, close doors and windows securely.
9. Always pay hut fees.

Nelson Lakes National Park Bylaws stipulate that a person must not remain overnight for more than two consecutive nights in any one hut in Nelson Lakes National Park (unless it is an emergency involving danger to life or property).



Angelus Hut

Angelus Hut (serviced, 28 bunks) is well insulated with a wood-burning stove for heating (not suitable for cooking on), toilets, bunks, mattresses and water supply. The hut does **not** have lighting, gas cookers or pots and pans.

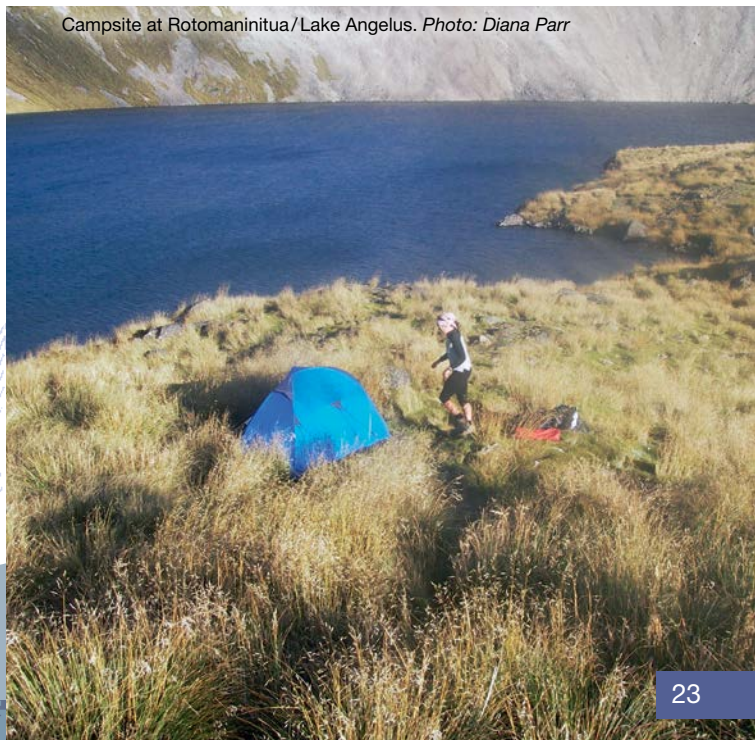
The **hut must be booked all year round**. Overnight stays are limited to two consecutive nights. Please be considerate of other visitors. Hut users are expected to use firewood sparingly, leave the hut clean and tidy and take all rubbish out with them.

Do not put any rubbish down the toilets as this causes strong smells and blockages in the system.

Angelus Hut Campsite

The **campsite must be booked all year round**. The designated camping area is below the hut near the lake. Campers can use the hut to prepare and eat meals and must use the toilet facilities at the hut. Please be considerate to other visitors: leave the campsite clean and tidy and take your rubbish out with you. The Angelus basin is a fragile area – camping away from the hut's toilet is discouraged.

Campsite at Rotomaninitua/Lake Angelus. Photo: Diana Parr



Track categories

Tracks are developed to different standards to cater for a variety of experiences. Choose the type of track that matches your skills, fitness and the experience you want – be realistic. Your safety is your responsibility.



Easy to intermediate walking track

- Mostly well-formed track offering easy to moderate walking for up to a day. Some track sections may be steep, rough or muddy, and some minor stream crossings may be unbridged.
- Suitable for people with moderate fitness and limited outdoor skills and experience. Walking shoes or light tramping/hiking boots required.



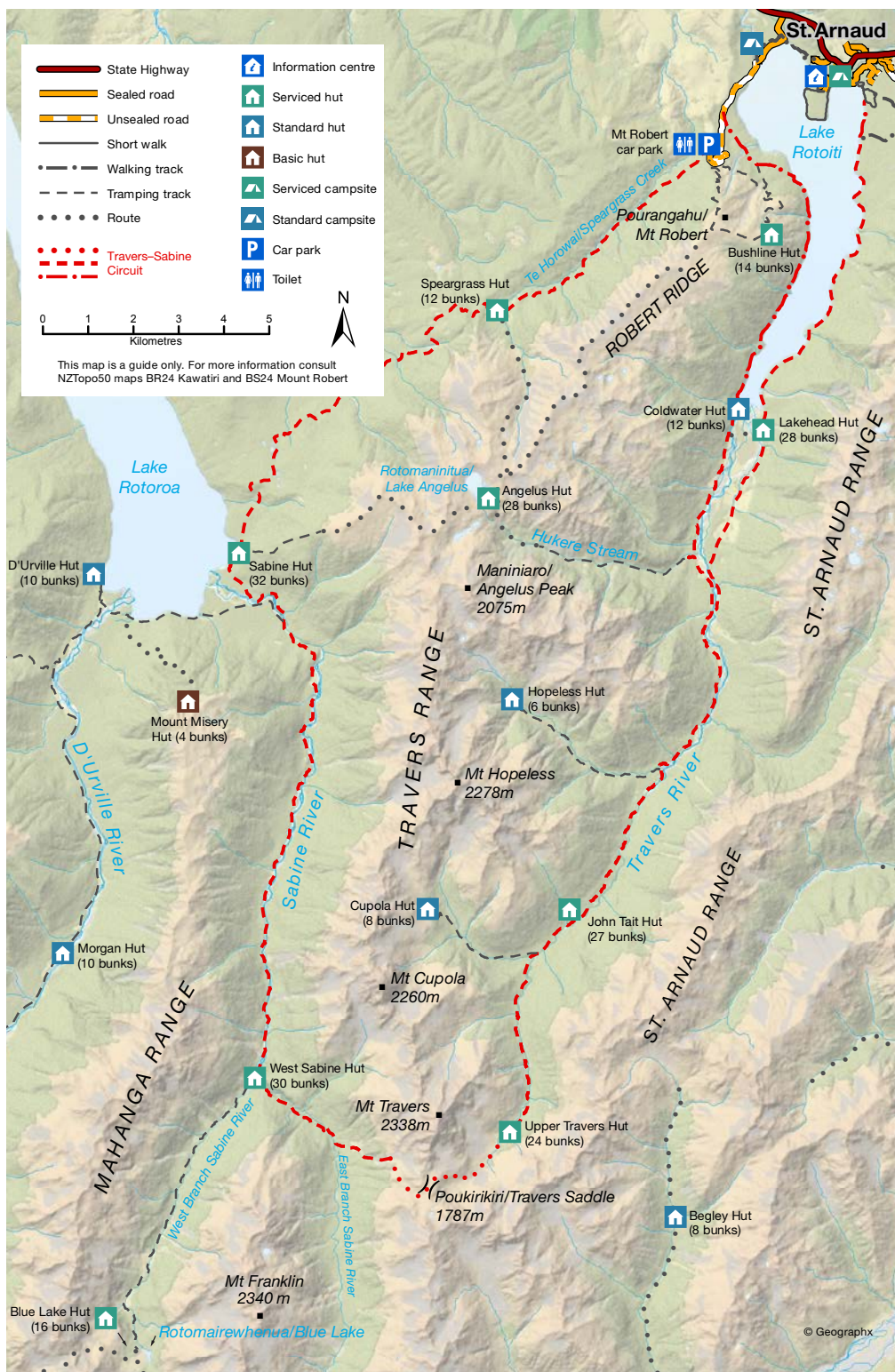
Advanced tramping track

- Mostly unformed track for challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking trips. The track has directional markers, poles or rock cairns for wayfinding. The track may be rough and steep with unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Suitable for people with moderate to high fitness who have backcountry (remote area) and river crossing skills and experience. Tramping/hiking boots required.



Expert route

- Unformed route for challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking trips. The route has directional markers, poles or rock cairns for wayfinding. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Suitable only for people with high fitness who have high-level backcountry, navigation, river crossing and survival skills and experience. Complete self-sufficiency and sturdy tramping/hiking boots required.



Tracks to Angelus Hut and Campsite

You must be fit enough to walk for 2–3 days, up to 12.2 km for 6 hr per day and climb to 1,800 m. You must be comfortable on rough terrain and not be afraid of heights.

There are four ways to reach Angelus Hut: via the Pinchgut Track/Robert Ridge Route (the most popular route in fine weather), Speargrass Track/Speargrass Creek Route, Travers–Cascade Track/Route and Mt Cedric Track/Route.

All track times and distances are one way.



Pinchgut Track, Robert Ridge Route

6 hr, 12.2 km

From the Mt Robert car park, a steep zigzag track (the Pinchgut Track) climbs up to the junction with Paddys Track (Bushline Hut is 30 min from junction). The Pinchgut Track ends and the route along the ridge is marked with poles. The route follows a broad ridge to Julius Summit (1,794 m). From here, the route has some sharp and rocky sections. Take care here in icy or winter conditions as accidents have occurred on this section.

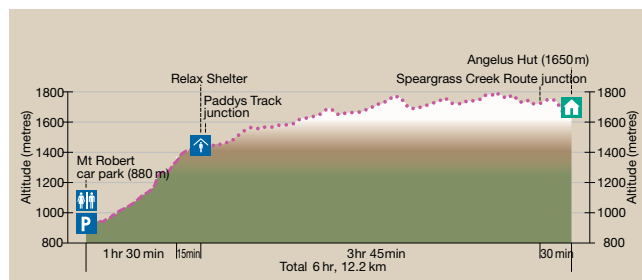


Tramper on Robert Ridge Route in winter. Photo: Lukas Marek

Continue past the junction with the Speargrass Creek Route (30 min from Angelus Hut) onto the ridge overlooking the Angelus basin. Follow the poles down to the lake and hut.



There is no water along this route. The route is fully exposed to any weather conditions and can change very quickly.



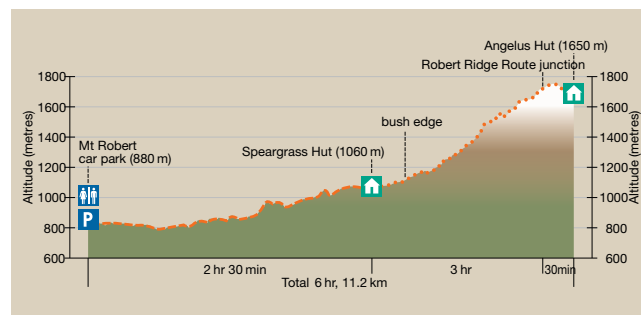
Speargrass Track, Speargrass Creek Route

6 hr, 11.2 km

From the Mt Robert car park, follow Speargrass Track to the Speargrass Creek Route junction approximately 5 min before Speargrass Hut at 1,060 m (served, 12 bunk hut). From the car park to the track junction takes approximately 2 hr 30 min – 3 hr. From the track junction, the poled route has many unbridged stream crossings up the Te Horowai/Speargrass Creek. The track intersects with Mt Robert Ridge Route 10 min before you reach a viewpoint over the Angelus basin. Follow the poles to the lake and hut.



Expect muddy sections below the bush edge. This route is often used in bad weather.



Speargrass Track with trampers. Photo: Ruth McKie





Travers-Cascade Track and Route

6 hr, 9.4 km

From St. Arnaud, the options are to walk along the Lakehead Track to Lakehead Hut (3 hr, 9 km) or along the Lakeside Track to Coldwater Hut (3 hr, 12 km from Lakeside car park on Mt Robert Road or 4 hr from the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre).

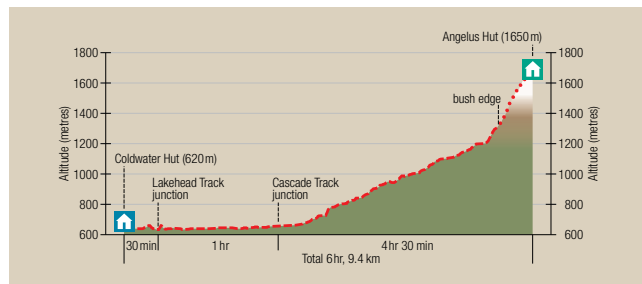
Coldwater Hut to the Cascade Track junction takes about 1 hr 30 min. From Lakehead Hut, it is also 1 hr 30 min to the Cascade Track junction. Note that this includes crossing the Travers River.

If the Travers River is in flood, a swing bridge is located 1 hr 30 min upstream. From the Cascade Track junction, it's a steady climb for 4 hr alongside the Hukere Stream.



The track ends at the bush edge. Climb the steep poled route to Angelus Hut. During winter, snow and ice can create hazards requiring walkers to have suitable experience and equipment to safely negotiate this route.

From May to November, the bridge over the Hukere Stream may be removed due to avalanche risk. After rain and during snow melt, crossing the river can be difficult – take great care.



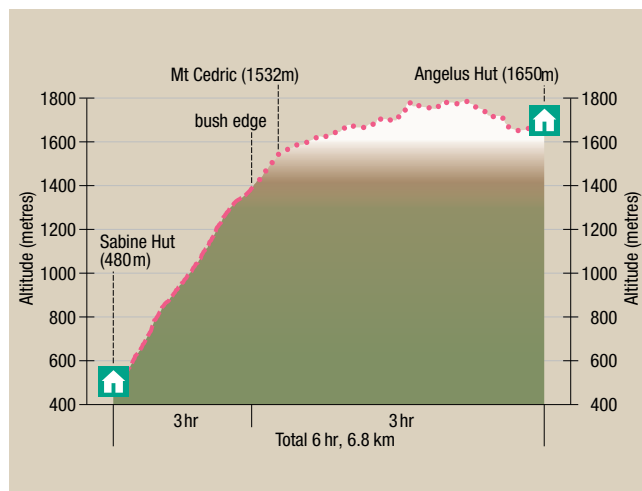
Mt Cedric Track and Route (from Sabine Hut)

6 hr, 6.8 km (allow additional time in snow and poor weather conditions)

This is a very steep route to the Angelus basin which is exposed above the bush edge. The track begins behind Sabine Hut (serviced hut, 32 bunks) and climbs very steeply and steadily to the bush edge. Poles and cairns mark the route from here, which eventually drops off the eastern side of a high ridge of Mt Cedric (1,532 m) and on to Rotomaninitua/Lake Angelus.



There is no water along the track/route. During winter, snow and ice can create hazards – make sure you have the experience and equipment to safely negotiate this route.



View above Lake Angelus. Photo: Julian Baker

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).

The circuit is best walked as described below because crossing the Poukirikiri / Travers Saddle is easier from the Travers side. Walking times are a guide only and will vary with fitness and weather conditions. Weather and snow conditions are most favourable between October and May, although in some years winter snow persists into late November on alpine passes.

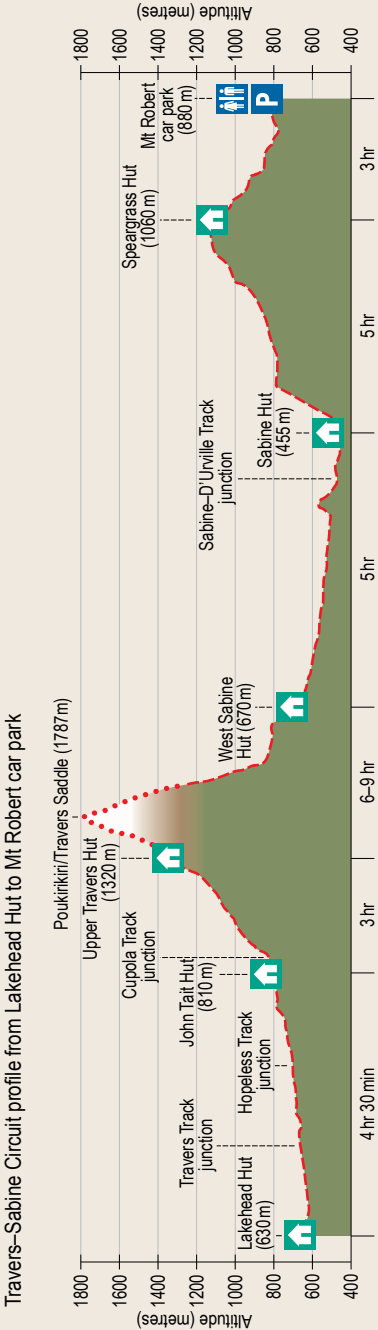
The circuit requires 4–7 days to complete and involves a crossing of Poukirikiri / Travers Saddle, an alpine pass subject to freezing conditions at any time of year.

Most of the track is classified as a tramping track. It is well marked and although most rivers and streams are bridged, after heavy rain there are a number of streams that may not be safe to cross. Sturdy boots and a good standard of fitness is required, and warm, waterproof clothing is essential.

Descending Travers Saddle. *Photo: Stefan and Kathrin Marks*



Track profile





St. Arnaud to Lakehead Hut / Coldwater Hut

3 hr, 10.4 km

From Kerr Bay: Beginning at the eastern end of the bay, the Lakehead Track wanders through forest, crossing several shallow streams and shingle screes. Small beaches along the way offer picnicking opportunities and mountain views. At the head of Lake Rotoiti, the grassy flats of the lower Travers valley greet you. Lakehead Hut (serviced, 28 bunks) is 15 min further on from the jetty.

From West Bay: Walk up Mount Robert Road to where the Lakeside Track descends to the lake edge through dense mānuka and kānuka forest. Follow the lake shore to Coldwater Hut (standard, 12 bunks), which is perched right on the water's edge. The short diversion to Whisky Falls is worthwhile. Many trampers take a water taxi to the head of Lake Rotoiti to start their trip.

Lakeside car park on Mt Robert Road is 2 hr 30 min (8.2 km) to Coldwater Hut. Contact Lake Rotoiti Water Taxi for drop-offs at Lakehead Hut jetty or Coldwater Hut.



Coldwater jetty. Photo: Crystal Brindle



Lakehead Hut / Coldwater Hut to John Tait Hut

4 hr 30 min, 14.2 km (15 km from Coldwater Hut)

From Lakehead or Coldwater Huts, walk up the Travers River flats through forest and clearings (remnants from the valley's farming days). The track from Coldwater Hut passes the turn-off to Rotomaninitua / Lake Angelus. After 1 hr 30 min of easy walking you'll reach a swing bridge, beyond which the track continues on the west bank of the Travers River.

Soon the valley narrows, and walking becomes more varied, alternating between forested terraces and grassy river flats. Mount Travers can be glimpsed as the track nears Hopeless Creek.

Cross the creek on a swing bridge. Soon you'll leave the river and notice the gradient becoming steeper. As it eases, you'll hear the river again. Cross a few small creeks and suddenly emerge to the welcome sight of John Tait Hut (serviced, 27 bunks) at the head of a small clearing.

John Tait Hut was the first public hut in the park and owes its existence to voluntary public effort. Two shelters existed at the head of Lake Rotoiti by 1939, but teacher John Tait who was also the president of the Nelson Tramping Club, saw the need for a shelter in the Travers valley.

The Rotoiti Scenic Board gave permission for the hut project to proceed but lacked the funds to pay for an estimated £250 hut. With the support of one-to-one government subsidy and community contributions, the hut was assembled in a Nelson backyard and then dismantled into manageable bundles. All the timber framing was rowed to the head of the lake and the aluminium walls and roof by motor launch. After weeks of carting materials to the site by foot, the hut was constructed at Easter weekend 1951 with Tilley lamps extending the working hours.



Travers River below the track junction with Hopeless Creek. Photo: Sarah Wilcox



The track between John Tait Hut and Upper Travers Hut.
Photo: Gabriella Czoma



John Tait Hut to Upper Travers Hut

3 hr, 6.7 km

Continue beyond John Tait Hut to Cupola Creek chasm, from where the track climbs steeply, leaving the river in its gorge below. A sign marks a short side-track to Travers Falls, a 20 m cascade plunging into a deep bowl.

Back on the main track, the gradient soon eases. Cross several scree slopes, and eventually the Travers River via a short bridge. From here, the forest is noticeably stunted and the track, although steep again, offers occasional views of the looming mountains.

Finally, the track levels and emerges from the trees onto an extensive tussock-covered flat, where Upper Travers Hut (serviced, 24 bunks) nestles at the base of the east face of Mount Travers.

If Summit Creek is in high flow, a diversion to a swing bridge across the Travers River adds on 30 min walking time.



Upper Travers Hut to West Sabine Hut

6–9 hr, 8.4 km (depending on weather and snow conditions)

Poukirikiri / Travers Saddle is an alpine pass requiring ice axes and crampons in winter and well into spring. Be prepared for sudden weather changes. The Sabine side of the saddle in particular is exposed to avalanches. At Upper Travers Hut, the track becomes a route marked with snow poles as far as the bushline on the Sabine side.

Cross the Travers River near the hut and follow the poles through dense alpine shrubs. Leaving the boulder-strewn



The descent from Poukirikiri / Travers Saddle into the Sabine valley.
Photo: Kathrin and Stefan Marks

valley, the track steepens and zigzags up a scree slope before continuing more gently to the saddle with its panoramic views. The saddle is 450 m above the hut, about 1 hr 30 min walking.

From the saddle, the descent is steep – the Sabine forks lie 1,000 m below. The track crosses tussock and scree, then briefly enters stunted beech forest before emerging into a steep gully. Descend by zigzagging to the valley floor, where the track begins again, and the walking becomes easier.

Approximately 10 min further on, a bridge crosses the deep chasm of the East Branch Sabine River. The track sidles around the edge of this chasm before descending into the West Branch Sabine River valley and heading upstream a short distance to West Sabine Hut (serviced, 30 bunks).



West Sabine Hut to Sabine Hut

5 hr, 15 km

Use the swing bridge upstream of the hut to cross the west branch of the Sabine River. The track down the valley sidles above the river and crosses three long, open flats.

Leave the river where it enters a gorge in the lower valley. Climb steeply, then descend again, rejoining the deep river at a bridge across a narrow cleft. Easy walking leads to Sabine Hut (serviced, 32 bunks), with its expansive views over Lake Rotoroa. From Sabine Hut, there are two ways to finish the tramp: either by tramping via Speargrass Hut and the Speargrass valley or taking the Lake Rotoroa Water Taxi to Rotoroa village.



Speargrass Hut. Photo: Kathrin and Stefan Marks

Completing the circuit – Sabine Hut to St. Arnaud



Sabine Hut to Speargrass Hut 5 hr, 9.5 km **Speargrass Hut to Mt Robert car park 3 hr, 7.3 km**

Follow the track along the lake shore before climbing to Howard Saddle, then begin a long sidle in and out of several small valleys and through delicate wetlands. Here you will notice the distinctively conical kaikawaka/ New Zealand cedar, with its dark foliage, stringy bark and often twisted trunk.

After about 5 hr, the track reaches a saddle from where it descends to a clearing above Speargrass Hut (serviced, 12 bunks).

Leaving Speargrass Hut, cross the bridge over Te Horowai/ Speargrass Creek and enter the forest. A well-graded track descends to the valley floor and follows the river before climbing gradually for some distance to Pourangahau/ Mt Robert car park, overlooking Lake Rotoiti. From here, it is a 1 hr 30 min walk down Mt Robert Road to St. Arnaud village.

Side trips

Travers valley side creeks



Hukere Stream, 4 hr: From the junction with the Travers Track, it is a steady ascent to Rotomaninitua/ Lake Angelus and the lake-filled basins of the Travers Range.



Hopeless Creek, 1 hr 30 min: Follow the river to Hopeless Hut (standard, 6 bunks).



The Cupola basin, 2 hr 30 min: A strenuous climb leads to the lofty perch of Cupola Hut (standard, 8 bunks), with superb views of Mount Hopeless.

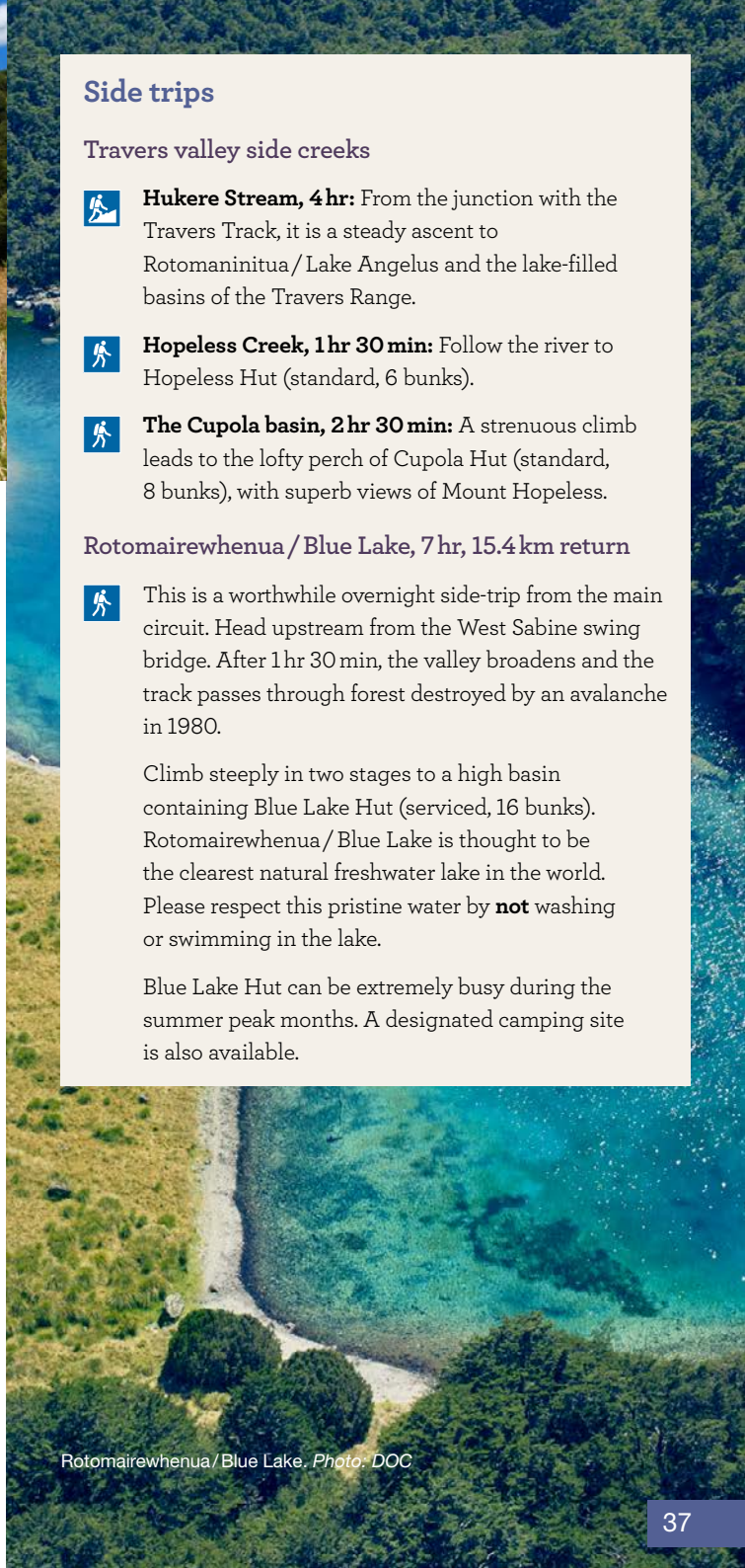
Rotomairewhenua/ Blue Lake, 7 hr, 15.4 km return



This is a worthwhile overnight side-trip from the main circuit. Head upstream from the West Sabine swing bridge. After 1 hr 30 min, the valley broadens and the track passes through forest destroyed by an avalanche in 1980.

Climb steeply in two stages to a high basin containing Blue Lake Hut (serviced, 16 bunks). Rotomairewhenua/ Blue Lake is thought to be the clearest natural freshwater lake in the world. Please respect this pristine water by **not** washing or swimming in the lake.

Blue Lake Hut can be extremely busy during the summer peak months. A designated camping site is also available.



Rotomairewhenua/ Blue Lake. Photo: DOC

Other activities

Climbing

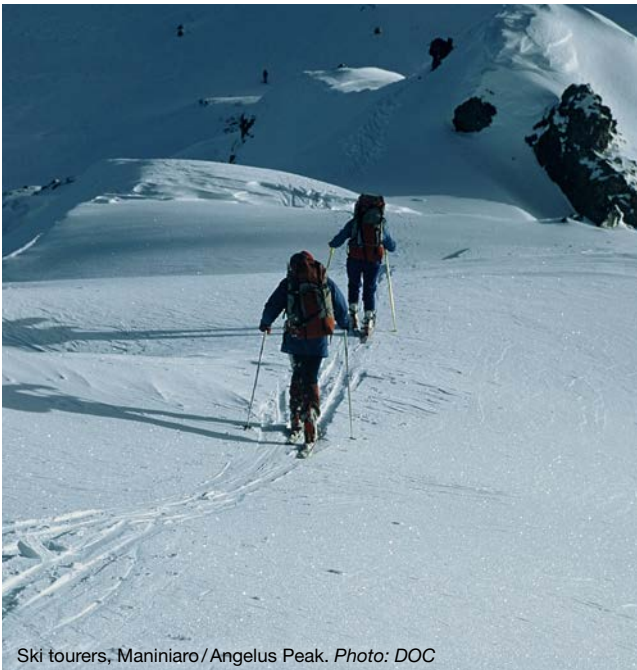
In summer, the best side trip from Angelus Hut is the climb of Maniniaro / Angelus Peak (2,075 m). If the mountain is clear of snow, no special equipment or experience is required. The less energetic could climb to Sunset Saddle and then traverse west for 10 min to the Travers Range. This provides spectacular views of the D'Urville and Sabine Rivers twisting lazily to the head of Lake Rotoroa.

Hunting

Speargrass valley is a popular hunting area. A hunting permit is required; you can get one from the DOC website www.doc.govt.nz/hunting or from the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre.

Ski touring / snowshoeing

The Robert Ridge in winter is good for both of these activities, with skiing possible through to Angelus Hut in ideal conditions.



Ski tourers, Maniniaro / Angelus Peak. Photo: DOC

Can I do it?

You must be fit enough to walk for 2–3 days, for 6 hr per day and climb to 1,800 m. You must also be comfortable on rough terrain and without a fear of heights.



Be prepared for snow and ice during winter and spring. Robert Ridge is very exposed and is subject to high winds and poor visibility at any time of year.

Plan and prepare

Plan, prepare and equip yourself well. Have the right gear and skills for the trip. For up-to-date track alerts, weather and other safety information, go to www.doc.govt.nz/nelson-lakes-national-park. This information is also available at the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre.

Weather

Hospitable and welcoming on a fine day, Nelson Lakes National Park and (especially) the alpine routes over Poukirikiri / Travers Saddle and Robert Ridge are prone to sudden weather changes bringing freezing winds and snow at any time of the year. Even small streams are dangerous in flood.

Winter conditions or bad weather could slow or stop your progress to or from the hut. A fall onto hard or icy snow could be lethal. Snow avalanches are possible during the winter months.

For weather information, check the NIWA weather website for Nelson Lakes National Park at weather.niwa.co.nz/parks.



Trampers above the inversion, Robert Ridge. Photo: Brian Dobbie

What to take

Pack a range of clothing for warm, cold, windy or wet conditions. The weather is changeable in an alpine environment. You will need at least one set of clothes to walk in and another dry set to change into at night. Cotton clothing is not suitable; wool and modern synthetics are better as they dry quickly and give more warmth.

Winter visitors should carry and know how to use: an ice axe, crampons, snow shovel, avalanche transceiver and probe.

Personal locator beacons are available for hire on behalf of Nelson Area Locator Beacon Trust, from the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre.

You will need to provide your own sleeping bag, fuel, toilet paper, cooking equipment, food and utensils. Take a day's spare food in case of delay due to weather conditions.

The Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre has a number of outdoor items for sale including gas cannisters and backcountry food.



Trip intentions

Leave details of your trip (return date and time, planned route, party members names and vehicle licence plate numbers) with a trusted contact, and don't forget to let them know when you return. You can also do this with the New Zealand Outdoor Intentions process on the Mountain Safety Council website www.mountainsafety.org.nz/learn/skills/leaving-trip-intentions. Remember to fill in hut books during your trip, even if you do not stay in the hut. They can assist in search and rescue operations and may help save your life.

Safety information



Snow and avalanche

With snow on the ground, Poukirikiri/Travers Saddle and Angelus Hut as well as side trips into the alpine basins should only be attempted by experienced and well-equipped trampers.

Be wary of avalanches. Avalanches occur in the park every year, normally between June and October but sometimes as late as December. Most occur during winter storms or in spring/early summer when warmer temperatures or rain make the snow unstable. The Travers–Sabine Circuit has more than 20 recognised avalanche paths.

To reduce the risk of being caught in an avalanche, do not stop between the avalanche signs. Even if you cannot see snow from the track, there may be enough snow out of sight on the upper slopes to form an avalanche that could reach the track. Avalanche paths are only marked on the Travers–Sabine Circuit and Blue Lake Track.

Latest avalanche risk information, including track and hut closures, is available from the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre. Alternatively, check the NIWA weather website for Nelson Lakes National Park at weather.niwa.co.nz/parks for weather and avalanche advisory.



Avalanche path in winter, Hopeless Creek.
Photo: Tom Young



Water quality

Water supplies in the Travers and Sabine valleys are generally of high quality but cannot be guaranteed. You may choose to boil, filter or treat drinking water. Please use toilet facilities and help keep water supplies clean.

There is no water source on Pinchgut Track, Robert Ridge Route and Mt Cedric Track/Route. Bring your own water.

Beware of catching or spreading norovirus (stomach bugs); good hygiene practices are essential. Always clean hut surfaces after use.

Water from taps inside the huts must be boiled.



Cooking

No cooking facilities are provided in the huts. All visitors should carry portable cookers and fuel.



Wasps

There are high numbers of wasps, particularly between January and April. Consider carrying an antihistamine product and, if you are allergic to their stings, ensure you carry medication with you.



Sandflies

The presence of biting sandflies can detract from your experience at the lakes, especially during the summer months. Cover up and apply a good quality insect repellent to any exposed skin.

A variety of insect repellents is available to purchase from the Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre.



Environmental care

The alpine environment, although apparently harsh, is very fragile.

- Do not wash utensils or use soap in the lake – use the hut facilities.
- Use the toilet facilities provided.
- Use firewood sparingly – the stove is only for heating.



Rubbish

No rubbish facilities are provided in the backcountry – pack out what you pack in.



No pets

To protect wildlife, domestic animals are prohibited in Nelson Lakes National Park. Dog owners convicted of bringing a dog into the park face a fine of up to \$800 under the National Parks Act 1980.



Bikes

Bicycles are not permitted on any day walk tracks/routes in Nelson Lakes National Park. The Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre has information on mountain bike tracks in the vicinity.



Drones

Drones are prohibited in the Nelson Lakes National Park.

Timeline

Pre-1840s

Mangatawai (Wairau Pass), the lowest saddle of the Southern Alps/ Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, lies at a strategic watershed of major river valleys that Māori used as pathways to collect and trade in stone such as pakohe (argillite) and pounamu (greenstone). Lakes Rotoiti and Rotorua were key stopping places to replenish food and other resources essential for survival.



1840s

The first Europeans travelled on foot to Nelson's hinterland, guided by Māori following their traditional pathways. Tracks were cut, opening the way for sheep to be walked to the new pastoral runs.



1850s

Transport was mostly by horse or foot. The primitive state of the roads meant the sheep were walked to Wai-iti to be shorn as this was the easiest way to transport the wool.

In 1855, William Thomas Locke Travers, aged 36 years, solicitor (and later a district judge) of Nelson began to roam the area. William Travers named the Spenser Mountains.

TOP TO BOTTOM LEFT:
Lake Rotoiti, St. Arnaud. *Photo: Herb Christophers*
Mt Travers. *Photo: DOC*

RIGHT:
Mail coach and Tophouse.
Photo: NN Provincial Museum. Copy Collection C2743

1860s

The discovery of gold spurred a period of road building, brought on by the diggers demand for supplies. Wheeled vehicles, mostly bullock teams, could now be used. A horse and droving track to Canterbury by way of the Upper Wairau (Rainbow Road) became the main overland route south.

1870s

The push for better and shorter routes to the goldfields continued, a road was formed over Kerr Hill and the Hope Saddle route opened. Horses gradually replaced bullocks and Newman Bros began a mail service from Nelson to Murchison.



1880s – 1910

Travellers from Nelson took the railway to the end of the line and continued their journey by horse, either to the West Coast or to Lake Rotoiti. The railway reached Belgrove by 1880 and Glenhope by 1912.

1920s

The first motorcar travelled to Lake Rotoiti using the new Korere-Tophouse Road and Kerr Hill deteriorated to an impassable state.

1930s – 1940s

By 1931, the railhead reached the Gowan but was never fully used due to the increasing road transport. State Highway 63 (Renwick to Kawatiri Junction) was built, and Lake Rotoiti was home to road construction gangs.

1950s

With road improvements, more cars made the trip to Lake Rotoiti. Fishermen, boaties, hunters, skiers and trampers all became regular visitors. A 3-day-a-week passenger and mail service operated from Nelson.



George Lyon. Photo: DOC

Nelson Lakes National Park was constituted in 1956 as one of New Zealand's national parks. George Lyon, the first Nelson Lakes National Park ranger (1956–1980), guided the development of the first recreation facilities for the park, including 11 backcountry huts.

1980s

On 1 April 1987, the Department of Conservation was established and became responsible for the management and administration of Nelson Lakes National Park.

Tirairaka pango/black fantail. Photo: Shellie Evans



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 following the Land Safety Code.

- ▶ Choose the right trip for you.
- ▶ Understand the weather.
- ▶ Pack warm clothes and extra food.
- ▶ Share your plans and take ways to get help.
- ▶ Take care of yourself and each other.



Keep NZ clean

Use toilets where provided. Take all rubbish with you.



Show respect

Respect others, respect culture.



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Further information

Rotoiti / Nelson Lakes National Park Visitor Centre

View Road
St. Arnaud 7072

PHONE: 03 521 1806

EMAIL: nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz

Whakatū / Nelson Visitor Centre

PHONE: 03 546 9339

EMAIL: nelsonvc@doc.govt.nz

www.doc.govt.nz

COVER: Angelus Hut.
Photo: One Shot / Tony Brunt

This information was accurate
at the time of printing.
For the latest information on
DOC's policies and facilities,
visit www.doc.govt.nz.

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