

# Waikakaho/Cullen Creek Walkway

## Mt Richmond Forest Park



### Introduction

The Waikakaho/Cullen Creek Walkway follows an old goldminers' trail across the range between the Wairau Valley and Linkwater. It can be walked or ridden in one day but you will need to arrange transport between the road ends. It is best to begin at the Waikakaho end to avoid the steep climb on the Cullen Creek side. Both the Waikakaho and Cullen Valleys provide historically interesting half-day return trips.

The walkway is classified as a tramping track; a reasonable level of fitness and strong footwear is recommended. The streams at both road ends and those flowing into Cullen Creek are unbridged and become impassable after heavy rain.

### Access and how to get there

Access to the start of the track at the northern end is at the end of Cullensville Road, Linkwater. The track entrance is through private land. Please keep to the marked track and respect farm stock and the private property leaving all gates as you found them.



In the south the track begins at the end of Waikakaho Road. This road leaves the Kaituna-Tuamarina Road along the northern side of the lower Wairau River, midway between State Highway 1 at Tuamarina and State Highway 6 at Kaituna. Please keep to the road and the track which provide legal access to the Mt Richmond Forest Park boundary.

### History

Payable gold was discovered in Cullen Creek in 1888 and within two weeks over 200 diggers were working there. At the height of the rush there were nearly 1000 men on the diggings. A township called Cullensville was established, with three hotels, two billiard saloons, a bank, courthouse, and five bakeries. No visible evidence of the town now remains although signs mark the sites of many of the old buildings. Gold

was found shortly after in the Waikakaho and in most of the streams draining the schist highlands east of the Kaituna Valley.

After quickly exhausting the easily-won surface gold the miners turned to the more difficult deep gold of the flood plains and terraces. These had to be worked like underground solid rock mines, with deep shafts and tunnels. Often the mines had to be drained with waterwheel-driven pumps.

Also in 1888, gold-bearing quartz reefs were discovered in the ranges above. Within a short time over 40 claims were licensed—on both sides of the range—and numerous shafts, tunnels, and trenches were dug. Most proved unsuccessful, but by the end of 1890 about 1000 tons of gold bearing quartz was waiting to be processed.

In 1891 the Ravenscliffe Gold Mining Company of London took over these claims and began processing the quartz. The company installed a five kilometre-long aerial tramway to take the quartz from the mine high in the hills, 600 metres down to the floor of the Waikakaho Valley. The cable way was reputed to be the longest in the country; the steel cable weighed 10 tons and carried 150 buckets, each with a 75 kilogram capacity.

On arrival at the battery, the rock was initially broken up by a 20-stamper battery of heavy hammers that plunged up and down, crushing the gold-bearing rock to powder. The power to operate the battery was provided by Pelton Wheels driven by a jet of water from the Waikakaho River. The water fell 78 metres over two kilometres and was run into progressively smaller pipes to increase the pressure of the final jet driving the Pelton Wheels.

The crushed rock was treated with 'quicksilver' (mercury) which instantly spreads over the grains of gold forming an amalgam. The amalgam was heated to drive off the mercury, leaving the gold behind. The poisonous mercury vapour was then condensed back to a liquid to use again.

The Ravenscliffe Battery began operation in 1892 but, despite good returns from samples tested overseas,

only 112 oz of gold was extracted. It was thought that the mercury-amalgam extraction system was being incorrectly used. Despite trying other extraction methods the company went into liquidation in 1899.

Following the failure of this venture, there were sporadic efforts to work the deep leads in the early 1900s. Then, in a pattern repeated all over New Zealand, the miners returned during the 1930s depression but were once again unsuccessful.

## Vegetation

At the southern end the track initially passes through regenerating forest with the toothed leaves of kāmahi and needle-like foliage of turpentine bush dominant. Higher up the forest becomes taller with large red and silver beech forming the canopy.

Although it looks relatively undisturbed, there are many sawn off stumps, especially below the track where the forest was once logged by the miners. The timber produced was used to build the huge wooden pylons of the cable way which took the quartz ore from the mine to the battery.

On the Cullen Creek side too, the vegetation is mostly regenerating. Bracken fern and shrubs are the main cover of the lower valley. Above the private hut is a pine plantation and above that the beech forest of the forest park.

## Walking the track

### Waikakaho Valley to 'Village Clearing', 2 h

From the farm house, the road continues between other farm buildings and yards, and through several gates for two kilometres to a parking area beside the Waikakaho River.

Just before this crossing you will see, on each side of the stream, sheds surrounded by buckets and machinery. Each shed covers the entrance to a deep (20 m) shaft. The shafts were dug during the 1930s. A tunnel links them deep under the river, with a number of short exploratory drives extending back up into the bedrock base of the river. These sheds are on private land and access to them is not available without the owners' permission.

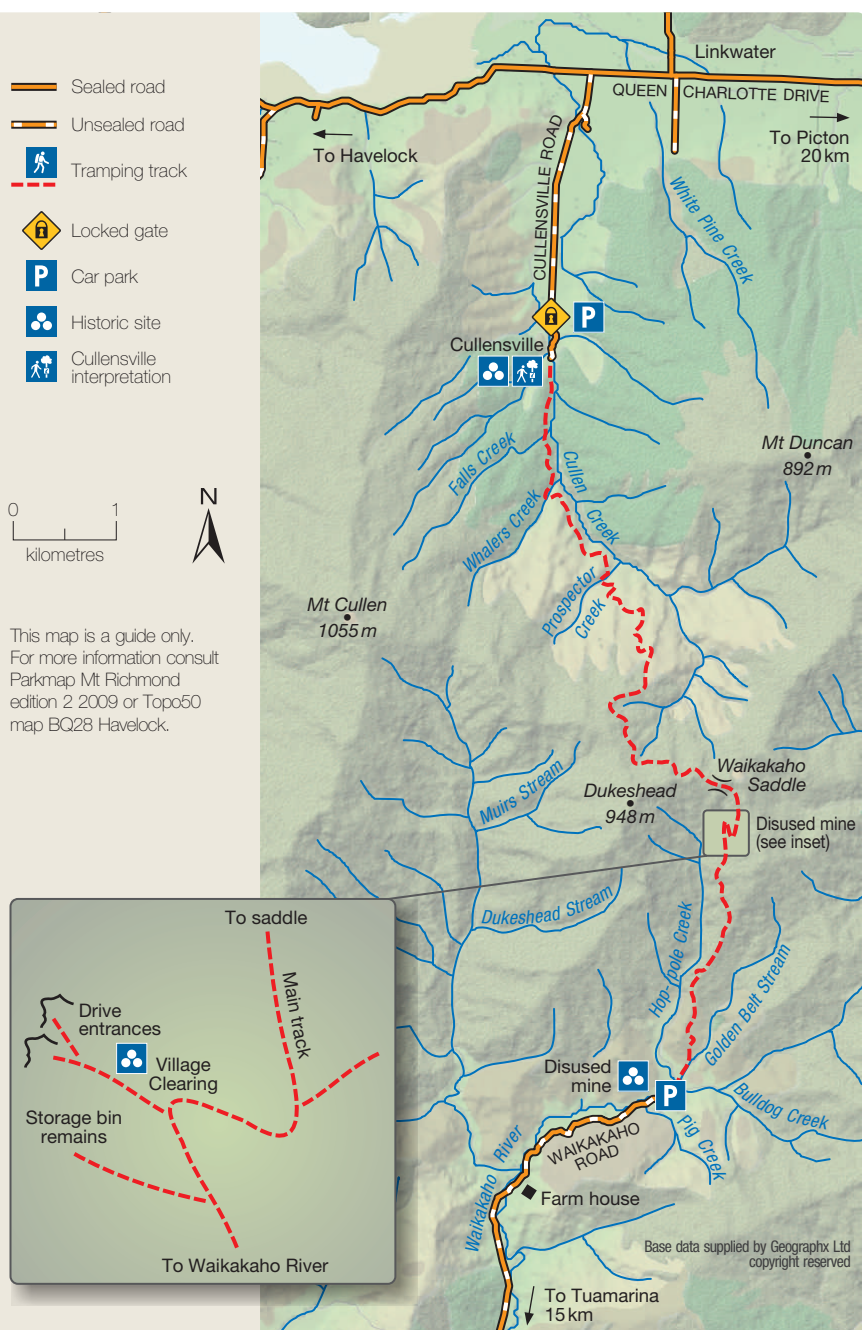
The Ravenscliffe Battery was sited against the base of the hill across the river from the farmhouse. However, apart from a series of terraces cut into the hillside, little evidence of it remains.

Cross Golden Belt Stream and climb gradually on the eastern face of this spur through scrub and pasture before crossing to the western face and climbing all the way to village clearing, zigzagging occasionally.

### The Village Clearing

This terraced clearing was the centre of activity during the quartz extracting period. In its heyday there were about 200 men employed in the mining or processing of quartz. Now, only the remains of stone chimneys, foundations and rock-lined pools are left.

About five minutes above the clearing, a side track leads to the entrance of a drive which extends over 100 metres into the rock. It is not maintained and should not be entered.



## Village Clearing to Waikakaho Saddle, 30 min

The main track leaves the village and zigzags before climbing steadily to the saddle. Sections of rock benching, cuttings through rocky spurs, and stone culverts remain from the mining era.

## Waikakaho Saddle to Cullensville, 2 h 30 min

Beyond the saddle the track is a little rougher. It sidles to the left and descends gradually for about 30 minutes to a small grassy clearing. Throughout this stretch, mountain cabbage trees, capped with tufts of broad, strap-like leaves, are common. At the clearing is a stone chimney and the collapsed remains of a hut left over from the 1890 quartz era, and the depression of the 1930s.

From the clearing the track follows a spur down through native forest to a face planted in pine trees. The track now zigzags through exotic pine forest into Cullen Creek Valley. After crossing Prospector Creek the track begins a spectacular sidle above the creek, cut in places out of near-vertical rock walls by the miners. It eventually descends and crosses Cullen Creek to the road end and the site of the former mining town, Cullensville.

## Tramping track

- Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking.
- Track is mostly unformed with steep, rough or muddy sections.
- Suitable for people with good fitness. Moderate to high-level backcountry skills and experience (including navigation and survival skills) required.
- Track has markers, poles or rock cairns. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Tramping/hiking boots required.

## Mountain biking grade 4 (advanced)

A mixture of long, steep climbs, narrow track, poor traction and obstacles that are difficult to avoid or jump over. Generally exposed at the track's outside edge. Most riders will find some sections easier to walk.

## Mountain biking

### Waikakaho Car Park to Cullen Creek road end, grade 4 (advanced), 33 km, 4–6 h

From Waikakaho Car Park to the saddle (800 m) allow 1–2 hours, followed by a 2 km rough mostly un-rideable section to Cullen bush edge. From here the walkway zigzags to the valley floor. This ride is best ridden from Waikakaho Car Park or be prepared for at least an hour of bike carrying if riding from Linkwater.



## Please remember


### Safety


- The track passes through very steep terrain in the lower Cullen Creek area—please keep a close watch on any children with you.
- The weather is changeable so take warm, waterproof clothing and plenty of food.
- The major watercourses are not bridged, care is required when water levels are high.
- Do not enter any mine shafts or the sheds beside the road at the Waikakaho end of the track.

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

Remember your safety is your responsibility. To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call **DOC HOTline 0800 362 468**.


 **Private land:** Please leave all gates as you find them and respect stock and private property.

 **Mountain biking:** The walkway is open for mountain-biking and best ridden from south to north. Mountain bikers must stay in control of their bikes and give way to walkers.

 **Dogs** are allowed in the Mt Richmond Forest Park under permit. A maximum of four dogs per party is allowed—permits are available from DOC offices in Marlborough.

Dogs may be taken on to the northern, Cullensville, end of the track with the permission from the owner, Jimmy Stuart, phone (03) 574 2331.

No dogs are allowed to be taken onto the private land at the southern (Waikakaho Valley) end of the track.

 **Historic sites** remind us of our past. Please do not disturb them.



**NEW ZEALAND  
environmental  
CARE CODE**

- Protect plants and animals
- Remove rubbish
- Bury toilet waste
- Keep waterways clean
- Take care with fires
- Camp carefully
- Keep to the track
- Consider others
- Respect our cultural heritage
- Enjoy your visit
- *Toitū te whenua* (leave the land undisturbed)

## For further information

We hope you enjoy your visit. To find out more please contact:

### **Picton i-SITE**

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