

Piano Flat and Waikaia Forest

Waikaia Forest (10 500ha) is a large island of beech forest, nestled in extensive farm and pastoral lands in the mountains of northern Southland. Piano Flat, a grassy enclosure at the southern end, provides a picnic area, "back to nature" camping ground and several walking tracks.

As a result of the Ngai Tahu settlement with the Crown, a nohoanga (meaning 'a place to sit') entitlement is located here. This gives Ngai Tahu people exclusive camping rights to access customary fishing areas and gather other natural resources. This does not affect public access.

Popular recreational pursuits in the area include horse riding, trailbike riding, trout fishing, hunting, walking and four-wheel drive excursions. Several private cribs (holiday homes) are located here.

History

Piano Flat is named after a member of an orchestra, which was formed to entertain early settlers and miners. Harry Selig, the piano player, was reputed to have been the first person to recover gold on the flat and for a short time the area was known as Piano Harry's Flat.

The remains of a number of water races, as well as numerous mining relics, are present.

The Bunting family are believed to have been the first people to have camped at Piano Flat in 1928. Anglers have since made the area popular and camper numbers continued to increase. The first cribs were built about 1948.

Water Race

The water race at Piano Flat was built in the late 1800s to provide water for gold sluicing operations. It was used up to the late 1940s. The water race is still maintained to supply water to several cribs and the camping and picnic area. It is the only operational water race known in Southland.

Flora

Waikaia Forest is the best remaining example of the mixed beech forests (red beech - *Nothofagus fusca*, mountain beech - *N. solandri* var. *cliffortioides* and silver beech - *N. menziesii*) which once covered much of the area.

Two rare tree daisies, Hector's tree daisy (*Olearia hectori*) and *Olearia fimbriata*, grow in the Waikaia Forest area. The largest population (c. 300 plants) of Hector's tree daisy in Southland is found above Waikaia Forest. In the Piano Flat area only a few adult plants of Hector's tree daisy remain, so restoration planting is being carried out by the Department of Conservation to boost population and ensure its survival.

Fauna

Notable fauna in the area includes South Island robin, New Zealand falcon, New Zealand pigeon, yellow-crowned parakeet and long-tailed bat. Apart from Fiordland and the Mavora Lakes area, Piano Flat is the only place in Southland where the South Island robin is found.

Four unique invertebrates are found in Waikaia Forest. **Peripatus (*Peripatoides* and *Ooperipatellus*)**

Peripatus, or velvet worms, are very ancient in the fossil record and have features of both worms and insects. They are forest-dwellers, living beneath or inside rotting logs and lead a nocturnal existence to minimise the danger of drying out. Like earthworms, they are unable to control water loss through their skin. *Peripatus* are predators, trapping their prey in a sticky glue from openings on each side of their mouth.

Peripatoides females (grey/blue colour, 15 pairs of legs) bear live young from eggs hatched internally while *Ooperipatellus* females (orange/brown colour, 13 pairs of legs) are egg layers. Both species were first discovered in Waikaia Forest.

Piano Flat spider (*Pianoa isolata*)

Considered a tuatara of the spider world, the large brown Piano Flat spider has physical and behavioural features from which many other present day spiders are derived. Once believed to be found only around Piano Flat, it has now been known throughout Waikaia Forest and some other locations in northern Southland and West Otago.

This nocturnal spider lives among leaf litter and rotting logs on the forest floor. It hunts by pouncing on victims smaller than itself, rather than building a web.

Fern weevil (*Megacolobus garviensis*)

The fern weevil, a large and flightless insect, was a feature of early New Zealand. It has since become rare due to the introduction of rodents and known only from sightings made in 1953 and then again in 1998. While the Garvie fern weevil remains in this valley, a sister species found in Banks Peninsula is now possibly extinct.



Piano Flat camping ground.



Protect plants and animals

Remove rubbish

Bury toilet waste

Keep streams and lakes clean

Take care with fires

Camp carefully

Keep to the track

Consider others

Respect our cultural heritage

Enjoy your visit

Toitu te whenua
(Leave the land undisturbed)

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Te Papa Atawhai

Walking track: easy and well formed to "shoe" standard. Suitable for people of most ages and fitness levels.

Tramping track: requires some skill and experience to "boot" standard. Suitable for people of average physical fitness.

Route: requires a high degree of skill, experience and route finding ability. Suitable for well equipped trampers.

Waikaia Forest Tracks

Ngahere Ara track, 30 mins return (walking track)
 This is an easy walk leading to mine shafts and an operational water race built in the gold mining days.

Piano Flat Creek Loop track, 1 hr return (tramping track)
 This track passes through beech forest and signs of early sawmilling days.

Waikaia River track, 4 hrs return (tramping track)
 This track follows up the true right of the river, crosses a swing bridge and returns along the opposite bank and along the road.

Titan Rocks track, 7 hours return (marked route)
 This rewarding tramp offers excellent views from above the bush line.

