



WALKING**ACCESS**
ARA HĪKOI AOTEAROA

Walking Access Strategy 2017 - 2022



Foreword

We are pleased to present the Walking Access Strategy for 2017 - 2022.

This strategy outlines the access heritage that underpins New Zealanders access to the outdoors, takes stock of where we have come from and looks forward to the changes we need to see in the coming five years.

It is the second iteration of the Walking Access Strategy following the formation of the New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hikoi Aotearoa in 2008, fulfilling the organisation's function under s10(1)(a) of the Walking Access Act 2008.

More than that, this strategy lays out a direction for the Commission so that locals and tourists alike can enjoy access to the outdoors.

The Commission takes a long-term view, helping to create enduring access that will exist far into the future. This long-term success will come from a multitude of smaller steps, of which this strategy is one.

In the years since the Commission came into being, strong relationships have been formed with landholders, farming groups, iwi, local and central government agencies, recreation groups, and others.

These relationships have been key to the creation of significant new access opportunities, to educating the public in how to behave responsibly on private land, and to lifting the consideration of public access in planning and development.

This strategy will take the Commission's work to the next level, building on what is, partnering with key stakeholders and forging new bonds to ensure great

outdoor opportunities for all, without compromising the rights of landholders.

We know that granting public access is not always easy for landholders, and we want to recognise that it is a great gift to share their special places with us all.

Through education, behaviour has and will continue to shift. Respect for the land is key to maintaining access rights, and to enabling the creation of new enduring access in the future.

Our principles of integrity and our willingness to engage with individuals and organisations holding a wide range of views and interests has been a strength of our work, and this will continue.

From the time of early Māori and Queen Victoria through to the modern day with Te Araroa and Ngā Haerenga, ensuring people have the ability to get to the places they want to go has always been critical, whether for communication, commerce, or recreation.

It is an honour to lead the Commission who work in this area every day, and we want to thank everyone who has engaged with the Commission over the nearly ten years since our Act became law.



John Forbes
Chair, Walking Access
Commission Board



and Eric Pyle
Chief Executive, Walking
Access Commission

Our access heritage

New Zealanders are rightly proud of our natural environment. Access to the outdoors is a very important part of who we are as a people. Beaches, rivers, lakes, mountains and wild places form an important part of every New Zealander's cultural identity.

For Māori, connection to the land is paramount to who they are. Long before Europeans came to this land, iwi maintained traditional trails for communication, migration, and gathering of kai and taonga such as pounamu.

Whanganui iwi have a whakatauki (proverb):

“Ko au te awa. Ko te
awa ko au.

I am the river.
The river is
me.”

This illustrates their connection to their awa (river) as an ancestor, and other Māori feel the same way about the awa and maunga (mountains) in their rohe (territory).

As Europeans began to colonise New Zealand, and the nature of land ownership changed from Māori kaitiakitanga (guardianship) to an English model of individual property rights, the nature of access changed.

In the mid-late 1800s, surveyors mapped the land and through this, created access to connect communities. These accessways formed the legal basis for enduring public access to many of our waterways, beaches, forests and other special places.

Our egalitarian and agricultural culture meant that through the mid-1900s, for most landholders, granting public access was as simple as getting a knock on your door from a local hunter and giving them approval to cross your land to the nearby forest.

As New Zealand became increasingly urbanised in the first half of the 20th century, the public continued

to be intimately involved in creating access and connections to the outdoors. Both public service agencies and community volunteers have spent countless hours building and maintaining tracks and associated facilities.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, as our population grew, and people grew more mobile with the increasing use of vehicular transport, New Zealanders created significant outdoor access infrastructure, from tracks to huts, toilets and campgrounds, right across New Zealand, with a focus on access to and across public land.

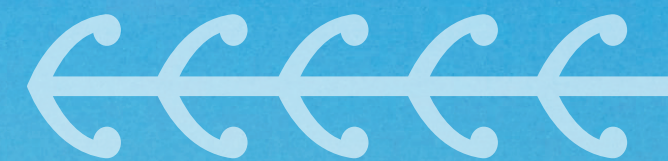
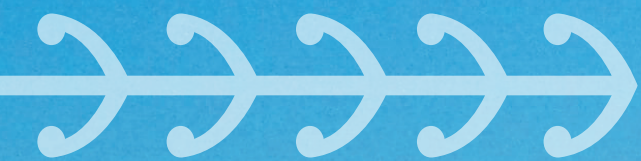
This development of access infrastructure tailed off by the 1980s. At times, the infrastructure far outstripped use, but as our population grew alongside rising domestic and international tourism, use began to catch up.



The Walkways Commission was created to move to the next stage – beyond simple access infrastructure on public land, towards access across and through the landscape over a mix of land tenures where significant recreational or conservational values and opportunities were available.

As the Walkways Commission was absorbed into the Department of Conservation in 1987, the concept of trails across the landscape fell into the background, and recreationalists were left with inadequate support to ensure free, certain and enduring access to and across private land. The early days of the Department saw an increased focus on the conservation estate, but little creation of new trails across the landscape.

As tourism – both domestic and international – increases, and New Zealanders are increasingly interested in walking and cycling, the demand for public access is also increasing. In and near urban areas, increased interest in health and fitness has led to a need for new and improved access infrastructure. More and more, some of our most popular trails are nearing capacity, and infrastructure is starting to struggle with demand.



Te mauri o te hīkoi

Journeys across the land and to our special places

PROJECTS

Leading and supporting access planning in key areas around New Zealand.

Development of access policy and perspectives.

Effective digital communication.

Establishing and improving relationships with iwi.

Providing leadership and support to trail initiatives.

Creating and sustaining access and resolving access disputes.

RESULTS

Managed access is available where it will add most value to communities.

People know how to find access, and how to behave when using it.

Landholders and local authorities understand the need for, and provide, enduring access.

Trails are in places that connect communities to each other and to community assets.

USES

People use access within, and between, their communities.

Māori have access to mahinga kai, wāhi tapu, and other taonga.

Recreational and tourist access needs are met.

People accessing the outdoors do so responsibly and safely.

Conflict between use types is minimised, and well-managed.

BENEFITS

Increased community cohesiveness, and enduring and positive visitor/community relationships.

Improved cultural connections with the outdoors.

Improved public health outcomes.

Enhanced rural-urban relationships and connections.

Increased tourism revenue, assisting regional economic development.

There is some evidence of a reduction in informal access, with landholders changing and new owners sometimes less linked in to “the Kiwi way”, particularly with the impact of increasing numbers, new and more intense types of land use, and a decreased connection between urban and rural New Zealanders sometimes leading to poor behaviour in the outdoors.

The Walking Access Commission was born out of these needs – an agency who could ensure public access to New Zealand’s rivers and beaches; resolve disputes between landholders and recreationalists; negotiate free, certain and enduring access across New Zealand for the benefit of all; and assist with trail development at a landscape level, covering all land tenures.

The Commission would lead on from the best examples of what had come before, including the work to create Te Araroa, and exemplar trails covering different land tenures.

Access in the present

A predominantly volunteer-led movement for trail building is growing across New Zealand, and the Commission has a key role to play in facilitating the creation of trails – particularly in peri-urban and front country areas – through assisting with the negotiation of access, organising support from territorial authorities, central government agencies and community groups, and assisting community-led initiatives.

The Commission’s currency is integrity, accuracy and knowledge. This is built into all of its stakeholder interactions, from a regional field advisor (RFA) working with a territorial authority or farmer; to

a local Fish and Game license holder using the Walking Access Mapping System (WAMS) to find access to a waterway; to the Commission working with a community group on a trail initiative. As an organisation, the Commission needs to get things right, in a way that is useful for those who consume the information it provides.

The bow wave of longstanding access disputes that the Commission inherited is being managed. While dispute resolution remains an important core task for the Commission, there is now the opportunity for more time to be spent on developing a more proactive, strategic approach to access.

There is also increasing diversity amongst the uses people have for access. The traditional walking, hunting, fishing and tramping are still popular, while cycling is rapidly growing, alongside kayaking, mountain biking, surfing, horse-riding and other uses. Growing tourist numbers in recent years have also contributed to this shift.

The Commission has strong and established relationships across the sector, from primary industry groups such as Federated Farmers to recreational groups including Fish & Game and Federated Mountain Clubs.

When properties are sold to overseas investors, the Commission has a unique leverage point through the Overseas Investment Office (OIO) process that can be used strategically to build better access to and through our natural landscapes. Over time, these pieces can be linked together as parts of a bigger whole.

Through digital and print means, the Commission encourages good behaviour in the outdoors, which will help reduce the impact of high-use in some areas,

give landholders the confidence to continue offering access across their land, and help to keep New Zealand’s special places special, and its wild places wild.

Increasingly, the Commission is focussed on two different types of access. The Commission is still facilitating access as a means to an end – for example, access across a farm to reach a river for fishing, or into a plantation forest for deer stalking. An increasing focus is another kind, access as an end in itself. This is where the access itself is the goal, such as creating a track for walking, cycling, or horse-riding.

Access in the future

The leadership role that the Commission plays in championing public access will continue to be a vital contributor to New Zealanders’ experiences of the outdoors.

This includes a key role in facilitating the creation of new trails across the landscape and other new access opportunities to the outdoors, and in publicising new and different trails to both international visitors and domestic users. These roles will help to relieve pressure on hot spots.

The Commission can also play a vital role in connecting trail development initiatives – both volunteer- and government-led – and providing the technological and other support that they need to ensure their plans are complementary and long-term.

These roles will help contribute to meeting the needs of growing tourist numbers, while also enabling regional economic development, particularly in New Zealand’s provincial and rural communities.

Facilitating access for Māori communities to wāhi tapu and other traditional sites is another area of focus for the Commission, with strong relationships built through whakawhanaungatanga at the core of this work.

In the ongoing expansion of urban centres, the Commission will work alongside territorial authorities, developers and the NZTA to ensure access is at the forefront of planning, long before any building is done.

This will help to ensure our newest communities are built for active methods of transport, both within and between parts of the community.

As a body without significant statutory powers, and with a broad scope of operation, the Commission is uniquely placed to work across and with central and local government, industry, and non-governmental agencies, to maintain an oversight of, and leadership on, public access across New Zealand.

The Commission’s core work will remain a crucial part of its activity on the ground – resolving disputes and steadily working to increase public access to rivers, lakes, beaches and forests by negotiations built on mutual trust and respect between the Commission, landholders and recreationalists. New work will involve working with all sections of the community on trails initiatives.

Through the creation of free, certain and enduring access, the Commission is ultimately ensuring that New Zealanders maintain and enhance their connection with our natural heritage in perpetuity; promoting healthier lifestyles to enable better connected communities to thrive; and enabling wonderful experiences that turn international visitors into advocates for New Zealand.



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