

Waiau Pass Track

Walking

Difficulty
Hard

Length
115.5 km

Journey Time
5-8 days

Regions
Nelson/Tasman , Canterbury

Sub-Regions
Hurunui District , Tasman

Part of Collections
Te Araroa - New Zealand's Trail , Te Araroa - South Island

Te Araroa section: This long tramp connects the Travers-Sabine Circuit with the St James Walkway. It's an extraordinary summer tramping experience at the Southern Alps' northern end. St Arnaud is a pleasant tourist village on the shore of Lake Rotoiti. Nelson Lakes National Park is serviced by a network of spacious, popular huts.

St Arnaud to Lakehead Hut - 9.5km / 2-3 hours

The track starts opposite St Arnaud's alpine store. This is on the Black Valley Walk, which heads through beech forest to DOC's Kerr Bay Campground on the shore of Lake Rotoiti.

Te Araroa then joins with the Travers/Sabine Circuit at the eastern end of Kerr Bay. From here the track follows the shoreline through the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project area to Lakehead Hut. This is about 15min beyond the jetty near the lakehead.

The recovery project started in 1997 and is one of 6 maintained by DOC. Its goal is to restore native biodiversity to the beech forest. A trapping and poisoning programme aims to rid a 5,000ha block of introduced pests including cats, possums, stoats, wasps, rats and mice. Kaka and reintroduced great spotted kiwi are two native species that benefit from the project.

Booking is required for Lakehead Hut. Hut tickets are no longer accepted, and it is NOT covered by the Backcountry Hut Pass from 1 Oct to 30 April each year. However, Te Araroa Trail Pass, Backcountry Hut Pass, or 1 standard hut ticket can still be used for camping outside of the hut at any time. See the Trail Pass accommodation section below for more information on discount and booking.

Lakehead Hut to John Tait Hut - 14.5km / 5 hours

The well-graded track continues from Lakehead Hut up the river flats through open and forested sections to John Tait Hut. Mt Travers comes into view around Hopeless Creek.

John Tait (1901-1982), a former president of the Nelson Tramping Club, led a volunteer effort to raise funds and to construct the original hut in 1951. This was 5 years before Nelson Lakes National Park became New Zealand's 8th national park. The original hut survived 27 years. A new hut sits in a clearing with views of Mt Travers and Mt Cupola.

Booking is required for John Tait Hut. Hut tickets are no longer accepted, and it is NOT covered by the Backcountry Hut Pass from 1 Oct to 30 April each year. However, Te Araroa Trail Pass, Backcountry Hut Pass, or standard hut tickets can still be used for camping outside of the hut at any time. See the Trail Pass accommodation section below for more information on discount and booking.

John Tait Hut to Upper Travers Hut - 6.5km / 3 hours

Beyond John Tait Hut the track continues up the Travers Valley and has some steeper sections. The track passes marked turn-offs to Cupola Hut and Travers Falls, which is a short and worthwhile side trip.

Upper Travers Hut sits on the edge of a large flat immediately below Mt Travers.

Booking is required for Upper Travers Hut. Hut tickets are no longer accepted, and it is NOT covered by the Backcountry Hut Pass from 1 Oct to 30 April each year. However, Te Araroa Trail Pass, Backcountry Hut Pass, or 1 standard hut ticket can still be used for camping outside of the hut at any time. See the Trail Pass accommodation section below for more information on discount and booking.

Upper Travers Hut to West Sabine Hut - 8.2km / 6-8 hours

The track continues as a defined ground trail that follows snow poles up to Travers Saddle (1787m). This is a steady 450m climb.

From the Saddle, the snow poles continue down the western face to the tree line. The track then takes walkers down to the East Branch Sabine River in the valley floor below. This is a long and in places steep descent and crosses a large avalanche risk zone. Take the alternative marked track during times of avalanche risk.

From the East Branch Sabine River, the track climbs, sidles and then descends to the West Branch Sabine River. West Sabine Hut is a short distance upstream.

Booking is required for West Sabine Hut. Hut tickets are no longer accepted, and it is NOT covered by the Backcountry Hut Pass from 1 Oct to 30 April each year. However, Te Araroa Trail Pass, Backcountry Hut Pass, or 1 standard hut ticket can still be used for camping outside of the hut at any time. See the Trail Pass accommodation section below for more information on discount and booking.

Change to Travers Saddle Track

Note for NZTopo50 map users. The Te Araroa map for this section is based on LINZ Topo50 map (BS24 Mount Robert 2018). The black dashed line does not correctly show a later modification to the route. The yellow Te Araroa route is correctly marked on Map 99. At km 2026.5 southbound follow the poled route down the ridge. The older route, still shown on the maps, is visible leading to the right, but was abandoned due to track damage in the steep valley. For northbound travel follow the poled route up the ridge after km 2028.

West Sabine Hut to Blue Lake Hut - 7.3km / 3 hours

Te Araroa leaves the Travers/Sabine Circuit from West Sabine Hut and continues up towards Blue Lake and Waiau Pass. Trampers wishing to return to St Arnaud can continue on the circuit.

From the hut follow the Blue Lake Track up the West Branch Sabine River to its source. The route is forested and climbs steeply in places, in particular during the short final climb to the hut and lake. The track crosses several short avalanche risk zones.

Blue Lake Hut is a popular side trip to the Travers/Sabine Circuit.

Booking is required for Blue Lake Hut. Hut tickets are no longer accepted, and it is NOT covered by the Backcountry Hut Pass from 1 Oct to 30 April each year. However, Te Araroa Trail Pass, Backcountry Hut Pass, or 1 standard hut ticket can still be used for camping outside of the hut at any time. See the Trail Pass accommodation section below for more information on discount and booking.

Conservation – Your help is needed please.

Help stop the spread of lindavia (lake snow algae) to Blue Lake and Lake Constance

Lindavia is an invasive microscopic algae that causes a sticky mucus known as lake snow. It is already present in Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa. Trail walkers are asked to help stop it spreading to the area's pristine alpine waters.

Please use a cleaning station at Coldwater Hut, Lakehead Hut, or Sabine Hut for all gear that's wet from river, stream, or lake water.

Important: Do not swim, wash, take water from or put any equipment into Rotomairewhenua / Blue Lake or Rotopōhueroa / Lake Constance. Your damp swimsuit or water filter may contaminate these pristine lakes.

These lakes also hold high cultural significance to Māori, particularly Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō iwi. They are tapu (sacred) and access restrictions have been placed to uphold their mauri (life force) and purity.

Show respect by not touching the water. Not touching the water in these lakes will also prevent the introduction of lindavia. You can swim and fill drink bottles in the Sabine River below the outlet of Blue Lake.

Before swimming or taking water from any other alpine lake or tarn, including Lake Angelus, ensure all your gear has been completely dry for 48 hours. Be extra careful if you've recently swum or filled a drink bottle from Lakes Rotoiti or Rotoroa

Thank you for helping take care of these beautiful places!

See more about lindavia www.doc.govt.nz/lindavia

Blue Lake Hut to Upper Waiau Forks - 7.8km / 6-8 hours

The next section, over Waiau Pass, is the most demanding on this track. It is a fair-weather route, suitable for experienced individuals or parties with experienced leadership. Good fitness and reasonable agility is a prerequisite for all.

Waiau Pass is a Te Araroa highlight. Allow a full day for the journey.

The track leaves Blue Lake Hut through the forest and climbs onto Lake Constance's moraine dam. The lake itself is attractive and set within a dramatic alpine landscape. From the dam, a rough and rocky track, marked by snow poles, leads up above bluffs on the west side of the lake. Then it descends very steeply in places to the lakehead. The track continues across the open upper valley floor and then climbs a steep scree slope in direct fashion to a high terrace. From here it is a 500m sidle and climb up to Waiau Pass.

The route from the pass continues through the rocky and exposed country. Take care when turning off the main ridge to follow the poled track route as it then drops steeply in places through bluffs to a terrace. Continues west before descending to the West Branch Waiau River in the valley floor. This area is an avalanche hazard zone in Spring and early Summer.

From the valley floor, the track follows the river through thick sub-alpine scrub to the Upper Waiau Forks. There is an attractive informal campsite here within a stand of beech trees.

Upper Waiau Forks to Waiau Hut - 8.9km / 4-5hr

The track follows the Waiau River down and stays mostly on the true right. The valley opens up as you near Waiau Hut (6 bunks), new in 2017 thanks to a generous donor.

Caroline Creek Bivouac, which is marked on NZ Topo50 maps near km 2052, was removed by DOC in March 2022.

Waiau Hut to Anne Hut - 26km / 7-8 hours

Travel down the valley is easy, through grassy flats, and on the Waiau River's true right. Two bush-clad terminal moraines add interest and provide good camping opportunities.

In time the Ada homestead comes into view. The homestead area remains in private hands. Trampers should avoid this area and continue to the Ada River. This is a straightforward crossing in low to normal flows. Beyond the river, trampers link to the St James Walkway and continue down in a south-west direction towards Anne Hut – a nice 20 bunk hut.

Booking is required for Anne Hut. Hut tickets are no longer accepted. Te Araroa Trail Pass, Backcountry Hut Pass, or 1 standard hut ticket can still be used for camping outside of the hut at any time. See the Trail Pass accommodation section below for more information on discount and booking.

Anne Hut to Boyle Flat Hut - 17.6km / 6-7 hours

The track continues up the Anne River through a series of grassy clearings towards Anne Saddle. Then it descends into the Boyle River Valley.

The small 3 bunk Rokeby Hut is lower down the valley. Built in 1965 it is in original condition. Beyond Rokeby Hut the track continues downstream on the true left to a swing bridge. Boyle Flat Hut is a short distance beyond down the true right side of the river.

Booking is required for Boyle Flat Hut. Hut tickets are no longer accepted. Te Araroa Trail Pass, Backcountry Hut Pass, or 1 standard hut ticket can still be used for camping outside of the hut at any time. See the Trail Pass accommodation section below for more information on discount and booking.

Boyle Flat Hut to Boyle Village - 12.5km / 3-4 hours

Re-cross the swing bridge and continue southwest on the walkway. The track sidles through a gorge and descends to a junction. Cross the river on a swing bridge here and continue on the track within the forest margin. In time the track crosses the river on another swing bridge and continues down towards Boyle Village. The track emerges at a carpark next to the Boyle River Outdoor Education Centre.

Conditions

Track standard: Tramping track

Snow and avalanche risk

At 1870m, Waiau Pass is Te Araroa's second-highest point. It's the most likely part of the route to be blocked by snow and has some avalanche risk on its southern face. Contact the Department of Conservation (DOC) before you start, to enquire about the route's current condition. DOC is at the Nelson Lakes Visitors Centre in St Arnaud P: 03 521 1806

Potential hazards

- In winter and spring some sections are snowbound and avalanche prone
- River crossings - Never cross flooded rivers Take care with Wairoa, Motueka, Waiau and Ada Rivers, these rivers are unbridged
- Weather extremes - snow or heavy rain can occur at any time of the year
- Steep drop-offs Avalanche zone - Travers Saddle, track to Blue Lake, Waiau Pass

Nelson Lakes (Visitor Centre) weather

NIWA 3-day forecast Nelson Lakes

Nelson Lakes (Angelus Hut) weather

NIWA 3-day forecast Angelus Hut

Nelson Lakes (Travers Saddle) weather

Waiau Pass weather

NIWA 3-day forecast Waiau Pass

St James Walkway (Christopher Hut) weather

NIWA 3-day forecast Christopher Hut

How to get here

Northern Start: Start of Black Valley Walk (on SH3), St Arnaud
Southern End: Junction of Magdalen Valley Rd and SH7, Boyle Village (car park and bus shelter on SH7 next to the Boyle River Outdoor Education Centre)

Transport

- East West Shuttles - P: 03 789 6251 - Shuttles run between Westport and Christchurch – via Lewis Pass, Boyle and Hanmer Springs. You must book for the Shuttle to stop at the Boyle. Call to book and confirm pricing. Bookings also available online during the season.
- Hanmer Tours & Shuttles – P: 03 315 7418, E: info@hanmertours.co.nz Will Shuttle from / to the Boyle or from/to Windy Point for a minimum $150 one way for up to 5 people. Call for availability.
- Nelson Lakes Shuttles - P: 03 547 6896 or 027 547 6896 – Scheduled transfers between St Arnaud and Nelson, including destinations in Nelson Lakes National Park and stretching to Boyle Village. Prices on enquiry - E: info@nelsonlakesshuttles.co.nz.
- For a Shuttle Service to Hanmer Springs, contact Kirsty Innes on 03 315 7772 or 027 466 7305.
- Private Driver Hire - P: 03 391 0500 (Paul) - can transport to/from all locations Picton-Anakiwa-Pelorus Bridge-Nelson-St Arnaud, priced on enquiry.
- Hanmer Hiking Services offers affordable and flexible TA trailhead connections between Hanmer and Boyle Village/ Windy Point from $25pp (for a four person trip). Please contact us on 027 264 0848 or via our Facebook page for bookings or enquiries.
- South Transport offer shuttles between Hanmer Springs and the trailheads at Windy Point and Boyle Village. Charge $120 per vehicle for a maximum of 4 passengers, so it's $30 each for a full car. Call Andrew M: 022 524 9870 or drop into Som Tam Coffee & Thai at 4 Harrogate Street

Accommodation

Trail Pass

Kerr Bay - km 1,991.2 - 20% discount on serviced campsites (Bookings required)

Lakehead Hut - km 2,001 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

John Tait Hut - km 2,015.4 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Upper Travers Hut - km 2,021.7 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

West Sabine Hut - km 2,029.8 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Blue Lake Hut - km 2,037.1 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Waiau Hut - km 2,053.4 - Included in The Trail Pass (Bookings required from 1st November)

Anne Hut - km 2,081 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Ada Pass Hut - St James Walkway - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Cannnibal Gorge Hut Hut - St James Walkway - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Christopher Hut - St James Walkway - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Christopher (Ada) Cullers Hut - St James Walkway - Included in The Trail Pass

Rokeby Hut - km 2,092.8 - Included in The Trail Pass

Boyle Flat Hut - km 2,096.7 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required).
Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass

Boyle Campsite - km 2,109.3- Included in The Trail Pass (Bookings Required)

Magdalen Hut - near km 2,100.6 - Included in The Trail Pass (Bookings required from 1st November)

DOC Backcountry Hut Pass use information

Some Huts on the Waiau Pass Track are no longer covered by the Backcountry Hut Pass from 1 October to 30 April each year.

Hut tickets are no longer accepted at these huts as booking is required. The Te Araroa Trail Pass and Backcountry Hut Pass can still be used for camping at any time.

Trail Pass holders who camp at huts may use the hut facilities

This applies to **Lakehead Hut, John Tait Hut, Upper Travers Hut, West Sabine Hut, Sabine Hut, Speargrass Hu**t, **Ada Pass Hut, Cannibal Gorge Hut, Christopher Hut and Boyle Flat Hut** and **Blue Lake Hut**.

A few TA walkers have been challenged after assuming the Backcountry Hut Pass was sufficient for these huts. DOC staff will check.

Angelus Hut, a popular diversion off Te Araroa on the Mt Robert Route, requires advance booking and payment year-round. Outside of the peak season, you can use your Backcountry Hut Pass number to apply a discount.

Alpine Lodge St. Arnaud - Lake Rotoiti, Nelson Lakes National Park (St Arnaud Village) - E: info@alpinelodge.co.nz - P: 03 521 1869 - W: Dorm and double private rooms plus hotel rooms available. There is internet, laundry facilities, spa pool for hire, an excellent restaurant/bar/café. The Alpine Lodge can store food parcels - $15 per parcel, $20 for a large box - staying/not staying at the lodge. Alpine Lodge, 75 Main Rd, St Arnaud, RD2 Nelson 7072. (Clearly mark the parcel with ", Te Araroa Walker, estimated date of arrival").

Accommodation at southern end of route

Boyle River Outdoor Education Centre - Te Araroa Services 2025-2026 Season

The Boyle River Outdoor Education Centre is a not-for-profit organisation, primarily providing programmes for secondary schools. We are on the trail - SOBOs will arrive from the Waiau Pass route, and NOBOs from Harper Pass.

We aim to provide services to Te Araroa walkers but appreciate your understanding that we may not always be immediately available and we are staffed by volunteers on weekends so please be kind and patient.

Enquiries: Phone 03 315 7082; Email: info@boyle.org.nz

Hours of opening: Monday - Saturday are 9 - 5. Sunday is 9 - 3

This season Boyle River are providing:

Parcel storage – bounce boxes

- Size 3 box (Regular size) $35, Size 4 box (Large) $45
- Post your box to:

  Boyle River Outdoor Education Centre

  Private Bag 55002, Orchard Road

  Christchurch 8154

  - Label your parcel clearly with your:
    - Name
    - Contact phone numbers and emails address
    - Your expected date of arrival
  - *Do not post to our physical address – your parcel won't arrive*
  - *Use NZ Post – other couriers do not deliver to the Boyle*
  - *Post your parcel two or more weeks in advance to ensure delivery to us*
  - Go on-line and pay for your box at https://www.boyle.org.nz/shop
    - *Make sure the details you use on-line match those you used on your box label*

Accommodation

- Is on a first come first served basis
- Accommodation includes hot showers, cooking facilities, laundry & powder, Wi-Fi, base sheet and pillow in shared accommodation.
- $60 per night per adult.
- We also have one stand alone room with a double bed and kitchenette - $130/night for the room.
- We take cash and can do transactions with credit cards but not eftpos/paywave

Food and Gas Supplies

- We operate a small shop with camping gas, cold drinks, cheese, chocolate, pasta, rice, snacks and other basic supplies / necessities.
- Our chef made Pizza ($25) is available most days for anyone and includes Gluten Free, Dairy Free, Vegetarian, Vegan, Hawaiian, Meatlovers.

Other facilities nearby

- Limited Cell phone reception near the DOC carpark for those on Spark.
- DOC Boyle Campsite – a Standard Campsite adjacent to the DOC carpark with 10 tent sites, a toilet, and untreated tap water. Pay cash on arrival at the self-registration ($10 per adult)
  Backcountry hut tickets and annual hut passes are not valid at this campsite.
- Hanmer Springs – a township 55km from the Boyle, with a range of accommodation, grocery shops, cafes and restaurants, and hot pools. For a **Shuttle service** to Hanmer Springs, contact Kirsty Innes on 03 315 7772 or 027 466 7305.

Hanmer Springs

- YHA Hanmer Springs - Kakapo Lodge, 14 Amuri Avenue, Hanmer Springs P: 03 315 7472 E: hanmersprings@yha.co.nz
- Hanmer Backpackers - 41 Conical Hill Rd, Hamner Springs - P: 03 315 7196 - E: info@hanmerbackpackers.co.nz
- Numerous other accommodation providers at most levels.

Reefton

- Reefton Old Bread Shop Backpacker - 157 Buller Rd, Reefton - P: 03 732 8420 - E: breadshopbackpackers@gmail.com
- The Old Nurses Home Accommodation - 104 Shiel St, Reefton - P: 03 732 8881 - E: reeftonretreat@hotmail.com

Food And Supply

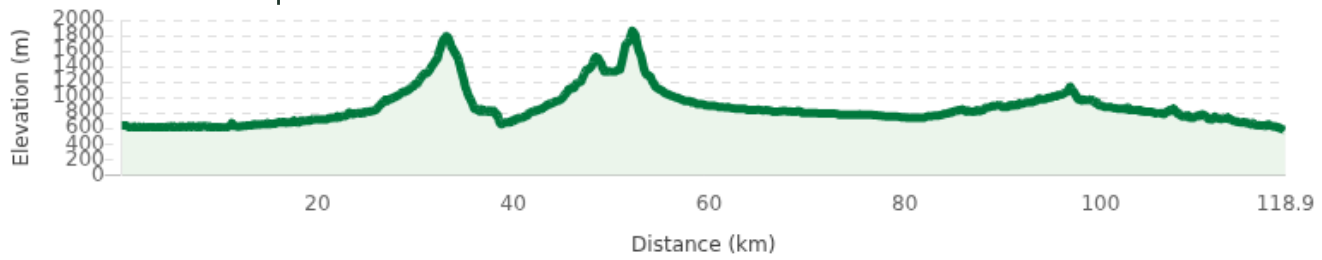
Hanmer Springs

- Hanmer Springs Four Square Supermarket - Conical Hill Rd, Hamner Springs - P: 03 315 7190
- Hanmer Springs Foodway - 45 Amuri Ave, Hamner Springs - P: 03 315 777

Reefton

- SuperValue Supermarket - 65 Broadway, Reefton - P: 03 732 8313
- 4 Four Square Supermarket - 47 Broadway, Reefton - P: 03 732 8888

Track Elevation and Map





More information

Hanmer Springs

Hanmer Springs i-SITE Visitor Centre - 40 Amuri Ave - P: 0800 442 663 - W: www.i-site.org

Reefton

Reefton i-SITE Visitor Centre - 67-69 Broadway, Reefton - P: 03 732 8391 - E: reefton@i-site.org - W: www.i-site.org

Before starting Te Araroa either as a through-walker of the whole country or a section walker, please register on Te Araroa website. Please also visit the website or download the app for detailed maps, trail alerts and other relevant information.

This track is part of the Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa track database. Herenga ā Nuku has maps and advice about public access to the outdoors.

We encourage you to continue gaining the skills and knowledge required for a safe trip. The NZ Mountain Safety Council has lots of free resources and information you can use. These can be accessed via www.mountainsafety.org.nz.

We recommend trying these online learning tools:

- Trip Planning
- Tramping/field Skills
- Basic Navigation
- River Safety

Additionally, check out the range of helpful videos available from the NZ Mountain Safety Council YouTube channel.



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