

# Walks in coastal Marlborough

NELSON MARLBOROUGH



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

# Contents

Introduction	1
How to get there	2
Robin Hood Bay	3
Whites Bay	4
Mt Robertson Track	8
Pukaka Valley	8
Rarangī/Monkey Bay	9
Bluegum Corner	11
Main map	13
Wairau Bar	14
Grovetown Lagoon	16
Wairau Lagoon	16
Marfells Beach/Cape Campbell	19
Isolated Hill Scenic Reserve/Sawcut Gorge	21
Please remember	25
To find out more	26

## Introduction

Eastern Marlborough is an area of rugged mountains and an equally rugged coastline. The Department of Conservation offers a number of recreation opportunities to enjoy in the area ranging from a secluded forested bay through to a sheltered estuary, to more open coast where the great Pacific Ocean sweeps up on to wide-open, shingle beaches.

Camping and walking are the main activities available at these places, with some scope for bird-watching, hunting and swimming. All are within easy reach of Blenheim, the wineries, gourmet food producers and artists of Marlborough.

In Marlborough on public conservation land there is a restricted fire season all year round. Outdoor fires are only possible if you have a fire permit. Contact the South Marlborough Area DOC office (contact details on [page 26](#)) for a permit or for more information.

In this publication the heritage values and recreation opportunities on coastal public conservation land in Marlborough are described as they are linked by State Highway 1.

## How to get there

Bluegum Corner, Rarangi/Monkey Bay, Pukaka Valley, Mt Robertson, Whites Bay and Robin Hood Bay are all accessed from Port Underwood Road.

Port Underwood Road from Whites Bays to Picton is not recommended for caravans.

Follow State Highway 1 to Tuamarina (9 km north of Blenheim or 20 km south of Picton). Turn off and head east via Hunter, Pembers and Rarangi Roads to Rarangi and Monkey Bay. From Rarangi/Monkey Bay the road climbs steeply over hills to Whites Bay and Robin Hood Bay. Whites Bay and the historic cable station is signposted down a short side road off Port Underwood Road.

Information on how to get to the other recreation sites is described in their individual sections.



## Robin Hood Bay

This small bay in Port Underwood, exposed to the southerly swells and storms that occasionally rage up the coast, is popular for fishing and surfing. At the northern end of the bay a flat grass area is an ideal picnic spot. Opposite the picnic area is the historic stud and mud Robin Hood Bay Cottage. Built as a whaler's cottage in 1848, the building is now maintained by members of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and Blenheim Rotary Club.

The basic campsite (no fees) at the southern end of the bay is big enough for eight tent sites. It has a toilet and a water supply from the nearby stream.

### Please remember



Fires are not allowed.



## Whites Bay

This historic and scenic bay provides the only safe swimming beach on the Cloudy Bay coast. It is named after a black American known as Black Jack White who, in 1828, deserted his whaling ship and took up residence with local Māori. They in turn had long used the bay as a base for fishing expeditions in Cook Strait.

In 1866, Whites Bay became the South Island terminus of the inter-island telegraph cable. The original cable station still exists. Some of the original forest also remains, although much

was burned in the early years of European settlement and is still regenerating.

### Things to do

The twenty site camping area has running water from the Pukatea Stream and toilets are provided at each of the three separate camping areas.

The shoreline provides both rocky areas for scrambling and exploring and a near-flat sandy beach that is excellent for swimming, if a little cold.

A network of tracks is also available (see map on [page 7](#)).



Rarangi view

 **Pukatea Walk (10 min)**

From the uppermost camping area the Pukatea Walk meanders down to the cable station alongside Pukatea Stream passing through regenerating forest.

 **Black Jack Track (1h return or 1h 30 min to complete the loop)**

From Whites Bay the track climbs to a superb viewpoint on the edge of a bluff where Port Underwood, Cook Strait and Cape Campbell can be seen. Children need to be closely supervised here. Return the same way or complete a longer, loop option by winding slowly down through regenerating forest.

 **Rarangi-Whites Bay Track (1h one way)**

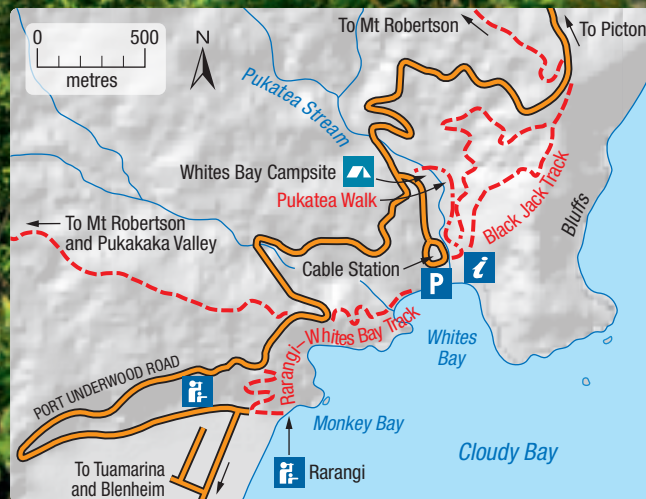
The Rarangi-Whites Bay Track is a tramping track which must be walked both ways unless transport is arranged. It zigzags up from Whites Bay to the Port Underwood Road through a pine plantation, and then follows the road for about 500 m before descending to Rarangi, near the Monkey Bay track (described on [page 10](#)).

Longer, more strenuous walks are available on Mt Robertson (see [page 8](#)).

**Please remember**

 Fees are payable for camping at Whites Bay.

 Fires are not allowed.



Whites Bay Track entrance from Port Underwood Road

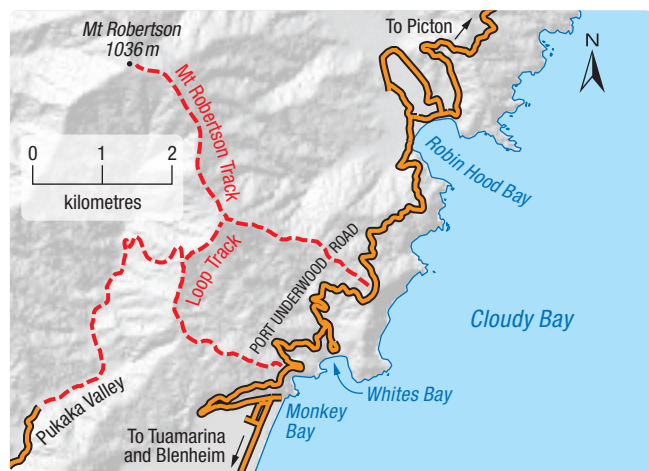
## Mt Robertson Track, 8–9 h return



Access onto the Mt Robertson Track is from the Loop Track (tramping track standard) and is well signposted from two access points on the Port Underwood Road (see the map below). The Loop Track climbs through regenerating and mature forest to a junction at about 700 metres altitude where the Mt Robertson Track begins. From here the track follows an obvious ridge to the summit through beech forest. This last section of the track takes about two hours. There is no water supply on the track so make sure you take water with you.

At 1036 metres above sea level, Mt Robertson (Toko Maru) dominates the Scenic Reserve to which it gives its name.

For a longer trip, with the added reward of starting from sea level, begin your ascent from either Whites Bay or Rarangi using the tracks described above to get to the loop track starting points.



## Pukaka Valley

### How to get there

Access is via the unsealed Pukaka Road that leaves Pembers Road about halfway between Tuamarina and Rarangi. The car park is 17 km from Blenheim.



Rarangi Recreation Reserve

This forested valley is part of Mount Robertson Scenic Reserve and provides good tramping and hunting opportunities and gives an alternative access to the Loop and Mt Robertson Tracks.

### To the Loop and Mt Robertson Tracks

From the car park follow the track up Pukaka Stream, crossing it in several places. Eventually the track leaves the stream and climbs up to the Loop Track.

From the car park allow three hours to Whites Bay and five hours to Mt Robertson summit.

## Rarangi/Monkey Bay

This coastal reserve has opportunities for both day and overnight visitors. Please keep all vehicles on the maintained driveways as the grassed area between the highway and the reserve is soft and vehicles easily get stuck.



Rarangi Recreation Reserve

## Things to do

This reserve on the coastline is a popular camping site. Camping is subject to a maximum stay of seven days onsite at any one time. Fees are payable to stay here and are to be deposited in the iron ranger at the self registration kiosk.



### Monkey Bay Walk (20 min return)

This short walk leads from the northern end of Rarangi Beach around a rocky point and into Monkey Bay, with its small beach. A lookout point near the beginning of the track offers good views and has signs explaining the way that sea currents have formed Rarangi beach over thousands of years.





Walkers on the Monkey Bay Track

## Bluegum Corner

This community managed amenity area, still being developed, is an interesting place to stop. A large rock with two spy holes drilled in it give direct views of the sunrise as it comes up on the horizon on 1 January each year, and Tapuae-o-Uenuku at 2885 metres is the first peak in the South Island to get the sun.

## Map key

	Road		Hut		Car park
	Walking track		Campsite		Boat ramp
	Tramping track		Information		Lookout
	Route				

## 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. **Safety is your responsibility.**

### Walking track

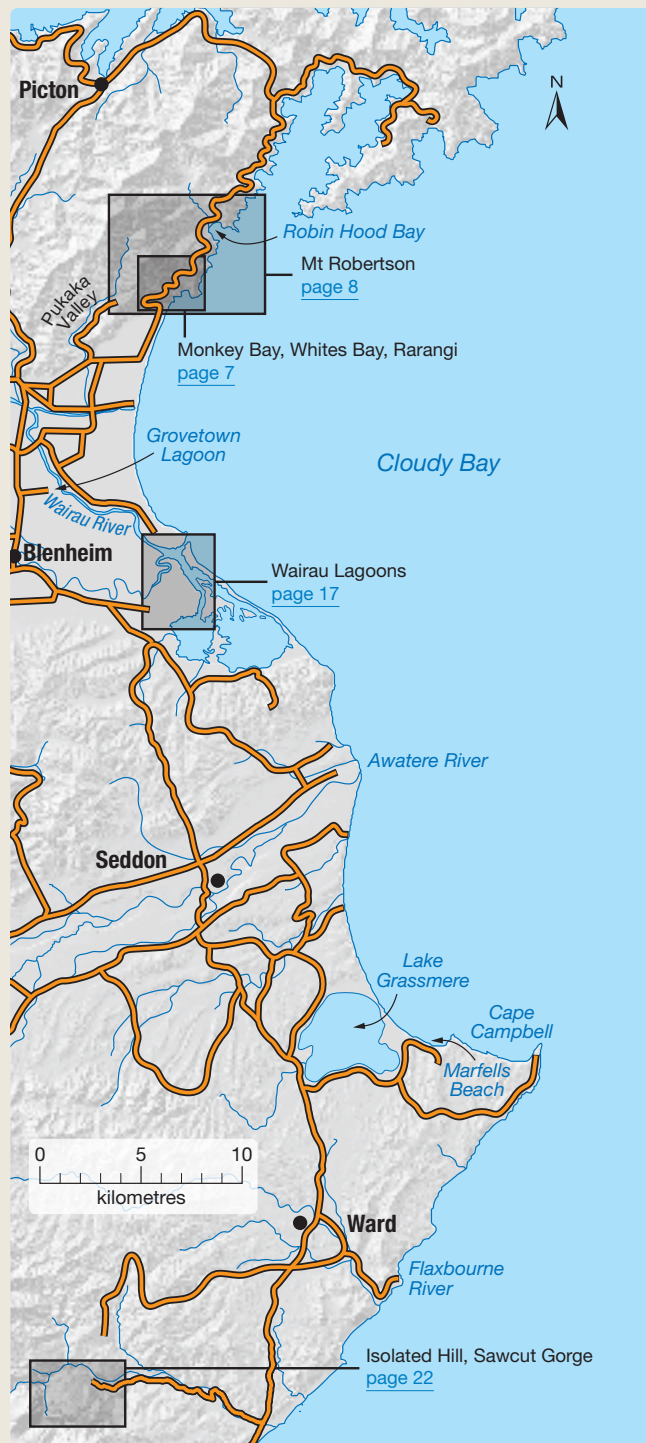
- Easy to moderate walking from a few minutes to a day.
- Track is mostly well formed, some sections may be steep, rough or muddy.
- Suitable for people with low to moderate fitness and abilities.
- Clearly signposted. Stream and river crossings are bridged.
- Walking shoes or light tramping/hiking boots required.

### 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.

### Route

- Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking.
- Track unformed and natural, rough, muddy or very steep.
- Suitable for people with above average fitness. High-level backcountry skills and experience, including navigation and survival skills required.
- Complete self-sufficiency required.
- Track has markers, poles or rock cairns. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.
- Sturdy tramping/hiking boots required.





## Wairau Bar

At the Wairau Bar the Wairau River, northern most of the great rivers draining the Southern Alps, pours into the sea. This is a dramatic place of many moods, where sometimes both river and sea are churned into a fury by flood and storm.

Until an earthquake in 1855 lowered much of the Wairau Plain, the bar was port and major point of entry to Blenheim. However as a consequence of the earthquake the Opawa River deepened and provided better boat access to the heart of the town (which was then known as Beavertown). Flat bottomed scows plied their trade up the Opawa well into the twentieth century.

“The Beaver”, and later on “Beaver Station”, were early names for what is now Blenheim. The reference to Beavers comes from Marlborough’s historical tendency to flood—often!

Fortunately now the region’s network of drainage and stop banks as well as climate change has changed all that. Now Blenheim is now known for its sunny and notoriously dry climate.

Today the bar and river mouth area is popular for sea fishing and white baiting. A natural sandy area near the wharf on the Wairau River provides a launching point for an excursion on the river, lagoon or sea. There is a toilet near the river mouth and some shelter is provided by trees.

### Please remember



Camping is not permitted at this site.



Please observe fishing regulations and take only what you need from the sea and river.

## Grovetown Lagoon

In 2002 a group comprising local iwi, Marlborough District Council, DOC, Nelson Marlborough Fish and Game Council, New Zealand Landcare Trust and the Grovetown community started a project aimed at restoring the Grovetown Lagoon. The aim of this group is to restore the lagoon to enhance the habitat for fish and bird life and to enable gathering of food and encourage recreational use.

The Grovetown Lagoon is an oxbow loop of the Wairau River. While quite highly modified, it is one of the largest remaining areas of natural value on the Wairau Plain with areas of open water, swampy ground, ground springs and adjoining land. Local iwi value the lagoon for its resource for food and plant material. Sadly the lagoon has been altered and degraded over time.

This recreation reserve close to Blenheim on State Highway 1 makes an ideal place to visit for a family picnic. If you are interested helping with this project contact the Marlborough District Council in Blenheim or Department of Conservation.

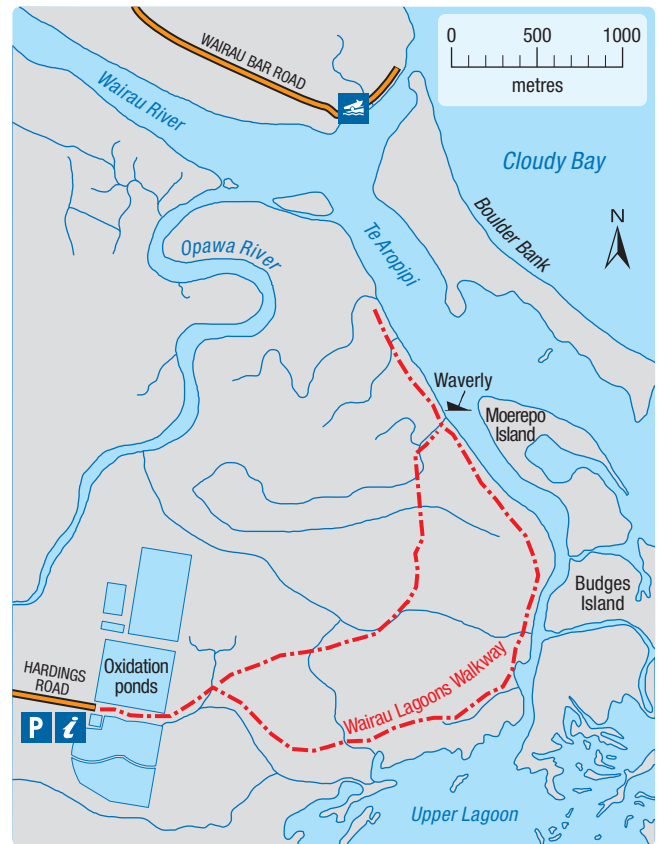
### Please remember

  No camping and no fires.

## Wairau Lagoon

This is one of few places along the eastern coast of the South Island where it is possible to enjoy the richness and unique beauty of a large estuary. Estuaries are rich and productive places. They play important roles as breeding and living places for many bird and fish species and can help reduce the effects of flooding when high tides prevent rivers from emptying into the sea.

The Wairau lagoons have formed over the last 6,500 years behind an 8 kilometre-long boulder bank created from gravel and stones washed up the coast by sea currents. Water from the surrounding hills gathers behind the boulder bank and combines with the tide flushing in and out each day. Specialised plants and animals have colonised habitats between the high and low water marks, some of which are more 'productive' than the best pasture.



This productivity drew Māori to the lagoons to find food and it is thought that some of the channels have been made or extended to help trap eels and moulting birds. Evidence from the boulder bank confirms some early occupation camps were made there and where the now-extinct moa were hunted and eaten.

### How to get there

The main access point is from the end of Hardings Road, which leaves State Highway 1, 5 km south of Blenheim. There is a car park and information.

### Things to do



#### Wairau Lagoons Walkway (3h loop)

This three-hour walk gives an insight into the lagoons and the habitat they provide. The walk is, unlike most walks in New Zealand, virtually flat. It makes a loop from the car park



Marfells Beach

along the shoreline of the upper lagoon and past Budges and Moerepo Islands to the lagoons' main channel where the rusting hulk of the Waverley sits in the mud. The Waverley was towed from Wellington by the SS Wairau to the mouth of the Wairua River, where she was to be sunk to form a breakwater. Before being scuttled, she was swept up the channel in a flood to where she now lies in the Wairau Lagoons.

There are plenty of birds to see here and a bird book and pair of binoculars would be a useful addition to your equipment.

Return either the same way or, more directly, across the saltmarsh area, with its salt resistant plants. Alternatively, it is possible to continue beyond the Waverley for a view of the river.

### Please remember



There is no fresh water here so carry some with you on the hot, dry days that characterise Marlborough's summer. There is also a lack of shade trees, which means the lagoons walk is exposed to sun, driving wind and rain.



To hunt waterfowl you require a Fish & Game New Zealand game bird licence and a specific DOC hunting permit. Fish & Game New Zealand game bird licences

are obtainable from sports shops, Fish & Game New Zealand or go to [www.fishandgame.org.nz](http://www.fishandgame.org.nz).

For a specific DOC hunting permit, contact the South Marlborough DOC office in Renwick. For the DOC permit you will be asked to produce your Fish & Game New Zealand game bird licence and if you plan to take a hunting dog you will also need to produce your dog registration number.

## Marfells Beach/Cape Campbell

### How to get there

The turnoff to Marfells Beach is 36 km south of Blenheim via State Highway 1. The beach is a further 8 km down Marfells Road.


This small coastal reserve has a long history as a public recreation area, starting in 1925 when the Marfell family exchanged land with the crown for that purpose. The reserve has since been extended and the facility improved and is managed by DOC as a picnic and camping area.

Fishing off Marfells Beach and bird watching in nearby Lake Grassmere are popular activities.


While Lake Grassmere still offers good bird-watching opportunities, it also produces about half of New Zealand's annual salt requirements—60,000 tonnes. The salt works have come a long way from their beginnings in 1943 when the salt was harvested in wheelbarrows and washed in a concrete mixer. Guided tours for school groups and bus tours can be made by prior arrangement. Call (03) 575 7021 for more information.

### Things to do

 An unmarked route follows the beach from the eastern end of the camping area to Cape Campbell, the southernmost extreme of Cook Strait. The striking lighthouse there is the second, built in 1903 to replace the original built in 1870. Allow a full day for this walk and be aware that spring high tides can block access around the foot of bluffs along the way.

 Please check tide timetables before you go. Above the high tide line, land beyond the first headland is private land.

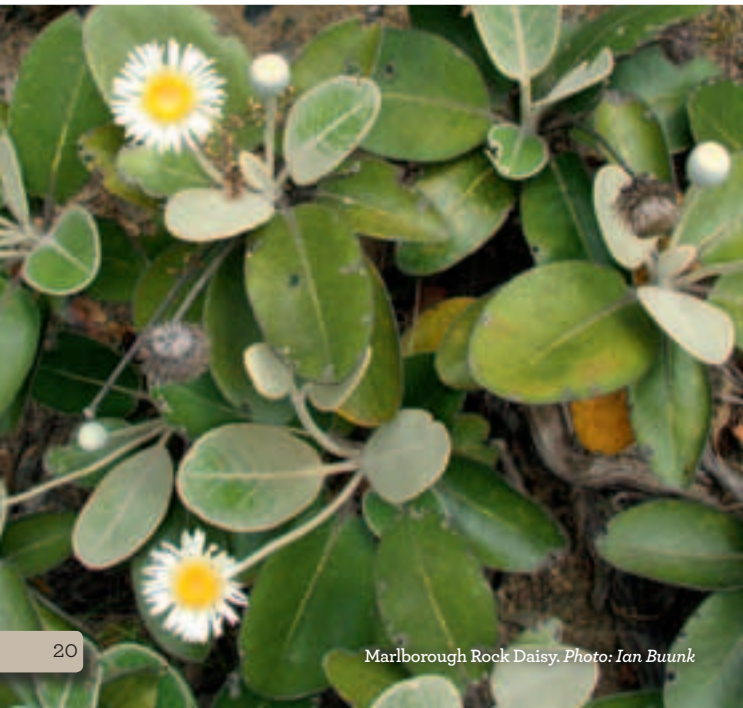
### Please remember

 Fees are payable for camping at Marfell's Beach. Deposit all fees at the self registration kiosk.

  Fires and dogs are not allowed.



Sawcut Gorge Route. Photo: D Parr



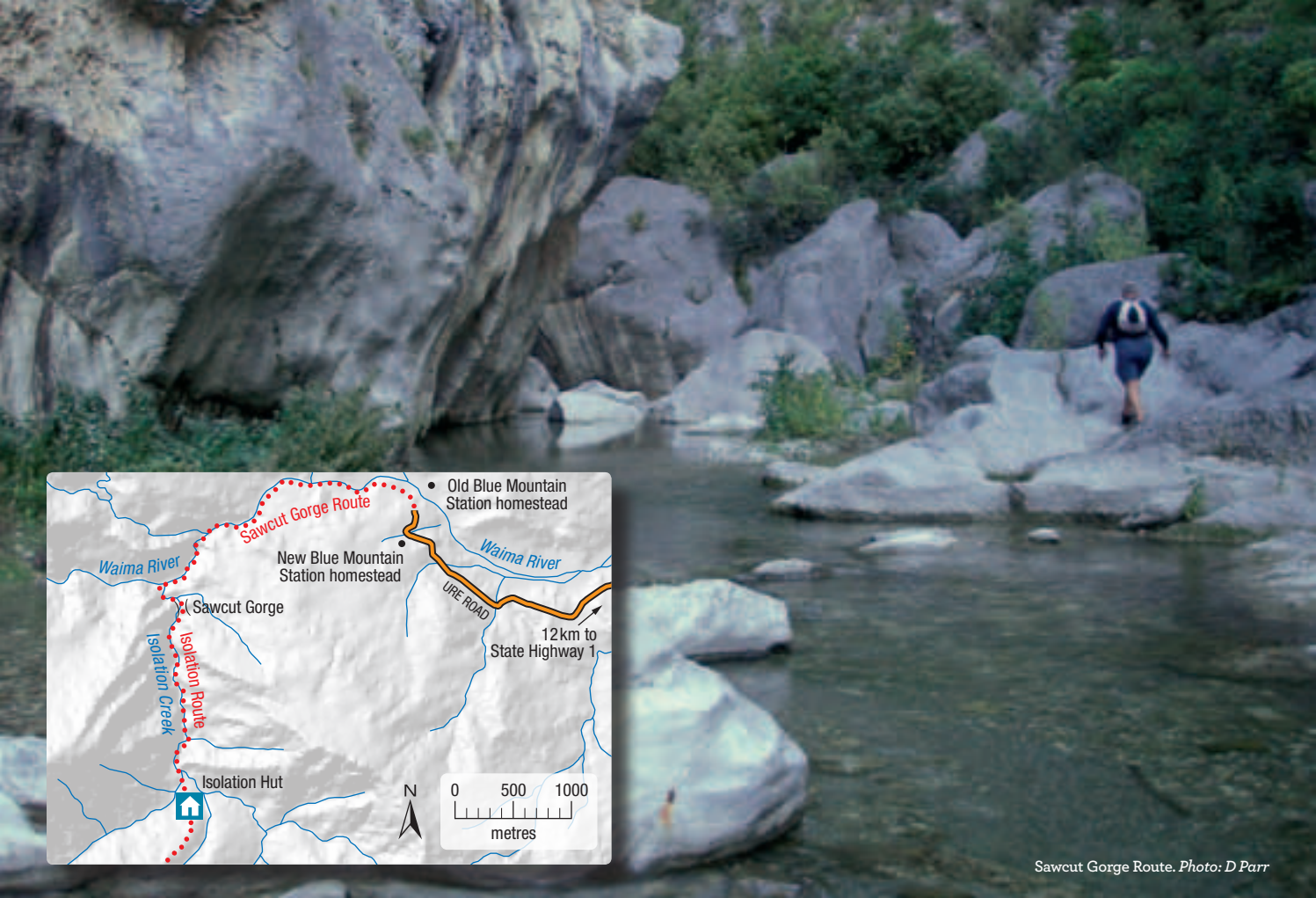
Marlborough Rock Daisy. Photo: Ian Buunk

## Isolated Hill Scenic Reserve/ Sawcut Gorge

Isolated Hill Scenic Reserve is typical South Marlborough: rugged bluffs and steep, dry hills drained by stony rivers. This is a geologically and botanically interesting area that invites exploration by experienced walkers and hunters.

The vegetation varies from beech forest to tussock grasslands, while some of Marlborough's unique and/or threatened plants cling tenaciously to the steep rock walls. Intensive goat, possum and weed control programmes are undertaken in this reserve to protect these plants.

Much of the rock here is stark white limestone, interspersed with grey wedges of argillite, sandstone and mudstone. Several pools along Isolated Creek smell distinctly of sulphur.



Sawcut Gorge Route. Photo: D Parr

## How to get there

Turn off State Highway 1 on the north side of the Waima River Bridge 55 km south of Blenheim (72 km north of Kaikoura) into the Waima/Ure Valley and follow the narrow gravel road with steep drop offs in places, up to its end at Blue Mountain Station, 12 kilometres from State Highway 1.

The access into this area is through private property; please respect this by leaving the gates as you find them and parking appropriately. 2WD vehicles must angle park right to the edge of the drive in the car park at Blue Mountain Station homestead. 4WD vehicles may go down to the lower car park or onto the riverbed but are not to cross the river. The long drop public toilet is located just above the lower car park.

## Things to do



### Sawcut Gorge Route (3 h return)

The marked route starts from the riverbed. From here, look out for the distinctive orange triangles directing walkers in and out of the riverbed. Some are large and are nailed to a post while others are smaller and usually nailed to a tree branch. After 45 minutes' to an hour's walking and crossing the river several times you arrive at the reserve boundary. From here the route leaves the riverbed for a short while then meets Isolated Creek. After 30 minutes you reach the spectacular Sawcut Gorge. The stream flows through this chasm, which is 150 metres deep, but in places, is only two metres wide. Look for plants clinging to the bluff outcrops, notably the Marlborough rock daisy.



### Isolation Route (2h 30 min one way)

Follow the route from the Blue Mountain Station car park to Sawcut Gorge (1h 30 min).

Beyond the gorge the marked route continues in the riverbed for an hour to Isolation Hut (6 bunks). From here further marked routes give opportunities for exploring the surrounding hills and vegetation, for hunting or a climb up Ben More (1244 m).

Trampers staying in Isolation Hut are asked to write their name on the white board at Blue Mountain Station and sign the visitor's book. This is to allow other trampers to see who is in the area and staying in the hut and whether they need to carry a tent.

### Please remember



Follow the instructions of the Blue Mountain Station owners on the sign attached to the gate as you enter their property.

Backcountry Hut tickets or a Backcountry Hut Pass are required to stay overnight in the DOC huts in the area.



Any trip in this area is a serious undertaking due to the hazards of rising rivers and falling rocks. There are no tracks as such and the riverbed is rocky. Anyone venturing off the marked route should carry Topo50 map BS28 Kekerengu.



Hunters require a DOC hunting permit **and** permission from the Blue Mountain Station owners (D & L Buick, Private Bag, Blenheim. Phone (03) 575 6729).



Dogs are not allowed without a Dog Access permit **and** permission of the Blue Mountain Station owners.



Hunting is not allowed from sunset on the 22 December to sunrise on the 9 February each year.

The reserve is subject to pesticide control, check a current pesticide summary that is available from the South Marlborough Area Office or [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz).

## Please remember



### Fire

Marlborough has a dry climate and fire is a significant hazard to human safety, natural areas and farming. In Marlborough there is a restricted fire season all year round. Outdoor fires are only possible if you have a fire permit. Portable cookers should be used in the outdoors.



### Rubbish

Please take your rubbish away with you—no facilities are provided.



### Dogs

Dogs are not allowed at Whites Bay or Marfells Beach.



### Drinking water

The purity of drinking water cannot be assured unless it has been boiled, filtered or treated.



### Safety

Use the track classification system to choose an activity that suits your experience and equipment. Hot, dry conditions and strong cold winds are both common in this area.



To report any safety hazards in the outdoors call **DOC HOTline 0800 362 468**. For fire and search and rescue call 111.



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)

## To find out more

For further information contact:

**Department of Conservation  
South Marlborough Area Office**

Gee Street, Renwick 7204

PO Box 51, Renwick 7243

Ph: (03) 572 9100

Fax: (03) 572 8824

Email: [southmarlboroughao@doc.govt.nz](mailto:southmarlboroughao@doc.govt.nz)

or

**Kaikoura i-SITE Visitor Centre**

West End

Kaikoura 7300

Ph: (03) 319 5641

Fax: (03) 319 6819

Email: [info@kaikoura.co.nz](mailto:info@kaikoura.co.nz)

or

[www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

Published by:

Department of Conservation  
Nelson Marlborough Conservancy  
Private Bag 5, Nelson 7042  
New Zealand

February 2012

Crown copyright

*Cover photo: Sawcut Gorge;  
unless otherwise shown,  
photos: Chip Warren.*

**New Zealand Government**



**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**

**Report any safety hazards  
or conservation emergencies  
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111**