

Aotea Track

Located in Great Barrier Island/Aotea in the Auckland region

The Aotea Track offers a range of spectacular landscapes, superb views and rich history.

Travel over streams that show off a constant spectacle of beautiful native bush; tranquil wetlands; and the surviving forests of kauri, rimu and kahikatea with their special plants and wildlife.

The track is a combination of easy walking tracks, boardwalks, steep climbs, stairways and bridges. It's suitable for reasonably fit beginners or experienced trampers.

Taking in the epic view from the Aotea Track.
Image: Andris Apse ©



View you'll see from the Aotea Track on Great Barrier Island. Image: Andris Apse ©



View from Mt Heale Hut,
Great Barrier Island
Image: Andris Apse ©



Admiring the view from
Hirakimata/Mt Hobson,
Great Barrier Island
Image: Andris Apse ©



Enjoying the view on the
Aotea Track boardwalk
Image: Andris Apse ©



Swing bridge on the
Aotea Track
Image: Andris Apse ©



Walking the Aotea Track
Image: Andris Apse ©



About this track

Walking options

- For a 1 night trip, stay at Mt Heale Hut
- For a 2 night trip, stay at Mt Heale Hut then carry on to Kaiaraara Hut or campsites along the way
- Walk the track in reverse to the description below and end with a soak in hot pools

Hot Springs to Mt Heale Hut

Time: 3 hr - 3 hr 30 min

A paddle or soak in the Kaitoke Hot Springs is one of the highlights of the Aotea Track

Starting from Whangaparapara Road, the Kaitoke Hot Springs Track begins flat and easy, following an ancient shoreline.



Follow the boardwalks across the unique Kaitoke Wetlands and listen out for the call of a fernbird or spotless crane, or maybe spot the orchids and sundews close to the track. Enjoy the hotpools but take care - they might be too hot in places.

After a brief steep climb and descent, join Tramline Track North, which harbours reminders of the toil of loggers 80 years ago. Peach Tree Track soon appears on the left and you climb steadily through the regenerating forest to reach Mt Heale Hut.

Given a clear evening, the striking sunsets over Hauturu/Little Barrier Island make the journey all worthwhile.

Windy Canyon to Mt Heale Hut

Time: 3 hr - 3 hr 30 min

Alternative access to the Mt Heale Hut is possible from the east, via Windy Canyon and Palmers Track, accessed from Aotea Road at the top of Whangapoua Hill. This section is fully bridged and is the shortest and easiest option for the first day. Here a steady climb takes you through the sheer rock faces of Windy Canyon with superb views of Okiwi Basin and Whangapoua estuary to the north, and Kaitoke and Medlands Bay to the east.

On the ridge still stands the 'wooden horse', a sturdy H-frame used for winching logs up and over the saddle, before sending them down the other side on their way to the sea.

The track follows the ridge, offering constantly changing vistas in every direction, before an impressive set of steps and stairways leads you to the summit. From here take South Fork Track along and down to Mt Heale Hut.

Mt Heale Hut. Category: Serviced Facilities:
20 bunk beds, cooking, mattresses
Bookings required

Consider taking a side trip to the Mt Hobson (Hirakimata) summit for a 360° panoramic view. (30 mins return). Hirakimata is home to rare species such as kākā, kākāriki, tomtit/miromiro, black petrel/tāiko, and recently re-introduced North Island robin/ pītoitoi. The beautiful endemic Great Barrier tree daisy and tiny sundews like it here as well. Wooden steps closer to the summit protect the black petrel nesting grounds and sensitive ecosystems.



Mt Heale Hut to Kaiaraara Hut

Time: 3 hr

Follow the signs to Kaiaraara Track. The track is a steep downhill track with 15 bridges including 3 suspension bridge. The summit track is an easy tramping track with many stairs going downhill and the rest of the Kaiaraara track is of day visitor standard

Several kauri dams were built in this area in the 1920s to transport timber from the mountain to the sea. An estimated 7 million feet of timber was slid into the dams. Once loaded, the dams were tripped one after the other so a full blast hit the lower dam, propelling the logs into Kaiaraara Bay. The foundation timbers still remain in place but unfortunately the Kauri Dam was washed away in a storm in June 2014

Kaiaraara Hut: Category: Serviced
Facilities: 28 bunk beds, heating, mattresses
Bookings required



Kaiaraara Hut to Whangaparapara Road

Time: 4 hr

The last day is an easy grade route with no major climbs following Forest Road. Enjoy the beautiful bush and mountain views on route including Maungapiko Lookout, Kauri Tree Route (a small stand of impressive large kauri trees), as well as extensive vistas of the bays to the west.

From Forest Road follow the historic Tramline Track to The Green campsite. On the way, a 5 minute detour to Kauri Falls is an excellent waterfall swimming opportunity. You can camp at The Green campsite at Whangaparapara or exit onto Whangaparapara Road.



Boardwalk through Kaitoke Wetland
with Te Ahumata in the background

Nature and conservation

Keep an eye out for the following on the walk:

- Chevron skink, one of NZ's most endangered lizards. They can grow up to 30cm long.
- North Island kaka. Large brown noisy parrots are often seen flying high above the forest canopy, their raucous call is part of the island's atmosphere.
- Banded Rail, often mistaken for baby weka, are a common site.
- Black Petrel, North Island Robin and tomtit also inhabit the slopes of the highest point Hirakimata.



The native forest is regenerating after a history of land clearance and kauri logging. Three plant species found only on the island are found along the track:

- Great Barrier tree daisy
- prostrate kānuka
- subspecies of hebe

History and culture

The kauri forests were logged with increasing intensity between the 1880s and early 1930s. Much of the Aotea Track follows old kauri logging and milling tramway routes. A few areas of original kauri forest survived, one area being the summit and surrounds of Hirakimata.

Know before you go

Experience required: moderate fitness

Dog access

Dogs with a DOC permit for recreational hunting or management purposes only.

Help stop kauri dieback

- Kauri dieback disease is killing our native kauri. It spreads by soil movement, but you can help prevent it.
- Stay away from kauri tree roots.
- Clean your gear before and after visiting kauri forest.

Protect our wildlife

- Check - your gear for pests, eg. rodents, insects, skinks
- Clean - footwear and gear, removing soil and seeds
- Seal - ensure your gear is zipped up (no open bags)

What to expect

- walk 10 - 25 km
- carry a pack
- some steep climbs
- many steps and stairways
- hot sun and high UV
- rain and colder temperatures
- slippery portions of track

What to take

- tramping boots are recommended
- sunscreen
- raincoat/jacket
- clothing for hot, wet and cold weather
- sleeping bag
- drink bottle
- first aid kit
- food
- cooking and eating utensils
- torch/batteries
- matches and candles

Before you go into the outdoors, tell someone your plans and leave a date to raise the alarm if you haven't returned.