

THE ST JAMES WALKWAY

A five day, 66 km long walkway, well benched and marked with an excellent series of huts. It winds through pastoral land, beech forests and over the sub-alpine Ada Pass [998 metres] and Anne Saddle [1136 metres]. It was built by the NZ Walkway Commission and runs through the Lewis Pass National reserve, St James Station (one of NZ's largest), Lake Sumner Forest Park and Glenhope Station.

Bird life includes parakeets, kea, brown creeper, [yellowhead](#), grey warbler, rifleman, [South Is robin](#), tui, [bellbird](#), [fantail](#) and [tomtit](#). Most common are the [paradise ducks](#), [geese](#) and pipits, rarest are great spotted kiwi. [[blue](#) = seen] The most noticeable fauna is the sandfly. Edible flora on the track include the elongated black juicy kotukutuku berry, the deep red-black makomako (Wineberry), red but tasteless Supplejack berries, the sweet juicy yellow fruit of bush lawyer, the currant-like fruit of the coprosma shrubs, the fleshy red stalk supporting the green seeds of the snow totara and the five-lobed, white, red or pink fruit of the snowberry. Poisonous plants include the waxy-white pointed fruit of the pinatoro (native daphne *Pimelea prostrata*) and all parts, particularly the black berries (hanging in clusters), of the tutu (*Coriaria*).

DAY ONE

Lewis Pass entrance to Cannibal Gorge Hut (7 km, 3½ hours).

The track begins at the picturesque tarn and picnic area on the east side of State Highway 7, near the top of Lewis Pass [5 minutes from the Maruia Hot Pools and pub]. An intentions book located a short distance along the walkway should be filled in. Follow the Tarn Nature Walk (boardwalk) skirting the tarn, pass the Rolleston Pack Track then take the north-east (right) fork following the old pack track. The track enters the Mountain then Red Beech forest and zig zags steadily down to Cannibal Gorge and the Maruia River. Cannibal Gorge or Kapaio-kai-tangata (a good feed of people) is named after the massacre and feast that occurred here when a Ngai Tahu party was trapped by the Ngati Tumatakokiri.

A huge swingbridge crosses Cannibal Gorge to the true right (west) bank of the Maruia River and, in half an hour, passes Phil's Knob (an excellent lookout point). A staircase helps one around the knob. The track sidles above the gorge (actually in and out of numerous gullies) and eventually emerges onto a large grassy flat just downstream from Cannibal Gorge Hut [20 bunks].

DAY TWO

Cannibal Gorge Hut to Ada Pass Hut (3 km, 1½ hours).

Ada Pass Hut to Christopher Hut (10.5 km, 4½ hours)

From the hut the walkway follows the Maruia River through beech forests and across grassy alpine flats, climbing gradually to the Ada Pass Hut. In winter, avalanches may cross the section of the walkway between Cannibal Gorge Bridge and Ada Pass Hut and caution should be exercised. A short, steep climb up a (pretty if one is going the other way) bush-clad terrace then around a slip takes one to Ada Pass Flats, where there are views back down the valley, and of Gloriana Peak to the north. A swing bridge over the Maruia River takes one to the hut [20 bench/stove], described as the most attractive on the entire walkway [I disagree], where there is a good view up onto the rock basins of the Spenser range.

From the hut the walkway passes through (intermittent) lush beech forest across Ada Pass [998 metres], fording the Maruia River/stream along the way. A large sign indicating the start of the St James Station (173,340 hectares, about half the size of South Taranaki, although it has been as large as 800,000 hectares, which is bigger than all Taranaki). The walkway now descends into the Ada Valley. The beech forest is gradually replaced by open areas of tussock and grasses with patches of forest (mountain beech). Small tarns along the way provide pleasant places for lunch stops. Yellow-orange discs at the edges of clearings mark where the walkway goes into forest areas. Watch out for cattle, wild horses and abundant bird life. The walkway continues along the true right bank of the Ada River crossing several avalanche paths. The Spenser Mountains (Gloriana Peak 2214m & Faerie Queene 2236m) are spectacular.

Two hours from the Ada Pass the track emerges from beech forest to flats. At the confluence of the Ada and Christopher Rivers the walkway passes the historic Old Ada Cullers Hut (1956, 4 man). Christopher Hut [20 bunks (more like 12)/stove] is a further 10-15 minute walk from here, close to the edge of the bush, about 350m from the Ada River with a good view of the Waiiau Valley. The majestic 'Wild' horses and cattle of St James Station are often seen around this area.

DAY THREE

Christopher Hut to Anne Hut (15 kilometres, 5 hours)

From the Christopher Hut the walkway follows the valley on the true right bank of the Ada River to where the river runs hard up against the bottom of a hill about 1½ km above the Ada Homestead. The defined walkway starts here and eventually joins up with a vehicle track. There is little shade if it is hot. The Ada homestead across the river is private property (a St James outstation) and the owner's privacy should be respected. [Of interest to some of us is the pass at the top of the (private) Waiau Valley drops down to Lake Constance in the Nelson Lakes National Park]. The vehicle track continues to where the Henry River meets the Waiau Valley. From here the walkway keeps to the lower slopes of Mt Federation, passing through matagouri (Matabloodygouri) thickets and some open rolling (undulating) and swampy ground [and flocks of paradise ducks] to eventually sidle up a terrace to the 4WD track. The walkway heads west (the right fork) on the 4WD track and within half an hour fords the Jackson Stream, leaving the 4WD track and crossing a swingbridge over the Henry River. The walkway follows the true right river bank, then rejoins the vehicle track as it gently climbs to Irishman Flat then descends to a footbridge over the Anne River next to Anne Hut [20 bunks more like 12] and an old 4 man shelter. This hut has an emergency radio. If the weather is good and water levels normal, one can save some time and climbing by following the vehicle track all the way to the hut, bypassing the track and bridge near Jackson Stream.

DAY FOUR

Anne Hut to Boyle Flats Hut (15 km, 7 hours), through St James Station and into Lake Sumner Forest Park.

The walkway follows the true left bank of the Anne River for about 2 kilometres to a large terrace of red tussock where a footbridge gives access to the true right bank of the river. The walkway climbs steadily (fording the Kia stream halfway) to Anne Saddle (1136 metres). A short climb up the ridge north of the saddle brings one to a clearing with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains (Opera Range) and the Boyle Valley. From the saddle the walkway drops steeply (210m in 2 km) into the Boyle valley where markers indicate where the walkway crosses the river flats. At several points the track climbs high above the river to avoid flood conditions so if the water level is normal, it is far easier and quicker to ford the river and continue along its banks. Rokeby Hut [2 or 3 bunks] is an old shelter and not particularly desirable. The walkway continues down the true left river bank to a swingbridge across the Boyle River below the Boyle Flats Hut [20 bunks/wood stove] sitting on an open sunny river terrace.

If the hut is crowded, it is a further hour to the turnoff to the 7-9 bed Magdalene Hut (with "character"), delightfully secluded in a bush clearing 15 minutes down the track. Lots of mistletoe on the beech trees.

DAY FIVE

Boyle Flats Hut to Boyle Village and main road (14.5 km, 5 hours)

After recrossing the swingbridge to the true left bank of the river head south where there are red & white markers through the tussock grass of Boyle Flat to the start of the Boyle River Gorge. A swingbridge crosses the Boyle River and the walkway continues through the forest up onto terraces 150m above the river flats, crossing several small gullies until it reaches another swingbridge. The river flats are private, land, part of the Glenhope Station and should not be crossed. Unless one wants to visit the 9 bed Magdalene Hut (1 km, 15 min), cross the bridge and follow the true right (west) bank into the broad Magdalene Valley. The final part of the walkway passes through 7 km of river flats and regenerating forest (including kowhai) and a few sheep on the northern side of the Boyle to a swing bridge and then a short stretch parallel to St Andrews Station Rd to finish at Boyle Village, and the Lewis Pass Highway.

Sources:

1. AA "Book of New Zealand Walkways" Lansdowne Press 1982
2. DoC "St James & Lewis Pass" Trackmap 335-06 Edition 1 1996
3. DoC "St James Walkway" 50cent brochure
4. DuFresne J & Williams J "Tramping in New Zealand" 3rd Edition Lonely Planet 1995
5. Pickering M "New Zealand's Top Ten Tracks" Heinemann Reed 1990
6. Pickering M & Smith R "101 Great Tramps in New Zealand" Reed 1998
7. Spearpoint G "Walking to the Hills" Reed Methuen 1985

Editor: Keith Blayney 2002