

Aotea Track

Aotea Conservation Park
Great Barrier Island/Aotea

Huts and campsites

Two well-positioned huts allow for manageable walks of 3 to 4 hours over the 3-day walk. **Mt Heale Hut**, opened in December 2010, provides spectacular views over the Hauraki Gulf and Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island, sits on the central ridge a half-hour walk from Mt Hobson (Hirakimata), the island’s high point. This 20-bed hut has excellent sleeping and gas cooking facilities.

Kaiaraara Hut is near sea level on the western side of the island. This is a 28-bed hut and has a wood burner and gas cooking facilities. It is 3 km from a general store, burger bar and Information Centre at Port Fitzroy.

Six Department of Conservation (DOC) campsites are spread throughout the island. **Akapoua** and **The Green** are the nearest campsites to the Aotea Track entrances, providing places to camp the night before or after walking the track. The other four campsites are further

from the track and require transport, or a long road walk, to the track starting point. See www.doc.govt.nz for more campsites details.

It is essential to book huts and campsites in advance – see Booking information and fees.

Rubbish

There is no free rubbish collection on Aotea/Great Barrier Island. DOC only provides recycling bins for bottles, cans and plastics at campgrounds during the summer peak season.

You should take your own rubbish to the Claris landfill site.

There is also a rubbish truck, which only accepts orange rubbish bags that are available from camp hosts at DOC campgrounds (\$4 each).

Booking information and fees

Bookings in advance are essential for all huts and campsites. All prices include GST.

Bookings can also be made at the Visitor Centre, 137 Quay Street, Princess Wharf, Auckland.
Phone: 09 379 6476
www.doc.govt.nz

Huts

Adult \$15.00 per night
Child (age 5–17) \$7.50 per night
Child (under 5) free

Campsites

Adults \$15 per night
Child (age 5–17) \$7.50 per night
Child (under 5) free

Budget accommodation providers

Backpackers

Great Barrier Lodge
Whangaparapara – 09 429 0488

Crossroads Backpackers
Claris – 09 429 0889

The Wiltshire
Claris – 09 429 0773

Sunbeam Sanctuary
Okupu – 09 429 0349

Medlands Beach Backpackers
Medlands – 09 429 0320

Orama Oasis Accommodation and Backpackers
Karaka Bay – 09 429 0063

For more accommodation options

Pick up a Great Barrier Island Visitor Information Guide or visit www.thebarrier.co.nz

Transport operators – getting there

Barrier Airlines
Phone: 0800 900 600 (call free); 09 275 9120 (Auckland); 09 429 0257 (Great Barrier Island).
www.barrierair.kiwi

FlyMySky Airline
Phone: 0800 222 123 (call free); 09 256 7025 (Auckland).
www.flymysky.co.nz

Sealink
Phone: 09 300 5900 (Auckland) or 0800 SEALINK
www.sealink.co.nz

Transport operators – on the island

Aotea Car Rentals
09 429 0474 or 0800 426 832

Great Barrier Wheels
06 429 0062
www.barrierwheels.co.nz

Go Great Barrier Island
09 4290 222 or 0800 997 222

GBI Shuttle and Transfer Service + GBI Rent-a-Car
09 4290 062 or 027 492 3641

Great Barrier Buses (shuttle/transfer service)
09 4290 474 or 0800 426 832

Medlands Rentals
09 4290 861

Mike Newman (based at Port Fitzroy)
021 876 296 or 09 4290 052

Tryphena Shuttles
027 282 2733

Keep an eye out for black petrel/takoketai

Once widespread on the North Island, breeding colonies of these large, burrow-nesting seabirds are now confined to Aotea and Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island. The main colony breeds here on the slopes of Mt Hobson (Hirakimata) between October and May each year. Mature birds spend months at sea flying as far as South America and only return to the island to breed. Watch out for them on the road at night.

Aotea Track

The Aotea Track is special. It sits within the Aotea Conservation Park – rugged and remote, wild and isolated, yet just a 30 min flight from Auckland. You’ll be captivated by the stunning scenery of this beautiful island at the eastern edge of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

The 25 km Aotea Track loops the central mountainous area and is a manageable 3-day circuit for reasonably fit trampers. The track is a network of easy walking tracks, steep climbs, stairways and bridges. You will travel over a range of spectacular landscapes: 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. Enjoy the superb views from much of the track as you follow the central ridge of the island. You’ll also be able to explore the rich history of Aotea Conservation Park with sites such as the wooden horse and tramline remnants.

Quick facts

- Aotea Track is a 2 night, 3 day walk and has several entry points.
- There are two huts on the walk, Mt Heale and Kaiaraara, both of which need to be booked online at www.doc.govt.nz
- The highest point on the island is Mt Hobson (Hirakimata) at 627 m.

Getting there

Aotea Conservation Park can be reached by boat or plane. Two airlines (Barrier Airlines and Fly My Sky) fly daily between Auckland’s Mangere domestic airport and the main island airfield in Claris. Sealink offers a passenger and car ferry service three or four times a week according to season. Passenger bus and rental car services are available, and entrances to the Aotea Track and Aotea Conservation Park can be accessed by road. (See Transport operators in the *Booking information and fees* section).

Further information

Aotea / Great Barrier Island Base
Private Bag 96002
Great Barrier Island
PO Box 0962

PHONE: 09 429 0044
EMAIL: greatbarrier@doc.govt.nz
www.doc.govt.nz

View living treasures and explore rich history

Many of the reptiles, amphibians and birds on Aotea are now rare or extinct on the mainland. They can be secretive and require patience to spot. Keep an eye out for the following on the walk:

- Chevron skink/niho taniwha – one of New Zealand’s most endangered lizards, they can grow up to 30 cm long.
- North Island kākā – 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/moho pererū – (often mistaken for baby weka) are a common sight.
- Black petrel/takoketai, North Island robin/pitoitoi and tomtit/miromiro also inhabit the slopes of Mt Hobson (Hirakimata).

The native forest on Aotea is regenerating after a history of land clearance and kauri logging. Impressive kauri trees can be seen just a short walk from the Forest Rd section of the track. Three plant species found only on the island are found along the track: the Great Barrier tree daisy, prostrate kānuka, and a subspecies of hebe.

Māori oral history speaks of early occupation, of Ngātiwai and its chief Rehua settling on Aotea and claiming mana whenua over the land in the late 1700s. Being ancestral land, the entire island is sacred to Māori. At its centre stands Mt Hobson (Hirakimata), the maunga tapu (sacred mountain) of Ngāti Rehua.

The kauri forests of Aotea 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. Much of the forest is now regenerating.



Kākā landing in a pohutukava tree.
Photo: Leon Bernard



Chevron skink. Photo: Dirk Veitch



Banded rail/moho pererū.
Photo: Andris Apse



The twin slip swing bridge - Summit track. Photo: Andris Apse



Whangapoua views. Photo: Andris Apse

Published by:
Department of Conservation
DOC Aotea / Great Barrier Island Base
Private Bag 96002
Great Barrier Island 0962
August 2019

Editing and design:
DOC Creative Services,
Conservation House, Wellington

Front and back cover photos: Andris Apse

This publication is produced using paper sourced from well-managed, renewable and legally logged forests.

What to expect

Aotea Track requires a moderate degree of fitness and the ability to carry a pack containing a sleeping bag, cooking and food requirements, and warm clothing. The track is sometimes steep and is scattered with several lengthy stairways. Tramping boots are recommended. Include sunscreen, raincoat/jacket, clothing for hot, wet and cold weather, sleeping bag, drink bottle, first aid kit, food, cooking and eating utensils, torch/batteries, and matches. Be aware of limited cell phone coverage on the track – we recommend downloading NZ Maps GPS app (pro version).

You can expect:

- to walk 10–25 km
- to carry a pack
- some steep climbs
- many steps and stairways
- hot sun and high UV
- rain and colder temperatures
- slippery portions of track
- spectacular panoramas
- stunning bush, mountain and stream views.

Your safety is your responsibility

New Zealand’s backcountry is renowned for its changeable weather and rugged terrain. Be aware that streams and rivers rise quickly on Aotea and be prepared to turn back. Carry food and warm, waterproof clothing, even on short walks.

If you think there is a safety hazard in a conservation area, call the DOC HOTline.

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468
Report any safety hazards or conservation emergencies
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111

Tell someone before you go

Remember to leave details of your trip (return date and time, planned route, party member names and vehicle licence plates) with a trusted contact, and don’t forget to let them know when you return. Information on the Outdoor Intentions System can be found at www.adventuresmart.co.nz

Remember to fill in hut books during your trip, even if you do not stay in the hut. They can assist in search and rescue operations, and may help save your life.

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable ground
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimise the effects of fire
Check before you light a fire – a ban may be in place
- Respect wildlife and farm animals
- Be considerate of others



leave no trace
NEW ZEALAND

Help stop the spread of kauri dieback

When entering existing tracks, use the boot-cleaning stations marked on the map.



KEEP KAURI STANDING
STOP KAURI DIEBACK DISEASE SPREADING
KIA TOITU HE KAURI

Aotea Track description



Kaitoke wetland. Photo: Andris Apse

Day 1:
Hot Springs to Mt Heale Hut
4 hr


Starting from Whangaparapara Road, the Kaitoke 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 hot pools but take care – they may be too hot in places. After a brief, steep climb and descent, join Tramline Track North, which harbours reminders of the toil of loggers and journeys 80 years ago. Peach Tree Track soon appears on the left and you climb steadily through the regenerating forest to reach Mt Heale Hut. On a clear evening the striking sunsets over Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island make the journey all worthwhile.

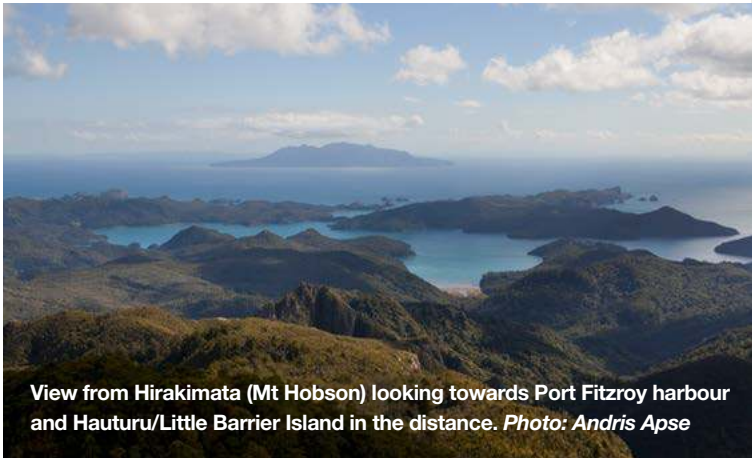


Windy canyon. Photo: Andris Apse

Day 1 (alternative):
Windy Canyon to Mt Heale Hut
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 is the shortest and easiest option for the first day. 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 plummeting 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.

 Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking. Track is mostly unformed, with steep, rough or muddy sections. Suitable for people with above-average fitness. Moderate to high-level backcountry skills and experience, including navigation and survival skills, required. Expect unbridged stream and river crossings.



View from Hiramimata (Mt Hobson) looking towards Port Fitzroy harbour and Hauturu/Little Barrier Island in the distance. Photo: Andris Apse

Day 2:
Mt Heale Hut to Kaiaraara Hut
3 hr

Before starting the descent from Mt Heale Hut to Kaiaraara Hut, consider taking a side trip to the Mt Hobson (Hirakimata) summit for a 360° panoramic view. Hirakimata is home to rare species such as kākā, kākāriki, tomtit/miromiro, black petrel/takoketai, and the 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. This walk is about a 30 min round trip.

Once back at Mt Heale Hut, follow the signs to Kaiaraara Track. The track is a gradual walk downhill crossing one swing bridge and several streams – take care when crossing streams in flood. 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 Kaiarara Bay.



Photo: Andris Apse

Day 3:
Kaiaraara Hut to Whangaparapara Rd
4 hr

The last day is an easy grade route following Forest Road, with no major climbs. Enjoy the beautiful bush and mountain views en 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-min detour to Kauri Falls is an excellent waterfall swimming opportunity.

You can camp at The Green campsite at Whangaparapara or exit onto Whangaparapara Road.

Alternative options
You may prefer to walk the track in reverse, ending your 3 days with a soak in the hot pools.

