

# Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway

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Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>The Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway</b>	2
<b>History</b>	8
<b>Conservation management</b>	9
<b>Map</b>	10
<b>Track categories</b>	13
<b>Other options/short walks</b>	14
<b>Marine life</b>	17
<b>Geology</b>	19
<b>Please remember</b>	20
<b>Environmental Care Code</b>	22
<b>Commercial operators</b>	23
<b>Further information</b>	24

Cover: South Bay pouwhenua.

The archway pouwhenua as you walk up the entrance path at South Bay tells the story of Māui going fishing in his canoe and pulling up the house of Tangaroa (the god of the sea).

The pouwhenua at the end of the entrance path is Māui fishing up Te Ika-a-Māui (the North Island of New Zealand).

Take a close look at the southern end of the interpretation building, here is the third pouwhenua; Māui and his brothers going fishing.

These beautiful carvings were made locally on Takahanga Marae.



View south from the cliff top.

## Introduction

Jutting out from the rugged east coast of the South Island, with a backdrop of steep mountains, snow-capped in winter, Kaikoura is a major attraction for visitors. Its wildlife, including whales, dolphins, seals, birds and crayfish, provides a unique experience. It is also an area rich in history and scenic beauty.

The Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway provides easy access to explore the Kaikoura Peninsula. An impressive collection of information panels located along the walkway enables you to journey into the fascinating history of the people and to learn of the geology, the animals and the plants that make the area so special. The walk is classified as a walking track and is suitable for families, providing an easy to moderate half- or full-day trip. A section of the walkway is also accessible to wheelchairs. Walking shoes and warm, windproof clothing are required.

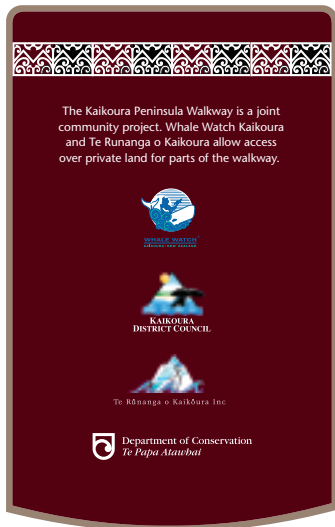
## Getting there

Kaikoura lies almost midway between Picton (154 km) and Christchurch (183 km) on the east coast of the South Island. Regular bus and train services pass through the town.

There is no scheduled public transport from Kaikoura to the walkway but it is possible to arrange commercial transport (check out the commercial operator section on page 23).



# The Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway



The Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway is a joint community project, shared among Whale Watch Kaikoura, Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura, Kaikoura District Council and the Department of Conservation (DOC). Whale Watch Kaikoura and Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura allow access over private land for parts of the walkway; Kaikoura District Council manages the urban sections, including Toms Track and Dempseys Track; the remainder is managed by DOC.

Distinctive marker posts and, at some locations, interpretation signs link a loop walkway, sometimes following urban footpaths and road verge, from West End, the town centre, to Point Kean Car Park. The track crosses the Peninsula's cliff top, with excellent views of the Seaward Kaikoura Range, ocean and coastline, to South Bay. It returns to the township via South Bay and Toms Track. To fully explore and enjoy the features of the walk, allow at least 3 hours to complete the whole Walkway, which extends 11.7 kilometres.



Walker studying interpretation sign.



Seal resting at Point Kean Car Park. Photo: Markus Baumann



## Kaikoura town centre to Point Kean Car Park (50 min, 4.4 km)

From the town centre, follow the footpath and road verge along the Esplanade, Avoca Street and Fyffe Quay to Point Kean. On the way, look out for the interpretation signs on the Esplanade opposite Brighton and Margate Streets, telling stories of 'Life on the Edge', a community living by the sea—the land, the sea and the people.


At Avoca Street, the sign takes you back to 1909, when the new wharf was built.

Near Fyffe House, a sign details the early European settlement in Kaikoura and, at nearby Armers Beach, the story tells of the importance this site holds for the local community, both past and present, for the shelter it provides.



As you approach Point Kean Car Park, you will notice several signs warning that seals are likely to be present in the surrounding area. Most of the seals in the car park are males. They may appear to be harmless; however, they are capable of becoming aggressive if disturbed and can inflict a nasty, infectious bite. The seals on the rocky platforms out from the car park are generally females and their pups. These females have recently begun breeding at this location. For your safety and to avoid disturbing the seals, please remain 10 metres from any seal in the vicinity of the car park. Along the rest of the Kaikoura Coast, 20 metres is the recommended distance to keep away from a seal.

There are toilets at the car park.

 **Point Kean car park to Point Kean viewpoint**  
(5 min, 200 m)

A 5 minute walk up the hill from the car park takes you to a lookout platform. This platform, designed in the shape of a waka, affords an excellent view of both the sea and the mountains. Here, interpretation panels provide stories of the land, the sea and the people who lived here.


From the car park when the tide is low, you are able to explore the open tidal platforms. You may see wading birds, such as oystercatchers and reef herons, feeding on the platforms. Shags are common also, and blue penguins may be seen bobbing just offshore.

Just off the tidal platforms is an excellent diving area for those who want a closer look at the marine life.

Seaweeds, both small and large, thrive in the nutrient-rich waters of the Kaikoura coastline. In the many rock pools, shellfish, anemones, shrimps, triplefins and rockfish can be seen, although the fish may be hiding to avoid feeding birds.

This is also an excellent snorkelling area for those who want a closer look at the marine life.

You may notice patterns on the rock surface, as if a mini water-blaster has been at work. These are left by limpets grazing on algae when the tide is in, or at night. One species always returns to the same place to await the tide's return. Over time it modifies the rock to fit its particular shell-shape, thus minimising water loss.


 **Point Kean viewpoint to Whalers Bay viewpoint**  
(25 min, 1.5 km)

Beyond the lookout platform, follow the track along the cliff top for superb views of rugged cliff formations, tidal platforms and the seaward Kaikoura Range. An interpretation panel on this section of the walkway explains that, hundreds of years ago, the peninsula was forested with many species of native New Zealand trees and plants. Most of this vegetation was removed during successive waves of human development, leaving small, remnant outcrops of hardy shrubs and plants clinging to the steep cliff faces.

 **Whalers Bay side-trip (20 min return, 200 m)**

A 10-minute walk down a stairway and graded track follows a former whalers' route down the cliff to the shoreline. A prominent feature in this area is known as 'the Sugarloaf'. To prevent further erosion to this landmark, please refrain from climbing it.

Seabirds, seals, walkers, divers, crayfish floats and fishing boats all lend their own flavour to the view. Out to sea, you may see scores of seabirds feeding frantically on small fish herded to the surface by bigger fish or dolphins.

 Please take great care to avoid disturbing any wildlife along the shoreline as there are large colonies of birds in



the area. These are particularly vulnerable to disturbance during the breeding season over summer.

Return back up via the same cliff track, as tides or seals along the shoreline may prevent you from returning to the car park.

Interpretation on the cliff top overlooking 'the Sugarloaf' describes the point below as 'Bird City'—the largest red-billed gull colony in the South Island. From here, whalers kept a vigil over the sea, looking out for their quarry. Around the corner in Whalers Bay was the launching point for the whalers' boats.



Red-billed gulls. Photo: DOC



### Whalers Bay viewpoint to South Bay viewpoint (20 min, 1.1 km)

On the sea cliffs near this section of the walkway, DOC and the Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust is working to establish a new colony of Hutton's shearwater behind a large predator-proof fence you see along the way. If you are walking this section in summer, you may see large rafts of these birds sitting on the water. At nightfall, after feeding at sea all day, they return here, behind the fence, and to their breeding colonies high up in the seaward Kaikoura Ranges. An interpretation panel further explains the work being undertaken to establish a colony on the Kaikoura Peninsula.



## History

Legend has it that Māui used the Kaikoura Peninsula as a foothold to brace himself when he fished the North Island out of the sea. From this comes the peninsula's earliest name: Te Taumanu o te Waka a Māui, the thwart or seat of Māui's canoe. The name Kaikoura means 'eat crayfish', recalling the occasion when Tama ki te Raki had a meal of crayfish here, pausing on his journey around the South Island in pursuit of his three runaway wives.

The peninsula, providing abundant food and shelter, is rich in over 800 years of Māori tradition. The earliest Māori hunted moa and sheltered in coastal caves. A grave found in the 1850s revealed the skeleton of a man holding the largest complete moa egg ever discovered and a pakohe (argillite) adze. As moa numbers declined, gardening became more important and settlements more permanent. Fortifications were built on hilltops as lookout points and for shelter in case of attack. There are at least fourteen pā sites on the peninsula, most of which were occupied for short periods only and witnessed some fierce battles. Today Ngāi Tahu occupy the area at Takahanga Marae in the township.

Both Māori and Pākehā have found Kaikoura ideal for settlement, relying on the bountiful harvest of food from the ocean and the shelter afforded by the Peninsula. The whaling industry attracted the earliest European settlers to the area. Whales occur here because of the unusually deep waters close to shore, some pausing in their migration from feeding grounds in Antarctic waters to breeding grounds in the warm sub-tropical seas of the Pacific Ocean, north of New Zealand. Robert Fyffe established the first shore-whaling station, Waiopuka, in 1843; other stations were built soon after in South Bay.

Due to the pressure of the whaling industry, whale numbers steadily declined after 1850 and it became uneconomic to

exploit them. Today, with marine mammals in New Zealand being fully protected, the whales again find Kaikoura a safe environment. Kaikoura is now internationally renowned as a whale-watching location.

Fyffe House, standing on piles made from whalebone vertebrae, provides a link with Kaikoura's whaling days. It was built by George Fyffe in 1860 and is situated on the way to the northern end of the Walkway. The house is a Heritage New Zealand property and is open to the public.

For many years, the town's main link with the outside world was its official port of entry; now, all that remains of the former customhouse is an old brick chimney near Fyffe House. Because the overland routes and bridle tracks were hard-going, most people and freight travelled by sea, often braving inclement weather and the perilous coast, which could take a heavy toll on a small coastal vessel. Eventually, access by land improved and, in 1931, the port closed. In 1945 the Christchurch to Picton railway opened, complete with 21 tunnels.

Like other small towns, Kaikoura suffered from the economic recession of the 1980s. However, since then, an increased number of visitors, attracted mainly by the opportunities provided to observe marine mammals close at hand, has brought increased prosperity to the area.

## Conservation management

The Kaikōura (Te Tai o Marokura) Marine Management Act came in to effect in August 2014. The Act established the Kaikoura Marine Management Area which integrates a number of marine protection and sustainable fisheries measures in the Kaikōura marine environment. These include a marine reserve, a whale sanctuary, a fur seal sanctuary, two taiāpure (one of which surrounds the Kaikōura peninsula), three mātaitai and new fishing regulations. More information is available at [www.doc.govt.nz/kaikoura-marine](http://www.doc.govt.nz/kaikoura-marine).



	— Easy access short walk
	— Short walk
	- - - Walking track
	— Alternative short walk
	- - - Alternative walking track

0      500      1000  
metres

	Information centre
	Information
	Viewpoint
	Hutton's Shearwater colony
	Seal colony
	Car park
	Toilets
	Historic pā sites

Point Kean  
Te Rae o Tawhiti

To Blenheim



South Bay  
Te Waero o te Hiku

Te Rae o Atiu

To Christchurch



Limestone Bay. Photo: Rebecca Mitchinson

## 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.**



### Easy access short walk

- Easy walking for up to an hour.
- Track is well formed, with an even surface. Few or no steps or slopes.
- Suitable for people of all abilities and fitness.
- Stream and river crossings are bridged.
- Walking shoes required.



### Short walk

- Easy walking for up to an hour.
- Track is well formed, with an even surface. There may be steps or slopes.
- Suitable for people of most abilities and fitness.
- Stream and rivers crossings are bridged.
- Walking shoes required.



### 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.



View to South Bay.



### South Bay viewpoint to South Bay car park (15 min, 600 m)

From the South Bay viewpoint, the walkway descends to a fully accessible path that leads to an information shelter and toilets at South Bay. Before descending to South Bay, linger to view the tidal platforms and the view south. The interpretation panel here has a landscape profile identifying the mountain peaks and Goose Bay.



### South Bay to Kaikoura town centre via Scarborough Street (1 h 5 min, 3.9 km)

From the South Bay shelter, return to Kaikoura town centre by following the marker posts along the coast towards the marina. Follow the marker posts to South Bay Parade and cross to South Bay Track, walk up the hill, cross Scarborough Street and walk down Toms Track to return to The Esplanade.

## Other options/short walks



### Point Kean car park to Point Kean viewing platform (5 min, 200 m)

From Point Kean car park, walk to the viewing platform or beyond and return to the car park.



### South Bay car park to Limestone Bay (5 min, 250 m)

At South Bay, a fully accessible path from the car park takes you to Limestone Bay. The elevated walkway above the tidal platform gives wonderful coastal views and allows you to smell the ocean and watch the birds.



### Limestone Bay to South Bay viewpoint (10 min, 350 m)

A 10-minute climb up to a viewpoint on the cliff top rewards you with superb views of tidal platforms, cliff formations and Haumuri Bluffs to the south.

Your experience on the walkway will depend on the weather conditions of the day. Whether it is windy, wet or sunny, any weather conditions make the walkway an exhilarating experience.



## Marine life

The Kaikoura Canyon, which forms part of the underwater canyon system called the Hikurangi Trench, is the most biologically rich ocean habitat known in the world at depths below 500 metres. The canyon is special for its geological and ecological attributes and is unusually close to shore.

Variety is said to be the spice of life, and nowhere is this saying truer than at Kaikoura Peninsula.

Jutting out around 4 km from the shore and sculpted by numerous rocky headlands and small, semi-sheltered embayments, the peninsula presents a wide variety of aspects depending on the weather. Rocky outcrops, wave-cut mudstone platforms incised with guts and channels, and tortured-looking limestone reefs are interspersed with boulder reefs and small, crescent-shaped, stony beaches. The reefs, so prominent at low tide, continue for hundreds of metres offshore, eventually breaking up into flat expanses of pebbles, which eventually terminate in sand and mud further offshore.



Seaweed and limpets in rock pool.

The peninsula is a biological nodal point, a place where 'north meets south' or, more accurately, where 'warm meets cold'. Here, the distributions of typically northern and southern species overlap—the seaweeds show a strong southern affinity, while the animals show a warmer, more northern influence. Add to this the rich variety of intertidal and sub-tidal habitats, and you have one of the most biologically diverse locations of the entire east coast of the South Island.

Firmly anchored to the rocks, bull kelp forms a distinctive fringe along the low-tide mark, its dense mass of leathery fronds swirling snake-like in the waves. Kelp and numerous



Hutton's shearwaters. Photo: Graeme Taylor/enlargement © Dennis Buurman

On the sea cliffs near Whalers Bay viewpoint on the walkway, the Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust is establishing a new colony of the endangered Hutton's shearwater. Kaikoura is the only place on earth where these unique sea birds breed.

Between 2004 and 2013, 500 Hutton's shearwater chicks were brought down from their mountain colonies to the new site. The chicks were fed in artificial burrows for up to a month, ensuring that they would return to the new site to breed. In 2009, the first of the translocated chicks returned. While the Hutton's shearwater population will take some time to fill the entire area within the fence, eventually it will protect a population of 10,000 breeding birds.

Funding raised by the Trust has paid for the 500 metre long, state-of-the-art predator-proof fence around the new colony site. The fence will keep out introduced mammals such as rats, cats, possums and stoats as these burrow-nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to predators.

This new colony adjacent to the walkway provides a sanctuary for these unique birds and a special opportunity for visitors to experience the delight of an active sea bird colony, especially at night, when the birds return from feeding at sea.



Predator-proof fence around Hutton's shearwater colony site.



Kōura (crayfish). Photo: Roger Grace



Seaweed. Photo: DOC

other seaweeds thrive in the pulsating light zone of Kaikoura's nutrient-rich coastal waters and, along with phytoplankton (microscopic plants), form the beginning of the marine food chain. Kōura (crayfish) shelter in rocky crevices and under boulders around much of the peninsula; these are some of Kaikoura's best known marine creatures and lend their name to the town. Ranging from barnacles, limpets and crabs to pāua, sponges and fish, the multitude of marine animals found at Kaikoura Peninsula is simply remarkable.

## Geology

Kaikoura Peninsula is made of limestone and siltstone laid down beneath the sea about 60 million years ago; it has been exposed to the elements for a mere 180,000 years. Once an island, it is now linked to the mainland by debris eroded from the Kaikoura mountains. These mountains are rising faster than any other mountains in New Zealand (10 mm per year) but erosion keeps their height fairly constant.

Periods of rapid uplift have formed the steep-sided promontories, ideal for pā sites, and have twisted the neatly layered limestone into unusual shapes. The relatively young rocks have been worn into many interesting forms by the pounding sea. In less active periods, the sea has cut large tidal platforms in the softer sandstone.

The deep underwater canyon system, the Hikurangi Trench, comes unusually close to shore at Kaikoura, where it is known as the Kaikoura Canyon. The canyon floor collects sediments that will form tomorrow's rocks and may appear in millions of years' time as new mountains. The Hikurangi Marine Reserve is approximately 10416 ha, extending offshore for 23.4 km and including 1.95 km of shoreline encompassing much of the floor and part of the head of the Kaikoura Canyon.



Tidal limestone platform.

## Please remember

### For your safety

Keep children with you at all times, especially along the cliff top and at the water's edge. Keep to the formed track of the walkway. It is dangerous to descend the cliffs on unformed tracks. DOC manages a project to revegetate the cliffs and does not want these plants trampled. If you wish to descend to the shoreline, use the formed track down to Whalers Bay and return via this same track.

### Toilets

There are no toilets on the cliff top. Toilets are located at Kean Point car park and in South Bay.

### Weather

The Kaikoura Peninsula is very exposed to coastal winds. Weather conditions can change quickly, especially when a southerly storm arrives: be prepared with warm and windproof clothing.

### Private land

Sections of the walkway cross private land. Please respect farm property and stock and do not take vehicles, mountain bikes, firearms or dogs on the walkway.

### Tides

High tide may restrict access along the shoreline.

### Dogs and other pets

Dogs and other pets are not allowed on the walkway except on these sections:

- The town centre to Point Kean car park but not in the car park.
- Within the confines of South Bay Recreation Reserve and along South Bay Parade to the start of South Bay Track.
- Toms Track to the town centre.

Dogs and other pets are a threat to wildlife: do not take them on the cliff-top section of the walkway or the tidal platforms.

### Wildlife

Many animals make the peninsula their home. Please observe wildlife from a distance. If birds start flying at you, this is their way of telling you that you are too close to them.

Please report any injured or stressed wildlife to the Department of Conservation: **DOC HOTline 0800 362 468.**

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

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

### Rubbish

There are no rubbish facilities along the cliff top. Please use the rubbish and recycling facilities at the car parks.

### Mountain biking

Mountain biking is not permitted on the walkway.

### Camping

No camping is allowed on the walkway. No camping or over-nighting by campervans is allowed in the car parks or picnic areas at Point Kean and South Bay.

### Fires

No fires are allowed on the walkway, on the shoreline or in the car parks at Point Kean and South Bay.



Warning sign.



View north.

### Kaikoura, a Green Globe certified community

Kaikoura District Council is committed to maintaining the environmental health of Kaikoura for residents and visitors. Kaikoura is a certified Green Globe community. This certification recognises the commitment of the community to protecting the environment. As a resident and a visitor you can contribute to the health of the sea and land by not littering the shoreline with your rubbish and by observing the recreational fishing regulations and also the bans on fishing and gathering from temporarily closed areas (rāhui). To learn more, pick up a Kaikoura Green Globe 21 brochure from the Kaikoura i-SITE Visitor Centre.

## Commercial operators

### Activities

#### Kaikoura Kayaks

Half-day guided Sea Kayaking tours to view New Zealand fur seals and marine life around the peninsula. Kayak hire, fishing, retail/online shop and kayak school also available. Free ph 0800 452 456 or +64 21 462 889 [www.kaikourakayaks.co.nz](http://www.kaikourakayaks.co.nz)

#### Maori Tours Kaikoura

Half-day tour offering a mix of storytelling, hands on activities and bushwalk to learn traditional uses of plants. 0800 866 267 [www.maoritours.co.nz](http://www.maoritours.co.nz)

#### Seal Swim Kaikoura

Guided tours to swim with wild New Zealand fur seals. Located at 58 West End, Kaikoura. Visit [www.sealswimkaikoura.co.nz](http://www.sealswimkaikoura.co.nz) or ph. 0800 732 579 or +64 3 319 6182.

#### Whale Watch® Kaikoura

Award-winning nature tours to view the giant sperm whale. Tours operate all year. Book online at [www.whalewatch.co.nz](http://www.whalewatch.co.nz). Freephone 0800 655121 or +64 3 319 6767



leave no trace

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimise the effects of fire
6. Respect wildlife and farm animals
7. Be considerate of others

## Further information

We hope you enjoy your walk.

For further information on Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway or to make a booking with a commercial operator, contact:

### **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)

Web: [www.kaikoura.co.nz](http://www.kaikoura.co.nz)

For more DOC information contact:

### **Department of Conservation**

#### **Nelson Visitor Centre**

Millers Acre Centre / Taha o te Awa

79 Trafalgar Street, Nelson 7010

PO Box 375, Nelson 7040

Ph: (03) 546 9339

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

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



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