

Tunnel Gully upper picnic area

Winding streams, historic trails and forest giants

Nestled within the Remutaka ranges between Wellington and the Wairarapa, the Pākuratahi Forest rises to the peak of Mounts Climie and Bawbaw, and feeds the waters of the Pākuratahi River. A blend of native and exotic forest, the area is best known for its walking, mountain biking and swimming, and the historic structures of the 1870s Remutaka railway line.

Remutaka Rail Trail

Running from Kaitoke to Cross Creek, the 18km Trail is gently graded from Kaitoke to Summit. Once through the 584m Summit tunnel it descends more steeply via the famous "Fell engine Incline" to Cross Creek in the Wairarapa.

Tunnel Gully Recreation Area

Named for its link with the historic Remutaka railway line, the sheltered Tunnel Gully is now a popular spot for walking and tramping, mountain biking, picnicking and exercising your dog. In summer children also enjoy paddling in the shallow water of Collins Stream which flows through the picnic area.

History

Until a large earthquake in 1855, Te Awakairangi (the Hutt River) was navigable by canoe up to Te Marua where Ngāti Ira had their Whakataka pa. From there Māori crossed to the Pākuratahi River flats as they travelled between Te Whanganui a Tara (the Hutt Valley) and Wairarapa via Remutaka Pass.



Ladle Bend bridge in the 1880s

The colonial government set about establishing road and rail links between the port of Wellington and the fertile plains of the Wairarapa from the mid 1800s. The road, now State Highway 2, followed the Māori route via Remutaka Pass. For the railway, a route up the Pākuratahi Valley was chosen. It had a gentle gradient on the Pākuratahi side of the Remutaka hills, but a sharp 1:15 descent down in to the Wairarapa. This is the steepest section of main line railway ever built in New Zealand. A "friction-drive" system of raised rails and engines designed by English engineer John Barraclough Fell was used along it. Six Fell locomotives worked this "Incline" for 77 years (1878-1955). Eventually the high operating costs, slow speeds and the need to replace the hard working Fells lead to the building of an 8.8km tunnel under the hills which opened in 1955.

The redundant railway lines were removed but the pathway, bridges and tunnels were left in place. Over time, public use of the historic route grew and by the 1980s it had become a popular walkway. Formally opened in 1987, the Remutaka Rail Trail is managed by Greater Wellington from Kaitoke to the Summit Yards and by the Department of Conservation on the "Incline" from Summit to Cross Creek.

Caring for your park



Pack in and pack out. Take your rubbish home and recycle it where possible.



Dogs are welcome. Keep dogs under control and remove droppings. Dogs must be leashed in the tunnels.



Do not remove, disturb or damage plants or animals.



Light no fires. You may use a portable gas stove.



Pākuratahi Forest



Cover photo: Fell engine remains at Summit Yards.
Photos of picnic at Tunnel Gully and woman and dog in tunnel by Jessica Dewsnap. Photo of W Class train with sheep trucks passing round Ladle Bend [ca 1880s] Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ [G73-1/2]

For more information, contact the
Greater Wellington Parks department

parks@gw.govt.nz

Greater Wellington contact centre:

0800 496 734

Metlink (for public transport
timetables and fares)
0800 801 700
www.metlink.org.nz

Walking or cycling to the park?
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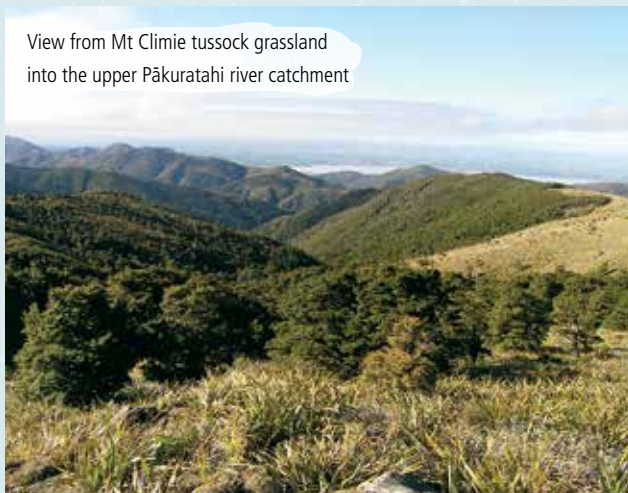


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Ridgeline drama, forested seclusion

View from Mt Climie tussock grassland
into the upper Pākuratahi river catchment



The Pākuratahi forest is part of an almost continuous band of native vegetation across the Akatarawa, Tararua, Remutaka and Orongorongo ranges. It includes significant mature indigenous forests and wetlands that are important for the survival of our native fauna.

The forest supports native birds including whitehead, rifleman, and tomtits and five species of bully and dwarf galaxias fish. Kaka parrots have also been seen flying this key ecological corridor between the Remutaka and Tararua Ranges.

Mt Climie ridgeline runs along the western side of the Forest and forms a distinctive backdrop to Upper Hutt. Much of the original forest on the foothills was burnt by fires started by sparks from steam engines on the railway and by colonial settlers converting the forest to farmland. Since the railway line closed accessible slopes have been planted in pine plantations and most of the rest allowed to regenerate to native bush.

The remote upper catchment of the Pākuratahi River, upstream of Summit Yards, is hidden between the Mt Climie ridgeline and the main dividing ridge of the Remutaka Range. Its steep and winding valley was beyond the reach of the early settlers and remains clad in native podocarp/hardwood and beech forests. The only snow tussock grassland in the Remutaka Range lies at its upper reaches.



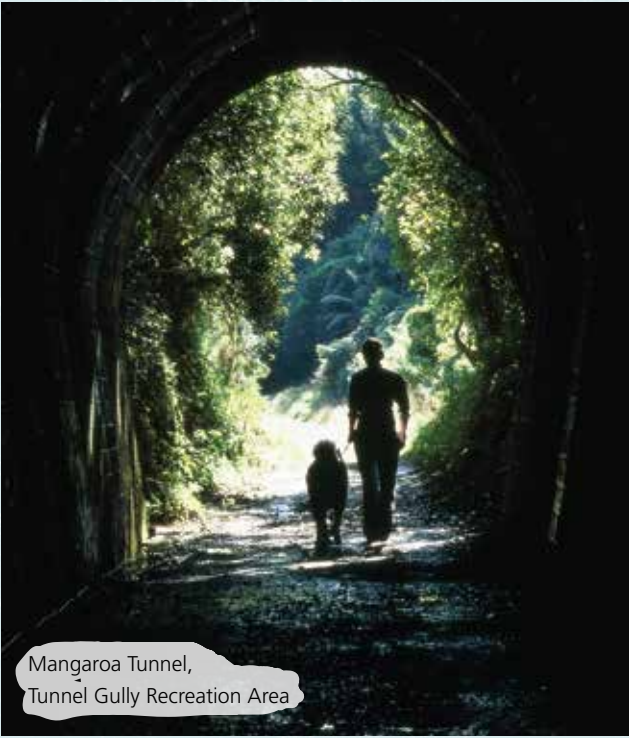
How to get there

Remutaka Rail Trail: The signposted turn off from SH2 is 9km north of Upper Hutt. The Kaitoke carpark is a further 1.7km along a narrow road. Or you can enter the DOC managed section of the Trail via Cross Creek Road in the Wairarapa.

Tunnel Gully Recreation Area: Turn off SH2 at Te Marua, 6km north of Upper Hutt. Follow the signs to the park entrance at the end of Plateau Road.

Public transport: Take a No 112 bus from Upper Hutt Railway Station to the end of Plateau Road, and walk 1km to the Tunnel Gully picnic areas. Or catch the train to Maymorn Station and walk or cycle 2km up the track and through the Mangaroa tunnel to the picnic areas.

Things to do in the Forest



WALKING TRACKS

Tane’s Track
1 hour return

This easy native bush walk starts from the information kiosk carpark in Tunnel Gully picnic area. From just within the forest, the left hand path takes you up to mature black beech forest along the valley side then on to a delicate waterfall at the bridged crossing of Collins Stream. From there you return down valley through tall lowland forest to emerge at the gum trees of the upper picnic area. Descend through it past the portal to the historic Mangaroa tunnel and down through more lowland forest back to your starting point.

Te Ara Tirohanga
1 hour return

The track starts from the State Highway 2 carpark on the Hutt side of Remutaka summit carpark (555m). It climbs steeply to the subalpine crest of the Remutaka range (725m) with its superb views of southern Wairarapa. Wear good walking shoes and a windproof jacket as the Remutaka Hill is very windy, especially near the crest. Do not attempt the climb in windy conditions.

SHARED TRACKS

Remutaka Rail Trail
5 hours one way

The 18km Trail was a railway line between Kaitoke and Cross Creek, in the Wairarapa. The Trail features restored railway bridges and historic tunnels. It is best done from Kaitoke with its gentle 10km gradient up to Summit Yards. From the long Summit tunnel, it descends steeply down the historic “Fell engine Incline” to Cross Creek. That side is managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC).

Station Drive
1 hour return

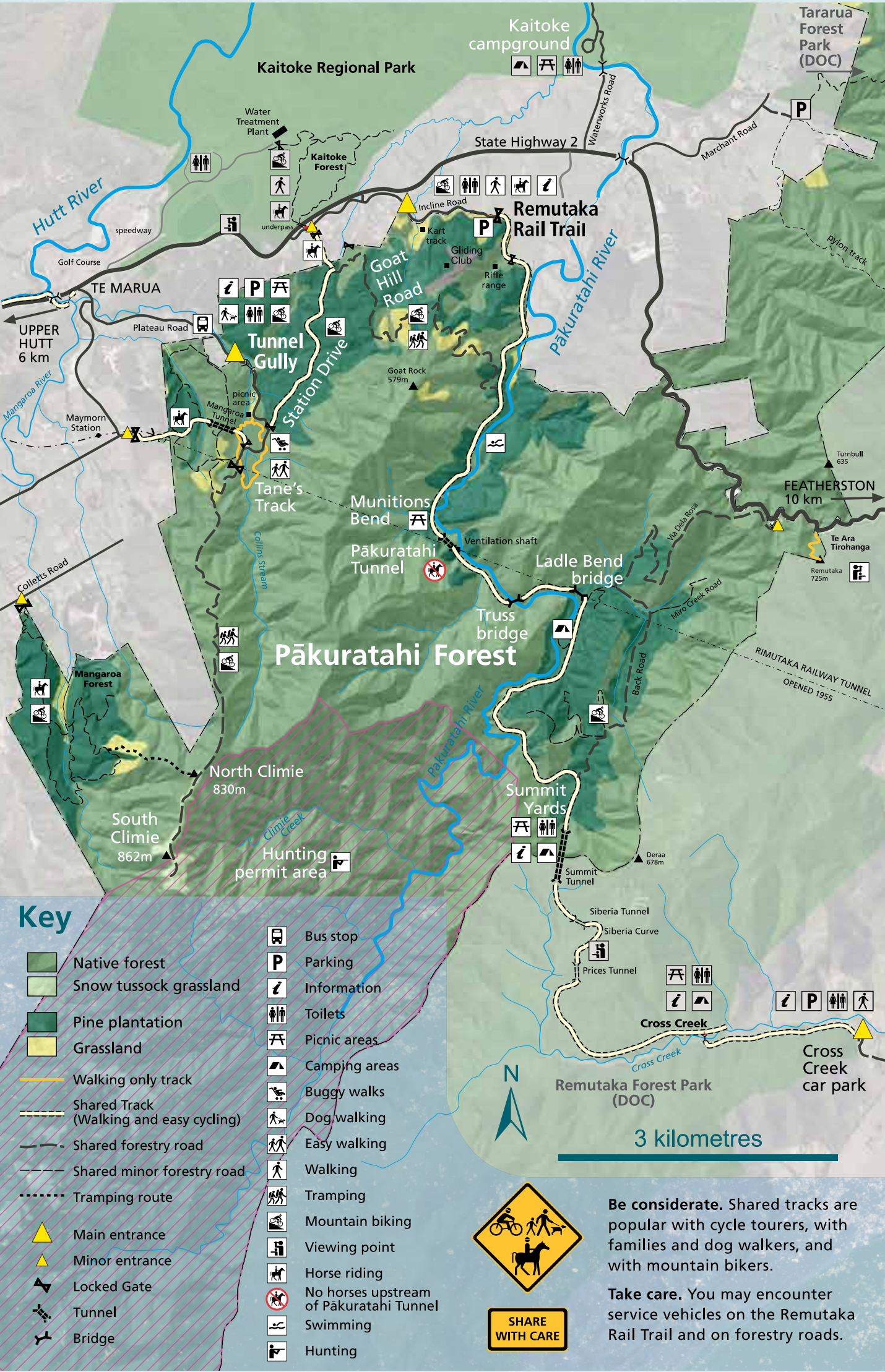
This easy pleasant walk is along the former railway line. It is popular with horse riders in summer and mountain bikers use it to ride between the mountain bike tracks through the pine plantation forests above and below Station Drive.

Both the Remutaka Rail Trail and Station Drive are part of the 3 to 5 day Remutaka Cycle Trail.



Mt Climie Track
3 - 5 hours return

Start from the Tunnel Gully upper picnic area carpark. This easy 14km return tramp is a steady climb of 460m up a 4 wheel drive road to the summit of South Climie (862m). There are magnificent views of the Hutt Valley and of the more distant Wairarapa. You go through a range of vegetation, from regenerating broadleaf forest near the start to divaricating shrubs, astelia species and snow tussocks in the native grassland of the alpine tops.



- There are many pine plantation forest tracks to explore by foot or mountain bike, in addition to those described here. Take care - unsigned tracks are not maintained and may be in use by plantation contractors.
- There are sheltered spots and picnic tables through Tunnel Gully Recreation Area and at spots along the Remutaka Rail Trail.
- Enjoy swimming at spots along the Pākuratahi River. Some have access tracks down to them.
- There is good camping beside the Pākuratahi River near Ladle Bend and at Summit Yards. You may camp elsewhere if you are more than 500m from a mapped track.
- Hunting permits are available from Greater Wellington’s Upper Hutt office. Firearms must be unloaded and disarmed outside the designated hunting area. No hunting is permitted in the Tunnel Gully Recreation Area or near the Rail Trail.
- Horseriding is allowed in designated areas of the forest. Contact the ranger for a permit and key. Do not ride in Tunnel Gully picnic area or through the tunnels and comply with all forestry signs. Dismount and lead your horse when going through the SH2 underpass.

Be considerate. Shared tracks are popular with cycle tourers, with families and dog walkers, and with mountain bikers.

Take care. You may encounter service vehicles on the Remutaka Rail Trail and on forestry roads.

Safety in the forest

Most parts of the forest are isolated, exposed to wind and rain and without cellphone coverage. Weather conditions can change quickly so please:

- check the weather forecast before your trip (southerly weather conditions make the Remutaka Rail Trail extremely cold)
- wear strong lace-up footwear and carry warm and waterproof clothing and enough food and drink for your trip
- carry sun protection
- plan your route and tell someone your intentions
- take a torch for the tunnels

