

## Rawhiti Cave, Takaka

Also known as Manson Cave, and marked as such on most maps, the Rawhiti Cave entrance is huge – up to 40m wide and 20m high – making it one of the largest cave openings anywhere in New Zealand. It's filled with an especially diverse array of plant life due to long exposure to the sun which can reach into the back of the cave during winter months.

The forest is beautiful. Podocarp species are prolific with rimu, matai, southern rātā, and miro well represented. In addition, there are groves of nīkau along with ferns and other understorey plants. It is quite the botanical nature walk with an otherworldly setting underscored by the total lack of any river sounds and only the sigh of the wind on some days.

The walk is worthy of a visit in its own right and begins behind the farmland flats at Dry River, where a marked DOC trail heads into an impressive and foreboding canyon. Once in the ravine, you will recognise how special the place is – quiet, waterless, and full of the sound of forest birds echoing off the 450m bluffs.

The trail is delightfully easy, with one crossing of Dry River so there will be no wet feet here, except after heavy rain, when it can be dangerous to proceed.

A well-padded trail then continues for about 30 minutes, beneath forest and bluff, to the foot of the climb to the cave.

The easy section now morphs into a steady uphill trail, zig-zagging on a 200m ascent to the cave mouth.

Though not especially steep, it is narrow and lumpy in parts and needs a little care, mostly on the descent.

Arriving at the cave mouth is momentous. Imagine a great overhang of rock, battleship grey in colour, soaring above the tōtara trees on the forested hillside. At its base is an ominous gash curling back into the interior where light slowly fades into a black hole. On the roof of the overhang are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of stalactites ranging from tiny needles to great curved tusks up to four metres in length and thick like an elephant's trunk.

A stairway descends into the maw, to avoid damaging the formations, to a platform. Stout stalagmites guard every turn and the slash of sunlight recedes.

## Wild File

**Access** At Motupipi on the Takaka-Pohara Road, turn onto Glenview Road and then into Packard Road. Look for the Rawhiti Cave signs. Signs indicate where to go. Leave gates as you find them.

**Grade** Easy

**Time** 40-60min

**Distance** 1.57km

**Total ascent** 249m

**Topo50 map** BP24

## Elevation Profile



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