

## Gunsight Pass, Nelson Lakes National Park

From St Arnaud, Take Lakehead Track to Lakehead Hut, or save time and take the water taxi across the lake. From Lakehead Hut, the tramp to John Tait Hut crosses the easy terrain of a valley ploughed by past glaciers. The trail climbs gently up the valley from the head of Lake Rotoiti.

The track to Cupola Basin is a delight; climbing gently at first, then zigzagging through mountain beech forest, wispy with lichens.

Once a base for animal research, Cupola Hut is different from other backcountry shelters. Stories of scientists chasing down deer fawns with butterfly nets, tagging grasshoppers and recording the bird and plant life are an integral part of the hut's history. After the research ended in the 1970s, my friend Bruce Postill, who was a park ranger at the time, converted it into a trumper's hut – including installing a wood-burner. A fire certainly added to the hut's cosiness.

The hut lies just on the bushline, beneath perhaps the most appealing alpine basin in the whole national park. From the hut, head south to sidle beneath Mt Cupola, aiming for the distinctive notch in the ridge ahead: Gunsight Pass.

Staring up the barrel of the basin, the U-shaped pass looks almost as if it was carved mechanically. Locals have long known it as Gunsight Pass, even if it remains nameless on the maps.

A small drop, followed by a climb, leads to a shelf beneath the pass, where the final approach steepens until the 1790m pass is reached.

The route then descends a chute, then sidles beneath ribs, across tussock and rock slopes, past a dome-like lump of rock, and up to another saddle at 1800m. This is a painful but necessary climb to avoid steep terrain on the far side.

Finally, the route crosses a large boulder field before intercepting the Travers Saddle track just above the bushline. A final climb of around 400m leads over Travers Saddle. The Upper Travers Valley track is easy going and in short time Upper Travers Hut is reached.

The trail carries on beside the burbling streams of the Upper Travers and the track gradually descends through the beech forest to Summit Creek, and on to John Tait Hut, from where there's a long walk back to St Arnaud via Lakehead Hut (or catch the water taxi again).

### Wild File

**Access** From St Arnaud along Lakehead Track or by water taxi to Lakehead Hut

**Grade** Difficult

**Time** Lakehead Hut to John Tait Hut, 4-5hr; to Cupola Hut, 3hr; to Upper Travers Hut via Gunsight Pass 8-10hr; To John Tait Hut, 3hr; to St Arnaud 2.5-3hr

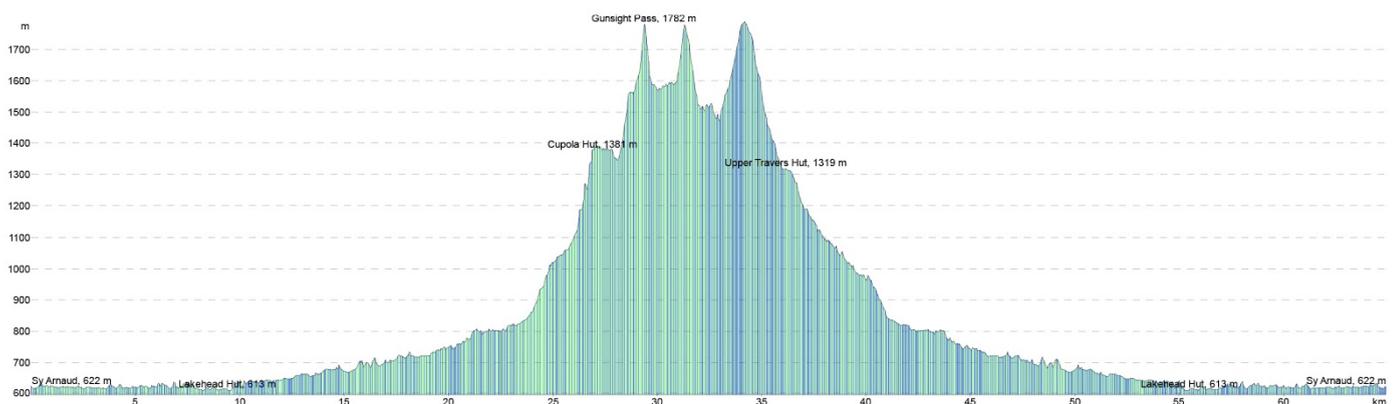
**Distance**

**Total ascent**

**Accommodation** Lakehead Hut (28 bunks), John Tait Hut (27 bunks), Cupola Hut (eight bunks), Upper Travers Hut (24 bunks)

**Map**

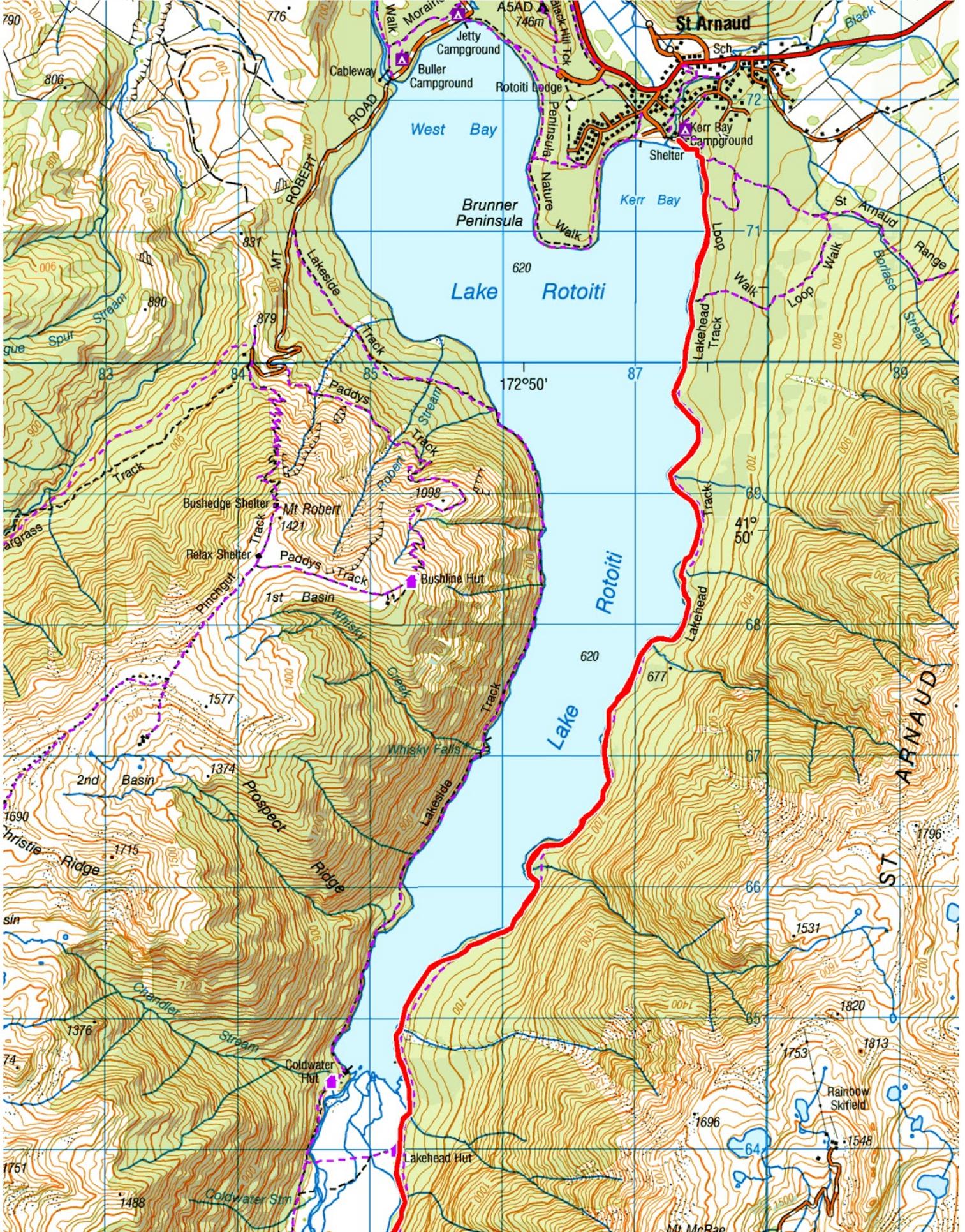
### Elevation Profile



# Gunsight Pass, Nelson Lakes National Park. Map 1.

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# Gunsight Pass, Nelson Lakes National Park. Map 3.

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