

Rod Donald Hut via Hilltop, Banks Peninsula

The track begins in the Montgomery Park Scenic Reserve at the eastern end of Te Ara Pātaka and immediately goes up a steep and rocky former riverbed through native forest, before emerging into the vast hilltop farmlands. Remain alert here and watch your footing for rocks and tree roots, while also enjoying the viewpoints along the way.

After 10min an impressive 2000-year-old totara measuring 8.5m wide is reached. Stunning views across Banks Peninsula await once out of the reserve, as the track continues through farmland toward the first peak of two along this section of Te Ara Pataka, with a gentle climb up to Mt Sinclair (841m).

From Mt Sinclair, the track continues along a ridge towards Mt Fitzgerald (826m). On a clear day, this section of track presents incredible views of the remote Pigeon and Port Levy Bays and a greater 360-degree perspective of Banks Peninsula.

It is a short but steep climb as the track skirts around Mt Fitzgerald, with a sign-posted split in the track for walkers to separate from mountain bikers. This is an enjoyable part of the track with a narrow, rocky trail through bush, offering a brief respite from the exposed farmland which dominates the trail.

The trail now descends to a junction with a track that leads to Richfield Road. Skirting to the south of Pt717, the track maintains a steady elevation, though can be exposed and windy. There are rare boulders or the odd totara offering shade for breaks.

Continue in an easterly direction, above the headwaters of Owhetoro Stream until Waipuna Saddle. At the saddle is a totara graveyard; a burnt-out forest on the exposed hilltop.

It is a steep, 45-minute descent on a well-formed track through gorse to the hut from the saddle. It's tough on the legs and can get slippery, so care is needed.

Efforts have been made to restore native bush growth around Rod Donald Hut. Don't be fooled by the thick gorse, which has been allowed to thrive and will, over time, allow for native flora to take over and regenerate. The hut is a sanctuary, respecting its namesake, Rod Donald. The nature-loving conservationist and politician is buried in the valley below.

The hut has a spacious communal area, solar-powered LED lights and a composting toilet.

The Rod Donald Trust maintains both trail and hut.

If transport has been arranged, it's possible to walk back to Waipuna Saddle, turn left and continue for 20 minutes to exit at Port Levy Saddle on Western Valley Road. Otherwise, return the same way.

Wild File

Access Hilltop Tavern near Montgomery Park Reserve

Difficulty Easy-moderate

Time 6hr

Distance 12.1km to hut

Total ascent 747m

Accommodation Rod Donald Hut (\$15, nine bunks)

Topo50 map BX24

Elevation



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