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EPIC HIKES of AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND

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Explore the most thrilling trails of Australia and New Zealand

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**EPIC
HIKES**
of AUSTRALIA and
NEW ZEALAND

Explore Australia and New Zealand's most thrilling treks and trails



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Easy Harder Epic



THE PAPAROA TRACK

A glorious trail created from a tragic tale – the latest addition to New Zealand's Great Walks, the purpose-built Paparoa Track, winds through rugged West Coast mountains.

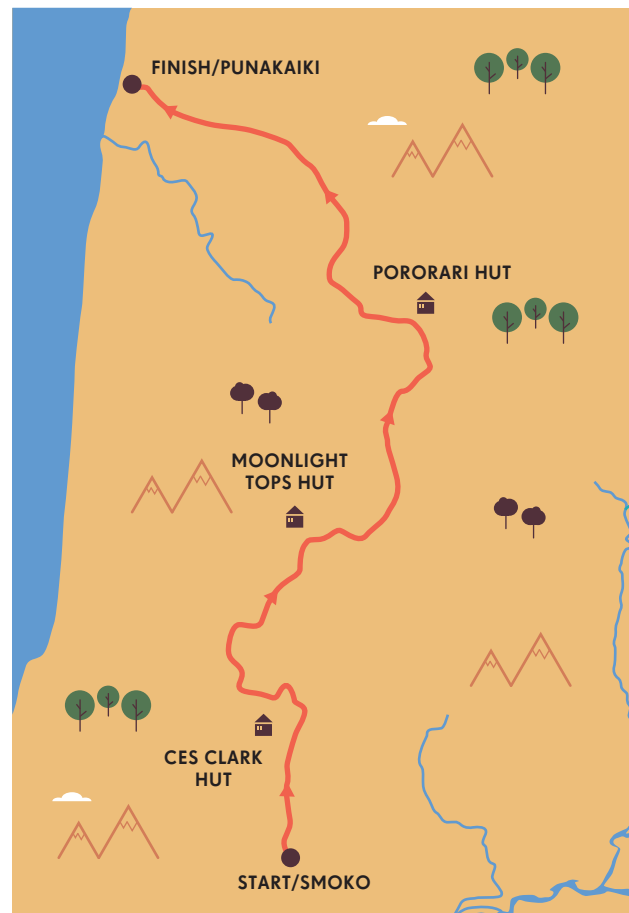
Greymouth in Grey District on the banks of the Grey River is a gritty place with few pretensions – a West Coast town built on fishing, logging and mining accessed via winding mountain roads. West Coasters are renowned for their self-sufficiency and stubborn spirit, attributes hewn from the mountains shadowing them and distilled from the wild Tasman Sea forming the horizon.

The Paparoa is the first new Great Walk to be added in two decades in New Zealand, the only one to be purpose built, and the tenth in total. Built for both hikers and bikers, it weaves 55km (34 miles) through the ranges staring down onto the West Coast near Greymouth.

Gold drew miners to these ranges, then later coal. It was a tragedy of coalmining that led to the creation of the Paparoa. In 2010 an underground explosion at the Pike River Mine trapped and killed 29 miners. It was one of the darkest days in modern West Coast history. The devastated families resolved to create something in memory of their loved ones. The Paparoa Track is that memorial.

At Monteith's Brewery, the local speciality – a West Coast IPA washing down whitebait fritters – sets us up for the hike. The shuttle to the trailhead the next morning is hair-raising. En route we stop at Blackball village with its eclectic mix of businesses and buildings including Formerly The Blackball Hilton, a grand building offering accommodation, food and a bar. On the wall, proudly displayed, is a letter from the global hotel chain's lawyers with instructions to cease using the Hilton name. The owners just added 'Formerly' and carried on regardless.

It is raining steadily as Wendy, my hiking companion, and I don waterproofs beneath the marginal shelter of the trailhead



© Nicom Sabod / Shutterstock



sign at Smoko. The first part of the Paparoa follows the Croesus Track, an old miners' route that has stood the onslaught of time remarkably well.

After climbing steadily through glistening beech and podocarp forest, we pop above the treeline and arrive at Ces Clark Hut. Our timing is impeccable for not only lunch, but also for the wind and heavier rain now starting to buffet the building. We are booked that night at Moonlight Tops Hut, 10km (6 miles) further and, with a forecast for worsening weather, know the most exposed part of the trail lies between our current safe haven and the next.

Conditions are certainly challenging – I hold onto Wendy a couple of times to stop her taking flight deeper into the Southern Alps. Jokingly I suggest we drop packs for the half-hour detour to 1200m-high (3937ft) Croesus Knob. But Wendy doesn't smile. Apparently, on a good day, you can see Aoraki/Mt Cook, New Zealand's highest mountain. Utterly drenched, we are very glad to reach Moonlight Tops before moonlight.

The spacious hut sleeps twenty. Twenty trampers moving wet gloves, thermals and waterproofs around the fire like a damp boardgame. A gap appears as a beanie is moved from hearth to head, a pungent sock soon taking its place.

Tramping is in the Kiwi DNA: respect for the land, an enjoyment of it, even when being out in all weathers is your day job. At the hut, stories are told. Indeed Roger, a North Island sheep farmer, allows his pasta to boil over three times in his quest to tell all, true or tall.

At dawn a mist hangs in the valleys, but we cheer when a watery sun warms the cloud and picks out the main escarpment in a glorious, tangerine light. To the north, the remote peaks of the Paparoa Range remain black in silhouette. With smiles on our faces and boots on our feet, we set off down a trail that drops into the most enchanted of mossy forest before emerging onto the



PANCAKE ROCKS

Be sure to visit Pancake Rocks at Punakaiki, ideally when the sea is surging at high tide. The short, cliff-top hike winds among pancake-stack-like formations and blowholes formed around 30 million years ago from dead marine life and plants that landed on the seabed and solidified into limestone as a result of incredible water pressure. The pancake-like stack was created over time by gradual seismic activity that pushed the limestone out of the seabed.



Clockwise, from above: the fern-forested banks of the Pororari River; a wild West Coast beach at Punakaiki trailhead; crashing seas at Pancake Rocks. Previous page: Punakaiki's stacked-up Pancake Rocks



ORIENTATION

Start // Smoko

Finish // Punakaiki

Distance // 55km (34 miles)

Duration // 3 days

Getting there // Drive from Christchurch to Greymouth (3.5 hours) or take the TranzAlpine Railway. Shuttle operators offer transport to/from either end of the track.

When to go // Year-round, but November-April is best.

What to pack // The huts have mattresses and stoves, but you need to carry sleeping bag, billies and utensils. The Paparoa is in the mountains of the West Coast of the South Island which is code for 'pack suitable clothing for all weather'.

Things to know // You can hike or mountain bike the Paparoa. Most hikers/cyclists travel south to north. No camping is allowed and the huts must be booked, often months ahead.

More info // greatwalks.co.nz/paparoa



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escarpment. An airy few hours follow, the track clinging to a cliff edge dropping away to the west.

Far below, to the east, we pick out the final piece of the Paparoa jigsaw. The 11km (7-mile) Pike 29 Memorial Track, scheduled to open in 2022, leads steeply down 800m (2624ft) to the mine site. Here a memorial and interpretive centre unfolds the story of the disaster.

After lunch, overlooking distant Tasman surf, we plunge over the scarp, threading a route through the cliffs and across to the ridge holding Pororari Hut. Below the steepest section we meet Martin, one of the trail builders. With a family history steeped in mining – his mother from a mining family in Australia's Broken Hill, his father a miner on the West Coast – Martin, too, had worked the mines in both places. Now he puts his skills to work above ground, not below.

The drying games of the previous night are replaced, at Pororari Hut, with outside dining and a sunset over the ocean. Occasional sand flies do little to spoil the moment.

Our last day on the Paparoa leads us down through fabulous fern forest, to the Pororari River. Once across, via a swing bridge, the trail rolls on down the river. Now, deep in limestone country, the final few kilometres head below huge cliffs that step down into verdant vegetation along the banks. The sun is warm, a dip is tempting, the water cold.

When we pop out at Punakaiki trailhead, it feels right to continue the short distance to finish on a wild West Coast beach. The Paparoa, by boot or by bike, is a west side glory indeed. **HK**

Opposite, from top: Green Cape Lighthouse, at the end of the Light to Light Walk; hike or ride the Wangetti Trail through Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, amid beautiful blooms like the cocky apple flower

MORE LIKE THIS LONG-DISTANCE TREKS

OLD GHOST ROAD, SOUTH ISLAND

Further up the West Coast from the Paparoa Track, near Westport, is the winding, weaving Old Ghost Road. The name would indicate this that trail would be a long-established route but it only opened in 2015, after a process that can only be described as persistent. The creation story is told in a thin book called *Spirit to the Stone*, copies of which are scattered in the five spectacularly located huts along the route. Required reading for anyone interested in trails and trailbuilding, it covers the story of landslides, proposed hydro dams potentially flooding its route, funding challenges, and mountains and gorges that would have sent lesser men and women away with their hands in the air, surrendering to the steep and deeps of the New Zealand wilderness. The graded trail flows over mountaintops and clings to sheer gorge walls. It was built very much with mountain bikers in mind, but it is a work of art to be much enjoyed by hikers too.

Start // Lyell Campground
Finish // Rough & Tumble Lodge
Distance // 85km (53 miles)
Duration // 5 days
More info // oldghostroad.org.nz

LIGHT TO LIGHT WALK, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

A beauty of a coastal walk that will impress anyone who loves to exercise with a side of clifftops and sparkling beach. The trail is bookended with celebrations of the maritime history of this far South Coast gem of New South Wales. Sea kayakers, too, often enjoy this section of coast but, with Bass Strait just around the corner, it can be a fearsome place. Paddlers often take refuge in the sheltered bays of Mowarry or Bittangabee. Like so much of the South Coast, the walk was impacted by the Black Summer bushfires of 2019/20. But, despite the torching, life is returning to blackened limbs, showing the resilience of the Australian bush. And, as part of the recovery, the Light to Light Walk is being redeveloped to offer both camping and hut experiences.

Start // Boyds Tower
Finish // Green Cape Lighthouse
Distance // 30km (18 miles)
Duration // 2-3 days
More info // nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/things-to-do/walking-tracks/light-to-light-walk

WANGETTI TRAIL, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Epic, purpose-built trails are appearing in all points of the Australian landscape, and the far northern reaches of Queensland are no exception. The Wangetti Trail takes a route exploring the coast and hinterland of the tropical landscape between Palm Cove and Port Douglas. Hikers and riders can explore the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and Macalister Range National Park, among others, and should be on the lookout for everything from crocodiles to cassowaries. Being built in stages, the 33km (20-mile) section from Palm Cove to Wangetti was first to open, and the full trail with camping areas is due for completion in 2023.

Start // Palm Cove
Finish // Port Douglas
Distance // 94km (58 miles)
Duration // 5-6 days
More info // dtis.qld.gov.au/tourism/qld-ecotourism-trails/wangetti-trail



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