

Guest Information Book



Packhorse Hut

Guided Walking Tour

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BY NATURE

Welcome to the Packhorse Hut guided walking tour!

Step away from the city and into the Port Hills on a guided scenic drive and relaxed day walk to Packhorse Hut. With sweeping harbour views, quiet hill country, and a rewarding destination, this hidden gem offers a perfect mix of gentle adventure, history, and time outdoors—an ideal escape just beyond Christchurch.

Duration: 7 - 7½ hours

Transport: Provided

Food: Morning tea, picnic lunch & afternoon tea are included

Start/Finish location: Christchurch City Centre or Lyttelton Port

Start time: 8:30 am

Finish time: 4:00 pm

Overview:

Packhorse Hut is one of four historic stone “rest houses” built as part of an ambitious plan to create a walking route from Christchurch to Akaroa. While the full route was never completed, the remaining section showcases some of the most beautiful landscapes overlooking Lyttelton Harbour. The day begins with a scenic drive through the Port Hills, following parts of the historic route via Dyers Pass, Summit Road, and Gebbies Pass. From Gebbies Pass, you’ll enjoy an easy out-and-back walk to Packhorse Hut. The walk is approximately 11 km return and typically takes 3–4 hours, making it a comfortable and rewarding day walk with stunning views throughout.



Packhorse Hut



Native fern



Lyttelton harbour from Packhorse hut track

Itinerary

Imagine this amazing day trip! Our friendly guide will pick you up and take you on a scenic drive up the Port Hills, making stops at the historic rest houses "Sign of the Takahe" and "Sign of the Kiwi". Here you will discover the breathtaking views of Christchurch and Lyttelton Harbour.

We'll then head south along summit road, pausing for a delightful morning tea break at the charming "Sign of the Bellbird." Then, we'll continue to Gebbies Pass at the southern end of Lyttelton Harbour to begin our walk.

The trail takes us through open farmland, pine forests, and opens up to stunning views of the harbour and Quail Island. We'll even pass by the remarkable volcanic rock formation called the "Remarkable Dykes" before reaching the historic Packhorse Hut.

While your guide prepares a delicious lunch at the hut, you can explore the area, take fantastic photos, and soak in the natural beauty. After lunch, we'll head back to Gebbies Pass and Christchurch. At the end of this incredible day, we'll drop you back at your accommodation, in the city centre or at Lyttelton Port. Get ready for an unforgettable adventure and amazing memories!

Tour starts – Christchurch

○ *Travel – 20 minutes*

● 1. **Sign of the Kiwi** – Photo stop, 5 minutes

○ *Travel – 10 minutes*

● 2. **Sign of the Bellbird** – Snack, historical sight, 15 minutes

○ *Travel - 15 minutes*

● 3. **Packhorse Hut** – Guided walk, lunch, 5 hours

○ *Travel – 1 hour*

Tour finishes – Christchurch

Local Information – Christchurch & Surrounding Area

About Christchurch (Ōtautahi)

Christchurch, known as Ōtautahi in te reo Māori, is New Zealand's oldest city, founded in 1850. Its origins trace back to the Canterbury Association, a colonial group established in England in 1848 with the goal of creating a planned settlement based on English social structures. The first European settlers arrived on the First Four Ships, landing in Lyttelton between December 1850 and January 1851. The city was named after Christ Church, Oxford, reflecting the heritage of its founders, particularly John Robert Godley.

Over the years, Christchurch has developed into a vibrant urban centre known for its beautiful gardens, parks, and rich cultural history. Despite facing significant challenges, such as the devastating earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, the city has shown remarkable resilience and continues to thrive as a key destination in New Zealand.

Major Cities in New Zealand (2023):

- **Auckland:** 1,571,700
- **Christchurch:** 369,000
- **Wellington:** 202,700
- **Hamilton:** 160,900
- **Tauranga:** 136,700
- **Dunedin:** 126,300

Formation:

The Canterbury Association was established in London in 1848 by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and John Robert Godley, among others. It aimed to create a model settlement in New Zealand based on the principles of systematic colonization.

The Association's vision was to establish a planned settlement in Canterbury, modelled on the English social structure and featuring a network of towns and rural districts. The plan aimed to attract settlers of high social standing and wealth, with an emphasis on the Anglican Church.

The Canterbury Association purchased land from the New Zealand Company in the Canterbury region, including the area around present-day Christchurch. Surveying of the land began in 1849 in preparation for the arrival of settlers.

First Four Ships:

The Canterbury Association organized the immigration of the First Four Ships, which arrived in Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, between December 1850 and January 1851. These ships brought the initial wave of European settlers to Canterbury.

1. **Charlotte Jane:** The Charlotte Jane was the first of the First Four Ships to arrive in Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, on December 16, 1850. It carried approximately 150 passengers, mostly from Scotland. The arrival of the Charlotte Jane marked the beginning of organized European settlement in Canterbury.
2. **Randolph:** The Randolph arrived in Lyttelton on December 16, 1850, just a few hours after the Charlotte Jane. It carried around 140 passengers, also primarily from Scotland.
3. **Cressy:** The Cressy arrived in Lyttelton on December 27, 1850, with approximately 240 passengers. Like the Charlotte Jane and the Randolph, most of its passengers were from Scotland.
4. **Sir George Seymour:** The Sir George Seymour was the last of the First Four Ships to arrive in Lyttelton, reaching the port on January 17, 1851. It carried around 240 passengers, primarily from England.

- Families of these first four ships are prominent in Canterbury society today.
- Christchurch and Dunedin have more social structure than other areas of New Zealand
- What High School students attend in Christchurch is of extreme importance. An interesting local quirk is asking, “What high school did you go to?” during the first meeting. This doesn’t happen in other areas of NZ

Dubbed the “Garden City,” Christchurch is renowned for its abundant green spaces, meticulously maintained parks, and botanical gardens, including the sprawling Hagley Park, which provides a tranquil retreat for outdoor recreation and leisure activities.

The Avon River, meandering gracefully through the heart of the city, offers opportunities for punting, kayaking, and leisurely strolls along its picturesque banks, providing residents and visitors with a serene escape amidst urban surroundings.

The Christchurch Cathedral

The Christchurch Cathedral, formally known as the Cathedral Church of Christ, was built between 1864 and 1904 in the heart of Christchurch, New Zealand. It is a significant example of Gothic Revival architecture and was designed by the English architect Sir George Gilbert Scott.

The cathedral features a distinctive spire rising to a height of approximately 63 meters (207 feet), making it one of the tallest structures in Christchurch. Its Gothic architecture includes pointed arches, intricate stonework, and decorative elements typical of the style.

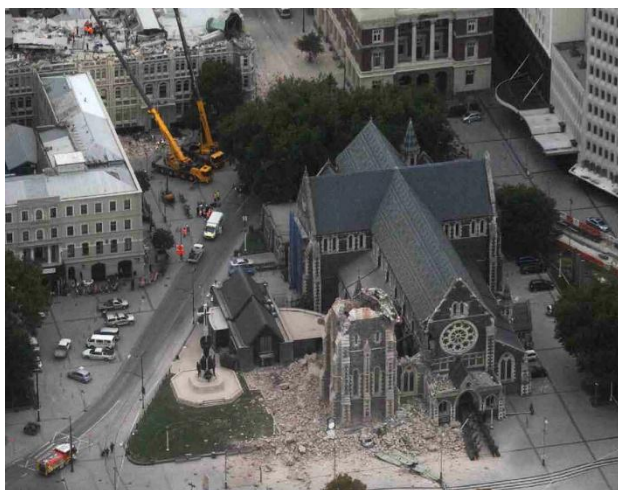
The cathedral suffered significant damage during the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, particularly the collapse of its spire and extensive damage to its structure. These earthquakes had a profound impact on Christchurch and its built environment, including the cathedral.

Following the earthquakes, debates and discussions ensued regarding the future of the cathedral. Various proposals were put forward, including restoration, demolition, or rebuilding. The decision-making process involved considerations of heritage preservation, engineering feasibility, and financial resources.

Construction of the cathedral began in 1864 but was interrupted several times due to funding issues, labour shortages, and the effects of the New Zealand Wars. It took 40 years to complete, with the final sections finished in 1904.

At its peak, the cathedral's spire stood approximately 63 meters (207 feet) tall, making it one of the tallest structures in Christchurch at the time.

In addition to its spire, the cathedral also featured a bell tower with a peal of 13 bells, including a Bourdon bell weighing over 6,000 kilograms (13,000 pounds). These bells were used for various purposes, including marking the hours and special occasions.



As of recent years, plans for the restoration or redevelopment of the Christchurch Cathedral have been ongoing. Following the Government's decision in 2024 not to provide further funding towards the reinstatement of the cathedral, construction is now be paused while all options are being considered.

Treaty of Waitangi – Te Tiriti o Waitangi

(signed 6th February, 1840)

The Treaty is a broad statement of principles on which the British and Māori made a political compact to found a nation state and build a government in New Zealand. The document has three articles. “In the English text, Māori leaders gave the Queen 'all the rights and powers of *sovereignty*' over their land. In the Māori text, Māori leaders gave the Queen 'te kawanatanga katoa' or the complete *government* over their land.” (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty>)

It is common now to refer to the intention, spirit or principles of the Treaty. The Treaty of Waitangi is not considered part of New Zealand domestic law, except where its principles are referred to in Acts of Parliament.

Māori History of Ōtautahi

The Māori name Ōtautahi translates to “The Place of Tautahi” or “The Place of Tautahi’s People.”

Tautahi was a significant rangatira (chief) of the Ngāi Tahu iwi (tribe) who played a prominent role in the region’s early history. The name Ōtautahi honours his legacy and the ancestral connections of Ngāi Tahu to the land where Christchurch now stands.

According to stories, Tautahi is an important figure in the migration stories of the Ngai Tahu people. Te Waka o Aoraki is the name given to the migration story from their ancestral homeland to Te Ika-a-Māui (North Island) and then down to Te Waipounamu (South Island). This migration, known as Te Waka o Aoraki, is a foundational aspect of Ngāi Tahu people’s identity and history.

The Māori name for the North Island of New Zealand is “Te Ika-a-Māui,” which translates to “The Fish of Māui.” According to Māori mythology, the North Island is said to be the fish that Māui, a legendary figure in Māori culture, caught while fishing with his magical hook.

The Māori name for the South Island of New Zealand is “Te Waipounamu,” which translates to “The Greenstone Waters” or “The Waters of Greenstone.” This name reflects the significance of pounamu (greenstone or jade) in Māori culture and the abundance of this precious stone found in the rivers and mountains of the South Island.

Hawaiki: In Māori tradition, Hawaiki refers to the legendary homeland from which the ancestors of the Māori people are believed to have originated. It is considered a mythical place, often described as a distant island or land across the ocean. According to oral tradition, Māori ancestors migrated from Hawaiki to Aotearoa (New Zealand) many centuries ago in voyages by waka (canoes). While the exact location of Hawaiki remains unknown, it holds deep cultural and spiritual significance in Māori cosmology. It serves as the ancestral homeland of all Māori tribes, including Ngāi Tahu.

Harry Ell

Harry Ell was fascinated by these hills. He was a public-spirited man, and a lover of nature. In many ways he was ahead of his time as a conservationist determined to protect the remnants of the natural flora. In his dedication to preserve what was best, he had the brilliant idea of involving the public by ensuring that they had access to the whole area. Thus arose the exciting concept of a highway, together with walking tracks, along the summit of the Port Hills, and indeed extending right around the peninsula, with rest houses spaced at easy intervals.



To this end Ell cut short a hitherto successful political career in order to devote the rest of his life to the pursuit of his dream. Overcoming political difficulties and incredible financial constraints (development took place during the great depression of the 1920's and 1930's) this remarkable man had laid the foundations for the Summit Road and its rest houses as we see them today by the time of his death in 1934.

Conceptualization and Advocacy: Harry Ell was instrumental in conceptualizing and advocating for the Crater Rim Walkway in the early 20th century. He envisioned a scenic track that would encircle the rim of the ancient volcanic crater surrounding Christchurch, offering breathtaking views of the city, harbors, and distant mountains.

Development of the Track: Ell played a pivotal role in the development of the Crater Rim Walkway, working tirelessly to establish the track and make it accessible to the public. He collaborated with local authorities, conservation groups, and volunteers to clear paths, construct steps, and install signposts along the route.

Preservation of Natural Beauty: Ell was passionate about preserving the natural beauty of the Canterbury region, and the Crater Rim Walkway was a manifestation of his conservation efforts. By creating a designated walking track along the volcanic rim, he aimed to protect the area from urban development while allowing people to appreciate its scenic splendor.

Connection to Bridle Path: The Crater Rim Walkway intersects with the historic Bridle Path Track, which was used by early Māori and European settlers to travel between Christchurch and Lyttelton. Ell recognized the historical significance of this route and incorporated it into the larger network of walking tracks around the Port Hills.

Legacy and Impact: Today, the Crater Rim Walkway stands as a testament to Harry Ell's vision and dedication to conservation. It has become a popular recreational trail, attracting locals and tourists alike who seek to experience the natural beauty and panoramic views offered by the volcanic landscape. Ell's legacy continues to inspire efforts to preserve and enhance New Zealand's natural heritage for future generations to enjoy.

The Sign of the Kiwi and the Sign of the Takahe

In 1909, the Summit Road Scenic Reserves Board was established to champion Ell's ambitious dream of creating a scenic roadway that would grant public access to the breathtaking landscapes of the Port Hills. Ell was a strong proponent for the inclusion of rest houses along the Summit Road, ensuring that travelers could pause and appreciate the natural beauty surrounding them. Among the most notable of these were the Sign of the Kiwi, completed in 1916, and the Sign of the Takahe, whose construction spanned from 1918 to 1948. Other notable rest houses included the Sign of the Bellbird and the Sign of the Packhorse.

In 1989, Heritage New Zealand registered the Sign of the Kiwi as a Category I historic place. This building was originally designed by architect Samuel Hurst Seager, who also created two other smaller rest houses: the Sign of the Packhorse (built between 1916 and 1917) and the Sign of the Bellbird (constructed in 1914).

The Sign of the Takahe, initially known as the Tram Terminus Rest House, opened for business in 1920, although it was only a small part of the final building. Although the initial stone for it was laid in 1918, the project took three decades to complete, culminating in a testament to Ell's enduring legacy in 1948.

The Sign of the Kiwi and the Sign of the Takahe stand as two remarkable rest houses that survived the 2010-2011 earthquakes but required extensive restorations to preserve their integrity and charm. Each of these structures not only represents a vital piece of history but also serves as a welcoming point for those exploring the picturesque vistas along the Summit Road.



Sign of the Kiwi. Image credit: Allie Hogg

The Sign of the Bellbird

The Sign of the Bellbird is another historic building located in the Port Hills above Christchurch, New Zealand. Built by Harry Ell in the early 20th century, it is one of several wayside inns designed to provide amenities along the Summit Road for visitors to the area. Named after the native New Zealand bellbird (*korimako*), known for its melodic call, the inn reflects the natural beauty and wildlife of its surroundings. Designed by architect Samuel Hurst Seager, it features rustic stone walls, exposed wooden beams, and a sloping roof, characteristic of the Arts and Crafts style. Originally serving as a tearoom and rest stop for travelers and hikers, the Sign of the Bellbird allowed visitors to enjoy refreshments and scenic views. It is also recognized as a Category I heritage building by Heritage New Zealand, highlighting its historical and architectural significance.



The Sign of the Packhorse

Constructed in the 1940s, Packhorse hut showcases early settler architecture designed to resemble the packhorse stables used during the colonial period. It served as a rest stop for travelers and packhorse carriers who transported goods through the rugged terrain of the Port Hills, highlighting the historical significance of packhorses in New Zealand's transport system prior to the arrival of modern vehicles.

The hut features a rustic and sturdy construction, utilizing local stone and timber to blend seamlessly into the surrounding landscape. Its practical and functional design provides shelter from the elements. Packhorse Hut typically includes basic amenities for visitors, such as picnic tables and sometimes a fireplace, making it a popular spot for hikers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Perched at a high elevation, Packhorse Hut offers breathtaking views of Christchurch, Lyttelton Harbour, and the surrounding hills. The hut is accessible via various walking and biking trails,



including the popular Packhorse Track, which allows visitors to explore the area's natural beauty while learning about its historical significance.

Over the years, Packhorse Hut has undergone restoration to preserve its historical integrity and ensure it remains accessible to the public. Local conservation groups often engage in maintenance and community events to promote the hut's heritage. The hut stands as a reminder of the region's pioneering history and the connection between the land and its early inhabitants. It continues to be a cherished spot for both locals and tourists, reflecting the enduring spirit of exploration and adventure in New Zealand's natural landscape.

Te Ara Pātaka Track

The Te Ara Pātaka Track is a scenic walking and biking trail located in the Port Hills. Stretching approximately 10 kilometres (about 6.2 miles), it caters to a range of fitness levels, making it accessible for both locals and visitors. The track offers breathtaking panoramic views of the Canterbury Plains, Lyttelton Harbour, and the Southern Alps. Its name, which translates to "The Pathway to the Storehouse," reflects the historical significance of the area to Māori, who utilized the region for food gathering and cultural practices. Designed for various users, including walkers, joggers, and mountain bikers, the trail features well-maintained paths and clear signage. As it traverses diverse ecosystems, visitors can enjoy the native flora and fauna, highlighting ongoing conservation efforts in the area. Overall, the Te Ara Pātaka Track provides a rewarding outdoor experience that beautifully blends natural beauty with cultural history, making it a must-visit for anyone exploring the Port Hills.



What You Might Spot Along the Way

Livestock – Sheep Breeds

- **Romney** – White face, sturdy build. Most popular sheep breed in New Zealand, valued for both wool and meat. Found in lowland farms and hills throughout Canterbury.
- **Merino** – Smaller frame, often horned rams. Extremely fine, soft wool used in high-end clothing. Found in high country stations.
- **Perendale** – White face, thick wool, medium build. Hardy and good for mixed terrain. Common in hill country; bred from Romney and Cheviot sheep breeds.
- **Coopworth** – Similar to Romney, slightly larger with heavy fleece. Dual-purpose for wool and meat. Find them throughout Canterbury plains.



Livestock – Cow Breeds

- **Friesian (Holstein-Friesian)** – Large black-and-white dairy cow. High milk production. Dominant on dairy farms.
- **Jersey** – Smaller, light brown with a gentle face. Produce rich, creamy milk (high butterfat). Found on specialist dairy farms, often mixed with Friesians.
- **Hereford** – Red body with white face and underbelly. Beef cattle. Graze on hill country farms or finishing on Canterbury Plains.
- **Angus** – All black or red, solid build. Premium beef breed. Frequently found on hill farms and in mixed livestock operations.



- **Belted Galloway** - This breed is known for its distinctive white belt that encircles the black or sometimes red body. Known for their hardiness and ability to thrive in cold and rugged environments. Produce high-quality beef.



Other Wildlife

- **Pūkeko (Australasian Swamphen)** – Bright blue with red beak and long red legs. Common near roadside wetlands and drains.



- **Pūtangitangi (Paradise Shelduck)** – Large, striking duck; males are black, females have a white head. Frequently seen grazing in paddocks and flying in pairs.



- **Pīwakawaka (New Zealand Fantail)** – Small, friendly bird with fanned tail. Often seen fluttering near rest areas or forest edges.



- **Kāhu (Harrier Hawk)** – Large brown bird of prey seen gliding low over fields. Commonly spotted while driving.



- **Black Swan** – Elegant with red bill, native to Australia but naturalised in New Zealand. Seen on lakes like Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere and roadside ponds.



- **Papango (New Zealand Scaup)** – Small diving duck, black (male), or brown (female). Seen on lakes and braided rivers.



- **Karoro (Southern Black-backed Gull)** – Large gull, common along coastlines and in fields (paddocks).



Introduced Animals Commonly Seen

- **European Rabbits** – Often seen on roadsides, pastures, and high-country hills. Especially noticeable in dry, open areas.
- **Hedgehogs** – Nocturnal but sometimes seen in grass verges or rural gardens.
- **Deer (Farmed or Wild)** – Only Red deer are farmed in New Zealand due to the fact they grow large quickly compared to Fallow deer. Farmed deer are visible behind high fences. Both Red deer and Fallow deer are found in the wild (rare in lowlands, but possible in high country).



Wild Rabbit



Hedgehog



Fallow Deer - Buck



Red Deer - Hind



Packhorse Hut Tour - Maps and Routes



