

GO NZ: Walking »



Trampers walking between Flea and Stony Bay, along the Banks Track, Banks Peninsula.  
Photo / Alister Winter

# BREAKING THE BANKS

## Maggie Wicks makes tracks on one of NZ’s oldest and most beautiful private walkways

What is that smell? That’d be the penguins. There’s one nesting under the toilet block, another under the hut, and several dozen have their private homes — complete with their names painted above the door — up the valley above the farmhouse.

At Flea Bay/Pōhatu, on the Banks Peninsula, you’ll find the largest little penguin colony on mainland New Zealand. And you’re most welcome to visit — if you fancy the 11km walk to get here.

I’m here on night two of the three-night Banks Track, a stunning walk across the Banks Peninsula which begins and ends in the harbour town of Akaroa.

At 30 years, this is New Zealand’s oldest private track. In the 1980s, nine local families banded together to cut tracks, built huts and opened up to 296 walkers in the season of 1989. These days, five families are involved, committed conservationists as well as farmers, artists and gardeners, from across New Zealand and the world.

Across three days and three nights, everywhere you look there are thoughtful little details, the kind of details that turn a three-day tramp into something truly magical.

There are fresh-cut lupins arranged outside the huts and long drops with views overlooking the ocean. There is a shower built into the side of a tree, and a trampers’ shelter built into the side of a huge slab of rock. There’s a tiny back-country store stocked with boutique local cheese and salami and fresh vegetables, all for sale on a cash honesty system. And although the beaches look tempting, I wouldn’t walk them — those wet-looking rocks are almost certainly fur seals, visiting from the colony around the bay.

**Getting started**

The Banks Track begins just outside Akaroa. Walkers are collected in the early evening from the old Akaroa Post Office and driven to the first hut, Ōnuku, 200m above Akaroa. The hut is surrounded by cabbage trees and well-kept lawns, with views down to the harbour. It’s a perfect spot for your first dinner, and to meet your fellow trampers.

Arriving close to dusk, birdsong fills the air. Outside our room, a bellbird/korimako stuck his head deep inside the harakeke flowers, with just an occasional glance at us to be sure we were keeping our distance.

Ōnuku sets the scene for how well looked-after Banks Track trampers are. The walk is self-catering, and kitchens offer a range of gas hobs, electric ovens and barbecues, as well as tea, coffee and milk. At Ōnuku, there are bunk rooms and



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