

# Tramping in the Travers

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In January 2016 I (Ray), my son Brent, Brent's partner Lisa and Brent's daughter Stella (14) set off for Nelson Lakes National Park. We had made bookings for Angelus hut on the 5th, but cancelled them because of uncertainty about Stella's capability to enjoy such a strenuous walk. Abel Tasman huts and campsites were fully booked, so we decided to take the water taxi to the head of Lake Rotoiti and make detailed decisions day by day.

Since we were planning to stay at the head of the lake and to come out the same way we decided to carry in a couple of bottles of wine and some fresh fish for the first night. Might as well have a little luxury!

Monday afternoon saw us in the water taxi heading for the hills, but Stella was coming down with a very debilitating cold – a huge amount of nasal fluid! Sunbathing at Lakehead hut before dinner was pleasant, but not something for us all to do for days while waiting for Stella to recover. It was agreed that on Tuesday Stella and Lisa would stay at the hut, while Brent and I would do a day tramp.



There were a number of options available, but to Brent's surprise I agreed with his suggestion that we could try to reach Angelus hut and return. 1000 metres up (and down), and 22 km was a bit of a challenge for us old and older men, but I said we could always go till 2pm and then turn round if we had not reached Angelus lake and hut.

Brent decided we could do with just one pack that he would carry. I did not disagree. Armed with lots of water, and plenty of Tararua biscuits, we set off about 9am. Fording the Travers was the first challenge – a good practise of our river crossing skills. Others the day before us had found such skills to be needed, and in their case lacking. About an hour further on we set off up the Cascade track.

The beech forest was beautiful in the totally fine weather, and from the occasional clearing we also got to see the rock slides and mountains above us. One waterfall spectacularly dropped into our valley from on high. We made good progress, using the BackCountry Navigator app on my phone to check exactly where we were and how we were going for time. About midday we rose above the bush line and could see the myriad waterfalls on the upper tributaries that give the track its name. Since we were still well short of our turn-around time we pressed on, up the steep but well-tracked and marked path.



Checking altitude gain from the phone against time showed we were keeping up the 300m per hour rate of climb that we expected.

We arrived at the magnificent DoC hut beside Lake Angelus at 1:15pm. After a well-earned rest and lunch I ambled around the lake for other views, but the hut is on the best lookout point.



It was a shame we had to leave, but at 2pm we left for the return. Descent rate on the steep part was faster than ascending, at 450m/hr, but not as fast as we thought it might be. The landmarks in the bush that I had noticed on the way up weren't picked up on the way down, so it was a pleasant surprise to find us back in the main valley again about 4:30. Back to the hut at 6pm – much to Lisa's surprise – and a celebratory cup of instant soup.

By Wednesday morning Stella was much better so we packed up our gear and headed up the valley to spend the night at John Tait hut.



However, a few hours up the river we met a couple who persuaded us that if we were not going to go over the pass we would be much better to spend the night at Hopeless Hut. John Tait would be full to overflowing with people, whereas we could be on our own in a delightfully situated hut by a small mountain stream. Hopeless was at 1000m above sea level so involved twice the altitude gain that John Tait would (at 800m) but we decided to do it anyway.

We were not disappointed! Privacy, an idyllic setting, a mountain stream to bathe in, and views of the mountains. Even a separate room for the snoring (and snogging) members of the party.



When we started the trip we knew that rain was forecast for Friday. On Thursday morning we decided that we did not want to spoil our memories of the trip by tramping in rain, so after an hour or so exploring the head of the Hopeless valley we headed back the way we had come.

As we moved down the valley we started to think more closely about the next day's logistics. We wanted to pick up the water taxi, which had a scheduled run at 10:45, but was also likely to have a

charter before that. If we went back to Lakehead hut, we would be 10 min from the jetty, so would have to wait in the rain to flag down the taxi. We decided instead to go to Coldwater hut, right on the lake edge, despite the fact that it was small and would likely be overcrowded. Then we remembered our wine bottles and other rubbish that we had left at Lakehead hut!

When we came to the ford that led to Lakehead hut Stella and I went on to Coldwater, after watching the others ford the river, to claim bunks for us all, and to get the water ready for soup, while Brent and Lisa added an extra half hour to their trip by going to Lakehead and returning with rubbish.

Friday dawned wet, as promised, and the water taxi turned up an hour early, as hoped. All in all an improvised but very successful few days.