

Week 171 – 28 January

Active Lifestyles – Sandi Burleigh from Sport Northland, www.10000stepsnorthland.co.nz

Walk of the Month

Welcome to 10,000 Steps Northland's 'Walk of the Month'. Each month a stunning walk somewhere in Northland will be highlighted. If you have a favourite track or walk in your community contact us on email at 10000steps@sportnorth.co.nz.

January's Walk of the Month – **WAIPU CAVES**

There is no better time than the present to walk some of Northland's beautiful tracks. With the weather settling into a fine rhythm of long, warm sunny days, hiding under the cover of trees and bush is a welcome retreat. Put on your walking shoes and take the family on a very enjoyable walk through the grounds and hills of the Waipu Caves Reserve.

Drive to the Waipu Caves carpark where you will find toilets and plenty of space to park your car. Camping is also permitted on the reserve with wonderful opportunities to do some underground exploring if the sport interests you. The Waipu Caves reserve is found south of Whangarei off State Highway 1. There are signs posted on the highway on two exits. Follow the signs for approximately 12 – 16 kilometres on a mixture of paved and metal roads. You will recognize the unique rock formations once you get close to the reserve.

Start your walk from the toilets and walk towards the bush and orange marker posts adjacent to the facilities. If you want to have a peak down the caves do so with extreme caution as the rocks are often slippery and wet. There are guiding organisations that will take you into the caves safely if this is something you would like to do with friends and family. This article is highlighting the diversity of the track only.

The track starts further along the creek and on the opposite side of the caves. There used to be a large bridge crossing over the creek but it is no longer there. It is an easy jump over culverts and boulders to get to the other side. You will notice the orange trail markers clearly once you are into the bush.

The track is particularly beautiful and sheltered inside the forest that hosts a large stand of Totara and Puriri trees. The karst / limestone landscape also creates a mystical forest experience which provides unique habitats for plant species and bird life.

If you prefer a shorter walk, follow the track through the bush and up to the top of a paddock where you will see a gorgeous wooden bench seat to rest at. This walk is 1.2 kilometres or 1500 steps one way (3000 steps return). Bare in mind you will be exerting a lot more energy than just the 3000 steps to walk this track as it has a mixture of hills to climb



Above, the Waipu Caves area features a karst / limestone landscape and weathered rocks.



and descend. Proper footwear and water is recommended.

For the more ambitious walker, follow the track along the ridge tops all the way to Ormiston Road. You will have to walk the track the same way back to reach your vehicle. This 'high road' offers beautiful views out to the coast and stunning views over the rural lands of Waipu. It is approximately 3.5 kilometres to Ormiston Road (approximately 4,400 steps one way), which will have your reaching your 10,000 steps a day goal easily.

Enjoy!

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