

#loveyourleith

RIVER TRAIL

Proudly brought
to you by



Dunedin's very own river – the Water of Leith – flows
from the northern hills, through the city, and out to sea.

Over the years, your little river has helped shape your city.

Although it is home to many creatures and a rich local history,
don't be fooled by its tranquil waters – the river can be fierce
and strong during floods. Otago Regional Council help tame
the river to keep you safe. From high-walled channels
of the past to our current flood protection works, we
continue to give the Leith love by making it a safer,
better-looking and more accessible waterway.

Length: 4km

You'll need to
wear shoes
that are
comfortable
to walk in!



Want to know more about your river?
Head over to www.lawa.org.nz
and search 'Water of Leith' for latest data
on flow and water quality.



1 Ross Creek Reservoir

Ross Creek Reservoir is the oldest artificial lake in our country – and the oldest water supply reservoir still in use.

The reservoir was built to supply Dunedin with drinking water almost 150 years ago, when the population was booming from the Otago gold rush. The Leith contributes to our drinking water further up the valley at Sullivan's Dam and is joined by Ross Creek here near the start of our Upper Leith Walkway.

When you come to the split in the walkway, take the left track and watch Ross Creek pass under the bridge on its way to meet the Leith.

2 Woodhaugh

Sleepy Woodhaugh used to be a very busy spot!

New Zealand's first paper mill was built right next to the Leith on the corner of Rockside Rd and Malvern St. Across the river there was also a quarry producing metal, stone and sand from the hills around the river. Everything was running well until 1911, when the mill was damaged by a fire and a major flood swept away bridges and land surrounding the quarry.

Did you see the abandoned concrete shed along the trail? This is an old explosives store, the only building left from the old quarry.

3 Boulder traps

When it floods, the Leith brings all sorts of bits and pieces downstream.

We built a boulder trap upstream of Malvern St to help protect the river bed. Made from 7 lengths of steel railway tracks, the trap stretches across the whole river. It lies in wait, ready to catch any runaway branches, trees, rocks or boulders escaping in a flood. To make sure our trap doesn't become a dam, we keep an eye on the amount of stuff that gets stuck and clear it away if it's caught too much.

4 Woodhaugh Garden

A long time ago, the river was spread out over the floodplains, where the city is now.

A wetland forest of kahikatea trees – among the tallest trees in New Zealand – could have fringed the river. You can still find some of these tree giants in Woodhaugh Garden today, the only forest of its kind in Dunedin. Can you spy a tui or hear the kereru flapping its wings?

5 Fish ladder

Did you know some fish can 'climb'?

Trout and salmon can leap up small obstacles or waterfalls against the current. They come up the Leith from the ocean and need to get to the calm pools upstream to have their fry (baby fish). Parts of the spread-out river were harnessed into a series of concrete walls to help protect us from high floods. The concrete river bed quickly moves flood waters out to sea, but this smooth surface made it difficult for some fish to get upstream. So, we built a ladder – a path of small steps for them to jump up. Can you spy it from the George St bridge?

6 Bronze trout statue

The Leith is home to many native water critters: eels, freshwater crayfish and shrimp, common and redfinned bullies, banded kokopu, inanga (whitebait) and lamprey.

The river is also the adopted home of Chinook salmon and brown trout, both introduced to Otago waters. Next to the lake in the Botanic Gardens, the jumping fish statue celebrates the release of brown trout into the Leith in 1969. Have you seen any fish in the river today?

7 Owheo

The original name of our river is Owheo, said by some to be named after a local Maori chief called Wheo.

Not many people know that the waters of the river are sacred to some Maori. Up the Leith Valley, at the waterfall Unu-unu-a-kapua-i-te-raki (Nicol's Falls), healing ceremonies were performed to help injury or illness. The water carried away the sickness, which flowed down into Owheo. Any water downstream of this point could not be consumed. This protection extended to the fish, birds and even firewood along the river.

8 Sister stone

On the steps in front of the river, you can find the Dunedin-Edinburgh sister stone.

A celebration of the historical bond between the two cities, this sculpture by Scottish artist Sylvia Stewart is made from Aberdeenshire granite, all the way from Scotland. A similar stone made from Otago volcanic magma rock lies next to the Water of Leith in Edinburgh.

Did you know the main campus was the original home of the Botanic Gardens? After multiple floods, the Gardens moved in 1869 and the University of Otago took over the land. Our recent flood protection works on campus created more space and made it easier to dip your feet in the Leith on a hot summer's day.

9 Albatross bridge

Walk across the footbridge behind Teacher's College and you'll be on the back of a giant albatross!

Created in 1992 by then-art school student Bill Ryalls, the welded steel rod albatross head rests on the centre wall of the Leith, while the footbridge forms the bird's giant wings. Best viewed from the Art School side, the albatross 'soars' over the double channel of the Leith. Can you see the sea from here?

10 Harbour Mouth

Did you see any weirs on your way along the Leith?

The big wide single 'steps' that go right across the Leith are called weirs. During low tide, the river alongside the stadium can be still or slow and could become rather smelly. The weirs are made of recycled blocks of concrete which help keep water pooled – which keeps the smell away. Sea-faring trout and salmon enter our river here, jumping over the weirs to make their way upstream.