

9 December 2010

Ten-day Walking Festival in Rotorua

Rotorua is known for its scenic lakes, forests and geothermal wonderland. The Rotorua Walking Festival being held from 11 to 20 March 2011 will include walks in native and commercial forests, through areas with geysers, mud pools and thermal springs, along the edge of Lake Rotorua, and guided walks at Lakes Okataina and Tarawera. The 20 walking events over ten days range from a challenging marathon walk in Whakarewarewa forest, to a nocturnal walk to see glow worms and hear night life, to family walks that can include the tots in pushchairs. All the walks are recreational and non-competitive and are organised by the Rotary Club of Rotorua West, the Department of Conservation, and Events and Venues Rotorua of the Rotorua District Council.

On Saturday 12 March volunteer guides from the Mount Ngongotaha Bush Restoration Trust will accompany walkers on this volcanic dome of 757 meters which sits right beside the city of Rotorua. There is an easy loop nature walk through unlogged native forest on the lower slopes of the mountain. More ambitious walkers can continue to the summit along the historic Jubilee Track cut by the people of Rotorua in 1890.

On the following day the SPCA is organising a Paws Walk for dogs on leashes and their owners and friends in the Redwoods, a magnificent stand of Californian sequoia trees on the edge of the city.

Over this first weekend of the Festival there are two walks which have been organised for residents of Rotorua. The Department of Conservation will provide a sneak preview of the first 14 km of the Tarawera Trail, from the Buried Village to Hot Water Beach, to the locals. This part of the trail will be opened to the public some time in 2011. Eventually the trail will provide a multi-day walk right around Lake Tarawera.

The second event for the locals, on Sunday, 13 March, will be a boat trip to Mokoia Island in the heart of Lake Rotorua, offered at a discounted price. The day will include a guided tour of the island, an introduction to the native forest and to the endangered birds that have found a sanctuary there, and a hot soak in Hinemoa's Pool. Wai Ora Experiences run similar trips daily for visitors.

During the following week there will be organised walks in the Redwood Forest, or locals and visitors can join various existing Rotorua walking and tramping groups. An example is the Rotorua Cross Country Walking Group that organises solid full-day walks requiring a moderate level of fitness on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The highlights of the Rotorua Walking Festival are the International Walks, being offered for the 18th year by the Rotary Club of Rotorua West. These leisure walks provide great scenery, fun, fellowship and a real sense of achievement when those who complete two walks over the weekend receive a medal. On Saturday, 19 March, there is a choice of 10 km, half marathon, or marathon walks through Whakarewarewa Forest. This magnificent forest has dozens of tree species and was established in 1901 as an experiment to test the suitability of different native and exotic forest species for commercial planting. The management of this forest now includes strategies to welcome recreational users.

On Sunday, 20 March the 10, 20 or 30 km walks go along boardwalks through clouds of steam drift, over boiling mud and steaming fumaroles, past the Sulphur Bay bird sanctuary

on Lake Rotorua, along the lakefront, and through city parks and garden suburbs. Marshalls along the routes provide encouragement and drinks. Some of the areas on these walks are very dangerous with signs to advise walkers to stay on the path at all times.

For those who prefer walking in native forests and along lakes, there are two guided forest walks to choose from on the Sunday. A 22 km walk goes from Lake Okataina to Lake Tarawera and then along the Tarawera River to the stunning Tarawera Falls. There are charming picnic spots along the river to stop for lunch. Those interested in native ferns will be delighted by the many species found here. Transport is provided to drop the walkers off, and to pick them up near Kawerau. Those who do not feel up to this walk which requires a moderate to high level of fitness can opt for a boat ride from Tarawera Landing to the Tarawera Outlet from where they can walk for as far as they choose along the river and then return back to the boat.

All are welcome on the International Walks in which hundreds of overseas visitors also participate. These walks of international quality are part of the IML Walking Association's programme and walkers who complete walks of at least 20 km on each of the two days receive IML medals.

After a full day of walking, Rotorua's internationally famous hot bathing pools and spas will beckon. The final weekend programme includes a dinner cruise on the Lakeland Queen and a prizegiving on Sunday afternoon. All the International Walks start from the clubrooms of the Netherlands Society in Neil Hunt Park, where refreshments will be available and entertainment provided.

Just in case the Walking Festival is not providing a walk that suits your level of fitness or interest on a particular day, there are lots of other walks to do in and around Rotorua. There are free walks at Hamurana Springs, along Lake Rotorua at Hannah's Bay, and on the 26 km Rotorua Walkway which is broken up into eight shorter sections.

Registration is required for the International Walks and for some of the other walks of the Rotorua Walking Festival. Information on how to register and on all the walks is provided on www.rotoruawalkingfestival.org.nz

There are discounted registration fees for families and teams, and for those who register for both days of the International Walks.

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