

CRUISING LAKE KANIERE

Kaniere is a real gem of a lake, less than 10 km in length but well worth exploring for a few days. It's not far from Lakes Brunner and Mahinapua, and the three together would make a very nice family outing for a week or more, in combination with visits to Shantytown, Hokitika (which has lots of interesting things to see), and other West Coast attractions.



Lake Kaniere, looking south from near the jetty. The far shore, at Lawyers Delight Beach, is 7 km distant.

SOME BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE LAKE AND ITS WEATHER

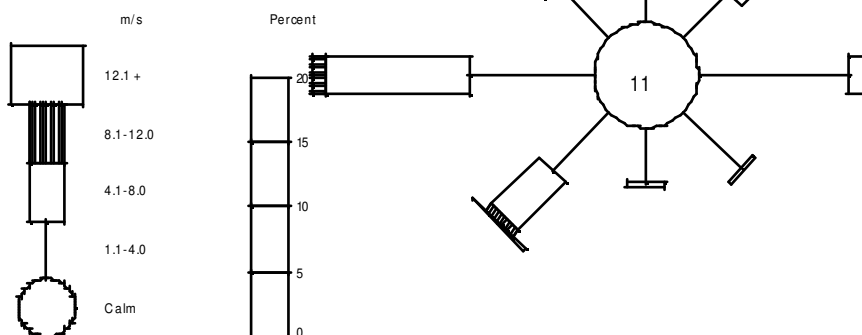
Lake Kaniere is about 15 km southeast of Hokitika, along a good sealed road. It is on the LINZ 1:50,000 topographic map 260-J33, *Kaniere* sheet.

The lake has a surface area of 13 square kilometers, and a maximum length of 8.6 km. It is a "landslide-dammed lake", with a maximum depth of 200 m. The Alpine Fault runs 2 km to the southeast of the lake, and the landscape is spectacular, with permanent snow less than 20 km distant – even though the lake is only 15 km from the sea. Kaniere is oriented roughly north-south, flanked by Mt Graham to the west and Tuhua to the east; winds on the lake are strongly controlled by the pattern of ridges and valleys that surround it.

Dec/Jan/Feb wind data

Site 207904 Hokitika AWS wind speed/direction

1-Oct-1980 to 4-May-2007



The December-February wind rose for Hokitika (kindly supplied by the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research) shows that the prevailing winds are from southwest

through to north, with calms recorded 11% of the time. The wind patterns on Kaniere are rather different, however. At the north end of the lake, the airflow tends to swing around from the northwest and then blow south, straight down the lake. At the south end, the wind comes in over the saddles from the Kokatahi River flats, and then blow north, straight up the lake. As always where there are steep hills along the shore, winds can be shifty or gusty, particularly at the south end. Out in the middle of the lake, though, the wind tends to be rather more steady and reliable.

Average annual rainfall at Hokitika, 15 km away, is 2,900 mm, but rainfall at Kaniere is rather higher, as the Southern Alps force rain-bearing winds to rise and dump moisture. February and March are, in general, the driest months. Average daily temperatures at Hokitika are 16°C in January and February – cooler at Kaniere because of the more persistent cloud cover, but the climate in this part of Westland is really very pleasant.

BOAT RAMPS AND OTHER FACILITIES

There are two boat ramps suitable for launching and recovering a Noelex 25. One is at the bach settlement at the northeast corner of the lake, at the end of the sealed road from Hokitika. There is a campground and toilet facilities here, and a jetty is about 200 m away. The other is at Sunny Bight, at the northwest corner, again with a campground and toilet, and in a very pleasant spot. At low lake levels, the “settlement ramp” can present problems for launching, as the lake bottom is gently sloping. The Sunny Bight ramp is perhaps more suitable for a Noelex, and also a little more sheltered – but be careful to keep clear of the water ski lane here.

There are no other facilities at Lake Kaniere, but Hokitika has all the services that a Noelex crew is likely to need, including supermarkets, garages, etc. The Department of Conservation office is a good source of information about outdoor activities in the area.

THINGS TO DO

Although you can sail (or motor) the length of Lake Kaniere in only a couple of hours, one can easily spend two or three days poking around. The lake provides safe and pleasant sailing – the only real hazard is logs and driftwood in the shallow bays, and a shoal (which is marked) in the entrance to Camp Bay.

The beaches at Sunny Bight and Lawyers Delight are very pleasant spots, and sheltered by the forest backdrop. From both these beaches, a walking track leads along the western shore of the lake – an excellent introduction to west coast forest. There is also an easy walking track up to Dorothy Falls from the gravel fan on the north side of Big Bay, and from near the lake outlet, the Kaniere walkway leads along a hydropower water race for about 8 km – an easy but longer walk through bush. For the much more energetic there are tracks up to Tuhua and the Mount Brown ridge – both requiring 7-10 hours for the return journey. (Note that the huts marked on map 260-J33 at Lawyers Delight and Mt Brown no longer exist).

ANCHORAGES

There are several lovely anchorages around the lake, although none along the western shore. Canoe Cove provides all-weather shelter in an almost completely enclosed backwater with a nice sand-gravel beach. The west arm of Hans Bay, just opposite the settlement boat ramp (which has several mooring buoys), also is very sheltered. Christmas Bay, halfway along the lake, also provides good shelter, although getting ashore is less easy, due to driftwood. These three probably provide the best refuges, if the weather turns nasty and there isn't time to get the boat ashore.



Lawyers Delight Beach; a very pleasant and sunny spot.



Slip Bay, with Tuhua peak in the background. Note the driftwood on the lake bed – lake level is very low in this photograph.

The east and south arms of Big Bay and the southernmost shore of Slip Bay provide sheltered conditions to tie back to shore; Big Bay has a gently shelving wetland-type shoreline, while Slip Bay should be negotiated carefully, as there is a lot of driftwood and logs on the lake bed and along the shore. Lawyers Delight Beach is perhaps the most pleasant spot for an overnight stop, but it is exposed to a strong northerly wind. (A sheltered spot around the headland to the west of Lawyers Delight is reported, though we haven't visited it). The shoreline in Sunny Bight, to the west of the boat ramp, also offers a tie-back that is sheltered in northwest conditions but would be exposed to a southerly blowing all the way up the lake.

AND A WORD ABOUT LAKE MAHINAPUA...

Lake Mahinapua, about 8 km south of Hokitika and half an hour's drive from Kaniere, is only about 3 square km in extent, but is a great spot for a pleasant sail and an overnight camp. The launching ramp at the scenic reserve campground is fine for a Noelex 25, with a jetty right beside it. The lake is generally 2-3 m deep, and has several bays with lots of wildlife, including white heron. The only beach is a tiny one, at Picnic Point, but it's a very pleasant spot for an overnight stay. A foot track starts here that links to the Mahinapua walkway, a delightful walk along the course of an old logging tramway. Being only 1 km from the shore, the lake tends to have steady winds that are largely undisturbed by hills, so the sailing is good – excellent for younger crew members to practice. The Lake Mahinapua Aquatic Club sails every Sunday during October to March, though we're not sure if there are any trailer yachts in the fleet. But Mahinapua is well worth a visit, whichever day you're there!



Lake Mahinapua – the jetty and launching area, with the Southern Alps providing the backdrop.

Paul Mosley
Silmarillion

