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Don't underestimate our rugged terrain: DOC

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English tramper Robert Atkin was found dead in the Kauaeranga Valley on April 12. His body was at the bottom of a waterfall, only hundreds of metres from safety. His girlfriend maintained a vigil as searchers scoured the rugged terrain and his parents flew out from England. The trio took his body back home last week; a planned year-long OE was tragically cut short.

Robert Atkin is one of many visitors who have been lost in Kauaeranga Valley throughout the years despite all the safety advice staff at the Department of Conservation's Kauaeranga Visitor Centre urge trampers to heed.

DOC Hauraki area manager John Gaukrodger says what happened to the English tramper was tragic and DOC is going to look further into what went wrong. "Kauaeranga Visitor Centre provides tourists with information about the different tracks and what condition they are in," he says.

"The Pinnacles walk is by far the best-posted walk and suited to inexperienced trampers.

"The most important thing we learnt from the death of Robert Atkin is that we have got some of the most rugged ranges in New Zealand on our doorstep and it's critical not to underestimate it," he says.

Thames Land Search and Rescue volunteer Robert Brouwer says there are too many people who don't do their homework before tramping in our bush.

"You should always be prepared to stay overnight in the bush, even when you're just planning to have a short walk."

Mr Brouwer is disturbed by the number of unprepared people who set out for walks in New Zealand.

He took his family to try out the new Windows Walk in the Karangahake Gorge last weekend and saw several people in sandals and T-shirts.

"People should always bring warm clothes, food, drink and a raincoat when they go for a walk in New Zealand.

"And the most important rule when you get lost is to stay put."

Sadly, Robert Atkin didn't stay put and that is why it was hard to find him, Mr Brouwer says.

"I guess he didn't know how good a search and rescue team we have got in New Zealand. He probably didn't know whether anyone would come and look for him."

Mr Brouwer says it is a lesson for everyone tramping in New Zealand and he wishes more

information could be included in tourist publications and websites.

"If you get lost, stay put and make yourself comfortable and we'll rescue you."

Thames i-Site Information Centre manager Diane Connors says the Kauaeranga Valley is one of the most popular destinations for tourists visiting Thames.

"There are about 22 different tracks they can choose from but we usually advise them to take the Pinnacles walk; a dry option where DOC has done an amazing sign-posting job. We always tell visitors to write a note telling where they are going, what time they left and how many people there are.

"We also advise them to take some food and water and to stick to the tracks. A pretty low number of people get lost and we've got an excellent search and rescue team who will find them if they just stay put."

HAURAKI HERALD

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