

# Photographic Locations Worth Sweating For: A night at the Tararua Penthouse suite

by Peter Laursen



### Brooding Bivvy

My bivvy spot at sunset, on Mitre – the highest point in the Tararua Ranges, Jan 2021  
Lumix TZ 220, F8, 1/25s, ISO125, 24mm



### Eastern Eye Candy

Peggy's Peak, viewed from Mitre at dawn, Tararua Ranges, Jan 2021  
Lumix TZ 220, stitch of 3 landscape images, F3.3, 1/3s, ISO125, 24mm

Being Wellington-based, I get in to the Tararua Ranges fairly frequently. Certainly enough to know that these relatively low lying ranges still deserve utmost respect. While the highest point is less than 1,600 metres, most approaches to the tops involve big steep climbs over rooty, muddy terrain. But once above the bush line, those rugged Tararua ridges combined with dynamic, often broody, weather produce spectacular landscapes for the keen photographer.

At 1,571 metres, Mitre is the highest point in the Tararua ranges. Ironically, the trail giving access to it from Mitre Flats Hut on the eastern side, while requiring a big 1,200 metre height gain, is one of the easiest I've encountered – nicely graded and not particularly steep for the most part. It's

possible to climb Mitre as a long day walk from the Pines, at the end of Upper Waingawa Road. The return trip is about 24km, taking 10 to 12 hours – certainly involving a fair bit of sweat. But, while doing it this way permits a very lightweight pack and more certainty about weather conditions, you'll be in the bush for both dawn and dusk.

A better approach is to walk the three or so hour Barra track to Mitre Flats Hut on the first day, then set off a couple of hours before dawn next morning so that you can breach the bush line for sunrise. Better still, do what I did in January this year and stay the night on top of Mitre. That gets you both sunset and sunrise – and it's definitely worth sweating for.

Being the highest point, it's exposed, so you need to pick a nice weather window. There is no water supply up there so be sure to bring some for the overnight stay. And before you depart Mitre Flats, take care of your number twos, or take a poo-pot, because there is no loo at the Tararua Penthouse suite.

While the amenities are 'basic', there's plenty of spongy tussock to hunker down on and the 360 degree view is outstanding. Mitre actually sits a bit off to the east of the main range, so it affords great views north, across Table Ridge to Arete and Bannister; and south along the main range to the Three Kings, the Broken Axe Pinnacles and McGregor. On the east side, once it's dark,

the lights of Masterton twinkle, this paling in comparison to the Milky Way directly overhead though.

Both dusk and dawn are beautiful. If conditions are right dawn goes on and on. The myriad of colours afforded by sunlight appear well before the sun actually breaks the eastern horizon. Then a lightshow unfolds as one peak or ridge top after another catches the light.

For more captioned images and a route map visit the link below and weigh up if this is a location worth sweating for!

<https://www.occasionalclimber.co.nz/browse-images-2/new-zealand-north-island/tararuas-browse/mitre-via-table-ridge/>