

Photographic Locations Worth Sweating For: Waimakariri Falls Hut, Arthurs Pass

by Peter Laurenson

Waimakariri Falls Hut, perched above the falls.
Lumix TZ220, stitch of 3 portrait images @ F8, 1/160s, ISO125, 24mm





View south to Waimakariri Falls Hut
Lumix TZ220, stitch of 5 portrait images @ F8, 1/250s, ISO125, 24mm



View north to Waimakariri Col (1,787m)
 Lumix TZ220, stitch of 4 portrait images @ F8, 1/250s, ISO125, 24mm

There are more than 900 huts dotted throughout New Zealand's hill country. Some have been there for many decades, perched in spectacular spots providing trampers and climbers much needed shelter from the storm, but also places of tranquillity, often steeped in history and character.

Waimakariri Falls Hut is one fine example. Built in 1950, it's essentially just a small red box anchored to the ground by strong steel cables. The hut was refurbished in April 2005 by the Canterbury Mountaineering Club and now has 6 bunks with foam mattresses, insulated walls, double glazed windows, a cooking bench, fire extinguisher and blanket, and fixed ventilation. A new toilet was also installed in February 2012. It's a small but cosy space – modernised, but still exuding the charm only possible from a hut with a 70 year history.

For photographers, it's the spectacular alpine basin ringed by some of Arthur's Pass National Park's highest peaks and bordered at the southern end by a sheer cliff and plunging waterfall, where the hut is perched, that really makes this destination one worth sweating for. The tiny hut provides an ideal visual reference point for demonstrating the grand scale of the surrounding mountains.

The basin collects the headwaters of the Waimakariri River, where snow melt drains down through cliffs, scree, then beautiful alpine tussock, concentrating in a stream that quickly builds to the gushing Waimakariri Falls right beside the hut. Nearby tarns also offer a

superb photographic subject, reflecting the mountains on their surface when the conditions are right.

Though the location is certainly alpine, you don't need to be a mountaineer to reach it. This is river country though, so if it's wet or the river is up care is required and the route may not even be feasible. Even in good conditions expect to get wet boots from some river fording.

From Highway 73, at Klondyke Corner 10 kilometres south of Arthur's Pass Village, the first stage of the journey requires a rubble plod up a flat braided section of the Waimakariri River to the large (36 bunks, 800 metres) Carrington Hut, taking 4-6 hours. Here you cross the White River, just west of where it joins the Waimakariri to regain the true right bank of the Waimakariri, which you then continue to follow.

To begin there is a defined trail, but this gives way to cairns as the terrain steepens, so some route finding is needed. It takes 3-4 hours to reach Waimakariri Falls Hut (1,300 metres) and the terrain becomes increasingly impressive as you go. The final section below the hut, accessed via a small bridge, requires some scrambling up steep rubble and tussock.

The area has an untouched feeling about it and the big picture is not the only attraction, with alpine flora and fauna to be seen and photographed along the route. While I haven't spent a night up at the hut, expansive views both north and south, plus the ridgelines and peaks towering overhead, should make the magic hour live up to its name when conditions permit.



Waimakariri Falls Hut, perched above the falls.
 Lumix TZ220, stitch of 3 portrait images @ F8, 1/160s, ISO125, 24mm