

# Photographic Locations Worth Sweating For: Paritutu Rock, New Plymouth

by Peter Laurenson

Dawn View Of The Sugar Loafs

Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens  
Stitch of 3 portrait images @ F9, 1/50s, ISO100, 27mm





**Dawn View Southwest, Paritutu, New Plymouth**

Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens  
Stitch of 2 landscape images @ F4.5, 1/20s, ISO200, 27mm

In this 'worth sweating for' article, I'll give you a bit of respite from the sweating, because one of New Plymouth's icons, Paritutu Rock, is just 156 metres high and from the car park at its base (56m) only takes about 15 minutes to climb.

It can take much less time if you're in a hurry, but the steep and narrow trail ascending volcanic andesite rock dictates that you move at the slowest person's pace in many parts. Yes, it's steep, but you'll have ample time at the top to allow any sweat to dry off while you enjoy the 360-degree panorama.

A large volcano, thought to have been similar in size to nearby Mount Taranaki, was active around 1.75 million years ago. Paritutu and the nearby Sugar Loaf Islands are the eroded stumps of its ancient volcanic crater. Māori flattened the summit of Paritutu to make shelters and kumara storage pits, and the people from nearby Moturoa called it Fishing Rock. Captain Cook first spotted it in 1770.

I was born in New Plymouth and lived there until I headed east to Massey University in Palmerston North. 'Paritoot', as we affectionately called it, was a part of the fabric of my childhood for as long as I can remember. Since heading away to Uni, I've always lived elsewhere, but whenever I return to 'Paradise' as the locals call their district, I make a point of zipping up Paritutu to get that 'coming home' feeling.

Over the years, the trail up Paritutu has been greatly upgraded. It was a rock scramble from the bottom when I was a kid. Today, the first section

is a manicured wooden staircase that becomes a well-worn rocky trail with bolted steel chains for much of the way, providing handrails even some occasional concrete steps. You need both hands quite frequently, but it's not difficult.

Being just minutes from central New Plymouth, the trail can get pretty busy on fine days and public holidays. The trick is to climb Paritutu just before dawn or sunset. Do make sure you take a head torch with you, though. When I've done that, I've enjoyed an uncongested trail and a serenely peaceful top every time. This is where my 'worth sweating for' ethos applies for this particular location. You could also add that 'the early bird catches the worm'.

And for that predawn sweat, you'll enjoy the twinkling lights of New Plymouth city laid out to the south and east, with Port Taranaki and its unique 198 metre tall chimney (second only in height to Auckland's Sky Tower) directly below. The entire district's icon, Mount Taranaki, provides a striking skyline feature directly to the south. Looking west and north are the seven Sugar Loaf Islands, spread across an ocean expanse, with the rugged black sands of Back Beach directly below. When you throw magic hour light into this mix, you have a photographer's paradise – ocean scape, cliffs, skyline features, and heaps of other fore and middle ground details. Even the trig stationed on the summit provides an interesting photographic subject, so there are plenty of opportunities to fill your memory card!



**Dawn View Of The Sugar Loafs**  
Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens  
@ F9, 1/50s, ISO100, 27mm





**Top: Dawn View Southeast, Paritutu, New Plymouth**  
Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens  
Stitch of 3 landscape images @ F5.6, 1/125s, ISO200, 27mm

**Bottom: Dawn View Southwest, Paritutu, New Plymouth**  
Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens  
Stitch of 4 landscape images @ F6.3, 1/125s, ISO200, 48mm