

Ben Lomond, From The Approach Trail

Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens @ F20, 1/80s, ISO100, 27mm

Photographic Locations Worth Sweating For: Ben Lomond, Queenstown

by Peter Laurenson





Above: Wide View South From Ben Lomond Summit

Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens, stitch of 4 landscape images @ F18, 1/100s, ISO100, 27mm

One of the best views you can get of Queenstown and its beautiful surrounds is from a 1,748 metre peak just four kilometres northwest of the town centre named after Ben Lomond in Scotland by the early shepherd Duncan McAusland.

The 1,438 metre elevation gain of the Ben Lomond track certainly tends to induce quite a bit of sweating, especially during the summer months. From Queenstown's CBD it's a 6-8hour, 11 kilometre return journey. You can start at the Skyline Gondola car park (310m), following the Tiki trail or from the bottom of the Skyline Access Road. Both trails take you up through Douglas fir and pockets of mountain beech to the top of the Skyline Gondola (812m), but by taking the gondola, you cut off 500 metres of climbing. Be wary of mountain bikers as there are many mountain bike trails bisecting the foot trail. Above the gondola you breach the treeline, heading up a well-formed track marked by orange poles, crossing open tussock and shrub-clad hillside.

While access is relatively easy, Ben Lomond is still high enough that the temperature on the summit is much lower than down in the town. It can often be fully snow-clad in winter conditions. There is no water supply on the track, but toilets have recently been installed at the saddle (1,316m).

Even at the saddle (a 3-4 hour round trip), you can enjoy good views back to Queenstown, Lake Wakatipu,

Ka-kamu-a-Hakitekura/Cecil and Walter Peaks and Kawarau/Remarkables to the south and Mount Aspiring/Tiitea (3,033m), Mount Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi (2,830m) and many other peaks of the Southern Alps to the north, but by climbing the final 432 metres, taking about another hour, the even better views are definitely worth sweating for. This section of the trail is still easy to follow but certainly the most challenging section of the route. If it's snowy, crampons and a walking axe are recommended, and you must be aware of avalanche danger.

Allow time to spend soaking up the magnificent vista from the summit. Queenstown is deemed by many as the jewel in New Zealand's tourism crown, and from this vantage point, it's hard to deny. On the summit is a detailed directional sign indicating what the numerous peaks are in every direction, enabling you to know what you're actually looking at.

While I've been up Ben Lomond in both summer and winter, I haven't been on the summit for dawn or dusk, but I know it would be a superb spot to be at during fine weather. A good head torch would be entirely sufficient to descend in the dark as far as the gondola, which operates late into the evening. A glass of chardonnay (or whatever your preferred poison might be) before you drop back down to Queenstown would be a nice way to finish off too.



View North To Mt Earnslaw From Ben Lomond Summit

Nikon D7000, Nikon AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105 lens @ F18, 1/160s, ISO100, 52mm



View South From About 1,000m, Above Skyline Gondola
Nikon D70S, Sigma AF 28-70 F3.5 lens, stitch of 3 landscape images
© F22, 1/125s, ISO200, 27mm