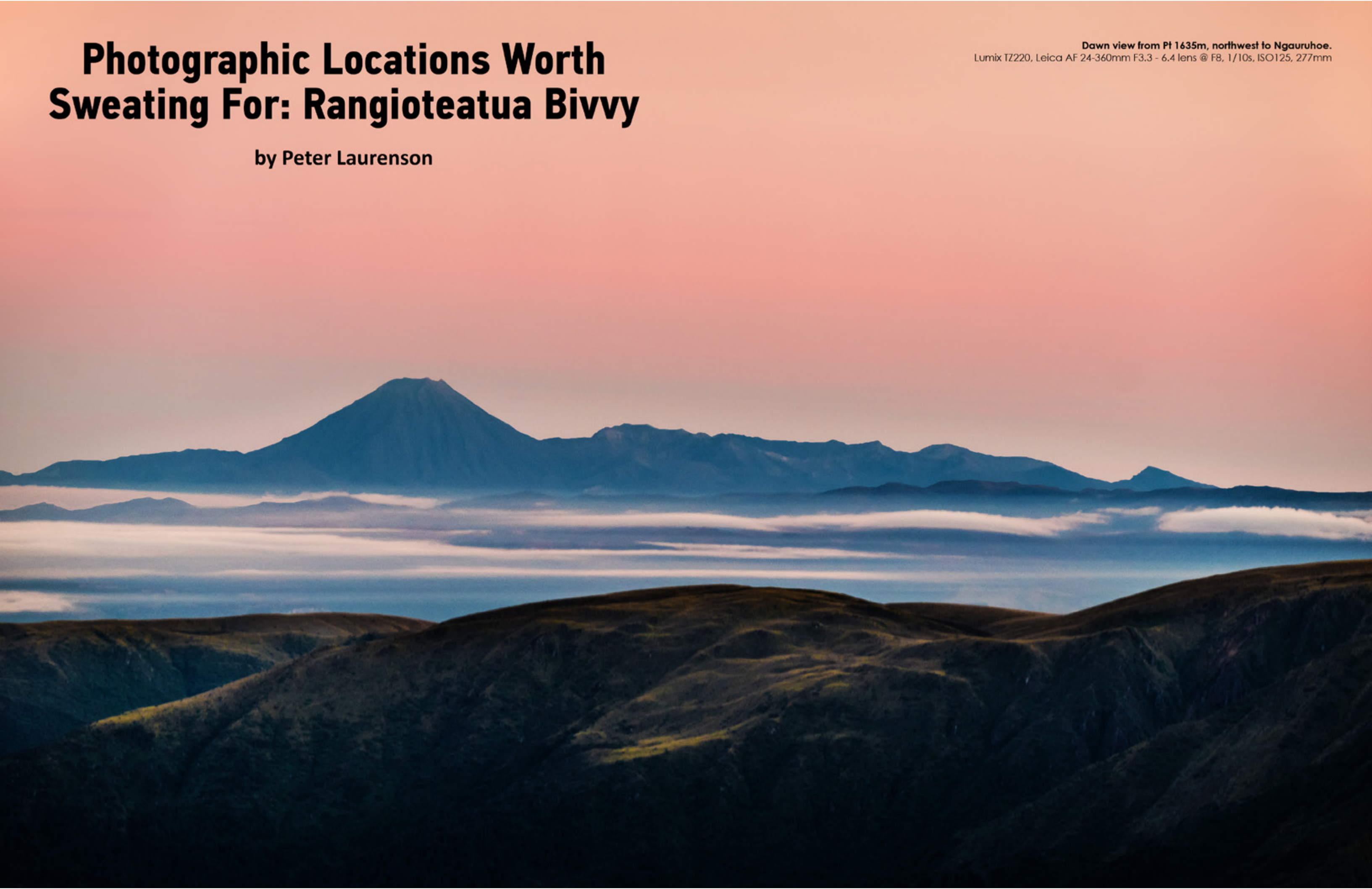


Photographic Locations Worth Sweating For: Rangiateatua Bivvy

by Peter Laurenson

Dawn view from Pt 1635m, northwest to Ngauruhoe.
Lumix TZ220, Leica AF 24-360mm F3.3 - 6.4 lens @ F8, 1/10s, ISO125, 277mm





Dawn view from Pt1635, north to Waipawa Saddle in the dip and Te Atuaoparapara top left, Ruahines.
Lumix TZ220, Leica AF 24-360mm F3.3 - 6.4 lens @ F8, 1/40s, ISO125, 24mm

'No pain, no gain.' Camping a night out high on the Ruahine tops provides undeniable proof of that saying, because visiting those tops certainly demands parting with a good deal of sweat. But, if you time it right and have clear settled weather, there are few natural landscapes that can beat this one for magic hour loveliness.

There are six points above 1,700 metres in the Ruahine Ranges. That's where you can find some of the most spectacular alpine terrain and viewpoints outside Tongariro National Park on the North Island. In April I visited two of them – 1,704 metre Rangioteatua and its unimaginatively named 1,715 metre companion A6G4, for an overnight bivvy (camp with no tent) above the clouds.

In the warmer months this landscape is free of snow, but reaching it still requires more than a vertical kilometre of ascent. The most direct approach is from the gravel road end of North Block Road, accessed from Wakarara Road, in turn, accessed from State Highway 50, just north of Ongaonga in Hawke's Bay.

The route first traces the Waipawa River up to Waipawa Saddle at 1,326 metres. While the river

is quite open to begin with, expect to get wet feet, and as you near the saddle it steepens and becomes loose underfoot, eventually joining a steep path up through dense leatherwood. From Waipawa Saddle head southeast up the scree slope towards Three Johns, but then turn southwest at about 1,500 metres to follow the main ridge up to Pt1635, and then on to Rangioteatua. The terrain is open, but not marked, so in the case of cloud, a map, navigational gear and the ability to use them is essential.

While Waipawa Forks Hut offers shelter down at 740 metres on the true right of Waipawa River, this is no use if you want to be up on the tops for sunset and sunrise. Up there the only 'amenities' are a tarn offering drinking water, situated just off the ridge, between Rangioteatua and A6G4, and flat tussock spaces offering a relatively soft surface to sleep on.

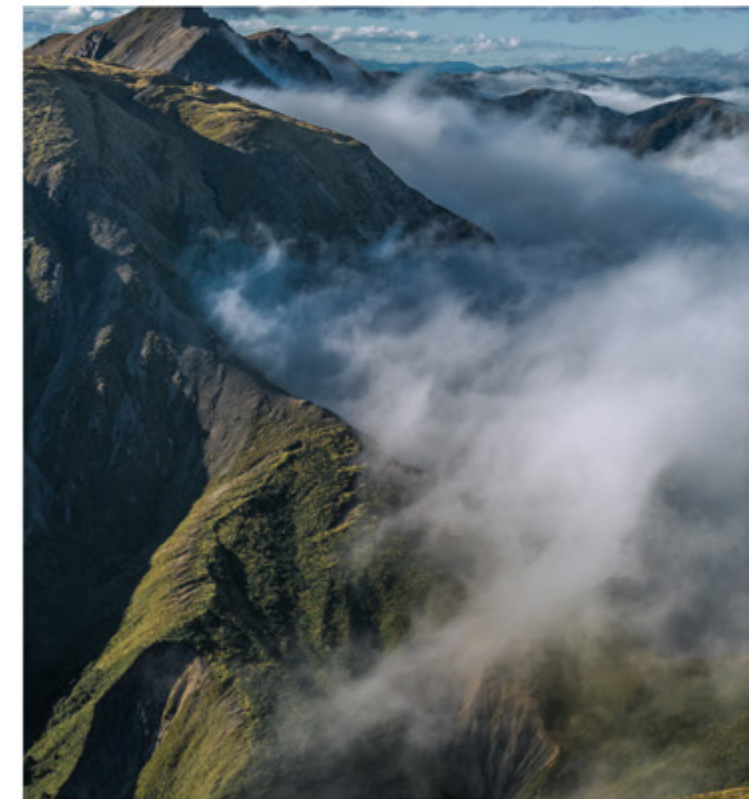
On my visit, I climbed in dense cloud cover until above Three Johns. Then the clouds gradually cleared, revealing spectacular cloud-draped ridges and, for a brief time, even a brocken spectre (a rarely seen miniature rainbow in the shape of a halo, centred on my own shadow, projected on cloud cover beneath me). The drama of sunset up



Three Johns at dusk, viewed from Pt1635, Ruahines.
Lumix TZ220, Leica AF 24-360mm F3.3 - 6.4 lens, stitch of 2 landscape images @ F8, 1/800s, ISO125, 172mm

high was further enhanced by the retreating clouds which caught the warm hues of the setting sun. I found it almost wasteful to close my eyes during the fabulously clear night as shooting stars, (sadly) multitudes of satellites, and the occasional grunts from a family of nearby deer kept me entertained. The chill breeze deterred me from trying some astrophotography during the small hours, but the onset of sunrise made it easy to climb from my sleeping bag at dawn. It really was a photographer's paradise, which was mine alone.

The quickest way out again would have been to retrace my steps of the day before. But I much prefer a circuit, where the wonder of new ground provides more motivation to keep moving. My route went on over A6G4, then down ridge to Smiths Stream Hut at 900 metres. From there I paid my dues for having enjoyed such a wonderful time on the tops. As I slogged back up another river, then up and down repeatedly, across the grain of the land, back to my parked car I reflected 'Yes, it's true – no pain, no gain'.



Waipawa Saddle (1,326m) and the route leading up to Te Atuaoparapara top left, Ruahines.
Lumix TZ220, Leica AF 24-360mm F3.3 - 6.4 lens @ F8, 1/800s, ISO125, 69mm



Dawn view from P11635, west to Mangaweka (right) and south to Rangiateatua (left of centre), Ruahines.
Lumix TZ220, Leica AF 24-360mm F3.3 - 6.4 lens, stitch of 3 landscape images @ F8, 1/15s, ISO125, 24mm



Te Atuaoparapara (1,687m, left) and Three Johns (1,569m, right) at dusk, from Pt1635, Ruahines.
Lumix TZ220, Leica AF 24-360mm F3.3 - 6.4 lens, stitch of 2 landscape images @ F8, 1/80s, ISO125, 27mm