

# Photographic locations worth sweating for

Arete Hut, Tararua Ranges

WORDS AND IMAGES  
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ARETE HUT, AUGUST, F8, 1/320 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM

*It's easy to fall into the assumption that a great landscape photograph is simply a lucky snap that anyone can take with a smartphone these days. However, the truth behind capturing truly stunning images often involves much more than just being in the right place at the right time.*

*In the first of a series of articles by Peter, we are taken on a fascinating journey behind breathtaking landscapes. From the sacrifices of time and comfort to the enormous commitment and passion required by those behind the camera, you will gain a new appreciation for the dedication, art, and skill of landscape photography, and hard work that goes into creating these photographs.*

The Tararua Ranges have a reputation for offering miserable slogs up steep, muddy, densely bush-covered hillsides in the rain, on to clagged-in viewless tops. If you chose to visit them in bad weather then that reputation is fair enough, but you don't have to do that if you're prepared to be patient and to work with, rather than against, Mother Nature. Of the 36 trips I have made into the Tararua Ranges, only a third involved some poor weather, and only a couple were viewless slogs. And when the weather is kind, the photographic opportunities are definitely worth sweating for.

If you want to capture really beautiful images, the trick is to be up on the tops for sunset and sunrise when the weather is calm, with at least breaks in the clouds. Although the number fluctuates, on my last count there were 58 huts in the Tararua Ranges. Some of these huts are located high-up on spectacular perches – ideal spots to overnight very near the tops. I have visited 30 of the huts and one of my favourites is Arete.

Nestled in a hanging tussock basin at 1,360 metres, beneath 1,505-metre Arete (one of 15 points above 1,500 metres in the Tararua Ranges), facing southeast, Arete Hut is beautifully positioned for sunrise. A scramble up Arete also offers a superb 360-degree panoramic view from which to enjoy sunset.

The landscape surrounding the hut is dominated by 1,537-metre Bannister to the east and 1,504-metre Lancaster to the south, but many other high points also feature. From the high points, ridges and spurs descend into deeply-cut Arete Stream. Add

morning light and you have a dramatic landscape of highlights and shadows, with the Wairarapa stretching out beyond.

I have slept at Arete Hut on two trips, in December and mostly recently in August, when the tussock-covered landscape was coated in glistening rime ice, adding another level of 'wow' to an already spectacular scene. For Tararua vistas, and indeed alpine vistas in general, this one is hard to beat when the conditions are right. But there is a catch.

There is no easy way to reach Arete Hut. An approach from Poas Road east of Levin can be hiked in one 10-or-so hour day, but a more civilised approach is to stay a night at Te Matawai Hut before heading on up next morning. The reason I chose one long day was so that I would be at the hut next morning when the weather was forecast to clear, which it did. But the climb up and over Arete the evening before was in freezing sleet, which coated my friend and me in a thin film of ice by the time we reached the hut after nightfall. It was a good demonstration of why you should not take the Tararua tops lightly.

You can also reach Arete Hut from the east from Kiriwhakapapa Road, north of Masterton, but that requires another 10-hour day with a choice of two ascent routes from Cow Creek Hut, which both involve challenging terrain.

Another factor to consider is that Arete Hut is a two bunk cutey. A magic place to be when you have it to yourself or with just one other, but if others are already in residence, then you may be sleeping under the stars.



ARETE HUT, DAWN AUGUST, F8, 1/125 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM



SUNSET VIEW NORTHWEST FROM ABOUT 1,100M ON THE TRAIL TO PUKEMATAWAI,  
AUGUST; STITCH OF 2 LANDSCAPE IMAGES F4.5, 1/100, ISO 125, 24MM



DAWN VIEW TO BANNISTER (LEFT) FROM NEAR ARETE HUT, AUGUST;  
STITCH OF 3 LANDSCAPE IMAGES F8, 1/80 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM

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#### About Peter Laurenson

Peter joined the New Zealand Alpine Club (NZAC) in 2002 and has since become an occasional climber, balancing time in the mountains with work and family commitments. Since 2004, he has been winning occasional Wellington Section and National NZAC annual photo competition awards, Federated Mountain Club (FMC) photo competition awards, photo challenges, and getting the occasional shot published at NationalGeographic.com. Since 2014, he has also had short articles featured frequently in Wilderness Magazine, NZAC Vertigo and, since 2019, articles in NZPhotographer and with the Excio photo community.

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