



Photographic locations worth sweating for

Mt Arthur, Kahurangi National Park

WORDS AND IMAGES
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A VIEW THROUGH SWIRLING CLOUD TO TASMAN BAY FROM THE MT ARTHUR TRAIL



A MT ARTHUR SUMMIT VIEW AT SUNSET SOUTHWEST TO THE TWINS IN CLOUD AT RIGHT



A MT ARTHUR SUMMIT VIEW AT SUNSET NORTHEAST OVER THE MT ARTHUR ROUTE (SUNLIT)
TO TASMAN BAY (RIGHT)



A MT ARTHUR SUMMIT VIEW AT SUNSET NORTHEAST OVER THE MT ARTHUR ROUTE (SUNLIT) TO TASMAN BAY (RIGHT)



A MT ARTHUR SUMMIT VIEW AT SUNSET SOUTHWEST TO THE TWINS IN CLOUD F8, 1/80 SEC, ISO 125, 39MM

In the second article in this series, we join Peter Laurenson on a captivating day-trip adventure to Mt Arthur, where the allure of capturing landscapes is just the beginning. Situated in New Zealand's Arthur Range, this majestic peak unveils its distinctive karst rock formations and panoramic vistas. Starting from the Flora carpark, a leisurely hike through enchanting beech forest leads to the cosy Mt Arthur Hut.

Embarking on a three-hour ascent to the summit, Peter reminds us that there is more to photography than meets the eye. Swirling clouds, dramatic landscapes, and the spirit of exploration await, inviting us to embrace the magic that lies beyond capturing mere scenery.

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In December 2022, my partner Cathy and I shifted south from our home in Wellington to a new one we had built on the foothills above Richmond. From 110 metres above sea level, we gaze directly across to Mt Arthur / Tuao Wharepapa, one of the highest points in the Arthur Range / Wharepapa. Just from our deck, the dawn and dusk photographic opportunities keep me occupied as the seasons unfold. But being so close to the peak compelled me to go and spend a night on it to catch the magic hour.

A day-trip to Mt Arthur is popular with outdoor lovers of all abilities. Access is via the Flora carpark situated at 950 metres, only a tad more than an hour's drive from Richmond. The gravel road to the carpark is mostly in very good order, aside from a steep section where parallel concrete tracks have been laid to counteract the challenges of wet conditions. Winter conditions

should also not be taken lightly. The road cuts through steep mountainous terrain subject to slips, snow, and ice.

It's not much more than an hour's stroll from the carpark, up through beech forest on a very nicely maintained footpath, to reach the 8-bunk Mt Arthur Hut at 1,300 metres, nestled right at the edge of the treeline. There aren't too many easier ways to reach the alpine tops than that, which is one of the reasons for the route's popularity.

Another reason is the distinctive and spectacular scenery, defined by karst rock formations. A karst landscape evolves where bedrock is dissolved over eons, forming sinkholes, sinking streams, caves, and springs. Mt Arthur is hard, crystalline marble, transformed from softer limestone laid down under the sea about 450 million years ago.

During the ice ages, glaciers carved smooth basins on the flanks of Mt Arthur, scouring and polishing the marble. The basin floors are pock-marked with sinkholes where surface water drills its way underground into extensive cave systems. These sink holes are often so deep that when you peer down into them there is just blackness. Some smaller holes can be hidden by tussock so, when travelling across this terrain, you should not assume the next step is solid ground.

From hut to summit takes around three hours. Above Mt Arthur Hut, the trail remains very well trodden and clearly defined. Very soon after leaving the bush, spectacular karst formations greet you – with Tuao Wharepapa dominating the distant skyline. It's a bit more of a scramble for 200 or so metres beneath the summit, but nothing to be concerned about in good conditions. Being 1,795 metres high, the broad peak can often collect cloud coming from the west by late morning or early

afternoon. Therefore, I figured the best chance to enjoy magic hour was to bivvy up on top. I figured that if dusk was clagged in, I'd still be in place for dawn.

Factors to consider before spending a night out are that there are no toilet facilities or water source available on the summit. If the weather does close in, as it did for me around dusk, wind can really increase and the temperature will drop significantly. I didn't get ideal conditions, but the swirling clouds around the Twins, just to the south, dawn saw me scurrying off the cloud-engulfed top, tail between my legs, as the wind threatened to blow me off my feet. But that location, offering a magnificent 360 degree panorama, will ensure that I'll be back. A crisp, calm winter's night out on top might be the ultimate photographic location worth sweating for, or perhaps shivering for.