

Photographic locations worth sweating for

Ellis Basin, Mt Arthur Range

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DAWN VIEW EAST FROM OUR CAMPSITE
F8, 1/10 SEC, ISO 125, 62MM

In the July/August issue of Captivating Photography Journal, I described a night on top of Mt Arthur / Tuao Wharepapa, one of the highest points in the Arthur Range / Wharepapa, in Kahurangi National Park. I mentioned how accessible Mt Arthur is and that it's situated in a fascinating and very photogenic karst landscape where, during the ice ages, glaciers carved smooth basins on the flanks of Mt Arthur, scouring and polishing the marble.

Now I'll describe another amazing photographic location very near Mt Arthur – one also carved out over eons by glaciers. To reach it you need to descend south, off the top of Mt Arthur, dropping 200 metres to tussock lands at 1,600 metres. Here, you're at the northern rim of Ellis Basin. The rim is spectacular in itself, defined mostly by very steep ground or sheer cliffs. But there's a weakness in these fortifications allowing you to drop into the basin a little east of Point 1753. From there, a smear of a trail makes its way underneath Point 1753, giving access to less steep tussock.

This is one of the routes that climbers use to reach North Twin, which looms overhead further to the south west. While it's steep and rugged terrain, in fine summer conditions no technical climbing gear is required. From Flora carpark to the tussock lands beneath Point 1753

takes five to seven hours to reach in good conditions. And one advantage that the upper Ellis Basin offers over the summit of Mt Arthur is water. Several lovely tarns are nestled in the tussocky hollows between 1,570 and 1,450 metres – perfect spots to set up a tent. Another advantage is that in the basin it's more sheltered than on top of exposed Mt Arthur. That doesn't mean though that you can be casual about weather conditions. Everywhere up above the tree line in our mountains can become very hostile in bad weather.

Although the camping spots are situated down below the jagged ridges of the basin rim, the basin is wide enough to permit dawn and dusk light to penetrate. The basin walls take on lovely hues as magic hour unfolds, while further afield the Richmond, Ragland and St Arnaud Ranges provide an intricate, layered skyline to the southeast.

After enjoying a night under the stars, it's possible to descend further to the basin floor (1,150m) to reach Ellis Basin Hut, or to link up with a steep trail that ascends the eastern wall of the basin to Winter Peak, where it rejoins the main trail back to Flora carpark. Any option you choose will certainly demand some sweating, but it is unquestionably worth the effort.



DUSK LIGHT ON THE EASTERN FLANKS OF NORTH TWIN
F8, 1/100 SEC, ISO 125, 85MM



TARNS ON THE ASCENT TO THE BASIN RIM, WITH NORTH TWIN IN CLOUD AT LEFT
STITCH OF 4 PORTRAIT IMAGES, F6.3, 1/320 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM



OUR CAMPSITE AND NORTH TWIN (LEFT) AT SUNSET
STITCH OF 4 PORTRAIT IMAGES, F8, 1/50 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM



DAWN VIEW EAST FROM OUR CAMPSITE
STITCH OF 3 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F8, 1/10 SEC, ISO 125, 62MM



DAWN VIEW TO NORTH TWIN CENTRE
STITCH OF 4 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F8, 1/40 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM



SHAUN BARNETT CAPTURING THE DAWN VIEW EAST FROM OUR CAMPSITE
STITCH OF 3 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F8, 1/8 SEC, ISO 125, 27MM