



Photographic locations worth sweating for

Jumbo Hut, Tararua Ranges

WORDS AND IMAGES
PETER LAURENSEN

occasionalclimber.co.nz



THE THREE KINGS, MITRE AND BALDY RIDGE AT DAWN
F8, 1/160 SEC, ISO 125, 63MM

One of the best known routes in the Tararua Range is the Powell Hut Mt Holdsworth Jumbo Hut loop, which can be done in either direction and completed in a day if you're fit enough. The access point is via Mt Holdsworth Road, a little northwest of Masterton. This loop is popular because it starts and ends at the Holdsworth carpark, making logistics easy; it features three huts (Powell, Jumbo and Atiwakatu), giving lots of flexibility; and it touches two high points, Mt Holdsworth (1,470m) and Pukeahurangi Jumbo (1,405m), linked by an open ridge offering great views the whole way.

If you go there in summer or on public holidays, when the weather conditions are good, expect to share the route with plenty of others and make sure you book a spot in the hut you intend to use well in advance, or take a tent or bivvy bag.

While the route is well trodden and sign posted it still involves some sweating. There is some steep climbing below Powell Hut and on the Raingauge Spur below Jumbo Hut. Above the tree line the terrain is exposed to the elements, so taking plenty of water in summer and avoiding bad weather are important considerations.

For photographers, a big draw card is having both Powell and Jumbo Huts situated on the tree line at 1,220 metres, giving unimpeded dawn views to the east and ready access to Mt Holdsworth – 30 minutes from Powell Hut, and Pukeahurangi Jumbo – 20 minutes from Jumbo Hut. Both these vantage points offer expansive views in every direction for dawn and dusk.

ICE PATTERNS CATCHING DAWN LIGHT ON THE
INSIDE OF THE FIRE EXIT DOOR OF JUMBO HUT ▶
F8, 1/160 SEC, ISO 125, 31MM



My most memorable visit to this area was in July 2020. It was Covid Level One and my good friend Shaun Barnett and I felt that we had to get out and do SOMETHING. The forecast was for horizontal snowing, followed by a post-southerly fine weather window next day. We chose to go anticlockwise, along Atiwhakatu Track and then up Rainguage Spur. From 800 metres we plugged up through deep snow to Jumbo Hut, arriving just before nightfall. With Jumbo Hut to ourselves, we managed to get the fire going (which was just as well because the water tap was frozen) and enjoyed a surprisingly cosy night listening to the rattle of snow on the hut exterior. Next morning dawned blue-bird, rewarding us with a snow-clad and rime ice-encased landscape painted in alpenglow.

After getting over the excitement of the magical dawn photography we'd enjoyed, our plan was to carry on over Pukeahurangi Jumbo, along the poled route to Mt Holdsworth, then down and out. Due to the deep unconsolidated snow, reaching the first high point that normally takes 20 minutes or so, required two hours of hard slog. With snowshoes, Shaun led the charge, still crashing through the surface about half the time. I followed in my crampons, sometimes on my hands and knees. We soon realised that our original plan wasn't feasible that day. But it didn't matter. Seeing the Tararua Range in such impressive winter conditions made it look more like the southern Alps. We enjoyed a photographic smogasborg that was unquestionably worth sweating for, before retracing our steps of the previous day.



SHAUN BARNETT, STAUNCH IN SHORTS, AS WE REACH JUMBO HUT
F3.5, 1/30 SEC, ISO 400, 24MM

CLIMBING RAINGUAGE SPUR ►
STITCH OF 3 LANDSCAPE IMAGES STACKED, F3.5, 1/30 SEC, ISO 400, 24MM





LOOKING OVER JUMBO HUT, EAST TO THE WAIRARAPA
STITCH OF 2 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F7.1, 1/125 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM