

# Aotearoa Light

Moments of wonder and realisation  
in New Zealand wilderness

A new book from our 'worth sweating for' author Peter  
Laurenson

WORDS AND IMAGES  
PETER LAURENSEN

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In 2025 photographers and writers face perhaps the most challenging environment since 1455 when the Gutenberg Bible, the first book ever produced on a printing press, was released. Today, while there has never been such a wide choice of channels (most of them now digital) through which to publish your work, they are usually fragmented, making the achievement of 'economies of scale' needed to cover the costs of producing a coffee table book, let alone turn a profit, beyond the reach of most. The adoption of AI is also now accelerating, prompting questions about the very viability of future human-generated photographic and written works.

I've produced three photographic coffee table format books now. My first was a tentative self-published effort in 2013, titled OCCASIONAL CLIMBER: A Journey to Mount Clarity. I only had 150 printed, but certainly learnt a lot from that exercise. My second was released in 2021 by Bateman Books, just as Auckland, our biggest retail market, went into Covid

lockdown for several months. Titled KHUMBU: Gateway to Mount Everest, pathways to kinship, it was the adventure heritage winner at the NZ Mountain Film & Book Festival 2022, yet we were unable to sell out the initial print run. Here today, gone tomorrow. It's a ruthless game. So why on earth would I produce a third title?

Well, making money is definitely not the answer, but I do have several reasons. As a photographer, if you're like me, there's nothing like seeing your favourite images in print. Maybe I'm just 'old school', but for me the ultimate test of an image's worth is if it can stand up to in-print scrutiny. And the tactile, physical nature of print still feels special. For me, curling up in a comfy chair under good light to amble through the pages of a tastefully produced, large format coffee table book will always beat scrolling or clicking through a publication on a digital screen.





I've been creating outdoor and travel images ever since I left home on my O.E. in 1988. Today I have hundreds of thousands of them, cumulatively representing my skills, industry and passion. But if they aren't put to some useful purpose, then what's the point? Getting published is a way to share some of my best work widely, to stimulate readers, and to gain feedback and validation.



So, a love of the printed image and word and a desire to make my work meaningful, thereby justifying the massive time and energy I've devoted to it, are two motivations behind my books. But there is a third. Sharing beautiful 'eye-candy' in print isn't enough these days to hold a reader's attention. There has to be some 'substance' to the story behind the images. The substance behind the images in my latest book, AOTEAROA LIGHT: Moments of wonder and realisation in New Zealand wilderness, is about how we can protect the future viability of humanity.

For us to effectively minimise the damage (to ourselves and all biodiversity) resulting from human-induced climate change demands informed, holistic, courageous leadership and action by governments, industry leaders and big corporates. But ultimately that will only occur if voters, consumers, employees and investors (and readers) demand it – us.

Preaching and chastising are not an effective way to encourage positive, lasting change. Showcasing some of my best New Zealand landscape images and their associated experiences and insights, within an aesthetically pleasing and thought-provoking context, is my way to contribute constructively to a dialogue that simply must continue towards effective positive action.

AOTEAROA LIGHT blends landscape photography, wilderness experiences and a message of concern, plus a call to individual positive action, to nurture our natural environment. It is my attempt to encourage 'us' to constructively think more about the actions we choose to take.

# AOTEAROA LIGHT

MOMENTS OF WONDER AND REALISATION  
IN NEW ZEALAND WILDERNESS

PETER LAURENSEN



SAMPLE PAGE FROM AOTEAROA LIGHT



More New Zealanders than ever before are venturing into and recreating in our natural environment — wilderness — and with that, a growing number are doing wonderful things through their involvement in conservation-related activities. Despite this, I remain dismayed by the apathy, indifference and arrogance still shown by many, including sometimes right to

the highest ranks in government, towards our natural environment — the ecosystem we're all a part of and so dependent upon. AOTEAROA LIGHT is relevant to all New Zealanders, although those most interested will be people who engage with the outdoors and/or enjoy landscape photography. Here's the book's preamble. I hope it resonates with Excio members out there too.

Light; for landscape photographers, is the element that makes all the difference.

Dawn and dusk are known as 'magic hours' for good reason. The interplay between sun, cloud and landscape can bring magic at other times of day too. And when light is shed figuratively it can bring clarity, insight, wonder and realisation.

There is much to gain from venturing in to wilderness. To move safely in the un-constrained natural world, not modified for our convenience, can demand absolute in-the-moment focus. Other times, the contrast between city and wilderness allows us to step away from our 'every-day', gifting us the time and space to more deeply engage with companions, to more honestly know ourselves, to ponder bigger issues.

Concerned about the challenges our warming planet brings, photographer, trumper and occasional climber Peter Laurenson presents stunning images of Aotearoa New Zealand that convey the benefits of wilderness; reminders of what we must protect and nourish, if humanity is to thrive.





South of Wharepapa/Arthur Range, deep in Kahurangi National Park, lies a gem of a tarn typical of many less-well-trodden spots known by Shaun Barnett. On my third trip with him in March 2018, we joined Darryn Pegram and Steve Baker to complete a seven-day loop starting at Wangapeka River Road and finishing at Baton Valley Road. On our third night we camped at 1,400 metres, beside the tarn pictured **BELOW**, on Biggs Tops. I won't forget the view to Mt Herbert and Mt Kendall just north of us across Karamea River. We also enjoyed some photogenic local company. At **RIGHT** Shaun captures a moment while Darryn looks on.



SAMPLE PAGE FROM AOTEAROA LIGHT

OK, I'm biased, but physically AOTEAROA LIGHT is a beautiful thing — hardcover, 260 pages, 270mm high by 300mm wide, featuring over 300 colour images, including 20 double-page spreads. Its approximately 52,000-word narrative has been meticulously edited by journalist Kathy Ombler, past NZ Geographic Board member David Barnes, and writer/photographer John Rhodes. The foreword is by Les Molloy QSO, one of our country's most widely respected eco-warriors.

And last but by no means least, AOTEAROA LIGHT is dedicated to my dear friend and one of our country's best known, loved, and now missed outdoor photographer-writers, Shaun Barnett.

To get a copy, go to:  
[batemanbooks.co.nz/product/aotearoa-light](https://batemanbooks.co.nz/product/aotearoa-light)