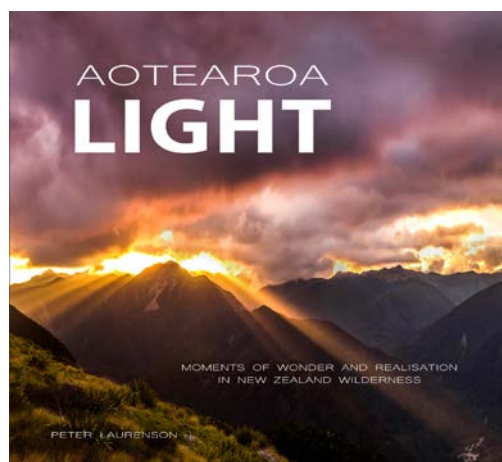


Aotearoa Light, by Peter Laurenson

Bateman Books, \$69.99

Following his outstanding *Khumbu: Pathways to Kinship* (Bateman Books, 2021), Nelson-based photographer, trumper and climber Peter Laurenson has turned his lens on more local wildernesses, and the results are again breathtaking. This new book is subtitled “*Moments of wonder and realisation in New Zealand Wilderness*”, an apt summation of both the portfolio of images and the deeper thinking that comes through in the text.



The photography comes from half a lifetime tramping and climbing throughout the country, including ascents of some of our highest peaks. The images and associated narratives are grouped into seven chapters covering different terrain types, from coastline, through tussock and shrubland, and on to snow and ice. Many of the images demonstrate that Laurenson has actively sought out the best light – frequently early morning or as the sun recedes – and where the book’s title comes from. On many occasions, this would have involved cold campsites in very exposed locations to ensure that he was in the right spot as the rising sun worked its magic. As well as landscapes, we see intricate images of birds, plants and fungi. The results show that Laurenson is firmly in the top echelon of New Zealand’s backcountry photographers.

The images are interspersed with text that tells the stories of the landscapes and their histories, and of the journeys that took him there. These are well told, and convey a real sense of being there alongside the author. A frequent companion on more recent trips was respected backcountry chronicler and lens master, the late Shaun Barnett, and to some extent this book also serves as a tribute to him that will be appreciated by the many people who enjoyed his work.

Underpinning all this is the opening chapter, where Laurenson dives into climate change and then links this burning issue back to his love of our wilderness, with an exhortation for the rest of us to love it too. He looks at how we got here, what’s maintaining the problem (wealth inequity and political inadequacy are both in his sights) and where to from now. Under the subheading “The Power of One”, he explains the steps that he has personally taken to reduce his footprint. I might be making this sound preachy, but it’s not – it’s pragmatic. For example, he recognises that there’s a carbon footprint from manufacturing and purchasing a new electric car that is probably greater than continuing to use his petrol car and focusing on reducing its use. Likewise, he’s made the call that, while overseas travel clearly comes with a major carbon cost, having family overseas makes some international air travel justifiable. While this chapter is a key part of the author’s rationale for publishing this book, if you really can’t be bothered thinking more on this vital subject, it could be skipped and you’d still be looking at a collection of superb images with some nice tales of how they came about.

David Barnes lives in Lower Hutt and is an avid trumper and an armchair mountaineer.