



# Photographic locations worth sweating for

Mt Lockett  
Kahurangi Pass National Park

Some photographic locations can be reached with a short walk from the car park. Others require hours of climbing, careful planning, and a willingness to carry everything you need into the backcountry. In this issue, Peter Laursen takes us into the rugged alpine landscapes of Kahurangi National Park in search of a remote tarn near Mt Lockett, a journey that delivers spectacular scenery, unexpected challenges, and a reminder that adventure photography rarely goes exactly to plan. From lake-studded ridges and peaceful camps high above the valleys to an unfortunate encounter between a camera and a river crossing, Peter's story captures both the rewards and realities of photographing New Zealand's wild places.

WORDS AND IMAGES  
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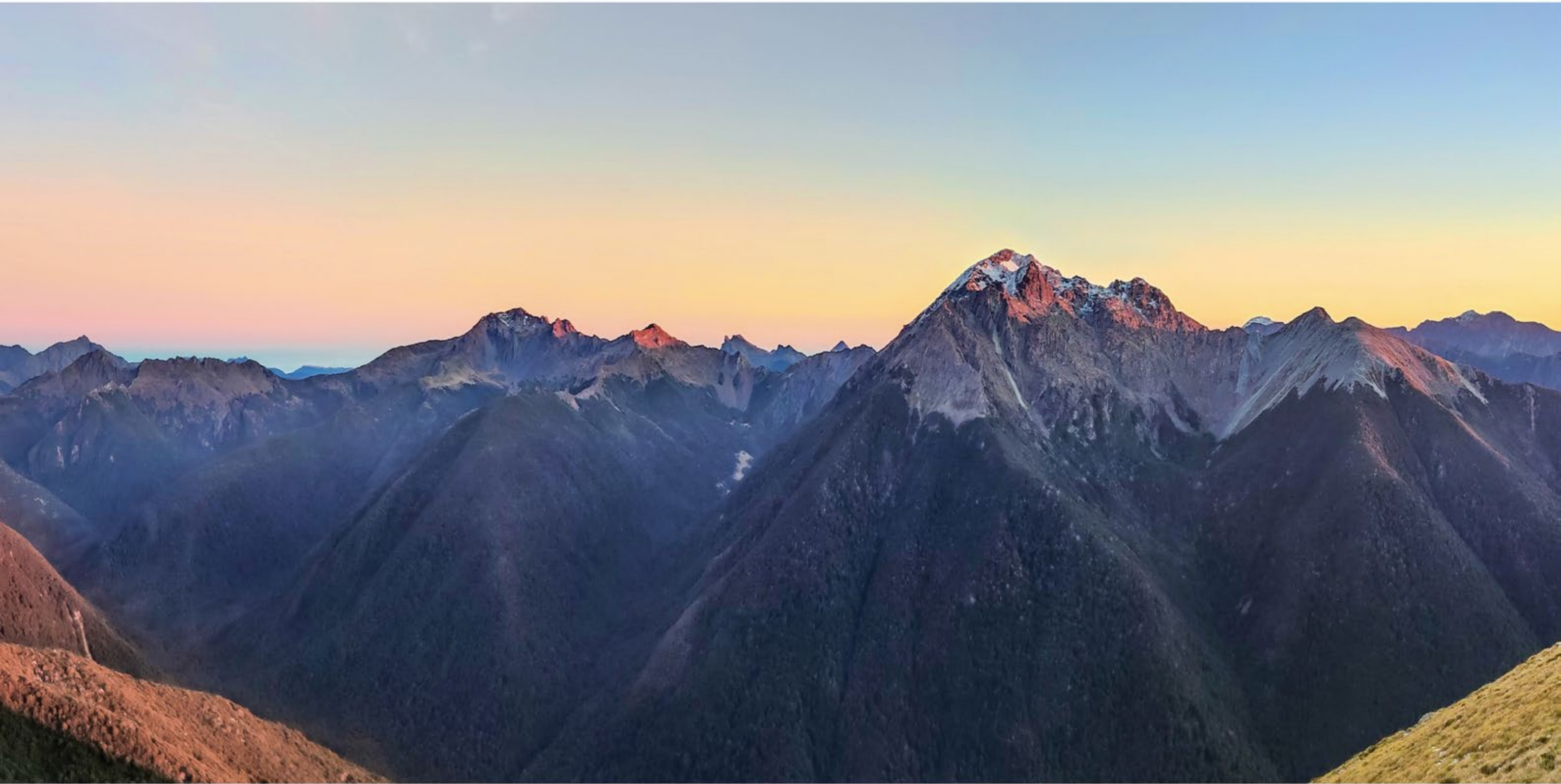


DAWN VIEW TO MT SNOWDON (RIGHT) AND MT LOCKETT'S SUMMIT (LEFT)  
 STITCH OF 7 PORTRAIT IMAGES F1.8, 1/33 SEC, ISO 160, 27MM

One of the challenges of ridge travel in the often karst-based Kahurangi is water supply, especially in summer months. The limestone and marble can be cracked and porous, allowing the relentless trickle of water to drill sink holes through it over geological time. When you climb up through the forest above the many rivers in the region, if you haven't carried it with you, the main water sources on or near the ridge tops above are tarns, and these can be few and far between in places. While browsing the NZ Topo map a marked tarn just beneath the summit of Mt Lockett caught my eye. There is a frequently used camping spot beside Lockett Lake, but having such a conveniently located tarn so close to a summit was enticing indeed. So in April I went for a look.

The access to Lockett Lake and the Lockett Range is up the spectacular Cobb Dam Road, off SH60 near Upper Tākaka. The road traces Tākaka River through towering vertical cliffs and dense near-vertical forest to Cobb Power Station, then on up to Cobb

Reservoir. At the dammed northern end is a car park at the trail end of the Sylvester Lakes Track and also a lesser travelled trail, forged by the Friends of Cobb conservation group, extending from a quarry, up beside Diamond Lake Stream to Lake Lockett. My plan was to use this trail to reach the lake, then find a way up to the bush line above to access the Lockett Range, proceed along those tops to camp near Mt Lockett's 1621-metre summit, then next morning drop 300 metres to the valley containing Diamond Lake, before climbing up the far side of the valley to the ridge leading to 1695-metre Iron Hill. From there is a well trodden trail leading down past Lake Sylvester to my parked car. While this route is about 28km and requires nearly 2000 metres of ascent (some sweat required), it's not particularly difficult tramping and the lake-bejewelled alpine landscapes are certainly worth the effort – especially when camping where I did to enjoy the magic hours, abundant water supply and calm solitude up high.



DAWN VIEW TO MT SNOWDON (RIGHT), KAKAPO PEAK (LEFT)  
AND DRAGONS TEETH DISTANT CENTRE  
STITCH OF 2 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F1.8, 1/100 SEC, ISO 250, 27MM



DAWN VIEW OF THE HIGH TARNs AND LAKE LOCKETT, WITH WHAREPAPA ARTHUR RANGE FORMING THE SKYLINE  
STITCH OF 8 PORTRAIT IMAGES F1.8, 1/100 SEC, ISO 320, 54MM

My plan went almost without a hitch. Almost. On my way in I had to cross Diamond Lake Stream just once. The river crossing isn't difficult, but I was wearing some new tramping boots on their maiden voyage. Their vibram soles proved to be slippery on wet rocks. I'd taken care to avoid getting my boots wet as I rock-stepped my way across. With only one more step to reach the far bank my head, shoulder and chest, where my new Sony

RX100VII camera sat awaiting use in its little pouch, suddenly were submerged. Not good. I quickly clambered out while uttering many not publishable expletives. Despite giving Sony some electronic CPR it could not be revived (at time of writing one month later I have just received my now fully recovered Sony back from the doctors, along with a \$540 repair bill). What to do?

My OPPO Reno15 F5G mobile phone with its 32mp front camera remained dry. My model is well down the lower end of the range, as I'd never envisaged taking tramping or climbing photos on it, but 'needs must'. Could I get some passable images using it? Well, I think so, although my OPPO did prove to be a last resort plan B. Shots I took using the digital zoom and in very low light were a fail, and even the wide angle landscapes, when you enlarge to 100% on a big screen, reveal their mobile phone origins. I didn't enjoy holding my device out in front of me like some Aztec sun worshipper, or the vastly reduced amount of photographic control

(setting F-stop, shutter speed, ISO and so on). But my experience did help me to understand how latest model mobile phone camera tech, at the high end at least, is now giving its users some impressive results while allowing them to shoot in full manual mode. No view finder giving that enhanced composition capability, but much less weight, plus the convenience of having all those other apps all at your finger tips in one device.

I'm still not a convert.



A SUMMIT VIEW EAST FROM MT LOCKETT TO THE HIGH TARNs, LAKE LOCKETT  
AND MY RIDGE TOP ROUTE OF THE AFTERNOON  
STITCH OF 3 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F1.8, 1/244 SEC, ISO 125, 27MM