

Matiri Valley and Plateau

Kahurangi National Park

Introduction

North of Murchison lies the remote back country of the Matiri Valley and Kahurangi National Park. Tramping tracks provide access to the Matiri Plateau and the head waters of the Matiri River. Marked and unmarked routes provide an array of challenging trips for well equipped and experienced trampers. Landforms of the Matiri Valley are spectacular and found nowhere else in New Zealand. Landslide and lakes formed behind rubble dams attest to a history of earthquakes in the region. Such chaos is hard to imagine gazing upon the tranquil wildlife refuge that is Lake Matiri. Looming above Matiri Valley are the fortress-like bluffs of the 1000 Acre Plateau, the oldest land form in New Zealand. Originally the bed of a shallow sea, upheaval over time raised it 1000 metres above sea level, high enough to be snow bound in winter. Forest in the Matiri Valley is mainly beech species with a sprinkling of rata, kamahi, totora, broadleaf and in higher places, neinei and mountain cedar. Amongst the tumbled rock of recent landslides, tutu, *Olearia* and *Coprosma* shrubs, and prickly lawyer, make for tough going. Above the bushline on the Matiri Plateau, limestone-rich soils sustain an amazing diversity of alpine plants, 437 native species have been recorded.

How to get there

Murchison, the gateway for southern Kahurangi National Park is about four hours drive from Christchurch and 1.5 hours from Nelson. About six kilometres north of Murchison, (just north of the bridge over the Buller River), turn off State Highway 6 onto Matiri Road. Continue for about 16 kilometres to reach the roadend. Access is available to 4WD vehicles from the carpark to the West Branch River, this is at the drivers own risk. Vehicle owners should be prepared to pay towing cost if this is needed. From Nelson, the Matiri Road turn off is sixteen kilometres past Kawatiri Junction.

Roadend to Lake Matiri Hut

2WD Roadend to Lake Matiri – 3 hours

4WD Roadend to Lake Matiri – 1.5 hours

From the carpark it is three kilometres to the West Branch Matiri River which in normal flow is easily crossed. Be aware that this river can rise rapidly and become impassable with rain in the headwaters. Once across the West Branch, continue across farmland beside the river before entering forest and climbing the face of a slip brought down by an ancient earthquake.

The track levels and soon reaches Lake Matiri Hut (8 bunks), overlooking the tranquil Lake Matiri which is an important wildlife refuge. Flocks of paradise ducks rest there during the summer moult when they cannot fly. Little Shag, Mallard, Scaup, and Grey ducks are also common visitors.

The Matiri plateau

Lake Matiri Hut to Poor Petes Hut – 3 hours

From the fork in the track just beyond Bay Creek a tramping track climbs abruptly up a spur. After about 40 minutes there is a good place for a rest and to take in the panorama of the Matiri Valley and lake below. The track continues steeply through a diverse forest of silver and mountain beech, kamahi, rata and mountain totora. The plateau rim, a welcome respite is reached in about two hours from Lake Matiri Hut - a huge expanse of tussock land dotted with patches of stunted forest. Beyond the rim a marked route sets out across the boggy-in-places plateau to Poor Petes Hut (Basic Hut 2 bunks).

Poor Petes Hut to Larrikins Creek Hut – 3 hours

The marked route from Poor Petes climbs to a high point of 1115 metres and then gradually descends a broad, undulating ridge, occasionally crossing limestone creek beds. Approaching the steep slopes of The Haystack, the ridge narrows and tussock gives way to beech forest. Maintain the level gradient through the forest on a marked



route before emerging into clearings where Larrikins Creek Hut (Standard Hut, 4 bunks) sits.

Day Trips from Larrikins Creek Hut

The hut is a good base for exploring the striking landscape features of the Devils Dining Table (or the 100 Acre Plateau as it is also known) and the mudstone peaks of The Needle and The Haystack. To reach the Hundred Acre Plateau climb the bushy gully to the north of the hut to a tussock basin with tarns. Sidle west out of the basin onto the plateau. On the western rim is a bump called Mt Misery. Its a good vantage point to survey the vast Mokihinui watershed to the west.

The Needle can be climbed either from the plateau or by continuing to the ridge above the tarns. Spectacular views of the Matiri Plateau, Mokihinui watershed and the broken limestone Matiri Range are the reward. For the agile a ridge traverse is possible from The Needle to The Haystack although there are some scrambly notches on the narrow ridge and should only be attempted with good visibility.

Larrikins Creek to the Mokihinui River

For experienced trampers Larrikins Creek provides access to the Mokihinui River and exit options to either Seddonville or Lyell. Both are major undertakings and are dependent on fine weather to cross rivers.

The Matiri Valley

Lake Matiri Hut to McConchies Hut – 5 hours

Sidle around the western shore of the lake through beautiful beech forest. Just beyond the open flats where Bay Creek flows into the lake signs indicate the track to the Matiri Plateau and the Matiri Valley. Continue up-valley on river flats for several kilometres. Travel slows as the valley narrows, two steep climbs avoid gorge sections. McConchies Hut (Standard Hut, 4 bunks) is about half way up Matiri Valley.

McConchies Hut to Hurricane Hut – 6-7 hours

Beyond McConchies Hut, earthquake damage and diversion around obstacles on the valley floor make for slower going. Thirty minutes up river from the hut an unnamed side creek provides an arduous, unmarked route through bluffs to the tops near The Haystack.

Continue up-valley until another side stream on the true right is reached. Leave the main valley here and head up the stream. Jumbled scrub-

covered rocks require careful marker spotting. Eventually the track leaves the stream and climbs a slip to the ridge crest separating the side valley from the Matiri Valley.

The track keeps to the ridge, passing through a mixed forest of beech, cedar, rata and neinei. Eventually it drops off the western side of the ridge and emerges on to a boggy red tussock flat. Skirt the margin of the flat and climb over a forested saddle to another smaller swampy flat on the other side. Descend into a limestone stream bed which is often dry and follow it down to rejoin the Matiri River.

A short climb leads to Lake Jeanette where drowned trees fringe a lake created by rockslides during the 1929 Murchison earthquake. Sidle the western shore of the lake and the western side of the now flat valley floor to reach Hurricane Hut (Standard Hut, 4 bunks). Broken limestone bluffs and landslides filling the head of the valley are an impressive scene.

From Hurricane Hut to Wangapeka Saddle – 10-11 hours

This ridge top route should only be attempted by experienced parties with map and compass skills. Fine weather is also an essential ingredient as the ridge twists and turns and is difficult to follow in fog. A marked route climbs to point 1442 above Hurricane Hut. Beyond this point there are no markers. Most of the distance to the Wangapeka Saddle is above the bushline with only one tarn (north of point 1398) for a water stop. Panoramas of the Mokihinui and Wangapeka catchments and distant ranges of the Mt Owen massif, Mt Patriarch and Mt Kendal are superb. Map BQ Wangapeka Saddle in the Topo50 series is the map required for this route.

For your safety

The Matiri Plateau and Valley are remote tramping experiences. Trampers need to carry and know how to use a topographic map. Map BR23 Murchison in the Topo50 map series is the map that covers most of the area. Trampers should be well equipped and fit. The terrain is often rough. Rain and flooded streams can alter your plans and freezing conditions can occur at any time of year. Remember your safety is your responsibility. It is recommended that your intentions are also left with a friend/relative prior to the start of your trip. Remember to notify them when you have completed your trip.

Please remember

Backcountry Hut Pass or Backcountry Hut Tickets entitle you to stay in the huts. They can be purchased at any DOC office or the Murchison Information Centre.

Water

It is recommended you boil, filter, or treat drinking water.

Dogs

Dogs are only permitted for the purpose of hunting. They require a specific permit issued from the DOC Murchison Field Base or Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre and are not allowed to overnight in the Matiri Valley or Kahurangi National Park.

Mountain Bikes

Mountain bikes are not permitted in Kahurangi National Park.

Hunting and Fishing

Each hunter must carry a permit; each angler must carry a fishing licence.

Environmental Care

Minimize impact on the environment by using a portable cooker. Use only dead wood in fireplaces at huts. There are no rubbish facilities in the back country. Carry your own rubbish.

For further information

To find out more about the Matiri Valley and Plateau contact:

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