



Photographic locations worth (really) sweating for

Red Hills, Richmond Forest Park

In this gripping article, Peter takes us on a journey to some of the most remote and challenging landscapes, where the rewards are as grand as the effort it takes to reach them. From jagged ridges to stunning alpine vistas, Peter's quest for the perfect shot has led him into wild terrains where conditions can turn from awe-inspiring to treacherous in an instant.

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Since moving to Richmond in December 2022, I've been enjoying the close proximity of the conservation parks surrounding me. Looming up behind my house to the east is the Richmond Forest Park. Although there is a Mount Richmond in the Park, it isn't actually the highest point. At the western end of the Richmond Range and 1,791 metres high, Maungakura/Red Hill is 30 metres taller and claims that title.

In February this year, a fine weather forecast encouraged me to set off in pursuit of a traverse over Maungakura/Red Hill, camping on the long ridge overnight. I approached from SH63, east of St Arnaud, climbing up the easy tramping Red Hills Track to Red Hills Hut. En route are several historic farm buildings that offer some nice photographic options. Above Red Hills Hut at 900 metres, the track becomes a route, climbing scrubby slopes onto The Plateau at about 1,100 metres. This wide rolling tussock space containing many tarns is also very photogenic and worth a visit on its own. But I kept climbing.

From a distance, Red Hills Ridge appears quite benign. The gradient is low and the ridge rolling. Due to the mineral composition of this rocky terrain, with high levels of iron, magnesium, and toxic metals, the soils are poor and vegetation is sparse. But the orange to deep-crimson colour palette is striking.

As I discovered, though, underfoot the ridge is an abrasive, jagged rock pile, with no water sources (I carried three litres) or shade up high. And the ridge is long. On my first day, I covered 22 kilometres, much of it rock hopping, to reach Pt 1749 after nine hours. I cleared a vaguely flat spot among the rocks to pitch my tent, then relaxed in the afternoon sunshine, waiting for sunset. As dusk unfolded, I enjoyed lovely light and impressive landscapes in every direction. The beautiful cloud ceiling as the sun approached the horizon had me transfixed – certainly a location worth sweating for. But I should have also realised that its presence foretold the approach of rough weather, despite the earlier favourable forecast.



DROPPING OFF POINT 1666, WITH MY CAMP SPOT BEYOND ON POINT 1749 (THE HIGHEST POINT ON THE LEFT SKYLINE)

STITCH OF 3 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F8, 1/400 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM



WETLAND FLORA ON THE PLATEAU SOUTH OF RED HILLS
F8, 1/50 SEC, ISO 125, 360MM



IN THE FLATTEST SPOT ON THE ROCKY RIDGE AT POINT 1749, LOOKING SOUTH,
BACK DOWN MY ROUTE OF THE DAY

STITCH OF 3 LANDSCAPE IMAGES, F8, 1/320 SEC, ISO 125, 24MM

Around midnight, the wind started up and, at 4.45 a.m., gale-force winds collapsed my tent around me. It took me a while to figure out how to extract all my gear while trying to hold down what had turned into a kind of parachute having an epileptic fit. The breakthrough came when I undid the other fly door so that the wind blasts could pass through – the windward door zip had failed earlier, which may have been the weakness Mother Nature needed to flatten my shelter. Then, at dawn, I had to descend 250 metres in the blizzard to a tarn to get some water before retracing my steps. Definitely no magic hour light for me that morning,

and no chance of continuing my planned course along the rocky ridge to pass over Maungakura/Red Hill.

After 11 hours of mostly boulder hopping in 10-metre visibility, with driving rain and wind gusts constantly threatening to fling me onto jagged rocks, I staggered into Red Hills Hut. That stretch took me four hours longer to complete than the day before. I knew my memory card held some distinctive landscape images, but this time I'd *really* sweated for them!



A VIEW EAST TO MT PATRIARCH (1,656M)
F8, 1/200 SEC, ISO 125, 48MM



A VIEW WEST ACROSS THE GORDON RANGE
F8, 1/500 SEC, ISO 125, 153MM