



Hump Ridge with its striking rock outcrops, mountain tarns and sandstone tors and the Southern Ocean stretching away in the distance.

Natural Beauty and Historic Relics in Remote Western Southland

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Outdoor enthusiast and former Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark raved about it. So does everyone who has walked the Hump Ridge Track, deep in western Southland.

The three-day tramp takes in some of New Zealand's most spectacular terrain, unspoiled native bush, remote beaches and isolated heritage sites, and it's easy to understand why trampers still talk about it long after they've returned to the humdrum of the daily grind.

The Hump Ridge Track was conceived by the local community and then constructed with the same pioneering spirit and hard work that built the timber township of Tuatapere.

The Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track Trust was formed in 1995 to build the track and two lodges, and not only had to raise \$3.5 million for the project but also obtain permission from private land owners to cross their land. That amazing effort resulted in the track and lodges opening in November

2001 as New Zealand's first and only privately operated, independent tramp on public land.

A good idea is to spend the night before the start of the tramp at the Waiau Hotel in Tuatapere. It is ideally situated for attending the pre-track briefing and meeting your guide and tramping companions, and for breakfast you get to taste Tuatapere's world famous sausages made to an old family recipe with the traditional flavour of sausages reminiscent of the early 1960s.

In the morning the trust's minibus takes trampers to the Rarakau car park. A short helicopter flight across Te Waewae Bay to Flat Stream reduces the first day's tramp by two to three hours over a section of the coastal route that is part of the final day's tramp. From the air you might also see Hector's dolphins frolicking in the bay.

Above the Flat Stream swingbridge the track begins to climb, passing through stands of beech, rimu and ferns. A section of boardwalk protects the delicate roots on the forest floor.

Guide Graeme Scott happily shares his extensive knowledge of the various trees, ferns and native plants, including edible plants and those with medicinal properties.

Lunch stop is at the Water Bridge Shelter where Graeme produces a block of dark energy chocolate and a flask of hot water for a refreshing cup of tea as a Robin (native bird) cleans seeds and insects from our boots.

After a more strenuous and steeper climb the track emerges from the native bush at Stag Point, revealing amazing views below and Te Waewae Bay in the distance.

Okaka Lodge, 890 metres above sea level and nestled on the side of a glacial cirque is the first night's stop. The view is breathtaking.

For lodge manager Sharon Symons this is home for ten days at a time and it's hard not to be envious as one looks out over Te Waewae Bay and the Waiau Basin with the Takitimu Mountains to the north. A short scenic loop track leads to Hump Ridge itself, and an alpine wonderland of striking rock outcrops, mountain tarns and sandstone tors. The 360-degree panoramic views take in Rakiura (Stewart Island), the Southern Ocean, Solander Island (40 kilometres offshore) and the wilderness of Fiordland that stretches as far as the eye can see.

Meantime back at the lodge Sharon has prepared a three-course gourmet dinner, which is served with a glass of locally produced wine.

It's an early start the next morning but the reward is a stunning sunrise and nourishing breakfast, enjoyed while the guide prepares the lunch packs. Overnight packs are dropped off at the helipad, and the 19-kilometre tramp to Port Craig begins.

Initially the track goes along an exposed ridge that commands respect. However, negotiating the crest of Hump Ridge to Luncheon Rock in fine weather offers spectacular 360-degree views, while the fascinating sub-alpine flora growing beside the track is a delight to see. From here a long steep descent leads through native trees, past some interesting ghostly rock outcrops before the Hump Ridge Track joins the Department of Conservation (DOC) South Coast track at the Edwin Burn viaduct, the first of three timber viaducts to be crossed.

The timber viaducts are among the last relics of the Marlborough Timber Company's Port Craig venture built to get the 14.6 kilometre tramline across deeply incised streams as it headed westwards to Port Craig.



Okaka Lodge nestled on the side of a glacial cirque looking out over Te Waewae Bay and the Waiau Basin.



Dinner at Okaka Lodge: from left; guide Graeme Scott, Noreen Wise (UK), Janet Weir, Lindsay Benbrook and David Wise (UK).

THE HUMP RIDGE TRACK

The operators offer trampers a number of options, including a fully guided three-day premium tramp that includes return track transport from Tuatapere, helicopter flight from Rarakau car park to Flat Stream, heli-packing your luggage to each lodge, premium accommodation at Okaka and Port Craig Lodges - private rooms with King-sized double beds or twin share King singles with all bedding and towels provided. The lodges have hot showers, drying rooms, gas heating and cooking and solar lighting, and offer gourmet evening meals, hot breakfasts and packed lunches each day.

- There are also Freedom Walk and Freedom Plus packages with optional extras that can be added.
- **The track:** a mix of natural tracks, boardwalks and steps, steep in places and can be muddy.
- **Fitness:** moderate to high level, able to walk 6-8 hours over 11-19 km per day.

As invited guests of the trust, and the Waiau Hotel in Tuatapere, Janet Weir and Lindsay Benbrook embarked on the all-inclusive Guided Walk package. Although experienced trampers, the authors enjoyed not having to carry heavy packs with sleeping bags, dried food, gas stove, cooking and eating utensils - those essential items one requires to survive in the tramping wilderness. It made the job of carrying and looking after their professional camera gear a lot easier.

www.humpridgetrack.co.nz



A few lengths of No. 8 wire and insulators are all that is left of the communication link that stretched through the bush almost 100 kilometres from Puysegur Point lighthouse to Orepuki.



Unspoiled native beech forest.



The single-room Port Craig School, built in 1926, is now a comfortable DOC hut.

The Marlborough Timber Company's Port Craig sawmill and logging operation in western Southland was an unsuccessful attempt to introduce to New Zealand's South Island the scale of operation and methods used by the Pacific Northwest lumber industry of the United States. The mill began operations in September 1921 but unfortunately the company over-estimated the volume of timber it would produce and under-estimated the costs of working in such an isolated and rugged environment. The whole logging and milling operation employing 200 people ceased in October 1928, just three days after it was decided to pull the plug on the largest and most modern sawmill in the country. Two months later the Marlborough Timber Company was wound up.

Next on the track is the Percy Burn viaduct built with Australian hardwood in 1923 by a Canadian firm, Chester Construction Company. Standing 36 metres at its highest point and 125 metres long, the Percy Burn is the highest surviving timber trestle bridge in the world.

The track follows the old tramway formation with its timber sleepers and metal dog spikes. Also visible at various points along the tramway are the porcelain insulators and No. 8 wire attached to trees that formed the phone line which was installed from Orepuki to the Puysegur Point lighthouse in 1908. It stretched for almost 100 kilometres along the Southland coast and was out of order 701 days in the first three years of service. All the same, the flimsy metal thread was an important communications link from the lighthouse keeper for communicating weather reports. Weather patterns from the Tasman Sea come on-shore first at Puysegur Point allowing forecast predictions to be written for the rest of the country. The telephone line lasted until 1925 when it was replaced by a radio link.

After crossing the last timber viaduct, Sand Hill Point, the track leads to an open grassy area beside the restored Port Craig School, which now serves as a DOC hut. Fifty metres further on is Port Craig Lodge, where manager Noeline Godinet spoils tired trampers with another sumptuous three-course dinner, including freshly smoked salmon.

The lodge sits in the area once occupied by the married mill workers' accommodation. At first glance it's hard to imagine that this site was once crowded with buildings and all the activity that surrounds a major timber-milling operation, but a little exploring soon reveals many relics, including the remains of the bakehouse oven and cookshop.

Nearby is a marked heritage trail well worth exploring – men's toilets and septic tank, the old brick structure of the mill boiler house, a small boiler and foundry slag where the blacksmith's shop stood. The trail leads down to the remains of the Port Craig wharf where an upside down boiler sits in the sand at the end of the timber wharf pilings. Close by is the chassis and turntable of the wharf crane manufactured by Priestman Bros of Hull, England. It was originally used to load barges at the wharf and was later incorporated into an innovative system of loading ships at anchor off-shore by means of a flying-fox overhead cable system.

On the third and final day, trampers follow the South Coast Track through large stands of podocarp forest to Breakneck Creek beside the beach. The walk continues over several small headlands and along short sections of the beach where we observed a never-ending continuous flock of muttonbirds skim the water and heading south.

The final section through to the Fiordland National Park boundary ends at Track Burn. It then follows a four-wheel drive track to Bluecliffs Beach which is dotted with cribs (baches). Hector's dolphins surf in groups of three on the gentle waves. It's a magic finale to memorable days in nature's paradise.

After three days of tramping, exploring the history of the bush tramline and Port Craig, and being waited on hand and foot at the lodges, we arrive back in Tuatapere eager to return another time. □



The remains of the Port Craig wharf, breakwater and Lidgerwood hauler's boiler. In the background, bush regeneration has reclaimed the terrace area where the timber mill stood.



An abandoned six-wheeler side tipping rock wagon on the foreshore at Port Craig.

Tuatapere, the self-styled sausage capital of New Zealand, is approximately 88 km from Invercargill on the Southern Scenic route, and about 100 km from Te Anau.

- Tuatapere, originally called Papatotara and renamed in 1904, is on the site of a government owned and operated punt that used to ferry passengers across the Waiau River.
- Early industries sawmilling and flaxmilling, with around 30 sawmills operating at its peak.
- Today's population around 1000
- Main industries are forestry and farming, with tourism gaining importance.
- Range of accommodation and great outdoor experiences
- Visit the Bushman's Museum



The 22-metre high Edwin Burn viaduct.