

# Midnight tramp

**Bevan Hurley** tackles the stunning Hump Ridge track by night.

**F**ULL MOONS around the world are marked by acts of lunacy and mindbending raves till dawn and beyond. And so it was in remote western Southland, where a group of hardy trampers recently gathered at midnight at the height of the lunar cycle to join a 24 hour, 55km hike across the stunning Hump Ridge Track.

Stump the Hump attracts fitness masochists of all abilities and ages. This year, 120 hikers aged from 14 to 81 took part.

The event is the brainchild of Kate Hebblethwaite, the track's marketing and operations manager, who hasn't slept for a week while putting the finishing touches to Stump the Hump. Fitting, as sleep deprivation is about to become familiar to us all.

The event tripled in size this year and the master plan is to encourage hikers to enter in teams, dressing up in costume. All profits are put back into the local community. Organisers don't want it to turn into a race and, besides, there's absolutely no running,

**“Even in the darkness the intriguing beauty of Fiordland is apparent.”**



Boardwalks are a feature of the Hump Ridge track in Tuatapere, Southland.

TUATAPERE HUMP RIDGE TRACK

we're told. It would wreck the millions of dollars worth of wooden boardwalk. This doesn't stop the youngsters from taking off like Usain Bolt when the starter's shotgun is fired.

The hike begins through forest at the entrance to Fiordland National Park. It descends to Bluecliffs Beach, and a wander for several kilometres along the sand at low tide. The head torches of a hundred hikers light it like a cityscape, and thousands of glow sticks dropped along the track ensure stragglers are not lost in the pitch black overcast night.

Soon we head inland and pass the first of many

checkpoints. The lubricated volunteers, all dressed in assorted costumes, hand out chocolate pick-me-ups.

After a couple of swing bridges, comes the big climb. The steepening track spreads the field. Even in the dark the intriguing beauty of Fiordland is apparent, giant ferns and soaring nothofagus trees create a spectacular canopy.

By now it's around 3am, and the first wave of fatigue hits. The body wants to shut down, the mind is not far behind.

I reach another checkpoint where the marshal, wears a horror film costume. The track then hits its



Jet boating on the Wairaurahiri River.

SUPPLIED

## River to the sea

WESTERN Southland is emerging as a compelling adventure tourism alternative to Queenstown. And a jet-boat ride down the the Wairaurahiri River is a perfect way to venture deep into the wilds of Fiordland.

The 92km, six-hour trip leaves Lake Hauroko, New Zealand's deepest lake, at 10am. History buffs will be in for a surprise. Sitting in a cave on an island in the middle of the lake is New Zealand's archaeological answer to the Egyptian mummies. In the 1960s, the well-preserved skeleton of a Maori princess was discovered sitting upright, pointed north. She would have died around 1620, lived to the age of

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around 50 and enjoyed a healthy diet. Under an agreement with local Maori, the remains have stayed where they are, but have, unfortunately, deteriorated in recent years. And although jetboating tours are not permitted to go near the cave, guide Johan Groter's informative commentary brings the legend to life.

The river falls 185m in its drop to the ocean, as it winds its way through grade-three white water rapids on the Wairaurahiri River down to the rugged south coast. As well as being an expert driver, Groter checks stoat traps and allows short bush walks into the uninhabited forest.

A delicious barbecue lunch at Waitutu Lodge is included in the price of \$225 an adult. Johan can also pick up trampers or link to helicopter rides in and out of the region.

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