

A TRAMPERS' GUIDE TO THE OHAU CATCHMENT. By Tony Gates

The Ohau Catchment is the home of supplejack! It is a small catchment, at least by Tararua standards, often utilised, as the Mangatainoka is, as a jumping off point before you visit the vast Tararua heartland and the tops beyond. NB, access to the Ohau has frequently encountered legal difficulties because it crosses farmland, and, being only fifteen minutes from Levin, is not far for vandals to go.

Lower Ohau River

From Levin, the Poads Road car park is only about ten minutes' drive. There are marker poles across the farmland to the bush edge (ten minutes), then a well-used, though muddy, track follows the west bank of the river for 30 minutes to the new swing bridge over Blackwater Stream, then Ohau Shelter. That is a grotty place that should be burnt to the ground if it has not already been destroyed. The river can be followed back down from the shelter at the price of wet feet. The usual route follows the river upstream from there for one hour, to the south/ North Ohau forks (Deception spur). There is now a new track on the west bank named "Oscars Track", which is yet to be connected to any others. Shelter to forks, by either track or river (when low) one hour. Continue on South Ohau (below).

Waiopehu track climbs the very gentle ridge on the Ohau catchments western boundary, from the farmland, or from Ohau Shelter. Farmland to Waiopehu Hut 4 hours (variable). Several dog legs on the flat track make for deceptive distance calculations. Edwards Shelter, an hour or so before Waiopehu Hut is very grotty, but has water. Waiopehu Hut is a pleasant resting spot for those continuing on up the stepped track to Waiopehu peak, with its small area of tussock tops. Bit of leatherwood there too, but reasonably well cut r tracks where they count. Great views from Waiopehu. Then there is a gentle saddle to the south- east, before the grave and memorial cross of Twin Peaks. The partially overgrown track continues to the north, to a saddle then Richard's Knob (one hour), then a further three hours over Gable End and Mayo Knob back to Ohau Shelter. Muddy.

South Ohau

The route up into the North Ohau from the confluence follows the river bed, which can easily be followed most times. The small gorge presents no real problems. Forks to south Ohau Hut one hour. (South Ohau Hut is a reasonable starting point for a Friday night.) "Yeates 500" track climbs steeply behind the hut for half an hour, but soon levels off, then splits to the east, (a further half an hour) to Te Matawai Hut, (another half hour) and to the west, to Butchers Saddle then Richards Knob (one hour). Te Matawai Hut is a fairly popular hut because of its location, not its quality. Every time I have visited, it is grotty. Last year, it had no water! Five minutes past the hut, in heavy scrub and deep mud, the track splits, east (and up) to Pukematawai, or north (and down!) to Girdlestone Saddle. Te Matawai Hut to Girdlestone Saddle one hour. There is a quicker route from South Ohau Hut to Girdlestone Saddle directly up the main river sidling Downing Falls on a well-marked track. Hut to Saddle one & half hours. Deception Spur, in between the two Ohau branches, has an old route, but is not easy to follow. DOC plan a major new track there, and a swing bridge at the forks.

North Ohau

This catchment is seldom visited despite its proximity to the road end, and presents some very mixed travel. Following the river bed from the forks takes you past some wide open flats for about an hour, then just as the valley closes in, North Ohau Biv is found. No facilities, avoid! Five minutes up valley are some delightful grassy river flats, much more my style. Everything is strictly off track above there, as the valley steepens. However, there are still numerous open spots and slips, and some great views of mighty Dundas Ridge and the Mangahao Valley. An interesting off track day trip.

The Makeretu catchment

Another seldom visited catchment, with one long stream providing reasonable off track travel, and heavily bushed faces. Good river flats. The Makeretu provides a good route up to the big bush of the Waitewaewae/ Otaki, and to Oriwa Ridge Biv, but the area is strictly for the competent bushman, and can be rather unpleasant in grotty weather. Poads road car park to Oriwa. Biv seven hours (in good conditions!).