

A TRAMPERS' GUIDE TO THE MANGAHAO CATCHMENT

North and east of the Mangahao River, there is just one DOC hut – north Mangahao Biv. Muddy track, scrubby bush, deep gorges and no views! Never been there and perhaps never will. Access is over farmland off Kopikopiko Road (Pukehoi Road), in from Mangamaire, five minutes' drive south of Pahiatua. Patupiaehē Stream is followed for 10 minutes over farmland, then where it splits at the bush edge, take the southern ridge. If you are lucky and can find the biv., please report it to me! Apparently, it would provide access to some of the lower Mangahao Gorge, and over to the Tokomaru River, but as I said, it is a singularly unattractive area for trampers, and has little to offer. Also, the biv has the dubious distinction of being on the junction of four maps. Forest is mixed Kamahi, with Leatherwood, Supplejack tangles and a general mixture of everything else.

Moving a little further north, up the main Mangahao Gorge, there is more rough untracked country. The gorge is spectacular, but somewhat dangerous and ruined by the hydro scheme. Ngapuketarua Stream, or Weasel Creek, provides reasonable travel along its entire length, with some nice river travel lower down, but no connecting tracks. Off track travel on many ridges is good below the leatherwood. Burn Hut was a bit grotty when I was last there. It is found at the end of the track from the middle dam, which takes approximately two hours to tramp. The track is a wide slice through the leatherwood plateau just up from the hut, then drops steeply down to the Mangahao River, and a difficult side creek - if in flood. It follows the river down around the corner to the dam.

The road to the dams takes you right into the heart of the northern Tararuas without even getting out of your car! A different sort of way to see the hills along a windy bush road past giant man-made environmental disasters. The dams and their lakes do have some strange sort of fascination - a ghostly appeal that leaves you wondering what the valley used to be like.

*A TRAMPERS GUIDE TO THE MANGAHAO CATCHMENT. Continued by Tony Gates
This is the third in the series of tramping route guides for the Tararuas, completing the more popular parts of the Mangahao catchment. There will be more in depth coverage of the Tararuas, and other ranges, in future editions.*

The Mangahao Catchment is the closest, most accessible large catchment to P.N. It is becoming increasingly popular, despite its long and winding road, and relatively few tracks in the lower gorge area (covered in the last newsletter). From the top dam there is a track that follows the east bank of the dam to College Creek, (15 minutes) then up the steep, obvious spur to the leatherwood, and the tops overlooking Ngapuketerua Stream and Baber Creek (one hour). Travel from there is strictly off track, and restricted basically to the tussock covered ridges climbing south over Massey to Ruapae. (Two and a half hours). Following the eastern side of the Mangahao watershed south to Arete is the main divide, or Dundas Ridge, familiar to many of us. It is a dominant tussock ridge reaching 1500 metres in places that is easily visible from the plains. East Peak is some 15 minutes south of Ruapae, then there is a deep saddle to cross before the ascent to West Peak (one hour) and an easier gradient along to Walker and Pukemoremore. Continual ups and downs typical of the Tararua tops lead to Logan, then finally the trig of Dundas. West Peak to Dundas two hours. There is a recently cleared track from Dundas, over Triangle Knob, then down to the Mangahao River. Down one hour, up two. A little over an hour south on the main range sees you on the slopes of Arete, at the southern end of the Mangahao catchment. Arete Biv, located on Arete Bench, is just over on the Waingawa side. Note, the biv may be difficult to locate in the mist. Following the catchment boundary west, it is maybe one easy hour over to Pukematawai, then a long two hour descent to the well-used Te Matawai Hut. It always seems an even longer distance to climb. Actually, Te Matawai Hut is about ten minutes into the Ohau/ Otaki along a very muddy track, as the track to Girdlestone Saddle drops off the ridge in the monkey scrub, and is soon in the bush. Turn off to Girdlestone Saddle 45 minutes.

A large leatherwood infested area to the west of the upper Mangahao River, known as Tawirikohukohu, or "The Camelbacks", due to their profile, are untracked, and seldom visited by trampers. Need I say more?

The main Mangahao Valley, from the top dam to Girdlestone Saddle, takes approximately eight hours to tramp. Please note that the time is very approximate. From the top dam, a good track follows the water's edge to Roaring Creek (no bridge), then rapidly degenerates to the mud bog it is known as. Wide, Beech covered river terraces soon close in to the upper gorge, which the track sidles, then crosses on a swing bridge a little over an hour in from the car park, and about half way to Harris Creek Hut. The gorge side track is well worn, but jumps up and down a bit. Some parts of the track resemble a goat track! Dick Creek, difficult to cross in flood, is reached five minutes before Harris Creek Hut, a cosy spot, though typically, prone to becoming rather muddy. Car park to Harris Creek two-three hours. Then the valley opens out to pleasant grassy flats and wide beech forest terraces. Harris Creek has recently been bridged, but do not be fooled, Barra Stream, en route to Mangahao Hut, is a similar size, and impassable when in flood. I seem to recall a very muddy track on the beech forest terraces up valley, but also some extremely pleasant river terraces. An easy hour up from Harris Creek Hut will see you at Barra Stream. Then there is a small gorge - a small series of pools the track easily climbs past - and from one high point on a slip, a magnificent view of the Mangahao River circling around beneath. From that prominent view point, the track crosses several pleasant grassy flats to the luxuriously appointed new Mangahao Hut. Harris Creek Hut to Mangahao Hut two hours. It takes a further two hours on the track from the hut up to Girdlestone Saddle. There is another sizeable creek to cross about twenty minutes up from the hut, then the Mangahao River itself a further hour upstream, past the old Avalanche Flats Hut site. The track winds up over one bluff, but presents no real difficulties apart from the river crossings. From the high point above Avalanche Flats, the Dundas Track climbs steeply up to the leatherwood on Triangle Knob, then Dundas (refer above). The last bit on the main track up to Girdlestone Saddle leaves the Mangahao River, follows the western tributary, for ten minutes on easy terraces, then wanders for ten minutes more up to the saddle. DOC are considering making a new tramping track through the Ohau (Deception Spur) and main Mangahao Valley. Judging by the recent increase in tramping there, it, would make a popular circuit. Some new tracks and bridges are all that is required.