

## **A TRAMPERS' GUIDE TO THE RUAMAHANGA / MANGATAINOKA CATCHMENTS.**

The Mangatainoka is a small river in the northern Tararuas, draining some heavily bushed valleys in from Eketahuna. Good public access to much of the northern Tararuas wanders through the Mangatainoka, then the Ruamahanga catchments, including perhaps the easiest route up onto the tops, via Herepai Hut. The Ruamahanga and Mangatainoka catchments are therefore frequently visited by trampers.

### **Mangatainoka**

There is a car park and small picnic area at the end of Putara Road. The only track leading from there splashes through the mud of the farmland alongside the Mangatainoka River for five minutes or so to the first swing bridge. It then continues at a more or less flat gradient on the west bank through reverted farmland, and to the second swing bridge, about half an hour upstream. From there, the track will really sort you out, as it climbs steeply up onto the large, flat ridge. Heavy podocarp forest cannot fail to impress trampers, as there are numerous tall, straight trees up to about 700 metres altitude. There is a particularly delightful stand of Miro/Matai/ Rimu forest on top of "655", the flat topped knob that the track sidles under in the lower Mangatainoka (in between the car park and Herepai Hut). Shortly after the track gradient eases off, there is a signposted track junction, right - twenty minutes to Herepai Hut; left (south) - 90 minutes to Roaring Stag Lodge. The track to Herepai Hut follows the southern edge of the Mangatainoka catchment. The hut is nestled in a handy spot for day trippers and weekenders, just five minutes from the tops, and with a good view of them and the Ruapae catchment from the hut roof.

The track onto the tops climbs steeply, and is exposed and eroded in places. Both the Mangatainoka and Ruapae catchments drop steeply away from the track, and look to me like leatherwood infested series of bluffs and waterfalls. But I don't want to put you off! Herepai peak is a mere blip on the ridge, just in the scrub, Ruapae is the first main peak, on the main range, bordering with the Mangahao Catchment. That is where the pleasant tussock basins begin, stretching largely uninterrupted south to Mt Holdsworth. Ruapae is well worth a visit of a fine day!rast Peak is a short distance south, then there is the deep saddle in the leatherwood (1145 m) to cross before the steep climb up to West Peak. Take care at the saddle, for it drops down on the Ruamahanga side to Chamberlain Creek, considered the most rugged in the entire Tararua Ranges. Abseiling equipment very necessary for that one!

### **Dundas Ridge**

The mighty Dundas Ridge, towering above the Horowhenua Plains, leads southwest from west Peak. As this ridge borders with the Mangahao, it has already been discussed in that section. Derek and Nigel have a campsite along this ridge.

### **Bannister Ridge**

Similarly, this ridge has been written about in the Waingawa chapter of the guide. Briefly, Bannister Ridge is pretty rugged, requiring reasonable conditions, fitness, and confidence to cross. It is one of those legendary ridges on the Tararua tops that is seldom visited due to the rugged nature of the terrain, and relative remoteness. There are no huts on the ridge, only Arete Biv, on Arete Bench, at the western end, and beyond the eastern end, Cow creek Hut way below, and cattle Ridge Hut to the north.

The route east from Arete peak, rather Arete Peak east, follows an easy tussock slope down towards the very head of the Ruamahanga. Easy terrain rapidly gives way to thick leatherwood and bluffs down there, so avoid! Heading east, climb up to "The Twins", and follow the obvious ridge over several ups and downs and direction changes to Waingawa trig. From there, the steep terrain relents, and wide open spaces on Cattle Ridge open up.

### **Cattle Ridge**

Like Cow Saddle, Cattle Ridge was named for the beasts living there early this (last) century. The upper; Ruamahanga catchment curves around Cattle Ridge in steep, rugged forest and leatherwood, but the ridge top itself, in the tussock, is largely flat, presenting easy travel. From Waingawa Trig, the edge of the Ruamahanga catchment descends gently to the bush edge above Cow Saddle, then steeply to Cow Saddle. There is a fine campsite just below the bushline, with water during all but the driest times. Cattle Ridge proper rolls gently north-east from Waingawa to Pukekino in tussock, and some wind swept gravel flats. There is a small notch in the ridge designed to frustrate tired trampers. A bit of leatherwood and Spaniard there too! Then more rolling tussock flats, as the ridge drops gently through some clusters of Leatherwood to Cattle Ridge Hut, a wee way above the creek at; the bushline. The flat areas may cause some route finding difficulties in poor weather. Allow two hours plus to tramp the length of Cattle Ridge. There is a steep and very muddy track descending through the bush from the Cattle Ridge Hut to Roaring Stag Hut. One hour down, two up. Swing bridge over the Ruamahanga River.

### **Roaring Stag area**

From the Mangatainoka track turnoff, allow maybe one and a half hours. It is an easy ridge either way, passing through some delightful podocarp forest near Ruapae Stream. Some pleasant, albeit small river flats are found at the confluence of the Ruamahanga and Ruapae, five minutes upriver from Roaring Stag Hut. It may not be the tidiest hut in the Tararuas, but believe me, it is a welcome haven in grotty weather.

Delightful heavily bushed river terraces follow the river down to the confluence with Cleft Creek. No official track exists, however the route is not difficult to follow on either bank. Follow the west bank to join up with the track to Cow Saddle. Roaring Stag Hut to Cleft Creek one and a half hours, and a further one hour up to Cow Saddle.

### **Lower Ruamahanga Gorge**

The river takes an obvious kink away from the fault line, at the confluence with Cleft Creek, and flows out to the east through the lower gorge, then the farmland near Mt Bruce. Under normal river flows, this gorge presents no real problems to tramp down, bar a few crossings maybe waist deep. On the whole, the river banks can be easily followed. Blue Range Stream joins the Ruamahanga about one third of the way down from Cleft Creek. Alternatively, there is an overgrown but adequate track following the southern bank. Access in from the farm is not well defined.