

## Kaweka J Circuit, Kawekae Forest Park

This three-day circuit explores Kaweka J, traverses part of the main range, and ends back at Makahu Saddle after passing through Kaweka Flats, site of the historic Iron Whare.

Kaweka Road ends at a car park with information panels and a toilet at the lofty altitude of 975m. The road is manageable by 2WD in most conditions, but may require chains in winter.

It takes just five minutes to walk to Makahu Saddle Hut. Two tracks offer access onto the main Kaweka Range and Kaweka J, and Trials Spur is the easiest to ascend. It zigzags through regenerating forest, among the dead remains of lodgepole pine.

About 20 minutes after the junction of Trials Spur and Makahu Spur, a short sidetrack leads to Dominie Biv. The well-marked trail to Kaweka J climbs ever upward, passing some rocky knolls and a couple of small tarns. Higher up, the terrain levels off onto the expansive flat tops of the Kaweka Range.

The Kaweka J summit lies to the south, on a poled route.

The route to Back Ridge Hut is indicated on a signpost near Kaweka J, and gradually descends a spur towards the west. In the forest, the track leads towards Sterns Saddle until branching off to the hut, which is set in an attractive valley-head, near the burbling stream. From Back Ridge Hut, take the route up the spur on the northern side of the valley, which once more climbs onto the open tops. It regains the main range about a kilometre south of North Kaweka. From there, poles lead northward across undulating terrain to Whetu.

From Whetu, a track junction offers a choice: if you want to visit or stay in Ballard Hut, take the poled route west to another track junction above Ballard Hut. It's a steep 200m scree descent to the hut. Alternatively, from Whetu head north-east to the Camp Spur track junction.

It's a short distance down Camp Spur to the bushline, then a long downhill march to Middle Hill Hut, with the gradient easing as you descend. Set in a clearing among the beech trees, Middle Hill Hut has a large and welcoming veranda, and makes a sheltered, comfortable destination for the night.

From Middle Hill Hut, head back along the Camp Spur Track until the turn-off to Kaweka Flats. The track drops to ford the Koaro Stream, climbs onto another high, forested plateau, and then drops again to ford a branch of the Makahu River. A stiff climb leads to Kaweka Flats, where a signposted side-trail leads to the Iron Whare, the oldest hut in Hawke's Bay. Built sometime in the 1870s, it served as a hunters' hut and a place for sheep musters using the Hawkestone stock route late in the nineteenth century.

Set in a clearing fringed by manuka, Kaweka Flats Bivouac is a two-bunk bivvy which offers more than adequate shelter and has fine views of the Kaweka Range. From here, undulating travel through increasingly diverse forest, leads back to Makahu Saddle and the end of the tramp.

### WILD FILE

**Access** From the end of Kaweka Road, at Makahu Saddle car park

**Grade** Moderate

**Time** Makahu Saddle to Dominie Biv 2-2.5hr; To Kaweka J, 1-1.5hr; To Back Ridge Hut 2hr; To Ballard Hut 3-3.5hr; To Middle Hill Hut, 3hr; To Kaweka Flats Bivouac, 2.5-3hr; To Makahu Saddle, 2-2.5hr

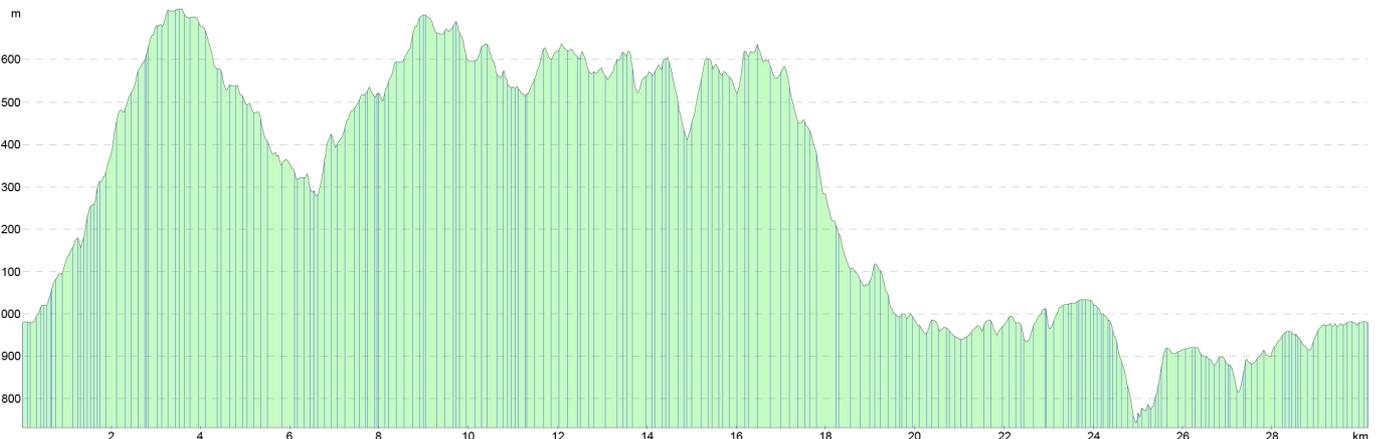
**Distance** 27.7km

**Total ascent** 2534m

**Accommodation** Makahu Saddle Hut (\$5, four bunks); Dominie Hut (free, two bunks); Back Ridge Hut (\$5, four bunks); Ballard Hut (\$5, four bunks); Middle Hill Hut (\$5, six bunks); Kaweka Flats Bivouac (free, two bunks)

**Map** BJ37

### Elevation Profile



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**Disclaimer:** While every effort has been made to map this route correctly, *Wilderness* does not accept responsibility for any errors. Users should plan their routes and gather as much information as possible before departing. The GPX file associated with this route has been drawn using Memory-Map software, version 6. Use discretion when following the route, especially when no track is marked on the map. **The GPX file in these cases are a 'best guess' of the route only. Users should use a combination of GPS, visual observations, maps and compass to find the best possible route.** Memory Map shows purple tracks and hut icons as verified routes and huts. Red or blue routes are those drawn by Wilderness.

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