

Kirwans Hut via Montgomerie Hut, Victoria Forest Park

This two-night circuit in the South Island's Victoria Forest Park starts and finishes near the town of Reefton. There's no car park at the end of Gannons Road, which branches off SH69, five kilometres north of Reefton, so you'll just have to find a spot before the bridge and hope for the best.

There's no difficulty following the track as it heads upstream along a gentle gradient. It's an easy 3-4 hours to Montgomerie Hut, with the only confusing section being a point where the track abruptly ends on the river bank. Don't attempt to cross the river but instead look for a faint foot-pad leading through overgrown bush close to the river's edge. The broad track-proper is regained shortly after.

Montgomerie Hut is a classic six-bunker with a fire and good outlook over the river.

The track picks up the Montgomerie River and plunges into deep green bush.

Three kilometres of easy ambling leads to a sharp left-hand turn at Kirwans Creek. It's a beautiful tramp along the cool, cascading mountain creek, with the track gradually steepening.

At the foot of the spur leading to Kirwans Hut sits the Lord Brassey Stamper Battery, a hulking, rusted relic of the mining days that looks incongruous against the lush bush and rushing creek.

The track zigzags its way up 500 vertical metres, passing cableways and fallen structures and the site of Kirwans Reward, an open cast quartz mine.

Kirwans Hut is perched on a rounded, grassy summit and provides views to the coast and the Southern Alps.

A worthwhile diversion is the high point on Kirwans Hill, which offers the only views to the east, across the high peaks of Victoria Forest Park. The track is marked but becomes a little indistinct after leaving the bushline.

It's a long but easy descent out to the road end at Caplestone along a wide track that follows various spurs before levelling out on the pretty Topffer Creek.

It's a not quite a complete loop – to find your car, scramble up a steep ridge and hike down a road before finally descending to Waitahu River Road (all routes signposted). Allow an extra hour.

Wild File

Access Waitahu River Road, off Gannons Road, 2.6km along SH69 north of Reefton

Grade Easy-moderate

Time Gannons Road bridge to Montgomerie Hut, 3-4hr; To Kirwans Hut, 4-5hr; To Caplestone, 4hr

Distance 36.8km

Total ascent 2303m

Accommodation Kirwans Hut (\$15, 12 bunks), Montgomerie Hut (\$5,

Map BS21, BS22

Elevation Profile



