

Tarn Hut, Puketeraki Forest Conservation Area

The track to Tarn Hut initially follows the Ashley River through farmland. It's well-marked, flat – and belies the challenge to the knees up ahead.

After an hour or so there's an easy crossing of the Lilburne River, after which the track divides: the right fork follows the Ashley River towards Youngman Stream Hut, the left ascends sharply towards Tarn Hut.

At the start the uncompromising 4WD track leads steeply away from the river with a few switchbacks to provide respite. It's wide and well-graded and there are fantastic views down the Lees Valley and over the Canterbury Plains towards Christchurch. Pt1250 is reached after ascending approximately 800m. It's a good spot for a break and the hut is only 30 minutes away along a level track. In the right light, the views towards the Pancake Range are spectacular. In poor conditions, however, it can be exposed, with only tussock and a few lonely trees for company.

Tarn Hut pops into view at the last minute. It's a basic four-bunker with a certain spartan charm, a functional stove and a setting that is hard to beat in Canterbury, nestled just below a ridgeline studded with beech trees that provide ample deadwood for the fire. The modest tarn, a stone's throw from the hut, supplies water and swimming for the adventurous. There are staggering views of the Canterbury Plains and, westward, over the ridge towards Puketeraki.

From the hut a poled route ascends to the summit of nearby Lilburne Hill (1405m), the highest point of the circuit.

Return the way you came, or continue along the ridge past Lilburne Hill to descend to six-bunk Youngman Stream Hut. The descent is through tussock, which soon gives way to beech forest and ends with a straightforward river crossing.

From the hut, the track enters beech forest before crossing the Ashley River, after which it ascends out of the trees to sidle around 100m above the river – watch out for treacherous patches of matagouri that encroach on the narrow path – before descending to re-enter the forest and rejoin the river. From there it sticks close to the water until the fork with the Tarn Hut Track and the path to the car park.

Wild file

Access 29km along Lees Valley Road there is a turn-off to a 4WD track, which leads to the carpark

Grade Moderate

Time Car park to Tarn Hut, 4hr; to Youngman Stream Hut, 2hr; to car park, 4hr

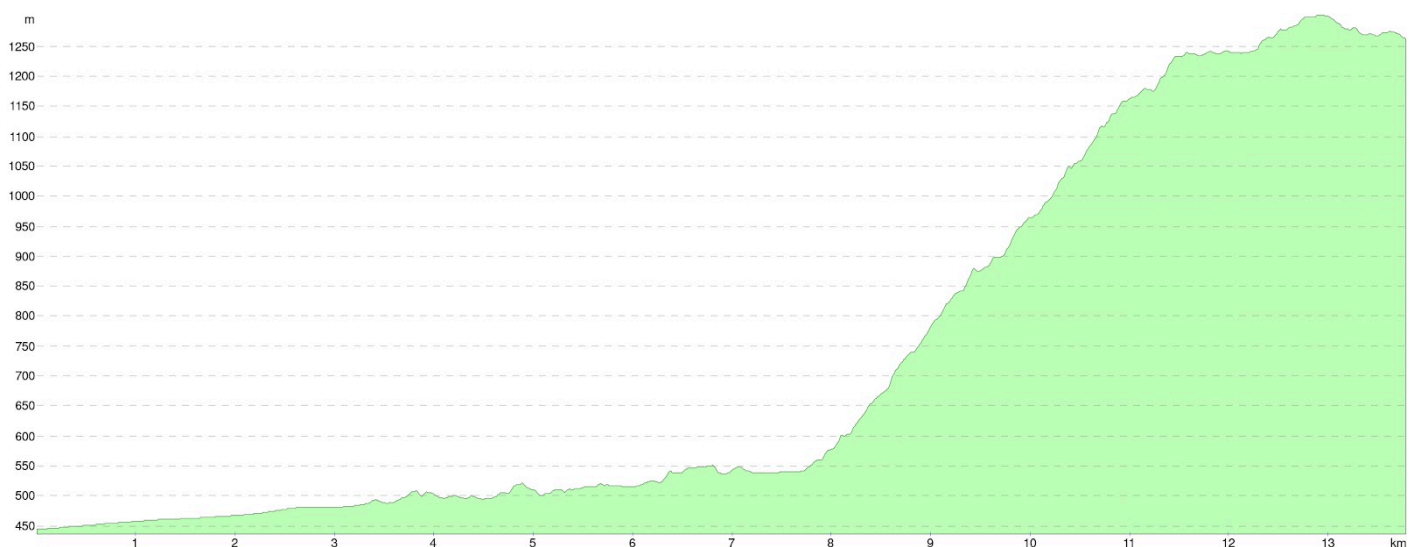
Distance 13.8km to Tarn Hut

Total ascent 919m

Accommodation Tarn Hut (basic, four bunks); Youngman Stream Hut (standard, six bunks)

Topo50 map BV22

Elevation



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