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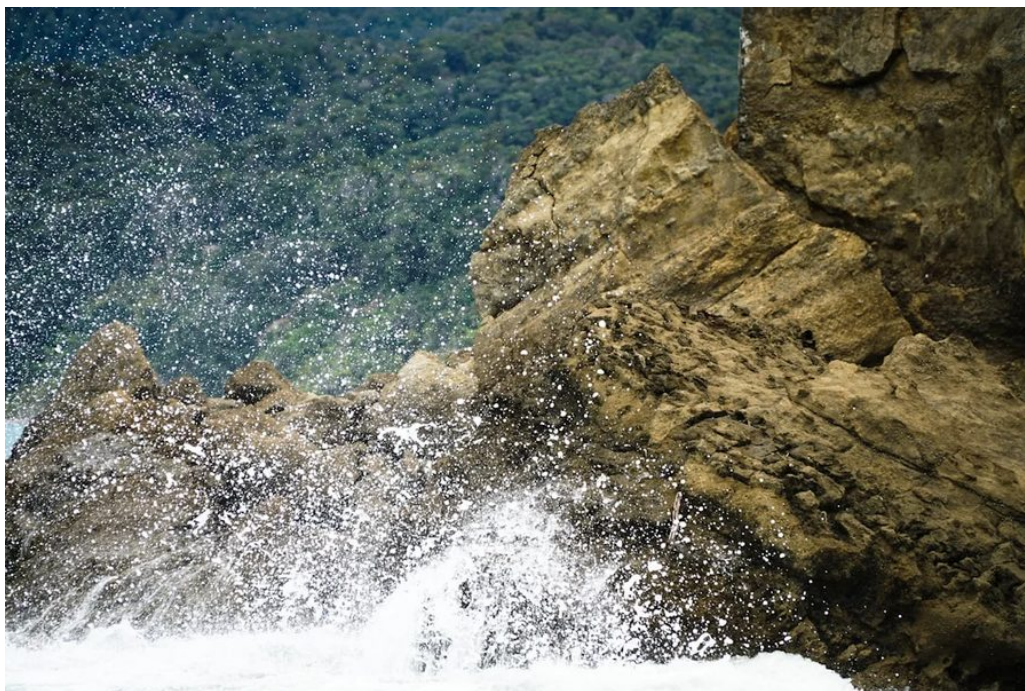
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Welcome



Wave breaking on rocks, last few kilometers of Hump Ridge Track, December 2018 — James Rathmell

Stand at the trailhead near Tuatapere and breathe in air that tastes of salt, peat, and the cold green weight of a forest that has been growing, undisturbed, for longer than memory reaches. To the south, the Foveaux Strait glitters like hammered tin beneath a Southland sky that can shift from cobalt brilliance to iron grey in the time it takes to lace your boots. Behind you, the last small town on this edge of New Zealand fades into the paddocks. Ahead, the land lifts sharply into one of the most remote and genuinely wild walking experiences the country offers — a 61-kilometre loop through ancient podocarp forest, along dramatic coastal sea cliffs, across viaducts suspended above cathedral-deep gorges, and over an exposed ridgeline that feels, on a clear day, like standing on the spine of the world.

This is the **Hump Ridge Track**, known in te reo Māori as **Tuatapere Hump Ridge**, and it asks something real of you. It is not a gentle promenade. The trail climbs hard through dense rimu and matai forest, negotiates kilometres of boardwalk through saturated wetlands, and presses you out onto windswept ridge country where the only shelter is what you carry. Over three days and roughly 945 metres of cumulative elevation gain, it will test your legs, your weatherproofing, and your patience — then repay every bit of that effort with scenery of a kind that lodges permanently in the memory. Moderate in its official grading, the track rewards hikers who arrive prepared and leave behind any expectation of the manicured.

New Zealand's South Island has no shortage of celebrated long-distance walks. The Milford Track, the Routeburn, the Kepler — these names circulate the globe, filling booking systems months in advance. But the Hump Ridge Track occupies a different register entirely. It is community-owned, built and maintained by the people of Tuatapere and the Waiau district, and it carries that local character in every handcrafted detail — from the information carved into trailhead signs to the huts that perch

2.3 Permits & Booking

The Hump Ridge Track is a **privately operated track** run by the Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track Trust, and its booking system differs significantly from New Zealand's Department of Conservation (DOC) Great Walks. There is no DOC hut pass or backcountry permit applicable here. All bookings — including accommodation and track access — are made exclusively through the trust's own platform at **humpridge-track.co.nz**, and they can be made up to **two years in advance**.

For the **2026/27 season**, the Freedom Walk package is priced as follows:

- **NZD \$495 per person** — multi-share 8-sleeper room accommodation
- **NZD \$575 per person** — multi-share 4-sleeper room accommodation
- **Optional upgrade: NZD \$150 per night** — private room (sleeps 2 in King or Twin Single configuration), available at both Okaka Lodge and Port Craig Lodge

These prices are **inclusive of accommodation at both Okaka Lodge and Port Craig Lodge**, as well as creamy oats porridge and brown sugar offered for breakfast each morning. The package covers two nights of accommodation across the three-day walk. It does not include dinners, lunches, snacks, transport to the trailhead, or any optional helicopter or jet boat upgrades, which are priced separately.

Bookings must align with **Freedom Start Dates** — specific designated departure days published on the track's website. You cannot simply turn up on any day of the season; the track manages walker flow through a fixed start-date calendar to prevent overcrowding at the lodges and on the trail. These dates sell out well in advance for the peak January and February period, so booking early is not merely advisable — it is essential if you want your preferred dates. The website allows you to view available start dates and submit a booking request form directly.

A **deposit** is required to secure your booking, with the balance due closer to your walk date in accordance with the trust's payment terms. Full terms and conditions, cancellation and transfer policies, and the Customer Declaration Form are available on the website and should be read carefully before paying. The trust operates a reasonable but firm cancellation policy: transfer dates may be available depending on lead time, but refunds are subject to specific conditions outlined in their terms. **Travel insurance** is strongly recommended, particularly for international visitors, to cover cancellation costs in the event of illness, injury, or disrupted travel.

Once your booking is confirmed, you will receive a **Walker Information Pack** detailing transport arrangements, what to bring, lodge facilities, and key logistical instructions. Read this document thoroughly — it is the operational backbone of your trip and contains start-time requirements, vehicle storage information, and emergency contact details. The track office can be reached at **+64 3 226 6739** for any pre-trip queries not answered by the website.

There are no separate DOC permits, camping fees, or conservation levies to pay beyond the Freedom Walk package fee. The private trust funding model means your package price directly supports track maintenance, lodge operations, and the remarkable ecological restoration work the trust undertakes across the Waitutu Forest area.

shore. The beach is exposed to the full fetch of the Tasman Sea, and the waves here, even on calm days, carry the energy of their long journey from somewhere west of Tasmania. Swimming is generally inadvisable — the undertow is powerful and the water frigid — but the beach is magnificent to walk and to sit with.

The track's final section pulls back from the coast and into the margins of the forest and coastal scrub, eventually connecting with the walking tracks and boardwalks of the lower Waitutu area. The terrain becomes progressively more familiar as you approach the trailhead — more managed, more accessible, less utterly remote — and this gradual transition serves as a kind of decompression chamber between wilderness and town. Use it. Let the forest walk you back to the world rather than arriving at the carpark still mentally on the ridge.

The **Rarakau trailhead** arrives without fanfare, as trailheads generally do. The carpark, the information board, the sight of a road — all of these feel both entirely normal and faintly unreal after three days in the Waitutu. Tuatapere is a short drive from the trailhead, and the town's modest comforts — a hot shower, a meal that someone else has cooked, flat ground beneath a roof — will feel more genuinely satisfying than any luxury you can easily name.

Before you leave the trailhead, pause. Turn back toward the forest one more time. The **Hump Ridge Track** has taken you through one of the quietest and least-visited corners of the New Zealand outdoors, past the remnants of human ambition and the quiet evidence of the natural world's long persistence, along a coast that still largely belongs to the birds and the wind and the sea. What you carry away is partly in the photographs and partly in the ache of well-used muscles, but mostly it's something less tangible — a recalibration of scale, a renewed sense of what the world contains when you give it your full, unhurried attention for three days.

Day-by-Day Summary

Day	Route	Distance	Elevation Gain	Elevation Loss	Est. Time	Difficulty
Day 1	Tuatapere (Rarakau) to Okaka Lodge	16 km	945 m	120 m	6–8 hrs	Moderate–Hard
Day 2	Okaka Lodge to Port Craig Lodge	22 km	200 m	945 m	6–8 hrs	Moderate
Day 3	Port Craig Lodge to Tuatapere (Rarakau)	23 km	80 m	120 m	5–7 hrs	Easy–Moderate

"By the time the forest releases you back to the road on the final afternoon, you understand something you didn't when you started: the Waitutu doesn't perform its wildness. It simply is wild, quietly and completely, whether anyone walks through it or not."