

Hector Track

5-6 May 2019

John Rhodes

This farm near Woodside has been the starting-point for Hector Track crossings since early last century. Peter Stout owns the land and allows tramping access through it.



Alexander Turnbull Library

Peter and I have differing ideas about the exact location of Bassett's Hut, where trampers used to stay. The photo dates from 1915.



Seen from Mt Reeves, the tops I'm heading for are under westerly cloud; but the forecast is good.

Wild cattle once roamed here, among trees that were burnt in about 1890.





Alpha and Omega are names assigned by surveyors in the 1870s. I've deviated from the original Hector Track route, and will rejoin it on Omega.

Greasy boulders make photographing the Tauwharenikau River a slippery business .





I collect miro fruit before the 800 metre slog to Omega.

Below the top, the track breaks out into a clear area that must have been burnt like Mt Reeves.



The cloud still looks forbidding, but the top of the Neill-Winchcombe ridge is almost clear. Called the 'Cone Ridge', it was mooted until 1911 as the route for the Greytown to Otaki track. Wally Neill and Alex Winchcombe were the first to traverse it, in 1929. I've walked their ridge 11 times that I can recall.



The vegetation at Hells Gate is in good shape, unlike in 1961 when Forest Service deer control was just beginning and Mavis Davidson took the photo above.

What's being done now about deer in the Tararuas?





Walking on a good track
in silver beech forest is
always a delight.





Alexander Turnbull Library

At Easter 1920 these Scouts visited the first of three Alpha Huts. One Scout wrote:

We climbed in our usual way, 10 minutes hard going & a 5 minutes rest. We passed quite a number of other parties, all merry & bright. The climbing is very stiff, but the scenes are wonderful. Everyone felt he was closer to Nature & God.

They went to Mt Hector before going home.

We arrived back in Masterton on Monday evening, our clothes the worse for wear, but all agreeing it was the best Scout Trip they could possibly have.





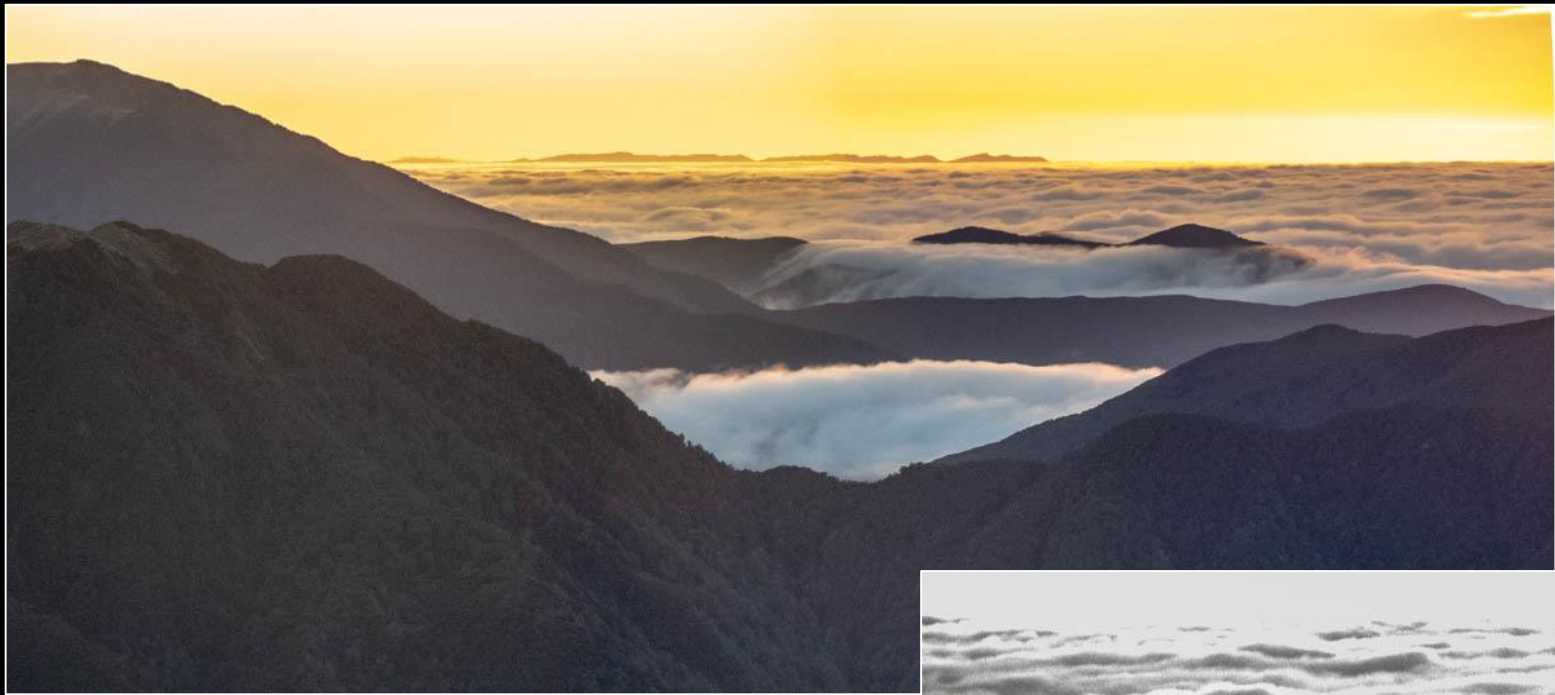
To get closer to Nature
and God - or perhaps
just to check out the
prospects for tomorrow
- I walk up to bushline.
False Spur is clear, so
that's a start!



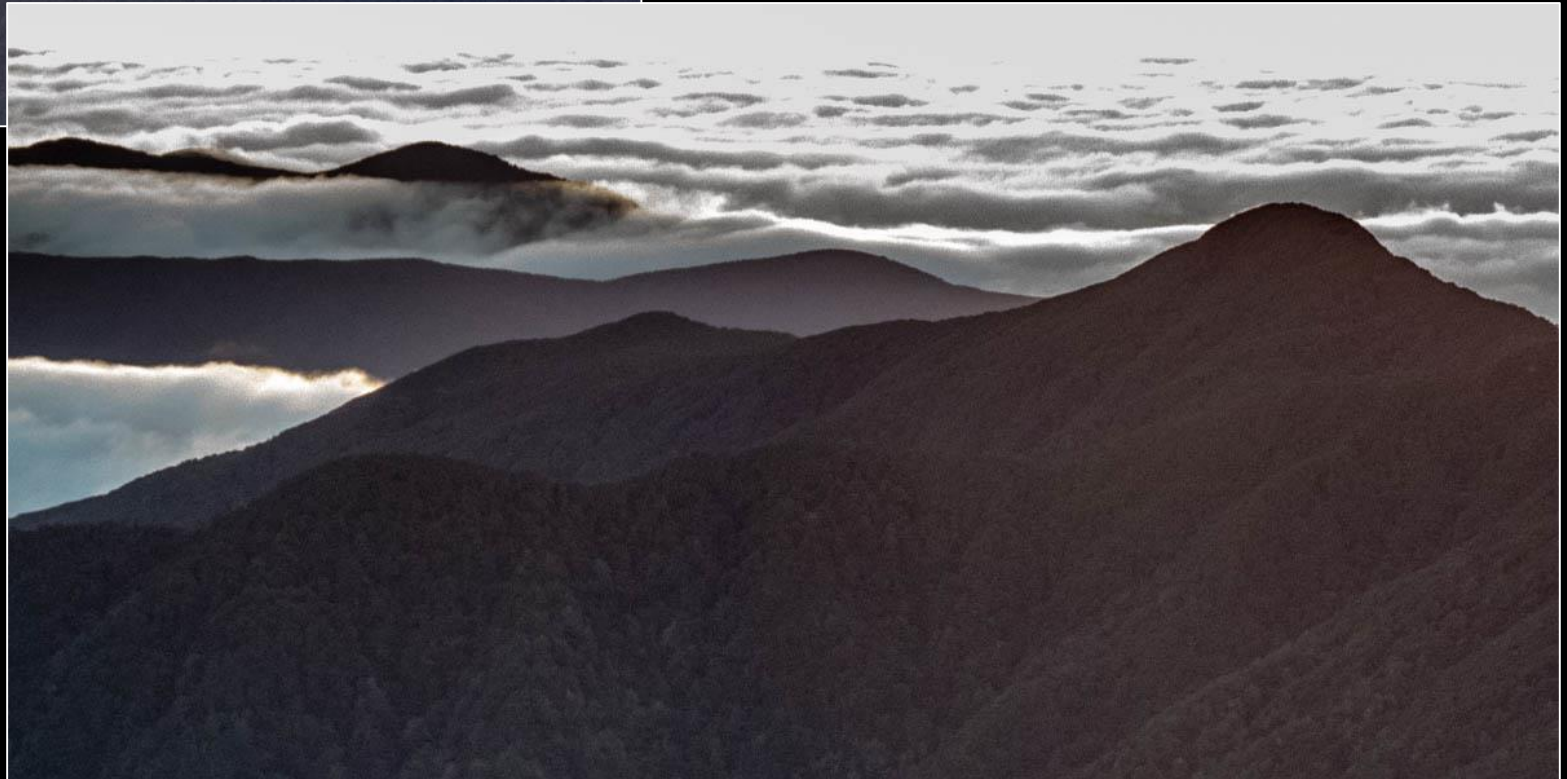
I'm on the move in the glow of dawn ...



... which has its reward.



Wairarapa people are under
cloud on this Monday morning.





Rhodes family archive

In January 1975 Ann and I were having breakfast at this tarn below Alpha when an earthquake shook the Tararuas - and us.

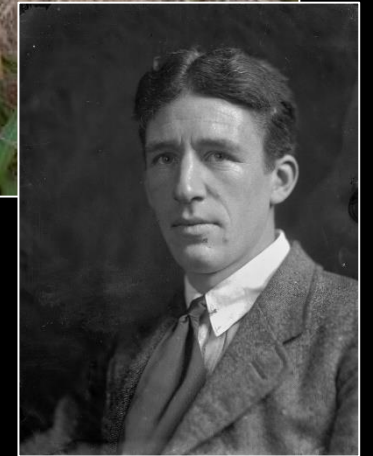




In this view of Quoin Ridge from Alpha, cloud stretches up the valley of the Western Hutt.



After the descending from Alpha it's a gradual climb to Aston (left distance) and a steeper one to Atkinson at right. Bernard Aston and Esmond Atkinson came this way (in the other direction) with Willie Field and Frank Penn in 1912.



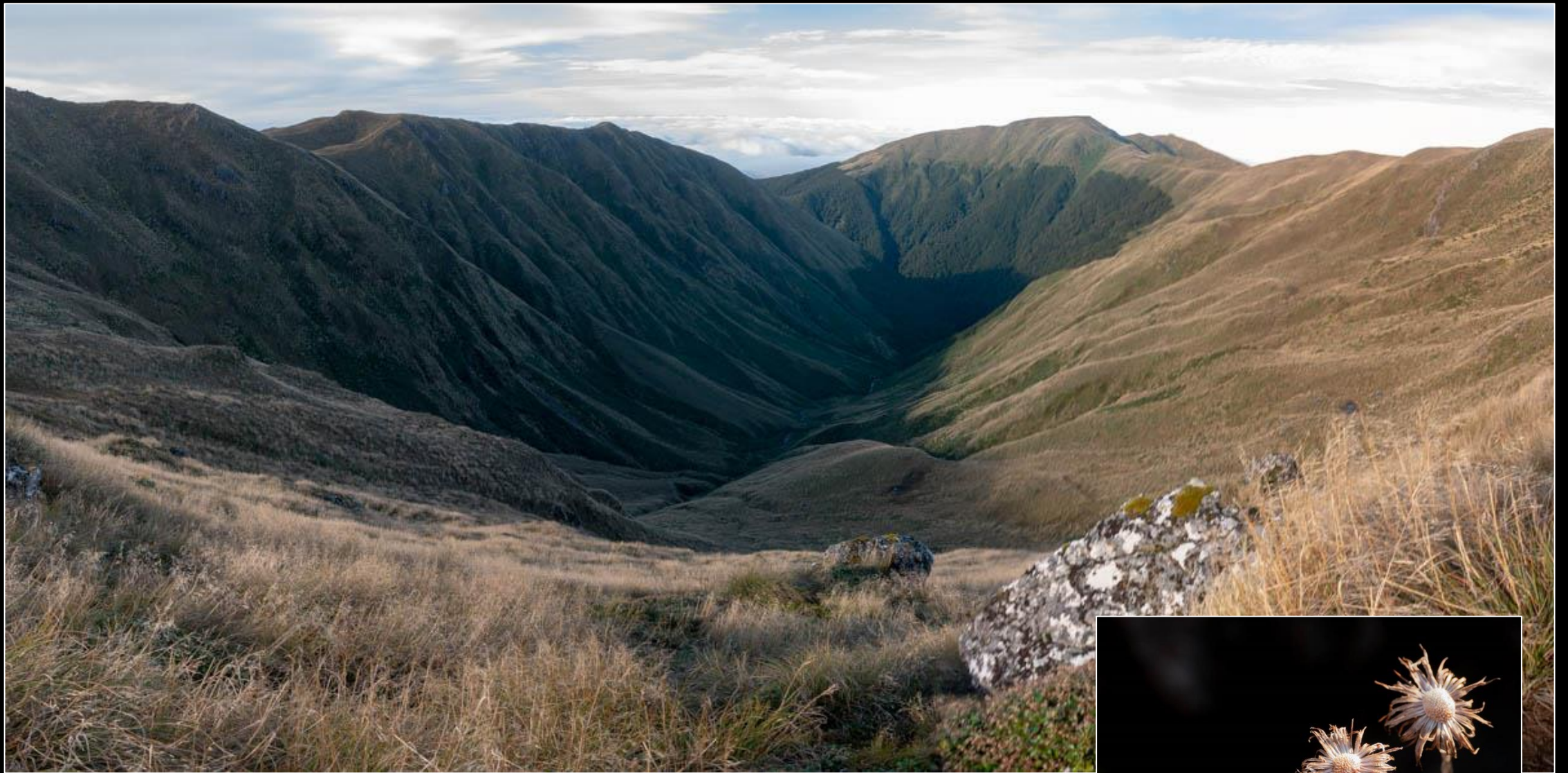
Alexander Turnbull Library (both photos)



I'm nearly at Aston and looking down the Western Hutt again. The pointy knob on the right is where Ann & I slept the night before the earthquake.



I've taken this Dress Circle photo several times. Surveyor Hubert Girdlestone named the Dress Circle and Beehives at Easter 1915. Although I sometimes deride the idea of marker poles on the tops, I think this one adds to the picture.



The climb to Atkinson gives a view right down the upper Tauwharenikau, with Mt Alpha beyond. Strangely, instead of continuing up-valley the beech forest stops abruptly.

It's only 9 am and I'll probably make it right through. At least I'm in better shape than these *Celmisia* flowers!





Approaching Atkinson, False Spur comes in on the right.



Ahead: two Beehives, then Hector, where the memorial cross is just visible.



To the north-east
from Atkinson:
Beehives Spur,
Winchcombe ridge
and the distant
eastern range of
the Tararuas.



Out of the picture, these ribs lead up to Hector, North Beehive and South Beehive respectively. All three peaks represent layers of hard sandstone laid on the floor of a Triassic sea.

A Real Trumper would sidle below the ridge to get more of a challenge.



The terrain on the eastern side is more benign but still doesn't tempt me.



I seem to be on the right track, if mud means anything.



Hector is in cloud, and the edelweiss have hunkered down for winter.



I sit down to tell Ann,
'I'll probably go right out
to the Forks'.

Below Hector, a string of tarns drains to the wild Hector River. The TTC's Hector Dogbox of the 1920s was nearby, out of the picture to the left.



"DOG KENNEL" HECTOR HUNT TARARUAS

Tararua Tramping Club archive

To get a cup of tea you carried twigs and made a fire like these people. Few trampers had alpine cookers.

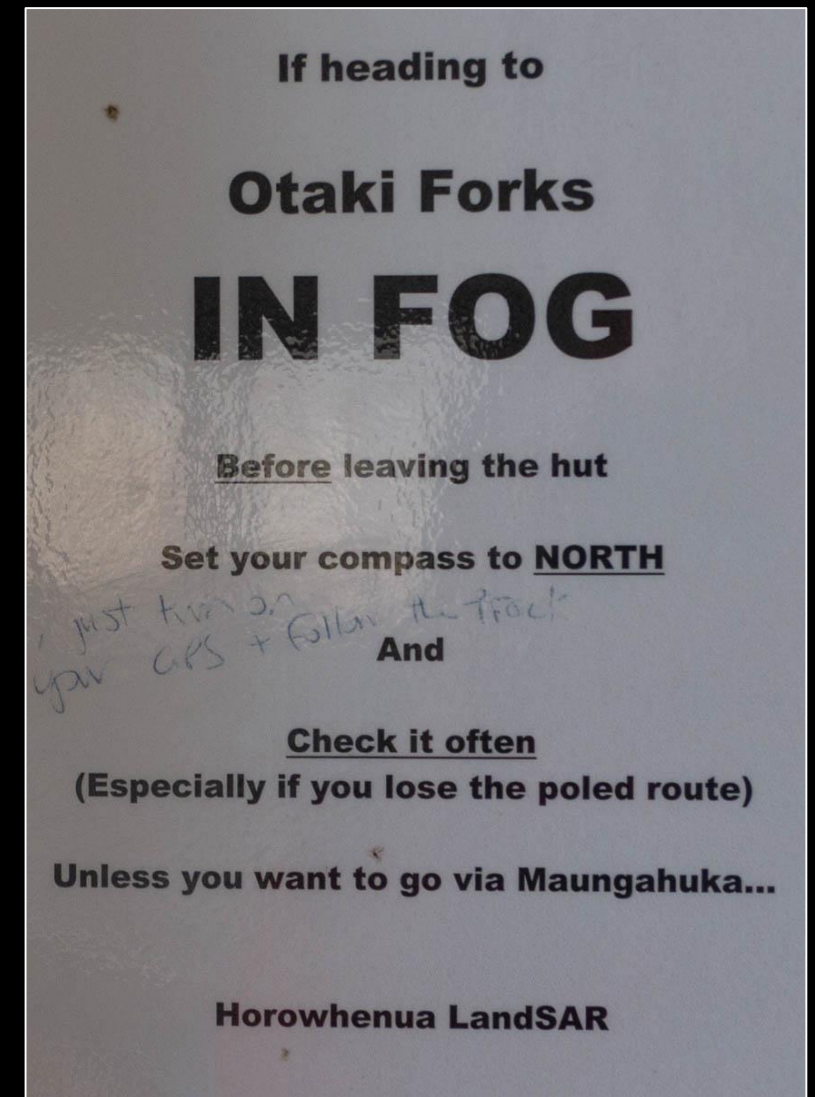


This is the third Kime Hut, built in 2013. Its name recalls Esmond Kime, one of 14 people who have died on the Hector Track (or Southern Crossing as it's now called).

With horses for transport, Joe Gibbs' and Jack Fisk's building of the first hut in 1930 for TTC was a huge achievement.



I would have stopped for a brew earlier, but a chilly south-easterly kept me moving. I used to think that gas stoves were for girls and sissies, and Real Trampers used white spirits. But I'm now at a time of life when every gram counts.



Horowhenua SAR is tired of looking for people around here ...

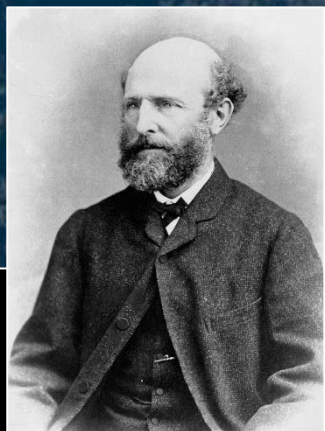
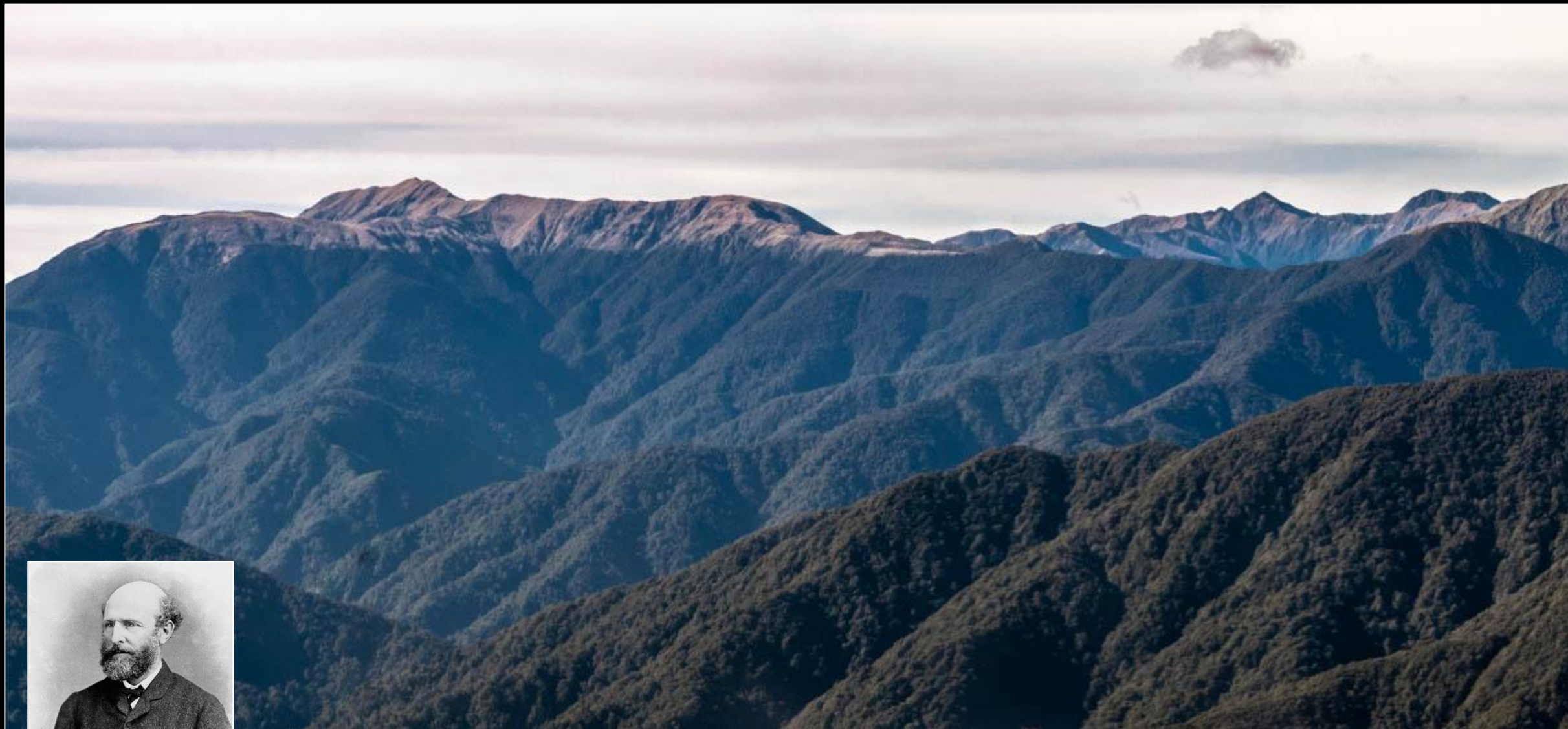


... and they've thoroughly marked the route.





There's 1300 metres to lose down Judd Ridge. In the early 20th century David Judd farmed at the foot of this ridge and allowed trampers to use his whare.



The view to the north is a Tararua geography lesson. At left are Shoulder Knob and Mt Crawford. In 1863 James Crawford became the fifth Pakeha to venture above bushline in the Tararuas. He never climbed the peak named after him, but he probably saw it from near here. Out to the right are Girdlestone and Mitre, where my last trip took me.



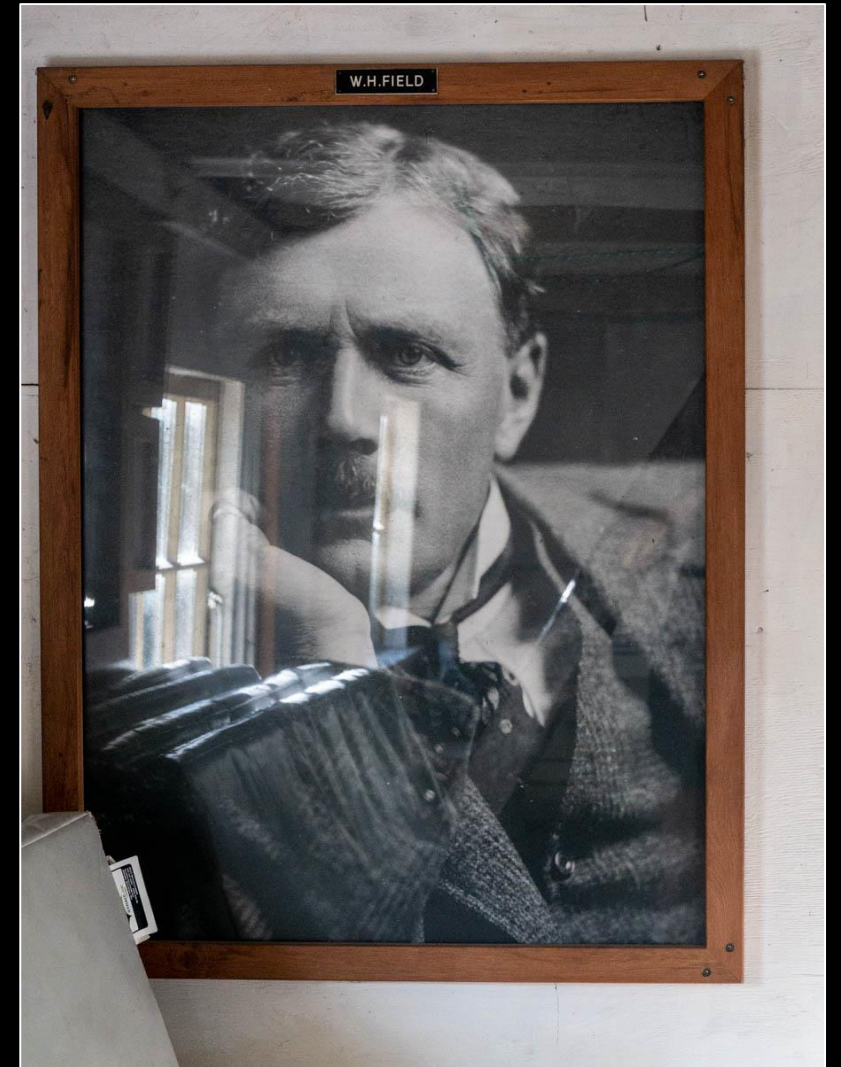
Otaki Forks, the end of the Hector Track, is still 900 metres below.



The Otaki River winds over the Horowhenua coastal plain in the distance.



The track to and beyond Field Hut (a Gibbs & Fisk masterpiece built in 1924) made possible the building of the first Kime Hut.



Inside, Willie Field keeps an eye on stacked mattresses and looks across the hut to a bottle of traditional Dijon mustard. A man of refined taste, he'd have appreciated that.



NOTICE.

The
Mount Hector Tourist
Track Committee

desire Tourists to kindly note that the upkeep of the Track and Huts has to be provided for, and would respectfully ask if they will assist in so doing. The Committee has contributed personally to a large extent, and it now remains with those using the Track whether it shall be carried on or not. If any mountaineers desire to assist, donations can be forwarded to the Secretary, Greytown, who will duly acknowledge any contributions he receives.

When using the Huts it is specially requested that the Doors be Closed, and Firewood should always be left in them for the next visitors, and thus ensure dry wood for cases of emergency.

MARK MAXTON,
HON. SECRETARY.

There's a touch of Greytown in the old notice from the Mount Hector Tourist Track Committee. It's unlikely to have been exhibited here originally, because the Committee had nothing to do with building this TTC hut.

The pack belongs to Craig Higgie, on a day trip with his son Jake. They have a car at Otaki Forks, and if I get down in time they'll give me a lift to the main road.

So no more photos!