

Traversing NZ on foot

The 7-year-old who walked the length of the country

West Coast girl Emilie Bruce was just seven years old when she hiked the Te Araroa trail with her mum Victoria — the length of New Zealand. The following is an extract from their new book, *Emilie Walks Te Araroa*.

The Richmond Ranges

The mountains are tall, but I am taller because I'm standing on the summit of Mt Rintoul in the Richmond Ranges. We climb up the side of Little Mt Rintoul, then down a bit, then up on top of big Mt Rintoul, covered in alpine daisies. Now I am 1731 metres above sea level — and I can see the sea all the way in the distance. This part of our journey is very long, even longer than the Tararua Ranges.

We take 12 long, hot, sweaty and sometimes scary days to walk through the Richmond Ranges, all the way from the Pelorus River to Nelson Lakes National Park. The best parts were waking up on Christmas Day to find Santa has

left presents in my trail shoes! A big chocolate bar, which I eat for breakfast while watching the sun rise above the mountains. We do a lot of swimming in all the creeks and rivers, and I make some friends at a hut. We try to hunt goats with sticks sharpened into spears. We almost get one, but then the goats ran away.

We also eat yummy food from a local company called Real Meals — they gave Mum and me free food for the entire Richmond Ranges section! My favourite meal is Beef Stroganoff with Chocolate Cake Pudding for dessert.

The scary part is when I slip off the side of a very steep track and roll 10 metres backwards down the bank and nearly fall into the Wairoa Gorge. Thankfully a baby tōtara tree stops me from falling any further. It didn't hurt so much, but I got a huge fright. So did my mum — she leapt down the bank after me!

After my fall, my legs wobble like jelly and my heart was pounds in my ears. Mum gives me chocolate to eat and water to drink, then we keep going, slowly, carefully, all the way to the next hut. Big ones, small ones, new ones, old ones. My favourite hut colour is orange. I love visiting all the old huts and shelters.

Huts don't have electricity or flushing toilets or



Emilie and her mum Victoria on the trail.

PICTURES: Victoria Bruce



Emilie hopes her story will help encourage other New Zealand children into the outdoors.

running water. They are completely off-grid. Most huts have wooden bunk beds with plastic-covered mattresses, a bench to prepare your food and a rainwater tank. Sometimes you just collect water from a nearby stream to drink and cook dinner. Some huts have a fireplace, or a table and chairs, but mostly they are a safe place where you can sleep the night.

The scariest part is when I slip off the side of a very steep track and roll 10 metres down the bank. A couple of days later I am exploring outside another hut when I disturb a wasp nest in the undergrowth. Suddenly three wasps are flying at me, landing

on my body and crawling over my face and neck. Have you ever been stung by a wasp?

It's the worst pain you could ever imagine. The poison from the wasp stinger feels like fire burning through me. Mum squashes the wasps then holds me tight until the pain finally goes away. Now I have a huge, swollen eye to go with the cuts and scrapes from falling down the bank. It looks like I've been in a big fight!

Mum says I'm a wāhine toa — a warrior woman. From now on, I am always on the lookout for anything with wings and black and yellow stripes.



Emilie Bruce managed to clock up visits to 400 backcountry huts by the time she turned 11.



Emilie at the Starveall Hut in Mt Richmond Forest Park.



Emilie Bruce and her mum have written a book about their adventure, *Emilie Walks Te Araroa*.

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