

New Waikaremoana Ultra Run for Great Walk track

Runners, grab your trail shoes and tackle a monument of New Zealand trails! The Genesis Energy Lake to Lighthouse Challenge organisers have just announced that the 46 km trail run stage around Lake Waikaremoana will now double as a stand-alone running race.

The first Waikaremoana Ultra trail run will be held Saturday 19 November. It will be open to individuals and teams of two, with the assurance of transport, camping, and full race support.

The L2L has been a great success, and four years after launch, has secured its spot on the multi-sporting calendar, plus a place in the hearts of the people of Tuai and Wairoa, where the event starts and finishes. But having received a continual stream of feedback about the beauty of the Waikaremoana track, race organiser Chris Joblin wanted to offer the option of a stand-alone run.

“We’ve had so much feedback about the sensational scenery. We’ve talked about offering the run concept several times — it’s a no-brainer really,” Joblin says. “We’ve got all the facilities set up already for the multisport race. There’s a boat to take teams runners up the lake. It’s all there in place.”

This will be the first-ever running race for the Waikaremoana Great Walk, which is one of the monuments of New Zealand bush trails. It’s usually tackled as a three-day tramp.

The inaugural Waikaremoana Ultra will start at Hopuruahine Landing, an hour before the multisporters, on the first day of the Lake to Lighthouse. Transport to the start from race headquarters at Tuai will be available, so there’s no need for runners to have a crew as support.

Runners will have up to 12 hours to finish the distance, so it’s not reserved to the mega-fit. That said, as Joblin says: “Unlike some of the other Great Walks this track is challenging. It’s unrelenting! It’s not an immaculately groomed trail so there’s a real sense of achievement in completing it.”

“Being able to split it up as a team of two is major,” he reflects. Teams runners will bite off legs of 26 km and 20 km, with the second half the tougher of the two, taking in a grueling up-and-down climb to the Panekire Bluff, 600 m above the lake, then a plunge down to the run’s Onepoto finish line.

Richard and Elina Ussher have clocked 4 hrs 58 mins and 5 hrs 36 mins for the run, as part of the multisport race. Beating those times won’t be easy, as both Usshers are accomplished trail runners.

The first recorded running of the length of the track was in 1979, when Keith Scholes, 31, and Bernie Vette, 36, took around six hours. Writing in the now defunct New Zealand Runner, Vette wrote "I'm filled with a strong feeling that I will remember this for a long time, for the satisfaction of having run the full distance of the track (despite my doubts with an hour to go), and from the pleasure of having run through that marvelous country. I've also discovered that these adventures are enhanced and not diminished by good running partners."

For detailed track descriptions and elevation maps, and to enter the Waikaremoana Ultra trail run, visit www.laketolighthouse.co.nz