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# Pouakai Hut sees people sleep on the floor during peak weekends

Jeremy Wilkinson · 11:40, Apr 29 2016



CAMERON BURNELL/FAIRFAX NZ

A police search and rescue team is heading to find two trampers lost on the Pouakai track in Egmont National Park.

Overcrowding at huts on Mt Taranaki is a disaster waiting to happen, a mountaineer says.

At Anzac weekend Ian McAlpine spent the night at the Department of Conservation's (DOC) Pouakai Hut and estimated there were 30 people staying there, almost twice the the limit of 18.



ROBERT CHARLES/FAIRFAX NZ

The view from the tarns near Pouakai hut.

"This overcrowding is for one a major fire risk with hut guests sleeping on the bunks, plus under tables, scattered around the floor and on the kitchen's sink benches," he said.

While not the biggest of DOC's eight huts, Pouakai – located only an hour walk from the Mangorei Rd – was the most popular, accounting for 18.5 per cent of DOC's occupancy rates.

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As well as the overcrowding, McAlpine believed a number of the guest had not paid the \$15 a night fee and he was surprised there were no DOC wardens on hand.

DOC partnerships manager Darryn Ratana said he was aware the hut was busier during holiday periods but policing the issues was dependant upon the availability of volunteer wardens.

However, it was an area DOC were looking into, he said.

While there were no penalties for not carrying a hut pass, wardens could issue an invoice to guests who weren't carrying one with them, Ratana said.

"Policing [of hut passes] is based on volunteer hut wardens when available, and public honesty," Ratana said.

"This is an area we are looking at, how we may increase the use of hut wardens in the future."

Ratana said while huts were busy during holiday periods, the total occupancy of the park was only 6.9 per cent, or 3557 nights used out of 51,465 in 2014.

Taranaki Mountain Shuttles owner and operator Rob Needs said Mt Taranaki's huts were continually growing in popularity and Pouakai Hut in particular was facing increased pressure and strain.

"The demand for use of the hut seems to be increasing every year," he said.

Although the Mangorei Rd track was recently refurbished with wooden boardwalks all the way to the hut, Needs said it wasn't the new track causing pressure.

"It's the promotion of the park and all the tracks within it," he said.

"Tourists especially are starting to see these brochures and pamphlets advertising the park and are including it in their list of things to see in New Zealand."



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