

2014



TRAMPING & MOUNTAINEERING





*Tramping
&
Mountaineering
2014*

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**Wellington Tramping
&
Mountaineering
Club**

P.O. Box 5068
Wellington.
www.wtmc.org.nz

Kate Cushing on the track to Horseshoe
Flat Hut, Moeraki River, South Westland

PHOTO Ian Harrison

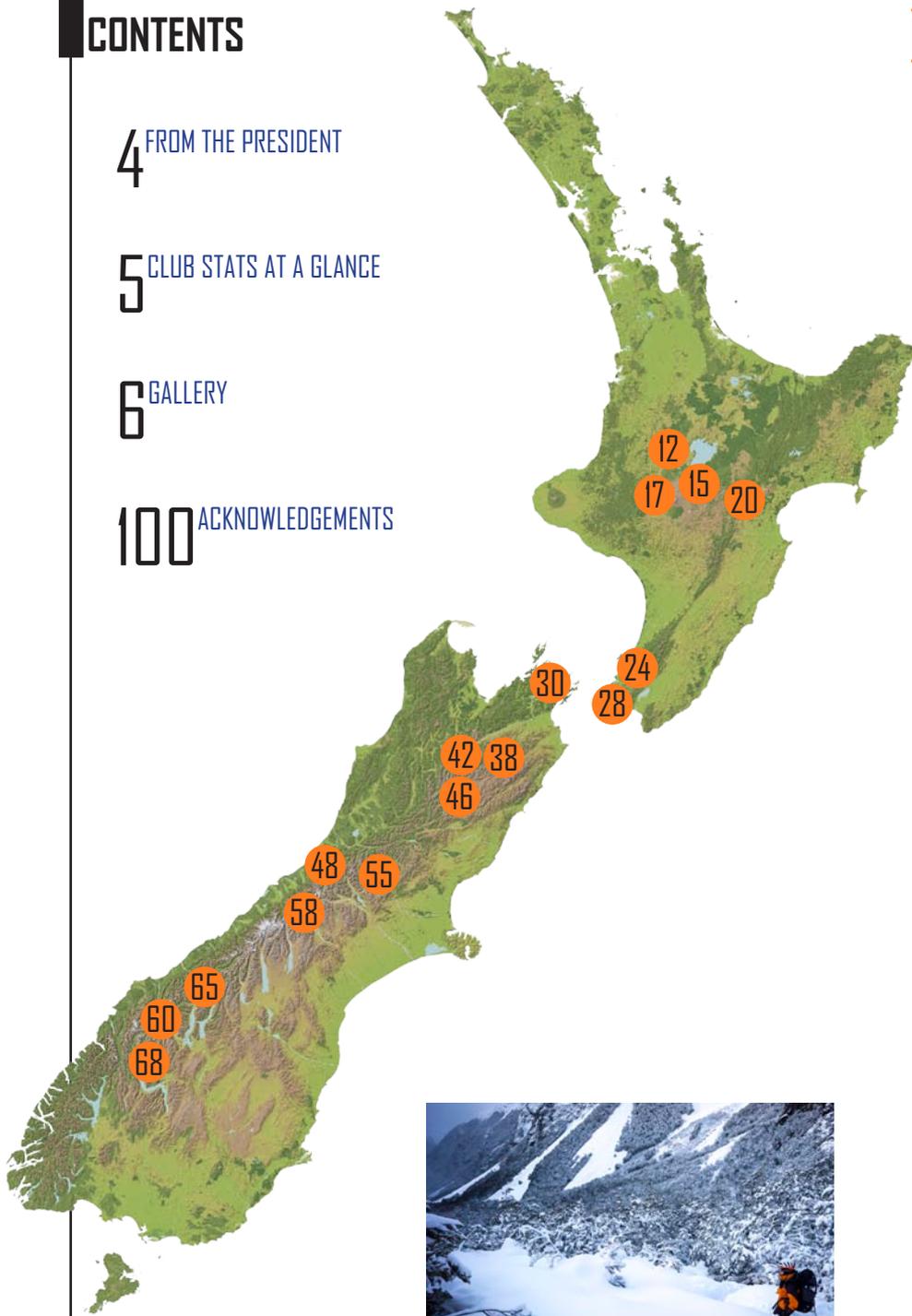
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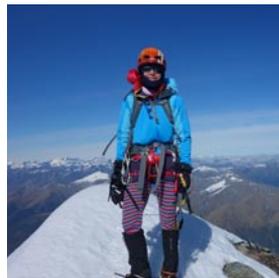
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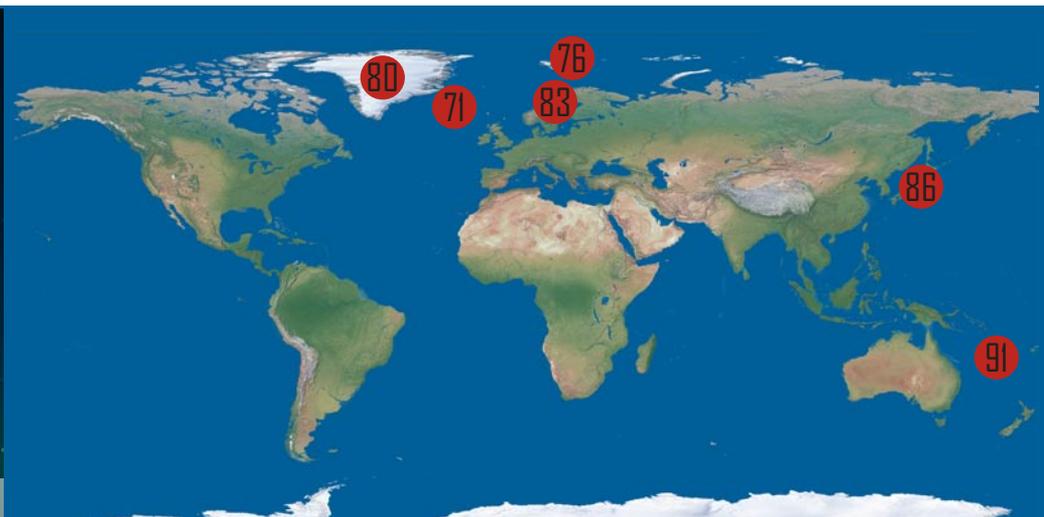
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's an exciting time to be part of WTMC. As well as our usual range of outdoor adventures, this year's committee has devoted energy to the question of how to maintain and grow our appeal. Whether this involves reducing perceived barriers to membership or looking at the attractiveness of our brand overall, it's about asking tough questions. Questions like "why do we do things this way?" and "what would happen if we looked through a newcomer's eyes?"

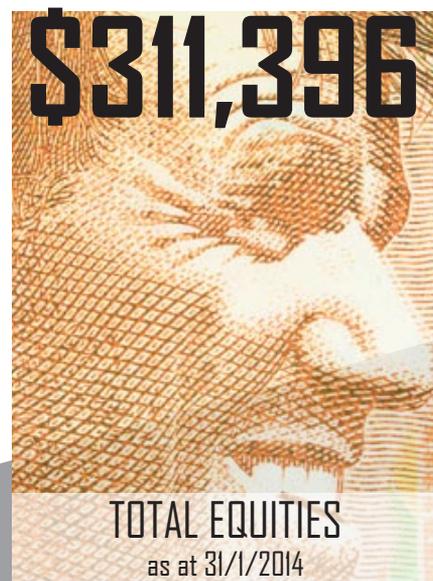
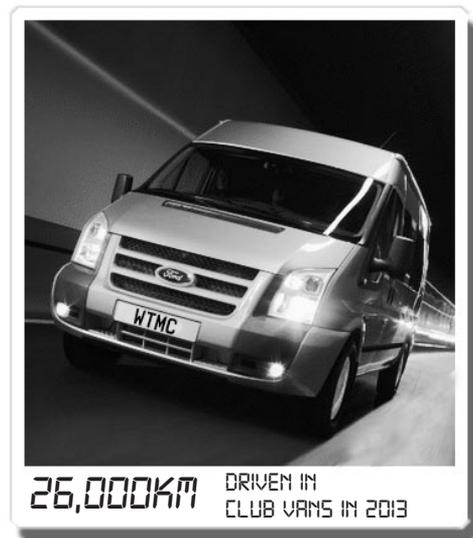
We also see opportunity in DOC's new openness to partnerships. Whether it's getting involved (again!) in hut maintenance, or the blue duck pest-trapping line we're currently looking to adopt in the Ruahines, tangible work caring for our outdoors can only have positive results. In tandem with the thinking I've referred to above, it's opportunities like this that really draw people to the club.

Our club is successful only because of its members. Whether you lead trips, greet people at the door on Wednesday nights, clean the vans or do any of our multitude of other jobs, you create our vitality. In an age where most membership organisations are struggling to fill roles, this year we've had a full committee and people eager to help out with the random tasks that keep things ticking over. Part of this comes from our expectation that people will help out, but most of it comes from the example and standard set by our members. And the fact that most of us get far more out of the club than we will ever give.

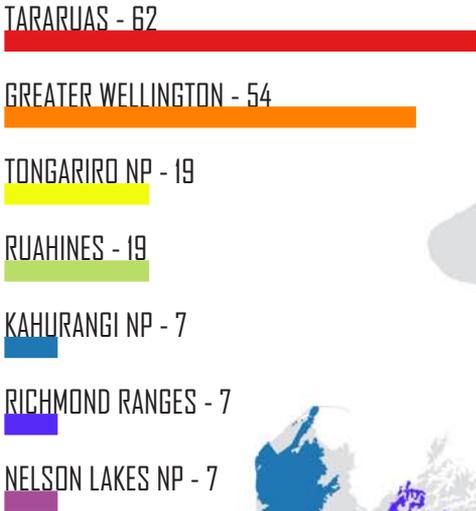
Thank you to Ian Harrison, who has taken on editing the journal this year for the first time. Like you, I always look forward to reading the journal, seeing the photos and finding ideas. I also want to thank Tony Gazley, who started editing the journal in 2009 and has done such an excellent job for the past five years. Another highlight of this year has been Tony and Megan Sety's update of the Schormann-Kaitoke (SK) book – a unique piece of tramping, club and cultural history, or a dangerously inspiring read, depending on your point of view.

All the best for your summer adventures.

AMANDA WELLS



THE CLUB'S FAVOURITE DESTINATIONS*



CLUB'S WEB SITE USAGE

//69,876 page views
//21,935 sessions
//7,326 users

From 1/7/2013 to 30/6/2014

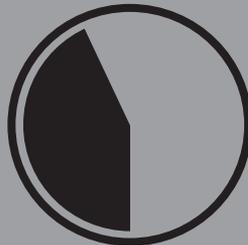
*Based on number scheduled trips 9/13 to 9/14



437 MEMBERS

AS AT AUGUST, 2014

43%
FEMALE



57%
MALE





ICEBERG, GREENLAND

Katja Riedel

After sunset a massive iceberg floats dreamlike in the calm sea off East Greenland.

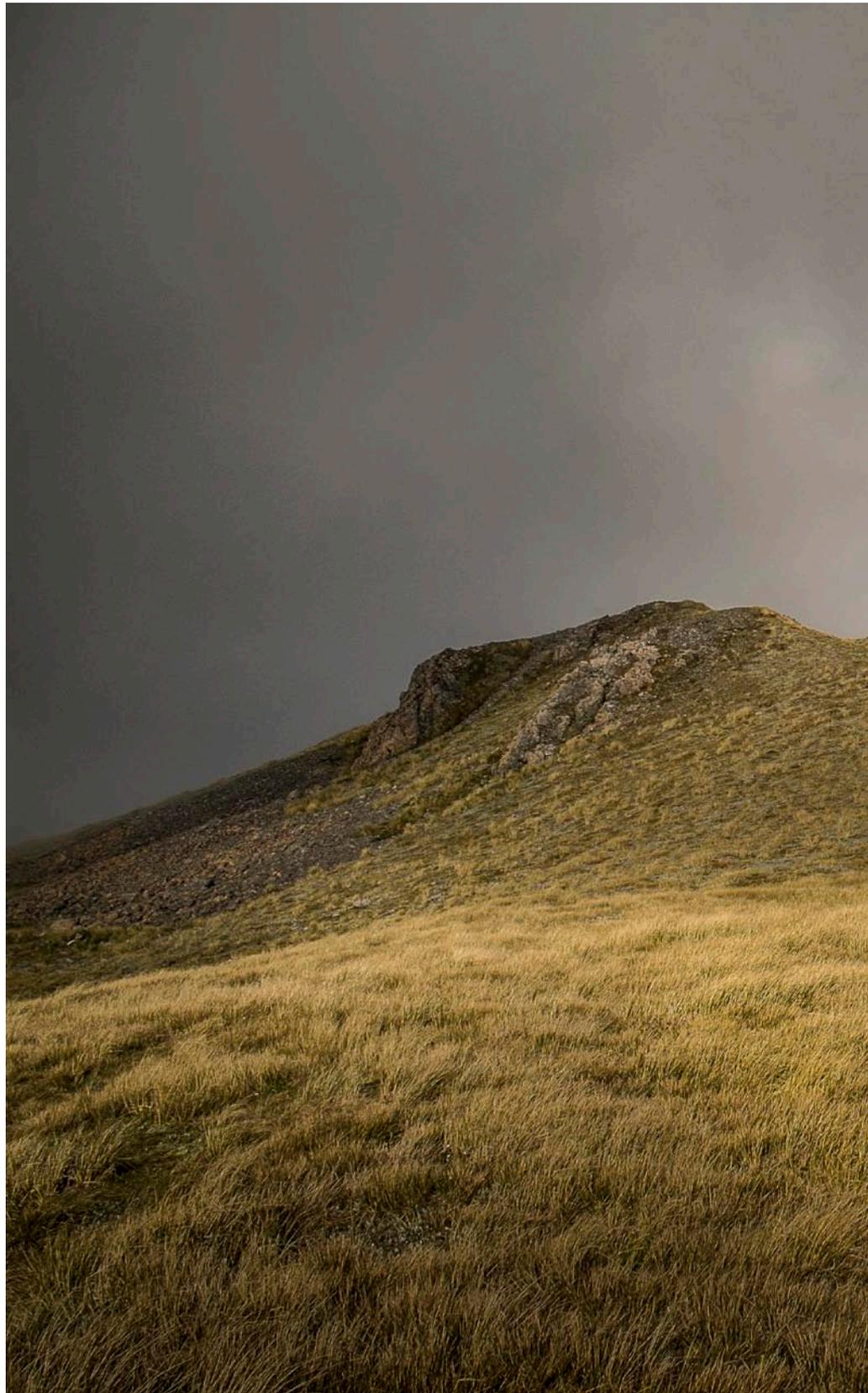
Katja took this photo while working as a guide on a cruise ship circumnavigating Svalbard in the Arctic. More of Katja's photos from the Arctic can be seen on page 74.

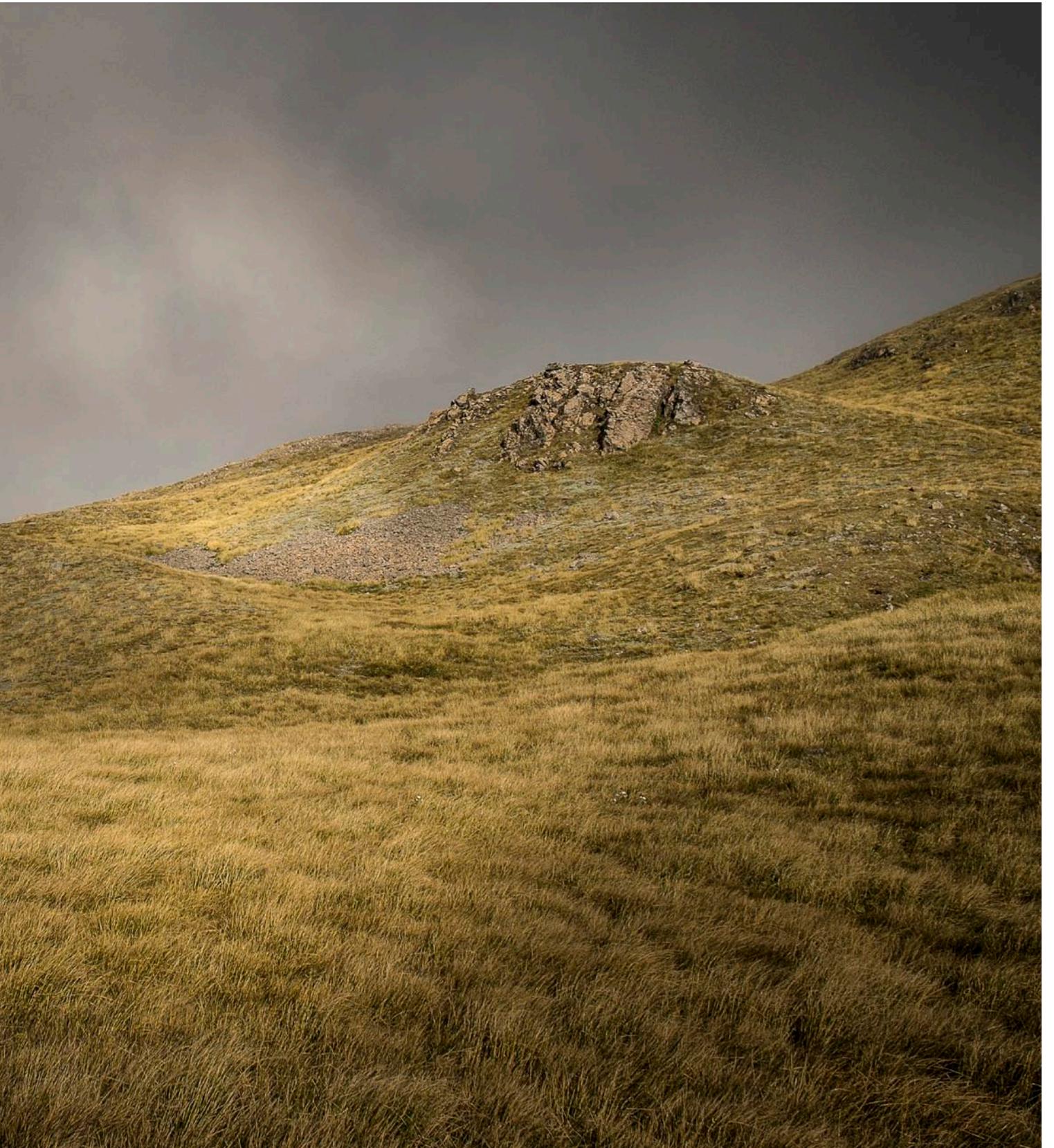
**TARN COL, ARTHURS PASS NATIONAL
PARK**

Ian Harrison

Soft dawn light and golden tussock
contrasts dark clouds above.

This was taken on a Christmas tramp
where a group from the club camped on
the Col in near perfect conditions despite
threatening clouds.









**WINTER SUNRISE OVER NGAURUHOE
AND TONGARIRO**
Spencer Clubb

This image was taken from just above a well known viewpoint near the club Lodge. Every morning sunrise is different and this particular morning Spencer was lucky to get an interesting display of clouds and light.





TIMBER!

RIDING THE TIMBER TRAIL

by IAN HARRISON
with MEGAN BANKS

I wake with a start. My right calf is cramping painfully. It's Saturday at the start of Labour Weekend. We haven't even begun yet and already my legs are complaining!

I manage to stretch out the cramp which was probably due to the long drive from Wellington to Taupo the previous night. Megan and I are here to bike the Timber Trail which starts in Pureora about 80 km west of Taupo.

The Trail was opened in March, 2013 by DOC. It runs for 85 km and makes use of existing walking and logging tracks as well as an historic tram line and newly formed sections of trail. The main feature is the "timber"; Pureora being renowned for its native forest which was saved from logging by protest action in the 1970s. The other feature of the track are the eight suspension bridges. They were built by DOC specifically for cyclists and are incredibly impressive. Being able to ride over them is reason enough to do the trail.

At the Pureora car park we faff with panniers and our bikes. Two or three other groups are doing the same but without the panniers. They must have got one of the shuttle companies or friends to take their gear to the road-accessible camp at Piropiro half way along the track. My panniers are crap and I'm a bit worried they're going to cause problems. Also I didn't have time to check the bikes before leaving other than to dribble some oil on the chains. I do have tools and am confident I should be able to keep us moving in the event of a breakdown. Then a cyclist appears asking if anyone has a crank tool. One of his party has had their cranks fall off only a few metres down the track. No one has a crank tool... ..I'm not so confident now.

The start of the track has the richest forest of the area. We hear long tailed cuckoos, tui, kakariki and kaka. The riding is easy going but soon starts to climb as we break out of the forest into clear fall; or as DOC euphemistically describes it: "an area

of recent logging history”. It’s a steady but gradual climb up the lower slopes of Mount Pureora and back into the bush. I’m faster uphill than Megan so go ahead but I’m soon held up by traffic; a lady on her bike doesn’t hear me behind her. It’s time for lunch anyway so I stop and wait for Megan.

After sandwiches we continue climbing to almost 1000m (about the same elevation as the Desert Road). DOC signs warn to prepare for an “alpine environment” even though we never leave thick bush. I wait again for Megan around the corner from a short steep section. Megan heralds her arrival by crashing into the ditch. “You OK?” I shout; walking around the corner to see a pile of limbs, wheels and panniers. “It reared like a horse!” she explains. Heavy panniers on the back and a steep track are a bad combination! She’s unhurt and we’re soon enjoying a good downhill run. My crap panniers, which I’m sure were designed by someone that had never ridden a bike other than maybe doing a couple of laps of a car park, are unhitching themselves at regular intervals. I’ve bunged them on so they can’t fall right off, but I still need to stop and re-seat them on my carrier.

My seat also is giving me reason to complain. It was designed by a sadist. The brand name is Fi’zi:k, and you’d think it’s unusual to have a name with random symbols in it... until you ride the +#%:ing thing and see it makes every poor ^*#!ing bastard who owns one to use a lot of %-#*ing symbols. It’s partly my own fault as I didn’t get around to swapping over my trusty seat from my road bike; which makes me even more annoyed by it.

However, discomforts are soon forgotten as we round

a bend to see the first suspension bridge. It’s an impressive sight and shows what can be done if there’s the will and money available. (There was the will and money for building the Timber Trail because it is part of Nga Haerenga, the New Zealand Cycle Trail). I stop in the middle of the bridge to get the full experience of being suspended over 50 metres above the ground, but starting off again is nerve wracking as I have trouble clipping my second foot into the pedal and the panniers are putting me off balance. The bridge looks very well made, but the nylon mesh on the sides to prevent certain death in the event of tipping off your bike, looks very thin although it’s somehow reassuring that health and safety isn’t the main criterion for the bridge design. It’s an idyllic scene. I hear a group of women whoop with delight behind me as they catch sight of the bridge. People at the other end have stopped to regroup and enjoy the view.

From here the track to Piropiro is mostly downhill. For the entire length of the Timber Trail DOC have put in kilometre marker posts. These are really helpful as the small map we have doesn’t have most of the landmarks (i.e. bridges) marked on it, and the undulating terrain makes it difficult to work out exactly where you are. With the markers everyone knows how far they’ve come. We cross a further four suspension bridges before coming out on to sections of gravel forestry roads with the bush replaced by scrub near Piropiro. Our sore bums are happy to arrive at the campground about six hours after setting off. There’s heaps of room to camp and people have set up quite elaborate caravans with dogs, utes, quadbikes and woodpiles for campfires.



Megan crossing the Maramataha Bridge



Campfire under the Milky Way at Piropiro

The evening passes uneventfully punctuated by ruru calls and the hyaena laugh of a drunken lout in a neighbouring group of campers. Happily, the lout passes out as the Milky Way appears in the night sky and the ruru continue to call to one another.

We wake early on Sunday morning. I'm anxious to get going early. I booked a shuttle from the end of the track for 2:30 p.m. This is earlier than we would have liked but the shuttle company specified the time so we could be included with another group. The day before we took six hours to cover 40 km and today we have 45 km to do. We're rolling by 8 a.m. It's quite cold and overcast and I'm thankful for my new warm cycling gloves.

The Maramataha Bridge hoves into view after only a few kilometres. It's the biggest of the track at 141m long and 45m above ground at its highest point.

The first hour passes as we ride undulating terrain. We're not going fast but are on schedule. After about 10 km the undulations are replaced by nice sections of downhill. The kilometre posts flash by in quick succession and it's apparent we have plenty of time up our sleeves. Some of the downhills are great fun despite having to repeatedly stop to fix my panniers.

We come to the section of track that follows the historic Ellis and Burnand Ongarue Tramway that was used to extract logs between 1922 and 1958. It follows the

contours with frequent cuttings and a few cliff ledges.

On a flat section we're passed by two fit looking cyclists on flash full suspension bikes. Just ahead is a small muddy patch spanning the full width of the track. The first of the pair starts to power through it but quickly becomes bogged and in super slow motion topples over in ridiculous fashion. "Ha that would've been me" says Megan who was leading up until a minute ago. It's a funny moment and the toppled cyclist can do nothing but laugh at himself.

The final notable feature of the track is the Ongarue Spiral. It allowed the old tram line to lose elevation in a short distance without steepening the gradient. We cycle over a bridge that goes above the track and then loop around to the left and through a short tunnel to come out under the bridge we just crossed. It's pretty cool. Railway spirals all seem to be described, as this one is, as "a great feat of engineering", but I suspect it was a well-established technique for railway builders.

We're on the final stretch of downhill. I throw caution



Riding down the Ellis and Burnand Ongarue Tramway

to the wind and let the bike go full speed. Then for the first time one of my panniers falls completely off. Suitably reprimanded I reattach it and continue at a more pedestrian pace.

We make it to Ongarue by 12:30. The shuttle company is based in town and kindly offer to take us back to Pureora straight away.

Megan and I are both in agreement we want to do it again - without panniers. I'd even love to try and do the whole thing in a day. We were lucky with the weather and given a good forecast it's a lot of fun and highly recommended.



WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU MAKES YOU STRONGER

by **TIM DUNNING**

with **SARAH FISHER** and **SHAY BENDALL**

It all started out pretty normal; hopping out of a van on the Desert Road at 10 p.m. with gale winds sand-papering our porcelain chops with wind-driven ice particles. The prevailing opinion “you’re sick in the mind”, not ours, but that of our would-be rescuers who stopped to find out what calamity had landed us in such a god-forsaken spot on a road that had opened only nine hours earlier. Hi ho, it’s off to Waihohonu Hut we go.

No such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing, right?

How things change – a little over an hour later we were in \$750,000 of copiously insulated hut marvelling at the electric lighting and enjoying the warmth thrown out by the previously lit fire – thanks Daniel from Auckland! You could have cracked nuts on my left cheek when we arrived, but it was shorts and t-shirt thereafter. Sarah and I took advantage of the toasty main room, with Shay dismissing us as soft and toughing it out in the bunkroom. It took a bit to chip the ice of him in the morning but he’s almost back to normal now.

Saturday was an absolute cracker, with the only cloud funnelled by the southerly between Mount Ruapehu and the Kaimanawas away from us as we headed off toward the saddle between Mounts Ruapehu and Ngaurahoe. The weather was specially arranged as it was also Sarah’s birthday! You generally don’t ask a lady so I won’t spill the beans; but suffice to say that I only have vague recollections of being that young, dammit.

We popped into the historic 1904 Waihohonu Hut on the way to check out the ground-pumice insulated walls

and separate mens/womens quarters. The fact that men’s quarters contained the fire with none in the women’s goes to show that chivalry has been dead for quite some time!

The snow got steadily deeper toward the saddle (at about 1300m in elevation) and the going got tough, with a breakable crust resulting in some amusing moments as we took turns flailing around trying to get out of waist-deep pits of powder snow. We got lucky later on as some folk who we saw way in the distance turned back due to the conditions, gifting us with well packed holes to step in. Just as well, as we had 23 km to travel that day.

Accompanied by what sounded like a re-enactment of the last eruptions on the distant Whakapapa ski-field as the operators managed avalanche risk, we plodded our



Setting off from Waihohonu Hut on a fine Saturday morning



The historic Waihohonu Hut

way through in the increasingly hot sun to have lunch on top of Taranaki Falls. By now there was a steady stream of tourists attired in everything from crampons through to sneakers and duffel coats. I'm always torn between enjoying the solitude and the knowledge that if a place is not visited, it's perceived value can diminish, thus becoming a target for less sympathetic alternate uses.

I was wondering what we had gotten ourselves in for as we carefully avoided the multiple buried Jack Daniels RTD cans and opened the door at Whakapapaiti Hut to 50's music and dancing. Yes, dancing. A rather well lubricated group had tramped in for the night to re-enact the same scene from previous years. Joy. Apart from a self-diagnosed conspiracy theorist, who proceeded to bend our ears on all "races" who have set up shop in New Zealand prior to the Maori, the other notable character was a pyromaniac who had an incredible ability to turn every

sentence into a discussion on how the fire was performing, punctuated by jamming another log into the over-full glowing box in the middle of the room. Luckily there was a door to the bunkroom which shut out some of the heat, but not enough of the noise. I don't want you to think it was all bad, one guy graciously shared a photo of him in the nude on top of a mountain, as is his ritual.

We gained altitude rapidly the next morning on our way toward the Turoa side of the mountain and unfortunately bumped into more heavy drifts. Heading south, we toughed it out for a couple of hours, creating more post-holes than a Taranaki farmer. No bonus compacted steps this time around. There was little or no ice apart from the breakable crust, but the depth of the snow was our downfall as we realised that our pace would not get us even to our early bail-out option at Horopito from Mangaturuturu Hut in time for the scheduled pick-up. Thus, we back-tracked to the junction above Whakapapaiti Hut and headed cross-country to intersect the Whakapapa skifield mountain road to hook up with our transport at the lodge.

What goes on tour stays on tour, but I will say that there was not a single one of us who drove back that day who has not learned some kind of lesson, picked up some new nugget of knowledge or extended their ability in some way – and that is exactly what we get out there to do, become stronger in many different ways. Mission accomplished.



Happy birthday Sarah!

THE YEAR OF THE GOAT



by STEPHEN HEALEY

Three of us agreed to sign up for The Goat Adventure Run earlier in the year, and as two of us had never run that distance before we had some work to do!

In preparation, I signed up for my first ever race in July; Nat and I were going to run in the Double Rainbow 16 km event south of Rotorua. But the Tuesday before the race Nat texted to say he had the flu and couldn't make it!!! However, I went down by myself and had a reasonable run; first step ticked off working up to the big day.

We then both went down for the Rotorua Tough Guy in August. Nat said not to wear a coat as I would get wet and muddy anyway. As we headed out the door of the barn and up the first hill it started to hail. I was in a short sleeved thermal and wondered what I was doing there.

The Big O trail run was next in September. I was down to run the 21 km event while Nat had signed up for the 10 km. Driving down it was wet and miserable and I had not run for two weeks as I had been away skiing, so I chickened out and dropped back to run the 10 km with Nat.

Next was the Xterra Karangahape Run. I ran the 19 km event which was similar in profile to the Double Rainbow, but longer, higher and more scenic. It was my toughest run to date.

October also saw us running in the Fat Ass Kiltathon around the shores of Lake Tarawera to Hot Water Beach. It ended up about a 16 -17 km run, everyone in tutus or kilts. Lots of fun, with a boat ride (with open bar) back to

the road end. This is a fantastic run, my favourite of the year.

November came and Nat ran the Toi (18 km and his toughest race to date, very hot and very hilly) and also the Karapiro 21 km, both of which I was unavailable for.

We finished our preparation with our longest run up to that point, a 30 km trail run over undulating ground at the Tect Mountain Bike Park between Tauranga and Rotorua. This went quite well for both of us, and was a good confidence boost with the Goat only two weeks away.

I woke on Saturday 30 November with a very sore throat. One week until the Goat and I was coming down with the flu.....guttled. Sunday to Tuesday I was a write off. Wednesday a little better. Thursday better still; there was hope yet!

Friday I was back to about 85%, the flu had been in my head and chest and my legs felt weak just walking to the dairy, but I was improving. We were supposed to leave Friday by 3 p.m., but Nat rang to say he would be half an hour late. This suited me as I had a busy day ahead as well. I finally got everything done by 3:30 p.m., just as I got a phone call to say Nat was at home waiting for me. Rushing back I forgot my running watch and phone as I quickly packed up, so was without both for the weekend. What else could go wrong!

We arrived at our accommodation, just a minute's walk from the Powderhorn, and went up to registration, taking our jackets for confirmation that they were acceptable, only to be told we needed all our gear there for a gear check before they registered us. I didn't see that written down anywhere! So back we go to pick up packs and gear, lucky we were staying close by.

Everything checked out and we headed back for a reasonably early night; about 11p.m.

Up at 6 a.m. we sorted gear, drinks and breakfast and wandered over to the bus. Driving around the mountain the conditions didn't look flash. Cloud covered the whole mountain and the weather forecast was for a band of rain to come through between 8 a.m. and 2p.m The top of The Bruce was miserable, very low visibility, cold and misty. I elected to run in a short sleeved thermal and a jacket

(which never came off).

Eventually the appointed hour arrived and I lined up at the start gate alongside a runner I knew from Tauranga. I managed to get myself into the second wave and that seemed to work out quite well.

The gun went and we took off down the road. I quickly settled into the middle of the pack, where I remained until we dropped off the road. The next three hours were a bit of a blur; we had just 50-100 metres of visibility the whole race and conditions were very wet. The track was a mudbath in places; ankle deep and more in the ruts, which we tried to avoid as much as possible by running on the grass verge above. Further on, where there are a lot of places where the route comes to steep drop offs, this got interesting. Normally you would just run down these dirt banks, but they had become muddy and very slippery, so instead it involved lowering yourself down as far as you can and then running down a greasy slope trying not to slip over. The rivers and streams were all up a bit, but still passable without too much trouble. They had race wardens out at 3 a.m. that morning checking the streams before making a call on whether to run the event or not. Luckily we got the all clear to race, as I would not have enjoyed racing on a substitute course after all that build up and expectation- it would have been a bit like kissing your sister!

The wind got stronger and stronger as we ran around the mountain. Winds were predicted up to 65 km/hr for the day and it felt close to that at times. Fortunately it was from the northwest and so mostly behind us. A southerly would have raised the stakes considerably - the lower temperatures would have been a real problem - it was cold enough as it was. It even started to sleet or hail for a while.

I ticked off the main landmarks as we went; the first big climb up out of the Whakapapaiti Stream, then the climb up the lava fields. Dropping down to Lake Surprise I felt remarkably good. I was running strongly and felt I was making good time. I had set a goal time of under 3 hours and I felt like I was still good to get there in that time at this point.

Coming down the hill past Lake Surprise I came to the long downhill stretches of boardwalk. Normally back home on the Mount I would take these two at a time, but as much as I tried I just couldn't get up the courage to do this. The steps were wet and with 16 kms already under my belt I just didn't have the confidence to tackle more than one at a time.

Reaching the bottom and back on gravel and rock, I had my one fatal lapse in concentration. I had just passed three runners over some steep broken ground, got a little ahead of them and then strangely took my eyes off the ground ahead to look ahead to the valley below. At this very instant I caught my foot on a rock, stumbled and ended up sprawling forward in a heap, grazing my hands and knees. I quickly recovered, got up and took off again, just in front of the three people who I had just passed and who obviously thought I was an idiot. This was the only time I hit the deck all day but it was a rough fall. Coming down to the Mangaturuturu River I passed a stretcher team heading North. Obviously at least one person fared worse than I did. Climbing back up the bank to the hut, I had a brief glimpse of a lot of people peering out at me and continued on into the gloom.

At this point I came to a sign saying 4 km to go. I got there just after 12 p.m, so had 30-odd minutes to cover the last 4 km to get in under three hours; should be possible surely!

I had forgotten how steep the climb up past the waterfall is. The minute we started up this, everyone dropped to a walking pace, it being so wet (it was raining steadily now) and the rock was very slippery. One of the guys I was climbing up with got on a flat section of rock and just started sliding backwards; he managed to stay on his feet, but was skiing backwards down the rock slope. I managed to get a hand on his backpack and helped to slow him down until he recovered and stopped his slide.

Passing the marshalls all through here I was feeling bad for them, as at least we were moving to keep our body temperature up and the wind was at our backs. They were stuck there for hours in the one place and had the wind and rain in their faces, but most of them were encouraging, with a smile or a "well done" as we passed. They did a great job under very difficult conditions.

The 3 km sign eventually turned up. This was the hardest kilometre I have covered in a race; well that was until the next one which seemed to take forever. Passing the 2 km sign we could hear some crazy marshalls up ahead at the road. They had cow (goat?) bells and were yelling and screaming encouragement to everyone. The only trouble was that we heard them a long time before reaching them. It seemed to take forever to get up to the road and we still could see nothing ahead so still didn't know how far to go.

Arriving at the road I hitched up my skirts and started to run up the road. After about a minute I was tapped on

"The 3 km sign eventually turned up. This was the hardest kilometre I have covered in a race; well that was until the next one..."

the shoulder by a guy I had been crossing paths with for the last few kilometres. Turning I saw he was walking up the road beside me. I didn't need any further hints and promptly returned to a walking pace, travelling just as quickly and saving considerable energy. There was a guy just ahead of us still running, but he was travelling at the same pace as us and swaying from side to side like he was drunk; he really looked like he was having a very hard time of it. About this time the wind picked up considerably and the rain was driving in from the northwest; blasting us on our left-hand side. I tried to keep my hood up, but it kept blowing back off and I just gave up in the end. Finally the slope eased and the car park came into sight. At this point I started running again. Coming up to the finish line they were calling names and times, but my number was covered by my jacket anyway. I have no idea if they called my name or not and I didn't even look at the clock. Crossing the line I could see a finishers' tent ahead which I headed for as I desperately needed to get out of the wind, rain and cold. Someone stopped me and handed me a medal. This was the 10th anniversary race and all finishers got a medal this year; I just snuck in for a silver one. Then, as I approached the tent, another person stopped me and said they need my transponder off my shoe. I looked at him and at my shoelace, which seemed a very long way away from my frozen fingers, and suggested somewhat brusquely that I would adjourn to the tent now, take it off in there and bring it back out. Standing around in the cold and rain and struggling with shoelaces with frozen fingers seemed ridiculous.

The last four kilometres had taken me somewhere around 50 minutes to complete; the slowest four kilometres of my life.

Mamas Mile (around one kilometre) had taken me just over 11 minutes to complete which was around the average time for the people around me most taking 10-12 minutes to get up this stretch. I ended up coming in around 3:17, slower than I hoped, but under the conditions I wasn't really disappointed with that.

Inside the tent and out of the weather there were drinks, bananas and goat curry, all of which I indulged in though I couldn't finish the goat curry. But as I stood around I got colder and colder and couldn't stop shivering. Eventually I just couldn't stay there any longer and went off looking for the gear bags. These were waiting downstairs at the café with the upstairs having heaters going, but just as I walked in a crew member said buses were about to leave so I decided to bail and get back down to Ohakune for a hot shower. I went down to the bus, hopped on, only to wait nearly an hour before enough

other people got on to allow it to leave. This also meant I missed the free burgers and beer that were served up in the café. By the time I heard about these I didn't want to hop off the bus in case it suddenly filled up and left. It was about 2 p.m. before it eventually got underway. I fell into the showers back at the motel, having first to hose out my shoes and socks which contained a horrendous amount of mud and silt.

My abiding memories of the race will be of mud, rain, mist and cold. This was the worst weather they have run in over the ten years of the race and it must have been close to being cancelled. One of the guys I ran it with had done it two years ago and has a number of marathons to his credit. He said this was by far the hardest race he has ever done. However, I'm already looking back on it fondly and can't wait to return and have another go on a good day. It was a fantastic day out and a wonderful event.

Thanks to Nat and Jym for tackling it with me; we already have plans for a number of more events over the coming months: a run around Ngauruhoe is next in our sights and two of us have signed up for the Tarawera 60 km event next March; who knows what is next... From a trumper who ran to keep fit, I seem to have morphed into something else entirely. Don't wait 'til you are as old as I am before trying trail running, it is a whole lot of fun and opens the door to a heap of new places you might never have seen. Get out there and give it a go, you just might surprise yourself as to what you can achieve.

THE KAWEKAS

– the best ever South Island Easter tramp!

by **SPENCER CLUBB**

with **DEBBIE BUCK, FIONA ELLIOT,
SHARON BRANDFORD and PAUL CHRISTOFFEL**



The day the South Island got trashed in a 100 year storm was the day we were supposed to be starting our tramp from Nelson Lakes to Lewis Pass. I called the visitor centre and they described the weather outside as “pretty epic”. DOC had closed a slew of great walks and tracks all around the South Island. There were tens of thousands of trees down that day, creating months of track clearing work and affecting many popular off-track routes for years to come.

Not only did Mother Nature intervene to change our plans but so did the Interislander, which cancelled all sailings. A sorry but common problem this year on all of my South Island trips. We decided to go for a beer instead, lick our wounds, and come up with a plan that didn't involve crawling under and over logs for a week.

The weather map showed that the driest, calmest place

in the country was going to be the Kaweka Range. A place I had never been to but that came highly recommended by a couple of people in the party. A place of pleasant beech forest, good tracks and great huts apparently. We decided to go for it. But not before scoffing a load of tea and cake while basking in the Wellington sunshine. What storm?

Debbie, as always, was chomping at the bit to get away, whereas Paul was planning on only doing tramps that didn't require a rain jacket (big softy! He was perhaps still traumatised by his West Coast Christmas mission!). So I agreed to head off early with Debbie and get an extra day of tramping in – meeting the others at a designated time and place in the not too distant future.

We took Debbie's car as we could both drive it and it is a fair way to Makahu Saddle road end. It's a nice little car – with a little boot and little wheels. I don't think it



was designed for seriously steep, muddy, gravelly, narrow, windy New Zealand road-ends though, and Makahu Saddle was turning into just such a road. I was coaxing it up the ever-steepening hill, getting seriously worried that we would run out of traction, meet another car or perhaps just slide right off the edge. “Come on car. Come on car. Come on car”. Eventually the road flattened out and all three of us (me, Debbie and the car) breathed a big sigh of relief.

There was still an hour before dark so we headed off towards Kaweka Flats Biv, with heavy packs. The biv was a gem and was a perfect place to eat pumpkin curry and listen to kiwi calling. The next morning I got some nice sunrise shots and we headed off in dubious conditions towards Middle Hill Hut.

I gotta say, it was tough going. Up and down steep

spurs with eroded red mud and slippery shale. 300m climbs felt like 1000m. I was not used to eight day camping missions! And, oh yeah, I forgot to mention I had a tripod strapped to the back of the pack too!

At lunch a friendly hunter warned us the rest of the day was “rough”. In return, we warned him to expect some rowdy WTMC trampers, as the rest of our party were due to stay there that night.

It was round about then that my water bladder decided to break. Day one of an eight day tramp. Thank you very much Murphy! Debbie attempted emergency field surgery and it seemed to hold together. I guess no-one carries a spare water bladder....?

The rest of the afternoon was seriously tough and relentless as we climbed up and down and up and down



Kaweka Flats Biv

steep ravines. It was a relief to get to the final high point and look down over the Mohaka River to the northern wilderness.

Fifteen minutes later we reached Makino Hut. Although we hadn't gained much height (we were 90m higher than we started the day!) we had ascended about 1140m. It felt like it. We celebrated with a Backcountry meal, which Debbie obviously decided would taste better as a soup, as she liberally interpreted my request for "a tiny bit more water" by drowning the poor thing. It was horrible.

Meanwhile, the second group were now at Middle Hill Hut where they were enjoying a hearty meal of freshly caught venison casserole cooked for them by the friendly hunter we had met earlier that day. Luckily I didn't know this so was not jealous!

The next day was a "rest day" as we waited for the others to catch up. And what better way to spend it than a day trip to the Mangatainoka Hot Spring on the Mohaka River. It was a 500m descent then a lovely walk alongside the river to the almost deserted hot springs. Great ambience and a lovely river to hop into and cool off made the

visit highly enjoyable. The only drawback was the wasps that kept falling in the hot pools and swimming around threatening to sting you where you least wanted to be stung! After a bit of an unwanted grovel back up to the hut we met Fiona, then Paul and Sharon. They had found a dead possum on the verandah. It was sleeping there when we left so had a pretty bad day by possum standards.

The others had taken a high route to the hut, avoiding most of the grovelling, and were in good spirits. As far as I was concerned, the cavalry had arrived. The mountain radio was taken off me, food was reallocated and my pack felt a million miles better. There's a fine line between a really heavy pack and a really ***** heavy pack!

After much map-gazing and weather-wondering we made a plan of how to spend the rest of the week. We would head quite far west, then dip down south, then back east over the main Kaweka Range. It looked remote and exciting.

The next day we headed to Te Puke Hut via Mangaturutu Hut. We headed downhill to the Makino River and across the walkwire. Strangely, Debbie decided to wade the river as she had an apparent fear of three wire bridges. It was a long, slosy, climb for her up the other side to a wonderful scenic lunch spot on the tops. There really isn't much flat ground in the Kawekas!

The rest of the day was, however, superb tops travel on a broad heathy plateau. It was getting quite late when we arrived at Te Puke Hut and there were some initially unfriendly hunters in residence in the fairly small hut. Debbie and I decided to camp – a common choice as it turned out as we would be encountering many more full huts and many more hunters. And boy could these hunters snore!!!

It was the roar, after all. Hunters "book" huts in advance and fly into them with all their gear for the week. Many of them come from Australia and hunt the same mountains every year. A few of them were a bit feral, but on the whole, a highly skilled and gregarious bunch. Many of them did wonder why trampers like us would pick this



Debbie descending off the tops



Cooking dinner

week, of all the weeks in the year, to be wandering around and taking up space in “their” huts. I guess the weather forecast was the answer!

Day five dawned fine and we set off on our way towards Ngaawaparua Hut via Harkness Hut. And what a start to the day! Wonderful views from the nearby trig, lovely subalpine plants and great craggy scenery. It was a shame to leave the tops and head back down to the valleys. Harkness Hut was in a big clearing and would have made for a good place to rest up, but we headed on down and criss-crossed streams until we arrived in the early afternoon at our destination. Here, things turned a bit for the worse....

We met some very nice hunters at the hut who seemed surprised to see us, given that the hut was at a dead end. Say that again? Given that the hut was a dead end. Uh, what about the bridge? Bridge was removed by DOC years ago. And the track up to the tops that is on our map? Land is private. No track. Oh, and the river is up too so you might not get across.

This was a pivotal moment for the trip. We had two choices: retrace all our steps exactly, right back to Makino Hut, or take a major punt that we could cross the river, find the old track and get to the tops (without getting shot). The river was indeed up and was definitely not a sure thing. I managed to befriend a couple of people rafting the river that were camped near the hut, but they didn't quite offer to ferry us across. Nevertheless, they probably would rescue us if we fell in!

I was in no mood for going back, and nor were the others, so we decided to take the more risky option and go for it. We linked up and got in slowly, shuffling across the

river in textbook manner. It was a bit scrappy for a while in the middle, but we made it, with great relief! This relief was doubled when we found the old track, which offered pretty good travel right the way to the tops. We had done it! And nobody got shot!!! We relished the wonderful tops scenery before descending to Rocks Ahead Biv, and “zipping” (labouring!) across the flying fox to the hut.

Rocks Ahead Hut was pretty civilised and we were back within striking distance of the main range. A couple of hunters were happily boiling a stag skull on the fire (see what I mean by civilised?) and a Frenchman even

turned up (quelle surprise!). I whiled away an hour or so taking photos, then Fiona took some star photos. An added bonus was that she offered to carry my tripod for the rest of the trip in return!

Day seven and we climbed up towards the main Kaweka Range. I was totally enchanted by Back Ridge – with lovely forest and magical glades. It was a really special place. This was in stark contrast to Back Ridge Biv – a windy, desolate place occupied by a hermit/hunter. We quickly left and headed on our way to our resting place for the night – Back Ridge Hut. Strangely, many huts in the Kawekas including Back Ridge are made out of what looks like Meccano. Most peculiar! We took over the hut and Paul negotiated skillfully with another group for them to continue on down to the more spacious camping around Rocks Ahead Hut, rather than cram in with us for the night.

Our final day dawned fine and a quick climb saw us basking in sunshine and light winds, as mist lapped at our backs from the gentle easterly. I was happy resting and enjoying the view, but some of the others went off to summit the other peaks on the Kaweka Range. Eventually I was enticed off my backside by talk of the “Elixir of Life” – a natural spring just down from where we were sitting. It was indeed well guarded, being in a little gully and surrounded by spiky Spaniards. It was cold, refreshing water, and I instantly grew younger by at least two minutes!

The trip finished with an easy descent back to the car. A fabulous trip through lovely, uncharted (for me) scenery, great tracks, even better huts, and a fabulous bunch of people. Paul even got his wish of no rain!!!!!! Take that huey!!!!!!

MAKARETU TO EAST WAITEWAEWAE

by HARRY SMITH
with SHAY BENDALL

A trip from Ohau to Otaki Forks via Makaretu Stream and the East Waitewaewae is one that I have wanted to do for a long time...

On the map it looks like an obvious line, with the two catchments linked by a fairly low saddle, but I don't recall the club ever doing it (at least not in my time in the club, although I have vague memories of seeing a trip report in an old club newsletter from the 70's or early 80's that went into this area). I had been into the Makaretu before, on the way out from Oriwa Bivvy, but I had never been into the Waitewaewae catchment at all, and for me this whole area constituted a fairly large and significant blank on the map of my explorations of the Tararuas. The East Waitewaewae sounded like a serious gorge with nowhere decent to camp, so it would be necessary to get all the way through to the junction of the East and West branches of the Waitewaewae on the Saturday. This looked like it could be a long, slow day of gorge travel, so the trip went down on the schedule in January rated as fitness essential (FE) – one of very few FEs in recent years! In

the end I only got one punter signed up – Shay Bendall, a new and enthusiastic club member who I had never met before.

We got dropped off on Friday night at the Ohau Pipe Bridge by Alistair Young in the club van – Alistair was leading a trip into Waiopehu Hut via Blackwater Stream and would pick us up at Otaki Forks on the Sunday. From here we walked for about 10 minutes across farmland to the start of the Makaretu Gorge, where we camped.

Next morning we were away at 7:45 and set off up the lower gorge. Two and a quarter hours later we arrived at the middle flats. There were some nice campsites here – one sunny day I'd like to come in here and just camp for the weekend.

Beyond the flats the river closed in again until at 12:30 we came to the bottom of the spur running down from Oriwa Bivvy, where we stopped for lunch. Already we were behind time – I had originally hoped to have lunch on the saddle leading over to the East Waitewaewae!

After lunch we continued upstream until we came to a major fork. I was looking for a major fork and I was about 95% sure this was it, but I had expected to pass an earlier one marked on the map and I hadn't seen it. I decided it was better to be safe than sorry, so I dropped my pack and headed back downstream for 5 or 10 minutes, where I found the earlier one – a tiny trickle of water coming down out of a steep cleft in the bush and easily overlooked. Back at the correct fork, we headed up the open Western branch before climbing out up a grassy rib. This was steep and exposed – we were hanging on to the grass and you wouldn't want to fall. Eventually we entered into the bush and the going became easier. After a long climb we sidled out to the left and eventually found ourselves on the saddle. It was now 3 o'clock and we still had the whole of the East Waitewaewae before us!



Makaretu Gorge camp



Mid-Makaretu flats

Travel down the East Waitewaewae was typical slow gorge travel. At first the river was only a small stream clogged with vegetation and we sidled along above it. Later, as it grew larger, we dropped down into it and followed the river bed. At first this was more like travelling in a tunnel, with the vegetation arching over our heads above us, until it eventually widened out into a full-sized river.

At around 5 o'clock we came to the junction between the two major headwater branches of the East Waitewaewae. Normally at 5 o'clock you would be beginning to think about stopping and camping but at this point we still had a long, long way to go! The next couple of hours consisted of long, slow gorge travel – boulder-hopping down the sides, following gravel beaches, wading pools, criss-crossing the river, and negotiating log jams. It became clear that we weren't going to make it to the junction with the West Waitewaewae before dark, so I decided that at 7:30 we would begin looking for somewhere to camp. It would be getting dark at about 8:30 or 8:45, so that would give us an hour to find somewhere to stop for the night.

At about quarter past seven we came to a particularly evil-looking section of gorge. At the top was a pool with no way around. Our options were either to take a swim or take to the hillsides! We clambered up the gorge wall on the true left and began sidling downstream. Below us the gorge looked dark and nasty, so I decided to continue sidling for a while in the hope that the river would improve.

But the hillside was very steep and before long sidling became impossible, so we had no choice but to drop back into the river again. This proved difficult, but Shay found a way down a steep gut with an unpleasant vertical step halfway down.

“I began to envisage spending the night sitting perched on a boulder or some damp ledge halfway up the gorge wall”

Back in the gorge we found the going OK again. (In hindsight I suspect the pool at the top of this section was the only impassable bit, and we should have dropped back into the river immediately beyond it, rather than trying to continue to sidle.) As we carried on down the gorge I tried to find somewhere to camp. There were one or two places where I thought we might just have been able to pitch a tent on a gravel beach or bar but it was really desperation stuff – the spots were tiny and within inches of the

water, both horizontally and vertically, and we would have been completely trapped if it rained and the river came up. I began to envisage spending the night sitting perched on a boulder or some damp ledge halfway up the gorge wall. We kept on going downstream, hoping against all the evidence that we would stumble upon somewhere decent. Then at about 8:20, with no more than 20 minutes of daylight left, Shay spotted a possible place out to the right. I hadn't even noticed it, and even looking at where Shay was pointing it didn't look like anything to me, but I went over to have a look. Entering through a barrier of trees we



Salvation campsite, East Waitewaewae Gorge



“Island Forks” Hut (not at Island Forks!)

came upon a perfect campsite – flat and dry, soft and leafy, high enough above the river to be safe except in the case of a serious flood, sheltered amongst trees, and with enough space to pitch two or three tents! I felt a surge of joy pass through me. In the space of about 30 seconds I went from total worry and despondency to complete and absolute relief. Just when it looked like we were in deep trouble, we had been saved. Shay, you're welcome back on one of my trips anytime!!

We still had a long day before us on the Sunday so next morning we were away by 7:15. About quarter of an hour down river from our campsite we came upon a small waterfall in the river but we scrambled down easily through the trees on the right. An hour later the river began to open out as we neared the forks with the West Waitewaewae. A hundred metres before the forks we came across a small two-bunk hut in amongst bracken fern on a terrace up to the left. Again, it was Shay who spotted it – I walked right past it with my eyes focused firmly on the ground in

front of me! I had been told there was a new hut in this area but I thought it was at Island Forks, which at least in my understanding is actually a short distance up the West Waitewaewae at the junction with Prout Stream. However, the names of the forks in this area are confusing - the topo map does not name the forks between the East and West branches of the Waitewaewae at all, and while the name Island Forks does appear on the map, it is not clear what it is actually referring to. Reading the map, you would naturally assume that it refers to the most important forks, the junction between the two branches of the Waitewaewae itself.

We stopped here for a while to check out the hut, which has been put in for work by Project Kaka in the area. To add to the geographical confusion, it is even officially called Island Forks Hut.

From here we continued down what was now the combined Waitewaewae towards the main Otaki River. It was still mostly slow travel in the river itself but I was surprised



Waitewaewae – Otaki forks

to pass some nice grassy flats and good campsites – I had assumed it would be fairly enclosed all the way down. As with the Makaretu, one day I'll have to just come in here and camp.

After an hour and three-quarters we reached the forks with the Otaki River and I was now back in familiar territory. After a quick rest we carried on down river around a couple of large lazy bends until we spotted the swing bridge ahead of us and we were soon at Waitewaewae Hut. It was 11:15 and time for an early lunch. Just as we were finishing lunch, who should turn up but Spencer Clubb, who had come down from Shoulder Knob.

Now all we had left to do was the walk out on the track up over the Plateau and down to Otaki Forks. The climb up around the big slip in the Waitatapia didn't seem as bad as I remembered it, but the bit around the top was very exposed – the slip has obviously been growing and they are going to have to push the diversion track a bit further up the hillside. Further down the Waitatapa out of the bush the track was at one point being undermined by another major slip and it probably won't be long before another diversion is required at this point as well. When we reached Otaki Forks at about quarter to five, we found Alistair waiting for us asleep in the sun!

This proved to be an excellent trip through an interesting and little-visited part of the Tararuas, but it is one that you would only want to do in summer when the daylight hours are long and the river isn't too cold. And you wouldn't want to even consider going into the East Waitewaewae if the river was at all up or rain was threatening. I based my estimated times for the trip on Merv Rodgers' guidebook *Tararua Footprints*, but as in the past I found he understated the travel times by quite a bit (or maybe I'm just slow!). It is a good twelve hours or more between the Ohau Pipe Bridge and the junction with the West Waitewaewae River, and you would have trouble finding somewhere decent to camp in the East Waitewaewae Gorge. We were very lucky to find the excellent campsite we did but we could have easily walked right past it and I suspect I might have some difficulty trying to locate it again.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

...JELLIED LAMBS' TONGUES
APPARENTLY

by IAN HARRISON

My first trip with the club was a day walk up Kapakapanui. On the drive to the start of the track someone asked me how long I'd been with the Tongue and Meats. Of course I had no idea what he was talking about. In the ensuing conversation he explained WTMC had got the nickname many years ago as the club shared its initials with the long defunct "Wellington Tongue and Meat Company".

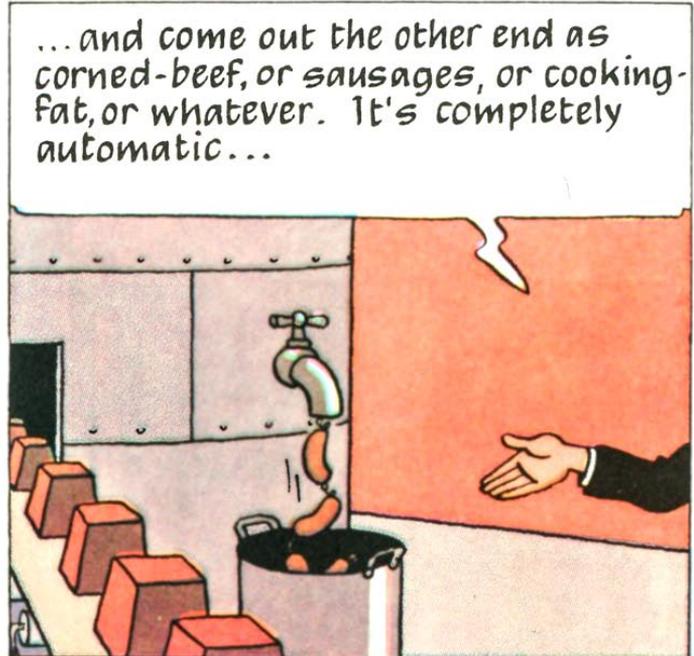
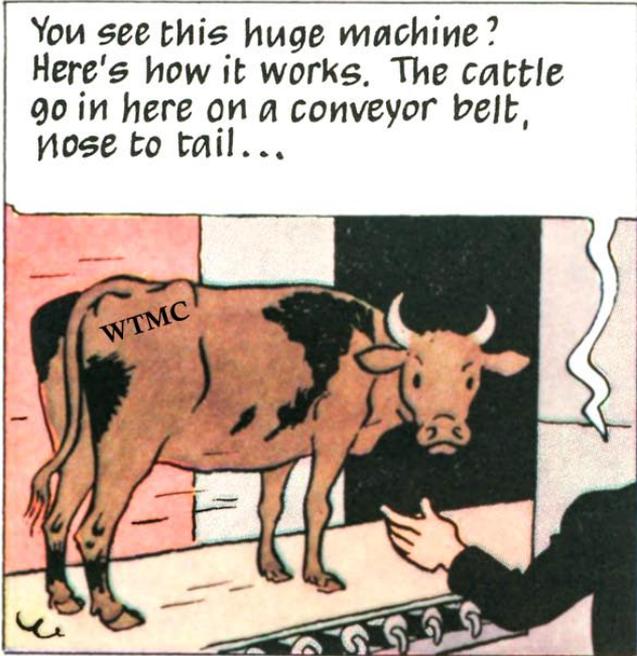
There has, however, always been doubt in my mind that such a company existed, and I'm sure I'm not the only doubter. It seems more likely to me that it was a humorous fiction, but I thought I'd try to find out if the Wellington Tongue and Meat Company ever existed. Being a lazy introvert this involved sitting at my computer and typing "Wellington tongue and meat company" into Google.

The first meaningful result was a newsletter article by none other than the club's very own Harry Smith (*The name is Tongue and Meats! A geriatric old codger braves the Ranges of Everlasting Mud and Misery* by Harry Smith. WTMC Newsletter, July 2011). He (as usual) was be-moaning the state of today's youth, particularly that a new club member didn't realise they belonged to "The Tongue and Meats". Harry wrote somewhat... ah...*tongue* in cheek... "I was shocked and stunned. How sad. Has the once proud and noble nickname of our club been completely forgotten? Have we really been so overtaken by latte-sipping yuppies and overseas interlopers unaware of our proud traditions that nobody even recognises the venerated name anymore? Is nothing sacred? Has it really come to this?"

Well yes it has Harry. He continues: "How did this name come about? There seem to be two different stories. One says that it arose from confusion between the initials of our club and those of the Wellington Tongue and Meat Company, a local Wellington meat processing company back in the early days of the club. The other says it was a deliberate insult inflicted on us by members of the rival Wellington tramping clubs. Personally I think this is the more plausible version."

Given Harry's knowledge of the club I didn't like my chances of finding out anything else that Harry didn't know but I continued Googling... ..and found no evidence that there was a meat processing factory with the initials WTMC.

However, what I did find was at the time when the club was in its infancy the Wellington meat processing scene was at its peak with a number of companies; dominated by the rather mechanically-named Gear Meat Company. "The Gear" as it was known was based in Petone by



the Hutt River on Gear Island where the Shandon Golf Club now is. A book on the history of the company, *'The Gear: A history of the Gear Meat Preserving and Freezing Company'* by Warwick Johnston says: "Plenty recollect the harbour waters would turn red with blood at times" [from waste from the works]. Ah the good ol' days. No doubt there weren't any latte-sipping yuppies and overseas interlopers around to witness that!

Harry's supposition looked to be on the money and I looked no further.

Some months later I happened to be browsing through some old club journals in the club lodge. Lo and behold the 1987 journal had an article on the origin of the club's nickname. The author (Murray Worsop) confirms the nickname was created as a joke poke fun at the WTMC when it first appeared on the scene in 1947: [the other clubs' reaction was] "Well, well - what have we here? Wellington Tramping AND MOUNTAINEERING, eh! What a high faluting name! It looks more like the Wellington Meat Export Company (which operated in Ngauranga Gorge) or their Tongue and Meat division".

The article states that the first official mention of the name was in the May 1948 edition of the TTC's Tararua Trampler: "The Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club contingent (familarly known as the "Tongue and Meat") was following, but their truck decided to spend the night in the ditch."

So there we have it. If the name didn't originate from

the TTC they were certainly instrumental in publicising it.

I have to say I prefer the singular version "Tongue and Meat" than the plural we use today. It seems more bizarre to say of a group of trampers "Here comes the Tongue and Meat" than "the Tongue and Meats". We should drop the "s" if we want to get full value from our nickname!

Incidentally the Wellington Meat Export Company did indeed exist and was located in Ngauranga Gorge. WTMC/WMEC... they're not quite the same but I reckon it's close enough if we want to say there actually was a Wellington Tongue and Meat Company.



Tasty treats from the Wellington Farmers' Meat Co.

THE RIME OF HARRY THE ANCIENT MARINER

...and of Gareth the Scot, First Mate Bob, and their Epic Quest for the Holy Grail, the elusive Buoy of Green!

by **HARRY SMITH**

with **ELIZABETH CLARIDGE** and **GARETH GRETTON**

[BEST READ ALOUD IN A STRRRONG SCOTTISH AAACCENT!]

This is the story of Gareth the Scot
and his merry pirate crew,
through Pelorus Sound in a kayak bound
for a beautiful bay or two.

In the year Two Thousand and Ten and Four,
on a bright Waitangi Day,
they packed their craft, both forward and aft,
and prepared to paddle away.

They packed their craft, both forward and aft,
with goodies quite a few –
and now it's time in this fair rime
to introduce the crew.

One was an Ancient Mariner
and he satteth, one of three,
down in his boat, on waves afloat,
and said “my name's Harry”.

And up in front the First Mate toiled,
no slacking on the job.
Elizabeth Claridge was her name,
“but you can call me Bob”.

And out ahead in his own boat,
with a map their course to plot,
was their leader, Gareth Gretton, also
known as Captain Scot.



Our Glorious Leader, Captain Scot

“Och, Laddie,” quoth our Captain Scot,
“we'll sail the seas like yon wee yacht,
and see the Sounds stretch on for miles –
'twill be just like the Scottish Isles!”



And see the Sounds stretch on for miles

“Och, Lassie,” did continue he,
“we'll bob and toss on many a sea,
and when we come ashore we'll bag us
a 'tater stew or tasty haggis!”

“Och aye, 'twill be a bonny trip,
past yon wee isles and lochs we'll slip,
'neath rugged hillsides rising high,
just like the Cuillin Hills of Skye.”

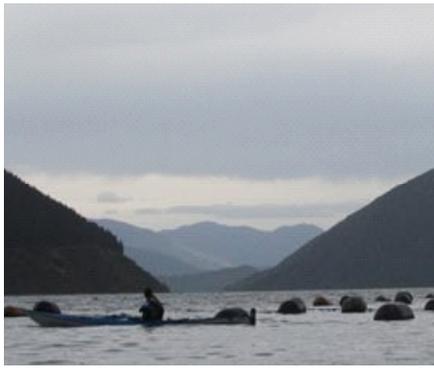


'twill be a bonny trip..

They started off in Mahau Sound,
a few miles out from Havelock Town,
and entered the Hikapu Reach,
and stopped for lunch at Pipi Beach.

Then paddled into Nydia Bay
and past vast mussel farms.
Down lines of floats they steered their boats
and into sheltered calms.

Down lines of floats they steered their boats
with ever-onward motion.
Along the lanes of tethered chains,
like racetracks in the ocean.



Down lines of floats they steered their
boats

But now our Ancient Mariner
a curious fact did glean:
The buoys all came in various hues,
in reds and blacks and browns and blues,
but none of them were green!

“The buoys are black or pink or red,
or colours in-between.
The buoys are orange, blue, or white,
but never are they green!”

“A buoy of green, a watery sheen,
is very hard to spot!
A buoy of green, if such be seen,
will never be forgot!”

And thus began an epic quest,
our kayak crew would never rest,
from North to South, from East to West,
a search of every place marine –

would they, could they, ever find,
above, below, ahead, behind,
a buoy of colour green?



The buoys were never green!

They camped that night in Nydia Bay
at a pleasant DOC campground.
Then cruised along the shore next day
back out into the Sound.

And here they passed more mussel farms
with buoys of every colour.
There were some bright and shiny ones
and some that were much duller.

“The buoys are black or pink or red,
or colours in-between.
The buoys are orange, blue, or white,
but never are they green!”

“A buoy of green has ne’er been seen
upon the sea or ocean!
A buoy of green will ne’er be seen
while spins this world in motion!”



They camped that night in Nydia Bay

They stopped for lunch at Jacobs Bay,
a campsite green and mossy.
A stranger's kayak came ashore –
Good Lord, it's Jenny Cossey!

Then onwards into North-West Bay
and then a barren shore,
and out along a snaking point
round which the wind would roar.

And across Tawhitinui Reach
and into Kauauroa Bay,
to haul ashore on a shingly beach
to end a long and drizzly day.

And here they camped like castaways
amongst the driftwood piles,
beside a secret waterfall,
with no-one 'round for miles.



And here they camped like castaways, amongst the
driftwood piles

“Och aye,” did quoth our Captain Scot,
“I like this little bay a lot!
And now I'll just unpack my gear
and leave it scattered everywhere!”

But he soon found they'd company;
it was a lurking weka.
It raced off with the Scotsman's spoon
clashed in its thieving pecker!

His spoon, his knife, his woolly hat –
the weka soon disposed of that!
And everything the Scot put down
was sure to vanish from the ground!

It stole a heap of shiny things,
whatever it could forage.
And then there came the ultimate crime:
it stole the Scotsman's porridge!

Now, the Scottish are phlegmatic race;
they take things in their stride.
But to steal a Scotsman's porridge
is to dent a Scotsman's pride!

And he averred he'd slay the bird
that stole his breakfast victuals.
And he averred he'd stew the bird
with ceremonial rituals!

He chased the bird and cursed the bird
and wished it early death,
like the Witches in the “Scottish Play”,
the one they call MacB***.
(’Tis seven years bad luck on ye
if ye said the word “MacB***”!!)

“Beware the Weka Bird!” he cried.
“The bird doth steal! The bird doth snatch!
Beware this wascally bird, and put
your things back in the hatch!”

“God save us, Ancient Mariner,
from the fiend that plagues us so!
The bloody crow! Had I crossbow
I'd shoot the so-and-so!”



It was a lurking weka

That night they slept beneath the fly,
they thought that it would keep them dry –
in this they were mistaken.
In the dead of night, at 2 a.m.,
the heavens opened up on them
and they were rudely wakened.

The rain did fall, the rain did pour
the rain did bucket down.
The *\$%#\$@# fly leaked like a sieve
and they were nearly drowned!

Then brave Sir Harry ventured out
and round the kayaks he did scout,
and fetched the oars to use as tools
to prop the fly and drain the pools.

And thus Sir Harry saved the day
(or should that be the night?)
For they were able to sleep again
until the morning light.



The *\$%#\$@# fly leaked like a sieve!

Then out to sea they sailed again
and found more mussel farms,
and yet more floating buoys amongst
the briney ocean balms.

The buoys were black, the buoys were blue,
the buoys were red and orange.
The buoys were found in every hue,
unlike a Scotsman's porridge!
(Apologies for that silly line
but nothing rhymes with orange!)

The Isle of Maud was their next stop
across the vast sea's vim –
the home of three-eyed reptiles
and frogs that cannot swim.

They cruised along the island's coast,
along its Northern shore,
and hove to in a sheltered bay –
to land was against the law.



To land was against the law

And in this happy, restful spot
the tabloids would hit pay-dirt.
A famous mystery was resolved
when the Scot removed his spray-skirt!

What is it that a Scotsman wears
beneath his kilt and sporran?
What is it that a Scotsman wears
beneath his dress so foreign?

What is it that a Scotsman wears
under that twilly tartan?
What is it that a Scotsman wears –
is it a little spartan?

What is it that a Scotsman wears
beneath his frock so frilly?
What is it that a Scotsman wears –
could it be a little chilly?

What is it that a Scotsman wears
beneath his chequered kilt?
Alas! Alack! My lips are sealed!
The beans will not be spilt!²



What does a Scotsman wear under his spray-skirt?!

They quickly scurried to escape
this ghastly mental vision,
and stopped for lunch in Waiona Bay –
an excellent decision!

For 'twas a deep and peaceful cove
with sunny beach and sheltering grove
of ancient macrocarpa trees –
a safe retreat from stormy seas.

Then 'round more coastlines to the West
and into Fitzroy Bay
(though time was getting on by now –
'twas late into the day).
And once more they found mussel farms
and buoys in vast array.



A cute wee hut - a perfect hideaway

The buoys were black, the buoys were blue,
the buoys were red and orange.
The buoys were found in every hue –
unlike a Scotsman's sporrangle!
(Regrets profound! I've still not found
a word that rhymes with orange!)

They battled round in heavy seas –
this stretch took all their might!
Then, weary, turned to Tawa Bay,
their campsite for the night.

By this stage it was getting late –
the watchman said 'twas nearly eight! –
for they had come full many a league
and had begun to feel fatigued!
And when upon the beach they parked,
the sun was down, 'twas nearly dark!³



By this stage it was getting late...

They stepped ashore, they set up camp;
they donned warm clothes, took off the damp.
They hauled their boats above tide's reach;
they made a fire upon the beach.
They boiled the billy, they poured the wine;
they could relax now – life felt fine.

Fire, fire, burning bright,
late into the starry night.
The bay was bathed in soft moonlight –
it was a peaceful, placid sight.

Fire, fire, burning bright,
in the quiet of the night;
What immortal hand or eye
could form this moonlight in the sky?⁴



The bay was bathed in soft moonlight

When they awoke the morrow morn
It was their final day;
their goal was Tennyson Inlet and
the wharf at Duncan Bay.

(Now Duncan is a Scottish name⁵
and it is very pretty;
what better place could there be found
to end this trip and ditty?)

They paddled out around the isles
and into Matai Bay,
and stopped off at a cute wee hut –
a perfect hideaway!



A cute wee hut - a perfect hideaway

And then they faced their final hurdle,
enough to make their red blood curdle!
Out of a bay a gale was spilling

with scary seas both rough and thrilling!
To cross it was a big, big ask –
but they were equal to the task!

They crossed it with a ferry glide,
relieved to reach the other side,
into the shelter of the hills,
without sustaining any spills!

Then onward into Duncan Bay,
the last stop of their trip.
Beneath the bush-clad hills they cruised,
and into port they slipped.

And here were anchored many a boat,
a fleet of rich men's toys.
And wherever there are fleets of boats,
why, there are also buoys...

The buoys were black, the buoys were blue,
the buoys were red and orange.
The buoys were found in every hue,
like a thing that rhymes with orange!
But however hard they looked, and keen,
there was still no sign of a buoy of green!

“The buoys are black or pink or red,
or colours in-between.
The buoys are orange, blue, or white,
but never are they green!”

“The buoys are tulip, topaz, tan;
they're scarlet, saffron, cerise, cyan.
The buoys are charcoal, chestnut, cherry;
they're sulphur, salmon, or strawberry.”

“The buoys are purple, plum, or prune,
or even tangerine.
They're coral, cobalt, copper, chrome,
but never are they green!”

“A buoy of green has ne'er been seen
in any state or nation!
A buoy of green will ne'er be seen
in any situation!”

Then to their right they saw a sight,
the best they'd ever seen!
At the bow of a boat they spied a float,
and the colour of it was --- GREEN!!!



It was a buoy - and it was green!

Oh, they could scarce believe their eyes!
The Holy Grail! The quest! The prize!
The greatest sight they'd ever seen!
The long-sought buoy – a buoy of green!

They shuddered to a stop and stared
at yon bright wondrous buoy.
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!
They chortled in their joy!

They changed their course, they raced across,
They almost feared it would get lost!
They touched it like a Holy Relic –
like a little morsel of Tom Selleck!

(OK, OK! But it's hard at times
to find a simile that rhymes!
“Belic”? “Melic”? “Pelic”? “Nelic”?
Nothing seems to rhyme with “Relic”!
But we'll try again, we'll do Take Two,
and see this time what we can do...)

They changed their course, they raced across,
they almost feared it would get lost!
They touched it like a Holy Relic
with beaming smiles and eyes angelic! (Ta-dah!)

They pumped their fists into the air,
and tore out chunks of their own hair!
And sobbed and wept with tears of joy,
to see at last a true green buoy!

Then round the buoy they circled thrice
with outstretched hand and lowered head,
for they on honey-dew had fed
and drunk the milk of paradise.⁶



They touched it like a Holy Relic

And now our happy, happy crew
could come ashore – their quest was through.
And don dry clothes and load the van,
and bask in glory, to a man.
(Or to a woman, if you're Bob –
to write gender-neutrally is a tricky job!)

Their odyssey was now complete –
it was a trip could not be beat!
And they had had an awesome time –
it was a journey most sublime!

For in the course of four grand days
they'd explored many coves and bays,
and undertaken many a crossing
with heavy seas and rough waves tossing.

And navigated through the shallows,
around the rocks and through the narrows.
(And scraped the bottom once or twice,
but don't you tell now, if you're nice!)



They'd navigated through the shallows

And paddled under many a pier,
to see if they could squeeze through there!
(Just for the fun, just for a dare!)

And eaten oysters from the rocks,
and watched the seabirds fly in flocks,
and looked at trees with nesting shags,
and lofty peaks lost in the clag.

And beguiling sirens on the beach,
alluring you within their reach
with ambrosial nectar in golden cup
(OK, I made that last bit up!
But all the rest is strictly true –
would I ever lie to you?)

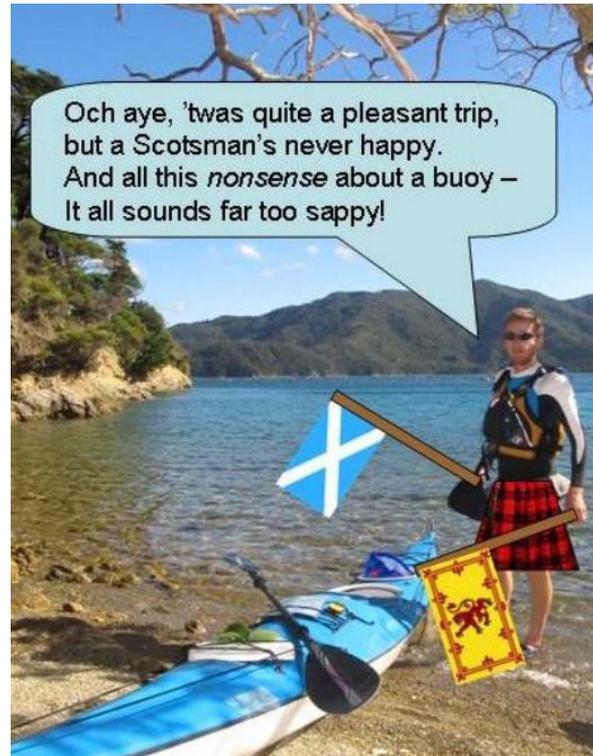
And cosy campsites (in the main,
but not the one with the #**%&\$\$ rain!)
And blazing campfires in the night,
with glowing embers, warm and bright
(though to dodge the smoke took all their might!)



Glowing embers, warm and bright

Yes, Harry, Bob, and Captain Scot
had all enjoyed the trip a lot!
But best of all – the final sheen –
they'd finally found a BUOY OF GREEN!

-- The End --



Och aye, 'twas quite a pleasant trip,
but a Scotsman's never happy.
And all this *nonsense* about a buoy –
It all sounds far too sappy!

Footnotes

- 1 With apologies to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lewis Carroll, William Blake, and William Shakespeare⁷
- 2 Shorts, actually
- 3 I'm afraid to say they'd been delayed with their kayak packing.
In getting away at the start of the day there'd been far too much faffing!!
- 4 Well, actually, of course, it's simply sunlight reflected off the moon and shining through clouds – but this is a poem, not a science textbook.
- 5 Most famously in the “Scottish Play”, the one they call MacB***.
(That's another seven years bad luck if ye said the word “MacB***”!)
- 6 But was there a snake in paradise?
Maybe the buoy was a Boojum, you see...
- 7 The author of the “Scottish Play”, the one they call MacBeth.
(Oh Damn! I said it!)

OUT

OF BOUNDS

A three-day alpine trip to Bounds Peak in the Raglan Ranges

by **EMILY SHROSBREE**

with **ANDREI ZUBKOV, PATRICK BODZAK, PAUL CHRISTOFFEL, SHARON BRANDFORD, SHAY BENDALL and TONY GAZLEY**

Post fish and chips and kumara pie on the 8 p.m. ferry, we poured over the map talking through various options for our attempt at Bounds Peak in the Raglan Ranges. There was some wet and windy weather forecasted for one night so our initial plans to camp were up for debate. It was after midnight when we bedded down under a fly at Kowhai Point campsite in the Wairau Valley. We were glad of the fly as it did rain a little in the night.

We were woken to a singing competition between bellbirds and tui, both species challenging each other with louder and more melodic calls as the morning went on. While there was cloud around, it was still and clearing in patches, so our hopes were high for a reasonable day. We were soon on our way up the gravel road along the Leatham Valley. We drove as far as the van could go to the Boulder Stream track, which marked the start of our adventure. Crossing the river and taking a left turn we followed the four-wheel drive track alongside Boulder Stream for half an hour or so.

Some way up the track we found a good place to re-cross the river; we needed to head up a spur along a fence-line on the opposite bank. This area is known for possum trappers and just before we left the track Shay and Patrick spotted a struggling creature trapped under a tree. They flipped the trap and let it go; possums are pests, but there are kinder ways to dispose of them than live traps.

We plodded up the steep spur to join the ridge above, stopping occasionally to take in the view; or for Shay,

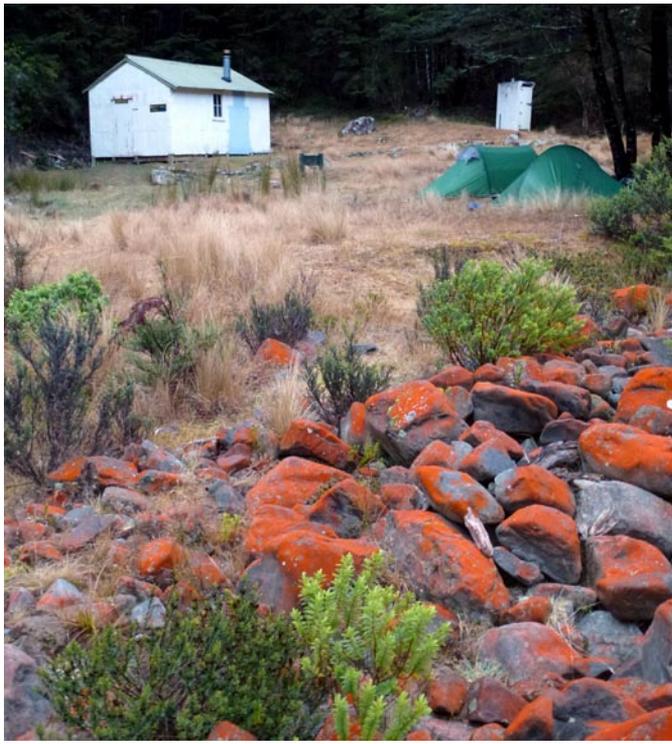
stopping occasionally to do a headstand in a precarious-looking spot! It was very dry, and there was no snow in sight, so we were already beginning to curse the extra kilos our ice axes and crampons were gracing us with.

Within a couple of hours we were at a potential campsite; a lovely spot by the stream. With our plans still undecided, we stopped for lunch and deliberations. We could set up camp for the night, but it was a bit early for that. Or we could continue up and over a saddle, then down to Hidden Hut for the night. Either way we would have a full day to tackle Bounds Peak the next day, but the route up would depend on where we spent the night. We decided to spend the afternoon tramping to the hut and so off we set; up towards the saddle.

Heading down, Sharon's knee started to play up and we regrouped to take some of her pack weight to ease her load. She'd twisted it coming down the river bank only half an hour into the trip earlier that morning. Divvying out her pack contents amongst most of the group really helped. As we headed further down the valley towards Hidden Hut we started to come across some tree fall. Climbing up and over, under and through, and occasionally looping round we were almost an hour longer making it to the hut than expected.



Looking up the Leatham Valley



Hidden Hut



Hidden Hut is a five-bunk hut so two of us were outside in tents. After setting up camp, some of us helped with dinner while others perused the hut book. At this point we were planning an early start up the track to Turkeys Nest Bivvy, then on upwards through some infamous wilding pines that I had already heard cursed by other club members attempting a summit of Bounds the year before. It was going to be a long day, but we were ready for it...until we read the hut book...oh...the track up to the bivvy is impassable due to tree fall...oh...better re-think then! Already aware of how much the tree fall on the route into Hidden Hut had slowed us down, we knew we just wouldn't have time to get up there and back in one day. So that was Bounds ruled out for this trip...well...maybe. This was Tony's third attempt to make the summit and if any opportunity presented itself, he was going to take it.

As we ate we decided that the best option for Saturday was to head to the camping spot we'd

lunched at on Friday, but rather than retracing our steps we'd go up and over Mount Impey to give our legs a bit of a stretch, and our eyes a bit of a change of scenery. There'd still be some windfall to tackle, but it would make for an interesting day all the same.

Early Saturday morning we headed off, ready for the tree fall challenge. After drawing an initial blank, we found our way round the first section and identified the track which initially seemed relatively clear. From just a little way up we could see Bounds Peak against a clear blue sky, taunting us with its presence...so close but yet so unreachable...but was it? As we stood, catching our breath, and looking up we discussed an alpine start from the campsite the next morning, a clamber along the ridge which looked knife-edge from our viewpoint and a speedy pack-up of camp on our return before heading straight back to the van and onto the ferry. Our spirits were high, and we chatted about details such as wearing our helmets on the ridge although it looked like there'd be little need for either crampons or our ice axes.

But that was tomorrow - first we had to get through the tree fall and over Mount Impey to set up camp by the evening. So onwards and upwards we went. It was slow progress climbing under and over the tree fall. There was barely anything left standing, we think from the end of the cyclone that hit the West Coast over Easter. Every horizontal tree took a chance at grabbing our ice axes, scratching us, or ping-ponging a branch back in our faces. Hard work, but I was loving it and feeling like a kid in the best playground ever! Others were not enjoying it so much and as we found a suitable spot for a break, a plan was hatched to leave the 'track' and head down a little to another spur where there appeared to be less damage. We decided to split into two groups; 'Team Love Tree-fall' would continue 'battling', or as we saw it 'indulging', in the clambering along the 'track'



Mount Impey - our back-up target

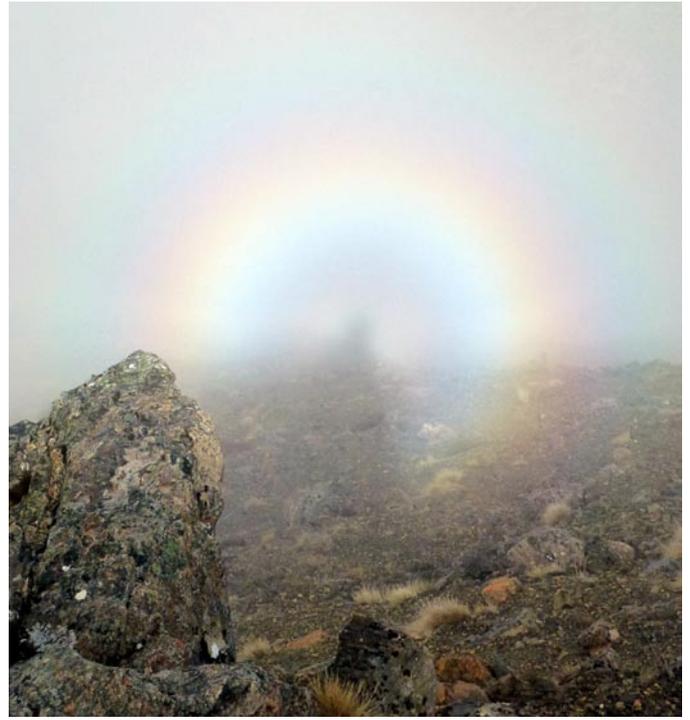


On the summit of Mount Impey

directly up the ridge until we hit the top where we knew there was a four-wheel drive track. ‘Team Hate Tree-fall’ would drop down to find an easier going route away from the fallen orange triangles. Off both teams headed, agreeing to meet on the four-wheel drive track and wait for each other there.

Less than twenty minutes later Shay, Patrick and I popped out at the top of the ridge into the sunshine having hopped, skipped and jumped our way up and over the rest of the wounded timber. We sat in the sunshine on the edge of the track chatting away, and occasionally looking over towards where we were expecting the others to appear. A time-check revealed we’d been waiting more than an hour, which started to worry us a little, not least because their aim was to find an easier route, not one that took a lot longer! We took a stroll along the track to see if we could see them, and it was almost another thirty minutes before we spotted the first of ‘Team Hate Tree-fall’ come into view. Paul, Sharon, Andrei and Tony appeared one by one above the track looking less than refreshed. ‘Team Love Tree-fall’ almost didn’t dare tell them how long we’d been waiting!

Reunited, we continued a couple of kilometres along the four-wheel drive track towards Mount Impey. By now it was warm, although there were afternoon clouds building. ‘Lunch at the top’ announced Tony, as we set off on



A magical Brocken spectre

our ascent. We made it to a false summit and made an almost unanimous decision that this would instead be the lunch stop. Unfortunately, the first arrivals made a poor effort of communicating this to those still on their way up, so Andrei and Tony ended up going without lunch.... although I think they were mostly just distracted by Shay’s further attempts at yoga poses on teetering rock edges.

Onwards and upwards, we made it to the summit of Mount Impey an hour or so later and found the only patch of snow we’d seen all trip...yes, this was now officially an alpine trip! There was a fence up there so clearly we were not pioneer summiters but having not seen a soul so far it felt a bit like it (and no-one has yet claimed it on peak-bagger). There was a fair amount of cloud swirling about the tops so we pushed on, as we still had a good way to go before dropping down to our campsite. We were a bit too eager to get down and were encouraged into a scree traverse which we, some way down, realised was not going to get us far enough round to reach the saddle we were aiming for. Back up to the ridgeline we went. On finding the correct line down, the cloud was still swirling and the group was momentarily disconnected; we could all hear each other but not see each other. While others were double-checking the map to ensure we avoided a second unnecessary re-ascent, the light and cloud arranged themselves just perfectly for me to see my first Brocken spectre.

By now the group was tired, and the prospect of a 4 a.m. start to summit Bounds was not greeted with as much enthusiasm as earlier that morning when we were all feeling fresh, and we still had a good hour or two before reaching our camp. The final descent along a bumpy spur was glorious. The sun had reappeared, and the evening light was beautiful. There were plenty of soft patches of tussock so we had more than one lounging break, and a few sugar stops too. Shay who had bounded ahead helpfully, erected his bright orange tent, so not only did we know how far ahead of us he really was, but we also knew how far we still had to go.

On arrival at camp it was all hands on deck to gather firewood before the light went, put our tents up and get dinner on the go. I had a quick wash in the stream and discovered a few lovely pools which I was tempted to test the next morning. We had dehy meals as today we had expected to be very late back from a long day climbing Bounds Peak. Even without the intended summit we were all eager to eat. We sat warming around the fire, chatting and waiting for the water to boil.

By now we'd completely canned the idea of an alpine start ascent of Bounds and were instead dreaming about how we would spend a lazy morning around the camp. I

woke early in the morning, and having been a little cold in the night I wasn't surprised to find a frost outside. We got the fire going again and cooked up some leftover sausages, then packed up camp slowly not setting off until about 11 a.m.

We took a different route out, choosing to stay high, walking along a ridge with several rocky towers which provided good challenges to an otherwise straightforward three hour walk back to the van. From high on the ridge we were rewarded with great views both down into Boulder Stream, and later up and down the Leatham Valley. We also spotted the van a long way below, realising how high we still were. The descent was steep and mostly on dry grass, with the occasional matagouri bush. I took more than one slip, and quickly decided, along with everyone else that bum-sliding was indeed the most efficient way down, and of course the most fun too! So long as you stopped in time to avoid the matagouri spikes.

Back at the van we had a quick wash and change and headed off to Picton for our ferry back to Wellington. Alas, Bounds Peak had eluded us this time, and for some of us for the third time, but that just means we'll have to be back again in the future!



Evidence this was a true alpine trip

MOUNT ANGELUS

by TONY GAZLEY

with ANGIE WILKINSON, EMILY SHROSBREE, ANDREI ZUBKOV, SAM KEMPTHORN,
BRENDON ECKERT and SPENCER CLUBB

Nelson Lakes is a wonderful winter playground for trampers, skiers and climbers; and the annual WTMC post-snowcraft trip to Mt Angelus at the southern end of the Mt Robert Range has always been popular...

Descending down to Hukere Stream from Lake Angelus



This year seven punters arrived at the ferry terminal at 7 a.m. on a fine Saturday morning - but they had to wait until after 10 a.m. before the boat left the wharf. While this was initially annoying, the seven enjoyed the relaxing trip south; lounging in the children's play area, reading or playing cards, and then the drive to St Arnaud, and the easy walk into Speargrass Hut which they eventually reached just after dark.

To make up for lost time they were up and fed next morning shortly after 5 a.m. and out the door at 6 a.m. The walk up to Angelus Hut is normally straightforward, however, on this day there was deep soft snow that had fallen during the previous few days and which from above the bushline became deeper still. The two biggest macho alpha males were sent out in front to plug steps for the other mere mortals. And the steps were deep! And very often one or other of the seven would fall even deeper into a snowy hole which would cause much mirth among the others until they eventually took a turn at sinking themselves.

But the sun shone from a clear blue sky, there was no wind and the view got better and better the higher the seven climbed. They reached the ridge above Lake Angelus where there was a spectacular 360 degree panorama of snowy mountains and deep green valleys. Lake Angelus was frozen and there was talk of a contest whereby one could slide down the snow slopes above the lake to see how far across the ice you could get—probably for the better this idea was dropped when someone suggested that the ice may not be thick enough to support a person and that it could all result in a very damp ending.

So instead, they competed to find the silliest way to descend the snow slope to the hut. Sam and Angie won hands down with their method (not taught in snowcraft)

of simply running as fast as possible until they were able to come to a semi-controlled stop or fell flat on their face. The hut was empty so the seven spread themselves around, ate lunch and packed gear for the climb of Angelus.

By this time the wind had increased, there were dark Southerly clouds forming around the higher peaks, and Mt Angelus had disappeared from view. Nevertheless the seven set out into the gathering storm with high hopes of reaching the summit. The climb around a frozen Hinapouri Tarn was slow because of the deep snow but they eventually reached the slopes leading up somewhere to where they supposed the top to be. By now the wind was very strong, visibility was near zero, there was blowing spindrift and falling snow. It was very definitely an inhospitable place to be. In spite of this, the decision was made to go on a bit higher and try for the summit if possible.

Somewhere about 60 m from the top the soft snow changed to an icy surface and crampons were needed. Here it was decided that four would call it quits and head down while Angie, Sam and Brendon would carry on as far as possible. The four turned down into the wind with the idea of simply following the deep tracks made on the way up, but they had already gone, filled in by the drifting snow. With no visibility and uncertain of their location they descended by dead-reckoning until Emily spied two tarns that they had passed on the way up and that were dimly visible through the greyness. From here on it was simply map and compass travel until thankfully the hut loomed ahead of them. They changed out of snow-covered clothes and moved back in to find two other occupants had arrived after following the footsteps from Speargrass.

They had a hot drink, started preparing the evening meal, and continually watched out the window for the return of the other three. As time went on, and with



Deep snow on the way up to Lake Angelus



A demonstration of silly descending

daylight fading, they became increasingly anxious, only to be relieved by the sight of three dim figures moving slowly towards the hut somewhat off-course but at least safe. And to make it better, even though they had iced-up clothing and hair and were clearly tired, they had big smiles after a successful summit. It was a cheery group that enjoyed a hearty meal prepared by master chef Andrei before heading to bed and another early start next morning.

With the amount of new snow about and the generally slow travel, a walk out along Robert Ridge was not possible so Hukere Stream was an obvious alternative. The seven were away by 7 a.m. heading down the steep slopes to the valley below. The snow was even deeper and softer here and the leaders left a deep trench for others to follow. The weather, while better than the previous day, was still windy and snowy and the view down the valley was one of tones of grey without any colour at all, but with the dark sky it appeared very dramatic all the same.

Once in the bush, the scene changed to a winter wonderland of snow covered trees with a small stream flowing between snowy rocks. It was such a delightful place and the seven enjoyed the easy walking compared with the earlier trench furrowing. Many stops were made simply to take in the stunningly beautiful winter scenery. Eventually they arrived at one of the pleasant grassy Travers Valley River flats and called it time for an early lunch. There had already been some discussion about Sam's gumboot tea making ability so it seemed like a good idea to have some tasting. Sam set the others the job of collecting enough wood while he lit a fire and started the billy boiling.

As Sam admitted, it was not a record billy boiling time but the seven were in no hurry and simply lay about enjoying the warm sunshine—even though there were small snowflakes still falling. And then there was the nice surprise when Emily announced that she had exactly seven marshmallows left to share for toasting while they waited.

The tea was a good black hearty brew but not Sam's best, as the tea bags he used were an odd assortment of dregs from the bottom of various packs and the peppermint flavour dominated the taste somewhat. But no-one cared - it was that sort of trip.

The seven made it to Coldwater Hut with half an hour to spare so everyone, except for the wimpy trip leader (who used the excuse he had done it many times before), jumped off the jetty into the lake. Here Angie took honours with her leap of a tucked two-footed take-off forward somersault. Then the water taxi arrived for the trip down the lake to St Arnaud and the waiting van.



Back at the hut after climbing Angelus



Angie executing a tucked forward somersault

FROM SNOWCRAFT TO MOUNT TRAVERS

A long journey for a
South Island summit

by **DEBBIE BUCK**

with SHARRON CAME, ANDREI ZUBKOV,
DAVID JEWELL and TIM DUNNING

Snowcraft 2012 was a medley of weather. The mint day for summiting Te Heu Heu erased the less than perfect other weather from my memory.

After that, to embed the John Wayne crampon walk in my muscle memory, I had a few 2012 alpine tramps. Ngauruhoe high camp was claggy and calm. We had a sunny walk up and down the Hodder River, and bailed partway up the col to Tappy's summit as a storm approached. Te ao Whekere was a rock grovel that, for me, ended beneath a steep technical snow section enveloped in clag.

2013 was more of the same. I was mastering cramponing and snow travel in various terrain and various weather, getting used to chilly feet and fingers and bagging summits up at Tongariro National Park. But the South Island summits were proving elusive. Fortunately I'm persistent and patient.

For the 2014 alpine tramping season, my goal was one (any one) South Island summit. I spent a weekend up at Tongariro National Park, learning about snow anchors, alpine rope-work and pitching...perhaps if I had some technical alpine skills I'd be more confident and the alpine weather gods more cooperative!

Tappy became Not Tappy or 'not quite Uwerau'; complete with a six hour upward bush bash to get anywhere vaguely alpine. Cupola, after a week of snowfall, was a step plugging and 'spot the avalanche' mission that ended not far above the stunningly sited hut.

I took heart and reflected on the experience of real

mountaineers – their many summit bids that didn't succeed for a plethora of reasons reinforce the sweetness of hard-won summits.

The four day Travers and Cotterell ALP1 was my final South Island alpine tramp for the season. David sent out the trip plan and Sharron sent some helpful hints about snacking on the go and drinking electrolyte fluid instead of water (my usual beverage). The weather forecast ummed and aahed in the week before. By Friday afternoon it was looking like we would have one mint summit day and one undecided summit day. Hopefully there had been enough freezes to consolidate the fresh snow that was around from the previous weekend.

On Saturday morning, the five of us (David, Sharron, Tim, Andrei and I) tramped up the Travers Valley to our base at John Tait Hut. After lunch we went on a Mt Travers recy up to the junction of Summit Creek with the Travers Valley. Tim and David scouted further up Summit Creek to the basin and came back with promising news about the ease of travel and the snowline. Back near the hut Sharron found a spot to cross the Travers River for the ascent of Cotterell Peak the next day. We made dinner and settled in for an early night – albeit a rather hot and sleepless one because of a crew of glampers who kept a bonfire stoked well into the night.

We woke late after missing our daylight-saving adjusted alarm and fuffed about. Andrei decided to walk up to Cupola Hut instead of attempting Cotterell. The rest of us postponed the inevitable cold crossing of the Travers River until about 9:30 a.m. We ascended through untracked bush and my wet feet got colder as we tramped through the snow. We reached the bushline which was windy and cold.

By now, I couldn't feel much of my feet below my ankles and was definitely the slowest of the crew. The trip plan had mentioned a steep technical section near the



Summit Creek with Mount Travers in the distance

top of Cotterell. It had also mentioned that bailing at the bushline would be a 'good day out'. I decided that I was too tired and cold to progress at the pace that would get the four of us to the summit of Cotterell. I was content to leave the others and navigate back down to John Tait Hut. Hopefully this would save some of my energy for the Travers summit bid tomorrow on the forecasted mint day. So I spent a cruisy couple of hours wandering on bearings down to the Travers River. Fortunately the snow melt hadn't made the river level too high to cross alone. It was a good day out!

Back at the hut, I had a wash in the river, caught up with Andrei, and chopped some of the dinner veges. I jettisoned some unnecessary kit before Sharron returned to inspect my pack contents...she'd promised to be brutal! Fortunately she wasn't too appalled by what was left in my pack – she removed the goggles and hand warmers because if the weather was bad enough for goggles then we'd be bailing anyway. After dinner, I relocated my snacks to various accessible places – jacket and shorts pockets and the top of my pack, and filled up my camelback with 1.5 litres of Replace. Hopefully this would be enough liquid for the day. I felt prepared for the Mt Travers summit day. All I needed was a good night's sleep before I got up at 5:45 a.m. to put on the stove.

The next morning we got up as planned, left at 7 a.m. and made quick time (50 minutes) to Summit Creek. After another 50 minutes of tramping through the bush on the true left, we were near the bottom of the Travers basin and had reached some snow patches. We filled up with water and de-layered because it was warm. Lots of sun without cloud or wind. We tramped through alpine tussock, spaniard and heath, reaching an icier section where we put on crampons. We'd had a good overnight frost, so



The summit ridge

the snow was still quite firm at 9:30 a.m.

I led off into the basin, keeping on the left. It felt good to be cramponing at a solid pace in firm snow. I turned right to cut across the basin and was soon in step plugging country. Tim and David charged in front of me... I was relieved. We waited for Andrei and Sharron and then continued the step plugging up the steeper section near the lip of the basin. This opened into another basin. I needed some savoury food to keep going, so I had a quick cheese and salami break and then powered on in David and Tim's steps to meet them at the saddle.

Only another 150 vertical metres to the summit. This section was steeper and softer and the sun scorching. I was thankful for Tim and David's steps. The three of us met just before the final 'knife edge' 50m or so to the summit.

I contemplated just staying where I was and not going across the knife edge...but knew how annoyed I would be with myself if I baulked. I'd been wanting to test my exposure threshold, so here was my chance! David led, then Tim and I followed. The snow was firmish and as long as I looked straight ahead along the footsteps in front, I was blissfully unaware of the drop off on my sides. There were only a couple of brief places where it was quite narrow and required a bit more manouvering than one foot in front of the other. I felt a bit hesitant and took these steps carefully. The rest of the knife edge was a sunny saunter at the top of the world to the summit of Mt Travers (at about 1 p.m.).

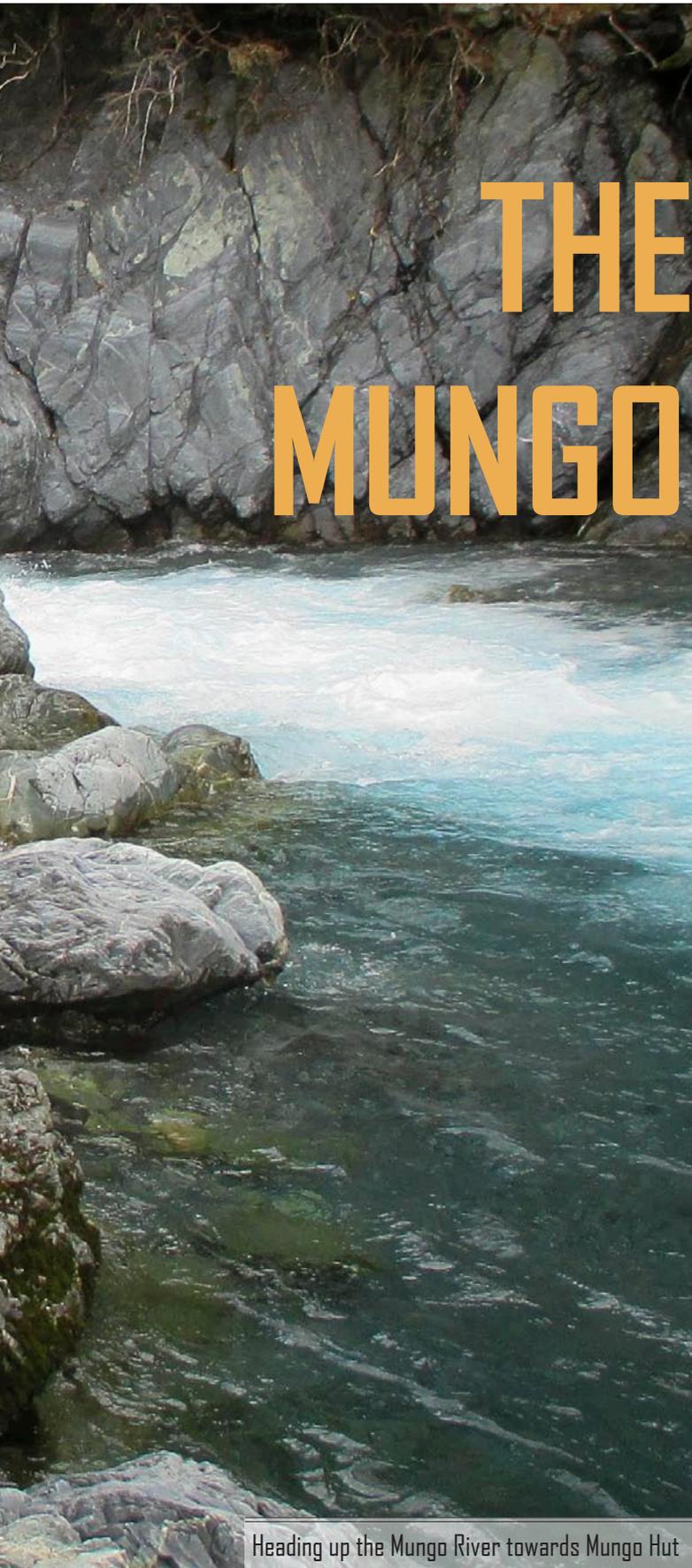
I was relieved, and a tiny bit exhilarated - my first South Island summit. And such an awesome mint weather day! I could enjoy the expansive mountain vista (unhidden in clag), take some silly pose photos and revel in the moments and the day. Sharron joined us shortly afterwards, having left Andrei at the saddle.

The initial steep part of the descent required facing into the snow. After that it was a mix of side stepping, facing outwards and stepping and then, when the snow got too deep and soft, bum sliding. Eventually we took off our crampons, had a snowball fight (mainly Tim and I) and let gravity help us tramp back down the mountain to the track.

Back at the hut we wearily prepared dinner and re-hydrated. Since it had been such a hot and sweaty day, I refreshed with a quick cleansing dip in the Travers River. It had been a sustained and satisfying South Island summit day, hopefully the next one would be soon.

"I contemplated just staying where I was and not going across the knife edge...but knew how annoyed I would be with myself if I baulked"





THE ELUSIVE MUNGO HUT

According to the 'isolated huts' website Mungo gets only a handful of visitors each year. Some may think, "Well, maybe it's not worth visiting then", but to others "rarely visited" means an irresistible challenge.

by **PAUL CHRISTOFFEL**
photos **MEGAN SETY**

with: **KATY GLENIE, SHARON BRANDFORD**
and **MIKE PHETHEAN**

In a clearing near the banks of the Mungo River sits Mungo Hut, one of many huts installed on the West Coast by the New Zealand Forest Service back in the day. The huts were built for deer cullers, but after culling by foot was made redundant by helicopter hunting, they remained as shelter for trampers and recreational hunters.

When Mike prepared six alternative West Coast routes for a WTMC post-Christmas trip, all included a stay at Mungo. He had tramped the area before and bagged little-visited huts like the Sir Robert, but Mungo had eluded him. So any route we chose into the isolated ranges east of Hokitika was going to include a visit to Mungo.

Heading up the Mungo River towards Mungo Hut

DAY ONE

Friday 27 December 2013 dawned fine and sunny in Hokitika. After a half hour drive, our party of five set out from the road end just south of Lake Kaniere, near the confluence of three rivers – the Kokatahi, the Styx, and the Toaroha. We followed the last of these; first to Cedar Flat hut for lunch, then on to Upper Toaroha Hut for the night. We said farewell to the other WTMC group, who we'd see again in a week.

We set out across farmland in the warm sunshine. Was this really the West Coast? Soon we joined a bushy sidle track that eventually met up with the Toaroha River. After a kilometre of boulder hopping we headed inland again, avoiding the Toaroha Canyon. We ran into a party of young people heading out, one carrying a canoe with the intention of kayaking out once they hit the river. They were impressed that we expected to head all the way to Upper Toaroha that day. We soon found out why.

To state the obvious, a pack with seven days worth of food is pretty heavy. As a result, we weren't making the progress we had hoped for. DOC says it takes 3-4 hours to get to Cedar Flats, and Mike had banked on three given we were a reasonably fit group. It took four hours. The DOC time to Upper Toaroha is 5-6 hours. It looked like we were in for a long day.

We decided to lunch in Cedar Flat Hut to avoid the heat and sandflies. There are actually two huts, including an historic one, but we opted for the modern version. No one was tempted to try out the nearby hot pools – they'd seem more appealing in cooler weather.

After Cedar Flat the track got rougher, and in places had collapsed altogether, leaving us scrambling up and down crumbling banks. Mike went ahead to set up the mountain radio for the 7.30 p.m. schedule. The sun had disappeared behind the mountains as the rest of us arrived at Upper Toaroha after 7p.m It had been a tough 10 hour day.

Upper Toaroha Hut has a stunning spot in a basin surrounded by high peaks. We made the most of our limited remaining daylight to enjoy the scenery before a cup of tea and dinner. This was the first of our dehy meals that the punters from the two groups had prepared in the preceding weeks. Sharon and I were late entrants to the trip so had only contributed financially. As we were to discover some months later, it's a lot of work preparing a dehy meal for a large group. So many thanks to all those who did the cooking and dehydrating – your efforts are much appreciated. And the meals were way better than the Backcountry version.

DAY TWO

The mountain radio guy promised fine weather for Saturday, and so it was to be. Mike promised us a much shorter day as we headed for the legendary Mungo Hut. But first we had to get over Toaroha Saddle.

The route started off very steeply and in places someone (possibly DOC workers) had installed chains to help trampers haul themselves up. We paused after the main climb to admire the spectacular view back down the Toaroha Valley from where we had come. The hut looked tiny in the distance. Then it was on to Toaroha Saddle where we enjoyed great views of the snow-covered peaks towards the western edge of the Arthur's Pass National Park.

Toaroha saddle lies between the Diedrichs and Toaroha ranges and is the site of a bivvy. We chatted to a hunter who had spent two nights there after hurting his knee. He was preparing for a slow trip out, hopefully in time to compete in a West Coast tennis tournament. We didn't fancy his chances of getting out quickly (or of success in the tennis tournament), but wished him luck all the same.

From the saddle it was a precipitous 600 metres downhill, followed by a bit of sidling. The sidle track at one point joined a steep stream (more of a waterfall really), which we had to clamber down for about 20 metres before picking up a track down to the Mungo River.

We lunched in the sun by the river before heading off on the final stretch to the legendary hut. Eventually we had to cross the river, no easy task, but the crossing point wasn't too bad. Shortly after crossing we hit a nasty looking black stone bluff, which looked a major challenge. Thankfully it wasn't as bad as it first appeared and we all traversed it in no time.

Further up the true left bank the others found a hot pool with just enough room for one person. But the



Descending from Toaroha Saddle to Mungo River



MUNGO PARK

The Mungo River and hut are named after the Scottish explorer Mungo Park (born 1771); the first European to find the source of the Niger River.

Near Mungo Hut is Park Stream, and into Park Stream flows the Niger stream; the final clue in the puzzle. Of course, how a short river on the West Coast of the South Island came to be named after a Scottish explorer of Africa is another matter. I pass on that one. According to Wikipedia, there's only one other Mungo River in the world, and that's in Cameroon.

Mungo Park drowned on his second trip to Africa in 1806- something to bear in mind later in this story.

Historians are rarely of much value on tramping trips, but sometimes we have our uses.

weather was still too warm to sit in hot water, so we continued on. Eventually we reached the Brunswick Stream, which looked impossible to cross. Katy found a sidle track through the bush and we followed the pink ribbons until we emerged further upstream at what was presumably a crossing point. But it still looked uncrossable. Was that a cairn further upstream? We went to investigate. It soon became apparent that the 'cairn' was actually a large boulder atop an enormous boulder. How it got there who knows, but clearly people weren't involved.

Megan and I decided to head still further upstream to try and find a crossing point. Why was there so much water? We figured that several days of warm sunny weather must have melted the snow, filling up the waterways. Our upstream expedition was fruitless, and we returned to find Mike futilely shot-putting large rocks into the Brunswick, presumably in the forlorn hope of creating a crossing.

We had wasted well over an hour to no avail. And no-one even took a photo of the stream! There was nothing for it but to retrace our steps then continue down river to Poet Hut.

Disconsolately we trudged back the way we came. I was getting tired, having been lumbered with much of the heavy gear. Then I hit a nasty looking black stone bluff, which looked a major challenge. How were we going to get across it? Hold on, wasn't this where we crossed the river? Sure enough, there was an easy crossing point right there.

After we had crossed the river, Mike pointed out that it was the wrong place. So, after a bit of faffing, we re-crossed and headed over the 'nasty looking black stone bluff', which I belatedly realised was of course the exact same one we had traversed on the way in. Doh!

At 6.30 Mike and I arrived at Poet Hut. I was knackered. Despite Mike's promise, it had been another 10 hour day.

Poet Hut may be a pretty name but it's also a highly misleading one. The floor was barely visible for rat droppings. Mike set up the mountain radio while I tried to clean the place up a bit before the girls arrived.

After much sweeping the hut looked a lot better, although that didn't stop the others spending a further 10 minutes cleaning up once they got there. Katy announced there was no way she was sleeping in the hut, so Mike's enormous tent (buried in my pack) was going to get an airing. Megan said rats didn't bother her as she'd lived in a house with rats before. Sharon, as a psychologist, had done plenty of experiments with rats, so sleeping in the hut didn't faze her either. I said nothing. There was no option given Mike and Katy were sharing the tent.

That evening lights were out in the hut for barely 10 minutes when there was a loud scream. A rat had run across Sharon's bare shoulders. Megan grabbed her torch and soon caught a large and frightened looking rat in its beam. The



Traversing a bluff beside Mungo River

rat ran to and fro looking for a way out before heading up the chimney of the open fireplace. I had a poor sleep that night. I suspect Sharon didn't sleep that well either.

DAY THREE

The weather people again promised fine weather and Mike promised us a short day. The sky was a bit cloudy, but it remained fine. We were heading up to Bluff Hut, only a few hours away. This time it looked like we really would get a short day.

We headed down the Mungo to the point where it meets the Hokitika River. Although the Hokitika seemed to be no more than a large creek thundering into the Mungo at an absurdly steep slope, the Mungo from then on gets renamed the Hokitika. There seems no logical reason for this quirk of naming, but the result is that the Mungo River is no more than 9 km long.

The suspension bridge just past the confluence of the rivers was only installed in 2009 after an earlier version was washed away in a flood. After crossing the bridge we climbed 650 metres up to the hut passing some impressive rocky bluffs towards the top. We were all there by mid-afternoon. Mike had delivered on his promise of a short day.



Bluff Hut

Bluff Hut is in a magnificent location on a flat spot at the end of the Conway Ridge. It had great views back the way we had come; particularly of the Diedrichs Range, and also of the Homeward Ridge to the east. The old hut was moved to a more stable location in 2009 and was pretty much rebuilt. Only the corrugated iron cladding remains. Sturdy cables keep Bluff Hut affixed to the rock, a reminder that it can get windy.

There was little wind forecast according to the mountain radio guys. Instead they predicted rain. As we had a

bit of river work to do the next day, it looked like we could be in for a hut day. And so it was to be.

DAY FOUR

In the early hours of Monday morning there was a bit of a kerfuffle, as Katy and Mike got up to investigate noises outside. They claimed a possum had been trying to steal our ice axes. The possums are quite welcome to mine, I thought. We had brought ice axes on the off-chance that one of the various proposed routes might take us high into snow. As 1300 metres was the highest we got, they remained strapped uselessly to our packs, regularly getting caught up in overhanging vegetation and adding un-needed extra weight.

The rain wasn't heavy come daylight, but it was steady enough to deter us from going anywhere. We were thankful for a warm and comfortable hut, nothing like the one the night before. Sorry Harry, but there's something to be said for these flash new huts. We chatted, played cards, read – the usual stuff. We may well have lit a fire; I don't recall. It wasn't particularly cold.

Mike again aired his disappointment at not getting to Mungo Hut, but Katy had lost interest. She now had her sights set on Sir Robert, another of those hard-to-get-to huts. I failed to notice it at the time, but only a few kilometres from Bluff Hut lies Frisco Hut, on a spur far above the other side of the Hokitika River. According to remotehuts.co.nz, the Forest Service and DOC haven't maintained the access tracks since the mid 1970s, but in 2011 'permolat' volunteers associated with the remote huts website restored an access track from the Hokitika River. The website proudly boasts that the hut now gets a couple of visitors each year. Even more remote is the Serpentine Hut, on the gorgy bit of the Hokitika River beyond the new swing bridge. The Serpentine is apparently generally visited only by the occasional kayaking group, although it did get a foot visitor in 2009 and another in 2010. More huts for Mike's list perhaps?

The mountain radio guys predicted better weather for Tuesday, but more rain the rest of the week. Mike was concerned about a crossing we'd have to do in a couple of days, over the worryingly-name Rapid Creek. We'd have to cross that bridge when we came to it, so to speak - except that, according to the maps and Mike's memory, there was no bridge.

DAY FIVE

Light rain was falling as we set off on Tuesday, but nothing to worry about. We headed up the Hokitika River (little more than a large creek at that point) most of the way to its headwaters. Then the route swung abruptly west



Heading towards Frew Saddle

before a steep 200 metre climb up to Frew Saddle, the highest point on our trip. Just over the saddle was another bivvy where we stopped for photos before heading down into Frew Creek. We could see a hint of blue sky in the distance, but where we were showers persisted on and off.

Although there is a track marked on the map, in reality you head about two kilometres straight down Frew Creek. Thankfully the travel was pretty easy – in fact quite fun most of the time. After that a track led, after several kilometres of rough bush travel, to Frew Hut. This is another comfortable newish hut with a luxurious 10 bunks. It sits on the banks of the legendary Whitcombe River, named after John Whitcombe who, with Jakob Lauper, crossed from Canterbury to the West Coast in 1863. The First Crossings guys re-created their epic journey in the first episode of their first TV series. It was one hell of a trip, ending with Whitcombe drowning not far from their destination. In 2013 descendents of Whitcombe recreated the journey (sans the drowning bit) in celebration of its 150th anniversary.

Frew Hut was inhabited by a hunter who had spent the previous night at Frew Biv. When we told him of the weather forecast he decided it might be a good time to head out, or at least on to Rapid Creek Hut. But before he left he provided us with some very welcome information. Rapid Creek now has a swing-bridge. Our worries that we might spend several days stuck at Frew Hut diminished, although hadn't disappeared altogether. There were still other creeks on the way to worry about.

That night we got a message to the other WTMC group that we expected to be back in Hokitika in a couple of days. They were doing a second trip further south, but would be out in good time to join us. Everything seemed to be falling into place, as long as the gods played ball.

DAY SIX

On Wednesday morning it was raining, as predicted by the mountain radio guys (well, really by the Met Service, whose forecasts they read out). We didn't have far to go, so aimed at leaving as soon as the rain diminished. At lunch Megan offered me some of her food, as she had plenty left. It consisted of Tararua biscuits spread with her special homemade mixture with ingredients that included peanut butter, coconut cream powder, and some unidentified incredibly sweet stuff. It was like rocket fuel in its effect (although not its taste) and I soon became hyperactive. The weather was clearing, and I decided it was time to go. Those who have tramped with me before will know that I'm a notorious faffer, but I was packed and ready to go in no time, waiting impatiently for the others. No wonder Megan was so often full of energy!

Not long after we left the hut the sun came out, and it even got pretty hot. Most of us stopped to put on sun screen. Five minutes later it started pouring with rain and the temperature plummeted. The rain continued for the rest of the afternoon.

The route followed the Whitcombe River, which raged a frightening brown colour. Many of the rocks were slip-



The Whitcombe River in flood

pery, making us super-careful. One slip and we would be following the likes of Mungo Park and John Whitcombe to a watery grave. At one point we had to swing on vines to get over the worst of the hazards. It was slow going and we were getting cold from the persistent rain.

A few kilometres from Rapid Creek Hut the steep river banks flattened out making travel easier and less scary. Eventually the Whitcombe River met up with the Hokitika River, which had headed through a series of deep gorges since we last saw it the previous day. Consistent with the apparent naming rules in the area (ie, 'Hokitika' trumps all other names), the Whitcombe became the Hokitika River as soon as the two rivers met.

After a long detour through the bush we finally came to the Rapid Creek swing bridge. Nasty looking waters surged below us. We would never have got over without a bridge. Five minutes later we reached Rapid Creek Hut.

As the rest of us changed out of our cold wet gear, Mike stoically set up the mountain radio in the rain. He organised the mountain radio guys to book a taxi van to



Thank-you Rapid Creek Hut!



Cable-way over the Hokitika River

pick us up from the road end. A pretty good service this mountain radio!

DAY SEVEN

Our final day was uneventful, the highlight being a really long cable-way across the Hokitika River that required us to crank each other across. It rained most of the day and we were all soaking wet again by the time we reach civilisation.

Civilisation came disconcertingly quickly in the form of a large DOC parking area complete with toilets, a shelter, and some informative displays. We huddled under the shelter to keep dry, a smelly bedraggled crew blocking the view of the information boards for the tourists who regularly arrived. The main attraction there was a highly-groomed walk that ended with a spectacular lookout over the river.

Finally our 'taxi' arrived – actually a bus. Mike had wisely kept large amounts of cash to pay for our trip back to Hokitika. Once there we booked into a backpackers to await the arrival of the other group. To my surprise there was still hot water left even after the others had finished their showers. What luxury!

This was one of the longest trips I've done, and it was very satisfying getting into country that I didn't even know existed. And maybe one day some of us will make it to the elusive Mungo Hut.



REFLECTIONS

by TONY GAZLEY

I had it all planned. The weather outlook was perfect and the trip was definitely possible...

I had been along parts of the ridges before so now it was simply a matter of joining them all up. I had even allowed an extra half day in case things turned out to be a bit more difficult than expected, given that it was mid-winter.

I started up Bealey Spur with the sun shining from a clear blue sky above and the mist gradually clearing from the Waimakariri Valley below. It was a couple of easy hours through the delightful beech forest to the snug Bealey Hut where I took a short break. Then on upwards to leave the bush behind and to the start of a problem that took me a bit by surprise. The snow I had hoped would be reasonably

compacted was instead deep and soft and with a wind crust that broke every second or third step. This was frustrating as I was constantly struggling to get out of a deep hole, only to crash back down within a couple of steps. I continued on hoping that things would get better higher up and I could start to make some reasonable headway.

But it didn't really improve much at all. There would be short stretches where the snow was firm and the walking easy only to have the dreaded crust return and the pace slow again to a pathetic crawl. And while the ridge ahead, to the skyline and around to the Mottram Peaks where I was heading, still looked a long way I was determined not to give up too quickly.

Finally I stopped for a late lunch and took stock of where I was. And I had to admit to myself progress had been pitifully slow and I was nowhere near where I needed to be to finish the trip in the time I had, even with the extra half day - I would need an extra half week at the speed I was going.

Reluctantly I decided going on was not an option. I had to go back and think of something else to do in the next couple of days. Slowly making my way back down I mulled over the possibilities until it suddenly became clear - I wouldn't do anything else. I would simply take two days to get back the short distance I had already covered. I would just camp wherever, and do whatever I felt like at the time. The view was wonderful where I was and I was in no hurry to get down too far, so when I passed a small area where the ridge had been blown clear of snow I pitched my tent.

There was still a few hours of warm late-afternoon sunshine so I wandered to the tops of some of the nearby bumps on the ridge and took a few photos before just sitting and taking in the wonderful views in all directions. Later I watched the sun dip below the distant peaks and felt the temperature suddenly drop. As the first few stars appeared I crept into my sleeping bag and cooked my tea in the open doorway of the tent. I slept for a few hours then got up, struggled into frozen boots and wandered along the ridge to a high point. The sky was inky black and there were myriad stars. The view was enchanting - snowy peaks shone eerily against the blackness, and it was utterly still and quiet. I stayed for an hour or so unable to leave such a magical scene, but eventually the cold got the better of me and I



Wonderful views from the tops

slowly made my way back down. I slept well in the tent which didn't give the smallest flap during the night it was so completely calm.

In the morning, I was out of the tent well before daylight and climbed back to my viewpoint to watch the sky lighten from black, to delicate pastel shades of lilac then crimson, before the sun appeared over the furthest hills in a blazing golden light. Again the view was enchanting. I thought how the disappointment of turning back yesterday from my planned adventure had now turned into something like a perfect mountain experience.

Once the sun had risen higher the day felt warm and I could comfortably sit on a rock while I had breakfast. With nothing planned except to walk down to the flat area in the tussock below, where there were some pleasant looking tarns, I could take just as long as I liked to do whatever I liked.

Later in the morning, I packed and headed down to below the snowline and then across the tussock to the tarns. I dropped my pack and searched around for a campsite - not just any campsite but the perfect one. And it was under a single lonely beech tree that promised to be just what I was looking for. At the head of the valley were the Mottram Peaks shone snowy-white against a clear



The perfect campsite



blue sky. In other directions were the tranquil tarns without the slightest ripple to disturb the surface, and behind them were high hills with a touch of snow remaining from the last storm.

I pitched my tent while a bellbird quartet sung from the branches just above me. It was warm in the sunshine and I scattered my gear around to dry without any worry of it blowing away - there wasn't even the slightest puff of air. Then a kea joined me. It tried to land on my sleeping bag which had been thrown over a large tussock, but missed its footing and slid to the ground in a flurry of wings and legs. It picked itself up then did it again - it seemed like fun. But twice was enough and it flew away in answer to its mate calling from somewhere high above. I thought of all the other wonderful camps I'd had and decided that this was certainly up with the best.

I filled in the afternoon without any cares just wandering wherever - around the tarns both big and small, through the open beech forest surrounding the open golden tussock, and then just sitting listening to the songs of more bellbirds. Again I watched the sun dip below the high peaks and felt the air instantly chill, and as on the previous evening I cooked tea from my sleeping bag. Later the frogs in the tarns started croaking - first from one pond then answering from another. Then moreporks began calling from each side of the valley. It was all rather like a wonderful dream that you hoped would never end.

I had a few hours sleep and then once again struggled

into frozen boots for a walk around the tarns. The views were even more entrancing than the previous night with the mirror calm water reflecting a thousand bright stars. I stayed a few hours transfixed by the scene, the dim snowy peaks and the countless stars above, and the sounds of the forest, the calls of the frogs and the moreporks and the soft murmurings of some ducks as they glided slowly across the tarn. But eventually the cold became too uncomfortable and I retreated to my tent.

It was colder than the previous night and the tent had a layer of ice on the inside by early morning so it was easy enough to get out before dawn to watch the changing light as the sun rose. Each tarn reflected a different view, high snow covered mountains, glowing golden tussock covered hillsides, forests of beech, and all with a bright blue sky. Some of the smaller tarns were quite thickly frozen and small plants were coated with delicate feathers of frost. Each reflection seemed better than the last and I spent until late morning just walking from one to another and back again not wanting the magic kaleidoscope to ever end. But all dreams do end and eventually I had to drag myself away early afternoon and head back to the road and eventually home.

I had not spent such enjoyable days in the mountains for a long time - and even if the trip really was a total failure in terms of my original plans, I can't wait for the next one.

COULOIR PEAK

ARROWSMITHS RANGE

by **MIKE SCHIER**
with **BRENDAN ECKERT, KATY GLENIE,**
and **MIKE PHETHEAN**

Last year I went on one of David Jewell's trips to climb Mt. Arrowsmith (2781m) via the South Cameron Glacier (East Face). I remember that it was pissing down all day long on the way in, and we slept pretty much the entire second day due to snow fall.

On the third day, however, we got pretty good weather but the snow conditions were far from ideal (we sank up to 1m in the snow) and we ended up turning around 300m below summit and running home the day after.

Despite having bad luck with the weather, I kept the Arrowsmith Range in good memory as the way in is quite nice (not a nightmare with heavy packs), the hut has an awesome purple colour, and most importantly, there are 15+ peaks which can be climbed from there.

All that made me put up a trip there on this year's schedule, with no particular peak in mind. With the trip date coming closer and the usual suspects (Brendan, Katy, and Mike) signing up, I asked Mr. Google for some nice pictures of the Arrowsmith Range, and one of the first hits was the south route onto Couloir Peak (2642m). It instantly caught my eye as the route is super obvious - a big couloir going from the Upper Cameron Glacier all the way to the top - so no way for me to mess up navigation.

After the usual procedure - flying to Christchurch, rental car to Lake Heron, walk in - we arrived at Cameron

Hut on Saturday afternoon with a day of mint climbing ahead of us and a decent weather report in our pockets. According to the hut book one would roughly expect one party per month, so we were quite surprised to meet not one but two groups there. However, space turned out not to be an issue, and one of the groups comprised of girls which was a pleasant diversion for Brendan.

For the next day, we decided to split up as Katy and Mike wanted to climb Mt. Arrowsmith rather than Couloir Peak. So an alpine start saw us four leaving the hut together under a clear night sky; Brendan and me heading up the main valley via the Cameron Glacier, whereas Team K&M scrambled up the moraine ramp to reach the main snow field below Mt. Arrowsmith. Concerns about the snow freeze luckily did not eventuate and we worked our way up onto the upper glacier at a decent speed. After crossing a crevasse that separated the couloir from the main glacier, we climbed two ice steps which were described as the crux of the route, and steadily plucked our way to the ridge. From there the actual top was only a 20 metre hop away, so we sat down to have an extended lunch and absorb the stunning 360 degree view. Every now and then we tried to spot Mike and Katy, but with no luck. Black dots, which we believed to be them, turned out to merely be rocks after not seeing them move for a while.

After lunch we carefully traversed to the top, where I tried to recover the ice screw that had reportedly been left behind by a Canterbury climbing party a week earlier, again with no success.

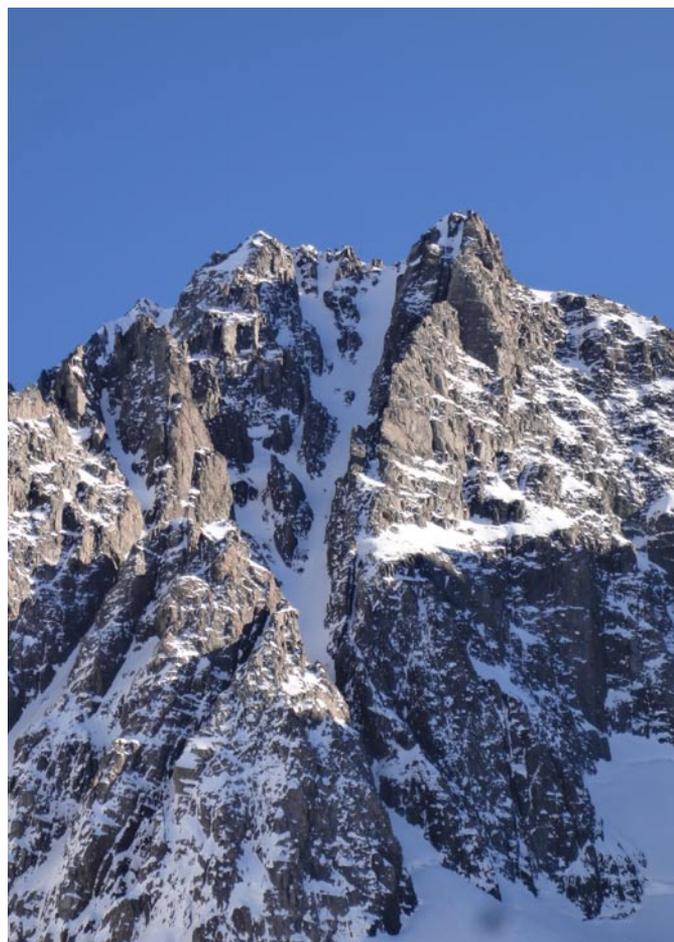
We went back to the hut the same way without incident and met up with the other two who had come back a bit early. It turned out that they had to fight with poor snow conditions and loose rocky ground underfoot on



Walking in to Cameron Hut



Cameron Hut in the foreground looking towards the Cameron Glacier



Couloir Peak

their way up, so had turned back.

After some sunbathing and fixing the hut radio, Mike and I decided to go for another early start the next day to climb the west face to the ridge of Tent Peak before heading out to the car. However, soft snow on one of the vertical bits of the route made us turn around half way; but nonetheless it was quite nice to get at least something done for the day as the weather was as brilliant as the day before.

In summary, it was one of the best trips so far in NZ as all the three core ingredients were right - destination, weather, and company!



MANY HAPPY RETURNS

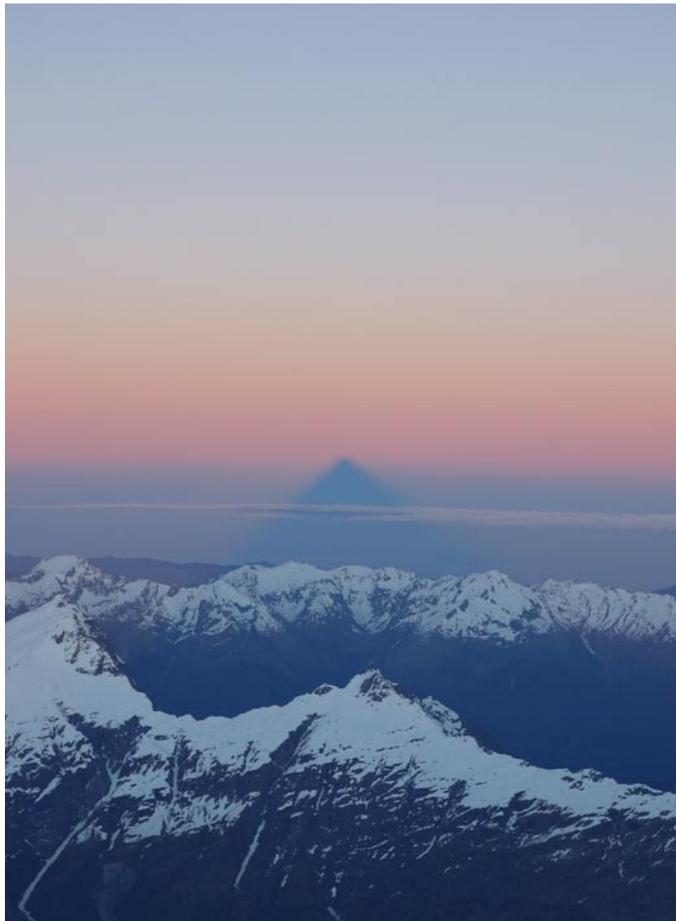
by SHARRON CAME
Photos SHARRON CAME and DAVID JEWELL

As my crampons scrape across the last of the sastrugi coated ridge I'm aware of two things. The sky is lightening with the promise of dawn and there is not much slope between us and the star-sprinkled sky above. In the stillness of a fine, calm morning snowy peaks stretch out below us in every direction; icing on the cake punctuated by the cappuccino froth cloud nestling on the valley floors...



Suddenly there is nothing solid above us. I'm surprised that we can stand comfortably and look around; surprised at how quickly we got here once we crested the main ridge and surprised by how far we can see in every direction. The size of DJ's grin is evidence this experience doesn't have a use by date. You wouldn't guess he's been here twice before. We stand in silence listening to the silence taking in the 360 degree view. Minutes fly by while we're lost in memories associated with the various landmarks below, familiar acquaintances from years spent visiting this favourite national park. The feeling is a bit like being transported back to a childhood birthday party – a long period of anticipation followed by events unfolding to deliver an experience even more amazing than you wished or imagined.

Sunlight begins to smudge the horizon, lighting up the sky and colouring the snow icing pink, tangerine and yellow. One by one, like a series of candles on a birthday cake, the snow-coated peaks around us start to glow, ignited by the soft dawn light. The chunky shape of Mt Cook is easily identifiable. Closer to home the twin peaks of Mt Earnslaw remind me of a couple of roller coaster ascents to Esquilant Biv followed by quick descents with bad weather



hard on our heels. Mt Brewster is above the clouds stirring memories of a broken crampon, a long exposed summit ridge, unfinished business.

I cry out in delight as I notice the sunrise is casting a pink reflection of the summit triangle of Aspiring onto the Western horizon. The shadow starts off small then gets bigger and darker before fading as rapidly as it appeared as the light flexes its muscles. For an unforgettable 10-15 minutes we watch light sweep the sky, the mountains and the valleys. What a great way to celebrate ascending a special mountain.

Climbing folklore is littered with stories of the heroic walk in and summit attempts thwarted by bad weather followed by a miserable retreat.

I'd wanted to climb Aspiring since I saw it on my first tramp in the park named after it, an epic Xmas trip undertaken in my student days. Our route is now called the Five Passes, but back then it was known simply as the Beans Burn-Rock Burn. I've returned to the park many times and each trip has been memorable. I recall the feeling of relief mixed with a fresh appreciation for New Zealand wilderness I experienced over three weeks spent exploring the Shotover Saddle, east Matukituki and the Albert Burn, immersed in the beauty, solitude, remoteness plus the challenge of juggling route-finding with unpredictable weather and rough terrain. All in stark contrast to the several months of crowded, scheduled, well-trodden paths of trekking and climbing I'd just ticked off in Nepal. In 2010 from our campsite on Cascade Saddle we looked across to Mt Aspiring and watched the sunset light it up in spectacular fashion. Climbing Mt Liverpool the next day I resolved it was time to try Mt Aspiring again. (DJ and I first headed up together during Easter of 2007 but we, along with everyone else, abandoned our summit attempt after a big storm coated the mountain in verglas).

The walk in to the bottom of Aspiring is brutal. You have two choices. Either head up the West Matukituki to Pearl Flat then keep going to the head of the valley where the route culminates in a tricky rock climb up waterfalls

Mt Aspiring casts a triangular shadow in the dawn light

and steep slopes to Bevan Col. Or take the slightly easier route by way of French Ridge and the Breakaway or Quarterdeck then across the Bonar Glacier. Both options require solid tramping, scrambling and climbing skills, good fitness and great resilience. They are challenging enough in themselves, let alone in winter conditions with packs full of food to last several days plus climbing kit. For these reasons, plus the unsettled nature of NZ weather many climbers fly to Bevan Col just one hour's walk across the Bonar Glacier to Colin Todd hut or a bivy site near a preferred route. Most people walk out via French Ridge. Climbing folklore is littered with stories of the heroic walk in and summit attempts thwarted by bad weather followed by a miserable retreat.

Being older climbers and hence slightly richer, and well versed in the fickleness of NZ weather we flew. This decision was made easier because my brother was coming with us. John is an experienced trumper but working on a farm means he only gets to the mountains once or twice a year. We had taken him for a crash course in ice axe and crampon use culminating in an ascent of Tahurangi a few months prior to our trip.

So, after assembling in Wanaka, we organised our flight up to the Bonar. After an anxious morning waiting to see if the cloud would lift high enough, we met our chopper at Aspiring Flats and were soon deposited on Bevan Col. From here we descended to the glacier and roped up for John's first experience of glacier travel. We crossed the Bonar glacier without incident and we were soon settled inside Colin Todd Hut. John immediately befriended an Australian pair, who returned to the hut shortly after we arrived, tired from a practice climb on a nearby peak. When they asked whether he would be climbing the mountain the following day (they had been told by their guide they needed another day of practice), John looked

shocked and replied "Oh no, I've got two young children". Worried looks crossed their faces before we all burst into fits of laughter. Their guide was a little slower to see the funny side.

We retired early, determined to leave Colin Todd at 4 a.m. to minimise the chances of encountering soft snow while descending The Ramp. We had a full moon and despite mild temperatures the snow was sufficiently firm for us to make rapid progress back onto the Bonar where we followed the easy crevassed slopes to the base of The Ramp. If you can get across the bergschrund at the base this route effectively cuts the corner on the main ridge providing relatively steep (45-55 degrees), but direct access to the main ridge.

Our early start turned out to be a stroke of genius, not due to the snow conditions but because we arrived at the top at the same time as the sunrise. At 4.30 a.m. we didn't know this however, and DJ was muttering about how more light and more sleep would have assisted route selection. I was happy to jump the bergschrund at the base of The Ramp under the cover of darkness and then head up a slightly steeper line than necessary to join the NW ridge proper!

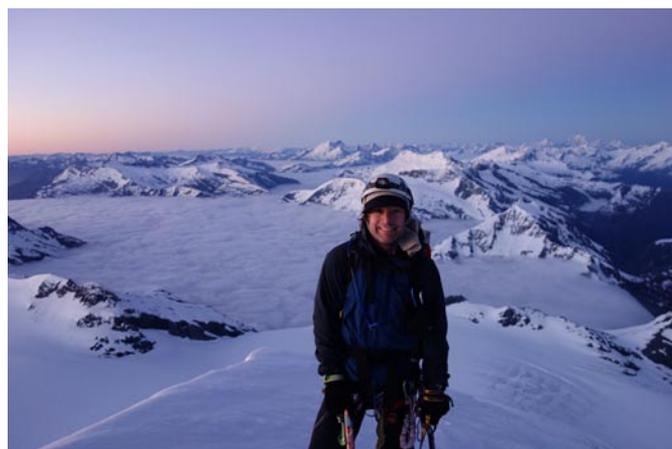
I'd read many stories of parties underestimating The Ramp, particularly on the descent. This is easy to do particularly if you ascend by a different route, are in "I'm nearly home" mode, and either underestimate the extent to which the snow softens as the sun warms it and/or fail to appreciate that the terrain steepens as you get closer to the bottom. The ascent though is relatively straightforward provided you concentrate and find your rhythm. We got our pacing right and paused only briefly when we reached the main NW ridge to shake out our hands before continuing.

Four hours after leaving the hut we had our summit

Colin Todd Hut with Mt Aspiring in the background



David on the summit



sunrise. Elated as I was to have been to the top, I was anxious about descending The Ramp given its reputation. We had a short discussion about whether to rope up but decided to start out soloing. DJ was comfortable soloing while I was fairly comfortable but wanting to hedge my bets, not yet experienced enough to judge how I'd feel on the steeper section. I would have preferred slightly less ice or slightly more technical tools. Heading up a steep slope is quite a different feeling to down-climbing, this is partly due to the inevitable fatigue on descent but perhaps the bigger factor is that no imagination is required to picture what will happen if you slip.

Another time in similar conditions I'd solo The Ramp



Sharron on the summit

but half way down I reflected that we had plenty of time thanks to our early start and quick ascent and I was about to head off on an alpine course for which I had done very little practice using a rope. I suggested the lower half of The Ramp was a good place to get the rope out and practice. DJ kindly agreed.

What followed was a seemingly endless period of digging in, constructing snowstake anchors and then down-climbing while being belayed by DJ, stopping making myself safe, belaying DJ down to my anchor point then setting off again. This was all excellent practice and I'm glad I did it because it was tough. The snow was hard enough to make digging a platform a mission. Getting the ropes right and setting the anchor properly took lots of care and attention. I got cold hands and sore calves. I struggled to be patient and make good decisions. At times grumpy, hungry and scared, I recognised this was definitely what I needed—the discomfort associated with pushing my climbing boundaries. The angle of the slope left no room for error. I counted my blessings. It could have been

colder, it could have been steeper and DJ could have been less patient.

We reached a spot near the bottom of The Ramp only to discover my pitching had led us away from where we needed to be to re-cross the bergschrund. I'd guided us to an unpromising site above some nasty looking rocks and a big drop off. Cue some deep breathing from me as I tried not to panic. DJ calmly took in the scene, he'd been advising me to pitch left for some time. After a few minutes thought and a little bit of scouting, DJ found a spot from which to set up a belay. He lowered me down and across to a better position. I organised the rope while he down climbed to join me and led the way as we soloed the final section of The Ramp to the bergschrund.

Getting ourselves back across the bergschrund was more difficult than ascending it. DJ put me on belay and I lowered myself into the bergschrund and wiggled and levered myself across to the far side of it, digging in enough to get my balance so I could shuffle sideways along its lip and guide DJ down. The main problem was we couldn't see where to put our feet and if we'd fallen into the bergschrund getting out would be problematic. We crossed the bergschrund just as the sun hit The Ramp. From the far lip it was easy travel to the glacier below. We stopped a couple of times to shed clothing and eat jelly beans as it was now hot and we were wading through soft snow.

We arrived back at the hut at noon, eight hours after we set off. After lunch and a snooze we wandered up Shipowner Ridge with John. The following day we walked across the Bonar in perfect conditions and made it to French Ridge in time for lunch. Here I left John and DJ to enjoy a night in the hut followed by a night at Liverpool Biv and headed out to the road end to sort out my gear for my alpine skills course. The walk out was long and hot but as my spirits were still soaring in the clouds above, very pleasant. With each footstep I reflected on the highlights of a very special trip and plotted a return trip to do the classic route, the south west ridge of Aspiring. Our good luck and timing was underlined by the fact that our Australian friends were unable to summit on the day after we did despite perfect conditions. One of them caught a virus necessitating a helicopter evacuation. I hope they get a chance return to Aspiring and realise their dream of climbing it.

TRIALS AND ERRORS

by SHARRON CAME
photos DAVID JEWELL

"The next time you're planning a trip to the backcountry, your enthusiasm sparked by some glossy coffee-table book picturing snow-capped peaks under perfect blue skies, you would do well to keep in mind whence that glorious snowpack came. It is the nature of mountains to wring from the winds what moisture they happen to be carrying." **John Krakauer**

My first attempt to climb Mt Brewster took place in early 2013. First though, we had to wait out the summer storm that cut off the West Coast and stranded tourists and locals, along with a few WTMC'ers in Franz Joseph. While there are few places that rival Wanaka if weather forces confinement, we were well and truly ready for the hills when the Haast River was finally fordable.

The first time we checked the river, on New Year's Day, it was still flowing fast and deep so we returned to Wanaka. A further 24 hours made all the difference and we were able to cross safely from Fantail Flats and haul our packs through beech forest then tussock to Brewster Hut. The climb is 'staircase direct' but the views of the Makarora Valley, Mt Armstrong and Brewster quickly erase any memories of physical exertion.

Next morning we left the hut at 6:30am, quite late for what we had planned going by the accounts recorded in the hut book. I recall doing many things during our Wa-



Crossing the Haast River in low flow

naka confinement but route research was not one of them; nor was checking the state of my gear. At least we had visibility which was useful. Despite a smattering of cairns marking the way, the ascent and sidle around the slopes of Armstrong, via a series of narrow rock benches, tussock, rubble and waterfalls, to the glacial lakes and Brewster Glacier itself is not easy to pick out. The trick is to traverse at between 1750 -1800m - something we worked out by a process of elimination.

At the glacier toe we put on our crampons and roped up. About a third of the way up the glacier I noticed there was something wrong with my right foot. Bending down for a closer look I saw that the crampon bail had snapped in half. Should we turn back? We'd come so far, I was feeling pretty confident and the snow was not icy. People used to climb mountains before crampons were invented I thought, how hard can it be?

We completed our glacier crossing to the West Ridge and commenced our ascent; DJ leading the way, cutting

steps where possible. I followed, favouring my left foot. As it was mid-summer much of the snow had melted off the ridge exposing the rock below. We made slow but steady progress as the day heated up. After a few tricky traverses across steep snow ridges it was back to mixed climbing. DJ went ahead to check out possible descent routes as he was worried about retracing our steps. The climbing was definitely awkward and seemed harder than the grade 2 rating assigned to the route.

At noon, still a couple of bumps from the summit proper, we made the decision to turn around. To get to the summit would require at least one rope length of pitching and we didn't know whether we'd be able to abseil off the summit down the South Face, as we had heard that this option gets cut off in summer when the bergschrund opens up. If we couldn't abseil off safely we would be looking at a very long, tedious descent down the West Ridge with the possibility that we would not reach the glacier before dark. Retreating seemed the prudent option.

The views from the summit ridge were spectacular, offering a unique perspective looking along the spine of the main divide towards Mt Cook. The scenery certainly helped motivate me, although I noticed it less than I normally would because I spent most of my time watching where I put my right foot. I guess those early mountaineers didn't spend a lot of time admiring the views either.

It was a good thing that we turned around when we did as descending with one crampon was much more challenging than ascending. The snow was softer now and consequently less stable underfoot. Down-climbing felt very insecure. I was relieved when we had descended far enough to abseil off the West Ridge to the glacier. However, abseiling was quickly abandoned when it became apparent that it was both quicker and safer just to down-climb the soft snow.

Back on flat ground we walked quickly across the glacier to the lakes where we rested and ate a very late lunch while enjoying the view across to Mt Aspiring, Rob Roy and Mt Avalanche. This would be a superb camp spot we thought – scenic and no need to locate rock ledges by feel and traverse rubble and waterfalls in the dark. We also noted the rock walls built by climbers for that precise purpose.



Almost a year later, we again slogged up to Brewster Hut. This time we carried on past the hut and set up camp at the glacial lakes. This is a five star camping spot even if you have no summit ambitions. It reminded me a little of Cascade Saddle though the latter is probably very busy in

the middle of summer. Both campsites offer marvellous views of iconic Mt Aspiring National Park landscapes for relatively little effort.

This time we decided we'd try the South Face of



Camping by the glacial lakes

Brewster. This route is graded 2+ and I was on a mission to tick off 2+ routes, but the main reason for selecting this route was that it looked a lot quicker and easier than the West Ridge and it was covered in snow – no mucking around with mixed climbing. The South Face is steeper than the West Ridge but still only 40-45 degrees. I checked my crampons carefully before we headed up given I was now experienced enough to know exactly how hard descending steep slopes is without them.

Determined to give ourselves plenty of time we set off as soon as it was light. It took us no time at all to cross the glacier. It was well filled in so we didn't rope up. At the base of the South Face we selected the most benign looking snow gully and headed up. We thought we may have



DJ on the climb

to pitch the top bit, but it turned out to be okay with two tools so we continued in this mode to the top. The last couple of hundred metres required front pointing and my calves were screaming by the time we topped out. Travel was as quick as anticipated and we were on the summit a couple of hours after leaving our campsite. There was a stiff southerly blowing so lingering held little appeal. Plus the weather was on the turn with cloud beginning to pile in from the west.

We were a little concerned about getting down the



On the summit

South Face but the snow was firm thanks to the cold conditions. We were able to follow the summit ridge for a bit and then select a good spot to down climb from. Initially the down climbing was steep and demanding but the slope angle reduced quickly and we were able to make a methodical and uneventful retreat to the floor of the glacier.

We were back at our campsite in time for morning tea. We timed things perfectly as the summit was now obscured by thickening cloud. After packing up we headed back towards Brewster Hut. DJ had a sore knee by now. It got steadily worse as we made our way across to the ridge high above Brewster Hut. After an hour with the heavy packs climbing then descending uneven ground, DJ was in a lot of pain. We stopped for some first aid and rejigged the gear so most of it was in one pack. I took that pack and headed down ahead of DJ, before he followed with the other pack after resting for a bit. We considered staying the night at Brewster Hut to rest the knee but it was only noon and it seemed unlikely it would come right overnight. We decided it was best to get the descent over and done with. Sitting around would just give it time to seize up completely. The next couple of hours were very long, painful ones for DJ. The descent from Brewster Hut



The author

is bad for quads but unlike knees at least you can stretch and massage then afterwards. It is horrible for knees. I reached the car first and packed away my gear then headed back up to relieve DJ of his pack.

It was great to climb Mt Brewster on our second attempt. The South Face is slightly more technical and hence a better climb than the West Ridge. Because the route was quick, we were able to utilise our narrow weather window to get up and down before visibility was compromised, and this being our second attempt we'd learnt from the mistakes we made the first time round. Although Brewster is highly accessible by New Zealand standards, like the rest of our backcountry it should not be underestimated.

7 BROCKEN SPECTRES IN ONE DAY

by JENNY COSSEY

photos JENNY COSSEY and PAULA MacFARLAND

Heather Jock Hut

To avoid the congestion, bustle and noise of Queenstown in the school holidays, a wee gem of a trip is a short 30 minute drive west of the town along Lake Wakatipu. Three kilometres before Glenorchy is the Mt Judah Track heading into the Richardson Ranges, Whakaari Conservation Area. During the Land Tenure Review process the area was deemed to be of national historic importance and in 2009 DOC obtained seven huts and the Judah/McIntosh mines, perched on the mountainsides 1000 metres above sea level.

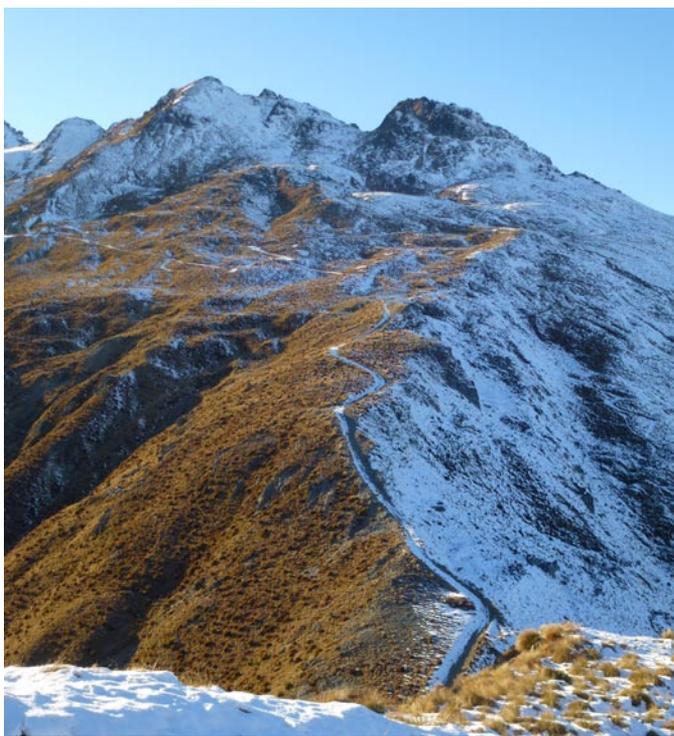
DOC has preserved the huts. The slowly re-vegetating workings remain as a reminder of the ingenuity of the scheelite mining industry miners who lived in the area until the 1960s hand-picking or dangerously blasting the ore from the land before dragging it by horse sledges and tractors down to the valley floor. (Scheelite is a mineral used for hardening steel gun barrels). Of the seven huts, four are now deemed historic (suitable for day use only) and three are suitable for overnight stays, although none

have heating. Each of the seven huts has its own quirky features and can be visited on foot or by mountain bike in a weekend. Seven huts in two days was a good hut bagging goal for Paula and myself.

From the car park a climb leads up onto the old Mt Judah road, which sidles around the northern side of Mt Judah passing the remains of the Glenorchy Scheelite Battery and the State Mine, last operated in the 1960s. Continuing up the road, past The Junction, the track crosses the Bonnie Jean Creek to the historic Jean Hut (day use only) with its rocks 'dripping off' the roof to stop the tin flying away.

A marked track follows an old mining road up a zig-zag to the Heather Jock Hut (three bunks) with its eight pane glass front door. We left our packs here and wandered up the four-wheel drive track until it petered out.

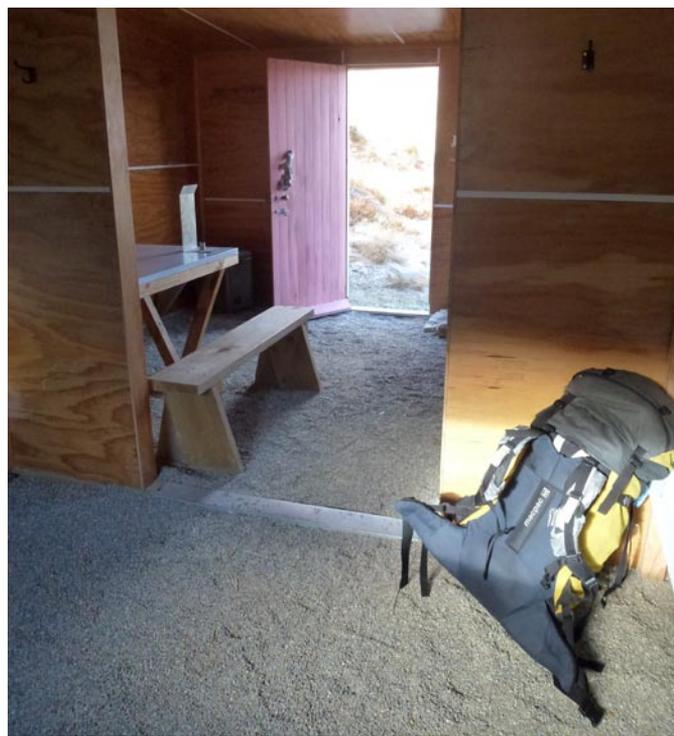
With ice axes in hand, we climbed the snowy ridge to Mt Alaska with stunning views to Mt Larkins and the snow filled western basins used by heli-skiers. As we did



Mount Alaska

not have a rope I was quite glad we decided to turn back rather than continue along the arête ridge to the higher peak of Mt Larkin. We returned to a cold night in the hut. Dinner ensured our full bellies stoked our internal heating systems until the sun rose the next morning to warm us, but not the frozen water tank which required the icy surface to be smashed by ice axes. We were very glad we had filled the billy and water bottles the previous evening for the morning brew.

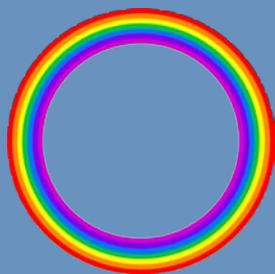
The following day we descended the same track before sidling down and across to the Bonnie Jean Hut (day use only) with its adjacent tractor shed, untouched since the 1960s. All the mementoes left as found, a museum behind iron bars.



McIntyre Hut's pea-stone gravel floor

Descending to Boozer Hut (aptly named after its last inhabitant) we found a dead kid outside on the grass with a nanny bleating near-by. This hut was moved by DOC from its previous site 100m uphill as it was deemed to be in a landslip area. The historic items inside the hut were carefully replaced in the same position after the relocation.

From The Junction we follow the steeply dropping marked track down to the Buckler Burn with its huge icicle covered walls of rock. A steady climb up an old mining road led to McIntyre Hut (three bunks). The external pink paintwork matched the pink hue in the sunset. This was my first visit to a hut with a pea-stone gravel floor. Neatly raked, it required no sweeping and no condemnation from anyone about wearing crampons inside. How-



A Brocken spectre (German Brockengespenst), also called Brocken bow or mountain spectre, is the apparently enormous and magnified shadow of an observer, cast upon the upper surfaces of clouds opposite the sun. The phenomenon can appear on any misty mountainside or cloud bank, or even from an aeroplane, but the frequent fogs and low-altitude accessibility of the Brocken, a peak in the Harz Mountains in Germany, have created a local legend from which the phenomenon draws its name. The Brocken spectre was observed and described by Johann Silberschlag in 1780, and has since been recorded often in literature about the region. However, it can be seen in any mountain region.
(Definition from Wikipedia)



McIntosh Hut and McIntosh Peak



Brocken spectre

ever, late night visitors heading to the toilet would wake everyone with the loud crunch crunching, however quietly they tried to tip-toe.

Further up the hill below McIntosh are the two McIntosh Huts. One is historic and draughty, the other a four-bunk hut with a bar and wonderful sink. We left our packs there to ascend McIntosh with axes, crampons being required for the summit 10 metres.

Collecting our packs we descended to Long Gully Saddle and a steep climb along the ridge gave superb views of Lake Wakatipu, Mt Earnslaw/Pikirakatahi, and the Dart Valley. The descent from here back to the Glenorchy road and the car is not recommended for mountain bikes as it is steep and unformed and follows a ridge fence line with steep drop-offs which would not be desirable in steep snow. But on this day as our shadows danced on the valley cloud, our first Brocken spectre appeared. Slowly four more complete rings circled our dancing shadows and a further three broken arcs surrounded us, seven brocken spectre rings in one moment with the distant peaks beyond in blue skies.

ISLANDS AND ICECAPS IN

ICELAND

by **SUE WALSH**



Sue at the Jokulsarlon glacial lagoon

When I left Iceland and Greenland five years ago I knew that no matter what, I had to go back. So, one sunny afternoon in July of this year I found myself getting off a plane in Keflavik at the international airport in Iceland. Eamonn was already in the country having completed a trek with some mates and would be meeting me that evening.

The next day, after picking up Eamonn and the rental car, we set off for six days of adventure along the south coast. We were heading to Hella and ended up by taking a rather circuitous route as a friend of Eamonn's joined us for the afternoon.

The next morning we went to the Vestmannaeyjar Islands which number around a dozen, however, the only one you can actually get to is Heimaey. The people of Heimaey got a rude shock early one morning in late 1973 when a volcano decided to erupt almost literally on their back doorstep. The images were shown around the world and as a young girl I watched them wondering how you could have fire and ice at the same time. Those images stayed with me over the years so it was quite exciting to finally get there. The other exciting part of going to Heimaey was to see the puffins that nest in the cliffs around the islands.

The ferry trip was quick – just 45 minutes from the

new terminal. It was interesting watching the different islands come into view with their weird and wonderful volcanic shapes. Once in Heimaey, I booked a boat trip to go around the island bird-watching while Eamonn went off to walk up a number of small peaks.

The boat trip started and I found myself a place to stand that was as protected as possible from the elements, without being inside. The harbour of Heimaey is distinctly unattractive with fish factories on the waterfront. However, these soon disappeared from sight as did the houses. Due to a lack of trees you could clearly see the shape of the island with the different colours of volcanic rock – red being a dominant colour. Soaring black cliffs were capped with emerald green grass on seemingly impossibly steep angles with sheep dotted all over them. Birds soared through the air and sat on nests. The smell of the sea was at times overpowered by the smell of guano. As we worked our way around the main island the other islands came into sight. One had sheer cliffs going up for what seemed a good hundred metres ending in a basin with what looked like mown lawn with a farm house in the middle. Access up to the house was not obvious. As we carried on our journey we slowed down near an area that again had soaring cliffs, but this time something man-made showed up. Bolts had been put into the rock to

form an artificial staircase leading up to the grassed area. That must have been how the isolated farm house was reached.

We went past a puffin breeding colony, but they were so far away they were only white dots on the hillside; then the boat was surrounded by small fast flying birds. Just as I caught a glimpse of a colourful beak and recognised it as a puffin, we were told we were surrounded by puffins. It was so exciting!

As we progressed around the island we stopped at three different caves and gently floated into each. The caves were quite sizable and colourful with red and green tinges in the rock. In the last cave the engines were turned off and one of the crew came up on deck with a saxophone and played “Amazing Grace” – the acoustics were wonderful and he got a great reception.



One of the caves on Heimaey Island

Back at the port, I met up with Eamonn and we decided to call it quits as the weather wasn't improving and everything seemed shut. My reading had failed to say that on Sundays, Heimaey is closed. We changed our return tickets and left on the next sailing. It was disappointing to have to cut our visit short.

The next day we made our way to Skaftafell National Park. We stopped at some places of interest along the way and eventually pulled into the campsite in the early afternoon. Before leaving for Iceland I'd been trying to find hostel accommodation but everything was booked out. Eamonn wasn't too concerned and was happy to camp, but I was set up for hostel accommodation; not camping. Eamonn was able to secure some extra gear from one of his mates which was helpful. Once the tents were up,

Eamonn shot off to do a circular track and I meandered up to Svaitifoss (a waterfall) where I wanted to get a shot I'd missed last time. The track, like the camping ground, was packed with tourists. I found it quite overwhelming as there was no getting away from people. The south coast of Iceland is always the more popular place but the sheer number was a bit much. I got to the waterfall, got my shots and then went back down. Eamonn wasn't due back for some hours so I decided to have an early dinner as I hadn't had lunch. I couldn't find my sharp knife anywhere so had to resort to using the spork to cut my veges. Then I realised Eamonn had the tin can opener, so my nice meal of tuna pasta with veges quickly became a dull meal with pasta and badly cut veges with huge chunks of garlic – not really the best. I was writing up my diary when Eamonn returned. For some reason he'd decided to run the bulk of the track so did it in around three hours rather than the usual six hours. He was quite amused by my dinner.

Due to the problems with finding accommodation, the plans I'd had for our time on the south coast went to the winds and the next day found us travelling to the Eastern Fjords to stay in a small village called Djupivogur. On the way we stopped at the Jokulsarlon which is a large glacial lagoon on the edge of Vatnajokull National Park. It's an amazing place with small icebergs that have calved off the Breidamerkurjokull. A channel goes down to the sea which some of the icebergs eventually take, some of them making it out to sea while others come to rest on the beach. I didn't have much time here five years ago so was looking forward to a longer visit. After a quick look around Eamonn didn't seem too interested so went back to wait in the car. I strolled along the top of an old moraine wall until I left the bulk of people behind and found a place to sit, watch and take photos. It was quiet and very peaceful. Distance is very deceptive in Iceland and the lagoon, on first looking at it, didn't seem that big, however it is around 4 kms long by 1.5 kms wide and it was packed with icebergs of all shapes and sizes. Seals were swimming in the water and seabirds were flying around, sitting on icebergs and paddling on the water. Off to one side were some guides in kayaks and further in the distance was a yellow boat full of tourists chugging about.

I went down to the shoreline and slowly meandered back, stopping by some small pieces of ice that had washed onto the shore. I threw a couple back in the water then looked closely at another. The ice was crystal clear and must have been hundreds of years old. As is happening in New Zealand, so the glaciers in Iceland are also receding and bit by bit the lagoon is getting wider. It's picture perfect for tourists but of huge concern to others. I



wanted a photo of me by the lagoon and soon found someone approachable to take my photo. With a record of me being there it was back to the car and onto Hofn, then through a long tunnel to emerge into the realm of the fjords and eventually along the long windswept desolate shores until we reached Djupivogur. Here we separated – Eamonn to his tent and me to a hostel. We met for dinner at the hostel and planned our next day; which was to go for a drive further around the coast.

By this time we had both spoken with a number of tourists, and I'd had a long chat with the hostel owner who was talking about the number of tourists coming to Iceland. The Icelandic population is around 350,000 and in 2013 they had over one mil-

Iceland



Travelling to Skalafellsjokull



Sue and Eamonn on the Skalafellsjokull icecap

lion visitors. My impression that things were somewhat different wasn't wrong. Speed was higher on the roads with drivers being less tolerant, it was more expensive as Iceland was coming out of its recession, and there wasn't enough accommodation to cater for the number of tourists. A couple staying at the hostel were both somewhat angry and distressed as their planned holiday was being cut short as they couldn't get accommodation where they wanted – this I could sympathise with and it certainly wasn't the case the last time I was here.

But then, five years is a long time.

The next day Eamonn was keen to go to Papey, an offshore island which is home to many seabirds. We were wait-listed as the boat was full, and it wasn't looking hopeful. Other people at the hostel had mentioned a gravel road that two-wheel drives could go on, and I was curious to see if I could find it. Eamonn wasn't interested so I set off. I'd pulled off to the side to take some photos when I saw a large tour bus turn off and go along a dirt road. This, I thought, could be it, so I followed. It wasn't, but I got excellent views of the fjord and a short walk revealed a small fierce waterfall. I explored a bit further until I got to private property then headed back to the road and found the correct turn off. I texted Eamonn to say I wouldn't be able to make Papey which turned out

I rounded a corner and a sign indicated the road was going up on a 17% gradient. I turned the next corner and the road seemed to go straight up.

to be a good call as they couldn't accommodate us.

I was somewhat nervous as I'd left the map behind and wasn't sure what I was getting myself in for. While I pondered this a number of two-wheel drive cars came off the road so I finally gritted my teeth and set off. Initially the road was flat then it started to go up in a gentle incline gradually getting a bit steeper. I rounded a corner and a sign indicated the road was going up on a 17% gradient. I turned the next corner and the road seemed to go straight up. Thanking my lucky stars I was in an automatic, I gingerly put my foot down and went up the incline which included a hairpin corner before finally easing out. The good weather I'd had

down by the fjord was changing and I was nervous about it raining but I still kept going; it was too exhilarating to turn back. I stopped wherever I could to take photos and eventually got to a height where there were lots of patches of snow. I didn't think I was too high, maybe around 1000 metres, possibly a bit higher, however my latitude was around 64° north (the Arctic Circle is at 66.56° north). The road continued to climb but it was now in gentle undulations. I could just imagine what it would have looked like during the ice age. Drizzle started and I hesitated but the call of the unknown was too great so I kept going. The road was in good condition and there

was light traffic so one eye was carefully fixed on the rear vision mirror so I could pull over whenever another vehicle got too close. The folk at the hostel had talked about the road going by the longest lake in Iceland. When a signpost came up and I saw the place names on it, I knew where I was headed to. I didn't actually want to go there, but the drizzle had let up and the road was on a downwards slope so the wheels kept turning. I went along the side of a small

lake and when the road changed to seal I pulled over and called it quits. The journey back was as much fun and this time I wasn't too fazed about the drizzle. Going down the 17% incline was probably freakier than driving up it, particularly with the hairpin corner. If you weren't careful you'd go straight over the edge.

At dinner that night Eamonn and I compared stories and agreed our departure time for the next day. The weather that day was great and we took our time driving back around the fjords, stopping at different sights. We made good time to Hofn so decided to go onto to Road F985 where four-wheel drives take you up the Skala-fellsjokull. There you have a choice of doing a 4WD tour on the upper reaches of the glacier to a point where the horizon is the icecap, or going on a set path on a skidoo. My choice was the 4WD tour which I'd done on my previous visit and really enjoyed. Eamonn came along too. The drive is quite cool, figuratively and literally. We followed the tracks of previous vehicles and on the odd occasion I got a brief glimpse down into narrow blue slots. The driver said going later in the season could become quite hazardous with the crevasses opening up. We stopped a couple of times for photos and a brief play in the snow before heading back. We had a cuppa at the cafe and then it was back to the car and to the camping ground in Hofn.

We were so lucky with the weather when camping and this night was no exception. From the camp ground there were glaciers in all directions coming down off the icecap. Knowing I would never be going back there again, it was both magical and sad.

Early the next morning I dropped Eamonn at the bus terminal and then drove out to the airport to catch my flight back to Reykjavik. I was so fortunate with the flight as my seat was on the land-side of the plane so had wonderful views over the icecap and to the interior on the other side. It was a magical flight but again tinged with sadness.

Landing in Reykjavik I caught a taxi back to the hotel, sent another parcel home, did some serious shopping and had a scrummy lasagne for dinner. Before I knew it I found myself at another airport the next morning about to head to Greenland; and that is another story (which as it happens, is on page 78).

SVALBARD PHOTO ESSAY

by KATJA RIEDEL

Three years ago I started guiding on cruise ships sailing to the Arctic and Antarctic. I work as a guide, give lectures, drive zodiac boats and lead walks on land.

In the Arctic the presence of polar bears forces us to carry bear bangers and rifles. Tramping is not so relaxing when behind every rock or in every ravine can be a white fluffy sharp-toothed bear but sometimes I manage to find some time to snap my own photos.

The pictures here are from the Arctic season 2013 when I circumnavigated Svalbard, an archipelago north of Norway, six times and cruised from Svalbard to Northeast Greenland and Iceland.



Icebergs get trapped in a narrow channel between Rødeø Island and Milneland, Scoresby Sund, Greenland.

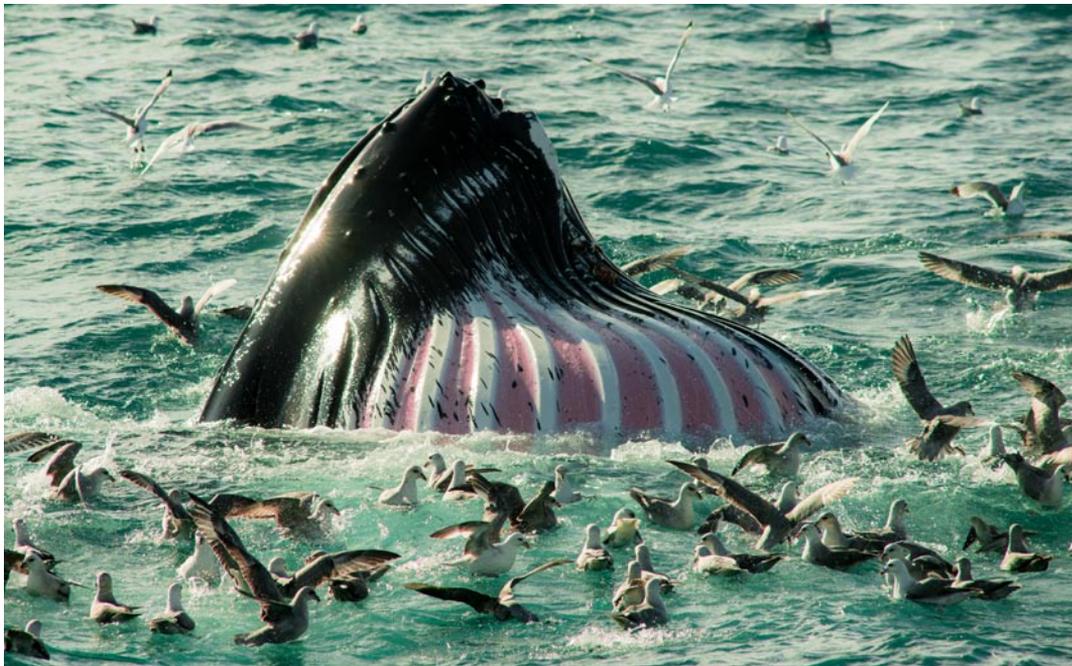
Water lines show the history of the icebergs on their journey, tumbling and turning.

Rødeø Island (meaning Red Island) is named for the red old Devonian sandstone.





A Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) glides along the Svalbard coastline and casts a curious eyes on the ship while lenticular clouds gather in the sky, ominous signs of a coming weather change.



In Liefdefjorden, Svalbard, Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaengliae*) bubble feed, taking huge gulps of water and filtering out krill and small fish with their baleens. Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*) join in on the feeding frenzy.



While sailing from Iceland to Greenland an Aurora Borealis dances over the bridge of Ortelius.



With a roaring thunder a big chunk of ice breaks off from Osbornreen glacier in the spectacular St Jonsfjord, Svalbard.



A curious young female Polar Bear (*Ursus marinus*) approaches the ship, maybe attracted by delicious smells from the galley?

A GLIMPSE OF GREENLAND

by SUE WALSH

Glacier on the island of Kulusuk

Kulusuk is a small island off the east coast of Greenland. I had been there five years ago and had to go back. Last time I was in transit, this time I chose to stay for a while. When I Googled the hotel I had booked, it looked to be in the middle of nowhere when I thought it was located in the local village. When I got there I saw that the hotel was most definitely in the middle of nowhere; although the airport was only a short drive away. The road to the hotel continued past it to the village which was about a 10 to 15 minute walk away, and then it went on to various highpoints. Kulusuk's main claim to fame is the airport which means it is the jumping off point for adventures in East Greenland.

The afternoon I got there was very quiet while I found my feet. The next day I went on a boat trip to see some icebergs with other guests at the hotel. We were at reception at the agreed time. However, the staff had a laid back attitude to things so we waited awhile before they finally appeared, told us where the life jackets were and gave the instructions on where to find the boat. We walked past old sheds down to the water's edge where we found the boat which was operated by a local Inuit. He mimed for us to put the jackets on and get in the boat, then we set off.

The boat slowly crossed the water. At one point I could see a gap between Kulusuk and another island was

choked with icebergs of all sizes. It looked so interesting, but that wasn't our destination. We headed towards a small bay that had two small glaciers in it that went down to the sea. Due to the dangers of ice calving off the glaciers we didn't go in too close. The engine was shut down and we drifted in total peace and semi-silence; soaking in the views and taking photos before turning back.

In the afternoon, fellow tourists and I did a walking tour of the village of Kulusuk with one of the hotel staff. After about seven minutes walking we came upon the cemetery which was on a small hill, which also had a good view. The Inuit don't bury their dead, mainly because the ground is so hard and rocky, so a shallow trough is dug and the deceased person placed in that with stones piled on top. The crosses don't have names on them as they believe the name disappears from the person when they die. There were lots of artificial flowers on the graves adding colour to a sombre place.

The view from the top of the hill was great. Behind us was the airport, swinging around to the other islands and a mountainous horizon, then sweeping views down the coast with the shoreline disappearing in the haze of the afternoon. Big icebergs sat in the water behind the village.

We went back to the road and carried on towards the village going by a small lake on one side. The lake is the main water supply for the town and goes through a puri-



Cemetery on Kulusuk

fier before being pumped into the homes. Carrying on down the road we started to get to the first houses. My eye was caught by a snow mobile parked next to a trampoline with a grave on one side and huskies off to the other side. As we rounded a corner a small cove came into sight and floating in the water tied together were three dead seals. We were informed that the sea is the fridge for the locals.

We wandered through the village which seemed deserted. It was Sunday and apparently the locals don't come out much. If it had been a weekday the place would have been bustling. We walked to one end of the village with the guide pointing out different sights and down towards the water's edge, then back to the centre and down the other road. There were huskies tied up everywhere and they looked amazing, skinny and hungry. We were told they are fed only every three days during summer so they don't put on too much weight. A pup went skulking across the road in front of us and the guide said that pups are left to roam the village until they get too big and dangerous at which point they are tied up.

I looked back the way we had come and the village looked desolate. There was rubbish everywhere, rusted metal piping (that our guide said carried wires for electricity), huskies sitting in the sand and prams left at the

bottom of hills.

As we retraced our steps the local school was pointed out along with the play area which was just dusty ground in front of the building. We continued to retrace our steps until we got back to the hotel and first-world luxury.

I had a wonderful helicopter flight the next day going to Tasiilaq. In the hotel I was upgraded to a room which had its own bathroom. It turned out that the room I had booked was in an annex and a group of Icelandic road workers were staying there.

In the afternoon I walked around Tasiilaq and found myself in a bookshop that had a Mrs Brown look alike from the TV programme Mrs Brown's Boys. I was totally taken aback when this person stood up and asked me if I would like some help. I couldn't get out of there fast enough!

I was keen to see if I could afford a helicopter flight onto the icecap, however, the cost was prohibitive so instead I booked another boat trip to look at icebergs and went for a walk in the Valley of the Flowers. It was quite a hurried walk as it was a perfectly still day. It sounds ideal, but the only problem is that there are little tiny insects that like still days and particularly like trying to fly into your mouth, ears and up your nose; so you walk along constantly flapping your hands in front of your face as



Kulusuk scenery

they can't cope with any type of breeze.

I got talking to a Danish girl on my way back and we ended up by the doing the boat trip together although it wasn't quite as we expected. They had cancelled the boat trip going down the coast to a fishing village as the swells were too bad. On the boat looking out to sea it looked absolutely flat so I had high hopes of seeing huge icebergs like I had previously. There was one in the entrance to the sound and I was all set to start taking photos when we hit the first swell. Well... There were six of us on the boat and we were all at the front of the boat where you would get prime views of everything. It also meant you got prime views of the bow dipping into the water and then heaving up before going down again. It was impossible to move and near impossible to take photos. I had to worm my fingerless gloves up my hand so it was my actual hand holding onto the railing as I was scared my gloved hand would slip and I'd go flying in some uncontrolled direction that wouldn't be nice for my camera or myself. We didn't have life jackets on and weren't given any instructions when we boarded about emergencies. Two people eventually went inside, but I stayed out as I needed a horizon to look at so I wouldn't get seasick.

The skipper was moving the boat around trying to get to some smaller icebergs. Initially I was actually enjoying myself. It was quite exhilarating to be going up and down and left and right so sharply in the waves; it reminded me of a kayak trip I had done some years ago where we battled our way along a coastline in a washing machine. I remember it took two hours to paddle and when we came back the following day it took just 45 minutes. Back in Greenland though, the excitement wore off after a while and I was starting to get concerned about what was going

to happen. It was around this time the skipper obviously thought enough was enough and he turned the boat around and we lurched back into the sound and calmer waters. We got taken to all the small icebergs in the sound before finally heading back to the wharf and dinner – and yes, I did have dinner as I was starving!

I was leaving the next day and in the helicopter going back to Kulusuk I gazed out over the water to the distant icebergs and my thoughts were all over the place. At the airport (which is just a big hangar divided into about four separate areas – arrivals, departures, bag check in and a shop) I updated my diary as I had quite a bit of spare time before my flight left. The airport gets really busy

when a flight comes in as it gets packed with those leaving and then those arriving. Room is cramped and those who have been on expeditions of any type take the comfy seats and spread themselves out leaving the rest to sit on hard seats at small metal tables. After one flight had left and quietness reigned again, I went outside and looked at the amazing scenery.

I had been absolutely set on coming back to Greenland but in the back of my mind I hadn't been sure whether it was the right thing to do. Last time I'd seen Greenland with rose-tinted glasses; this time those glasses were off, and to be honest I got more of a buzz from the first visit. This visit was more about people and those random connections you make when travelling. Greenland is an awesome country and the small amount that I've seen kind of whets the appetite to see more. I thought I'd closed the door to returning, but.....



Sue in the Valley of Flowers

R

ROCKS RAIN & REINDEER

Exploring Norway's
Rondane National Park

by **KATY GLENIE**
with **MIKE PHETHEAN**



Over the hills and far away lies a kingdom of rocky peaks, deep fjords, snow shoes, Vikings and reindeer. Sounds like somewhere worth checking out.

Our plans were to make the most of a brief trip to Norway by getting out of the city quick-smart. We touched down in Oslo to a surprisingly hot and humid day, and headed straight to the local DNT (similar to DOC) for maps and tips. The first tip of the day was that our train north, booked online months previously, was possibly cancelled.

Despite gloriously hot weather in Norway's capital, further north had been experiencing torrential downpours. The train line had been washed out, and public transport was in a European version of disarray. This meant our train would be leaving on time. We liked this version of disarray.

After pacing around the local shopping mall to buy our food for our planned three day hike, we were soon on the Norwegian version of Platform 9, ready to head for the hills. The train glided out of the city towards green fields and small townships. We spotted our first grass-topped roof and did an inconspicuous high-five – no public transport disarray in sight.

We spoke too soon – the train stopped at a local station and we were all ordered off. Within minutes the clouds opened and a train-load of sodden travellers crowded into a small waiting area whilst thunder and lightning crackled overhead. A good few hours later a replacement bus arrived to take us past the flooded section of track. Then we were on to the connecting train, and finally arrived at



Grass-topped accommodation at Hovringen



over Norway's oldest national park, the Rondane. The main hotel building was from the 1700s and the food and hospitality was top notch.

We took our time leaving the following morning – weighed down by a delicious breakfast and a promise of rain. The trail took us around the edge of several rivers and lakes. We stopped for lunch on a rocky outcrop overlooking the famous Peer Gynt's Hutta. This idyllic stone cottage offers hot drinks and waffles during the summer months – very civilised.

We carried on up to another old stone cabin built into the rocky cliffs. The notebook in this basic rock bivvy told of nights sheltering from gales and snow – we were hoping for a better weather forecast.

Our host at Hovringen had suggested we head off the main trail and camp at a high point near some lakes. We followed his advice and clambered for hours up endless hills of rocks, rocks and rocks. We kept hoping to reach a nice grassy plain next to one of the high alpine lakes. The only decent campsite we could find was, unsurprisingly, covered in rocks, although to be fair it was just a little bit flat, with a small amount of moss

Peer Gynt Hutta area

Otta. It was too late to catch the local bus, so we splashed out on a cab ride to our accommodation 30 minutes up the hill from Otta. The view stretched out for miles beneath us as we wound our way to the small village of Hovringen - it was still broad daylight at 10.30 p.m.

Our accommodation was one of a number of individual log cottages, all with grass roofs and a magnificent view



Mike at the rocky campsite



View from Rondvassbu DNT lodge

under one side of the tent.

That night we hunkered down as thunder, lightning, and periods of heavy rain rolled over us. The new tent performed well, and we came through the night unscathed. Over breakfast we soaked up views of high peaks around us. Rondane National Park holds many of Norway's 2000m+ peaks.

The following morning dawned bright and clear, and we headed towards the main trail. We couldn't resist a quick side-trip down the trail to one of DNT's fully serviced lodges. Rondvassbu was incredible. Many use it as a base to climb the nearby Rondslettet - Rondane's highest peak at 2,178m. We treated ourselves to a second lunch of meatballs and waffles, and looked out over beautiful Rondvatnet Fjord with a steaming mug of herbal tea. What a treat.

With full bellies we climbed back up the main trail, and over a high pass in the sun. We struggled to find the cairned route, so were pleased to finally reach the saddle and see the northern valleys spread out below. After clambering down yet more rocks (not a tree, or a reindeer, to be seen - I thought we were in Norway!) we were hit with the full brunt of a summer storm - rolling thunder, lightning, and heavy rain. The rain eased by late afternoon, just in time for the midges to arrive. They didn't seem too vicious as long as you kept moving, so we did. We found a good campsite overlooking the Doralen River, and a light breeze kept most of the midges at bay.

After a well-earned night's sleep (using our eye masks to protect from the almost 24 hour arctic sun) we crossed the river and turned south-west for our final day. On route were two small areas of forest (not that I was counting), and some stunning lakes. One had a hut equipped with a



Hut on Doralen River, fully equipped with picnic table, gas cooker, and inflatable boat for fishing on the lake

table cloth, picnic blanket, and a blow-up row boat, just in case you wanted to try your hand at fishing in the nearby Lake Doralsvatnet.

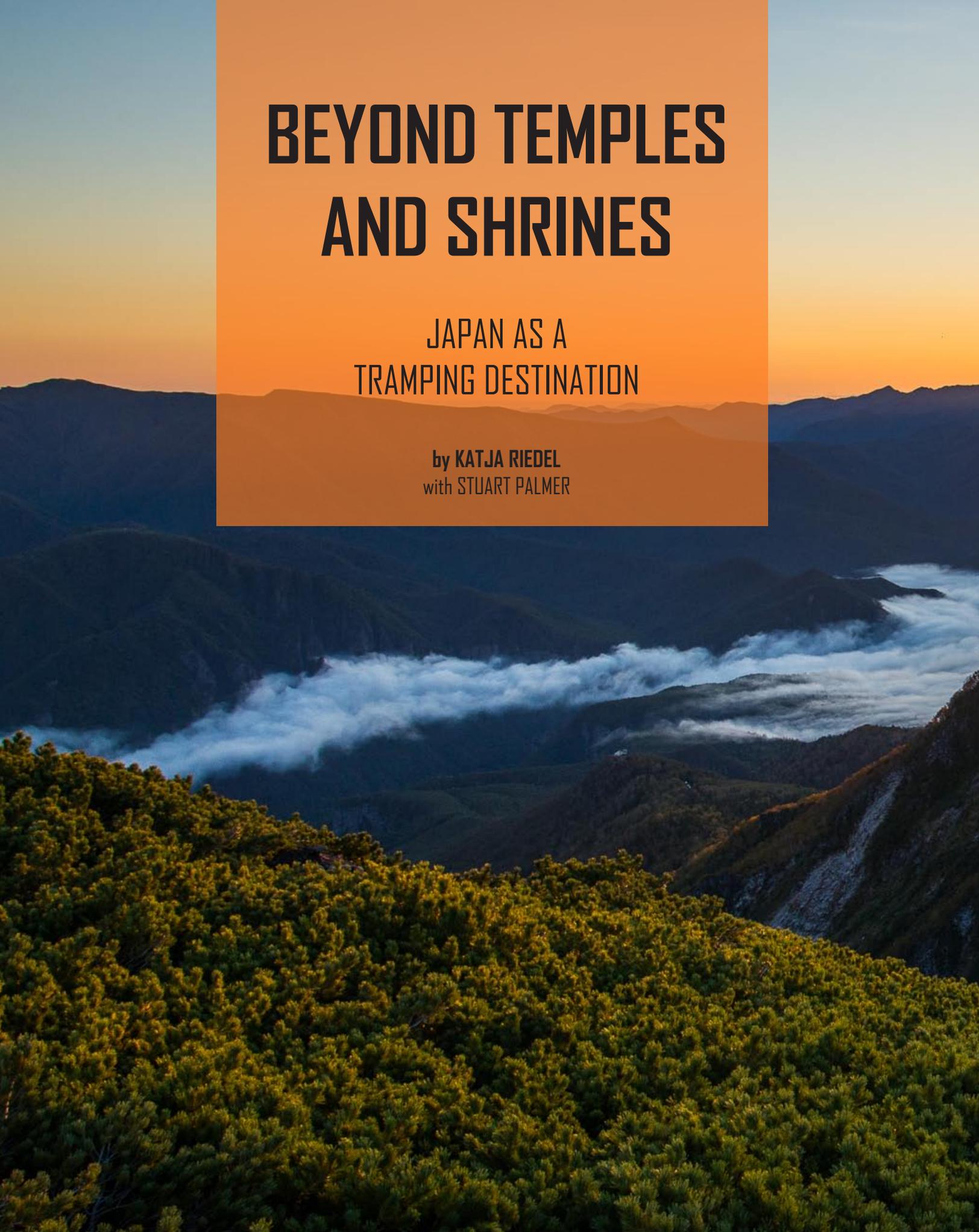
A quick dip after lunch in a snow-fed river to cool off, then off over the final pass and back down to Hovringen. We stopped at Otta for dinner before heading back on the train for a few hours sleep in a backpackers near Oslo airport.

So a pretty whistle-stop tour of Norway - just enough time to know we'll be back for more.

BEYOND TEMPLES AND SHRINES

JAPAN AS A
TRAMPING DESTINATION

by **KATJA RIEDEL**
with **STUART PALMER**





The land of the rising sun.
Sunrise, Daisetsuzan National Park

A love for sushi and the urge to see the autumn colours took Stuart and me to Japan. Away from the concrete and neon lights of the big cities one can find steaming volcanoes, spectacular gorges, hot pools, lofty mountains and of course blood-red maple leaves.

We travelled twice to Japan, once exploring the main Island Honshū, and once cycle touring on Hokkaidō in the far north. Apart from the obvious tourist attractions we were mainly drawn to the Japanese Alps and the many national parks.

There are some peculiarities about tramping in Japan which seem a bit weird for the seasoned Kiwi trumper. To start with, there is a distinct tramping season from mid-July to mid-October. Huts will close at the end of October when the first snow could dust the mountains. Huts are huge! 1000 or 1200 beds are not uncommon. Bears roam the hillsides and Japanese trampers carry a bear bell; or two or three. Signs are in Kanji which means that probably a ten minute stop is necessary to compare the dashes and dots on the sign with the ones on your map. Nature is not really wild here; concrete stabilises hillsides or waterfalls, ropes mark your way and just around the corner you might find a soft drink vending machine on the track (some even have hot coffee in cans).



A hut for a 1000

Public transport in Japan is great and buses and trains get you to nearly every place you want to go. From Tokyo we took a fast and comfortable overland bus to Hakuba, a small resort town in the Northern Japanese Alps. The Hakuba Alps Backpackers is run by Kiwi Troy and his wife Sakiko. They were fantastic and not only dropped us at the trailhead next morning, but also lent us two old mountain bikes that we stashed there for our journey back.

Our tramp took us from Sarukura (1250m) up

through the autumn coloured forest to the Daisekkei, the big snow valley, which holds snow year round. After five hours of climbing we reached a hut that was more like a hotel which sleeps up to 1000 people, and even has a post office and a vending machine. But we were lucky, the tramping season ended a week ago and the hut was closed. We were alone and put up our tent on the lee side of the hut. After that we wandered to the summit of Shiroumadake (2932m), the 'white horse' named for the snow cap on the mountain. We cooked our dinner with a fantastic view over several mountain ridges in different shades of blue.



View while cooking dinner

Next morning the snow was icy. Unfortunately we didn't take ice axes or crampons and I worried that we would make headlines as stupid tourists who ventured ill equipped into the mountains. Isn't that what we say about foreign tourists? Luckily as the sun rose the snow softened and soon we sidled below the summit of Yari-ga-take (2903m). After a steep 600 metre drop we reached Yari-Onsen, a natural hot pool. Normally there are changing rooms and entrance fees, but now everything was packed away for winter and we quickly shed clothes and sank happily into the 44°C warm water. While soaking we enjoyed panoramic views of mountains and the valley below. Dragging ourselves out of the pool we continued to descend and disturbed a ptarmigan, half brown half white, already changing into its winter plumage.

Back at the trailhead we unlocked the bikes and it was pure joy to freewheel down the mountain, flying through the autumn colours. Back at the hostel we were treated to a visit to the village onsen; a Japanese bath, strictly separated by men and women and later a traditional Japanese fondue, where vegetables and meat are boiled in a pot with



Ptarmigan

miso soup.

One walk that really stood out and became the highlight of our trip was a day walk around Nara, which was Japan's capital from 710 to 784. For us it was like a treasure hunt: discovering the countryside with trees full of persimmons, mandarins and fresh figs which we bought for a few yen at honesty road side stalls; walking through forest and country lanes; stumbling across temples where monks swept court yards with ancient brooms; finding emperor tombs more than 1300 years old; seeing food offerings at shrines under the green canopy of trees; and listening to barking dogs while we passed rice paddies and ponds with floating lotus leaves.



On our second trip to Japan we took our bikes with the aim to explore Japan's northern most island Hokkaidō on two wheels. From Sapporo we took the train to Asahikawa and cycled on the well-designed cycle path to Sōunkyō Onsen. Little did we know that it was the beginning of a long weekend and the popular autumn colour viewing and accommodation was very tight. Next morning we stocked up on supplies in a little store. Not much in the normal way of tramping food, but we found rice triangles filled with salmon, tuna, or fermented seaweed wrapped in nori - a good and tasty snack. Dinner was more difficult and pots with 2-minute noodles had to suffice.

A great thing about tramping in Japan is that cable cars can whisk you up the mountain in no time. At the top of the Sōunkyō ropeway we joined the long queues of people who



Stuart sitting outside the grotty hut

wound their way up to the top of Mt Kurodake (1984 m) in Daisetsuzan National Park. Tramping in Japan is not really a solitary activity. As long as access is easy you will find crowds. We planned to stay at a hut and do a loop walk next day to Mt Asahidake (2291 m) the highest mountain in Hokkaidō and an active volcano. Unfortunately the hut was a real hovel, draughty, dark without windows and with a dirt floor, not the nice cosy retreats we are used to in New Zealand. The outside bio toilet was funky, after doing the business one had to pedal a modified bike to stir the sh....

After a night with lots of snoring I got up early for the sunrise. Normally I am alone when I clamber around in the dark but this time there was a line of torch lights in front of me and I had to share the sunrise with 43 others! This is after all the land of the rising sun. When I got back to the hut Stuart was probably the only one still in bed at 7 a.m. Our walk that day took us around the crater rim. From the top of Mt Asahidake steam was rising out of



View from the crater rim walk

vents and vivid greens, yellows and white were signs of volcanic activity.

From Daisetsuzan National Park we cycled north to Akan National Park where Meakan-dake (1400 m) makes a good half day trip, with some adrenaline thrown in for the larger than usual chance to bump into a bear, and the volcanic siren system that was put in place to warn trampers of the real danger of volcanic eruptions. From the top you can look down into the 300 m deep crater. From here toxic white fumes billowed up sometimes taking our breath away. Other gems in Akan National Park are the tranquil lakes Mashu and Kussharo and during a day trip without luggage we enjoyed windy roads, funny ball shaped Marimo algae and hot pools at the lake side.

Our next cycle legs took us along



Stuart at the Asahikawa Sounkyo Cycletrack



Salmon and fishermen

the coast to Shiretoko Peninsula from where one can wave to Russia; so far to the north and east it is. This was also the time of the salmon run and silver fish were clogging the rivers in their mad dash to their spawning grounds and fishermen and bears alike made good use of these circumstances.

On our trip we normally stayed in Youth Hostels (definitely worthwhile to be a YHA member). Once we also camped for free on the local golf course. Dinner was normally included in the hostels and we were fed on local delicacies of varying quality. The last stop on our Hokkaido cycle tour was Kushiro Shitsugen National Park, well known for its Japanese red-crowned cranes. On our bikes we explored the dirt roads in the park and were lucky to spot some cranes. Their flight is so graceful that it makes your inner-being hurt. Decimated until 1952 by careless hunting, their numbers have come back and there are now around 1000 cranes in Japan and every winter photographers flock here to photograph their mating dance.

We had a wonderful time in Japan and discovered the natural side of the land of the rising sun. There are many good tramping opportunities - check out the Lonely Planet guide 'Hiking in Japan'. And if you asked how many bears we saw, the answer is none – even without any dingy bear bells!



LE TOUR DE NOUVELLE CALEDONIE

by HARRY SMITH

THE START

I was cycling down the highway in the dark. My right hand was done up in a bandage after coming off my bike a few days earlier on a flat street in suburban Kilbirnie, making it awkward to operate my right-hand brakes and gears. I was on the unfamiliar, right-hand side of the road, continually reminding myself to keep right but aware that in an emergency my natural, instinctive reaction would be to head left, an instinct which in the current circumstances could have disastrous consequences. Huge trucks were roaring past me in the dark. I was desperately trying to find somewhere to camp but it was impossible to see anything in the darkness beyond the edge of the road. There were no streetlights and my bike lights provided only the feeblest illumination. I hoped like hell the trucks could see me. Another one roared past within a metre of me and I could hear another one coming up behind. It was bloody scary and I was bloody scared.

It was late October 2012 and I was at the start of a four-week cycle-touring trip around New Caledonia. I had arrived at Tontouta International Airport late in the afternoon. I hadn't booked any accommodation – this was a trip on the cheap and I was planning on camping. Noumea was 40 or 50 kilometres away to the south but I wasn't planning on going there until the end of the trip. I had set out up the highway northwards from the airport to find somewhere to camp but it had got dark earlier and more quickly than I had expected. There are actually some brilliant places to free camp in some nice clearings in the scrub within a few hundred metres of the airport itself, as I discovered a few weeks later, but I didn't know that at the time. I had been

naively expecting a nice, quiet road as befits a laidback tropical South Sea island paradise and had instead found myself on a busy, traffic-filled highway.

I had to get off this highway fast! I spotted a promising-looking lane off the side of the road and stopped to check it out. But then I realised it was actually somebody's driveway and decided I'd better not camp there. A bit further on I found a quarry works but decided it was too uncomfortable to serve as a campsite. And anyway, the workmen probably wouldn't appreciate turning up in the morning to find someone asleep in their shingle pits.

After a few more scary kilometres I came to a bridge over a large river. It was one of those long, narrow bridges with high lattice sides of large steel girders – a bit like a giant cheese grater. Please don't let any trucks come along just now, I prayed desperately as I set off across – don't let me get cheese-grated against the side. Safely on the far side, I spotted a dirt vehicle track leading out to the right and turned off down it. I felt a sense of absolute relief, of total thankfulness. I was indescribably glad to be off the highway, to be safe and alive, out of the traffic, away from the trucks. I followed the track down to the river bank and came to a stop. This would do. I wasn't going any further. I wasn't going back out onto that highway in the dark, that was for sure. I hunted around with my torch and found a small clearing in the scrub where I could camp, and hauled my bike across to it. This was home for the night.

Just then a car came down the dirt road and pulled up by the river bank. I heard car doors slamming, bottles clinking, music playing. I wasn't sure who these people were, but it was dark, I was in a strange country, and I didn't speak the lingo. It was probably better they didn't know I was there, so I sat quietly in my little clearing about 30 metres away, not moving or making any noise or shining a torch for a good hour or more until they went away again and I was able to get my sleeping bag out and go to bed.

All in all, it was a rather interesting and unusual introduction to a new country. But in the quiet of the morning I awoke to the sight of the broad river flowing lazily down from the distant mountains and gleaming silkily in the early light of dawn, and I decided this was going to be a good trip after all...

THE TRAFFIC

I packed up and headed off up the highway, and soon realised that I had seriously underestimated this trip. I didn't have a detailed plan – you never do when you are cycle touring – but my rough idea was to do a circuit around the main island of Grande Terre, up the west

coast and back down the east coast, followed by a few days in Noumea and a few days down south. I was also thinking about walking the GR1 track, a four or five day *Grand Randonnee* (Great Walk) in the mountains behind Noumea. I had roughly estimated that each side of the island would take me a week to cycle, including a couple of rest days. That turned out to be wildly unrealistic.

I had based my estimated distances and travel times on a small-scale map, which was all I could find before the trip. But once I arrived in the country and got a decent map, the distances turned out to be considerably bigger than I had thought. Something I thought was going to be 50 km would turn out to be more like 70. And I had naively imagined the road being flat, since it appeared to follow the coast; instead, I was met with constant ups and downs – not necessarily big climbs, just endless tiring undulations. And it was hot – man it was hot, with that kind of thick tropical heat which envelops you like a blanket and weighs you down and saps your energy. Small hills that I would have no trouble with at home I found myself struggling up, and I was stopping for numerous rests and going through litres of water. There were kilometre markings set into the road surface and they passed by excruciatingly slowly.

To make it even worse, the road didn't actually follow the coast at all but generally ran 5 or 10 km inland, following the foot of the mountains. But the campsites were all out at the coast, so at the end of each day I had to do an extra 5 or 10 kilometres to go out to the coast to reach a campsite, often on a tiring dirt road, and the next morning I would have the same 5 or 10 kilometres back inland to the highway, adding an extra 10 or 20 or sometimes even 30 kilometres to each day, on top of the distances that were already longer than I had expected anyway.

And finally there was the traffic. The traffic was unpleasant, with cars and heavy trucks zooming past far too close for my liking. New Caledonian drivers are crazy. As



A common sight

I cycled along I passed a parade of wrecked cars beside the road, in ditches or wrapped around telegraph poles. White crosses could be seen at depressingly frequent intervals beside the road, marking the demise of some crazy motorist, or possibly some unfortunate foreign cyclist who just happened to be in the way. On at least two occasions cars travelling in the opposite direction to me overtook onto my side of the road, coming right towards me. Either they didn't see me or they didn't care. Fortunately in both cases there was a shoulder where I was able to dodge off the road; otherwise there might well have been another white cross beside the road and I wouldn't be here to tell the story.

Towards the end of my first day a passing car stopped up ahead of me and the driver got out and waved me down. I pulled up to see what he wanted and he began babbling away at me in rapid French. My schoolbook French was decades old, and none too good to begin with, but eventually I began to make out a few words and phrases.

“La circulation!” (The traffic!), he proclaimed. “Tres mauvais!” (Very bad!). “Dangereux!” (Dangerous!).

“Grand risque!” (Big risk!), he waved his arms for emphasis. “Splat!” That one didn't require translation. “Mort!” (Death!).

His message was clear: he was warning me in no uncertain terms about the dangers I faced cycling on this highway. I had already reached the same conclusion, but what could I do? I wanted to go north and there was only one road. There was no alternative route. I agreed with him that it was risky, but I had no other choice. So I thanked him for his concern and continued on my way.

An hour later, as I was having a rest beside the road, the same car pulled up and the same man got out. This time he got out a cell phone and put me through to his sister, who spoke a bit of broken English. She explained to me the dangers of cycling on this highway and told me about some other cyclists who had been killed the previous year. “Be very careful, Monsieur”, she pleaded. “It ees very dangerous, especially in ze evenings when ze sun is low and in ze drivers' eyes.” Go over to the east coast, she urged, where it is much nicer and quieter and safer.

At this point I very nearly did decide to go over to the east coast. The traffic really was unpleasant and these people were genuinely concerned about my safety and serious in their warnings. Only a few kilometres back down the highway I had passed a turnoff to one of the roads leading over to the other side of the island; I could turn around, go back, and cross over to the east coast, where everything would be better. But then I thought, if I cycle

up the east coast, what am I going to do when I get to the top? I would just have to turn around and come back down again, and I really didn't want to do that. I wanted to do a complete circuit and see both sides of the island. To cap it off, the crossing over to the east coast involved a 400-vertical-metre saddle and I just couldn't face that at this stage of the trip. I was struggling in the heat with climbs of 20 or 30 metres. And surely the traffic must improve as I headed north, further away from Noumea, I reasoned. And even if it didn't, I still had the option – assuming I was still alive – of heading over to the east coast later on, over one of the other saddles further north. So again I thanked the man for his concern and decided to continue on my way.

As it turned out, the traffic did improve as I went further north, but only slowly, after a few days. The stretch of Grand Terre north of Noumea is not really a particularly pleasant place for a cycle tourist.

THE WEST COAST

I spent a week cycling up the west coast through farmland and a succession of small farming service towns. In some ways, with the farmland, the small towns, and bush-covered hills, I could almost have been in NZ - apart from the heat, the fact that I was cycling on the wrong side of the road, and the fact that all the signs were in French. But there were some things that reminded me that I was not in New Zealand. One day I visited a restored old military fort from the 1880's that was used to hold French criminals and as a stronghold against an uprising against the French colonists by the native Melanesians, or Kanaks. Another day I was passed by a long convoy of military vehicles. France still maintains a military presence here - it is discrete and largely out of sight, but it is there. Near the town



New Zealand WWII cemetery

of Bourail I visited a New Zealand war cemetery from the Second World War. I have no interest in war history but it was a beautiful location and it was moving to see the rows of gravestones, still carefully tended and cared for 70 years later. There were fresh poppies on some of the graves, and many Kiwi names in the visitors' book. My cycle-tourist eye also couldn't help noting that it would be an excellent place to free-camp! One day I visited an idyllic hidden cove called Turtle Bay out at the coast with a superb beach and large numbers of strange, tall, thin pinetrees which are found around the New Caledonian coast. This would have also made an excellent free camping site, although I discovered it too late and had actually camped at a commercial beachside campground a few kilometres away!



Le Couer de Voh???

Halfway up the west coast at the town of Voh I was keen to view Le Couer de Voh (The Heart of Voh), a famous natural heart-shaped formation in the mangrove swamps. In recent years photographs of this unusual feature have appeared on pretty posters and in numerous books of landscape photography. There was a special lookout tower on the hill up behind the town, so I walked up there to have a look, but when I got there I couldn't see anything. Where was Le Couer? All I could see was the swamp, the highway, the dusty town, and the local rubbish depot spread out down below me at the base of the hill - hardly an inspiring sight. The Heart was nowhere to be seen. There was no marker arrow at the lookout to indicate which direction I should be looking in, and I had absolutely no ideas of the scale of what I was looking for. There were one or two discoloured patches in the distant swamp which could conceivably be the elusive Couer, but none of them really seemed to fit the bill. But I took some photos of the swamp anyway, and a couple of months later, back home in New Zealand, I was able to work out where the famous Heart was in the photographs by comparing them

with aerial photographs of it on the internet. It turned out it was there after all, but it appeared at such an oblique angle that it was totally unrecognizable. Despite being on top of a hill the lookout really wasn't high enough to give you a good view - you would really have to view the Heart from the air to fully appreciate it.

I had a variety of campsites on the west coast. Most nights I enjoyed a nice campsite out by a beach. There are campsites scattered all around the New Caledonian coast, both paid ones and official free ones, and you can get an excellent free map from the tourist information offices which shows their locations. They are pretty basic but were just what I wanted. There was always a water supply and usually picnic tables and concrete fireplaces. I hadn't brought a cooker - it was hard to find out beforehand what fuel would be available and the French have their own system of gas cookers, incompatible with our Kovea-type ones - so I was cooking on open fires, and generally this was no problem. Sometimes I had to scrounge around a bit to find enough firewood, but I discovered dead palm-tree fronds burn extremely well, although unfortunately they don't last very long so it was necessary to gather a large supply.

Occasionally I free-camped away from the official sites. One afternoon I reached the top of a big saddle and was feeling so knackered I didn't think I could go on. I was aiming for a campsite out by a beach but it was still 30 kilometres away and I didn't think I could make it. Just off the road at the top of the saddle was a large white deserted concrete building, a water-pumping station or something, so I jumped the fence and camped around the back of it. A few days later towards the top of the west coast at Koumac I camped a few kilometres inland at a reserve by some limestone caves. This was completely free of the mosquitoes which were found at many of the campsites by the coast and it was luxury to be able to walk around in the evening without getting bitten to pieces! In contrast, near Ouégoa at the top of the island the mosquitoes were so bad that all I could do was retreat to my tent at nightfall and not even think of getting out again until morning!

THE NORTHERN EAST COAST

After Koumac I headed inland across the island, up over the steep Col d'Amos, and down to the east coast. The east coast was quite different from the west coast. As I descended down from the Col I was greeted with the sight of tropical vegetation, coconut palm trees, and white sandy beaches. Yes! This is what tropical island paradises are supposed to be like! I soon found a nice deserted beach and stopped for lunch and a swim.

I spent the next four or five days cruising south along the northern east coast. This was definitely the nicest, most relaxed part of the whole trip. The roads were deserted and largely flat, and generally stuck close to the coast. Coconut palms arched up overhead. Rugged mountains rose up steeply behind the narrow coastal plain, or sometimes straight from the water's edge. I crossed several large rivers on long bridges and passed a number of impressive large waterfalls tumbling down out of the hills. There was one large river that wasn't bridged, so I crossed it on a car ferry.

On the way down the coast I passed a number of old historic churches and Catholic missions dating back to the middle of the 19th century. One at Ballade had an impressive set of stained glass windows depicting scenes of the arrival of the first missionaries.



Catholic church

Unlike the west coast, where the population was mainly made up of Caldoches, or white New Caledonians, the people on the east coast were mainly Kanaks, or native Melanesians, and the Kanak culture was strong. Most seem to live a fairly basic, subsistence lifestyle, growing crops or fishing. I passed a number of roadside stalls selling fruit and vegetables, flowers, shells, and soapstone carvings. Signposts pointed to Kanak tribus or tribal areas inland up valleys and in the mountains. The Kanak women all wore long, loose, colourful "mission dresses", so called because they were introduced by the Catholic missionaries in the 19th century who were shocked to discover that in this tropical heat the natives quite sensibly preferred to go around *au naturel*. Lonely Planet describes them as "Mother Hubbard dresses" and they have in effect become the national costume of the country.

There were signs of a strong independence movement

everywhere on the east coast. The multi-coloured Kanak flag could often be seen, and portraits of Che Guevara and slogans calling for an independent country of Kanaky could be found scrawled over bus shelters and bridges.

Halfway down the northern east coast I came to one of the most famous landmarks in the whole of New Caledonia – the limestone cliffs and rock formations around the small town of Heingéine. Here a broken band of upturned limestone rock stretched across the mouth of a large bay. On the northern side of the bay it formed a limestone island called The Sphinx which bore a strong resemblance to the ancient Egyptian monument, while on the southern side another even more famous rock island known as Le Poulet or the Brooding Hen looked for all the world like a giant chicken. Further south, I stopped for lunch where some huge limestone cliffs towered up over a beautiful palm-tree-fringed lagoon.



The Brooding Hen (Le Poulet)

To the south of Heingéine I visited a Kanak cultural centre with traditional Kanak carvings and fares, or thatched conical huts. On the wall of one building was a large mural depicting a number of Kanak heroes from the independence unrest back in the 1980s, including Eloi Machoro, the Kanak Che Guevara, who was gunned down in a hail of bullets by the French para-military forces when he was involved in the occupation of a mining town, and Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the greatest Kanak leader of all, who was assassinated shortly after signing an agreement with the French in 1988 to put an end to the violence. When I first read about this I assumed it was done by pro-French extremists, but no, it seems it was actually done by other Kanaks. I don't know the full history behind this but I think they must have thought he was selling out.

Further down the highway I stopped for a rest outside a school and was invited in for a meal by the Kanak teachers. With roast chicken and pork, fried fish, rice, taro, and kumara it was probably the best meal I had on the whole



Kanaks

trip, and it made a nice change from my standard meals of dehy potato and tuna, or canned ravioli! For some reason the grocery stores in New Caledonia have whole shelves devoted to vast quantities of canned ravioli at dirt-cheap prices, which makes it a perfect meal for budget-conscious cycle tourists!

One of the teachers spoke a bit of English and we talked about the New Caledonia and the Kanaks and the different Kanak languages spoken there. I mentioned I had visited the cultural centre and seen the mural of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, and this made them happy. One of them gave me a cigarette lighter in the Kanak colours as a souvenir, and later another one gave me the t-shirt off his back, which featured a Kanak slogan! This is the great thing about cycle touring – things like this just wouldn't happen if you were travelling around by hire car and staying in fancy hotels! As a poor cycle tourist they clearly regarded me as *sympathique* (which I was).

I enjoyed a range of beach-side campsites down the east coast. Two in particular stand out. One was an abandoned old campground just north of Touho where you were allowed to camp for free. There were picnic tables and fireplaces scattered around a grassy field, but the grass was overgrown and there was no water in the taps. The campsite was located down a side-road beside a quiet estuary, and through the trees was a nice little hidden sandy beach.

By this stage I had been going 10 or 12 days in a row and felt like I could really do with a rest day. I had had a couple of half rest-days but no full ones. This was an excellent spot - apart from the lack of water. I was carrying enough water with me to last for one night but not

for two. I tried all the taps but there was nothing. In the morning I reluctantly packed up and was about to head off. I walked down to the estuary to have one last look around, and when I came back to my bike I suddenly noticed water gushing out of one of the taps! And when I tried the others there was now water in them as well! Somebody must have seen me and turned the water on for me! That was it! I unpacked, put the tent back up, and spent the rest of the day relaxing, lazing in the sun, swimming in the estuary, sunbathing on my little hidden beach, and drinking endless cups of tea. This turned out to be the only full rest day I had on the whole trip until I got into Noumea. So much for my original over-optimistic plan of a rest day every three or four days!

The second memorable campsite was at a place called Tikan. Tikan campsite was amazing. Beautiful mown grass stretched out under palm trees for hundreds of metres along the coast, studded with fireplaces, water taps, and thatched fares for shelter. And all for the absolutely dirt cheap price of four New Zealand dollars a night, which you paid with an honesty system at the farmhouse across the other side of the highway. Amazingly, it was nearly completely deserted, with only one or two other groups camped there.

Even more amazingly, it had a hot shower, a Heath Robinson contraption fuelled from a large gas cylinder. This was unbelievable luxury! None of the other campsites I stayed at had a hot shower, not even the more commercial ones. This shower was even mentioned in Lonely Planet, and I had been looking forward to it for days. I set up camp and cooked dinner, intending to check out the shower later in the evening. But then I got invited by a French couple over to their campfire and we got talking about their travels. They had a bottle of nice French wine, the conversation flowed....and when I finally stumbled back to my tent in the early hours of the morning I had completely forgotten about the hot shower. Next morning I packed up and set off, and it was only when I was about twenty kilometres down the highway that I suddenly remembered it. Damn!

THE MOUNTAIN

Halfway down the east coast I entered a black hole. The Lonely Planet guidebook has sections describing the northern east coast and the southern east coast, but there is a gap in the coverage in between. I soon discovered why. The map showed the road going inland, and it was clear that it must go through some hills. What I wasn't expecting was that it climbed right over a mountain.

I was cycling along beside the sea when the road began

to climb. It wound its way up through a huge open-cast mining area. Eventually the road crested the ridgeline and began going down the other side. I thought I must have reached the top, but I was wrong. The road did go down the other side - for about 50 vertical metres or so, then it levelled off and began sidling around the hillside, and then it began climbing once again. It kept going up and up and up. I passed through an altitudinal zone of unusual pine trees, which I read later was an alpine species, and found myself up in the clouds!



View of the coast from mountain road

Eventually the road flattened off and I reached the top. I'm not sure how high this climb was - it's not mentioned in the guidebook and my map did not have any contours or spot-heights, but my guess, based on how much I climbed and what it looked like looking back down, is that it was probably 700 to 800 metres above sea level. By way of contrast, the top of the Rimutuka Hill Road north of Wellington is 550 metres above sea level, and that doesn't actually start at sea level, so this was a big climb and I was glad to finally reach the top. But I'm glad I did this in the direction that I did, from north to south, because the road at least wound up over quite a few kilometres and was basically rideable, whereas the other side just plunged down. It dropped down so steeply into the valley below that there was no way I would have been able to ride up it - I would have been off walking and pushing the bike the whole way.

This was the most wild and remote part of New Caledonia I passed through. There were no towns or villages this day, very few if any farms, and virtually no traffic the whole day. I stopped for lunch and a swim in the river in the valley floor, but what was worrying me was that, from

the map, it looked like I may have to go over an equally big hill on the other side of the valley in the afternoon! As it turned out, I did go over some more hills but they were nowhere near as large. I emerged out into another remote, deserted valley which led me back out to a sizeable town and mining port on the coast.

THE SOUTHERN EAST COAST

The southern east coast felt quite different from the northern east coast. It seemed more scrubby and barren, and the hills were heavily scarred by mining operations. There were several small mining towns by the coast with the road going inland between them, up valleys and over saddles, which was hard work on the bike.

On my last day on the east coast I passed over a 400-vertical-metre saddle. The road was narrow and winding and unsealed, with vertical drops off the side in places. This would be a very dangerous stretch of road, so an unusual one-way system has been put in place to deal with it. It takes about half an hour to drive through from end to end, and traffic is only allowed in one direction at a time. Traffic heading south is only allowed to enter during the first 20 minutes of even-numbered hours, and traffic heading north is only allowed to enter during the first 20 minutes of odd-numbered hours. I had been warned that this could be a dangerous road on a bike, but in fact it worked out perfectly. I set off from the northern end shortly after all the other traffic had left, so I had the road completely to myself. It took me nearly an hour just to get to the halfway point at the top of the saddle. Here I sat and waited for the traffic to come through from up ahead, and when that had all passed by I set off down the far side, safe in the knowledge that there would be no more traffic coming through from ahead and that it was still too early for the next batch of traffic to catch up with me from behind. I reached the far end without encountering a single car the whole way. I was off the dangerous section of road, relaxing by the river in the valley, when the next lot of cars came through from the rear.

NOUMEA

I spent my last night on the east coast at a nice palm-tree-fringed campground south of the mining town of Thio. Next day I cycled back across the island over a 400-vertical-metre saddle and the following morning I cycled south to the airport at Tontouta, nineteen days after I had left it. From the airport I got a bus into Noumea. There was no way I was going to cycle into Noumea itself with all the crazy New Caledonian drivers! And anyway, the highway turns into a motorway south of the airport, and it

would have been a complete nightmare trying to find my way into the city on the confusing suburban backroads.



Noumea sunset

Noumea was a nice place – a small city, but definitely a city and the only one in New Caledonia (the next biggest centre is only about the size of Waikanae.) It was typically French, with a large central square and a large cathedral overlooking the town centre on the hillside above. There was even a Latin Quarter, or at any rate a separate suburban district which rather grandiosely went by that name. Policemen rode around on bicycles, cruise ships disgorged tourists at the wharf, and people played boules in the tree-lined square. Old Kanak women walked around in their mission dresses, while hip younger ones wore designer jeans. Sporty locals biked or jogged around the waterfront, luxury yachts packed the marinas, and luxury, five-star, high-rise hotels full of rich tourists overlooked the beach at Citroen Bay. On the hill overlooking the cathedral was the youth hostel, the only one in New Caledonia, where I stayed for two nights.

THE FAR SOUTH

By this stage I had abandoned my plan to walk the GR1 track. My bike circuit around the island had taken longer than expected and I no longer had the time – or the enthusiasm, with the heat and the hills. But I still had a few days to spare before I was due to fly home so I decided to get the bus down south to see the southern end of the island and visit the Parc Provincial de la Riviere Bleue, New Caledonia's premiere national park.

The southern end of Grand Terre is a strange landscape of reddish, mineral-rich soils and shrubby, stunted vegetation. The park encompasses the forested valleys at the head of a huge man-made reservoir occupying the central valley floor – a barren landscape of bare red earth, cracked red mudflats, and the stark skeletons of drowned forests. Some people may consider this a scene of devastation and destruction, but I found it a landscape of strange, austere

beauty. The barren expanses and harsh reddish colours give it a surreal, alien feel, as though you have been mysteriously transported to the surface of Mars.



Parc Provincial de la Riviere Bleue

You need a permit to camp in the Park, but it is a mere formality at the park entrance. From there a road winds up the valley beside the upper reaches of the reservoir until you come to a bridge over the river. Cars have to stop here, but walkers and cyclists can continue beyond this point. I cycled up the road and unexpectedly found myself in kauri forest! This was a complete surprise! I had thought kauri was a uniquely New Zealand tree, but no, it turns out there are several species here in New Caledonia, as well as species in Australia, New Guinea, and Indonesia. Just like in New Zealand, most of New Caledonia's kauri forest has been milled, but I stopped off at one huge specimen which was thought to be the largest remaining kauri tree in the country.



New Caledonia's biggest kauri tree



A cagou

In the evening I saw three strange greyish-white birds wandering around my campsite. These large flightless birds are called cagous and are the New Caledonian equivalent of the kiwi in New Zealand. They are a symbol of the country and the name is applied to New Caledonian sports teams. I wasn't expecting to see any cagous - they have been affected by introduced predators, just like our birds, and are now rare. I had also read that they were shy and retiring. I don't know about shy and retiring - the three I saw wandered around my campsite completely unconcerned, as if they owned the place (which in a way I suppose they do).

Cagous are famous for their unusual call. This is commonly described as sounding like a dog's bark, but it didn't really sound like that to me. To me it seemed more like a whirring, mechanical sound, a bit like an old, hand-pushed lawn-mower. It would accelerate up, then whirr away, then decelerate to a stop. When I first heard it



Tropical paradise

I looked around, thinking rather improbably that somebody must be mowing the grass in the campsite where I was staying. And even when I figured out that it was the cagou, every time I heard it I would still instinctively look around for the lawn-mower!

Another famous New Caledonian bird I saw was a New Caledonian crow. These are the only birds in the world, and one of the few animals of any sort, which make tools. They break and fashion twigs which they use to extract grubs and worms from holes in trees and rotten logs. Tool use is a sign of intelligence, so these are quite possibly the most intelligent birds in the world.

After two nights in the park I got the bus back into Noumea, where I spent another couple of days looking around and checking out the beaches, the museum, the cultural centre, and other sights. My last night was spent camping in the bushes outside the airport before getting my early morning flight for home the next day.

I enjoyed my trip cycling around New Caledonia, but it definitely proved tougher than I had expected, even though I wasn't doing particularly big days. It was much hillier than I expected, and the heat definitely took its toll. But it is still a fascinating country to visit and an excellent place to go cycle touring (even allowing for the crazy drivers and the traffic north of Noumea). The northern east coast in particular is superb. If you had a month to spare you could cycle right around the island like I did, but even if you only had a week you could do a great trip. Catch a bus up north and spend four or five days cruising down the northern east coast before getting a bus back down south, and finish off with a few lazy days in and around Noumea. New Caledonia is our closest neighbour (it's actually slightly closer than Australia) but sadly not many kiwis ever seem to go there.

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FRONT COVER IMAGE

by **Megan Sety**

Katy Glenie and Sharon Brandford heading towards Frew Saddle, West Coast.

BACK COVER IMAGE

by **Ian Harrison**

West Coast mud.

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