



The Mouth 'n' Ear

Wellington Tramping & Mountaineering Club Newsletter

Email: newsletter@wtmc.org.nz

September 2011



... but it was cold outside
Photographer: Tony Gazley

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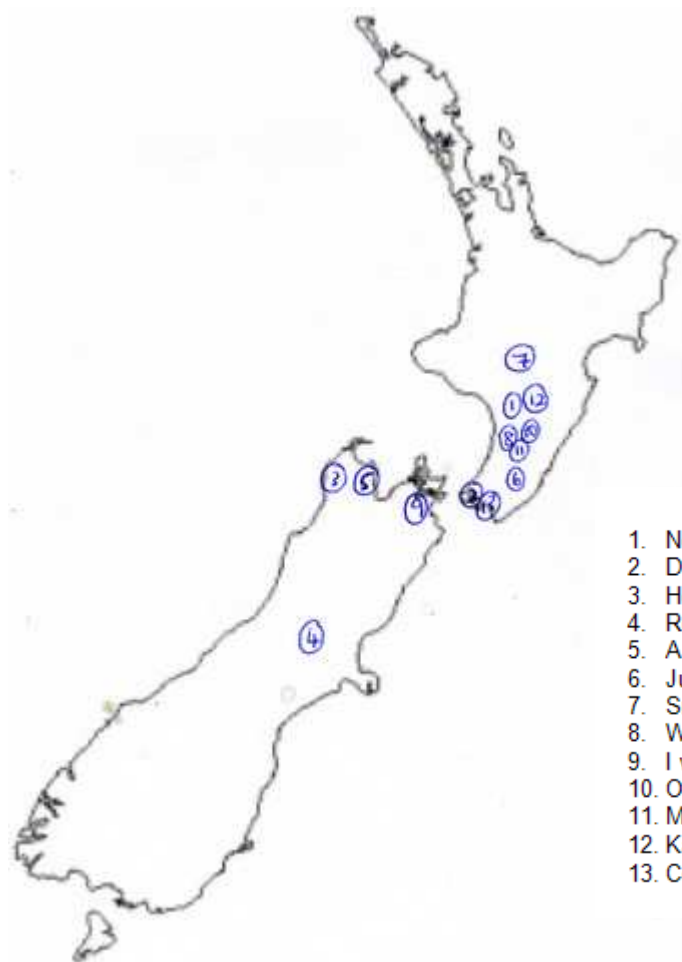
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The Nature of Things

Sharron Came, President



This month Amanda and Richard have been busy putting the finishing touches to the spring trip schedule. We have some great trips coming up so I hope you manage to go on a few of them. I know many people take photos on their trips. It would be great if some of you photographers offered to show your pictures on a Wednesday night. This would not only keep the regulars entertained but allow people new to tramping and/or Wellington to get a good idea about what we do. If you were thinking about offering to lead a trip or have recently come up with a trip suggestion it is not too late to contact us. Even if your trip doesn't get on the printed trip schedule if you come up with something that fits with the organised road ends and are prepared to lead it Amanda may be prepared to allow the trip to run. Contact Amanda at chiefguide@wtmc.org.nz

Wasn't it great that the snow came to us for a few days in mid- August! Sadly normal service has resumed and we're back to having to go to the snow. Just as well we have a nice warm Lodge right where the snow likes to hang out. Megan has been working on a poster advertising the Club Lodge. This will shortly be available for people to display at their workplaces and other social spaces. If you would like a poster, or are interested in helping out with Club promotion please contact Megan at promotions@wtmc.org.nz . Also Megan is always on the hunt for great photos of people engaged in Club related outdoor activities.

The Committee is thinking about whether it is feasible to rent one of our Club vans out during the week to other organisations. While we do not want to make a profit from our vans it is desirable to get close to covering the costs associated with running and storing the vans if we can do so in a manner that satisfies our insurance obligations. If you know of any group that may be interested in renting one of the vans on a regular basis during the week we would be interested in hearing from you. Please contact Gareth at transport@wtmc.org.nz. Also, if you would like to become a trained van driver let Gareth know and when there is sufficient interest he will organise another session. I've been told the van training is even more fun than watching Top Gear...

By the time you read this Mika and Hans will probably have departed our shores for Nepal where Mika is going to work as a doctor and Hans is going to play at being a trekking bum. It will be interesting to see which one of them has the most fun. They will both be greatly missed not least because of all the time and effort they put into the Club doing everything from leading trips to driving the vans to taking notes at committee meetings in Mika's case and contributing slideshows and newsletter and journal articles. Thank goodness they will be back in time for Christmas!

The website group is continuing its work; in fact we had a great meeting last week. The chocolate fudge cake was particularly delicious. It was the same kind as Prince William had at his wedding (he stole the idea from Sarah and Alistair so I don't think he will be

invited to any wedding anniversaries). I now know that Drupal is a Content Management System (CMS), and that we are looking for people who know how to write for websites. We need website writers to help translate new and existing material into a form that suits the electronic medium. If you know what I mean and this sounds like you the person to contact is Sarah at newsletter@wtmc.org.nz. The pay is terrible but the perks are very tasty.

We are reviewing the club membership requirements to see if they are still appropriate in 2011. Helen is working on some options for change and she will be seeking your feedback. If you have any suggestions please get in touch membership@wtmc.org.nz. Also, if you have done three overnight trips and want to become a member all you need to do is fill out an application form and give it to a committee member. Okay you have to pay a sub as well but members enjoy cheaper trip fares, FMC membership and you will get a Club Journal next time one is published. Come on, join us!

Track Talk

Amanda Wells, Chief Guide



Wellington's recent snow visited alpine conditions on our suburbs. But even before that dump, there were surprising amounts of snow in the Ruahines and Tararuas. On the weekend before the snow came in, Steve, Richard and I were slightly bemused to find a good half metre on parts of the Southern Crossing, though perhaps less surprised than the extremely cold, younger guys we found in Alpha hut. I won't bore you with another cautionary warning about gear! But I found it interesting when back at work that people were asking me about heating in huts and looked shocked when I said it's pretty absent on the tops. The two guys we found in Alpha seemed almost to have counted on there being a fire. While there is a good stove at Alpha, there's virtually never any dry wood stored or easily found in the vicinity. Even when people take the trouble to find and stash wood, the next group rarely replaces it. We were expecting and prepared for the cold, but our hut companions weren't and it added a layer of misery to their trip.

Enclosed with this newsletter is the Spring trip schedule, which as I write is yet to be completed but will (hopefully!) be an action-packed array of inspiring trips. We haven't put any Christmas trips on the schedule as they tend to be more loosely organised - if you are keen to lead or go on a Christmas trip, talk to me and/or consider putting a notice on the website forum. Now is the time to start thinking about it!

It can be quite hard to find leaders for trips. This time round we produced a really good mix of potential trips for the draft schedule - that part of the process is mostly painless thanks to enthusiastic participation from club members. But actually looking for leaders can be a bit soul destroying, as you nag on and then feel guilty that the same old people are shouldering most of the load. As a general principle, if you want to go on more than one trip a schedule, you should think about leading a trip, otherwise the system starts to fall

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down. If you absolutely don't think leading is your thing, that is fine and there are (many!) other ways that you can help out. But if all that's holding you back is never having done it before, then sign up for the leadership course in October. If we are slipping into providing a "service" to people who go on trips but don't contribute to the club's functioning, then we need to consider how our model should adapt, rather than burning out the core group of people doing all the work. Your feedback is very welcome - email chiefguide@wtmc.org.nz.

I've just read the latest edition of the FMC journal. An excellent read as always, but perhaps I'm not alone in finding this issue deeply depressing. It seems recreational users of the wilderness will need to fight a rearguard action just to maintain the wilderness areas, back country huts and tracks that we already have. This is without giving any consideration to greater investment in desperately needed pest control or new protected areas. During Richard Davis' slideshow last week showcasing the efforts of the FMC and its current concerns, I had grim visions of lying in front of a bulldozer come to dam(n) the Tauherenikau (perhaps the most beautiful valley in the Tararuas). But the best way for us to save our hills is to get others into them. The outcry against mining in national parks showed that the weight of voter opinion makes a difference. If we can get more people passionate about tramping and our wild places, we take concrete steps towards saving them. Perhaps that's a much better argument for leading trips than my moan above. When you look back in 20 years time, what will you say you did for the places you love?

Membership

Helen Law, Membership officer



This month we welcome two Senior members: Maarten Ruiter and Yingjie Zhang, and Alex Huang as a Family member.

If you have been reading our previous newsletters you would have noticed that we are currently reviewing our membership policies. We have asked for your views and suggestions. Thank you to a number of people who gave me their valuable comments. However, I would like to get feedback from everyone please – whether you are a club member or not. Even just a short message of support or against.

There are two main topics up for discussion:

1. New Members

At the moment, a potential member need to have done three overnight trips with the club prior to joining, two of which have to be tramping/ mountaineering trips. This is for the benefit of potential new members to see if they like tramping or the activities we offer and

to see how the club operates. Of equal importance is for the club to ensure that the person has a basic understanding to enjoy the outdoors. These pre-membership trips give the opportunity to assist and support new members as required.

As day trips are getting more well-liked by newcomers, and while some can participate mainly day trips due to family, work or other commitments, we are considering changing the criteria on approving new members. We want to relax the rules so that day walkers will get a chance to become part of the club, one possible change is:

The potential member needs to go on two different trips within a reasonable period, say 3 to 4 months and the total number of days that potential member must be on those trips is three or more days. Therefore, they have a choice of doing just 3x daytrips, or one weekend trip plus one daytrip. These trips can be any activities we offer – kayaking, cycling, lodge based trip, social trip, working party or instruction course. Then they will need to have the application form signed by all their trip leaders, seconded by a committee member and approved in the committee meeting; currently approval forms do not need to be signed by trip leaders.

This is just one idea, please tell me what you think!

2. Associate Members

We are looking to propose automatic upgrading Associate members to standard membership after his/her long connection with the club - say 10 years. This means an Associate member can become a full club member without having to have done three over-night club trips. So after that period, the Senior (Veteran) and his/ her Associate member partner will become Couple (Veteran Couple) members. Once upgraded, they will get the same benefits as full members. This may be a practical way in which to recognize Associate members who have maintained their connection and indicated their commitment to the club.

Current Associate members and their partners have already shown their support, and now I need more support and comments from the rest of the club.

Please let me know what you think

Please note that these topics are still at 'thinking' stage of ways to improve our club, therefore any of your comments, suggestions and opinions will be valuable. Please send these to me by emailing membership@wtmc.org.nz, alternatively you can post them to **WTMC, PO Box 5068, Lambton Quay, Wellington 6145**. Please send them in before 30 September as these will be up for discussion at our October committee meeting.

Thank you everyone in advance



Murmurings from the kitchen

Donna Maher and Jenny Beaumont, Social convenors

There are a number of exciting talks coming up on club nights in September including Kate Cushing talking about the Larapinta Trail, a 223km walk through the middle of Australia, Amanda Wells on tramping in the Tararuas and Dave Collett on cycling in the south island. For more information go to the home page of the club website: <http://www.wtmc.org.nz/>

New boots intrepid journey

19-21 Aug, MF Tramp, Wakelings hut, (map #1)

Robert Hirschberg

Punters: Dirk Naish, Kate Cushing (leader), Hans Wiskerke, Paul Christoffel, Robert Hirschberg

The instructions were to be at platform 9 by 5.15 for a 5.30 take-off. Arriving, I find snow chains being fitted. Don't they know the snow has gone? Don't worry, it is only that Kate wants to see sparks. OK. Then out came the map book as there was concern that the Manawatu Gorge was shut. Wait a minute aren't we going to Mangaweka? It appeared a certain punter was a bit geographically challenged. That sorted, it was into the next great debate: where was dinner. Must be Bulls as there great kebabs. No Levin, as it has more selection, after all there is Pizza Hut. The Bulls kebabs won out and then the place was packed! So, fish & chips or Subway. So sad. The trip up was, to say the least, entertaining with Kate and Jo in full flight. Just as well what goes on trip, stays on trip. Arriving at Kawhatau Base road end the path was covered in snow so when the van got stuck the order was to push with the chains staying in the van (that figures). The dogs at the gate had Jo flicking between hiding behind the van and going for the gate. The goats did not help. It was all worth it when the lodge came into view complete with its cloth covered mattress.



The over the river cage took much organising. The first across must have a key to the van and so must the last as on the last trip poor Dirk got left behind. I suppose that's why he went second this time.



With all the snow we were going to do plan C – join the medium group at McKinnon for the night. In the end we did plan D. Joining the M group meant the MF had to be the snow ploughs. It was just as well Hans had long legs as the snow got deeper. By the time we reached the bush line it was almost waist deep on the shorter members of the group. With the sun trying to shine, no wind and soft powder snow it was magic on the tops. Well it would have been if we could move. After slogging for nearly an hour and going no more than 300m defeat was admitted so the decision was made to return to the lodge for another night i.e. Plan D. But not before a photo stop and play (Pete spread eagle on the snow, a feat he had always wanted to do, Dirk playing roly poly and Kate trying to run off into the distance). Down was interesting as the snow was melting into slush, which made for very slippery going. I have not wiped out or ended on my bum so many times since learning to tramp as a teen. However, all did make it down in one piece. Snow melt from the trees proved a problem with impromptu falls with one memorable fall collecting 4 senior members while they rested.





Having not done much snow work before I have since come to the conclusion that leather boots just don't hold out the water well enough as my feet froze. Thanks heavens for pyromaniac Pete and his fire.



In the lodge book past users complained about the generator not starting. As a services Engineer I was tasked with starting this 2 cylinder Lister, that looked almost as old as me, and came with no instruction. Was I set up for failure with our leader only giving me a 30/70% chance of success? She who has so little faith. And yes we did end up with lights. This Kate lead trip was considered as a success after all we got out of the hut and walked for a little while at least... She now answers to the 'Grand ole Duke' as she marched us to the top of the hill then marched us back down again.

With the walking accomplished on the Saturday, Sunday was a sedate trip back punctuated by coffee fixes and information views, once the goats where out of the way.



When I asked "Are there many first timers dumb enough to do a MF on their first trip?" the reply was "not that come back". Will I be back? Given the quality of the company and the accommodation and the good time I had, yes I will be back.

Day trip to Colonial Knob

13 August 2011, Easy tramp, (map #2)

Christine Birchall

Punters: Ray Walker, Sandra Cameron, Deborah Stoebe, Stefan Lehmann, Christine Birchell and Marieke van den Bergh



We met in the Rahai Street car park at 10.00. Although the weather forecast was dubious, we had perfect walking temperatures.

We began our ascent through the bush track through the Porirua Scenic reserve, really well maintained track that had only the odd bit of litter here and there. We came to a dirt road and continued our gradual climb to the top.

It was very peaceful except for the annoying dirt bike that passed through the group as we scrambled to safety.

On reaching the top, the view was slightly obscured by some cloud but didn't deter us from grabbing some refreshments and posing for the odd photo. Speaking of posers, the motorbike rider decided to enlighten us with his opinion as to the best way to descend the hill - by bike in 5 minutes! For a brief moment, I was tempted to rename the site Colossal Knob after him.



On descending the 468 metre high Colonial Knob, we passed the turn-off to a track going to Mt Kaukau. This required a mere 5 hour tramp - another day perhaps. Instead of that route, we came through Spicer Botanical Park then up Broken Hill road to our vehicles in the car park.

All in all, a very enjoyable 3 hours spent in good company and I look forward to the next walk Ray leads through the Tararuas in September.

Heaphy MTB revisited

12-14 August. Mountain bike private trip (map #3)

Ant Mulick

Punters: Andy Aldridge, Richard Simpson, Debbie Corbett, Ant Mulick

It was with immense satisfaction that the first judder of many peculated through my bones at the start of The Heaphy Great Walk. This was no tramp though, but a long awaited mountain biking adventure. I first rode this track back in 1996 on a fully rigid bike. Then I was new to MTBing. Now, I was on a luxurious full suspension bike with a bit more single track under by belt. It had taken 15 long years to be allowed to return; at times I wondered if it would ever be reopened in my MTBing career, at last it was! Either way the rocks seemed not to remember me, and with indifference bounced me on my way.

After mixed interest in a WTMC trip back in July, some friends whom I'd successfully sold the idea to, decided to organize their own trip, and thankfully invited me along.



View from Goulund Downs Hut

The Heaphy Track is 78.4km long cuts an arc across the top of the South Island through the Kahurangi NP. It starts in beech forest in the east, crosses a high open basin and ends in nikau palm lined beaches in the west. Though it can be ridden in either direction it is much easier from the Collingwood end. In this direction most of the track is rideable, for a rider with good skills and fitness. We were spreading the trip over 2.5 days so that we had plenty of time and didn't set ourselves up for an epic of the wrong sort.

The first few hours were spent winding uphill in a low gear. The climb has a good consistent gradient, some parts are smooth others rockier. The rocky sections drain your legs and are paradoxically easier to ride in a higher gear.

Plenty of side stream means we don't need to carry much water which is a bonus as we are all already carrying 8-9kg packs. This is a self sufficient trip and sleeping bags, spare clothes and food are all carried on our backs. Though this is nothing unusual for a tramp it is a very strange feeling for an MTBer.

After several hours of climbing with intermittent rests we reached a lookout (920m) over the surrounding bush. This was the highpoint of the track and although not the last of the climbing by any means at least now we could engage the 'gravity assist' feature of our bikes.

We were heading for Goulund Downs hut, a charming and tidy old hut with a gigantic fireplace. If not for its historical value it would have been ripped out and replaced long ago.

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Here we would spend a comfortable night eating our Backcountry cuisine and coaxing the fire with damp wood.

Sunrise brought us a fine day to cross the Goulard Downs and the prospects of some of the best MTB riding in NZ. The Downs are a large upland basin, a spectacular and unique landscape filled with colour and interest. From the hut a relatively level and fast track wanders through tussock fields, into pockets of enchanted trees, across creeks, past boulder outcrops, and around charming water features.

Before lunch there was some steady climbing and the odd slower muddy section. These swallowed the occasional front wheel much to the amusement of the rest of the group. Boardwalks crossed the boggy sections of the track though. A nice downhill run had us coasting to McKay Hut for a well earned lunch.



Andy, Richard and Debbie on swing bridge

After lunch we descended continuously down a spur towards the coast and Lewis hut. This is classic gravity fuelled riding, though a bit more technical than earlier sections. After a days riding already, the body and bike are starting to flow and the pack is no longer noticeable. As we get lower there are less obstacles to interrupt the flow and the riding gets faster. At the Lewis River we opt to take the swing bridges despite low rivers. After an exhausting battle to cajole the bikes across

we admit that the river would have been a much easier option at these flows.

We arrive tired and just on nightfall at the Heaphy hut. The last section of track has taken us twice as long as planned. Sand piled onto the track as part of an 'in-progress track upgrade' makes this section exhausting and unrideable. Our bikes are choked with sand, brakes grinding away discs and rims with every touch, gears grate, quick release pedals - don't!

The hut was already warm and cosy, courtesy of two other MTBers. More Backcountry cuisine and clean clothes restore our energy levels and spirits. The night brought coastal rain and a bit of a clean for the bikes. In the morning a more thorough clean and re-lube and the bikes are functional again.

We set off on the last leg of our adventure with the rain just holding off. This last section of track skirts pristine beaches southwards along the coast. The riding is mostly flat with the odd quick climb between beaches. We stopped often just to take in the sheer beauty of this untouched coast, views north and south equally breath taking. A blustery Tasman Sea added to the rawness.

At Crayfish Point we dropped down onto the beach and pushed our bikes along the firm sand to the edge of the incoming tide. It was the edge of a different world to that which we were trying to return to.

By the time we reached the last beach, Scotts Beach, we all felt a little saddened that our epic adventure was nearly over. One last grunty climb followed by a superb down hill and it was all over. High fives all round, fish and chips in Little Wanganui and a drive over Lewis Pass in a blizzard rounded out a brilliant trip.

For more info on MTBing the Heaphy check out:

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/parks-and-recreation/activity-finder/mtn-biking/heaphy-track-mountain-biking-trial.pdf>



Crayfish Point

Rolleston Revisited

13th Aug: Private trip, Alp 2 (map #4)

Sharron Came

Punters: David Jewell and Sharron Came



In Arthur's Pass on Friday night we pack ready for an early start. DJ has a cold and has so far refrained from reminding me that he is on an alpine sabbatical. I decide to sleep in the main room at the Alpine Club Lodge so DJ is not disturbed by me checking my watch every hour. Instead we are both disturbed by a steady stream of Friday night arrivals, the last at just after midnight. The just after midnight arrivals wake me up again at 2.15am as they start getting ready to go climbing. "You're going up Rome Ridge as well?" asks Nick from Utah, "What time are you leaving?" "Earlier than I had planned" I reply as I abandon all attempts at sleeping.

It's 3.45am as we start up the Coral track. Although there has been no overnight freeze there is plenty of snow on the track. I volunteer to do the early route finding as I know I'll be calling on DJ to do plenty of that later on.

Above the bush line we pause to put on over-trousers and crampons and to let Nick from Utah and his Swiss companion pass us. I figure they owe us lots of step plugging. As we make our way higher up Rome Ridge the sunrise is muted but gorgeous. Although the ridge is hardly knife edge it is nice to have the extra light. When the sunlight hits the ridge we quickly warm up. Like yesterday there is no wind. The amazing views, the excellent snow and weather conditions and fear that DJ's cold will return keep me going at a steady pace. Soon it is time to leave the ridge and traverse round to the start of the bit where Rome ridge is broken. Known simply as "the gap" this bit is often the crux section of the climb to the Low Peak of Mt Rolleston.



The traverse is fine. The snow is quite soft but I sink in rather than slip off it. Soon we are putting on our harnesses and tinkering with hardware while we let a female climbing pair pass us and head to "the gap". I take a look. "The gap" doesn't look too scary to me, there is no wind and the snow is not icy. I think I'll be okay to down climb unroped I tell DJ. I follow him down, across and then up. It is a great day to be out climbing I tell myself as I concentrate on doing everything correctly. A fall here would not end well.

The sun has been on the snow for about an hour now. In places I struggle to make my ice tools stick but patience and persistence is all that is required. Gradually we leave the soft stuff behind and find some firmer snow. We keep heading up one foot in front of the other, one ice tool in front of the other.

At 10am we reach Low Peak. The vista is amazing. I'm pretty sure DJ is not thinking about his sabbatical as he studies the Middle and High Peak. He doesn't think they are in condition. I don't really care. We are probably too late to try them anyway given my speed, the softening snow and we want to descend via the Otira Slide rather than going back down Rome Ridge. Later Nick from Utah confirms DJ's assessment of the Peaks although I'm pretty sure getting to the very top posed no problem for the women climbers we let past.

We take a few photos then DJ leads the way down the top of the slide. I am the tortoise of all down climbers but DJ remains patient, probably the warm conditions and glorious views help. Perhaps he is feeling a bit tired now. Finally we reach a small col where it is flat

enough to have a bit of lunch, reapply the sunscreen and just sit and contemplate the snowy mountains. Not for long though as the snow continues to soften. Soon we are able to walk comfortably although for a bit we sink in the snow up to our knees. I mention to DJ that at least we should comfortably beat our mate Stu from TTC who reckoned it took him 19 hours to do this trip a couple of weeks back.

Back at the Village we call in to see Geoff and Renee who very kindly feed us and entertain us with stories of life in Arthur's Pass. If you head down that way, and I hope you will, it's a choice place, don't forget to look up Geoff and Renee they would love to see you. (Contact details are in the member's part of the website or Renee works at the Visitor Centre 3 days a week).

A Great Walk in winter

Private trip: Abel Tasman, (map #5)

Judy Gardner

Punters: Judy Gardner and Pete Goodwin

When we set forth on the Great Walk we hoped our way would be lit by the moon but it was still well below the horizon. Walking by torchlight and in silence it feels like one is in ones own world, thoughts slow down and there are only the night noises to keep you company. Because it was 16 months since I carried a pack and longer for Pete all energy and thoughts went into walking. We were grateful that the track at the western end of the Abel Tasman Coastal walk was on an old farm road and had a gentle gradient. Reaching the saddle, the moon was rising through the trees and out into the wide open and starry sky. Our friend who had taken us to the road end pointed us in the right direction and bid us 'adieu' before disappearing into the darkness. Arriving at Whariwharangi Hut we explored the many bunk rooms. This hut is the old farmhouse and had a cosy feel about it. We boiled the billy and warmed ourselves with a brew before rolling out our sleeping bags. The stars were all out and it was cold making us feel very pleased that we had brought our homemade polypro liners. The next morning frost was everywhere including on the sand just behind the beach.

About three minutes from the Whariwharangi Hut was the first of many golden beaches. It was so beautiful I took my pack off and danced along the beach. The sun was shining out of a brilliant blue sky and was to do so for much of the 4-day trip but the air was too cold for shorts. The walking was easy, giving us time to admire the changing views and sounds. Sounds of seals, waves lapping gently onto the beach, bright greens in the forest contrasting strongly with the stringy brown bark of the kanuka made for a kaleidoscope of colours and even



Rocky outcrop on Abel Tasman Coastal Walk

lunching beside the car park at the Totaranui campsite did not detract from the beauty of the place.

At Awaroa Estuary the shadows were long and the tide was just within the limits of when our notes said you could cross safely. It still looked dodgy but as the choices were standing in the cold shadow of the hill, standing in the sun on wet muddy sand with crabs scuttling around or crossing the expanse of water we went for the later. We took off our boots and socks and rolled up our long johns. Nobody could have prepared me for how cold, cold water can be. I think I spent the first five minutes of the 20min crossing exclaiming about the cold and at Awaroa Hut it took a hot brew and piece of Mum's fruit cake before I felt human again.



Pete Goodwin wading Awaroa Estuary

The next day the 'sky trail' gave fantastic views of the Awaroa Estuary and then it was down the other side of the headland for our second wade. The water was no warmer today. We had morning tea in the company of a pair of paradise ducks and a seagull. They squabbled over our crumbs and were not shy in coming forward. Later in the day a kereru sat looking at us either unperturbed by our appearance or too heavy from a meal of fresh supple-jack berries to be able to take off. Although there was not much bird life they certainly were not frightened of us.

The cluster of buildings and campsite at Bark Bay was like a little village. We shared the hut with two Belgians, two Brazilians and one Mexican. They ate Tim Tams and drank wine for dinner making our 'dehy' mince, spud and peas seem rather mundane. Needless to say they did not seem to rise very early the next morning!

Anchorage Hut was our home for the last night. We shared the hut with a party of 12 from Rangitoto College. Well behaved and very entertaining. The girls clearly did not feel the cold as they washed their hair out side and the bunk room smelt like a deodorant bottle. The smell of deodorant was more pleasant than the boots and socks drying by the heater. Several yachts were anchored in the bay.

The last day saw us walking through many invasive weeds and passing day trippers and with the wind picking up and clouds gathering in the sky we finished the trip. Throughout the four days we never tired of the golden beaches intersected by forest covered headlands, delightful streams and rivers with the occasional waterfall. Winter was the ideal time with few people and the Abel Tasman Coastal walk had been an ideal trip for people who had dusted off their packs and boots.

Jumbo / Powell circuit, Tararuas

3 July 2011, Private day walk, Medium (huh!?), (map #6)

Anita Su'a

Punters: Shirley Wells, Anita Su'a and Heather (from Masterton)

I had one of those days where serious lapse in judgment overtook me. This coming Sunday weather was going to be a stunner. So, what do I do? I decide to enquire with Shirley (Queen of the Tararuas) if she'd like to do a day walk on the Sunday. Left it entirely up to Shirley for a destination as she was intending to go out anyway and I didn't want to offer any suggestions as I was the interloper and it was to be her day walk. Shirley had decided that she'd like to do her own favourite circuit of Holdsworth; she's only done it four times.

8 am Sunday, I met Shirley at the bottom of Aro Street. Wellington was cloudy but warm. We drove over the Rimutakas, stopped at The White Swan in Greytown where Shirley bought herself a coffee, and then travelled the rest of the distance to Holdsworth carpark. 10.15am we were on the track. We passed Donnelly Flats walking through easy bush with the Atiwhakatu River beside us. Not long after, we arrived at the junction signpost for Powell/Jumbo Huts. The walk to Powell would be 3½ hours of a very hard grueling climb. At this stage I didn't really know what I was getting myself in for. I thought a climb to the top in beautiful fine sunny conditions... 'I can do that'. (*What top? Did I even consider how far I'd be climbing – NO!*)

True to this description it was grueling and relentless. And this is where I discover how truly unfit I am. My last tramp was on 28/29 May doing the Tongariro Circuit. No tramps since then - no wonder I struggled big time with the route. We started out with a few gradual climbs until we hit the steeper sections. Being a total shock to the system, my body reacted quite severely; I felt I was going to be sick and was slightly light headed. Up and up into this hell of a descent. I had to make regular stops, lowering my head to shake off giddiness, sometimes to get my breath back, sometimes stopping just for the sake of it – I guess my way of coping with the situation. Shirley coped admirably; after all, this is her territory. Me, I avoid the Tararuas like the plague.

After feeling sorry for myself, I coped as well as I could. A lone day-walker caught up with us who was pretty fit and practically running up the hill. Admittedly she was only carrying a bum-bag. I don't think weight would have made any difference to my abysmal performance. Oh well! On and on we continued climbing – forever and ever and ever! Yeah I know I'm a drama queen. But damn at this stage I was really feeling sorry for myself. We had climbed a fair way and you could see the thinning of the trees which was a good sign; unfortunately we still had a long way to climb. A very very long way to climb. Just before we got to the open clearing we stopped to have a quick break and to don our rain jackets. Shirley mentioned that it would likely be windy and cold she thought she'd prepare herself. At that moment the lone woman who had passed us appeared. Since she was returning the same boring uninteresting way we had come from, Shirley invited her to join us on our circuit. Her name was Heather and she hailed from sunny Masterton. I enquired as to weather conditions where she had come from. She said "not bad". For

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some dumb reason I thought the tops would be sunny and fine but windy. My inexperience and total ignorance of winter alpine conditions was clearly evident. We donned jackets. Shirley and I both had shorts on having decided earlier that we would get hot from the steep ascent.

When we came out onto the clearing there was snow everywhere and the cold wind just blasted into our faces. OMG, I thought, I'm not prepared for these alpine conditions. I didn't even have the basic attire, ie leggings and gloves on. Both were in my pack. My whole perception of our ridge climbing was totally incorrect. As we started to climb – yes – more climbing was involved here, I wondered how on earth I was going to get to our destination when I was already badly fatigued and unprepared.

At this point, feeling a bit deflated, I had to stop to rummage through my pack for gloves, far too late now to change into leggings. Thank goodness I had brought gloves. People started coming down as we started our ascent. They must have thought Shirley and I were crazy not having leggings on. Even though the wind was bitterly cold and strong, my legs fortunately didn't suffer too badly. I probably could have done with another layer, but also too late to make a change. It took me a while to retrieve my gloves Shirley and Heather were already waiting in the biting wind and cold further up the track.

Our first task was to reach the top of the snowy ridge. This was quite difficult as no markers could be seen and the track was hard to find. In front, Shirley had to scrape away into the ice and snow with her walking pole; luckily she had this valuable piece of equipment. She also plugged steps which were very much appreciated by me and Heather at the back. Ice axes would have been valuable up here. Shirley probably wouldn't have continued on in these conditions but as we were probably at the point of no return, it was decided to continue on to Powell.

The icy conditions made our way to the ridge even more difficult. Once we arrived at the top we picked up the track and made our way through the snow. Some parts of the track were very icy and caution had to be taken. We slipped quite a lot on the ice picking up a few bruises along the way. Progress was very slow making the ascents/descents further up the mountain.

It seemed like ages before we came upon the Powell Hut signpost which was an hour away. An hour, in good conditions, would normally take an hour, but this seemed like it went on forever, made difficult by snow and ice. We were also descending so great caution had to be taken.

We finally reached Powell Hut at 3.40pm. I had had a good breakfast at 6am, half a muesli bar before we started at 10.15am, then the other half before we made the ascent in alpine conditions. I was starving and lacked energy.

At Powell a group of school kids from Paraparaumu had arrived. They were staying the night at Powell and continuing on to Jumbo Hut the next day. A poor Maori boy had collapsed on the deck outside; I thought I was the only one who felt like that.

It was already late, so a quick lunch was had before we decided to hit the track at 4pm – I had only eaten half my lunch. We had a further 3 hours to the car park. From the hut there wasn't much snow on this side and there was no wind (yay!). The terrain was a steep descent (Hmmmmmm – so good for my knees – NOT!!!). Again, slow-going. As we only had another hour of daylight left, the last 2 hours would probably be in the dark. As Heather had decided to join us at the last minute she would need to share the light from both our torches. Luckily I had new batteries. We descended most of this difficult terrain but in a few sections a few gradual climbs were required, not too grunty thank goodness. Light seemed to disappear quite rapidly so torches were now required. Heather had gone on in front as she was way faster than Shirley and I. She waited along the track as lighting became difficult for her. The last section of the journey seemed to go on forever; maybe because it was so dark and we couldn't see anything. We were now walking the Gentle Annie track and DoC steps gave my knees reminders why I should never attempt these sorts of tracks. I don't know how long it took but I was so grateful when we reached various signposts leading us to the car park, our journey finally coming to an end.

By the way, Shirley and I both wore our new Meindle tramping boots. The day before, I wore them for the first time for a few hours around the house. Shirley was wearing hers that day for the very first time. I didn't suffer any blisters, or bruised toes. But I think they may be a tad too big as they don't fit like gloves and there seemed to be too much room in the boot; I felt like "bigfoot" walking along the track. Neither Shirley nor I experienced cold or wet feet from the snow, which most probably would have happened in my older boots. We wore our boots in pretty well that day, walking in muddy, gravel, snow and icy conditions.

We arrived at the car park at 6.15pm in total darkness. A total of 8 hours (approx) with stops and lunch included. Thank you Lord for having delivered me from this hell of a trip. Shirley claims that in better weather conditions, it would have been easier and would have only taken 7 hours.

Snowcraft 2 – A reply from the Elites

Snowcraft 2, 5-7 August, (map #7)

Katy Glenie

Punters: Rowena Johnstone, Katy Glenie, Mike Travers, Weimin Ren, Anna King, Paula Vincent, Tatiana (Tanya) Krayushkina, Simon Lovatt, Mika Verheul, Hans Wiskerke, Ian Harrison, Dmitriy Alkhimov.

Leaders: Sharron Came, Mike Phethean, Steve Austin, Jenny Beaumont

Quick out of the blocks on Friday night at 5.30pmish, Snowcraft 2 set off for our second trip to The Mountain. Due to delays from phaffing, traffic and phaffing, some had to consume their Bulls kebabs on-the-run.



The dreaded hogsback



Exfoliation photo opportunity in the whiteout

The sun-gods seemed to have turned their back on Whakapapa this time, choosing instead to warm the faces of those left in Wellington (we missed you Donna!). The grim mountain forecast didn't stop the intrepid Elite squad from heading out early Saturday morning for a summit attempt.



The Elites take on the danger runs

As the clouds darkened and the dreaded hogsback increased in size, the Elites began to question their initial enthusiasm for the exposed summit route. By 12 noon the visibility had reduced to hand-in-front-of-face. After a bit of hopeful circling around, snack breaks, and photo opportunities, the squad decided to head back down. To maintain credibility, only wind-exposed low-visibility advanced routes were taken on the return leg (thanks Steve!), therefore reducing the percentage of bum-sliding opportunities.

The Podium group chose a different, possibly more insightful course for their summit attempt. With the expert guidance of Allen, they cleverly stuck to routes sheltered from the wind, and took a pass through the Pinnacles rather than heading for Glacier Knob; potentially more bum-sliding opportunities and less facial exfoliation from ice-laden wind gusts.

Saturday night dinner was a gourmet treat laid on by Mika, ably assisted by her charming partner-in-crime Hans. Her skills even extended to a gluten-free dessert!



In contrast, the Podium team's frolic through the Pinnacles

We woke on Sunday to driving hail against the windows. The rest of the morning was spent in-doors soaking up Mike P's knowledge on how to effectively hide an avalanche beacon in the store cupboard, and Sharron's obvious disdain for snow caves (it's not really an emergency shelter if it takes four hours to build).

We set off at midday to battle the afternoon traffic and grab a bite at the bustling metropolis of gumboot-town Taihape.

A big thanks to Steve, Sharron, Mike P and Jenny for your brilliant instruction on the weekend. Despite the weather we all loved every minute of it.

Waitewaewae Hut

Easy Medium, 25-26 June, (map # 8)

Margaret Craigie

Punters: Clinton Hunter, Spencer Clubb, Deb, Rachel, Margaret Craigie, Megan Banks (leader)



I was disappointed that we weren't camping out on the Friday night. It is one of the few chances that I get to see the stars without the light pollution from the city. As it was, I had to set the alarm for 5.45am on the Saturday morning. Times before 6am are anathema to me and I was almost sleepwalking through my porridge. I'm sure I was a sight; tramping pack, boots, pole, and helmet, whilst perched on my bicycle to rendezvous with Megan. I'm glad it was dark.

The two of us roared in from Upper Hutt to Wellington, collected the van and met our fellow punters. I was delighted to catch up with Clinton and Spencer who I hadn't seen for some years. We all arrived at Otaki Forks uneventfully, but

then made the mistake of stepping out of the van. We could all hear it... the sound of air escaping from the back tyre. Given it was a side-wall puncture, the whole tyre would have to be replaced, but for now, our immediate problem was getting the spare wheel off.



What seems odd to me is that access to the spare tyre was from the underneath (!) of the van. As time progressed, the damaged article looked less and less like a circle and more and more flat, and the spare was getting harder and harder to get to. We looked in the manual and looked at the spare tyre, and looked at the flat tyre, and looked at each other hopefully and generally looked thoughtful.

Eventually, the Blokes - 3 Dads and 4 young boys - arrived at the car park also heading to Waitewaewae for a Blokes's weekend. After much discussion and more looking at the book, we (they) finally worked out that what looked like a bolt keeping the rear bumper attached to the van, was in fact, a security bolt hiding the release for the spare tyre. The Blokes left, and after more looking at the book and grovelling in the gravel we found where to place the jack. Megan took to the nuts with gusto, the lads did some more grovelling and before long we were finally on our way.

It was mid-winter, and we were blessed with the most beautiful weather. The sun was shining, but not too hot. We traipsed along chatting about whether we really had to report such a small puncture. Would anyone actually notice if we just put the tyre in the back as if nothing had happened..?



Rachel and Deb were both on their first trip, and the Tararua ranges really put their best foot forward for them. We rounded a corner and met a man with a rifle and a fearsome Pekingese, (well, it was big for its breed), which chirruped at us in its bravest bark. I immediately realised that such a yap-dog could not possibly belong to the hunter. I resolved to keep an eye on the papers to see if a woman (and her dog) had been taken into the bush, and shot. However, on being asked if he came with his wife, he denied it... Hmmmm.

A minute later, we crossed an incredibly beautiful river, so very still and clear, clean (and yes! Green too). Shortly after that we witnessed the power of Mother Nature in the form of a fairly large slip. We traipsed onwards. The great thing about this pathway is that there were tracks put in at one time for machinery, meaning that apart from the occasional diversion, the slope is very comfortable. But then, we came across one of the largest diversions I've ever seen. This slip was gigantic, and marked as active. It was HUGE. It looked as if a whole hillside had already completely disappeared.



Not much farther on, there was a rusting abandoned log-hauler. A good place to stop for lunch before starting the next (watery) leg. (This is a pun on the name Waitewaewae.) Somewhere in the vicinity, we heard and saw some whiteheads. We were now following a stream up, criss-crossing every few minutes.

Unfortunately, I made the mistake of stepping on a stone that was a little slippery, and paid the price, falling over with Spencer grading it as 2 out of 10. To my credit, he upgraded the score to an 8 when he saw the size and colour of the bruise. Clinton, however, outdid everyone on the trip. Trying to keep his balance, he danced downstream for 15 feet or so, before falling over face down. And stayed there. With his heavy pack, despite all wriggling of his arms and legs, the poor man was stuck and simply gave the impression of a helpless turtle every time he waved his limbs. Spencer gave him 9 out of 10 for style.

More criss-crossings, and even more, and finally we came to the head of the spring. Up and over a small hillock and we were on the plateau. By implication, (and reality) the area was flattish and with nowhere for the water to drain, it was very muddy. The tuis whistled while we walked and when the mud finished, we started heading down-hill. Before long, I caught a whiff of smoke and knew that we could be no more than 5 mins from the hut. Heading down hill, we were detoured by some recently fallen trees. It was getting late in the day, and had just reached the creek at the bottom of the valley. With two ways to choose, we opted for dry land. This involved not only going uphill to detour around a bluff marked on the map, but a higher detour around more deceased trees. As we walked under a mahoe, a ruru flew in, landing not 6 feet from us and watched as we filed underneath its branch. In all, it was 1.5 hours after smelling smoke that we finally arrived at the hut. (The longest 5 mins ever).

Our meal was an extremely healthy vegetarian meal including couscous and (expensive) capsicum. The Blokes had brought in steak and sausages. There might have been hash-

browns, but even that could have been too much vegetable for their palates. Envious, much!

At one point, on needing to visit the ladies' room, I exited the hut to find that an apprentice Bloke was peeing off the steps. He made a point of keeping his back to me, but then the previous occupant of said ladies' room came around the corner. Women everywhere, and nowhere to turn... I took care where I stepped.

Breakfast whilst tramping has become a cerebral exercise for me. I try to go with lightweight, slow release energy, filling, easy to prepare, and hot. For me, this means a bowl of porridge. However, none of us could believe Deb's blueberries on her muesli, and felt a pang of jealousy.

It was time to leave our patch of paradise with its amazing summer swimming holes, and interesting hut-book entries. (Someone is apparently searching for Gollum, and the 1080 debate also started.) We retraced our steps to the log-hauler for a brief rest while Spencer tried comparing the defunct machine with a dog.

Upon arrival at the van, we were pleased to see that the tyre was still inflated and we drove home without incident. Having put on my slippers, I didn't want to put on my wet, muddy boots for the cycle home. Given the bogan reputation that Upper Hutt has, I decided I could get away with it. I'm still glad it was dark.

I want me money back

Fit tramp, Richmond Ranges, 22-24 July, (map # 9)

Tony Gazley

Punters: Tony Gazley, Jenny Cossey (leader)

The club newsletter for July listed a five day trip to the Richmond Range and commented that the leader Jenny was planning an epic. This sounded like a trip one should definitely sign up for—especially when there had recently been a very heavy snowfall throughout much of the South Island, and more snow and gale force winds were forecast. So I paid my money for a flight to Picton, my share of a shuttle to the start of the Red Hills track, and a flight home from Nelson.

The forecast strong winds were already evident when the pilot announced at Welly that it was too dangerous to land at Koromiko airport and so we would have to divert to Blenheim—hey great, already things were going wrong. Peter the shuttle driver then added to the drama by telling us there had been one of the heaviest snowfalls in Nelson Lakes for many years and most tramping parties were being turned back. So when we started up the easy track to the Red Hills we were unsure what we were really in for—but surely it couldn't be all bad.

We arrived at the new Red Hills Hut in time for a late lunch then set off for Porters—the next hut along Te Araroa walkway. There was quite a deep snow cover over the track but

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for the most part we stayed on the top without having to plug too many steps. There were just a few wispy clouds in the sky and there was no wind—certainly no epics so far.

The easy travel continued through some charming countryside—beech forest to the west of the fault line that cuts the length of the Red Hills, and tussock and low scrub to the east where a mineral imbalance in the ultramafic rock prevents the usual beech from growing, and many of the plants in this area are endemic to the Red Hills. Daylight was fading fast as we reached Porters Creek and we remembered Peter's warning that the final climb out of Lowther Creek to the hut was not well marked and could be easily missed even in daylight.

In the beam of our torches we had picked out a few small cairns in the riverbed but eventually we had to admit that we may have gone too far upstream and so we backtracked a few hundred metres to the base of a wide scree slope. We could find no markers here but it seemed to be the spot where the map showed the track started so up we climbed.

Then another small cairn appeared out of the darkness and eventually an orange marker. We followed

along the top edge of the scree for half an hour or so and then into the scrub where the track disappeared again. We were now in a very featureless flat area of low bushes that looked the same wherever we shone our torches and although we knew we were close to the hut we were not quite sure in which direction it lay. We pondered over the map for a few minutes and then headed off in the most likely direction only to have the hut immediately appear straight in front of us. We soon had the wood burner warming the hut and tea cooking on our stove. It had been a nice pleasant day in the hills—certainly with none of the advertised epics.



Easy walking along Te Araroa

The following day we left just on dawn with the idea of getting to the next hut early enough to have the option of pushing on over Mt Ellis to the Wairoa Valley. However, we were in no hurry—the day was calm and clear again and by the time we arrived at Hunters Hut it was too late to sensibly go further so we moved in. We collected a heap of firewood for the burner and spent the remainder of the afternoon lazing about, taking in the view, and planning for what was likely to be a long next day.

We had only one book between us so after tea as the increasing wind roared around the hut and a few snow flurries passed by the windows I lay back on top of my sleeping bag in the toasty warm hut while the trip leader read a bedtime story for a couple of hours. Certainly not what I had in mind when joining the trip but nonetheless very pleasant.

Next morning we left before dawn again and headed down to the Left Branch of the Motueka River which we followed to a broad spur leading up to Mt Ellis. The first couple of hundred metres climb up the spur was easy enough but the higher we climbed the deeper the snow became and the further we fell through it to the buried scrub and grass below. Progress became pathetically slow. Every few steps involved sinking waist deep or more and then an exhausting struggle to get out—only to take another step and fall through again. At one point Jenny fell through into the branches of the beech trees below and could hardly struggle out of the tangle. I did much the same and when my foot got caught between some branches I had to take my pack off before getting back to the surface. It was hours of solid effort before we left the bush behind. But once out in the open we were faced with the strong easterly wind that had been forecast, and spindrift and falling snow combined with the mist to form a total whiteout. We could see virtually nothing around us but at least the snow surface was now wind compacted and we could at last walk without falling through. We could occasionally pick out one of the few widely spaced snow poles marking the sidle below Mt Ellis and we moved as fast as we could to keep warm. But then the snow surface changed to hard polished ice and with the drifting snow swirling about us we put on the crampons that we had thought would probably be just unused deadweight in our packs. Now we could move safely across the steepening sidle, stopping only occasionally to check the map and our compass bearing where there were no marker poles.

We eventually arrived at the wide saddle directly above the Wairoa Valley and spent some time arguing where exactly the route was down to the hut. Without fully agreeing we headed down the easiest looking place. At first the going was fun—plugging long steps in a firm snow slope that took us down very quickly. Then we spotted the first track marker off to one side and headed its way. Now almost without warning the snow changed to deep rotten porridge that we fell through almost every step. Again progress was agonisingly slow—Jenny fell face down through to the rocks below the snow and had to be hauled out.

Then I went through backwards and it was her turn to help me out.



... but it was cold outside

Although it was only about 1 km and all downhill to the hut it took us nearly 2 hours to get there. By the time we opened the door we had both had more than enough of hauling ourselves out of the deep holes we were constantly falling into—the DOC time for our day was 4 hours but it had taken us nearly 9 hours of non-stop toil. Just as it was getting dark we collected a pile of wood and while Jenny cooked tea I started a blaze in the open fire place.

Soon the hut was toasty warm and we could sit back and enjoy our drinks and meal while our wet clothes steamed dry. While it had been a frustrating and tiring day, even mildly unpleasant at times, it had been by no stretch an epic especially since after tea I again stretched out on my bunk in the roasting heat to listen to another couple of hours of bedtime story.

We were now a half day behind schedule and neither of us could afford to be late back to Welly so with the prospect of a very slow trip over the high peak of Mt Rintoul in the soft snow conditions we changed our plans and instead decided to head for the road end in the Wairoa Valley. But before that we had time to get to Tarn Hut for the last night of the trip.



... but it was warm inside

Once again we left just before daylight and headed down the gorge to Mid Wairoa Hut. The track climbed and dropped all over the place and crossed the river many times but it was interesting travel and the day was fine and calm again. We arrived at the hut for lunch then climbed the 700 m to Tarn Hut. I had been to this enchanting place a couple of times before on warm summer days but now the tarn was frozen and there was snow covering the beaches and surrounding trees—it appeared totally different to my memory and

seemed to me somehow both incredibly beautiful and dreary cold at the same time.

Again we cranked up the pot-belly in the hut and sat in the warmth drinking tea and eating our tasty meal, while outside it was crispy cold with gently falling snow. After tea there were a few more chapters of bedtime story before drifting off to sleep. Undoubtedly it had been another lovely day in the hills but it had been yet one more day without any of the claimed epics.

There now only remained the race back down the track to Mid Wairoa and then out to the road end where we waited for the mountain bikers building their tracks for a future park and to cadge a lift to Nelson when they finished work for the day. I flew home while Jenny stayed an extra day to visit friends.

It had been a wonderful five days in one of the most beautiful tramping areas in the upper South Island. But it had clearly not been the trip I had signed up for—where were the promised epics? Instead of epics there was mostly fine calm weather, wonderful views, generally easy tramping, roasty warm huts, nice meals, and bedtime stories every night. I felt cheated! I am now thinking of asking the club for a trip fee refund under the Consumers Guarantee Act.

PS. The nightly bedtime story was the autobiography of Ranulph Fiennes. Now there's a bloke who knows an epic when he sees one.

Oatmeal for the Soul

Neill Forks MF Trip, 29-31 July (map # 10)

Ian Harrison

Punters: Amanda Wells (leader), Kate Cushing, Megan Banks, Sharon Brandford, Paul Christoffel, Ian Harrison



I grew up happily located between Kahurangi and Abel Tasman National Parks. As a youngster tramping for me was an enviable choice between silver beech in the hills or golden beach on the coast. So naturally, when I first moved to Wellington I looked down my nose at the Tararuas. A fellow Mainlander, John Pascoe, summed it up best when he famously wrote: [the Tararuas] “are to Wellington trampers what oatmeal is to Scottish people; dull solid fare which gives them staple virtues”.

Well now it's a Friday after work, I'm no longer a youngster, have somehow become more a Wellington tramper than a Mainlander, and I'm in the club van heading to the Waiohine road end for my fix of metaphorical oatmeal. My fellow diners seeking staple virtues are Amanda, Kate, Megan, Sharon and Paul.



The plan is to walk into Cone Hut tonight. This is fine on paper but it's a windy, cool and damp night, and as with oatmeal, I like the Tararuas least when they're served cold. To cope with this we all over-dress before heading off. All except Kate that is, who being blessed with a perfect mix of toughness and foresight starts off cold so is at a comfortable temperature by the time the rest of us come to a halt, red faced and sweating, to peel off layers.

The walk to Cone Hut passes without incident, other than a 100m long killer worm blocking the track in front of Amanda. Well she said it was really big when she first came across it, but by the time the rest of us catch up it's all of 3cm long (but we believe you Amanda-really we do!).

Thankfully Cone Hut is unoccupied when we arrive; I don't think any of us fancied sleeping under the fly. I like Cone Hut. It's simple and comfortable. However, its chimney is in need of repair as a bit of corrugated iron is loose and is making a terrible noise when caught by

the wind. Kate, being a civil engineer, does some quick but complex mental calculus to work out various numbers relating to various letters of the Greek alphabet, and then implements her calculated solution by stuffing a bit of firewood in it. With that sorted we all hit the sack and get a good night's sleep.

The next morning we wake to occasional showers and a light southerly. Our planned route goes up to Cone Saddle, then Cone itself, west across Neill Saddle and up to almost the top of Neill where we will leave the track and follow a prominent ridge down to Neill Forks. Although it is cool we have learnt our lesson and don't over dress. But before we reach Cone Saddle we have stopped to remove our raincoats as the showers have petered out. Although we don't know it at the time there's no more rain to speak of for the rest of the weekend.

We make good time with short breaks at the saddle, the viewpoint at spot height 812, Cone (topped with snow), and just beyond Neill Saddle where we stop for lunch. Continuing on up to Neill we easily find the turn off down the ridge because Amanda has a good description of where it should be (she's not Chief Guide for nothing) and it is subtly marked for those who are on the lookout for it. However, it's not long before we have lost the ridge. It seems like we probably weren't the first to make this mistake based on the prominent ground trail that took us in the wrong direction. It's not a big deviation and we're back on track in 15mins.

The ridge route is sparsely marked by old blazes and occasional pink flagging tape. The tape and blazes are scarce to begin with but more frequent lower down the ridge and the going is easier here too, probably thanks to deer and possums. The route delivers us to the creek just upstream of Neill Forks Hut. The others don't seem worried about getting wet feet. Indeed Amanda and Kate have the same type of boots which are actually clever foot shaped sieves made from something not much less porous than tissue paper, so have wet cold feet already. I on the other hand have a new pair of sturdy Germanic wonders that are currently housing a pair of nice warm dry feet. I take a risk and find a boulder from which to leap gazelle-like across the stream, thus keeping dry feet (ok so maybe gazelle-like is overstating it a bit as I was actually thinking I'm going to look a right ass if I stuff this up).

Once again we are treated to an empty hut. Most members of the group go for a wash in the river. Given the icy water this is madness to me. I didn't preserve a pair of warm dry feet to then go for a spot of polar swimming. I seem to have a memory of Megan shivering in her sleeping bag on her return.

No matter, the fire is soon lit and an excellent dinner eaten. Paul gets some flak for not counting the chocolate biscuits he brought for dessert, as their number is not divisible by the number in our group. Doing my bit for the greater good I gallantly step into the breach and help eat the remainder.

A good fire and six bodies in a small hut equals about 40 degrees C in the upper bunk troposphere by the time I struggle up there. My sleeping bag has just celebrated its 20th birthday and shows its age by always being either too hot or too cold. The transition from too hot to too cold happens over a split second sometime in the middle of the night. The old bag's zipper zipped right off the end in my frantic attempts to counter the too hot phase so I can't zip it up during the too cold phase. Sigh... another bit of tramping gear to replace.

The morning dawns clear and crisp. It's the type of morning that if it was the Swiss Alps there'd be yodellers yodelling or in the Andes whistlers whistling or in London rioters rioting. As it's the Tararuas there's none of that, and also because it's the Tararuas sadly there's no bird song to speak of either, like most of New Zealand's bush.

We've really got this starting off cold nailed. No need for a layer shedding break this time. The air is rather cool but easily countered by the blood-pumping calorie-burning track that doesn't muck about getting from the valley to the top of Cone Ridge.

Cone Ridge has some decent patches of snow on it (note we were there a few weeks *before* the big dump of 2011). As we approach Cone itself we get great views of the snow covered Tararua tops.

The rest of the trip out to the Waiohine road end via Cone Saddle is straightforward and a very pleasant end to what has been a really enjoyable Tararua weekend.

I'm not sure if I have gained any virtues, staple or otherwise, but I do know that sometimes, nothing hits the spot like a good old bowl of oatmeal.

Thanks to Amanda, Kate, Megan, Sharon and Paul. With this crew it would have been a great trip even if the weather was rubbish, the huts were full and the navigation inaccurate.

Mount Bruce family trip

Family weekend, 6-7 August, (map #11)

Mike Gilbert

Punters: Mike Gilbert, Angela Gilbert, Toby Gilbert (8), Jack Chen-Sinclair (8) (Toby's friend), Yingjie Zhang, Alex (8), Sam Newington (9) (Alex's friend), Yingting Li, Jerry Zhang (2.5), Ally Clark, Simon, Dominic (3), Hamish (1) Beth Piggott, Carly (2), Taylor (4), Kelvin Thiele, Melanie, Cam (8), Bradley (3), Colin Bouttel, Nathaniel (9), Mary Gunn

"We'll name it Bigwheels, and it's a he," said Jack, as we set off on our journey. Our rental van had enough character that we thought we'd better give it - him - a name. Character isn't usually a great sign in a vehicle, unless maybe it's a Ferrari or a Monster Truck. This van didn't have 'character' in a good way. It had aquired its personality by lugging people the equivalent distance of six times around the earth, and had saggy seats, creatively realigned body panels, and a torpid, sluggish diesel engine. But still, like a slightly stupid but endearing puppy, it gained our appreciation over the weekend.



One in each hand and one on the back

Bigwheels was taking us to the [Otapawa Farmstay](http://www.otapawafarmstay.co.nz) (www.otapawafarmstay.co.nz) in the northern Wairarapa. We were looking forward to exploring the Otapawa Farm, meeting some farm animals (for the first time for some of the children with us), and then heading across to Mt Bruce nature reserve on the Sunday. Would we get to see the white kiwi that had just hatched there?

It was never going to be a rapid, sparkling journey in Bigwheels but that was okay. We gently dawdled our way over the Rumutakas and into Featherston, where we bought a big pack of fish and chips for the four - yes, four! - 8-year-olds we had in the back seat. They were very excited to be on their journey, and chatted away for the whole trip.



What our van looked like, 15 years ago when it was new

We got in around 10pm, not too bad a time. Others had driven themselves up, and had sorted out the accommodation for us. We finished off the not-quite-cold Featherston fish and chips - very nice they were too!

Off to bed we all went, with the posse of 8 year olds with a room to themselves. That might not have been so wise in hindsight. They carried on chatting and chatting - all the way until midnight, and then they

cracked on again at 5am!

Saturday morning saw a visit from our hosts, Dara and Douglas. They brought us yummy fresh baking and made sure we were all settled in. They gave us a map of tracks we might want to take a look at, around the farm.

In the meantime, the posse, now with Cam in the group too, had headed off to a stream behind the farmstay. Kelvin the Engineer (and Cam's Dad) had gone with them and built a very impressive bridge across the stream. The kids had found a collapsing silt bank that was swallowing feet and gumboots! Sam ended up having to dig his gumboots out, and everyone got fantastically muddy and dirty. Just what should happen on farm visits.

After studying the map for a bit, we decided to head off to a pleasant sounding waterfall, an hour or two up a farm track. We found cows and calves that stared obstinately until I shooed them away (some of the kids and, er, adults got a bit nervous). The posse rambled high and low over the farmland, going no-where near the boring track. When the track crossed a stream, the posse headed into the gully and dashed up the stream, throwing stones to splash each other and chasing each other up and under the bridge. As the track climbed around a hill, they ran straight up and over. They certainly had a lot of energy!

After an hour or so, we came to the spot where two streams met in a pleasant water hole, with cute wee bubbling waterfall tipping over a rock face into the hole. Just in time for lunch! We munched away on our various lunches, and the posse hurtled around over cliffs and banks. Kelvin and I started talking... and looking at the topo map... and figuring that it would be much more fun to follow this gully back... and then traverse around that spur... and follow that other stream... and come out on a road... and go home that way. A shortcut! Hmm. The posse were all up for it. So off we headed.

The first thing we found was a big coil of number 8 wire, partly unrolled and overgrown into the paddock. "What's that?", asked one of the boys. "Ah, that's a pig trap!", answered Kelvin, with authority. "Don't get too close to it!". The posse thought he was joking, maybe. But they weren't sure. Then Alex ran up and kicked it - and dived back. Nothing. He stuck a leg in. "You don't want to lose that leg, do you?", said Kelvin helpfully. He pulled it out again, fast. But eventually he crawled partially in... but not all the way. Kelvin was very, very convincing!

So we continued on our way, leaping from bank to bank of the small stream we were following. Then we hit our first roadblock - the gully we were meant to be following had been left to regenerate, and was overgrown with bush. We couldn't go up the gully, we had to go around it. And that meant, going up and around a ridge. And that's when our plans started to come unstuck. It was about then that the sleet started, too.

To cut a long story short, we followed a different route out - Kelvin having a GPS that gave us an exact bearing, distance and estimated time to the farmstay was a big help! We

wandered along through mud, water, hills, more mud, and dead animals. Lots of dead animals. Including one that looks like it met quite a grisly end. We were on the lookout for wild dogs after that! After a while we emerged in, er, Dara and Douglas's front yard! A slightly sheepish trot down their driveway and we were back home.

Astonishingly, the others, who went the 'long way' back down the track, were already back! Who'd have thought it? (Most of my short cuts end up this way!)

Our numbers had swelled, too, since two more cars had arrived. Mary, and Colin and Nathaniel, had both opted to come up on Saturday morning.

After cups of tea and farm baking, we split our forces for the rest of the afternoon.

Most of us went up to Douglas's parents' place - they had a collection of usual and not-so-usual farm animals - lambs, chooks, goats, donkeys, tigers, peacocks and elephants*.

**Some of these animals were not there.*

Angela, Mary, Yingjie, Kelvin and Simon headed off up the road instead. The earlier walk to the waterfall had passed by a recent slip of mudstone and the eager fossil hunters among us couldn't resist having a look. Simon knew the limestone outcrops along the ridges above the farm would prove a better fossil treasure trove. Alas, they came back empty handed, but they had a good time nonetheless - it's the thrill of the chase, not the quarry!

One outcrop caused great excitement, but it turned out to be mudstone and devoid of fossils. The wind up on the ridges was fierce and the kid in Kelvin made him leap from the car to experience the strength of the wind. The rest were content to evaluate the wind strength from the safety of Mary's car.

Hamish, Dom and Jack elected to stay put, so Ally and I elected to babysit. I certainly enjoyed myself drinking coffee and listening to Jack and Dom chatting away to each other - Dom was 4, Jack was 8, but they seemed to be able to find enough in common to talk about!

As we hung about the farmstay, the wind started getting up, to the point where in Wellington terms a stiff breeze was blowing. Of course, this was not Wellington, so that meant that in Wairarapa terms a gale had whipped up. Trees were groaning and swaying. And then - oh dear - the lights flickered and went out. No power! Just on dinner time, too!

Soon the others filtered back in and we started figuring out how to get something edible out of what we had. Spaghetti Bolognese was on the menu, and I didn't fancy cold, dry spaghetti with tomatoes and raw mince! Luckily we had a wood burner with a flat top, that was put to good use simmering the spaghetti and the sauce. It was interminable getting things up to temperature, but once they were there the pots simmered away nicely. And we were able to fire up a barbeque, and fry up the onions and mince straight on the cook

top. After combining it all back together it was as good as if we'd had the oven to cook with! Yippee. There was just enough for everyone - no more, no less. I'd judged it just a little bit finely... and then, a little bit too finely, when the clean-up crew found a plate of food that had been left lying around, and biffed it away - only to find it was poor Simon's dinner, who had been off sorting his kids out. Argh! Luckily we'd over-catered on desserts, and Ally had brought yummy banana cake as well - so no-body went hungry.

That evening, Kelvin and Melanie brought out Monopoly - the card game. It seemed very complicated, and my brain was very tired! The posse of boys were MUCH quieter than the night before. They slunk off to bed pretty early, and were completely silent within minutes of going to bed.

During the night, we could hear the wind blowing and the rain lashing. What would it be like in the morning?! Still windy, but relatively pleasant, as it turned out. But Bigwheels the Van, which I'd parked on a patch of grass, was now sitting in a small puddle. And when I tried to back him out of the puddle - I got about as much traction as you'd expect for soggy grass and mud. After a bit of progress with bark and wood under the tyres and suchlike, Mary took pity on us and pulled us onto stable ground with her Subaru, using a tow-rope that Kelvin magicked up from his car.

So off we headed to Mt Bruce, to explore and run about. We got in just in time for the Tuatara feeding, which was a revelation. I can vouch that Tuatara can go very fast when they actually want to! The keeper threw in some slaters (wood lice) and the Tuatara rapidly chased them about and devoured them. She kept up a constant commentary too, and I actually learned things from it. Did you know that no-one actually knows how long Tuatara live for, because the oldest one in captivity is 120 years old and counting? When that one dies we might have some idea of their lifespan.

Wandering about, we found a Kokako that countless tourists had taught how to speak. It was very proud of itself, and came down to chat to us. And another slightly unexpected sight at Mt Bruce is their stand of Redwoods, which tower over their surrounds. Planted as a forestry experiment in the 1930's, they are a little slice of California right in the middle of native NZ bush.

As luck would have it we'd also arrived at just the right time to see Manukura, the famous white kiwi. Once a week they get her out to meet the tourists. She is not an albino; it seems that a few white kiwi are born to the Brown Kiwi at Little Barrier Island, and 30 or so Little Barrier Island kiwi were relocated to Mt Bruce a year or two ago. Very special!

But soon it was time to head home. Looking at the storm clouds over the Tararuas and battling through the hail on the Rumutakas made us realise we'd got the best of the weather on our side of the mountains!

This was one of those weekends that seemed much longer than just two days. We crammed so many different activities into it! Thanks to Dara and Douglas at Otapawa

Farmstay for your great hospitality; and now you know where to stay if you want a few days of peace and quiet on the Northern Wairarapa. Just don't pick the same weekend that 20 adults and kids from the WTMC invade the place!

Kawhatau Base, Ruahines

Medium tramp, 19-21 August 2011, (map #12)

Gareth Morton

Punters: Jo Boyle (leader), Gareth Morton (co-trip leader)
Pete Gent (navigationally-challenged punter)



The last time it snowed in downtown Wellington I was too young to dress or feed myself. In the intervening years this ability had only slightly improved, yet I had learnt the basic use of an ice axe and crampons. So off we went all tooled up for the slow drive to the Ruahine's only a few days after NZ had been hit by the coldest polar blast in recent memory. At least we knew to expect snow, and lots of it.

The drive to Kawhatau Base went smoothly apart from the last kilometre driving through the farmer's property as the van slid out of the tractor tracks in the snow. Six hardy punters got out to push and through the last gate we went. With the lodge within sight, but the snow now a bit deeper, the van got stuck again and could not be freed so we bravely walked the last 50 metres to the lodge!



After a good night's sleep and the advantage of daylight we rescued the van from the snow and turned it around onto a semi-bald patch of ground by a large tree, before packing our gear and heading upwards towards either McKinnon Hut or Crow Hut with the MF group of 5.

Both groups safely crossed the cableway, including Dirk who had some unfinished business with this contraption, and the steep ascent began with heavy packs. The first 200 metres are the steepest of the climb up and was made more difficult in the slippery snow, but fortunately there is good foliage to cling on to, so long as you don't cling to any onga-onga! Having so much snow around sure made the forest incredibly beautiful and a rare privilege to be tramping in it in the Ruahines. The way that large mushroom-like clumps of snow would form on the

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leaves and branches made for some great photo ops. The climb to the bush-line would normally take about 2 hours; however, as the snow became deeper as we climbed, it was 3.5 hours before we made it to the bush-line at 1350 meters. Amazingly there was very little wind blowing on the tops which was a bonus because at this point our speed dramatically dropped even further due to waist-deep snow. Hans was in the MF group so we used his long legs to forge a track through the snow as Hans was also keen to get some training in for his upcoming 10 week trip to Nepal. We progressed about 100 metres in the next 30 minutes as we realised walking through waist-deep snow is about as quick as walking through waist-deep cement! With the turn-off down to the bush-line to Crow Hut being about 1.5 km away we realised we were not going to make this distance, so decided instead to enjoy the occasion where we were and play around and take photos for about 20 minutes before heading back down. The descent went smoothly with the odd clump of snow thawing and dropping onto peoples heads, and much caution needed on the lower steeper sections where the snow was now a bit slushier and combined with mud.

Back at Kawhatu Base 7.5 hours after leaving, we unpacked our gear once again, started the generator and enjoyed a good dinner of couscous with apricots, raisins and salami. Dinner conversations included the history of the light-bulb, wattage use of a slow-cooker and Canadian headwear terminology; the conversation briefly got more interesting with talk of airport codes!



Talk of heading up to Colenso the next day was quickly poo-pooed.

Instead we took the scenic drive home via Rangiwahia, Kimbolton, Feilding and Shannon. Pete seriously suggested we return via the Manawatu Gorge and SH2 but that idea was consigned to the rubbish pile when we pointed out some basic NZ road geography to him!

Although we only did 1 day's worth of tramping it was a good weekend with good company, good food and great banter.

Colonial Knob Walk

Family day trip, 30 July 2011, (map # 13)

Kelvin Thiele

Towering high above the alpine village of Porirua stands the magnificent peak of Colonial Knob.

Okay, while it did look like a mountain during the August snow fall, it's not THAT tall, and neither did the family group climb it in August. But at 450m, it is an honest climb, with magnificent views over Porirua, Tawa, out towards Kapiti Island and the South Island.

Everyone was in an adventurous mood, so we did the mega-loop, starting from Camp Elsdon, we climbed steeply through the bush of Porirua Scenic Reserve. The path then follows farm tracks along the ridge line to the summit.



We continued south, following the part of Te Araroa, The Longest Pathway, that heads towards Oharia Valley. This is further than the “normal” Colonial Knob loop, but is great fun as the path drops steeply through pine forest covered in slippery pine needles. The children treated this as a giant slide. Does the saying “leave nothing but footprints” extend to giant bum prints?

The track emerges to a clearing, where we followed a forestry road through Spicers Forest along the southern border of the Porirua Seagull Wildlife

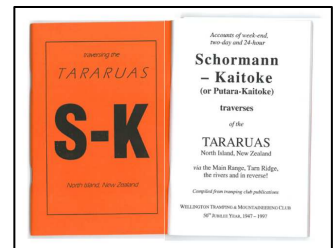
Sanctuary (rubbish tip). This road emerges across the road from Spicers Botanical Park, an arboretum of exotic trees. Cutting through the park a track follows the side of a man made reservoir surrounded by native bush, through Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve to Rahia Street and Camp Elsdon.

The total loop was nearly 10km. A great and varied walk, with good company and a fantastic day.

Other news, notes and reminders

P-K Tararua crossing books for sale.

Are you interested in the Tararuas? In which case, this book may be for you. We have a few copies left for sale at \$11 each (including postage). If you are interested contact Steve Austin via: treasurer@wtmc.org.nz



Use of hiking sticks in the mountains

The international mountaineering and climbing federation have released an interesting article about the use of hiking sticks, and how it should be done to avoid injury. To read all about it go to:

http://www.theuiaa.org/medical_advice.html#The_Use_of_Hiking_Sticks_in_the_Mountains

WTMC Leadership course - October 29-31

Learn vital skills, and pick up some great handy hints, you need to lead a WTMC trip including advanced navigation and weather reading.

Outdoor first aid course - October 29-31

Do you know what to do if someone in your group needs urgent first aid whilst on a trip? The outdoor first aid course will teach you those vital skills using a classroom and practical format. The course comes highly recommended!

Both the leader's course and outdoor first aid course are being run on the same weekend at the same venue. Please put this weekend in your diary now – sheets will go up on the board in early September, or email lardner.richard@gmail.com to book your place.

Turere Lodge opening in the Orongorongo Valley, Rimutaka Forest Park, 17 September 2011

This new 32 bunk facility has four bunk rooms, each containing eight bunk beds, large communal cooking/gathering facilities and a deck with stunning views of the of the valley. The facility is only a 2.5 hour walk from the main Catchpool car park near a popular day walk hub, easily accessible with no river crossing. For more information go to:

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/conservation-week-home/whats-happening/wellington-kapiti/celebration-turere-lodge-opening/>

Alpine or Antarctic calendars for sale

If you would like an Alpine or Antarctic calendar for 2012 check out the website
<http://www.caxton.co.nz/alpine-calendar.html>

Either order online here or for discounted club prices (depending on demand) contact Megan by Wednesday September 21st. Megan can be found at club most Wednesdays or email her at promotions@wtmc.org.nz

Deadline for submissions to the October WTMC newsletter: Friday 30 September

The views expressed in the articles in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club. Any queries or comments should be directed to the writer of the article. The editor of the newsletter reserves the right to edit and publish articles.