



The Mouth 'n' Ear

Wellington Tramping & Mountaineering Club Newsletter

Email: newsletter@wtmc.org.nz

May 2013



Could there be a more fabulous place to camp?
Mt Owen, Easter weekend

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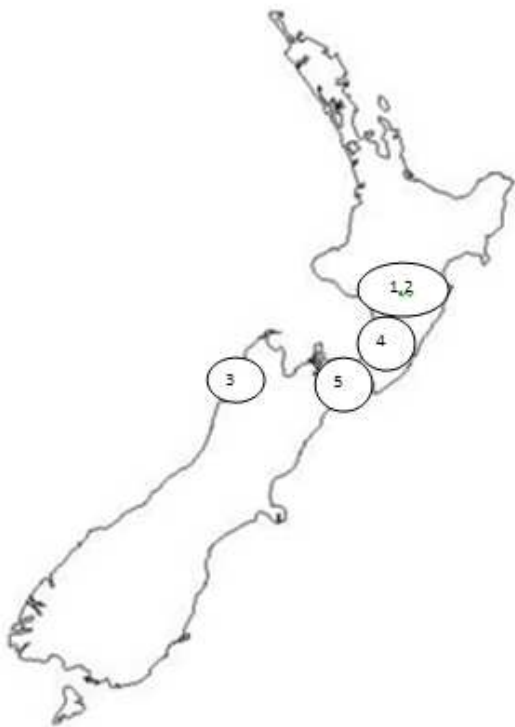
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Introducing the 2013 WTMC committee

This being the first newsletter for the 2013 WTMC committee, we thought it fitting to introduce ourselves:

Sharron Came, President

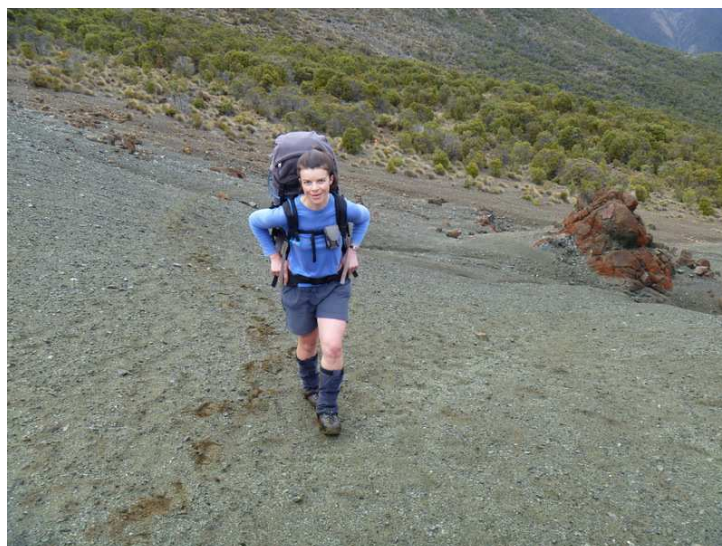
My job is to ensure our club is well run and members are inspired to make the most of New Zealand's fabulous natural environment through participating in our cool outdoor group activities and indoor social events. I've been a member since 2004. I joined WTMC to do the alpine instruction course. I've stuck around because of the people. WTMC is a quirky community of members who don't take themselves too seriously and share similar values along with a passion for outdoor adventures.



Amanda Wells, Vice President

I'm the Vice President and support Sharron in her role as President. I'm running the bushcraft and leadership instruction courses, and am keen to make sure we provide a welcoming, inspiring and safe environment to newcomers.

I've been a member of WTMC since 2005 and am passionate about tramping and how it's changed my life - and about the chance to give back to the community that is WTMC.



Mike Phethean, Chief Guide

I have been tramping for a few years and more recently have enjoyed the odd spot of mountaineering. As I am new to the committee I am a little in awe of the whole process but hope to help out. I will be focusing on supporting new and existing trip leaders and encouraging more people to sign up as trip leaders. I will also focus on reducing, where possible, the work load in organising a trip.



Debbie Buck, Assistant Chief Guide

I'm here to help the Chief Guide put together the trip schedule, encourage members to put their names down to lead trips and then provide trip sheets for people to sign up for exciting trips.

I've been an active WTMC member since 2011. I decided to become a committee member to contribute to keeping WTMC great for current and future members.

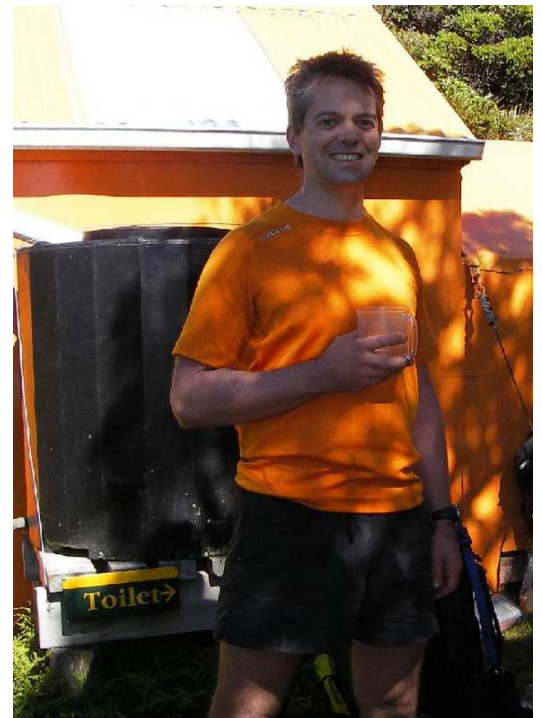
WTMC is an awesome club for anyone who wants to explore NZ's wild places, share inspiring outdoor adventures with like-minded others and learn (or instruct) new outdoor skills.



Richard Lardner, Transport Officer

I'm the Transport Officer which means I look after the club vans and allocate them to trips. I will ensure there is enough space in the vans to get WTMC trampers to their road end (and out again!)

I've been a member of the club since 2009



Mike Gilbert, General committee

I organise the family tramping faction of the club, as well as making sure the website is running smoothly and sharply.

I have been a club member since 1994, but took a 10 year overseas sabbatical and re-joined in 2007. I love how the club has such a wide range of members from all ages, walks of life, fitness levels and adventurousness, and that it's got something to offer all of them.



David Heffernan, Promotions Officer

I have been a club member since 2012, and joined the committee a couple of months ago with responsibility for promotions. I am in charge of organising the new members' nights each year, responding to enquiries from those who learn about us from our website, and generally helping out with the work of the other webby people.

I like how the club has members who have such a diverse set of skills, and I hope to get into more instructional stuff over the winter. In addition to leading a few trips over the winter schedule I am looking forward to tagging along on some of the navigation and alpine trips and trying to get a bit more out of my comfort zone.



Sue Walsh, Social Convenor

I've been with the club since 1991 and have previously been on committee in a number of different roles. After a wee break I'm back in the role of Social Convenor. In a nutshell, to me the Social Convenor is the very public face of the tramping club and is there to ensure we have presentations every Wednesday night. This is done by encouraging club members and external speakers to talk about their adventures and outdoor passions showcasing their photography. The Social Convenor also ensures that the very important tea/coffee and biscuits are put out on time at the start of each evening.



Sarah Young, Newsletter editor

I arrived in Wellington in May 2005 and started tramping with WTMC in the first week of my being here. I have met some of my best friends, including my husband, through the club. Going on trips with WTMC is a great way to meet people, make friends, see NZ and get fit!

I have been editing the WTMC newsletter for two years now, publishing stories of what you all get up to in the bush. I helped set up the current club website, and continue to edit content and look after the information architecture and usability of the site.



Helen Law, Membership Officer

I have been a member for 6 years now and love the variety of activities the club has to offer. I especially like meeting different people and go away on trips together, who all share the same interest of being in the outdoors.

As membership officer, I ensure all new members get their membership application considered at committee meeting, and notify the applicant of the committee decision.

Throughout the year, and when advised, I ensure all changes to members status and contact details are up to date on our database. Then at end of each year I send out subscription invoices and friendly reminders if payment not received by the due date.



The Nature of Things

Sharron Came, President



We had our AGM earlier this month; thanks to everyone who attended and for all the positive feedback we received on the annual report. Congratulations also to the members joining the committee for the first time: Mike Phethean, Mike Gilbert and Debbie Buck.

I know some of you have not managed to read the annual report and we certainly didn't dwell on it at the AGM. The annual report is important as it represents our best efforts to give a snap shot of the health of the club. Those of us focusing on the smooth running of the club use it to figure out what our priorities should be for the coming months.

2012 was a year of consolidation. This is reflected in the year's highlights:

- Further improvements to the website, improvements for which, I'm pleased to report, we have received plenty of positive feedback.
- Continuing to replace paper processing with electronic processing where this is cost effective for the club. For example, the lodge booking system, electronic invoices for membership and changes to the constitution to provide for electronic notice of meetings.
- Another year of smooth trip delivery. As I stressed last year, this is not something that can be taken for granted, it requires a tremendous amount of hard work and patience on the part of Chief Guide Amanda Wells and her team working in closely with Assistant Chief Guide Richard Lardner, Transport Officer Gareth Morton, Gear Custodian Pete Gent and his team and our trip leaders.

In the 2011 Annual Report I suggested that if various initiatives we had begun implementing were working I would expect to see:

- membership remaining steady or growing and more members staying with the club (less churn);
- increased trip participation;
- greater club night participation;
- greater usage of the lodge and vans; and
- plenty of volunteers stepping forward for the tasks that need to be done to keep the club running.

To the extent that we are able to measure our performance against these indicators the results are mixed. We appear to have made some modest gains particularly with respect to reducing membership churn. In 2012 we almost doubled the number of new members. While this result did not quite match the number of members we lost we came very close suggesting we may be on the way to reversing our pattern of net membership decline which until this year was tracking at an average of 20 members per annum. On the other hand at least some of the credit for this result will be due to our relaxing the member eligibility requirements slightly (from 3 overnight trips to 2). We currently have 448 members.

Churn is something we have to manage. People move to different parts of the country or overseas or into different life stages. A small but significant portion of our members are not Kiwis and do not intend to stay here so inevitably they join us on a temporary basis. Also, people have a wide variety of interests and not much spare time so everyone has to prioritize. Once you have met a few people, made some friends, learnt some skills and bought a car the need to belong to a tramping club like ours declines. This is why member engagement and building a sense of community is so important to the sustainability of our club. This year we turned 65!

The number of tramping trips that ran in 2012 increased for the second year in a row and we experienced less trip cancellations. Overall trip numbers were down slightly on 2011 meaning participation is down but only fractionally. We remain predominately a tramping club in terms of trips offered. Unsurprisingly this trend reflects our central purpose and member interest although we would run more kayaking and cycling trips if we were able to attract members with the specialist skills required for leading these trips - their popularity suggests demand outstrips supply.

We experienced the biggest growth in family tramping which is great news, particularly if we can get these young people to stick with the club. Mike Gilbert and his team have worked hard to ensure trip supply matches demand and that our trip systems are designed to accommodate the needs of family groups without compromising safety. I take particular heart from this development as I think it serves as a useful model if we are to retain or grow our current level of trip participation more broadly.

Our assets are in reasonably good shape. Lodge income was up slightly this year although we still made a loss largely due to the fact that we face rising costs for items such as insurance and power and we have a booking system and a maintenance program to pay for. The challenge of getting better lodge utilization, particularly in summer remains with us and we will be looking to try some innovative pricing options, booking rule changes along with targeted promotion. Paua Hut is enjoying relatively good utilization. This hut is available free of charge for use by members. Good to see the members making use of it! Van usage is up slightly on last year. South Island usage in particular has increased which is pleasing. One of the main reasons we have vans is to enable members to travel to places relatively cheaply and having our own vans helps with this. We face ongoing maintenance and storage costs which we endeavor to cover through the trip fees.

Our financial position remains relatively healthy with no large unexpected payments coming our way. We continue to keep a good reserve for when we need to replace the vans or gear or make significant investments in our existing assets.

Attendance at the Wednesday nights was down slightly presumably reflecting the entertainment preferences and life stages of the membership. Family trampers, for example, are probably tucked up in their beds at 8pm at night. The introduction of a slideshow roster accessible from the website will hopefully help with booking and promotion of club night entertainment. We have also established a small team of people to keep the Wednesday nights running so the burden does not rest with a single individual.

We don't have a single scientific way of measuring member engagement although we are now able to measure aspects such as visits to our website and length of time spent there. Our website analytics suggests good engagement with that platform. We have been able to find people to undertake most of the tasks required for running the club and members have turned out for key events such as the EGM, and new member's night which indicates reasonable engagement.

My intuition is telling me we have made some gains in this area but there is room for improvement. We still have relatively few people doing the bulk of the work running the club with a larger group essentially free loading off that effort. The three challenges we face are i) finding ways to make it easier for people to help out; ii) simplifying our systems so less helping out is required; and iii) getting members with specialist skills to step up – we are always looking for people with IT and accounting skills. The "informal small group participation" model we have adopted for looking after the Wednesday nights and for making improvements to the website is one that we will likely look to utilize to get more done in other areas of club administration.

Once again every single person on the committee worked really hard individually and very effectively as a team to ensure the smooth operation of the club. Good to know that the President is not indispensable. I was out of the country for 6 weeks and club administration ran like clockwork. I would like to thank everyone on the committee for their contributions. I continue to appreciate having the opportunity to work with such a co-operative and constructive group. Between us we have a good mix of skills and competencies and it has been a great comfort to me to have people on hand to compensate for my weaknesses.

While I'm at it, I'd like to thank Mike Gilbert and Tony Gazley for their work as Webmaster and Journal Editor respectively. These roles are off committee but this does not mean they are unimportant. How well these roles are performed has a huge impact on club life and how we look to prospective members. Thanks also to the club members who toil away co-operatively and quietly behind the scenes helping out with the large number of small, odd or small odd jobs that need to be done to support the smooth running of the club.

Gareth Morton and Jenny Beaumont have stood down from the committee after 4 years of service. They will be greatly missed and I wish them well. They have made a huge contribution to the smooth running of the Club and will likely continue to do so informally.



Having never served on the committee before I must admit the job of being chief guide is a little daunting. Luckily the good job that Amanda has done over the last three years includes a great handover. I hope I can keep up the efficient work.

The main thing I have inherited from Amanda is a very well stocked trip schedule for Winter. It is great to see so many people leading trips and in particular I would like to thank all those for whom this will be their first time leading. Now everyone else get out there and go places, lots!

As chief guide one of the first things I am trying to do is reinforce the support for trip leaders. There will be a leadership course on 3rd August and this is a good chance for those who are still a little unsure about leading a trip to gain some experience in the organisational and people management aspects of trip leading.

Even if you have already led a trip you are more than welcome to go along and I can assure you there are plenty of good learning.

Another key skill both for leading and also for tramping is navigation. It is more than acceptable to get lost but less useful not to be able to work out where you are having done so. The schedule has a lot of “nav” or navigation trips on it run by the some of the more experienced leaders and this is a good opportunity to increase yours skills and confidence.

Finally as a club we are more than happy to acknowledge that trip leading is not for everyone and there are plenty of other ways to help out. However you can still support the trip leader by making their life easy. Doing the following really helps:

- 1) Answering the emails quickly and paying promptly.
- 2) Thanking the leader at the end of the trip. Make sure they know you appreciate their effort! (Well, within limits.)
- 3) Offer to help when you can, e.g. cook the evening meal
- 4) Smile!

Membership update

Helen Law, Membership officer



This month we welcome 3 new Senior members, they are Tracey Black, Ingeborg Hickey and Paul Crozier. Gema Aitken also joined us as a new Child member. Also we welcome back Stijn Scheper and Richard Young re-joining us as Senior members.

The 2013/2014 membership renewal process was carried out fairly smoothly during the last few months. At least 85% of members paid on time and took advantage of the prompt payment discount. More than 7% paid after the payment due date. So far only 4% informed me about their resignation. The remaining 4% I still have not heard and if you think you are one of these people please get in touch with me asap. If you have any questions or comments about membership please contact me by either emailing membership@wtmc.org.nz or by post P.O. 5068, Lambton Quay, Wellington 6145.

Club night talks



Welcome to the Social Convenor's corner! I'm excited about being back on committee and in this role. I'm on the hunt for speakers for Wednesday nights and I have one or two "hunters" keeping their ears to the ground to pick up speakers for me too. If you are keen to try your hand at giving a presentation please let me know. I'm keen to hear from anyone, including our longer term members who might want to give us a blast from the past. You can contact me at social@wtmc.org.nz

Coming up we have:

- 1 May: Richard Young taking us on an African Safari
- 8 May: Paul Christoffel and team talking about their trip to the Dragons Teeth
- 15 May: Amanda Wells talking about her recent trip to the Tasman Wilderness Area in the Kahurangi's
- 22 May: Sharron and DJ take us on their trip to Sefton and Mt Brewster
- 29 May: Harry Smith has been nominated to show us photos from a recent trip that went over Ball Pass
- 5 June: The Great Tongue and Meat Quiz Night

Trip reports

Howletts Hut via Te Hekenga

22-24 March, Medium fit tramp, Ruahines (map #1)

Author: David Heffernan

Trampers: David Heffernan (leader), Debbie Buck (photos), Mariusz Drozdowski



The Howlett's Hut loop trip via Te Hekenga has been on the schedule for a while now, repeatedly postponed by weather, and it was great to finally knock it off.

After driving up with the Rangi Hut trip group and having a good feed in Levin we stopped off at Mangaweka campsite for a few minutes to unload them before we carried on to Renfrew road end.

A couple of minutes into the walk things got serious when one of the party jumped enthusiastically over a cliff in the darkness, their fall broken only by a sizeable pile of dead wood. Not quite the auspicious start.

The trip up to Rangi, with usual detour up and over the slip, took about 1:20. They are making a lot of upgrades to the track, and it looks like they are going to go with switchbacks to make the section up and over the slip a bit easier, with the new track probably opening soon. Lots of stairs have gone in as well, especially in the muddy section around the waterfall near the hut.



Despite mountains of gear in the hut we had the place to ourselves; presumably those working on the track had upped and gone home for the weekend. We settled in for the night, with Debbie and I on the balcony, although Debbie snuck in later on. It wasn't a silly decision, as I woke up in a sleeping bag dripping with condensation. We had a bit of a casual start and eventually left the hut just before 9:00.

we all took 3-4 litres each for the day, not knowing quite how long we would be walking for. Whilst there were one or two sad-looking tarns most of them were completely parched, so it was probably the correct decision. This was after a record drought though, with a bit of rain there would probably be water refills every half-hour or so.



We were a bit worried about a lack of water on the tops due the recent super drought, so

The weather was excellent, and we had great views out to Taranaki and the Central Plateau at the start of the day, becoming views of Wairarapa and the Hawkes Bay for the end of the walk.

We stopped at the top of the saddle West of Te Hekenga for a respectable lunch around 12:30, and then slugged it out down and back up to the peak.

Te Hekenga has been savaged by slips on three sides, and isn't really passable, so we knew we'd have to drop down the SW side and find a route onto and over them and back up to the ridge line towards Tiraha. The route down and around Te Hekenga was a bit easier than feared; as long as you know to look for the goat track it is pretty obvious where you should be walking, although that may not be true with snow cover.

After a second lunch we got our first glimpse of the hut, clearly visible with its bright orange roof. We packed off for the last leg, first a short hop to Tiraha where the main watershed – Sawtooth Ridge – turns off to the North, and then past a few more scary slips and a bit of leatherwood before reaching Howletts. Total time for the day was about 8:00 and we

quickly changed and cooked up a teriyaki chicken noodle stir fry which we ate outside whilst watching the sun drop behind the ranges. There were a couple of friendly oldies from Heretaunga TC at Howletts who had been doing general maintenance, and put three coats of fresh orange paint on the roof, which is why the hut stood out so well.

The next day we had a bit of an early start. We had promised the easy Raniwahia Hut group we would be out at the roadend at 2pm sharp. And we figured it would be about 8 hours walk. We woke early and were on our way fairly quickly.

The first section south of Howletts across Daphne ridge was pretty overgrown and a bit of a leatherwood bash in places, and progress was slow, but once we were through the saddle the sun came out and was another fantastic day of walking. As usual we had two lunch breaks at the turnoffs to Longview Hut and above Iron Gate Hut, respectively, and after a short rest at the top of Tunupo we charged down the hill to Heritage Lodge, arriving a bit later than expected. The Rangi Hut group had walked in to meet us though, and were sunbathing on the deck, and they didn't seem too bothered by the late arrival. We were back to the car park, changed and on our way by 3pm, and had a very relaxed drive back with a well-deserved ice cream stop in Shannon.

Rangiwahia Hut via Deadmans Track

22-24 March, Easy tramp, Ruahines (map #2)

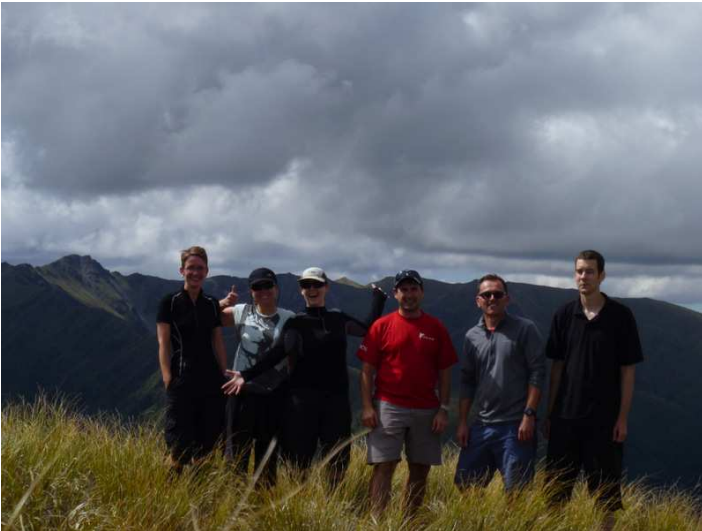
Author: Rory MacLellan

Trampers: Rory MacLellan (leader). Paul Crozier, James Hemming, Nicky Shields, Ingeborg Hickey, Ilske Vesburg



Leaving platform 9 an hour later than usual turned out to be a smart decision, with most of the Friday afternoon traffic already gone it was a smooth drive to Levin where we stopped for some food and to check out the public toilets with background music... really weird. Back on the road again we made it to the Mangawaka campground in good time and set up all the tents while Rory drove the members of the fit group to the road-end where he observed numerous possums along the road, a few of which preceded to commit suicide at the mercy of the van's front wheels. After a good night camping listening to the relaxing sounds of the nearby river we awoke on Saturday morning and the campground revealed its beautiful surroundings. It would be lovely to linger around but we were on a mission... so all back in the van and a half an hour drive with beautiful views of Mt Ruapehu got us to the car park at the trail head.

The track began with a somewhat steep gradient; however it was well maintained with plenty of steps on the way. Nevertheless it was quite exhausting for most of our party and in some places quite slippery, as our illustrious tramp leader found out when he took a tumble off some slippery rocks and scraped his leg. We continued on and finally the track levelled out and we left the bush line to be surrounded by tall grassland and views of the uphill climb. Most of the climb to the summit was relatively easy, however the final stages proved to be quite steep and very tiring with a full pack and some disappointing false summits. After several stops for water we got to the summit at around 1.30 pm, and were greeted by the most amazing panoramic views of the Ruahine mountain ranges.



The summit provided a great opportunity to take a well earned rest and have some lunch. There was some discussion about the route that the fit trip would be taking and as we were searching the various ranges for a glimpse of the route, someone thought that they could see the Pacific Ocean to the east.

The trek towards the hut continued on at a fairly level grade then a slight uphill that left

everyone wondering if we were actually done of the hills. Fortunately there were no more major hills and we rambled down to the hut in about an hour reaching Rangiwahia Hut around 4 pm on a gorgeous sunny day.

The views from the top were inspirational; we could see the countryside to Mt Taranaki and the volcanoes of the Tongariro National Park. The hot weather made us really warm after an enjoyable trek up Deadmans Track. So we all relaxed, four of us pulled out mattresses to lie on in the sun - Paul, Inky, Rory, and Nicky, the others Ilska, and James lay out on the deck. Rory also tried out his new hammock, and had thoughts of sleeping in it. After about an hour and half we started dinner, risotto, which was served after around an hour of preparation. Ilska followed up the main event by making a yummy Chocolate mousse for dessert. We had delicious dinner and dessert on the sunny deck and watched a beautiful sunset. Nicky was in the long drop looking up at the new skylight only to realize that her sunglasses slipped off and fell down, down, down. She was disappointed but did not think that they were worth attempting a retrieval operation. The next morning we all packed up, swept out the hut, and left around 9.15 am. We climbed down a slip prone Rangiwahia Track to the car park.





We finished our tramp in glorious sunshine, with enough time spare to dry out our tents from Friday night's camping and have a leisurely lunch in the trail head car park before driving the half hour trip to the Iron Gate hut road end to pick up the fit trip. En route, Rory pointed out the Apiti golf course in the middle of some farm fields, complete with fencing round each of the holes and lots of sheep! (Apparently this club has a large membership as this allows crafty members half price entry into other courses around the country).

Once at the road end, we had time to take a stroll into the Alice Nash Memorial hut while taking bets on what time we thought the fit trip would actually complete their tramp (they did pretty good!). It was good to see a large crowd of kids at the Nash Memorial hut being introduced to the outdoors. We learnt some motivational tips from their leaders to get them up the hill- "Come up here - I'VE GOT LOLLIES!!!!". Love it - we could definitely have a bit of that in the club! Our trip was ended by another driving marathon by our star, solo driver, Rory, who got us back to Wellie in the early evening with enough time to go home and enjoy the last bit of sun after a fantastic weekend.

Mt Owen Easter weekend 2013

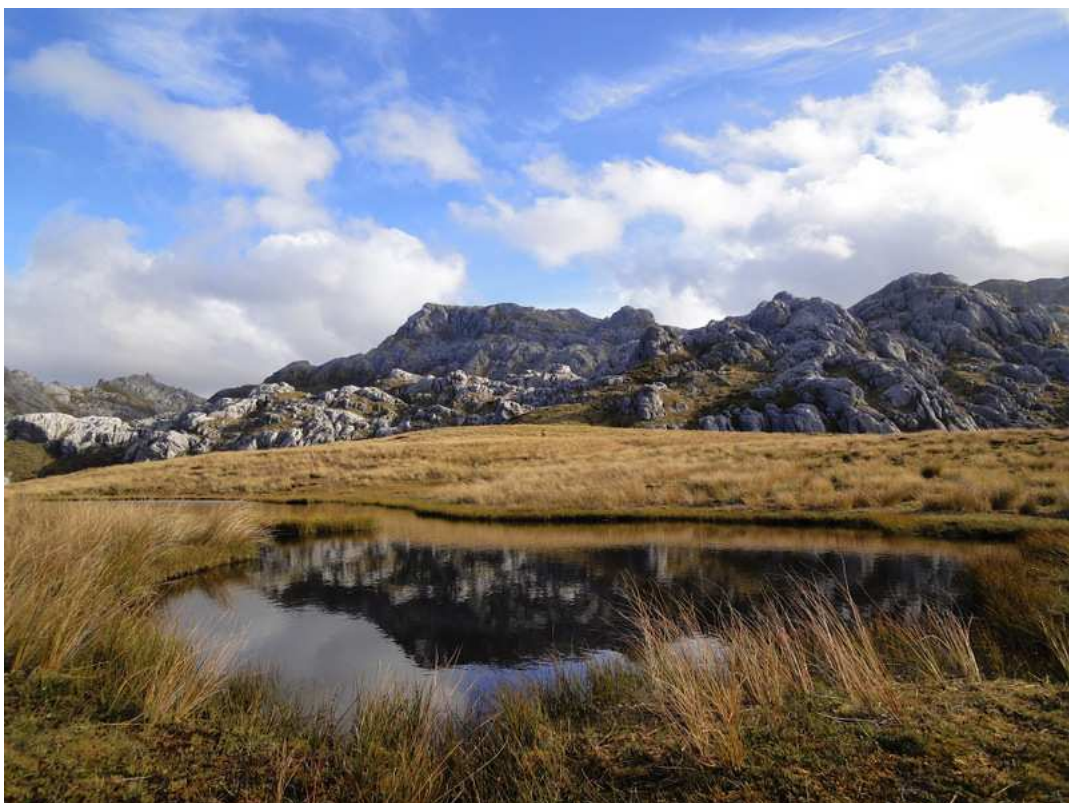
28 March – 1 April, Easy Medium tramp, Kahurangi (map #3)

Author: Katy Glenie

Trampers: Steve Healey (leader) Mike Phethean, Tatiana Krayushkina,
Katy Glenie, Dmitry Alkhimov, Katy Glenie



View from Mt Owen



Sentinel Tarns and Mt Owen

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Exploring Mt Owen area

Tatiana out for an early morning photo shoot

Campsite Sentinel Tarns



A dawn chorus of korimako wakes us long before the sun hits our shaded campsite at Courthouse Flat. The results of a successful predator trapping campaign soon become evident as we headed off into the eastern side of Kahurangi National Park. It's like stepping back in time as korimako, piwakawaka, toutouwai, kereru and miromiro swoop around us. I wait for a Moa to step out from behind a beech tree.

The birdsong is accompanied by a dull hum of wasps, but the pesky foreigners keep their distance. After exploring some of the old mining relics we leave the river behind and head up towards the high point. It's a decent climb - over 1200 meters in just a few hours. We're all feeling the lactic acid burn when we clamber through the limestone crags that mark "the tops".

A ramshackle descent off-track through spaniards and scree brings us to our campground for the night below Culliford Hill. The soft peaty ground is a welcome relief for scratched legs and aching muscles, and a quick dehy meal is just the ticket before falling into bed.

Once again we're up and about before the morning sun slips down the craggy hilltops to our campsite. Hot cuppas all round to warm the fingers before setting off towards the day's destination. We pitch camp around midday next to the Sentinel Hill tarns, and relax beneath Mt Owen's impressive limestone crags. The view from the summit that afternoon is glorious. We're on the highest peak in the park, and the bluffs, valleys and coastline spread out below us.



Heavy rain hits during the night, and glistening rock faces emerge through the mist the next morning. A break in the weather lasts long enough for a bit of "off track" exploring through the rocks and holes near the base of Owen, but we're soon back off the mountain to de-camp. We make a dash for Granity Pass Hut, hoping yesterday's crowds have been put off by the forecast.

At the hut we gleefully claim five bunks, finding just one other couple waiting out the weather. However the place soon fills up as various groups opt for a solid roof in the downpour. Before long the windows are steaming and the stragglers are finding sleeping spots on the floor.

Our final day in the hills includes a "warming" climb up the Devils Staircase. The birdsong returns for the descent to Courtyard Flat. The journey home is only slightly marred by a flat

battery (restored to its former glory by a heaven-sent pair of trampers with jumper leads that arrive in the nick of time).

Awesome adventure, awesome team, awesome spot. Well worth a return visit. Thanks for a great trip Steve!

Blue Range Hut

16-17 March 2013, Easy tramp, Tararua FP (map #4)

Author: Richard Lyth

Trampers: Richard Lyth (leader), Tamas Molnar,
Catherine Corbett, Alan Mitchell

We met up at Platform 9 for the usual last minute tramping requirements, and introductions to members of our party and the MF group. We had a comfortable trip out to Masterton along with an exciting, extended adventure in Chinatown. Chinatown is found in Greytown, where it takes 40 minutes on a Friday night to get your dinner. The MF were understandably itchy to get going, so the Transit left town with smoke pouring off the wheels.

We were a pretty interesting crowd including the quintessential salesman and Abed the quirky film student. We kept each other entertained through a night of spooky sounds at the campsite. Kiriwhakapapa is a beautiful campsite, a great spot to overnight on the Friday, with plenty of room and a good shelter should the weather turn.

While we were the 'easy' group I think a more apt name would have been the 'take it easy' group. The climb to the hut was hardly tough or gruelling. In fact it was a fairly leisurely hike up to the hut on a pretty steamy afternoon. We were mindful of the long dry spell that still had no sign of ending, so carried our maximum capacity of water to the hut, just in case.

Of course, on arrival, we discovered the water tank was full. We settled down to a chilled afternoon of chatting, and eating our supplies. A very necessary activity to lighten the load for the next day! We met some interesting people through the afternoon, especially the



classic Southern Man (albeit hailing from Masterton) and his adorable and championship winning dog Coke.

We were entertained at supper by some choice house anthems that a couple of teenagers thoughtfully played for us while we ate what we could of the pesto pasta feast and delicious brownies (supplied by our tramp leader, or rather his kids), with not-so-amazing-but-still-very-good-for-tramping custard. Note to self – take heed of Aunty Rata's custard making instructions.

We had the luxury of not having to hurry out on the Sunday, so we made a very leisurely pace through breakfast and packing. I do recall leaving some time just before midday. The oft heard phrase of “this is unreal” again reverberated through the forest, as we were struck with the beauty of the place.

A perfect weekend of nature, relaxing, good food and excellent company.

A Bike Triptych

April 2013, Private mountain bike trips, various locations (map #5) Author: Andrew Bichan
Mountain bikers: Andrew Bichan with Angela Gilbert (for the third trip)

Wairarapa Incline, Queen Charlotte, Port Underwood

A dodgy foot has enforced a break from tramping for the time-being and the need to find an alternative weekend activity. The on/off road MTB tour has proved to be a very satisfactory replacement providing plenty of scope for entertainment.

If you have a bike in the garage, the additional kit required is modest so why not give it a go? My first three forays are outlined below and may provide some ideas.

The idea is reasonably lightweight weekend touring from Wellington; on and off road, requiring no driving and getting to some new or long neglected places. Distance is not critical, so daily riding distances are generally on the 'medium' rather than 'fit' side.

For these trips I rode a bog standard MTB (Giant XTC2), with a single dry bag strapped to a cheap seat-post mounted carrier, light back pack, a sleeping role or tent strapped to the handle bars and a repair kit tucked into a corner of the frame somewhere. For tyres I ran the slicks I use for commuting. All up pretty casual; light weight and streamlined without being obsessive.

Incline and Ocean Beach

Easter Sunday, Monday 2013



Ocean Beach (left) to Lake Ferry (Centre)

The first weekend is mostly familiar territory. On Saturday morning I join the Hutt river trail and don't cross a road until the Akatarawa River junction. A short seal stretch to the railway line at Maymorn but then it is off road again, through to Tunnel gully and the Rimutaka incline (I recommend turning left at the end of Station Drive; right is unnecessarily hilly).

The incline really is a fantastic asset. 17km of enjoyable riding and the last few kms of single track have been upgraded nicely. The next stretch can be a killer in a head wind; it's a long ride beside Lake Wairarapa down to Lake Oneke. But traffic is light today and there are just a couple of moments caused by the enthusiastic side wind. It rains a bit towards the coast but nothing of note.

There are a couple of accommodation options for the night. I decide to crack on to the DoC Corner Creek campsite and ignore the road to the Wharekauhau Lodge.

It's an easy ride along the beach road past battered baches and across a couple of small streams to the camp site. Being Easter there are a lot of people about and they all seem to have a quad and an SUV. It also means the good tent sites are full; I discover a lot of the remaining area is too rocky or sloping for tents but eventually find a corner.

This coast can be a bleak and forbidding place. The clouds are streaming off the Orongorongos behind, but today Lake Ferry and Ngawi are bathed in the afternoon sun across the bay.

There's a bit of afternoon left so I pop along the coast to the Mukamuka stream and a bit of welcome quiet. There's a memorial to the early drovers and a view along the Coast. It would be good to close the loop back to the Hutt but not this weekend.

Back at the camp a few boats are being hauled up and you can see some of the attraction of the life style as the catch comes in.

It's a very windy night and as soon as it gets light enough I'm up, packed and away by 7.45. It's about an hour 45 to Cross Creek with virtually no traffic before a hard grind up the Incline into a strong wind. However from the top the going is good. Again there are plenty of people out enjoying the trail.

It's quick riding to the car-park, the access road, and back to Station Drive. Station Drive is a fast easy downhill and soon Tunnel Gully and I think the tenth and last tunnel section for the weekend is behind.



The Last Tunnel

It's not far now over Mangaroa hill, through Upper Hutt to re-join the river trail and home by early afternoon.

For reference; much of this ride is described in the Kennett Brothers book "Classic New Zealand Cycle Trails" if you are interested in finding out more.

Queen Charlotte

5-7 April 2013

Later the following week I decide to do a road foray along Kenepuru Sound. I study the Topo map carefully and the DOC website; there seem to be plenty of camp-sites and a fair length of road to explore so that's about as detailed as the plan needs to be. I commute to work with the bike set up for action and dash for the 6.25pm ferry.

Catching the ferry always feels like the start of a holiday. The grape vine ride is on this weekend so there are more than a handful of cyclists that walk their mounts onto the freight deck of the Arahura. Although this is one of the better ones I have discovered that the arrangements for bikes on the ferries is variable (I now carry a few short bungy cords as you can't rely on anything suitable being available).

A light wind in Picton at 2130 doesn't make it cold but I am pleased to have two layers on as I swing onto the Grove track. The ferry traffic quickly passes through and I'm left on my own on the dark road. It's a straight forward and pleasant 15K ride to Aussie Bay camp-site a little over 40 minutes from Picton. I find the last decent tent site and settle down for a quiet night.

In the morning I opt to head for the Queen Charlotte track (after the necessary 'change in plans' text). It's a short ride to Anakiwa where I discover that there is a \$12 charge to

access the track and a complicated machine to relieve you of your dosh; credit card an option for an extra fee. Two MTBers pull up and leave their car to head back to Kenepuru saddle by road. They intend to come back along the track; a good day option if you have a vehicle.

The first 12K to Te Mahia passes quickly. The track is wide and easily graded; never climbing above 200m and allowing a good pace.



Grove Arm and Okiwa Bay; Anakiwa behind the helmet and Aussie Bay somewhere on the left

The next section to Torea saddle has two hills and a bit of pushing; it is narrower, steeper, climbs higher and is more technical with some down-hills requiring attention. There are a few people on the track but nowhere near crowded so quite enjoyable. Views open up into Queen Charlotte and Kenepuru Sounds.

It's getting towards lunchtime so I take the option that gives this track such broad appeal; taking a break at a cafe. It involves the loss of 100m altitude but the gain of a gourmet burger and fries. I send a few "I'm still alive and changing my plans" texts, which may have had a slight hint of self-congratulatory smugness.

There's plenty of day left so I decide to knock off the next section of track. It's longer (24K) and reaches about 500m altitude with a number of ups and downs on the way but conditions are generally better than the last section. Some hills I would have grunted up in the morning become an excuse to get off and push for a bit.



Looking the length of Kenepuru Sound

For the first half there are quite a few people, about 50:50 MTBers and walkers. It's enjoyable riding and people are chatty. Most appear to be day walking with boat pick-ups pre-arranged. At Black Rock Shelter I meet the two MTB chaps from the morning who have some useful tips for the track ahead.

The views are fantastic: Queen Charlotte Sound and Tory Channel to the South, and eventually the length of Kenepuru Sound to the west. At some point the track reaches its highest point of a little under 500m but eventually I have the feeling that it is grading down for the rendezvous with the road at Kenepuru Saddle. It takes a while to do so and there is a prolonged section where the combination of water on the track, clay and road slicks makes for interesting riding. There is only one point where bike and rider go their separate ways, but it happens at low speed with no damage to either.

About 4pm I come to the gravel road at Kenepuru saddle. Ahead the track continues to Resolution Bay then on to Ships Cove; to the right the road drops to Punga Cove, and ahead to the left is the road to Anakoha Bay, Titirangi Bay and Port Gore. However this is the furthest point for this weekend so I take the gravel road to the left and behind; back to the head of Kenepuru Sound.

The road turns to seal near the head of the Sound and the DOC camp-ground here looks pretty good, but there's still a bit of daylight left so I carry on to Portage. It's good riding albeit I'm somewhat slower than in the morning. There are a few DOC camp-sites along the way providing good options, and frequent enough that if one is full you could just push on to the next.

It's about 5pm when I roll into Portage and, for the second time today, take a break at the café/bar. Cowshed Bay is 600m along the road and the only residents when I arrive are another cyclist and a couple of weka. Half of it is a construction site at present but it should be pretty good when finished.



Cowshed Bay still life; bicycle, tent and Ti Kouka.

There's a bit of wind in the night but it is calm by morning and the daylight saving donated extra hour is appreciated. It turns out that a weka has knicked my single serve muesli so I head up the road chewing on an OSM around 7.30am.

It is a little further than I thought to Linkwater on the Grove track and although there are no major hills, there is a fair amount of up and down. However I pass Aussie Bay about 9am, and arrive at the ferry terminal by 9.45. Yes, my ticket can be changed to the 10.30 sailing (\$5 surcharge) and there's even time for a quick hot chocolate at a cafe to drive out the morning chill.

I join the grape riders and board the Aratere for a somewhat lumpy return to a gloomy Wellington. The final leg home slots neatly between rain showers and by 2.30pm it's all over bar the unpacking.

The verdict? Queen Charlotte is a great fun ride accessible in a weekend from Wellington. It is not technically challenging and there's plenty of flexibility to mix and match your trip options. I had a ball and was still home by mid-afternoon Sunday. The bike set up performed well. After the previous trip I lowered the carrier bag as far as it would go and put the heavier kit in my back pack. Although the track is pretty good it is still pretty hard on bike mounted gear. The handle bar mounted sleeping roll didn't get in the way of the steering and helped distribute some weight forward.

Port Underwood Bike Trip

12 – 14 April 2013

The previous two trips being so enjoyable it was pretty much inevitable that I'd be out again the next weekend. The tails of excitement have clearly captured Angela's imagination and she is a keen starter.

I'm running the same bike set up as the previous two weekends with the exception that we now need a two person tent. The Macpac Nautilus rolled tight bungees to the handlebars

neatly and causes no problems at all. In fact the forward weight is welcome on the steep up hills.

The 6.25pm sailing is sold out so the 8pm Kaitiaki sailing it is. We board with the vehicles and make our way to the far end of the vessel and the bike park. This turns out to be a cheap bike stand in an expansive puddle. It looks way too precarious to park the bikes in the designed fashion so we lash them together across ways.

This sailing is noted as having limited services and they are that. It becomes a bit of a game trying to find someone to serve the food that is available. We unwisely snaffle the last two items in the pie warmer; a sausage roll of dubious character for Angela and a kumara and cashew pie for me, goodness knows how many sailings they have survived. In between abortive forays to the cafe, the rest of the smooth sailing is spent trying to snooze like the rest of the passengers.

The Picton streets are very quiet and we have a pleasant ride in the mild evening through to Waikawa Bay and on to the rural road to Whatamango Bay. The odd possum crashes up a roadside tree but it's the little blue Penguin in the middle of the road that causes the most consternation. It appears out of the night in front of Angela's front wheel narrowly avoiding an untimely demise as I swerve to miss Angela swerving to miss the penguin. It turns out to be quite an easy cruise to Whatamango Bay campsite. We bump down the drive, pay our dues and pitch the tent. There's tonnes of space, good grass and a basic but tidy ablution block. Lights out at 12.30.

By daylight we can see we are in a quiet valley, on a large flat area with clumps of bush with plenty of nooks for camping. Leaving the camp we turn left and grind uphill for 5K (400 vertical meters) with no stops. Enough said about that. A road cyclist cruises past with a cheerful "Nearly there; 1K to go!" He must be a regular as it is 1.1K.

At the top we allow ourselves a breather to look east and south into Port Underwood. Oyster Bay is far below and we can see our road disappearing around Willawa point; hmm, it looks like gravel already.



Port Underwood

From the saddle a 4WD track heads northeast along the ridge. It doesn't actually say no entry so this could be something to investigate another day, it also provides a gap where we can see back down to Whatamango Bay and beyond into Queen Charlotte Sound. The descent is entertaining and at the bottom we turn right to wind over and around the many spurs and bays. Oyster Bay is first and apart from the large Kuni Kuni pig our enduring memory will be the start of the gravel and the realisation that the grader has just been through. Still, at least it's not new metal.

The road winds through bush (although later there is an awful lot of pine), dropping and climbing constantly. The dips skirting picturesque bays and patches of farm land, the rises giving glimpses up, down and across Port Underwood. Each bay has its own character and many seem to have been associated with whaling. The drop into Tom Cane's Bay brings the delight of new road metal. Angela watches Andrew slew his way cheerfully down the hill and wisely dials in a more sedate pace. The experience is somewhat disconcerting and she votes for a cuppa tea stop before facing the loose climb out of the bay.

The bay has a short sandy beach, a wee stream and plenty of space for picnicking. The penny stove is soon doing its thing and we sit under a tree sipping our tea, nibbling a mallowpuff and watching a couple of Oystercatchers work the tide line around the bay. We allow the setting to divert us for a little longer than planned but there's no time pressure today so why not; this is simple, pure contentment.



Tom Cane's Bay; firing up a brew

We mark our progress by the approach of Robertson Point; the end of the spit that separates Port Underwood from the open sea. The rises so far have been below 100m but leaving Ocean Bay, the hill continues upwards to about 270m. This gives magnificent views and a thoroughly entertaining downhill to Robin Hood Bay but takes its toll on energy reserves and dwindling water supplies.



Looking across to Robertson Point

Robin Hood Bay (probably named after a ship) means we have left Port Underwood behind. There's an historic cottage, a bit of Maori history (gardening) and it's the most obviously visited spot with a large sandy beach, boogie boarders enjoying a modest surf break and plenty of space. There is a DOC campsite but it doesn't have drinking water and it's a little early to stop for the night so we reluctantly head up the next hill.

It rapidly becomes clear that a lot of vehicles travel here from Blenheim. The road becomes wider and relatively busy (10 cars an hour) and somewhat corrugated. The first hill is steep and climbs to a similar height to the last, with (just maybe) a little bit of pushing involved. The top however brings views across Cloudy Bay to White bluffs and beyond to Cape Campbell. Now it's just the last short haul to the blissfully flat landscape of the Wairau plains.

We bypass the DOC campsite at White's Bay but appreciate the return of the bitumen as we head up the last hill and into a couple of rain showers.

It's 3.20pm when we arrive in Rarangi and pitch the tent before killing a little time ahead of an early dinner. The first order of the day though is drinking water as we have been eking out our last drops. Then we find the least lumpy spot and pitch the tent. We sit out a bit of rain before an early dinner and walk before lights out.

We're up just before the sun and decide that Blenheim may have something more appetising to offer for breakfast than muesli and milk powder. We are both a bit vague about the geography between here and there but figure it can't be too hard. The air is cool but it's clear and the sun is at just the right angle to throw the rumples and folds of the Wither hills into relief, with a snow capped Tapuae o Uenuku lurking behind.

It's about 20kms to Blenheim which is just stirring at 8.20am when we find the one open cafe. Figaros' turns out to be an excellent find serving good coffee. Angela's eggs Bene, and my pancakes are as good as you will get anywhere. The sun streams through the open door thawing us from finger tips to toes.

Our next destination is the small but perfectly formed farmers market. The day is starting to warm and the place is buzzing. We don't have space to buy much but happily demolish a tray of fully ripe raspberries.



Blenheim Farmers Market

New Renwick Road takes us westwards through vineyards to Renwick where the road turns north. We decide to split and take both sides of the Wairau river to State Highway One; Angela down Rapaura Road whilst I cross the cycle unfriendly Wairau Bridge and turn right down the Kaituna - Tuamarina Road. This is a little more meandering with a few kilometres of gravel in the middle. It wouldn't be suitable on a road bike but is quiet and doesn't have any hills.

My road emerges on State Highway One right next to our rendezvous point; the site of the Wairau affray. I have about 20 minutes to read about the sad affair before Angela texts, she has been at the picnic table on the other side of the tree for 10 minutes. We lie in the grass looking into a cloudless sky munching OSM bars for lunch.

It's about 20 Km to Picton into a firm head wind on a busy road. We have plenty of time so potter along ignoring the trucks and traffic whizzing past. It's a good shoulder and pretty flat so not too bad a ride. A little after halfway we take a break at a memorial to two hunters "killed in tragic circumstances" in Robin Hood bay in 1966.

What we had thought was "the hill before Picton" turns out to be a bit of a rise. We coast down to Picton to drink excellent iced coffee and a cold ale at Le Café within minutes. The day is sunny, yachts are racing in Picton Harbour and the Blind Boys of Alabama are playing on the stereo. We keep just enough orders flowing so as to not outstay our welcome and the afternoon passes very pleasantly.

Waiting to board the 7pm sailing we are left in a tiny port-a-com waiting room. The other inhabitant turns out to be another tramping club member who has been biking the Wakamarina track so there's plenty to talk about.

The crossing is pretty smooth and Mike meets us off the Ferry (i.e. texts to say he's just leaving home). He forces me to put the bike on their rack and accept a lift home; I figure

this isn't really departing from the spirit of the trip, after-all, it is well after 10pm on a school night.

So that's the story to date. I have a few more ideas for similar trips which I'm dying to try out but there's a bit of a back log of stuff to see to at home first.

Become a trip leader!

Want to lead a trip but that little voice of doubt is putting you off? Our one-day leadership course gives you all the tools you need to lead a trip, and the confidence to get out there and give it a go.

Leading lets you give back to the club - and is also much more rewarding that you might expect.

Put Saturday 3 August in your diary now! It'll be an interactive, fun day with a mix of instructors.

We've also created an opportunity for you to practice these skills the following weekend. Just sign up for the EM navigation tramp that Richard and I are leading to Mitre Flats from 10-11 August. On this trip you'll get a chance to lead some navigation and to try out other leadership tasks.

Any questions, please chat to me at club or drop me an email: Amanda Wells - vicepresident@wtmc.org.nz

And a little bit of history

Want to know what walking technique you should be using when tramping? ...

HOW TO WALK - IN THREE EASY LESSONS.

This article is not intended for babes in arms wishing to make their first tottering steps but rather for those who have been getting around on their hind legs for some time.

Very few people, no matter how fit they may be, are capable of undertaking a long trip in the first few times they venture into the hills. This is because they have not learned the art of walking over rough country. If you are only going into the Orongo's or over to Tauwharenikau walk or run as you will BUT if you want to undertake any of the longer trips it is important for pleasure and safety that the ground be covered with a minimum of effort and strain.

In order to do this there are three important points to remember. First, both the body and the mind should be relaxed though alert. Any tension, mental or physical, only leads to exhaustion and lack of control over movements.

Secondly, all movements should be rhythmical and smooth. Sudden and jerky movements put undue strain on a muscle just as a sudden tug on a tow-rope is more likely to snap the rope than move the object being towed.

Thirdly, all movements should be precise. Decide where you are going to put your feet and then put them there. Don't just pick them up and throw them down again somewhere ahead.

These three rules are important in motion of any kind whether you are running in the Marathon, climbing a rock face, cutting steps or merely peeling spuds.

In walking up-hill the amount of drive or spring off the lower leg should be minimised. The technique of getting the legs behind and pushing oneself uphill with the legs moving like pile drivers is as wasteful of energy as it is dynamic to watch and only serves to indicate the inexperienced trampler. A tireless trampler makes balance and sway save him any forceful use of his leg muscles. Each step is made more with the body rather than with the legs. The body sways over the firm leg and this sway together with a lifting of the hip allows the loose leg to be raised and swung forward. Although the leg is swung freely forward the foot should be placed down with precision as crashing the foot down loosely only jars muscles and leads to earlier fatigue. The weight is then swayed over the foot that has just been moved forward and the same movement repeated. This relaxed swinging stride performed rhythmically at a regular pace is the secret of all long uphill grinds.

There is often some confusion about the meaning of rhythm in tramping. It does not mean going at the same pace all the time but rather that the same amount of effort be put into each stride. That is, move slower uphill than on the flat or downhill. In walking uphill place the feet so that the heel rests on the ground. It is a mistake to rush a hill and spring from the toes alone. If the grade is too steep get the heel down look for a stone, root etc. to set the heel on. If the foot slips back as on scree allow it to slip until it stops of its own accord. Do not make any convulsive effort to stop it.

On open hill-side which is too steep to be taken straight up in comfort zig-zag as on a path at an angle which lets you get your heels down onto the ground. Where there is a zig zag track avoid short cuts as these are generally made by people coming down. Coming down hills has a pleasure of its own. The legs should be kept under control and the feet placed slightly behind the direction of impetus. Do not allow your weight to get too far ahead of your feet as they may find some difficulty in catching up with you. The knees should be well bent and act as springs but they should only serve to keep your pace under control rather than stop you at each step. Do not be ashamed of using your arms and hands on trees, rocks or scrub to ease in any way the effort of balance and leg strain during rapid descents.

Road walking is not good preparation for tramping as it jolts and stiffens the muscles and fixes them in certain stereotyped movements. Good trampers rarely enjoy long road walks.

Forcing the pace is one of the commonest errors in tramping, not only on the part of the leader but of every member of the party. I do not mean forcing the pace as being synonymous with going too fast but rather the act of driving oneself along. Next time you are following behind someone and you find yourself straining to keep up with then try relaxing the tension of your muscles and swinging along with a comparatively effortless stride

You will probably find that you can still keep up with the rest of the party although you do not feel as if you are going all out.

Several years ago I conducted an experiment on the track to Blythe Hut on Ruapehu. One week end I went up to the hut and forced myself with tense muscles to travel at what seemed like a maximum pace. The trip took 2hrs. 55 mins. The following week end I went up at an easy, steady pace and the same trip took just over three hours while I arrived at the hut fit for anything. That was about 7 minutes lost in the three hours. The moral of course is that the speed at which you travel is not proportional to the effort you use but to the way in which you use it.

There are a few points of tramping etiquette which apply when tramping with a party. Most trampers suffer from the weakness of unconsciously increasing their pace the moment they take the lead on the track. It is better that the leader be thought to be getting old or lazy rather than that the party should be rushed. This is especially important when setting out on a climb.

Some trampers, whenever there is room to walk abreast, persistently keep slightly ahead of their companions. The effect is that the other person is perpetually straining to catch up and the pace increases till both are racing then one gives up and both lag until the game starts again.

When a party is moving in single file over rough country the entire party should stick to the route chosen by the leader unless he is obviously mistaken in his choice and the alternative is a distinct saving of effort for those who follow. In such a case the party should reform in the same order as the front man may justly resent having had the work of choosing the route at a hundred points only to have advantage taken of his one doubtful choice in order to displace him. If the leader picks a route which is not the best the tendency to hurry over it and thus hide his mistakes should be avoided as this breaks the rhythm and forces the pace over the rougher ground where it should actually be slowed down.

After a halt the re-start should be made slowly as the halt is to replace reserves used in the past; not for accumulating a margin to waste in the immediate future. In conclusion I will say that good hill walking technique is the first step towards sound climbing.

Phil Gardner.

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Excerpt from:
Tramping and Mountaineering, Journal of the Wellington Tramping
and Mountaineering Club, Inc. April 1949, Vol 1, No. 6.

Deadline for submissions to the next WTMC newsletter: Friday 24 May 2013

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