

TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING 2012





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COVER: *On the ridge above the Maitland Valley,
Ahuriri Conservation Park.*
Photo: TONY GAZLEY

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Journal of the Wellington Tramping & Mountaineering Club

Edited by Tony Gazley

CONTENTS

4	Great expectations	Megan Sety
12	Crusty	Barbara Seville
15	Two of the best	Miles Long
18	MTB'ing with Paul and Clarence	Tony Gazley
20	Orongorongo wandering	Harry Smith
23	Monte Rosa	Sharron Came
25	Five Passes	Paul Christoffel
30	The cycle tour	Harry Smith
33	In the footsteps of Ryhar Mhist	Otyn Layzeg
37	Mountain magic	Katy Glenie
40	How to break a bike	Hans Wiskerke
42	Wot the club done at Labour Weekend	Kate, Sharron, Illona, and Ray
52	Condors at my feet	Mike Phethean
57	South Georgia	Katja Riedel
64	The pass that didn't	Tony Gazley
67	Holdsworth to Otaki	Spencer Clubb
69	Gallery	
76	Off the Heaphy highway	Harry Smith
78	Fiordland odessey	Amanda Wells
82	Getting high in the Pyrenees	Sharron Came
86	Gippsland express	Harry Smith
91	Sundy afternoon	M. T. Bykka
94	Climbing (nearly) Tappy	Stephen Healey
98	Camping in a volcano	Debbie Buck
102	The way we were	Tony Gazley
106	travls thru d kowhai-torlesse tusoklnds	brian



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

by MEGAN SETY







It wasn't what we expected, and that is what made the adventure. When Tony and I started pondering about the *next big trip* I'm not sure what made me think of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho. I had never tramped there, but I vaguely remembered my brother's story of a trip he did there some twenty years ago. It is the largest wilderness (a special designation to protect the pristine nature of wilderness areas in the US), located in Idaho, the state where I grew up and my family still resides. It is also home to the Salmon River, one of the longest uninterrupted rivers in the US, and its many tributaries. Remembering my brother's story and my own experiences rafting the river I had the idea to link a long tramp with a rafting adventure.

Whenever you start a trip you always have expectations. In preparing for our thirteen day tramp followed by a six day rafting trip we read books, surfed the internet, scoured maps, talked to rangers and hassled my brother for information and tips. We had all these ideas about what the trip might be like but when we actually got on the trail we frequently discovered something different. It was exciting to begin each day not knowing what the terrain would be or what our campsite might look like. Here's a sampling of our *great expectations* and the real experience.

When there is thunder and lightning, there will be rain

When I picked up Tony at Boise airport at 7 pm the temperature was 42 degrees centigrade. Idaho was having one of its hottest summers on record and we had expected sunny weather for the whole trip. We were just hoping it would be a little bit cooler in the mountains. We started our first day at the Big Horn Craggs campground, wandered up and through endless rock formations and jagged alpine summits, constantly surprised at how often we would see a single tree way above the bush line at the very apex of a jagged rocky peak.

As we stopped for lunch taking in the 360 degree view we started to hear loud booming thunder, often lasting for several seconds followed by huge strikes of lightning. We could see the rain off in the distance. As we packed up lunch we made sure our parkas were near the top of the pack in case the storm rolled in before we could get to our first campsite at Welcome Lake. However, the rain never did arrive. In fact for the next several days we continued to have dry thunder and lightening every afternoon. On the tramping part of the trip we only had one light ten minute shower. Of course, the night we arrived to meet our rafting buddies when we were tasked with dinner while they rigged the boats we had a thunderous two hour hail storm!

Elevation changes of 1,600 metres in one day will make for long hard tramps

We spent our first three days wandering around the alpine lakes of the Big Horn Crag, visiting more than eight lakes, bumping up and over ridges here and there. Finally on day four we started down Waterfall Creek Trail which we had anticipated to be a long and potentially difficult day, travelling 18 km and descending 1,700 metres in the last few kilometres. However, we found the walking comparable to a footpath. In fact throughout the entire trip we discovered the US Forest Service, the government department responsible for building and maintaining most of the trails in the area, had a maximum gradient for trails. To create gentle descents extensive switchbacks were used.

This particular trail was not only gentle but it seemed that nearly all the rocks had been hand-picked and set aside. For the steepest descent we traipsed through metre-tall meadow grass. While the grass had covered the path it was easy enough to find the trail by simply putting your foot down on the only part of ground that had been levelled. We wondered if this trail was unique but as the days passed we continually found the trails to be built at gentle gradients and well cleared of debris making our other days of big climbs or downhills not only easy but enjoyable.

This wilderness will be full of tall pine trees

The landscape changed daily and was impossible to predict, allowing us to start each morning eager to discover what the trail and next campsite would look like. We encountered alpine lakes, hillside meadows, small streams and creeks, desert bush, and fast flowing rivers. However, there was one feature that was always present—extensive damage from forest fires. For decades the US government had a policy of extinguishing every forest fire the moment it started. Over the years this created dense pockets of trees and brush which dried out in the hot summer months and became ripe fuel for severe fires. The approach is now to just let fires burn.

Though some of the fires had occurred more than 20 years ago hundreds of dead trees still remained. Trees are always falling given strong winds, heavy winter snows, and just because. These fallen trees became a real pain and slowed us down as we crawled over log after log. Nearly every day we walked through once forested areas that had been devastated by fires in the past. Some days we would see charred areas that stretched for miles. We often wondered if our next campsite was sitting in a buffer zone that had somehow escaped the flames, or if it was an area full of precarious dead trees waiting to topple on our tent. At least once we relocated our camp after a tree fell down a nearby hillside without even a tiny gust of wind.



The only way to get deep in to this wilderness is to walk

We weren't sure if we would meet people along the way on our trip as the wilderness is described as fairly remote. But over the first few days we met people who were only walking to the closest lake and using horses either as transport or to pack in their own supplies. As we travelled deeper in to the forest we expected to see fewer, if any, people but we had forgotten that this wilderness has more than twenty light aircraft landing strips.

As we travelled along Big Creek in our first week we met a few people who had flown in, but it wasn't until we arrived at Cabin Creek that we discovered a traffic jam. We spent the night there and the next morning eagerly awaited the arrival of our food drop, in particular the fresh salmon and cold beers for that night's dinner. Four planes landed that morning bringing anglers who would rather not have to walk and carry their gear, before our plane finally arrived. Then the following seven days we never saw another person. Although in our entire trip we





over 40 degrees, it was just too hot to tramp. So we spent our afternoons napping, swimming, reading, or photographing the wonderful sights around us.

We will see big wild animals

As we told people about our trip, their eyes would grow wide and they would tell us of all the large wild animals that we could expect to see daily, such as bears, deer, elk, moose and maybe even the elusive recently re-introduced wolf. On the tramping trip we saw one deer at our first camp and one deer running away on our

met many people, not one person was carrying their gear for more than one day.

We will need a rest day

We had planned to spend the entire day just lazing about at Cabin Creek after we had received our food drop, but giving the increasing air traffic, the ease of walking and our excitement to start another day we decided to get moving. A rest day had seemed like a good idea on a thirteen day trip and we were surprised not to need it. However, when I reflect back on the trip instead of only resting on one day actually we rested every day.

As the travel was easy, we would often finish our day's walking in about four to five hours, arriving at camp just in time for a late lunch. This turned out to be a very good thing as the hottest part of the day, rather strangely, was usually from 2 to about 6 pm. With temperatures

last day. We had many theories about this, but the one that rang most true was suggested by a veteran professor who worked at Taylor Ranch, a University research centre located right in the middle of the wilderness. He told us with the re-introduction of the wolf (obviously a natural predator to big game), that the elk and likely other animals had become more 'invisible.' We did, however, see lots of fish, tadpoles, frogs, birds, insects and a couple of snakes.

Our travel on the river was slightly different. Probably the most memorable sighting was a deer that visited one of our river camps as we were sipping pre-dinner cocktails. He seemed quite tame and likely had been fed by previous rafters. All the same we were still shocked when the deer decided to eat a hot-pink singlet one of our crew left out to dry on a tree. It wasn't until just about ten centimetres of the shirt were all that was left hanging from the deer's mouth we realised he really was going to eat the whole thing. A good twenty minutes of chasing the deer around the campsite and the shirt was eventually spat out.

Hazards include bears, rattlesnakes, poison ivy and maybe even cougars

Students from Taylor Ranch told us they had already spotted 22 rattlesnakes in the last six weeks and come around a corner on the trail to a black bear romping through the meadow. However, the only snake we saw was a giant non-venomous bull snake who appeared just as I was about to take advantage of the hole I had dug for my toilet one afternoon. After my initial panic I realised it was far more terrified of me and we stopped to watch him desperately try to hide his yellow and brown





checkered skin in the green bushes.

At the lower elevations along Big Creek where the berries were in full bloom we saw many large piles of bear scat. When camping in these areas we made sure to walk a few hundred metres away to hang our bear bag, but we never did see any adult bears on the tramp. I was lucky enough to catch a brief glimpse from the raft of a black bear cub madly running up the canyon walls.

Thankfully, on the tramp when we frequently traipsed through thick and tall bushes we only saw one very easily avoidable bush of poison ivy, a plant that causes a terrible itchy rash. However, the trails along the river were covered with it, which meant taking extra precaution when we stopped to look at pictographs or stumbled away from the campsite at night to the toilet.

As for other creatures by far the worst were the mosquitoes and large biting horse flies!

Many of the trails are unmaintained and we will spend much of our time navigating because the trails have disappeared

In the planning stages I was surprised to have a hard time finding a forest service ranger who could provide any

information about trail conditions. We weren't sure what lay ahead but we knew that starting on day seven the trails we were planning to use weren't being maintained. We thought these areas would be less visited and there would be a good chance that trails would be overgrown. We were looking forward to having some fun navigating and exploring. We had been warned that the biggest challenge would be logs which had fallen across the trail.

We were pleasantly surprised to discover the trail along Cow Creek, a climb of more than 1,200 metres, had been cleared by private outfitters who guide hunters and fishers. For the remaining week we frequently found trails were being maintained by the outfitters for their own private use. In fact only ten minutes off the track on our planned exploration to Papoose Lake we landed right in the middle of trail that ended at a perfect campsite. This was a good learning exercise as on our last day we were looking for a trail junction that was on the map but not on the ground. We decided to bush-bash to where the trail was meant to be. We had a feeling that the outfitters were maintaining the track, but just not the last 100 metres to prevent their trails from being accidentally discovered. Indeed, another fifteen minutes and there was the perfect



trail, saving us a good two hours.

Walking off track will be easy because we are just walking through a forest of tall trees

These little forays into off-track travel have given us confidence that further explorations away from the trail would continue to be relatively easy. We had found that the tall thick trees had kept sun from reaching the ground preventing much if any ground-level bush. The only impediment to walking was usually stepping over fallen logs. So on day eleven we decided to spend the entire day off the trail. We dropped down the 700 metres or so into the small Peak Creek Canyon planning to follow the creek's path to Black Lake where we would camp for the night.

As we started down from the ridge, the travel was so easy, I slipped my hands in to my pockets. Eventually the terrain became steeper and we entered in to an area of extensive forest fires. Logs were down everywhere you looked. It wasn't too challenging though, we would just slow down to clamber over the logs. Interestingly we realised that one must be more cautious stepping over dry and burned logs. Once the branches are gone there is sharp stubs and the lingering bark and surface of the log is like sand paper. It was easy to get scraped up and an accidental fall could mean getting skewered on a sharp



stump of a branch.

What we hadn't taken into account is that at lower elevations near running water the soil is richer with nutrients and bush grows more easily. Within 100 metres of the creek the bush was at least a metre tall, lush and thick. We often couldn't see where we put our next step and seemed to either find ourselves sinking into muddy bogs or twisting ankles on old logs. When we got a breather from this we would look up to see a pile of giant burned logs as if they had spilled from a pick-up-stix game. We would carefully thread our way up, down, under, and on top of logs. Those same fallen logs also ruled out the creek as an alternative option—it simply turned into an obstacle course.

It was a rough day and we both had plenty of bruises and scrapes. We learned our lesson to confine off-track travel to higher elevations. And we were thankful this was the only day on the entire trip that turned out to be that challenging.

Maps, the GPS and guidebooks would be accurate

While it was mostly easy to follow and find the trails, we were often surprised to discover that the paths on the ground were sometimes not the same as the ones on the



map. In particular, when we left our Black Lake campsite we were looking forward to a well-cut trail as we had an 800 metre climb in just a few short kilometres. The travel was once again easy and we stopped paying attention and started chatting. Suddenly, twenty minutes had passed and we stepped in to a swamp. The trail disappeared and we checked our GPS which showed us miles away from where the trail was supposed to be. We compared our maps to the topography of the land and yup, we were in the wrong place. How had that happened when we just followed the trail?

We back-tracked until the last junction where a brand new sign indicated we were headed in the right direction. Sure enough the trail did not go where the GPS, guidebook, map from 1962 or map from the 1980s

said it was supposed to go. We contemplated our options and decided we would bush-bash where the trail was meant to be, hoping to pick it up or else determined to prove that all our guiding tools were wrong. They were wrong and it was long uphill slog. It was amazing but this wasn't the only time we followed the trail glibly chatting, only to discover the trail on the ground had taken us some place other than the trail on the map and we then had to self-correct by travelling off-track. But overall navigation was not too difficult and we made only a few wrong decisions that were quickly corrected and not too much time was lost.

The tramp ended with a long zigzag descent to the Salmon River where we sat on the sandy beach and took off our boots for the last time.

On the river we will sleep in, sit lazily on the boat, swim, take in the sights, have fantastic meals around big campfires

Our river rafting adventure was the one part of the trip that turned out just as expected. We had all the comforts you could possibly imagine. Each day we would wake from sleeping under the stars, since the dry environment kept away condensation. After sleeping in we would ease back into folding camp chairs for a mug of tea or coffee. After morning chats we would have pancakes, eggs and bacon, or fresh fruit with yogurt and muesli.

We would load up the boats and float gently down the river, getting excited at the occasional rapid. All the while we took in the history of the pioneering people who had attempted to make a living in this isolated canyon. We stopped to look at pictographs left behind thousands of years ago by Nez Perce and Sheep Eaters (indigenous tribes), rocks where early miners carved their names, cabins where whole families lived in one room, and Buckskin Bill's infamous rock turret to defend himself from the US government. We took a longer stop at Yellow Pine Ranch where the caretakers showed us their museum and extensive garden, and also shared a slice of chocolate banana loaf fresh from the sun oven. We would pull up on white sandy beaches for lunch and more sun cream. Then have a few more hours floating and in some cases the captains even let us row (Tony's past paddling skills giving him an advantage in keeping a straight line and even navigating some rapids). Hours before the late sunset we would find our campsite usually with another white beach and set up the tables and chairs for cocktails. We took turns cooking dinners of steak, spaghetti, enchiladas, teriyaki chicken and pork ribs. By far the most popular dessert was the Tim Tams we brought.

It was a fantastic trip and while many things weren't as we imagined them in our mind it was all the more exciting to approach each day with no expectations and instead with a sense of curiosity.



CRUSTY

A short walk in the Ruahines

by **BARBARA SEVILLE**

Breakable crust—the bane of snow travellers whether on foot, snowshoes, ski, or whatever. And it just so happened that on the weekend we chose to visit the Ruahines for the first time it was everywhere we went above the bushline.

Rosina and me had arrived at the Rangiwahia Road end Friday night late June and decided to camp there rather than walk up to the hut, which judging by the number of parked cars seemed likely to already be fairly full. We woke a couple of times during the night to a gentle pattering on the roof of the tent and in the morning looked out to a fresh covering of snow. But the sky was already beginning to clear as we started up the easy graded track to the bush edge.

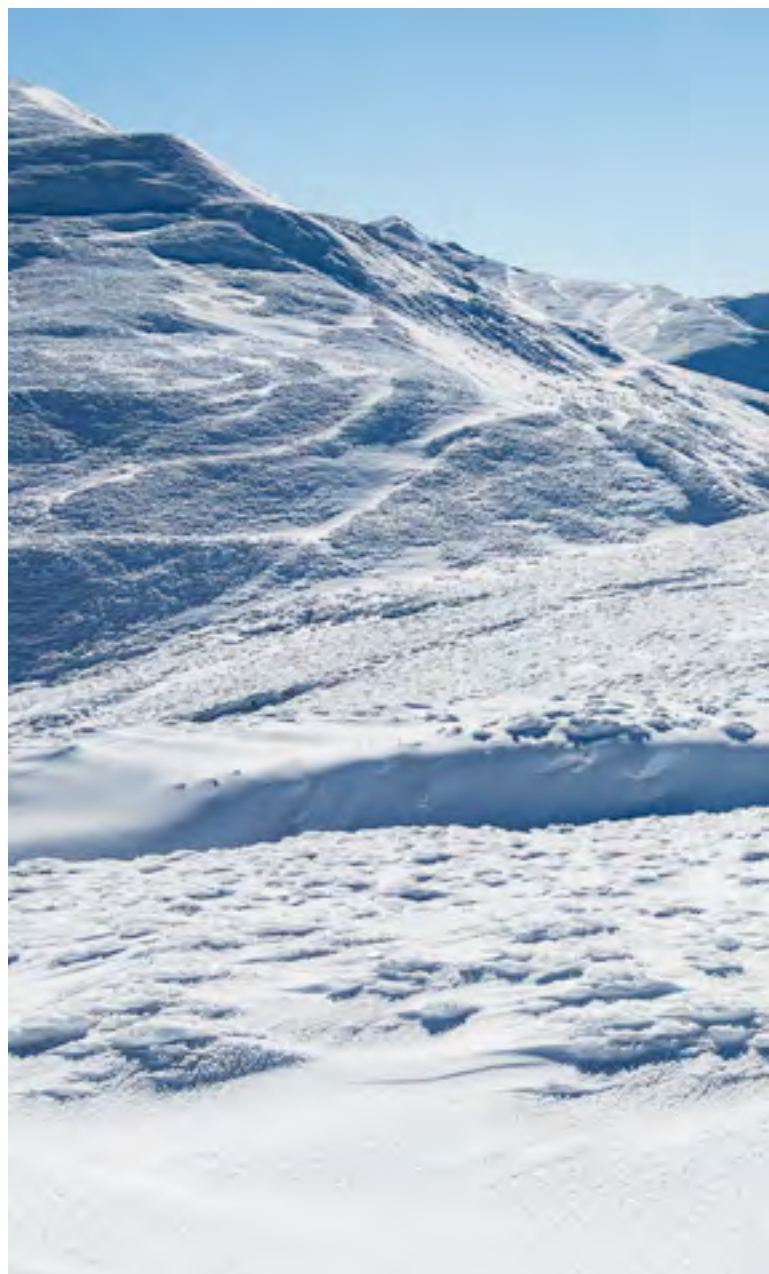
We had a late breakfast sitting on the porch of the hut in the imaginary warmth of the low winter sun but with great views over to Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe, and then soon after started up the main ridge leading towards Mungamahue.

At first the snow covering was fairly thin which made for easy walking but as we climbed higher we met the first of the deep snow with the dreaded breakable crust. And not your ordinary fairly gentle breakable crust like that on a well baked loaf of bread but an evil coarsely frozen unforgiving crust that mostly wouldn't quite support your weight but was thick and rough enough to rip at shins every time you broke through even when wearing gaiters.

Progress immediately slowed to a snail's pace—one step on the surface then the next breaking through the crust to the ground at knee's depth. Then stepping up out of the hole to straight away break through with the other leg. Then repeat. Maybe then one step on the surface and then down again. Physically tiring and mentally frustrating we suddenly seemed to be getting nowhere very fast.

Sitting on the ridgeline and looking ahead to where we had planned to go it didn't take much thought to realise that this was just not going to happen at the speed we could manage. We revised our plan downwards to what we thought would could achieve at our pathetic pace and started off again towards Mungamahue.

But now we were going downhill to a wide saddle and we found we had another problem. As it was impossible



to tell when you would break through the crust we still had to go at snail's pace even when on the surface for a bit because when you did break through if you had any downhill speed at all the weight of your pack carried you forward while your leg was trapped at knee height by the totally rigid crust. A broken leg was certainly possible in these conditions and we both actually gave ourselves a few scares at some near misses.

In the early afternoon when we arrived at the turn-off to Triangle Hut we had another think—for it now seemed we wouldn't even make our revised trip. There were a number of nice spurs leading to adjacent ridges that seemed to join up in an attractive round trip but we were already aware of another downside to the Ruahines—



the almost impenetrable band of leatherwood and other nasties than forms a barrier everywhere at the bushline. So after some pondering it seemed our best-laid plans would be reduced to an out-and-back trip to Triangle Hut making use of the track through the scrub to get to the river level.

But somehow all this didn't seem to matter. Even if the snow conditions were so bad that all our plans were being thwarted we were still enjoying ourselves by just being there—after all the weather was perfect and the views in all directions were stunningly beautiful.

So after a late lunch sitting in the sun above the scrub we started down to the hut. Even in the bush the snow caused us a few little problems as on some of the steeper

sections of track it had frozen to a glazed icy surface that made it very slippery and we both took a couple of fairly harmless slides. We crossed the river to the hut, collected a load of firewood and moved in. The potbelly soon had the hut toasty warm and we had a hot drink of tea and took our time preparing an evening meal. And we could now look out the window and watch the snowflakes gently falling past from a suddenly clouded sky.

In the morning the sky had cleared again to a sparkling fine day. For us it was back up the hill towards the ridges shining above us in the morning sunshine. Part way up the track we found a giant worm on the snow frozen almost rigid from the cold. A bit of warming in a bare hand and it showed some sign of life again and so



we put it on a patch of ground free from snow and bade it farewell.

Then a few minutes later we stumbled on a very big weta upside down in the snow also a bit solid looking. Again a few minutes in a warm hand and it started to move about very slowly so we left it on a sunny log and again said our cheery farewell. Then just to complete the animal rescues for the morning we repeated the procedure for a big and scary looking spider also lying frozen in the snow until warmed in an ungloved hand.

Further up the track the glazed icy sections we had slipped down the previous day caused us a few problems as we hauled ourselves up on the bushes. Then as soon as we were above the scrub we were back in our totally unfriendly breakable crust. But now we did have our previous day's tracks to follow and it was easier just to step into the holes already made than to have the uncertainty of when you would break through anew. But progress was still slow even if not as bad as before. So we decided to continue on to Mangahuia and then head back to the road end via Deadman's Track. This turned out to be a pleasant and easy walk through the forest with many attractive totara trees lit by the last warm light of the setting sun and we were soon back down to the car.

As we drove home in the fading light of the evening we pondered the vagaries of the trips we make to the hills. We had such grand plans for the weekend—as you typically do—and yet here we were leaving after covering only a fraction of the trip. But this time neither of us were even slightly bothered. We had seen the snow-covered Ruahines in perfect weather, and that was enough for us to know that we would back again very soon and hoping that the conditions would be better for us to complete our previously planned trip through some more of the wonderful countryside we had already travelled.





TWO OF THE BEST

Fine weather in the Tararuas

by MILES LONG

During April and May two of us made a couple of short weekend tramps into the Tararuas which are worth recording simply because on neither one was it wet or windy. In fact on both trips we stayed pleasantly warm and dry the whole time.

The first was a pleasant weekend trip along Table Ridge. We had driven to the Kiriwakapapa Road end early on Saturday morning and set off up the track towards Blue Range. The climb is fairly easy and we were soon over the ridge and heading down to Cow Creek. A short stop at the hut for some food and drink then up the ridge towards Brockett.

The last time I had been here there was only a faint blazed trail but now there were DOC orange triangles to follow which made things very simple. We emerged from the bush into the tussock and were met by some light

misty cloud drifting lazily across the ridge but which caused no problems to way-finding. We wandered easily along the ridge passing the mirror-calm tarn before the final climb to Brockett. From here was a short step to Girdlestone and then another hop to Tarn Ridge Hut for the night.

We had no particular plans for the next day but eventually decided to get back to the road end via Mitre. So on a clear and mild Sunday we headed back over Girdlestone and up to the summit of Mitre. We stopped here for a while taking in the wonderful 360 degree view before heading straight down to the Waingawa River following the spur between North Mitre Stream and Peggy's Stream.

At first the travel was through easy open snowgrass meadows but getting through the scrub above the bush proved to be a little bit of a bash. Once in the bush the travel was mostly straightforward but to stay on the crest of the winding spur required a good bit of concentration. Soon enough we emerged onto the track above the Waingawa just upstream from the junction with Peggy's Stream but for a few minutes we couldn't find a way down to the riverbed itself. We had to wander along the edge of the bank for a while to find a place where

we could climb down swinging from the branches of a couple of spindly tress clinging to the steep drop.

We crossed the river here and then headed directly up the other side towards Te Mara. To start with the bush was open and easy going but higher up there were many windfalls on the spur that made for slow travel. We wanted to be on the Blue Range track before dark so we didn't stop until we reached the crest of the ridge just below the highest point. We could take a break here as it was simply a short drop to the track somewhere just below us.

We only made it a little way down the track before needing head torches but from here it was an easy enough wander out to the road end in the soft warmth of the evening with the only sounds those of the gently babbling streams we passed and the moreporks calling from across the valley.

The second trip was to repeat a tramp I had only done once before up Pakihore Ridge. We drove to the Otaki Forks road end early on Saturday morning and wandered

easily up to Fields Hut then Table Top. The track down to Penn Creek was simple enough and we were soon sitting on the grassy flat next to the hut enjoying the warmth of the sunshine.

After our lunch we crossed Penn Creek and headed up towards the crest of Pakihore Ridge itself. The last time I had been here there was no easy track to follow but now, as for the first trip, there were DOC triangles to mark the way. We plodded our lazy way up the ridge in no hurry and as we got higher we watched the sun slowly setting behind us. We carried four litres of water for our evening meal and the next day's breakfast so we could stop just anywhere we found a flat spot.

Right on the top of Point 1088 turned out to be the ideal place for our tent. We sat outside and cooked our tea as the light slowly faded from the sky and the first stars appeared between the branches of the gnarly lichen covered trees. It was a calm evening and warm enough to leave the tent door unzipped for the night.

The next morning was fine and sunny again with





some light misty cloud pouring gently between the peaks from the east and drifting into the western valleys before evaporating away leaving a clear deep blue sky. We packed our gear and started up the final remaining slopes of bush then tussock to reach the Southern Main Range. Here it was sunny and warm and we could stroll along the ridge without a worry in the world.

As we dipped into the saddles between the peaks we passed through the mist flowing from the cloud-covered Wairarapa and we were followed by a very bright Brocken Spectre and fogbow. These are not often seen and we were fascinated to have them appear each of the many times we dropped below the cloud level.

We climbed into the sunshine again heading up to Bridge Peak where there was a surprising number of snow patches remaining from an early winter cold spell a week or so before. We found some snow-free grass on a north-facing slope and lay out in the last warmth of the sun sheltered from the gentle southerly breeze for a late lunch. Three others who we could see following us along the ridge joined us here and as we ate we swapped the usual tall tales of past Tararua trips we had done and future ones we still had to do.

The walk down Fields Track was one we had done so many times before but it is always pleasant enough

when the weather is fine and the sun is still shining on the Tasman Sea beyond Kapiti Island. And this time we even made it back to the road end well before needing to find our way using our head torches.

So ended two of the best short trips into the local hills we had done for some time. While the Tararuas can mostly be wet and windy with many tramps turning into more of a survival exercise than a fun day out, when they are at their best there is some magnificent mountain scenery that must surely satisfy the most discerning trampers—even us.

ABOVE: *Goblin forest and setting sun on Pakihore Ridge*

LEFT: *Heading towards Mitre from Brockett*

PREVIOUS: *Brocken Spectre and glory, and a fogbow. Southern Main Range*



MT BIKING WITH PAUL AND CLARENCE

by TONY GAZLEY

Paul is a very fit road cyclist—4½ hours around Lake Taupo would be an average day. But it was a while since he had done any mountain biking. So while I was quite sure he was going to leave me behind on the climbs, maybe, just maybe, I could get ahead of him on the downhills and then we would be even.

I was about to find out as we pedalled out of the carpark at the Kahutere Stream bridge and immediately started up the 1,000 m climb to the saddle that would take us into the Clarence Reserve. And just as expected Paul slowly got further and further ahead in spite of all my efforts to keep up. We arrived at the summit of the 4WD road about 5 minutes apart after 2 hours of steep

grinding away in granny-gear and were wiping the sweat away from our eyes when up the other side came a couple on horseback. We chattered for a bit and they told us our time up the hill was about the same as it took them when on their horses. I didn't know whether to be happy or devastated with that news.

But it didn't really matter, the weather was hot, calm, and there was barely a cloud in the sky, the view was great, and it was all downhill for the rest of the day. We were heading to Seymour Hut on the banks of the mighty Clarence River for two nights from where we would make daytrips up and down the tracks alongside the river. I started down the steep first section of the 600 m drop only to have Paul pass me on a rough section of the track and I couldn't quite close the gap before we reached the bottom. Damn! It was clearly going to be one of those trips where I would be struggling to keep up with him whether going up or down hill. Although I did feel a bit better when he admitted he wouldn't be as fast downhill if we swapped bikes and he then didn't have the advantage of a bike with full suspension.

We stopped briefly at Warden Hut for a late lunch and then continued down the stream with many crossings, most of which were rideable. We dropped our bikes part way to make a detour to visit the old Black Spur Hut built from poplar slabs for the musterers in 1920 and which was still standing. Then more bumpy river travel and late in the afternoon we arrived at Seymour and



made ourselves at home. We were travelling as light as possible so it was a fairly meagre evening meal, and then an early night ready for a longer day to come.

The next morning we were away just after sunrise along the road to Goose Flat—the northernmost end of the reserve. But first we stopped at Quail Flat to wander through a restored 1920s cob cottage and talk to a couple of blokes setting off to find possums that had been fitted with electronic collars to track how far they had travelled each night.

The 4WD track from here climbed up and over many spurs and the occasional slip. The surface was mostly great for easy riding and we took our time on the uphill to avoid sweating too much in the beating sunshine before letting rip on the downhill and level sections. All the time the views around us were stunning. A deep-blue river meandering between green terraces, and in the distance the tall peaks of the Inland Kaikoura Range including Mt Tapuae-o-Uenuku, Mt Alarm and Mitre, all beneath a cloudless blue sky. It was fast and easy MTB'ing at its best.

Some hours later at Goose Flat Hut we made ourselves a cup of tea and had lunch in the shade of an old willow tree. Here we agreed that on the return Paul would go his own speed while I would bring up the rear stopping for photos along the way.

Later in the afternoon when I arrived back at Seymour Hut after a swim in the river to cool off I found Paul working on his bike. It turned out one pedal had broken away from its axle leaving only the shaft on the pedal crank. The important bits had either broken beyond repair or were missing and we certainly hadn't considered taking spare parts for pieces of bike that should never have failed. So he was now going to have to ride wearing one bike shoe clipped into the good pedal and an old and battered running shoe on the other foot and using just the bare pedal shaft. Ha!—now maybe I could keep up with him.

The next day we started off early again and headed up Seymour Stream as far as the turn-off to Palmer Hut where we dropped most of our gear. Then a long steep 500 m climb up a track with a very difficult riding surface. Paul was not far ahead when I saw him stop riding and start walking. The lack of two proper pedals was obviously troubling him so I walked too without falling any further behind. But once on the following downhill he raced off



faster than ever—obviously determined not to let the missing pedal slow him there.

We arrived at the Willows Hut only a few minutes apart but I was actually surprised to see him still there—I thought he would be at least started on his way up the last climb to Palmer Hut. It turned out the missing pedal was making riding more awkward than he thought so he had decided to call it quits and was instead filling the billy from the nearby stream ready to make our lunchtime drink of tea.

The Willows was another poplar slab musterers hut also built about 1920 and still had the interior much as it would have been then including the rough sawn bunks with dried grass for mattresses. We sat outside in the warm sunshine drinking tea and admiring the

ABOVE RIGHT: *Black Spur Hut. Built in 1920 it looks much the same today as when it was first used by musterers except there would have been a horse and not an MTB parked outside*
Photos: TONY GAZLEY

RIGHT: *Inside Willows Hut. This would have been cramped with all the 10 bunks full. Originally the gaps between the poplar slabs were filled with mud*

PREVIOUS BOTTOM: *The Clarence River winds past Goose Flats which was once extensively farmed*



scenery which, although stark and barren, was strangely attractive. Since we had decided we were not going the last few kilometres to Palmer Hut there was no hurry and we lingered for quite some time before starting up the climb and the easy 4WD sidle track back to our packs.



From here it was just a short ride back up Seymour Stream with the many stream crossings to get to Warden Hut. It was a competition to see who could ride the most crossings and we were even until a particularly deep one where I got sideways on the rocks and abruptly stopped. Hurriedly twisting one foot out of the pedal clip I promptly fell the other way and took an impromptu bath in the river. It had to happen to one of us—fortunately we could get a roaring fire going in the potbelly in the hut to dry my clothes. Our evening meal cleaned up all the food we were still carrying and then a last early night in a comfortable hut.

The next morning was fine again although there was now was some ragged mist hanging about the hill tops. We made a fairly relaxed start—after all we only had the easy graded climb back up to the saddle and then there was the ripping fast and scary 1,000 m descent back to the carpark. After a short drive back to Kaikoura (with a stop to collect some delicious apples growing wild beside the road), and a last meal together we went our separate ways. Me to Picton and the ferry home while Paul headed to Christchurch for yet more biking. But this time to a 160 km race on his flash road bike—which actually had two pedals.

ORONGORONGO WANDERINGS

by HARRY SMITH

The Orongorongos seem to be a bit of a neglected area for Wellington trampers. On the weekends lots of day trippers, family groups, and private hut owners take the Five Mile Track into the Orongorongo Valley, but few people seem to go anywhere beyond here—more serious trampers tend to spend their weekends going to the Tararuas and other places further afield. I hadn't been anywhere beyond the Orongorongo Valley (or indeed, hardly anywhere beyond Paua Hut) for quite a few years. In January I had some time on my hands so I decided to head into the Orongorongos for a few days mid-week when all the usual weekend visitors would be away.

Monday afternoon saw me at the Sunny Grove road end in Wainuiomata, and I had a pleasant walk in to the valley in sunshine over the Whakanui Track. There is a nice grassy clearing at the end of the track, about a hundred metres before the river, where I camped. I had plenty of daylight left so I decide to wander across the river to

check out Baines, the Hutt Valley Tramping Club hut. I had visited it shortly after the big floods back in 2005 and the area around the hut had been badly affected, but the hut itself had survived. Now I was curious to see whether it had suffered any further problems in the last few years. But the whole area was virtually unrecognisable to me, despite my brief visit in 2005. Before the floods Matthews Stream used to be full of buddleia scrub and there was a track up through the bush to Baines—now the stream was a broad, open gravel highway. Gravel was spread out under the surrounding bush and Baines was nowhere to be seen! I blundered around for a while criss-crossing the area, wondering whether it was a bit further back in the bush than I remembered, but I couldn't see any sign of it. Eventually I stumbled onto a track leading up onto a raised terrace where I came across a private hut I hadn't previously known about.

Surprisingly, the owners were in residence and they

told me the Hutt Valleys had demolished and removed Baines. The floods had left it in a precarious position, with any new floods threatening to wash right through it. The floods also of course seriously affected Waerenga Hut, the Tararua Tramping Club's hut beside Brown's stream opposite Jacob's Ladder, and they ended up shifting it to a new site 100 metres back into the bush. So our own Paua Hut was the only tramping club hut to come though the floods unscathed, thanks to its fortuitous location on solid ground high above the river.

Next morning I headed up river to Boulder Creek. When I visited here after the floods in 2005 all the gravel outwash from the creek had dammed the main river and a lake had formed behind it—this was now gone, but signs of where it had been could still be seen. I boulder-hopped up Boulder Creek and set off up the Papatahi Track. This was steeper and rougher than I remembered—at one point a rope had even been put in place to help you haul yourself up a steep scree section!

Eventually I reached the top and headed off down the far side. The weather had clagged in and it was cold and drizzly and miserable, but by the time I got down to the Wharepapa River on the Wairarapa side of the ranges it had cleared up again. After lunch at Wharepapa (Joe's) Hut I wandered down the river bed in glorious sunshine towards the coast. I camped at Ocean Beach and went in for a swim in the surf.

Day three was my shortest day—all of about an hour and a half! I wandered around the coast and camped in the trees between the Mukamuka and Mukamukaiti streams. This was a superb spot—the ranges rose steeply behind me and the waves rolled in on the gravel beach below me. It's a rare chance to tramp and camp on an undeveloped coastline in this country and I'll never tire of these Cook Strait coastlines. I spent the rest of the day wandering around the area, checking out the beach and the rocks and poking my nose up Mukamukaiti Stream. Unfortunately the four-wheel-drive hoons seem to have discovered this area since I was last here, churning up the grass terraces and leaving broken bottles strewn around.

Next day I headed up the Mukamuka to cross back over the ranges via South Saddle. It must be over twenty years since I was last in the Mukamuka and I don't remember it very well, but I'm sure it wasn't like this! The whole valley was a broad, flat sea of gravel stretching from hillside to hillside, with all vegetation stripped away from the valley floor. Obviously the 2005 floods had hit this side of the ranges hard as well!

The valley floor provided a super-highway, a smooth escalator ascending steadily up into the ranges. As I followed upstream the hillsides closed in and I soon found myself in a narrow defile. Eventually I left the open gravel streambed to follow track markers up through the bush and tangled scrub of a narrow gully leading steeply up to the saddle, where I stopped for lunch in the sun.



ABOVE: *Bain-iti Hut*
Photos: HARRY SMITH

TOP: *Mukamuka Stream from South Saddle*

OVERLEAF: *Eastern coastline*



I had originally intended to head out over the Whakanui this day but it was so nice in the sun I decided to stay for another day. So instead of heading down I headed up to the summit of Mt Matthews. Later, back down in the valley, I checked out Bainiti Hut, across the opposite side of Matthews Stream from where Baines used to be. This is the only open hut in the valley. I was pleased to see it was still there and hadn't suffered any damage, but with all the gravel build-up it is now only a couple of feet above the river bed, whereas I'm sure it used to be a good two or three metres! It seems safe enough at the moment but it would only take another sizeable flood and it too could be washed away.

I spend the night back at my old campsite at the end of the Whakanui Track. Next morning I decided to head out over the East Whakanui, which I had never done before. This turned out to be an excellent alternative, climbing steadily up the ridgeline past some superb giant ratas, then down through a shallow saddle before joining the main Whakanui Track. Here I decided to take the old route out via Nikau Stream rather than what is now the standard way out to Sunny Grove. This proved to be overgrown but still followable. Back in Wainuiomata I capped the trip off with a giant ice-cream before catching the bus for home. It had been an excellent five days in the local hills.

...Two paths diverged in the wood and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

MONTE ROSA

Climbing the highest mountain in Switzerland

by SHARRON CAME



Snowy mountains and a grumpy train guard competed for our attention as we disembarked from our train at Rotenboden station already 2,819 metres above sea level. Our tickets were for another station further down the hill but the guard let us off with stern instructions to pay extra on the way back. Welcome to Switzerland! Back towards Zermatt we could see the Matterhorn (4,478 m) and the more rounded peaks of the Briethorn, Castor and Pollux. In front of us across the Gorner glacier Lyskamm (4,527 m) was a sparkling tower of shiny ice reflecting bright sunshine. To our left and totally upstaged the Monte Rosa massif sat like an inflated snow blob blocking the view into Italy.

A splendid morning for a wander up to Monte Rosa Hut (2,759 m) we thought. The hut perches on a rocky island called the Plattje between two glaciers. Used to NZ conditions we assumed the direct route down the worn track was the right route. After some interesting rock climbing amongst moraine debris we emerged a bit dirtier and wiser to haul ourselves up onto the dry glacier



and head across to the foot of the rocky island. Here we slogged up the cliff to the main ridge making full use of the numerous ladders and ropes on the actual route. We were at Monte Rosa hut in time to enjoy a late lunch out on the main balcony.

The current hut, a massive five story crystal shaped silver and white edifice dates back to 2009. It's a triumph of architecture and engineering design. There are loads of floor to ceiling windows which serve to both let in all available light and to give full effect to the spectacular views—you feel like you're outdoors only warmer! I thought from the postcards that the hut would be a real eye-sore but once you are in the mountains it fits seamlessly into the alpine landscape.

The afternoon disappeared as we busied ourselves getting organised for our climb. The signs in the toilets warned that the water was not for drinking so we enquired in the kitchen. The hut might be 90% solar powered but there is no such thing as free drinking water—only commercial bottled stuff sparkling, or still, and sold to punters for a small fortune. Our bunkroom was up six flights of stairs and shared with a party of Czech climbers who not only spoke Czech but German and English. They were used to climbing in expensive places like Switzerland and seasoned at finding ways to make their dollars stretch far enough for them to be able to drink plenty of beer. They kept us entertained with their funny stories and jokes about New Zealand being at the bottom of the world.

In the dining room we all enjoyed the catered dinner. The food did not match the views although it is hard to fault the ice cream. The level of commercialisation even in this remote hut amused us. The place mats were advertisements for Coca Cola, the mugs were festooned with the Mammuth rhino and logo. Climbers are allowed one litre per person of climber's tea for free! We filled up our bottles after dinner although I did not end up drinking any of it.

On summit day we were up at 2 am and out the door soon afterwards. Another lovely clear, mild day, as we joined the thin line of head torches heading up

the hill. Not far above the hut we reached the permanent snowline and donned our crampons and busted out our brand new bright green 20 m rope. Ropes are a bargain in Switzerland. While the going was relatively easy different groups took turns leading the way as there was some step plugging and the altitude made the climb tiring. Surprisingly there were no mountain guides. Our acclimatisation since reaching Zermatt had consisted of plodding up the Briethorn (4,164 m) after catching a couple of cable cars but we managed to keep up with everyone.

The long haul up the glacier to the saddle at the base of the west ridge is followed by a series of rocky knife edge ridges where the climbing is a mix of snow and rock—pretty common in NZ. After the mixed stuff we moved onto some steeper snow slopes. We managed these okay and the views were getting better and better even as the air got thinner and thinner and my teeth started to chatter. At one stage DJ pointed out Monte Blanc poking out of the clouds to the west, not many peaks above us now.

We reached the rocky west ridge summit—4,634 m at 9.40 am about 6½ hours after we started. Wearing big grins we quickly took a few snaps and checked out the view into Italy to the south. We knew a storm was forecast for later and clouds were already gathering. The descent was in some ways more tiring than the ascent as we had no appetite and we still needed to concentrate on correct foot placement. Luckily I could drink the sports drink we had picked up in Zermatt once my camelback tube thawed out.

We picked our way back over the rocky ridgelines down onto the easier snow slopes of the glacier still bound together with our green Swiss rope which may be christened Rosa. We found out later that the rest of the climbers abseiled off the summit of Rosa and headed back by an alternative route. There was some logic to this as I imagine in the peak season the route gets pretty congested and we may have done the same with a bit more preparation. But we were content to retreat the same way we came plus we were first back to the hut even with a detour to collect some free stream water.

In fact we were the only climbers to beat the thunder and rain. Despite the horrible weather and our exhausted state we decided to forgo a second night at the hut. After forcing down some lunch and encouraging the Czechs with their celebratory beers we packed our stuff for the three hour slog to the station. We were keen for pizza in Zermatt in much the same way that the Czechs were looking forward to their grungy but cheap campsite in the bowels of Brig. As we tramped out no amount of tiredness, or rain pouring down our necks, wind whipping our cheeks or the thought that we could have halved our weight by leaving some of our spare gear in Zermatt detracted one bit from the buzz of a big day out in the hills and a successful climb of our mountain.

In mid-January 2012, Sharon and I took a rare trip to Queenstown, taking advantage of Jetstar's new direct service from Wellington. We had booked our flights with no idea where we'd go tramping, so when a workmate suggested the five passes trip we thought we'd give it a go. I had seen the trip described in Sean Barnett and Rob Brown's *Classic Tramping in New Zealand*, and it sounded great. But with no tracks or huts, in an area officially classified as 'wilderness', was it really a trip to be tackled by the navigationally challenged? We would soon find out.

Route descriptions for the five passes usually start with the Routeburn Track, but we decided to do it in the opposite direction. We wanted to use a jet boat to avoid many hours of walking, and figured it would be easier to book a jet boat drop-off than pickup. In retrospect I'm not sure that's true, but it certainly provided a spectacular start to our trip. We had delayed our departure a day due to some pretty cold and unpleasant weather. As a result, the surrounding mountains were covered in snow. The views as we headed up the Dart in gorgeous sunshine were spectacular. I could understand the popularity of the Dart River jet trip, which takes you right into the back country without having to break into a sweat or get your feet wet. The foreign tourists we shared our ride with were impressed. The murkiness of the river due to a large slip the previous year was the only blot on the landscape.

Eventually our jet boat took its scheduled stop at our destination—the head of the Beans Burn (Scottish names abound down south). It's a popular spot—a tour company group was already there preparing to head up the 'burn' in inflatable boats. We said our goodbyes, donned packs while swatting sandflies, and headed off into the bush. Within a minute we spotted two kakariki.

After about an hour we were enjoying the sun in open river flats, with snow-capped mountains towering on either side. They had cool names like 'Mount Chaos' and 'Tantalus Peak'. The mountains are not that big by South Island standards—most are under 2000 metres—but they make up for it by their steepness and ruggedness. According to our map the track ends at the river flats. In reality we were on a marked track most of the first day. We found when we finished our trip that the Routeburn end of the track, which the various accounts I had read described as 'unmarked', is actually signposted and the track has been cut and marked for a good 15 km or so up the Rock Burn. It seems the 'wilderness' is gradually being encroached upon.

We managed to lose the track for a while on the first day, where some of the cutting and marking had been a bit neglected. But we were soon back on course and by late afternoon we could see our destination—the Beans Burn rock bivvy—in the distance. By then the

FIVE PASSES

by PAUL CHRISTOFFEL



ABOVE: Start of trip in Beans Burn
Photos: PAUL CHRISTOFFEL



ABOVE: Beans Burn



track had disappeared, along with the forest, and it took us seeming hours to fight our way through tussock and scrub to the bivvy. Note for future trips—the quickest route is probably straight up the river, even though it's a bit deep in places.

We found we'd been beaten by a party of four, who had nabbed the only decent camping spot leaving the bivvy to us. The 'rock bivvy' was really a cave, with one entrance partially blocked by a crude stone wall to keep out the wind. You could sleep six in there no problem, so we had plenty of room to spread out. Our fellow campers were two couples from Pukekohe, who looked well into their 40s. They were taking it fairly easy having been dropped off the previous afternoon before staying in another bivvy at the first river flats. They hated their jet boat trip as much as we enjoyed it—zooming into sleet in an uncovered boat is apparently not much fun.

The Pukekohe group were early risers and were long gone by the time we finished breakfast. To keep their feet dry they travelled up the true right bank of the Beans Burn while we crossed to the left bank where the travel was easier. Several kilometres later we briefly caught up with them but parted company again as they headed up on a broad zigzag course. One of the various sets of instructions we'd printed off the net said the best route was straight up following a small dried-up stream bed. So straight up we went. It was very steep.

We were heading for Fohn Saddle, the first of the 'five passes' and one of two over 1,500 metres. The saddle soon disappeared behind large bluffs. There was no sign of the other party. Were we going the right way? The apparent lack of alternative options, and the occasional cairn, made me pretty confident we were on course.

Eventually we hit snow. Queenstown DOC staff had mentioned reports of snow and suggested ice axes might be needed, and maybe crampons. My experience is that DOC suggests ice axes at the merest hint of snow despite

the fact that ice axes and crampons are often useless, particularly in summer. There's either so little snow that neither are needed or so much snow that you constantly sink in over your knees. In this case we largely avoided the snow anyway by climbing over large boulders.

A pole on Fohn Saddle was a welcome sight and the last official-looking marker we were to see for the next few days. Our next destination was the Fohn Lakes. Although Barnett and Brown describe these lakes as 'one of the highlights of the trip', they actually require a detour of a couple of hours from the main route. After following some cairns in the wrong direction we eventually backtracked then sidled across the ridge until we could see the lakes in the distance.

Within an hour we were lunching by the largest of the Fohn Lakes, surrounded by snow but in warm sunshine. The snow-covered Sunset, Corinna and Brenda Peaks towered above. On the way there we spotted the other party in the distance. They ignored the lakes and instead took the easy way down to the Olivine Ledge—a large grassy—well, ledge I guess—that provides good camping far above the Olivine River. The route down to the ledge from the Fohn Lakes is much tougher, and it took some time to pick our way through sharp boulders and slippery grasses. We eventually reached the ledge, set up camp by a large rock, and settled in to enjoy a surprisingly warm evening. Keas cried as they circled the sheer cliff tops far above.

The third day dawned clear. We needed to cross the Fohn Lakes outlet stream which from afar looked a major undertaking but once we got there was a doddle.



ABOVE: Fohn Lake

TOP LEFT: Climbing to Fohn Saddle



ABOVE: Camp on the Olivine Ledge

We were headed for Fiery Col, which was out of sight around a corner for most of the morning. On the way we ran into a couple who looked around 60, heading the opposite direction. This was clearly not a young person's tramp!

Fiery Col is the highest point on the trip, at 1,546 metres. It's named after the red rocks that abound in the area, particularly on the southern side of the col. Apparently geologists love this area with its huge variety of rock types, particularly the red ultramafic rocks. Once they break up, these red rocks have very sharp edges, as we found. The steep southern side of the col had a generous covering of snow which we could, in theory, have avoided by taking a route over sharp rocks. Instead we donned our over-trousers and slid down on bums and boots, mainly the latter. Great fun!

We had caught up with the early-rising Pukekohe group, and joined them for lunch in the sun. On the way down we came across a group of five going in the opposite direction. Two of them looked in their 60s, and an old guy with a ZZ Top beard looked well over 70. The last two in the party were teenagers, presumably dragged out tramping with their grandparents. Don't trampers in their 20s and 30s venture into the wilderness we wondered?

It seemed impossible to get lost as we could see Cow Saddle in the distance below so we followed our noses through craggy rock fields surrounded by towering cliffs. The country was spectacular. But we ended up taking a pretty roundabout route then had to head down a steep stream to get back on course. Although it was more picturesque than the standard more direct route we lost a lot of time with our detour, which took us into the headwaters of Hidden Falls Creek. Technically then, we



ABOVE: Leaving the Olivine Ledge



ABOVE: Fiery Col. Olivine Ledge right.

had missed Cow Saddle which is a bit of a rise between the headwaters of Hidden Falls Creek and the Olivine River. It is counted as one of the five passes although it's more of a boggy grass flat than a pass.

The travel down Hidden Falls Creek was slow going at times as it's regularly flanked with huge red rockslides giving the country a slightly bleak appearance. Route descriptions from the internet said there was great camping further downstream but it was getting late and we were tired. Strong winds seemed to be coming from every direction but eventually we found a sheltered spot large enough for a single tent. The creek had mysteriously disappeared leaving nothing but a couple of pools by our camp. Even these disappeared overnight.

Shortly after 6 am it started raining. We took shelter under trees and packed as quickly as we could. The only obvious route seemed to involve heading straight down the creek bed clambering over huge boulders. After a time we found a cairn and a ground trail to the left of



ABOVE: *Heading down from Fiery Col*



BELOW: *Resting below Fiery Col*

the creek which by then had built up to a small trickle. Within a couple of hundred metres Hidden Falls Creek became a torrent. Where had all that water been hiding?

We came to a large camping area, obviously the one described in our internet material. From there onwards we were frequently unsure of our route. We were using a combination of Moir's Guide and internet advice to try and find the spur up to Park Pass. Navigation was not helped by the steady rain, and we backtracked several times. We eventually spotted a pink tie on a tree far to our right, denoting that the route did a sudden sharp turn. A short distance later, someone had attached an orange permolat marker to a tree, and scratched on it the words 'last marker before Rock Burn' (or something like that).

Yay! We'd found the start of the spur. From there we followed a good ground trail up to Park Pass.

It was a steep climb, and we were cold, wet and hungry by the time we sheltered under rocks for a quick lunch. The rain hadn't let up for a second. We were too cold to linger for any longer than it took to gulp down a One Square Meal bar.

Gale force winds over the pass blew rain and sleet in our faces. Sharon got blown over several times and I struggled to keep my feet. Waves raced across a large tarn below us, looking like Wellington Harbour in a southerly gale. We were pretty glad to reach the other side. Eventually we found the rock bivvy that our various guides said was about 20 minutes over the pass. Eight people sheltered under the overhang—the Pukekohe group, who had decided that this was far enough for the day, an Australian couple who looked (you guessed it) well into their sixties, and a couple of guides they had hired to take them on the trip. We didn't feel tempted to stop so pushed on after a brief chat.

We had to twice cross the upper reaches of the swollen Rock Burn on the way down to the bush line. Once we hit the bush a marked track took us all the way down to the large river flats of the valley below. Getting there involved two stream crossings that at first looked impossible. The first stream was a narrow wild torrent that looked like it could sweep us into the Rock Burn and certain death below. I crossed it by holding onto an overhanging branch, then helped Sharon across. We had avoided getting into the FMC Journal 'back country accidents' reports, at least for the moment. The next crossing was easier after a bit of scouting around, and we soon reached the river flats. Huge waterfalls cascaded down giant cliff faces to our left, one of which had brought a large quantity of ice and snow with it.

The next stream we reached was clearly uncrossable, so we turned around and set up camp by a large patch of bush. It's a bit miserable putting up a wet tent in the rain, but things stayed surprisingly dry inside. Warm in our sleeping bags we drifted in and out of sleep.

I opened my eyes to the drip, drip, of water off the trees. The rain had stopped! We unzipped the tent to be greeted by blue skies and sunshine. Cue frantic running around hanging things on bushes in the sun. The sun soon disappeared behind the mountains, but we managed to find enough dry wood to light a fire to keep warm, and dry the rest of our gear. Dinner and a warm fire—what more do you need? Nothing like nine hours of miserable rain to help you appreciate the simple things in life. We slept well that night.

On day five the waterfalls had disappeared and we crossed yesterday's 'uncrossable' stream without getting our feet wet. We headed down the river flats in pleasant weather and debated whether to camp or to walk out. While we prevaricated we ran into the Aussie couple



and their guides. They had decided to abandon their trip and retreat back to the Routeburn road end where they started, after hearing the long-range forecast on their satellite phone.

Actually, there was really only one guide, from Aspiring guides in Wanaka. His mate was a German guy he'd hired to help carry the tents and food. We joined them for lunch and chatted in the sun. The Aussies said they had done South Island guided trips several years in a row including the Young-Wilkin circuit the previous summer. They were pretty disappointed to be turned back by the weather, and were hoping it didn't follow them up to Abel Tasman where they were going kayaking. The party offered us a lift into Glenorchy but we decided to camp. The weather looked settled, we had an extra day up our sleeve, and we were enjoying this glorious country.

On the way back to the clearing we spotted enough mice to convince us there must be millions of them in the bush. Maybe killing predators like stoats and rats had enabled the mouse population to take off. At our camp, sandflies harassed us for the first time so we donned plenty of clothes.

On the last day we had an easy walk out over Sugarloaf Pass, the last of the five passes. We were getting close to civilisation and could see Lake Wakatipu below. DOC promotes the trip up Sugarloaf Pass as a day walk and we ran into an American couple doing just that. Once we hit the Routeburn track 'highway' it took less than 30 minutes to reach the Routeburn shelter. Suddenly there were young people and family groups everywhere.

We nabbed the last two unreserved seats on the

afternoon bus to Queenstown via Glenorchy. On the way the bus picked up four Aussie guys who had done another wilderness trip that overlapped our route. One guy said he took a great photo of the Park Pass tarn with mountains reflected in it. Not on the same day we were there I suspect. As we shared stories of our respective adventures, we felt like real wilderness trampers. Sure we saw a few people, there were marked tracks some of the way, and we were buzzed by the occasional sight-seeing plane. But most of the time we felt well away from it all. It was certainly a great introduction, and we looked forward to more.



ABOVE: Nearly home. Heading down from Sugarloaf Pass. Lake Wakatipu in background

TOP: Waterfalls above Rock Burn

THE CYCLE TOUR

In which Harry the cycle tourist with the bung knees who cursed climbed and was

by HARRY SMITH

I came sweeping down the hill and there it was. The signpost. About a block long. Black letters on a white background. *Lots* of black letters. 85 to be precise. Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu, it said. I pulled on the brakes and turned into the parking bay. I had made it.

Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu. It felt daunting and hard to pronounce. It would be easier with a few hyphens, I thought. Taumata-whaka-tangihanga-koauau-o-tamatea-turi-pukaka-piki-maungahoronuku-pokai-whenua-kitana-tahu. But I knew it by heart. *'The place where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, who slid, climbed and swallowed mountains, known as 'Land-Eater', played his flute to his loved one'*. I had wanted to visit this spot for a long time and now I was here.

I had started that morning at the Tamaki River road-end in the Ruahines. I had camped there overnight with the trampers. They were going to walk to some hut.

I forget the name but I bet it wasn't 85 letters long. I had cycled down into Dannevirke, then eastward into the hills, heading towards the remote east coast and the world's longest place-name.

And there had been lots of hills. My map had 100 metre contours and didn't show all the hills. Lots of little 40 or 50 metres hills could sneak in and plonk themselves down in between the 100 metre contours, I discovered. And there were several big hills where I collapsed exhausted at the top. But despite the hills it had been nice country, with very little traffic and some large tracts of unusual cabbage tree forest in the valley floors. And now here I was, at the world's longest place-name.

The name itself actually referred to a hill in the distance to the west of the road. It wasn't a very big hill. It hardly seemed to deserve such a big name. In fact, if you stood the signpost on end it would probably be taller than the hill. It seemed a strange place for Tamatea to choose to play his flute to his loved one. But then, I reflected, who was I to tell Tamatea where to play his flute?



swallowed by mountainous hills describes his visit to the world's longest place name

I got my camera out and tried to take a photograph of the name but had trouble fitting it all in. I had to use my telephoto zoom lens just to see the far end of it. I walked from the beginning of the signpost to the far end and collapsed from the effort. It was that long.

Next to the signpost with the name was a smaller signpost describing the background to the name. I was disappointed to learn that the loved one referred to was actually Tamatea's beloved brother, not his sweetheart as I had always assumed. Somehow that made the name seem a whole lot less romantic. But never mind, it was still the world's longest place-name.

But then a twinge of doubt came over me. Call me a cynic, call me a killjoy, but is all this stuff about Tamatea actually a *name*? Isn't it really just a long descriptive phrase? When does a long descriptive phrase become an actual name? To count as a name, surely you have to psychologically grasp it as a single unified whole? Can anybody claim to actually do that with this story of Tamatea?

But never mind. It's recognised by the New Zealand Geographic Board and is in the Guinness Book of Records, and that's what counts. I sat there basking in the

sun, and in the achievement of having visited the world's longest place-name.

Finally it was time to go. I was heading out to Porangahau on the coast to camp for the night. I got on my bike and took off down the road. By the time I reached the far end of the signpost I almost needed another rest.

Eventually I reached Porangahau and headed out to the beach. It had been a long day with all the hills. I had expected to get here at about 4 o'clock and it was now nearly 6 pm. Porangahau Beach was more built-up than I had expected—there must have been a couple of hundred houses there. But the beach itself was superb. It was long and sandy, with waves rolling in. It stretched away for kilometres to the north. And there was a free camping area under some pine trees at the back of the beach. I pitched my tent and went in for a swim, followed by a long walk along the beach.

As I was cooking my dinner in the evening I began thinking about names. Porangahau was quite a long name, but it wasn't nearly as long as Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu. It wasn't the longest name in the world. It wasn't in the Guinness Book of Records. But



then I suddenly had a brainwave. Why not give this place a new name? What an excellent idea, I thought. So I decided to call it *The Place Where Harry, The Cycle Tourist From Wellington, Camped Under The Pine Trees At The Back Of The Beach And Went For A Swim In The Surf*. Ta-dah! Take that! 113 letters! The world's longest place-name!

On Sunday I headed back towards Dannevirke where I was due to get picked up by the trampers. I followed a broad valley northwards, and there were quite a few ups and downs which didn't show up on the map, just like the day before. To make matters worse, it was swelteringly hot—the first really hot day of summer.

After a couple of hours I turned off and headed westward towards a saddle in the hills that leads back over towards Dannevirke. But the hills and the heat were getting to me. After a while I completely ran out of energy and collapsed exhausted in the shade of a tree beside the road, rubbery-legged, feeling light-headed and dizzy, completely drained. I gulped down over a litre of water, munched my way through a whole packet of chocolate biscuits, and just lay there sprawled out on my back in the shade for a good 20 minutes before I came right. But then I thought, if old Tamatea could have a place named after him for playing his flute there, maybe I could have a place named after me for having a rest. So I decided to name this spot *The Place Where Harry, The Geriatric Unfit Cycle Tourist From Wellington, Collapsed Exhausted In The Shade Of A Tree Beside The Road And Gulped Down Over A Litre Of Water And Munched His Way Through A Packet Of Chocolate Biscuits And Lay Sprawled Out On His Back In The Shade Before He Came Right*. Bingo! 241 letters! Another record for the world's longest place-name!

I continued on up towards the saddle, pushing my bike up the steepest bit. At the top it flattened out, followed

by a superb long downhill run into Ormondville, to the north of Dannevirke. Just before Ormondville two innocent-looking bridges were marked on the map. At both of them the road dropped steeply into a gulch and climbed steeply back out the other side. Naturally neither of these gulches showed up in the 100 metre contours on my map. I dropped steeply down to the first bridge and ground slowly back up the other side in granny gear. I swooped around a sharp curve heading down into the second gully.

Then it happened. My back wheel started wobbling and rubbing badly. I ground to a halt at the bottom the gully and found my wheel was buckled. I had a broken spoke at the start of the trip and hadn't got around to replacing it. But the strain on the wheel had clearly been too much and now I had broken two more.

Fortunately Ormondville was only a short distance up ahead. I pushed my bike laboriously up the far side of the gully and on into town. And fortunately, despite being a Luddite, I had decided to carry one of those new-fangled cell phone gizmos with me, just in case. I managed to get a message through to Anna, who was leading the trampers. Can you come and pick me up, I asked.

An hour or two later Anna turned up in the van and I loaded up my bike. But before we left I had one last duty to perform. Ormondville seemed a pretty poor and unimaginative name for this place, I thought. Surely I could do better. So I christened it *The Place Where Harry, The Cycle Tourist From Wellington, Sat Relaxing In The Sun On The Verandah Of The Country Pub Appreciatively Sipping A Welcome Cold Beer And Munching A Mince Pie And An Icecream While Waiting For Anna To Turn Up In The Van And Pick Him Up (And Was Secretly Glad That He Had An Excuse Not To Have To Cycle All The Way Back To Dannevirke With The Heat And The Hills!)*. Now that's what I call a place-name!

‘When you have worn out your shoes, the strength of the shoe leather has passed into the fiber of your body. I measure your health by the number of shoes and hats and clothes you have worn out’.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF RHYAR MHIST

The tale of a hazardous journey through an uncharted countryside

by OTYN LAYZEG



*...Entered a narrow chasm. The brook and road
Were fellow travellers in this gloomy straight,
And with them did we journey several hours
At a slow pace. The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And in thee rent at every turn
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfettered clouds, and the regions of the Heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light--*

As far as weekend tramping adventures go they don't get any more dramatic than that recorded in the 2011 WTMC journal by that renowned sometime intrepid trumper Rhyar Mhist (retired). Travelling through an inhospitable countryside with uncharted hazards such as steep and treacherously eroded hillsides, streams with impassable waterfalls, and impenetrable groves of matagouri, Rhyar and his devoted followers laboured heroically to retrace the sketchy route recorded by ancient travellers along the path that would lead them to the magical Maj Tuh. Indeed, the whole episode reminds one of the lines from Wordsworth's sublime poem *Prelude*.

Rhyar overcame many obstacles on his journey but finally, almost in sight of his destination, had to admit

he was defeated—there was no way past an appallingly crumbly cliff with terrifying drops on all sides and awful foaming waterfalls that plunged thunderously into the hideous darkness of the bottomless abyss. The unyielding countryside had broken him physically and mentally and he was forced to retrace his steps back to civilization, but in spite of the exhaustion and privations he still had time to observe that far off in the hazy distance there appeared to be a way past the difficulties and an enticing path leading to the often-sort but seldom visited Maj Tuh.

So it was that I decided to follow in the footsteps of Rhyar and experience for myself the difficulties he overcame and perhaps find the beguiling path he had seen in the distance that could lead me more easily to the promised Maj Tuh. I packed my gear carefully making sure to take those items that Rhyar had wished for but lacked—such as a rope for descending the otherwise impassable waterfalls he met, and of course for my own guidance, safely stowed in a waterproof bag, I had a copy of his diary of the epic journey.

I arrived together with my trusty travelling companion Cajike at the end of the road at Rogee Masert where we packed our bags and with that joyous feeling of coming adventure we set out. But instead of ascending Cklab Lilh as Rhyar had done we headed up the nearby stream—I had after long deliberation decided to repeat his round-trip in the reverse direction which I thought may give us a greater chance of success.

We travelled easily up the rocky stream crossing back and forth to give us the best path possible and avoid us tiring ourselves unnecessarily. The sun shone warmly from a clear blue sky and kowhai trees bloomed brightly yellow in the patchy scrub. We journeyed lightheartedly with none of the foreboding that had troubled Rhyar's thoughts from the very beginning of his journey.

Later in the day the way became steeper and more difficult and there were places where stupendous slips had lately carved away whole hillsides and left the debris piled high in the valley we were travelling. There was no obvious route out of the stream to the saddle and then onward to the path that would eventually take us to the land of promise hidden beyond the farthest ridge. As we were unable to find any easy way we were forced to struggle upwards through the thick bush and scrub that clung precariously to the steeping hillsides, scratching ourselves and tearing our clothes as we passed. It was slow and difficult but we persevered mindful that this was likely only the beginning of our trials.

Once we crested the ridge the way ahead was clear but we reminded ourselves that because of our late start the day was already nearly done and darkness would soon overtake us. But this didn't trouble us too much as we headed downstream towards the confluence with Maj Masert and the promise of a comfortable night in the golden Maj Tuh just as Rhyar must have imagined

almost exactly a year before us.

Soon it was gloomy enough to need our headlights to find the way ahead—and suddenly the first sign that our trip was not to be without troubles, for the torch of my usually reliable companion had empty batteries and we carried no spares. There were no campsites to be found anywhere in the narrow rocky valley so we had no choice but to continue slowly and with much difficulty on our way down the stream gorge with a single torch. Then just short of our destination we came to the top of a high waterfall that filled the width of the valley and we had no option but to climb up into the bush to sidle past. But then to our dismay there was no way visible in the beam of our single torch back down the nearly vertical drop to the river flats below. Clearly we were stuck, with no possible way to continue further.

We turned and headed dejectedly back to the sidle above the waterfall with no clear idea of what to do next, when suddenly, in the densest manuka, we chanced upon a flat clearing just large enough for our tent. This was almost too good to be true—on the steepest hillside in the thickest scrub was a wonderfully sheltered and secure campsite. Our spirits soared and we pitched the tent in the warmth of the evening while bright stars twinkled between the tree branches overhead and then we sat on the soft mossy ground to cook our evening meal. We slept without care that night knowing we were quite safe and there was only a little distance to travel to reach Maj Tuh.

In the morning we were woken cheerfully by a wonderfully melodious dawn chorus. We packed our bags and slithered down the steep drop to the river which was obvious in the daylight and before too long we opened the door to the fabled Maj Tuh. We ate breakfast while reading aloud the Tuh manuscripts which told us that the few visitors had mostly arrived by a short walk upstream from a rest day on an El Nacerc pilgrimage, or who had flown in by helicopter. We thought how disappointing it must have been for Rhyar and his party not to have made it to this wonderful place but we were also mindful that because we were doing his trip in reverse we now had to travel the route that had troubled them and which was necessary for us to take to get back to our starting point.

Shutting the door behind us we headed down Maj Masert. This was easy walking under another clear blue sky and we were soon standing in the riverbed looking up at the end of the ridge that Rhyar had seen in the distance and boldly written in his diary, 'it would go'. Now it was our turn to head into the unknown as we climbed the steep start to the ridge. We turned east along the crest finding mostly easy travel through the sparse scrub and the piles of boulders. On the top of Noipt 884 we stopped in the sunshine to have our lunch. Then as we sat in the sheltered warmth we noticed light snow flakes falling from a clear sky and settling on our clothing! How

bizarre we thought—there must be storm clouds behind the ridges and snow is blowing over to us from there. So we stayed without a care as the gentle snowflakes continued to decorate us with polka-dots of pure white.

Soon we continued along the ridge towards Noipt 961 where we would then turn west and head towards Byhorn Vib which Rhyar had passed by and where we would spend the night. This was splendidly easy climbing and we relaxed and chatted as we walked. Then on the ridge crest, suddenly, there was a marker pole. What on earth did it mean? There seemed to be no point in it being, so we carried on mildly amused and wondering only slightly if it was for anything important.

Travel along the ridge tops continued to be a joy, with wonderful views in all directions, mostly straightforward underfoot and no bush that presented any real difficulties. As we turned and headed down towards Byhorn Vib we passed another pole. This one seemed just as absurd as the previous until we suddenly realised there was an obvious shortcut available directly across all the side spurs between the poles! We had taken the longer route over the tops but it didn't matter anyway for we had enjoyed far better views by passing that way.

Further along the ridge on the top of a knoll was a third marker pole. This one was obviously important for there were two spurs both of which seemed to lead to possible routes to Byhorn Vib that we could now see in a grassy clearing still a long way below us. We chose the easiest looking spur and started along expecting to find another marker to confirm we were headed the correct way. Nothing appeared so we headed back and tried the other spur—but with the same result. This was annoying—clearly the pole was there to mark that there was a correct way to be taken but which one of the two ways was it?

We decided to carry on in the hope we were right but it soon became obvious we were seriously wrong for opening up below us were hopelessly steep eroded hillsides that we were certainly not going to be able to safely descend. So back up to the pole it had to be. We started down the second spur just as daylight was fading and were pleased to find easy travel and much later yet another pole. This one had a wobbly bent white permolat arrow that blew about in the breeze and didn't point anywhere in particular, but it didn't matter for we knew which way to go and there was only a short push through the manuka to get there.

We moved in, cooked tea, read the manuscripts particularly noting the entries that Rhyar had left as he passed by, (once in each direction a day apart!), and noting that there had been only two other tramping groups passing through in the 12 months between his visit and ours. Later that night we lay comfortably in our sleeping bags while through the open windows we watched lightning flash across the cloudless sky.



ABOVE: Travelling down Maj Masert

BELOW: Confluence of Maj Masert and El Nacerc



We left Byhorn Vib early next morning as we knew first thing we had the harrowing descent to Gnarswoss Masert that Rhyar had so graphically described in his diary. We headed back to the ridge next to the marker pole with the wobbly arrow not knowing where the correct descent started. I dropped my pack and wandered left and then right along the cliff edge growing increasingly troubled that there seemed to be no possible way at all down the steep and hideously eroded slopes below us. Surely we would not be forced to turn back too! I had all but given up when I decided to have a better look to the left and there, all but hidden, was a narrow gut that had relatively firm rock and which seemed to carry on right the way to the bottom of the unstable slope. Feeling pleased with myself I hurried back to Cajike who had just re-read Rhyar's diary which described in detail the route they had taken up the slope—and from the description it



was clearly the same gully I had just found!

Now it was all so obvious—we should have read the diary more thoroughly in the first place and should also have grasped the significance of the pole. Even though the arrow now pointed whichever way the wind blew it probably once pointed to the start of the descent and the gully below, and not the other way to Byhorn Vib as we first thought. We clambered without bother down the gully and then started up the stream. This turned out to be lovely easy travel on smooth rounded boulders between the sparkling clear water, passing deep green pools and small cascades on our way.

Then around a corner we came quite unexpectedly upon the waterfall Rhyar had despaired at descending until he had found a rope tied to tree by some unknown previous travellers on the very edge of the drop. Of course looking up from the bottom the rope was obvious and hauling ourselves up was easy, even if we were not very happy the old weathered hemp rope could be entirely trusted. But there was really no choice and we were soon on our way again up the stream towards the start of the climb up to Ucock Laddes.

We were carefully watching the map, and the twists and turns of the stream, as we travelled to hopefully pick the correct turnoff up the hill, and had stopped where we

thought we should begin when Cajike suddenly spied the only orange triangle we saw the whole trip—except it was attached to a tree that had fallen over and only the tiny tip was visible from under the trunk. But at least it confirmed we were at the correct place and so we started up the open hillside. This was a relatively short climb and we were soon standing on the crest of Neb Rups.

As Rhyar had recorded in his diary travel along Neb Rups was easy and scenic. And all the while standing grandly behind us were a majestic line of towering snow covered peaks. However, towards the top of Neb Rups the sky gradually clouded and snow started falling again. As we turned north towards Cklab Lilh the snow fell much heavier and quickly covered the tussock and scrub—and us—then deepened enough to have to wade through.

Cklab Lilh summit was windy, cold and misty and our hoped-for view of the way home was not to be. We set a compass bearing to the top of a long snow-covered spur that would take us to the grassland above El Nacerc and then set off northwards through the dreary mist and snow-covered scrub towards the farmer's track and eventually the road where our car was parked. A while later as we neared the far end of the spur the clouds briefly parted and we were lucky enough to have a brief glimpse of the

4WD track far below—and because it was not marked on the map at least we now had some idea where it was even if for the moment we had no clear idea how to get there.

Snow had fallen almost to sea-level during the last few hours and we crossed the final steep and slippery grassy slopes before heading straight down through an open forest of tall old manuka to meet the farm track.

So in three days we had completed a journey partly pioneered by Rhyar and his party of four—and thanks to his detailed diary what an amazing and enjoyable journey it had been. We had travelled through areas very seldom visited that are quite different in so many ways to our usual tramping areas—although as recorded by Rhyar, and from our own experience, it is not an area to be taken lightly. But I will be going back—I know that the flowers are beautiful in the springtime there, and I would love to wander carefree along Neb Rups once again.



ABOVE: *Neb Rups*

MOUNTAIN MAGIC

Hiking through Peru's Cordillera Huayhuash

by KATY GLENIE

Arriving early morning off the over-night bus from Lima, Huaraz is an explosion of sights and sounds. Taxis honking expectantly for customers, walking towers of Peruvian-style Disney balloons, mountain guides touting their wares, colectivos bursting at the seams with locals heading out of town. At 3,000 m above sea level the air is noticeably thinner and it's tough making the three-block climb to Olaza's hostel.

Olazas will be our base camp for the next few weeks in Peru. The roof terrace looks out over the small mountain town of Huaraz and down the valley to the towering peaks of Huascaran National Park.

Mike and I spend the next three days acclimatizing to the altitude, testing our broken Spanish out on the street vendors. Huaraz is a maze of cobbled side-streets and small plazas. The alleyways are well-stocked with plucked chickens, roasted guinea pigs, gigantic wheels

of cheese, and knitted alpaca. Stocking up on supplies for our 12 day trek is an expedition in itself, and it doesn't take long to convince Mike of the absolute 'necessity' of hiring a chef for the trip.

In Peru your chef comes with a donkey to carry the cookware, and the donkey comes with a donkey-driver (who knew donkey management could be a legitimate career choice?).

So on May 10 we meet our new best friend Jacquiem at the bus station, and watch him load crate after crate of cookware, food, and other provisions into the luggage compartment. Upon arrival at Llamac we meet our second-best friend Samuel, who proceeds to load the crates and bags onto four fine-looking donkeys. The crowning touch is a wriggling box tied with twine, carefully added to the pile. It seems that we are to be accompanied by a third-best friend—a rather scrawny



free-range chicken. Our first day trekking the Cordillera Huayhuash circuit is long and hot. We struggle over the 4,300 m pass, arriving at camp after nightfall to a beaming Jacquiem and a very welcome hot meal.

The vista greeting us the next morning is spectacular. Laguna Jahuacocha stretches away to the east, lying beneath some of the highest peaks in the valley. The snow glistens under a perfect blue sky. But the weather doesn't last for long, and soon we are laboring up a 4,750 m pass under gathering storm clouds. We make it to the high point just as snow begins to fall. Further down the valley this turns into sheeting rain, with thunder and lightning adding to the drama. We arrive in to camp thoroughly drenched, once again thankful for Jacquiem's culinary expertise and the cook tent.

Day three dawns fine and clear, and we head straight up 600 m from camp to the high point. Jacquiem gestures wildly up ahead, so we look skywards to see a condor. At 3½ m the condor's wing-span is second only to the Wandering Albatross. The bird can live for over 100 years, but its numbers have been in sharp decline due primarily to habitat loss. So it's a very special moment to see this majestic bird soaring above.

The following day gives us our first glimpse of Siula Grande—the mountain made famous through

Jo Simpson's book and movie *Touching the Void*. At 6,344 m it towers majestically above its neighbours and forms a perfect backdrop to our campground at Laguna Carhuacocha. That night we realise we're too late to say our goodbyes to third-best friend. It's a real mystery where she's disappeared to, so we console ourselves with a delicious meal of pollo.

We choose the high pass route the next day, taking in views of the *Tres Lagunas* formed from nearby glaciers. A short scramble through volcanic rocks takes us to our highest point yet at 4,800 m. I'm starting to feel the effects of altitude.

A good night's sleep puts things right, and we set off for another day in the mountains. Disconcertingly we're trailed by a couple of gun-wielding locals. The pass is commonly frequented by *banditos* trafficking drugs from the north, so the locals act as protection for unsuspecting tourists like us. The guns seem to be more for show, straight from a 1960s military display.

We arrive mid-afternoon to a welcome sight—hot springs! My first wash in six days feels amazing. It prepares me for the following day, when we climb the highest pass of the hike. Punta Cuyoc is 5,000 m, and my



TOP LEFT: *Condor*
Photos: KATY GLENIE

ABOVE: *Siula Grande and Sarapo*

LEFT: *On the path to Tres Lagunas*

OVERLEAF TOP: *Diablo Mundo*

OVERLEAF BOTTOM: *Rondoy and Jirishanca*

head pounds from lack of oxygen.

In the Cordillera Huayhuash each campground is managed by members of the local community. Camp fees are distributed directly to the families, who choose how to spend the income. Some use it to buy a nice pair of sunnies and a new donkey, but most put it straight back into campground facilities and maintenance. Amazingly in the Guanacpatay, our next campground and miles from the nearest road, we are treated to flush toilets and running water.

Our next day is supposed to be an easy 6 hours, with no high passes to climb. The landscape kindly continues to provide enough lumps and bumps to keep the heart-rate up (who would want a nice steady downhill at this stage in the hike!). At around mid-day we turn up a side valley, through a gate that's been unlocked at our request. We're right in the heart of the mountain range now, and are almost completely surrounded by peaks. The valley is a riot of flowering lupins.

We arrive at camp mid-afternoon. The site nestles into the side of a glacial moraine, at the base of Sarapo and Siula Grande. This spot was the start-point for Joe Simpson and Simon Yate's legendary climb that almost ended in a fatality. Joe was left for dead at the bottom of a crevasse with a broken leg and severe frostbite. Through sheer willpower Joe made it back to camp by crawling out along the base of the crevasse, over the glacier and through the moraine field. It took him three days and nights. Simon was packing up camp to leave, thinking Joe must be dead, when he appeared out of the gloom. Simon took some time to realise Joe was not a ghost that had come to haunt him. Joe survived to tell the tale, and is now mountain guiding in the Peru and the Himalaya.

We take a walk up to the edge of the glacier lake, watching a series of avalanches crack and crumble from the surrounding jagged peaks.

It's back on the mountain pass treadmill the following day. We head back down the valley and up to another pass. The campground is pretty basic, with a single doorless long drop sagging dejectedly over the other side of the valley.

The next day dawns bright and sunny, and we cruise over the pass in just a few hours. This gives us time to analyse a route up Diablo Mudo—the peak we are hoping to climb the next day. We also fit in a short Inca history lesson. Jacquiem shows us around an ancient site, pointing out the ruler-straight line of stones marking the old road. It seems the Incans were very like the Romans—they loved a good road and couldn't abide corners.

The following morning we dive headlong into an alpine start—up at 2 am to navigate Diablo Mudo's glacial moraine in the dark. Following thinly spread cairns we make it to the snow-line just on sunrise. There's nothing quite like the sensation of warming rays of sun

on your back after hours scrabbling around in the dark, and the panorama of mountain-tops is breathtaking. Due to a heavy snow-fall we can't quite make the top, but get within spitting distance. This means a quick re-planning of the exit route. We spend several hours making our way down through an un-tracked valley, arriving at camp as dusk is falling. Jacquiem is grinning from ear to ear and Samuel is uncharacteristically animated, giving us each a high-five. They thought we'd fallen into the clutches of Diablo Mudo, which is sometimes known to live up to its name (the *Silent Devil*).

After a very sound sleep we wake for our last morning in the Huayhuash. The sun is rising over the mountain tops as we set off for our last pass. It's a doddle at 4,300 m, and we arrive back in Llamac with enough time to fit in a bracing Coca Cola. We say a fond farewell to Samuel, our donkey troupe, and middle-of-the-night freezing pee-stops before jumping on the bus with Jacquiem back to Huaraz.



HOW TO BREAK A BIKE

Cycling through Molesworth and Rainbow

by HANS WISKERKE



Some weekend trampers will recognize the pattern of looking forward to a good workout in the hills, and once the first climbs are done and the body feels hungry and a bit sweaty, the thoughts drift off to nice food, a good cuppa and a warm shower as a treat after the weekend. Things are quite similar for the typical long-distance cyclist, but when you're cycling and camping for a few weeks, that shower is the one thing you're missing most and doesn't fit in your panniers. Back in '93 some cyclists put their heads together which resulted (after some detours) in 2005 in the website www.warmshowers.org. This site aims to link smelly cyclists to friendly hosts with a warm shower (or even a spare bed, tent site, etc.) using an interactive map, discussion forums and message service.

Supportive of the idea Mika and I signed up as hosts and have received some interesting visitors over the last few years, some touring within NZ while others were pushing the pedals all the way from Poland or France. Listening to their great stories it became apparent there must be a reason why these cyclists chose to come to NZ, so January 2012 I set out to spend a few weeks on the bike in the South Island. The road through Molesworth and Rainbow Stations was high on the bucket list, as this is only open for a few months each year. Alas Mika wanted(?) to work in Wellington so without the possibility to share the camping gear, a heavy bike rolled downhill to the ferry.

Keen to test the receiving side of the Warm Showers hospitality I had mailed two addresses in Blenheim and received two invitations, and ended up with a cheerful family where trampoline jumping with the kids was essential before the tacos were served. The local bike shop sold me a good-looking pannier to clamp onto the handlebar to improve weight distribution, and with sufficient food for two long days I continued over Taylor Pass towards the Awatere Valley.

Heading up the valley the smooth sealed road became rough, vineyards gave way to uncultivated slopes and the hilly sections became more frequent. The views were stunning, even more so when the green glow of the long grass contrasted with a purple and blue sky, but less so when this resulted in a downpour obscuring the views. More like a cold shower! The day's destination being the DOC campsite at the entry gate to Molesworth Station I had expected some basic facilities and put up my tent in the drizzle. Once finished a friendly lady from a nearby campervan came over with a steaming mug of tea and some gingernuts—service extraordinaire!

Next morning the skies were dry and allowed some exploration around the campsite, including a lovely original cob cottage. Back on the bike the short climb to Wards Pass proved to be too stressful for the new pannier bracket—two bits of plastic had broken off making the intelligent clip-on system useless. Not wanting to return to Blenheim the problem was fixed with some lateral thinking and a sturdy strap. Then time for the great downhill into the wide Acheron valley—woohoo!

The road dropped down to follow the Acheron up to where it merges with the Clarence, followed by a flattish stretch to the foot of Jollies Pass. Actually really nice cycling—generally downhill, hardly any traffic and beautiful scenery (just try to look past the omnipresent power pylons). White gentians and blue borage cover provide some colourful accents to the tussock and the grey hills. Due to the lack of warm showers along this stretch of road I had planned to push on till Hanmer Springs. Although steep, Jollies Pass didn't require the push-bike to be pushed and once over the crest a steep and rutted 4WD road led straight into Hanmer. Some good advice—do your shopping on arrival as the shops close quite a bit earlier than in Welly.

With two days of serious cycling under my belt the idea of a rest day was appealing, so under a cloudy sky I headed to the springs, only to find out they'd open at 10 am. Nothing wrong with a nice morning walk around the village, so two hours later I paid a few dollars to undergo a slow-cooking experience. Quite enjoyable at the start, but I decided against the lobster-scenario and got out alive with still many hours of daylight to go. While the clouds were disappearing I carefully looked

at the altitude profile on the map and decided to pull out the pegs and leave Hanmer Springs. Today's destination would be Lake Tennyson which involved crossing Jack's Pass back to the Clarence and then another two hours up to the lake.

Let's say getting up Jack's Pass in a pre-boiled state with the January afternoon sun on your helmet wasn't the easiest part of the trip, but it was nice to be away from the holiday village atmosphere. Once down the pass and cycling towards the lake, it appeared the road map was not sufficiently detailed to show all the little corrugations on the gravel road. Pretty uncomfortable and quite hard work, but eventually the turn-off to the St James MTB track appeared, followed by the side road leading to Lake Tennyson. That's really a stunning place to pitch a tent—feels like cycling through alpine meadows to some remote pristine lake. Well, it actually is! Another great meal of instant noodles, fruit and chocolate helped to digest the day, which ended with the sun dropping behind the distant hills beyond the lake.

Heading north the road goes up to Island Saddle (about 1,350 m) so again a good climb but not too steep. Standing on the pedals every now and then the chain touched the front derailleur—probably hit by one of many rocks over the last few days? Before morning tea the bike made its way to the top of the saddle and some lovely downhill stretches brought me down to Coldwater Creek. Great cycling here—probably only two cars in the first three hours on the road so the main focus is avoiding the cattle. A downhill bike is likely their main event of the day, so they react with bulging eyes, unpredictable jumps or just plainly sprinting across the road.

As the road ahead zigzagged up another saddle before reaching the Rainbow Valley I decided in favour of a pre-lunch. Certainly I didn't want to carry too much food back into civilisation. Another good climb, but subsequently the downhills started to take over. One essential stop at Rainbow Station gate to pay a gold coin and have a chat with the gatekeeper. Apparently quite a few days since a pushbike came through, as many people put the MTB on the 4WD to do the St James cycleway or whizz straight to Hanmer's tracks. For the very keen ones there is however the yearly Rainbow Rage event, but that's probably the only day per year it gets busy with bikes on the road.

North of the gate the road gets smoother and eventually turns to tar seal, still meandering through the beech forests. This is where those black-and-yellow fellows live—not the Phoenix! One of those wasps ended up in a ventilation slot in my helmet—a short sharp sting made clear what the wasp thought of our encounter. Being sensitive to wasp stings this meant a few hours later a guy with an asymmetric face checked in at the St Arnaud's backpackers, receiving concerned looks from the other guests. Pop a few pills (anti-histamines in this



ABOVE: *Upper Awatere Valley*



ABOVE: *Lake Tennyson*

case), lie down and hope for the better. At least a warm shower and an opportunity to wash some clothing.

For the next day I'd arranged to ride to a Warm Shower (note the capitals) in the Nelson area which meant no more gravel roads. That was rather fortunate considering I had only one functional eye, the other still being blocked by significant swelling. With a few hundred metres to drop from St Arnaud to the coast it was a smooth ride, only interrupted by the occasional second breakfast, pre-lunch, and ice cream stop. Approaching Nelson a bit earlier than expected I decided to detour over Upper Moutere, avoiding the busy SH6. Going gently uphill I pushed the pedals a bit harder, heard a sudden bang and saw the bike giving way under me. Total surprise, mixed with fear of what might have

happened if it had broken earlier, left me immobilised for a few moments, but eventually I concluded timing and location could have been much worse.

When informing my hosts for the night I was having some trouble to reach them, they even came around to collect the two half-bikes, the panniers and myself. Again great Kiwi hospitality (should I omit they were Dutchies?). Swapping stories with my hosts it turned out they even had a unicyclist staying who was touring NZ, together with some 'traditional' cyclists to carry

the gear. A look at the remains of my bike confirmed the seat position would not be correct for uni-cycling so I abandoned that option. Better get reorganized and carry on at a later date (in the end the bike manufacturer provided a new frame free of charge).

The good news is that Mika and I are moving to Nelson late 2012 so I may just pick up the ride where I had to abandon in January. For those interested there will be an additional Warm Showers address in Nelson—you're welcome even if not on a bike!



WHAT THE CLUB DONE AT LABOUR WEEKEND

On the Friday before Labour Weekend the Met Service weather warnings made sorry reading. Saturday and Sunday were forecast to be heavy rain in the west of both islands with severe gales in most eastern areas—including the Marlborough Sounds. Then a cold southerly change on Monday with snow to low levels in the east of the South Island and very strong winds at

higher levels everywhere. Suddenly there were five trip leaders making hurried alternative plans for the weekend. But WTMC punters are a hardy lot and 25 folk duely turned up at the ferry and set sail for Picton, while two more flew to Christchurch, then all headed onwards to various parts of the South Island on a variety of trips—these are the stories of four of them:

Kayaking Queen Charlotte Sound

by KATE HODGKINSON

Labour weekend marked a number of firsts for me—my first time on a WTMC trip, my first time stepping foot on the South Island, and my first time seeing a pod of dolphins in the wild.

It also marked my formal education in a number of crucial life-lessons, mainly: if there's even the remotest possibility that you may get sea-sick, don't sit right at the front of the ferry to admire the view, regardless of

night—after admiring the stars (NB. you don't see stars like that in London!).

We were up bright and early on Saturday morning and, blessed with glorious sunshine and calm weather despite the rather foreboding weather forecast, were all raring to get paddling. Lyndsay and Michele arrived at the boat shed just in time to display to us all the true level of comfort that can be enjoyed on a kayak trip. With barely disguised envy at the ease to which Lyndsay's fold-up deck chair slipped into the bow of his kayak, we got kitted up and after a safety briefing from Steve we loaded the trailer and headed to Ngakuta Bay.

We buddied up with our paddling partners and, with buoyancy aid packets crammed full of snacks, pushed



the number of sea-sickness tablets taken beforehand; there is such a thing as 'dehydrated vegetables' (being reasonably new off the boat from that grey place on the other side of the world that is the UK, this was a revelation to me—much to the amusement of Kevin and Tony); don't pitch your tent next to a stream when rain is forecast; and returning to the office after a long weekend is made so much sweeter by being able to recount a pretty epic weekend with WTMC to one's colleagues who, on the whole, 'didn't do very much'.

After a ferry ride that was more eventful for some than others, we were met by Steve from the Kayak hire company and driven to their boat shed at the south end of Queen Charlotte Sound where we bedded down for the

off into the Sounds.

The morning's Met Service forecast was for the weather to turn in the afternoon so we decided to play it safe and paddle to the campsite at Kumutoto Bay, just a few paddling hours away, in time to set up camp before lunch. En route, we passed a number of solo seals chilling out on the rocks. I was just thinking how big they were when Tony told me they must have been juveniles as they were so small.

With the image of walrus-sized seals in my head we carried on across Christys Bay and out across Torea Bay. Crossing the middle of the bays proved to be pretty exhilarating as the wind was, for now at least, helping us along.



evidence of our plight.

After a delicious dinner of fresh muscles, veg pasta and cake with custard (which Kevin got a little too excited about) we headed for bed.

The rain came during the night and me and Alix woke up to find ourselves in the middle of a pool of water. It turns out that pitching our tent next to the stream in order to shelter from the wind was a bad decision. We'd have taken the wind over 4 am emergency dry-bagging any day!

However, Sunday proved to be just as glorious as the previous day so we made a group decision to paddle on to Ratimera Bay for a spot of lunch before embarking on an epic voyage back down to Umungata Bay in anticipation of the weather front that was due to move in on Monday.

After 7 hours of paddling, much of which was into headwinds, we pulled into Umungata Bay and set up camp while the feat of the paddling we has just done sunk in and we got a brew going.

Dinner that night involved the notorious dehydrated vegetables and enough fruit salad to sink a battleship.

After borrowing a spare ground sheet me and Alix woke up in a perfectly dry tent on Monday morning and it felt like we'd spent the night in a five star hotel.

We all had a relaxed morning before packing our kayaks for the final time and heading out on a quick paddle to our last port of call. We were met at Anakiwa by Steve and we headed back to the boat shed for much needed showers and lunch.

We arrived into Picton with a few hours to spare



We had just landed at our campsite when we spotted a pod of dolphins out in the bay. Alix and Rory donned their wetsuits and snorkelling gear in earnest and headed out to see if they could find them. With Rory in just a $\frac{3}{4}$ wetsuit and no boots or gloves between the pair of them, they put up a valiant effort and came back with handfuls of muscles for our dinner.

After lunch, me, Tony, Alix, Debbie, Hans and Rory decided to take a hike up the hill at the back of the campsite to see if we could join on to the Queen Charlotte Track at the top. This proved to be an at-times near-vertical, almost-impassable, assault course through supplejack vines. After realising we'd only gained 100 m of the 400 m elevation we needed to get up to the track after going for an hour, we decided we were fighting a bit of a losing battle against the vines and turned back.

We were greeted at the campsite by a smug set of rested kayakers telling us that was the reason they opted out of the walk. The six of us should be in the running for some sort of perseverance prize though as we did continue on well beyond the point at which any sane person would have given up! You can see Alix for video



before our ferry set sail. Some opted for beer, some for fish and chips—and some for crazy golf. Apparently you're never too old to enjoy a game of pitch 'n' put!

After such an awesome weekend we all wearily boarded the ferry back to Wellington that evening while recounting the weekend's most memorable moments and saying what a brilliant job Kevin and Lyndsay had done organising and leading the trip.

As we stepped off the boat in Wellington late Monday evening and Labour Weekend came to a close, I realised I couldn't think of a way I would rather have spent it. Kevin Cole (leader), Lyndsay Fletcher (kayak co-leader), Michele, Helen Law, Tony Gazley, Rory MacLellan, Pete Gent, Anna Lambrechtsen, Sue Walsh, Alison laferriere, Hans Wisckerkie, Debbie Buck, and Kate Hodgkinson. M Kayak—Queen Charlotte Sound.



Photos: KATE HODGKINSON
and TONY GAZLEY



Mt Mulick

by SHARRON CAME



Photos: DAVID JEWELL

Friday night sees us downing cups of tea and birthday cake at Ant's place in Christchurch. Maps are spread across the table. DJ and I dither about sorting, packing and repacking. Weather forecasts are studied for the twentieth time. Ant calmly taps away on his lap top conjuring up Plan B.

At dawn on Saturday we drive along the deserted road through the snowy mountain lands to the Bealey Spur road end. Already Arthur's Pass Village is gift-wrapped in a veneer of thin, grey cloud creeping over the divide like fast growing ivy. Still clear and sunny in the east though.

Day packs on we trot past the cute cribs to the Bealey Spur track which leads to the hut of the same name. The terrain is easy going through bush and tussock tops interspersed with delightful tarns. This walk is popular with Canterbury school parties and I can see why. The hut is at nearly 1,000 m altitude and the walk to it affords great panoramas of snow coated tops as well as a clear view down the Waimakariri River valley. Apart from a couple of admittedly very noisy Canadian ducks we have the place to ourselves.

From the hut we continue above the bush line through soft snow following Hut Spur all the way around to Jordon Saddle on the Black Range. If we had a better weather forecast it would have been fun to traverse the entire range but that adventure will have to wait for another day. As it was his birthday we graciously let Ant do lots of step plugging. The views were inspiring, the snow stayed firm enough for us to make good progress and the weather held although the burnt toast colour of the billowing clouds suggested a change was imminent. The odd bit of scrambling kept us on our toes literally.

About half an hour before our high point and due to an oversight on my part I'm in front. Suddenly visibility shrinks to about a metre and loads of little white snowflakes trickle earthwards surfing the gusty southerly that has arrived from nowhere. Good excuse to surrender the lead I decide as Ant pushes on to our high point. We christen this bump Mt Mulick in honour of the birthday boy. Photos record our ascent for prosperity as snow swirls around us and the wind flares and bites.

Time to retreat to Jordon Saddle. We pull our ice axes out thinking the snow will be icy but we are able to affect a rapid, easy descent on medium firm snow. In no time we are wading through patches of accumulated snow at the top of Jordan Stream looking for the best descent route which turns out to be the stream itself. The top half of the stream is a bit gorge-like so we get lots of boulder climbing and stream wading practice. Funny sand terraces collapse around us if you so much as glance their way. Everywhere snowflakes waltz and swoon as the sun struggles valiantly to pierce the clouds without success. Lower down the snow is replaced by a rather

more prosaic drizzle.

Eventually as the afternoon draws to a close we pass Little Jordon Stream and the valley opens out giving us views of the Waimakariri in the distance. Another couple of hours and we're back at the main road from whence it's a short amble back to the car.

The Bealey Spur – Jordon Saddle – Jordon Stream loop is a great day walk. For us it represented a short, intense exploration of a part of Arthur's Pass we'd not been to, and we returned to Christchurch for another round of birthday cake satisfied we'd fed our climbing addiction and maximised our louver sized weather window.

Ant Mulick, David Jewell and Sharron Came.
ALP1 F—Arthurs Pass NP.

Mole Tops

by ILLONA KEENAN

People are surprised when I mention that I haven't done much tramping in Nelson Lakes. So I was pretty excited with the prospect of playing there over Labour Weekend. Given the dodgy forecast, our plans changed from Mole Tops to a trip to Blue Lake, with potential to go over Moss Pass and back down the D'Urville Valley. After dropping the other group off at a backpackers in St Arnaud we bravely made our way to the shelter at Rotoroa—driving past the Rotoroa backpackers thinking how staunch we were. Luckily I had my (new, kindly bought by boyfriend) insulated lilo so was the warmest I have ever been lying on the concrete floor of a shelter.

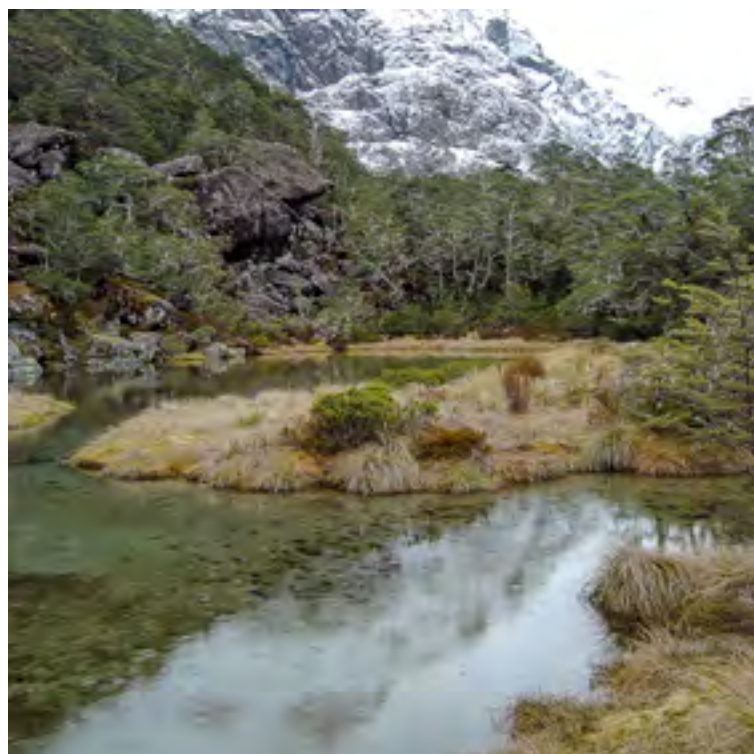
The view of the lake was wonderful as we waited for the water taxi to take us across to Sabine Hut. A trip on a boat is a great way to start a tramp. The kowhai were flowering on the water's edge and you could pick out the clematis flowers in the forest. It was interesting to see all the snow damage from 4 years ago—with huge gaps in the canopy.

There were a bunch of Christchurch fisherman with their own boats at the hut. As we headed up the Sabine track, Sharon shared her understandings of the impacts of the Christchurch earthquakes. I really enjoy meeting new people on club trips—it is always fascinating to find out their backgrounds and experiences.

Despite the forecast, the weather was excellent tramping weather—cold when you stopped, but just right when walking. There was even a bit of sun when we were on the open river flats. Robins were making loads of noise, and there were signs of deer. The Sabine River was roaring so I was somewhat relieved when I realised that we didn't need to cross it to get to Blue Lake. Seeing all the avalanche paths and scree slopes was great—and when members of the party stopped next to the signs 'Avalanche path ends', comment was made regarding our faith in DOC. The weather started to play games with clothing choice, the old guarantee that if you put on your coat and pack cover it was bound not to rain. I took a hit for the group and kitted myself out in full rain protection, which had the effect of no rain until the hut.

We got to Blue Lake just as it started to snow. There was a fair amount of snow on Moss Pass, so that (and being a bit pooped) dampened my enthusiasm to do the planned trip. Phil did a great job in collecting and chopping fire wood and getting a decent fire going in the rather under-sized fire box. A girls versus boys 500 competition kept us entertained until bed time.

Craig, the taxi captain, had mentioned the lack of good keen men and the negative effect it was having on their business. We had to concur the next morning, as hail and rain kept most of us in our sleeping bags, with no desire for a trip over the pass or up to Lake Constance. Paul was not slow in picking up on my dampened enthusiasm when he saw me knitting. However a departure time was



Photos: PHIL DUNLOP

given, in true leadership style and the rain had stopped on cue when we left the hut (although it started again an hour or two later). There was a girl vs boy debate on whether it would be worth crossing the Sabine to get to West Sabine Hut (the bridge was out). I didn't like the look of the speed and depth of water, and didn't fancy getting all wet just to go to a hut. The boys on the other hand remained keen. Luckily when we got to the crossing point their enthusiasm had tapered off due to the wildly raging river so the plan was changed to head back down the Sabine again. We later learnt that some Hutt Valley Tramping Club members had crossed the river to complete a Travers-Sabine circuit. They said it took them half an hour to find somewhere they could cross, and even then it was pretty hairy.



There are lots of good camp sites in the Sabine Valley, and I was keen to camp rather than stay in the hut. The others, being a bit cold and wet, weren't so keen. A little later, the roles were reversed, thanks to a rather amusing incident. Sharon and I had fallen behind and kept each other amused with general chatter. But the amusement level was about to skyrocket.

Natural log bridges don't usually pose much of a challenge, as long as you are careful. I was crossing one on a side stream, when I noticed that it was over a rather deep (and inviting) pool. Unfortunately it was a bit too inviting as all of a sudden I slipped and was going for an unexpected swim. Lucky for me it was deep, as I fully submerged—Sharon saw the top of my blue pack liner disappearing under water. I soon popped back up to the surface, and laughing my head off clambered onto the bank. I was my own little waterfall with water streaming off me and my pack. An immediate priority was sorting out my pack, whose contents we assumed would be wet. But thanks to my pack cover it was still bone dry! Taking my coat off there was even a dry patch

on my T-shirt. Much laughter occurred for the next wee while. We caught up with the boys a little later on and Paul immediately made the observation that I seemed to be rather wet. At which point I had to fess-up to my hilarious dip. By this time the weather had cleared and the others had decided that camping might be an option after all. However, my willingness to camp was diminished by my level of dampness so we ended up spending the night with the fishermen and others in a pleasantly warm (or maybe over-warm) hut.

Despite the swim and inclement weather it was a thoroughly enjoyable trip and I shall be returning with haste. Many more adventures need to be had in Nelson Lakes.

Paul Christoffel (leader), Sharon Brandford, Phil Dunlop and Illona Keenan.

MF Nelson Lakes National Park.

John Tait Hut

by RAY WALKER

I hadn't been on a club trip to the South Island for quite a number of years and had not planned on going away over Labour weekend. However, Barbara Keenan persuaded me to co-lead an easy-medium trip with her to Nelson Lakes National Park over this long weekend. Co-leading the trip turned out to be a really good option (more on this later). Having committed to this trip, I was really looking forward to getting away for the weekend. Our group consisted of six people—and all were club members. This is most unusual to for an EM trip.

The plan for the trip was to start at the south end of Lake Rotoiti and tramp up to John Tait Hut where we would stay for two nights. On the second day we would do a side trip, and on the Monday we would return to the end of the lake by the same route. Unfortunately the weather forecast for the weekend was not good—the words 'rain' and 'showers' appeared in the forecast for each day.

We chose to stay at the Alpine Lodge Backpackers in Saint Arnaud on the Friday night which we all thought was good value for money as none of us were keen on

camping out in bad weather. On Saturday morning we packed up our gear and met the water taxi at the jetty for the quick trip up to Coldwater Hut at the other end of the lake. Katja, who had planned on being with the medium group, joined us for the trip up the lake. She had injured herself in a fall from her bike earlier in the week, and had decided to recuperate at Coldwater Hut over the weekend.

The track to John Tait Hut follows the true left of the Travers River. It is a reasonably flat and easy route which, according to DOC, should take about five hours to complete. As we were in no particular hurry, we stretched this out to six hours which included plenty of stops for photos, snacks and lunch. The forest along the way consists mainly of beech trees with the odd totara here and there. The track also meanders through some open grassy fields which reminded me very much of the Saint James Walkway (probably due to the presence of matagouri bushes). There were some ideal camping spots, but as bad weather was predicted, we weren't tempted to put up the fly. We had been lucky with the weather so far, but we could see that rain was following us up the valley. After feeling a few spots of rain I decided it was time to have an early lunch before the rain caught up with us.

It was not all plain sailing this day—we had a boot problem. After an hour of walking one punter reported that her boot sole was coming off. Closer inspection showed that the sole was indeed doing just that. This was a bit of a surprise as the boots were reasonably new and were a good quality brand. I initially used tape from my first aid kit to fix the problem, but after getting wet it came off. Plan B was then to use a draw-cord from a stuff sack—this worked well. We used string again when



Photos: DAVID BAKKER

her other boot sole came adrift. Fortunately the string on both boots stayed in place for the rest of the trip.

We finally arrived at the John Tait Hut about 4 pm having kept ahead of the rain all the way. The medium trip punters led by Katie Glenie were already there. Their plan was to climb Mount Travers the next day (Sunday). There was no shortage of firewood at the hut. At some stage an avalanche or slip had brought down a large number of trees only a few metres from the hut. Although there were some good camp sites nearby, nobody was keen when it soon started raining.



The next day arrived but unlike the medium trip, we had no definite plans for the day other than doing a side trip of some sort. The mediums left for Mount Travers via Summit Creek. There were a couple of possibilities for a side trip: the track to Cupola Hut, Travers Falls (about an hour from the hut), or both. It was raining steadily now. Barbara decided to stay in the hut and get the fire going.

Having donned our rain jackets and over trousers, we set off up the Travers River. The river was up and flowing fast. When we reached the turn off to Cupola, it was suggested that we carry on to the falls before going up to Cupola Hut. So, that's what we did. The falls were indeed spectacular; more so than I thought they would be. Due to the amount of rain fall over the last 12 hours or so, there was a huge amount of water cascading over the edge. We spent quite some time there gazing at the falls and taking photos.

It was time to move on. David, Anita, and Clare were still keen to go up to Cupola Hut. Meena wanted to go back to the hut but at a leisurely pace while taking plenty of photos on the way. My preference was to get out of the rain and spend the rest of the day drinking tea by the fire in the hut. Thus three went to Cupola, and two returned to the comfort of John Tait Hut. Back at the hut Barbara had successfully got the fire going. A group of three blokes arrived at the hut and had lunch before heading off to Cupola. They had been at Hopeless Hut the night before, and had shared that rather small hut with a group of nine people from the Tararua Tramping Club. They advised us that the latter group were on the way to this hut. I did some quick maths—there would be enough bunks for everyone, but I suspected that there would not be much room to move about in the hut.

A short time later a small group of TTCs who were camping further downstream arrived. I thought they were very keen to be camping out in such weather. They had decided to do a walk up to this hut and return to the tents later. The three chaps who had been in the hut for lunch had left for Cupola, but one of their party returned as he had had a fall and was not feeling too good.

Sometime later our medium group returned. They had been thwarted by the weather in their attempt to summit Mt. Travers. However, they did manage to get to 1,660 metres in altitude. The hut was starting to fill up. Clare, David, and Anita arrived back. They were very happy to have got to Cupola Hut. They brought back photos of the hut covered with a thick layer of snow.

There are some good camping spots near the hut and if the weather had been a lot better I would have camped out—crowded huts are not my cup of tea! Barbara was in charge of the evening meals on this trip. She did a wonderful job. Working out recipes to cater for the number of food allergies in our group was challenging. So we had two great meals.

The plan for the next day was to walk back down the track to Coldwater Hut and catch the water taxi back to St. Arnaud from there. As mentioned earlier Katja was staying there for the weekend. As it was still raining steadily we were not going to dawdle on this walk. We didn't want to get cold during photo taking stops.

We set off shortly after 8 am expecting the walk to take five hours or more. Understandably there was a lot more water about. There was no chance of performing puddle-dodging dances! We all splashed through the water. Although there were a number of side streams crossing the track, none of them presented a problem. All the significant creeks had very robust bridges over them.

There was one very irritating feature of the weather that day—something I have rarely encountered before. Every now and then the sun managed to shine through, so much so that we could see shadows. However, it would only last between 30 seconds and a couple of minutes and then it was back to more rain. It was most frustrating!

We progressed quite quickly along the track. We reached Coldwater Hut in just over four hours which was significantly quicker than our leisurely stroll up the valley on Saturday. On arrival at the hut we met up with Katja who had just put the billy on (this was good timing). The water taxi was not due until 2.30 pm so we had quite a bit of time on our hands. We changed into dry clothing and had lunch. David decided it was safe to dispose of his emergency rations. So he handed out soup sachets to all the punters which went down a treat. I was tempted to get into my sleeping bag for a while, but instead lay on a bunk and put another mattress over the top of me. This did provide some warmth. The other punters were very amused and took photos of me peering out from under the mattress.

The water taxi arrived right on time and whisked us away to St. Arnaud. So it was the end of my first club trip to the South Island for quite a number of years.

Notes about the trip:

The track to John Tait Hut is an easy and pleasant track. The scenery is beautiful and there are plenty of good camping spots. Fine weather would make a significant difference on this walk. There are good options to go further afield. Other huts in this vicinity include Upper Travers, Cupola, Hopeless, and Angelus.

Barbara and I co-led this trip. I found that having two people organising and leading the trip significantly eased the burden of leadership. There is a lot of work involved in leading trips, especially to the South Island. I really recommend co-leading as an option for these trips. Ray Walker (Co-Leader), Barbara Keenan (Co-Leader), Anita Su'a, Meena Kadri, Clare Todd, David Bakker. EM Tramp, Nelson Lakes National Park.

Advertisement



Did you know that the club has a neat little hut in the Orongoronga Valley? Did you know that it is for use by all club members free of charge? Did you know that on the weekend of 10-11 November 2012 over 20 folk on a number of trips met there for the Saturday night and had a great time?

You too can enjoy yourself out in the bush in a great wee hut. Give it a try—you won't be disappointed.



CONDORS AT MY FEET

by MIKE PHETHEAN

The acclimatization has gone well. As told in the story by Katy we had spent 12 days going from 4,000 m to 5,200 m. The only down-side was missing the summit of Diablo Mudo but it was not ‘going to go’, so we lived to climb another day.

A day off in Huaraz was supposed to allow me to prepare to go to climb Pisco Oeste (5,760 m), but I got a stomach bug and we lost a few days until I felt well again. I had then intended to climb Copa (6,130 m) but decided to go to Pisco after all.

Logistically it is a much easier climb, there are combies (small passenger vans) and the three hour squashed journey cost me \$7. I had not started early, so it was after lunch that I commenced my climb up to the refugio. They are run by a christian charity and all the profits go to helping the poorer locals with housing. Thus I could go with both a lighter pack and conscience—multi tasking!

I arrived about 5 pm having climbed 800 m from the valley floor. The refugio is at 4,650 m and they gave me a welcoming coca tea and as the place was empty I got a



room to myself.

An alpine start of 2 am saw me leave at 3 am. I knew roughly where I was heading but my late arrival the previous day prevented me from scouting the route the night before. The way through the moraine is cairned but finding these in the dark was problematic. Eventually I gained a moraine ridge which led me to the glacier edge.

From here the route was obvious, the popularity of the peak means there is a well trodden path. A bit of a weave through some crevasses and I was on the main ridge. The wind picked up making the travel very slow. The snow got blown into deep pockets in which I had to make new deep footsteps, which at altitude is even harder. I reached the summit at 11:30 am and took a few photos before quickly descending. I stopped to chat with some Chileans and Germans—both were finding the route hard work.

Once out of the wind I had lunch and then wearily traversed the moraine somewhat beaten up. I got to the refugio and went to sleep for a few hours before supper. The next day I descended to the road finding a direct bus back to

Huaraz. I was happy having made the first summit of the trip and my highest solo climb to date.

A day off allowed me time to meet my guide, Nacho, and pack my bags for the Ishinca Valley. The plan was over 10 days to try and climb four peaks. The Ishinca valley base camp is just one day from the road end. Two of the peaks could be climbed from the base camp and two needed a high camp. However for peaks of this sort of altitude there are few places in the world with such easy access. The base camp is therefore popular but unfortunately neglected by the Huarscaran National

Park. You pay a park fee for every week you climb but 90% of this fee disappears straight into the coffers of the government in Lima. The long drop toilets were falling down and people had to dig pits themselves but being near a stream this is not a long term solution!

The first two peaks went well—Urus (5,495 m) and Ishnica (5,530 m). Both are non-technical and so were a good chance for Nacho and me to sort out our climbing systems. I was starting to feel good, the loss of the first two peaks was now balanced out by three wins.

Next up was the west face of Tocllaraju. (6,030 m). I had a tried to do this in 2008 but had been thwarted by a storm on our summit day. What I didn't know was that nobody had climbed it since that year. On Urus we had used the fantastic views to decide a route which would minimize our time under the seracs (large ice formations which have a nasty habit of dropping on climbers and killing them) and get us through a rock band. Both were new features since my last visit.

From the high camp we followed the well worn track along the normal route before branching off through knee deep snow to the object of our climb—the west face. The first three pitches were straightforward with the ice axes getting good purchase. The fourth pitch through the rock band was interesting as the snow had melted and sometimes refrozen leading to soft snow followed by ice and then some rock—quite hard mixed climbing!

By now the sun was up and as usual for alpine mountains we changed from kicking our hands and feet to keep them warm by circulating the blood, to wanting a good drink of water. We didn't want to stop as we were climbing under the seracs and the same heat that was making us thirsty might also destabilize the ice. We pushed on, veering towards the south ridge to stay off the main fall line of the ice above. Three more pitches on some very hard ice, took us to safety and I shared one of my bottles with Nacho. We lunched about another 40 m higher sitting on the apex of the ridge.

In our plans we had thought we would now cruise to the summit but the snow was very soft. It wasn't just a case of step plugging—sometimes you had to compact the snow so that you could step up on it. Sometimes you just wallowed. It took another three hours to reach the summit—too late for any views as the mist had descended. It was 4 pm and we had left at 2 am, so it was time to switch on because although the north ridge route was well tracked and fitted with someone else's belay points our tiredness was our enemy.

Three and a half hour later with head torches spotlighting the way we trudged happily into our base camp. Pablo our cook was waiting and presumed we would break camp and drop the two hours down to the valley but Nacho and I stayed. After some welcome soup and pasta, we fell asleep, leaving Pablo to get back to the warmth of base camp—in the state we were in it would



have been a risk too far.

Afterwards Nacho let me know we were the first to climb the route for four years. He also raised the grade to TD from D which probably was right—we will let other decide if this is correct when they climb it. Needless to say there were a few enquiries over the next couple of days.

A rest day followed and we learnt that the road out was blocked. There is a local gold mine which has been polluting the head-waters of the rivers. The locals had started protesting about this one and a proposed new one. Peruvians don't send postcards to politicians, instead they block the road with rocks and just stop anything moving. They also can riot and in a protest later in the year people would die in clashes with the police. The protests only lasted one day on this occasion.

Somewhat obliviously we headed up to the Ranapalca high camp. This is located just below the obvious col between Ischinca and Ranapalca (6,130 m). The sunset was a stunning alpenglow and it was one of the moments that climbing is all about!

We again set off early and followed a trail put in by some Spanish climbers a few days earlier. Running

ABOVE: *Inchinca*
Photos: MIKE PHETHEAN

RIGHT: *Shaqsha*

PREVIOUS: *Hauscaraan Sur and Norte, and Chopicalque from Yanapacha*

belays took us up the face to the rock band which proved to be quite fun to traverse. I spent ten minutes trying to shout over the top to Nacho to get some slack—he eventually figured it out, hearing my noise but not the detail. We then took some more running belays to the summit plateau. Others had formed a gentle path to the summit and we started on our way before we found some large recently fallen ice blocks across it with the prospect of more to come. It was an easy decision to not go any further. We made good time descending using the snow stakes left by the Spanish. Meanwhile up above, the rock band decided to hurry us along our way by throwing bits of itself on to us! The snow by this stage was very soft and I broke through the crust to my waist too many times. This time we had enough energy and time and carried our camp down to the valley floor. A few beers made the evening go a little more quickly anticipating the trek out to Huaraz the next day.

The next peak was Artensonraju (6,020 m), the mountain which features on the Paramount film company's logo. I had climbed it before by the South East Ridge but this time would attempt it from the North Ridge in the Santa Cruz valley. The valley holds the most popular trekking route in the National Park and is another example of just how poor the National Park Authority are. A few kilometers of the route had been washed away during the winter rains by a massive mud slide and lahar from one of the lakes that used to be in the Artensonraju cirque.

The Park refused to do anything about it, saying that they did not have the money. Eventually the trekking agencies got together and agreed that they would sort the issue out. They paid for a large number of the local donkey drivers to rebuild and remark the track. A higher levy would be charged on any agency trip through that year—the locals were enthusiastic as a lot of their income comes from the tourism. It was great to see such cooperation. Two leisurely days took us to our base camp, from where we hiked across the lahar remains and

through some steep wooded meadows to the moraine where we camped just below the glacier. We set off early, weaving our way through a broken-up crevasse field at the bottom of the glacier. As we reached the top of this the mist fell and we climbed to the ridge line too early, the way being blocked by a horrible cornice. A descent and traverse put us back on track and more running belays took us to the summit proper. It was knife edge in places with some quite soft snow so the last section of ridge was interesting. We lunched on the summit as the swirling clouds gave us glimpses of the view around us. We had to put in our own anchors for the descent as there was no evidence of any one else being up that year but we were reasonably quickly back at camp. Some hot soup fired us up and we headed down to the valley stumbling occasionally through the trees and the lahar debris. The welcome lights of base camp guiding us in.

The last time I had climbed Artensonraju it had taken me 18¾ hours and is the longest climb I have ever done it was fitting that this time the whole day was 18½ hours!

I would learn a new mountaineering term when I



returned to Huaraz—I think it is American but we were now ‘sending’ which roughly means knocking them off with ease! (I was not so sure about the last bit.)

Fatigue was now catching up with me and the next trip out was a few days on the Yanapacha Glacier. We spent a long time practicing almost every different crevasse rescue, self rescue and all sorts of other climbing tricks. A lot was a good refresher and its aim was so that I would lead Nacho up this mountain.

The plan went well to start with but a combination of waiting for half an hour while some Germans failed to cross the bergschrund in front of us left Nacho feeling too cold. We therefore swapped the lead on each pitch.

The cold went with the sun coming up and for once the views were breathtaking. Golden snow covered the surrounding mountain reflecting off a base of clouds in the valley. We summited just in time and lingered there snapping the scene before munching a second breakfast.

By now I was just waiting for something to go wrong. Only one mountain to go—Shaqsha Est (5,690 m). The west peak involves crossing a dangerous ice fall so we opted for the east peak which was a bit steeper but relatively safe. This mountain was only an hour from

Huaraz and could easily be seen from the roof of my hostel while I had breakfast! Things did not start well—the arrierio (donkey driver) did not show and we then recruited a local to take his place. We then headed off up the tussock hills to our base camp. Stopping for lunch we waited for the donkeys.

And waited...

And...

About 3 pm we gave up and after some deliberation headed down and arranged a taxi back to town somewhat worried about where our gear was but more worried about the welfare of our cook. We resolved to make an early start and again arranged for a local arrierio. Sure enough as if out of a movie we arrived to find a ponchoed man prancing his horse in the middle of the road. We headed up again and followed a slightly different route (albeit not the one from the guide book.) Just as dawn broke we spotted the cook’s camp on a plateau we had crossed before.

Over eggs and coffee we found out that they had taken the different route, but worse, had gone to the wrong camp site. Reunited and with food to harden our resolve we thought about the peak. The arrierio scrounged some donkeys and we used his horse to take some of the loads too. We headed to the main camp.

Until this mountain we had followed well known trekking routes but up here the trails were faint and more importantly the rubbish was non-existent. Our final alpine start led us scrambling over steep moraine before picking up a snow covered ridge to the glacier. A few crevasses needed skirting to reach the main wall. One pitch took us to the bergschrund which though wide had a solid bridge one rope traverse to the right. This, however, meant we had to angle back over to the main route and it was slow work making sure we safely crossed the very soft snow fluting. After this on the main face the snow was extremely inconsistent, hard, then soft and then ice but we made steady progress to gain the top of the face.

We dug some good foot placing and settled down for lunch. Then six rappels took us to the bergschrund and a good leap got us both safely over that. Then one of those magic moments as a condor glided by below us, my first sighting of a condor from above—sheer beauty. The descent found us reaching the camp at dusk with a great feeling of completeness. I knew that my fatigue was shared—Nacho had originally planned one rest day for himself and then would look for some more guiding work but by now it was at least three!

The next day we walked out quickly and after a good hot shower had a celebration meal and a few beers. There are some that may doubt this but it wasn’t many, I was too thin and too tired to drink properly.

The next day I took the bus to Lima to catch my flight out of Peru and back to another world—I’ll leave you to decide which one is more real.



The most amazing island on Earth—bar none

South Georgia sits at the fringes of Antarctica, a chunk of land thrown into the middle of the Southern Ocean. Wild ice-covered peaks rise into the sky, albatrosses soar the ever-blowing wind, massive glaciers calve into the sea and waves pound beaches filled with wildlife so dense that it is hard to find a place to walk. In summer thousands of fur seals, elephant seals, and king penguins congregate here to fight, mate and rear their young.

For me South Georgia was always a dream, my Ultimate Thule. I read books about Shackleton's harrowing journey after his ship the *Endurance* got crushed by ice, from Elephant Island to South Georgia, 800 nautical miles across the Southern Ocean in a small boat that I wouldn't want to take outside Wellington Harbour. Having landed on the uninhabited southern side of the island they then had to cross the unknown mountainous interior with nothing more than a carpenter's axe and a few screws fixed to the soles of their leather boots. I was glued to my seat when Graham Charles talked about the first kayak circumnavigation of South Georgia, achieved by a Kiwi team in 2005—and for Colin Monteath, photographer, traveller and Antarctic guru, South Georgia is the 'most beautiful island in the polar world—bar none'.

How could I have said no to the offer to work as guide and lecturer on a cruise ship sailing from Ushuaia in Terra del Fuego to the Falkland Islands and then on to South Georgia? Do you want to visit the most stunning place in the world and be paid for it? We left Ushuaia at the end of January 2012 and headed southwest—and though the Falklands were interesting, reminding me of New Zealand in some regards, I was waiting for the main act. On the fifth day of our journey land started to appear on the horizon—South Georgia—finally.

It's hard to describe what I felt when we arrived—my long harboured dream finally coming true. Joy, excitement, but also a bit of anticipation—would the weather be kind to us? South Georgia is well known for its ferocious winds and how easily bad weather could make landings impossible. We got a taste of this on our first day when we tried to land in Right Whale Bay. Katabatic



winds are cold down valley winds that accelerate down glaciers and ice caps, driven on by gravity. They are the strongest winds on Earth and we were about to experience them. The whole ship was buffeted by gusts. I was standing on deck and one moment I could see the gusts coming across the water, the next I had my breath knocked out of me as they hit. Water was flung up into the air, the whole sea a violent maelstrom. No way could we launch a zodiac in this.

We left Right Whale Bay and anchored overnight in the Bay of Isles ready to visit Salisbury Plain in the morning where 60,000 king penguin pairs breed. Sometimes during the night the wind carried the strong smell of algae and sea bird guano to the ship. In the morning we readied the zodiacs and headed to shore. As guide you are always the first to land. When I set foot on South Georgia for the first time I felt like stepping into paradise. The beach was covered with fur seals and their pups, king penguins and their brown fluffy chicks.





The kings are so beautiful with their dark orange spots on the sides of the head and the orange and yellow feathers on their chests. So here they were and not only a few but thousands of them! I was blown away. Sounds of squawking and trumpeting and fishy smells were surrounding me. Gleaming penguins with beads of water on their feathers kept coming out of the ocean surf then waddling busily to find and feed their chicks.

The amazing thing was that none of the animals showed any fear, more in contrast, the seals snarled at us and even the very young pups opened their mouths and bared their tiny teeth which made me laugh.

A king penguin couple courted right in front of me! The craning of necks and crossing of beaks was amazing to watch, from tender to forceful. They had only eyes for each other. A dedication and single mindedness that can make one jealous! After a few snow showers suddenly the sun broke through the clouds revealing dark 1,000 m peaks that fringe Salisbury Plain. I was dumbfounded by what I saw—sure I'd seen pictures, I heard about it but reality was—bar none! I sat down at the beach and watched and watched.

Soon passengers started to arrive and I had to work, helping to land the zodiacs while standing with my waders chest deep in icy water. Once everybody was ashore I was free to roam! I strolled over to the colony where brown fluffy chicks stood flipper deep in mud. King penguin chicks look so different from their parents that the early explorers took them for a different species. One chick took a special liking to me; it tried to cuddle up to my knees and pecked at my camera. Environmental protocol meant that we can't approach wildlife closer than 5 m, but nobody told the wildlife...

For the afternoon we got permission to land on Prion Island! This island is very special, it is the only place to see wandering albatrosses on their nests and only 20 people at the time are allowed ashore (a logistical nightmare for our expedition leader Delphine since we had 96 passengers on board). I love albatrosses—when other kids wanted to be dogs, lions or cats I always wanted to be a wandering albatross. I remember pouring for hours over the pages of my kids' book on 'Birds of the World' that showed the wandering albatross with its 3 m wingspan. I was on the island for 90 short minutes, escorting passengers up and down the wooden steps, which have been built to protect the fragile ground. This was not nearly enough time, especially since passengers often got side tracked by fur seals and I wanted to yell at them 'forget about the blasted seals! Go, run and see the albatrosses'! Once I made it to the viewing platform I was mesmerised. It was the first time that I had seen these huge birds so close, so intimate. Wandering albatrosses get whiter with age and right in front of me was a pure white bird sitting on its nest, from time to time getting up and stretching its legs and wings.



ABOVE: *King penguin chick*
Photos: KATJA RIEDEL

TOP: *King penguin colony at St Andrews Bay*

LEFT MIDDLE: *Inquisitive fur seal pup*

LEFT BOTTOM: *Love is a battlefield for King penguins*



ABOVE: *The author and friends*

LEFT TOP: *Female elephant seal hanging out in the tussock grass at Grytviken*

LEFT MIDDLE: *Macaroni penguins with their silly hairdo*

BELOW: *King penguin colony at Salisbury Plains with 60,00 breeding pairs*



The most amazing ritual to witness is the dance of the albatross, large wings are spread, beaks are pointed skywards and birds touch each other gently at the tips of their beaks. It is wonderful and each couple has its own unique sequence. Other birds were gracefully sweeping overhead and I so desperately wanted to soar with them.

'The wind sails the open sea steered by the albatross that glides, falls, dances, climbs, hangs motionless in the fading light...the statue of the wind'. (Pablo Neruda).

My days in South Georgia were quite long. Like a kid on Christmas Day I woke up early each morning and jumped out of bed to see the sunrise at 4 am. One morning we landed in Grytviken, the oldest whaling station on the Island. It is also the place of Shackleton's grave. He died here in 1922 of a heart attack, just when heading South again for another expedition. Rusty ships, derelict buildings and the big flensing plant talked about the whaling past. It was very moving to stand at Shackleton's grave, but my feelings for Grytviken were very mixed. This place is soaked with the blood of whales. In the years between 1906 and 1931 a shocking 200,000 whales were killed around South Georgia in order to make soap, lamp oil, corsets, cat food and explosives. Men's cruel efficiency! I was glad when we left this place of death.

South Georgia so far had been amazing but I would never have guessed what I was about to see when we landed at St Andrews Bay.

The coast, normally pounded by huge swells, was glassy calm. Heavily glaciated 2,000 m mountains rose from sea level and in front of me were 150,000 breeding pairs of king penguins. Together with non-breeders and chicks I was probably looking at half a million penguins. As far as the eye could see there was a sea of black, white and orange cut through with swathes of brown chicks.

It was unbelievable! I wandered around, sometimes sitting down and watching life unfold in front of me with all its little details. Penguins preening, feeding, courting, mating. The best view was from the top of a moraine which overlooked the rockery, this abundance of life. I sat there for hours just looking. It was the most amazing thing I've ever seen in my life and for the rest of the day I couldn't get the grin off my face.

It was my job to round up the last passengers and herd them back to the landing site. Put the fox in charge of the henhouse. Nobody could better understand than me that people didn't want to leave! There was so much to look at—glaciers, penguins, elephant and fur seals, and South Georgia reindeer (brought here by Norwegian whalers as meat source). By the time we were back at the landing site the sun was low and the light had turned soft and golden. We sent the last zodiac with passengers back to the ship and had 20 minutes of 'staff time' with just five of us at the beach. Everybody dispersed and sat quietly by themselves absorbing beauty. When I now close my eyes I still see this scene, with the river flowing out from

the mountains, its shore lined with penguins which form the shape of a heart while the sun is slowly setting behind the mountains and lenticular clouds turn golden.

Soon after we got back on board the traditional BBQ on the back deck started. It was surreal in sight of St Andrews Bay with the faint sound and smell of the colony. I dancing through the night as I have never danced before, ready to embraced the whole wide world. A day in my life—bar none!

Over the last few days we had slowly worked our way along the northern coast of South Georgia, and now it was time to turn a corner and head for Cooper Bay at the eastern side. When the anchor chain clattered into the sea thick fog engulfed the ship. Mine was the second zodiac to leave—I was more feeling my way through the fog to shore, not without entering the ships position into my GPS so that I would be able to find our way back. Slowly it started to clear but some low clouds were caught in the cliffs creating an eerie atmosphere. The water around my zodiac was teaming with fur seals trying to race my boat, chinstrap and macaroni penguins were porposing along on their way to the colony. Macaronis got their name from their yellow feather bundles to both sides of their head. They reminded the sealers of an Italian gentlemen club with similar silly hats. On the beaches more fur seals and some elephant seals were hauled out. Two big males were fighting with loud groans and moans. The macaroni rockery was bustling with animals, sooty albatrosses soared overhead in perfect synchronised flight, shags were feeding their fluffy chicks on cliff tops, kelp created wonderful abstract patterns on the water and the sun was shining—life was good!

After a steep climb uphill, dodging several fur seals hidden in the tussock on the way, we reached the upper cliff level where macaroni penguins were sitting on chicks or showed off their wonderful courting display which consists of a lot of neck twisting and squawking, making me a little bit jealous with their display of affection.

In the afternoon the captain manoeuvred the ship into the 14 km long narrow Drygalski Fjord. Mighty peaks rise directly out of the sea to over 2,000 m, shattered steep glaciers and icefalls fringe the fjord with ice towers and seracs ready to tumble into the deep blue water. Beautiful pure white snow petrels with friendly dark button eyes and hectic Antarctic terns were wheeling around in search of food. It got interesting when the fjord became so narrow that the ship had to do a three-point turn in order to get out again.

As far as I was concerned time could have stopped there and then. I didn't want to leave, I wanted these moments to last forever and when I saw the southern coast with its rugged mountains slowly disappear in the distance I was sad. South Georgia is well and truly the most stunning place on earth!



ABOVE: *Nesting wandering albatross,
Prion Island*



RIGHT: *Jagged glaciers in
Drygalski Fjord*

BELOW: *South Georgia
under a moody sky*





THE PASS THAT DIDN'T

Wandering the Ahuriri Valleys

by **TONY GAZLEY**

We had air tickets to Christchurch late May and an extra days leave to add to the weekend. So all we had to do now was to decide where to go. We had thought of a few possibilities but after pouring over our maps while waiting for the flight south we eventually decided on a pass hopping trip from the Ahuriri Valley—an area that neither Jackie or I had been to before.

So it was a late Friday night camp under the trees on the shore of Lake Ohau, and then next morning a short drive to the Ahuriri road-end. We ate a quick breakfast before shouldering our packs and heading off up the valley. The sun was shining from a clear blue sky and there wasn't a breath of wind. The higher peaks and ridges were gleaming white with their covering of new snow that had fallen over the last few days. But we were not worried that we hadn't brought any alpine gear—

after all our chosen passes were not very high and any snow should be manageable. Or so we thought.

The walking was easy up the flats beside the Ahuriri River and even after we turned off the main valley and headed up Watson Creek we had no troubles picking an easy route. There were pleasantly shaded patches of open beech forest

to find our way through before the valley finally opened out to wide grassy flats. We sidled high to the topmost terrace to enjoy a lunch stop leaning back against a giant sun-warmed bolder.

Our first pass lay at the head of an unmanned valley from Watson Stream. This wide side-stream gradually steepened and became rocky then finally snow covered. The easy walking gave way to slow plodding as the snow deepened and it was late afternoon when we started up the last steep climb to the unmanned pass that would take us to the South Temple Valley. The winter sun had already dipped below the peaks and it was cold in the deepening shadows. Our boots that had been soaked from numerous river crossings were beginning to freeze on our feet as we plugged steps in the deep powder snow up the last few hundred metres towards the pass.

Our progress slowed further as the slope steepened again and the snow became deeper still. Daylight was fading fast when we stopped to decide what to do. We both had very cold feet, the depth of new snow and our slow progress had taken us by surprise, and the thought of camping where we were was not particularly inviting. We also reminded ourselves that our second pass back to the Ahuriri planned for the next day was even higher and we would probably have bigger problems than here. So it was a fairly easy decision to give up on this crossing, to simply turn around and head back down to get out of the deepest snow. We would then think of another plan for the next two days.

It was well after dark before we pitched our tent on a small area of flat ground fairly free of snow. We collected water from a nearby stream that had a thick coating of ice covering the nearby rocks, and then later when we finally warmed up a bit in our bags we cooked tea in the tent and with the map spread out we looked for a possible alternative trip.

We decided that it seemed possible to climb straight up behind our camp and cross the range to the Maitland Valley. From there we could get back to the Ahuriri Valley via a low saddle that led to Snowy Gorge Creek. There was even a hut in Snowy Gorge that we should be able to reach in a long day—it actually seemed like a plan at least as good as our original idea.

That night was as cold as either of us could remember and by the morning our water bottles next to us in the tent had frozen. It took us over half an hour to thaw our feet back into our frozen boots before we could get underway and it was later than we planned before we started up the 600 metre high scree slope to the top of the range. But again it was a perfect day and we were soon warmed especially when we had climbed high enough to be out of the shaded valley and into the sunshine.



ABOVE: Our last camp was just around the corner to the right at the bottom of the scree. Watson Stream in the sun centre. Mt Barth the highest peak left centre.



But once again our progress was slower than we had hoped—for the loose surface of the scree was lying on a frozen under-layer which made it very like trying to climb up a slope of ball bearings. It was two steps up and one sliding back down. But thankfully nearer the top we could kick steps in the snow and we moved faster again.

When we reached the crest of the range we stopped to take in the stunning view around us. To the north and west were the highest peaks in the area—Mt Barth and Mt Huxley standing head and shoulders above the rest. Below were wide grassy valleys with their patches of beech forest, and above a blue sky with a few wispy high clouds. We would have liked to have stayed longer but we still had a way to go. We decided to descend straight down the long snow slopes directly to the valley of a stream leading to the Maitland rather than traversing along the nearby ridge. It proved to be a good choice and we were soon down in the bush and travelling along the crest of a broad spur that took us easily to the river and the marked track to Maitland Hut.

We stopped only briefly here before heading off up the valley, at first along an easy track through the beech forest before emerging late afternoon into the wide open grassy slopes leading to the saddle with the Snowy. We were part way to the saddle when the sun set and the sky gradually darkened and the first bright stars appeared. We knew we still had about 3 hours to get to the hut but it was such a pleasant night and the walking so easy (apart from the occasional barricade of spaniards) we were happy to be out and wandering about.

We crossed the saddle and started down the Snowy. At first the going was tricky with plenty of very healthy spaniards lurking in the long snow-grass and the loose rocky gullies. But once in the main riverbed there was the easiest walking imaginable—wide open river terraces and not a spaniard anywhere. We raced down the river and just after 9 pm we opened the door to the hut.

ABOVE: Still about 500 m of scree to climb to the ridge.

PREVIOUS: Heading along the ridge to the saddle. The Maitland Valley is to the right.



We cooked a special meal of homemade dehy stew and followed that with steamed Xmas pudding. We read in the hut book that there was at least one resident mouse so we hung spare food from a long wire hook under the rafters before settling in for the night.

It was not to be a totally quiet night though—before long there was the scratching and squeaking of at least a

couple of other occupants. At one point I shone my torch across to the cooking bench to see a very small mouse scuttling about—and then as I went to lie back down again was suddenly face to face with another sitting casually beside my pillow. But we were too comfortable and warm to worry and left them to their business.

Next morning was fine, calm and frosty again. And once more our sox and boots had frozen and there were the usual antics of thawing complaining feet back into them before we could get out the door. The sun was almost to the valley floor as we started down the long Snowy Gorge back to the Ahuriri. But it was delightful travel—easy open snowgrass terraces, and all the while a clear blue sky and the warm sunshine on our backs. Then later we stopped for lunch in the long grass of the Ahuriri Valley before starting our walk back towards the road-end.

But now our easy travel suddenly changed to an energy sapping struggle with clumps of tall tussock in swampy ground with rivulets running invisibly between that we fell into every few steps. We were now going so agonisingly slowly it was obvious we wouldn't get to the car before dark. So we decided to head directly across the valley to the road. Once there we left our packs in the farmer's paddock and as the shadows lengthened across the valley jogged the 9 km back to the carpark.

All that remained now was to get back to work on time Tuesday morning. So as far as three-day weekend tramps go it had been about as good as it gets—even if we had wimpped out on our first half a pass.

ABOVE: *Snowy Gorge Hut.*

BELOW: *Wandering down Snowy Gorge Creek towards the Ahuriri Valley.*



HOLDSWORTH TO OTAKI

An unusual Tararua crossing

by **SPENCER CLUBB**

Friday night. No car. No Club van. Just me, my pack and a one way train ticket to Carterton. Just like the old days when I first moved to Wellington. I would take the train to the Wairarapa and walk to a popular turnoff and hitch rides into the mountains, then hitch home again, usually from Holdsworth or Kaitoke. People even bought me beer and drove me to my door. It was fun.

The plan tonight was to walk a couple of k's along SH2 to Chester Road, stick the thumb out, and catch the wave of Wellington traffic taking the quick route to Holdsworth. Easy. I was in the correct spot, just about 30 metres along Chester Road on the verge. Cars had to slow down for the corner, had time to see me and had to be going my way. There was just one problem. It was dark. Really dark!

I must have appeared for a split second in their headlights like a ghost or an apparition. Frightening them out of their skin, causing them to swerve into the ditch and maybe drop their incredibly tasty Istanbul kebabs

on their laps and spill their lattes. After half an hour of frightening people I was starting to get depressed and was weighing up the idea of jacking it all in and walking back to catch the last train home again. Then I got lucky.

I got picked up by a car coming the other way. Locals that had taken pity on me and decided to drive me to Holdsworth even though they weren't even going there. They were from Masterton Tramping Club and just the loveliest, coolest people you could ever hope to meet. I was off!

I was heading for Otaki Forks via Totara Flats, Neill Forks, Maungahuka, the Tararua Peaks and Field. I decided to get a bit of a head start and do some climbing so I hiked up and spent the night at Mountain House. It was a bit out of the way, but meant for one less climb the next day. Mountain House was a bit windy and cold as it has only three and a bit walls. It has great indoor-outdoor flow though!

I was up at first light, ready for a reasonably big day to Maungahuka. However, I had only gone about 20 metres when I had to stop in my tracks. The sun had risen and was pouring through the trees which were, themselves, still shrouded in early morning mist. It was a magical scene, with rays of light illuminating the mist and creating beautiful shadowy patterns on the ground. I grabbed the camera and fired off a few shots, trying to





get a good composition and working out how to deal with having the sun shining right towards the camera. I knew I had been lucky to come across such a scene, but did not realise till I got home that the photos had come out really well and looked beautiful. This photo was the winning entry at the FMC photo competition.

While the original image was very strong, it was the shape and form of the trees and shadows that made the shot, so it was a natural choice to try a monochrome look. The final image is actually a split tone rather than a pure black and white, which gives it a very pleasing, warm, sepia-like tone. This is very easy to do in Lightroom.

Time was pressing on so I put the camera somewhat reluctantly away and headed down to Totara Flats then popped over the hill to Neill Forks. By now it was getting towards mid afternoon and I was feeling a bit tired. The thought of a steep 1,000 m climb was not exactly exciting me but it had to be done. Once out on the tops it was all worthwhile, climbing steadily through the tussock as the clouds wafted past. It was a beautiful afternoon and I was looking forward to making the hut—after a pretty decent nine hour day. Shortly after arriving I met a grumpy hunter who had spent an hour stalking a nice deer that I had unwittingly frightened. Luckily I wasn't wearing my camo hat so he didn't shoot me by accident.

After dinner I went outside and encountered an amazing sunset. There was a lot of low cloud creeping

up the ridges from the valley below and some lovely orange afterglow from the west. Again I couldn't believe my luck—two great shooting opportunities in one day! I took a series of shots, one of which came runner up in the Club photo competition for 'above the bushline', though it did not seem to impress the FMC judges. To get the final image I had to increase the exposure as the original shot was a little dark, but I wanted to keep the shadows dark so that the ridges formed more of a silhouette. I did not need to touch any other settings as the colours were already great.

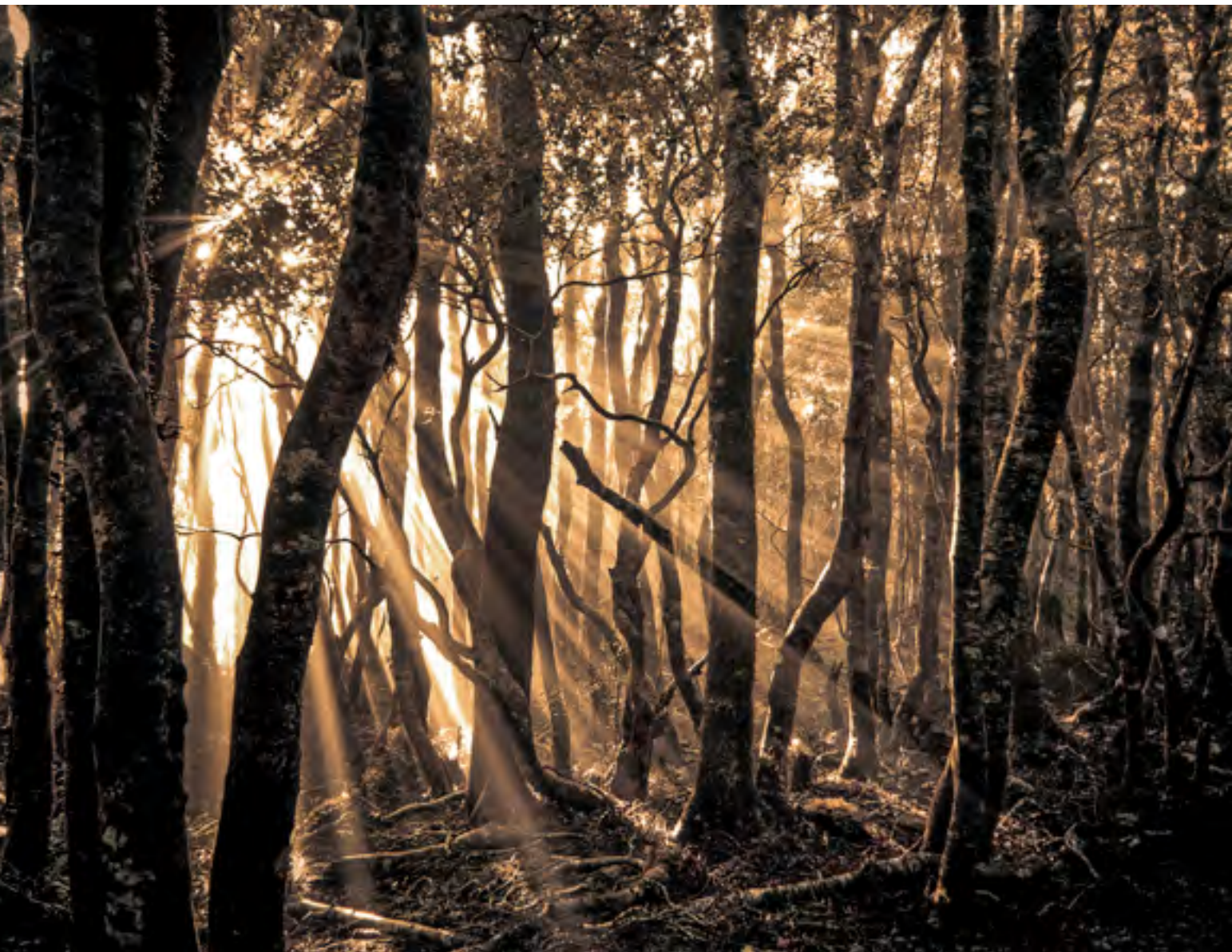
The next day I tramped out over the Tararua peaks, headed to Otaki forks and got my thumb out. I didn't even have time to stretch when the first car that came along picked me up and insisted on driving me all the way home, despite some very bad wet sock smells wafting uncontrollably around the car!

ABOVE: *Maungahuka Tarn*

PREVIOUS: *Sunset from Maungahuka Hut*
Photos: SPENCER CLUBB

A photograph of a frozen body of water, likely a glacier or a large lake. The foreground is dominated by a large, dark, textured ice floe. In the middle ground, there are many smaller, angular ice floes of various sizes, some with sharp edges and others more rounded. The background shows a vast expanse of water with more ice floes scattered across it. The overall color palette is a range of blues and greys, with some white highlights on the ice surfaces. The word "gallery" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font, oriented vertically on the right side of the image.

gallery



ABOVE: *Early morning Mt Holdsworth track*
1st prize FMC photo competition 2012.
 Photo: SPENCER CLUBB

RIGHT TOP: *Breakfast luz del sol,*
Ngauruhoe crater
 Photo: STEPHEN HEALEY

RIGHT BOTTOM: *Waingawa River,*
Tararua Forest Park
 Photo: TONY GAZLEY

PREVIOUS: *Fractured ice,*
Tasman Lake
 Photo: TONY GAZLEY

CENTREFOLD: *Ahuriri River Valley,*
Ahuriri Conservation Park
 Photo: TONY GAZLEY









ABOVE: *Hapuakorari,
Taranua Forest Park*
Photo: TONY GAZLEY



RIGHT: *Camp on summit of Ben More,
Korowhai-Torlesse Tussocklands*
Photo: BRIAN

LEFT: *Mt Robert Track,
Nelson Lakes National Park*
Photo: TONY GAZLEY



OFF THE HEAPHY HIGHWAY

A solo journey to a hidden hut

by HARRY SMITH

October 2010: I am at Goulund Downs Hut on the Heaphy Track with Jenny Cossey and a party of school students of hers who are doing the trip as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award. We have enjoyed a pleasant night at this historic hut, my favourite on the track. Last night I went kiwi-spotting in the bush behind the hut but unfortunately failed to spot any. Today I am planning a quest of a different sort, one that I hope will prove more successful. Jenny and the others are heading through to Mackay Hut for the night but I have other plans. I remember reading about an old hut somewhere on the McKay Downs to the north of the Heaphy Track—a hut put in by the old Ministry of Works when they were investigating proposals to put a road through here from Karamea to Collingwood back in the early seventies. (This was around the time I first walked the Heaphy, and well before Jenny's students were even born, but that fact is just too depressing to contemplate). Thankfully the road never went ahead, but the hut remained. A quick check and sure enough, I find it marked on my map, just a centimetre in from the northern edge. A passing DOC ranger confirms it is still there, and has in fact recently been done up and restored, but warns that it can be hard to find. I determine to check it out.

Later in the day at Blue Shirt Creek I wave goodbye to the others, turn off the benched and graded, super-smooth Heaphy Highway, and head north up a narrow, enclosed, trackless, tussock valley. Ahead the map shows an extensive area of downlands—a fascinating mosaic

of shallow tussock basins and valleys separated by low, bush-covered hummocks and ridges, forming a large, flat plateau, 850 metres above sea level. This looks like interesting but potentially confusing country, like a giant jigsaw or a huge, rumpled, multi-coloured knitted quilt, and I am looking forward to the navigational challenge. By stringing together a series of linear tussock leads it looks like I should be able to follow a good 'handrail' route right the way to the hut.

A kilometre and a half upstream the valley opens out into a large tussock basin. The going is swampy underfoot, with a small stream meandering through peaty, marshy flats. It proves slow going as I try to avoid sinking into the mud or being forced into the scrub. Once or twice I see indications of footprints, suggesting that others have been through this way before me. They seem very recent—is it possible I will actually run into somebody at the hut ahead of me?

I climb out up the side of the basin, cross the far ridgeline, and bash down through a short section of bush before emerging out into another open tussock valley. Here I head right, but after a few hundred metres the ground begins to drop away steeply in front of me. Puzzled, I stop and check the map. This doesn't make sense. This should be flat going. What is this stream? What are those hummocks to my left? Where is that open lead I was expecting? I am completely confused. I get my compass out and take a series of careful bearings. Nothing seems right. Then suddenly the map snaps into focus. Ah, of course! Now I see! I must have crossed the last ridgeline a few hundred metres north of where I thought I had. Now it all makes sense! I am annoyed with myself for the error but glad that I didn't just plunge on, that I stopped and figured it out. I backtrack for a few hundred metres, then head off in the right direction, down a narrowing tussock lead.

The tussock lead opens out into a wider valley. I turn left, and after a couple of bends my route leads up a narrow, bushy gully. At the top of this I climb out over a dry saddle and down broad slopes into another narrow, tussocky valley. I follow this through a slow series of wriggly bends, criss-crossing the stream, then head north for another kilometre, climbing gradually up another widening valley towards another open saddle in the distance.

At last I reach the saddle. If my navigation has been



right the hut should be only a few hundred metres away down the other side. I can see nothing. The afternoon is getting on and there is a cold wind blowing—I hope I haven't stuffed it up. I head down the small valley from the saddle and sure enough, there is the hut, hidden from view up to the right. I have done it. It has taken me 3½ hours to travel 5 kilometres across the maze of the downs—slow going, but I have strong sense of satisfaction of having navigated successfully to my goal. I open the door and step inside. Nobody is there.

The hut is a classic old-style Forest Service six-bunker. The location is slightly disappointing, in a small, barren alcove without a view. I think I have been subconsciously hoping for a nice, smooth grassy flat and sweeping vistas. But never mind—the hut itself is neat



and tidy and in good condition. It has an open fireplace, as all good huts should, and wood is neatly stacked in the porch.

I check the hut book and find that there was another party here only two days ago. They must be the ones who made the footprints I saw in the mud earlier in the day. And another party was here only a week before that! Checking the entries, it appears the hut generally only receives a handful of visits a year, often with months between them, so it seems pretty amazing that I am the third party here in little over a week! Many of the people visiting the hut are en-route to or from Kahurangi Point lighthouse down on the coast to the north. Others mention the route from Blue Shirt Creek that I have followed. The hut book goes back many years and makes fascinating reading. It seems that Arnold Heine of the Hutt Valley Tramping Club has been the main driving force behind unofficially maintaining and preserving the hut for many years before DOC finally stepped in recently and restored it. DOC wanted to remove it but were eventually persuaded to keep it because of its historical significance.

That night I enjoy a blazing fire and the comforts of a hut to myself. It's funny, I contemplate to myself how

this dot on the map in the middle of nowhere provides a target for people like me who like to visit out of the way places. The hut itself is situated nowhere in particular and serves no particular purpose. If the hut wasn't here we wouldn't come here. But paradoxically, by being here it attracts us to this spot and thus justifies its own existence!

Next morning I am away at 7.30, heading back to the Heaphy Track. Rather than returning via Blue Shirt Creek I decide to follow a direct route across the downlands to James McKay Hut. Again this involves navigation by map and compass across a confusing undulating landscape, following another 'handrail' of tussock leads amongst low, bushy hummocks. Together with my route the previous day, today's route will form the second side of an almost exact equilateral triangle on the map, the third side being a 5 kilometre section of the Heaphy Track between Blue Shirt Creek and Mackay Hut that I will miss out.

I travel down a broad tussock valley and pass a distinctive balancing rock, before hopping up over a small sharp saddle, where I note with satisfaction a cairn on top. Others have clearly been this way before me. Beyond the saddle I emerge out into a larger valley where I am surprised to discover a series of sticks placed upright in the swampy ground, serving as marker poles, indicating the route down valley.

At 11.30, four hours after leaving the hidden hut, I finally reach a large open clearing on the ridgeline below Otepo Trig. Down the hillside before me I can see McKay Hut and the Heaphy Track. Again I have a sense of satisfaction of having successfully navigated to my goal. Tonight I will rejoin Jenny and the others at Heaphy Hut on the coast and tomorrow we will tramp out down the coast to the end of the trip at the Kohaihai Bluff, but for now I am in no great hurry to get back to civilization. Below me I can see some small stick figures milling around outside the hut. I could go down and have lunch at the hut but somehow that would seem to spoil the day. Instead I slip my pack off, sit down in a comfortable spot in the clearing, and enjoy a relaxed lunch in the sun before finally descending and rejoining the Heaphy Track.





FIORDLAND ODYSSEY

by AMANDA WELLS

The Wednesday before we left on for our 12-day Fiordland epic, Sharron gave a slideshow on her Westland Christmas adventure. It looked hard. She said that there were times every day when she wished she wasn't there. It was a comment I often recalled in the coming days...

Why do you spend valuable leisure time doing something so painful that watching television from a couch appears an unobtainable nirvana? After another long Fiordland day, I made the breathless comment to Richard that 'tramping is full of highs and lows'. Rather than it being an experience of unalloyed joy, as you might

imagine a holiday to be, it's a continual ascent/descent between despairing pits and sublime heights. The highs are hard to explain and sit inside the context of the lows.

On this trip, each day we consciously reflected on our individual 'best' and 'most challenging' moments. Over the course of the trip there were three standout moments where both of us felt total euphoria. But they won't make much sense without some background.

We fixed on our route in early December, after some extensive perusal of Moir's Guide, and a lot of crawling around on a floor full of Fiordland topos. Our hope was to start from Te Anau's South Fiord (subject to being

granted the necessary permit for the takahe protected area) and head through the Murchison Mountains to Middle Arm. We would then go up the Doon River, up Campbell Creek, past Lake Wapiti, down Twin Falls Creek, up the Stillwater and then to Henry Saddle on the George Sound track, with a pick up at Lake Hankinson. From the Doon onwards, we would be following in the footsteps of both a WTMC trip of 2002, and a trip by Richard Davies and Quentin Duthie in 2008. We had printed accounts of both trips, and Richard and Quentin had also made comments on the WTMC trip as they went, so they made for interesting, if slightly intimidating, reading.

Preparing for 12 days in the wilderness somehow consumes more time that you ever thought possible. We dehydrated all our own evening meals (doing the same simultaneously for our nine-day Tararua training trip), baked Tararua biscuits and got busy with the vacuum sealer. All of the route notes were combined and retyped in the right order (trying to reverse Moir's guide directions is an interesting and non-recommended experience) and the logistical loose ends were tied. You always wonder if you're going to get sick at the last minute, or sprain an ankle, so it was with a sense of relief that we landed in Invercargill one Saturday in early February.

We always knew it was going to be heavy. Twelve days food, plus mountain radio, tent, GPS, beacon and all the other usual essentials. Hauling the packs off the water taxi and on to the beach at South Fiord was unsurprisingly difficult. Steve, our friendly skipper, made the obligatory 'rather you than me' comment. And then we were alone. And we stayed alone. We didn't meet anyone else till we were picked up exactly 11 days later.

The first day was toughened by an accidental 40 minutes uphill. More forgivable than it sounds, because we expected there to be only one orange-triangled track in the area. Once we realised the mistake (a clear 'most challenging moment' winner), downhill was at least decidedly more speedy than up. The high point of the day was a lake-clad saddle just on the bushline, with a relatively quick descent to Te Au Hut afterwards. The huts in the Murchison Mountains are set up for DOC use, with some interesting furniture and copious food supplies in sealed containers. We enjoyed the hut book dating from 1980. It's only relatively recently that conditional public access has been allowed, and the application form requires lengthy description of your suitability and qualifications for wanting to tramp in this special area, which is dedicated to takahe conservation. You must follow a prescribed route, stay in the designated huts, and only one party (of four or fewer) is allowed in the area at a time.

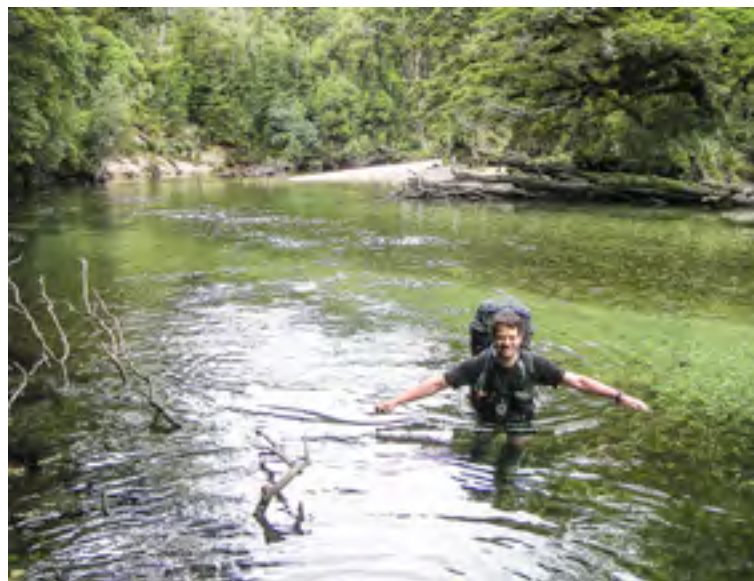
Day two saw us climbing again, up above the bushline to Esk Saddle and then a supposed 2½ hours unmarked climb/sidle/descent to Robin Saddle Hut.

Taking five hours in the baking hot sun was not a high point, though the hut's amazing location and better-than-expected condition made up for it. For a room without windows, it was surprisingly light and airy, as well as being nicely clean and tidy (like all the huts we visited). The navigation from Robin Saddle to the hut was one of those routes that look satisfyingly impossible from a distance but easy close up.

Next morning we retraced our steps to Esk Saddle (completing the navigation in a still-dispiriting 3½ hours this time) then descended to the Woodrow burn and along to its eponymous hut. Unlike the other, historic huts, this one was new and sported a solar electric light! The evening mountain radio sched was still giving us cheering news about the weather, with rain forecast in a couple of days time but set to clear quickly. We couldn't believe how hot it was; sleeping bags fully unzipped every night.

Day four was the start of more-intimidating territory. We would be leaving the tracks of the takahe special area and relying on our navigational and bush bashing ability. It was a quick morning down to the Junction Burn confluence, then a bit of time mucking around deciding where to cross. Some maps have an old track marked from the Junction Burn to the Doon but it is definitely gone now. So we followed Moir's sidle directions to where the Doon turned a sharp corner about 500 m inland.

Before the trip we had uncovered a very exciting piece of information: a trapping line had been laid up



ABOVE: *Crossing the Doon*
Photo: AMANDA WELLS

PREVIOUS: *Heading down to Robin Saddle Hut*
Photo: RICHARD LARDNER

the true left of the Doon as far as Pisgah Creek. Both the WTMC and Davies/Duthie account expressed difficulty getting up the start of the Doon, so we were very keen to find this new track, which was on the opposite side from the Moir's route. The Doon is deep, wide and very slow, though the first only became apparent when the knee-deep sandbar I was wading somehow brought water to my armpits. It was an optical illusion, with each step looking shallower but the water getting deeper. I just avoided bobbing downstream and made it across, with Richard coming behind by a marginally less wet route. And then we started to search for the trapping line. I stayed with the packs while Richard ventured inland. We knew the vague plot of the line, Richard having talked to its layer. After a few minutes, an excited shout came back to me. It was unexpectedly one of those moment of sheer happiness and relief that make tramping so alive. We would get up to our destination for the night easily instead of having to grovel through pepperwood. And it turned out that what was supposed to take four or five hours took two.

But the day had not ended. Crossing back to the Doon's true right at Pisgah Creek, we went in search of the bivvy rock that both other groups had easily found. We were especially keen to stay there as the rain had started and we figured a rest day would make sense tomorrow. And we couldn't find it. The Doon is a confusing mass of islands at that point and it took a while to work out where the bank really was. All we knew was that the 'excellent' rock was 150 m from the bank and that there was an old line of permolat marking the way. We couldn't find the markers, so started searching the area. In vain. We checked out a lot of rocks. We did find a sloping rock with very old traces of a fire, but it hardly fit Moir's 'excellent' description. To make matters more worrying, there was a distinct lack of anywhere flat enough to even camp. After 1½ hours, just when things were seeming less optimistic, we decided to cut back to the river bank and again expand the search. And Richard

saw a pink ribbon in a tree. This was our second 'yes' moment of the trip, a rush of relief that was confirmed when we followed the trail of ribbon and permolat to large, spacious rock shelter that kept us dry that night and the next. We did spend some of the rest-day afternoon marking a route from the Pisgah crossing back to the permolat line with orange survival bag strips (good bye sitting mat). Given that the bivvy is actually about 100 m downstream from the Pisgah junction (versus Moir's 'directly opposite'), we felt very fortunate to have made it (grid reference available on request!).

Day six and the packs finally felt less massive. But the section we had worried most about prior to the trip was imminent. Both previous groups had experienced 'horrendous' grovels going up Campbell Creek. We kept higher on the true right than I suspect either of them did, and made surprisingly quick time. Thanks to some good terrain awareness by Richard, we managed to cross below the waterfall (which looks slightly less impressive than that description implies), as recommended by Moir's, rather than boulder-crawl up its true right as the others had. And then things got even easier, with some deer trails and only minor bush bashing. We reached the campsite ahead of schedule—ahead, in fact of Moir's time! This called for a little celebratory dance by me on arrival. After the debacle of Esk Saddle, to beat a Moir's time seemed akin to a two-hour marathon. The third of our standout, unexpected, memorable moments. It's not that the rest of the trip lacked excitement or joy, but just that those three moments reminded me why I do this when the pack is heavy and the bush viciously scratchy. You can't get that kind of high from a computer.

Naturally it was the navigation that we had not worried about that proved testing. Day seven saw us bleeding through the scrub towards Lake Wapiti, then sidling high above the lake to its head. We reflected on the snow that the WTMC group had endured—we were on to our sixth day of fine weather, if cloudy at times. The difficult-looking pass to Twin Falls creek was an easy and enjoyable piece of climbing and sidling, and the descent mostly lived up to its 'easy' description. But we shouldn't have relaxed so soon. After hitting the main creek, Moir's recommended descending 'the creek bed'. Perhaps this was intended to be shorthand for 'the bush next to the creek bed' because our attempts to climb down cataracts soon became obviously stupid. Bush bashing was fine but we were a bit grumpy by the time we broke out onto the beautiful flats in the creek's mid-section.

Going down this flat mid-section the next day was a highlight of the trip: travel was easy and did live up to Moir's description of wading from one shingle beach to the next. It was good to stop looking at the ground and not get more scratches. But the quick travel meant a relatively quick end to that bliss. We were meant to

RIGHT: Crossing
Campbell Creek
Photo: RICHARD
LARDNER

OVER: Heading
up the north
branch of the
Stillwater
Photo: AMANDA
WELLS



follow obvious deer trails down the true left of the falls the creek is named for. But something went awry and a little vertical bush bashing ensued before the foot of the falls were gained. We continued up the Stillwater, again fortunate with the weather and resulting low river flows, which meant reaching our forks campsite at 3 pm. Most of the trip, we'd been setting up camp at 5 or even later, so this was a pretty exciting event, especially given that we were on the road by 7.30 am every morning. And we only had one day to go before we rejoined orange markers and could relax a bit.

But that next day was not quite as straightforward as Moir's implied. Our climb up the true left of the stream gorge must have been too far away from the river, and trying to sidle steep slopes while bush bashing proving a near impossibility. We eventually made the creek bed and gained some time, stopping at what we surmised was Moir's 'poor campsite' for lunch. The tops had been clagged in all morning and we were relieved to see the cloud lift. But it was still hard to interpret where we were supposed to go, and we eventually ended up on the spot height near the southern end of the saddle, after negotiating a slightly tricky ravine. Then it was along the tops, up yet another climb (1,000+m that day, which definitely seems more in Fiordland than it does in the Tararuas!) then down a slightly unobvious descent to Henry Saddle. We were back in the land of triangles. It didn't matter than some unforecast rain came in that night, nor that we had to pick our way through a bog the next morning. We arrived at Thomson Hut at lunch time and enjoyed an afternoon of rest—and did the same



thing next day at Hankinson Hut. We could have gone to George Sound, given that spare time, but the thought of rest was much more appealing at this point.

Watching the float plane come towards us on Lake Hankinson was an exciting end to a gruelling but rewarding trip. I felt much more confident about being off track in Fiordland (and in general), and incredibly thankful for the weather we'd had—only 1½ days of rain in 12. Having to focus so much on every step, and on the navigation, totally clears your mind of everything else, and it had been a total break. Even if we felt in need of some rest afterwards!

An adventure is only an inconvenience
rightly considered.

An inconvenience is only an adventure
wrongly considered.

G. K. Chesterton

GETTING HIGH IN THE PYRENEES

by SHARRON CAME



One of the great advantages of being a pessimist is that you are often pleasantly surprised. I thought that compared to NZ the Pyrenees would be over-crowded, difficult to navigate physically and linguistically, and scenically underwhelming. I was proven wrong on all counts.

Great lakes

The Pyrenees is heaving with alpine lakes. They come in all shapes and sizes, attention grabbers without exception especially when sporting reflections of snowy mountains and or large icebergs.

After a soggy night camped in the forest we weaved our way up to the snow covered Col d'Arriou (2,259 m), and past the beautiful Lac d'Arriou (2,285 m) to the Passage d'Orteig. The latter is not for those susceptible to vertigo. Exposed rocky outcrops are secured with steel cables. You must scale the rocks then pass above a deep abyss before scrambling down boulders to Refuge d'Arremoulit (2,305 m). The reward is the sight of the largest Arremoulit lake, decorated by a fleet of glossy white ice bergs and reflections of Pic d'Arriel (2,824 m).

Up over Col d'Arremoulit (2,448 m) and we were into Spain where we balanced on snow coated rocks to pass between the twin dreamy blue and white surfaces of Lacs d'Arriel. I gave up counting lakes as we passed another pair of blue-green stunners bordered by rocks and tussock. The Spanish Pyrenees are dry, barren and brown with bonsai conifers perched precariously on steep stony slopes. Refugio de Respomuso (2,200 m) sits on a bare plateau overlooking a lake with a dam. We checked out the displays of old climbing gear and pictures of the Spanish climbing team who attempted K2 in the early 1990s before camping beside yet another lake.

Petit Vignemale

The day we climbed Petit Vignemale was particularly memorable because it was our first full day of sunshine and our first 3,000 m+ peak.

From the town of Cauterets we taxied up to the road-end at Pont d'Espane. We climbed the cobblestoned trail through conifer woods to Lac de Gaube where a few people were fly fishing. At the top of the rise beyond the lake we got our first views across the glacial plain to the

peaks and glacier of Vignemale.

After dropping our packs at the camping spot near the Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube (2,151 m) we headed for Petit Vignemale (3,032 m). PV is the lowest and easiest of the four main peaks on Vignemale, and one of the easiest 3,000 m peaks in the Pyrenees. Apart from marmots and crows we shared the afternoon's vistas with a pair of young French lads forced by their inadequate footwear and lack of alpine gear into a humiliating crawl down the slippery snow slope above us. Lucky for them there were some old steps to provide a bit of purchase. We summited just before the late afternoon clag that haunts mountains everywhere rolled over to join us.

Grand canyons

The Spanish canyons of Odessa provide a visually dramatic and colourful landscape experience. Monte Perdido (3,355 m) is the third highest peak in the Pyrenees, a great limestone hulk that towers at the head of the Odessa Canyon while Breche de Roland presents a formidable natural looking glass separating Spain from France.

After a couple of hours of climbing through the forest above the Spanish town of Torla any memories of the cold and rain experienced on our first week in the Pyrenees were consigned to ancient history. We were sweltering in the 35 degree Celsius heat. We succumbed to the lure of the car park restaurant and a morning tea of espresso and donuts. These refreshments fuelled us for the climb up the main track past many impressive waterfalls (cascades) and many day trippers all of whom stared curiously at our enormous packs. For the first time we got a sense that we were not the only people in the Pyrenees.

Foot placement became a focus not because the terrain was difficult but so as to avoid squashing the swarms of lizards slithering across the rocky sections of trail. We emerged into trademark Pyrenees alpine meadows —vividly green and festooned with colourful flowers. We paused amongst the horse flies and cow pats for a late lunch looking across to the formidable walls of Circo de Soaso with Monte Perdido above.

From the top of the cirque, an interesting rock scramble itself, we had views across to the moon-like canyon landscapes coloured pink, ochre, and grey. Our day ended at our dusty but spectacular campsite above Refugio de Goriz (2,170 m). Like most of the shelters we camped near this Refugio can sleep 90 people but it was not busy despite it being only a day walk from a main road, the start of a weekend and the base for climbing Monte Perdido (3,355 m).

We woke to the sound of climbers ambling above our camp. We rushed to join them. After a couple of hours we reached a small tarn at 3,000 m. This is where everyone



ABOVE: *Lac Arrious*
Photos: DAVID JEWELL



ABOVE: *Climbing Petite Vignemale*

BELOW: *Vignemale Glacier*





surveys Cilindro de Marbore (3,328 m) on the left and the summit ridges that leads to Perdido on the right. We let another group plug steps up the first summit ridge then we led the way onto the summit. Relishing the perfect snow conditions and grand views we were nevertheless back at Goriz in time for an early lunch as we anticipated a big afternoon. Unlike their French counterparts the Spanish Refugio cooks don't do omelettes so we were forced to eat huge plates of ham and eggs with an unordered side serving of flies.

Being pre-fatigued and unused to the heat meant we plodded slowly through the wonderful moonscapes between Goriz and the Breche De Roland (2,807

m). With most punters focused on summiting Perdido followed by cold beers at the Refugio we had the place to ourselves. Looking back down we spotted a herd of sheep painted blue. On other occasions we spotted green sheep and pink sheep. In the Pyrenees spray paint replaces fences.

The breche is a gap in the frontier ridge about 40 m across with walls 100 m high. Early evening we passed through back into France sunburnt but satisfied. Refuge de La Breche (2,587 m) was occupied by a group of 65 Spanish school kids so we

set up camp about 80 m below it in one of the designated campsites. The views from our camp were breath taking - the top of the Cirque de Gavarnie and surrounding peaks including Pic duTaillon (344 m). Back up in the Refugio we enjoyed dinner with the school kids who asked through their English speaking teacher, 'why have you come here from so far away'? 'The mountains', we replied. I think they got it. Back at our magic campsite we soaked up the evening vistas. On NZ summer alpine evenings the cold forces me into the tent early so it was a novel experience to be warm enough to stay outside absorbing the beauty and tranquillity of the mountains.

Luchon Loop

Our final Pyrenees adventure incorporated an ascent of the highest peak Aneto (3,404 m); the highest pass on the haute route - Col Inferieur de Literole (2,983 m); plus some great company.

Faced with a few days of rain and low cloud in Gavarnie we opted to escape to Luchon. Waking to sunshine we immediately caught a taxi up to Station de Superbaneres, a skifield above the town and headed back into the lush green flowery meadows. We reached Refugio dEspingo (1,967 m) late afternoon.

By now we were Pyrenees fit so elected to continue on to Refuge du Portillon (2,571 m). There is a well-engineered path paved in the 1930s with stone slabs from when construction workers built the dam at Lac du Portillon. As usual we had the hut to ourselves. Every hut supplies a plastic basket for carrying key items upstairs to the sleeping quarters while packs



remain downstairs. You also help yourself to a pair of hut crocs. This surprised me, France having something of a reputation for being *tres chic*.

Next morning we crossed the dam and headed up the steep track littered with cairns. After negotiating loose scree and crossing a large snowfield we caught our breath on Col Inferiu de Literole (2,983 m) on the French Spanish border. We descended carefully on the steep snow covered east side of the pass crossing fields of boulders and snow.

The route between Portillon and Renclusa is challenging by Pyrenees standards. We thoroughly enjoyed actually having to create a route rather than follow a path. It was also a pleasure to indulge in a spot of stream and gorge bashing Kiwi style. Our enthusiasm was probably not shared by other punters judging by the number of abandoned walking poles and sigg bottles we discovered wedged between and under various boulders.

The Valle de Remune eventually opens out and we dropped into the pine forest on down to the road and Hospital de Benasque (1,760 m), a Spanish ski resort where we convinced the Spanish chef to make us cheese omelettes. Stomachs full again we sweated our way along the road to the main car park so we could complete the slowest ever ascent to Refugio De La Renclusa (2,140 m). The camping looked dismal so we booked to stay the night in the hut and donned pink crocs. As with Monte Perdido we had managed to arrive on a Friday night. The hut can sleep 110 and was fully booked for Saturday night.

We enjoyed our second communal dinner with about 12 other weekend warriors all intent on climbing Aneto or neighbouring peaks. Despite some thunderous snoring we slept well. Summit day arrived with perfect conditions. Despite this we managed to get ahead of the pack and off the route, ending up a couple of hundred metres too high forcing a retreat from a knife edge ridge. From a col at 3,196 m there is a steep snow slope to climb to Puente de Mahoma where you must tackle the narrow exposed rock ridge to the summit. This is the crux of the climb and scares the living daylights out of weekend warriors. As we returned from the summit another party arrived and the leader immediately sat down and lit two cigarettes with trembling hands. 'Best leave you're walking poles here', I helpfully suggested while smiling my encouragement, glad we had already tagged the summit.

Back at the Refugio we decided we didn't fancy the company of 110 people so we'd head over to France. Some chaps returned just as we had all our gear strewn over the courtyard. They gave us a good ribbing for carrying so much stuff. In the car park we enjoyed a picnic lunch while our new friends had a beer to celebrate the end of their trip, then we waved goodbye as they drove off.

Saddling our heavy packs again we followed the steep

zigzag path north to a plateau that offered great views across to the Maladeta massif to which Aneto is attached. Pre-fatigued again the climb to Port de Venasque (2,444 m) was nevertheless enjoyable as we savoured the array of wildflowers, marmots and little tarns knowing our time in the Pyrenees was drawing to an end. As we got higher we could see that people had written their names on the grassy slopes below us with white stones.

From the Port the path descends steeply to the Refuge de Venasque situated next to a set of five small, deep lakes. The setting was picturesque and secluded confirming the strategic brilliance of our decision to flee Renclusa. This, our last, refuge was tiny by Pyrenean standards sleeping just 15 inside and the same number camping outdoors. The size surprised us given the superb setting and proximity to Luchon. The warden, like all the others we encountered, spoke good English and couldn't understand a word of our appalling French when we tried to name the places we had been. Actually he reminded me a bit of Harry Smith except he seemed to enjoy cooking and other housework. We pitched our tent by one of the lakes and passed the time before dinner watching the valley mist rise and fall.



LEFT: *Marmot*

BELOW: *Blue sheep*



PREVIOUS TOP:
*Camping below
Refuge de la Breche*

PREVIOUS BOTTOM:
*Traversing below Refuge
de la Espingo*

For our last Pyrenees dinner we enjoyed the company of four French climbers from Toulouse, two of whom planned to climb Aneto the following day. The roast duck, a Southern France speciality, and chocolate cake were delicious. The Harry Smith look alike was not a fan of fishermen, something to do with their failure to book and to abide by the camping rules. Our final entertainment for the evening involved watching as several fishermen tried to pitch their tent on the side of a cliff they had been directed to by the warden. The tent, and then the fishermen rolled down the hill narrowly avoiding taking swims in the lake.

GIPPSLAND EXPRESS

A cycle tour of the rail trails and beaches of southern Victoria

by **HARRY SMITH**

Day 1

I am caught up in a confusing nightmare of busy traffic-filled streets, all of which seem to turn into freeways. Somewhere out to my left, I know from a previous trip, there is a pleasant cycleway leading into downtown Melbourne, but I can't find my way onto it. I don't have a map—I couldn't find my maps of Melbourne yesterday when I packed for the trip but I thought I'd remember it ok. Now I am lost and confused! I decide to turn around, go back to the airport and start again, sure I'll recognise the turn-off this time, but now I can't find my way back to the airport! I must have taken a wrong turn. I turn around again, deciding to forget the cycleway, to ride in through the city on the roads, but I am soon hopelessly lost again. I stop and ask someone and they tell me to follow the tram tracks, and now I make better progress—until the tram tracks diverge! There is more confusion, more stopping and asking directions, more wrong turns. Eventually I find my way into downtown Melbourne. It has taken me all morning to go 20 kilometres from the airport—not a good start to the trip!

roads and rail trails, scenic coastlines, islands and ferries. At Geelong I will catch the train down to Warrnambool at the western end of the Great Ocean Road and meet up with Stuart Douce, who is doing his own three-week trip around the southern coast of Australia from Adelaide to Melbourne, and spend the last week cycling with Stuart up the Great Ocean Road and back into Melbourne. I have done the Great Ocean Road before but it is a spectacular road to cycle and I am happy to do it again.

I catch the train out to Warragul to the east of Melbourne and set out southwards across the flat farmland towards the distant hills. It is swelteringly hot and I am pouring with sweat. I have caught the tail end of a heat wave—a few days ago Melbourne experienced its highest ever overnight low temperature—35 degrees! I camp for the night in the grounds of a derelict old schoolhouse at Seaview, halfway up into the hills. I am completely out of water but fortunately I am able to get some from a nearby farmhouse.

Day 2

I continue up into the hills and onto the Grand Ridge Road, the scenic route which follows the crest of the hills eastwards. The road flattens out and runs through a forest of huge tall eucalypt trees, with pretty ferns and tree ferns below. It is really beautiful, but unfortunately it doesn't last very long and after a few kilometres I emerge out into farmland. Sadly, the Aussies, like their New Zealand counterparts, seem to have cleared most of their native forests.

I continue through a landscape of rolling farmland and small patches of bush when suddenly, going down a hill, I have the worst moment of the whole trip. My back wheel starts to wobble and rub badly. Damn! I've broken a spoke! What a pain! Fortunately I have some spares and should be able to fix it. But when I stop to look at it I find it's worse than I thought. The spoke hasn't actually broken; it has ripped right out of the wheel, leaving a jagged hole in the middle of the rim. There is no way I can fix this!

Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn! I am unsure what to do. I really should turn around, go back and find a bike shop and get it fixed, but that would probably mean going all the way back into Melbourne and I really don't want to do that at this stage of the trip, so instead



It is mid-January 2010 and I am on a two and a half week Australian cycle-touring trip. The plan is to go down through Gippsland to Wilson's Promontory National Park and do some bush-walking, then head westwards around southern Victoria following a mix of

I adjust the other spokes and straighten out the wheel as best I can and carry on, praying the wheel will hold together for the rest of the trip.

In the afternoon I turn off the Grand Ridge Road and drop down out of the hills, out onto the plains to the south. I camp for the night in a pleasant recreational reserve in the small rural town of Meeniyana.

Day 3 Meeniyana marks the point where I join the first rail trail of the trip—the Great Southern Rail Trail. This is great—flat and smooth, off the roads, out of the traffic! And even though I am going through farmland there is often 20 or 30 metres of bushland on the old rail corridor on either side of me, so I am often almost unaware of the farmland beyond. It is like following a long narrow linear strip of parkland.

At lunchtime I turn off the rail trail at the little settlement of Fish Creek and head south towards Wilson's Prom. I like Fish Creek—it has a different feel from all the other small towns I have been through. They have been very much your typical small rural service towns, but Fish Creek has a funky cafe, a small second-hand bookshop, and hand-crafted fish-themed seats along the street. It has an alternative feel, as if a whole lot of artists and craftspeople have all come and settled here.

That afternoon I experience a series of torrential downpours. I try waiting them out under an overhanging tree at the side of the road but eventually give up and carry on, resigned to getting intermittently drenched.

I arrive at the toll-gate at the boundary of the national park. You have to pay to enter the park and to camp down at Tidal River, the main park centre. It is holiday season and the campground is booked up, but fortunately they set aside a few campsites every night for overseas visitors like me who just turn up.

Entering the park, I soon find myself in a scene of devastation. For kilometres after kilometre I ride through burnt out shrublands, stark and blackened. There was a huge bush fire through here not long ago and it has burnt out the whole northern half of the park. They closed the park down and fought it for a week before they finally got it under control. The scale of the devastation is just mind-boggling to someone from New Zealand where everything is always so damp and wet, but every year Victoria experiences bush fires like this.

Eventually I leave the flat northern part of the park and the blackened remains of the bush fire behind and enter the main hilly southern part. This probably used to be an island before being joined to the mainland sometime in the geological past. I reach Tidal River, the main centre of the park. This is a huge campground, almost a small town with hundreds of campsites, a shop and cafe, and even an outdoor movie theatre. That evening there is another torrential downpour.

Day 4 The weather has cleared up. I get up early and go for a wander down the river and out along the beach. There are interesting granite rock formations beside the river. The beach is superb—wide and sandy, sloping gently out to sea, with white waves rolling in. Up behind the bay rise rounded bush-covered granite hills. The place feels like a tropical island paradise.

Later I go for a bush walk up Mt Oberon, which overlooks the south side of the bay. From the summit there are superb views out over the bays and beaches and granite domes of the park. In the afternoon I go for another walk over the headland to the north of Tidal River to the beach beyond—Squeaky Beach, so named because the sand makes a squeaky sound as you walk along it. It feels remote and wild, and there are interesting rock formations at either end of the beach. That evening I go to a movie under the stars at the outdoor movie theatre—you can't do that in the Tararua's!



Day 5 Wilson's Promontory is a beautiful place and I wish I could spend more time here. I had originally planned to spend a couple of days doing an overnight bushwalk further down the peninsula but I now decide to head back north today. You are supposed to get a permit to stay at the campsites further south and this is peak holiday time so it seems unlikely that any permits will be available. Also, I have received an email from Stuart saying he is making good progress and will probably be in Warrnambool a few days earlier than expected, so if I am going to meet him there I need to get moving. And I am worried about the bike—cracks have now developed in the outer flanges of the wheel and are spreading inwards, and you don't need to be a rocket scientist to see that when these cracks meet up with the hole in the middle of the rim where the spoke pulled through the whole wheel will break in two! I need to get back into Melbourne and find a bike shop and get it repaired. I set off back up the road and I can hear the wheel creaking and groaning

alarmingly beneath me. God knows how much longer it will hold together! I cycle rather gingerly back north, out of the hills, back through the burnt-out area, back up to Fish Creek, back up the rail trail. That night I camp in the same recreational reserve I camped in on the way down three days ago.



Day 6 I intend checking out buses back into Melbourne but somebody tells me something that changes everything—apparently there is a bike shop in the next town up the rail trail! This is completely unexpected—like finding a bike shop in Featherston or Eketahuna! I set off up the rail trail and sure enough, in the next town I find a great little bike shop. An hour later—and my wallet a hundred and something dollars lighter—I have a new wheel and am back on the road again, my worries over.

I head south-west, down to Inverloch and the Cape Patterson coast. This is a beautiful stretch of coastline where the plain meets the sea and deserted beaches are tucked into bays at the foot of cliffs down below the road. I camp for the night at Eagle Nest Point and go down the steps to my own private beach for a swim.



Day 7 Inland to Wonthaggi and the start of the next rail trail—the Bass Coast Rail Trail. This crosses farmland before running back out to the coast, where it runs right along the back of the sandhills and crosses an impressive trestle bridge. White waves roll in onto a superb deserted sandy beach. Time for lunch and another swim!

In the afternoon I head out to Phillip Island, across the road bridge over the narrow channel which separates the island from the mainland. Phillip Island is a popular holiday destination and there is heaps of traffic up and down the main road and lots of people down on the beach at Cowes, the main centre of the island. It's all a bit too busy and touristy for my liking. The big attraction on the island is the daily Penguin Parade, and I had originally planned to spend a night here and go to it. Every evening at dusk hundreds of little blue penguins come ashore at one of the beaches down the far end of the island and waddle up to their nests. But when I enquire about it at the visitors' centre, it rapidly loses its appeal. Hundreds of tourists turn up every night, you have to pay a lot to get in, and there is tiered seating around the back of the beach. Apparently you can even have your own private box seat if you pay enough! It hardly seems like seeing penguins in their natural environment! God knows where they actually find room to nest with all the tourists stomping around! It's not my scene, and I decide to give it a miss and take the ferry that afternoon across to French Island, the next island to the north.

Coming ashore at French Island is a complete contrast. I am the only person getting on or off the ferry and there is nobody on the wharf. The ferry takes off over to the mainland and I am left alone. All is quiet. I wheel my bike ashore along the jetty—nobody is about. At the base of the jetty is a line of old, dusty, beaten-up four-wheel-drives and farm vehicles - not a BMW or campervan or mobile home in sight. A corrugated dirt road leads off into the distance, up into the island.

I set off up the road, 6 or 7 kilometres up the coast to where there is a small Victoria Parks Service campsite. On the way I am passed by a ute and the driver slows down, leans out the window and gives me a big wave and a cheery giddyay. Yeah! This is great! This is my kind of island! A bit later the road deteriorates and turns to sand, impossible to ride through. I am off laboriously pushing my bike when the same ute comes back, slows down and stops. 'Are you going up to the campsite?' asks the driver. 'Throw your bike in the back and I'll give you a lift'. 'Nah', I reply, 'I'll be right. I'm enjoying this!' The driver gives me a look over. 'Yeah, you'll be right' he says, and takes off. And again I think, Yeah! This is my kind of island! Eventually I reach the campsite—a nice spot under tall manuka-like scrub at the back of a sandy beach, nothing but some ground to camp on, a pit toilet, and a water tank. I have the place completely to myself.

Day 8
I originally intended to just spend one night here and get the morning ferry over to the Mornington Peninsula because I am supposed to be getting off down the Great Ocean Road to meet up with Stuart. But I decide that is silly—I have been down the Great Ocean Road before but I have never been to French Island and it looks like a great place. I decide to spend an extra night here and spend the day exploring the island.

This is a great island! 25 kilometre from end to end and 10 or 12 kilometres from north to south, about two-thirds of it is a national park, the rest is private farmland. There is a small general store and cafe, a tiny school, a ranger's station, one or two private accommodation places, and a few private farmhouses. About a hundred people in total live on the island—a greater contrast to Phillip Island would be hard to imagine. There is a network of dirt roads and four-wheel-drive tracks and I spend a superb day tiki-touring around, exploring. I ride through a mixture of bush and scrublands and walk along some interesting stretches of coastline. I see koalas in the gum trees and my only snake of the trip, an old historic chicory kiln and an old prison farm. In the whole day I only see two motor vehicles! I arrive back at the campsite in the evening dehydrated and exhausted after travelling 60 or 70 kilometres on tiring dirt roads and go in for a swim followed by a superb sunset. It has been an excellent day!

Day 9
I catch the morning ferry over to the mainland and set off southwards down the eastern side of the Mornington Peninsula. I pass through small towns and stop for lunch on a nice beach. As I head south the road becomes hillier with lots of ups and downs—not really big climbs but relentless and tiring. I'm not really sure where I'm heading for today—all I know is I'm supposed to be getting off down the Great Ocean Road to meet up with Stuart! Going up a hill I suddenly come across lot of parked cars. It turns out there is a walkway here out to the coast, with a nice camping area at the start. It is only mid-afternoon but I decide this is where I'll stop.

I hide my bike in the bushes and set off down the walkway. After a few kilometres I emerge out at Bushranger Bay, a beautiful isolated spot backed by bush and farmland, then follow a walking track south along the clifftops for 3 or 4 kilometres to Cape Schanck. This is a spectacular landscape of wave-beaten cliffs, with a lighthouse perched up on the headland above. That evening as I walk back up the track to my bike in the fading twilight a herd of kangaroos bound across the track right in front on me. Magic.

Day 10
I continue up and over the crest of the peninsula. I

am descending a hill down the other side when I suddenly come to a screaming, screeching stop. Out of the corner of my eye I have caught sight of a sign: Peninsula Hot Springs! This is a complete surprise—I didn't know there were hot springs here! I am supposed to be getting off down the coast to meet Stuart, but to hell with Stuart! Stuart can wait! After more than a week on the road I'm not missing this! I head up a side road and soon come to the entrance to the hot springs. They are man-made—there is natural thermal water underground but it doesn't naturally come to the surface so they have put a borehole down to tap it and have created an excellent thermal complex. There are various pools of different shapes and sizes and temperatures to soak in, and a thermal stream trickling down a small valley. I spend several hours relaxing in the pools with a completely clear conscious—completely oblivious of the fact that I am supposed to be getting off down the coast to meet up with Stuart!

Eventually I reluctantly drag myself out of the pools and set off down the coast. This side of the peninsula is much more developed than the other side—it's more or less continuous suburbia and resort towns spreading all the way down from Melbourne. Right at the very tip of the peninsula is Point Nepean, where old military bunkers and gun emplacements used to guard the narrow entrance to Port Phillip Bay. This is now a reserve open to the public and I spend a few hours exploring here before returning to Sorrento to catch the ferry across to Queenscliff on the other side of the bay. I spend that night out at Point Lonsdale, camping in the middle of the local cemetery!



Day 11
Back into Queenscliff for a look around. This was a fashionable seaside holiday resort in Victorian times and there are some grand old historic buildings. I spend a couple of hours in the fascinating maritime museum, worried that I really should be getting off down the coast to meet up with Stuart! That afternoon I head west through a number of crowded holiday resort towns and spend a couple of hours lounging in the sun on a beautiful deserted beach.

Late in the afternoon I approach the resort town of Torquay. Torquay is a popular surfing town and marks the point where the main highway comes down from Geelong and continues on southwards down the coast as the Great Ocean Road. I am coming in on a back road—the main road runs further inland while I am on a narrow corrugated dirt road running along the coast at the back of the sandhills behind the beach. I have just reached the edge of town and am entering a roundabout when I notice a cyclist approaching from the other direction. Suddenly this cyclist starts going the wrong way around the roundabout and charging straight towards me. Oh no! Who is this mad, deranged, homicidal Aussie nutter? Then I recognise him—it's Stuart!

This is a complete surprise. I had more or less given up on meeting up with Stuart at this point—I hadn't had an email from him for nearly a week and I had no idea where he was. We'd agreed we wouldn't hang around wasting time waiting for each other if we failed to meet up. Now, by an amazing coincidence, here he is! Just as I was coming into town on the back road, Stuart was heading out of town on exactly the same back road looking for somewhere to camp! If I had been an hour earlier or an hour later I probably would have missed him completely!

Day 12
The original plan had been to meet Stuart in Warrnambool at the western end of the Great Ocean Road and spend a week cycling together into Melbourne. I have ended up meeting up with him here at the eastern end of the Great Ocean Road and spent just one night camping together, but it has still given a nice sense of completion to the trip. We spent last night camping in the sandhills at the back of the beach, a couple of kilometres out of town. This morning we spend swimming at the beach before heading off in our own separate directions in the afternoon. Stuart is heading north to Queenscliff, across on the ferry to Sorrento and up the Mornington peninsula to Melbourne, while I set off southwards along the Great Ocean Road.

I don't get very far this day. About 15 kilometres south of Torquay a side road leads down to Point Addis. When I did the Great Ocean Road a few years ago I didn't bother coming down here so this time I decide

to check it out. It turns out to be a superb spot with a lookout on the headland and a long wild beach backed by bushland. I decide to stop here for the night. Stuart came down here on his way through and reckoned there was nowhere decent to camp but I find an excellent spot down in a broad open gully in the bush. Obviously Stuart is a mere amateur in the art of finding free camping spots! I spend the rest of the afternoon lazing on the beach and swimming in the surf.

Day 13
Continuing south along the Great Ocean Road. This is a stunning road to cycle, carved into the cliffs with the deep blue sea down on one side and the bush-covered Otway ranges rising up on the other. I pass through a series of settlements and resort towns, and sandy beaches tucked into bays and rocky coves. That evening I find another excellent campsite in a grassy clearing, with my own private beach below me.

Day 14
The great Ocean Road continues all the way to Warrnambool where I was originally going to meet Stuart, but that is still two or three days cycling away and I am running out of time, so I turn off and head inland, up into the Otway Ranges. This is a big climb—over 500 vertical metres—but the road I am following is nicely graded and I just get down in bottom gear and cruise slowly up without stopping. At the top the road levels off and runs along the crest of the ranges through a stretch of beautiful eucalypt forest, with a canopy of huge mountain ashes towering over a dense understorey of tree ferns. In the afternoon I stop at a campsite in the forest and go for a bush walk down to a pretty waterfall in the valley below.



Day 15
The small settlement of Beech Forest marks the start of the last rail trail of the trip—the Old Beechy Rail Trail. This was a little narrow-gauge mountain railway that brought settlers up into the ranges in the early decades of the 20th century and took timber out. It descends steeply down the northern side of the ranges through a mixture of farmland and bush, before flattening out onto the plains beyond. I spend the night in the small provincial city of Colac, camping behind the hedge in the far corner of the grounds of the Colac Gun Club, hoping like hell that they are not going to hold a shooting meet this evening!

Day 16
I catch the morning train back into Melbourne. The trip is over.

Over the last couple of weeks I've cycled on roads and rail trails, through forests and farmland. I've passed through crowded resort towns and deserted scenic coastlines. I've caught trains and ferries, and visited islands and peninsulas and national parks. I've gone for walks in the bush and along rugged beaches and headlands. I've lazed in the sun on stunning sandy beaches, swum in the surf, and soaked in some superb hot-springs. It's been a great trip!

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

On the Northern Walkway

by M. T. BYKKA





Make your way to J'Ville then by whichever track that tickles your fancy head up to the top of Kaukau. Take a mo to look around—it's a great view down to Welly Town on a fine day. When ready head south...



For starters it's mostly easy downhill—and now you don't even have to open the gates...

Then comes a couple of short bike carries. Gives you a chance to look around again...





Once past the last carry there is a long flat grassy ridge—fast. Now some bumpy single track through the gorse and cow poo—not so fast. Then it's fast and easy again along a 4WD track until almost Johnsons Hill. Finally a short ride/walk and you are at the top...

*Then down the steps—
it's more fun the faster you go...*



*On down the track through the bush to Karori—
then around the roads and home again...
Cool.*





CLIMBING (NEARLY) TAPPY

by STEPHEN HEALEY

Tapuae-o-Uenuku, or Tappy as it is commonly known, can be seen from as far away as parts of Christchurch and Taranaki and is clearly seen from the Wellington coast on a fine day. Standing at 2,885 metres it is the tallest peak outside of the Southern Alps.

Steve, Weimin and I were all returning for another attempt—last year we had a last minute change of destination to Robert Ridge and Angelus instead because of the tail end of a massive storm. The weather ended up being magical for that trip but didn't look too promising for us this time. Rain was promised Friday and possibly snow Saturday, but the wind seemed to be the biggest obstacle to our success—the forecast was for a couple of days of medium to strong winds with a southerly change Saturday afternoon.

This year was not without its logistical challenges either. I had originally booked flights to and from Wellington for late September which were the original dates on the Alpine Schedule, but this was then changed to early September, requiring a change of flights. Then a storm again got in the way and the trip became early October—so another change of flights.

Thursday night eventually saw us on the Ferry and the trip was under way at last. A calm crossing with plenty of games of 500 to pass the time and John even got me

bidding a few times. The drive south from Picton all went smoothly and we had the tents up above the Hodder River by midnight. Ant was already asleep in his ute when we arrived having driven up from Christchurch—he was joining the two Michaels on an ascent of Mt Alarm the same weekend.

We were underway by just after 8 am the next morning and the weather was overcast with a cool breeze discouraging any dips in the river en route. The trip upriver was uneventful until just before we reached the big sidle on the true right when Debbie decided to sit down in the river, so ever the gentleman, Ant went to the rescue only to drop one of his matching walking poles into the river while doing so. The pole floated off down river towards the Awatere until fortunately getting caught by a rock—unfortunately on the other side of the river to where Ant was. I was already on that side and watching events unfold so I dashed off downriver to retrieve it before it took off again.

The grunt up the slip to the top of the sidle track was next and we had split into two groups by this point but as we levelled off at the top of the slip we saw the others at the bottom so we carried on up valley along the sidle track knowing they were just behind us.

In the meantime Michael had gone on ahead up the

sidle track and I caught up to him once we got back down into the river valley, and as we progressed up the valley we came upon a couple of fairly large goats in the river bed just ahead of us. They seemed completely unperturbed by us and just wandered along ahead of us for quite a while before eventually heading off uphill. I felt like we were shepherds guiding our flock.

At this point the bad weather which had been threatening all day finally started to arrive and it began to drizzle. I had just a polypro T-shirt on and was starting to feel the cold. I wanted to push on though until I could see the huts before stopping and as soon as they came in sight I stopped and got out my parka enjoying the shelter it provided from the wet breeze. Michael turned up at this point and I asked if he wanted to get his jacket out at the same time—but no he happily continued on up valley in a short sleeved T shirt—these Austrians are a hardy breed apparently. We popped up out of the river and arrived at the huts just after 2:30 pm with the balance of our party arriving not long after.

We got on a brew and spread ourselves out in the hut anticipating the rear-guard arrival at any time. We started wondering where they had got to though until they eventually came into sight around an hour later, having had a bit of a hold up en route. Weimin had been our official counter on the way up and he said we had crossed the river 59 times. This figure could vary wildly depending on your party's choices of route in the river but represents a fair indication of how many times you will get your feet wet on the trip up to the huts.

Dinner was the next challenge for the day because due to varying reasons both parties found themselves short of a staple for the evening meal. We had a late withdrawal from our party and somehow only part of that person's food allowance got transferred on leaving us with half the required amount of rice for the Thai tuna curry. Meanwhile the Alarm party had to make spaghetti bolognaise without most of the pasta. Fortunately we both had massive deserts to finish.

Short of sleep, I was off to bed early, but woke up at midnight for a visit to the outhouse and the sky was brilliant. There was a three quarters moon, a starry sky, and no clouds. The wind, however, remained strong and the forecast was for a southerly change with snow showers in the afternoon. Retiring to bed I drifted off again to the sound of the wind occasionally buffeting the hut, wondering what the next day would bring.

We woke around 5 am but procrastinated and eventually left about 6:30 am. We were actually so late getting away we ditched our headlamps as it was bright enough by then to walk without them.

After crossing the slip we dropped back down to the Hodder River and spent some time looking for the best crossing point—eventually mostly deciding on our own separate options to try and get across without getting our



ABOVE: Hodder River
Photos: STEPHEN HEALEY

BELOW: The Hodder Huts (and goats)



feet wet and all with varying levels of success. Some of us had carried in dry boots and I was determined not to undo all that good work by a slip into the river at this point.

It wasn't an easy task—Steve sort of straddled a couple of rocks, managing to ease his way across. I jumped the same gap, managing to land successfully. One of our group though slipped and ended up in the water up to his knees, and after some debate this was the end of his climb. Can't say I blame him. I had dry feet and socks and I, along with some of the others, had very cold toes for most of the climb.

The four of us continued on up Staircase Creek and



ABOVE: *Climbing up to Staircase Creek*

BELOW: *On the icy slopes to Tappy. Mt Alarm group in distance heading towards their peak*



as we popped out over the top onto flatter ground we immediately had to break out the crampons and ice axes. There was a huge amount of snow up here this year. Steve thought it was the most he had ever seen! It was also quite icy—much more so than my previous trip up here and the crampons were definitely required for safe travel today. But this meant good travel up the valley, crisp and firm underfoot and we made good time for a while but as we gained height the wind started to play with us. Although mild at first we were regularly swept by gusts which would see us bent low over our axes holding on tight to avoid being unbalanced by the wind. At this point we were passed by the Mt Alarm

group—they had left after us but were determined to try and make their way to the top today as well.

The sky remained remarkably clear and even if it was a beautiful blue sky above the wind was definitely a southerly and very cold and blustery at times. But more worryingly we could both hear and see it above us. It was blowing snow off the tops and I wondered how we would get on when exposed to that on top of the ridgeline.

As we gained height more steeply again on the final climb to the top col we noticed ominous black clouds creeping up from the south over the ridges away to the west of us. These became closer and blacker as we gained in height and soon we could see bands of rain falling on the ranges as well.

We stopped at about 2,700 metres just a few minutes below the col that would pop us up onto the summit ridge above and had a conference. Did we want to continue and get caught in the bad weather now only about half an hour away, or turn and retreat before it got here?

We unanimously decided discretion was the better part of valour and turned dropping much more quickly back down the slope we had just worked so hard to climb. Being only 180 metres and around three quarters of an hour from the summit it was galling to turn and retreat, but we were vindicated in our decision as by the time we had reached flatter ground below the clouds had rolled in and the peaks were out of sight. Within another quarter of an hour of this the first light snowflakes started to fall.

Leaving aside the wind on top which would have been unpleasant, it had now completely clagged in above us and was starting to snow seriously—none of us wanted to be up there in that. We could still see the Alarm trippers—they had started up a gully but apparently found it a little too iced up, so retreated and taken a second gully which popped them out onto a snow slope above. They were crossing this and heading up into the murk when we lost sight of them, probably somewhere around the same height as we were when we turned around.

While descending Steve and I managed a couple of really long bum slides down the now less icy slopes and then had a brilliant walk down the rest of Staircase Creek, with snowflakes falling diagonally across our path as we descended. As the snow arrived the wind had decreased and it was quite magical down here with light snowflakes falling around us.

Reaching the Hodder again Steve took a running jump through the river and crossed without mishap. I managed to find two rocks close enough together that I could leap across again without getting my boots wet and we headed off back down river across the slips. As we pulled into the hut about 12:30 pm we were very glad to be down here and not up higher as the wind had swung round and the snow was now blowing up valley with some force.

The snow continued for most of the afternoon. The

Alarm group rolled back sometime after 2 pm—they had got to within about a hundred metres of the top climbing most of the way in the lee of the wind. The last part was exposed to the weather though and like us they eventually had made a decision to retreat rather than face the elements any longer.

As the afternoon went on there was occasional breaks in the weather and by 5 pm there was even the odd ray of sunshine breaking through and sunny skies away down valley to the north. Most of us spent the time playing six handed 500 until dinner. A full meal of couscous and chorizo sausage, followed by more cards until the lack of sleep caught up with us again and it was off to bed for another early night

The weather changed again overnight and when I got up again around midnight for a comfort break it was snowing heavier than ever and there was snow accumulating on the ground around the hut.

The forecast for Sunday was for fine weather though and



so it turned out. Next morning dawned crisp and clear and we packed up and headed off down river on what would have been a very good day to be standing on the summit.

Special thanks to Steve Austin for again leading this trip and taking Debbie Buck, Weimin Ren, John Hickey and me along for the ride.

‘Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go’.

T S Elliot

CAMPING IN A VOLCANO

A club alpine tramp

by **DEBBIE BUCK**



After a glorious day ascending Ruapehu during snowcraft in August, I was eager to consolidate my alpine skills on Marie and Stephen's trip up Ngauruhoe, with the bonus of snow camping at the top.

Marie and Rowena left Wellington early and were tramping in from the Chateau. Stephen was driving down from sunny Tauranga. I was under strict instructions from Marie to make sure the rest of us (Debbie, Oleg, Dmitry, Austin, Weimin and Harry) got from Wellington to the Mangatepopo Hut efficiently and without incident!

After trips to the supermarket to get water bottles, a slight detour to Southgate to pick up Dmitry's forgotten boots and a stop in Newtown to properly close the van's rear door we were on our way—oh well, I would concentrate on the efficiency! We travelled efficiently until we arrived in Bulls for dinner. My burger was delicious and efficient. With service from the new fish

and chip shop, Harry was ultra-efficient. As for the rest of the punters who dined in the kebab shop....

Dmitry and Weimin did a superb job of driving us safely to the road end where Ngauruhoe greeted us, fully visible and shimmering under the almost-full moon and clear sky. If it wasn't almost midnight and past bedtime, I would gladly have walked for a few hours amidst the expansive presence of the mountains on such a serene night. The superhighway to the hut was so brightly lit by the moonlight reflecting off the mountain that some of us didn't use our headlights.

Fortunately there were enough beds for all of us in the hut. On Saturday morning we met our fellow trappers, had breakfast and negotiated how much water we should each carry up to the top of Ngauruhoe to minimise snow melting. Being staunch, I filled an empty wine cask bladder with 5 litres of water and nestled it in

the club billy at the top of my pack. I also had 2 litres in my Camelback and Platypus. When I put on my pack it felt sloshy and I wished I was skilled in carrying an urn of water on my head.

Just before we set off at 8:30, a group of four uni students arrived at the hut. They'd dropped into the hut about 1 am and found it full, so they'd continued on and walked most of the way up Ngauruhoe!

Inspired by the students, we set off on the Tongariro Crossing superhighway, which fortunately was not full of people just yet. The morning was clear and we travelled slowly but surely with heavy packs over the coarse volcanic rocks, enjoying the uniquely stunning vista towards the mountain—so different to the Tararuas. It wasn't long before we encountered patches of snow, glorious snow. But it wasn't quite time for crampons yet. After a sustained climb to the base of Ngauruhoe, we stopped for a snack. I decided to offload some of my water—Harry and Marie quickly presented their cups for some of the 'liquid gold' which was gaining value exponentially with every metre of altitude gained.

Some more travel over loose rocks before it was time to put on the crampons and get out the ice axe. The snow was slightly soft but not too slushy. Steve, Harry and Dmitry powered ahead, making good tracks. As we plodded gradually up the cloud started to arrive, shrouding the mountain top. We could still see the bottom and the constant slope—the thought that it was one huge slippery slide did cross my mind and make me diligent with my crampon and ice-axe placements. Following Weimin's and Austin's footsteps and moving at a steady, rhythmic pace gave me the chance to appreciate the ascent. Time to look back over the snow and rock patterns towards Tongariro, out to the greenery to the west, spotting a few ant-like trampers way below, looking up and around for the route to take.

A long way up we stopped for a welcome rest on a band of snow-free rock and slushy soil that was warm from the thermal activity beneath. After sugar-loading I struggled for a few steps using my crampons on the earth before making a beeline for snow again. Avoiding the warm earthy patches as much as possible and a few falling rocks, we soon arrived at our summit in the clouds. Fortunately there was no sign of the raging snowstorm that had greeted Ngatoro-i-rangi when he climbed to the top of Ngauruhoe to claim it for the Tuwharetoa tribe.

Time for decisions—where to camp? Stephen had spied a good spot just around the corner and (wisely) away from the edge of the mountain. Marie checked it

out and endorsed it. On the move again for two minutes to camp one. Lunch was postponed whilst we beavered away flattening our tent sites, digging down in case the forecast front arrived with full ferocity. Carving out a bit more snow so the tent would snugly fit in the sheltered space—aah the addictiveness of snow camping, releasing the inner sculptor. Dmitry was a magician with the snow shovel—he conjured a curvilinear wall at the southern end of his and Austin's tent, with a nautically inspired porthole for a guy rope to slide through. If Rowena hadn't needed the snow shovel to secure her radio aerial, Dmitry may well have constructed a 9 person igloo in the kiwi-russianesque style, complete with flying buttresses.



Another decision—where to locate the loo? Behind the closest snow mound was deemed too close (especially since we were upwind). Austin was sent off to scope the suitability of the next snow mound—sufficient privacy but close enough not to get lost in a whiteout.

Tents were up, warm clothes were on. Stephen got out his multipurpose frisbee and had a few throws with Dmitry to build up their appetites. Now it was time for lunch and a brew. A dedicated cooking pit was dug. Donations of liquid gold were called for. Soon we were all happily rehydrating and digesting as the cloud descended upon us. As soon as the cloud gave a hint of lifting, Stephen headed for the crater. By the time the rest of us were 3/4 of the way up, the cloud had returned. Standing at the crater edge we couldn't see anything in it and could barely see our campsite. So we plunge stepped down into the whiteness back towards the campsite, practicing for the descent tomorrow.

After eating some of the uncrushed potato chips that magically appeared from the depths of Rowena's pack,



it was time to start cooking dinner. But alas, one punter hadn't read the food list and we were without half our carbs! The nearest Hells pizza was Ohakune but they hadn't yet installed GPS's in their delivery snowmobiles, so takeout was not an option. Harry saved the evening with his offerings of emergency 2 minute noodles from which master chef Marie created an amazingly tasty couscous-noodle fusion food delight, eaten al fresco a la snow.

Being totally sated by dinner, I was thrilled that the cloud lifted a bit so we could explore an east-facing ridge just above the campsite. At a rocky part we found some thermal vents which were perfect for warming

ABOVE: *Ruapehu from Ngauruhoe summit*
Photos: STEPHEN HEALEY

PREVIOUS: *Ngauruhoe from South Saddle*

RIGHT: *Our cosy camp site*

BELOW: *A nice and natural hand warmer*



our hands. The vents gave the engineering-inclined amongst us grand visions of piped hot water down to a hot pool at the campsite, or at least the avoidance of melting snow for breakfast cuppa. We gazed out towards the Desert Road, and ventured up a bit higher to a knob with sastrugi formations. From here we could see Mt Ruapehu, framed by clouds lit by the evening sun. It was calm, peaceful and totally worth carrying the heavy pack to camp in such a special place. Feeling mellow and contented, we plunge stepped or sitting glissaded (aka bum slid) down to the campsite where we shared



our decadent pot luck dessert—a scrumptious medley of hokey pokey, macaroons, fudge, chocolate and afghans. After effortlessly cleaning our dinner bowls in the snow, it was bedtime at 7 pm.

The weather report came in loud, clear and promising on Rowena's radio at 7:30 pm. I drifted off to sleep shortly afterwards, taking almost every nanometre of my allotted 0.833 person space in the 2.5 person tent Marie and Rowena were graciously sharing with me. I slept amazingly well and was toasty warm all night.

After turning the clock forward for daylight saving, I woke at 6:30 am—Stephen and Weimin were already up (above the campsite) photographing the sunrise. Others were still on winter time (fair enough when you are snow camping) and slept in. It was a clear, crisp day. As the sun crept down towards our campsite, we climbed up to meet it so that we could sunbake whilst eating breakfast.

We packed up and headed back to the edge of the mountain. Heck it looked steep and exposed—did I really have to plunge step all the way to the bottom? Marie carefully guided Rowena and I around some bouldery bits and onto the snow. Mmmm—if I side-



ABOVE: Scrambling along the ridge to Tongariro

stepped I could look out to the east, enjoy the scenery and not notice how far down I had to go (or would go if I fell). So I side stepped for quite a long way. When my uphill leg got tired I changed direction to face west, but it didn't seem to work so well the other way. So I switched back, rested for a bit and took in more scenery. Soon I was at a point where I could plunge step and make faster progress. Then I was at the bottom snacking, relieved to have dealt with the exposure and to have avoided falling.

Once we had all made it to the bottom we thanked Marie for leading us so far and said goodbye to her and Rowena, who were heading off for a few more days of alpine tramping.

The rest of us walked on the flat to the base of the route up Tongariro. It was here that Oleg realised he'd left his ice axe at our previous rest stop. So he returned to retrieve it and would meet us at the road end.

Stephen, Austin, Weimin, Harry, Dmitry and I started with some rock scrambling that got a little bit more serious, mainly because of the pack carrying. But after getting over a section that seemed more like a low grade climb than a rock scramble, I was feeling more comfortable. Further on and we convened at a point that looked even more serious. Stephen climbed up the rocks to scope the high route up the ridge to Tongariro, whilst

Dmitry scoped the low route.

Suddenly Stephen came rushing back with news that he'd seen Dmitry slip on the icy snow and take a slide. He and Austin went to find and assist Dmitry, Harry scoped a descent route and the rest of us waited and got out first aid supplies. Eventually Dmitry, Austin and Stephen returned. We were all very relieved that Dmitry was (stoically) ok and Weimin diligently set about applying first aid to Dmitry's grazed shoulder.

We decided to abandon our Tongariro summit bid. After sharing some of Dmitry's gear amongst us, we descended the west side of the ridge until the slope eased off. From here we sidled in the snow until we met a long rocky ridge that ran past Mangatepopo Hut. We revelled in the sun and sauntered along the ridge top for several kilometres until we descended to a stream next to the Tongariro Crossing track. Aaah—running water—elixir of the gods (even better than liquid gold). I splashed my face, washed my hands and had a long drink. Then it was back onto the superhighway for the last 45 minutes to the road end where Oleg was waiting for us.

We said goodbye to Stephen and thanked him for co-leading the trip then piled into the van for the efficient and incident-free drive back to Wellington. It had been a sensational, well-lead alpine adventure.



was lying submerged on the bottom of the river. So the first job was to refloat the boat and for the mechanics in the party to help the owner take the motor apart, dry it out, and get it going again. Eventually though after two boat trips they all arrived with their 30 kg packs on the first grassy flats and set off up-river.

The travel was typical West Coast river-bashing with awkward boulders along the sides and thick bush on the terraces. It was a hard slog for the first few days but they mostly made good time to eventually emerge just a bit battered at the head of the valley.

And this was an extraordinarily dramatic place. A large cirque with glaciers leering over the tops of high vertical cliffs, waterfalls that were feathered in the wind before reaching

the valley floor, and just a few grassy areas beside the old moraine walls. Then to complete the picture standing head and shoulders over everything with its summit above the clouds was Mt Aspiring. Nearly everywhere they looked was either very steep or vertical—no wonder they had not been able to find out from anybody if it was

THE WAY WE WERE

A yesteryear's Xmas trip

by **TONY GAZLEY**

It seems a long time ago that trampers carried hideously uncomfortable Mountain Mule packs, walked in heavy ill-fitting boots, and wore japara parkas that seemed to be designed especially to get you wet—and, because dehy food was mostly inedible, even took a rifle on Xmas trips to get the food for some evening meals. But with all of the above, eight young blokes from the club set out some years back on a trip to the Wiatoto Valley—one of the more rugged and least visited areas of South Westland.

Their idea was to climb out of the head of the valley and sidle beneath Mt Aspiring to the Bonar Glacier and then down to the West Matukituki Valley where there would be a food drop at Aspiring Hut. Then over Arawhata Saddle and up the Joe River, and finally over O'Leary Pass and down the Dart River to Glenorchy to complete the 14 day trip. Mostly it all went to plan—with the exception of a few unexpected adventures on the way.

They arrived at Wiatoto—a settlement of about half a dozen houses where residents survived thanks to venison and whitebait—and were a bit surprised to find the jetboat that was to take them through the first gorge



ABOVE: *The head of the Waiatoto with Mt Aspiring behind*

RIGHT TOP: *Dennis with some of the Waiatoto locals*

RIGHT BOTTOM: *Taking a rest near the head of the Wiatoto*



possible to climb out of the place—probably no-one had ever tried.

They pitched their tents, prepared a meal and then lay back trying to figure out a way they could get out the valley and onto the Volta neve, and then under the western buttresses of Aspiring. It all seemed very difficult but they thought there may be a couple of possibilities.

Next morning they headed up the slopes they hoped would get them to the neve. As it turned out they had picked a good route and though steep was not too desperate. Later in the day they stood on the crest above the neve with grand views across to Aspiring and in the other direction out to the coast at Haast. They glissaded down to the neve itself, pitched their tents then went to check out the slopes beneath the rocky ridges of Aspiring.

It didn't take long for them to realise that the snow was steep, very unstable, and that they wouldn't safely be going that way. But they didn't have another plan—so their big problem now was how to get off the neve!

They pondered over the map and next morning plugged their way around to the col above Wilmot Saddle where they thought it may be possible to climb down to Ruth Stream. But one look over the edge to the near vertical slopes below and that idea was ditched. So they went further around to Ruth Spur. This looked only marginally better but they had to get down somewhere so down they went. It took them many hours of down-climbing very steep and scary rock and snowgrass, with a few abseils for good measure, before they arrived at Ruth Flats. The flat terraces seemed like heaven with



ABOVE: *Resting on a rock ledge part way up the climb to the Volta neve. Aspiring behind*

RIGHT TOP: *Looking down to the Wiatoto River below*

RIGHT BOTTOM: *Glissading down from the ridge to the Volta neve*



warm sunshine, a sparkling river, soft grass for their tents and enough scrub for a fire to cook tea.

But although they may have been over the worst problems they certainly still had a major one to sort out. For at the time of their trip there was no track down the East Matukituki Valley and the gorge below them had a fearsome reputation. But there was no alternative except to head down the river next morning and just take whatever they found. Fortunately they were all happy enough with big rivers and linked up in two groups of four they formed strong teams that could get through all the tricky crossings of the swift and gorgy river though not without a struggle on a few nasty ones.

Thinking that reaching the end of the gorge was the end of their problems for the day they relaxed as they headed down towards the West Matukituki and their food drop. But they hadn't gone too far when they came across a solitary tramper lying unconscious in the hot sun covered in bites from swarming sandflies. They tended to their patient while the runner in the group left his pack and took off across the river flats to the Aspinall's homestead thankfully at that stage only about 4 km away.

Fortunately one of the sons was home helping on the farm and he drove a tractor and trailer back to the group, picked up the tramper who had now regained semi-consciousness and much later they all arrived at the farmhouse. By this time Mrs Aspinall had the kettle boiling and the scones with jam and cream on the table. And if that wasn't enough the Aspinall family put them all up in the shearers' cottages for the night after giving them a hearty famer's tea.

They had an easy wander up to Aspiring Hut the next day and picked up their food for the next 7 days before heading up to Liverpool Biv for the night. At this point they found the leg of ham they were carrying for the evening meals when they didn't have venison had become fly-blown and some time had to be spent getting rid of the maggots before they could eat their tea.

Next day was the climb to Arawhata Saddle which although it meant climbing long steep snow slopes was easier for them than for travellers today now that the snow has receded over the years leaving crumbly rocky cliffs. Then down to the spacious Arawhata rock biv for the night. Next day was the first lazy start on the trip and it was a fairly easy wander down to Williamsons Flats with its big area of golden grass looking very welcoming in the warm sunshine. Then the following day up the Joe



TOP: A quick game of chess and a smoke while waiting for the weather to clear

MIDDLE: On the way up to O'Leary Pass

BOTTOM: Climbing out of the Joe River

River on the deer trails through the bush to camp on the grassy flats below O'Leary Pass.

There were many stories told of crossings of the pass—from parties that had made it relatively easily to others who had had desperate struggles. It seemed that unless you followed the tricky route exactly there were likely to be significant difficulties. The club party were not sure if they followed the route correctly or not but there certainly were significant difficulties anyway—from the expected very steep snowgrass to the waterfall where you went behind the water as it poured over the cliff above, and much more besides.

They were all relieved to make the top safely and agreed that it was definitely a onetime crossing—there would be no going back to ever do it again. They camped behind the rock walls built on the ridge with only a couple more days before the trip would be over.

Next day was down to the Dart rock biv where everyone was by now getting very hungry, so in the afternoon some of the group headed up to Dart Hut to check if any spare food was lying about while the hunter went out looking for tea on the hoof.

No-one was successful so it was a hungry night before the long drag down valley to Glenorchy next morning. A restful trip down Lake Wakatipu on the steamer Earnslaw—where there was food available—to Queenstown and over the next couple of days the long trip back home.

It had been a wonderful adventure travelling through some of the most challenging tramping country in NZ. There had been that satisfying sense of camaraderie that comes with everyone sharing a common goal and everyone being confident and capable enough to be able to contribute to the party's wellbeing. There were lots of laughs and not a single angry word—well maybe just a few directed at some of the scariest countryside.

Those who shared the wonderful adventure were:

Allan Higgins, Noel Thomas, Dennis Gazley, Pete Goodwin, Murray Brown, Graham Westerby, Kevin Moynihan and Tony Gazley.

PS. Quite some time after the Wiatoto trip one of the group climbed Mt Aspiring and could look down into the valley they had tramped up some 30 years before. The changes at the head of the valley were rather staggering. All the flats where they had camped were gone, simply drowned by a large terminal lake that had formed where once there had been a much smaller pond. The glaciers flowing into the head of the valley had either retreated or disappeared completely. Altogether it looked a sorry wreck of what it once had been. Although of course when they first saw it then it was already a wreck of what it had been sometime before that.

The top photo is looking down from the summit of



Mt Aspiring into the Wiatoto Valley. The large terminal lake was not there when the Xmas trip passed by. The party camped somewhere where the lake is now and then climbed up the slabs near the bottom right of the photo.

The bottom photo is taken just to the right of the top one and is looking down onto the Volta neve. The Xmas trip party climbed up to the ridge at the bottom left of the photo and then dropped down the snow slopes to camp on the neve below. Next day they traversed along the length of the neve and around the corner to Ruth Spur to get down to Ruth Stream and the East Matukituki Valley.

Both photos above by Jackie Foster.

travls thru d korowai-torlesse tusoklnds

by brian

ey m8

av u bn getN ot n d hills l8ly? heR uv bn slackN arnd eaps. bn doiN qute bit myslf n jst got bk frm 1 of A1 wkendr dne 4 yonks.

flw 2 chch n drov 2 d doc cmpste by d ymak rivA—u no d 1 whr d coast2coast kyak Nds. durin d nyt sm of d local yobos drov thru n thr beat ^ 4x4 for a few donuts n thN lobd a blody big X-(hare @ d tent. gueS ez 2 gt bord f u liv n Springfield.

Nyway nxt dy wz fne n frsty n we drov 2 sumit portrs pass n lft d car jst ovr d othr cyd n strted ^ d trck 2wrds d ridg. realy ez walkn evn tho qyt bit of *** bout. passD a bloke trainin 4 a mt race by doN laps ^ n dwn d 300 m clmb—breed em tuf n d sth is.

1s on d top of d ridg wz gr8t jst wnderin alng 2wards rabbit pk W orsum vews in2 d hyest pks of d alps at d hed of d rakaia rivA n 1 dircton n a gr@ pnorama of d cantabry fthills n d torelesse rnge n d oder. realy wrm n evn neded me sunes n d brite sunshyn.

n d saddl b4 d clmb ^ fnd sum springs W frsh cln h2o bubblng 2 d surfce. coudnt rch d botm W a walkn pole so f u stepD in...

on d top had bit of rest b4 headn ^ d lng rdge 2 ben more. *** wz deepr hre bt by picn a gud route u cUd fnd plces u didnt sink thru 2 d grass Blow. d vews wr getN btr n btr d hyr we climbd n wx stayD perfct—hrdly a cloud n d sky n no wind @ ll.

Dcided cos wx so gud we'd camp ryt on d summt of ben more— realy XposD bt seemD lk a fun thng 2 do. so pitchD d tent on prety mch d hyest bit of *** we cUd fnd dat wz fl@ nuf n s@ n watchd d sun set ovr d main dvide. amazn stuf.

got realy cold 1s d sun went dwn so hoppd n d tnt 2 cook t. thN owtsd agn 4 a yl 2 l%k @ da vu. absolutel btiful. Peaks 2 d west silhouetd agenst a fadn sky yl 2 d east wr the plains n n d distanC d lyts of chch. cud av stayD 4 ages Xcept wz friggn cold so dived bk n d tnt 2 warm ^ agin. Endd ^ havN a nce warm nyt n slpt realy wel.

n d am wz awak and owtsd erly nuf 2 woch d sunrse n prety amazn dat wz 2. d sky brightend W ll d shdes of pnk 2 prple n reflectd off d *** yl a brite cres m%n hung directly abve us. 1 of A1

bdrm windO pict shows ive seen 4 a lng tym.

thort we'd gt bk 2 d car by an ez rdge leadin 2wrds d rivA thN climb bk ^ 2 a markD trak leadin bk 2wrds rabbit pk. Il went esily nuf—where der wz *** twas supa ez travL n d opN tussk wz np itha. we hd lnc bside d rivA bt movD on qkly nuf whn d sun dipd Bhnd d nerby rdge n d temp immed dropD bout 10 dgrees.

evNtuly arivd bk@t d car n glad 2 fnd stil had a windscrn and 4 weels. Off bk 2 chch W plnty of tym 4 for the lst flyT hom.

so 1 of A1 m8. ave atachd sum of me pics. tht's w@ ur missN ot on. So tym u strtd getN ot agn eh? CU n d hills china.

b



the last word



Photo:TONY GAZLEY

OPPOSITE: Frank Church Wilderness, Idaho
Photo:TONY GAZLEY

REAR COVER: Derelict gold miner's cottage,
Big River
NIGEL GAZLEY



COVER: *On the ridge above the Maitland Valley,*
Ahuriri Conservation Park.
Photo: TONY GAZLEY

