

2015



TRAMPING & MOUNTAINEERING





**COVER**

SPENCER CLUBB, KEVIN COLE and DEBBIE BUCK  
on Red Crater, Tongariro National Park.

PHOTO: Ian Harrison





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ANGIE WILKINSON abseiling in the Darran Mountains, Fiordland National Park.  
PHOTO: Tony Gazley



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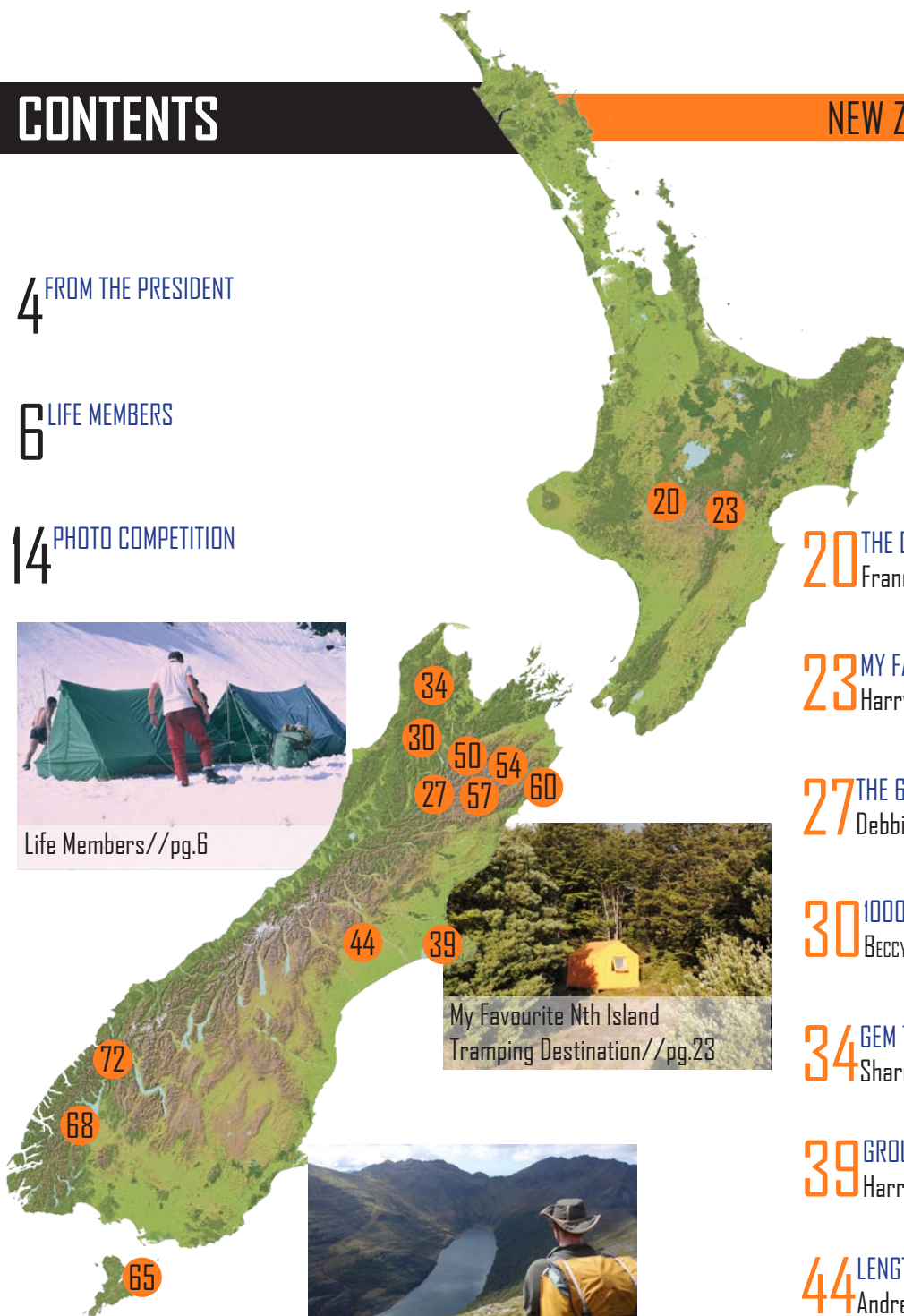
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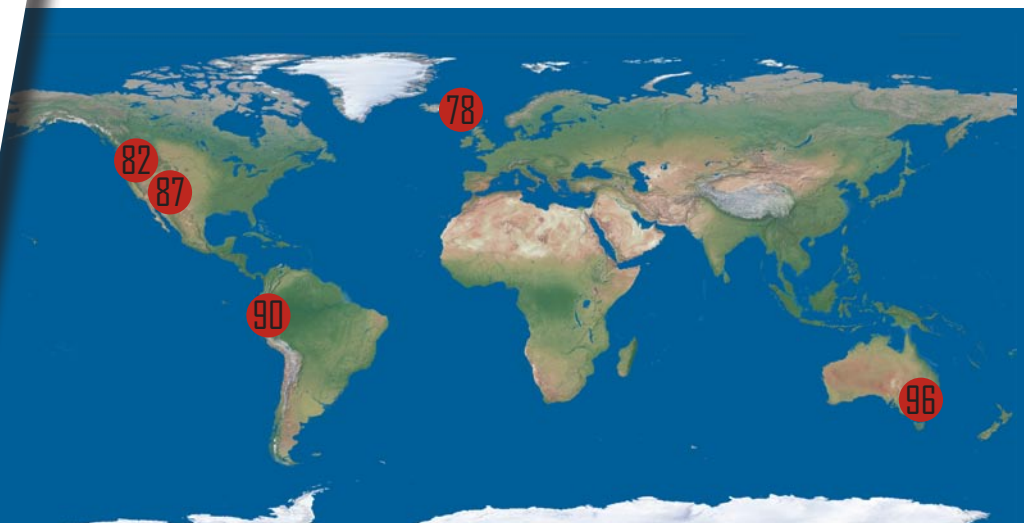
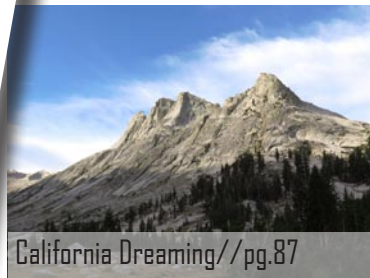
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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I write this early on a Friday morning, I am looking forward to the end of the day when I will head to the station, meet some new people and drive away in a WTMC van on an adventure. Having suffered periods of injury and illness, these days when I head to the station after work on a Friday, I smile with gratitude. Gratitude that my body is (hopefully) up to this tramp, and gratitude that we have this club that every weekend sends people into the hills.

It's easy to take the logistics behind this system for granted. But every year, incidents cause us to realise the value of our emergency contacts system, of our careful maintenance of the vans, and of our training and support of leaders. Heading off on an adventure as part of the club means having a layer of assurance that just doesn't exist in other contexts. It's really important that we maintain these levels of safety and protection, and that we support the systems behind them. The nature of this work means it's often invisible to the general membership, even as it consumes disproportionate amounts of committee and volunteer time.

This year has seen an influx of new members into the club, after we changed our joining requirements last year. Many of these new members are going on trips regularly and adding to the life of the club. While it's too early to reflect seriously on this change, early indications appear very positive. At the start of this committee year, we gathered on a Sunday morning to discuss what, aside from day-to-day business, we should focus on over the next 12 months. This increase in new members was a topic of discussion, and drove one of our three areas of focus. We have developed a new member induction package, which is a series of emails that new members receive over the first month that they are part of the club. These emails cover what the club offers, how things work, and what is expected of them.

We also chose to focus on redeveloping our website, and on taking a serious look at the volunteer effort involved in running the club. This meant a survey available to all members to fill in, detailing their level of work and how they feel about it. The results of this will inform some changes to the way we do things, as we try to split jobs into more manageable chunks.

While many of our volunteers are happy and fulfilled in their roles, we have a small but significant number of people putting in many hours of work and feeling at times fed up. We need to make sure we reduce the burden on individuals, spread the work and regularly cycle different people through roles.

This journal is an impressive collection of adventures, and I hope it inspires you to dream some new tramping dreams. Thank you to Ian Harrison, who has again put together a high-quality publication.

Safe and happy tramping.

AMANDA WELLS

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

*Hi Journal Editor,*

*I was sitting on the very delayed train to Tawa tonight, 2nd October, and saw the WTMC van and its trampers loading up for a weekend in the hills. It brought back so many memories from the 70's at platform 9, when I was at Tawa College and was a member of the WTMC and was very well mentored by people like Barry Hunt and Paul Green; icons of WTMC. I recently came across the updated SK book with names like Nick Jennings, Laurie Gallagher, Barry Biggs - also victims of Tawa College. I have spent many years offshore but still could be considered a Tararuaphile, having spent a lot of time in the Tararuas (between the odd cardiac stent) filling in the few last red-lines, and a year or so ago I bought a 18 acre life style bush block and hut on the true right of the Otaki river just below the forks.*

*Those Friday nights and the weekend MF tramping trips still are very much in the highlights of my last 60 odd years.*

*Andrew McKie*





DEBBIE BUCK and MEGAN BANKS cooking dinner, Pararaki Hut, Aorangi Forest Park. PHOTO: Ian Harrison



## LIFE MEMBERS

This year **MIKE GILBERT** interviewed four of the Club's life members for our online newsletter. They're such interesting reading we thought it a good idea to reproduce the interviews here in the physical print form of the journal.

### SUE WALSH

Sue Walsh is one of the life members that is well known to a lot of us who go to club regularly. She's been the friendly welcoming face you saw up front on Wednesday nights for several years up until early this year. She remains a regular smiling face at club nights and you can rely on her to be helping out in all sorts of quiet ways.

Mike Gilbert spent some time chatting with her. We started with – what exactly is a WTMC Life member? It seems like something special, and the bios on the club website point to a group of accomplished individuals. But what is it all about, really?

#### **What does an individual have to do, to become a life member?**

Life membership is in recognition of sustained contribution to the club over many years. We have guidelines for this as it's so important.

#### **And, what would you say your contribution was?**

I held a range of committee positions over many years. But life membership is more than recognising a committee contribution. In the first eight to ten years of being with the club I was out tramping a huge amount and predominantly led easy and medium trips. At one point when I looked back on that time I realised I was away virtually every second weekend. I also went to many trip planning meetings, helped other committee members, helped with bushcraft and leadership training before then going on to organise and lead these weekends for a few years. Along with Ruth Parnell we pulled together a mini bushcraft



series to help with the influx of new members and then I instructed on them. I revitalised the emergency contact system, and I was also involved in helping to organise both the 50th and 60th celebrations.

**Leading a trip every second week for eight years is a huge commitment! You must have got something amazing out of that, to put that much of an effort in.**

It was! I met an amazing array of folk, made new friends and saw some great country. It did come at a cost at times. I remember my parents ringing me saying, “Does our daughter still exist?”

You get into a routine of gear pick up, pack, go, tramp, get home, clean wash and dry, then start over again. And of course in leading trips, there was also talking with punters, organising food and gear.

I got a real buzz introducing newcomers to the outdoors for the first time. Showing and explaining to them that no, you don't take your boots off to cross a river for instance. It's a really special feeling to know that your knowledge and effort has given them a new-found awareness of the outdoors and encouraged them to become members.

#### **Why did you first join committee?**

Mike Pratt asked me. “We're looking for a secretary.” So Secretary I became. It also seemed to be a way that I could help influence things, and I had the time. I didn't realise I would go on to be the Membership Officer, Vice President then President, let alone being the Lodge Convenor and then finally Social Convenor.

#### **What were the issues you needed to deal with?**

An example; at that time mountain biking was becoming very popular and there were discussions as to whether we, as a club, wanted to start promoting mountain bikes rides on the trip schedules. A similar issue came up with sea kayaking. There was discussion over the years about the transient nature of some of our members, recognising that Wellington drew a mixed bunch of people, some of who are here for a few years then move on. There was concern about a possible lack of understanding as to how the club works, the role of trip leader and the fact that punters can't turn up and expect the trip leader to do everything for them. Transport was always in the background too, first regarding the demise of the Duchess, then the purchase of the bus followed by the purchase of our transit vans.

#### **You were also the club's first Lodge Convenor.**

Yes. Previously the role was called lodge maintenance officer but my skill lay in organising and coordinating.

After discussing it with the lodge subcommittee we altered the title to Convenor and divvied the work amongst the subcommittee where the skills lay. That format continues to this day, and was a wise move as the role had become very specialised.

### **What other ways did you help out with the Lodge?**

I'd got into skiing, so I spent a lot of time at the Lodge in winter for skiing and summer for tramping too. I've been with the lodge subcommittee for many years as well.

There were a lot of social events there then. I was introduced to the annual winter solstice in my first year at club, then after a few years took over the organising of this for five or six years which included an excellent 50th anniversary party. We had over 40 people on the mountain. Allan MacLachlan brewed up a pretty lethal mulled wine and before we knew it the "Go Go" girls – Jo, Suzie and Janet – were dancing on the tables. It was an awesome night!

### **We owe a lot to the original club members for the Lodge.**

Yes. Originally our Lodge was to be further up the mountain where the TTC and HVTC lodges are. Fortunately the Lift company at the time wanted that land so we were moved off. It was very fortunate that those involved chose the spot they did.

### **You've seen many changes over the years I'm sure. As Trevor Walsh's daughter, you must have been involved from an early age.**

Actually no, not really. I do have some vague early memories of being at the lodge and also staying in the hut at Walls Whare in the Waiohine Gorge.

I was always fascinated though by the outdoors and devoured many outdoor books. I was an armchair explorer and climber!

When I decided to join a tramping club I wanted to do so under my own name, not Dad's, so, I joined another club. It didn't go well and when one of my friends tragically died on Ruapehu I decided to call it quits.

Several years later life had moved on. I was still reading those outdoor books so decided it was time to walk the read and joined WTMC. Initially it was quite tough as I didn't do a tramp straight away, but once I'd done my first trip I was away laughing.

### **How would you compare the culture of the club between then, and**

### **now?**

Different! Back then you wouldn't turn up to club in your work clothes. We stayed at road ends on the Friday night rather than backpackers or campsites. At times that could be challenging, finding a good place to put the fly up; it made a good incentive to get moving in the morning.

FE trips were still running and there was a different feel to club; technology had yet to alter life as it has now. We went through a phase of having

very large groups go out on Easy trips. My largest group was 20 people – don't know how I did all that! We sometimes had two people nominated for one committee position. We had a truck, the Duchess, for transport. Our trips left at 7pm on Fridays. We had slide presentations too.

### **What's changed? Where have the FE trampers gone?**

Time moves on, the club changes as membership changes. Technology has had a huge impact. When I started to lead trips I would hand write the gear and food info for my punters. Then it changed to typing it but it was still personally given to them. With the advent of email, well, that created a few ructions, particularly with concern that punters wouldn't come to club nights and the trip leaders would meet the punters for the first time on the Friday night. Sound familiar?!

The FE trumper has changed; but we do have folk like Sharron Came, DJ, Mike Phethean and the like doing the hard trips.

The club has to evolve though and that is good as remaining static is not healthy. The challenge though is how we place ourselves moving forward without losing sight of where we came from. We have 68 years of history which I feel shouldn't be forgotten. This is an issue committee has been looking at for a couple of years, and will probably continue to look at for a while.

### **After an incredibly long run, you've stepped down from Committee now. What are you going to do in your 'retirement'?**

It's the club's 70th anniversary in 2017 – a pretty significant milestone! I want to prepare a history of the club to help celebrate the 70 years. I just hope I can do justice to this project.



Ruapehu Solstice 1997



At Holdsworth road end with the Duchess



# RON FAYLE

When I met up with Ron at a local pub, he belied his 80+ years with a twinkle in his eye, a clear voice and a sharp memory. We spent the afternoon over a pint, as club life in the 1960s came to life in Ron's reminiscing.



## How did you first get introduced to the club?

I came to New Zealand from Liverpool, back in '56. My first flat was in Wadestown and I used to go up the hills at the back of Crofton Downs, across paddocks where Ngaio is now and over the ridges to Karori. I really enjoyed getting out like this, it was so different to where I was brought up.

A friend from work got me to come down to Tongue 'n' Meats at the Trades Hall, where the club used to meet in those days. I remember some of the people I first met – the Catchpoles, Dot Christie before she married Dave Catchpole. They signed me up for my first trip, which was a working party to Smiths Creek.

I had no gear; the older hands sent me off to Vern Small's, a shop in Mercer St. They were very good there, always friendly and with great advice. My first pack was a Bergen kidney crusher, I followed that a few years later with a much better external-frame mountaineering pack. Vern Small's is long gone now but all the outdoors shops are still there where it used to be. Vern Small's was opposite where Bivouac is now.

## You were on the committee a good ten years, and joined only a couple of years after you joined the club.

That was because Dotty Catchpole was getting married so she wanted to relinquish the secretary's job. Trevor Walsh, Sue's father, asked me if I would take it on. I said I'd never been a secretary before, he said, "Oh, you'll be alright!" And so it was.

## Who were some of the people you went tramping with?

I mentioned Nick Jennings, he was one that sticks in my mind. Dion Quirke, he married a club girl, Doreen Daley. We weren't known as the 'Wellington Tramping and Matrimonial Club' for

nothing!

Ted Daken died early and suddenly in the early 1960s, just a few days after I'd been on a Mangahau-South Ohau weekend with him. That was really sad – he was a good mate of mine.

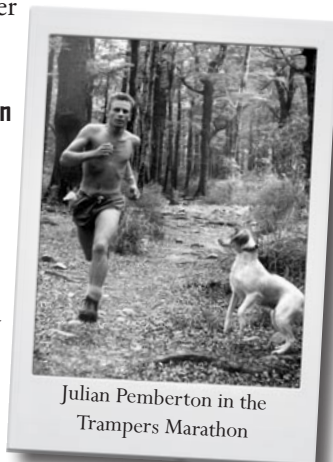
Graeme Hall was a fit and strong character. Easy going at the same time, very likeable guy.

I shared a flat in Newtown from 1960-1969 with Allen Higgins, Neil Gray, Peter Atkinson, Brian Devon and others too. There were a few parties over that time!

## The Trampers' Marathon features a lot in your photo album.

Yes – it was a Wellington Associated Mountain Clubs event between us, the Catholic Tramping Club, the Tararua Tramping Club, the Hutt Valleys and the University club.

There'd be other events too – tug of war, Billy boiling, that sort of thing. And there'd be a campfire on the Saturday night afterwards. There was a guy in Tongue 'n' Meats, Peter, who would be the MC, he'd get people singing along, it was good fun.

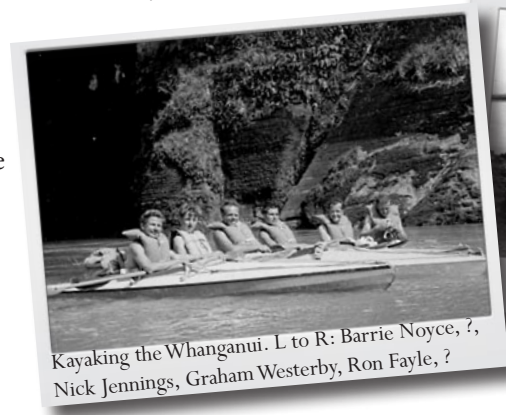


Julian Pemberton in the Trampers Marathon

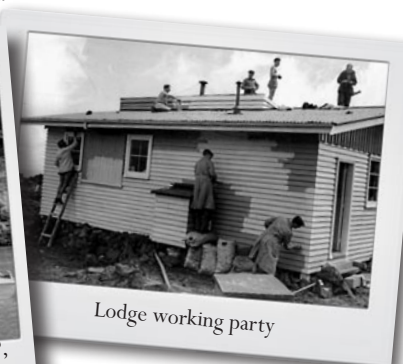
## You've also got a long history with the Lodge. What was it like back then when it was 'new'?

I remember the opening of the Lodge in 1960. Trevor Walsh was president then, and he was involved with 2-3 others to select the hut's location on Salt Ridge where it is. So he was the one that cut the opening ribbon.

A 'simple mountain hut' it was in those days. The bunk area was a U shape, with bunks three tiers high to sleep 24. It had one of those stoves with an auger oven on each side of it, that's where the meals were cooked and it was the main heating for the lodge too. There was also a pot-belly stove for the drying area. Toilets were long-drops out the back.

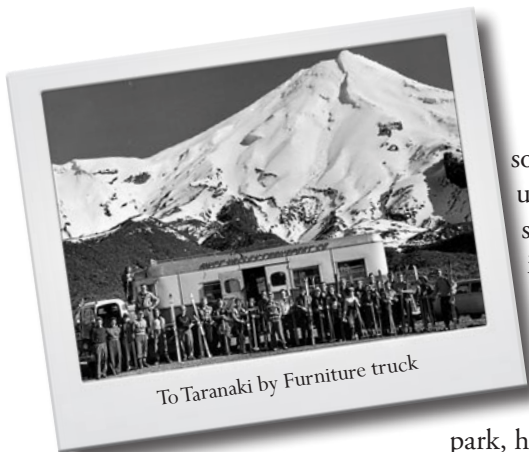


Kayaking the Whanganui. L to R: Barrie Noyce, ?, Nick Jennings, Graham Westerby, Ron Fayle, ?



Lodge working party

We used to travel in furniture trucks. On ski trips we'd put in a platform,



To Taranaki by Furniture truck

so the gear would go underneath and we'd stretch out in sleeping bags. We'd leave from Platform 9 of the railway station; the driver would stop at National

park, he'd have a kip there

and we'd stay in the truck. On Saturday morning he'd take us up to the Top of the Bruce.

Then, much later in the mid 1990s, Noel Thomas approached me to see if I could take over the lodge bookings job from Brian Hunt. I wasn't much active with the club at that time and I really enjoyed returning to involvement with the club again.

### **That long-drop would have been exciting in the middle of the night in a freezing blizzard!**

If you'd had a few drinks too! There were quite a few parties there and I got myself more the worse for wear a couple times!

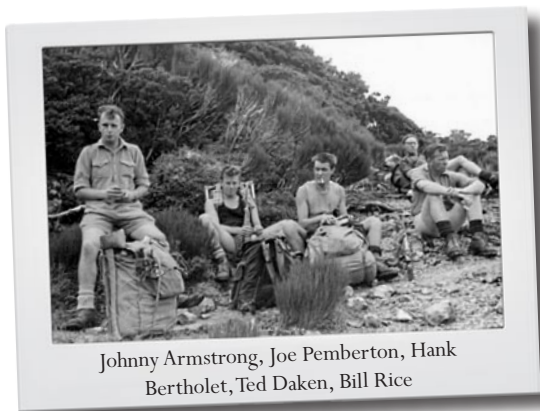
### **You were on committee when we acquired Paua Hut, weren't you?**

Yes, we were approached by the Paua Tramping Club – they were winding up and so asked us if we wanted to take over their Paua Hut. We were delighted to. Trevor Walsh and Neil Green both had their own private huts in the Orongorongo valley but having a hut there for all club members was really worthwhile.

### **What was it like, receiving a Life Membership of the club?**

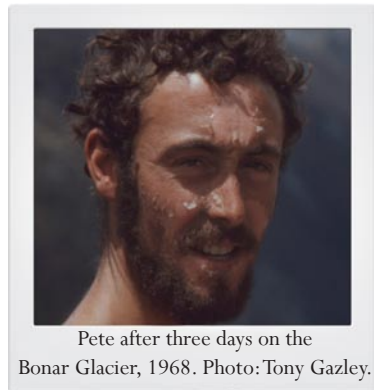
I can't remember now what was said, because it was complete surprise to me that I was going to be nominated. It meant that replying to my nomination was tough.

I remember saying that it's always been the case that the club has been very special to me. It's been my whole social life for so long. I enjoyed being involved. My social life was completely wrapped around the club.



Johnny Armstrong, Joe Pemberton, Hank Bertholet, Ted Daken, Bill Rice

## **PETE GOODWIN**



Pete after three days on the Bonar Glacier, 1968. Photo: Tony Gazley.

I mentioned to Pete one weekend at Ruapehu Lodge that I was doing some Life Member interviews and he promptly said 'Right we'd better bloody get on with it then'. So he regaled me with decades of club adventures over coffee surrounded by kids playing and with stunning views of Taranaki out the window.

### **When did you join the club?**

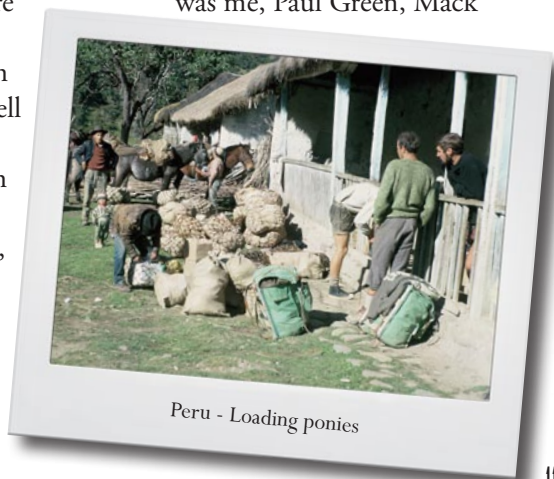
It was in about '63 or something like that. I just started a plumbing apprenticeship with Peter Daniels, he belonged to the club and he was a plumber too. He got me onto my first tramp and I thought, shit, this is bloody good! We went from Holdsworth and the plan was to go along the ridge above the true left of the Atiwhakatu. We got a bit ballsed up and ended up at the bush edge where you go into Mitre Flats! We mucked around up there for the day and walked out and got the bus home. I loved it!

Then he got me on the first Fitness Essential trip too. Peter was one of those guys that'd inspire you to do more than what you were capable of doing, he was bloody good. But then you start doing FE trips and then you never want to go back to do lesser trips. I did all the trips in the Tararuas that I could. I never bloody enjoyed river trips but tops, valleys, yep.

### **You were on the South America club trip weren't you?**

Yeah, I'd started climbing, first at Te Tai bay and then I did AIC's up at the lodge. Then I went south on a really good Christmas trip, with Ken McNatty, Graham West-erby and Kev Moynihan – we climbed Aspiring, Darshack at the head of the Godley Valley, some others too.

In 1968 the club ran a trip to Peru and I got myself in on that. There was me, Paul Green, Mack Riting, Allen Higgins and Ken McNatty – as well as a few others like a bloke from Hutt Valleys, a relation of Ken's, some guy from LA who joined us for a couple of weeks.



Peru - Loading ponies





Peru - Mac, Allen, Dick at Base Camp



Peru - Mac, Allen, Dick

Matukituki River gorge, up the West Matukituki River, over Arawhata Saddle and down the Arawhata River, up the Joe River and over O'Leary Pass and down the Dart River and out. We were all just about knackered at the end of that. But that would have been about the best trip at Christmas I did.

Then I joined up with on his Christmas trips. I

Probably the highest we went up was about 18000 ft [5500m]. None of us really suffered from altitude sickness or anything like that. When we first got to our base camp we really noticed it. Just to move a boulder around it was a huff and a puff. After a week though you'd adjusted to the height and then you were away.

We climbed most of the peaks in the valley we were in. We met all the locals while we were there, they used to come and trade with us. We had milk powder tins and kerosene tins that they'd trade us potatoes, cheese, things like that. They were a bit dodgy on that so we never actually ate it! But we still accepted it off them for a few tins. They were right into the old tins! When we left, they gave us all ponchos, hand-made and woven on their looms and everything. We never gave them money, it was always trades for this that and the other.

We stayed in Machu Picchu, just a bit above the valley we were staying in. We spent a night there too, you certainly couldn't do that now!

That was a great year, what with the Peru trip and the club's 21st when we came back, too.

**There were lots of impressive Christmas trips back then – did you go on a few?**

1968 we also did a great Christmas trip, probably the best I ever did. It was with Allen Higgins, and Graham Westerby, Kevin Moynihan, Noel Thomas, Murray Brown, Tony Gazley and Dennis Gazley, both of them. There were eight of us.

We went up the Wia-toto River, over the Bonar Glacier, down the East

old Brian Hunt must've done about 8 Christmas trips in Aspiring national park with Brian. By the time we'd done a few we didn't even need a map because we knew where we were going.

The first trip we did with Brian we had about sixty pound packs - we thought, bugger that for a joke! After that we'd arrange at least two air drops so we'd only have 30 pound packs. But the only trouble was if the weather crapped out. One Christmas trip we flew into the Te Anau gorge, went up to about the 2nd creek on the true left – and then it shat on us the next day. We were down to half rations, not good on the second day of a Christmas trip! It cleared up again and we were away again but that was the catch, if the weather crapped out you could be in trouble.

It was all fixed wing air drops, so we'd pack all our food in old wheat sacks and 4 gallon tins. We'd have special bloody Tararua biscuits, that had to be a certain dimension and wrapped a certain way. We'd pack them into the tins, I'd solder the tops and put them into the sacks, straw in around the cans and off they'd go. We never lost any, but we had a few damaged and burst. The guy flew a bit high and just heaved them out the bloody door... but we did alright I reckon. There're a few ten gallon tins scattered around Aspiring national park now, slowly rusting away.



**When did you start going up to the Lodge?**

At first we went climbing, then attitudes changed and I thought I'd try bloody skiing. That was when the old Downhill rope tow still operated – it was a separate crowd to the RAL lifts. They had a flying fox, just behind the old longdrop toilet, so you'd throw your skis on the bloody flying fox and then walk up. So it was a bloody good piece of exercise.

Friday night the old Runciman bus would roar up from Wellington. You'd head to the lodge with your sleeping bag, grab a bunk, then you'd go back and grab your pack and bring up the food.

Then in the '70s, Brian Aitkens started organising trips down to Broken River near Arthurs Pass. Don't know how many years we went, it was always the first weekend in August because I always had my birthday down there.

We had a Broken River reunion about eight years ago. Was blimmin good to see the old crowd again, and the White Star hut we used to stay in was still there. We'd sleep there, and have our meals in the main hut up above. You had to walk in the last bit to Broken River, so you'd be up there on the mountain for the whole week.

I got involved with a lot of the maintenance on the Lodge too, I still am involved in looking after it. When we did the big revamp for the whole place in '77 I did the plumbing and stuck the roof on.

### **You were Gear Custodian for ages, weren't you?**

Christ I did that for bloody donkeys years. When we first started it used to be in Trades hall. That was bloody great, because we were all apprentices then, Noel and me, he lived down the road from where I lived. He stayed with us for a while he was doing his apprenticeship. Thursday nights we'd roar down, go to the steak house in Willis St, have tea, down to the club. Often when the club talk was on we'd bugger off to the pool hall around the corner to the steakhouse, have a few games of pool and then back to the club house for the end of the meeting.

The old Trades Hall was blimmin good. And we had great Christmas parties too, there was always a theme so you used to have to get dressed up and all that carryon. One year, Paul Green and Kevin and Graham and me, we put 20 cents a week in for a whole bloody year and at the end of the year we spent it on drink for the club's Christmas party. So down the pub we went and Christ, we had bottles of whisky and gin and vodka, and a crate of bloody flagons. We were all frowned upon for that by the older members when we turned up!

Those Christmas parties were bloody great. Blimmin dag.

### **How do you think the club's doing now, compared to over the years?**

I've been pleased to see how the club's changed to incorporate Mountain biking and kayaking - it's kept the club alive. I think we'd be struggling if we'd stuck straight to tramping. Opening the club up to all sort of other activities is what's kept the club ticking over nicely.

There's some younger ones ticking through, in their mid-twenties, thirties - but they only seem to last a few years then they're off to look at something else. It's keeping them there that's the thing! In our day we sort of started tramping and then stuck with tramping, and I'm still good friends with a lot of those bods now.

Our lodge seems a bit forgotten now, it needs some money spent on it I reckon - the carpets, bathrooms, that sort of stuff. It's the only thing the club's got to make money and we always grab money off it for when we want to buy a van or something. It needs some bloody work done on it, but when that'll happen I dunno.

The climbing fraternity seems pretty strong at the moment. When I came along there were a lot of good climbers from England that spurred things along, but after they sort of did their dash it died right

off, it was struggling for a while there so it's great to see lots of alp trips running again.

The club's had its ups and downs over the years but I reckon it's ticking along quite blimmin well right now. There's lots of trips on the schedule and that's so good to see.



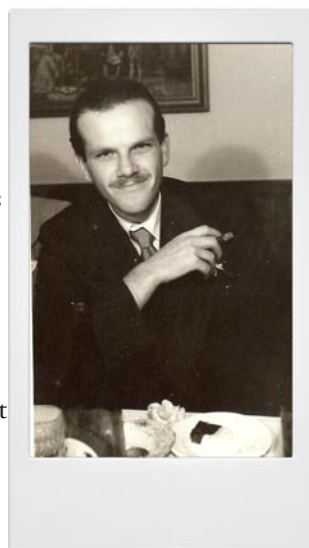
Looking at Liverpool Biv





# NICK JENNINGS

Nick Jennings' tramping CV is impressive. The list of roles he's performed for WTMC, Federated Mountain Clubs, Mountain Safety Council, DOC and its predecessors, and LandSAR, is extensive. Mike Gilbert spent an afternoon talking with Nick about the times and places behind the statistics.



## How long ago did you start tramping?

I started in the beginning of 1948. Coming from England, the opportunity to actually get into real bush and mountains was fantastic.

The local Rover Scout crew in Island Bay had a number of members of what became the Tongue and Meats - and I just followed along essentially and that's why I joined that club. Onslow College was another place where a lot of our original members came from, since in those early days the outdoor education thing hadn't quite started.

## If you've been involved with the club from 1948 to the early 1970s, including 5 years as president. That's a long run! It must've changed a lot in that period of time?

Every club had their own huts that they looked after, not as it is today where DOC seems to do everything. We ran regular working parties for hut and track maintenance - often as a combined clubs working party. The Wellington Associated Mountain Clubs used to coordinate that - working parties would be advertised amongst all the clubs and you'd get 60 or 80 people along to work. The sheer challenge of getting slashers and axes and so on to that many people was daunting - but it worked!

## You had a lot of involvement with Search and Rescue (SAR) in those times. Who else from WTMC was involved?

Everybody! The Chief guide would work out who could do what - their competence, experience - and everybody was a volunteer.

Because of my experience I was a team leader for many of the rescues we performed.

## Any rescues that stand out in your mind?

There was a light aircraft crash at the back of Paraparaumu I was involved in that was the craziest situation I'd ever been in. The police dropped us at the end of a log-

ging track and I was coordinating the party heading in and setting up a base.

I was driving back with the Police to check on a garbled radio message when we came across two people walking down the logging track - the pilot and his passenger! It was as simple as that. I got back to the road end and up to the top of the ridge and looked for the crash site - I saw a 'discontinuity' in the bush and that was where the crash site was. Just then, two planes appeared from the aero club and dived into the bush gully. I wondered what they were up to. It turned out they were dropping rolls of toilet paper as markers! When we got to the site, there were perfectly aimed streams of toilet paper hanging on the fuselage.

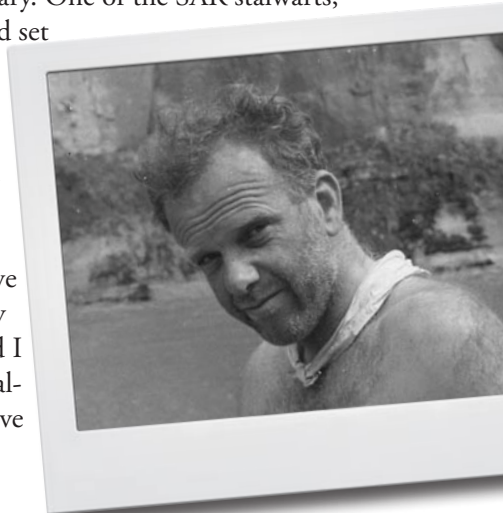
One of the most intensive rescues I was involved in was for a youngster called Bryan Carey. He'd slipped on the hard snow on Alpha whilst on a school trip. They couldn't get down to him because it was too hard, and it'd taken a day for the school party to get out and raise the alarm.

We put an alpine group in by helicopter - the first time a helicopter had been used for this purpose in New Zealand. Meanwhile a policeman and I walked in, up that cursed Marchant Ridge. When we got there that night we discovered the alpine group had found footprints, along with one of the boys' boots, and his pack! Turned out he'd knocked himself out when he slipped, and when he came to, he'd climbed back up and tried to walk out in what he thought was the way they'd come in. But his trail soon disappeared and we weren't really sure of even his direction.

So we were left with having to organise a search for someone who was somewhere in the headwaters of the Tauherenikau River or the Hutt river! That's a very large area.

I had two teams in the Hutt River and two teams in the Tauherenikau, both working their way upstream. I had another policeman at Renata hut as back up in case another team was necessary. One of the SAR stalwarts, John Patchett arrived and set up a sub-base in a forest service hut somewhere off Aston, down in the bush with a radio to add to the comms network.

24 hours later a message came through - we've found him! John rapidly let us know at Alpha and I sent back a message equally rapidly saying is he alive



# NICK JENNINGS LOOKS PART Has The Aura Of The Outdoors

NICK JENNINGS carried just the vaguest suggestion of being out of place in ordinary civilised life. Which fits his preference for carrying something else—a pack on his back as he strides New Zealand's outdoors.

He has been president and chief guide of the Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club, now in its 21st year, and a member of many related organisations.

A tramping and climber of long standing, not an average expression, his experience has been increasingly called on in the sport. He has been to find some of his own opportunities in getting outdoors as much as he would like and this he regards.

For Mr Jennings is acutely aware of the contrast between town and country. He has had no difficulty making his way in the latter through a service officer with the Labour Department. His natural environment seems to be a natural environment.

### Not Place

He can drink a cup of tea with you in a restaurant but you somehow feel that while sitting and eating should be an open-sided tartan shirt and the tea to me at least, he looks like an outdoors man should look.

It is nothing he said but there is just a characteristic that one associates with the dedicated outdoors man. He is deliberative and thoughtful, he is markedly independent, and he is not easily led.

It has been said that such men are philosophers and Mr Jennings fits the outdoors part.

### Saturday Profile

He is very satisfying to feel you can go confidently into a natural environment and stand on your own two feet. He is a happy man. "I can exist here even if I am subjected to a load and a lot of ash."

He started some search by a club and records trends this on the best way of getting the technique and, especially as important, the sense of being sure in tramp by using the necessary and appropriate.

### By Dan Chapman

"It is important that people should get proper and adequate training. The best place to do this is in a club and here we have a problem. I don't think it is desirable for several worthwhile organisations to have a complete absence of a conflict of interest like the YMCA, Scouts, Boys' Brigade and the tramping club. With some of these groups there is not the same emphasis on the outdoors but overall there is a great emphasis on the outdoor experience in the overseas tramping club party."

### Familiar

Experience has brought him this confidence. He recalls his first time in the Tararua some 20 years ago. "I would stand on top of a ridge and all about very mysterious, a great tangle of bush, it is challenging, and a little bit of training in some ways."

"Now it is all familiar. Thinking my way round the Tararua would be like finding my way round a city."

"I might take the odd wrong turning but it would be just the walking to the next corner in a town. I could find my way round both anywhere in New Zealand just as I could find my way in any city."

"Limited experience may be fine if everything goes just as planned. But if the weather turns lousy or a leg is broken, things can go seriously wrong. This is where a solid base of experience is so vital and can take the strain that, say, a novice leader might not be up to in difficult conditions."

"We want to encourage youngsters to go out on their own and to meet some other people. In the same time we want them to do it safely. You can never afford to be off-balance about the open country. You must always treat it with respect and you must be prepared for the worst that can happen."

### Analysis

"Even on the simplest of things I take a sleeping bag, just in case one day they turn into two, and I always take a first-aid kit. And he reflected the peak of my image of the outdoors man as he explained what he meant. "You need the ability to analyse things and to make a careful and accurate assessment of the situation and be willing to learn as you go. In the end, you can't light a fire in the rain or plan escape routes if the weather changes down."

And I felt I was almost in the bush when he conversed. He explained what to do when lost. "Just sit down and light a cigarette. Sit down and think. Work out where you are. This may be and where you think you went wrong, you check you are slightly off hearing of way out."

### Variety

His early ambition was the navy but that went as his travels broadened and he came to New Zealand, with his parents. Much of his working life has been with a public service, safety and camp supervisor, safety and training officer, personnel officer—and he has enjoyed the variety."

"What he tries to get across in his present work is a positive attitude to any task in his job and willingness to get it done and done well. "I also try to see developed people rather than taking them back to the bush. He is finding one that the emphasis is on the interest in the bush, it being to change."

### Positive Attitudes



Nick Jennings. "It is very satisfying to feel you can go confidently into a natural environment and stand on your own two feet."

Or how to walk. "There are different techniques for walking in the bush as opposed to walking down the street. There is a difference between being on a track and off it, between going uphill and downhill. A tramping is a different matter. They seem to make all the difference when it comes to moving efficiently through the country, both in the bush and on the street."

Mr Jennings, who could be taken as a typical New Zealand tramping and mountaineering man, was born in Wellington in 1928 and did three years of his schooling in Jamaica as a wartime soldier.

### I understand you were involved in setting up the club's training regime?

Brian Hunt, who was Chief Guide then, tapped me on my shoulder and asked me to look after the training. This was very much in line with my training role at work, and it overflowed into my work with the Mountain Safety Council. I'd been with the Mountain Safety Council from its inception and was working on training and standards at a national level. So I did quite a lot of work on developing the WT&MC standards for bushcraft, river crossing, and other parts of bushcraft.

### Who were some of the people you remember from those times?

Frank Dement was a very competent climber and tramping — he taught me a lot. We'd head out to Titahi Bay for climbing and afterwards, he'd get tea together — for him that was working around the coast, and getting all the sea life that we could eat that evening.

He also used to go over and trap in the Orongorongos out of a private hut. We'd go over there with fresh fruit and veg, and have a meal with him which was the remains of the possum stew that he'd started the previous week. A real bushman was Frank.

Bill Bridge was a former Army Captain whose specialty was mapping. He founded Land Search and Rescue activities in New Zealand through the TTC and FMC and in association with the Police (who he joined as an Inspector when he retired from the Army). He did a very sterling job for years. Land Search and Rescue in New Zealand is essentially based on Bill's work.

### Today people have many more accessible opportunities in leisure and sport. How does tramping fit in to this today?

Tramping's an antidote to the increasing competitiveness of both life and other sports. This is one of the few sports where you can go when you choose, where there is no regular practice and commitment and where the only competition is between you and nature. It's up to you to make the decision whether or not to accept the challenge.

or dead?! The reply was, He's alive! Hooray! Joe Pemberton, a WTMC member who was in a search team led by Gary Lund, had found him in the Hutt river catchment.

The next problem was how to get the boy out down the Hutt River lower gorge. A great big field stretcher was built and a tractor inner tube produced for flotation. Three carrying teams of 10 men were involved. It took a day from where he was found to get him out.

He was very, very lucky. Sometimes youngsters can survive this when an adult just wouldn't. He'd spent three days on his own, starting in the snow. He'd lost his other boot on the way too.

Another major (and successful!) search involved club member Peter Reid in the Wairarapa. Peter was in at Mid Waiohine Hut with a few other club members; they went off doing their own things on Saturday but Peter didn't come back on Saturday night. They had a search for him on Sunday and then went out to raise the alarm.

First I knew of it was when Brian Hunt rang me to say I needed to start a search! The Masterton people didn't seem all that bothered and he thought we needed to do something.

After a night with no sleep trying to get the logistics together and working with police, I arrived at the Wairarapa to find the search advisor ready to go. In the meantime a busload of volunteers had arrived from Wellington at Holdsworth Lodge.

We got going, and luckily after a relatively short time Peter was located walking out from the Waiohine Gorge towards Totara Flats. It turned out that he'd trodden on something that gave way underfoot, and fallen and briefly lost consciousness. He'd made his way to the Waiohine River but he couldn't tell whether he was upstream or downstream of the hut. After walking upstream for some time he decided the hut must be in the other direction, so he turned around and headed back, until we found him.



## CLUB PHOTO COMPETITION

Each year the club holds a photo competition open to all members. The categories are the same as the national FMC photo competition so first and second place in each category can be entered in the FMC competition.

In the past the competition has been dominated by the club's three keenest photographers - Spencer Clubb, Tony Gazley and Ian Harrison. With their agreement it was decided they would still enter the competition but be ineligible for prizes to encourage the budding photographers in the club. However, if any of their photos were judged to be in the top two of a category it would be included in the club's entry to the FMC competition. As it transpired Spencer won the FMC Flora & Fauna and Below Bushline categories, with Katja Riedel taking out the Outdoor Landscape category and the prestigious overall winner as well.

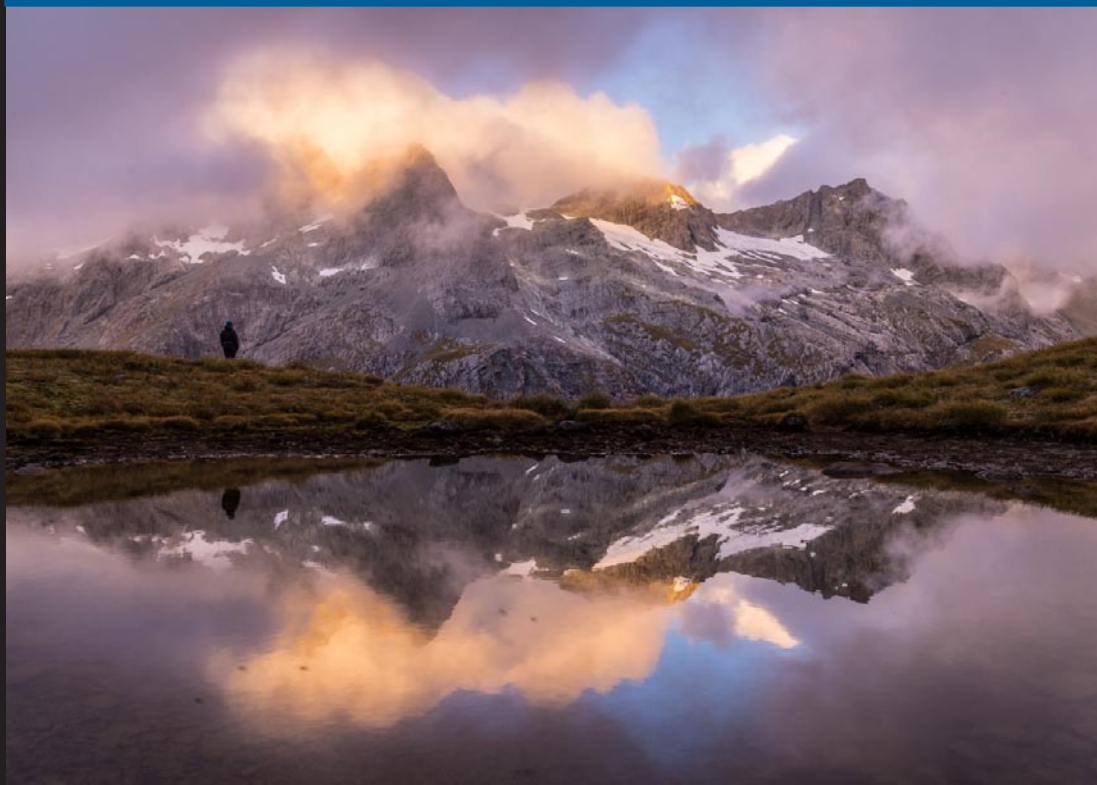
Thanks to Grant Newton for judging, Tony Gazley for organising the competition, and Bivouac Outdoor for sponsoring the prizes.

**bivouac/outdoor**  
COMMITTED TO ADVENTURE



ABOVE BUSHLINE RUNNER-UP Katy Glenie

ABOVE BUSHLINE WINNER Katja Riedel





BELOW BUSHLINE WINNER Andrei Zubkov

BELOW BUSHLINE RUNNER-UP Harry Smith







NATIVE FLORA & FAUNA WINNER Jenny Beaumont

NATIVE FLORA & FAUNA RUNNER-UP Harry Smith



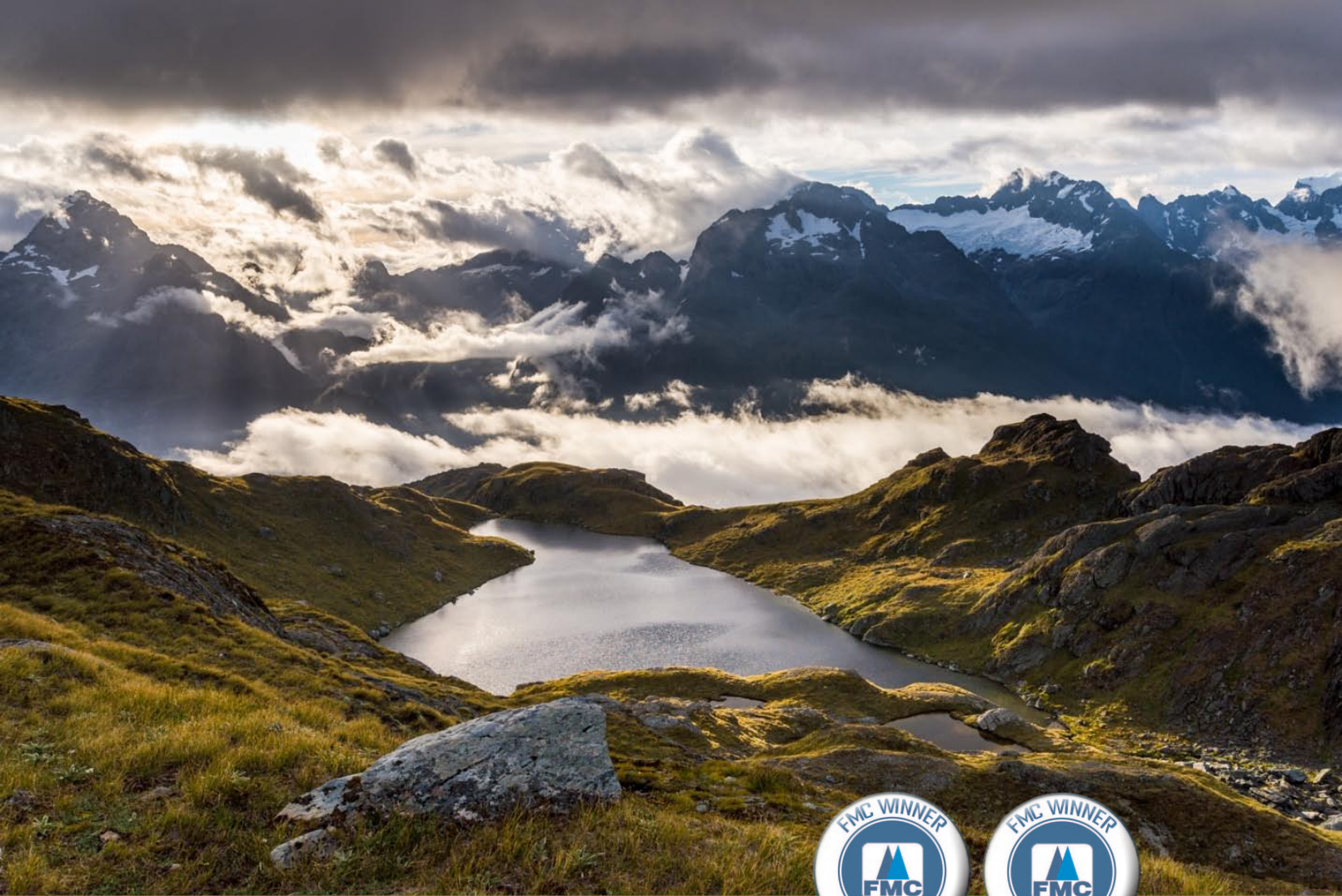


HUT & CAMP LIFE RUNNER-UP Andrei Zubkov

HUT & CAMP LIFE WINNER Harry Smith







OUTDOOR LANDSCAPE WINNER & JUDGE'S CHOICE Katja Riedel

Spencer Clubb





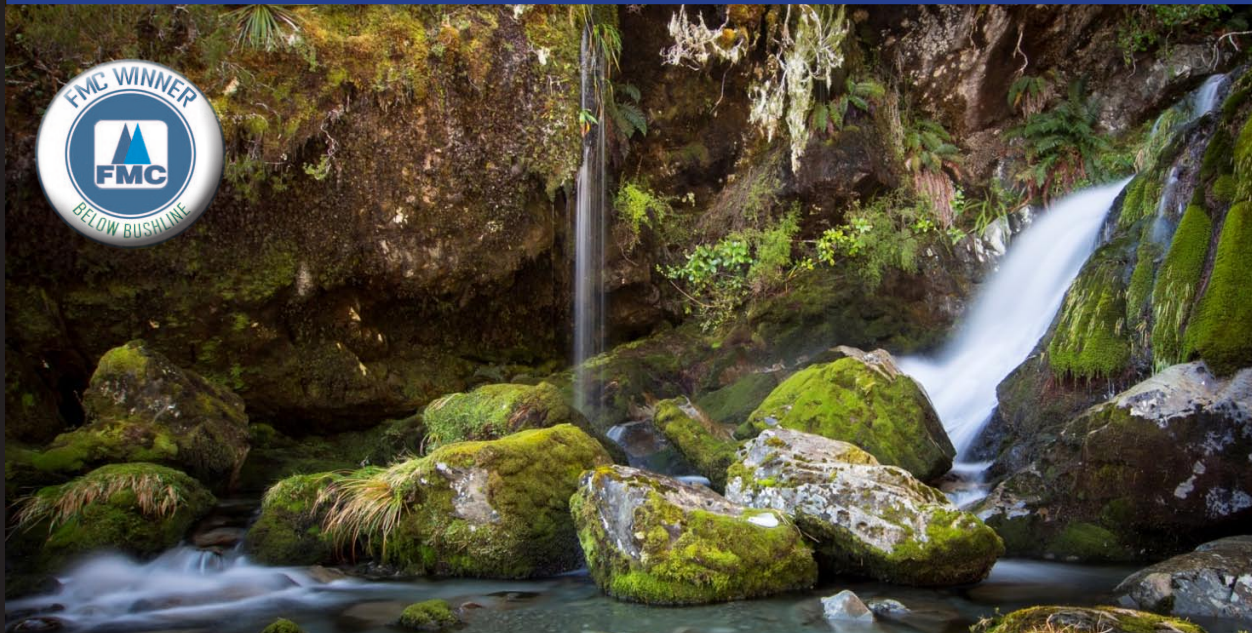


OUTDOOR LANDSCAPE RUNNER-UP Katy Glenie

PEOPLE'S CHOICE Spencer Clubb



Spencer Clubb





# THE DAY I BECAME A MOUNTAINEER

by **FRANCES BOYSON**  
photos **PAUL McCREDIE**

Climbing Te Heuheu

**I**t began with a book. I wish I could say it began with a centuries-old work of literary genius; a philosophical masterwork that has inspired great social movements. However I cannot pretend that *Yes Man* by Danny Wallace neatly fits that bill. But my desire was philosophical in nature, even if the book doesn't squarely fit in that genre. Is it possible to retrain one's brain to be rid of the fear of failure that prevents one from attempting new things, and gain instead an excitement and thrill for experiencing activity yet untried?

The resultant self-imposed 'yes woman' dictat led me to to the climbing gym within 48 hours of arriving in Wellington, and two hours after that I had signed up to a rock climbing course that would change a lot of things about my life. *Yes Woman* took me to a yoga class at the tramping club, whereupon I was invited into a whole new world of adventure. I could spend every weekend in amazing places with wonderful people, with a shared sense of mission and of team that had felt lacking in my life. But then the winter came and with it the realisation that the tramping fun might have to end: snow was cutting me off from the peaks I wanted to summit and from my quest for ever greater heights and more inspiring views.

A solution came in the form of the New Zealand Alpine Club's introduction to alpine skills; an entry point into the world of mountaineering. *Yes Woman* signed me up. In spite of my tentative footsteps in even a dusting of snow, a childhood spent avoiding sledging, and the fact I used to divert my walk to work on cold days in Edinburgh when the hill got too icy for comfort. I was uneasy about *Yes Woman's* decision. I wanted to push myself but both my fear and my concern about the implications of mountaineering – putting oneself at extreme yet avoidable risk – made me uncomfortable. But I decided to go ahead and find my limits and at that point call it a day, *Yes Woman* or no *Yes Woman*.

I found those limits on Ruapehu one weekend in late October. At 6.30am on Saturday we began our ascent of the east ridge of Te Heuheu. Ngauruhoe was glowing in the morning light and the lower bluffs of Ruapehu were a warm inviting

senna, but Te Heuheu Peak itself was imposing more than inviting.

Being well into spring, the snowline was far above our base on the Tukino Ski Field so I was glad to have the chance to warm up my muscles on the soft volcanic soil and clambering over the scattered rocks. But the snow came upon us sooner than I wished, and I took tentative steps in my boots on the icy stiff patches. The joy that I feel in that moment of swapping from tramping boots to the wondrous archaic invention that is a pair of crampons never ceases. Oh what friction! Oh what grip! Oh what a shift of confidence!

After dropping into a bowl and up over a saddle, the slope began to steepen and the exposure increased. I tried to keep pace with the others in the group as we zigzagged up the slope, but I didn't succeed. I avoided looking out behind me so not to lose my nerve and focussed on my feet, my grip and the steady rhythm of my steps and axe working together.

I reached a slight plateau where a rock provided a little shelter from the increasing wind and a little sense of security amidst the unrelenting slope. My confidence wavered, but faced with the prospect of descending the snow alone, going up felt like the better option. This was the first time I had been out on snow without my close friends around me reassuring me when I got nervous and showing me where to place my steps. As we headed up the long ridge, the gradient increasing all the time, I had to find those reserves of confidence alone, and this realisation itself helped me to focus, keep calm, and trust in my technique.

At the first of two steps – steep sections of snowy ice – the first in our party to arrive had set up a rope for security, pivoted around a snow stake in a simple belay. I found great safety in the rope's presence. I tried not to use it and to rely on my climbing skills instead but it was too tempting not to pull myself up using the knots. After the step, I declared myself a mountaineer, since the harness around my waist had now been put to use.

From this point, the gradient of the ridge was at its most extreme. I dare not look out at all. I longed for the cloud to rise to obscure all visibility. I left with two others, walking ahead of them and setting a steady pace. As I reached a short plateau I had my first striking views of Ruapehu from above: a swirling mass of peaks and lines, snow and shadow. But this spot was exposed to the wind and I feared I may be blown off my feet so I kept moving to the right.

I reached the second step but the others had already passed it and were out of sight. A trail of footsteps to the right told me I would be traversing below the step rather



### High on Te Heuheu

than ascending it. Ten metres into the traverse, I realised I was alone. I surveyed my situation: I could see no-one ahead, and no-one behind. I wasn't clear whether those behind me had realised where I had gone. Had I picked the wrong path? Were they taking an alternative route up? I looked out over the long steep slope below, I looked down at the stack of soft snow that was bearing my weight at the top of this sun-soaked slope, and I looked up at the enormous glistening icicles above my head. I secured my footing by kicking in my feet and stabbing in my axe, and I panicked. I didn't want to go on alone, where if I fell, no-one would see me. But nor did I want to retrace my steps back into the wind, or wait beneath the precariously positioned icicles. I felt stuck.

After a few minutes I regained control and decided to move. I walked back out the way I had come. From that point I could see the remainder of our group, and I signalled so they would know my position. Then a few moments later, a friendly face appeared from the right hand side. My relief was probably not evident to him as I called across to him, demanding he ply me with reassuring words. He duly obliged and helped me regain the momentum and confidence to finish the traverse.

From there it was an easy walk to the summit, but I was in such a state of shock from the experience of the ascent and the final traverse that I barely took in where I was. I didn't speak for twenty minutes. It felt like an hour since we had left the lodge, but it had been five. We had ascended 1000m. I was dizzy with adrenaline and full of dread for the experience just passed and in that moment I decided I would never put myself in that position again.

We headed out along the ridge and over Tukino Peak, and only then, once I realised that the gradient and exposure I had just experienced would not be repeated, I finally relaxed. I began to smile, acknowledged what I had



achieved, and was able to enjoy the environment.

When some of the party decided to abseil over an edge rather than take the 'long way' round, I announced I would join them. Yes Woman didn't tell me to do this. I saw an opportunity to do something I had not done before and I wanted to do it – not least because since I had just decided my alpine days were over, I may not get another chance. I helped dig the channel for the snow bollard and heard myself volunteering to go first. I steeled my nerves, lowered myself over the edge and descended slowly to the bottom of the rope. The rope ended a lot sooner than I had hoped, and it dawned on me that I was only a quarter of the way down the face. I experienced the same self-determination from the ascent: I was alone, and I had no choice but to deal with the situation. So I unattached myself from the rope and began the long downclimb, kicking in my crampons hard to get good purchase and trusting my ice axe to hold me. Every time I looked down the ground seemed no closer. I steadied myself against the ice with my free hand, and rued my decision to wear my thin gloves; my hands getting colder and colder as my gloves became increasingly frosted up with hundreds of small balls of ice. Finally I reached flat ground and I beamed with joy as I walked across the summit plateau to join those who had taken the more straightforward route.

From the plateau we took a detour to visit Whangaehu

Hut, the snow ever softer underfoot as the day wore on. The afternoon sun bathed us in heat as we skirted round to the ridge alongside the Whangaehu glacier. We arrived back at the lodge shortly after 5pm, and sat on the deck watching the sun go down over the mountain and celebrating our successful ascent.

I have spent months pushing myself to do things that I would never before have done, and it has been a richly rewarding experience. On Te Heuheu I achieved things I never imagined I would achieve. So this trip in some ways feels like the culmination of my quest ever to expand my comfort zone and change my long-embedded thought patterns and ways of approaching new things. I no longer need to use a mantra to push myself out my comfort zone: instead I want to do it because I trust that the consequences of giving it a go will be uplifting.

But on Te Heuheu I found my limits. The reward of being in the mountains on snow is great but the risk is great too. The objective level of risk from the activity I undertook is a moot point: my experience of that risk manifested itself in so much tension that it outweighed the delight of making it to the top. It overshadowed the experience of spending time in a sensational landscape few get to enjoy. It brought a level of discomfort I was not able to bear. And so the day that I became a mountaineer became the day that I retired from mountaineering.





# MY FAVOURITE NORTH ISLAND TRAMPING DESTINATION



by **HARRY SMITH**  
with **SHAY BENDALL**

Studholme Saddle Hut

God and the Devil were discussing tramping.

*"I have created a tramping hell" announced the Devil with an evil smirk.*

*"Sounds quite Devilish", said God.*

*"A place of everlasting mud and misery" gloated the Prince of Darkness.*

*"How hellish" said God.*

*"Bucketting rain and endless howling gales", continued the Devil with sardonic glee. "People will be forced to crawl on their hands and knees over the wind-swept tops, hanging on desperately to the tussock for dear life. And if they drop down into the valleys they will be faced by raging, uncrossable rivers."*

*"That's completely Satanic" said God.*

*"A purgatory of tangled, wet, miserable, impenetrable bush, thick with bush lawyer and supplejack."*

*"Sadistic."*

*"Kilometre after kilometre of impenetrable leatherwood."*

*"Sick."*

*"Never-ending ups and downs."*

*"Awful."*

*"Miserable, dark, gloomy, impassable gorges."*

*"A nightmare."*

*"Mud, mud, mud, mud, and even more mud."*

*"Diabolical."*

*"Yes!" said the Devil, rubbing his hands together with glee.*

*"Just imagine all those poor, miserable trampers spending their whole pathetic lives trudging around through the endless mud and rain, never experiencing anything else, not knowing any better, thinking that's what tramping is all about. The poor, miserable sods!"*

*"You're a complete bastard, Dev" said God.*

*"Why, thank you!" said the Devil, purring with pleasure at the compliment. "Such high praise gladdens my heart" he gloated with a Machiavellian grin.*

*"And I have even given this hell a name" added the Devil.*

*"But you'll never guess what."*

*"The Tararuas?" asked God.*

*"Good Lord, how did you ever know?" cried the Devil with a*



wail.

*"It wasn't difficult..." said God.*

*"Meanwhile", said God, "I have also been busy."*

*A worried look passed over the Devil's face.*

*"I have created a tramping heaven. A place of glorious tramping bliss."*

*The Devil was beginning to feel seriously concerned.*

*"A place sheltered from the weather from all directions" said God. "A place where it never rains. A place where it is never cold. A place where the sun always shines."*

*"Impossible!" said the Devil.*

*"A place with wide, dry, rocky tracks."*

*"No!" gasped the Devil.*

*"A place with no mud!" added God.*

*"It can't possibly be!" cried the Devil in despair.*

*"No mud" repeated God, watching as the Devil writhed in agony.*

*"A place with beautiful river valleys and nice grassy river flats."*

*"I don't believe you!" wailed the Devil.*

*"Nice beech forest."*

*"Arrgh!"*

*"No leatherwood."*

*"Unfair!"*

*"Flat, rolling tops."*

*The Devil buried his head in his arms in desperation and despair.*

*"A place with a nice network of tracks, and nicely spaced huts that are never crowded" said God.*

*"La, la, la, la, la, I can't hear you!" cried the Devil, desperately plugging his chubby fingers into his pointy ears.*

*"And the huts will not be painted in those awful, dull, politically-correct pastel green colours you find everywhere else, but will be bright orange" said God.*

*"God's own colour" pointed out God. "And I ought to know", He added with a chuckle.*

*"And there will be distinctive stamped metal signposts pointing trampers on their way, so they will never get lost and will never need to refer to those damned GPS thingimmyjigs" said God.*

*"Those infernal electronic gizmos are the work of the Devil!" thundered God.*

*"That's true..." conceded the Devil.*

*"And I will add some glorious distant snow-covered volcanic mountains as a scenic backdrop" said God, getting carried away with visions of His own majestic handiwork.*

*By this stage the Devil was feeling lost in despair.*

*"And", added God, "as a final touch I will even throw in a hot-spring or two for weary trampers to soak in at the end of*

*a long day."*

*"Won't that be nice?" said God, as the Devil buried his face in his hands and wept.*

*"Though of course, in this tramping paradise the days will never actually be long and trampers will never actually be weary" added God.*

*The Devil could take it no longer. He let out a long sob of despair and with a final flick of his forked tail he vanished forever in a puff of metaphysical pique.*

*"And", added God, watching the smoke-rings slowly fade away, "I too have given my creation a name."*

*"I have decided to call it", said God, standing tall in his long white flowing robes as massed angelic choirs began singing the Hallelujah Chorus behind him, "THE KAWEKAS!!"*

Saturday morning, Anniversary Weekend, 2015: Shay Bendall and I woke up at Makahu Saddle roadend and rose to look up at the main Kaweka Range in the morning light. The weather was of course fine and sunny. We had a lazy breakfast and collected water from a convenient fresh-water stream at Makahu Saddle Hut, a short distance away. After packing up we set off up Makahu Spur, and a couple of hours later we arrived on the crest of the range and wandered along the flat, open tops to the large cairn marking Kaweka J, the highest point in the range. Behind us to the east the ranges dropped off into farmland which stretched off towards Napier and the Pacific Ocean in the far distance. Before us to the west a vast expanse of wild country stretched away to the horizon, with the hazy, snow-covered mass of Mt Ruapehu rising up into the skies beyond the various ranges and plateaus of the Kaimanawas. It was a superb day to be in the hills.



Shay on Makahu Spur

Leaving Kaweka J behind us, we dropped down off the back of the range, following a tracked spur down past the turn-off to Back Ridge Hut, which we could see nestled below us in a narrow, enclosed valley beside a beautiful babbling stream. Like most of the huts in the Kawekas, it was painted bright orange. Ahead of us the ridge climbed and swung southwards. We followed a wide mossy track through beautiful beech forest, and at 1 o'clock we arrived at Back Ridge Bivvy, an orange-coloured dog-box bivvy a few hundred metres off the main track, where we stopped for lunch. It was hot and dry, and there was no water in the stream by the bivvy, but by dropping down into the narrow gully below the bivvy I was able to find some in a hidden pool.



Back Ridge Bivvy

From Back Ridge Bivvy our original plan was to drop down to Rocks Ahead Hut on the Ngaruroro River, climb out up onto the tops on the far side, and travel around to Manson's Hut for the night. But looking at the map I now estimated we probably wouldn't make it to Manson's until around 8 o'clock that night, and I decided to change plans and short-cut the trip by heading straight down Back Ridge to Kiwi Mouth instead. This would give us a more reasonable day, and it also meant I would get to traverse the rest of Back Ridge, which I had never been down before.

Much of this part of the Kawekas was burnt off by the early settlers back in the 19th century when they attempted to graze sheep here. As a result, the western side of Back Ridge is open and scrubby while the eastern side is still covered in beech forest. The track followed along in the open beside the bush edge, meandering up and down over several rises and falls, before a final steep descent



Travelling along Back Ridge



Kiwi Mouth Hut

brought us down to Kiwi Mouth Hut located on a nice grassy flat where Kiwi Creek joined the Ngaruroro River. The hut was of course painted bright orange. It was only 5.20 and still nice and sunny, so we were able to spend a pleasant couple of hours relaxing before dinner, and I went for a cooling dip in a nice pool in the river.

Next morning we were away at the relaxed time of 9 am. We headed up Kiwi Creek and climbed out up to Kiwi Saddle Hut, where we stopped for lunch. I was saddened to discover that this hut was painted dull green instead of bright orange, and there was a standard DOC signpost outside instead of the distinctive sheet metal ones found elsewhere in the range – a possible worrying sign of a downward slide in the Kawekas, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed that the rot won't spread any further!

After lunch we headed northwards around the open tops towards Studholme Saddle, and as with the day before, we had glorious views across to Ruapehu in the distance. Halfway along we stopped for a rest at Castle





Mt Ruapehu viewed from the ridge north of Kiwi Saddle

Camp, an unusual hunters' camp in a clearing in the bush where the ridge drops through a slight saddle. This consists of a small, cubical, timber-framed shelter covered in transparent plastic sheeting, with a dirt floor and a corrugated iron roof. There are shelves but no bunks. The plastic walls act like a greenhouse and inside it felt like a sauna. A water tank provided some welcome water, the only water along this ridge between Kiwi Saddle and Studholme Saddle.



Studholme Bivvy

At around 4.30 we arrived at Studholme Bivvy, a classic two-man dog-box bivy located in a small patch of bush at a stream junction a couple of hundred vertical metres down off the tops. This is the third time I have visited this bivy over the years and it has become one of my favourite little spots. There is a newer four-bunk hut about a 15 minute walk away up the main stream but I would personally much rather stay here at the bivy than at the hut. The hut is in a clearing in a narrow valley and the setting some-

how feels cramped and enclosed and clammy, whereas the stream junction where the bivy is located feels wild and open and airy, and you get to look out across to the open hillsides on the opposite sides of the valley. DOC were originally planning to remove the bivy when they built the hut but thankfully they seem to have decided to keep it. And thankfully, after the disappointment of Kiwi Saddle Hut, it was painted orange.

It was a swelteringly hot afternoon when we arrived, and on my previous visits I had discovered a couple of nice little rocky pools a short distance downstream, just around a right-angled bend in the stream, so I went off for a cooling soak. That night Shay slept in the bivy while I slept out under the beech trees a few metres away.

Next morning we followed the track up the stream to check out the hut, then climbed out up onto the open tops and followed them northwards up onto the main Kaweka range and along to the cairn at Kaweka J where we had been two days before. Dropping back down Makahu Spur we met the other trips at the roadend just before midday, and after lunch at the carpark we loaded up the vans and headed for home. It had been an excellent long weekend in the hills.



Kaweka J cairn

The Kawekas are probably my favourite tramping area in the North Island. I always enjoy visiting them, and this particular circuit makes an excellent round trip, with a nice combination of open tops, bush-covered ridges, and river valleys. The weather always seems to be good there, and the huts are nearly all painted bright orange. What more could a tramer possibly ask for?





Lake Thompson evening

# THE 6 PASSES

## Nelson Lakes to Lewis Pass

by  
**DEBBIE BUCK**  
with ELIZABETH CLARIDGE and AMIE CLARIDGE

Early on a pre-Easter morning, Amie, Bob (aka Elizabeth) and I were waiting at the Lake Rotoroa jetty, Nelson Lakes, to catch the water taxi to Sabine Hut. We were about to set off on a tramp to Lewis Pass, generously giving ourselves 8.5 days. Bob was carrying her ‘oversized handbag’ pack, Amie had an over-loaded ultralight pack, and well, my 75L pack was fully

loaded and along for the weight training.

As forecast, days 1 and 2 were wet, so we had a leisurely couple of wet days lugging heavy packs to Blue Lake Hut. Late on Day 2, Andrew arrived at Blue Lake Hut – he was doing the same tramp as us, but several days faster.

On Day 3 we set off about 8am in a dry kind of mistiness, and skirted around Lake Constance on the poled route. Andrew passed us here. By the time we hit the lakehead, the sun was out for our ascent on scree and alpine scrub to Waiiau Pass (1870m). We bumped into Andrew up here, and he may have made some comment about it being a bit of a grunt...or perhaps that was my own thought! We could see our day’s destination – Lake



Thompson – tucked beneath the mountains to the south, and seemingly at the same altitude as us. There was no flying fox to get us there, so we descended to the Waiau River and then turned right and followed the true right of the stream up to Lake Thompson. It was a bit windy up here, so we layered up and set about scoping for the route to Thompson Pass. Soon enough we found it, and also saw Andrew's tent pitched overlooking the valley and the mountains to the north. We opted for a lakeside campsite, which treated us to some beautiful reflections as the sun set. It also treated us with some windiness and a chilly night. I was pretty happy with our first 'real' day of tramping.

Day 4 started with a short climb up an obvious shallow gully to Thompson Pass (1796m). The view down to the valley floor at the head of the Durville River was daunting. But we were taking the high route - a scrambly route that headed east to get above a prominent notch. It was a bit exposed in parts, and after several unnecessary detours that ended at minor bluffs, I pulled out Stephen Healey's photo with a big red line showing the route. We navigated by picture across and above the notch, then climbed around the top of a knob and descended to the grassy bench. Phew, we'd hopefully done the crux of the tramp and it was not yet lunchtime! We travelled along the grassy and sometimes screey bench to our lunch spot at streams beneath Upper Durville Pass (not the pass we were taking). It was pretty hot by now and we baked as we traversed and then headed up on whiteish rock to Durville Pass (1840m). Not a cloud in the sky as we looked back to Thompson Pass and then south to the Ella Range. We zoomed down the scree to a turquoise tarn nestled in jagged boulders. I barely stopped to undo my boots before I jumped in for a quick cold dip. This was how tramping



Descending Durville pass scree

was meant to be - Tararua cloud and wind was banished from my consciousness! Now my brain was cool enough to focus on the navigation to get us down to the Matakaitaki River East Branch. After a couple of hundred metres we found a plausible route down that weaved between a rocky spur and a damp gully, with plenty of bum sliding. This was followed by some earnest tussock wading down to the river. Amie sprawled on a rock to stretch her back, whilst Bob and I munched snacks. After this break, we followed the dry riverbed, as the water detoured underground for a couple of kms before emerging as the river changed direction. It wasn't long before we found a primo campsite on the edge of the first patch of bush on the true left, and settled in for the night.

Day 5 was another stunner. We followed the Matakaitaki River downstream, revelling in the beauty and wildness of the river and bush, which hadn't yet caught the sun. We were a bit chilly so appreciated the opportunity to have a snack break at the first sunny clearing, and then ambled on through more sunny clearings and bushy river crossings until East Matakaitaki Hut, standing in a clearing beneath the Ella Range and the Spenser Mountains. Lunch here in the wide valley with clear sky was an indulgence - we swam, sunbaked and feasted on crackers with cheese and salami. It was hard to leave and set off back into the bush. There was an orange triangle route from here, but we rebelled until the last possible moment, where we joined the tame track. It was quite muddy and rooty in parts, with an abundance of tame wasps hovering around at knee level. We followed the triangles, over a tame three-wire bridge above the turquoise and sedate Matakaitaki River West branch. After this, we had several hours of obstacle course sidling over and around tree fall on the track, before breaking out into the wide river flats where the quaint and charming Bob's Hut was welcoming us. Here we chatted with Andrew, had a cosy fire, and generally enjoyed a restful night in a stunning location, with no sign of the ghost of Bob's Hut.

Day 6 started with an eerie mistiness - the sort that I hoped would burn off as the day warmed up. It was also groundhog day for Amie, so I set off carrying the two tents. For about 4km the orange triangles continued to follow the Matakaitaki River West branch. Then they and the track disappeared and we were once again following our nose up the river as the mist gradually lifted. By the time we had skirted and climbed a bit on the true left to avoid a gorgy bend in the river, we had a bluebird day. For several hours we travelled alongside the river in the tussock and rock-hopping as the river gradually climbed, with the mountains closer by with every step. It was lunchtime and



Bobs Hut

I handed over one of the tents to Bob to carry - it was my turn to feel knackered. After lunch, we continued to follow the river, closer and closer to the Three Tarns cirque. We left the river and found an easy spur to take us up to the southernmost tarn. By this time we were all feeling a bit tired, and the wind and cold were picking up. We saw an obvious looking pass so headed for it. Although it wasn't quite where the map said Three Tarns Pass should be, it looked inviting. After 15 minutes of upward mobility I realised we were going the wrong way. So, after a bit of deliberation, we traversed, lined up the tarns and



Bob on final rib to Three Tarns

headed up to a less inviting notch, which was the real 3 Tarns Pass (1880m). A bit of a shingle gravel and we were there. Without lingering at the windy pass, we descended the shingle scree on the other side and took a roundabout route to find the least windy campsite above the largest of two tarns. Challenged by the wind, we briskly set up camp, cooked dinner and crawled into bed. We'd just cocooned ourselves in our sleeping bags when the wind stopped and all was silent.

On Day 7 we were up early to savour the sunrise and our last morning of solitude. I was feeling a bit subdued because this would be our last day of 'remote' tramping. We descended a rocky slope and stayed on the true right of the stream as it transitioned to alpine heath, spiteful spangier and then into beech forest. There was a gorgy section that we climbed high above, following and losing some cairns. Eventually, we clambered down a dry side stream and into the beech forest alongside the main stream, following a well-defined foot trail. Savouring the last of the solitude, we had a swim and a break in the sun. Shortly afterwards we hit the trail near Ada Pass Hut, just in time for the Good Friday rush hour! We set up camp in a clearing in front of the hut and spent the afternoon sunbaking and occasionally talking to trampers passing by. A suicidal robin kept us entertained with its fire walking antics as we cooked dinner.

Day 8 dawned rainy and cold. But the adventure was not over! I was determined to head up the ridge behind the hut to scope access to the Zampa tops. This overgrown untracked route kept us moving and sodden for the morning as we climbed to the bushline, poked our noses out to feel the wind speed, and descended back down to the derelict former loo of Ada Pass Hut. After warming up in the hut for lunch, we loaded up the imaginary yaks for the harrowing journey on boardwalks to Ada Pass (1008m).

Day 9 was clear again and we zipped along on the Cannibal Gorge track to Lewis Pass (840m, our 6th pass) for lunch, de-smelling, and waiting for our shuttle. Thanks Bob and Amie for sharing an awesome tramping adventure.





# 1000 ACRES OF PERSPECTIVE

by

**BECCY DAY**

photos Gareth Gretton

For me, tramping is all about getting things into perspective. It's about getting away from the daily grind, giving yourself physical challenges and becoming absorbed with more fundamental mental challenges than modern life normally presents. On a tramping trip life becomes, 'where's the next clean water supply?', 'what's the best route up onto that mountain?' and 'did we bring enough pasta for dinner?' Somehow, in these circumstances you are able to forget about your normal worries.

Occasionally, you have a trip that you know will go down as one of your all-time best trips. A trip that is challenging, that takes you somewhere amazing, that pushes you to your physical limit, and a trip that you become totally absorbed in. This year I had one such trip. It was to 1000 Acre Plateau and the Matiri Valley.

Gareth and I had tried to go to 1000 Acre Plateau a couple of times before, but weather and circumstances never conspired to allow it. Just before Christmas 2014 we were in possession of ferry tickets, a car full of tramping gear, a glove box full of maps and track notes, and no plan whatsoever. Studying the weather maps on the ferry it became apparent to us that there would be a week-long good weather window almost as soon as we arrived on the South Island. We were reluctant to waste it driving south, and realised that this was our opportunity to get into 1000 Acre.

To get into 1000 Acre Plateau you must cross the West branch of the Matiri River. I am a bit neurotic about water,





1000 Acre Plateau from the Needle

and an extremely nervous river-crosser, so this was a mental and physical challenge for me. There had been heavy rain a few days prior to our trip and as we approached it was clear that the river had been high but levels were lowering. We assessed the standard crossing place and decided it was too risky with rapids just downstream, so we headed up the West Branch a little until we found a more suitable spot. Gareth is both more confident in water and stronger than me, but using all the skills I had learned on the WTMC river crossing course and restraining a few expletives, we linked up and made it across through the thigh deep flow. Assisting an ill-equipped tourist wearing Welly boots (gum boots) to cross behind us, and spending an hour working our way back along to the track on the other side, made our first day a good bit longer than anticipated, so we were glad to reach the comfort and fine views of Lake Matiri Hut. Unfortunately a possum on the roof kept us awake much of the night, but we were filled with anticipation for the trip ahead.

On day two we ascended the steep slopes from the Matiri Valley up to the Plateau itself. Enroute we befriended, or were befriended by, two Christchurch botanists full of superb information about rare grasses. The ill-equipped

tourist had pushed on the previous night to Poor Pete's Biv. He had little more than a day pack and was carrying a shopping bag (yes.... A New World plastic bag!) with 2 litres of milk in it. Whether he had made it safely to the hut, and whether we would have to use our brand new PLB on his behalf became a chief topic of conversation. The weather was absolutely stunning, which did give us a little hope, and the view down to Lake Matiri was spectacular. Thankfully, on arrival at Poor Pete's Biv we found the ill-equipped tourist contentedly listening to the radio (which he had also carried in). We pushed on with the botanists to Larrikin's Creek Hut. It was so hot the plateau wasn't even very boggy, and the going was easy.

At Larrikins Creek I stripped off and jumped straight in a pool downstream of the hut. We crashed out on our mats in the sunshine and it seemed like everything in the world was good. We decided to take a rest day, and spend the next day doing a day trip up the Needle and Mt Misery. In the baking sunshine that day trip was far from miserable. The vista across the plateau was stunning.

Conveniently, we had enough mobile phone reception on the top of the Needle to check the weather forecast. It seemed our good luck would continue with no rain on the





Looking down to Lake Matiri while ascending up to the plateau

way for at least four days. Ecstatic at this news we plotted our route onwards. We had pre-researched a route over Haystack and along the Matiri Range to a point (spot height 1326 if you wish to try it) where we could bush bash down to the Matiri Valley and to Hurricane Hut. Much useful information on this route had been gleaned from a trip report on the WTMC website – thanks Harry for that trip information!

For me, the next day on the trip consisted of four challenges:

Challenge 1: Ascend the steep scree slopes of Haystack.

Challenge 2: Navigate along the narrow ridge on the top of Haystack.

Challenge 3: Descend Haystack through a region of difficult bluffs.

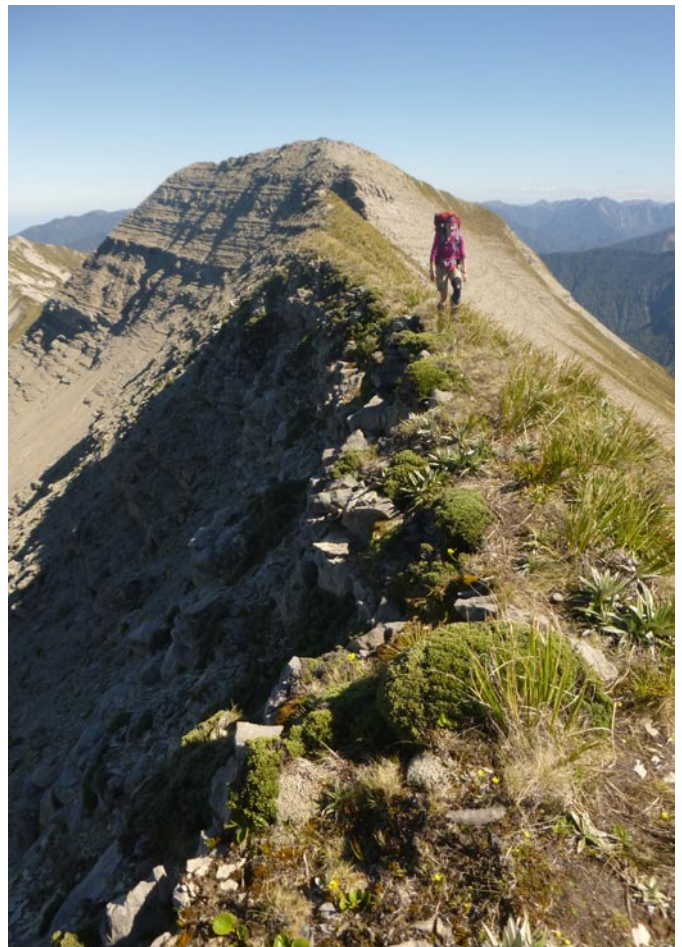
Challenge 4: Bush bash down to the Matiri Valley through steep bluffy bush.

Each challenge on its own made me nervous, so all four in one day made me extremely nervous. Luckily, I was not on my own and what I would not have been able to

achieve alone was possible as part of team Gareth-Beccy (sometimes known as team GB). The slopes of Haystack, whilst vertigo-inducing, were not that hard to climb, and made considerably easier by some good route information from the Christchurch botanists (who we had waved goodbye to at Larrikins Creek Hut).



Ascending Haystack



Haystack Ridge

The Haystack Ridge was mostly OK apart from one difficult step in an exposed spot. Gareth coaxed me round that (well done Gareth!). Successfully avoiding the bluffs on the descent, the only challenge remaining was the bush bash. Harry's trip report had warned us that this would take around three hours, so we did have some idea what we were in for. Descending off the Matiri Tops into the thick leatherwood was like most bush bashing experiences: slow, painful, frustrating... a bit like some form of torture! After around 45 minutes we hit a bluff and traversed along to find a place we could descend. After around another hour it seemed that this descent route was impossible and Gareth mooted the idea of going back up and trying a different spot. I just about lost it at this point – we'd already had an eight hour day having started just after dawn to give ourselves lots of time. I was tired and I just could not see a way out of the bush. Recognising that I needed a hug, Gareth sat me down, fed me some chocolate and told me it would all be OK (this is something he often says... and it has a 50/50 chance of either helping the situation or just making me mad!). "I just want to get down" I wailed. "Well..... How about a little bit of down climbing then?" Gareth replies "There is a lot of bush to hang on to....". We then proceeded to down climb a bushy bluff hanging onto roots and branches as we went. Under standard circumstances I never would have done this, but this was a trip that pushed me to my personal limits (Gareth probably found this a doddle - it's all about personal limits!). Another hour of bush bashing and the comforting sight of the orange Matiri Valley Track marker appeared. Never have I been happier to see a little orange triangle. It was around another hour on the track to Hurricane Hut, and what a treat it was to arrive! We discovered we were the first visitors for five months, and, after a 13 hour day, we were totally exhausted. We dumped our packs, ate the most delicious tasting backcountry meal ever and conked



Hurricane Hut

out on our bunks. I don't think I had moved an inch when I woke in the morning.

Today was Christmas Day and we were looking forward to something a little easier. We were weary, but the sunshine and blue skies and the thought of the Christmas cake we had carried spurred us on. Unfortunately the track was not as easy as we had hoped. We were clearly the first trampers for a long time and it was very overgrown with tutu - the bush bashing was not over for us yet it would seem. The steep river banks had also been heavily affected by slips and there were several large detours up the bank and down again. My legs were more than a little tired by the time we reached McConachie's Hut. Backcountry roast chicken served as Christmas dinner and we bedded down. Unfortunately for me, my next challenge was an inability to breathe. Five glorious days of sunshine and high temperatures had brought the grasses that surrounded the hut into seed. The seed was so thick it was like a mist as you walked about. Only suffering hayfever mildly in normal circumstances, my body went into histamine overdrive and I was not able to get much sleep.

Thankfully, the next day, the exercise of tramping seemed to open my airways. Our target for the day was the familiar Lake Matiri Hut. Again it was a little harder going than we had hoped, but as we got nearer the hut the track became easier again. When we reached the familiar spot we really felt we had made it – it was only an hour from here to the river which we knew we could hop across in five minutes after six days of no rain. Safe in the knowledge that we were nearly out we indulged in something great - we ate all of the remaining Christmas cake. We didn't have to save any for emergencies, we didn't have to conserve it, we just ate it – heaven!

The West Branch of the Matiri was the predicted doddle and we joyously tramped back to the car. My boots had been gradually falling apart all trip and finally gave in on the four wheel drive track through the farm land. It seemed this trip had truly been the luckiest trip ever. I ceremoniously chucked them in the bin when we arrived in town. I had new ones in the boot of the car ready for tramp two and three of this trip (yes there were two more tramps to go before we returned to Wellington). We arrived at the Lazy Cow in Murchison, very scratched, very tanned, very dirty and very tired. We opened all our Christmas presents and ate everything in sight!

This was truly a trip that challenged me, and truly a trip that put things into perspective. Thanks New Zealand for bestowing your best upon us, and thanks Gareth for giving me a hug in the middle of the bush bash!



# GEM TOUR

by **SHARRON CAME**  
with **SAM KEMPTHORNE** and **JESSIE GO**

A view of Island Lake from below Mt Gibbs







Tramping is nowhere near as addictive as smoking, drinking or pizza. It would be easy to give up. It's time consuming, hard work, uncomfortable and lacks glamour. There is no instant gratification and no showers. You have to invest in specialist gear which you'll only use if something bad happens. You have to put up with crap weather, other people's idiosyncrasies and, even worse, your own. The food is pretty average. I go tramping when I have failed to make other plans.

If you are sentenced to tramping, put in a request to serve your time in Kahurangi National Park. Our second largest national park often enjoys better weather than other backcountry areas and it contains such a wide variety of landscapes, flora and fauna, and history there is less risk of discomfort or boredom. Sam and I have done places together in Kahurangi. The Dragons Teeth, the Devil's Dining Table (Thousand Acre Plateau), Mt Owen to name a few. On this our fourth trip, Sam has a gem tour organised. Fuelled up on caffeine and sticky buns, mosquito bites from our Friday night freedom camping temporarily forgotten, I'm cautiously optimistic about the chances of extracting enjoyment from the jaws of misery.

Caffeine and sugar remain in my bloodstream when we finally shoulder our packs. Sam has his yellow Mountain Mule, it looks awesome. Jessie is kitted out in full storm gear, he looks badass. Too badass for the warm day and four wheel drive track that winds its way through mountain beech towards Sylvester Hut. The hut book confirms that WTMC old boys Andrew McLellan, Stuart Palmer and John Thompson have passed through several hours earlier. They are going gem spotting as well.

Past Sylvester Hut, as we spot our first gems - Lake Sylvester and her sister lake Little Sylvester, Sam discovers the soles of both his tramping boots are parting company. He and Jessie stop to effect repairs. When they do, I inspect their handiwork. The boots are held together MacGyver



MacGyver style boot repairs

style with wire and shoe laces. After poking round the culvert on the bigger lake, the first of several engineering experiments gone awry we will examine on the trip, we climb above Iron Lake to the main range. Discarding our packs for the scramble up Iron Hill, loads of Kahurangi lakes, the peaks in Nelson Lakes National Park and the nearby Arthur Range jostle for attention.



The view from Iron Hill

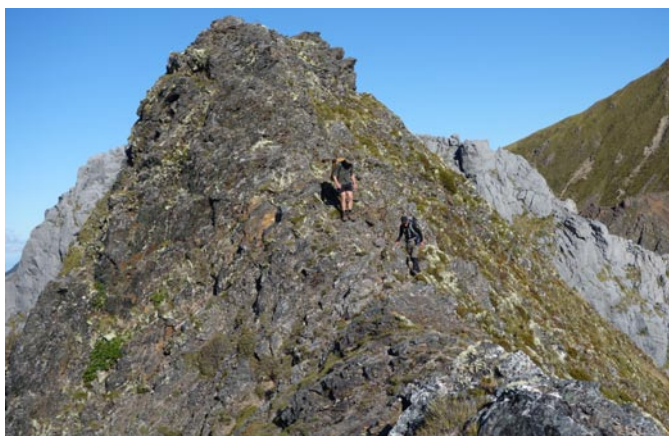
At home on the range we munch lunch and salivate over the necklaces of glacial lakes curled below us. Nelson Lakes may have a couple of big lakes but they lack the charm and brilliance of the smaller lakes Kahurangi side. Blue and green jewels sparkle and glitter in the sunlight. These precious gems, the wide open alpine tops, the expansive sky coupled with the light breeze and bright sunshine spell a perfect afternoon.

Surveyor Sam loves route finding. He isn't a bad teacher either, patiently sharing his knowledge and insights without being condescending. His passion is contagious. Jessie and I enthusiastically study the maps and figure out how they translate on the ground. The afternoon vanishes in a whirl of scrambling along stones and tussock ridges identifying lakes in the valleys below. The Diamond Lakes are sprinkled like hundreds and thousands in the tussock, further on lies dainty Lake Lillie. Bright, shiny, perfectly proportioned Ruby Lake marks the afternoon's critical decision point - to descend and collect water and swim, or not? Bold, brassy Lockett Lake stretches languidly on the horizon soaking up the afternoon heat, relishing the attention.

We laugh at the vegetable sheep even as we squash them, we marvel at the random patches of white quartz. South Island edelweiss and carpet grass poke out of the rock jungle gyms. We discover Jessie loves a good scramble and he doesn't get too hot because he is used to the high humidity and far warmer temperatures of the Philippines.

We climb over rocks, around rocks, squeeze through gaps in rocks. We check and recheck our maps. We admire the cloud formations. We wonder about water. We sit for a bit and enjoy the warmth of the sun and the prickle of the tussock. We decide to forgo swimming as we are reluctant to surrender our vantage point only to have to reclaim it. I'm grateful for my failure to make other plans.

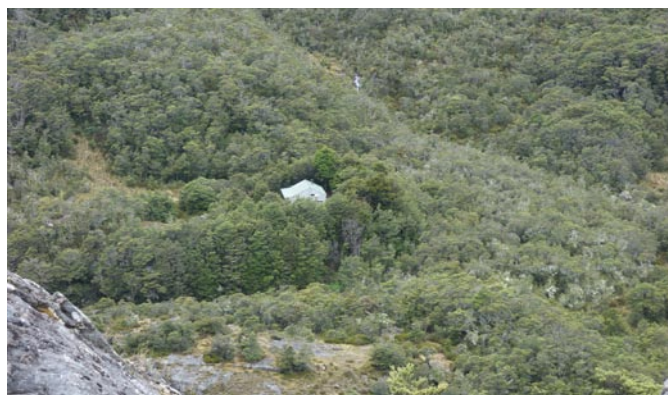
Descending a scree slope a particularly intimidating piece of ridge line causes us to pause. Do we go up or traverse? We can't wait to find out! On closer inspection the ridge is nowhere near as bad as we feared. Due to our late start we will not get all the way to Sam's preferred campsite. Instead, a group of small tarns near some alpine scrub is declared a good spot for pitching my tent and Sam and Jessie's bivy bags. Huts are nice but in good weather, after a great day in the hills, nothing beats camping for peace, solitude, wildness and retaining an intimate connection with nature.



Sam and Jessie make their way over a steeper section of ridge

We wake to grey skies and wind worrying the clouds around like a sheep dog. Jessie mixes leftover salmon pasta and chocolate mint slice together for breakfast. As we head along the ground trails the cloud lowers, obscuring the view and the rain sets in. Now we really pay attention to the route keeping warm by speeding across open tops with occasional forays into the bush. After about an hour we reach the campsite Sam and I have stayed at previously. Even clothed in wet, grey blankets it showcases all the attributes of a gem of a campsite – superb outlook, a good supply of firewood, plenty of flat grassy spaces for tents and a big tarn nearby.

From the campsite the track is well formed up to the turn off that marks the sharp descent into the Cobb Valley and Fenella Hut. Fenella Hut plays ugly sister to its Cinderella toilet which is perched near a cliff edge and features a stained glass window. The hut serves as a memorial to



Approaching Fenella Hut

Fenella Druce one of four people from the Wanganui Tramping Club killed in a freak accident. The trampers were overnighing in a hut at Barron Saddle in Mt Cook National Park. Big winds blew the hut off its site into the Dobson Valley while the unlucky inhabitants lay on their bunks trying to sleep. Mother Nature doesn't care that a hut represents shelter in a storm.

The Easy Mediums and the WTMC old boys are also sheltering from the rain. Mike kindly makes me coffee. Sam and I join the card game and admire photos from the easy medium's adventures. We are not exactly preserving the fit trumper mystique as we munch on chocolate and I accept a second espresso. Jessie, however, has set himself down on the stone floor in his full storm gear including tramping boots. His only concession to comfort is using the concrete rim of the fireplace as a pillow. His pack sits beside him untouched. He refuses all offers of chocolate and hot drinks. The WTMC old boys are lying in their sleeping bags on the mattress cushioned bunks munching on biscuits. They don't say anything but I can tell they're impressed.

By 1.30pm the skies have cleared. Our group and the Old Boys head for the Peel Range. We climb above the lake where the Easy Mediums spent Saturday afternoon swimming and head into the dracaphyllum forest. Our party is keen to climb Xenicus and Gibbs before heading round to Camp Lake. Ascending Xenicus turns out to be more adventurous than we anticipated. Packs are parked in order to make the rock climbing safer. Xenicus is only 1525m but a gem of a climb. Getting off is interesting. Once reunited with our packs we head for the more straightforward but taller Mt Gibbs. The Dragon's Teeth puncture the horizon marking out the Douglas Range another spot rich with gems. A bit further on we have views of Island Lake, complete with the tiny island that inspires its name. We agree it's the most attractive lake we have seen; it's hard to cease ogling and commence walking.





Tarn near Fenella Hut

The Peel Range offers good ground trails till the need for shelter causes us to abandon Camp Lake as a goal and drop to Round Lake for the night. The wind has picked up and although it is sunny it's a good ten degrees colder than yesterday. We savour a relaxed evening of making our own brews, cooking, exploring and sitting watching the tussock shimmer and glow. It's only when I notice I'm shivering far more than the tussock, despite my down jacket that I

determine it's time to head tent-side.

On our final morning an early departure sees us descend past Lake Cobb to the main valley allowing plenty of time for exploring Tent Camp and Chaffey's Hut. It's always fascinating to see what improvements DoC has made to these historic shelters. Jessie, always the dark horse, envisages concubines inhabiting them. The robins like them too. We speed up thinking we will fit in a quick swim before the long drive back to Picton. As we are dropping the Old Boys back at the Lake Sylvester car park, we set the record for the number of trampers you can squeeze into a club van - 16. Meena gives Jessie a run for his money in the staunchness stakes by squeezing between the handbrake and the dash board. More swimming at Pelorus Bridge. Tramping aye, just as well it isn't addictive.



On top of Xenicus Peak



# GROUNDHOG DAY at Packhorse Hut



View over Lyttelton Harbour 2015

by HARRY SMITH

There are certain trips that I seem doomed to repeat over and over again forever, caught up in an endless metaphysical timewarp like Bill Murray in the movie *Groundhog Day*, recycling forever through the same events, unable to break free, never able to actually complete the trip.

One such trip is Mount Gloriana in the Spencer Range at Lewis Pass. I have set out to climb this peak three times over the years and the trips have always been the same. We walk in on the first day and camp in an alpine basin above Ada Pass, intending to climb the peak the next day. But then the weather turns bad on us and we spend the next day lying in our tents in a blizzard instead, hoping that the weather will be better the following morning. The following morning the weather is of course still completely miserable, and in the afternoon we give up, put on our storm gear, crawl out of our tents, pack up, and retreat back down to Cannibal Gorge Hut for the night. On the last day we walk out to the Lewis Pass highway and go for a quick consolation soak in the Maruia Springs hotpools before heading for home.

It's been a few years since our last trip to Gloriana and I am beginning to get a nostalgic yearning for our alpine basin and its blizzards. I swear I can hear the groundhogs howling mournfully in the distance – it must be about time the club scheduled another trip there...

Then there is Mt Snowflake. Mt Snowflake is in the Seaward Kaikoura Range; it is one of the highest peaks in the range south of Mt Manakau and should be a straightforward climb if you get the right weather conditions, but of course this is a Groundhog Day story and we never do. Twice over the years Sharron Came and I have attempted to climb Snowflake via Snowflake Spur from the Kowhai River. Both times we have spent all day staggering exhaustedly uphill, to camp high on the spur in a cosy tussocky hollow just before the tussock runs out and the spur steepens and becomes more rocky and scrambley. Both times we have had excellent views out over the Mt Fyffe Range and the Kaikoura Peninsula to the east. Both times conditions have looked good for an ascent of the peak in the morning. Both times the north-westerly winds have got up overnight. Both times when we have attempted to continue up the ridge the next day we have found ourselves barely able to even stand on our feet, let alone make any upward progress. And both times we have accepted the groundhogs' verdict and retreated back to our campsite, packed up, and headed out. I still want to climb Snowflake but I know what will happen if I ever try again. The groundhogs are at work - it's completely predictable and predetermined.

Another trip has recently joined Mt Snowflake and Mt Gloriana in the Groundhog Day stakes and that trip is Mt Adams.

Mt Adams (2208 metres) is down on the West Coast, just south of Harihari. It is a high westerly outlier of the Southern Alps, affording great views in all directions, in-



cluding out over the Adams Wilderness Area and the Garden of Eden ice plateau to the east. I distinctly remember seeing Mt Adams in the distance on a Christmas trip to the Garden of Eden many years ago. We came in up the Perth River from the West Coast and as we traversed over the top of the Great Unknown on the way to the western end of the Garden I saw a high snow-capped mountain off to the north-west with a long and very distinctive trench-like glacier leading gently up to the summit. I remember thinking at the time it would be an interesting place to visit one day.

Many years later my chance appeared to have come. Over the last few years the club has included some more adventurous alpine trips on the schedule, one of which has been to try and climb Mt Adams in a weekend from Wellington. The idea is to fly to Christchurch on Friday night, drive like the clappers over to the West Coast, crash for the night in Arthurs Pass or Hokitika or Harihari, continue on down the Coast past Harihari to the roadend at the Little Man River early on Saturday morning, walk in up the river for several hours, locate a poorly marked and little-used track at the side of the valley, stagger up the near-vertical hillside for several more hours lugging vast quantities of water as none is to be found further up, emerge out onto a dry, tussocky mountain ridge, head up the ridge until it flattens out and it is possible to camp, drop packs and pitch the tents, carry on up the ridge to the top of the mountain, negotiate through the final rock outcrops and snowfields to the summit, look at the view for 5 or 10 minutes (weather permitting), pose for a summit photo, return to the tents, catch a few hours' sleep, head back down the ridge to the bush-edge, drop back down the near-vertical track to the valley floor, walk out down the river to the roadend, get changed, load up the car, drive like the clappers back up the Coast and back over Arthurs Pass to Christchurch, find somewhere to stay for the night in Christchurch, catch a few more hours' sleep, get up at some ungodly hour on Monday morning, race out to the airport, catch an early morning flight back to Wellington, and turn up at the office fresh and keen and eager for the start of the working week. Apparently there are some people who wouldn't find this fun.

On our first attempt in April 2014 the weather turned miserable as we drove down the Coast early on Saturday morning. Sitting in a cramped, wet tent on some freezing, windswept mountain somehow didn't seem very attractive to Sharron and me, so we desperately searched around for a Plan B. Welcome Flat on the Copland Track seemed like a good place to go to instead, and most of the others on the trip were easily persuaded, although I don't think Mike

Phethean, our leader, was very happy.

That evening I lay back in the hotpools at Welcome Flat looking up at the grey clouds overhead and thinking we had made a good call. But then the cloud magically evaporated and the stars came out. I had a great view up to Welcome Pass and the peaks on the Sierra Range and found myself rather guiltily wondering what the weather would be like on Mt Adams, a short distance further up the Coast. I argued to myself that as Mt Adams was further north than the Copland and the weather system had been travelling north it would still probably be pretty miserable up there, but I don't think I really succeeded in convincing myself with my own logic. Next morning Mike didn't seem very happy.

At the end of that weekend we drove back to Christchurch and the others all flew home early the next morning and raced back to work, but I had allowed myself a couple of extra days in Christchurch to fulfil a long-standing ambition to visit Packhorse Hut.



Packhorse Hut 2015, Mt Bradley in the background

Packhorse Hut is a historic stone hut out on Banks Peninsula. It was built in the early years of the 20th century as part of a visionary scheme by Harry Ell, a prominent Christchurch civic leader, to create a tourist route from Christchurch out along the spine of the peninsula to Akaroa. A series of rest-houses was to be built for tired and weary travellers along the way. The grandest of them, an imposing mansion in the Cashmere Hills behind Christchurch, was christened The Sign of the Takahe. A more modest stone hut was built further out along the route on the far side of Lyttleton Harbour and became known as The Sign of the Packhorse. Unfortunately for Ell's dream, the proposed roadway never reached that far, but almost a century later the solid stone hut is still there,

right in the middle of an isolated saddle looking down upon the surrounding farmland. These days it is controlled by DOC who seem to have quietly dropped the “Sign of the Packhorse” name and just refer to it rather prosaically as Packhorse Hut. Clearly bureaucrats have no romantic souls.

For years I had heard about this hut and had been intrigued by it. Banks Peninsula seemed such an unlikely place to find a tramping hut, and a stone hut seemed even more unusual still. Add to that its unusual history and I knew I had to go there.

On Monday I got the bus out to Lyttleton and caught the ferry across to Diamond Harbour. My plan was to follow the Mt Herbert Walkway up to the crest of the peninsula and along to the hut. It was 1 o'clock and I was running late – I had just missed an earlier ferry – but I figured I could still make it to the hut before dark. For about the first hour the weather was ok, but then it clagged in. As I ascended the hillside a freezing southerly wind got up and it began raining. I stopped to put on my parka and thermal layers. Three hours after I set off I arrived at the Mt Herbert Shelter, a three-sided open structure perched on the ridgeline just along from Mt Herbert, the highest point on the peninsula. Here I debated whether to go on. A signpost said it was only an hour and a half around to Packhorse Hut, but I had been told the route was rough and overgrown and I only had a sketch-map. The weather was awful and in two hours it would be dark. Could I make it? I thought seriously about stopping at the shelter instead – I decided that if I huddled in my sleeping bag in the far corner I should survive the night ok, though it would clearly be freezing cold and miserable. But I really

“For years I had heard about this hut and had been intrigued by it. Banks Peninsula seemed such an unlikely place to find a tramping hut, and a stone hut seemed even more unusual still. Add to that its unusual history and I knew I had to go there.”

did want to visit the hut and it would be disappointing to give up now. The timing would be tight but I decided to go for it.

Leaving the shelter behind, the track sidled steeply around the hillside on the southern side of Mt Bradley through overgrown gorse, slippery grass, and slimy bush. Then it emerged out into the open, turned a corner, and

began descending. I knew the hut was somewhere in a deep saddle far below me but I couldn't see a thing – I could just sense a vast openness up ahead. The wind was blowing and the rain was falling and I was worrying about how long it was taking and how much daylight I had left. Then to make matters worse I lost the track. I suddenly realised I was no longer on the proper track but was just following the rough tracks of other people who must have gone wrong before me.

I carried on a bit further around the steep hillside in the direction I thought I should be going and found myself floundering around in a steep gully in thick bracken fern. I was wet and miserable and beginning to shiver, the daylight was rapidly fading, and I remember thinking to myself that this would be a stupid and embarrassing place to die, here on Banks Peninsula, 10 or 15 kilometres from downtown Christchurch, in what was essentially rough farmland. I tried to think where the track could have gone. If it wasn't here to the right it must have gone out to the left instead, even though that seemed like the completely wrong direction. I sidled out that way and was relieved to pick it up again at the end of a long zigzag across the hillside. I followed it through a tongue of bush and a long, muddy, right-hand side that seemed to go on forever. When I finally saw the hut looming out of the clag



Mt Herbert Shelter, 2014



Packhorse Hut 2014



up ahead of me I was completely relieved. It was nearly 6 o'clock and I had maybe 15 minutes of twilight to spare.

I stepped inside and found I had the hut to myself. Clearly nobody else was stupid enough to go there on a Monday night in such miserable conditions. Even though the top of the saddle was only four or five hundred metres above sea level the southerly was howling up the valley to the south and it was freezing cold. Thankfully with a bit of effort I managed to get the fire going in the pot-belly stove and heat the place up a bit. I spent most of the evening lying reading in front of the open fire.

Next morning the wind and rain had died away but it was still cloudy and drizzly. I sat around the hut all morning hoping it would magically clear up but it never really did. I did get one or two brief clearances in which I managed to get a view of the hillside I had come down the day before, but then it clagged in again. After lunch I decided it was time to go. I set off along another rough track back around the northern side of Mt Bradley, but then the groundhogs must have decided it was timewarp time again and in a repetition of the previous day I lost the marker poles in an area of steep, open farmland. I sidled around, picked up another track, and dropped down into a scrubby valley which I followed out downstream. Suddenly I came across a bizarre and mysterious doorframe standing all alone in the valley floor, painted red and purple and looking quite incongruous in the middle of a grassy clearing, a bit like Dr Who's Tardis or the Monolith from 2001 A Space Odyssey. Maybe it was a portal into another world where it would be nice and fine and sunny? After all, anything was possible in a Groundhog Day story! I stepped hopefully through the doorframe but alas, I

found it was just as cold and wet on the other side!

The valley emerged out into a large reserve known as Orton Bradley Park which I followed down to the southern side of Lyttleton Harbour. Here I had a long and tedious road-walk back around to Diamond Harbour, where I got the ferry back over

to Lyttleton and the bus back into town. I had achieved my goal of visiting Packhorse Hut but the trip had been a bit of a disappointment and I hadn't had the stunning views I had hoped for.

Flash forward to October 2015 and I was signed up for another trip to Mt Adams. This time Sharron was the leader and Brendon said he was not interested in a "Plan B". But I hadn't realised when I signed up that the groundhogs had clearly got their teeth into this trip and would not let go. They were toying with us, waiting to pounce. On the Thursday before we were due to depart Sharron sent around an email cancelling the trip. Heavy rain and nor-west gales were forecast on the West Coast. All the others had booked refundable flights to Christchurch and were able to cancel them and get a refund, but I had taken a risk and gone for the cheap option and bought non-refundable tickets. It seemed a pity to let the tickets go to waste. What should I do? I listened to the groundhogs calling in the distance and decided to do another trip to Packhorse Hut.

On Friday evening after flying to Christchurch I got the late-night ferry across to Diamond Harbour, where I bivvied out in the domain under a pine tree. The next morning I walked down the road to the start of the Mt Herbert Walkway. My plan was nearly thwarted when I came across a large and prominent notice saying the track was closed for lambing, but after flying all the way from Wellington I wasn't going to let that stop me. According to the notice the walkway was due to reopen in a week's time, so lambing was clearly nearly over and I figured I could stretch the date a bit and no harm would be done. I followed the track up the hillside, keeping an anxious eye out for any irate farmers with shotguns. I had glorious sunny



Mysterious portal in the valley at Orton Bradley Park 2014



View from Mt Bradley, 2015. Packhorse hut is visible in the saddle centre right

weather, and three hours later, on the dot of midday, I reached the summit of Mt Herbert and stopped for lunch. I had stunning views back down to Lyttleton Harbour and the Port Hills behind. Out to the south I could see Lake Ellesmere and the edge of the Canterbury Plains stretching away into the distance, while beyond the Port Hills I could see the snow-capped mountains of Canterbury out to the west. As far as I could tell, it looked fine and sunny all the way across to the West Coast and Mt Adams...

From Mt Herbert, I followed the track westwards along past the Mt Herbert Shelter and around the flank of Mt Bradley, and when I turned the far corner of Mt Bradley I got the view I had missed out on the year before. Far below me was the saddle and sitting snugly right in the



Departing Packhorse Hut 2015

middle of it was Packhorse Hut. With good visibility I could see where I had gone wrong the previous year – the track zigzags down a steep, grassy hillside, and in the clagged-in conditions I must have overshot one of the corners. I dropped my pack and scrambled up through the scrubby rock outcrops to bag the summit of Mt Bradley before continuing on down to the hut.

The next morning it was still fine and sunny, but the forecast nor-westerly gale had arrived and was howling across the saddle. I had originally been thinking of taking the track down to Gebbie's Pass and following the crest of the Port Hills all the way back into Christchurch, but the strong winds would have made that very unpleasant, so I decided to leave it for another occasion and head out the same way as the year before, around the north side of Mt Bradley, down through Orton Bradley Park, and back to Diamond Harbour.

This time I took a different route down through Orton Bradley Park, heading down through farmland on the



Ferry departing from Diamond Harbour 2015

ridge to the west rather than dropping down into the valley and following it out. I wasn't looking forward to the long road walk back around to Diamond Harbour, but just as I reached the road somebody stopped and offered me a lift. He turned out to be a trumper and we discussed trips we had done into the Olivines and the Pyke. I spent another night bivvied out under my pine tree in the Diamond Harbour domain but the nor-westerly gales were so strong that at one point I thought the tree was in danger of being blown over on top of me. Next day I caught the early morning ferry which bounced and crashed its way through the waves back into Lyttleton, and a couple of hours later I was out at the airport to catch my flight back home.

And so a cancelled trip to Mt Adams had turned into an excellent trip to Packhorse Hut. It turns out there is a surprisingly large network of public tracks and walkways on this part of Banks Peninsula, and Packhorse Hut provides a natural target for an overnight trip. It is a quite different experience from our usual bush tramping – in Wellington terms it would be roughly equivalent to finding a tramping hut in the hills of Belmont Regional Park. Apparently another public tramping hut has just been opened a few kilometres further along the spine of the peninsula to the east of Mt Herbert, allowing even more options for multi-day tramps in this area. The groundhogs are already calling me back and I look forward to my next trip there next year – when I sign up to go to Mt Adams yet again...





## LENGTH OF THE SOUTH

### A NINE DAY WANDER

by **ANDREW BICHAN**

So here's the idea - ride my trusty old MTB from Slope Point and, avoiding asphalt as much as possible, see if I can get to Cape Stephens.

There are a few Southern rides on my 'bucket-list' so I decided to join a bunch together over the Christmas break. Sally, my long standing (and suffering) support crew was keen to come for the drive so I set myself some soft brevet rules. I would be self-sufficient but free to take advantage of motels, shops, huts etc. However, whilst I may be OK sleeping under a bridge, Sally isn't, so we agreed that provided I get to a place where I could get accommodation she can pick me up to go somewhere meeting her exacting standards (shower, roof – that sort of thing).

#### SLOPING OFF

From Picton, regular driver swaps get us to Waikawa in under 12 hours with a short drive the next morning to

Slope Point for a 6:15am start.

It's mostly good gravel travelling north through the Catlins, up the beautifully lush, bush hemmed Waikawa Valley and over a low saddle. There's virtually no traffic for 70km.

Unfortunately the historic Tuapeka mouth punt across the Clutha/Mata-au is not operating but I stop in for a look.

Lawrence is on the other side of a range of hills via 'Breakneck Road'; a hot climb and fast descent arriving at 3pm with 155km on the clock. It's pretty and hospitable. I've broken a bottle cage already but manage to find a secondhand one. An hour or so later, full of iced coffee, I've given a donation to use the Otago Gold Trail and set off again.



A promising looking road



The beginning: Slope Point

#### TRAILING ALONG THE CLUTHA

The Otago Gold Trail shadows the main road from Lawrence to Beaumont (20km - a pub and little else) with a gentle 120m climb to a tunnel. There are a few cyclists at the start but soon I'm on my own. The surface is generally good as I cruise to Millers Flat (about 25km - shops, camping ground and pub); it's a pretty ride beside the deep green river and its trees.

20km on is the bustling Roxborough at 7.15pm under now cloudy skies. Sally is waiting and we head back to Lawrence; it's quite a drive as I hadn't anticipated doing 217km.

In the morning the clouds skulk around the hills trying to look menacing as I leave Roxborough along the last 9km of the trail. Then comes 800 vertical metres of knee-crunching grind up Knobby Range, mostly gravel but the last few kms on farm track. The rain holds off and the clouds burn away the closer I get to Alexandra.

The downhill is fast and fun and, after a final clattering descent down Graveyard Gully, at 10:45am and 36 hard kms I cruise into Alexandra for a toasty cheese.



Top of Knobby Range

## RIDING THE RAIL

The Otago Rail Trail is more established than the Gold Trail and there are heaps more cyclists, although apparently not peak season yet. The surface is good but chunkier than the Gold Trail, the grading is gentle (of course!), but lacks the interesting twists and turns and the cooling presence of the Clutha. There are impressive bridges and tunnels and the wee towns are geared up to provide refreshments etc.

It's hot again but the wind is helping. I stop at Lauder (1pm, 29km) after which the Trail heads up a rocky gorge through Raggedy Range and a couple of tunnels. At 58km I'm ready for another stop at Hayes Engineering Heritage Centre (Oturehua) and a little tired of long straight gravel. This is the end of the Trail for me; it curves east then south for Middlemarch, while I head north.

## OMARAMA SADDLE

Hawkdun Runs Road is rough on an already tender backside and the 4WD track up the Manuherikia West Branch is even rougher with a million river crossings through dramatic but not really beautiful country.

The track passes two DoC huts but I figure I can make Omarama under lights if necessary so continue for the final 250m push up to the Saddle (1250m) arriving at 7:45pm. The day is finally starting to cool and I'm wrung out.



Looking North from Omarama Saddle

The descent is on a good farm track with a steep finish. Although not rushing I still lose my bottle and the new secondhand bottle cage it was in. A tail wind and the evening shadows chase me down Broken Hut Road to Omarama.

It's almost 9pm (184km) when I arrive at the campground. A shower, plenty of water and some hot porridge go some way to restoring equilibrium before crawling into bed.

## ALPS TO OCEAN TO BURKES PASS

Overcast and cool: perfect for a bit of uphill on the Alps to Ocean Trail on seal, gravel, then single track to the Tarnbrae highpoint (900m).

I'm looking forward to an entertaining descent but some knee trouble slows things up so divert onto Te Ara-roa Trail dropping quickly to re-join the Alps Trail and a lovely stretch of single track to the lake outlet. Ben Ohau frowns down from across the water.

Taking the flood route to Twizel is a mistake: the road is in a miserable condition. Still, Lake Ruataniwha is pretty. I'm lurching in Twizel when the support crew turns up, having spent the night in Alex.

After traversing some flats, the trail meanders comfortably between the ridiculously beautiful Lake Pukaki and the road but it's not long before I leave it for a short, hot 140m climb to the Tekapo Canal.

The canal road to Tekapo is closed to vehicles; it switches to gravel, and a strong head wind springs up. About 22km later, despite the views across the MacKenzie Country, I'm pretty relieved to leave the Canal and climb the rise to Tekapo. Sally has booked a unit so I pop in for a good wee break before hitting the main road.

The wind is howling from the east. A French family are huddled by the road with a couple of youngsters unable to continue on their bikes. However, they are planning to pitch camp so I leave them to it.

The evening sun strikes low under the steely clouds



spilling over the ridges and from Burkes Pass. The township has accommodation options so meets my conditions for a pickup from Sally, who turns up bang on time (7:30pm and 155km).

### SEAL BLOODY SEAL; CANTERBURY SCENIC HIGHWAY

Let's draw a veil over this bit as I couldn't identify any feasible alternatives to the highway. Burkes Pass, Fairlie, Geraldine (10am) after which it's hot and dry, with interminable busy straights.



Canterbury heat

By Rakaia Gorge I'm 'doing-it-tough' from heat, lack of fitness and less than ideal nutrition and hydration management compounding with various physical niggles. I call it quits at Sheffield (7pm, 190km).

### OFF THE BEATEN TRACK; THE WHARFDALE

In the morning I hook up with three bikers on the way up to the crowded Wharfedale carpark, from where the single track slips beneath the trees and upwards in the shade. After a bit of climbing (and some pushing) the track levels and drops before resuming climbing to the saddle (750m) with a few rocky, pushy bits. There's plenty of walking tracks and a few walkers about.

There's no views from the saddle so I don't stop. A few washouts and creeks require a bit of bike wrestling but it's generally good riding although you have to pay attention - just before the hut I smack my head into a fallen tree damaging my helmet then, minutes after, flip inelegantly over the bars and off the track. The hut provides a chance to regroup, swear and bleed for a bit.

Despite the mishaps I'm relishing not being on roads, the cover of the canopy, and just being surrounded by bush. One of the big things for me on this trip is how much native forest there isn't over large tracts of our landscape.

The track soon leaves the bush, and that's it for shade

for the day. I join Lees Valley road (gravel) and head north through farmland. It's baking again.

### LEES AND OKUKU

The road (farm track) climbs briefly to Okuku Pass (630m); then meanders up and down. Ideally you get permission to go through McDonald Downs and dramatically shorten this section. I didn't, and face a long-cut around Mt Grey which gets even longer when I have to bail out over Okuku Saddle (600m) with both tyres delaminating. The flapping tread makes cornering on the way down quite interesting.



Tyre troubles

I reach the plains way further south than planned. Sally is in Amberley and meets me a bit after 7pm (112km) at Loburn, where there are sufficient accommodation options for my rules. However, she has booked a unit in Hanmer so there's a long commute.

Lees Valley and Okuku Pass isn't beautiful country; it's all forestry and farming but is off the beaten track and more interesting than the endless tarseal of yesterday but despite a 'low K' day I've not recovered appreciably.

### HANMER

It's 10am when I return to Loburn (with new tyres) and set off. Not much to say really; a bit of gravel to Amberley then main roads to Hanmer but I'm leaving Canterbury at last! A bit of wind and pretty hot again but it clouds over after Culverden to see me rolling into Hanmer for a good break at 4:40pm.

It's a quick scoot over Jacks Pass to the bottom end of the St James and a DoC cottage I have crashed in before. At 7pm (127km) Sally does a pickup and we return to Hanmer with plenty of time to marinate in the hot pools. I'm feeling a lot better after the short day.

### TAKING JACK AND CLARENCE TO THE RAINBOW

The support team drops me over Jack's Pass and I fol-

low the corrugated Tophouse Road up the Clarence River. The Molesworth presents a barren landscape with cattle on the flats and two lines of pylons dominating the valley.

The road climbs over Island Saddle and into the Wairau catchment. The final grunt is steep but short to (reportedly) the highest publicly accessed road in the country (1,347m).



Island Saddle, the high point of the trip

A nice downhill follows, through Island Gully to the Wairau River and down to the edge of the flats with Lake Sedgemere somewhere ahead.

I reach the boundary between the state-owned Molesworth Station and the private Rainbow Station about 11:30am. The countryside becomes greener and rockier; beech appears and it's dramatically different to the sterile landscapes of the Molesworth. At Coldwater Creek there is an idyllic DoC campsite set amongst trees beside a clear stream.



The Wairau; trees at last!

At 65km I stop at the old cob homestead to pay my dues (\$2). I'm the sixth bike today.

A little later a dip and a bite at Hamilton River before continuing, very much revived, across fords, through trees and along grassy flats. Eventually (75km) the road crosses Six Mile Creek and joins the sealed Rainbow Skifield road. From here it is a comfortable ride following the pylon cor-

ridor down valley.



Hamilton River

The road joins SH 63 part way up Top House Saddle. With 92km down it's 3:20pm and, with a firm tail wind I turn towards Blenheim.

About 8km later I meet a tramper with pack biking to St Arnaud – he's done in after a strong headwind most of the way from Blenheim but now has less than 20km to go. I'm looking forward to assistance from the wind he has been up against. Wrong. Within 10 km it switches.

Eventually I decide to pack it in at Wairau Valley Township (155km); there's accommodation available and a friend in Blenheim pops up to meet me. The support crew meantime is slumming it at the lovely St Arnaud Alpine lodge.

### PUSHING IT ON THE NYDIA

The plan was to cross the Richmond Range via the Wakamarina Track to Canvastown. Suffice to say 30 wasted kilometres later I discover access is closed for logging so it's the main road to Havelock. From there it's Kaiuma Bay Road around the water's edge to the Nydia track.



Home sweet home

The Nydia is highly rated for MTBing, I'm going against the normal flow but don't see that it makes much difference. There are three climbs; two to get to the Kaiuma Saddle (387m), and then to the Ny-



dia Saddle (370m). I push most of the uphill and a fair amount of bike wrangling is required through the hillside creek cuttings and around stumps and rocks (I wouldn't do it with panniers!). But if you just knuckle down it's not so bad. Anyway, you forget it pretty quickly on the downhills and flats which offer some wonderful riding. It would be treacherous in the wet though and the beech roots after Nydia Saddle and around the coast get a bit irritating.

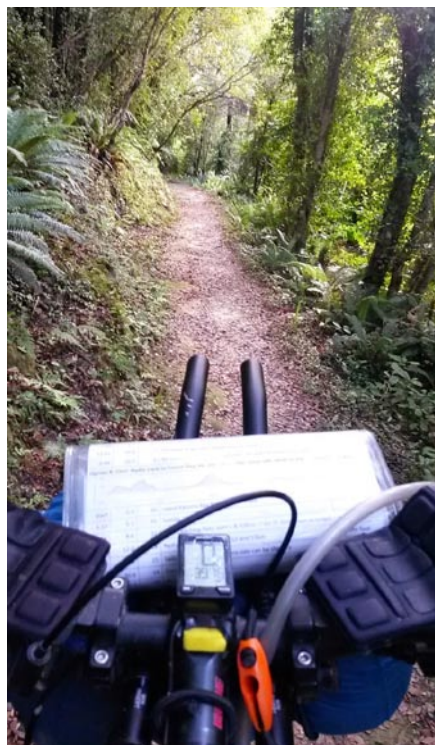
It's 3pm when I start and just after 8pm when I finish without seeing a soul. I keep a reasonable pace as I reckon I should be able to finish tomorrow but the track definitely deserves a more leisurely approach with a swim and picnic in the middle.

After all the farms, commercial forests and barren landscapes over the last week it is so nice to be in gorgeous bush. A tree at the Harvey Bay DoC Campsite provides shelter for the night with morepork and weka calling in the dark.

### A SHOT AT ARCHERS

It's a cool grey day as I head west for Archer's Track about 7km away.

The track is about 8km with a bit of up and down, a few rooty bits and dismounts required, but nothing dramatic. It passes through some nice bush, a secluded wee bay and some not-so-nice recovering forestry land, ending



Archer's Track

with a section of 4WD track, before popping out in someone's driveway.

From there it's a short climb to the French Pass Road in what is shaping up to be another hot sunny day. The gravel road follows the backbone of the peninsula before a ripping good downhill into Elmslie Bay arriving around mid-day at French Pass (Anaru).

There's a shop with fuel, a DoC campground and a

backpackers. I track down Craig Aston the boat operator. He and his wife Christine live on the island but the trip across is so short it's a matter of minutes for him to scoot over and do a pick up. He quoted \$75 each way for me and bike. They also have a house on the island for rent.



French Pass and D'Urville Island

### DOING D'URVILLE

Craig drops me at Kapowai Bay Wharf and I start a steady climb on the good gravel road. There's plenty of shade from the bush so it's not too bad in the heat. The climb tops-out after 8-9km at 570m (Attempt Hill). At 12.5km is the Community Hall; a large log building which can be booked for accommodation.

The bush becomes low scrub as the road sidles around Mt Ears then bare farmland. At 28km I leave the road to follow the ridge for the last 7km to the Cape (access pre-arranged). Eventually a lone cabbage tree comes into sight, and it suddenly dawns: I've run out of island.

It's 4:25pm on Wednesday 14 January. The odo stands at 1,340km and, like much of the trip, the day is a scorcher.

The Bishop's Cauldron and the Sisters Islands are below and Stephen's Island away to the northeast. 100km due east is the Kapiti Coast just south of Levin, 107km west is the coast south of Collingwood and Blenheim 91km south.



The End - The Sisters



And time for lunch

It's not the northernmost point of the South Island but it is where I was aiming and I'm chuffed to have made it. Celebration is somewhat muted though as the prospect of making the return trip in time to get off the Island weighs on my mind. But it's not so bad as the day cools, the only item of note is the traffic - one car. At 8pm Craig responds to my call immediately when I ring from the



Stripping down for the last time

wharf.

As we zip across the still waters, the hazy air in Tasman Bay is bright with golden evening light through the passage to the southwest. To the east and behind, the Sounds and D'Urville Island dim into evening. I wrestle the bike up the wharf steps, pay the ferryman and find Sally, who has entirely missed the triumphant return.





# A R amble in the ough ugged aglan ange

by PAUL CHRISTOFFEL with BERNIE DIXON and SHAY BENDALL

**B**ack in 2008 I read in this journal a story by Tony Gazley about the Raglan Range, which he described as tramping's best-kept secret. A Google search revealed that this 'best-kept secret' is an area of Marlborough roughly between Nelson Lakes National Park and the Kaikouras.

As I discovered in three separate trips there, the Raglan Range (officially the 'Leatham Conservation Area') is divided into sharply contrasting halves. The eastern half consists largely of former farmland and is festooned with wilding pine and four-wheel drive tracks. The western part is like a drier and more rugged Nelson Lakes, and in fact is treated by DOC as an extension of the National Park, which the Wairau River divides it from.

This western part of the conservation area presents significant tramping challenges. The several broad valleys that run through it contain marked trails and several comfortable huts. But between these valleys lie craggy mountains rising to 2000 metres with no obvious routes over them.

A decent trip into the Raglan Range therefore requires several days and some navigational nous – not something I am known for.

I went on two slightly thwarted WTMC trips to the area where we got up to the tops but had no time to progress further. I realised four days were the minimum needed, which is, of course, the length of the Easter holiday. So when a Raglan Range trip went on the WTMC trip schedule for Easter 2015 I volunteered to lead it, despite having only a vague idea of the route.

The WTMC trip schedule listed two landmarks on the proposed trip route – Hellfire and Misery Streams. For some reason few signed up for "Hellfire and Misery", while Mike's trip to the prettily-named Cotterell and Chitterden Peaks on the other side of the Wairau River was quickly full. Furthermore, several of my punters pulled out and in the end there were only three of us. This turned out to be a reasonable number for what was quite a challenging trip.

One member was Bernie, a young lad recently arrived

from Otago. This was to be his first medium-fit trip with the club but I'd accompanied him on a medium trip and his long stride and fitness seemed up for the challenge. The other punter was Shay, a little older but very fit. He promised not to go running ahead of us.

## Day 1

Getting to the start of our trip involved heading down the 4WD road that ultimately links the Wairau Valley with Hanmer Springs. The club van negotiated a tricky stream crossing no problem but it was a different story on the way out on Monday. We first had to drop Mike's group off at their starting point then double back over a rough road, so we didn't hit the track until 10.30 am.

It was a lovely sunny day as we crossed the swing bridge over the Wairau and then, instead of following the track markers to the right, headed left. I found on the internet an account by a group that had done the trip I planned, and we followed their route closely. After heading a couple of kilometres north up the Wairau River we came to Hellfire Stream and followed it into the bush.

Between 2008 and 2012 volunteers from the Nelson Tramping Club worked with DOC to cut a track up Hellfire Stream to the tops. So we found ourselves following a well-cut track and orange triangles along the true right of the stream. This was easy and I had visions of reaching our goal – a tarn at 1700 metres – in good time. Then we hit treefall which seemed to go on forever. My visions quickly reajusted – would we get there by nightfall?

We fought our way down and crossed the stream to the relative safety of ordinary thick bush. Thankfully the tree fall – presumably a huge slip – eventually ended, but we lost sight of any track until about an hour later when permatat markers suddenly appeared. We followed these for a time and eventually came across orange triangles. I looked for a spot in the sun for lunch, but because we left so late the sun seemed to be forever just beyond us. Hellfire Stream, by the way, seemed pretty benign despite its name.

After lunch the trail got increasingly rough. I hadn't tramped with a heavy pack in well over a year and whenever I stumbled I overbalanced and regularly fell. It was getting tiring and I was relieved when we emerged into a lovely grassy clearing. This was where our internet companions camped on their first night, but we still had plenty of daylight. We relaxed in the sun at last, until it moved on and we followed suit.

Eventually we were out on the tops, but still had a long way to climb. Bernie and I were completely exhausted and lay down to admire the view while Shay tried to convince us it wasn't far to go. The sun had set by the time



Camping spot on day 1

we reached a large tarn, our camping spot for the night. It was almost windless but at 1700 metres a bit cold. My cooker struggled to get the billy boiling and I regretted not paying more attention when packing to the fact that neither of my gas cylinders were full. Breakfast, dinner and hot drinks had already drained most of our gas supplies on day one of a four day trip. Furthermore I left my pocket knife, which I'd had for nearly a decade, at our lunch spot. Thankfully Shay had a knife that could be used to cut up vegetables or we would have been truly stuck.

## Day 2

The next day dawned cloudy. We needed to get going as we had to climb 250 metres to get over the craggy peaks overlooking our tarn before they clagged in. I was a little nervous about what lay on the other side, but needn't have worried. As we clambered over the parapet of jagged rocks we were greeted by gentle slopes, although these soon got very steep. It was claggy and drizzly by then and the wet grass was getting us soaked. Shay and I donned overtrousers, which, for me at least, proved useful in sliding down the slopes. The clag made navigation tricky but soon we came across a large tarn which was marked on the map. This was good, as I knew we needed to get into the nearby headwaters of Misery Stream to get down to the valley far below.

Paradise ducks 'gazzooned' and squarked loudly as they swam across the tarn. As we headed into the Misery Stream headwaters we came across an enormous field of speargrass. Shay and I were grateful for our overtrousers. An hour or so later we hit the valley floor and it was just a short walk downstream to Top Misery Hut, where we arrived just as it started to rain.

Top Misery is a pleasant hut with an excellent stove. We lit a fire which served the dual purpose of warming us up and boiling water for hot drinks. The hut book dated





The Branch River Valley

from the early 2000's, and a number of WTMC members were among those who had stayed there. The DOC sign suggested boiling the water for drinking. Was this just a reference to the tank water or the stream as well? We all drank the stream water all day with no ill effects, so maybe it was the former.

After lunch we headed off in drizzly wind-blown rain, which thankfully didn't last long. This time we were following a marked track that went in and out of the bush. Eventually we emerged from the bush to a stunning sight. The Valley had opened out to be perhaps a kilometre wide. On either side huge peaks rose 2000 metres into the clag. It was the sort of scenery you couldn't capture with a camera. Even more so than with Hellfire Stream, Misery Valley seemed completely misnamed.

We had a navigational glitch at the far end of the valley but eventually found our way back into the bush. After a while we came across pine forests – the result of the old Forest Service's attempt to stabilize the eroding former farmland. We were on the border between the east and west of the conservation area. We arrived at Bottom Misery Hut, where Misery Stream hits the Branch River, in good time. Shay set about chopping firewood from a selection of large logs while Bernie and I relaxed. The wood shed had a resident rat but fortunately he couldn't get inside. I had seen on the net that the hut had been recently done up, so it was securely rodent-proof and had a nice new stove which we fired up for a brew and dinner. A recent entry in the hut book was from a party led by Shaun Barnett, doing our trip in the opposite direction. He later wrote up the trip for the September issue of Wilderness magazine and graded it as follows: "Difficult. Off-track travel and route finding". I liked that very much.

### Day 3

Our internet companions spent their third night at Branch Biv, nearly three hours up the valley, but they still didn't get to Lees Creek hut until 7 pm. We therefore had a long day ahead so needed an early start. Daylight saving ended on Sunday but as a psychological ploy we kept our watches on the old time in order to get away by 7.30 am (6.30 am – the correct time - sounded way too early). It dawned to a beautiful but chilly morning. The track up the Branch River is pretty straightforward, with large stretches along a broad valley. We got to Branch Biv in well under three hours, by which time it was warm and sunny. The track ends here.

We had seen no-one since Friday morning so were surprised to find the gear of two hunters in the biv. The hut book dated from 1986 and still had plenty of blank pages. DOC has a sign in the biv suggesting boiling the water, yet there had been no similar sign in Bottom Misery Hut where the water supply was also from the river. The water looked pristine and we ignored DOC with no ill-effects. I knew we needed to head up into the bush to avoid a tricky river gorge, which we did. Eventually we found a trail which we followed until it reached a large slip. Then we did more bush-bashing until we found another trail which led down to the river, by now just a stream. This we needed to follow almost to its headwaters, which went well until we reached a junction, with one stream flowing in from the left and another from the right. A check of the GPS confirmed that the stream to the left wasn't marked on the map despite its substantial flow, so we headed right.

Suddenly we came across a cairn, which I figured marked the point where we would try to cross the mountain range to our right. Earlier it had looked impossible but this looked doable, although very steep. Up we clambered, with Shay going way ahead. I missed an



The rugged tops above the headwaters of Lees Creek

obvious scree slope to the right and instead took Bernie and I though a narrow gut, which was pretty hairy going. But we made it in the end and flopped exhausted onto a wide ledge for our lunch break. The views were fantastic but I was nervous about our next move. The cliffs behind us looked horribly sharp but to our left was a nice gentle slope so I decided to head that way. Nope, wrong way, so the horribly sharp rocks it was. I regretted leaving my gloves buried in my pack and my hands were soon covered in cuts and scratches. But finally we emerged at the top.

The view down the other side into the headwaters of Lees Creek was just as scary. This was incredibly desolate country – think Mad Max – and felt so remote. It was hard to believe there was a ski field no more than 15 km away. Now here was a spot where ‘Hellfire’ and ‘Misery’ would be appropriate names! Yet there was something strangely beautiful about it. According to Sean Barnett, ‘the Bounds of Hades’ was an early name for the Raglan Range, and I could see why.



Heading down to the headwaters of Lees Creek

The way down was steep but soon we hit a large scree slope and were at the bottom in no time. From here, rather than heading along Lees Creek, we sidled across the slope, making rapid progress. This was brilliant travel, although I did notice Bernie, unused to long hard days, lagging behind. Shay and I, on the other hand, were being propelled along by adrenaline in this amazing country. Eventually we hit forest and, as sidling was working well, we decided to keep going. Bad call, as we were soon mired in treefall and new-growth beech. After an age, we fought our way down to the creek and crossed to gentle easy slopes on the other side. In no time we emerged into the valley below, which I knew was no more than a couple of hours from the hut.

I had been here twice before, the last time on a winter trip when we camped at the head of the valley. On both occasions Lees Creek was full of water. This time, however, it had disappeared after a dry summer, leaving a dry creek bed. The creek eventually emerged from under the ground, as if by magic, several kilometres downstream.

Bernie got slower and slower as nine hours of hard tramping took their toll. We removed stuff from his pack and I sent Shay ahead to the hut to collect and chop firewood. Once the route became obvious I headed off also, there being little else I could do. Bernie arrived some time after us and collapsed on the ground for half an hour. When I saw him later in the year he told me he loved the trip, and clearly meant it. That last couple of hours had obviously been erased from his memory.

Lees Creek Hut was less inviting than I recalled. There was a dead possum under the hut and a remarkably bold mouse hung around, startling Shay as it ran across his foot. The stove worked well though, and rather ironically we ended the trip with gas left over. Bernie eventually recovered, much to our relief, and the colour returned to his face. He tucked into dinner with enthusiasm.

#### Day 4

On our final day we only had a three hour walk so figured we had loads of time. We lit a fire – there was plenty of wood thanks to Shay’s efforts - and gave the hut a thorough clean. We arrived at the club van around 11 am, only to find Mike’s group already there. We all headed off with the aim of getting an early ferry, although hit a delay when the van got stuck crossing the creek. It was all hands to the wheel, as it were, and Bernie and Shay ended up soaked from their efforts. Despite my scepticism we all managed to get the early ferry despite it being a long weekend. It was a satisfying end to a brilliant tramp.





# Going up is Easy(er)

An ascent of Mt Alarm, Inland Kaikoura Range 2877m

by EMILY SHROSBREE  
with BETT, KATY AND MIKE

I signed up to climb Mount Alarm in the Inland Kaikoura Range with an odd mixture of excitement and dread. In theory I had the necessary fitness and alpine skills, but in practice I had no idea whether my brain was capable of sending the right messages to my body to get me up a real mountain.

Setting my eyes on the peak, as we walked across the scree and snow slopes into the basin between Tapuae-o-uenuku and Alarm, I was pretty sure my brain was not going to send the right messages! The face of Alarm looked both vertical and very high – I could not imagine reaching even halfway up, let alone getting to the top. I decided it would be prudent to share my mental state having seen our target. Mike's response to my 'that looks terrifying – you'll never get me up there' was a relaxed 'ah, don't worry, it looks steeper than it is'. Ok, so I wasn't getting out of this that easily...might as well plod onwards and upwards and see if it starts to look any less steep...



Heading up the Hodder

This was Day Two of the three day round trip to Alarm. Day One had been a seven hour slog up (or mostly in) the Hodder River, involving seventy crossings and 1000m of ascent. All the alpine climbing gear required for the 'looks steeper than it is' ascent meant we were all weighed down with various ropes, snow stakes, technical axes and carabiners. My pack was a good 20kg, which is more than I would choose to carry 20-odd kilometres up a river. There is the option to carry in dry boots for the climb, but adding to my existing 20kg was not an option for me – I would have toppled over backwards with every third step up the bouldered river. Instead I borrowed a newspaper guide to Kaikoura from the Interislander with the hope that I could sponge out some of the water and avoid frozen toes once we hit the snow. The weather was beautiful for the walk in, but I was nervous about the climb the next day so I was finding it difficult to enjoy it. For a lot of the way, the noise of the river prevented easy conversation so we were a quiet party of four. We passed Shin Hut where Ed Hillary spent the night before his ascent of Tappy, recently re-enacted by Kevin Biggar and Jamie Fitzgerald in 'First Crossings'. This and the goats climbing vertical cliffs in their hooves provided good encouragement that challenges can be achieved....and so we plodded on up the river!



Hodder Huts

Back to the climb in hand. We donned crampons an hour or so after leaving the hut. It was cold, and there was the odd cloud moving fairly speedily across the sky indicating that it was windy higher up, but nothing that would stop us continuing to climb at this point. Going was steady, and a little pressured. Our target in sight, we needed to get to the bottom of the face as quickly as pos-

**“My calves were burning with the pressure I was pushing into my toes to keep my crampons safely in the snow.”**

sible to give us enough time to climb and descend safely. As we neared, it still looked incredibly steep to me. We reassessed our route and decided to head up to the col between Tappy and Alarm, then along the ridge to the summit of Alarm. This would give us the best chance of reaching the summit – if we continued to the face and were too slow (or it got too challenging) we wouldn't have enough time to retreat to the ridge and make a second attempt that way. I liked this decision, as although the ridgeline still looked pretty steep, it was far less intimidating than the face. On we went up to the col. No time to stop. We made our way up the ridge line slowly but fairly straightforwardly. I was feeling stable with both axes and the snow conditions were good. But already this was more challenging for me than any previous trip. The ridge disappeared fairly steeply on either side, so the exposure was present, but not too bad. Then we got to the steep section just below the summit. There were two options –

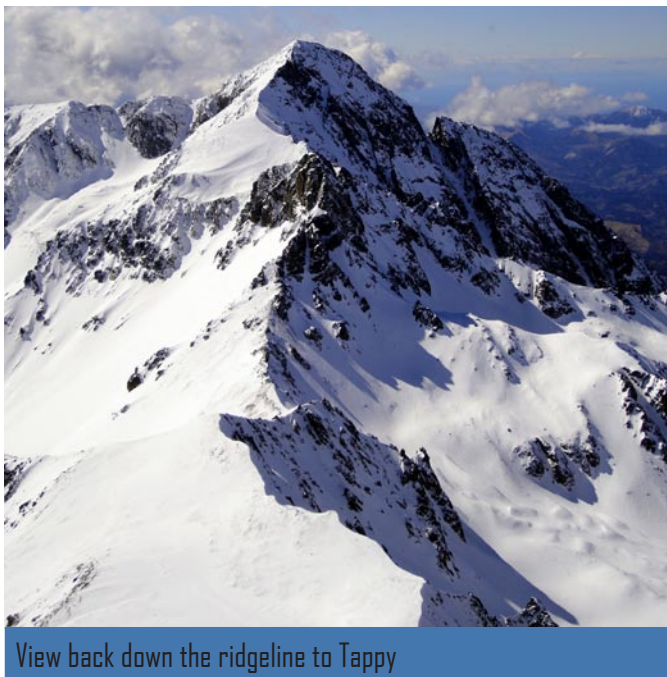
across, then up steeply, or up a bit less steeply then along the last bit of the ridge to the summit – I opted for the 'bit less steep' up. Katy plumped for the 'across then up' route. Up we went. I followed Mike using the footholds he left in the snow and hitting in my axes as I went. It felt steep and I felt vulnerable, but I was learning to trust my axes more with each step. The mountain was sucking all my concentration so the expansive views out along the Kaikoura Coast were lost on me... My calves were burning with the pressure I was pushing into my toes to keep my crampons safely in the snow. My shoulders were also feeling the effects of an hour and a half of swinging heavy technical axes for every step of progress. I reached the crux, a metre or so of the steepest terrain so far, with much of the snow



Views out over the Kaikoura Coast



already chewed up and rocks not looking inviting enough to house my axe. I could see Katy ahead on the summit and Mike just above me. I knew it must be possible to climb through this, and once I was through the remaining short ridge section it would be comparatively easy. One concerted push and up I went, joining the others on the summit with the great feeling...that I was half way there. I had done the easy bit! I scoffed some much needed chocolate and had a little water – I'd not eaten or drunk for the last two hours and I had used pretty much every ounce of energy. Many of those ounces shed in pure concentration and mind-willing effort, let alone the physical effort of hauling myself up a good thousand metres from the huts we had left at 6am that morning. It was now 1pm.



A couple of months prior, I was one of four WTMC members to participate in an Alpine Instruction Course (AIC) instructed by Lydia Bradey (first woman to climb Everest without oxygen). Amongst many other things Lydia provided the inspiration for the title of this report - check out her book 'Going Up is Easy'. This was the first year the club has run an AIC for a while and hiring a guide such as Lydia to provide the instruction proved an excellent strategy. I was learning for every waking minute of the six days of instruction – building snow anchors, abseiling, and crevasse rescue and all sorts of hints and tips that you pick up from learning from someone very skilled in their field. What AIC also taught me is that you can't learn this stuff from a textbook, and there is always more to learn! The only way to become more competent is to get out there and start using the basics, preferably with some

more experienced and trustworthy companions. And so it was that I was now perched gingerly on the summit of Mt Alarm...

...resting for a few minutes. I didn't really enjoy being at the top. Partly I was exhausted, partly it was so steep that concentration was required to remain stable and I couldn't let my guard down to jump up and down and take in the view. But mostly I knew that somehow I had to get down that short steep section where there was now even less snow to dig myself into. We discussed options for the descent. There was the route Katy had taken up, but she reported that it was quite hard and icy. We could put on the harnesses we stupidly had forgotten to put on at the same time as our crampons and abseil down. Or there was 'simply' down-climbing the same section that I'd come up. I didn't fancy negotiating harness-donning on this steep angle, plus the ease with which Mike's experimental snow stake anchor had gone in didn't fill me with confidence. So I took a deep breath and said 'I will be ok to down climb, it's just that one section that I'm worried about. If you can talk me past that, I will be fine'. And I was. But I did need talking down that 'one section'. Slowly but surely I made my way down, grateful for the helpful directions for foot and axe placements from my companions above and below.

Back at the hut a few hours later we shared stories about mountain adventures over dinner and retired to our sleeping bags pretty quickly. It was a chilly hut and we were all tired from the day's climbing.

Day Three was a reverse of Day One, but much less of a slog given the now lighter packs, our more nonchalant attitude towards wet boots, and my more relaxed demeanour having conquered my fears of the climb the previous day. It was a cold morning, and my boots had frozen despite spending the night inside the hut. The water tanks were also frozen so our morning brew was limited.

We clocked 72 river crossings on the way out. Blessed with a third clear day in a row, it was refreshing to spend time in the river. Within six hours we were back at the van, with time for a celebratory gourmet burger on our way to the ferry. Challenge accomplished!



# NOT THE POO VALLEY!

by **MIKE PHETHEAN**

with **TOM, ANDREI, BETT, ABBIE, SAM, ED, JESS, CHRISTINE, and KATY**

“**W**hat are we going to do this Easter?” asked Katy. I mentioned that I was leading a trip to Chittenden and Cotterell.

“I’ve never heard of them, where are they?” asked Katy. I explained they were off the Rainbow Valley on the east side of Nelson Lakes National Park

“Oh you mean the Poo Valley! I don’t want to go there again. What else can I do?” asked Katy. This was a reference to Rainbow Valley which was the valley up from our route. It is a working station with lots of animals and their associated mess. I explained that the route I intended to take was on DOC land so no animal mess.

“Huh! There will still be poo! What other trips are there at Easter?” asked Katy.

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David Jewel had led a successful trip the previous spring to both Mt Travers and Mt Cotterell from the Travers Valley. Studying the map I realised that Mt Cotterell could be climbed from the other side and the guide book revealed it was a rock scramble in summer. Whilst the Travers valley is one of the most beautiful of the Nelson Lakes valleys, I have been up there about ten times and it has become overly familiar.

I was looking for some variety, and somewhere the club hadn’t been before. I reckoned that Mt Chittenden could also be climbed as part of the same trip. As I was Chief Guide the trip naturally found its way on to the schedule. No one volunteered to lead it, so I put my name down.

The other trip to the area was entitled Hellfire and Misery. This was enough to attract Paul Christoffell as a leader

who we would share transport with. (Personally I feel the map-makers missed an opportunity. What if the valley were called Brimstone?)

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Thankfully I did not delegate trip marketing to Katy and so I ended up with nine other people signed up. This began to worry me a little as this is quite a few for an alpine trip. Luckily there was a good mix of experience in the selection, with a good sprinkling of rock climbers and alpinists who had ascended some of New Zealand’s 3000m peaks.

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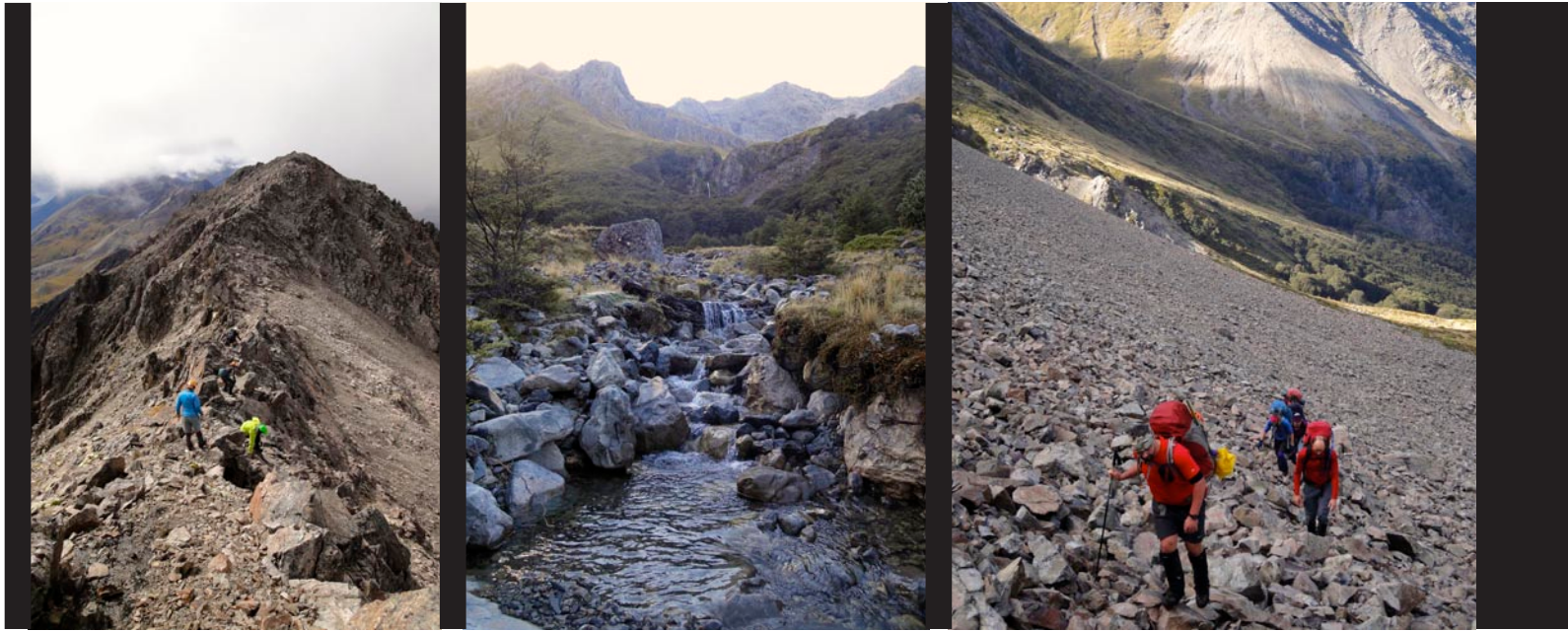
We camped on the Thursday night at Kowhai Point campsite, erecting our tents some time around midnight after an on time ferry.

The morning brought good weather and we got dropped off by Paul’s group at Connor’s Creek. After the usual bit of pack sorting, we headed off along the track passing through great beech forest. The sun was shining, a great way to start a tramp, but we knew there was a bad weather front coming the next day. The track peacefully crossed the river a few times before delivering us to lunch at the bush edge. Nary a sign of domesticated animals.

The route then followed the valley up to a saddle in the ridge line. The going was slower with Spaniards and high tussock impeding the way. Route finding was also not optimal with a minor diversion up a side stream, whilst avoiding the aforementioned foliage.

Various peaks can be climbed from the saddle but time did not allow. We dropped into the stream and followed it down until we reached the track at the bottom of the val-





ley. A few of us were a little out of tramping practice and glad to see the hut. The hut accommodates eight people so volunteers and snorers (not mentioning names, but he is Russian) slept outside in tents. A little later a disappointed couple arrived to find the hut busy and elected to camp down on the flats.

We chopped some wood but after discussion, the general agreement was that the open fireplace would cause too much smoke to circulate round the hut. Dinner was followed by early to bed as we wanted to make an early

start to dodge the worst of the wind the next day.

We set off not long after the break of dawn with drizzle already descending. We followed a volunteer-maintained track up to the third side stream on the true left of Begley Creek. We boulder hopped up this side stream until bypassing a 70m waterfall on the true left by climbing up through the bush. Tom led us up through scree field scrambles until we reached the South ridge of Chittenden somewhere between point 2162m and the summit.

By now the wind had picked up to the point where it was getting close to blowing people over. This was not the weather for knife edge scrambling and so we had to turn back despite being so close.

Luckily my spirits were kept high by Andrei. He was finding the route finding on the scree descent a little bit intimidating. I offered to show him the way allowing me to use the classic Terminator line of "Follow me if you want to live." I am not sure if Andrei got the reference but we all managed a safe descent and I was happy. The weather was deteriorating further, reinforcing our decision to descend.

The cold from the weather led to the fire being lit with no discussion and thankfully most of the smoke went out of the chimney. (A tear in the chimney would allow gusts to blow back smoke). Noodles, chocolate and reading filled the afternoon as we listened to the rain come down outside.

The skies had cleared by the morning and we again took the track up Begley Creek but this time headed up slopes to the saddle at 1675. The way up to the saddle is a tussock and loose rock scramble, which was a little more



Arriving at Begley Hut



Keeping warm by the fire in Begley Hut



View of the Traverse Valley and Lake Rotoiti from Mount Chittenden

precarious with heavy packs.

After some exploring for routes to the summit, we dropped our packs a few hundred meters down the other side of the saddle and started our ascent. A steep stream with a 5 metre scramble got us on to easier scree slopes. These we followed up to the summit ridge, arriving north east of the peak before following the ridge to the top.

The mists were swirling but there were good glimpses of Lake Rotoiti down the Travers Valley. We had a good half hour of sitting and photos, content in having made one of our summits.

The descent showed the value of wearing helmets. Abbie pulled a rock onto her head before it bounced down the slope. As usual, once on the gentler slopes heading down the Hamilton River the pressure of trip leading disappeared from me.

Not for long though! I had planned to camp at the bush edge of the Hamilton but the tussock was lumpy and generally not flat. We trudged further down river almost desperate for a campsite. Then the river went underground and we began to wonder.

Eventually we found a raised grass bank not very far from where the track proper started. Some sites needed some gardening but it was a good spot and the river had made a useful reappearance. Sam arranged a fire and soon we were fed and asleep.

The morning brought good weather and we walked with a spring in our step to the road end, picking up the track as we went.

Although we were early to the van, bathing was curtailed when Paul's group emerged from the Lees Valley. We loaded up, and apart from getting stuck in a ford, made good progress to an early ferry home from Picton.

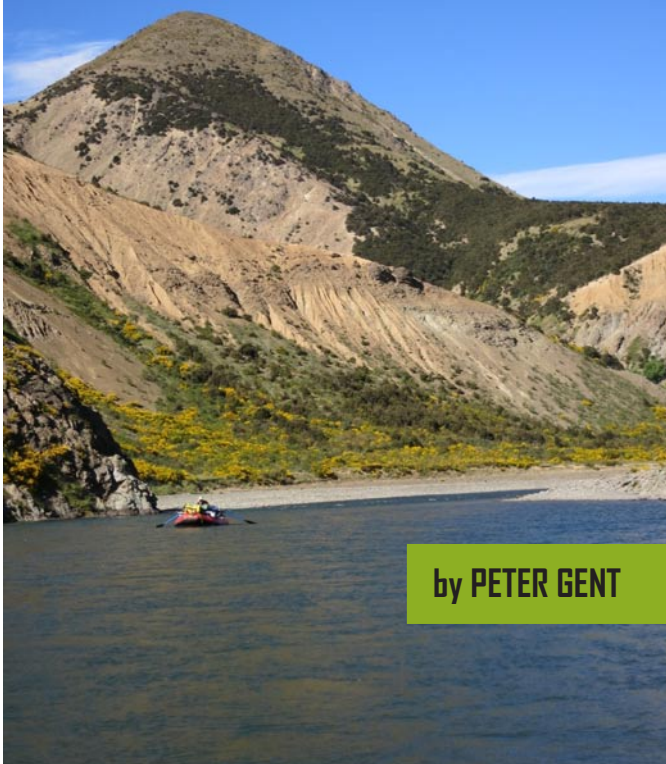
Thanks to all of the punters who made it a great trip - Tom, Andrei, Bett, Abbie, Sam, Ed, Jess, Christine, and Katy.

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"Well there was no poo on the trip after all," Katy remarked on the Ferry. "Yep", I thought.



# CLARENCE RIVER RAFTING



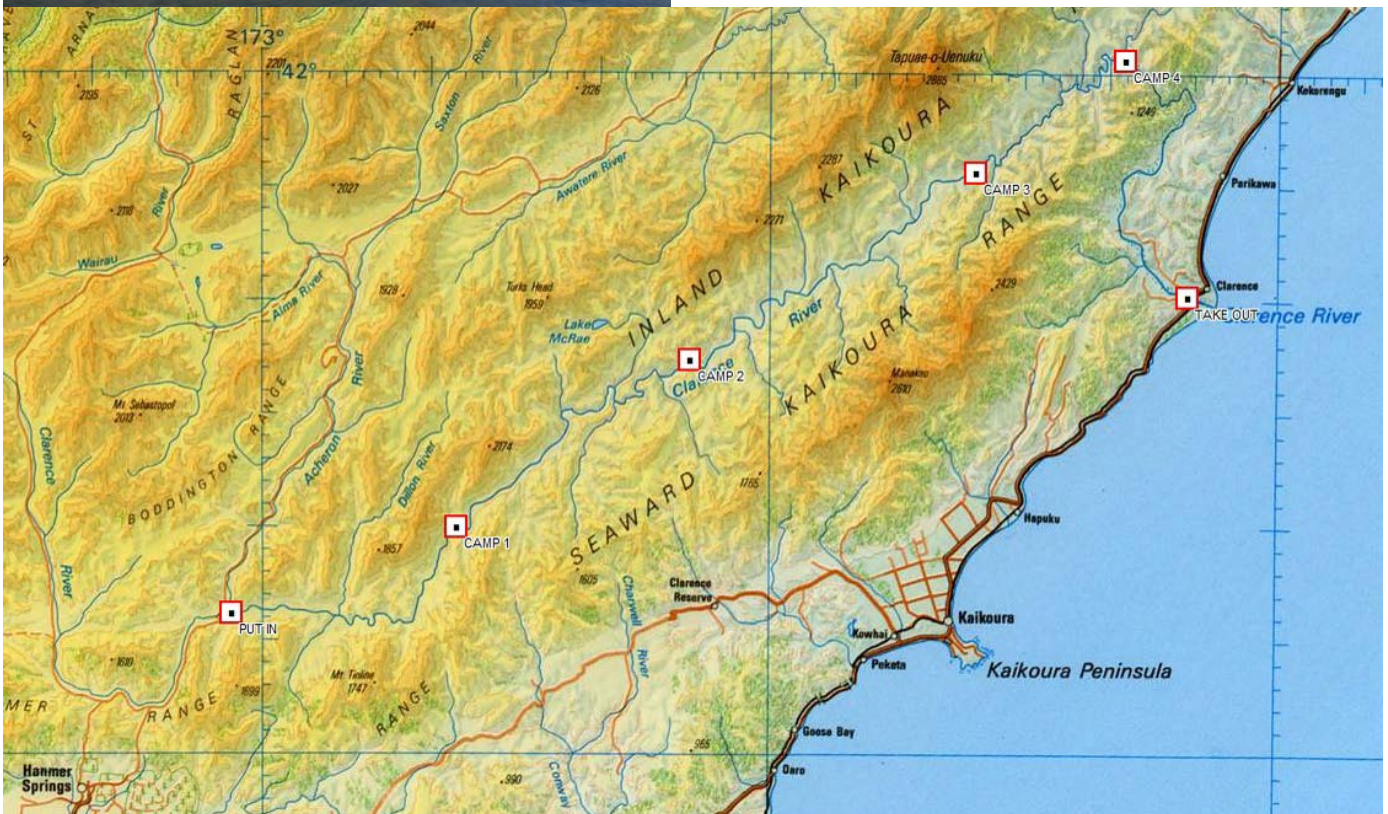
by PETER GENT

## Day 0

Like all good trips, trying to round up the punters at the airport was the starting point for a week's rafting down the Clarence River with Hidden Valley rafting. Seven of us - Ken, Jim, John, Greg, Peter, Paul and myself finally assembled to be collected for the drive up to Hanmer Springs to meet our guides for the week - Grant, Sam and Eli.

After a couple of detours to ensure the cellar didn't run dry, we made it to Hanmer for the gear packing session and the first of an excellent week of meals cooked by Grant and co. We even managed to get a trip to the hot pools before dinner, to ensure we were in the best condition for the week of paddling ahead of us.

The planned route was to raft 180 km of the Clarence and with a 700 meter descent over five days. The first couple of days would be in relative open high country, before spending two days heading in a northeast direction through the valley between the seaward and inland Kaikouras. Finally, the route turns in a south westerly direction heading towards the Pacific Ocean and finishing at the river mouth at Clarence township.



The Clarence River showing location of camps



## Day 1

After a mammoth van packing session in Hanmer, we headed up over Jack's Pass at a leisurely hour with Grant. Thus allowing Sam, Eli and the van relocation crew a head start on pumping up the boats and getting most things loaded up, so we weren't spending too much time dealing with sand flies and faffing at the first put in.

We put the rafts in just downstream of the junction of the Acheron River, at 700 meters above sea level.



Loading the rafts



The crew

For the trip, we had three rafts on the water - one with four rafters, one with three rafters and a third with all the gear including the kitchen sink and hunting rifle.

To start with, I was in the four-man raft with Sam being our guide for the day.

Eli manned the gear boat using some oversized oars to keep things moving and Grant took the select three-man crew with him to head our motley crew down the river.

At this point, my inner gear junkie was having a field

day with kit galore including a large number of Pelican cases to transport everything from satellite phones, batteries to keep the gadgets charged, through to my snack box to ensure on the water refreshment was never in short supply.

The first morning was spent getting used to the raft, ensuring the crew paddled almost in unison and getting used to being coordinated by our guide.

After lunch on what turned out to be the smallest beach of the whole trip, we approached our first rapids. Helmets were donned and gopros were switched on to encounter our first set of white water. Although there was some decent movement to the rapid, it was a gentle warm-up to the rest of the river. Later on in the afternoon, we came across more rapids, but what appeared to me to be the bigger hazard was not puncturing the rafts. It seemed the aim of the guide to stop the raft bouncing off the rocks on any turns, to stop the rafts getting punctured. I can only imagine the size of the patch required to get a six-person raft airtight again, although a hole on the raft would not deflate the whole thing, as it had various air chambers to ensure no single point of failure / immediate sinking.

After a steady first day overall, we had covered around 35 km and descended 110 meters.

The routine of camp for the next four nights was started, with an en masse boat unloading of all the gear. Sam, Eli and Grant were a well-oiled machine setting up the kitchen and various camp luxuries. Accommodation was provided but you did have to build it every night. I took up residence in the cosy one-man Macpac tent which offered down time and (a little) space away from the madding crowds and the rest of camp.



Day 1 campsite

## Day 2

Day two we woke to the sound of breakfast being cooked for us along with the option of cereal and yo-



gurt for those requiring the continental option! After the decent feed of day one, breakfast muffins were offered to continue the high standard of catering that was experienced throughout the trip.

The day turned out to be a windy day, with a good half hour of going nowhere fast, even going backwards up river at one point on the strait near Palmer Hut. This was not the rafting trip I had expected. However, once we got moving again, we managed to find a very small spot on the bank to pull in, have morning tea and recharge before attempting to carry on hopefully downstream.

As the wind died, we came into a slightly more gorgey part of the river valley and stopped for lunch on a nice wide sandy beach which made a change from the stop for morning snack. At this point, the sun was in full effect and we were struggling to find enough shade for those that wanted to escape a little of the lunchtime sun.

The afternoon's paddle was not that full of rapids but the water was moving with a good flow and there was some definitely noticeable gradients. The GPS was not giving too much away but visually we appeared to be heading down a steady gradient.

Late afternoon we arrived at Quail Flat homestead on one of the straighter sections of bank, but finding a suitable spot to land and camp brought us right to the end of the racing straight overlooking the clock face up at 1091 meters. We took the opportunity to walk round the remaining buildings of the historic homestead, passing the airstrip and accommodation which appeared to be bookable for a stay with a solid roof over your head. After another hearty meal, the last rays of daylight bought dramatic light across the inland Kaikouras. A handy hint for anyone that didn't pack the boat themselves is to ask where the loo paper is kept before the guides go to bed as it's a sensible thing to do.



Quail Flat homestead

### Day 3

Today was where all the action seemed to happen. This morning we were being tasked with topping up the air in the boats and helping Grant and co with breaking camp. It did make a change from watching the professionals do all the work.

As we set out from camp two, we were aware that the weather may deteriorate from here on in as the forecast on Monday morning had predicted things may turn today. During the morning while the weather was still holding, we came to one of three sites where it is possible to cross the river by four-wheel drive. A colleague of mine, who was meant to be on the trip but had to pull out at the last minute for family reasons had crossed here a few months earlier with his 4x4 Club. Ken, who was paddling next to me on the front left of the boat today, starting a running commentary of the crossing site, just as a 4x4 came through (thankfully we were in front of the crossing point by this time therefore no right of way issues took place) and then we headed onto what looked like a decent but entirely manageable set of rapids at the end of the straight section where the crossing point was. Video replays after the event offer more information than I can remember, but it seems the raft seemed to take the initial rapids fine but a hole in the water caused me to exit the boat in a not very dignified manner. My entry back onto the boat was even less dignified - all I can say is that there is not much leverage available to get back into a raft in a deep river.



Fine weather in the morning

Eli, who was steering, suggested it was down to driver error but I suspect I was not an innocent party in my dunking. After falling in, I added another layer to keep the wind chill down but it seemed that the effort in paddling managed to keep me warm, however the adrenaline prob-



A faster flowing section of the river

ably helped a little too in those first few minutes. As early afternoon rolled in, the decision was made to keep moving as it was getting cooler and more overcast by the minute. Despite my dunking, I managed to keep comfortable unlike some others in the group who were reaching for every layer to hand. With blizzard conditions rolling in in the final 20 minutes as we came to camp three, it was cold once we stopped. Getting the gear up to the camp site - probably only 50 meters away but in sleet, and a rock bank for the first 10 meters - made for an interesting portage of gear.

After getting the gear up, Grant and co worked on getting some shelter up to keep people dry and fires were built. Being the keen and enthusiastic fire builder that I am, I pitched in, sawing, cutting and generally helping the group to warm up and have food prepared as some of the senior members of the group were getting really cold.

Talking of food, Sam broke out the cake mix and chocolate cake was served up for dessert along with a suitable wine from the cellar (read plastic barrel) as chosen by our on board sommelier Paul.

After a suitably excellent meal and video replay of the day's events as captured by our senior cameraman, Eli,



Snow on the Inland Kaikoura ranges

Sam and I headed off for a spot of deer hunting. Despite spending an hour or so at last light in the valley above camp, we only managed to see one at a distance and no fresh meat for dinner tomorrow either. To be honest, that was not a big issue with the amount of stores carried by the fleet of frozen chilli bins we had on board for the trip.

#### Day 4

The previous afternoon's blizzard conditions had translated into snow down to 600 meters on the inland Kaikouras which made for an almost wintery scene as we paddled downstream.

It was still a cool day, with the rafts requiring an unusual mid-morning top up of air to ensure the rafts would travel as well as possible (and deal with any groundings on the shallow rapids).

As the temperature was not warming up much, even with all the paddling, Grant got a fire going, which helped keep the group warm and got the kettle on for a well-deserved cup of tea.

After lunch, it was decided to end the day slightly earlier than planned. This was due to a racing straight where winds can pick up in the afternoons.

We camped for the night at Dope Growers' Corner, which sits at around 120 meters. It is named as many moons ago dope was grown on the site. It was apparently the furthest spot upstream that a jet boat could get to. There were the faint signs of horticultural activity with mesh netting holding the soil together in some of the flatter spots of the camp site.

The site offered a decent rocky beach and sheltered spot for the rafts. Not a great swimming location but quite picturesque with the last rays of sun that the afternoon offered on the final evening of the trip.



## Day 5

What was billed as the final day turned out to be more like the final morning. We left camp at Dope Growers' Corner pretty early on in the morning, despite the 75 meter rocky portage to deal with. After dealing with the racing straight, which didn't seem to cause any problems in the early morning put in, it was off for the final morning. It turned out that food was even in more abundant supply as Grant pulled out seemingly endless bags of cookies to feed to the not-so-hungry group. We finally turned from the north easterly direction we had been travelling in for the past couple of days towards the southwest and the Pacific Ocean at Clarence township.

As the morning progressed, Greg offered up a photography masterclass (as he had recently been on one of Richard Young's weekend courses) as the river widened out to become a flatter river valley, but still not heavily braided like some of the rivers found further south in Canterbury. The sea side of the seaward Kaikouras started to appear out to our right and stretching off to the south (and into clag) to remind us of how far north we had come over the past four days.

About an hour before the end, we passed under our first made man structure as we put in just downstream of the bridge at the Acheron on day one. The final group of rapids appeared, with one causing our raft to ground momentarily. The river seemed to have a little more life in it this morning, with two decent sets of rapids to get through. Then we had another hour of rapids and wind to deal with.

As we came up to the South Island main trunk railway bridge, there was some serious discussion over the last rapid, as there was some concern about puncturing a raft or two. Portaging the rafts was discussed but in the end, all three rafts ran the rapids and avoided the sharp flood

banks (full of old reinforcing concrete and rebar), passing under the railway bridge and then the road bridge of SH1. A final swift paddle to the true left of the river and some serious mud to deal with brought us to the get-out point. It was time to deflate the rafts and load up the waiting vans.

We headed back to the rafting base in Clarence township before parting with some of the team heading north to Blenheim while the rest of us headed for ice cream and cell phone coverage in Kaikoura before going home via the Koru Lounge. Being off-grid for five days was a great experience that something not many of us do these days. I admittedly survived until day three when I wanted internet back again! My thanks to my fellow paddlers, and Grant and team for leading us down the river (with a paddle) and keeping us well-fed along the way. The only problem is choosing which river to raft next?



Packing up at the end of the trip



## TO SEE WITH THE ALBATROSS

by SUE WALSH

I was sitting in the cabin of the catamaran eating my lunch looking out the door at two black-backed gulls gently rocking on the smooth water of Paterson's Inlet. One of them was really big and I was thinking "they breed them big down here" when I heard a crew member say "yes, it followed us in." All of a sudden the cogs in my head started whirring and I instantly realised that the big gull was in fact an albatross – one of my favourite birds. Not having seen very many of these marvellous birds I was torn between finishing my lunch and grabbing my camera and heading out to take photos. Food was important so I forced myself to finish eating and when I got my camera my feet were already halfway out the door. What an amazing start to the afternoon section of the pelagic tour.

The morning had started with everyone gathering at a small wharf to take the shuttle over to Ulva Island. Our guide for the day, Matt Jones, explained what the day would involve and what we would be doing on Ulva Island – bird watching – and then for the afternoon we would be on a boat heading down to Wrecks Reef to do seabird watching.

Once we landed on Ulva he took us through the history of the island and spoke in more detail about how we would go about spotting the birds. Never having done a tour like this before, I found it quite intriguing. We were to walk very slowly, stopping frequently and waiting and watching to see if birds would show themselves, and talk

very quietly. We were very fortunate and ended up seeing South Island saddlebacks, weka, tui, kaka, the very small riflemen, parakeets, oyster catchers, brown creepers, yellowheads, South Island robins and a Stewart Island kiwi who decided to come out during the day and forage for food.

After a couple of hours it was back to the wharf and onto the catamaran where my expectations for the afternoon were exceeded within five minutes of leaving the wharf. I didn't think it could get any better.

As we made our way down Paterson's Inlet and into the open sea more albatross flew in behind the original bird and we soon had a squadron flying in formation behind us. To ensure we did see seabirds, there was a large plastic bin in one corner of the catamaran that was filled with fresh blue cod. Before Matt could start to use some of it, the squadron turned into two, and as another boat came into view on our left, the albatross started peeling away and diving into the water. The other boat came from salmon farms and was dumping the dead salmon in the open water. Apparently they are allowed to do this once a week. The albatross saw an easy feed so went for it, however, once they realised the majority of the fish was old they left it alone. As Matt said, they might be opportunists but they won't eat everything.

Albatross are incredibly graceful in the air, however, coming in to land on water is another matter. As they drop down towards the sea their legs, which have been tucked up under their bodies, drop down. Just before they touch the sea their feet come forward to provide a flat surface. With wings widespread they touch down and



water ski across the surface, sometimes in a graceful arc using the end of the wing to balance, until gravity takes over, the landing gear goes back up and they settle in the water, usually with a big back wash that goes halfway up their front. At times the landing looked very precarious particularly when Matt would hold out a bit of blue cod. The albatross would fly in closely and eyeball the cod in his hand, usually with their landing gear down. As they landed they would still be watching the blue cod and you wondered sometimes how they didn't crash or do a nose dive into the water.

Taking off from the water was also interesting and comical to watch. The albatross sort of lift up a bit from the water and start to flap their wings which raises them further out of the water, then they run along the top of the water, wings beating, head extended with a very concentrated almost worried look on their face before finally lifting off and soaring into the air.

We eventually reached the reef and it felt like we were in the middle of nowhere, with the Antarctic due south. By this time the call had gone out on the bird grapevine and we were surrounded by magnificent albatross in all sizes as well as a variety of petrels including a great giant northern petrel, which was really huge. In direct contrast were a pair of small cape petrels that were incredibly cute.

In my eyes, albatross are very dignified; that image was shattered when blue cod was thrown into the water for them. These very elegant dignified looking birds suddenly turned into a rabble of playground thugs squawking and

shrieking at each other. The noise was shrill, ear piercing and constant. But it was startling how quickly you adjusted to it and it became commonplace.

As we bobbed in the water in perfect conditions, Matt pointed out the different types of bird. We had Buller's mollymawks, Salvin's mollymawks, white-capped albatross and three mighty giant southern royal albatrosses. Matt explained with the giant southern royal albatross that they observe a strict hierarchy. This was forcibly demonstrated to us when there were a mighty squawk and one of the lighter coloured royal albatross went for a darker coloured one and engulfed its head in its bill and seemed to be trying to close its bill exerting pressure on the head of what was the younger bird. I didn't know if I was going to witness something horrible when the older bird released the younger one. Matt, who had observed everything, noted that the younger bird had tried to snatch fish away from the older bird who had promptly demonstrated who was in charge.

I noticed two very small birds bobbing in the water. They were a pair of cape petrels. They paddled around outside the wider group of albatross and mollymawks and never attempted to get any of the fish that was thrown to the group. At one point they were quite close to a giant southern royal albatross and the contrast in size was quite significant, almost like comparing a sparrow to the body of a turkey, or maybe an ostrich.

As we were watching the birds, Matt called out pointing to a darker coloured bird that had an evil look about



Buller's mollymawks



Close up of a Buller's mollymawk



A cape petrel and southern royal albatross

it. The ferocious skua had arrived and, as I was comparing the albatross to planes, the skua looked like an enemy fighter plane. The colouring was dark, the head scooped low down giving it a hunchbacked look. Matt got some cod in his hand and held it up in the air. The skua swooped low over the boat looking at the cod. Matt threw the cod up in the air, the skua circled and caught it. Matt threw another piece up and the skua repeated its performance. This happened a few more times before it flew off.

I had realised after a while that seagulls were no longer part of the birds that were around us. I'd never thought about how far out from land they might fly and clearly we were too far out for them. Eventually, when we turned north and headed towards Oban the seagulls reappeared. The difference in flight between the gulls and albatross was interesting. Gulls madly flap their wings whereas albatross glide with the odd down or up push of their wings.

As we got closer to Oban the number of albatross dropped away and eventually seagulls were our only companions. The catamaran pulled into the wharf and that was the end of an amazing day and spectacular afternoon.

Back in the comfort of my home going through the hundreds of photos I took, the trip seems like a dream. It was so special seeing these amazing birds with their effortless glide and swoop over the waves. Folk normally associate Stewart Island with tramping and kiwi spotting. This time my experience was different, unintentionally focussed

on bird life. The pelagic tour was expensive, but it was worth every cent and I'm so pleased my memories are of cheeky kaka, a foraging kiwi and the magnificent albatross.



# KEPLER 2014

Or how to keep your running cap on in 50km/hr winds

by STEPHEN HEALEY

**N**at and I had completed the Tarawera Ultra in February 2014 and asked ourselves “what next?”

The obvious answer was The Kepler Challenge, Sharron had talked this up and we started looking into it, getting more and more excited as we pored over Youtube and Facebook footage on New Zealand’s premium mountain race.

Just a push for the Tarawera Ultra and 50/42Km races first though. These are really beautiful bush runs and have a huge amount of good will and camaraderie. Everyone involved is extraordinarily helpful and friendly and Paul Charteris has, without question, the best stocked aid stations in the business..

Aside from the usual fare there are salted chips, watermelon, various fruit, soft drinks and sweets. At the inaugural Tarawera 50km there were scones with cream and jam at the Buried Village aid station and when I suggested they should provide a cup of tea to accompany it, they had that too. We even got pizza at one aid station and kumara chips

at another.

This all just adds something unique to the journey and is a welcome change from Gu’s and lollies.

Moving on to the Kepler. We decided early that we were definitely going and we booked our flights and accommodation long before entries were available. This led to a nervous time on the morning entries opened, sitting at the computer waiting, fully aware that entries would sell out in minutes (it took just five minutes to sell out) and knowing we had committed to go regardless of the outcome.

As it turns out three of us got straight in, a fourth member of the group slept in, or went to work, or something and forgot to enter ‘til later, ending up well down the waitlist.

Time passed and as the date got closer we were joined by another friend off the waitlist and eventually the original fourth member of the party as well.

Two of us were going down by ourselves and three others were travelling with their partners. We had booked



a really neat house, just a minute's walk from Registration, with four bedrooms and a fold-out bed in the lounge. We were subsequently also joined by Jo Johansen, one of the favourites for the women's race and it was great talking with her and getting an insight into how the elite runners manage these races. One point she did raise was that while they might make it look easy, racing 60km is just as hard for them as it is for us, they just travel faster. We were all reasonably spent at the finish line, regardless of the different times taken to complete the run.

Finally the weekend arrived. The weather throughout November was arse and the forecast for this weekend was no better. The previous Saturday there had been snow falling and it was 25cm deep that weekend at Luxmore Hut. We were nervous!

We arrived at Te Anau via Air New Zealand and hire cars and settled into the house and headed off to gear check and registration. Weather was warm but the sky had some ominous looking high cloud promising wind and rain at some point.

With a 6am start some were up at 4am the next morning, meaning that all of us were awake shortly afterwards. The struggle with what to wear ensued. I eventually opted for a normal running shirt meaning I was carrying 2x long sleeve thermals, (along with everything else) in my pack. It was chilly but not really cold at this point.

We parked the cars and walked down to the start line, where I got straight into the toilet queue just missing the busloads that arrived shortly after, I only had four in front of me. Others heading there after me had an enormous queue to contend with.

Excitement now built quickly as dawn's early light began to unfurl and the starting time approached. We stepped up to the starting line and I was chatting with the others when someone said Nigel had gone by looking for me. I headed off up the line looking for him until I caught up with him just back from the start line. Standing up on concrete blocks I could see Vaijin and the other front runners just ahead of me, we then saw the seven hour marker just behind us and both felt a little out of place, we had guesstimated nine odd hours for completion, though I secretly hoped for eight+, Nigel was being coy though, as the third best runner in our group I was convinced he would be home well before this.

Suddenly it was time to run and we took off to the blast of the air horn and headed off around the lake. As usual my inexperience showed here and I got sucked into a bunch going way quicker than I should have been starting. I saw 5:35 minute km on my watch at one point, a bit too fast for me starting a 60km mountain race.

Coming into the First Aid Station I was at the head of a little group and had stayed there with just a few pushing past for the last few kms. Stopping to graze the table, as I like to do, I was passed by about 50 runners who just ignored it pushing straight on up the hill. Other than Jo I was the first of our group out of the aid station which confused me as there were two much better runners behind me still. Dion eventually passed me at the bottom of the hill and Nigel caught up about a third of the way up, both slowly pulled ahead, though Nigel saw Dion at Luxmore Hut and I caught up with Nigel there as well. Though his position was in part because at the crucial time, (show and tell for your compulsory gear) he somehow couldn't find his thermal blanket. He had to pull everything out and lost over five minutes, as well as gaining some more white hairs in the process. At one point he turned to me and said: you haven't got a spare thermal blanket have you? .. yeah right, let me just look I think it's under the books and laptop in the pack!

The trip up on to the tops is normal bush fare, until you reach the bluffs. These are quite spectacular and the metal steps and route round under and through the bluffs is memorable to say the least.

Breaking out onto the tops though is the highlight, with the mountains above and the lake below, you really appreciate the reason this walk has become so popular over



Running up the steps around the base of the bluffs





Luxmore Hut

the years.

Where's Wally was the theme for the aid station here and they were doing a great job playing along with this. The compulsory gear check here worked smoothly and efficiently and was less of an issue than I thought it would be. At this point it was windy and cool so I put on my jacket and it stayed on until we dropped down into the bush again on the way down to the Iris Burn. From Luxmore Hut the route sidles up and around under Mt Luxmore, eventually ascending and crossing the northern ridge off Mt Luxmore. At this point we crossed just below a long strip of snow and there were small patches of snow occasionally on the track from here on.

All the way along here the trip is fantastic. If I could change one thing about the Kepler I would have the tops travel continue for another 15-20km before dropping to the bush. The sense of airiness up there, with the lake below and mountains beyond, is just fantastic.



Along the tops

Aside from the views, the other fantastic bonus up there is watching the march of runner ants ahead and behind you. Some of the ridgeline is quite sharp and looking forward at times you can see runners silhouetted against the skyline ahead.

I kept in touch with Nigel all the way along the tops here and at Forest Burn shelter I could see him leaving in the distance as I was arriving.

The wind had got stronger as we traversed the open tops, gusting to peaks of about 50km's. Somehow I just managed to retain my cap - it got blown off once off towards the east where there was a big drop off, fortunately blowing along the ground first where I managed to catch up with it before it disappeared into the valley below. Often you would hear or sense the gusts coming, at that point I would drop my head into the wind or grab the peak of my cap to try to avoid losing it.

The steps down off the tops were fun and I loved the switchbacks. I'm normally in heaven blasting down this stuff, but I was holding back here, very conscious of the 30Km run home still to come. Just before the hut I passed a girl in a very fancy teal outfit, pleated skirt and long sleeved top, I felt very underdressed for the occasion at that point.

Iris Burn Hut and the half way sign arrived in 4:05, so low-eight hours was now the goal, as long as I could keep the wheels turning.

Heading off down river though, the thought of running for another 30kms was daunting. I eventually solved this by breaking the distance down by aid station. I simply said to myself: just 10 more kms to Rocky Point aid station etc and concentrated on that. Funnily with 600 odd people on the course, I spent most of the next 30km by myself and with no-one in sight. Loneliness of the long distance runner was constantly running through my head.

I really wished I had bought along some music for this stretch. I never use walkmans normally in a race but I could have done with some entertainment along here.

Aid station to aid station, I found myself passing four or five people, mostly walking, and was being passed by five to ten people, but mostly was travelling by myself the whole time.

Down in the flat area by Balloon Loop there was a boardwalk that veers off to the left to a look out in a lake area, while the main track veers right. As I reached this, I saw the boardwalk ahead and thought that was the main track. At the start of the boardwalk though there were some logs propped across the track in a cross - in my weariness it took me a few seconds to realise that this was indicating that this was not the route and I started in that

direction before turning around and following the correct trail.

I was not alone in this though as one of the front runners got to this point and jumped the logs and headed off out the boardwalk for a bit before realizing his mistake. Turning around he then compounded his mistake by turning right instead of left at the main track and heading off back the way he had come. It wasn't until meeting the next runner coming down the valley that he realised his error, promptly giving up a handy lead at the same time!

It was a lot warmer down here in the valley and I was glad I ran in my normal running shirt. My hydration strategy in these races is to normally just use a handheld bottle and refill at each aid station. I carry a spare bottle in my pack, but I should have transferred it to my front pouch when the temperature rose. I forgot to do this and found myself running out of water before each aid station, while I occasionally refilled at a stream or off the lake, I just wasn't drinking enough and after leaving Rainbow Reach had developed a bad headache at the back of my head and felt unsettled in the stomach to the point where I felt sick even trying to drink water. After walking for a few minutes I stopped and got out my spare bottle, attempted to eat some food, (not very successfully) and forced myself to drink a considerable quantity of liquid. This strategy seemed to help. It cost me ten minutes fluffing around but it taught me a valuable lesson about hydration. I had never been dehydrated before and don't want to repeat it again, so will be smarter next time and use the spare bottle, rather than just carry it.

The last aid stations were close together and the volunteers passed out beautiful wet Chux cloths to wipe yourself down with, running these over your neck, face and head was pure luxury.

Eventually you could hear the finish line announcer in the distance. Unfortunately as sound travels up the river for some way, you still have a couple of kms to run at this point. It is a beautiful sound to hear though.

Crossing the finish line, the legs can cease the forward momentum that has been your constant companion all day. Medal around your neck and a complimentary cold ale, does it get any better than this?

As it turns out we all had a great day out. Our little group had runners represented almost completely through the field with two 6 hour runners and one each at 7, 8, 9 and 10 hours. Jo nearly cracked the five hour mark, finishing in 6:12.

Jo had a ding-dong battle all day with Beth Cardelli, running closely together for a long time, she was eventually pipped by a couple of minutes at the end and came

third. Ruby Muir took out the women's title with an excellent effort.

This is a great run and I can't wait to go back for another go. The run across the mountain tops is just fantastic, but like any mountain range will vary dramatically with the weather. We were lucky as the bad weather held off until the late afternoon. It finally started raining around the tops while we were lying around at the finish line. We had high cloud with strong winds, but got the views that we had hoped for all day.

For those who haven't done this, I would highly recommend a wander over the Kepler Track.

This poem; (off the Kepler website) probably says it best:

This is my 10th and I've said it's my last  
I've been quite consistent but not very fast  
Athletic ability- zero to none  
Perfect C.V. for a nice long slow run  
Post run coma's slumped on the bed  
People saying you're wrong in the head  
Running for hours in the pouring rain  
How can you do that and still be called sane?  
The rituals, the gear checks, the bladder that leaks  
Unable to walk down the stairs for a week  
The suffering, the pain and the injury woes  
Not to mention the state of my toes  
I've run myself ugly, I'm over the hill  
The thought of another one makes me feel ill  
I'll farewell you nutters, my work here is done  
Stop kidding yourselves that this really is fun  
I've made up my mind it's a dangerous addiction  
Time to give up the Kepler affliction  
Never say never, does not apply here  
Good bye from me and I'll see you next year

This was a fantastic weekend, one that will remain in the memory for a very long time. Great company in a fantastic place, but it is the Kepler Track that is the star of the show, no matter whether you walk or run it, just put it on your bucket list as it's worth it.









# LOST AND FOUND

## IN THE

# DARRANS

by **MEGAN SETY**

WITH **ANGIE WILKINSON, BRENDAN ECKERT  
AND TONY GAZLEY**

photos **MEGAN SETY and TONY GAZLEY**

We had grand plans to spend two weeks based out of Homer Hut, located just before the descent into the Milford Tunnel, and tick off a number of various alpine adventures. Our first day we aimed for Mt. Talbot, but found ourselves trundling up to Barrier Knob instead to avoid the clagged in mountain and still refresh the feeling of walking with crampons. Then we sat out a few days of rain before setting our sights on Triangle Peak or Flat Top Peak, figuring the forecasted 2 days of fine weather would be enough to get at least one summit. But it wasn't. And we settled for the guidebook described 'improbable staircase' over U pass, a feature to rival any scene of the Hobbit.



**W**ith only a few days left, we set our sights on Mt. Madeline or even Mt. Tutoko, launching from Turner's Biv – the real reason we'd come all this way. David Jewell had described Turner's Biv as one of his favourite places in New Zealand, and he'd told us that he'd previously had to turn around after encountering a river too swollen to cross and running out of time. We were both excited and wondering how we'd go. We had only four days to summit and return before the notorious Fiordland weather was due to hit.

We knew the walk in was big, in fact most people cheat and chopper in to Turner's Biv. But choppers are banned from 1st December to cut down on traffic and maintain the alpine environment. This was a Christmas trip, so no chopper for us. As it turned out, this trip was all about losing and find things.

Our first day passed easily. Other than carrying the maximum weight possible, it was a relatively easy day with no elevation gained to get to where Leader Creek meets the Tutoko River. It was here that we would head up and off track, and where we'd camp for the night. We'd humped in tents for this night, but the weather was so fine, three of us opted to sleep out under the trees and luckily the temperature drop at night meant the swarm of sandflies disappeared when we actually tried to sleep. We stashed the tents in a bush since we'd be at the bivvy the next night or so we thought. Nobody lost anything on Day One.

The morning of Day Two set the scene for the whole trip. Just after leaving camp, Tony dropped his walking pole in the Tutoko River. Brendan promptly chased it downstream and retrieved it. Minor disaster thwarted, we crossed the river to meet our first cairn of the hundred-odd ones awaiting us. We had scouted the crossing the night

before as it wasn't clear just which stream bed to head up and we were grateful to spot a cairn on the opposite side confirming the way.

Crossing the river was like time travelling. Gone was the easily navigable track and thin bush. It was replaced by giant boulders, an overgrown stream bed, and last winter's washed-down debris blocking the way. It was arduous and fun, like climbing a jungle gym. Along the way were cairns to help choose the right fork in the dried-up streambed. We stopped for lunch when the streambed hit Leader Creek, giving us a view of Leader Falls and the Age Glacier. We still hoped for a late, but not unreasonably late, arrival at Turner's Biv that night.

We found a doable crossing, spotted some orange tape and easily bashed 20 metres uphill to something you might call a track. For another couple of kilometres we following one orange tape to the next until both the ground trail and tape disappeared, only to be filled in by thick immovable bush. We dropped to the creek again and started working our way upstream. If you look at the map, we only needed to go about a kilometre upstream before turning uphill to head towards Turner's Biv. We made good time for a while, but eventually we hit a section in the creek where the hillside had been recently washed out. Even if we could get safely to the far side of the impending mud slip burial, there was a giant pool below a boulder bigger than a car. There was nothing for it, but to bash uphill and alongside the stream. The bush was too tall for me to see over the top of it (at just 162cm) so Brendan walked behind me shouting left, right, over the tree, around the boulder. It must have been less than a hundred metres and it took over an hour. Along the way, Tony lost his crampon and Brendan found it. When we got to the other side, Angie realised her camera had also been sucked into the bush. While Brendan went back to find the camera on the promise of six beers for successful retrieval, Tony and I pushed on ahead, hoping to scout the route and save some time.

At some point, we would have to leave the creek and gain about 1,000 metres in elevation over another kilometre. The route is theoretically marked with cairns, but only after you clear the bush line. We weren't even in the bush and we had no idea where the cairn trail started. Tony had been this way some five years prior, travelling in the opposite direction and vaguely remembered abseiling down from the bottom of the cairns to a nice campsite at the bush line. He remembered an old dingy rope others had left behind.

So he and I dropped our packs, turned off the creek and charged up. It took us more than an hour to find



Climbing up the dry streambed (photo - Tony)

a place that looked like a nice campsite, amazingly discovered by Tony's sense that it was just over this hill, but no sign of cairns, ropes, ground trails or any hope of an upward approach. The ascent is incredibly steep and you can wander blindly without being bluffed out.

We returned to our packs, found Angie and Brendan snacking and quite equally chuffed at regaining a camera and being owed six beers for finding said camera. We delivered the bad news. It was now on 2pm, it would take over an hour to reach the campsite and when we did, we had no idea where to go. We had no hope of reaching Turner's Biv tonight and the mountain summits seem to slip away.

Nobody considered going back. We put on packs and bashed through one of the nastiest leatherwood bushes I've met. In fact, it ate one of Tony's Crocs and when we realised his Croc was gone, Tony was so angry at the leatherwood, he refused to go back for his Croc and this time



One blue Croc on Tony's foot (photo - Megan)

no one was jumping at the chance to find it.

We reached the campsite and found one of the most amazing swimming holes on possibly one of the hottest days in Fiordland that summer. Who knew if we would ever see Turner's Biv or Mt Madeline, but who cared. Lots of people had seen those places, surely almost no one had found this swimming hole.

The swim was pretty refreshing and Brendan was once again roused to go find something. He started exploring the hillside, looking for anything that would be a clue to our route. He ran back, grabbed my camera and then shot off to take a photo of something. He yelled at us to look. He pointed out a small section of red road visible about 500 metres away. I didn't see anything, but the 14x zoom on the camera did. Brendan had found the old red rope



Secret swimming hole (photo - Tony)

marking the start of our route!

At dinner, we made a plan. We'd already left our tents behind, so we'd be sleeping out but thankfully the evening weather was fine and warm. We would let go of the summit push leaving behind ice axes, crampons, ice screws and miscellaneous glacier travel gear. We'd sleep in and then attempt to find Turner's Biv – we figured our chances were slim of finding any route as everything was overgrown and there wasn't a cairn in sight. At 10am, somebody put on a billy and I had to finally get up. It was one of the best sleeps I'd had out on the/a mountain.

We packed up and took off. Even getting to the red rope was a mission. I made notes, drew a map and we even took away points just to be sure we could get back to the campsite and our stashed gear. When we finally got to the red rope, we discovered that Brendan had managed to see just a one metre length of red sling. There was no rope, but there was a lot of tat over the next hundred metres up, used by previously parties to climb up and abseil down. We took off our packs to pass them up and climb up the



The red sling (photo - Tony)





Steep stuff (photo - Tony)

miscellaneous slings and trees. As I turned around to grab my pack, I found a walking stick that had been left behind. We were now even. One missing croc replaced with a walking stick.

Once we scaled the steep section, it was another bush-bash through thick brush. We cut up Angie's sunglasses case and tied the fluoro green strips to bushes to mark our way back. When we came out the other side, we saw a cairn and for the first time in 24 hours, it seemed like we might get somewhere we had planned to. Many more hours, and surely a hundred cairns later, we found Turner's Biv. At times, Angie and I would stop and stare up waiting for a cairn to materialise in our vision.

Turner's Biv was magical. There was an incredible view of Mt Tutoko, constant rumbles of ice fall, fresh water dripping off the nearby glacier, and dried snow grass spread across the rocks as a bed. It was worth it. The next day we were up and away by 6:30am. We had one day to walk out what had taken us three days to walk in. We

found the cairns, then Angie's fluoro strips of sunglasses case, then the newly drilled bolt for abseiling. Two 20 metre abseils and we were nearly back at the campsite.



Abseiling (photo - Tony)





View from Turner's Biv (photo - Tony)

We bashed down to the stream, and of all things, Tony's blue Croc was sitting on top of a leatherwood bush and he couldn't resist the temptation to retrieve it.

We crashed out after about 10 hours to the roadend, stripped and swam in the Tutoko River under the bridge. We crammed gear in the car, squeezed and turned the key to silence. The engine wouldn't start. Two sets of tourists refused to give us the 10 minute ride into Milford. So Tony opened the bonnet of the hire car, wiggled some wires and possibly waved a magic wand because the car started. We drove to Milford for burgers and Brendan started cashing in on his beers.

We never got to a single summit, but we did spend a once in a lifetime night camped out in Fiordland with dry weather, swam in a secret swimming hole and claimed the right to say we found the way to Turner's Biv. I learned two things on this trip, losing the summit may bring you more than you think and Brendan will find anything if you promise him beer.





# TAKING A SHOT AT ICELAND

by KATJA RIEDEL





Godafoss - the waterfall of the gods in the evening light. One of the many tourist hot spots



Iceland is a dream for landscape photographers. There is an abundance of waterfalls, oddly shaped mountains, lonely beaches, gigantic waves, interesting sea stacks, volcanic steam vents and to top it off, light and clouds change constantly due to the volatile weather.

So when my last tourist-guiding gig ended in Akureyri in the North of Iceland I was keen to tag on a few days of holidays for photography. What I discovered was that Iceland can play with you. One of its character traits must be irony, because it jeopardized all my carefully laid out plans, deconstructed my preconceived ideas of the pictures I wanted to take, and probably also had a good laugh about me.

If you google Iceland photography, you will find thousands of beautiful landscape pictures and several dozen photographers that offer guided photo tours in Iceland. For example, New Zealand's Rob Brown and Craig Potton took a load of Kiwis around the island in June.

Being a bit tight on money, I couldn't afford to join one of these very expensive photo tours. But I did the next best thing, I downloaded an ebook from the internet, describing all the photographic hot spots, when to visit and where to go. Armed with this book, a four-wheel drive and two plastic bags full of groceries, I set off. I would take Iceland's ring road clockwise to Mývatn, through the Eastern Fjords and along the South Coast back to Reykjavik.

And that is where the problem starts. Everybody takes the Ring Road, the difference is only if clockwise or anticlockwise. And everybody stops at the tourist hot spots like Hverir (belching mudflats and hissing steam vents), Dettifoss (the biggest waterfall in Europe), Jökulsárlón (an ethereal lagoon full of blue icebergs) and Dyrhólaey (a huge sea arch). And while all these destinations are wonderful and stunning, they also feel defiled due to the sheer number of visitors every day. A million visitors per year are

now coming to Iceland, threatening the very thing everyone is travelling to see: Iceland's unspoilt nature. Places are now roped off, vegetation is trampled and signs have been put up to keep people from straying off-track.

For me as a want-to-be-photographer there is an additional problem. At each place I feel compelled to take a photo. And not just any photo, but a GREAT landscape shot. However, the scene I photograph at each stop is exactly the same scene that has been photographed a million times by a million travellers before me. I try to get something unique only to find a much better shot of the same scene exhibited in a coffee shop down the road.



The rising sun transforms a piece of ice at the beach close to Jökulsárlón

The one place in Iceland that I wanted to visit more than any other was Jökulsárlón in the Southeast of Iceland. Here pieces of ice from the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier are being sculpted by the sea and then washed onto a black sand beach. When I went there in the dark an hour before sunrise I wasn't sure where to go, but I needn't have wor-



A guided photography group at Skúgarfoss jockeying for the clearest, tourist-free view of the waterfall. The group leader even moved on some tourists which were lingering too long in the firing direction of his charges.

ried, because already from a distance I could see plenty of car lights. And when I pulled in, it looked like a supermarket car park on Saturday morning. Just as I packed my gear another busload with 20 photographers arrived. Each armed with a huge photo backpack and tripod sprinting to the beach. Luckily, photographer density decreased with distance from the car park, and by walking for 15 minutes I managed to find a stretch of beach I only had to share with two others.

I have to say that I had a glorious morning. When the sun rose each piece of ice became a diamond, precious and sparkling. I took hundreds of pictures and a few of them I like, which is why I am sharing them with you, but did I get anything unique? No, I most certainly did not. This is the problem with these pre-chewed, pre-sanctioned and pre-loved photographic sites. Whenever I got there, a guided photography group was already there, all jockeying for the clearest, tourist-free view of the waterfall, all trying to create the illusion of isolation. Or they would pile nearly on top of each other, their tripods stacked millimetres apart, for the one and only perfect composition.

Now to the irony; I went to Iceland to record it, see it through my lens, take “amazing photos”, package it all up and take it home. But it played with me and taught me to forget about expectations and to accept what is there. Instead of dramatic clouds I got grey drizzle, instead of sunshine I got rain and despite trying really hard, checking the aurora borealis forecast every evening and getting up in the middle of the night when there was the faintest chance of a clear sky and some activity, I didn't get any good pictures of the Northern Lights! Until my last night on the way to the airport, when Iceland put on the most amazing light show. Was it laughing at me? Or was it a departing gift, showing me that once you let go and accept what comes along everything is possible? Don't forget, life is what happens while you are busy making other plans - even in photography!

(PS: The ebook is “Forever Light” by Sarah Marino and Ron Coscorrosa. And it is good, if you don't mind going where everybody else went.)



Grjótagjá is a grotto filled with 46°C hot water. The steam makes beams of light visible that filter through cracks in the roof. The locals used to swim here, but then volcanic activity increased and the springs got too hot.



Aldeyjarfoss in the Mývatn region. You need a 4-wheel drive to get to this waterfall and walk the last bit, so it sees less visitors.



Sunrise at Vestrahorn in the South East of Iceland









# SO SORRY

by TONY GAZLEY



‘So sorry,’ said the ranger, ‘but the area you are planning to go just happens to be right under the smoke from the Washington fires and visibility will be very limited.’

‘Oh well, we’ll go anyway,’ we replied.

‘Sorry,’ said the next ranger a few days later, ‘but the access road you have chosen has been closed due to damage after the big wild-fire that burnt through here a few days ago. And your alternative road is closed because of the flooding from the storm we had yesterday.’

‘Oh well, we’ll go somewhere else,’ we answered.

‘Sorry to tell you,’ said the lady in the kiosk where we bought tickets for the gondola we were using for a short-cut to the top of the range, ‘but although it is mid-summer we had a lot of snow on the peaks last night and the temperature today at the top station is minus five degrees.’

‘Oh well, we’ll go anyway,’ we replied.

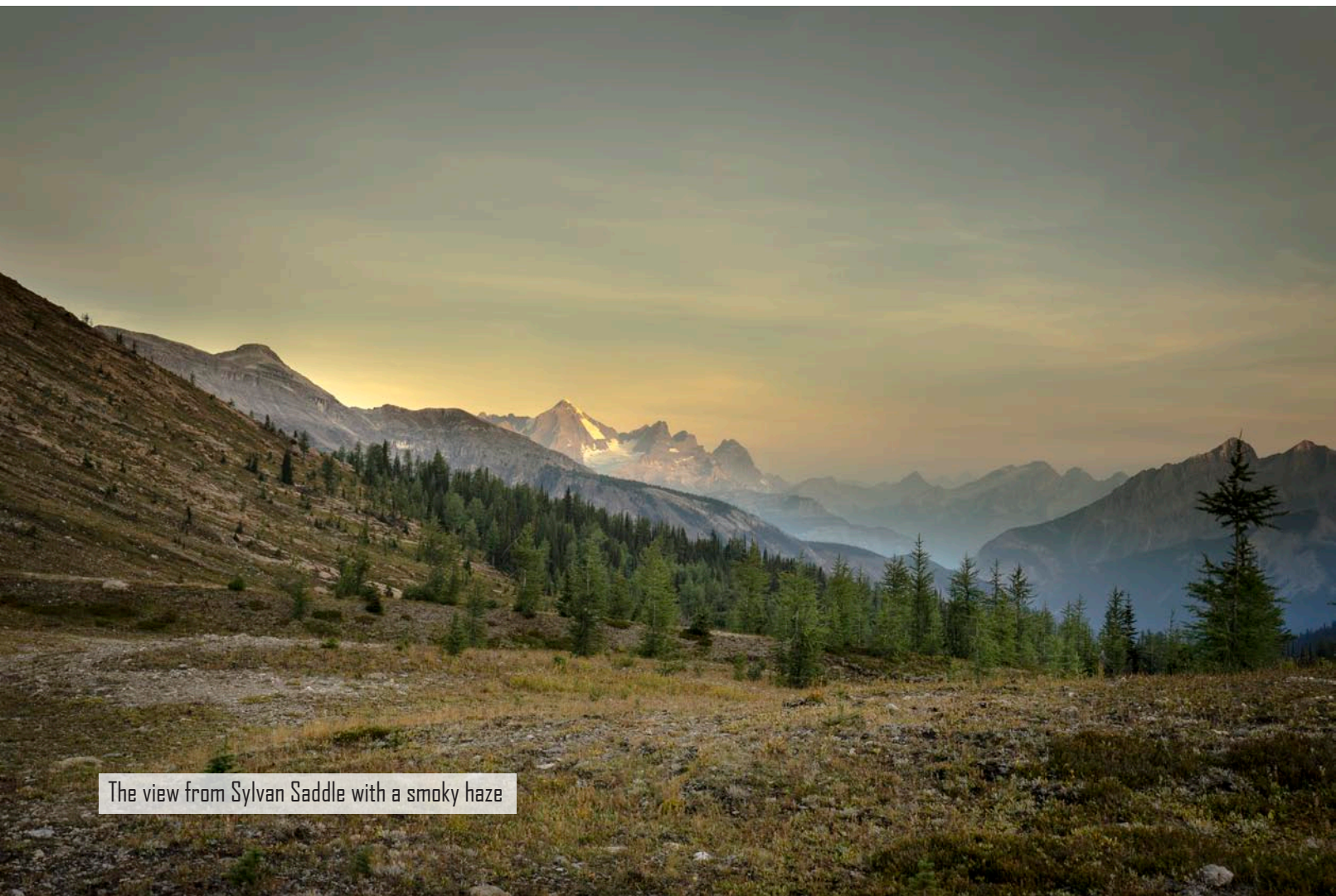
Jackie and I had met in Vancouver and headed off to the Kootenays, an area with high snowy peaks, lots of glaciers, lovely lakes—and mountain lions and grizzly bears. That night we stayed in Radium Springs where there were big horn sheep grazing on the grass outside the hostel.

Next morning we started up Joffre Creek laden with the usual hiking gear—plus bear mace each, and little bells tied to our packs. We talked very loudly and when the conversation ran out sang silly songs. Pine forests may look boring from the outside but here there was a vibrant understorey with leafy trees, flowers, and lots of busy wildlife—chipmunks, squirrels, and many birds. And then there was the smell of bears. But the walking was easy and we made fast progress.

We camped on Sylvan Pass away from any obvious animal trails—although we both silently knew that bears roam everywhere in western Canada, even well above the snowline, and could easily sniff us out wherever we were.

We climbed to the summit of a nearby ‘nub’ next day and dropped through a confusing series of cliffs and ledges to a remarkable extensive sloping area of weathered limestone about a kilometre across. This was a weird feature and it made for difficult walking—and there were no marked routes here to help you on your way.

On the other side we climbed to the top of an old moraine wall and followed it to a saddle above the Limestone Lakes. The view from here was stunning—in spite of the



The view from Sylvan Saddle with a smoky haze



smoke that blotted out all but the nearby views just as the ranger had said.

We dropped down to the lakes and searched for a campsite that we thought would be less likely to be visited by bears. In the afternoon we circumnavigated all the beautiful lakes and arrived back at our tent just as it started to rain heavily. Because we needed to cook away from camp to avoid food smells around the tent we decided that no tea was better than eating in the pouring cold rain. Later the rain stopped and we had a quick meal, stashed the bear barrel and extra food and, safely back in the tent, drifted off to sleep happy with our choice of campsite.

Next morning I noticed a big hole about 10 metres from the tent that I didn't remember from the day before. Jackie said that the reason I didn't remember it was because it wasn't there then. We then each took a millisecond to realise that during the night we had been visited by a grizzly—for they dig up the burrows of marmots when looking for as tasty snack, hence the hole. Rocks too heavy for us to lift easily had just been brushed aside and the ground looked a bit like a mechanical excavator had run amuck before either the bear got a meal or had given up.

We decided to shift camp—but while we were thinking about where to, the rain started again. It didn't take long to decide that now the chances of the weather being good enough to climb our objective Mt Abruzzi were almost nil and that the best option would be to walk out and wait for better weather somewhere else. We packed quickly and started back the way we had come. At the top of the nub it was snowing but lower down the weather was much drier and warmer.

The next couple of days were forecast to be wet and the weatherman got it right. So we did some touristy things before heading off to Whistler after being told that the access roads around Pemberton were closed indefinitely due to damage from a wildfire one day and a flood the next.

The gondola took us effortlessly to the top of the ridge where we headed east towards Russet Lake. Now the weather was perfect and the views without the smoke even better. We could gaze down on the turquoise coloured Cheakamus Lake, and shining in the distance were many glaciers and sharp mountain peaks. Walking through the mountain meadows here was easy and we made good time to the lake and by late afternoon we had found a perfect



The limestone ledges



campsite on the top of a small ridge.

The next day was to be a summit day. The climb to the top of Whirlwind Peak was straightforward and Jackie plugged steps through the final snow slopes in her running shoes. The 360 degree view from the summit was stunning—there were peaks and glaciers and valleys and forests of pine extending to the horizon, and above the sky was a picture of wispy high clouds.

But the lady in the ticket kiosk was right—the higher peaks were plastered with a loose layer of new snow that made the steep-sided rock ridge leading to our next peak, The Overlord, too treacherous in running shoes. So we called it quits—and actually it didn't matter at all for we were quite content to just admire the view from where we were.

After some time we descended back to our camp to leave unwanted gear and continue on down to a glacier that flowed in a valley below our campsite. The idea for the next day was to come this way and then climb onto the ridge across the valley and then sidle back to Whistler over two days.

But we had already noticed that part way along the range a deep and wide runnel extended from top to bottom and we were unsure if it would be too steep to be crossed safely. From our new viewpoint on the moraine wall of the glacier it was still impossible to be sure—so we decided then that we would only try to get out this way tomorrow if the weather was near perfect and we could see where we were going.

We woke next morning to a sky and our ridge covered by thick cloud—our planned route across the valley was not going to be. And given the new snow on the nearby peaks none of them were an option for us either. So somewhat reluctantly we packed and headed down through Singing Pass and then the track back to Whistler.

On both the trips we had done only a small part of what we had planned—but neither of us were in the least disappointed. For there is nothing to be done about wildfires, floods, mid-summer snowstorms and cloud covered ridges—they must just be accepted as part of being in the mountains. And the places we had visited were certainly more beautiful than anything we had imagined, while the possibilities for further trips nearby was clearly unlimited. We decided that what we had seen was simply a teaser, and that the only thing to be done now was to organise another trip for next summer.



Limestone Lakes



The Overlord from Whirlwind Peak



The ridge (on skyline) we hoped to traverse to Whistler



# CALIFORNIA

## Dreaming



by **KATY GLENIE**  
with Mike Phethean

The world's largest tree, Jack Kerouac, Flower Power, the Summer of Love, Harvey Milk, the fortune cookie. California is a state that overflows with ideas, energy, and... climbing destinations! What's not to like?

As Mike and I tossed around options for our next overseas adventure, it quickly became clear that the Golden State was going to come out on top. It didn't take long to convince ourselves that it was in fact "on the way home" from our annual UK trip to visit family.

After a quick few days in England to sample the UK summer (very similar to the UK winter), we were jetting off to San Francisco. I was beyond excited. So much to see, to absorb, to eat! Our two short days in the city included the

amazing Coit Tower murals, the aptly named Exploratorium, the gastro-nomic delights of the Ferry Building and the time-travelling Musée Mécanique. All too soon we were on the road in our rental, heading east to the Sierra Nevada. We stopped off on the way to visit ex WTMC member Rini and her husband Brandon, who lent us heaps of really useful equipment and gave us some good trip ideas.

The drive to Yosemite was long, hot and uneventful. We made it in time to cruise the "Valley" before nightfall, stopping to take snaps of the iconic Half Dome and El Capitan. However, August is not a time of peace and serenity in Yosemite. There were people simply everywhere, and our little kiwi souls began to feel claustrophobic. Fortunately our pre-booked campsite (which we snapped up after a lucky last minute cancellation) was located in a quieter corner of the Park. We dutifully took note of the bear-briefing, and stuffed everything with the slightest whiff of bear-tucker into our personal bear locker. Yep, that includes soap, deodorant, your half-eaten muesli bar, and ideally your partner (if they will fit comfortably).

Fortunately the next day in Yosemite proved far more successful on the serenity front. We found a great climbing spot off the Tioga Pass Rd (only open for three months in summer). It overlooked Tenaya Lake, and had some reasonable options for us. It was no mean feat to find something that we could actually climb. A bit of searching led us to a solid crack system ("holdless horrors"), and we enjoyed an excellent multi-pitch climb with brilliant views over the lake. The sound of rattle snakes chased us off the summit – we weren't keen for any close encounters.

Yosemite is often called the birthplace of rock-climbing, and the num-





Tenya Lake - View from climbing summit

ber of climbing spots in the valley is seemingly endless. However, it's not really a place for entry-level climbing. Bolts are used sparingly, and generally for climbs with long run-outs and no natural protection. Grades are notoriously "sandbagged", meaning it may be graded as a nice easy 15, but it's actually more like a 17 or 18. The granite rock provides excellent friction, and good crack systems, but it takes a while to get used to the minimal holds.

After our quick retreat from the rattlers, we set off on a long drive south to Lodgepole Campground in Sequoia National Park. After inhaling a dehy dinner at our campsite we collapsed with relief in to our sleeping bags at 11pm. There were many things that were wonderful about our trip. Travelling by car was not one of them. All too often we would find ourselves driving big distances between destinations late in the day. Choosing the right spot on a six lane highway, sandwiched between interstate "haulers" travelling at the speed of light, knowing that if you miss this exit you're in for a long detour, and all on the wrong side of the road (and often an empty stomach). It's not a recipe for travelling bliss.

Mike was up early the next morning to sort out some logistics around our hiking permit while I caught up on some extra zeds. Then we were off on our five-day adventure in the Park. Our first campground was on the shores of Ranger Lake. The route included a lunch-stop at the picturesque Twin Lakes, and a decent climb over Silliman Pass (3,194m – higher than Mt Aspiring!) Despite now being in the wilderness, each designated campsite had it's own bear locker. The lockers are incredibly effective – the area seems to have had very few bear problems since their introduction. The old method of "counter-balancing" by hanging food over a tree-branch no longer works in these high-use areas. Bears are pretty clever when they're hungry.

Our second day was a long hot walk through some pretty uninteresting pine forest. We cooled off our ach-



Ranger Lake

ing feet at each creek crossing and were pleased to see the campsite and rangers station at Roaring River. We had met the Ranger earlier as she passed on horseback wearing her classic National Park Ranger Hat.

Deadman's Canyon was the destination for the next day. I was particularly uninspired– it sounded like the sort of place where people may have, umm, died? Although we did pass the gravesite of one Alfred Moniere, Shepherd and Mountain Main (died 1887), the area was incredibly beautiful. It's the sort of place I'd be happy spending the end of my days. The valley was full of wildflowers and leafy aspens, fed by a clear, cool river. We camped with an excellent view of the upcoming pass and were treated to a pretty special sunset.

Our ascent over Elizabeth Pass was slow due to its altitude of 3,475m. On route we were entertained by mar-mots poking their heads out of rock fields, and lizards and small grass snakes slithering quickly away to safety. The views from the saddle were incredible and stretched for miles - the long climb was well worth it. Our descent to Bearpaw Meadow was steep and taxing on the knees. We



Climbing to Elizabeth Pass

made good use of the river to cool off at each rest-stop.

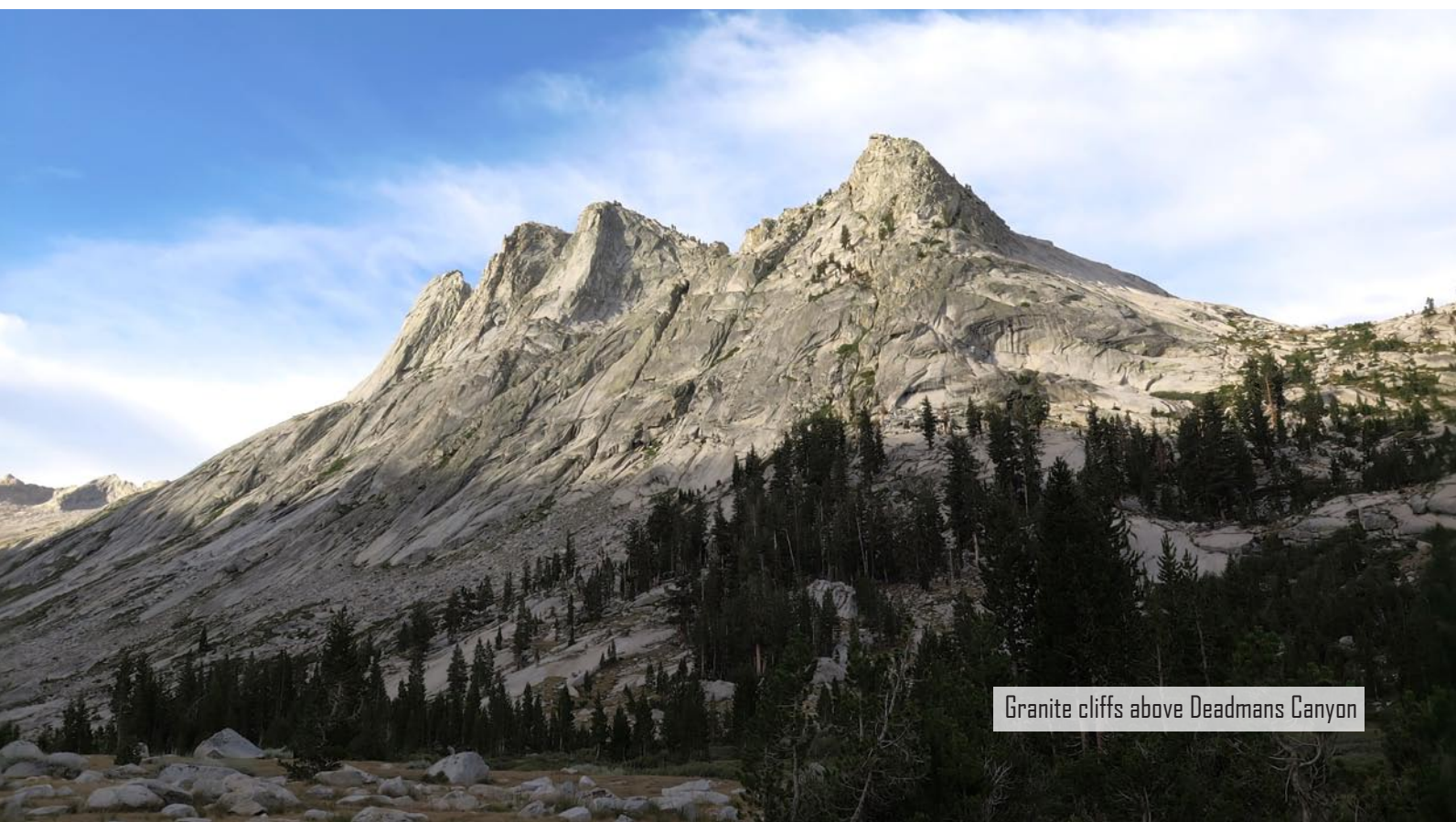
Our final day bought us on to the well-used High Sierra Trail. We tried not to look dismissively at a day-packed family of four whose gear had been carried by mule to the next campsite. Mule transport is a common option, unfortunately leading to quite a bit of trail poop. However, the views and the wildlife more than make up for it. The highlight of the morning was watching an adult bear and her cub decimate a rotten tree in the hunt for food. From a safe distance we were able to see the true strength of these awesome beasts.

We arrived back at our car around midday and headed south through the Park's famous Sequoia Trees. These impressive trees live for over 3,000 years, growing bark almost a meter thick as insulation from fire. The General Sherman Tree is said to be the largest living tree on earth at 84 metres high and 1385 tonnes. Sequoias grow naturally only in this area, and were protected in 1890 as part of America's second national park. This was no mean feat. The environmental movement was very much in its infancy at this stage, and it was primarily due to the inspirational work of John Muir that the park was established. Muir was an early advocate for the preservation of wilderness areas, and his emotive writings and speeches helped

to permanently protect Yosemite Valley, Sequoia National Park and other parts of the Sierra Nevada from environmental destruction.

After some more adventures, including climbing Mt Whitney with Rini and Brandon (Whitney is the USA's highest peak outside of Alaska), travelling through Death Valley (113°F – we barely left the car!), living it up in Las Vegas, and visiting Alcatraz, we headed back home, tired but contented.

*Post Script: Our trip was well-timed – a few weeks later the area was ravaged by bush fires as a result of California's four year drought. Many of the places we'd visited were closed or at high-risk, and the views we'd experienced had disappeared in clouds of smoke. Bush fires have been part of this eco-system for thousands of years, and many local species rely on fire for regeneration. So we hope that the area will slowly recover and revive, ready to take on the next influx of keen kiwi trampers and climbers!*



Granite cliffs above Deadmans Canyon

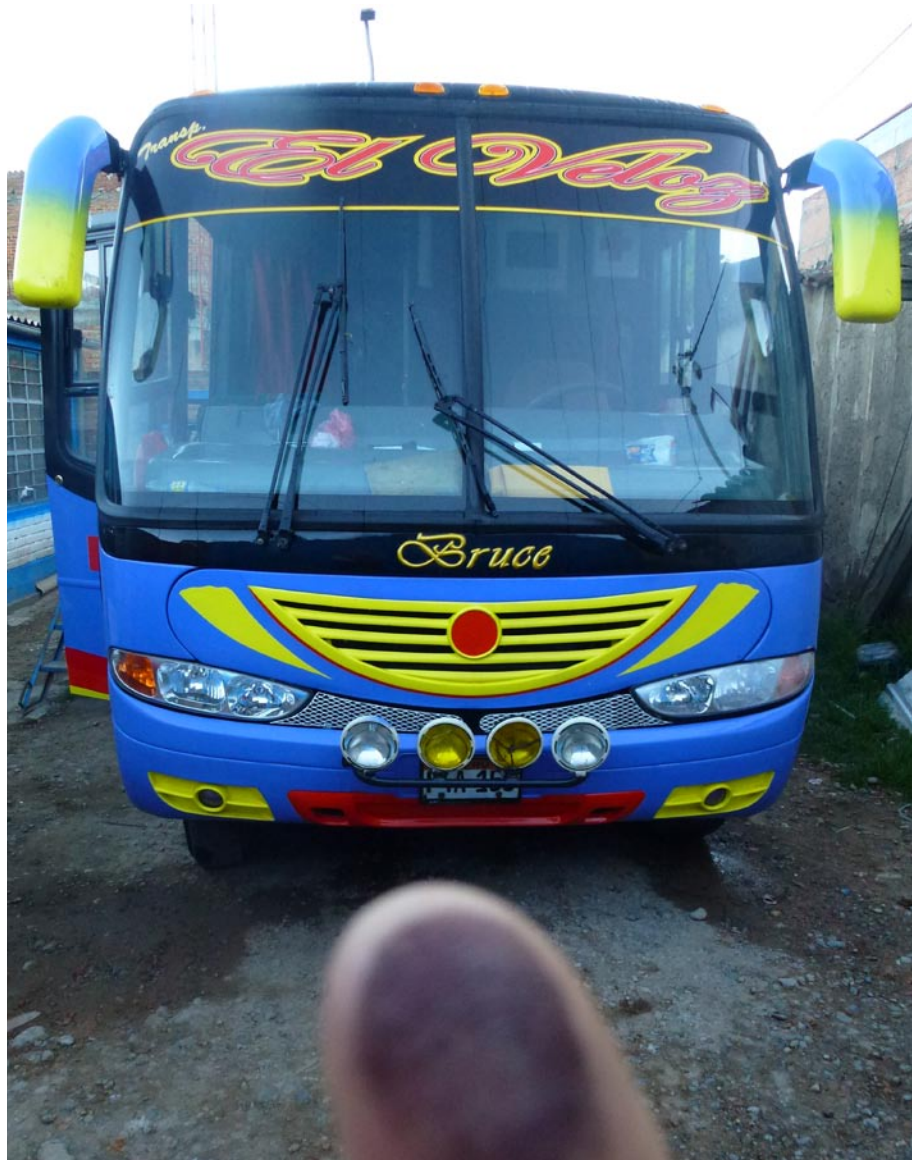


# ONE IS NEVER ALONE

## HUAYHUASH WITH PERRO AND OGGY

Hiking and bike-packing in the  
Cordillera Huayhuash, Peru.

by  
JENNY COSSEY



Security measures on local buses

**M**y one-year career break shrank to ten months when my eldest son announced he was getting married. After a quick Google on the net, I discovered that my role as mother of the groom was only to turn up and shut up. This would not require much energy from me and I could focus my time on organising myself for a long southern New Zealand summer in the Olivines and a four month bikepacking, trekking and climbing trip to Peru and Bolivia. In October I booked plane tickets to Lima for the following Easter. In mid December I received a preview email from Trailblazers about the new Cordilleras Blanca Hiking and Biking Guide by Neil and Harriet Pike being published in January 2015. Perfect route planning reading for my big trip after I returned to Wellington from a successful and good weather climbing trip to the Olivine Plateau and Cloudy Peak (near Mesopotania).

My new Surly Ogre (Oggy) was packed into her bike bag for the Easter Monday flight to Lima. Buying a round-the-world ticket gave me a luggage allowance of two 23kg bags, perfect for all my biking and hiking gear, tango dresses and

shoes.

Robberies are a real threat on long bus rides in Peru. There had been numerous night robberies on buses from Lima to Huaraz in the previous few months, including a few daring daytime ones. Local security measures include all passengers dipping their index finger in black ink and placing their mark on the bus company's seating plan sheet and having your photo taken while seated. This security system had one major flaw. Drivers were able to pick up as many passengers along the route that could be squeezed standing in the aisle, these were not fingerprinted or photographed. I caught a bus from Lima (sealevel) to Huaraz, the adventure centre of Peru, 400km north at 3060m on the Altiplato. A town in the middle of the Santa River Valley, a long north to south valley bordered on the west by the snowless Cordillera Negra range (highest peak 5181m) and on the east by the Cordillera Blanca – a 200km by 21km wide range with 33 major peaks over 5500m.

I based myself at Joe's Place in Huaraz, a honey pot hostel for climbers and mountain bikers. Up to ten cyclists camped on the tiny grass area surrounded by mature trees in a sheltered courtyard, the only hostel in Huaraz with grass. Great to meet fat wheel cyclists manufacturing amazing bike packing gear in this town. MTBers heading from Alaska to Chile, or in reverse, and tourers, including a girl who had cycled solo from Uruguay to Peru with a guitar on her front rack pointing forward like a giant compass needle.

My first local acclimatization walks were slow, painful and not very long, in late April and May, the peak trekking season is mid June to mid August. Bike packing above 3000m could be hard work after living at sea level in Wellington for years so I planned eight weeks trekking, biking and climbing in the Cordilleras Blanca to acclimatise before moving south to Huayhuash where I would be between 4000m and 5000m for two weeks. The wet season was long his year, dragging into the usual dry season months of late June and July. Snow continued to fall well into July and many climbers attempting high peaks were stopped by fresh snow drifts.

One is never alone trekking, attitude, not age, is what the young generation is about. Educated young Europeans had no quasms about trekking with an older single woman in the mountains. My first swaray into the hills was with a German chef and an Austrain nurse on the four day Santa Cruz trek. My companions had youth and great culinary skills, I upskilled them on how to find passes in rain and snow. I walked the classic Alpamayo Circuit in five day with a young, enthusiastic French wrestling team physio-therapist, who I upskilled in how to pack a pack and stay

dry in the snow when camping. Both high altitude treks are very easy to walk independantly without the need for guides, donkeys or large mess tents. I then undertook a three day solo trip from Olleros to the UNESCO world heritage pre Inca site at Chavin via the 4700m Punta Yanashallash Pass. More snowflakes flew around my pitched tent at night and my photos were only of cloud base. Parque Nacional Huascarán is one of two national parks in Peru to charge park entry fees, a 10sol daily non camping allowed fee, or 65sols for a 21 day pass that allows one to camp.

I also acclimitized with solo overnight bike packing trips around Huaraz that stretched my lungs until the first sulphur burp appeared and I knew I had gardia. Probably caught from not using strong enough water purification methods in water collected from high pastures with animals and no toilet facilities on the well worn trekking trails.



Gardia is a major health hazard in the park due to the high numbers of trekkers, arrieros (muleers) and mules, particularly at the end of the trekking season. The huge tablet from the pharmacy knocked the bug out of my system in a day. All drugs seem to be available at the pharmacy counter so there is not need to buy expensive drugs in NZ to bring with you.

By using local public mini vans to get my bike up hills (inside, on top, inverted, under the seats,) I descended 7500m in four days around my satellite base in Caraz, a beautiful valley town 70km north of Huaraz. Rides included both cordilleras ranges and the road down from the famous Tunnel Punta Olimpica (4732m), the highest venicular tunnel in the world that was only paved in 2013. Better on my bike were the dirt roads with less tourist traffic, hairpin switchbacks from the snowline to valley village fields. By stopping my bike for barking dogs and using the



local technique of beginning to stoop to pick up a stone, this action was usually sufficient to sent the solo, of pack of six, barking dogs fleeing. The locals obviously have a good aim and success rate at hitting dogs broadside with stones, the dogs assumed wrongly my aim would be as good. I would then be given a wide berth and left to cycle in peace. This is one of the best areas I have ever cross country rolled in on a bike, a gem worth visiting with a good bike brought from home.



Before I left Huaraz for Llamac 100km to the south, much planning, organising and supply shopping for Huayhuash was required. Llamac at the end of the public transport network had only two small hostels who were used to an older solo gringo women arriving with a bike and trekking poles, wishing to leave a good bike with a hostel owner to head off solo trekking for ten days. Then on her return to Llamac wishing to collect her bike and send her rucksack with trekking boots and poles back to a safe place in Huaraz while she solo bikepacked into areas tourists rarely go, before returning to Huaraz via the coast. Most gringos come to climb one of the six peaks over 6000m in the Cordillera Huayhuash, trek the classic eight to ten day circular track around the mountain massif with

a large local or international trekking company guide, arrieros and mules. Or as one of the slowly growing group of predominantly young men bikepacking three quarters of the way around Huayhuash and escaping downhill from the altiplateau to the coast via Catajambo. Most bikepackers generally follow the main trekking route and I was heading much further east. With my limited Spanish the organising went well with the help of diagrams, an old German 1:50,000 topo map of Huayhuash and the help of a passing English speaking Peruvian guide who gave me information about possible bikepacking routes east of my map that I hand drew on to my map margin. I had forgotten to pre load main trekking route GPS points from the guidebook into my GPS, hence my GPS was useless later when I needed it in whiteouts over the passes.

The southern end of this alpine circuit was used as a remote base for the terrorist group Sendero Luminesco or Shinning Path until 1992. Foreign travellers were shot at, mainly related to robberies, the last tourist killed in 2004. The seven local communities living in the Huayhuash region now charge a protection fee for conservation purposes to cross their land, whether you camp or not, which have reduced robberies of tourists. Each community fixes its own fee, the total fee to walk the circuit is currently 225 sols (NZ\$100). Community ticket can be re used in the same year and there is no time limit on staying in each area. Hence I could use the same tickets for hiking and biking trips.

I caught a ride in a trek groups mini van to the start of the main trail thereby avoiding a four hour walk uphill on a compacted mud and gravel road to the first campsite below the first of the six major trekking passes (passes ranged between 4650m and 5150m). The next morning as my lungs strained up to the first pass in mule mud, a large dog started to run ahead and then wait for me. I thought it was an arrieros dog as seem to know where he was going and the mules were already on the trail, their trekking clients below me in the valley. I ignored the dog. When I turned off the main mule route to saddle and cross a side pass away from the mule route to Lake Mitacocha, the large dog stayed with me. Perro (dog in Spanish) decided to remain with me for ten days as my companion and guard, sleeping outside my tent door every night in rain or snow. I never fed him and rarely patted him as had conjunctivitis. After a few days I realised Perro had done this trail many times before as would race ahead and then wait for me. When I walked the less frequented high routes he would follow at my heels not sure of what I was doing. Perro was a wonderful asset a few days later when I woke to 15cm of fresh snow on my tent top and 8cm on

the dogs fur in the high pastures between Huayhuash and Guanacpatay. No trail could be seen. The locals know the routes and tourists generally only come in the dry season when the ground is free of snow and earth trails with horse prints are obvious as there are no vertical carins, plastic markers or shrines to mark the way to the correct ridgeline saddle. Perro seem to know the way as stayed on my heels up to a false pass with a look on his face of “I know you are on the wrong route”, then bounced ahead when the cloud cleared and I got myself back onto the correct route down to the valley on glaciated rock covered in sleet.

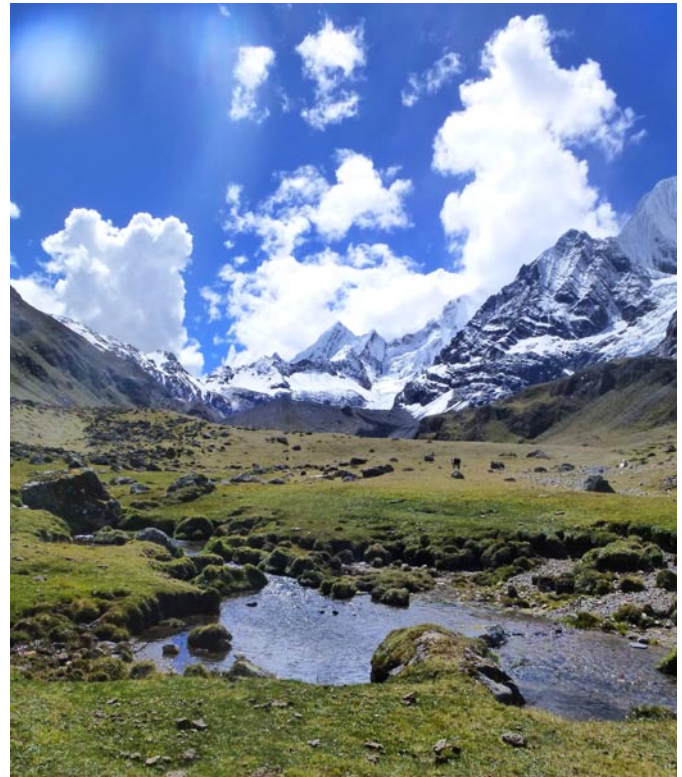


Perro at the top of Paso San Antonio (4850m), the descent is diagonally right via bluffs to the valley

It snowed or sleeted all day, and I stayed in my tent most of the afternoon, waking the next day to still white clouds capping the surrounding peaks and another 10cm of snow on my tent. I was wondering if it was wise to cross the hardest (but not highest) pass, Paso San Antonio (4850m) without a GPS in another white out and knee high snow with no surface features to indicate a trail. But Perro seemed happy and broke trail for me through the snow, floundering to his midrift and then lay waiting in the snow at the top of the pass as I trudged up in knee deep in fresh snow following his footprints, or crashing into thigh deep drifts. Avalanche warnings crept into my mind as I zig zag steeply down the lea slope during a

brief cloud clearing before faded sunlight gave me the faint furrow shadows in the snow of the trail as I weaved under rock bluffs and above cliffs down into the Sarapacocha Valley. A trekking group greeted me with tea in their mess tent, they had crossed the day before with no snow and under a blue sky.

The sun appeared mid day and I wandered up the Sarapacocha Valley, made famous by Joe Simpsons epic on Sivla Grande (6656m), shining white in a blue sky above me. Thinking of Joe brought back memories of climbing with him on the Sarre Roof aid route in Italy the summer prior to his Andean trip. An epic that included me tying him off while leaving him dangling in space at the lip of the climb, a full rope length above me, while I climbed up the descent route to throw him a rescue rope from above as trains passed under him on the Italian to France railway line. This was my third day of climbing ever.



Sarapacha Valley

The weather improved over the next few day and finally I saw the peaks in their glory, the turquoise lakes of the tourists’ brochures and sixteen condors soaring together on uplift winds above the ridges. Due to the snow I stayed an extra two days on the circuit; glad that I had brought so much food and had Olivine Plateau weight training trip practice to carry it. My dwindling supplies were supplemented by a kitchen sale of some food basics from the





Snowy peaks and turquoise lakes

chef with a trekking group. I was thus able to visit less well known side valleys and enjoy the splendour and solitude away from the popular mule route and noise in sunshine. The guidebook was great at giving side option routes including walking the water race route on the final day back to Llamac, another day away from the mule trail.

The hostel owner in Llamac was very relieved to see me as I was two days late. He informed me that Perro was a Llamac dog and an hour later his owner appeared, whistled and Perro was gone. I had got used to his companionship, but now I had Oggy to keep me company. An evening to repack into bikepacking mode and negotiate with an arriero to carry my bike on horseback over the first trekking Qaqanan Pass - a mule pass I had already walked over and knew it would be a grade five push and carry with a bike.

A mining company is slowly building a road to link the two valleys further upstream which will reduce the need to cross this first pass on foot, greatly increase accessibility to the region for tourists in the future and majorly changing who visits the area.

After the pass I said goodbye to the horses and pedalled east, beyond the edge of my map and the trekking circuit for two days. I knew I was slightly remote as men would come and shake my hand when I arrived in villages and the food was almost the cheapest I had bought in Peru.



Carrying Oggy on horseback

The towns' loud speaker systems played local music all day to the whole village. When I asked to camp near a house I was photographed on the farmers' phones and sent via Facebook to their family and friends. People may cook over wood fires with dirt floors but nearly everyone had a cell phone and many choza (huts) had a solar panel stick on the roof with a wire poked through the thatch to an internal light bulb.

I returned to my map and the main trekking trail near Huayhuash (a summer hamlet as well as the name of the mountain range). After three hours of pushing my bike up muddy trails and wondering why I was doing it according to the look on the local men on horses, I was passed by a young local lad (carrying nothing) who said nothing but helped me push Oggy over a large rock jam. Stopping for lunch I shared my food and inquired if he would push my bike up to Portachuelo de Huayhuash (4750m). He agreed saying it would take us an hour. Two hours later we arrive but it was the best 20 sols I have ever spent. The downhill roll to the hot pools was barely rideable but I had the hot springs to myself and could admire the glaciers in peace.

The roll to Cajatambo was pure bliss, endless kms of gentle downhill, a small ridge to ascend before a steep roll into the valley. My brake pads were not sounding good so I opted out of the last few thousand metres of tight, steep descent via zigzag and gorges to the coast and rode in a minivan with better brake pads. Definitely one of the most scenic narrow roads I have been on and a fast bike descent would have been brilliant but terrifying due to the local traffic. The minibus was a safer option and I was back in Huaraz that evening ready for my next adventure, climbing a local peak with far too much snow on it and rock climbing in the amazing sport boulder fields of Hatun Mackay. There is so much to see and do in Peru, but my visa was close to expiring and it was time to head towards the volcanoes and salt flats of Bolivia.



The best 20 sol uphill push I have ever had



# BLUEGRASS OR BUST!

by HARRY SMITH

## CYCLE TOURING IN THE VICTORIAN HIGH COUNTRY

I looked at the sign in the shop window. Bluegrass Music Festival, it said. Starting on Friday evening. Five days away. Right here in Harrierville. It was November 2013 and I was in the Victorian High Country, 200 kilometres north-east of Melbourne. The trip had started off as a cycling touring trip and had morphed into a music festival trip. I had already been to two music festivals and if I went to this one it would be festival number three.

### *Woke up this mornin' in the Wangaratta Jazz and Blues Festival...*

My original plan had just been to cycle the Great Alpine Road, a scenic route which runs for 300 kilometres across the high country from Wangaratta in the north-west down to Bairnsdale in the south-east, add in a few detours, explore a few side-valleys, and climb a few peaks along the way. But then I discovered there was a huge jazz and blues festival on in Wangaratta only a couple of days after I was due to arrive there! So after getting the train out from Melbourne I found a nice free-camping spot beside the Ovens River a few kilometres out of town to serve as home base for the next few days and waited around for the festival! I did a day ride out to Glenrowan, the site of Ned Kelly's last stand, then spent three days in musical heaven, attending concerts in the streets, in the pubs, and under the big top in the park.



At the end of the festival I thought it was time to get back on my bike and do some actual cycle touring; after all, that was why I had come here! But instead of heading off along the Great Alpine Road to the south-east I set off in the completely opposite direction on a three-day detour to the north-west to visit the Murray River, the largest river in Australia. I spent a morning cycling across flat, hot, dry farming country out-running the vast swarms of Aussie bushflies, but when I got to the Murray I have to confess I was a bit disappointed by how small it seemed. This river drains half a continent yet it didn't seem any bigger than the Wanganui or the Manawatu! I crossed over into New South Wales and followed down-river, went for an evening tourist cruise amongst the drowned tree-stumps of Lake Mulwala, then crossed back into Victoria and returned to Wangaratta.



Harry and Ned

## Top o' the mornin' to ye from the Beechworth Celtic Festival...

Then it was off up the Ovens Valley into the mountains, following the Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail (which doesn't actually start at the Murray or go right up to the mountains but runs up the valley from Wangaratta to Bright). I took a detour up a steep branch-line of the rail trail to the historic 19th century gold-rush town of Beechworth, where virtually the whole of the downtown area seemed to be registered with the Australian equivalent of the Historic Places Trust. There seemed to be an unusually large number of people milling around for a Friday afternoon, and that is when I discovered there was a Celtic Music Festival on over the weekend, starting that very evening! Knock me down with a four-leaf shamrock! The luck of the Irish must have rubbed off on me! Music festival number two, and I knew absolutely nothing about it until that moment! I spent an enjoyable couple of days going to concerts and watching pipe bands marching up and down the main street.

From Beechworth I cut across country and back onto the main rail trail heading up the valley. Up ahead rose Mt Buffalo, a massive granite plateau and a national park; I intended to cycle up it but the weather was bad up on the tops, so I headed up a side valley to camp at Lake Buffalo instead. This was a beautiful place, but the bushflies were absolutely atrocious! It was impossible to sit still - I had to keep walking, swinging my jacket around above my head to keep them at bay! I don't know how the Aussies can stand it - it would drive me nuts if I had to live there! There must be billions of them and they seem genetically programmed to go for your eyes and mouth; no matter how much you try to shoo them away the bastards keep coming back. They really did become the absolute bane of this trip. At high altitudes you largely get above them but down in the valleys they just never let up - they are a constant unignorable presence. Imagine being caught in a



Bushflies!

sandstorm where the sand grains are actually flies and you get some idea of what it is like. You cannot stop and enjoy a rest or a snack or just sit in the sun or go for a swim because you are continuously under attack. Keep cycling at about 15 kilometres an hour and you can largely avoid them, but any slower and you have them buzzing in your face, your hair, your eyes, your ears, and your mouth. Over the course of a month I must have accidentally swallowed at least half a dozen of the bastards!

## 7 Peaks Alpine Ascent Challenge

Back down in the main valley the next day, I discovered that there is a fun cycling challenge held in the High Country every summer known as the Seven Peaks Alpine Ascent Challenge. The idea is to cycle up the seven biggest skifield roads in the High Country. You can do these at any time, in any order, as many times as you like. You receive a passbook which describes each climb and provides a height profile and other useful information. When you complete a climb you get your passbook stamped at the skifield office at the top of the road to prove you have been there. You send in your entries with a copy of your stamps and at the end of summer the prize-winners are drawn at random. Separate prizes are awarded for each road, but if you have done four or more of the climbs you also get to enter for the main prize, which is an expensive bike. It just so happened that four of these peaks were located along or close to the Great Alpine Road where I was, and since I was planning to cycle up some of them anyway, I decided to take part!

This area of the High Country centred around Bright is incredibly popular with cyclists. The mountain scenery, the rail trails, the cruisy valley rides and the challenging hill climbs all make it a cyclists' paradise. A number of Australia's top professional cyclists base themselves here for the training opportunities that all the hill climbs provide. The hills in this area are absolutely massive. We tend to think of New Zealand as a hilly country and Australia as flat, but not here. The road climbs in this area are far bigger than anything I can think of at home in New Zealand. Most of the big climbs involve at least 1000 vertical metres of ascent, and the biggest are up around 1500 vertical metres or more. By way of comparison, the Rimutaka Hill Road north of Wellington is a 400 or 500 vertical metre climb, depending upon which side you are on, so imagine four Rimutaka Hills stacked one on top of another without a break and you begin to get some idea of the scale of things! Setting off at the bottom with heavy panniers and 1500 vertical metres climb ahead of you, they are absolutely daunting!



## Mt Buffalo

The first I tackled was Mt Buffalo - 23 kilometres long, 1120 vertical metres overall height gain (but more like 1200 of actual climb when you allow for the height lost in some short downhills, plus another 100 before you even get to the official start of the ride at the park entrance and 200 or so more beyond the park office up to the end of the road at the very top of the mountain), average gradient 5%, maximum gradient 11%. This was a relatively good introduction to the hill climbs, with a nice constant gradient nearly all the way. I cruised slowly up the road as it wound up the face of the mountain, got my passbook stamped at the park headquarters at the edge of the plateau, and camped at Lake Catani campground. It started raining just as I arrived up on the plateau, and in the morning a snowstorm set in. Snow in Australia in November! This couldn't be happening! In the afternoon I hitched a ride up to the end of the road in a bus with a school party. The road wound up across the desolate rocky plateau and past a small skifield before coming to an end at a scenic lookout. Snow lay on the ground around us. We climbed up the short track to another lookout on the very highest point of the mountain, a rock outcrop known as The Horn, but saw nothing in the clag.



Mount Buffalo National Park

I decided to hang around for another day and see if it would clear up. In the morning it was still drizzly but in the afternoon the sun came out and I cycled back up to the end of the road and climbed the Horn again, this time in good weather with stunning views out over the surrounding country. On the way back I also climbed another prominent peak known as The Hump. (Mt Buffalo gets its name from a purported resemblance in shape to a Buffalo, and The Horn and The Hump represent the horn and shoulder hump of the beast.)

## Mt Hotham

The following day I cycled down off Mt Buffalo and up to Harrierville, a village nestled in the head of the valley at the start of the road up Mt Hotham. The Mt Hotham road is possibly the biggest, toughest road climb in Australia, and as I sat astride my bike at the bottom of it I had very mixed emotions about it. I was looking forward to the challenge but also dreading it! 33 kilometres long, 1350 vertical metres of ascent but more like 1550 of actual climb when you allow for the downhills, average gradient 5%, several sections over 10%, maximum gradient a scary 18%. 18% is more or less equivalent to cycling to the top of Mt Victoria in a straight line from the end of Courtenay Place! Any steeper and you'd probably call it a face climb! The highlights (or lowlights, depending upon how you look at it) include a notoriously steep hairpin bend at the 5 kilometre mark known as The Meg, and two viciously steep hill sections towards the top, CRB Hill and Diamantina Hill. In winter the road is covered in snow and cars have been known to be blown off the sides in one of the deep saddles.

The climb began as soon as I left the village, a 10% gradient up around a steep S-bend. About two hundred metres down and I was already feeling knackered! Then it eased back a bit - 7 or 8% for the next 5 kilometres. There were heaps of other cyclists - being a nice sunny Saturday lots of people were clearly taking the opportunity to knock the bastard off! There was also a mountain bike festival on further down the valley in Bright and I think lots of people were coming up from that. But the other cyclists didn't have heavy panniers like I did to slow them down and there was lots of good humoured banter between them and me as they went past.

Five kilometres down and I reached The Meg. I stopped for a rest at the bottom and an Aussie guy pulled in behind me. "A rest - that's a good idea" he said. "I tried to do this ride last year and I had to turn back halfway." Then he pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit up a fag! Hmmm, maybe that could have something to do with it! Then it was time to bite the bullet, and I was off around the corner and The Meg rose before me. Down in bottom gear, standing on the pedals, pushing hard, giving it everything I had. Two hundred metres later I was at the top and collapsed for another rest.

Then another 5 kilometres of 7 or 8% gradient up a huge switchback. I could see the lower part of the road down below me through the trees. Jump off the side and you'd land right on the roadway 100 vertical metres down the hillside, or so it felt. A team of three professional-looking cyclists wearing identical fancy cycling gear and draft-

ing in close behind each other overtook me. “You guys are making it look easy!”, I called out as they went past, and the guy at the back rose up in his seat, looked at me, and called out “no, with all that gear you’re carrying, you’re the one who’s making it look easy!” I was chuffed by the compliment, but it certainly didn’t feel easy, and as soon as they disappeared out of sight around the next corner I stopped for a rest!

Finally, at last! The road levelled out and I was onto the restful middle third, like the slow middle movement of a sonata after you have experienced the build-up of the opening fireworks but before you are hit with the full fury of the resounding finale. Still gaining height but almost flat by comparison. I cycled along through the burnt-out tree trunks and blackened stumps of dead gumtrees resulting from a massive bushfire. The High Country seems to suffer devastating bushfires every few years. During the month that I was there, gangs of workmen were at work on the Mt Hotham road, cutting back dead trees that were threatening to topple over onto the road, and so the road was only open to cyclists during the weekend, another reason for all the cyclists this day. I was running out of water and when I spotted a trickle coming down the bank I stopped to refill my bottles. This was one of only two water sources I saw on the whole climb.



Bushfire landscape

Then onward and upward, past a deserted roadside office and winter chain-fitting areas. I came to a small saddle and a road junction and stopped for lunch. What a relief! Off the bike! Sprawled out on the grass, a rest in the sun. But all too soon it was time to go. Back on the bike and back to work! And now I was into the brutal final third, the *allegro fortissimo* movement of the sonata, the second side of the hurricane after the calm in the eye of the storm – a succession of winding ridges, short restful plateau sections, deep saddles, and dauntingly steep ascents.

I was out of the bush now, in low, scrubby, burnt-

out country, with stunning views out over the valleys and across to Mt Buffalo. A brief pause to rest and snap a photo and I was on my way again, pouring with sweat even with my helmet off. Helmets are compulsory in Australia but I was far too hot and sweaty to have it on. The cops come down hard on people riding without helmets, some passing cyclist warned me. Ha! So what?, I thought. There won’t be any cops out here! Then a few bends later I came upon a police car parked up beside the road! But I saw him before he saw me, so all was cool. I stopped for a chat and he told me he was parked there to catch speeding motorcyclists.

Then I came to the first of two deep saddles. What a relief! No need to pedal! I whizzed down and round the bend at the bottom. Don’t brake, save energy, don’t waste momentum! Before me rose CRB Hill, a brutal, kilometre-long ascent. I dug in, determined to give it a go, but my calves were screaming and I just couldn’t do it. So it was off the bike and time to walk - a change of muscles but still hard work.

Then more flattish going as the road curved around an open plateau. And now I could see the ski lodges of Mt Hotham Village lining the ridgeline in the distance across the far side of a valley, almost level with me. If only I could just cycle straight across there! But I couldn’t, and the road curved around and dropped down into another saddle, and there before me rose the final obstacle, the gut-wrenchingly steep and brutal opening salvos of Diamantina Hill, two kilometres or more of soul-destroying uphill carved out of the hillside, curving up and around the flanks of Mt Hotham, seemingly 15% gradient or more the whole way. Whoever designed this road was a complete sadist!

I sped down into the saddle, powered into the start of the uphill, determined to make use of the momentum I had built up - and soon came to a shuddering stop. So it was off the bike again, pushing, pushing, pushing. Pushing a heavily laden bike up a steep hill is hard work! I grabbed the handlebars, crouched low, and dug in with my shoes on the road surface. A few metres and stop. Change your hand grip. A few more metres and stop. Grab the seatpost instead. A few more metres and stop.

And just then a cyclist came speeding down the road towards me and waving! It was the guy I had met at the bottom of The Meg. This time he had made it to the top. Good luck Mr Kiwi Man!, he called out as he sped past, giving me the encouragement I needed just as my spirits were at their lowest ebb.

I rounded a corner and the road got even steeper up ahead! A few metres and stop. A few more metres and



stop. A few more metres and stop. Out to my left the mountains rolled off into the distance but I wasn't paying any attention to the view. A few metres and stop. A few more metres and stop. A few more metres and stop. My thighs were aching, my lungs were gasping. Change hands, lean forward, dig in, push forward, another few metres and stop.

And then finally the road began to flatten off slightly as I approached the shoulder of Mt Hotham, not very far below the very summit of the mountain itself. Yes! You're getting there! Keep at it! Don't give up! Only a short distance to go! That line in the road surface up ahead seems to mark the highest point - just aim for that! Keep going! A few steps at a time! Keep your eyes on the prize! A few metres and stop! A few more metres and stop! A few more metres and stop! Twenty metres to go! Fifteen metres to go! Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one! The final step! You've reached the line! That's it! There's no more! You've done it! Hallelujah! HALLELUJAH!! HALLE-LU-JAH!!! Time to lay down the bike, collapse down beside it and have a rest! Just lie there and rest. Gulp down some water and rest.

But it's not quite all over yet. You still need to get your passbook stamped to prove you've done it! So off down the other side, a steep two kilometre downhill run, curving around the far flanks of the mountain, round the bends, through a bizarre gaudy tunnel (an artificial ski overpass), and into the sprawling metropolis of Mt Hotham ski village. Where to go to get that vital stamp? I checked my passbook. The pub. Right, where's that? Right down the far end of the village of course. Of course - it just had to be down that end, not up at this end! More distance to travel. I cycled down and there it was, complete with a snowmobile parked forlornly up outside. I went inside and approached the barman. I'd like a stamp for my passbook, I said. Oh, and three steak pies and a beer.

### **Mt Feathertop**

After a long rest in the pub I returned up the road to the shoulder of Mt Hotham and back down the other side a couple of kilometres to spend the night at Diamantina Hut, a large A-frame public hut just up off the side of road. There were benches inside, but no bunks. There was also no door! I slept on my thermarest on the concrete floor and for the first time on the trip I felt cold at night and had to snuggle up tight in my sleeping bag. And no wonder - the hut is at an altitude of around 1800 metres above sea level! I would probably have been cosier if I had put my tent up on the grass out the back but it was nice for a change to be able to stand up and walk around with a



Diamantina Hut

roof over my head.

Next morning I left my bike in the bushes and set off northwards on foot along the Razorback Ridge on a 22 kilometre round trip to climb Mt Feathertop, the most prominent peak in the High Country. Mt Feathertop rises up fairly steeply above the surrounding country and the Aussies seem immensely proud of it - they call it the Queen of the Victorian Alps and describe it as a "majestic alpine peak". In winter it is covered in snow and people apparently sometimes do ice-climbing on its flanks. Alas, to a Kiwi it is somewhat underwhelming. It is certainly the most steeply angled, pointy thing in this rolling plateau country, but it is still really no more dramatic than a fairly middling Tararua summit. The very name Razorback Ridge highlights the difference between the Aussie and New Zealand mountains. In New Zealand terms it would



Razorback Ridge

be hard to find a more broad and gentle ridge. Whoever named it had clearly never visited Sawtooth Ridge in the Ruahines or somewhere like that! I strolled along the Razorback through the charred remains of a recent bushfire and up the final 200-vertical-metre climb to the top of the mountain. After lunch on the summit I visited the nearby Federation Hut, then returned back along the Razorback to Diamantina Hut, where I packed up the bike and set off back down the Mt Hotham road to Harrierville. I had to get off the road before the end of the weekend due to the tree-clearing work. What a contrast to the day before! It had taken me five or six hours the previous day to cycle up the road, and I got back down it in about an hour flat! It was an awesome 30 kilometre downhill run, apart from the few steep uphill climbs out of the saddle, and by the time I reached the bottom my brakes were hot and squealing! I camped that night in a bush reserve just out of town, the next morning I called into the general store - and there it was, up in the window, the fateful sign advertising the bluegrass festival the following weekend. Music festival number three!

### **Y'all come back now to the Harrierville Bluegrass Festival...**

Music festival number three - I was sorely tempted, but I didn't really want to hang around in Harrierville for the next five days. I was planning to go off over to the next valley system to the north and climb Mt Bogong, the highest peak in Victoria, and cycle up to Falls Creek, another skifield road. Now I was unsure what to do. But then I suddenly realised that if I went off in that direction I could actually do a complete circuit of the high country, heading out to Omeo in the east then looping all the way back over Mt Hotham to Harrierville and the bluegrass festival! And by doing that I would get to complete a short section of the Great Alpine Road that I was otherwise going to miss out between Mt Hotham and Omeo, and it would also enable me to collect another of the Seven Peaks along the way - Dinner Plain! It seemed like a good plan - could I do it? I looked at the map and calculated days and distances. Day 1 - Down valley, up over Tawonga Gap to the north, and up Mountain Creek to the base of Mt Bogong. Day 2 - Climb Mt Bogong. Day 3 - Up to Falls Creek and the start of the Bogong High Plains. Day 4 - Across the Bogong High Plains, down to the Big River, and out down-valley to Omeo. Day 5 - Back into the hills, up to Dinner Plain, along to Mt Hotham, and back down to Harrierville! Yes, it all seemed to work! It would be five long, tough days, including two huge hill climbs on the bike and another on foot up Mt Bogong, but if I didn't

have any problems I could do it. I could make it back here in time. I decided to go for it. Bluegrass or bust!

### **Tawonga Gap**

I cycled back down-valley and turned off towards Tawonga Gap. The Tawonga Gap climb seemed to go on forever, and once I reached the top I found out why. I had thought it was only a 300 metre climb, but according to the signpost at the top it was actually more like 600 metres - considerably more than cycling over the Rimutakas! And this was just a minor little saddle compared to the true giant road climbs in this area. From the top I got an awesome view out over the valley below and across to Mt Bogong in the distance, and I've got to say I was impressed! Mt Bogong looked like a real mountain in a way that no other Australian mountain has ever looked like a real mountain to me. OK, not a Southern Alps type mountain, but I felt I could be looking up at the Ruahines or the Richmond Range or somewhere like that. I zig-zagged steeply down the far side of the saddle and headed up Mountain Creek road to the campsite at the start of the Mt Bogong track.

### **Mt Bogong**

Next day I left my tent and bike behind and set off up Staircase Spur towards the summit of Mt Bogong. I passed a small hut high up the spur and eventually emerged out of the bush onto the open tops.

Open tops are rare in Australia; it's really only in the Mt Kosciusko / Snowy Mountains area in New South Wales and a few areas here in the Victorian High Country that they are found (plus some areas down in Tasmania). It felt quite different from the open tops in New Zealand; rather than lumpy tussock and pointy speargrasses I met low grass and herbs. After a steep climb, the hills levelled off into rolling plateau country and I came upon a long line of huge snow poles marching across the landscape, all individually numbered! Navigational directions must be easy up here - "follow the snow poles and turn left at number 178".

The summit was at the top of a gentle dome marked by a large cairn. This was it - the highest point in Victoria! I had great views down over the hills and valleys on one side and across the rolling open plains on the other. Mt Feather-top was visible off in the distance to the south, although it hardly registered as a significant peak. After lunch at the summit, I set off around the tops to Cleve Cole Hut, an unusual stone hut set in amongst snowgum forest in a gentle valley. Somehow this spot seems to have survived the bushfires which have burnt off most of the snowgum



cover elsewhere and destroyed a number of the other huts. Then I headed back down Eskdale Spur and followed a four-wheel-drive track back down Mountain Creek to my campsite.



Bogan on Bogong!

### Falls Creek and the Bogong High Plains

The next day I cycled up the Falls Creek road, another one of the roads in the 7 Peaks Alpine Ascent Challenge. 31 kilometres, 1200 vertical metres of ascent, plus another 200 to allow for downhills, plus at least another 100 up past the ski village and up onto the Bogong High Plains, a high rolling plateau, average gradient 4%, maximum gradient 10%. This was another long steady climb. It started off reasonably gently and had some nice downhill sections in the middle. I stopped for lunch and a swim at a hydro-lake. After lunch the climb continued, getting gradually steeper and steeper. At the same time I was getting more and more tired, so the final few kilometres up into Falls Creek Village became exhausting work. I got my passbook stamped at the skifield office and got some snacks from the village store just before it closed. Then I had an agonizingly steep 2 kilometre climb from the village up to the edge of the Bogong High Plains, where I camped beside a large hydro-lake, just around the corner from the dam.

I was looking forward to cycling across the Bogong High Plains the next day. Something about the name appealed to me. Next morning at 7 o'clock I looked out my tent door across the lake and thought I was going to have a good day. Half an hour later the weather had set in and it was wet and miserable. I lay there in my tent for another two hours, not wanting to get up. It was just too unpleasant outside. After cycling all the way up here, this was just unfair! But then I thought, if I want to get to the bluegrass festival I'd better make a move, so I dragged myself out of bed, crawled out into the cold and damp, hurriedly packed the tent up, and set off in the rain. The road crossed over the top of the dam and wound around the far side of the

lake and across the rolling plains. I thought I spotted a sneaky shortcut along a vehicle track beside a hydro-canal, but it turned into a long-cut because the dirt vehicle track became so sticky in the wet that it was unrideable and I had to get off and walk on the flat. How embarrassing!

There are a number of old historic huts just a short distance off the road up on the Bogong High Plains and I visited two of them – Wallaces Hut, an old cattlemen's hut, and Copes Hut, an old ski hut. Wallaces Hut was built in 1889 and is the oldest surviving hut in the High Country. Somehow it has managed to survive the bushfires over all these years. When bushfires have threatened it in recent years special teams of volunteers have gone in to protect it. It was fairly rough and uncomfortable inside but back in the old days it would have provided some much-welcome shelter in a storm. I have seen photos of it in winter with snow up to the roof-top.



Wallaces Hut

### The Back of Falls

The road then began its descent down off the High Plains and into the valley of the Big River to the south. It began quite steeply and after a short flat section at Trap-yard Gap it got even steeper! The last ten kilometres were just diabolical! Ten kilometres of very steep downhill, all over 10% gradient, without a single let-up the whole way. The last kilometre must have been up around 15%! I had my hands clasped tightly on the brake levers, taking it slowly and carefully the whole way until I reached the valley floor.

This would be an absolute brute of a road to cycle up! Ten kilometres of 10% gradient without a let-up, followed by more steep climbing up onto the High Plains. I did pass two cyclists going up and they were making hard work of it – and they were just day trippers and didn't have panniers! I think if I had had to go up it I would have been off walking the whole way. This climb is called the Back of Falls and it would unquestionably be part of the

Alpine Ascent Challenge if it wasn't for the fact that there isn't a skifield office at the top where you can get your passbook stamped. I learnt later that the corner where this road meets the road up the valley floor is known informally by local cyclists as WTF Corner because if you are doing the Back of Falls ride you come up the valley, which is basically flat, and when you reach this corner and turn to look up at the road ahead of you your jaw just drops and you let out an anguished cry of "WTF!" (or words to that effect).



Self portrait

By now the weather had cleared up and I stopped for lunch and a swim in the river, but unfortunately I was back down in fly country and I was under attack. Then I had a long ride out down the valley and around the hills towards Omeo. This was a beautiful bush-clad valley with a pretty flowing river but the flies completely ruined my enjoyment of it and I just put my head down and kept going, trying to outrun them. Even then I had them buzzing into my eyes and my mouth. Then I suffered two punctures in succession and it was a nightmare trying to fix them while being pestered by swarms of flies. I was definitely in a bad frame of mind as I approached Omeo! To add to my worries it was getting late and I had no idea where I was going to camp, but fortunately I came upon a spot by an old historic bridge a few kilometres short of town. It wasn't the best but it would do. The water in the stream ran down off farmland and looked dodgy but by this stage I didn't really care. I drank it and suffered no ill-effects.

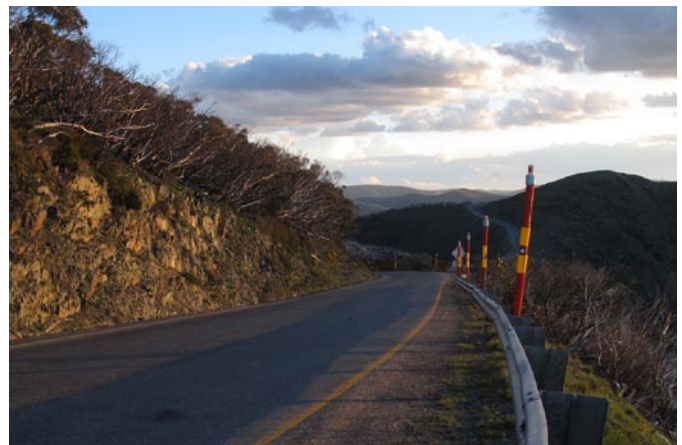
### Dinner Plain

From Omeo I turned back into the high country towards Dinner Plain and Mt Hotham. It felt strange heading back into the high country after I had just come out of it, but that was the way the bluegrass festival lay so

that was the way I went!

The road to Dinner Plain was a bit different from the others of the Seven Peaks I had done – it was longer and more undulating. 43 kilometres, average gradient 2%, maximum gradient 11%. The total height gain was only(!) 940 metres, but there were some big downhill sections along the way, and when you factored them in the total height climbed was probably more like 1400 metres. And from Dinner Plain the road continued along the range for 10 or 12 kilometres to Mt Hotham Village which probably involved another 300 metres of climb, and then to cap it off there was the 100 vertical metres up to the shoulder of Mt Hotham itself, giving 1800 vertical metres or more of climb for the day!

This was a long and tiring day. On the other big climbs I had done over the previous week I had felt pretty knackered by the end of the day but at least I had felt good in the morning when I set off. On this climb I was feeling knackered right at the very start! I had had a week of hard going and my legs were feeling like rubber. I was definitely looking forward to having a couple of days off listening to some music at the bluegrass festival! When I came to the first steep climb I just couldn't manage it. I got off and started walking, and I ended up walking most of the big uphill sections this day. There was one big downhill section of two or three hundred vertical metres in the middle, which was an awesome ride, but at the back of my mind I knew I was just losing height that I would have to regain later on. But it was nice country – after passing through a huge cattle station the road crossed over a large river and climbed steeply up into the hills. There were long sections of beautiful eucalypt forest without any fences, and in the distance I could catch glimpses of snow on the tops of the high peaks up around Mt Hotham. Finally I arrived at the Dinner Plain ski resort where I got my passbook stamped – my fourth of the Seven Peaks.



Sweeping downhill road





Ski-Doo parked outside pub

From Dinner Plain the road continued along the range top, still gaining height, until I arrived back at Mt Hotham Village, where I had been six days earlier. The ski mobile was still parked outside the pub. I was hoping the same barman would be there too, so I could walk in and say “Remember me? I’m back! I’m crazy!”, but unfortunately it was someone different, so the effect just wasn’t the same.

Finally I had the last excruciating climb up out of the village through the tunnel, and the final 100-vertical-metre ascent up to the crest of the road on the shoulder of Mt Hotham. By this stage my legs were feeling like two strands of soggy spaghetti and I walked the whole way. It was a great feeling to finally reach the top! There was the line in the road marking the crest, and out before me in the distance stood good old Mt Feathertop, with patches of snow still on the summit.

I had originally intended to cycle down the road to Harrierville this day in order to catch the opening night of the bluegrass festival, but now I decided to stop off again at Diamantina Hut and go down in the morning instead. Even though it was mainly downhill I decided I just couldn’t face it at this point. This was a good decision – I still had a couple of hours of daylight left and I just sat in the sun on the grass outside the hut drinking endless cups of tea and munching chocolate biscuits and relaxing, followed by a nice sunset as the sun went down to the west and all the hills and ranges of the high country were set off in various shades of grey and black. And of course, being high up I was out of fly country!

The following day I cycled down the road into Harrierville and I spent two days relaxing at the bluegrass festival. After a week of tough going I enjoyed it enormously! Even the ever-present bushflies couldn’t put me off!

### Postscript

*That was the last of the music festivals but not the end of the trip. On the Monday after the festival I got a bus up over Mt Hotham and back down to Omeo, and I spent the next week following the Tambo River out to the coast and exploring the Gippsland Lakes area of eastern Victoria before getting the train back into Melbourne from Bairnsdale at the end of the Great Alpine Road.*

*When I got back home I sent in my entry for the Alpine Ascent Challenge. As well as a copy of my passbook stamps I included a brief description of my trip and a few photos of me and my bike along the way. I didn’t win any prizes but I think the organisers were surprised to receive an entry from New Zealand and they posted a little story about me on their blog.*

*So if anybody is looking for an interesting place to go cycle touring, the Victorian High Country makes a good place to go. It’s easy to get to, the scenery is beautiful, and you can do some great bushwalking as well. If you time it right you may even catch some great music along the way! But man, those hills are awfully big and steep! And if only somebody could do something about those billions of blasted bushflies...!*



Bluegrass festival



SHARRON CAME and MIKE SCHIER  
descending from The Footstool,  
Mt Cook National Park.  
PHOTO: David Jewell





Mt. Whitney ridgeline at sunset.  
Sierra Nevada, USA  
PHOTO: Mike Phelan



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