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# PALMERSTON NORTH TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING CLUB INC.

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P.O. BOX 1217, PALMERSTON NORTH

**Newsletter - March 2001**

## **THIS ISSUE:**

**More words from the President, Tony's book review,  
and Terry's long trip compilation**

## **TRIP REPORTS:**

**St James Walkway, Waiohine Gorge tubing,  
West Coast tramping, and Manawatu Gorge news**

## **CLUB NIGHTS**

<b>MARCH 8</b>	<b>Kinabalu, Borneo</b>	<b>Chris Underwood</b>
<b>MARCH 29</b>	<b>AGM &amp; guest speaker</b>	<b>Peter Horsley</b>
<b>APRIL 5</b>	<b>Committee meeting</b>	
<b>APRIL 12</b>	<b>BYO Summer Slides</b>	
<b>APRIL 26</b>	<b>Ski mountaineering</b>	<b>Dave Henwood</b>

Club nights are held for all club members and visitors on the second and last Thursday of each month at the **Society of Friends Hall, 227 College Street, Palmerston North**. All club nights commence at 7:45 pm **sharp**, winter or summer. The PNTMC Committee meets on the first Thursday of each month.

At the club night: Please sign your name in the visitors book. A 50c door fee includes supper.

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**UP AND COMING TRIPS & EVENTS**

Trip Grades

Grades of trips can depend on many factors, most especially the weather and state of the track. As a guide, a reasonably proficient trumper would be expected to cover the graded trips in about the following times:

Easy (E): 3-4 hrs

Medium (M): 5-6 hrs

Fit (F): about 8 hrs

Fitness Essential (FE): >8 hrs

(T) refers to technical trips requiring special skills and/or gear.

Beginners should start with Easy Grade trips.

March 8            Thursday trampers  
                         Rosemary Hall            356-8538

**March 8            Club night: "Kinabalu, Borneo"  
                         Chris Underwood**

Chris will give a slide presentation of his recent adventurous trip with RNZAF 75 Squadron (Skyhawks) to Malaysia, including climbing Mt Kinabalu in Borneo.

March 10            Rock climbing            all, I  
                         Pete McGregor            356-7154 (w)

This is weather-dependent, as trying to stand on wet footholds is about as easy as making tofu tasty... If the weather permits, we'll head to Mangatepopo. This is a trad climbing area, i.e. natural protection, so you won't be clipping bolts and many of the climbs follow cracks in the rock, which means you jam bits of your body into the crack to help you move upwards. It's heaps of fun. Note that this is not a comprehensive instruction course, but we'll choose climbs according to your abilities and desires. We'll decide on Friday evening whether the weather's OK. If it is, we'll leave at 6:30 a.m on Saturday morning; back late that evening. To express interest, contact Pete (email mcgregorp@landcare.cri.nz or ph. 021 256 9001) by Wednesday 7 March.

March 11            Maharahara Xing            M  
                         Tony Gates            357-7439

Depart 8am. A good, local day tramp to the southern Ruahine Ranges on a track crossing from the Pohangina to the Dannevirke side. Good views if the weather allows, but it can be muddy.

March 13-15        Thursday trampers

Bev Akers            325-8879

March 17-18            YTTY            M  
                         Laurence Gatehouse    356-5805  
Depart 8am. An overnight trip inland from Otaki Forks in the western Tararuas. We'll walk in (swingbridge, tramline, stream, mud etc), stay the night at the fairly modern hut (mice, possums etc) and walk out the same route next day (etc mud, stream, tramline, swingbridge). Try & contact Laurence earlier rather than later for this one.

March 18            Mitre Flats loop            M  
                         Mick Leyland            358-3183  
Depart 7am. A walk in the eastern Tararuas in through nice forest to the palatious Mitre Flats Hut. An equally nice walk back out via the river.

March 22            Thursday trampers  
                         Phil Pearce            354-6687

March 24            Ruapehu day            M  
                         Peter Wiles            358-6894  
Depart 6.30 am and head for the Chateau. We'll take the ridge track starting behind the DoC shelter and after a few km head cross-country behind the Pinnacles, working our way towards the northern lava field, with lunch there or over looking Lower Tama lake. Return to base via the Tama crossing track.

Mar 24-25            Syme Hut ENP            M  
                         Harley Betts            354-2094

*Moved from March 4.*

Depart 9am for Dawson Falls car park on Mt Egmont's southern side. The track climbs gradually but steadily through beautiful montane forest of kamahi & mountain totara at first, breaking out into subalpine scrub (Dracophyllum, Hebe and Leatherwood) and tussock, offering great views back down to the coast. From here it's a scramble up bare scoria slopes to the hut. Syme Hut is at just under 2000 metres elevation on Fantham's Peak and we'll have all afternoon at our disposal to get there - heaps of time for rest/photo/food stops. The sunset views and sunrise views are magnificent, or if the weather isn't so great, the storms here are awesome too! Next morning, if people are keen & the conditions ok, we could head up to Egmont's summit (about 3-4 hours return) or alternatively head back down

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via Wilkie's Pools for a refreshing swim before returning to PN.

~~Mar 24-25 SAREX~~

Postponed to June 9-10.

~~March 25 Arawaru Otangane M/F  
Terry Crippen 356-3588~~

Cancelled.

March 29 Thursday trampers  
Judy Callesen 357-0192

**March 29 Club night: AGM & guest speaker:**

**Peter Horsley Conservation Board work**

Starts 7-45pm. This is the club's Annual General Meeting, which will be combined with a talk by Peter Horsley, chairperson of the Taranaki/Whanganui Conservation Board and lecturer in Resource and Environmental Planning at Massey University.

Remember that nominations for Patron, President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and general Committee members really need to be given in writing to our Secretary (Sarah Todd) at the beginning of the AGM; nomination forms will be available on the night. Include the position, name of person you are nominating, your name as proposer, and name of a seconder on the form.

So come along for an interesting talk from Peter, grab some nomination forms, and have your say on who & how your club is run. See you all.

March 31 - April 1 Mid King-Mitre F  
Dave Henwood 326-8892

Depart 7am. A walk in along the Barra Track to Mitre Flats in the eastern Tararuas. From the flats we'll do a loop up South Mitre Stream & past Mid King Biv onto the main ridge, with a camp near a tarn in the tussock below Girdlestone (option to go on to Tarn Ridge Hut if weather dictates). Completing the loop on Sunday we'll continue around over Brockett & Mitre and down to Mitre Flats & the track out to the cars.

*Dave may change this trip to another weekend, so give him a ring early for an update.*

1 April Herepai hut E  
Martin Lawrence 357-1695

Depart 8am. This is a nice easy and scenic walk in the northeastern Tararuas. It leads through the beautiful beech forests of the upper Mangatainoka River, before a short climb up through kamahi forest to Herepai Hut for a lunch break. Back out the same route.

5 April Thursday trampers  
Don MacLaine 357-0745

5 April Committee meeting

7-8 April Leon Kinvig M  
Pete McGregor 356-7154(w)/ah 0212569001  
email [mcgregorp@landcare.cri.nz](mailto:mcgregorp@landcare.cri.nz)

Leon Kinvig hut, in the headwaters of the Pohangina River, is a comfortable DoC hut with bench bunks, verandah, open fireplace and not enough sandflies to be really annoying in April. The river's lovely, and if you're lucky you may see or hear whio. Depart PN 9am, collect Pete from the Pohangina Valley at 9:30, then an hour's drive to the Limestone Road carpark behind Sixtus Lodge. A steady climb up Knights Track will take us to the remains of Toka trig on the Ngamoko Range before we head down the other side into the Pohangina Valley. The track drops steeply to the river, which we cross about 100m upstream from the hut. Lunatics have scuttled over in under three hours but we'll allow 4-6. Back out the same way on Sunday.

8 April Longview Hut E  
Stephen Liddall 357-6978

Leave at 7.30am for southern Hawkes Bay & Kashmir Road. Approx 2hrs from road end to Longview hut, good views if weather fine. Return the same way or possibly via Daphne hut track. A good easy walk to get some views.

12 April Thursday trampers  
Sue Pither 357-3033

**12 April Club night BYO Summer slides**  
Bring along your best slides and tell us what you have been up to & where you have been lately.

Easter

13-16 April Lake Colenso M  
Tony Gates 357-7439

The leader plans to make this medium Easter tramp a four day circuit, starting and finishing at the Makarora Valley. It is a lovely part of the Ruahine Ranges, with Lake Colenso as a real feature. There are plenty of route choices, good huts, and great scenery. Depart reasonably early Friday morning, back by Monday evening.

day Easter Eggmont F  
Warren Wheeler 356-1998

Depart 5pm Saturday (subject to change depending on the weather). This is the Classic



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## NOTICES

### NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

You can e-mail articles to  
 john.phillips@horizons.govt.nz  
 and deliver/post hardcopy articles to John's work  
 address:

c/- horizons.mw  
 11-15 Victoria Ave, PN

If you're e-mailing, we'd prefer you to include  
 your article as an attachment (please use  
 Microsoft Word Version 7.0 or Rich Text  
 Format), unless it is quite a small article, in which  
 case it is fine to type it directly into the e-mail.

Note that e-mails with certain attachments  
 (particularly scanned photos) will be filtered by a  
 "quarantine" system at horizons - you will get an  
 automatic e-mail reply from the horizons  
 'postmaster', confirming this. Don't worry about  
 this, all material gets through to us once it is  
 checked for viruses etc. by horizons' staff.

Please note, the deadline for anything to go in  
 each month's issue is the **FIRST THURSDAY** of  
 the month.

### FROM THE PRESIDENTS PC

Congratulations to the magnificent success of  
 those club members who entered the Kaweka  
 Challenge. Janet Wilson teamed up with Yvette  
 Cottam and came second in the Open Womens.  
 Not bad for a first-time effort. Llew Pritchard and  
 Brian Lawrence won the Vets beating off Mick  
 Leyland and his team mate who came in third.  
 And they had a lot of fun doing do it too despite  
 the less than perfect conditions.

On the Conservation Front we have made a  
 submission to the Proposed Hut Pass Review.  
 There has been a lot of reaction both here, at a  
 User Group Meeting with the DoC Area Office,  
 and nationwide. It is likely that the proposed  
 system which includes doubling the cost of hut  
 fees and Annual Hut Passes will be amended  
 significantly. If you would like to see the proposal  
 and our submission please contact me.  
 Submissions closed at the end of February but if  
 you want to put forward your suggestions a late  
 submission is better than none.

I look forward to seeing you at the Annual  
 General Meeting on the 29 March. The main item  
 of business is as usual the Election of Club  
 Officers and Committee and confirmation of the  
 membership fees. I invite you to consider any  
 improvements to the Club and who you would  
 like running the show. I can assure you that you  
 will not regret getting involved yourself. It is not a  
 very onerous task (some may disagree here!!) and  
 if you want to know more feel free to contact me.

Until when, then.

Warren Wheeler

### TRIP LEADER WANTED

to take the Top Gorge Hut Pohangina Valley trip,  
 medium grade, 21-22 April. Mary can't lead it.  
 Contact Terry 356-3588 or Tony 357-7439.

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Chris Underwood has moved from 66A Rongopai  
 Street, PN, and is now living at:

6 Frederick Street, PN  
 Phone 355-5820 (home)  
 351-5414 (work)  
 021-554-880 (mobile.)

### WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

Have you been on any longer trips over the last  
 year? Terry is compiling a list of longer trips, that  
 club members have been on, club or private trips,  
 over the last year. The plan is to do this each year  
 and publish it each April newsletter, ie following  
 the AGM. Its to show Club members and others  
 that we do a lot of good trips - lots of which dont  
 get written up in the newsletters, and that you may  
 not even hear about. It should spur us all into  
 doing longer and/or more trips. The list should  
 also give us ideas of where to go, and who to quiz  
 about the route etc. So any trips 3 days or longer?  
 NZ or overseas. (Dont worry about Tararua,  
 Ruahine or TNP trips - for ideas on longer trips in  
 these local places contact any of the experianced  
 Club members.)

So, Terry wants, for period Jan 2000 to March  
 2001: year, month, trip, area, club member(s)and  
 any ex-club members name (but not non-  
 members), any ascents.

Some examples:

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2000 June; Hollyford track, Aspiring Nat Park; Monica Cantwell.

2000 Labour weekend; 1000 Acre Plateau-Maitai, Kahuraniki Nat Park; Tony Gates, Stephen Liddel; Mts Broderick, Franklin.

2000 May-; Cycle touring, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile; Pat Janssen

Let Terry Crippen know soon: phone 356-3588, or email [terry\\_crippen@clear.net.nz](mailto:terry_crippen@clear.net.nz)

#### LEADERS: PROMOTE YOUR CLUB

Just a reminder to when you are leading a club trip: As stated on the Guide to Trip leaders, besides entering party members names and intentions, please put PNTMC or the clubs full name alongside the entry. Besides promoting the club, (with the hut being left tidy with plenty of firewood on your departure), having PNTMC recorded could help in cases of a search, if you leave some belonging in the hut, etc.

Thanks, Terry

#### BOOK REVIEWS by Tony Gates

*Mountain Solitudes - solo journeys in the New Zealand Alps*

Aat Vervoon (2000). Craig Potton Publishing.

5 multi day trans alpine trips, with philosophy, history, and opinion, are brilliantly written about here in 12 linked chapters. They are presented in a sturdy, well priced paperback of 160 pages. You could save this to read during a holiday break, or to take into the hills on a trip if you are trying to emulate the author. But its not easy to stop reading "Mountain Solitudes" once started, as the reader is led through remote New Zealand mountain lands with great interest and passion.

The author is obviously a man of many talents in the mountains. He has been a mountain guide, and educated in many aspects of natural history. Flora and fauna (both native and introduced), glaciology, history, philosophy, and mountain equipment are all keen interests of the author. He frequently diverts from the central theme of actually doing the trip, and discusses these interests- there is a lovely bit on how he hates some boots for torturing him, then praises more comfortable ones. Historical figures such as Scott, Amundsen, and Shackelton, and New Zealand explorers of the same era, are discussed to compare and contrast what they might have experienced. The author "role acts" such well known New Zealand explorers as William Dougherty and Charlie Douglas, offering a fascinating insight into and presentation of our history.

There is an extensive section on "Sources and further reading", and a tantalising glimpse of some of the areas visited by the author in eight pages of photographs. Work by well known mountain photographers Craig Potton and Geoff Spearpoint feature here. Maps too, are provided. These lack detail, offering the reader guidance with place names, and adding to the mystique of these mountain areas.

Summits often seem arbitrary endpoints of arbitrary exercises, and this is particularly so when they are lost in mist. Yet I admit that I was glad to reach this one. Enveloping cloud and buffeting wind intensified its remoteness: it was as if I had not only left human habitation far behind, but also the rivers, the forest, and the mountains themselves. I was alone in a cold grey void.

Quote from page 103

### TRIP REPORTS

#### ST JAMES WALKWAY VARIATION

2-6 February Terry Crippen

Starting at Lewis Pass, the St James Walkway is NZ's longest Walkway (66 km), but it is really just like a normal tramping circuit with good quality huts, well marked tracks or routes and plenty of excellent scenery. It is often considered by some as a bit of a boring 4 or 5 day tramp; because of its Walkway Status and the fact that a large section of it is on the grazed valley flats (St

James Station). But it is certainly worth doing - either as the standard 5 day tramp or some sort of variation.

Access to either end of the track is convenient with three bus operators. Also the Boyle River Outdoor Education Centre runs a shuttle service and vehicle storage set up.

We headed in from the Lewis Pass - this area is the Lewis Pass National Reserve ( a strange

designation since I think the only other National Reserve is the land the Waitangi Treaty House is on). Though beech forest, along the easy sidle track above the Cannibal Gorge section of the Maruia valley, to Ada Pass. The cannibal name stems from a conflict a few years ago when some Ngai Tahu became food for an opposition tribe. Ada Pass is a wide very flat area surrounded by beech forest - you hardly notice it's the divide between two catchments. A good hut here but we opted for a short bush bash up into a high basin on the Spencer Range and a tent camp for the next couple of nights.

Our second day we headed up via a series of basins with tarns and snow pockets to the top of the Spenser Range overlooking the Matakaitaki Valley of Nelson Lakes National Park. We had planned to traverse along to Gloriana, however a norwester was blowing up so we contented ourselves with a lesser scramble onto the 2087m nob before retreating back to the shelter of our basin. There were plenty of more variations that we were thinking of doing but the norwester and cloud that covered the tops the following morning meant that we would stick to the standard walkway for the rest of the trip.

The third day was our longest. For the morning, back down to Ada Pass, onto the walkway again, down the Ada to the Waiiau Valley and Christopher hut. This is where the valley becomes very wide and is grazed by the St James Station stock. However excellent views of Una and Faerie Queene are to be had. Also plenty of contrast between grazed runhold land and State Forest/DoC land. While we had the norwester as a tail wind in the morning it was a head wind as we curved round and headed up the Henry Valley to Anne Hut in the afternoon. It was a tiring 23 km tramp for the day. A mob of wild horses, with their large territory marking dung piles, took only a passing interest in us.

The next day was up the Anne Valley, a smaller and pleasant valley, over Anne Saddle via the stock track/tramping track combo, into the Boyle Valley, into the rain, and down to Boyle Flats hut - another excellent hut, sighted on a high grassy fan overlooking the very pleasant valley.

The fifth day was continuing down the Boyle, to where it opens out and is joined by the Magdalen valley. Apparently some problems have been encountered with a new manager on this particular

Station (?Glen Hope) so DoC have re-routed the track keeping well within the beech forest on public land (Lake Sumner Forest Park). This brought us out to the Boyle River OEC and our vehicle which they were keeping an eye on for us. Then it was off to Hanmer Springs for a soak in the hot pools.

All in all and excellent tramp was had by us (Terry Crippen and Christine Cheyne). Well recommended. See Brabyn's "Tramping in the South Island" for ideas for other variations.

#### WAIOHINE GORGE TUBING

February 24-25

by Lance Gray

Tony and I left Knowledge City mid Saturday afternoon, arriving at the Holdsworth road end just before 5pm. Before the gravel, and up to the right, there is a new café for those interested in rewarding themselves after a trip. My German relatives tell me they have a bit of work to do on their coffee "machen". Back to the trip, we wandered up the familiar Gentle Annie track, taking a passing interest in a robust gentleman who reeked of alcohol. The poor man looked hammered. We assumed he was on the descent given his proximity to the road end, and were quite surprised when a couple of teenagers at Powell inquired as to his whereabouts. A heart attack looked well on the cards had he continued.

Powell Hut was reminiscent of a crowded train station. We munched on bread rolls and drank a complimentary brew courtesy of Gerald Trahey, the hut warden. He is apparently the most volunteered volunteer in the Tararuas spending a phenomenal amount of time keeping an eye on huts such as Powell. This weekend he tells us was a bonanza in comparison to the wet Xmas - New Year period.

We wandered onto the tops for the twilight before nipping over Mt Holdsworth for another brew and a cosy bivvy in the tussock. Tony promptly fell into a deep sleep while I watched satellites and falling stars and worried about waking him up.

It was a fantastic sunrise to the east, and to the



south west, pink sky and cotton wool clouds spilled over the Tararua Peaks from the Otaki.

We departed early over to Isabelle Peak, before taking a right to the bushline and dropping down to a quiet Mid Waiohine Hut. Here we inflated the 20 inch tubes, grabbed a bite, packed dry bags and squeezed into wetsuits for a mid morning start. Also, we both wore helmets. What impressed me about this tubing caper was the “science” Tony had turned it into and how much fun this subsequently made the trip. The tubes comfortably carried each of us, as well as our packs, and provided much protection from the rocks and walls we inevitably greeted.



The first two hours was very spectacular, with okay travel. Neither of us looked like going for a “swim” as the rapids were fairly tame. We walked more sections than we tubed, and took a few photos. From Maungahuka Stream on however, I became very familiar with the river, tipping out more than a few times. Tony maintains that he was never relieved of his tube (but I did see him either wrapped around a rock, or stranded, several times). He did not go underwater, so I suppose that may not count. A number of favourite rapids were re-run, as were a number completely avoided. Neither of us was too keen at attempting the numerous mini-waterfalls, except involuntarily. Tubes may be relatively safe, but are hopeless to turn, and spinning around and going backwards was a common experience in a succession of rapids. The helmets we wore were certainly appreciated.

The last section, down from the Hector River confluence, provided gorgeous, and (mostly) relaxed tubing in the afternoon sun. Totara Creek arrived around 4:15 pm and the prospect of a climb back up to Gentle Annie set in.

Half way up the Totara Creek track we both ran out of gas, needing extended breaks. What did not help was a wasp sting to my calf that necessitated anti-histamines - a reminder to other trampers. We eventually arrived at the car park on dark to be greeted by Gerald the hut warden, who we gave a lift to. McDonalds Masterton provided needed sustenance before the drive back to a Barmy Palmy that was notable for the amount of sleep Tony managed and the singing I did to stay awake. All in all a superb trip made enjoyable by kind weather, good water levels, good equipment, and experience.



"NEWS IN BRIEF" by Duncan Hedderley

**Palmerston North mayor Jill White** ... was not among the good-sized group who walked the Manawatu Gorge Track on 25th February.

**Figures released by Massey University** reveal ... that we got through in 3 1/4 hours, leaving us time to go to orchestra practice, see relatives off at the airport, visit the Esplanade Open Day, or fix punctures later in the day.

**The city's \$2.4 million all-weather athletics track** ... probably won't have a tree down across it, like the Gorge Track did; but I doubt you'll be able to get as close to the Wind Farm as you can from the short side-track just before the last lookout (coming from Ashhurst).

**Personal** ... we were Susan, Joan, Debbie, Russell, Monica, Elton, Stacey, Roger, Kristin, Neil and Duncan (Our reporter, along with a little help from this week's Tribune)

THE WILD WEST by Dave Henwood

West Coast valleys have a deserved reputation as being hard man country. For the uninitiated among you, they usually contain the following 3 challenges to fast travel:

1. Lots of boulders – we're talking biggies here, car, bus and even house sized.
2. Bush – usually thick and untracked unless you're lucky enough to stumble onto a deer trail and full of such nasties as bush lawyer, Ongaonga (nettle), rotten logs and holes camouflaged with moss and ground ferns.
3. Sub-alpine scrub – scratchy, dense and frequently bad enough to make Ruahine leatherwood look like a carefully manicured garden. Progress in this sort of country is measured in hours per kilometre, not the other way round.

20 years ago, as an impoverished student I had foot-slogged into and out of the Landsborough river via the Otoko and Mahitahi valleys. In late January this year, as a salary earner and with limited holidays, I resorted to helicopter support to get into the same area.

My regular climbing partner, Don French from Masterton plus James and John from Christchurch and I flew from Haast onto the Solution Range on the boundary of the Hooker Wilderness area.

Despite being crammed in the Hughes 500, the flight, in perfect conditions with wonderful views of the peaks and valleys we were heading for was magic.

From the landing site we headed down a handy spur through open beech forest to Marks Flat. Keeping to the northern edge to avoid the bogs, we soon arrived at the roomy bivvy rock. As the weather was settled and we had 1,700 metres to ascend to the summit of Mt Hooker, we decided to have an early dinner, then head up the hill and bivvy high. 9pm saw us settling down on gravel ledges on the edge of the glacier, 640 metres higher than the bivvy rock. There was even a brief visit by 3 tar to wish us good night.

At 6 next morning, we headed up the gently sloping glacier in beautiful weather. Near the top of the ridge leading to the lower West Peak, the trick is to find a narrow ledge that leads into a north facing snow basin which gives access to the higher East Peak. In poor visibility, many a party has missed the ledge and ended up on the wrong peak but there was no such trouble for us. Glacial recession has caused a huge slump in the snow basin so in future years it may become more difficult to cross. However, we easily picked our way around the edge and scrambled up the final rocky spur to the summit of Hooker. A happy moment for Don as it was his 5<sup>th</sup> attempt. The views extended from Aspiring in the south past Cook to the north. After a relaxed lunch, we reluctantly headed down collecting our bivvy gear on the way and were back at the Marks Flat bivvy by late afternoon.

Day 3 saw us following the directions in Moirs Guide Book through bluffs and tussock terraces to the Lower Otoko Pass and thence to the main Otoko valley. 20 years ago when I had crossed the pass in the opposite direction, we had walked across the moraine covered Otoko glacier and up a steep scree slope to the pass. But things have changed a bit. Now the scree slope is a vertical moraine wall and the glacier has been replaced by a lake! This has necessitated a traverse on a shelf above the pass, then a descent to the lake outlet via bluffs and scree. The rest of the route down to the main valley consisted of boulder hopping and a bit of scrub bashing. Down in the valley, there were more changes - what used to be a largish lake is now gravel flats. We put up the fly on a mossy bench and spent the rest of the afternoon

sunbathing and studying our route for the next day.

Another 6 am start and we headed up the long snow couloir that drops down from the McCardle glacier (New Zealand's only true ice-cap glacier). Although intimidating looking, the only steepish parts were an icy bulge in the middle and the head-wall. We polished off the 1,000 metre climb in 3 hours and arrived at the col to find a nor'wester moving in. Our plan had been to ascend Mt Dechen and then if the route looked feasible, we would traverse along the range to Mt Strachan and Mueller Pass (it has been done once in winter but not in summer that we were aware of.) The weather altered those plans. Dumping our packs on the col, we raced to the summit of Dechen. Unfortunately, the nor'wester beat us to it and the only way we knew we were on top was because there was no more up! Visibility dropped to 30 to 40 metres making even the task of following our tracks back to the packs difficult. Collecting our gear, we quickly dropped into the snow couloir leading down into the Edison branch of the Mahitahi. This was largely unknown territory as prior research had unearthed very little about the valley. Even Geoff Spearpoint, the vastly experienced editor of the latest edition of Moirs hadn't been able to help. Our only info came from an article in the 1961 NZ Alpine Journal. We decide to descend to the main Edison river and travel down that to the Mahitahi. This required a long traverse across scree and tussock slopes crossing numerous deep stream guts followed by a short thrash through scrub. Drizzle and the occasional rain squall added some discomfort. Travel in the gorge proved tougher than expected and we hit our trip "slow point" – 400 metres on the map in 2 ½ hours. Mind you, this did include a 150 metre vertical jungle climb to bypass a bluff. The climb included many of the usual West Coast features including the need to climb up trees to be able to reach the base of the next higher tree and so on, plus a bit of pack passing to surmount some rocky bits. On the crest of the spur, we followed a deer trail until the spur abruptly terminated and we were forced into a steep descent back to the river. We emerged 20 metres from probably the only flat bit of gravel in that section of the gorge. Despite its proximity to the raging torrent, we readily pitched the fly and crawled under as it was now getting dark. We had been on the go for 15 hours and were wet, filthy and knackered. However before finally retiring, we selected a couple of suitable emergency

boulders to climb onto should the river rise and flood us during the night.

Next morning, it was still drizzling but the river level hadn't changed much. We crossed to the true right and to avoid the steeply descending and bouldery gorge, we traversed numerous slips and through more of that delightful bush. It was only about 2 ½ km to the Mahitahi junction – 7 hours later, we were there arriving in brilliant sunshine. The small tussock flats were soon festooned with drying gear. We relaxed for the rest of the afternoon and were entertained by the antics of a pair of whio in the rapids.

Day 6 and we commenced battle with the Mahitahi valley – boulders, bush and more boulders. On my previous trip I had descended the valley in heavy rain and the flooded river had forced us to travel in the bush. Less than pleasant memories of that trip made the boulders seem a better option. Progress was still not rapid with plenty of pool wading, grade 14 rock moves (great when carrying a heavy pack!) on big boulders and the occasional bit of pack passing/hauling. At last the valley opened out and we were into the scrub zone. At the head of the valley, we could see the tussock slopes leading up to Mueller Pass. We now had another decision to make as we passed a bivvy rock I had used on the previous trip. Though not marked on the map (NZMS 260 H36 Mt Cook sheet ref 516125) or even mentioned in Moirs guide, I knew it was a goodie. We were still some way from the pass but dark rain clouds were filling the valley and we knew that camp sites at the pass were very exposed. Not wanting another drenching, we decided to stay at the bivvy rock. If the weather cleared, we could get an early start and with light day packs blast up to the pass and tick our next target, Mt Strachan. We reckoned 3 hours to the pass, 3 hours to the summit and then a fast descent to the bivvy for a late dinner.

It cleared during the night so we were away by 6 am. It happened to be my 41<sup>st</sup> birthday so I was mentally focussed on a summit to celebrate. Surprise, surprise, things didn't quite go to plan. Scrub and boulders are slower to ascend than descend (logical really) and it was 4 hours before we reached the pass. Initially, progress above the pass up a tussock and scree ridge was fast and we felt we were back on track. When the scree turned into rock towers, we put on crampons and crossed the ridge to the summit glacier. Shock,

horror – we had expected a short climb up easy snow slopes to the summit. Instead we were faced with a huge steep sided basin criss-crossed with large crevasses and the summit was a long way off. And it was after mid-day. Everyone was stunned and hesitant. In the end it was the birthday summit fixation that caused me to launch off into a long step-plugging binge. At the first crevasse, we roped up and continued onwards. The crevasses forced a semi traverse of the mountain and it was another 3 ½ hours before we slogged up the final few metres to the top.

4pm is not a good time to be on a summit, especially when it has taken 10 hours to get there and cloud is filling the valleys and covering the lower passes and ridges. After a snack and drink, we headed down fast. The descent of the glacier only took an hour – still on schedule! While I coiled the rope and Don had a breather, John and James charged off into the rising mist. At this point, the ridge was quite broad and I had the feeling they were going too far left. However, a yell brought no response. Being well trained in the Tararuas, Don immediately produced the map and compass and we headed down taking frequent bearings. At 6:30pm we hit the pass, still time to get home before dark. Except we were 2 bodies short. We yelled through the mist and eventually heard a distant reply – they had dropped down the wrong spur and were bluffed. We continued to call to give a reference point and eventually two very embarrassed lads emerged from the lurg. It was now 8 o'clock and there was no way we were going to get home that night. With visibility down to 50 metres we followed Don's compass bearings and an hour later, just as it got dark we hit the scrub line at the boulder field we were aiming for. An overhanging rock was located and we moved in. John gathered dead tussock for a mattress, put his legs into his pack and curled up. I produced a tatty bit of karrimat for the rest of us to sit on. We put on all our clothes, ate a few scraps of leftover lunch, lay back on our packs, huddled together and went to sleep. As forced bivvies go, it wasn't too bad – no rain or wind and the mist stopped it getting too cold. I did sleep but every time I woke (which seemed quite often), my teeth were imitating a pneumatic drill and my body was keeping time.

Eventually morning light filtered through the lurg. We unkinked our bodies, packed up and headed

for home. 2 hours of scrub and boulders and we were back at the bivvy, 27 hours after leaving it. Last night's dinner became breakfast and we spent the rest of the morning recuperating. After lunch, we packed up and headed down valley. Experience from the trip up meant a few short cuts and we arrived at the Edison confluence at 5 pm. We set up the fly and got re-acquainted with the whio. Drizzle forced us into our pits early but no one seemed to complain.

The last 2 days of the trip out to the road were largely uneventful apart from the constant rain – more boulders and bush bashing but things got easier as we got further down valley. There was one exciting river crossing when the river proved deeper than expected and linked together we floated very fast towards large rapids until John displayed his kayaking experience by steering us into an eddy.

Our last night in the hills was spent in a musters hut, snug and dry. Out at the main road, we called in to see the local farmer to let him know of our passing and to enquire about transport back to Haast. He immediately offered to give us a lift to the Paringa salmon farm to catch the tourist shuttle. His “not very far” turned out to be more than 20 kms but when I offered him some petrol money he refused – “nah mate, I might need a ride someday, eh?”

While James rode the shuttle to collect his wheels from Haast, the rest of us retired to the salmon farm café, slurping coffee and stuffing ourselves with salmon filled croissants while watching the rain pour down outside. Hmmmm, this West Coast tramping isn't so bad after all....

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