



# PALMERSTON NORTH TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING CLUB INC.

P.O. BOX 1217  
PALMERSTON NORTH  
NEWSLETTER

June 1994 Edition

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President	: Tricia Eder	357-0122
Membership Enquiries	: Pauline Coy	354-9126
	: Nigel Barrett	326-8847
Gear Custodian	: Mick Leyland	358-3183
Newsletter Editor & Newsletter Distribution	: Peter Wiles	358-6894

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## ENQUIRES CONCERNING OVERDUE TRIPS

Mick Leyland	: Ph. 358-3183
Daryl & Linda Rowan	: Ph. 356-4655
Sue & Lawson Pither	: Ph. 357-3033

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TRIPS OFTEN LEAVE FROM THE FOODTOWN CAR PARK IN FERGUSSON STREET UNLESS THE LEADER ARRANGES OTHERWISE.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN GOING ON A TRIP, PLEASE ADVISE THE LEADER AT LEAST THREE DAYS IN ADVANCE. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN AN ALTERNATIVE DAY OR WEEKEND TRIP, CONTACT THE LEADER OF THE SCHEDULED TRIP.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN A DAY TRIP MID-WEEK SEE DETAILS BELOW, OR RING Lawson and Sue Pither (357-3033), or Monica (354-3834), Nancy (358-8241), John (358-3513).

### Trip Grades

Grade 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 hours, Medium (M) 5 – 6 hrs, Fit (F) about 8 hrs, Fitness Essential (FE) >8 hrs. (Tech) refers to trips graded technical requiring either special skills and / or gear.

Members are reminded that a charge for transport will be collected on the day of the trip, the amount depending on the distance traveled and vehicles used. Leaders should be able to give an estimate in advance.

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## THURSDAY EVENING PROGRAMME

Please sign your name in the visitors book. There is a door fee of 30c which includes supper.

Club meetings are held for all club (and intending) members on the last Thursday of each month and the Thursday two weeks prior to that evening. The venue is the Society of Friends Hall, 227 College Street, Palmerston North, at 7:45 pm unless otherwise notified in the newsletter.

The PNTMC committee meets on the first Thursday of each month.

## SCHEDULED EVENT LIST

### JUNE

Committee meeting 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Club Nights: Thursdays 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>

Date	Trip	Grade	Leader	Phone
<b><u>JUNE 25-26</u></b>	Te Hekenga Xing	F	Trevor Meyle	356-8782
<b><u>JUNE 25-26</u></b>	Howletts	M	Llew Prichard	358-2217
Depart 7 am for this trip. A trip to a great hut perched on the top of the range with a fantastic view out over the Hawkes Bay. An easy trip can be made to Daphne Hut for those who don't wish to climb to Howletts. See below.				
<b><u>JUNE 25-26</u></b>	Daphne	E/M	Leader required	

**JUNE 30**

**CLUB NIGHT**

Jim Neumann will be speaking about Search and Rescue. Jim has had many years of experience in the field as team member, on the coordinating committee and directing operations in the district. This should be an interesting perspective.

**JULY**

Committee meeting 7<sup>th</sup>  
Club Nights: Thursdays 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

Day	Trip	Grade	Leader	Phone
<b><u>JULY 2</u></b>	Kapiti Island	Contact	Tricia Eder	351-0122
This day trip will depart at 7 am. There are spaces available to make up a total party of 15. Costs are \$3 booking fee plus \$25 boat fee plus car transport. Get your name in ASAP. Spaces will be preferentially allocated to members if demand exceeds spaces.				
<b><u>JULY 2-3</u></b>	Climbing etc. North Egmont	F/T	Trevor Meyle	356-9126
This weekend will be based at Tahuranqi Lodge. If you would just like to potter around the lower margins of the mountain, then no problem; just let Trevor and Pauline know your interest.				

**MID TERM BREAK**

**JULY 4-8** If you are interested in some fit tramping Kaweka area, or, south-eastern Ruapehu or Kaimanawas for a few days contact Terry Crippen 356-3588.

**JULY 9-10** Open weekend based at Lawson and Sue Pither's cottage at Rangitaua. In conjunction with this, there will be a day trip to Lake, Surprise led by Llew Prichard. Pither's may be contacted on 357-3633 and Llew on 358-2217. Lots of scope from some early season skiing, climbing, some tramping or perhaps putting your feet up for the weekend, some serious socialising.

<b><u>JULY 16</u></b>	To be arranged	E/M	Tricia Eder	357-0122
<b><u>JULY 16-17</u></b>	Snowcraft 1	M	Nigel Barrett	326-8847
<b><u>JULY 23</u></b>	Yeoman's Track	Mtn Bike	Aaron Panchaud	354-8422
<b><u>JULY 23 24</u></b>	Jumbo	M	Jenny M <sup>c</sup> Carthy	06-376-8838
<b><u>JULY 30-31</u></b>	Tunupo-Irongates	F	Terry Crippen	356-3588
<b><u>JULY 31</u></b>	Whanahuia Range via Heritage	M	Mick Leyland	358-3183

**EDITORIAL**

We have sent off a submission containing some views in response to the publication of the draft management strategy for the Tararua Forest Park. I think Tony has put together some good material. (See a summary that Tony has written below.)

This whole business of (draft) conservation management strategies/(plans) (CSM's) sets me thinking. I have seen several of these documents over the years. They are almost invariably 1 or 2 volumes, 200-300 page affairs. I find them; thoroughly indigestible documents. I do not believe that they are what they purport to be – MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES (draft or not). Much of the contents seems to be a resource inventory. In addition much of this type of information appears to duplicate the work of the regional councils. This is inefficient, confusing and displays poor coordination between DOC and the regional/district councils. Instead I think these documents are strategy implementation documents.

A strategy, in my view, is closely related to a vision. In fact it is the fleshing out of the vision in terms of objectives and priorities of what is going to be done and identifying the resources to be put towards meeting the objectives – that is what I see is being a management strategy. This should be able to be stated in less than 10 pages -

including vital budgets of proposed income and expenditure. (I cannot recall seeing any financial information in any these documents.) If it requires in the order of 100 pages or more to state the strategy then something has gone wrong. Either, there is no strategy or the strategy has become so confused that no one can really get to grips with what is trying to be achieved. Perhaps it is because no one wants to be accountable for the objectives? Perhaps it is still a lingering throwback to the Public Service days - produce heaps of paper to keep the bosses at head office happy?

Running a forest park such as the Tararua is a commercial operation irrespective of whether the objective happens to be CONSERVATION or the fact that the bulk of the income comes from central Government. Income and expenditure budgets are the fundamental basis used to quantify the resources that are to be utilized and for what purpose.

The public consultation process should be the final check that the balance of the objectives identified in the strategy is about right. In the light of the submissions, the strategy objectives can be fine tuned.

Perhaps there is a hidden agenda to all this. I note (in NBR 10<sup>th</sup>. June) that the Nelson (Conservation Board is proposing that overseas tourists be levied \$20 on arrival and that both the ministers of tourism and conservation are opposed to this. However DOC is desperate for another substantial funding stream. Meanwhile the NZ Conservation Authority at its August meeting will be considering a \$25 entry fee to the five major tourist tracks (GREAT WALKS). The Authorities chairman, Jim Guthrie, is believed to be in favour of this "idea". However, it is stated that this would require an amendment to the National Parks Act. NBR further states; 'Commerce select committee chairman Trevor Rogers said imposing a ceiling on access to conservation land was the "sensible solution" (original text speech marks). Mr Rogers said his inquiry would show just what services DOC was providing for tourists and which ones could be charged for.' What does 'imposing a ceiling' mean, and also 'could be charged for'? In all probability, local users will end up being caught in this charging net to a greater or lesser extent.

Do other members have any views on this topic? We would be glad to hear them.

(Over Queen's Birthday weekend, three members of the club, along with about 20 or so others from all over the North Island, attended a mountaineering instruction course run under the auspices of FMC at Ruapehu. It was instruction for mountaineering instructors. I will comment on some aspects of this next month.)

## **NOTICES**

### **NEW MEMBERS**

Please welcome two new members to the club:

Candy Wong, 24 Dunk Place, PN, Ph 357-0492;

Graeme Roberts, 21 Liverpool Street, PN, Ph 357-8567.

### **SUBS ARE DUE**

Yes it's that time of year again - Family \$30, Ordinary \$25 and Junior \$10. Please get them into the Treasurer either by hand or via the mail (PO Box 1217). This will be your last newsletter for those that have not renewed.

### **NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING**

If you are unable to make it or expect to be late, please ensure that your apology is forwarded to the Secretary in advance. Next meeting at place Tricia's place 57 Fiars Road.

### **MAP ORDERS & HUT PASSES**

We have begun assembling a second map order, which is nearly full. Budget for an average charge of \$9/map. Hut passes continue to be available \$40 each. Alpine and Antarctic calendars can be ordered (allow about \$13.00 each). Get your order into Tony Gates.

### **RULES FOR PHOTO COMPETITION**

1. Slides must not have been entered previously.
2. All entries must be related to tramping, skiing or climbing.
3. All slides must have a cross on the bottom left hand corner of the mount for normal viewing (i.e. top right hand corner when loaded into the carousel).
4. There is a limit of 3 slides per person per category and no limit on prints.

#### **Categories:**

1. Alpine (NZ) Predominately alpine scenery in NZ i.e. above bushline.
2. Scenic (NZ) Scenes of natural pictorial interest in NZ hill, coasts etc. Predominately below the snowline.
4. Natural History ( NZ ) NZ flora or fauna.
5. Topical (NZ) People in tramping, climbing, or skiing-related activities in NZ.
6. Overseas alpine or scenic related to tramping etc. overseas.
7. Overseas people climbers or people met while tramping; climbing overseas.

Formats: Slides, black and white prints, colour prints. Prints do not need to be mounted.

You will note that this year we have included a separate overseas category. So go through your photos and find something to capture the audience's imagination. Prints may be judged as one group or separated at the judges discretion, depending on numbers.

#### **THURSDAY TRAMPING GROUP**

Yes very much up and running - trips to the end of June. All trips will depart from the bottle bank in the Terrace End car park at the time specified.

Date	Leader	Phone No.	Destination	Departs
23 June	Pam Wilson	357-6247	Takapari Rd	8.00 am
30 June	John Rockell	358-3513	Gorge Track	9.00 am

If you cannot lead the trip could you please find a replacement leader. Cost: 6c per km per passenger.

#### **FOR SALE**

Michael Curson has a pair of gaiters (size S) very good condition that he would like to sell. Ph.351-7064.

#### **CONSERVATION COMMENT**

The PNTMC Committee recently lodged a submission on the DOC Wellington Conservancy Draft Conservation Management Strategy. This all encompassing document is supposed to guide DOC for the next 10 years, and produces some important revelations we wished to comment on.

Briefly our submission covered points of concern such as; the existing Management Plan for the Tararuas, recreation and tourism, huts, tracks and bridges, public access, helicopters, rubbish, wild animal control, and hydroelectric power. These are important issues that can and will effect us, as users, a great deal. They must be discussed in detail before final DOC policy is formed. DOC need to be reminded who they are there for!

As a club, we generally support DOC. However we wish to have some say in what goes on.

#### **POISON OPERATIONS TARARUAS/ RUAHINES**

Pursuant to the notes in the last couple of Newsletters, there has been a lot of publicity concerning local DOC (and Regional Council) 1080 poison operations. The Animal Health Board wants to limit the likelihood and incidence of Bovine TB, which is spread by feral possums. Areas to be covered follow the eastern edge of the Rimutakas, Tararuas, Ruahines, and Kawekas, in both the DOC estate and private land.

Further inland, large areas of the Upper Waiohine, and the Mangatera (Lake Colenso) have been 1080'd. The Upper Waingawa is to be similarly blitzed by 1080, with the hope of reducing possum numbers in the sensitive forests there. Steve Bolton informs me that they estimate an over 80% kill rate in the Lake Colenso area. Possum populations will be monitored annually, and similar poison operations will be carried out as and when required.

All poison operations have been publicly notified, and there are signs at all the huts, and public access points. There is currently debate as to the effects of 1080 on water quality, bird life, and the general environment. The experts assure us that, with rainfall, residues are rendered harmless.

#### **TRIP REPORTS**

Don't forget (leaders) please get your trip reports in or use your short lived powers to delegate to an unsuspecting team member. How about a letter to the editor, perhaps, or some good gossip, or a poem or what ever.

Part two in the series, by Tony Gates.

#### **A TRAMPERS GUIDE TO THE OROUA VALLEY**

Te Hekenga, at 1695m, is the highest point of the Oroua catchment. From there, on a fine day, you can see much of the central Ruahines, including the ever popular Oroua valley far below. Here are a few notes for a trampers' guide to the Oroua.

The Oroua is a favourite spot for many of us. The river has a few grassy flats and a couple of small gorges. Heavy mixed podocarp/ beech forest blends into a most delightful open, easy to tramp through mountain totara forest zone known as "the feed belt". Then there is the Leatherwood belt, a formidable barrier in any language that is found in varying widths above the forest and below the tussock. Leatherwood, once tramped through, is never forgotten. Extensive tussock tops almost surround the Oroua catchment on three sides. To the west lies the sprawling Whanahuia Range tops, to the East the Ngamoko Range, and above the headwaters the main divide and parts of the jagged ridge shared with the Pourangaki and Tukituki Valleys.

Rivers can be dicey when in flood, and some of the side creeks likewise. Snow and ice are not uncommon on the tops. Soft snow may quadruple tramping times taken, and cramponable ice halve times on the tops!

Most tramps in the Oroua Catchment will logically commence at the car park off Petersons Road (off Table Flat Road) at the farmland just in from Apiti. There is an information sign there, next to the old logging steam engine.

A well marked and signposted track follows the east bank of the river all the way from the farmland to the tidy Iron Gate Hut. It starts as an old road, crosses Umutoi Creek on a distinctive wooden bridge constructed by the army engineers, climbs gently past the rifle range, then splits; one track to Heritage Lodge (large, unattractive), and the other down to the river flats and the lower gorge. It sidles high above the Oroua River from there, winding through heavily bushed river terraces, dropping and climbing between them when necessary. These ups and downs can present frustrating barriers to an otherwise rapid tramp. The track hugs the Oroua River for a short distance opposite the Tunupo Campsite, which is just downstream from its confluence with the Tunupo Stream. If the river is not in flood, it is definitely easier to cross the river there, and amble on up the river. It is not difficult from there to continue on up the river to the hut. Or the track is easily found five minutes up Tunupo Stream, and once again, follows river terraces up the valley. Car Park to Heritage Lodge, 30 minutes, Lodge to Tunupo Stream 1 hour, stream to Iron Gate Hut 1 hour.

A disused track climbs steeply from behind Tunupo campsite, through the leatherwood onto the tussock tops of the Whanahua Range. Overgrown and difficult to follow in places, but a valuable route nevertheless through the leatherwood and forest. Allow two hours.

A well marked track climbs gently behind Heritage Lodge, up onto the Ngamoko Range, and Tunupo Trig. A standard day trip with magnificent views in good weather. Allow two hours.

From behind Iron Gate Hut, the track to the tops climbs steeply, then levels off in the leatherwood belt above Tunupo Creek, then the tussock. Long flat terraces lead east to point 1519, then Otumore, (2½ hours) and the route down to Pohangina Saddle. Alternatively, taking a more south westerly bearing from the top takes you along short tussock of the Ngamoko Range, and to the track turning off to Top Gorge Hut (Pohangina) (half an hour), then a further half hour onto Tunupo trig.

It's all in the river for 10 minutes above Iron Gate Hut, with two or three crossings necessary before the gorge sidle track over point 1037 towards Triangle Hut. This track is a wee bit of a grunt, but takes only about one hour, rather than a formidable, though interesting gorge that would take a fit person 3 or 4 hours during summer. Back down in the river, much smaller at this stage, a slippery 20 minutes would see you at Triangle Hut, and back in the sunshine.

From point 1037, half way between Iron Gate and Triangle Huts, there is a rather overgrown but useable track straight up the prominent ridge through the leatherwood to the tussock, and Mangahua, a knob overlooking the well known tussock basins above Rangi Hut.

The more usual route up onto the tops, following the main track, climbs steeply for an hour or so from opposite Triangle Hut. This is the route to/from Rangi Hut, which completes the popular Oroua circuit.

Almost the entire length of the Whanahua Range can be easily traversed in good conditions. Wide open tussock ridges are well known to us. From the overgrown Tunupo track at the southern end, the tussock stretches far ahead to Mangahua, taking about 2 easy hours. There is one saddle with a little leatherwood to cross. Following the watershed to Mangamahue, broad tussock basins continue, so map and compass work could be required in misty conditions. Water is usually available in the numerous tarns up there. From the poled turn off to Triangle hut, sidle point 1635. Mangahua to Mangamahue 1½ hours.

Mangamahue to Te Hekenga should take you about two hours tramping dodging the leatherwood bushes and traversing numerous small bumps. The country takes on a markedly more rugged appearance east of here, as the formidable Sawtooth Ridge comes into view, and the absolutely awesome "Cheval Pitch" (Cheval- horse) is just down the ridge. There are still large areas of easy tussock country around, but this "Cheval Pitch" leaves you changing your thought patterns somewhat if you are confronted with it. I.e. "I'm never going to do this again" or "This is worse than the Southern Alps", or merely "Oh xxxx!" Check your life insurance policy, then if you are crazy enough, you can balance along a true knife edge ridge for three of four paces. The ridge overhangs on the Pourangaki side, gravel is loose! Otherwise "Cheval" the ridge (ride it like a horse). There is a "goat track" sidling a bit lower down in the Oroua, but beware. It can be slippery when wet.

East of "The Cheval Pitch" lies easy ridge travel above rugged, leatherwood choked streams on either side. Taumataomekura, then Tiraha are an easy hour from Te Hekenga. The legendary Howlett Hut, sheltered in the beech forest, is about an hour to the south of Tiraha, on a well marked track. A choice spot. Not many other tracks in the vicinity. Howlett Hut to Otumore takes two to three hours, and be prepared to fight the leatherwood! The burnt over Daphne Ridge is just out of the leatherwood, but it appears to be slowly growing over. The ridge track is pretty overgrown in places, and difficult to follow, so study the route carefully. Tramping is the usual up and down, then much easier south of Otumore, through flat tussocky ridges on the Ngamoko Range. A gentle climb up to Tunupo, and you are there at the top of the marked track from Heritage Lodge. Otumore to Tunupo one hour.

Part three: **A TRAMPERS GUIDE TO THE OTAKI CATCHMENT**

The Otaki River drains a vast catchment of the western side of the Tararua. Three main tributaries meet at Otaki Forks to flow down the popular lower gorge. The Waiotaru River drains the entire area bounded by Mt Kapakapanui and Mt Hector, the Waitatapaia – a sizeable chunk of "wilderness" - to the north of the Forks, and the Otaki River proper the largest single catchment in the Tararua. It starts on the slopes of Pukematawai, is bounded on its east by the main range, a continual up/ down ridge, right down to Kime Basin, and its west, a seldom visited, heavily bushed Waitewaiwai. The Otaki is a wonderful place to tramp.

Mt Kapakapanui, at 1102m, is just in the tussock, so commands a fine view of much of the southern Tararua. It dominates the Waiotaru catchment. Kapakapanui makes a pleasant day tramp.

## TRIP REPORTS

### TRAMPING WITH A DIFFERENCE May 7/8 1994. By Tony Gates

Left P.N. to the tune of dozens of black leather clad motorcyclists overtaking us near Ashhurst. All was quiet after that on the road, as we cruised the back roads of Southern Hawkes Bay - destination Big Hill Station. A very pleasant spot in the fine afternoon sun.

There is a good four wheel drive track from the farmland right up into the guts of the Northern Ruahines, with a choice hut, No Mans, nearly at the end. We drive a Subaru station wagon, which handled the road no problems, and we had two mountain bikes. Yes, we sure were tramping with a difference.

Two deer bounced out of zee bush and entertained us for a few seconds. Next on this action packed agenda, the car tried to blow up. Well, sort of explode, steaming and fuming, and demanding a stoppage. How many auto mechanical geniuses do we have? One replaced fuse, then the cooling fan resumed operation, and we were away again. Lovely cruising up there in the evening, gentle curves, easy gradient most of the way, through scrub, patches of bush, and tussock. We stopped briefly at Ruahine Hut, which was in a lovely grassy clearing, and was reasonably tidy. Then not far to No Mans Hut, much tidier, with two large Maori bunks, a porch, and our car right at the front door! A very brief foray told us what we wanted to know, it, was a super nice spot.

A fine frosty night saw us stoking up the fire, eating well, and sleeping for ages. Then more good food for breakfast, and, when the sun hit, a pleasant tramp around the tops. Glorious rolling tussock basins, patches of beech forest, and views for miles. Tauwharepokoru, at 1403 metres, is the highest point around, and we sat up there for half an hour soaking up the weak autumn sunshine, and binnocularising around. An easy walk back to the hut, and still more good food. Then it was downhill all the way. Sallie and Yvonne departed on their mountain bikes, while we remained at the hut to sweep it out. They reached the farmland just after the car, after a pleasant ride down.

The tramp ended in the Winerjes of Hawkes Bay!

"Trampers" with a difference were Tony, Yvonne, Sallie, and Warren

### MACKINNON HUT – MAY 14

We started from Llew Prichard's at 7 am on Saturday. We headed north along Kimbolton Road and met Pauline as we drove through Rangiwahia and found out that Mick and Trevor had decided to go up to MacKinnon j directly instead of via Purity and Mangaweka. We drove into Kawhatau Base. The snowline was about 100m above us on the side of Colenso. We walked out of the base area, crossed the stile and then (down to the river and the cable car. After a pleasant ride across the river, we waited for Llew to have a smoko and then proceeded up the hill along the ridge. There were great views up the Kawhatau River and across to the base but the upper slopes of Colenso were clouded in. We were soon up into the snow in the bush; the slope was fair and it took us an hour to reach the bushline. The cloud was at ground level and we could make out the first marker post but nothing else heading up a gentle slope. The wind was not too strong and the snow about a foot deep as we worked our way from one post to the next. The slope got a little steeper as we reached the small knoll at 1,460m. The next landmark was the signpost down to Crow Hut. We kept on past the tarn to the south of the track. The snow was getting a bit deeper and was a metre deep in places. Llew had been breaking trail for most of the way and we began to rotate the trail-breaking. Although Mick and Trevor were only 2 hours ahead of us their tracks had completely blown and sown in. The temperature was a little colder and feet were cold even though the work was hard enough to keep us warm on the body. We reached the sign pointing down to MacKinnon Hut and looked south towards Hikurangi but could only see about 20m. From the sign, we headed east along the ridge and down the gentle slope. The slope changed to steeper and looking down along the poled route we caught a glimpse of the hut in a gap in the mist. The track of the two ahead of us was a lot clearer here and we went straight down. We got down onto the flat where the hut was just below and turned down the hill into the first brush and to the door of the hut. David was first through the door and not recognised by Mick who was lying in his sleeping bag with a mug of coffee in his hand. The hut was really cold and soon we had lunch and soup on the go and hot cup of something. The test of the day was spent eating and getting the fire going due to the efforts of David and Llew. As the light faded, the sky cleared to the north and blue sky could be seen under the cloud close at hand. The rest of the day was spent cooking gargantuan meals and sitting around what turned out to be a really warm fire. We got into the sack at about 8 pm and soon asleep.

Next morning Trevor was up early and billy on at 6am, about an hour before light, we soon had the porridge on and some amongst us had some of last night's heated up. We left the hut at about 8am and away up the hill with Trevor braking trail up to the top and the hut sign.

The wind was blowing hard from the south and we headed just about due west from post to post as visibility was fairly short. We made good time back; reaching the edge of the bush in an hour and a half from the hut. Then down to the cable car with a smoko stop about two thirds down. Across the cable and up to the Base. A brew up and a strip off of wet clothing and a short chat with a group from the Manawatu Club who had over nighted in Purity. Then back to Palmerston with a short stop for an ice cream at Cheltenham. A really pleasant weekend in congenial company and lots of lovely snow.

Team: Mick, Llew Trevor, David and Peter

## **WALKING ON THE WINDY SIDE - NORTHERN RUAHINES 15-19 MAY** by Peter Wiles

Winter usually starts to make its presence felt by mid-May. However, during the May holidays it was planned to visit the northern-most parts of the Ruahines – south of the Napier to Taihape road. This area tends not to be visited very often by club members nor anyone else for that matter with the exception of DOC.

The weather the previous week had generally been bad with snow to 900-1,000 m. One presumed that the following week would herald better conditions. This, however, was not to be. Nevertheless, the plan was quite ambitious: we would start at the Comet Range road end (a few km west of Gentle Annie) and head south to No Mans, then either via Ikawatia Forks or Aranga Huts, westwards to Ruahine Corner and then north back to our starting point via Makirikiri Stream and the Wild Sheep Spur.

We left on Sunday morning at 6 am via the east coast route for Kuripapango and the Comet Range Road. The latter road leaves the Napier-Taihape road and climbs some 400 m rather steeply to the crest of the range. The view from this spot is very impressive and extensive. We parked on the flat crown of the range some 100 m from the hut and changed in rather cool breezy conditions before setting off at about 11 am. This is an area planted in *Pinus contorta*, which has subsequently run rampant. So the track starts by heading south through the pines and zig-zagging up some 200 m to the trig at about 1,100 m before entering a remnant of beech forest that somehow escaped burning in the earlier days. On the upper plateau, the track passes back to pines then to manuka forest. After about an hour, the plateau suddenly ends with a 700 m drop down to the Taruarau River. This is an impressive gorge and the track basically plunges straight down. When we reached the river, we found it up a little from the previous weeks rain/snow and a little discoloured, giving the impression that it might present a problem to cross. Fortunately, this proved not to be the case. In crossing the river, we had crossed from the Kawekas over into the Ruahines. On a grassy manuka covered terrace on the other side we had lunch in a spot sheltered from the wind blowing down through the gorge. Afterwards we picked up the track and headed up a gentle sidle for 30 minutes to Shutes Hut. This hut is unusual, in that it was built from river stones and cement in about 1920. (It was originally a muster's hut when it was attempted to farm this area prior to the Depression.) The hut remains still very serviceable and has four bunks and a good fireplace at the far end - which we made good use of. Some showers started late in the afternoon and during the night the wind increased.

The next morning we were off before 8 am on the track which heads south to the ridge top and continues in that general direction along the main range to eventually reach No Mans Hut (1,350 m). This involves a height gain of between 900-1,000 m from Shutes Hut. We thought we were taking this in leaps and bounds when we had climbed 400 m in 35 minutes. Once we were clear of the manuka and on the tops progress was entirely different. The wind was very strong and gusty. The higher we got the worse it got to the point at about 1,200 m we were struggling to stay on our feet. Considering that we still had a further 6-7 km of open ridge to cover to No Mans, it became obvious that we probably would not make it. There was an alternative shown on the map which in theory gave us some hope - but at the cost of having to reascend an extra 300 m. A track shown on the map dropped down to the east to the valley, before reascending back to the parallel ridge on the other side. This ridge has the road to NO Mans on it. We figured in this wind a road would be much easier to walk on, better still, much of the remaining distance along the road to the hut was sheltered in beech forest and even better still, the total length of ridge to cover was shorter. The only problem was whether this track could be found/existed and the extra 300 m plus bush bash if the track was not to be. Almost by chance we found the start of the track down, but after about 3 markers we lost it and we continued bush bashing downwards on rather steep slopes to the bottom. This was heaps better than the wind. After a brief feed and drink at the stream we started the upwards leg. After climbing about 200 m we came across the track again (very overgrown) and concurrently the rain started. Once back on the top we joined the road and trudged our way along in the wind, rain and cloud. We were rather wet and cold when we reached the hut for lunch. A large brew up of soup and instant noodles proved to be a life saver.

Here we had to make two critical decisions. One - were we going to continue south to Aranga or turn west and drop down to Ikawatea Forks? Two - were we going to stop here for the rest of the day and hope that the next day would improve? We decided to continue to Aranga. To reach Aranga, is nominally 3½ hours away. The whole journey is along the ridge top at between 1,300 and 1,400 m. The first 3 km is on completely open ridge and the remainder is along a cut track through the beech. Unfortunately, the track on the open ground takes the route that requires the least effort to establish and maintain - i.e. the windward side of the ridge where virtually nothing grows. The wind was too

strong for us to endure on these sections, so we tried to work the lee side in the tussock. I do not think I have ever encountered such strong Wind. We were repeatedly blown over. Perhaps there was some fortune in the fact that in the worst section the rain eased and thankfully no one got hurt. After nearly 2 hours of this, somehow we managed to get to the start of the bush section. At last it was time to cruise. Beyond the Parks Peak junction, the rain started to show signs that the weather was changing to snow. We reached the hut in fading light shortly after 5 pm. Nigel got the fire going and we settled in for the night.

All night the blizzard raged outside and by morning there was about 10 cm of snow but no let up in the conditions. Perhaps foolishly we decided to continue on our way to Ruahine Corner. This involves another 6 km of exposed ridge mostly facing into the storm and gaining another 200 m in height to reach the main range. For the first couple of km, stunted beech gave some respite from the elements and we made good progress. Beyond the bush line, the wind was only slightly less strong as the previous day and we struggled desperately at times to stay on our feet. Fortunately, the steeper lee slopes were comparatively sheltered. After between 3-4 hours we reached the summit of the range. At the unmarked trig U, the ground is very flat and featureless. We expected that the storm force westerly wind was pushing us off route towards the east as the desired route was almost south to north at this stage. We passed a small cairn in the whiteout, but was not sure what significance if any it had in relation to our intended route. The route off the range to Potae to the west is off a tricky minor spur. Taking the wrong spur would have serious consequences in these conditions. We discussed whether we should not take the risk and drop over to the east down a spur into the bush and aim for Upper Makaroro Hut. Terry took a final compass bearing and pointed in the required direction for the spur to Potae. This was a critical decision. We started to head off when I wiped some of the snow off my goggles and in a momentary improvement in visibility happened to look directly out past my right shoulder and there - 50 m away - was a sign post "Ruahine Corner 2 hours 30". Terry's navigation had been superbly accurate once again! The rest was easy in comparison. We dropped 400 m into the bush and out of the wind (for awhile). Even the sun briefly appeared. The track sidled around through the bluffs that delineate the eastern margins of the Mangaohane limestone plateau. After reascending 200 m, we were on the plateau just north of Potae and back in the rain, wind and snow. Now we had bush to shield us, apart from the last 5 minutes to the hut. We arrived in time for afternoon tea. Again the fire gave very good service in performing a major warming and drying out operation. Heavier showers returned during the night and the wind did not relent. (Ruahine Hut, like many NZFS huts, suffered from the booming chimney syndrome in strong winds. This made sleep difficult.) We considered our options. Plan A was to head north across the plateau and traverse the Otupae Range. (This was the fine weather option and was immediately ruled out.) Plan B was to head north and drop into the Makirikiri Stream and then traverse the Wild Sheep Spur and drop into the Timahanga Basin before climbing back up to Comet. Plan C was to drop down to Ikawatea Forks and climb back to No Mans before taking the ridge back to Comet via Shutes. (If the wind prevented us coming up then the wind would present the same problems going down, so that eliminated that option, even if we assumed we could cross the Taruarau.) Plan B was the obvious choice, but it had the difficulty that the track out from Makirikiri Hut via the Wild Sheep Spur was marked on the map as "overgrown".

We left Ruahine Corner Hut in similar conditions as the previous afternoon, except that the cloud was now at ground level, and headed north westwards taking the navigational safety of the road. After about 2 hours and 8-9 km, we took a turn off to the north-east to begin a 3-4 km trek to the eastern edge of the limestone plateau. Conditions were more favourable with the wind behind us and improving visibility. At the edge of the bluffs we could see the start of the (overgrown) track almost directly below. Progress was now rapid, losing about 400 m on the descent to Makirikiri Stream. We reached the hut for an early lunch. This hut was built probably in the 1920-30's and is unusual in so far as it is constructed out of flat sheets of galvanised iron (not corrugated). The hut is ex NZFS, but is on Maori land and is now virtually derelict but can still provide shelter if required.

After lunch we crossed the stream and started on the track climb up onto the Wild Sheep Spur (200-300 m), however, we lost the track fairly early on, most likely in one of several clearings. This was no big deal initially as we were able to make good progress through open beech forest. After about 2 km, the beech was replaced by dense manuka. Here we probably made a mistake and opted to sidle through the manuka on the eastern side of the ridge. After nearly an hour we emerged from a tangled mess of partially collapsed wet manuka on fairly steep ground back onto the ridge crest to rediscover the track. The track for the remaining 4 km along the spur was mostly easy to follow. On both sides were deep narrow and extensively bluffed gorges of the Makirikiri and Ikawatea Streams, respectively. At the northern end of the spur, the descent continued for about 150 m down through fairly open manuka but the ground was steep loose rocks covered with black slime. Finally there was a 30 m bluff down to the junction of the streams. Nigel headed down while Terry and I wondered, about the options of a better route down. Since Nigel did not reappear, we presumed this must be the route, which indeed it was. Although initially intimidatingly steep, it was quite negotiable once on it. We crossed the Makirikiri and joined the Ikawatea. The latter was very muddy and did not appear to be a pleasant prospect to cross. It was now 4.15 and since it would be dark by about 5.30 we opted to camp on the terrace at the junction. This gave good shelter. Terry and I erected the fly while Nigel got a fire going. After soup and instant noodles, the main course might have stretched the combo concept to new limits - rice and pasta, mushrooms, silver beet, pepperoni salami and sardines! It all was consumed with the greatest of ease. Jelly and pears followed.

It was fine during the night and we got away to a good start in the morning. After climbing up a steep bank to a higher terrace we got onto the farm road that runs the length of Timahanga Station. Along the way we saw the only other person on the trip - someone operating a tractor fitted with a backhoe digger. After about 8 km we crossed the Taruarau on the bridge and began to focus on the best route to take for the 700 m climb back up to Comet. We opted to get as high as possible on the farmland before tackling the manuka, followed by Contorta and patches of open



ground. Some parts were a bit of a push but we made good progress and just before 1 pm, we reached, the track about 50 m from the Comet trig. Then it was a short walk dropping 200 m down to the car and hut. After a brew and feed we headed home via Taihape. There was a slight hold up on the way. A road gang had shot 120 sticks of gelignite, a few minutes before we reached it, in a small bluff on a corner they wanted to widen. Unfortunately, the arrival of the bulldozer to clear away the debris, was not quite coordinated with the time of blast. However a bit of hand power cleared the way through and we were off as the dozer approached from further up the road.

Terry Crippen, Nigel Barrett and Peter Wiles

### **PENN CREEK HUT, VOSELLER, May 7-8** by Alistair Millward

The actual route, we took for this trip differed from the one in the club newsletter. I rang Brian for information on the trip the week before and found out that we were going to Vosseler, not Mangahuka, which made the trip easier. Five of us: Llew Prichard, Brain Lawrence, Graham Roberts, Mick Leyland and I (Alistair) squashed into Llew's ute and were at Otaki Forks by 8 o'clock on Saturday morning. We spent half an hour waiting for someone called Glen to turn up and while we waited two others from Wellington arrived, also going to Penn Creek Hut. The mathematicians in the party did some quick arithmetic and figured that five plus two equals seven. Penn Creek Hut only sleeps six so we forgot about Glen and the race was on. The track was a typical Tararua sidle track with roots, slips, MUD and up and down most of the time. We reached the hut in three hours, in time for lunch. The afternoon was free, so we sat around talking, drinking coffee and lit the fire early. Three other Wellingtonians turned up at about four o'clock and also wanted beds. The four PNTMC "real men" slept outside while, the rest of us enjoyed the hut.

The next morning, the weather was perfect. We had a look at the map in the hut and found that the track to Vosseler had been closed. Being "real men", we decided to go ahead with our plans and being "real men" we also figured it didn't matter how long it took us. I don't think Llew took this to heart because after our initial loss of route he took to the climb with a vengeance and disappeared into the thick bush ahead. A track miraculously appeared about halfway up but unfortunately it disappeared at the LEATHERWOOD. We were on top of Vosseler for lunch. Next was the big grind up to Field Peak. The views from here were fantastic and a glider trying to cross the range provided additional entertainment. We continued down to Field Hut for a late afternoon tea and the weather began to close in on the tops. The new boardwalk section of the track is very nice but not nearly long enough. The "real men" then decided to have a race down to the car while I used a sore knee as an excuse to walk. I'm sure Brian and Llew gave a sedate party of day walkers the fright of their lives as they came charging through. We were back at the car by five o'clock and home at six thirty.

### **EASTER AT WHANGAEHU Part I** by Nigel Barrett

Derek and I had been planning and dreaming about this trip for quite a while, so come Easter, we were keen to go. Our goals for this trip were to climb the Cathedral Rocks and I especially wanted to get onto some steep ice. So our 3 day schedule was going to be quite full with no allowance of what the weather might bring.

The traffic on the way was quiet; sadly my old Holden was not, but it did get us there, but it would remain to be seen if it could get us home. The Tukino Ski Field road has a locked gate about 6 km short of the road end, but we planned well and had possession of the key. A rough road meant a rough ride for the car; quite a few load clunks coming from under the car! Inspection underneath revealed a rather large leak of transmission fluid. Still we were so close to our destination we continued as far as traction on the sandy gravel would allow.

We packed our gear and headed off up to the hut, at a sedate pace; stopping occasionally to roll some rather large rocks down the side. We reached the hut some time about 1 pm, so we decided to climb the Clock Tower via the ridge from the east. We had one abseil before we reached the Tower itself. We roped up for the Tower, with Derek leading the way - 20-30 m maximum.

The top of the Tower was quite unstable, so caution was taken on the top. We had a pleasant view from here, so we spent some time looking around - lots of people at the Dome Shelter that afternoon (50+ was our estimate). Climbing down the other side of the Tower revealed to us that it is actually hollow near the top (ample room for two people to sit in). It was an easy climb down, but an extreme lack of belay points meant for a bit of fiddling around. Once Derek had got down it was a quick run to the hut where we met another party of 4. That evening we tried to think of something witty to put in the log book; it went something like this. "Hickory Dickory Dock, 2 students run up the clock ..... I forget the rest.

For dinner I cooked up an absolutely delicious culinary delight (stew), before we called the parents on the yuppie phone for the weather forecast – which was as about as useful as a forecast I once got on a SAR exercise – before we hit the sack.

The next morning ... continued by Derek Sharp.  
Saturday dawned with breakfast already consumed. Gear was sorted, bags packed and off we went to glance at Cathedral Rocks and a crevasse on the way. The plod up was steady going while keeping to the shadows as the day was warming up fast. Near the base of the Cathedral Rocks was a large crevasse that disappeared into a tunnel. About one third of the way along under the large lava columns of the Rocks, we sidled down the moderately angled

slope (bypassing some small deep cracks in the roof of the cave) towards the entrance itself to peek into the chamber. The first impressions were of disappointment as there was no possible rope work that could be accomplished in this cave. We were quickly distracted by the texture of the wall/ceiling - wavered and cratered - that caught our eye and a lot of Nigel's film. On further exploring, all disappointment was dispelled as two smaller passages were explored. Both opened up revealing amazing ice formations - stalagmites, stalactites, flow-stone like formations, curtains and columns - though not big enough to ice climb on. Some of the stalagmites were at extreme angles - horizontal, L-shaped or even spiralled - perhaps due to wind currents and slumping of the ceiling. All the formations were crystal-clear, moderately smooth and shiny, giving a nice blue hue to the cave. (Unfortunately Nigel had not loaded his film properly so the loss was definitely mourned afterwards.) In one almost hidden area there were numerous icicles that we were able to strike musical notes on, before they fell off making a delicate tinkling as they descended down a deeper hole. After finishing the examination of the optical effects of one particular column in the Cathedral's vestry, we had a late lunch.

After lunch, a quick direct climb up to the Rocks was undertaken in deteriorating weather - all in vain. The Cathedral Spire rebuked us. The rock climb amounted to less than 10 m before it became outwards sloping, snow topped, gritty with sand covered holds and ledges. Definitely more of a winter ice climb. After a quick decent back to the hut, it was time for dinner. What a disaster. The Whangaehu Gorge devoured most of it, with only about a third of the thirds being eaten.

The next morning brought clear weather and a quick crisp walk down to the car in a good 8 cm of fresh snow. A careful drive down the road was undertaken with a litre of transmission fluid put in at Waiouru.

Nigel Barrett and Derek Sharp.

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