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# PALMERSTON NORTH TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING CLUB INC.

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P.O. BOX 1217, PALMERSTON NORTH

**Newsletter - October 1999**

## **\*\*\*THIS ISSUE\*\*\***

### **NEWS:**

**Hut charges increase, Trip card 2000**

### **TRIP REPORTS:**

**Vol.3 of the Snowcraft Series, Avalanche Awareness, Climbing at  
Whakapapa, Ngauruhoe Day Trip**

## **CLUB NIGHTS**

OCT 14	“Ecological Leatherwood Bashing”	Peter van Essen
OCT 28	“Life in the Isle of Skye”	Viv Nichols
NOV 4	Committee Meeting	11 Pahiatua St
NOV 11	“Looking forward, looking Back”	BYO slides
NOV 25	“Scandinavian Touring”	Warren Wheeler

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.

**Oct 14 Club Night: “Ecological leatherwood Bashing” with Peter van Essen**

Leatherwood - most trampers have bashed through it, some have been stuck in it for hours, most have cursed it profusely. Now is your chance to find out how it functions ecologically. Is all leatherwood the same? What makes it so successful in some places? How does it cope with often extreme climatic conditions? Is it spreading to take over our mountains? This talk will give you the answers so the next time you find yourself leatherwood bashing (both physically and verbally) you can do it in an informed manner.

Oct 16-17      Hikurangi Range      M/F  
                     Mick Leyland              358-3183

Depart 6.30am. A walk up and along this broad ridge in the western Ruahines, taking in Mangaweka, the highest point of the Ruahines. Give Mick a ring for more details.

Oct 17              Mangaweka Trig              M  
                     Sarah Todd                      326-9265

**[Changed to Oct 31]**

Oct 21              Thursday trampers  
                     Merv Matthews              357-2858

**Labour Weekend**

Oct 23-25      Whangehu, Ruapehu      F/T  
                     Terry Crippen              356-3588

Leaving 6-30pm Friday. Up the Tukino Road on Ruapehu walking into either the NZAC hut on that side of Ruapehu or DoC's Rangipo hut. The plan is then to use a high level route to give either

one or two nights in the head of the Wahianoa Valley on the south eastern side of the mountain. This gives good direct access to climbs on Girdlestone, Tahurangi and Mitre. This is a climbing trip so you will need to be fully equipped.

Oct 24              Kapakapanui              E  
                     Llew Prichard              358-2217

Depart 7.30am. A loop track just inland from Waikanae in the southern Tararuas. We'll be walking up to Kapakapanui Hut on the bushline, continuing on for some views out across Kapiti Island if the weather is fine.

Oct 28              Thursday trampers  
                     Harry & Chris Allardice      323-4390

**Oct 28 Club Night: “Life in the Isle of Skye” with Viv Nichols**

A kiwi lass in the Isle of Skye, Viv spent three years in this land of wee sun and much rain (the rain often going up hill with the help of the strong winds). Come and hear about the life style, the people, the pubs, the plants and some of her rambles.

Oct 30-31      Tama Lakes Camp      M  
                     Laurence Gatehouse      356-5805

The Tama Lakes are situated between Mts. Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe and are fairly easy to reach but when carrying overnight packs not trivial (hence a medium trip). The plan is to walk in from the Chateau, set up camp in the region of the upper lake and do a little investigating of the surrounding terrain and walk out the next day. There are no huts so some form of shelter (tent, flysheet or bivvy bag) is an essential. The lakes are quite beautiful and the country towards Ngauruhoe rather interesting. All in all an excellent introduction to the National Park without getting too high or ambitious. We shall need an early start to make up for the drive up from Palmy probably about 6-ish unless people fancy driving on Friday night and sleeping in the public shelter at Whakapapa.

Oct 31              Mangaweka Trig              M  
                     Sarah Todd                      326-9265

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Depart 7.30am. After a short grunt up a farm hill, there is a reasonably gradual walk up through nice forest, including some interesting kaikawaka (mountain cedar) to Purity Hut on the bushline. Continue on up through the tussock to Wooden Peg and Iron Peg for some great views across the inner Ruahine Ranges.

[Changed from Oct 17<sup>th</sup>.]

Nov 4 Thursday trampers  
David Warnock 356-6247

**Nov 4 Committee Meeting**

7.30pm at Terry Crippen's Place, 11 Pahiatua St. Non-Committee members welcome.

Nov 7 Tunopo-Toka circuit M  
Mick Leyland 358-3183

Depart 7am Into the western Ruahines, up through nice forest, then sub-alpine scrub (on a cut track) onto the open tops of Tunupo on the Ngamoko range. Excellent views for lunch. South along the range to Toka and down via Knights track. A great circuit.

Nov 7 Titahi Bay Rock All, I  
Laurence Gatehouse 356-5805

The club does not do too much rock climbing but it is a useful skill for anyone planning a trip down south for when those annoying rock bands appear in your nice snow covered ridge. It also uses those rope skills you practised in the freezing cold on snowcraft. I do not do much climbing these days mainly trips to City Rock in an attempt to keep supple and maintain some finger strength but the climbing gyms, good as they are, don't compare to the real thing. Titahi bay is down near Wellington and offers a range of grades of climb on seacliffs of (mainly) good rock with some pretty good views and nice salt bathing for those who get too hot or just burn out their finger muscles. This is a trip aimed at beginners and all climbs will be top roped though anyone with a bit of skill (and gear) is welcome.

Nov 11 Thursday trampers  
Keith Domett 04 562-7322

**Nov 11 Club Night: "Looking forward, looking back"**

This is a BYO slide night where club members will show us what they have been up to over this winter: possibilities include sliding down snow slopes on the snowcraft course, sunny day trips in

the snow covered Ruahines, ski touring on the Murchison glacier, or enjoying the Scottish summer on the Cairngorms; etc. Also there will be short introductions to all those neat places and trips coming up over summer. To help coordinate the evening please contact Maree (358-9004 work) if you want to contribute (no more than your 10 best slides please).

Nov 13-14 Triangle M  
Liz Flint 356-7654

Depart 8am (from the PN police station) Into the western Ruahines, up to Rangi Hut for morning tea, onto the open tops for lunch, then down through forest to Triangle hut in the Oroua for the night. On the Sunday down the river via stream bed and track, with morning tea at Iron Gates hut, coming out at Table flat makes this an excellent through trip (a combo with MTSC).

Nov 13-14 No Mans 4WD & mountain bike  
Tony Gates 357 7439  
or 025 246 1901

**[Replaces Tony's Hidden Lake Trip]**

Well, the trip scheduled for July 1999 to No Mans, in the northern Ruahines, didn't go (we had a brilliant trip up Takapari Road), so now is your big chance. Tony plans to drive up into the heart of the northern Ruahines on the road through Big Hill Station to No Mans hut, camp alongside the vehicles, and generally enjoy the place. If you really wished, you could tramp no further than the four wheel drives can go (which will still give you some excellent views), or do any level of tramp that you desire. It's a gorgeous spot, way above Hawkes Bay, with flat-rolling tussock grasslands and beech forests. It's a wonderful mountain bike trip back down the road.

We hope to depart PN about 7.00am on Saturday, so we can reach the road end by mid afternoon, in time for some serious afternoon tramping. We will return mid afternoon Sunday.

Nov 18 Thursday trampers  
Anne Green 06-374-5208

Nov 14 Top Maropea M  
Neil Campbell 359-5048

Depart 7:00am for the eastern Ruahines behind Tikokino. After a short stretch of farmland we will follow an excellent well graded track through forest, climbing up to Sunrise hut on the bushline. Time for a rest break then up and over the tops of the Ruahine Range via Armstrong Saddle, dropping down to Top Maropea Hut in the

headwaters of the Maropea catchment. After lunch we will trace your steps back, mostly downhill, to the carpark. Come along for a great trip.

Nov 20-21 Rangi-Howletts Crossing F  
Dave Henwood 326-8892

**[changed to 4-5 December]**

Nov 20-21 Pouakai Range M  
Malcolm Parker 357-5203

Depart 6am for North Egmont. Up to join the Round the Mountain track, heading west to Holly Hut for lunch. In the afternoon across the Ahukawakawa swamp and onto the Pouakai Range, and Pouakai Hut for the night. The Pouakai Range is set off from Mt Egmont. With its open tussock tops it gives excellent vantage points for views of Mt Egmont, New Plymouth and the north Taranaki coast. The route back to North Egmont on Sunday will depend on what the group wishes, there being a number of options.

Nov 21 Sunrise-Waipawa M  
Warren Wheeler 356-1998

Depart 7.30 am. Popular destination with added variety and adventure. We will enjoy the variety of forest types up the track to Sunrise Hut on the bushline, marvel at the views west to Ruapehu and east to Hawkes Bay from the rocky tussock tops, boost the adrenalin down a scree slope into the north branch of the Waipawa Stream, and relish the untracked stream route. Expect to get wet feet before returning to the cars!

(Note: this trip has been bought forward from 5 Dec and swapped with Dave Henwood's Rangi-Howletts crossing trip which is now 4-5 Dec.)

Nov 25 Thursday trampers  
Jill Spenser 329-8738

**Nov 25 Club Night: "Scandinavian Touring"  
with Warren Wheeler.**

Warren Wheeler will give a slide presentation and talk on hiking Norwegian-style, as well as canoe touring in Sweden. Warren has spent the last two northern summer holiday periods in this part of the world. Both trips featured 14 day extended hikes amidst the valleys, mountains, lakes and fjords of Norway, experiencing the relatively luxurious accommodation and easy walking en route.

Nov 27 Navigation 1 & River Safety all, I  
Terry Crippen 356-3588

A day of instruction on two important aspects of safe tramping in the hills and valleys. Come to one or both: Firstly a practical navigation activity to introduce people to using compass, estimating distance and times. Terry will be organizing this and compasses will be supplied. A lunch break and then secondly: River safety instruction with Noel Bigwood and others of the local branch of the NZ Mountain Safety Council. This activity is always enjoyable with the keen ones going in for repeated wettings in the Pohangina and/or Manawatu river.

Starting times: For the Navigation exercise meet at the Ashhurst Domain public shelter 10am. Bring your boots or other suitable footwear and a pencil. For the River Safety 1pm again at the public shelter. Bring your pack filled up with the equivalent a weekends tramping pack load - well sealed up in a pack liner, and lots of polyprop clothing for when your in the lovely warm waters.

Nov 28 Ruapehu day trip F  
Peter Wiles 3586894

Depart 6 am driving up to the Chateau. From the car park, we will take the ridge track starting behind the shelter. After heading up the ridge for a few km, we will travel across country heading into a valley that drains the northern side of the Pinnacles. From here, we sidle across until dropping into the next stream draining this region and arriving at the top of a 20 m waterfall at the edge of the lava field. I expect to visit the extinct crater located on the lava field and the colony of seagulls that reside on the field. If time, weather and inclination are favorable, we can visit the Tama Lakes on the return.

**EXTENDED TRIPS THIS SUMMER**

4 - 15 Jan Arrowsmith Range F/T  
Peter Wiles 358-6894.

Leaving PN 4th Jan for Erewhon and the Lawrence branch of the Rangitata River. Aim for Mt Arrowsmith (give or take a couple meters, the same height of Ruapehu). Then might consider further peaks on the Arrowsmith range on the eastern side of the Lawrence, or might cross into the Sinclair River branch of the Clyde River branch of the Rangitata via a col on the west of the Lawrence. This would access a variety of peaks in the Kirk Stream tributary of the Rakaia River. Aim to be out on 15 January and people might wish to consider further trips following on after 15th.

17-26 Jan Franz - Fox, Westland National Park  
 Terry Crippen 356-3588  
 Graded as Fit and Technical, this is a 10 day trip, and follows on from Peter's Erewhon trip. Starting and finishing in Hokitika, we will head down the West Coast to Fox Glacier village, where we will fly up onto either the upper Fox or Franz Glaciers, for 10 days of fine settled weather (fingers crossed). We will be high up on the neves, with

lots of glacier travel, and some good climbs, exiting back down to the West Coast. Flight in will cost approx \$150. We will be staying in NZAC huts. Applications close EOYBBQ December 9th with \$50, so I can organize the food.

**Trip participants:**

If you are interested in going on a trip, please contact the leader at least three days in advance. Trips usually leave from the Foodtown carpark in Fergusson Street with transport provided by car-pooling. A charge for transport will be collected on the day of the trip, the amount depending on the distance travelled and vehicles used. Leaders should be able to give an estimate in advance. For general information or any suggestions for future tramps please contact one of the trip co-ordinators Terry Crippen (356-3588), Laurence Gatehouse (356-5805), or Peter Burgess (354-3533).

**Trip leaders:**

Please discuss with the trip co-ordinators, as soon as possible, if there is any doubt that you will be unable to run your trip as scheduled. This is so that alternatives can be arranged, put in the newsletter, or passed on at club night.

**\*\*\* OVERDUE TRIPS \*\*\***

Enquiries to: Mick Leyland (358-3183), Terry Crippen (356-3588), or Laurence Gatehouse (356-5805)

**NOTICES**

**ARTICLES FOR THE NEWSLETTER**

All kinds of articles, whether trip reports, interesting information & anecdotes, book reviews, or even a product review, are welcome for inclusion in this newsletter.

Articles may be hand-written or sent by e-mail to the Newsletter Editor John Phillips (see address on end page).

It is preferable to include your article as text in the e-mail rather than as an attachment (if an attachment please use Microsoft Word Version 7.0 or Rich Text Format).

Note that scanned **photos** must be sent with a covering e-mail (or phone call to John) to: [postmaster@horizons.govt.nz](mailto:postmaster@horizons.govt.nz).

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

**THE EDITOR IS BACK, BUT**

Before finishing with the Ministry for Environment, Editor John Phillips put himself out

of action with a fractured wrist and a sore back after departing company with his nice new motorbike. Lucky it wasn't worse. Although John is mobile he was unable to complete the newsletter himself. PANIC. Fortunately John has the newsletter format set up nicely and after a bit of cut and pasting, (and swearing and cursing) this is the result. Thanks to all the contributors, I trust it makes a good read.

Pending his full recovery keep sending your newsletter articles to John and he will pass them on.

Assistant Editor Warren Wheeler

**FROM THE PRESIDENTS PC**

Spring is here and the snow is disappearing up the mountain-sides faster than the grass is growing on the front lawn. Time to think ahead to summer and the trips we want to do next millennium. In this newsletter is a request from the Trip Co-ordinators for suggestions for the next events

calendar which is for January-June 2000, the start of the new millennium (or the start of the end of the last, in case you missed it this year). Lets make it a year to remember with special events and trips – how about all the peaks over 1999m north of Palmy?

The Committee has decided to support the newly constructed NZAC French Pass Hut at Mt Aspiring. We will send a Club cheque including a club donation of \$100 plus additional donations from individual club members. Please give your donation to Peter Wiles or send your cheque (made out to PNTMC) to reach the PO Box 1217 before the next committee meeting on 5 November. Look for the PNTMC name on the donation plaque next time you are at the Hut.

DoC has another User Group Meeting coming up on Tuesday 19 October, the agenda includes track and hut inspections and upgrades, and topics raised by the invited Users. If you would like Terry or myself to raise any issues let us know.

Warren Soufflot has left the Committee and the Club and New Zealand. Our loss is the world's gain and I look forward to the odd post-card from around Europe and the USA. Thanks for your contribution to the Club, Warren and Good Luck.

#### NEW MEMBERS

A big welcome to three more new members this month:

John Barnett  
62 Rennie Ave, PN  
Phone: 355-0933

Mike and Elaine Whitton  
27 Manapouri Crescent, PN  
Phone: 354-9553

Happy tramping, folks!

#### MAP ORDER

We will be sending away a map order to FMC after the first club night in November. Take advantage of the 30% discount and stock up for those summer trips.

#### HUT CHARGES INCREASE 25%

From the 1 November 1999 DOC hut charges will increase from \$12 to \$15 for Category 1 huts, \$8 to \$10 for Category 2 huts, and \$4 to \$5 for Category 3 huts. Some Great Walks charges have changed slightly too – check with DOC before you go – but Tongariro Northern Circuit remains at \$12 for summer (23 Oct-31 May) and \$8 in winter. Campsite and youth rates are half price. Add 25% if tickets not pre-purchased.

Annual hut passes will also increase from \$58 to \$65 (less 30% FMC discount) so be in quick – the corner of your FMC card is cut off quite painlessly when you purchase the Hut Pass from DOC in Tremaine Ave.

#### HUT TICKETS

Hut tickets are available from DOC but can also be purchased more conveniently from Mountain Equipment in the Square, PN.

#### NEXT SIX MONTHLY EVENTS CARD

It is that time when we plan out the next 6 months of trips. This year we are going to try to run some of the trips our *members* want as well as the usual ones where the leaders fancy going. What we want from you are suggestions for trips you would like to go on and if possible preferred dates. We will then try to arrange a leader for them.

Please pass on any suggestions ASAP to me at club nights, by email [lgatehouse@hort.cri.nz](mailto:lgatehouse@hort.cri.nz) or phone 356-5805.

Please also pass on any suggestions for Club Nights, guest speakers and other special events

Laurence Gatehouse

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## TRIP REPORTS

SNOWCRAFT III - AUGUST 28-29

by Pete McGregor; photos by Charles Russell

The day's first light yawned its way over the land as we hummed through Taranaki, peering at heartland icons: Hawera's giant fibreglass cow; boxthorn hedges; the sign identifying a factory as "Lactose New Zealand"; and of course the mountain. The forecasters had predicted mostly fine weather with a few cloudy patches, and on average they were right - Mt Taranaki had the cloud; everywhere else was fine. But as we drew closer we saw that the grey shroud had begun to lift and break. The three instructors leaned forward, scanning the slopes and trying to decide whether Kapuni Lodge was above or below the snowline. I had no idea where to look, mostly because the instructors' directions were about as helpful as a new form of lung disease.

I finally discovered it after we'd reached the car park and were milling around being Terryed into carrying more equipment than was safe for the integrity of our viscera. As I strapped a snow shovel to the ever-increasing collection of wickedly-sharp climbing paraphernalia on my pack, Terry pointed out the tiny form of Kapuni Lodge squatting bug-like and depressingly distant on the ridge. But the walk was a good warm-up; not too strenuous; even enjoyable as we chatted our way through Taranaki's weird forest, listening to Terry's peculiar and highly alarming views on cannibalism. I half-expected him to disclose that his preferred food was liver and his favourite tippie "a nice bottle of Chianti".

We stopped briefly at Kapuni Lodge to offload extraneous gear, then headed for the slopes above the hut. My heart sank when Derek led Charlie and me to a near-vertical snow slope and muttered something about making sure we could self-arrest.

"Terry taught us everything about it on Snowcraft One," I said hopefully. But Derek wanted to determine for himself that we could do it, so down we went until both shoulders were satisfactorily bruised. Nearby, several other groups were also practising self-arrest. Damon in particular seemed to be in his element.

"Look out Sue!" he yelled, flinging himself headfirst down the slope like a sardine from a high-pressure hose. How he managed to avoid

filleting himself with his axe I have no idea, but when we saw him later in the day he was still grinning and all his visible parts were intact and unbloodied.

After the self arrest practice we ate a quick lunch and watched a party climb the track to the lodge. Charlie fiddled with his camera, pointing it at things as if he still wasn't quite sure how it worked. I told him about taking an exposure reading from blue sky to avoid underexposing the snow. "If you take a reading from the sky, then from the snow, you should have about two, maybe two and a half, stops difference," I said.

Charlie pointed some more, and after several minutes of tweaking and pointing, said, "The readings are about the same."

"Oh," I said weakly, feeling deflated and old. When I was young, cameras were straightforward and mostly obedient. Now, like teenagers, they understand everything far better than you do, so that your only useful purpose is to embarrass them so they have a reasonable excuse for disowning you. Charlie's camera had succeeded admirably. I felt archaic, like a dinosaur; so much so that I had an uncanny sense that the feeling of being anachronistic was shared between the brain in my head and the secondary brain near my hips. I thought longingly of my old camera, snoozing quietly at home, undisturbed by young upstarts. We were surrounded by wonderful images; red and yellow tussock bent by the wind; the huge, angled line of a snow slope, its ridgeline lit by the sun against a dark-shadowed face; luminous mist swirling, ephemeral, ungraspable, like the memory of a dream. I remembered the legend of the mountain, and had a sudden sense of Taranaki's immense power; his unbearable solitude, imprisoned forever in the story. During Snowcraft I and II I'd had little sense of Ruapehu's personality, but here...

"Want a fruit jube?" Derek asked.

On the slopes we were not alone. In the late morning a lone man scampered up the tussock slope, seemingly intent on a summit bid. He wore a loosely flapping checked cotton shirt, prehistoric football shorts, a small army-surplus knapsack, op-shop sandshoes, and the lean and hungry look of an obsessive climber - someone who, in a bid to improve his power-to-weight ratio, would

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willingly donate one member of any set of paired organs other than his lungs. Kidneys, adrenals, testicles - anything to save weight and bag him an extra grade. I looked at his attire, his footwear and his lack of ice axe, then at the mountain and its gathering mist and cold, and decided that he must have donated at least one hemisphere of his brain also.

He stopped where the tussock gave way to unbroken snow and stood with his hands on his hips, looking up at the swirling cloud and shining snow, then down at his feet as if he couldn't understand why they weren't still heading uphill. He seemed perplexed, like a chicken on a roadside. Finally the remains of his brain took over; his survival reflexes kicked in and he turned sadly downhill.



That afternoon we practised the real thing. Derek showed us different ways to set belay anchors and we swapped leads up the slope, alternately climbing and leading. As the afternoon progressed I began to feel that the procedures were at last sinking in; that the sequence of putting in an appropriate anchor, calling "Safe!", then backing-up the anchor and so on were becoming more like natural and satisfying activities that marked progress up the mountain and less like intellectual activities that had to be worked out from first principles. I never managed to haul in the rope fast enough to keep up with Charlie's mad dash for the imaginary summit, but no-one with less than Schwarzenegger's arms could have achieved that. Sometimes a bulk of tanned muscle would be rather nice, I thought, remembering occasions when it would have been good to have had a physique more suited for impressing women and less like a tangle of used pipe cleaners. The image of Arnold's huge arms popped into my head. "I'd give my right arm for biceps like that," I thought wistfully.

Late in the day Derek confessed that he'd been suffering from a shocking headache and needed to call it quits. That suited me; the day had been wonderfully instructive but I felt the need for some time to mull over what I'd learnt rather than attempting to cram in even more. We picked our way back to the lodge, where we found Dave and Maree harnessed together in some form of imaginative bondage as Sarah reclined on the bench seat, smiling and breathing heavily.

"I'm, er, just showing Maree, um, how to escape from a belay," Dave said. "Yes, that's it - it's important to know these things." Derek disappeared quickly into the bunkroom; Charlie nipped outside, muttering about having to retrieve something from his pack; and I stood there noticing fascinating details in the floor, ceiling and walls.

"Derek's got a headache," I said helplessly, and began making a brew by pouring cold water over a teabag. In hindsight, the teabag may have been the one thing in the hut that *didn't* need a dose of cold water.

The last of the remaining teams returned just on dusk, by which time I'd prepared our cooking group's main dinner course. Nyree stumbled inside, following the scent of onion, garlic, bay leaves, red wine, bacon, mushrooms, venison sausage and assorted other secret ingredients (no liver, I hasten to add).

"When do you want to eat?" I asked her.

"When will it be ready?"

"Now?" I offered. Her smile would have delighted the grumpiest of curmudgeons, and soon Charlie, Sarah, Nyree and I were sitting at the table in an atmosphere of goodwill and delicious aromas (James was elsewhere). Sarah had found a dinner-party candle, too, and it sputtered happily in the middle of the table, casting cosy reflections in the wine as we ate. For dessert, Sarah heated chocolate and apricot steamed puddings and prepared chocolate mousse. Surely there have been few Snowcraft dinners more civilised, which was a good thing, because it meant the average tone of the evening remained about normal.

Later that evening, after most of the eating had finished, Terry walked nervously into the main room and ruffled his hair in a kind of embarrassed displacement activity. "Does anyone want to learn anything?" he asked, with an anxious grin.

"NO!" we replied unanimously.

"Oh, that's all right then," he replied, wandering off.

During the night I woke to the sound of a low rumbling. My puzzlement turned to alarm as I realised that it was the sound of a Richter-scale borborygmus that had begun near a set of tonsils and was progressing rapidly towards the opposite end of its owner. Seconds later the bunkroom shuddered with the sound of a huge and joyfully resonant fart. "James!" I thought. I couldn't help laughing - it was so unashamedly deliberate, and I've seldom heard a fart expressed (if that's the right word) with such glee. Fortunately I survived the consequences as well as the battering from the snorers on either side, but I got little sleep and woke the next morning with my eyes supported by bags that looked to have been made from an elephant's elbow skin.

Terry was already padding around, heating water and busily searching for other useful things to do. In behaviour, if not appearance, he reminded me of a tiny animal, the sort that has to eat its own body weight every couple of hours or die. I had the feeling that Terry risked the same consequence if he didn't do something helpful and responsible in a similar period.

"Sleep OK?" he enquired.

"No," I said, as I attempted to retrieve a contact lens from the porridge pot. It wasn't a good start to the day.

Richard wandered over as I ate breakfast and chatted with Sue, who was alternately yawning (possibly because of my conversation) and pulling on socks. She looked up and said, "Can I get one of you to stretch my vertebrae?"

Richard and I looked at each other, startled, but he was quicker than me and responded first. Sue explained what he had to do. "Stand behind me," she said, "and lift me up, then lean backwards." She crossed her arms, locking her hands on her shoulders, and stood waiting.

Richard's perpetual grin widened. Obediently he shuffled behind her and, placing his arms around her, lifted her off the ground and leaned back. At that moment, James walked out of the bunkroom and looked across at Richard and Sue locked into one of the Karma Sutra's more novel and strenuous positions. I'll never forget his look of agonised disappointment - the despair of a man who's just lost an irretrievable opportunity. Meanwhile, Richard carefully lowered Sue and, ever thoughtful, asked whether it had been as good for her as it had for him.

But Sue wasn't sufficiently satisfied and, while James and I watched enviously, Richard repeated the manoeuvre. I wondered what would happen if Janice appeared and saw her husband joined groin to buttock to an attractive young woman. Nervously I shuffled sideways to move further from the line of flying crockery, but the movement must have distracted Richard. With a yelp of dismay and fear he overbalanced backwards, and they crashed to the floor in a tangle of writhing limbs. My first thought was, "Oh god, he's dead," - my second was, "Oh god, if he's not dead now, he will be if Janice sees this." Fortunately he survived the fall, and fortunately Janice was elsewhere.

Breakfast had hardly finished before Terry began hurrying us onto the slopes. Lunches were made hastily; teeth were scrubbed quickly; a queue of agitated people formed on the track to the dunny; gear was packed, forgotten, remembered, unpacked and repacked. I was in the main bunkroom, extracting my water bottle from my pack, when Maree came in and clambered over the lower tier of bunks. "I think I'll get rearranged," she said, "I've put my undies on sideways and they're really uncomfortable." I laughed weakly, and bolted for the door, thinking to myself, Sideways!? How the hell do you put your undies on sideways?



For most of the day we continued to practise setting belays and runners, but now on steeper, more serious slopes. Cloud formed and dispersed and formed again. Sun turned the slopes into a sauna, then a bitter wind sprang up and froze our sweat. We struggled into warm, windproof clothing. The wind died away, the sun came out and our frozen sweat melted. Derek helpfully explained how one of the major problems of climbing mountains was trying to maintain a reasonably comfortable temperature. "You can

waste a lot of time doing this," he said, inadvertently putting his parka on inside out.

Eventually we climbed into the shade of a low bluff where the surface of the snow took crampons securely, without that momentary unease as the soft layer slips before the points bite. Derek demonstrated how to place an ice screw, inserting it into a layer of translucent ice that clung to the rock.

"You should try to get it into a good solid block of ice," he said. He yanked hard; the icicle splintered and the screw burst free. Charlie looked at me, then moved out onto the snow slope and set up an exemplary belay with a snow stake and axe. I led the pitch, up a steep, crisp slope that curved high towards the sun. Halfway up I placed a stake and tied in as Derek traversed across to inspect the belay. While we waited for Charlie to begin climbing we gazed out over the North Island, absorbed by the marvellous feeling of height and space and exposure; the mountain falling away beneath us; the tiny mite-like figures of other teams far off on distant slopes...

"There's a glider!" Derek exclaimed. He pointed with his ice axe; I looked up and saw blue sky, the clean brilliance of the white mountain, the slow arc of silver wings turning, leaning into the moment... heard the rush of air, then the long, resonant note of wind in the wires. We watched as the sailplane faded around the mountain. A second glider joined the first, and we watched as they soared overhead, snowlight flickering on the underside of their wings.

"I've gotta give that a go," Derek said.

By mid-afternoon, cloud had settled on the upper slopes and an evil wind knifed across the ridge. We climbed a few metres down the steep face, out of the worst of the wind, and hacked small ledges where we could dump our packs and rest. Derek passed around his delicious fruit jubes. "Yeah, I'd love one," I said, surreptitiously taking three. I took my helmet off and scruffled my hair, trying to massage away the headache that had developed during the morning. My cranium felt as if some small, vicious gremlin was trepanning its way out and although I felt better after removing the helmet, I eventually resorted to Nurofen and hoped they'd act quickly. We nibbled a late lunch as Derek enquired about what we'd like to do for the remainder of the afternoon.

"We could go and climb those bluffs over there," he said. He pointed to a desolate, mist-enshrouded line of ice cliffs; a blue and white battlement like

something from *The Left Hand of Darkness*. As we looked across the basin, a gang of rocks broke free from a bluff and hurtled downwards. They hummed past like giant shurikins looking for something to decapitate. One of the larger rocks struck a small outcrop and arced high into the air before plummeting from view far below. Seconds later we heard the CRACK! of its impact on the outcrop. I considered Derek's suggestion, which meant we'd have to traverse the line of rockfall to the bluffs.



"@#!&\*#," I suggested. Neither Derek nor Charlie offered much resistance, so we gradually made our way across and down the slopes, practising our glissading. Well, Derek and Charlie practised glissading; I practised stumbling, slipping, staggering and a lot of self arresting. By the time we reached the lower slopes I could glissade for long periods of up to several seconds, whereon Derek and Charlie decided to practise bum-sliding and whizzed down the mountain, leaving me with the awful decision whether to follow suit and freeze my nether regions or continue glissading awkwardly and slowly downhill. Eventually I chose the former, marking my progress with an irregular trail of bad language, shredded polar-fleece and short hairs.

Several of us stood outside, looking into the blue-hazed distance, trying to work out where Taupo was and what that low range of hills might be, and remarking on the peculiar feeling of standing high on a snow-mountain with the sea on each side. Already we'd begun to realise that the formal instruction was over; that the last PNTMC Snowcraft course of the 2nd millennium had all but finished. We stood there, quiet and thoughtful. A flock of finches flew past, their fragile calls tinkling in the afternoon air. Eventually James asked what we were doing in two weekends' time. It turned out that he was canvassing for participants for Tony Gates' Ruahine Classic - the West-East crossing via Te Hekenga.

"Yeah, I'm keen," I lied, remembering some of the entries Tony had written in Ruahine hut books. Fortunately, before I had to commit myself further, Terry began hustling everyone together for a group photo. He sent someone inside to round up the tardy.

"Tell them to get out here for a quick one," he said. So we assembled for a quick one and I was pleased to see that Charlie's camera couldn't operate entirely on its own, which is why he's missing from the photo.

We packed and trotted down to the car park. On the way down I stopped and turned to look back. Already the afternoon sun had slipped behind the mountain, illuminating a plume of cloud that flowed over the Shark's Tooth and poured downwards to dissipate into a sky the colour of light; the colour between pale blue and white; the colour that has no name. How do you find words for this, I wondered, and turned back down the track.

As we were about to leave, a Japanese man walked over and knocked politely on the car

window. "Excuse me," he said, "how long to the top of mountain?" We looked at his tourist attire, his soft sneakers and his delicate companions.

"Oh, about 17 hours," Andy said, then quickly added, "but there's a very nice walk just around the corner," and he described a gentle half-hour tourist track.

The man said, "Ah," and bowed and thanked us sincerely before returning to his companions. I looked at Bruce.

"Don't say anything," he said. But later I glimpsed Taranaki at dusk from the back seat of Andy's car. The mountain floated in a rose-washed sky like a Hokusai print; like the 37th view of Mt Fujiyama, and I wondered whether the Japanese man's desire to climb to the summit was more than just a casual urge to climb it because it was there. Perhaps, to him, it was more than just a mountain. For us too, for Snowcraft III, individually and collectively, Taranaki was more than just a mountain. It was something special, and I can't explain it better than with this slightly embellished recollection. I hope it gives you some of the sense of what it was like.



The instructors: Andy Backhouse, Terry Crippen, Dave Henwood, Bruce van Brunt, Derek Sharp;  
The instructees: Sue Bull, Nyree Fea, James Gordon, Damon Kostidis, Maree Limpus, Janice Lloyd, Pete McGregor, Charles Russell, Richard Squires, Sarah Todd.

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## AVALANCHE AWARENESS

Ohakune/Turoa

16-17th September

by Richard Lovell

We started the course with an evening session of about 12 people to discuss the factors involved with snow avalanches such as geomorphic expression, climate, temperature differentials and their effect on snow stratigraphy, and triggers (us!!). Our host Mark Sedon gave a good background into avalanches with help from the Turoa Snow Safety Cock, Oops- I mean Officer, in preparation for our field day.

After a comfortable night at the Gates Motel with the luxury of a shower (thanks Tony) Friday morning greeted us with ideal conditions- blazing sunshine and subsidised passes for the chairlifts to ferry us around the mountain like tourists. We spent a few hours playing around in a lahar channel burying avalanche transceivers practising our signal finding techniques. 12 transceivers in a small area created a bit of havoc with echoing signals and people homing in on the 'wrong' units. We soon got the hang of things and the novelty eventually wore off.

Lubing up with sunscreen we headed off to a few snow loaded lee slopes, covered nicely in a recent snowfall. Pinching my idea of using a pruning saw (a fraction of the cost of a snow saw) Mark instructed us to clear a vertical profile in the snowpack to examine layering. We then dug a snow pit to identify the shear strength between snow layers and how it is influenced by freeze-thaw temperature conditions. Stopping briefly to enjoy lunch and the alpine ambience (read nubile young ski bunnies) our guide took us for a Tiki-tour around the mountain illustrating terrain travel techniques and introduced the concept of moving from safe spot to safe spot. Meeting up with the other party we all joined together for a simulated rescue.

The scenario went like this: distraught snow boarder approaches us and tells us that he saw two companions swept downhill by a slab avalanche. The rescuers began spot probing while a couple of people used the transceivers. TC looked at the hillslope for a moment, evaluated the underlying terrain traps, rubbed his beard, paced a little and then proceeded to probe the 'body' straight off much to the amusement of all involved. It cut the exercise short quite a bit, but we got the idea of things.

That pretty much wrapped up the activities for the day so we prepared our gear to leave, at which point a furry little hitch hiker made a bid for

escape from my pack and shot off across the snow slopes. Speculation was rife about the source of said passenger, but judging by the size of his belly I reckoned that he came from the litter bins outside the cafe. Spoilt rotten again by the chairlifts we made our way off the mountain in a very comfortable manner. All in all a very casual day playing on the mountain.

We were Terry Crippen, Sarah Todd, Fuzzyhead (me), and Squeaky the mouse.

## WHAKAPAPA CLIMBING

17 - 19 September

Terry Crippen

After a successful day on the Turoa side of The Mountain, Sarah, Richard and I cruised round to the Top of the Bruce, and shouldered our heavy packs for the grunt up to the NZAC hut high above the skifield. Fortunately, on Sarah's suggestion, we managed to get a lift up on the lower chairlift, so we had only the second section to contend with - and it was very soft slushy snow - lots of slipping and sliding. We reached the hut shortly after dark, cooked up a scrumptious feed, got our gear ready for a 5am start and hit the pit to wait for the others to arrive - ex 6:30 pm from Palmy; Warren with or with out Nigel H.

I for one kept waking up; 10 pm, 11pm, 12pm, 1am, 2am; its too late, they can't be coming, they must have got sidetracked in the pub, they must have missed the hut! Finally at 3am (*maybe only 2am - Ed.*) - Nigel H. overloaded with skis and excess gear, and having taken a tour of all the distant lodges on the mountain - they arrived. One of the longer times to reach the hut! Turn off the alarm- no early start now.

We were still having breakfast a few hours later when Nigel G arrived, fit and ready to go, up from Raurimu. Fine but a bit windy up top - a Nor-Wester is forecasted - so off to the Pinnacles for the days climbing. Nigel G and I teamed up onto the face under the right hand peak of the Second Pinnacle - excellent hard snow - then traversing across to a suitable gully and up. (Richard and Nigel H took the gully up to the left hand peak on the Second Pinnacle, Sarah and Warren took the main gully and spur up onto the First Pinnacle.) Once we were on the crest of the Pinnacle the full force of the wind was on us, so we cut down onto the hot NE slopes with very soft slushy snow. But I still managed to break off the head of my LUCKY ice hammer - have to buy a Stubi now! We then traversed across to the col between the

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First and Second Pinnacle for lunch. Then up along the ridge towards the First Pinnacle, needing snowstake anchors to hold the rope onto the slope - it was airborne with the wind. Past the First Pinnacle and down a steep gully with upward wind strong enough to blow snowstakes up-slope. So the Nor Wester had arrived.

Saturday night the rain arrived. Sunday morning bought almost zero visibility as well. Warren was glad he hadn't spent the night in his snow mound he had built Saturday afternoon - he would have been soaked from the wet dripping snow with the relatively warm Nor Wester temperatures. A lazy morning, a few cell phone calls, then off down the mountain in the whiteout, rain and slushy snow. We "booked" into the Chateau for a read of the paper in front of the open fire, meeting other fellow trampers who were "staying" there. Then off to the Ohakune pub for a bit of a feed and drink.

The six of us: Nigel Green, Nigel Hough, Sarah Todd, Warren Wheeler, Richard Lovell, Terry Crippen (scribe).

#### NGAURUHOE

3 October

Warren Wheeler

Ignoring Daylight Saving we headed off at "6.30" for another perfect day to celebrate the 1995 Ruapehu Eruption. The snow was higher than in previous years with only an hour in crampons to give two of us some confidence on the western slope. The other two took the usual northern route with Terry giving Ashley the Instant Snowcraft Course. We both popped up onto opposite sides of the crater rim at almost the same time - 4 hours from the Mangatepopo carpark. Spectacular views with a bit of a breeze making the sheltered lee side of the east rim THE spot for a late lunch, especially with the volcanically heated warm rocks to sit on.

A bum-slide and glissade took us to the bottom of the north slope with novice Ashley starting to get his snow legs. Our stroll back to the Mangatepopo carpark took us past a motley camera crew taking film for the World Heritage Parks - cued for ACTION we high-stepped across the frame, well, Warren did, no doubt spoiling any chance of us getting a cheque in the mail.

Sore-footed but satisfied we headed home after seven fulfilling hours at our favourite volcano.

We were Ashley Banks, Peter Burgess, Terry Crippen, and Warren Wheeler.

#### WHAT I DID IN THE HOLIDAYS

by Dave Henwood

During the first week of the September school holidays I managed to escape to the South Island with 4 others from the NZ Alpine Club. The plan was to spend a week skiing and peak-bagging at the head of the Murchison Glacier in Mt Cook National Park. Unfortunately, Huey (the weather god) had other ideas.

With an unsettled forecast, we fled to Wanaka for a couple of days of day trips in the rain and drinking cappuchinos inside the cafes. Eventually a window appeared in the weather and we choppered onto Cascade Saddle between the West Matukituki and Dart rivers and put in a luxurious snow cave high on Governors Ridge. A sunny but very windy day was spent skinning up and skiing off Liverpool, Plunket Dome and Islington Dome in eminently forgettable snow conditions. We also managed an excellent ascent of the seldom climbed south face of Mt Maori - 6 pitches of fantastic ice. On the way back down we side-tripped up Mt Wahine (best set of cornices I've seen on a NZ mountain) arriving on the summit in time to watch the sun set. The ski back to the snow cave was assisted by an almost full moon.

The following day, in rapidly deteriorating weather we headed back down to Cascade saddle and thence to Aspiring Hut, a trip made somewhat epic by the high winds and deep mushy snow on the slopes below the saddle. Carrying skis down through the bush was also complicated by the fact that DOC had not yet completed their Spring chainsaw massacre of windfalls.

The trip out to the road end was completed next morning in a howling nor'wester that, at times threatened to blow us over.

A good trip but it highlighted the fact that if you are heading south, it pays to have a Plan B in case of emergencies.

Dave Henwood

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