



PALMERSTON NORTH TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING CLUB INC.

P.O. BOX 1217, PALMERSTON NORTH

Newsletter - August 2000

*****THIS ISSUE*****

**Historic Schormans-Kaitoke Marathon from 1977,
five new members, Kahuterawa track developments,
SAR training coming up, and more letters from Scotland**

TRIP REPORTS:

**Leon Kinvig, "The Pussycat" (Shorts Track),
Pourangaki, Manawatu Gorge, Tamaki**

CLUB NIGHTS

AUGUST 10	"Mt Tasman"	Matthew Perrott
AUGUST 31	"White Island"	Scott McIntyre
SEPTEMBER 7	Committee	Mick Leyland's place
SEPTEMBER 14	Interclub Quiz	@ Massey University
SEPTEMBER 28	"Search and Rescue"	Stewart Davies

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.

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.

10 Aug Applications close for Snowcraft 2

10 Aug Thursday trampers
Keith Domett 04 562-7322

10 Aug Club night: "Mt Tasman"
Matthew Perrott

This is the Interclub Guest Speaker evening, with Matthew Perrott of MTSC giving a slide presentation of an awesome climbing trip to Mt Cook National Park and the second highest peak in New Zealand.

12-13 Aug Ngamoko-Iron Gates M
Dave Henwood 326-8892

Depart 7am if Saturday is fine. A loop track up onto the Ngamoko Range in the mid-western Ruahines, returning via Iron Gates Hut and the Oroua River. Long-ish day on the tops Saturday, may do reverse direction with 8am start if weather dictates. If snow and ice, ice axe may be required.

13 Aug Tunupo M
Peter Darragh 323-4498

Depart 7-30am. This is a reasonably gentle ascent for the height gained, climbing up onto the Ngamoko Range from Heritage Lodge in the mid-western Ruahines, with good views from the Tunupo summit. Return via the same route.

16 Aug (Wed) Snowcraft 2 participants' evening
Terry Crippen 3563-588

17 Aug Thursday trampers
Judy Calleson 357-0192

19-20 Aug Snowcraft 2 (prerequisite SC1)
M/F, I Terry Crippen 356-3588

Friday night departure for Mt Ruapehu. The second of the three instructional snowcraft weekends, this weekend will consolidate use of crampons and introduce participants to rope work, belaying and anchors. Some places still left, contact Terry asap.

20 Aug Roaring Stag M
Malcolm Parker 357-5203

Depart 7am. A nice daywalk in from Putara Rd end in the northeastern Tararuas. An early departure means a leisurely 2 hours or so at Roaring Stag Lodge, for lunch and maybe a spot of trout fishing?

24 Aug Applications close for Snowcraft 3

24 Aug Thursday trampers
Bev Akers 325-8879

25-27 Aug Ruahine Classic FE, T
Derek Sharp 326-8178

This is the penultimate trip on the winter club calendar for fit and experienced trampers. Derek will head up to Rangi Hut Friday night, then onto the Whanahua Range and Te Hekenga on Saturday, with the option of iglooming near Tiraha summit Saturday night if the party is keen. On via Sawtooth Ridge Sunday, and out to Purity via Hawkes Bay Range (refer photo next page).

26 Aug Iron Gates Hut E/M
Martin Lawrence 357-1695

Depart 8am. A nice forest side track following the upper Oroua River into Iron Gates Hut for lunch. Back out the same route, as water temperatures may be a bit cold for walking down the river this time of year!

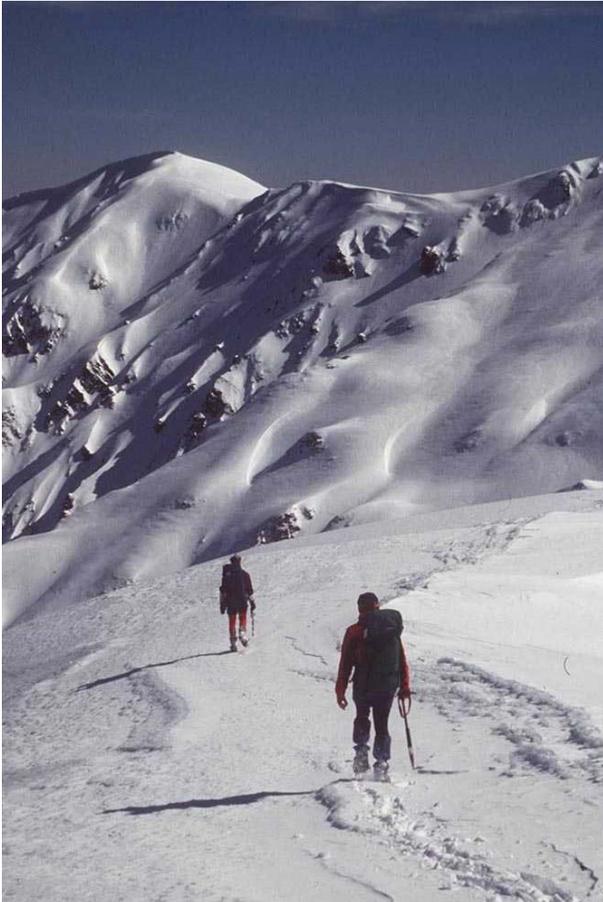
28 Aug (Mon) **Inter Club Photo Competition**
at Massey University

Not Tuesday as listed on the Trip Card. This is a MUAC club night. 8.00pm at Ag-Hort Building 1. MUAC will have about 10 minutes at the start to go over trips etc.

31 Aug Thursday trampers
Liz Flint 356-7654

31 Aug Club night: "White Island"
Scott McIntyre

Smoking volcanoes - no worries, right? You might change your mind after seeing Scott's slide presentation on this For-Crazy-Tourists-Only destination in the Bay of Plenty.



A club trip along Hawkes Bay Range in 1996.

[Photo: Tony Gates]

2-3 Sept Snowcraft 3 (prereq SC 2) M/F, I
 Terry Crippen 356-3588

Early Saturday morning departure for Mt Egmont. The third of the three instructional snowcraft weekends. This weekend will continue with rope work; using the range of anchors introduced on Snowcraft 2, also using multiple anchors, with lots of practice on some steeper slopes. Contact Terry for details.

3 Sept Ngamoko Range M/F
 Kevin Pearce 357-0217

Depart 7am. Day trip to where Pete McGregor tried to go (refer Trip Reports), up Knights Track to the tussock tops of Toka, then back down Shorts Track.

7 Sept Thursday trampers
 John Rockell 04 902-4415

7 Sept Committee meeting

9-10 Sept Waterfall Hut F
 Warren Wheeler 356-1998

Depart 7am. This classic trip takes us eastwards up past Iron Peg and into the middle of the Ruahine Range to the headwaters of the Kawhatau River - and yes, a Waterfall just up the creek behind the hut. The snow should still be about on the higher ridges including the summit of Mangaweka, highest point in the range, which we will bag en loop on the the way out.

10 Sept Te Atuaoparapara F
 Llew Pritchard 358-2217

Depart 7am. Day trip up via the popular Sunrise Hut, and over the imposing giant of Te Atuaoparapara. Crampons and ice axe may be required. Great views. Back via Waipawa Saddle.

14 Sept Thursday trampers
 Don MacLaine 357-0745

14 Sept Club night: Interclub Quiz

At PNTMC's usual venue & starting time, but sponsored by Mountain Equipment. Following up on our magnificent victory last year, we need a team of keen individuals, so contact us before we contact you! Or come along to support our club team & keep the abuse up for the other teams.

16-18 Sept Climbing Whakapapa F, T
 Terry Crippen 356-3588

Departing 6pm Friday night and heading up to the NZ Alpine Club Hut above the Whakapapa ski field on Ruapehu. We have places booked in the hut for 3 nights giving us the chance of Sat, Sun and Monday to practice all those skills learnt on Snowcraft. With the Pinnacles close by, there is plenty of scope for technical climbing. Also time to head up onto the summit plateau and the high peaks of Ruapehu. Or anything else you want to do. Come for two or three days. (Hut fees per night: NZAC members \$8, non-NZAC members \$18).

16-17 Sept Pureora Forest Park E/M
 Barry Scott 354-0510

Dep 7am. Walk to the Waihaha hut site (the hut recently burnt down) through imposing podocarp forest. Good, easy track.

21 Sept Thursday trampers
Gordon Clark 359-2500

23-24 Sept Howletts Hut F
Dave Grant 357-8269

Depart 7am. Fresh back from the Pyrenees, Dave will be keen to get back into some great NZ tramping. This trip is a loop in the eastern Ruahines, taking in an overnight stay at the superbly located Howletts Hut.

24 Sept Thompson M
Stephen Liddall 350-3473

A daytrip in the western Tararuas. More details next newsletter, or ring Stephen.

28 Sept Thursday trampers
Neville Gray 357-2768

28 Sept Club night: "Search and Rescue"

Stewart Davies

Stewart has been involved with Search and Rescue in the Palmerston North - Levin area for over 20 years, so has a great deal of experience. This promises to be an excellent presentation.

LABOUR WEEKEND 2000

Oct 20-24 Kahurangi NP M
Leader; Tony Gates. 06 357 7439
025 246 1901

Five full days in Kauharangi National Park, exploring the Thousand Acres Plateau, and the Matiri Valley. Advance price for Interislander, under \$75.00 pp. Tony plans a midnight departure, midnight Thursday that is, then five days of exploration in Kauharangi National Park, commencing at Murchison, then tramping around the gorgeous hinterland there. There are peaks with names like "Needle" and "Haystack", and probably the best native bird life found in NZ. A lovely spot. Early notification of interest please. We could take extras if necessary.

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), Janet Wilson (329-4722) or David Grant (357-8269).

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 David Grant (357-8269)

NOTICES

ARTICLES FOR THE NEWSLETTER

All kinds of articles (trip reports, interesting information & anecdotes, book reviews, product reviews, etc etc) 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 an attachment (please use Microsoft Word Version 7.0 or Rich Text Format), unless it is quite a small article, in which case it is fine to cut-&-paste into the e-mail. Note that scanned **photos** must be sent with a covering e-mail (or phone call to John) to: postmaster@horizons.govt.nz.

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

HISTORIC TRIP REPORT

4th - 6th February 1977. A MAIN RANGE S.K.

The odd wink of torch light to the north may or may not be Kevin and Keith. Paul Richardson of the Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club appears and states that he did not get away from Putara Hut until 4.30am. He disappears south along the Dundas Ridge. Our party dribbles onto East peak in ones and twos. A bright full moon provides nearly all the light one needs for walking. Keith and Kevin arrive bringing daylight with them. Torches are shoved into very light packs and we are moving again.

This is the ego trip of the Tararuas, Schorman's Track to Kaitoke — nearly the whole length of the range in a weekend. At least 10 people are doing S.K's this weekend and seven of these belong to our club. A husband-and-wife team from the WTMC left Putara last night and have camped somewhere along the ridge. We catch up with them on Walker.

At Arete tarn Ross decides to go with the main group - via the Greater Northern Crossing to Holdsworth and thence via Totara Flats, Cone Saddle and the Tauherenikau river. We give Ross the dehy, fruit and instant pudding and half of the Muesli and keep the T.V.P. stew ourselves. He will be able to balance his diet by sharing his food with the others. Kevin and Keith are carrying cold food only and Keith has no sleeping bag! Kevin lends his water bottle to the Main Range group and we part company.

Saturday was a long hot day and much liquid was drunk at Dracophyllum Bivvy, Nichols Hut and Anderson's Memorial Hut. We watch the sun going down and the moon rising to take its place while descending Aokaparangi. The lights of Otaki and those of Masterton appear. Walking becomes a little tricky until the moon has risen a little above the horizon. Maungahuka hut at 10pm looks good to us. We have had an 18-hour day. Paul Richardson has been here since 7.30pm!

The main party reached Powell Hut at 6pm. On Sunday, Keith and Julian went out to Holdsworth Lodge and hitch-hiked back to Palmerston North. Kevin, Ross and Alan continued south via the rivers to Kaitoke, got a lift into Upper Hutt and returned home on the Wairarapa railcar. Their total walking time for the weekend was 26 hours.

On Sunday, Peter and Trevor continued along the Main Range to Vosseler Hut, took the Southern

Crossing to Alpha hut and accompanied Paul Richardson down the Marchant Ridge to Kaitoke. They missed the railcar at Upper Hutt but returned home in style on the Silver Star from Wellington. Their total walking time was 52 hours.

The husband-and-wife team from Wellington arrived at Andersons Memorial Hut on dusk, Saturday, and left again at 4am on Sunday. They reached their car at Kaitoke close to midnight having been on their feet for nearly 40 hours during the weekend.

PNTMC party: Julian Dalefield, Peter Darragh, Keith Margrain, Ross Meder, Kevin Pearce, Alan Stowell (MUAC) and Trevor Bissell.

NEW MEMBERS

The club membership swells, with 5 new members this month:

Frances Woodhead
164 Park Road, PN
Ph: 355-0699

Jenny Doyle
18 Kauri St, PN
Ph: 356-1565

Phil Eades & Janet Shields
1/38 Limbrick St, PN
Ph: 359-0509

Andrew Lynch
Whitman Road RD4
Palmerston North
Ph: 325-8779

Chris Brausch
90 Gillespies Line, PN
021-112-8709

Welcome, and happy tramping!

E-MAIL FROM PETER BURGESS

I have just arrived in Glen Nevis, having lugged my huge pack up the road, only to discover that I could have caught the bus.

You must try and get into the Cuillins, next time you are in these parts, they are far and away the

best hills in Scotland, but the Skye weather often does make things difficult, unfortunately.

The weather here has been great after a poor start. I've just returned from 10 days in Ireland (mainly the north and west, with a couple of good walks in the Kerry mountains). The weather was good every day, which is unheard-of for that part of the world. Prior to that I've had some pretty good weather in Scotland and consequently, climbed 40 Munros, in about as many days. The effect was that my knees and feet got pretty sore and I lost heaps of weight. Also I wore the tread off the soles of my boots and have just bought some new ones.

Well, I'm getting a bit low on change (the YHA's here have coin operated internet terminals, but they eat it up at a fair rate), so I'd better sign off.

Happy Tramping,
Peter Burgess
Travelling Man
Email: peterb@computer.org

LOST AND FOUND Contact Terry 3563-588
Two screwgate carabiners have appeared in the Club's green bag - probably collected up or left after a Massey rock Wall evening or Titahi Bay or some other climbing trip. Anybody lost a Carabiner or two, and can describe them?

Also one of the Club's aluminium snowstakes (bashed head, no holes except for tape hole) has gone missing. Anybody got it with their own climbing gear?

SEARCH & RESCUE TRAINING COMING UP
For those of you on the Club's SAR team members list (or others who want to be) Keep these dates in mind:

Wednesday 23 August evening 7:30pm:
Helicopter training including use of fixed line.

Tues 19 Sept (committee night) evening: night navigation/search Gordon Kear forest.

End of October; a day of track and clue awareness.

Contact Terry 3563-588 for details.

KAHUTERAWA TRACK DEVELOPMENTS

TRIP REPORTS

STANFIELD 21 May by Liz Morrison

Terry Crippen
A few club members had done a tramp or two in the PNCC Water Reserve up the Kahuterawa Valley past Black Bridge, as well as various other walks, mountain bike rides and the like nearby. Also I have been helping Ian Argyll, one of the locals, cut a track along the old paper road towards the water catchment. There was an article about the area and the track in the Evening standard (Sat July 15). The plan now is to put a track up the Kahuterwa valley, through the Water Reserve (the part not collecting water for the City) and out to the Pahiatua side of the Tararua Ranges. It follows in part an old track used by the Maori to cross the ranges. Ray Christmas, a city councillor, put the proposal forward recently. It will be longer than the Manawatu Gorge track so will be more of a days tramp (short or long depending on fitness) rather than a half day walk. Also plenty of scope for loop tramps.

A working party has been set up under the umbrella of the Walkways Advisory Group and the PNCC. It's got me as the PNTMC representative, and representatives from DoC, MTSC, City Councillors, Council Staff and others. The plan is to get a firm proposal (exact route, costings etc) to put to Council.

I think it is a great idea both as a east-west day tramp very close to town and also for opening up a large area of bush on a wide range of terrain (which has quite a bit of history including platinum mining attempts), that up till now has been kept hidden away.

Ian and I could also use some helpers (mid week or weekend) to further the track work and/or explore possible routes in the water catchment and across to the other side. Give me a phone call if you are keen to help (3563-588).

as planned. Here, we separated into an “easy” and a “medium”. Mick, Llew, Derek, and Morgan headed up to to “A Frame” Hut, on Takapari Road, dropping down to meet us at Stanfield Hut for lunch. Duncan and I headed back down the road, across the farm bridge (which has now been repaired) and up the Holmes Ridge. An easy 4WD track leads up through farmland and bush to a lookout point. After a brief look over into the valley, we retreated from the gusterly north westerly for a break in the bush. The track down has a severe washout near the river, so needed a brief bush bash up and around, before heading up the valley to the hut. The fire was lit and billy boiled as we awaited “The Takapari Tribe”. (Morgan will report on this section). [*Press Gang on its way around* - ed.]

After we’d all had lunch, and many cuppas, it was back down the river. Last year the valley floor was like a jungle, but a flood last November swept this away, so we travelled mostly over chunky rock and shingle, in and out of the snakey watercourse. Only those with the agility of mountain goats, and with extra long legs, arrived at the car park with warm, dry feet. The rest of us gradually thawed our feet back to life with another hot cuppa.

We were: Mick Leyland, Llew Ptitchard, Derek Sharp (Mountain Goat), Morgan X, Duncan Hedderly, Liz Morrison.

MANAWATU GORGE SUNDAY TRAMP

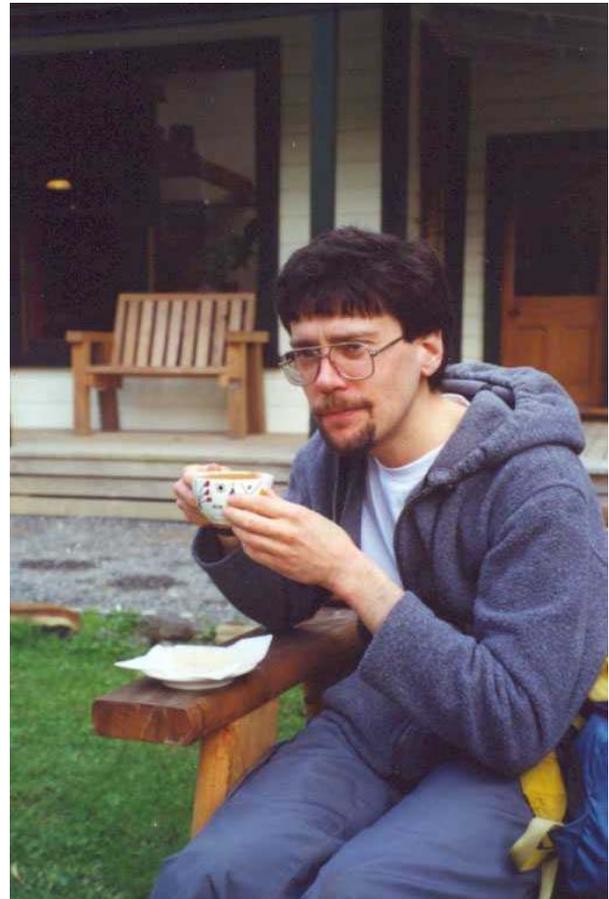
Sunday, 2 July by Tony Gates

Winter. Mist and clag on the ranges. Snow and ice on the mountains. Mud. Short days. Cold. Need exercise? Then how about tramping?

Nine of us wanted a reasonably easy walk, without the bother of carrying lots of stuff, or driving too far. Stuart the leader therefore took us on the very pleasant and popular “Manawatu Gorge Walk”. The 9am departure gave us time to sleep in, then get the exercise and views that we wanted, and a few cappuccinos at the café at the end. We all agreed that we should do this walk more often. It took us a mere four hours, but you would get along a bit quicker in dry conditions.

Firstly, the track skirts the main road, then follows a damp, shady stream bed as it slowly climbs to the ridge top. It then follows the ridge east, through Tawa/ Podocarp/ Nikau Palm forest all

the way. It climbs and descends gently here and there, and crosses a couple of small streams. Trampers can often hear vehicles far below, but still feel in the semi-wilderness. There are three good view points. At the eastern end, the track skirts some pretty impressive bluffs, then ambles past a mega Totara tree to the picnic areas.



Duncan Hedderly tasting a cappuccino at “Beyond the Bridge” Café, Ballance. [Photo by Tony Gates]

THERE ARE RAINBOWS IN THE RUAHINES

1-2 July by Frances Woodhead

Trip report: Up and down to Pourangaki Hut and up and down again.

They were long but good days, some sunshine, some mist and always it seemed, a huge almost circular rainbow to gawp at and exclaim to, high above the tussock in the heart of the Ruahines.

We headed up to Purity, on past the Pegs and a few baby patches of snow. The mist blew in and out as we trundled on, following a well-corrugated ridge round to the south. There were a few ups and downs.

Then it was just down, down, down and the reality of a Fit Trip for an irregular trumper like me began to hit home. We went down some more. The sound of the Pourangaki River below heralded the day's end a hop, skip and a jump away. Never hop or skip on slippery boulders. I clonked my head on a large boulder and as I write this a week later my hand reaches up for my temple to find the still-sore bit.

The Hut was cosy and dinner was fine. I was quieter than usual with extra drying out to do and recovering from the shock of my fall! Sadly not up to the post dinner games of SSNZ members.

The next day started at the civilised hour of 9.30 splashing down the glorious Pourangaki River. It was good to have a bold leader to follow. Janet fearlessly found the best crossing spots and we arrived at Kelly Night Hut with dry knickers.

The route back up to Wooden Peg was steady but straightforward. Blissfully free of undulations. It was great to reach the tussock again, the grass smelled fantastic as I clung onto patches for a hand up on the steeper bits. I was glad there was no snow to hide the glorious colours, leaf shapes and whorls of the alpine plants.

So that was it really, it was all down hill from there except for a quick stop back at Purity hut. On the way past the day before we had discovered an incredible stash of food. A message in the book from some strange Aucklanders confirmed it was for consumption. Indeed the 3 unopened supadooper size chocolate bars had already sustained us but now we were ready for another raid. There were shrink-wrapped wild boar pepperoni worth \$22.50 and many other exciting items. They must have been rich Aucklanders and we mused on what their packs must have contained at the start of their trip.

We were back to the car just on dark. There are rainbows in the Ruahines.

The trip was a pleasure. Thank you.
We were Janet Wilson, Graham Peters, Evette Cottam and Frances Woodhead.

A JOURNEY TO MAKE
A JOURNEY TO CHANGE
A delightful weekend in the Ruahine's with Tony Gates, Warren Wheeler, Terry Crippens, and Shaun Barnett

8-9 July by Andrew Lynch

Our resolve for the Sawtooth diminished as we passed through the southern Hawkes Bay where the soils were heavy with winter rain and the hills and mountains were jealously hidden by vengeful cloud. The Tukituki in its piqued and discoloured mood ensured our challenge to be a future endeavour.

We climbed up the track of rocks through pepperwood and leatherjacket to the clear ground of tussock and headed west to Longview. The cold wind fortified with rain pulled at our jackets trying to outwit high-tech garments made by mortals and in finding seams not as perfect as nature's, made the discomfort of this sombre day felt. Disconsolate mist hid our progress, something which would be our encumbrance for the next two days. Longview was reached, and as our parkas dried on pegs we sat for an hour drinking and eating hot tea and biscuits. Dissension followed by a resolution that Leon Kinvig, in the heart of the Pohangina, was a preferable terminus for the night than Howletts. South we headed and in falling off the edge of the maps that we carried we came under the stewardship of Tony.

As dusk approached we lost height quickly then arrived at Leon Kinvig. Under the tin roof and with flames dancing in the fire place we savoured the delights of emptied swags relieved from tired shoulders. Gourmet food indeed but the lack of Merlot or Pinot Noir was replaced with the bouquet of fine well aged company. In warm bunks we laid and offered a prayer for those who have spirits here, the trumper, hunter, or wanderer of a previous day.

We ascended between the great trees of Tane Mahuta, Rimu and Beech, amidst gnarled and stunted forest where rain and mist enshrouded impish gatherings. Up through the sentinel of leatherjacket which scorned and tore at would-be trespassers who dared to walk the alpine pastures. This was no place for us today. The enchantment of this chilly place and the disposition of men and elements were caught by Shaun on camera.



Shaun Barnett, trumper, and Montana Award winning photographer & writer, in the leatherwood near Leon Kinvig.

[Photo by Andrew Lynch]

Along the ridge we parted company, and as Terry and Warren dissipated in the gloom for Longview and our transport, the remnants of our party forged onto Ngamoko road end. Lunch at the rather dilapidated Ngamoko Tent Camp.

We ambled back down the track of rocks again and over the nebulous farmland the clouds parted bringing a glint of sun and as ramaru touched our dulled spirits we were well pleased with our efforts.

Refer to the map on the last page.

SECRETS AND HIGHS - NGAMOKO RANGE

16 July

by Pete McGregor

There are things he stretched, but mainly he told the truth

Mark Twain

Tony waited for us to catch up. He looked around furtively, as if checking that no

stray trampers or hunters were hiding in the undergrowth to pilfer his information, then, satisfied that we were alone, he pointed theatrically with his walking pole across the gully towards a bush-covered knoll.

"Now - " he said, "over there is a secret hut."

Craig, Mary, John and I exchanged glances, desperately trying to stifle laughter. None of us doubted him - well, I didn't - but I estimated that the number of secret huts we'd learned about in the Ruahine during the last couple of hours outweighed the number of official huts by a factor of at least three, and the length of secret tracks infiltrating the dense southern Ruahine bush exceeded the length of official tracks by a factor approaching double figures.

This, then was one of my overriding impressions of the trip I'd been cajoled into leading. Ostensibly it was to have been a loop from the Limestone Road carpark, up Knights Track, a short detour to summit Toka on the Ngamoko Range and admire the coast-to-coast views and peer into the Pohangina headwaters, then amble along the tops to Shorts Track, which we were to descend on our return to the cars. It's a great trip in good weather, and even foul weather has its appeal - I recall a solo trip a couple of years ago in a dark blizzard, snow piled deep in drifts under black cloud, luminous ice growing sideways from rusted waratahs and rimed leatherwood, everything rigid and shrieking with cold - and my huge weight of camera gear useless because I'd forgotten to bring spare batteries. Well, while the Manawatu basked in sunshine, that was the sort of weather we climbed towards, except it was so bitterly cold that the snow had decided to stay indoors out of the rain.

Mary drove over from Hunterville to meet John, Craig, Tony and me at Sixtus Lodge. We stamped and huddled in the wind, discussing what to do. Both Tony and I had been over the tops in similar conditions, and I certainly wasn't going to insist that we do the entire loop. To have done so would have meant a good hour or more in the sort of conditions that would have had rescuers shaking their heads and asking what the hell those nutters thought they were doing going up there in conditions like that. Fortunately, Tony's suggestion to head up Shorts Track and evaluate the conditions as we approached the cloud was well received.

During the climb we listened to Tony explaining the details of numerous secret huts and tracks. "I'll show you the secret track to the Pussycat slip," he promised, then began a lengthy discourse on how the slip got its name - "Some people call it the Teddy Bear slip," he informed us. When he'd exhausted that topic, he began a wide-ranging spiel on the Apiti Track, Hans Willems' books, native forest regeneration, his recent trip into the Pohangina with Shaun Barnett, the exigencies of book publishing, and, of course, trips he'd done in the Tararua and Ruahine. This was Craig's first trip with the club, and I wondered what he was thinking. I stopped and turned to look at him, then looked back up the track, where Tony's arse was disappearing around a bend, leaving a monologue hanging in the air. When I looked back at Craig he was grinning, but was too polite to voice his thoughts. I wasn't.

"I reckon Tony's got two sets of lungs," I said, "one set for walking, and one set for talking."

Somewhere in the zone where the kaikawaka loses its struggle with the leatherwood, we stopped for a late lunch. Apparently, Tony informed us conspiratorially, we had walked right past the secret track to the Pussycat Slip. We pulled on windproof clothing and nibbled assorted lunches in the gloom and wind and cold. I passed around a packet of golden fruits; Tony offered a sample of his homemade venison salami, with warnings about the amount of chilli it contained. I nipped off a tiny piece and ate it, clutching my water bottle in case I needed it in a hurry. I felt my tongue beginning to heat up. But it wasn't as savage as Tony had claimed, or perhaps the piece I'd eaten was so small that it lacked full firepower. It was very nice - meaty, and hot without overpowering the flavour of the venison.

I was reticent about climbing much higher, mostly because of the bitter weather, but also because it seemed largely pointless. Higher up, we'd have marvellous views of nothing, black cloud and each other's dripping noses. John, however, was keen to carry on. He was clearly fit and comfortable, the latter being nothing short of amazing considering his pre-war parka and similarly vintaged gear. Tony looked at John's ancient gaiters. "I had a pair like that," he said. "They're still in excellent nick." Eventually we learned that he'd lost one of them, prompting the remark that if they were indeed in good nick it was almost certainly because one gaiter is never

going to wear out because you never wear just one gaiter. Craig and Mary seemed just as happy to carry on as begin heading down, so, with everyone well dressed for the conditions, we began climbing again. I couldn't help thinking of a paraphrase of Oates' last words: "We are just going to climb a little further, and may be some time."

Tony was the first to do the sensible thing and say he'd stay at a relatively sheltered point on the track and wait for us to return. Shortly after, we crested a small knoll, and I knew we were not far from the tussock. Mist howled over the ridge; the track disappeared into darkness. I called the other three back. I felt equivocal, realising that I'd been there several times before, but the others may have wanted that sense of achievement, of being able to say "we went to the top of Shorts Track." There's always a slight sadness about turning around before a summit. If you're going to turn around now, then why not at the next little bump in the ridge? And if there, then why not the next? and so on. But the top section of Shorts Track has deeply incised sections, overgrown with snowgrass, and a mis-step could easily lead to a stuffed ankle, or worse. So, I called them back, and no-one complained, and they all seemed to be enjoying themselves.

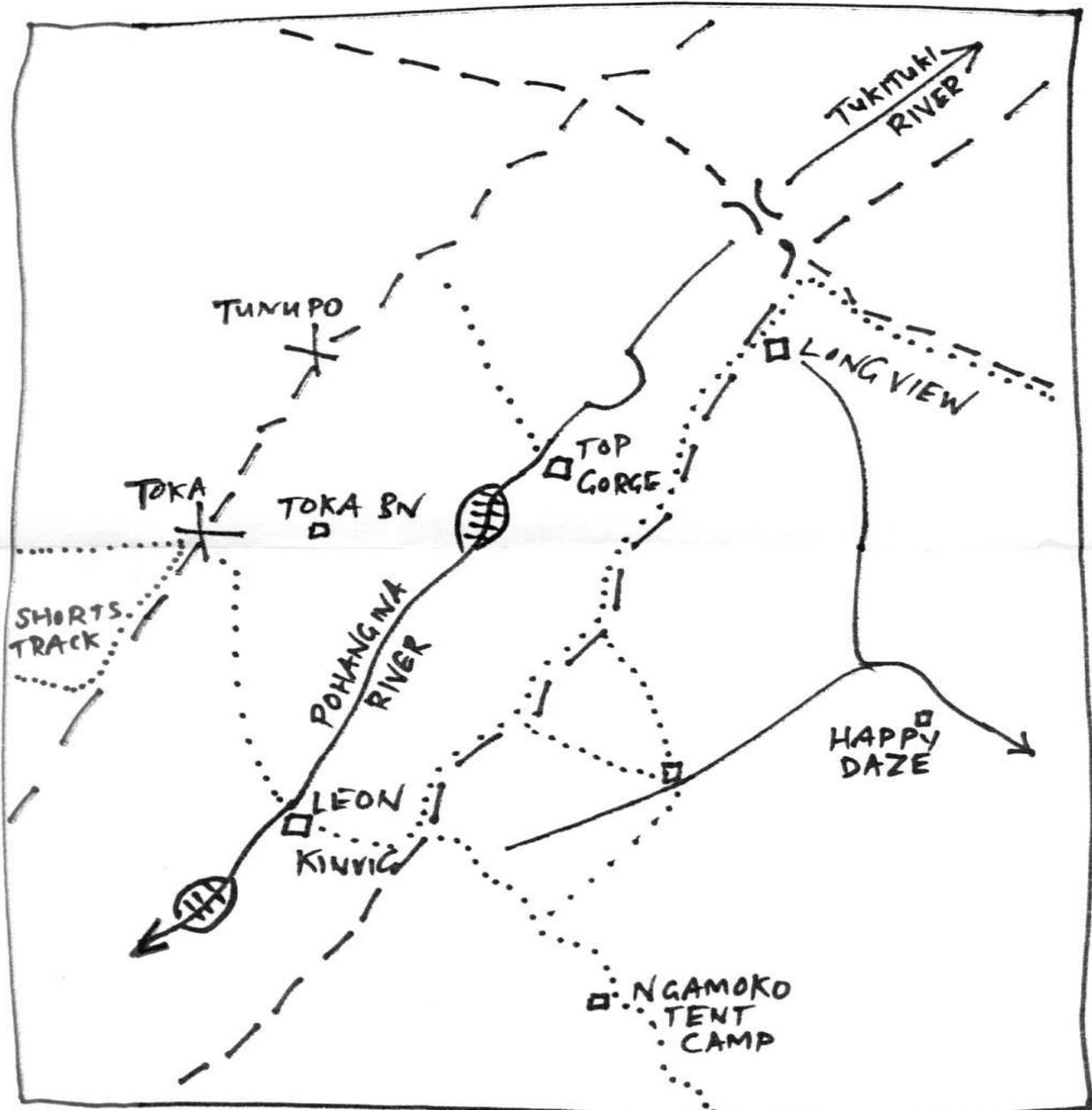
We stopped at Tony's secret track, and wriggled down it to the Pussycat Slip. It was worth it. We chatted at the top of the slip; I ran down to the small terrace to poke about and explore and look for deer sign. Nothing fresh, only old traces. I slogged back up, and we chatted some more, until I began to get cold and hustled them back up the secret track. We returned via the Deerford Loop Track and the shortcut through Te Ngahere a Tane, the Forest of Tane. Back at the cars, the wind had not abated, and, looking back, we saw that the cloud had lowered further still. Tony, exhausted by his efforts to educate us, slept much of the way home.

We returned to my little granny flat in the Pohangina Valley and lazed about, yarning over a beer and flicking through albums of photos of trips in the hills. Winter sunlight filtered through the windows into the warm room; quiet music filled infrequent gaps in the easy conversation. It seemed like the perfect way to end the trip.

We were: John Barnett, Mary Crow, Tony Gates, Craig Steed and Pete McGregor



View of the snow covered "Pussycat Slip" from Takapari Rd.
[Photo by Tony Gates]



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