



# PALMERSTON NORTH TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING CLUB INC.

P.O. BOX 1217

PALMERSTON NORTH

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 1995 Edition

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Membership Enquiries	: Jenny Prichard	358-2217
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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 (326-9691), 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 members and visitors on the second and last Thursday of each month. 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

		SEPTEMBER		
SEPTEMBER 16-17	Tunipo – Iron Gates	M	Terry Crippen	356-3588

Depart 7 am. An excellent winter/spring trip in the Western Ruahine Ranges. The snowy tops of Tunupo and then north along the Ngamoko Range for the Saturday, dropping down to Iron Gates Hut for the night. Sunday a stroll through good bush along the Oroua River.

**SEPTEMBER 17** Mitre Flats E/M Liz Flint 356-7654  
 Depart 7:30 am On the Eastern side of the Tararua Ranges this is a nice tramp, initially over farmland, then along the track through bush adjacent to the Waingawa River. Three hours takes us to the grassy flats or the (new) hut for lunch. Returning the same way.

**SEPTEMBER 21** Thursday day trippers Neil Gutry 354-0284

**SEPTEMBER 23** Southern Ruahine M Nigel Barrett 326-8847  
 Depart 7:30 am A hardout leatherwood bash for all those wishing to endure the ultimate in bush-bashing. Shall head out from the Wharite carpark and do a loop. Small packs and sturdy trousers (including shin pads?) essential. You will love it - guaranteed!

**SEPTEMBER 23-24** Stanfield/Cattle Creek E Richard Lockett 323-0948  
 Depart 7:30 am Depending on conditions and who is coming along there are a number of possibilities in this south eastern part of the Ruahine Ranges: The tramp will be centred around the open West Tamaki Stream to Stanfield Hut and then via forest track to Cattle Creek Hut.

**SEPTEMBER 28** Thursday day trippers Liz Flint 356-7654

**SEPTEMBER 28** Club Night HIGHLIFE  
 Phil and Jules, from the local outdoor shop will present a talk with slides about their business together with some of their outdoor interests.

**SEPTEMBER 30-1** Climbing. Whakapapa M/F/T Terry Crippen 356-3588  
 Depart 6pm Friday night. This is a climbing weekend based at the NZ Alpine Club hut (complete with all the mod cons like electricity) up on the Whakapapa (western) side of Mt Ruapehu. The Pinnacle Ridge opposite the hut offers easily accessible excellent snow, ice, or rock routes of various difficulty, while there are always ascents of Te Heu Heu and Paretetaitonga. Grab a climbing partner, and all the gear for the climbs, and visit this side of the mountain. We have ten places booked. Hut fees per night: \$18 {\$8 NZAC members).

**SEPTEMBER 1st Oct** Diggers Hut E/M Mick Leyland 358-3183  
 Depart 7:30 am Mick will lead this interesting annual event, playing it by ear, depending on who is on the trip. It will investigate a south-west part of the Ruahine Ranges with its forest, streams and ridges.

**SEPTEMBER 30-1** Ideas contact Derek Sharp 326-8178

**OCTOBER 5** Thursday day trippers Rosemary Hall 356-8538

**OCTOBER 5** Committee meeting at Tony Gates' place, all welcome.

**OCTOBER 7** Stanfield Hound Hike E Liz Morrison 357-6532  
 Depart 8am 'Body' invites her canine companions and their masters on a slow cruise up the Holmes Ridge to Stanfield Hut in the eastern Ruahines for a lazy lunch then back down the river. For the good keen hound there could be a medium return via Takapari road and the A Frame.

**OCTOBER 7-8** Ohau - Te Matawai M Graeme Roberts 357-8567  
 Depart 7 am. This western Tararua tramp will be either a clockwise or anticlockwise loop; via tracks, some stream and bush travel and Girdlestone Saddle staying at Te Matawai hut for the night.

**OCTOBER 8** River Safety Course all contact Terry 356-3588  
 Meet 1 pm Ashurst Domain playground shelter shed. This afternoon will be run by the NZ Mountain safety Council and will be centred on the Manawatu and Pohangina Rivers. It will be river safety instruction, which is a bit more than just river crossing. To know how to cross them safely and when not to cross them is important for all trampers. Even the local rivers and streams can be hazardous, e.g. the Mangatainoka (without its swingbridge) after rain. South Island rivers on those summer trips can also present major difficulties. You will need a loaded pack (about 12kg), normal tramping clothing (i.e. polyprop) for warmth (a wet suit if you have one) and a change of clothing. (A hat; will be passed round for donations to help cover MSC instructors' costs.)

**OCTOBER 12** Thursday day trippers Sue & Lawson Pither 357-3033

**OCTOBER 12** Club night Intro to South Island tramping areas

It's now time to start thinking about 'chosed South Island areas you want to visit for tramping and climbing over the summer. Tony Gates and Terry Crippen will give a visual and descriptive introduction to a selection of areas down south, ranging from easy tramping country, to harder alpine tramping and climbing possibilities. Areas could include: North-West Nelson (now, called Kahurangi National Park), Nelson Lakes, Arthurs Pass, Garden of Eden, Wilkin - Matukituki. The club may be running trips to a couple of these places but there is tons of other places that you could visit independently. So come alone and get enthused.

<b>OCTOBER 14-15</b>	Jumbo Loop	M	Nigel Scott	326-8161
Depart 7 am This should be a pleasant walk into Jumbo Hut on the eastern side of the Tararuas near Masterton. Wandering alongside the Atiwhakatu Stream then up to the hut for the night. Depending on interest and weather, we may return via the tops; Jumbo and Mt Holdsworth, making a interesting and a bit more demanding loop.				
<b>OCTOBER 19</b>	Thursday day trippers		John Rockell	358-3513
<b>Labour Weekend</b>				
<b>OCTOBER 21-23</b>	Kaweka, Mohaka Hot Springs	E+M	Mick Leyland	358-3183
<b>OCTOBER 22</b>	Tama Lakes TNP	All	Peter Wiles	358-6894
<b>OCTOBER 26</b>	Club night Steve Boulton from DOC Pohangina will talk about DOC activities in the Ruahine Ranges. You can order a hut pass directly from Steve.			
<b>NOVEMBER 9</b>	Pete Barnes talking on mountaineering in Peru.			

### **EDITORIAL**

Well, the days are getting longer as we see out the end of winter. It is now officially spring: by making use of the longer days, some of the keener fitter trampers may be looking forward to some longer trips. To my surprise, I've heard of some people who don't like the cold snow treks, and for those people it will be warmer and they will now, be able to get a lot higher and see a lot further without the use of crampons and ice axe.

For me, the snow is one of the great attractions when tramping and the superb views of the snow covered ranges have yet to be bettered. In New Zealand, we think we have a beautiful country, and tourists tell us this is so, but do we really appreciate just how good it is? Maybe some of us do, but I for one certainly didn't until I got myself out of the cowshed. I always wanted to go tramping, but now I am seeing what I missed in the years of dairy farming, and at long last I am realising what the country has to show us.

I have only been in the club for about 12 months, and have thoroughly enjoyed every minute. I thought I was reasonably fit, but found out the hard way on my first tramp up Tunipo - that there are plenty fitter. The club members and visitors and their variety of backgrounds and interests certainly make each journey different in its own way.

An observation that I have made has been the common sense/experience factor. Experienced trampers consider this common sense that inexperienced trampers don't. If you lead a tramp, don't think or expect people to know what to take or what to expect to experience. We learn by doing, that weather conditions, time of year, fitness or lack of it, gear available etc. can make or break a tramp. It is better to tell people the obvious than regret it later. For the novice, learn from the rest of the group for they all have their experiences and in doing so you will find out which walks are for you.

Great to see so many keen snowcrafters this year - learning some of the finer points of tramping and do so safely. On behalf of the participating members, I would like to extend a big thank you to the leaders for their expert guidance on our three weekend events. I'm sure they have been at, invaluable to them (the leaders) as they were to myself. I have recently had good reason to use the self-arresting skills - on a trip to Waterfall Hut via Sawtooth Ridge. Haven fallen on a firm icy ascent of Tiraha and quickly descending 100 m down to some, thankfully, soft snow below.

Finally a plea to all intending leaders, please make sure everyone in your group is capable of your trip and are aware of what is involved. Remember, there is a trip guide to refer to, so no important requirements are overlooked.

Nigel Scott

### **NOTICES**

#### **NEW MEMBERS**

Please welcome six new members to the club:

Andy Backhouse & Zoe Hart  
50 Hillcrest Drive  
Palmerston North

Jo Robins  
Makerua Road RD4  
Palmerston North

John Phillips  
87 Victoria Avenue  
Palmerston North

Ph 353-0774

329-8040

358-1874

Logan Westwood  
6 Cheviot Place  
Feilding  
Ph 323-9299

Lynn Murphy  
1A Baden Road  
Hataitai, Wellington  
04-386-3334

#### **THURSDAY TRIP SCHEDULE**

SEPTEMBER 14

Pam Wilson

357-6247

Overdue contacts: Sue and Lawson Pither (357-3033) and Trish Eder (357-0122).

#### **SMEDLEY MEDLEY**

This event is being held again this year on October 29. There is a choice of three course options to enter. Contact Warren Wheeler for more details - 356-1998.

#### **CALENDERS**

The calendar order has been sent off. We may get calendars with the cover photo (also reprinted on one of the months), of Ngauruhoe back to front.

#### **MORE POSSUM POISONING OPERATIONS**

This spring, DOC advises us, they will be carrying 1080 bait drops in the upper Waiohine, Hector and upper Tauherenikau rivers. Please take care with children and dogs.

#### **NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING** October

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 Tony Gates' place. All members welcome.

#### **MOUNTAINCRAFT MANUALS**

The second bulk order has arrived, cost \$10.50. Please collect and pay money/cheque to Terry 3563-588. Apart from the ones that specific people have ordered there is one spare copy for sale.

#### **THE JANUARY-JULY 1996 EVENTS CARD**

It's time for all of us to start thinking about the first six months of 1996 and the types of trips we want and places we want to go to. We are now looking for leaders for these trips and events; be they easy, medium or fit tramps, rock or snow climbing trips, or other events e.g. visits to places such as Kapiti or Mana Island; for a day, weekend or longer, or a Thursday night speaker. What are your ideas? Terry (356-3588) and Derek (326-8178) your friendly trip convenors and Bruce (328-4761) your friendly social convenor would like to hear from you so we can start to fill in all the spaces on the blank January - July 1996 events/trips card so you all can participate in a full and wide range of activities in the new year!

#### **NZ MOUNTAIN SAFETY COUNCIL EVENTS**

Following on from the last club night talk by Noel Bigwood on the role and activities of the NZ MSC, there are some courses coming up that club members may want to go on besides the River Safety afternoon (October 8<sup>th</sup> - see above blurb in the Scheduled event list). Over October there is the Outdoor Training Scheme (Basic Bushcraft). This consists of several evenings and two weekends and covers in depth, all the basic bushcraft skills, including travel and navigation in the bush without the use of compass! All good stuff. Cost about \$80 for the whole course. There is a risk management course also in October. For info on these all other MSC courses, contact Noel Bigwood (355-1453) or Eve Pura (357-97114).

#### **HOWLETTS AND WAIKAMAKA HUT RECENT USERS .**

It has been suggested that w~ send off a donation to Heretaunga Tramping Club (HTC) for the use of Howletts and Waikamaka huts in the Ruahines, and any other ones of theirs that club members have used of late. Unlike DOC huts, they club huts are maintained by volunteer club members and any \$4 per night contributions would, I'm sure, be gratefully received by HTC. So over the next month if you have used such hut(s) recently please feel free to give your donation, via Peter Wiles or Terry Crippen, so a lump sum can be sent off to HTC in Hastings. (The club has donated \$50 and others have already contributed a further \$50. So that is a start.)

#### **FOUND**

On a Club trip to the Blue Range recently a (now washed and cleaned) cream and blue pom-pom hat. Any owner? Phone Liz Flint 356-7654. Also found a plastic "oggi or iggo" lunch box (also washed and cleaned) from Snowcraft II. Contact Terry Crippen 356-3588.

#### **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.

Electronic copy is the most convenient. This newsletter is prepared using Wordperfect. So I can retrieve any material in Wordperfect format (version 5, 5.1, 5.2 or 6, in either DOS or Windows). If you use Microsoft Word or a MAC, then I need an ASCII (or DOS text file) version. With a MAC, you will need a DOS formatted disc. I can only handle 3½ inch discs.

If you have DOS or Windows, and are not sure that you have saved it in ASCII format, then retrieve it into Notepad (Windows) or Edit (DOS) to check the copy. If it's OK, it's OK, if it's not, it's not!

### **TRIP DECISIONS?**

If you decide you want to go on a trip, please ensure that you have contacted the leader by the Wednesday before, so that logistical decisions can be made. Recently, there have been some instances of people expressing an interest in a trip on the evening before - the leaders in some cases, having made other plans at that late stage.

## **TRIP REPORTS**

### **ADVENTURES ON MT. ASPIRING** by Bruce Van Brunt

(This is the second instalment - French Ridge Hut to Colin Todd Hut. Having got to French Ridge Hut (properly known as Lucas Trotter [memorial] Hut) (about 1500 m) in a thoroughly bedraggled condition, the plan, once the weather improves, is to ascend the Quarterdeck onto the Bonar Glacier (2300 m) and traverse the glacier down to Colin Todd. Fasten your seatbelts. Bruce takes up his account. Ed.)

French Ridge Hut is of modest size in comparison with Aspiring Hut; it can accommodate 10+ trampers comfortably. There are no frills in this hut (save perhaps for a barometer mounted on the wall) but there is a wireless and, though we could not appreciate the view owing to the weather, the nearby vistas are spectacular. The hut fees (in season) are \$10-00/ night and hut passes are not valid.

It was by no means obvious what the weather was going to do the next day. The mountain forecast was broadcasted over the wireless in the evening and early morning. We listened carefully to both forecasts: it was clear that the weather was not going to be brilliant, but there was a high coming in and the weather outlook was still fairly good. After hearing the morning broadcast (7:30am) we decided to leave for Colin Todd Hut. At this stage we reckoned that it would not be a particularly long day and we would be amply rested for an assault on the summit the next day. The two other climbers in the hut, Hep and Maree, also saw this as a break in the weather and a chance to get to Colin Todd.

The gradient of the ridge from the hut to a small glacier at the top of it known as the Quarterdeck is for the most part pleasant. We ascended for about an hour before we encountered snow in any quantity and then put on crampons. It was not precipitating and the wind was still, but there were numerous clouds hovering around the region. Occasionally the clouds would clear and we could sample some of the spectacular views afforded by this ridge. On the south side of the ridge there is what must be a sheer drop of hundreds of metres into Gloomy Gorge with the Matukituki River valley in the distance; the edge of the "cliff" is adorned with several ferocious looking cornices - we refrained from closer examinations. On the other side of the ridge is Mt. French and the "breakaway" where the Bonar glacier is extruded out between Mt. Joffre and Mt. French. We caught glimpses of these views but little more: the weather was looking omiuous.

Our first serious bit of climbing came when we reached the Quarterdeck. We knew from several recent accounts in the hut book and from the climbers we met at Aspiring Hut that there was a negotiable route up this glacier. It was really a matter of finding an efficient way up the glacier. Fortunately at this stage the visibility was good. The Quarterdeck was noticeably crevassed but it looked as if there was some navigable passage on the far right. The main obstacle to the ascent was a large (and deep) crevasse which virtually split the glacier into two pieces. It is at this crevasse that not too surprisingly the gradients become much steeper. We roped up for glacier travel and, after hopping a few minor crevasses, climbed up to a spot where from below it had look the most questionable. Clive led the way up and after a quick reconnaissance reported that it was passable but very exposed (remember the sheer drop on this side-well it is even worse higher up. Essentially, the passage would entail entering into the crevasse at the very edge of the glacier; this would then be followed by a steep but short ice climb out of the crevasse. Given the exposure and the potential deterioration in the weather, this was not an attractive option: we thought it best to retreat a few metres and search the other side of the glacier for an easier route.

As luck would have it we soon espied a small snow bridge over the offending crevasse. It was perhaps the remains of an old small avalanche who cared, it was our ticket up the Quarterdeck. Hep and Maree led the way over the bridge and set up their first belay on some steep ice about twenty metres directly above the soft snow of the bridge. I followed them but at Clive's suggestion started a traverse just after the bridge to avoid the ice. The traverse itself was about 15(?) metres but it was directly over that ominous large deep crevasse: I put a runner in just in case. After this traverse the gradient became steep, but the snow was soft and we could basically walk up to the top without any difficulties. Hep and Maree chose a direct route on the hard snow and ice and it cost them two pitches of rope

before they joined us. The visibility was not too bad when we got to the top of the Quarterdeck but the weather was deteriorating fast. We caught our first glimpse of the Bonar Glacier (apart from that portion one can see from the Breakaway). I emphasize here that it was but a glimpse, owing to the cloud conditions and even on a clear day one can see only the far upper part of the glacier from the Quarterdeck.

At the lip of the Bonar we took a short rest while waiting for Hep and Maree. We used this time to have a snack and get our bearings. As I stood, gazing down the slopes towards the centre of the glacier something slid by me from above - it was our maps in a nice plastic map case travelling at high speed. I fixed upon the maps watching the case slow down and reach some degree of equilibrium in a depression on the glacier. There would be no trouble getting to the maps but they were out of the way. We started towards, the maps immediately as the weather was closing in quickly and it would take at least 10 or 15 minutes to get them. When we got down to the centre of the glacier where the maps, were last sighted, all visibility was gone: we could not see each other let alone the map case. We were getting concerned at this point and it was singular luck that Richard managed somehow to spot the case. We recovered our maps but now we were in the centre of the upper part of the Bonar in what was quickly becoming a "white out". Somewhere above us were Hep and Maree. We started down the glacier with compasses in hand.

There were no features for the eye to fix upon on our descent down the Bonar. The slopes on the glacier are for the most part fairly gentle except near various mountains and we had little trouble with crevasses. Our real problem was visibility. Clive took the lead, Richard was mid-rope and I was in the rear. I could make out Richard in front of me and most of the time Clive, but little else. After a half hour or so we managed to get ourselves all turned around. We even reached the stage where Clive suspected all of our compasses were affected by some peculiar magnetic disturbance/ object. Nothing, of course was wrong with our equipment, but we were totally disoriented.

Out of the white came Hep and Maree. They were following a bearing taken from the Quarterdeck. We soon teamed up and were heading down the glacier towards Colin Todd Hut. The weather was getting worse and we were by this time all very wet and cold. Using the bearing from the Quarterdeck we found ourselves getting closer and closer to the slopes of Mt. Aspiring. The nice tight centre of the glacier was rapidly becoming more and more crevassed. We were on the right bearing (as we later found out) but it was "as the kea flies" for it took no account of the heavy crevassing near the mountain. We soon found ourselves surrounded by a sea of formidable looking crevasses barring any further direct descent down the glacier. This was clearly not the route described to us by those climbers in Aspiring Hut - we had clearly strayed too close to Mt. Aspiring.

We may not have been totally lost but we certainly were at our wits end to pick a path through the crevasses. There was no visibility and we had no idea about the extent of the crevasses in front of us. We were all getting tired and hungry; we began debating whether or not to set up the tent. We spent a few more minutes in an abortive attempt to escape and then finally sometime around 4:00 pm resigned ourselves to camping on the glacier. It was with some reservation that we committed ourselves to this course of action: we had Richard's 2-3 person Olympus tent among us; Hep and Maree had just their bivy bags. Few two person tents can claim to sleep five people with any degree of success: our tent was no exception. We knew that we were in for a long uncomfortable night. Somehow we managed to squeeze all five of us into the tent and cook a meal. Getting in and out of the tent on a casual basis was out of the question as we were truly packed in like sardines in a tin and it was an involved exercise to exit and enter the tent let alone attempt fitting boots etc.. The weather was absolutely horrible for most of the night and no one had the energy to attempt an exit. As darkness came we arranged ourselves as best possible in the tent. Our only comfort was that we were not out in the windy snowy weather. Indeed, the interior of the tent was pleasantly warm. I never bothered to even unfurl my sleeping bag.

There was no question of sleep. We were in for hours upon hours of forced yoga without relief. True, Clive and Hep managed to glean some sleep, but the rest of us were too uncomfortable to even contemplate it. What was perhaps worse was that we were bored and had before us only the prospect of "sitting" in the dark awake for several hours. A few hours into the saga Richard noted that it was 9:00pm and that we had-at least another seven hours of this. The night wore on. I found myself the keystone of our sleeping arrangements: when I moved everybody else was obliged to move, some less willing than others. It seemed at several points as if everyone was lying on me. I felt like a human "Thermorest". In truth there were only two people putting any weight on me, but it made me even more uncomfortable and at no time was I able to lie flat and stretch my legs.

Sometime after midnight the weather settled. I got stuck near the tent door (a fairly wet spot) and was able to watch the weather: this was my sole source of entertainment for nine hours. At about 4:30 am I announced that we should go as the weather had cleared. Incredulous as it may have sounded to my tentmates, the clouds had gone and the stars were visible. I stuck my head out of the tent and got my first view of Mt. Aspiring. We were camped right against the west face of it. In the dim early morning starlight I saw the crevasses which had thwarted our progress, but there was not enough light to see the "big picture". Nonetheless, nobody wanted to stay in the tent. Seldom has the world known such boundless enthusiasm for early morning travel as was displayed that morning.

Slowly, we untangled ourselves and got out of the tent. The freezing level had dropped considerably (as predicted by the mountain forecast) and much of our gear was frozen. Everything was all mixed up and it took some

time to bring order to our camp. Around 5:30 am we were packed up, roped up, and ready for glacier travel. None of us had eaten a hot breakfast - we just wanted to get off of the glacier and rest in the hut which we knew could not be far off.

Hep and Maree made a slightly earlier start down the glacier in the starlight but soon found themselves surrounded by vicious looking crevasses. As the lighting improved, we could see a fairly simple route down the glacier. We needed to get back into the centre of the glacier. We roped up as before with Clive in the lead. We felt a bit more secure with Clive in the lead: he was the largest (and most experienced) of us and if a snow bridge held him it was likely to hold us as well. We gingerly extracted ourselves from the crevassed section of the glacier and soon spotted Colin Todd Hut some hundred metres below on Shipowner Ridge leading to Mt. Aspiring. Within an hour we were off the Bonar and, climbing a steep snow slope up to the hut. We arrived in good spirits but utterly shattered and sodden from our stay on the glacier.

### **SNOW CRAFT 1**      22-23 July 1995 by Warren Wheeler!

Cancelled due to snow blocking the road: NO WAY! Thanks to Nigel's Plan E, we ended up at Egmont on Saturday morning only to find the road closed ... at least for those two cars without chains. Thanks to Terry and Barry for the ferry service up through the fresh snow. With sleet fluttering through occasionally it was quite a nice introduction to Snowcraft 1.

It was quite calm at the top carpark and on up through the forest but we were almost blown over above the Hooker Shelter before reaching the Kapuni Lodge. Egmont Alpine Club were also in residence running their own snowcraft course - they dug a couple of snow caves in the powder just outside the hut - one slept 5 or 6 that night which took some pressure off bed-space. The lodge is certainly a great asset even if one does have to keep digging the loo out of the wind-blown snow.

Despite the near white-out conditions we went out after lunch in our groups of 5 or 6 to have a play in the icing sugar: trying out walking techniques and some hopelessly pathetic attempts at self-arrest - it was either too icy and thin on top or just too soft.

Back at the lodge we stripped off in the steamy gear lobby before going inside to the cosy warmth of the potbelly and good company.

Dinner produced some truly tasty culinary treats despite the crowded kitchen. Nigel's stew and dumplings was even good enough for breakfast and lunch on Sunday as well: over-catering? No way!

The evening was filled with games of cards and yahtze, reading poetry and conversation before bed-time. Sleep? Well that was somewhat elusive for some - the combination of a strange bed., snoring control, and condensation dripping off the ceiling - but otherwise it was not too crowded or uncomfortable and certainly didn't have the same problems as Phil who had to spend more than an hour digging himself out of the solo snow cave he borrowed off the EAC - a little hint that Phil discovered is to always leave the shovel INSIDE the entrance. On the other hand the unpredictability of alpine hazards was painfully impressed on John after his knee was attacked by the icy crust as he stepped out for a midnight pee.

Next day was still cloudy but the blizzard had dropped and occasionally there was enough lift to see the Kapuni Gorge. With packed snow the conditions were much better for practising self-arrests, walking, and cutting steps. After lunch we headed back to the cars, passing a sweating group of young Scouts who looked like they would rather be heading down too. The compulsory end-of-course snow-fight at the carpark rounded off a fairly laid-back learning experience which, despite the weather and snow conditions, was a good easy introduction to the Big White.

Thanks to Nigel Barrett and the other team leaders: Peter Wiles, Terry Crippen and Barry Scott. The 18 students were: Marie, Mike, Cliff, Sarah, Mike (another one), Bridget, Vanessa, Lynne, Vicki, John, Kevin, Phil, Dale, Austin, Martin, Ron, Jo and me, Warren.

Post-script: a note was left in the hut book by one of the EAC instructors who was horrified at the seemingly irresponsible attitude of a couple of our groups heading off across to the Gorge before they had gained some experience - a bit acidic in tone maybe but he has a valid point: SAFETY FIRST - especially when the levels of confidence and skill are still in the formative stages. Fair enough really. Still, it was a challenge, and we all survived, so...OK.

### **THE MAHARAHARA CROSSING - LEADING QUESTIONS**

Question 1:            When is an "Easy" walk not easy?

Answer:                When it is a "Medium" (oops!!!).

Question 2:            How should a crossing group be split in two?

Answer:                With the weakest people going with the Trip Leader...

Question 3: When is an "Easy" walk easy?  
Answer: Never.

Safe tramping.

With apologies to my group,  
Warren the Worried Weary-monger.

### **WINDCRAFT III (Snowcraft III) at Rangipo Hut August 19-20 by Peter Wiles**

A group of 16 met outside Foodtown on Friday evening to begin the journey to Rangipo Hut. (Two were to leave a little later and travel independently to Waiouru.) We stopped at Waiouru to change for the walk in - not knowing just what the conditions at the road end would be like. It was fine and clear with only a slight breeze from the west. We elected to stop at the bottom carpark on the Tukino road. There was a strong south-westerly wind at this level and the temperature was below freezing. After the usual last minute organizing of gear (persuading someone to carry a rope or two etc.), we started to head up the road on foot at 10:10 pm. At the repeater station, the wind was very hard to stand up in, and we sheltered on its lee side while the group converged.

We set off on the track to Rangipo Hut. Despite changing direction to the south we were still largely having to force our way into the wind. It soon became evident we were in for a long haul - to not put too finer point on it. Before long we had to stop to put crampons on because the snow was frozen hard. There was considerable difficulties keeping together as a group, because of the varying abilities to cope with the wind. It was pitch black with no moon. Near the first ridge crossing, we lost the track. One or more of the track poles was obviously missing, fallen over or completely buried. We spent some time back tracking, and Nigel and others did sterling work scouting around for signs of the track. Eventually it was found and we staggered off again. A bit further on we again had some difficulty locating the track, but this time we located the top of a pole sticking a couple of centimetres out of the snow. Somewhere near the start of the Whangaehu Gorge most stopped briefly to have something to eat, to try to revive our energy as we had been struggling forward for more than 3 hours by now. Eventually we reached the hut at possibly the record time of 2:40 am. Fortunately the hut was empty. After a brew and further refuelling, it did not take long for everyone to retire.

The next morning, as one might expect, did not get off to an early start. Activity resumed about 9:00. There was still no let up from the wind. This limited our options for the day's activities. Although it was fine and sunny at the hut, higher up the mountain and especially to the south west] there was cloud and snow showers. Despite telling the NZAC that we would use the Whangaehu Hut, no one felt the urge to climb up to it in the gale. We headed back to the Whangaehu Gorge. We spent a useful few hours largely out of the worst of the wind and in the sun on the southern slopes, practising some rope work, abseiling, lowering, bumsliding (glissading?) etc.

After lunch, the weather improved (clouds dispersed and the wind moderated) At about 3:00 pm we headed over the river to the northern side of the gorge to some larger and steeper snow slopes that were in shade. We anticipated the snow would be hard and that we could climb several consecutive pitches on them. This proved to be the case, with most spending 2-3 hours on the slopes in good conditions, before returning to the hut for dinner.

Sunday's activities depended very much on the weather and especially the wind. We set the alarm for 5 am. There was very little wind and it was clear outside. A trip to the east ridge and northern slopes of Mitre seemed on. We left the hut at about 6:30 and headed up the slopes behind the hut. By the time we had climbed 200-300 m, the wind rapidly became strong and at the 1900 m area where the ridges converge to the single ridge to Mitre, it was a struggle to stand up in the gusts. We were not going to make any further progress on plan A. Instead, Terry located a section of the Whangaehu Gorge that had some good steep, but accessible, snow slopes on that we climb several pitches on, while remaining in the sun and out of the wind. Here we were able to use our gear, in the manner that it is intended to be used (rather than simulating). Most groups spent 3-4 hours here and gained much benefit from the activities.

We returned to the hut for a late lunch and left about 2:30 for home. By this time, again the wind was showing signs of abating. We arrived at the cars around 5 pm, without losing any further gear - mostly gloves and hats to the elements. Everyone probably put their gear to a good test of its performance and perhaps discovered some of its strengths and weaknesses. Wrist loops on gloves are very useful, if not essential. (How much gear have you lost now, Derek?)

For those into conspiracy theories, one cannot help but notice that the weather on the adjacent non-snowcraft weekends has been significantly better than the snowcraft weekends.

Team: Phillip Brown, Peter Burgess, Ron Derosé, Mike Lane, Kevin Pemberthy, Chris Saunders, Alistair Millward, Nigel Scott, Alan Bee, Andy Backhouse, Zoe Hart, Beth McDowal, Terry Crippen, Peter Wiles, Derek Sharp, Vicki Trotter, Lynn Murphy and Warren Wheeler.

## LAKE DIVE 15-16 July

I have often wondered why? Why do supposedly sane intelligent people voluntarily and enthusiastically leave warm dry houses, don shorts and tee shirts to traipse over beautiful bush clad hills in atrocious weather with visibility so limited that the beautiful bush clad hills remains unseen behind mist and cloud? But it gets worse. Having arrived at our destination, we huddle around flickering fires (that consistently go out) in a vain attempt to get warm and hopefully allow blood to once again flow through the fingers and toes. But the final point that upon our return to civilization with its hot baths, gas heaters and dry clothes, we rave to all and sundry about what a fantastic time we had. Is this rational behaviour? Would close examination of the DNA of such individuals reveal that a few rungs have unzipped? Or is it simply that Darwin was right but the relationship is closer than we would like to admit?

Whatever the answer, I am as guilty as the rest of us that partake in this pastime (some call it an obsession). And such was our trip to Lake Dive.

We left Palmerston North expecting to find lousy weather. We weren't disappointed. Upon arriving at Dawson Falls, we decided to opt for the lower track with the hope that Sunday would offer better weather for the higher (and more exposed) track. And it rained. And it rained. And it rained. While some of us praised this modern marvel of Gortex, others got wetter and wetter.

Upon arriving at the hut for a late lunch, it was a good opportunity to light the fire and warm the place up. Thus began the argument: do we close the front doors of the firebox to get it to work best, or do you leave it open? I thought the answer was obvious. But it wasn't.

Sunday dawned later than usual. But we didn't have far to go, so what was the hurry? Little did we know. It was actually quite pleasant tramping conditions - for the first half hour. Then it became a steady slog in up to mid thigh in snow. Upon reaching the first turn off I was convinced we were about one third of the way home. Wrong again. Who was it that forgot the ice axe and rope? Why is it that when you really need them you didn't expect to need them and of course you didn't take them? By the time we struck the most serious patch of ice we were supposedly almost 'out of the woods'. This is when the axe previously used for chopping firewood became an iceaxe. All this without the aid of computer graphics. It is amazing how much damage a couple of patches of ice can do to a nice freshly sharpened axe. But it did avoid the 5 hour alternative route when we were only 1½ hours from the car.

Eventually we reached, Kapuni Lodge for another late lunch and a rest. Before wandering down to the car and civilization. The cell phone was a big advantage. Maybe we should take one more often. And upon completion, once we had got over the cramps, the lactic acid in the leg muscles was back to normal and the swelling in the shoulders had subsided, did we rave about what a good trip we had had? Well you all know the answer.

Team was: Nigel S, Joshua, Malcolm and Lawie.

## MAHARAHARA CROSSING Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup> by John Phillips

or "CROSSING THE RUAHINES BY FROG" ( ...would have helped)

Readers be warned: I have been asked to write about what would have to be one of the worst walks I have ever done in my life. Having gained what must have been a totally misleading impression of tramping in NZ from the walk up to Rangi hut in June (in addition to two superb snowcraft courses) I actually thought that the Maharahara crossing might further fuel my newfound passion with the NZ landscape.

"Pleasant crossing of the Southern Ruahines" said the glowing programme description...not to mention an "E" rating...Ah! A great opportunity to introduce my (very unfit) partner to the joys of tramping for the first time. Actually, I'm sure the main reason Heather consented (to go tramping) was because she got sick of having to listen to glowing account after account on my previous returns.

So a group of ten headed off from the Foodtown carpark at 8 am on a cloudy Sunday morning in two carloads. One group (Warren, Vanessa, Magda, Llew and ?) drove to the eastern end, while the other (Trevor, Pauline, Richard, Heather and myself) started from the western end. Our group parked at the farm gate and set off at a cracking pace at 9-30am.

My first realisation that we were not in for a very nice day came 200 metres across the first farm paddock which, at this stage, was still definitely flat. I turned round to speak to Heather, only to find a look of utter disbelief and despair on her face as the rest of the group strode off ahead into the distance. We caught up to Trevor, Pauline and Richard who were waiting at the first hut on the bush edge. Feeling a little guilty about holding up the group, I explained that I would stay behind with Heather if necessary.

We set off up the hillside, thinking that the bush surroundings would provide a welcome change from crossing boggy farm paddocks. As the gradient steepened, and secure footholds became harder to come by, I recalled

another description of the Maharahara I had read the previous night in Kathy Ombler's Guide to the Ruahine Forest Park, describing this section as a "steady, muddy climb". Now, in my past experience "muddy" means walking knee-deep in the stuff at worst, but not clambering up a hillside on all fours, with two steps sliding back for every three taken, hands grappling every available piece of vegetation on the way (most of which had been kindly pruned out of reach by some well-meaning person).

After this steep section, we reached the rest of the group having a break in the forest. We were kindly informed that this track was an easy one for the Ruahines! Heading off again, we were not to see the group again until near the end of the walk.

The next section was much easier going, but this did not last as the grade once again steepened and the footholds (and handholds) became harder to find. I *did* expect the Maharahara to be a challenge to Heather's fitness, as it required a climb of some 700 metres. What I did not anticipate was these sort of track conditions, which presented a challenge to me as well.

Above all, I struggled to conceive how anyone would contemplate actually **choosing** to negotiate this 'goat' track, let alone enjoy it. I think I could have invented some new end uses for a set of crampons and an ice-axe on a track like this. Unfortunately we had to settle for the bare-handed version of the North Wall technique. And, not having any ropes, it was the equally-innovative hand-in-hand "hauling one another up the hillside" technique when poor Heather found it just too hard going.

It soon became apparent that gaining height meant being further up in the clouds, as visibility was down to about 20 metres by now. A strong nor'wester was building up and a continuous drizzle had set in. The programme description sprung to mind once again: "Great views to the north and south, east and west..." (On second thoughts, it's just as well we couldn't see a bloody thing; I think if Heather could actually see how far up we still had to go, she would have fainted.)

We met Warren's group not far before the summit which brought some brief, light relief.

Vanessa: "Welcome to NZ tramping"  
Heather: "Great views, Warren"  
Warren: Hmmm...I might have to reconsider the E rating on this one"  
Magda: "This is horrible"

Vigorous discussion ensued on what really is the true meaning of the now dreaded "E" rating...Is it "Energetic"? Is it "Exhausting"? If so, then does it follow that "M" really means "Marathon"? and "F" mean "Forget it"?

Heather: "Are any walks H rated?"  
"H?"  
Heather: "Yes, you know, Horizontal..."

As we parted deep in critical thought, Warren cheer-ed us with a reminder that we had only about 15 minutes to go to the summit.

We reached the summit forty minutes later, stopping briefly for the only photo taken on the trip (Heather propped up against the "summit" post - watch out Topical Photo category 1996!). "At least it's level or downhill from here" sighed Heather. Alas new challenges revealed themselves ahead. Yes! In the Ruahines, by "level" what they really mean is one large composite of a series of short alternating near-vertical climbs and descents. [I think I'll write a book on NZ tramping lingo...a bit like a book on Real Estate sales jargon...you know, where terms like "handyman's delight" actually mean the house is a load of crap and will instantly fall over if you so much as lay a finger on it...]

Heather was becoming very weary by now as she slipped and fell several times, fortunately avoiding injury. The grade became kinder after the Keretaki Hut turnoff, where we made good progress for the first time all day. I can't say the track itself was necessarily kinder, as the Maharahara revealed yet another variation in its repertoire for us to contend with. Of this section Kathy Ambler's guide glows "...push your way gently through the flourishing giant snow grass and toetoe..." ...so 'flourishing' in fact, that you can't see the bloody track underneath. Appreciating the beauty of nature is somewhat of a tall order while you're hurtling horizontally forward after tripping up on that tree root so *cleverly* hidden below...

A 5-minute stand-up lunch in the now howling winds, and a fleeting glimpse of the Dannevirke plains through the cloud ahead urged us on to the last downhill stretch to the Mangapuaka River. "Disbelief" was certainly the word of the day, I think, and none more so than on this last downhill stretch. With a slope that felt like 50° nice firm but slimy mud, and a complete lack of footholds, the attributes of this section as a tramping route were more akin to a "mud luge", claiming Heather with another skating fall, while I managed to jam up my left knee straining to avoid same. With great relief we emerged onto the riverbed, headed downstream and turned left into Kumeti Hut. No track was signposted out to the carpark; we found a track that continued up the other side of the hut and figured this must be it. Our hearts sun in the fading light as the track suddenly became overgrown; we returned to the riverbed, thinking that this would at least lead out to farmland, and human contact.

To our relief we intercepted Trevor walking back up the riverbed past the Hut to look for us, and he confirmed that the track to the carpark was, in fact, the riverbed. We arrived after 5-30pm to a waiting hot coffee and a drive after dark back over the Saddle Road, home to the best hot bath in years. Palmerston North never felt so good.

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# HIGHLIFE

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Felix Collins