



# PALMERSTON NORTH TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING CLUB INC.

P.O. BOX 1217  
PALMERSTON NORTH  
NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 1995 Edition

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## ENQUIRES CONCERNING OVERDUE TRIPS

Mick Leyland : Ph. 358-3183  
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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), 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

## NOVEMBER

**NOVEMBER 9** Pete Barnes talking on mountaineering in Peru. Last year, Peter climbed some of the 6,000 m peaks in the Cordillera Blanca region of the Andes. This is one of the world's most impressive mountaineering areas.

**NOVEMBER 11-12** Open w/e Rangitaua All Llew/Jenny Prichard 358-2217  
Depart whenever. This weekend's event will be held at Sue and Lawson's place adjacent to Ohakune and the slopes of Mt Ruapehu, are always enjoyable. Scope for all sorts of activity; investigating old hut sites and tracks, a hidden hut and/or lake, the odd active volcano; tramping, climbing, skiing, walking, mountain biking, relaxing and good evening eating.

**NOVEMBER 11** Rangitikei rafting M Derek Sharp 326-8178  
One of the best stretches of river in the North Island. Being done with Rangitikei Whitewater Guides. (This trip was to have gone in September but was postponed due to river conditions). This is its new date with warmer water and weather. Ring Derek if you want to go as there may be some places available.

**NOVEMBER 12** Holdsworth M Patrick Janssen 356-3116  
Depart 7am A favourite peak to visit in from Masterton in the Tararua Ranges. Heading up through the forest of the Atiwakatu Valley and then either via the Mountain House track or the East Holdsworth loop onto the tops and Mt Holdsworth with its excellent views on the perfect fine and sunny day that has been ordered for the 12<sup>th</sup>.

**NOVEMBER 16** Thursday day trippers Judy Callesen 357-0192

**NOVEMBER 18-19** Rangi - Iron Gates – Oroua M Judy Callesen 357-0192  
Depart 7am A visit to a favourite part of the Western Ruahine Ranges: Up to Rangi hut and then onto the tops from Mangahuia, dropping down to the Oroua Valley and Triangle or Iron Gates hut for the night. On Sunday down river and/or track with a chance for a swim to cool off. Meeting up with the day trippers on the way.

**NOVEMBER 19** Oroua River Loop E/M Terry Crippen 356-3588  
Depart 8am A relaxing stroll up the sidle track along the Oroua Valley in the Western Ruahine Ranges, to Tunupo camp site. Then down the river for some water activities (the odd deep pool), sunbathing and lunch. Meeting up with the weekend trip along the way. If interested, give your names to Judy Callesen ph 357-0192.

**NOVEMBER 18-19** Rockslide Biv M Mick Leyland 358-3183  
Departs: 6am This trip is in the fine and sunny North-eastern Ruahines. We will head in via Masters Shelter through beech forest and some open tops to find the two person Rockslide Biv on the banks of the Ikawatea River. The loop will be completed via Aranga Hut. (Note this trip has been brought forward from the 25-26 Nov).

**NOVEMBER 23** Thursday day trippers Tony Cameron 356-5461

**NOVEMBER 25-26** Rockslide Biv brought forward to 18-19

**NOVEMBER 25-26** Otaki River by tube has been cancelled: Andrew has gone overseas.

**NOVEMBER 25-26** Snowcraft Extension F/Tech Nigel Barrett 326- 8847  
This is another chance to get practice in those skills learnt on snowcraft before you head off down south or just to build up experience. It will be climbing but not formal instruction. At this stage it appears that we will be going to Mt Egmont/Taranaki as Ruapehu is still showing who is boss in the world of mountains. (This trip was originally down for earlier this month but due to exam/rafting clashes and Ruapehu's activity it's now this weekend.)

**NOVEMBER 26** Te Atuaoparapara M/F Christine & Barry Scott 354-0510  
Departs: 7:30 am (from outside of the PN Police Station). This is a combined PNTHC/MTSC tramp. We will wander up to Sunrise Hut, in the Eastern Ruahine Ranges, for morning tea, followed by a traverse around the ridge to Te Atuaoparapara and Waipawa Saddle (weather permitting) and out down the Waipawa River. Approximately 7 hours of steady tramping in total.

**NOVEMBER 30** Thursday day trippers Russ Johnson 358-7777

**NOVEMBER 30** Club night Ruapehu, what it's been up to in the past and present. Dr Alan Palmer of the Soil Science Dept at Massey University will be giving an illustrated talk on the recent continuing volcanic activity of our favourite mountain. Its activity has been upsetting various climbing trips; skiing, travel etc, but has put on some great visual shows. Alan will also look at some of Ruapehu's volcanic history.

**DECEMBER 2-3** Egmont Nat Park M Malcolm Parker 357-5203  
Departs: 6 am Saturday. Heading to North Egmont we will tramp round to Holly Hut then head across the Ahuawakawa Swamp and onto the Pouakai Range where you get great views of the mountain and the New Plymouth coast. Saturday night at the Pouakai Hut. Sunday, the loop will be completed via the track past/over Maude and Henry Peaks.

**DECEMBER 3** North Range Rd MTB Stuart Hubbard 356-8782  
Departs: 10:30 am This is a popular local mountain bike ride. (It can also be done on a normal ten speed but a mountain bike is more comfortable) and it joins the Pahiatua Track to the Ballance Reserve on the east side of the Gorge. There are great views to be had of the Manawatu and southern Hawkes Bay. It's about 4-5 hours cycle depending on whether we use cars at both ends.

**DECEMBER 7** Thursday day trippers Bud & Nan Cade 358-8241

**DECEMBER 7** Committee meeting at 12 Jensen Street. All members, not just committee members, welcome.

**DECEMBER 9-10** Tukituki – Pourangaki F Derek Sharp 326-8178  
Departs: Friday 7 pm As we will have superb weather for the whole weekend we will walk up the Tukituki River on the Eastern Ruahine side, from the roadend, and camp out. Saturday, over the Sawtooth Ridge to camp at the top of the Pourangaki River. Sunday, down and out via Kelly Knight on the western side.

**DECEMBER 10** Oruakeretaki E/M Terry Crippen 356-3588  
Departs: 8 am This is an nearby and interesting wander up the Oruakeretaki Stream on the south-east side of the Ruahine Ranges. We then climb up to Kiritaki Hut, well situated for great views, on a spur south of Maharahara. There are various return possibilities.

**DECEMBER 14** Thursday day trippers Pam Wilson 357-6247

**DECEMBER 14** Club night Christmas B-B-Q at Brian's place.

## EDITORIAL

### RIVER SAFETY

How many of you have had problems crossing rivers? Without any effort I can think of at least two occasions for me. Once in the North Island on a trip up the Waipakihi in the Kaimanawa Ranges. We were heading upstream which involves 10 to 20 crossings. The first crossings downstream were easy; wide and shingley. Normally the flow gets less as you go up. But it began to rain and continued to rain all day. So as we went up river the combination, of the river becoming more confined and the continuous rain, caused the flow to get bigger and almost impossible to cross. We only just managed the last crossing to the hut.

A South Island example was heading down the Francis making for McCoy hut in the Clyde. We had decided to have a long lunch to dry out our gear after a wet descent from the Garden of Eden. So the last crossing, mid-afternoon, at a section of the Francis called the Sewer, was typical of what to expect from a glacially fed river mid afternoon. We were swept down stream! We all managed to get to the bank the hut was on, minus some gear. We needed a couple of days to recover before we could continue.

The lesson was reinforced by us becoming quite short on food, except for rolled oats. So it was porridge for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Have you ever tried fried porridge fritters?

Anyhow the purpose of mentioning these bad river crossings: There has been major changes in the recommended methods of crossing rivers, going downstream once swept away, and exiting them. These new methods have been developed through the work of the NZ Mountain Safety Council. They will be featured in the new edition of the Bushcraft Manual (due out hopefully for Christmas). Some club members recently underwent instruction on these methods.

In short the techniques now recommended are:

(a) For crossing rivers: holding onto each other's packstraps, at waist level, by having the arms between the pack and the back of the two people each side of you. Waist straps tight (buckle easily accessible) but shoulder straps loose. In each hand you are firmly holding two separate pack straps, i.e. a total of four (unless you are the end person). The strongest person does not have to be on the upstream end.

(b) If you end up going downstream: You float head first (looking upstream) on your back on top of your pack with the waist strap still done up. This way your pack protects you from rocks etc. and your feet are less likely to get snagged.

(c) TO EXIT: Keep in above position looking over a shoulder, until some quieter water is reached, then kicking and using your arms, swing your feet round with the current until your feet are about 20 degrees away from the downstream direction. Using the current, your arms and feet, head into a safe landing.

(d) Waist strap precautions. Make sure any clothing, parka etc is well folded away under your waist strap (which is done up tight), so that it does not ride up with the water making it impossible to release if it does get snagged. practice releasing the buckle on dry land by having somebody pulling you along backwards by your packstrap!

Check the above methods with somebody experienced, and get some instruction. Remember we are dealing with river safety so don't cross unless it is safe to do SO. Look for a better crossing point, wait for the river to go down (even if that means an extra day or so). And don't forget glacial feed rivers rise as the day progresses and the snow starts to thaw.

Terry

## **NOTICES**

### **THURSDAY TRIPS**

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

### **CHANGE OF PHONE**

Maree Limpus can now be contacted on 025-525-715.

### **FMC MEMBERSHIP CARDS**

If there are any members (most likely recent members) who have not received a FMC membership card, please contact Peter Wiles, as we have received additional cards to fulfil expected needs.

### **SUNHATS**

Yes. We are placing an order for club monogrammed sunhats (15) and caps (5). Obviously limited supplies so if you are looking for something unique for Christmas, these could be the ideal gift.

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

Planning for the next six months of club events (trips and club evenings) is well under way with the Events card now in draft form. Terry has been trying to contact all the potential leaders for future trips. If he hasn't reached you by phone yet don't despair. Give him a call (356-3588) and he will gladly accept your offers). The Events card will come out with the December/January newsletter.

### **CLUB T-SHIRTS FOR SALE**

The club still has a number of T-shirts with the clubs modified logo on them. Colour and sizes are: SM blue, M red and fawn. This is your last chance to buy one of these as the club is about to change over to marketing Club sun hats. T-shirts are at the bargain price of \$5 – see Terry at club night or phone him on 3563-588.

### **NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING November**

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 Peter's place, 12 Jensen Street. All members welcome.

### **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.

## **EASIER SUMMER TRIP**

Lawson and Sue Pither are planning a trip of about 8 days duration (inclusive of rest days) into the Kaimanawa -Kaweka region in the period 20-30th January. It is expected that there will be up to 6 h tramping per day. If interested contact Sue and Lawson.

## **PHOTOALBUM AND SCRAPBOOK**

I have a confession to make; having accused various people of having lost these treasured items, I have found them in my possession. I was looking for something else and they turned up, but I am still looking for the original thing.

# **TRIP REPORTS**

## **TUNUPO & IRON GATES.** 16-17 September by Andy Backhouse

The day began with cloud, light winds and eight of us at the Oroua River above Iron Gates gorge. The brief walk down to head into the bush was soon over with only an odd comment about ski-poles for dwarves. Up the ridge we went, through the bush, climbing erratically. As we began to emerge into more open tops, the low cloud and drizzle were compounded by the strengthening wind. Sadly the visibility prevented all the good views except glimpses down snow-filled gullies as the track narrowed. Ice-axes came out, needed more for security in case of a gust catching the pack at a tricky moment. Quite suddenly, we were at the top. We fiddled with clothing and compasses, trying not to lose anything to the North-Westerly. Terry led us off on a bearing until the route onwards became more obvious. The crosswind made progress slow, and tactics perfected on Windcraft 3 were useful once more. Ways down through the mist to alternative ridges were pointed out but I'm not sure I'd recognise them on a clear day. Then off on another bearing to the track down. Once in the bush, there was shelter, drizzle (again) and mud, but we were at least going down and soon the river could be heard. Alistair had already started on the stove when the rest of us arrived.

Next morning Alistair was off early, having an orchestra practice that afternoon. Fortunately the river was not too high with the overnight rain, and we stumbled along the side track as it left the river slowly. Lunch at the Steerdorkers' hut where the purists sat outside to enjoy the outdoor experience while the rest of us went inside to escape the rain. And then a quick walk back to the cars, an excellent trip but the weather could have been better. Those present: Terry, Bridget, Zoe, Andy, Alistair, Ron, Lynn & Peter.

## **RIVER SAFETY COURSE** 8th October By Terry Crippen

This was an afternoon instruction course run by the Manawatu branch of the Mountain Safety Council. Noel Bigwood instructed us on the latest methods of crossing rivers and exiting the waters if we get swept down stream!! (See earlier for a summary of techniques.) The oldies in the group had to forget about linking arms, using ropes and floating feet first!! After some on-land discussion and linking up it was into the Pohangina River for some action. A few crossings and then some being swept downstream and exiting practice. We all kept having more goes at this, the water was great. Not cold at all. Then back to PN for tea and bikkies at Heather's and John's. In all, a worthwhile afternoon. Thanks Noel and MSC. There was about a dozen on the course, those from PNTMC were John and Heather Phillips, Alistair Millward, Richard Lockett, Warren Wheeler./ Terry Crippen.

## **SMEDLEY MEDLEY** October 29<sup>th</sup>

This was a navigation/map-use exercise at a fast pace, done as part of the Search and Rescue training programme for the Palmerston North Police/SAR region. Pairs from the various tramping clubs, MSC and police took part together with proper orienteers, on a series of courses on Smedley Station which backs onto the Wakarara Ranges in Hawkes Bay. Most trampers did the 14.5 km course, with a total height gain (and loss) of about 1000m, with pack and boots.

At one stage Alistair and I met Warren and John going in completely the opposite direction. They argued that they had taken the scenic route to checkpoint 4! At another point, with minimal visibility but plenty of mist around, we met a lone person who was about to clock into checkpoint 8 for a second time. We had to convince him that he had just gone in a complete circle round a patch of bush! But it was our turn to become partially

unstuck when we encountered what could be called a mini Grand Canyon when we decided to take a direct route between two checkpoints. And there was no indication of it on the map!

It was a enjoyable way to learn/practice our navigation and route finding skills. PNTMC's pairs were Alistair Millward & Terry Crippen, and John Phillips & Warren Wheeler.

### **TAMA LAKES** Labour Weekend Day Trip by Peter Wiles

It was a waste of time listening to the weather forecast. The forecast for Sunday sounded the most promising but was probably the worst of the three days. However it was passable.

We reached the carpark across the road from park HQ shortly before 8 am. The weather was fine but there was lots of low and high cloud about. As we headed along the track to Tama Lakes, the low cloud slowly drifted about and we could see clearly Ngauruhoe and further on Ruapehu in the very flat dull lighting. Ruapehu (northern slopes) were covered in grey ash deposits, which suggested some recent activity.

We made steady progress in the cool calm conditions, arriving at the lower lake at about 11 am. Light rain started. It was impossible to tell whether it was a passing shower or not. It persisted. We then continued on up to the ridge over looking the upper lake. Clouds were drifting about us - so the views were intermittent. We had an early, but much needed lunch, sitting on patches of snow totara over looking the upper lake. There were several patches of snow close by.

After a brief lunch we continued around the rim of the lower lake - fumbling our way a bit in the cloud. We emerged and admired the better views of the lower lake. Once we reached the round-the-mountain track we headed down the track as far as Taranaki Falls. (If the weather had been more favourable, we could have explored the lava fields on the lower slopes of Ruapehu.) Back at the falls, we opted to tack the lower track back to the Chateau. The journey through the bush was a considerable change from the barren ground about the lakes. The rain had eased by now although the bush was still wet.

Back at the cars, we spent some time looking at the displays in park HQ of the volcanic activities. Then it was time for the return home.

Team: Sarah Todd, Dale Lockart, Margaret Riordan, Bin Chang (Southern China) and Jiao Chan (Northern China), David Larsen, Christine Kelly and Peter Wiles.

### **AN ASPIRING SOLO SKI TOUR** 1- 5 Oct by Andy Backhouse

Having planned a ski trip to Wanaka as long ago as the winter before, I found myself without anyone to go climbing with. Too many avalanches, too busy at work, can only take university holidays; watertight excuses, all of them. I had said I'd leave Zoe with her sister for a week to go tramping whilst I went climbing. I could hire a guide, but that would be an expensive way to have all the decisions made for me or I could chicken out for the cafes of Queenstown, and no-one would ever have known.

But I couldn't do that, so I visited DOC: "Someone was in the park 3 weeks ago & said the French Ridge hut toilet was snowed up, he didn't get much further." Harris Mtns Heliski were more helpful. 4 people, 2 of them guides had planned to fly in to Bevan Col that day. I hired a transceiver, not sure if I might find any use for it alone. The weather looked good for the next two days, time to get in but not out, I mused. A helicopter could have solved that problem but it's an expensive way to get lost on the way home. But a trip was feasible even if the weather didn't last long enough to allow me to climb much. I planned a route. The route to Bevan Col was exposed to avalanche danger on difficult slopes, so French Ridge was the only way, probably via the Quarter Deck. I would take skis & ski touring boots and ski the Bonar to Colin Todd Hut, then perhaps try Aspiring. I figured I could be fast alone and on skis where possible.

So on Sunday I set off with a huge pack laden with skis and food rather later than planned. Zoe and her sister Tracy walked with me to a lunch spot about half an hour up the west branch of the Matukituki from the road end. I carried on alone in glorious sunshine with clearing views of the surrounding peaks. In spite of weight it was a lovely walk. I met two climbers coming out between Cascade and Aspiring huts, similarly weighed down by skis. They had failed on Mt Tyndall but reassured me that the high avalanche risk that forced them back would be less on the more southerly slopes I would be using.

At the river forks, I made the mistake of following the track. Trees were down everywhere and bush-bashing with skis on your back is hard work. I spotted 3 guys downstream on the other side below some rapids starting to ford the river on their way out from French ridge. I tried to press on to catch them before they left, keen to know about conditions higher up but got entangled in worse slips. At one point, having lost the track entirely

and simply keeping the stream on one side and hillside on the other, I tried to negotiate a swamp by walking along an old rotten log. The new trees down had other ideas entangling my skis and tipping me off balance 'till I lay like a beetle on my pack with arms and legs helpless in the air. Struggling to get out of this without losing my whole pack/ I failed to notice my camera fall from under the compression strap holding it. I began the climb up French Ridge now sure that it would go dark before I reached the hut. I could carry on but I might miss it if it was indistinct amongst so much snow. Not knowing for sure, I opted for a bivi on the ridge using snow or tarps for water. I had all I needed to do this and it was set for a lovely night. After 500m of climbing up, bumping into trees, backing down and trying again in a more stooped position to get my skis through the bush, I realised I'd lost my camera. Just as the sun set beautifully on Mt. Barff, I organised my bivouac. There was little wind, a half moon, plenty of stars and a solitary kea to provide me with quite a sleepless night. I was warm and comfortable but was half expecting the Quarterdeck to be out-of-bounds the next day.

I was woken by the dawn, not having heard my alarm: ironic since I had only fallen asleep at 3 am. I dressed quickly, brewing and packing at the same time and set off for French Ridge Hut and a weather forecast. I got there at 9 am after 1¾ hours. The toilet was accessible and the forecast fine 'till Wednesday. Things were looking good. As I carried on up, the Quarterdeck came into view; from a distance there was debris everywhere and it looked frightening, but on closer inspection, most that could come down had, sweeping across the slope and down into Gloomy Gorge, 1000 m below. Not a nice prospect. All the crevasses were filled but the bergshroud was smallest at its right hand limit -right above the drop into the gorge. The alternative route, the Breakaway had an enormous cornice across its full width. So it was the Quarterdeck or nothing.

I stopped on safe ground below and took skis and skins off. I wanted no unnecessary stops in avalanche terrain. Then a speedy trip up the last few hundred metres finding that the party I had seen before had turned the schrund on the right, at its lowest but most exposed point. As I was tackling this not having the security of rope, an extra incentive appeared in the form of two figures above me. They were two of the 4 who had flown in, and were on their way out after an ascent of Aspiring the day before. Conditions had been excellent, an 8 hour return trip from Colin Todd hut via the "Ramp" and the N-W ridge. My route seemed to be on.

Gaining the Bonar glacier at last, I smiled and cursed at the same time. There were no clouds anywhere. Aspiring was better than any picture postcard, clad in white with the early season snow. But I had no camera to record the glorious sight. I had lunch, chatting to the other two, or rather one, as the other was looking forlornly at his feet and muttering to himself in a tired sort of way. After about half an hour, I put my skis on to experience some of the reward for dragging them up there. Skiing the Bonar was superb. No-one in sight, a gentle gradient so I didn't have to worry about skiing too hard with my pack on, and all around fairy tale peaks. The crevasses were well filled and a route easy to find. I would have had to try hard to fall in a crevasse today. Twenty-five minutes to cover seven kilometres, including stops to admire the view! Knowing I had all afternoon to get to the hut, the climb up from the glacier was taken slowly and I reached the hut at 2.40pm.

Recuperating, rehydrating and planning my trip for the next day, discovered Clive and Bruce's account in the hut log and realised how different it had all been for them in the preceding autumn. Surprisingly there had only been three trips in as far as Colin Todd in between, and so PNTMC features twice on the same page in the log.

In the early evening, Phil Penney from Mt. Aspiring Guides, and his client, Adam, from Sydney turned up. After a chat for an hour, Phil suggested a skin up the Shipowner Ridge to ski down the Iso glacier, just for fun. Adam's climbing boots made skiing hard work so Phil and I made a half hour return trip part way up, zig-zagging up the ridge before traversing. A recent avalanche on the Iso and the evening sun made this a good time for a transceiver and a partner. It was good to have no pack and someone to share the experience with. The Iso was, certainly steep enough to test my skiing ability. Phil also works for a heliskiing operation and it showed! He even showed me how to take skins off without removing skis, a new trick at the end of a wonderful day. Then back to the hut for the mountain forecast and the alpenglow turning the peaks orange. Damn that camera.

5.30 am we all got up. Phil and Adam were planning ice climbing on Pope's Nose and then to go out to French ridge. We were all ready at 7.30. I was taking all my gear with to the base of the Ramp. It would give me more options including a bid for French Ridge if time went well.

Hard cramponing snow allowed a contouring traverse to the slopes below the Ramp. After an hour I dumped what I didn't need into my bivi bag and belayed it to my skis. I took a bearing on the base of the Ramp and noted the altitude, knowing that the weather was forecast to deteriorate late in the day. Moving much faster uphill now free of some weight, I knew that my main security on the Ramp, was speed to ensure I travelled it in good conditions both ways and care to ensure no slips. Using both ice-tools all the way it was in excellent condition though alone with the exposure I wished it to end. It took about an hour to climb the Ramp, making 2½

h from the hut to the small col on the N-W ridge. Suddenly I was in sunshine, with views all the way to Mts Cook, Tasman, and Sefton to the north, and Mt Tutoko to the south. Cloud covered the Therma glacier below but the skies above were clear.

After a drink I set off up the ridge knowing that I could make the summit but not wanting to be too long for the route down. The snow slope above made progress straight forward and I reached the summit at 11.20. I spent a minute or two looking at the severe Coxcomb Ridge and called out to the two dots way below on Pope's Nose, but it was getting windier and I had no camera to record the moment so I headed quickly down. As I approached the top of the Ramp at noon, the northerly wind was pushing warm clouds over the N-W ridge onto the Bonar and I knew I would be best to hurry.

Going down the Ramp, I felt the exposure less acutely but constant use of reversed curved picks for an hour was hard on my hands. The snow was still in fine condition having received no sunshine yet. I abseiled the small 'shrund at the bottom on a snow bollard and then walked down towards my gear. The snow was now balling up under my crampons on these lower slopes and the streaks of avalanche debris provided periodic welcome relief until I switched to boots alone.

Back at my gear I knew that this was a bad place to be as the snow warmed up so it was time to put skis on and traverse to an exit onto the glacier proper. My first attempt at this put me just above a 1m high crown wall about to ski off it with full pack and all. The overhead cloud had reduced my ability to see this hazard until I was almost on it. With relief I turned myself around and found an easier route down onto the Bonar and even put in a few good turns on the way.

Finally out of danger I had lunch and put skis on and headed for the centre of the glacier. I picked up my downhill tracks by their distinctive (i.e. bad) style and followed them back up. For 1¾ hours with the wind behind me and my tracks to follow there was no need for proper navigation, just a rough idea of altitude and glimpses of landmarks I was passing when the cloud occasionally lifted, it now lying thick on the glacier surface. Back at the Quarterdeck, I talked myself through another abseil rather than risk the very edge of Gloomy gorge so late in the day. A quick tramp across the debris to skiable ground and a marvellous ski down French ridge to the hut at 7 pm.

That night it snowed and sleeted. I was meeting Zoe at the road end in two days so a slow start was enjoyed. I was able to ski down the first 400 m of descent, despite the sleet and rain, before walking on down the ridge track. I managed to find my camera; damp but working. I even managed to ford the streams as I should have on the way in. After a cold night at Aspiring Hut with all my gear wet and only the mice for company, I walked out the next day in glorious sunshine and stripped off my wet gear at the road end and waited. I got sunburnt of course - serves me right. Anyone for the South-West Ridge?