

PALMERSTON NORTH TRAMPING AND MOUNTAINEERING CLUB INC.

P.O. BOX 1217
PALMERSTON NORTH

NEWSLETTER

February 1997 Edition

Club Patron	:	Lawson Pither	357-3033
President	:	Terry Crippen	356-3588
Vice President	:	Tony Gates	357-7439
Secretary	:	Warren Wheeler	
Treasurer	:	Peter Wiles	358-6894
Membership Enquires	:	Liz Flint 356-7654 and Warren Wheeler 356-1998	
Trips co-ordinators	:	Terry Crippen (356-3588) and Liz Flint (356-7654)	
Gear Custodian	:	Mick Leyland	358-3183
Newsletter Editor	:	John Philips	358-1874

ENQUIRIES CONCERNING OVERDUE TRIPS

Mick Leyland	:	Ph. 358-3183
Terry Crippen	:	Ph. 356-3588
Sue & Lawson Pither	:	Ph. 357-3033

TRIPS OFTEN LEAVE FROM THE FOOTOWN 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 (Wednesday or Thursday) SEE DETAILS BELOW, OR RING Liz Flint (356-7654), or Lawson and Sue Pither (357-3033), or Monica (326-9691).

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 tramer 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. Beginners should start with Easy graded tramps.

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.

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 7:30 pm during winter and 7:45 pm during summer unless otherwise notified in the newsletter. The PNTMC committee meets on the first Thursday of each month.

Deadline for notices and trip reports for inclusion in newsletter:
LAST THURSDAY of each month.

SCHEDULED EVENT LIST

NOTE TO TRIP LEADERS: PLEASE DISCUSS WITH THE TRIPS CONVENOR (TERRY 356-3588), 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.

FEB 13 Midweek tramping Neville Gray 357-2768

FEB 13 Club Night: Nepal and the Himalayas Robin Ross

Robin has spent much of the past 5 years living and working in Manali in the Indian Himalayas, and takes mainly New Zealanders on trekking, mountain biking and 4WD safari adventures to Leh in Ladakh. Robin has also built a house in a tiny village near Manali, which serves as a homestay for clients to acclimatise, and mingle with the local Himalayan Mountain People. Robin will be talking on these experiences & all are welcome to come along to her talk. The first meeting in the hall for the year.

FEB 15-16 Sunrise, Wakelins Hut F Llew Pritchard 358-2217

Depart 6:30 am Sat. A crossing of the Ruahines. From the Waipawa side, into the Maropea and the Waikamaka to the hut. Coming out via the Mokai Patea Range. Tops, good bush and easy river travel.

FEB 16 Titahi Bay rockclimbing all,T Peter Darragh 323-4498

Depart 8am. All grades of climbing available. A day on the coast. Top-rope to make it straight forward if you want. So come along with lunch, suitable clothing (and swimming gear).

FEB 20 Midweek tramping Jill Spenser 329-8738

FEB 22-23 Hapuakorari, Lake Oriwa F Tony Gates 357-7439

Depart early Saturday morning. Lake Oriwa and Oriwa Biv are hidden gems deep in the heart of the Tararua beech forest of the upper Otaki. This is bush tramping at its best, fairly strenous, but rewarding, following the ridge to Waiopahu, then south to the lake. Probably return via the Makaretu.

FEB 23 Harris Creek E/M Liz Flint 356-7654

Depart 8:30 am (leaving from the PN Police station). A nice walk in on the track next to the river. Leisurely lunch, swimming then back via the river bed swimming again if you like. A combined trip with MTSC.

FEB 27 Midweek tramping Doug Wakeling 323-4127

FEB 27 Club Night Massey Rock Wall Andy Backhouse 353-0774

Another chance for everybody to have a go at indoor climbing, as a starter or as an expert. Top-ropes can be used to make it straight forward. Starting at 7:45 pm, Massey University Recreation Centre, turn off at the top of the ring-road. Bring suitable clothing.

MARCH 1-2 Waiohine Gorge tubing M+tube Nigel Barrett 326-8847

Tubing Tararua gorges is a tradition stretching back many years, where you carry a well waterproofed pack, wear wet suit and helmet, blonk your posterior into a well inflated tractor tube, and let the river do the hard work (well, you do some pretty frantic paddling at times). Nigel plans to visit the remote central Tararuas, over from Powell Hut, and then down the Mid Waiohine Gorge to Totara Flats, then Walls Whare. A fantastic spot, definitely not for the faint hearted.

MARCH 2 Te Atuaoparapara M/F Christine Scott 354-0510

Depart 7:30 am from PN Police Station. This is one of our favourite areas of tussock and open tops in the northern Ruahines. Its just past Sunrise Hut, (which is also a favourite spot), and climbs the big hill right to the top. Good views, and a loop back via Waipawa Saddle. Bring a good water bottle. (This is a combined PNTMC / MTSC trip)

MARCH 2 Tunupo-Toka M+F David Grant 357-8269

Depart 7am. Just behind Apiti, Toka and Tunupo trigs are on the tussock tops of the Ruahine Range, and overlook the headwaters of the Pohangina Valley, and much of the Oroua as well. This trip will hopefully climb up one track, traverse the Ngamoko Range for a couple of hours, then descend the other track.

MARCH 6 Midweek tramping Monica Cantwell 356-9691

MARCH 6 Committee meeting, at Andy and Zoe's place, 50 Hillcrest Drive. Starts 7:30pm.

MARCH 8-9 Jumbo, Powell M Judy Callesen 357-0192

Depart 7:30 am from PN Police Station. This is the most well known circuit of the Tararuas. It has two well appointed huts, well used tracks and plenty of open tops. Good variety of vegetation and scenery. This is also a combined PNTMC / MTSC trip.

MARCH 8-9 SAREX M/F Warren Wheeler 356-1998

Two teams of 4 will be involved in this weekend Search and Rescue exercise in the Manawatu Gorge area. The programme includes training in helicopter safety, GPS technology, radio use, track & clue awareness, First Aid, and contact searching and procedures when locating a victim. This will be followed by an overnight exercise. Contact Warren ASAP if you would like to go - before he asks you!

MARCH 9 Kapakapanui M Llew Pritchard 358-2217

A great day trip in the western Tararuas, south of Otaki. Good bush and easy open tops giving excellent views of the Waikanae coast. Join Llew for a medium relaxing day.

MARCH 13 Midweek tramping Judy Stockdale 355-5277

MARCH 13 Club Night "Glaciers" Bruce Van Brunt

Bruce will give an illustrated talk on glaciers, what they are, and what their important features are from a tramping / climbing / navigation point of view: slots, schrunds, etc. Mount Rainier and other Northern Hemisphere glaciated mountains will be used as examples. A good lead up to the club's glaciocraft course.

MARCH 15-16 Wharepapa South rock T Andy Backhouse 353-0774

Depart Sat 6am. This is a relatively new rock climbing area near Te Kuiti, well developed with good camping at the adjacent school with facilities. A wider range of easier climbs than Whanganui Bay as well as hard climbing on ignimbrite rock. So come along!

MARCH 15-16 Ruahine Corner 4WD/family Dennis Moore 357-5651

Depart Friday night. Ruahine Corner is on the edge of a high tussock plateau in the Northern Ruahines. There is an airstrip for those that way inclined, and a farm track to walk, drive, or ride along, to the pleasantly appointed hut. A good spot, with fascinating botany. Contact Dennis early to book your seat. Bring a few luxuries in the four wheel drive vehicles!

MARCH 18 (Tues) Glaciircraft evening (for glaciircraft participants)

This is an instructional evening to prepare for the glaciircraft weekend. Roping up for glacier travel will be practiced, and prusick loops made to suit participants (you will be required to buy cord to make them). Full details and venue from Bruce on 328-4761. (NOTE: Prerequisite for this and the glaciircraft weekend is Snowcraft II or equivalent).

MARCH 20 Midweek tramping Liz Flint 356-7654

MARCH 22-23 Glaciircraft/climbing M, I Bruce Van Brunt 328-4761

NOTE: Prerequisite Snowcraft II or equivalent, and the Tuesday evening session. Follow up to Snowcraft and brush up for mountaineers. This trip will be held on the Mangaehuehu Glacier on the southern slopes of Mt Ruapehu. Glacier travel, navigation on glaciers, and basic extraction from slots. (One or two days - details from Bruce).

MARCH 23 Richards Knob M Richard Lockett 323-0948

Depart 7am. In the Ohau catchment of the Tararuas. Good access, good tracks, and good tramping. Richard will lead you up towards Richards Knob via Gable Edge Ridge for an enjoyable day tramp.

MARCH 27 Midweek tramping David Ross 06 376-7139

MARCH 27 Club Night Wine & Cheeze & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This is it, your big chance to have a vote, have a discussion, and join in on club administration. This evening will NOT be boring, the AGM business will be sorted out promptly, then there will be the serious stuff like wine and cheese, coffee and chocolate cake, and nattering to your friends and showing off photographs. NOTE: Please have all nominations for positions of Patron, President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and general committee members given in writing to the Secretary before the start of the AGM.

EASTER

MARCH 28-APRIL 1 (Tues) Nelson Lakes F,T or M/F Terry Crippen 356-3588

Departure: straight after the AGM on Thurs night! Nelson Lakes is a great place to go tramping / climbing: big valleys, great beech forest and interesting tops and peaks. And its not really too far from PN. Two possibilities: Either a climbing trip to attempt Mts Travers and Cupola from summit creek up the Travers Valley. Or a classic Travers-Sabine tramp via Travers Saddle and Lake Angelus. The trip that will run depending on which car Terry can use (ie will the rusty Datsun get its next WOF?)

Easter Eggmont M/F Warren Wheeler 356-1998

A full moon opportunity to climb Mt Egmont and camp out on top or, for the slightly less adventurous, a one day trip on Easter Sunday (we'll pick the day to suit the weather). This trip can be simply a rock scramble or an ice-climb depending on the conditions. The proposed route is via East Ridge but north or south options are also possibilities.

EDITORIAL

Well, the first newsletter edition of the new year is a thin one, which belies the multitude of trips undertaken by members so far this summer. The rather ordinary weather up to Christmas took a turn for the better, fortunately, for many of the trips over the summer break.

Firstly there was the Matemateaonga trip straight after Christmas, which might have included the original trip leader had he not 'done' his achilles tendon! See Heather's full trip report in this issue. I had seriously considered this club walk but the timing did not suit. However, Heather's account was sufficiently alluring to convince me to do a tramp somewhere in the forested hills of this area. I opted for a smaller, more accessible three day round trip (which turned into a two day back-the-way-we-came trip!) in the Waitotara Valley area to the south of Matemateaonga, of which there is also an account in this issue.

I have noticed that the club conducts very few tramps into the Whanganui NP / Waitotara Forest area, something I find a little surprising having done a tramp there now. I suppose one's initial expectation of these forests might be on the 'boring' side, looking at the vast sameness of the landscape on a map. But it was this very vastness that strangely interested me about the area in the first place. While most of my tramping in my first 18 months in NZ has been in the more immediate and obviously spectacular Tararua and Ruahine Ranges, I have always found something detractive about always having distant towns and farmland in view whenever one gets up onto a ridge. Apart from detracting from the 'wilderness' feeling that should be a part of tramping, having civilisation in constant view seems to remind me that it can't be too long before I'm back there!

Once a few hours into these Whanganui forests, however, you really do get the feeling that your well out in the bush. Sure, clear views from the ridges are not all that frequent, but what could have been a frustration almost seemed quite tantalising in a way. And of course the forest itself more than makes up for any lack of views. These podocarp forests were really different from the beech-dominated forest of our eastern ranges. Despite the ubiquitous signs of feral goats, I thought the Whanganui forests were superb.

There have been a wide range of trips by club members this summer. Apart from the Matemateaonga and Waitotara trips mentioned above, Terry conducted his 2-week Arthurs Pass trip (with Kristin Stokes and Nigel Scott) which must almost be a standard annual event for the club now. I've already mentioned the excellent weather we had. Well . . . just as an example, Terry tells me his 2-week trip to Arthurs Pass had half a day of bad weather! Not all went to plan, however, with an alpine trip by Peter Wiles, Derek Sharp and Nigel Barrett failing to bag Mt Brewster (near Haast Pass). However, they had a more successful tramp in the Cascade River - Red Hills - Big Bay area. That sounds like it would be a great trip account to read.

Other trips I have heard of include: a few days by Terry, Peter and Barry Scott in Nelson Lakes NP, which included Cupola Basin and a traverse of Mt Hopeless; Terry and Nigel spent a couple of days on Ruapehu climbing Paretataitonga and checking out the Crater; and Peter Darragh and Warren Wheeler tackled the Judd Ridge - Anderson - Waiteawaewae loop in the Tararuas.

Of course, with all this flurry of summer tramping and climbing activity, and such a smorgasbord of tantalising destinations, trip participants can expect an editor harrassing them for trip reports over the coming month - next edition should be a bumper one! We all hope to hear about your travels!

NOTICES

A note from your friendly editor, John Phillips...

TRIP REPORTS AND OTHER NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

To all of you who would like to contribute articles to this newsletter, small articles are okay hand-written (deliver to John Phillips, 87 Victoria Avenue), but it makes my job a bit easier if larger articles are on disc. Even better, if you have the facilities at home or at work, why not "e-mail" it to me at my work e-mail address which is PHILLIPS@MWRC.GOV.T.NZ.

PLEASE NOTE that I am now editing exclusively on Microsoft Word, and am no longer using Microsoft Works software. If you use any other software, give me a ring on 357-9009 (work) or 358-1874 (home) and I may be able to indicate whether it is compatible or not. If in doubt, a pretty safe bet is to send any files in an ".RTF" (Rich Text File) format, which can be easily converted from one software format to another.

Please note the deadline for each month's issue on the front page of the newsletter.

CLUB BADGES

The club now has cloth badges for sale (\$4 each) for sewing onto packs, shirts, etc. See Liz Flint at Club night, or phone her on 356-7654.

MANAIA TRACK STILE

Llew Pritchard, under the "guidance" of Mick Leyland, built and installed the stile over the fence at the start of the Manaia track into the Western Ruahines. This track begins across John & Jennifer Stent's land. John and Jennifer were club members earlier on. Thanks Llew.

TRIP REPORTS

MATEMATEONGA WALKWAY (WHANGANUI NATIONAL PARK) 27-30 DEC by Heather Gatehouse

Members of the party: Laurence, Toby, Richard, Vera, Gina, Stewart, Margaret, Iain, Grant, Christine, Jonathan and myself.

We assembled at Malcolm's place at 7:30 on the Friday morning, only to discover that Malcolm had injured his Achilles' tendon and so was unable to join us on the walk, assigning Toby Bunn as leader in his place. We drove over to Wanganui, to the River City Jet Tours' base, and from there were driven out, via Stratford and a lunch stop, to the Kohi Saddle entrance to the walkway. By this time (about 1pm), it was clear that we were going to have a good hot start to the walk. So, heavy packs donned, we set off.

The first hut (Omaru Hut) was only about 1½ hours into the walkway. We took it gently as the path wound its way up onto the top of the ridge. The heat of summer that had kicked in over Christmas was still with us and we all arrived at the hut thoroughly glowing! There were mutterings about going further that afternoon, perhaps spending the first night at Humphries Hut (3½ hours away), but most people seemed more than happy to stay put, so we settled in for the night. Radio sked

time provided for a little light entertainment during the evening as we discovered (just after 8pm, the time of our sked) that the permanent aerial set up over the hut, that we were attempting to use, was running North-South, not East-West as we'd thought! A little frantic running about and climbing trees resulted in us picking up the signal just in time to answer to our set number! Phew! A lesson learnt, I think! Sked-time over, Grant disappeared off clutching a mattress from the hut and set up his tent a little way along a side path. Laurence and I also plumped for the relative cool of the outdoors and pitched our tent in front of the hut, and Christine and Toby took up positions on the veranda, only for everyone to be woken in the night by Toby waking up nose to nose with what he later claimed to be one of the rarely seen giant-possums, over a metre long he claimed!

The cool of the dawn encouraged us all to be up early and get some distance under our belts before the day heated up too much. We reached the junction of the side track to Mt. Humphries with reasonable ease, so we ditched our packs and made the ascent, only to find that Grant (who had left first from the hut) was already up there and drying his washing!!!! The views from the top were wonderful - certainly made up for the disappointment of all the false summits of the ascent! Sadly the day was quite hazy, so no great views of the volcanoes. Then it was back down to the track, pick up the packs and carry on to Humphries Hut for lunch. Here we realised how glad we were that we hadn't come this far the previous day - not one of the more plush huts! Making a move from our little patches of shade back into the heat of the day took more than a little effort, and as we plodded along that last hour towards Pouri Hut, we cast all thoughts of going further that day out of our heads. Had the weather been a little cooler then maybe, but drained by the heat, and after probably too long a break at Humphries Hut the enthusiasm had waned somewhat. The track from Oamaru to Pouri Hut was clear and easy going, despite a number of slips (how recent was difficult to assess) and some patches of good thick mud. At Pouri Hut we met the only other person we saw on the track, a guy from New Plymouth, walking the track the opposite way to us, i.e. from the river to the road end. He encouraged us about the lack of mud on the latter part of the track, and he soon took his leave to squelch his way to the joys of Humphries Hut for the night.

With a full day's tramp ahead of us again on the Sunday, we made another early start and reached Otaraheke Hut before the sun really switched on for midday. By this time we had become a rather dispersed group of trampers, travelling in smaller groups, each at its own pace. After negotiating a huge fallen tree on the way, we ate lunch at Ngapurua shelter (a far nicer option for a night than the Otaraheke Hut I'd have said, and a good area for camping), and then headed on towards Puketotara Hut for the final night. At this point we started to really debate the value of the distance markers throughout the track. These count you down as you travel along the track, but reach zero at this final hut. All well and good, but as the day heats up and you slow down, its debatable as to whether the markers are helpful, counting the kilometres down as you go, or whether they just stress how much further you still have to go! It was certainly popular belief that the final kilometre was the longest! When everyone had arrived at the hut it became clear that Grant, who had fallen behind earlier in the day to do some bird-watching, was well behind the others. We spent some time worrying about what disasters might have happened to him, and Toby some time talking about what would happen to him when he finally turned up, before Toby, Laurence and myself set off back down the track. About a kilometre along the path we met him, sauntering along happily, timed easily to get back before the 8pm sked time. Back at the hut, we happily awaited the sked time, assured that all in the party were safe, only to hear that Cyclone Fergus was due to strike during the following day - thank goodness we were on our way out, but would we be off the river before the big winds came? With that thought, only Christine braved the outdoors that night, the rest of us taking to the shelter of the hut and braving the shouting, snuffles and snores that originated from various members of the party.

The next morning dawned cooler and cloudy, and by the time we had eaten and packed a fine drizzle had set in. The walk down to the river wasn't half as bad as I'd expected from the descriptions that Toby had given (so where was the vertical cliff? or was that just from memories of last time having to climb up it?!). We were all down by the river about half an hour before Roger was due to arrive to pick us up. Grant, resourceful as ever, took advantage of the occasion and went for a dip. The water looked freezing, but he assured us it was glorious! All in all it had been a really wonderful tramp - easy gradients, good track, terrific weather, and beautiful scenery. Soon Roger arrived and after a quick beer we jetted up to Mangapurua Landing and trotted off (relief of our packs made life so much easier) to see the Bridge to Nowhere - Weird!!!! Then back to Pipiriki for a delicious lunch and onwards back to Wanganui (in the now driving rain), stopping off at Jerusalem mission, Kawana flour mill, and, of course, the pub on the way. We met up with Malcolm there, still hobbling well, and looking thoroughly envious of us all! Maybe next time Malcolm!

Heather.

RUAPAE NAVIGATION EXERCISE Jan 12 By Neil Campbell

This navigation exercise was a repeat by popular demand of the exercise held on 1 Dec 1996. The area beyond the Putara road end in the Northern Tararuas is an ideal place to conduct a navigation exercise. It has areas of open forest which make for very pleasant off-track walking. Starting out at 9am, we followed the main track to the second footbridge. We then left the track and went over the hill to the North to have lunch on some flats by the Mangatainoka (Grid ref S25 239550). We then walked downstream to a tributary. Here we picked up the Three Bottles track (not shown on the map) which took us back to the main track. Following the main track we were back to the cars by before 4pm.

Thanks go to our leader Terry. We were Terry, Tony, Wayne, Christine, Warren and Neil.

WAITOTARA FOREST Anniversary Weekend (January 18-19) by John Phillips

The weather forecast was a bit average but, full of hope, three of us set off from Palmerston North at the extremely civilised hour of 9:15 am Saturday morning. Our destination was the Waitotara Valley and, after a quick lunch braved at the Wanganui KFC, drove a further hour, mostly inland on not-too-bad a road, to commence our tramp. Car parked at Peter Larsen's property, we waived Peter's tempting offer of a jetboat ride to Trains Hut, our decision assisted somewhat by the fee he was expecting (which may very well be standard jetboat-fare, but was nevertheless sufficient to suddenly make that half-day's extra tramp seem worthwhile).

The original plan was a 3-day tramp to fill the long weekend. The first day was to be an easy 10km mostly through farmland, hence the civilised departure hour that morning. The day's route was up Pokeka Stream to Pokeka Hut. The second day was to be a reasonably full day along a ridge route north and then west to Tahupo Hut. The final day would be the biggest, with a half-day south to Trains Hut, followed by a fairly long haul, albeit well-tracked, down the Waitotara Valley out to the car.

However Peter Larsen commented that we would be pushing it on the last day so, at the last minute we decided on a more southerly route on day two which followed a ridge that by-passed Tahupo Hut straight to Trains Hut for the Sunday night. We decided this, however, aware from discussions with a Wanganui DOC officer that this more southerly route was very much a route rather than a track, and would also take some considerable time and navigation skills.

It was after midday and slight drizzle set in as we mounted packs on backs, just to remind us that it was not forecast a fine weekend. We set off on a fairly direct uphill route along farm tracks rather than switch back down to follow the river, which meant we soon confronted the classic Wanganui mudstone hill country to get down to the river further on - a huge steep downslope soon confronted us as farm track petered out. Possibly negotiable when covered in bush, but more like a 'luge' when cleared farmland!

We picked up the farm track along Pokeka Stream which continued to the edge of the farm - about 6km from the car. Very boggy and swampy in places - in fact, at one stage the track passed some notable wetlands which I'd read about in a DOC publication on nominated 'protected natural areas'. It was a fairly pleasant walk for a muddy farm track I suppose, and the surrounding hills by now were, unlike the valley, covered in magnificent bush - a taste of what lay ahead. The weather had cleared too, turning it into a lovely sunny afternoon.

The sight of a dilapidated hut heralded the end of the farmland, marked by a small side-stream crossing. Ramon and Buzz trusted their balance on a wire-covered log. I didn't trust my balance, and trusted the stability of the stream bank edge instead for a huge leap to the other side (something I regretted - more knee deep encounters with Wanganui mud!). Much of the so-called 'bush' section of the remaining track to Pokeka Hut was actually in tall, grassy riverflats, with obvious signs of farm animal disturbance well beyond their domain, and the ubiquitous feral goats. Even the forest understorey was completely ravaged in places. I was also introduced, by way of direct contact, to the dreaded 'ongaonga' vine, its stinging nettles imparting instant pain, and leaving the flesh numbed for some days after!

By 4pm we arrived at our day's destination. Pokeka Hut was set in quite a magnificent forest / valley setting, with towering rimu and tawa, and tantalising glimpses further up the Pokeka valley. The hut was the usual 6-bunk ex-Forest Service fare, which I have come to like somewhat more than some of the big modern ones (when they are in liveable condition of course, and when the group is not too big). Those who ventured out after dark for the call of nature saw a magnificent half-moon through windswept clouds, perched above the silhouetted bush ridge. The call of a morepork off in the forest touched off an idyllic scene.

Packed and ready, 8am Sunday morning we set off NE up a steep spur between Pokeka and Whakauahi Streams to follow the ridge route to the old Maungarau Hut (now demolished by DOC, much to the disapproval of local trampers if the hut book entries were any indication!). Magnificent podocarps and broadleaf trees on the short climb (only about 200m) gave way to black beech along the ridge. This walk was a real delight, despite the periodic rain which, if anything, added to the magic. The ridges are completely covered in forest but, being quite sharp ridges, gave occasional glimpses out to the next ridge either side. Being quite low altitude (500m), the ridges in this dissected landscape were also quite close to each other, which creates quite a different sense of scale to that experienced in the more lofty, open tops of the Tararuas or Ruahines. As one looked out to the side through the trees, the next ridge was never far away, and in fact was close enough for one to distinguish every treetop that stood out on its narrow sharp crest, imprinted against the sky.

Snack and photo breaks were not infrequent as we continued north along our great raised forest walkway. By 10:30 am we reached the turnoff west to Trains Hut, and set off on what was at first a reasonably well marked track. However, soon we were in trouble when, after negotiating a large tree-fall, the white tree markers disappeared, and we were not sure whether the track was in fact the intended route or the mindless wanderings of some feral goat! All of a sudden the lie of the land

did not seem to make sense with our compass bearings, not helped by a giant “92” obscuring the spot on our map! Cloud had also set in over surrounding ridges, confusing what little direction sense we had left. Finally, the weather was starting to behave as forecasted. The rain was well and truly setting in, dampening any interest in finding any direction sense again. Given the time and distance constraints ahead on the route we had chosen, we decided that it was not wise to throw in navigation problems as well, so decided to re-trace our steps to Pokeka Hut and head back out to the car a day earlier than planned.

A short stop back along the main south ridge, we stopped for another break and a snack to warm the spirits, with the sun coming out for a short while through a gap in the trees to help along. On our arrival at Pokeka Hut at 1pm, the sun re-appeared for a lazy lunch break outside the hut, sunbasking and drying out clothes. The return to the car was uneventful, but somewhat boggier than on the walk in! Ramon’s new cross-trainers were providing little protection against the elements, soon filling with mud; it was a barefoot walk back along the farmtrack, probably quite healthy really, in the smooth slimy Wanganui mud! We arrived back at the car around 6pm for a late evening drive back to PN.

Despite the weather and change in plans it was an inspiring trip, and has me planning a return to the Whanganui forests sometime soon. We were: Buzz (Alan Bee), Ramon Strong and John Phillips.