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**Palmerston North  
Tramping and Mountaineering Club**

[www.pntmc.org.nz](http://www.pntmc.org.nz)

PO Box 1217, Palmerston North

**Newsletter December-January 2025**

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*Star light, star bright, first stars I see tonight. Mt Taranaki from Syme Hut.*

*Pic by Harley Betts*

### **Club Nights**

*Club nights are generally held on the second and last Thursday of each month at the Quakers Hall, 227 College Street, Palmerston North. Doors open 7.15pm for meeting start at 7.30pm. All welcome.*

**12 December 2024**

**End of Year BBQ**

**All**

Our annual end of year pre-Christmas BBQ and presentation of Annual Awards at the Ashhurst Domain. BYO food and drink, plus a \$5 gift to get into the festive spirit. A chance to discuss ideas and plans for summer holidays and extended trips over the New Year. 6.00pm to dusk.

**30 January 2025**

**Beginning of Year BBQ**

**All**

We start our year with a BBQ by the paddling pool in the Victoria Esplanade. A chance for a catch-up about your summer tramping and plans for future trips. BYO food and drink. From 6pm..

## Upcoming Trips

**7-8 December 2024      Kelly Knights Hut      M-F      Elly Arnst      022 682 3136**

A belated "love our huts" trip because huts deserve love all year round! We have a new ash bucket to drop off and a bit of track maintenance to do. Walking in via either Mania or Rangiwahia. Contact Elly if you're keen and we'll confirm details closer to the time.

**8 December 2024      Pinnacle Ridge Loop      E-M      Verity Elder      021 260 1885**

From Holdsworth Carpark we keep to the right side of the river and head up to Pinnacle peak for views of the Tararuas and surrounding district. Following the ridge we then loop back and cross the river to Donnelly's Flat and return.

**15 December 2024      Short Knights Long Day      M-F      Warren Wheeler      06 356 1998**

Celebrate the (almost) shortest night with a long day loopy trip in the Ruahines. We will go up Shorts Track, along the main range to Toka high point and down Knights Track. Depart PN 7.30am. Optional overnight trip camping at Toka, leaving PN mid-afternoon for sunset and sunrise next day.

**12 January 2025      Rangi Botanising      E      Warren Wheeler      06 356 1998**

Enjoy the summer alpine flowers in the vicinity of popular Rangi Hut - towering Spaniards, tiny orchids and much more to discover. Depart Milverton Park at 8.00am.

**18-20 January 2025      Social Trappers Triangle Hut      M/F      Janet Wilson      06 329 4722**

This Wellington Anniversary trip into the Ruahines is a combined trip for stoat trappers-cum-trampers into Triangle Hut on the Oroua River, over the beautiful tussock tops past Rangi Hut. Plenty of time for relaxing and exploring in the vicinity. Depart Milverton Park 7.30am.

**19 or 20 January 2025      Pinnacle Ridge Loop      E      Verity Elder      021 260 1885**

From Holdsworth Carpark we keep to the right side of the river and head up to Pinnacle peak for views of the Tararuas and surrounding district. Following the ridge we then loop back and cross the river to Donnelly's Flat and return. Let Verity know which day suits you best. Depart Milverton Park at 8.00am.

**25-26 January 2025      Roaring Stag Camping      E/M      Richard Lockett      06 323 0948**

This lovely summer trip in the eastern Tararuas starts from the Putara Roadend behind Eketahuna. After a couple of swing bridges there is a steep climb then a long gentle downhill to the hut and camping spots beside a big swimming hole downstream (optional stay in hut). Relax and enjoy. Return the same way or via the Ruapae Stream. Depart Milverton Park at 8.00am.

**26 January 2025      Archeys Lookout      E      Nicola Wallace      021 209 0720**

Part of the Te Araroa Trail. A nice walk past Makahika Outdoor Centre up the valley behind Levin. Across paddocks then into the bush with several small stream crossings then up to the lookout for views over Horowhenua. Depart Milverton Park at 8.00am.

**31 Jan – 2 February 2025      Tenting at Tutuwai      M      Ernie Cook      027 303 1363**

Depart Palmerston North at 7:00 a.m. and driving to Waiohine Gorge Road road-end. May return via Reeves and the centre of New Zealand. Possibly arrive at hut early enough to secure bunks for those who prefer. Day trip to cross Block 16 track up to Marchant Ridge off my to do list. Please contact Ernie Cook 0273031363 no later than the Monday previous.

**2 February 2025 Sunrise Hut M Jo O’Halloran 0274 171 140**

This popular track is the “jewel in the crown” for the Hawkes Bay region. A well graded track climbs up through mixed beech forest to the hut on the bushline. A further 15 minutes takes us to Armstrong Saddle for views west to Ruapehu. Depart Milverton Park at 7.30am.

**6-9 February 2025 Waitangi Long Weekend TBA**

Trip leader wanted. Please phone Warren 06 356 1998. Updated details will be on our website.

**9 February 2025 Beginners Tramp 1: Fern Walk E Verity Elder 021 260 1885**

This loop walk moves through original podocarp forest, including giant lowland tōtara, mataī and kahikatea as old as 1000 years, and up to 68 species of fern (hence its name). An easy, close to home introduction to tramping, this trip includes a short, in-situ introduction to map reading and orientation. Depart Milverton Park at 8.00am.

### **Trip Grading**

Trip grades depend on many factors, especially weather and terrain. A reasonably proficient trampler should expect to do the trips in the following times:

Easy (E):	3-4 hrs	Other Grades:
Medium (M):	5-6 hrs	Family (Fam)
Fit (F):	about 8 hrs	Technical skills (T)
Fitness Essential (FE):	over 8 hrs	Inst (Instruction)

BWD = Best weather day of a weekend

### **Trip participants**

Contact the leader, preferably at least 3 days in advance. Trips usually leave from Milverton Park. A charge for transport will be collected on the day.

### **Gear for trips**

Minimum gear for day trips is appropriate footwear, pack, lunch and snacks, waterproof jacket, over-trousers, gloves, warm hat, torch, toilet paper, matches or a lighter, sunblock, first aid kit, and a survival bag or space blanket. Each person needs to be equipped to survive overnight.

### **Overdue Trips**

If a club trip is late returning, please do not worry as there is probably a good reason for the delay. If you are in any doubt, please phone Martin Lawrence 027 446 6287 or Bruce van Brunt 06 328 4761.

## **Notices**

### **Love Our Huts**

Club members have supported the FMC Love Our Huts campaign in November with trips to some of our favourite huts in the Ruahines and beyond, including Smiths Stream, Hinerua, Rangiwhia, Syme, Iron Gates, Top Gorge, Mid-Poh, Ngamoko, Kelly Knight. It has been nice to see huts are being well cared for by users and DOC. See trip reports below.

The campaign has resulted in over 500 huts across New Zealand being visited as part of the campaign.

Well done to all involved.

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### **New Gear Custodian**

Peter Chamberlain (long time club member and keen mountaineer) has just taken over as club gear custodian. If you want to hire any club equipment, phone Peter on 027 656 0161.

Further details on hiring equipment under 'Gear Hire' on our website.

Many thanks to Peter for taking on this responsibility and to Martin Lawrence who has looked after the gear for the past wee while.

Anne Lawrence.

## Beginner Tramps 2025

Our programme involves a graduated series of tramps and workshops. Suitable for youth and above, those who've never tramped through to those who want to get back into tramping, our aim is to introduce you to tramping gradually.

The trip series begins with an easy low-land bush walk and progresses to exploring the tops of the Ruahine and Taranua Ranges. We walk as a group and at a pace to suit everyone on the day. Along the way you can participate in workshops and learn from our more experienced club members.

The next series of Beginner Tramps will start in February 2025.

All trips depart from Milverton Park at 7:30am. We carpool to reduce carbon footprint, petrol share will be included in trip information (cash on the day to the driver). For more information see [PNTMC trip planning](#).

For further information, phone Verity 021 260 188 or email [pntmci@gmail.com](mailto:pntmci@gmail.com) or check out our trip programme for dates.

## What's in my Pack?

In 2025 we welcome a new edition to our club newsletter: *What's in my pack?*

Whether it is for comfort, safety or function, we all have it; gear we swear by and can't live without when out in the backcountry. 'What's in my pack' is an opportunity for us to share our stories, tips and advice on the gear we carry in our packs when tramping.

Choose from the 5 categories below and write a short paragraph about the item or gear. Include a bit of history or an example of it in use, and a photo (in action is best) if available.

To add an extra layer of fun, for every entry to the newsletter, go into the draw to win a voucher from local outdoor store of your choosing.

Enter all 5 categories and go into the draw an extra 5 times. The draw will be made Winter Solstice, 2025 June 21<sup>st</sup>). Entries will be published in the newsletter throughout 2025.

Email entries to: [elderverity@gmail.com](mailto:elderverity@gmail.com)

### Categories:

**Two for one** – Every milligram on our back counts, which is why some gear earns its place for its dual, or even multipurpose function.

**Secondhand** – From merino gems, to vintage Swannndri and spare tent pegs, you never know what might be found in a secondhand store.

**Repair job** – in a 'throw away' society, taking a moment to repair your favorite gear can help save the planet and your wallet.

**DIY** – whether it is hand-made, self-made, custom-made or kit-set, gear that we make ourselves can have added value and satisfaction.

**Can't live without** – that one item you always pack.

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## PNTMC Annual Awards

PNTMC annual awards were announced by Warren Wheeler at the End of Year BBQ on Thursday 12 December 2024 to give light hearted recognition of some of our most memorable tramping incidents this year.

**Best Trip Award – Robyn Wheeler** - for her impressive faceplant at the Rangī slip diversion track.

**Tail End Charlie Award – Martin Lawrence** – for waiting patiently at the top of the Rangī slip diversion while the tail enders took the short cut old track across the slip and finally being phoned by Anne up ahead to say he was the only one missing.

**SuperGold Award – Woody Lee** - for his gold plated sunscreen dispenser.

**Otterly Awesome Award – Sarah Bramwell** - for wisely wearing a wetsuit top for the Ohau Gorge swims.

**Dropped in It Award – Jo O’Halloran** - for losing her Apple Watch down the Rangī loo.

**Rucking Good Award – Lawrence o’Halloran** – for becoming an early adopter of the latest fitness craze of rucking.

**Away with the Fairies Award – Verity Elder** - for her reverie in the goblin forest on Pinnacle Ridge.

**Most Concise Trip Report Award – Doug Strachan** – for his “good” report on Beehive Creek.

**Blast Blast Blast Award – Peter Darragh** - for having his slides all fall out onto the floor after his Blast from the Past presentation.

**Carry On Tramping Award – Ernie Cook** - for missing the left turn to Wharite and striding on regardless.

**Early Bird Award – Emma Gregg** - for arriving at club night a week early.

**Plan B Award – Janet Wilson** – for being rained off a social trappers trip so went on a mystery trip to the ladder up No.1 Line instead.

**TA Trail Angel Award – Neil Benton** – for being highly amused when he later found out that the lunch wrap his friendly Taiwanese TA walker was enjoying had been stolen from his lunch box.

**Falling Asleep on the Job Award – Michelle Benton** – for being keen to reach Cattle Ridge Hut but feeling somewhat unwell didn’t get past the bunks in Roaring Stag Hut.

**Whats in my Pack Award – Harley Betts** – for the goodies he unloaded for Pot Luck at Syme Hut, including a homemade cheesecake, 1 litre bottle of Kahlua, bottle of wine, espresso coffee pot, half a dozen eggs, bacon and more.

**Love It or Leave It Award – Warren Wheeler** – for optimistically picking Mid-Poh and Ngamoko huts for the FMC Love Our Huts campaign, but realistically offering it to Richard Lockett instead.

**Loving It Award – Richard Lockett** – for taking over the trip to Mid-Poh and Ngamoko Huts for the FMC Love Our Huts campaign when Warren confessed he probably wasn’t fit enough.

**Rise and Shine Award – Anne Lawrence** – for rising early for sunrise from her quiet top bunk at Syme Hut and brightly greeting the people sleeping on the floor before it dawned on her that they were strangers who had come in very late.

**Just Gremlin Award – Michelle and Neil Benton** - for just getting home after a week up north only to be phoned early by Warren to see if they could just get packed and join him before noon to go into Iron Gate Hut just before the end of the FMC Love Our Huts campaign.

**Dave Hodges Award for Excellence in Pursuit of Forgetfulness** – umm, noone springs to mind.

**Tararua Trophy Award for Best Newsletter Trip Report – Harley Betts** - for his Pot Luck at Syme Hut report (in this newsletter).



## Trip Reports

12-18 October 2024

Aotea Great Barrier Island

Report by Jo O'Halloran and Tricia Eder

A group of PNTMC members were able to accept an invitation from Barry Scott to experience the uniqueness of Aotea Great Barrier Island in October 2024. We arrived by aeroplane at Claris airport avoiding a 4-hour ferry trip. Barry had arranged a vehicle hire for our stay, which took us to his home, Whare Kotare, in Awana Bay. With clear blue skies we went for an afternoon stroll along the beach, estuary and the DOC camping site.



Second day: featured a tramp along the Harataonga Coastal Walkway. Along the track Barry shared his knowledge of the flowering botanical plants



*Rhabdothamnus Solandri*



*Cladonia Confusa*  
common name 'Fuzzy Reindeer'



*Clematis Forsteri*



*Hangehange*



*Thelymitra Longifolia* –  
white sun orchid



From a high vantage point we had magnificent coastal views looking towards predator free Rakitu Island



We were also treated to views of the Whangapoua Estuary – sand dunes, wetlands and forested mountains.

Third day: took us to Rangiwahakaea/Wreck Bay, one area which Barry had not previously visited. We began this tramp up a steep undulating metalled road. After tramping along the Tataweka Peak Track we moved onto an off track section to follow the ridge down to the bay, where we lunched under the Pohutukawa trees.



Fourth day: Awana Estuary area. Barry's project is to replant and develop this area with native plants and trees. Two rare plants have been discovered here, a dwarf mistletoe *Kothalsella Salicornioides*, located on manuka bushes, and a ground cover *Leptinella tenella*.



With sickle and gloved hands, in a couple of hours we cleared kikuyu from around the young plants.



Towards the end of the morning we were treated to spotting kawau - river shag, and the pāteka - brown teal duck, on the estuary. The afternoon had us relaxing in the Kaitoki hot springs, followed by a delectable roast lamb meal enjoyed by all – thank you Janet.

Fifth day: We completed a 6-hour day Hirakimata/Mt Hobson tramp –taking the route up South Fork Track of Kaiaraara to Mt Heale Hut, then up over Hirakimata summit via Palmers track to Windy Canyon.



Impressive views of the Pinnacles were had and the track seemed a never ending, up and down wooden staircase, engineered and built by DOC.





Sixth day: was a chill-out day exploring the local tourist spots -Art Gallery, museum and an extensive Recycle Reuse shop where bargains galore were found. In the afternoon Barry took us to Boulder Bay to enjoy the foreshore of rockpools and a fossick among the boulders, none of which when cracked open by Harley revealed a fossil treasure.



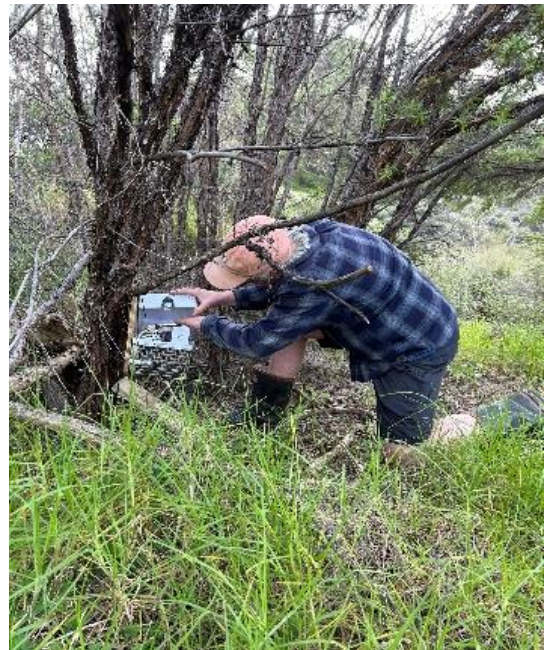
Barry, along with a supportive group of locals, has a vision of Aotea eventually being predator free.

Aotea is already possum free but there remain feral cats, pigs, rats and mice, and exotic/invasive plants to be overcome.

An extensive trapping system setup across the island is helping to improve the native biodiversity.

However, there is still more to be achieved with buy-in and collaboration of the various interest groups.

Barry is committed in his endeavour to inspire others to get on board with a drive to being eventually "Aotea Predator Free".



This trip was greatly enjoyed. Clear sunny weather made it possible to complete all planned activities, group camaraderie was warm and discussions hearty. Thanks to Barry for his hospitality and sharing the natural beauty of Aotea.

We were Barry Scott, Harley Betts, Fiona Burleigh, Tricia Eder and Jo OHalloran, Janet Wilson, Graham Peters, Malcolm and Dianne Thomas.



I've been like a 6 year-old at Christmas about this trip for a while now - going to Field Hut on the centenary of the actual day it opened. You only ever get one chance to do that.

If you didn't know already, Field Hut is the oldest surviving hut in the country built specifically for tramping, and has recently been recognised by Heritage New Zealand as a Category 1 historic place.

<https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/9821/Field%20Hut%20>

The weather forecast in the preceding few days wasn't good and even the day before was very wet. Nigel, Tim, Alice, Karen and myself set off from the road end in overcast weather, but by the time we reached the bridge at Otaki Forks, we were in bright sunshine and sweated our way up the hill. On the way up, we met someone coming down who had intended to be at the hut for the night, with the intention of joining the Tararua Tramping Club celebrations on the Sunday, but after a phone call to his wife had found out that TTC had postponed their party due to the poor weather forecast. It looked like we'd been lucky with the Sunday weather.



We arrived at the hut in time for a late lunch, took the obligatory photos, and filled in the hut book (no point in going there on that day without the proof!). Over lunch it started raining and we enjoyed and endured the rain most of the way down.





We were a bit surprised that no-one else had been up to the hut, but on the way back down met a couple who were going up for the night. I think they were more excited than me about it, as they had made a model of the hut which they were taking with them and had even left a 'happy birthday' sign at the road end.

Back on the flats we split into two groups, with some of us taking the side track to Parawai Hut and met up again at the bridge.

As another piece of good news, Kapiti District Council have recently announced that they intend to reinstate and reopen the road, fingers crossed, for May 2025!

<https://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/council/projects/our-towns-improvements/otaki/otaki-gorge-road/>

So for what might be the last time, it was then just the last few kilometres on the old road back to the minibus, tired but happy. To quote Sir Ed, we'd knocked the b'stard off.

### **19-21 November 2024 Smiths Stream Hut/Hinerua Hut “Love Our Huts”**

**Report by Ernie Cook**

**Pic by Jenny McCarthy**

Despite a good deal of interest, Jenny was the only one who fronted up for this trip to two seldom visited huts in the Eastern Ruahines. It is possible to study three topo maps to facilitate this trip. Tikokino to negotiate the roads to arrive at the North Block Road end and then Taoroa Junction on to the Norsewood map.

From the car parking area we ambled down the road, across Waipawa River and after Jenny pointed out the Smiths Stream Hut sign we walked a little way up the road to where another sign marked the start of the track. The first kilometre is slightly uphill along a fence-line through private farmland until the Forest Park proper is reached. From here it is down to cross an unnamed stream, up the other side then giving away the height gained to reach Middle Stream which is crossed to then begin a reasonably steep ascent.

The original trip blurb spoke of staying two nights at Smiths Stream Hut with a day trip to Hinerua Hut. I had subsequently revised that notion to travelling all the way to Hinerua Hut on the first day. A warm day had me battling a bit on the uphill and I called for an early lunch part way up the hill. When Jenny suggested that it would be okay to revert back to the original plan of two nights at Smiths Stream Hut I didn't offer any argument.

Once we emerged from the bush onto an open scrubby area we had to look keenly for waratahs though there appeared to be a semblance of a ground trail. We re-entered the bush and enjoyed a pretty good sidle before descending quite steeply into a stream bed which we followed for about a kilometre before spying a large orange triangle indicating the start of the track to Smiths Stream Hut.



The stream travel had been pretty good with some log jams to circumvent and the occasional good travel over terraces above the stream always being mindful that you had to be able to get back down again to the stream bed. It was reasonably steep going up from the stream to where a sign indicated the track continuing on to the tops or the alternative track to Smiths Stream Hut which we followed down to a nice setting just above a stream. It was then just a matter of settling in and showing the hut the requisite love.

Next morning we descended down to the stream bed which we followed for roughly 500 metres before spotting the track above and across a significant slip leading to a recently new cut and marked track. The track began quite steeply but gradually eased in

gradient as we continued on to Hinerua Hut which was reached about two hours after leaving Smiths Stream Hut.



Hinerua Hut

Jenny again showered the hut with love while I cleaned the windows and restocked the fire-wood shed. This hut was requiring of a little more maintenance than Smiths Stream.

After lunch we returned to Smiths Stream in about an hour and a quarter and cut up quite a lot of dry wood from a slip just up from the hut and right on the track. The hut-book here dated back to 2014 and revealed that in that time only three members of the PNTMC had visited with one member visiting twice.

The next morning was wet with mostly showers coming through and some debate about how to dress. We retraced our foot steps back to the

North Block Road end in about four hours and the arrival of the fore-cast rain meant that Jenny got quite damp opening and closing the several gates.

We were Jenny McCarthy and Ernie Cook.

**8 November 2024**

**Rangiwahia Hut “Love Our Huts” Cleanup**

**Report by Nicola Wallace**

*(Friday trip – Ed.)* Armed with various cleaning items, Michelle and I met Warren at Colyton, then drove to Renfrew Rd end via Cross Hills and Peep-o-Day, enjoying great views of Mt Ruapehu and Mt Ngauruhoe on the way. On arrival we parked behind Anne and Martin’s car. They’d come up earlier to walk the Deadman’s Loop before meeting us at the hut.



More than just a hut clean up, we cleaned the grubby Whio sign at the track start, leaving it gleaming white. We did the next sign, but none thereafter as we didn’t want to run out of “Spray & Wipe”. Part of the descent from the slip was on a flash new metal stair assembly, with a platform at the top.

I’d just arrived at the hut when Anne and Martin turned up, with tales of high winds up the top. As soon as we’d all arrived, it was early lunch or late morning tea, as you wished. Warren skillfully applied the FMC hut loving stickers in the book: one inside the front cover, another on the current entry page, and a specially printed Rangiwahia Hut one on the wall.





FMC had supplied guidelines of what to clean, pretty much everything, and this we did. Actually, the hut wasn't all that grubby, I thought the worst bits were the windows in the bunkrooms, particularly the tracks along the bottom. Dead flies and black gunge. Meanwhile, the living flies got the shock of their lives as their favourite windows were sprayed with either "Will & Able" or "Spray & Wipe". Sweet smelling but sticky, tending to leave the glass a bit streaky, needing a dry wipe afterwards. Someone also cleaned the loos. After our combined effort, the hut looked and felt very clean!



After a while I went outside and saw a glider fly past. We had a day visitor, a young lady from Kimbolton. I ate lunch at the picnic table outside, and boy it was getting colder and the cloud lowering. After a group photo session, where we all shivered while attempting to smile, we headed down and arrived at the carpark before 3pm. Its lovely up at the hut, but also nice to stand in warm sunshine.

Anne and Martin departed, and Michelle drove us back to Warren's via Umutoi, turning left just before we got to Apiti. This was a treat, I hadn't been along this road for years. We had afternoon tea with Robyn and Warren. It had been a

very satisfying day. Thanks to Michelle for driving me there and back, and everyone for a fun day.

**25-26 November 2024**

**Iron Gates - Love Our Huts**

**Report by Warren Wheeler**

Unfortunately Peter Darragh was unable to lead this trip and after being postponed a couple of times November was fast running out for the Love Our Huts mission.

Fortunately Warren was happy to give it a go and, when asked, Michelle and Neil were willing to drop everything and do it on the Monday and Tuesday, less than 24 hours after returning from a week away up north. After some rapid packing we met up and duly departed from the Pedersens Roadend carpark at 1.00pm.

Unfortunately the track to Iron Gates Hut was still "closed" due to slips.

Fortunately Michelle and Neil had been there recently and knew that the offending slips were not really a problem.

Fortune favoured the bold and the weather was perfect despite the prospect of a slow trip due to Warren's lack of fitness (due to Long Covid?) and Michelle still getting over a respiratory infection. It took us over 5 hours to "take our time" getting there (the posted time is 4-5 hrs, but). Neil was good and strong so ended up carrying more than his fair share.





The big slip half way in is settling down and now has a nice “hand rail” of tree roots at the top. The big cracks in the track further along are unnerving but easily avoided. A taped deviation is well away from this potential slip zone but not really necessary just yet... For experienced trampers the slips are nothing to worry about (famous last words?).



At the hut we settled in for dinner and got a head start on the chores for the FMC Love Our Huts Campaign. As the hut is only 5 years old it is in very good condition and well looked after by users and DOC. The main job was to clean all the windows and to remove and wash the insect screens to get rid of the buildup of green mould.

We didn't spot any whio at the hut, but we saw green hooded orchids before Heritage Lodge and spooked a deer along the track. We checked the traps along the track and cleared a dead rat from trap 97 near the hut. The traps had been rebaited two weeks ago, so we expected more kills, but.



On the way back out we decided to avoid the climb and the big slip by following Tunupo Stream the short distance down to the Oroua River, which also gave us a riverside view of the slips. The Oroua was running nice and low, making for easy travel back and forth a couple of times before exiting back to the track at Tunupo Campsite. After lunch there we retraced our steps along the track back to the carpark.

Mission accomplished. Apart from the paperwork to record data from the Hut Log Book, including the number of days used and

nights used (13 and 55 respectively since 16 Oct 2023 – mostly stoat trappers on the day visits), how many different people used the hut (146), and how many were “locals” (82). The hut book only started in March 2023 so missing data going back two full years to the required 16 Oct 2022.



It was pleasing to see that there were no issues with this relatively new hut and that despite the Closed Track status it is still getting plenty of use, albeit much from the monthly trap checks by the Ruahine Whio Protectors, thanks to Janet Wilson and her band of volunteers.

I hadn't been in to the hut for a while, but after two years the slip damage and erosion from Cyclone Gabrielle are finally settling down so hopefully the “Closed” status will soon be lifted, or at least amended to warn



people what to expect. In any case, summer low flows mean that the damaged track can be avoided by simply taking the traditional river route all the way from the Tunupo Campsite to the hut. Enjoy. Love Our Hutterers were Michelle and Neil Benton, Warren Wheeler.

**23-24 November 2024**

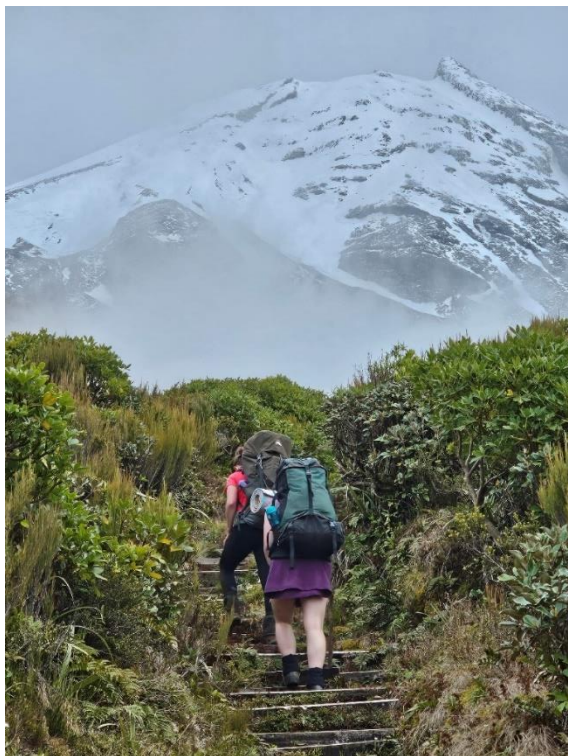
**Syme Hut Potluck Dinner**

**Report by Harley Betts**

This trip was originally scheduled for the weekend of November 2-3, well at least that was the plan until Covid tracked me down and knocked the stuffing out of me a couple of weeks prior. Plan B then swung into action: reschedule to November 23-24, eat lots of garlic, hope for the best, lie low, eat more garlic, keep hoping.

Fast forward to Friday November 22 and the forecast for the weekend looked a little less than ideal: predictions of a breezy southwesterly, low cloud and showers and coolish temperatures with fresh snow on the ground down to the bushline promised a reasonably unenjoyable ascent to Syme Hut. On the other hand the forecast models had also been consistent in predicting a big improvement in the weather by the following day, so in the end we decided that the prospect of a gloriously sunny Sunday morning would be worth the grovelling in the expected cold wind-driven mist and showers on Saturday.

We also had a cunning plan for Saturday evening regardless of the weather: a BYO potluck dinner. So there really wasn't any option left but for us to get ourselves up there to enjoy it. Six of us were confirmed for the trip, which just happened to coincide exactly with the amount of food and drink we had, and the number of bowls and cups and cutlery available. Perfect.



Saturday morning dawned cloudy, much as we had expected. We left Palmy/Ashhurst at 6.30, and with just the one coffee stop en route we arrived at the Dawson Falls carpark at 9.30 am. To our surprise and delight, the Dawson Falls side of Mt Taranaki turned out to be clear, thanks to the wind being a bit more westerly than the expected southwesterly so that the route up Fantham's Peak to Syme Hut was comfortably tucked into the mountain's wind shadow. How long this would last was an open question, but it was already a better than expected start.

We quickly shouldered our packs and set off into Taranaki's luxuriant moss forest, climbing steadily up an interminable procession of steps as the forest canopy gradually lowered and eventually gave way to shrubland to allow us a view out over the ring plain.

*Steps, steps and a few more steps*

Above the bushline, DoC have recently replaced the ageing boardwalk over the fragile tussock zone with an incredibly sturdy new one that looks set to endure for many years to come. (What was 537 steps is now 621 steps, for anyone who feels the need to count them to take their minds off the searing pain in their legs as they climb.)



Beyond the boardwalk, Taranaki's infamous loose scoria slopes began. To the uninitiated the steep slope towering above looks daunting, but with the right technique, a stick for support and plenty of patience, this part of the route can actually be easier than plodding up endless steps that always seem to be spaced a bit too far apart to be comfortable. Not that swearing and cursing was entirely avoided, was it Cherrie.

*My word, that loose scoria is rather a jolly nuisance*



*It's not really that steep, you just lean into it*

It remained mostly clear until we reached the top of the slope at about 1900 metres, then the final walk across to Syme Hut had us grimacing into a wet misty gale whipping over the tops with the temperature hovering just above freezing. Being clad in only t-shirt and shorts, I was quickly getting cold now that we were fully exposed to the elements, but with only a short walk remaining I decided it was better to keep moving rather than stop to get out the storm gear. Reaching the sanctuary of the hut was very welcome indeed.



The four people who were already in the hut looked on in amazement as we unpacked, pulling out a large home-made feijoa and white chocolate cheesecake (it somehow survived the trip intact), an espresso coffee pot, a 1 litre bottle of Kahlua, a selection of cheeses with crackers and pate, home made freeze dried nacho mix with nacho chips, guacamole, a bottle of wine, half a dozen eggs, a bottle of cream, a block of butter, bacon, a large and heavy cast iron frying pan, a flask of whisky... and so on and so on. We also had a tablecloth and candles for the table, and, for a little extra atmosphere, an inflatable palm tree complete with an inflatable parrot. It was the makings of a feast of epic proportions!

Outside the wind continued to sweep the ice-encrusted hut with a cold wet mist, but every now and then a fleeting break in the clouds racing past had us running out to catch a glimpse of the view. With a high grey overcast above and a thin layer of fresh snow on its slopes, the upper part of Mt Taranaki was monochromatic in the dull late afternoon light; cold and hostile. The warmth of the hut, with candles burning and freshly-brewed, Kahlua-enriched coffees at the ready, was wonderful to retreat back to.

Shaun insisted that he wanted to sleep outside in the tent, despite me with my responsible Dad hat on insisting that it was a stupid idea in this weather when there was plenty of room in a perfectly good hut. However, after much whining and nagging, I finally relented and we went outside to see if we could assemble the damned thing in the wind. It wasn't exactly an easy job (and it provided much entertainment to the others who lined up at the window to watch), but we finally tamed the madly leaping, flapping beast by jumping on it and guying it firmly to a collection of large rocks in the lee of the hut.



*That bloody tent, now firmly tied down and going nowhere*

Just before sunset the weather gods decided to play nicely and the cloud tops suddenly retreated to below the level of the hut, giving us great views in all directions. Outside we ran again to soak it all in as the sun set in a glorious display of colour before the mist blew in once more to finally blot everything out for the evening.





*A brief bit of sunset glory*



*Some shadowy characters at Syme Hut*



On to the feasting! We began with the cheeseboard and crackers with a little wine, and then out came the nachos and guacamole courtesy of Martin and Anne. Their home made nacho mince mix, carefully dehydrated to perfection, was absolutely top-notch and indistinguishable from freshly made. (Every tramper should have a dehydrator in their home). Following the main, Alex's cheesecake graced the table to a chorus of appreciative oohs and ahhs as we eagerly sliced it up and passed it around. And then just a little more wine to finish.



### *The Last Supper*

Being a bit weary we blew out the candles and retired just after dark for a well-earned night's sleep. In the small hours I got up for a pee and opened the door to find that the weather had completely cleared and the wind had eased away. To the east a half moon was rising, and overhead the Milky Way glittered and sparkled. It was now frosty but not overly cold, with just a light easterly in place of the stronger wet westerly we'd had earlier in the evening. It was just perfect. I tiptoed back in to retrieve my camera and then spent the next hour wandering around outside, taking a few photos and basking in the silence and the beautiful scene all around. [See pic on front cover – Ed]



*Shaun enjoying the view to Ruapehu at sunrise*

Sunrise came a couple of hours later, prompting another disgorging of bodies from the hut and more oohs and ahhs.

Ruapehu formed a hard silhouette on the eastern horizon as the sun rose, while, far below us, patches of mist lay in hollows and valleys.

An ear-ringing silence smothered everything.





*Breakfast Syme Hut Style*

It was time for breakfast. I retrieved the ingredients from the walk-in fridge (i.e. outside) where I had carefully stashed them out of the wind the previous evening. The heavy cast iron frying pan was finally brought into service: the hut quickly filled with the smell of frying bacon, and before long we were sitting outside in the sun enjoying French toast topped with the bacon plus freshly whipped cream, sliced bananas and maple syrup, looking across to Mt Taranaki's snow-covered main cone which loomed large above us. Heavenly indeed.

After breakfast we gave the hut a good thorough clean out (we had nominated ourselves to "do" Syme Hut as part of FMC's "Love our Huts" campaign), although we had been fortunate to find that it was already pretty clean and tidy and there wasn't a lot work required to leave it spick and span and clear of any rubbish. The west-facing window had been boarded up, which was a bit of a mystery to us as it didn't appear to be broken, although entries the hut book did mention that rain was being driven in somehow during storms. Hopefully DoC can see to it

as that window is probably one of the most scenic hut windows in the universe.



*Team Full Belly*

We packed up and headed down not long after breakfast, the first wisps of cloud twisting and turning above the sun-warmed eastern slopes as the day progressed. The cloud quickly thickened as we walked/ran/tripped/slid our way down the loose scoria, so that by the time we reached the top of the



tussock zone we could no longer see the mountain above us. We really did time our stay at Syme Hut to perfection.

Back to the carpark, where we unshouldered our packs and compared our varying degrees of jelly legs (also known as “Naki legs” – the unavoidable consequence of ascending and, especially descending, Taranaki’s gazillions of steps with a pack on). Finally, a quiet, tired drive back to Palmy where three days of leg muscle pain and stiffness awaited us all. However that was a price well worth paying for what had been a most enjoyable trip, with great company, great fun and much better than expected conditions. We were: Martin and Anne Lawrence, Cherrie Linney, Alex Betts, Shaun Betts, Harley Betts (trip leader and scribe).

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## LAST PICTURE SHOW



*Wrestling with the wind at Syme Hut, Mt Taranaki*

*Pic by Martin Lawrence*

MERRY CHRISTMAS  
AND  
HAPPY YEAR



## PNTMC Newsletter December -January 2025

- Upcoming Trips and Club Nights
- Notices: Love Our Huts Report, New Gear Custodian, Beginner Tramps, Whats in My Pack, Annual Awards
- Trip Reports: Aotea/Great Barrier, Field Hut 100years, Smiths Stream/Hinerua, Rangī, Iron Gates, Syme Pot Luck

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