

Pararaha Stream Bash

March 2005

David Hodges et al.

At the first club meeting of the year, in March, I volunteered to lead a trip up Pararaha Stream, the best stream bash in the Waitakere Ranges. Eight members signed up but 3 pulled out because they were sick, leaving only five of us. (Whose names I have all forgotten, as I am writing this 9 months later)

We started at beautiful Karekare Beach and headed south along the beach, following an old train line part of the way. This route had been used to transport Kauri logs from Pararaha Stream to the mill at Karekare, past swamps, sand dunes and spectacular pohutukawa-covered cliffs. A track follows the stream up to a shelter, and then you can climb up the adjacent hill to join Gibson's Track, or just continue on up the stream.

There is no track shown on the map up the stream and we were told there were a few deep pools we would have to cross, but just as our first intrepid trumper was nearly up to his neck in the first of these, we were

surprised to see a party coming down the hill next to the stream - it turns out that there is a rough track following the stream all the way. It's quite obvious once you know it's there! One member of the party doing the track in the other direction said that the track has been taken off the map because too many people have gotten lost on it (although I can't imagine how anyone could get lost as the track follows the stream all the way and is very easy to follow). Furthermore, the stream is only 1 to 6 inches deep in the few places where the track crosses it, so we can avoid all of the neck-deep pools.

There are a number of spectacular waterfalls along the way, particularly in Cowan Stream after a major stream fork where you can follow tracks up either Pararaha Stream (left) or Cowan Stream (right) up to the top.

To finish, we came back down Zion Hill track for a swim at Karekare before returning to Auckland.

Good Friday...and a Hut all to Ourselves

April 2005

Chantelle Watt, Andy O'Loan

You might think to find an empty 10 bunk hut on Easter weekend would have taken some Herculean effort...hours of back road driving coupled with an 11 hr slog through an unmaintained route...

But, in this case, you'd be wrong. We only drove for 5 hours and then had a 2 ½ hour amble along a track so wide and flat that mountain-bikers use it.

Where were we?

In Waihaha Hut, Pureora Forest Park. Pureora is Andy's geology fieldwork area and on this occasion he wanted to show me where he'd been spending so much of his time. It has nice bush with good views over the river and some impressive rock cliffs (which I now know are Whakamaru ignimbrite). The hut is lovely, with lots of windows, an enormous deck and heaps of table space (for a change!). There is an excellent swimming hole close to the hut if it's hot or you're feeling brave (I wasn't).

The next day I walked Andy 45 minutes down the track to where he would start stream-bashing/rock hunting. I then moseyed back to the hut and spent the rest of the day basking on a mattress on the

deck in the sunshine, alternating between reading and napping, in blissful solitude... until ten mountain-bikers suddenly rushed onto my doorstep! After a break, they went on their way, but the solitude was to end that evening, as we were joined by a horde of 3 other trampers! We had even brought a tent because we thought the hut might be full.

These three were soon to become fantastic hut buddies after they donated Andy and I a spare Golden Syrup steamed pudding ...yummy!

The next day, on Easter Sunday, Andy did some more rock hunting and I settled in for a bout of more reading, writing, and napping (aaahh). On his return in the evening, we wandered back out to the road end, and went to see what was open for dinner.

P.S. There is another hut 10 hours down the track called Bog Inn (4 bunks) if you want a harder trip (no circuit option though) and a new big hut is to be built soon about 8 hours down the track, to replace Nuffield Lodge which was removed. By all account, Waihaha is a lovely place to chill out or a nice easy beginners trip.

Umukarikari Track / Waipakihi Hut

April 2005

Jeremy Gabe, Kylie Brewer, Mark Wheldon, Wake Harper, Thilo Storm, Josef Silhan, Daniel Koze, Maja Aspaas, Jung-Jen (Ron) Chen



Wake Harper surveying the panoramic view from Sharp Cone on the east to Ngauruhoe on the west.

Ruapehu seemed so close, yet far enough away that we just sat wishing for a spectacular eruption, a thought soon admonished by a geologist's glance at the heavily eroded track beside us. Among the layer of pumice lay the charred remains of the vegetation which had once flourished atop the Kaimanawas in the year 192, when the violent eruption which created Lake Taupo charred the peak we stood atop. A glance behind showed the lake which belies its violent past, and this, too, looked safely distant enough.

We were standing atop the highest point on the Umukarikari Track, the 1591m top from which the track acquires its name, and which marked the halfway point between Desert Road and Waipakihi Hut. The two-day tramp was planned as a simple return journey over these tops to the hut and then back, spending most of the time on wide alpine expanses which make for easy walking atop the Umukarikari range.

After the forecast for fine weather set this trip to run Friday & Saturday of the Anzac weekend, two cars set off in the wee hours of Friday morning, at times which most of the group had never experienced, but soon discovered. The sun rose over the foggy Waikato, prompting the ubiquitous, 'Why can't the earth just swallow this place up

and bring the ends closer?' After a separate breakfast owing to one car missing the turn-off to Te Awamutu, we before noon. Lovely regenerating beech forest was the only thing between us and the views which the cloudless sky would soon provide.

The climb up through the bush was long, but oddly, this track isn't built as a shortest-route-to-the-top track which characterises most NZ tramping tracks, so the 600m gain through the bush passed rather painlessly and we were soon basking in the sun.



North Island Robin in the bush

Only Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro now blocked the views to the west. Continuing east, the track traversed the tops and the rest of the views began to mature: Lake Taupo to the north, the Waipakihi valley (headwaters of the Tongariro River) and Thunderbolt range to the south, and ahead of us to the east were the seemingly endless peaks of the Kaimanawas and Kawekas. As for the track along the ridge, one guidebook puts it best, 'If only all alpine travel were this easy!'

With darkness approaching, the group split up, with the leaders having a few minutes of twilight to spare upon reaching the hut. Those of us up to an hour in arrears were treated to a lovely sunset on the tops, with the hills & sky turning all shades of magenta, contrasting against the rising full

moon. Then, of course, the fun began as darkness set in. It was a thrilling adventure for some, harrowing for others, but whether by twilight, moonlight or torchlight, we all safely descended the ridge and sat in the small, cosy Waipakihi Hut by 7:00 waiting for a meal of risotto, sausages and apple crumble.

The cool, clear night had brought a healthy covering of frost which surrounded the hut and froze the water pipes, compelling us to get water out of the top of the tank – an occasion where you realise just what else gets washed down by the rain off the roof. After finding that the frost was thick enough to have a small snowball war, we headed off on the return journey with the sky just as clear as the previous day.

With the hut situated at 1100m elevation,



Thilo in the Waipakihi River near Waipakihi Hut ready to begin the climb on the second day.



Living the High Life. L-R: Jeremy, Kylie, Maja, Josef, Daniel, Mark, Ron, Wake, and Thilo

the climb was nowhere near as long as the first day, and the track up the ridge was much easier to find in the daylight than it had been by moonlight. Upon reaching the bush line, 200m above the hut, the blazing sun prompted me to reach up for my sunnies when the sudden realisation that they lay on the hut doorstep struck. Not being one to just leave a cheap pair of Aussie \$15 polarised sunglasses as hut rubbish, I naturally dropped pack and practised my adventure racing skills in the jog back. 15 minutes later, the sunglasses were saved, and the realisation that running uphill isn't as easy as Coast-to-Coast winners make it out to be soon hit. An hour after leaving the group, I finally caught them up as they had lounged at one of the tops for the past 30 minutes watching me struggle to run up the steep track.

Clouds were closing in, but the view of the volcanoes to the west provided a superb demonstration of how mountainous peaks arranged on a north-south axis will be wet on the west and dry on the east in the face of prevailing westerlies. After a humorous exercise in snapping group photos with all seven cameras (none of them simultaneously) near the top of Sharp Cone, we began our descent to the bush, which began to ring out with the firing of shotguns somewhere down below. This provided a bit more trepidation, but we soon learned from hunters heading up the track that there was a firing range below. Just before sunset, all nine of us were down and heading off to Taupo for what turned out to be an entertaining night of Indian food at Mr. India restaurant, complete with some scintillating Bollywood music.

Whatipu & A Cave Party

September 2005

Jane Dudley, Liana, Cindy, James, Jon, Rachel, Mohammad, Lara, Heiko, Reuben

The Tramp

At 10:30am on Saturday morning, 20 September, we headed west in our cars towards beautiful Whatipu. The route took us through the wilds of the winding bush-covered hills and onto the winding gravel road that leads to Whatipu. At the Whatipu carpark, we got out our daypacks for our days walk, which would travel along Gibbons Track, branching off to the Muir Track which would take us to the Pararaha Valley and back to the beach.

Gibbons track is a bit of a climb for the first part of the trip – the track winds up 280m through Pururi and Nikau trees, and then into a forest of Kanuka trees. After only 10 minutes, there is a look out over the wild and beautiful Whatipu Beach. Back in the bush, we continued on up the hill where there were pale violet Hebes in flower, with their tiny flowers all over the ground. Atop the ridge, we arrived at a lookout where we could see right across the swampland of Whatipu. This whole area has a real sense of remoteness, and the unique, wild nature of West Coast beaches. The ridge then heads back, climbing gradually in the bush

to the track junction.

Once on Muir Track, we started to go downhill, descending into a lush valley with a small stream to the right of us, and Pururi and Nikau all around. Then the track reaches a rocky outcrop where we had an amazing view right across the Pararaha Valley. At this point, the track is fringed with Kowhai to one side, with a step drop off on the other and we noticed a fruiting Native Passionfruit perched down the cliff. I almost tried for one of the fruits after having read *Edible Native Plants* but I thought better because it would certainly require rock climbing!

After the view, the track descends down into the Pararaha stream; we walked along it, crossing through many times. As the ocean draws nearer, the terrain becomes grassy marshland, where the stream meanders out into a swamp. We stopped and had a break where the boardwalk across the swamp begins, then carried on across the swamp and along to the sand dunes, which we climbed up. Here, you can see the headlands of some of the other beaches up the coast, which were



shrouded in mist from the salt spray.

We ran down the sand dunes, heading towards the sea. This point is always the hardest to navigate, because there is no clear track from the sand dunes out onto the beach – it's a bush bash through the coastal scrub and another small swampy area. On the way we went past a small estuary, which was swimming with the signs of life: tiny piles of sand from crabs' digging, pairs of paradise ducks and swans gliding past, wetland grasses and other water plants. This whole area crawls, secretes, glides, flutters, creeps and protrudes the lives of interesting little creatures.

After this pleasant distraction, we reached Whatipu beach. The sea here is always wild and foaming, full of innumerable dangerous rips and eddies. There is always something therapeutic about going to a place which is so wild and beautiful and looks identical to what it has for thousands of years; and where there is not a house, building or clock tower to be seen.

We carried on down the beach, walking between the high tide mark and the clumps of grasses growing on the dunes. At the end of the beach, there is track back along to the car park.

The Cave Party

After a short break at the cars, we retrieved our packs for sleeping the night in a nearby cave. In addition, we brought along with musical instruments; guitars, recorders and a trusty battery powered stereo. The walk to our lovely secret cave took about 15 minutes and then we put aside our gear to sit on a grassy knoll above the cave. Here we had a picnic of cold smoked chicken, and potato salad and cheese, bread rolls, cherry tomatoes and orange juice. Yum!

We sat there, many of us resplendent in our cave-dwelling furs (the theme for the party was to dress as cave dwellers), watching the sun set over the sea. Then we climbed down into the cave, where we stared lighting lots of little fairy candles. Everyone had brought so many that we ended up with over 70 little candles, all around the sides of the cave. As we went in, a little bat flew out, off to start his new night.

We settled down, put down our tarpaulin, and laid down our sleeping bags and bed rolls in a cosy little pile. Jon, Mohammad and Liana gave us all a wonderful musical performance involving guitars, singing voices, clapping and recorders. Jon revealed that he can even play the recorder with his hands alone! It all sounded great, and we didn't even need the stereo, as this was far more appropriate.

Afterwards, we watched MacGyver on Jon's laptop – a truly surreal experience in a cave – and ate jelly snakes while chatting. We had chocolate prizes for fellow cave dwellers (most primal, furiest, best cave man and woman), but we just ended up sharing all the chocolates among everyone.

We stayed up to watch the moon come up, which, along with the stars, we could see through the entrance of the cave. It was completely dry and warm – I even woke up sweating after we had blown all the candles out and gone to sleep.

The next morning as we packed up and prepared to return, I played some fantastic Peruvian pan pipe music on my stereo. It sounded eerily beautiful echoing around our cave.

Inevitably, we got back to the cars and drove back home to modern civilisation after our fantastic weekend at Whatipu.

Mt Kaitarakihi (852m)

September 2005

Maja Aspaas, Jane Dudley, Scott Houghton, Ronny Etzion, Sabrina Giesel, Helen Miller, Kate Newbur, Claire Siberry, Patrick

Jane and I continued our luck with weather on this trip, and it was sunny when we arrived at the start of the track, about 15km along the Kopu-Hikuai Rd at the base of the Coromandel peninsula. The track had been slashed within the last few days, which kind of diminished the untouched NZ bush feel, but made the going a lot easier. The area around Mt Kaitarakihi was once a kauri forest, but was logged extensively by some shortsighted individuals (trying to use nice language) back in the day, so the bush is still relatively young.

Climbing slowly towards the summit, we were deceived by the track times on the signs. The signs here turned out to be far more accurate than the Auckland Regional Council ones [in the Waitakere Ranges] which sometimes seem to take their times from 80 year olds on crutches. After what seemed far too long we reached the turn-off to the Devcich Kauri – track time 15 mins. Half an hour later, after a lot of scrambling down the steep clay "track" and pissing off a whole bunch of trees by using their roots and trunks and branches as handholds, we found ourselves staring up at an enormous kauri. No Tane Mahuta, mind you, but this was a bloody big tree.

Even the branch that had recently fallen off it dwarfed the surrounding trees.

After climbing back to the main track, we continued on, talking and moving at a leisurely pace. About 150m below the summit the path went up a rock face with chains attached – a good arm workout. Because of the steep gradient for this last part of the tramp, we couldn't see the summit and every time I thought we were nearly there I'd look up and see more climbing ahead. We reached the summit about three and a half hours after leaving the carpark and by then the weather had closed in a bit and we were in the clouds. A smooth piece of rock provided a perfect platform for lunch, and for a while we could see the Firth of Thames out to the west.

The walk back to the cars took about three hours, going back along the same track. We stopped in Thames for well deserved fish and chips and ate them sitting by the water before heading back to the big city. This walk is definitely one to tackle again some day, perhaps turning the trip into a big loop around to the west. Hopefully the weather will be clear too next time – the full view must be amazing!

Te Ahu Ahu Loop Walk

October 2005

Jane Dudley, Liana, Shane, Tony, Marie, Adam, Chris, Glenn

This trip was a Sunday day walk. We arrived at the notice board at 10:30am. Unfortunately daylight savings had just begun and some people forgot. Thus, 11:30 brought a few text messages asking where we were – the answer, of course, was that we were already on the track!

The loop track begins off Te Ahu Ahu Road, close to Piha. Unfortunately the weather was bad, so the first 10 minutes of our walk was in the rain, but it soon cleared and didn't return again for the remainder of our trip. As the cloud rolled away, we began to gradually see the spectacular coastal views and out to sea. The track follows the coastal cliff tops, allowing for a constantly good view. A few minutes down, we came to a lookout [*Eds. Note: Te Ahua Point*] where we could walk out to the edge of a huge cliff and gaze at the waves crashing below, safely restrained by wire fencing.

We followed the track until we got a view of Mercer Bay, situated between Piha and Karekare inaccessible with steep cliffs going down into it. Because it was spring, the track was fringed with flowering Kowhai and the yellow flowers were all over the ground. Clematis was flowering in the tops of the trees, which were mostly Kanuka and Manuka.

We turned onto Comans track, which follows this steep coast around to Karekare. This track provided more amazing views, and even more Kowhai thickets. We came across several Tuis feeding on the Kowhai nectar. On the way, we also came across some little *Pterostylis* (Greenhood) orchids as well.

The track continued down to Karekare beach, which we walked along until finding a suitable lunch stop. Karekare at this time of year is a wild and beautiful place, with very few people around. The combination of the iron sand, the jagged, distinctive west coast rock, the wind blown vegetation, and the foamy sea gives it a unique character.

After lunch, we started back toward our cars on the inland route, Ahu Ahu track. It starts in a Pohutukawa grove and it gradually turns into Nikau, Pururi, and then predominantly Kanuka. Near the top of the inland ridge, the bush is mostly Flax and windblown Manuka.

We kept up with our steady pace until we got back to the carpark. It was a thoroughly enjoyable trip thanks to the beautiful scenery and the fine company.



Karekare Beach, as seen from the Comans Track

The Track Time is Only 13 Hours Today...

November 2005

Chantelle Watt, Andy O'Loan

Tongariro Northern Circuit Day 1 (Whakapapa - Waihohonu)

My last exam (ever!) was on Monday, so come Tuesday morning at 8.05am Andy was knocking at my door for a trip down to the mountain. This was to be the last middle-of-the-week trip before I entered the workforce and became a weekend-only tramper. Our plan was that we would go mid week thus decreasing the chances of running into hordes of tourists on this Great Walk – and it was absolutely glorious sunny weather.

Not surprisingly, the carpark at Whakapapa was packed, but we got the second to last carpark opposite the visitors centre at Whakapapa (really hoping that the occupants of these cars weren't all staying at the hut that night) and set off down the track. We were greeted every few minutes by Germans, Americans or Slovaks. Luckily this meant that most of the cars in the carpark were daywalkers, and not staying at the hut. Taranaki Falls, the destination of all these daywalkers, were really beautiful. It was so hot we really appreciated a bit of breeze from the falls.

Further along, Old Waihohonu hut was really interesting- it had lots of information about when it was built and what it was

used for. Interestingly, it used to have separate male and female bunkrooms (the unlucky women didn't have a fire in theirs though) and men there used to ski in three piece suits and ties! The track time from Whakapapa was 5 ½ hours to New Waihohonu hut, which is about what it took us – including about half an hour visiting Old Waihohonu hut and other side trips (Lower Tama Lake was worth a look, though we didn't bother to walk up to Upper Tama Lake).

We got to the hut to find that it was only about half-full, which was very nice. Since we arrived late, everyone had already cooked dinner and we didn't have to compete for the cookers (brand-new and super-efficient). Unfortunately, I was allergic to a nearby plant and became Ms. Snuffalopogus for that evening until I took some Fenagen and became soundly asleep instead – drifting off to the sweet strains of German and Slovakian.

Day 2 (Waihohonu - Ketetahi)

All our hutmates got up really early and set off, though we decided a lie-in until 10ish was in order. So we had the whole hut to ourselves for breakfast, which was nice – although there was no one to drool over our bacon, garlic pita, tomatoes and



Chantelle at the Lower Tama Lake, Day One

Andy contemplates life near Ketetahi Hut, glad that he (dressed in bright orange and yellow) will not be mistaken by absent hunters for deer that do not exist on Mt. Tongariro



mushrooms for breakfast! We managed to set off the fire alarm with the bacon and the hut warden rushed in looking all worried – I didn't even know huts had fire alarms!

After this amusing event, we set off to Otatere hut for a lunch stop on one of the picnic tables outside. The landscape was sort of like a desert (much like the Rangipo desert further round, but with smaller hills) and there were some great wind sculpted rock formations. The walk was very flat for a while and then turned into a steep climb up to Emerald Lakes (absolutely gorgeous) where you can also see steam rising out of the cliff.

After admiring the Emerald Lakes we walked up to Blue Lake and had a break just to take in the great view. From there it is all downhill to Ketetahi Hut. Once the track rounds a corner, the hut seems really close, but the track goes in huge zigzags down the hill so it is almost flat. The hut only had one group in it, although 2 groups arrived later. We ate pikelets with butter and jam (Andy had brought a glass jar full!) for an afternoon snack, which was fantastic! After a long nap, we cooked dinner and met some of the other people in the hut. The view from Ketetahi hut is amazing, really beautiful!

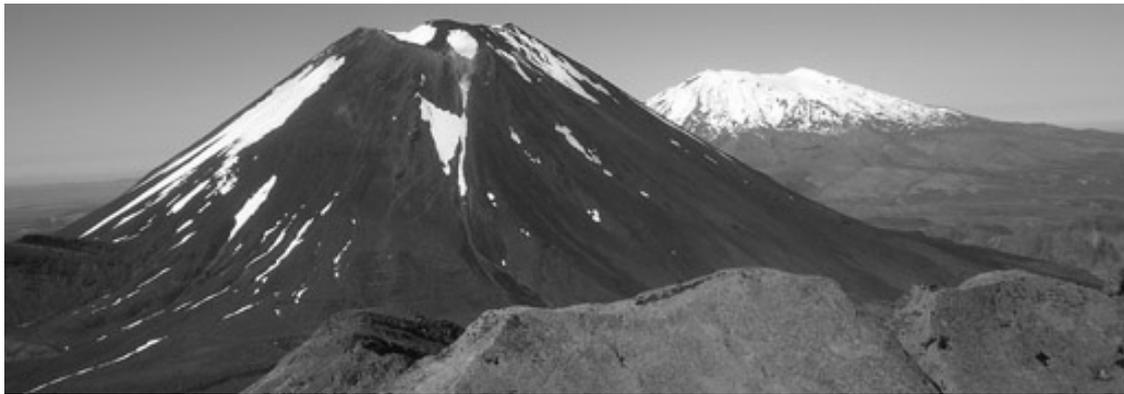
Day 3 (Ketetahi – Whakapapa)

The next morning alarms rang at the staggeringly early time of 7:00 because we had a big day planned. I wanted to get up to the summits of Tongariro and Ngauruhoe but the track times for those sidetrips alone was 5 hours, let alone the

around 8 hours track time just to get back to the car!

Luckily, we crushed the track time of 2½ hours back to the Emerald Lakes and arrived there in just 1 hr 5min. I was feeling very keen and enthusiastic to climb my first mountains (having not summited Ruapehu on snow schools due to poor weather). The weather was beautiful as we had this part of the Tongariro Crossing Track totally to ourselves! We pushed up the scree slope to Red Crater (hard work!) and dumped our packs to nab Tongariro's high point. It's not much of a climb at all from the track – we did it in about an hour return – and there were just stunning views of everything all around. By the time we got back to our packs it was rush hour on the Crossing and swarming with people. Our reverse route scurried down the scree slope while lots of the people on the way up looked like they were wondering what had possessed them to come on their strenuous daytrip.

At the bottom of Ngauruhoe, we chucked coats, lunch, and water into Andy's pack and ditched mine with the rest of the gear at the bottom. Conditions were ideal and we headed for the solid rock outcrop which was great fun to climb - more like rock climbing than tramping. I used my arms more than my legs (a welcome change)



Mt. Ngauruhoe (L) and Mt. Ruapehu (R) from the summit of Mt. Tongariro

because it was really steep – about 60 degrees – and required great concentration to avoid slipping on the scree. Close to the top of the crater lip, I was starving, so a lunch break out of the wind was an excellent rejuvenation. Then we walked up the snow to the lip of the inner crater - it's huge! Then we bumslid down to the middle – I had never been bumsliding before and it was heaps of fun! Luckily my jacket is longline, unlike Andy's, giving him a somewhat numb posterior. In the middle, we investigated the hot air venting out of the volcano (its kind of scary to realise just how active a volcano it is) and then walked along the rim to the true summit – it was great!

After a very steep and fast bumslide back down to the middle crater, we descended down the scree – another first for me, learning how to scree-slide, which is so much easier than walking! We were down at our packs at about 2pm. This late, there were only a couple more groups of Crossing walkers so we soon had the track to ourselves for the remainder of the walk.

This took us down the Devils Staircase (pleased we weren't going up it) with more amazing views. Then we got the junction at Mangatepopo Hut and turned south to go to Whakapapa. Here, off the Crossing, the track turns from a superhighway that you can walk down holding hands (and I know this because we did) to a narrow track with crap views. Thus, my motivation went through the floor as we passed the 7

hour mark, my feet started telling me they had had enough for one day. And I slowed right down – it seemed like we would never get back to Whakapapa, but we did.

It took us just over 10 hours since we left Ketetahi Hut and I was shattered – my ankle and knee both giving me grief. When I looked at Ngauruhoe off in the distance, it was hard to believe we had walked that far in one afternoon! Then I peeled off my boots with glee and we drove to Tokaanu hot pools for a much deserved soak (although a bit painful initially due to all the sunburned bits Andy and I both had). Finally, we arrived at Grand Central Fry just minutes before it shut for one of their legendary fish burgers and a deep fried Mars bar.



Scree-Sliding down Mt. Ngauruhoe

Waihaha Hut, Pureora Forest Park

Jane Dudley, James Russell, Jacques van Wyk, Josef Sihan, Nova Jiang

The tramping began at a car park along Highway 32. After the long drive down to Pureora Forest, we were happy to get out, stretch our legs and have lunch. After putting on sunblock we headed off. The walk to Waihaha Hut isn't long, but quite varied.

The first part of the walk follows the Waihaha stream, which has carved interesting patterns into the ignimbrite rock. About 15 minutes in, there are round pools that look like they have been dug out with an ice-cream scoop. Most of the bush around these pools is Tanekaha trees. Along the side of the path, there is a build up of pumice, which you can also see along the track cuttings – a testament to the Taupo eruption. We saw some flowering specimens of *Ornotheceras Novaezeelande*, which were growing out of the pumice, and lots of Tutu, covered in its poisonous berries, draped all over the track. As the track slowly climbs, there are some nice views of the bush and river.

After about an hour, the track becomes scrubbier and slightly overgrown at Pokiara clearing. This clearing was burned intentionally around 50 years ago and has been slow to regenerate.

Moving on, the trees began to get bigger and soon we met a successful hunter with a large boar attached to his back and dogs roaming around his ankles. As we knew, this area is popular with pig and deer hunters. Additionally, it is popular with mountain bikers since the track is reasonably smooth and not too hilly.

Away from Pokiara clearing, the mature trees were huge Rimu and Tawa. Kidney ferns and huge fungi were hanging off the trees while Prince of Wales ferns grew on



the ground. The bush was very lush and the bird life was noticeable by how much birdsong was around us. We heard Kakariki chattering in the tops of trees, Tui singing while flying around the canopy, and sociable fantails flying around us. Additionally, a few Kereru were bobbing around and eating berries.

We got to Waihaha Hut and met some deer hunters who were on their way off into the hills. A large deer skull attached to the side of the hut gave even more indication of its popularity with the hunting fraternity. Delightfully, a group of four Kaka flew over the hut making their hoarse calls.

This hut is situated next to the river, so after taking off our boots, we padded down to the river and someone spotted yet another deer skull submerged down stream. Nova decided to dive for it, so the men got sent back while Nova went skinny diving for the skull.

Meanwhile, at the hut, Jacque was unpacking, and showed off the .22 he had brought for possum hunting. In addition, he had brought batteries for his spotlight – each weighing 2 kg! He put the gun together and gave us all a go with firing it at a plastic lid next to the hut. It was good fun and James and Jacque decided that they would go and catch possums when night fell.

Later on, we got the fire going and had dinner, which was Spaghetti Bolognese. As night approached, we saw the full moon rise and James and Jacque set off on their possum hunting mission. The rest of us played cards and went to bed.

James and Jacque came back later on, but hadn't managed to find any possums! This is probably a good sign. Along with all the birdlife we and seen and heard, there must be some successful control of the introduced predators!

In the morning, we wrote our names in the hut book and found Andy O'Loan's name in the hut book several times when he had

been out here on some of his geology fieldwork. [See Page...]

We tramped back the way that we had come and met more hunters and a mountain biker on their way to the hut. Nova and I heard a fern bird lurking in the bushes, making its bizarre shrill call. We also saw paradise ducks swimming in the stream.

Back at the carpark, we set off home after a great tramp. Although the Waihaha track is not a difficult tramp, it is a very scenic area and offers a great variety of scenery – as well as a healthy bird population, due to the poisoning of introduced pests

Fairy Falls, Waitakere Ranges

Jane Dudley, Holger, Joseph, Pri, Jon Deverill, David, Jacque

I was surprised to discover that the map I had grabbed from the club's Waitakere maps shelf was in fact 29 years old, older than most people present. However, on that fine and sunny Sunday, it didn't matter at all, as Fairy Falls was marked on it. Such old maps have an added benefit of offering interesting insights into obscure tracks and destroyed huts of the past (though not as ancient as the fine Tramping Club Hut, but close to it).

At 10:30 am we embarked on our journey to the Fairy Falls car park from the club noticeboard. However, what should have been a quick 40 minute drive was interrupted by an anonymous request for a 1½ hour stop to drop off a tyre.

Finally, we arrived at the Fairy Falls car park, and began on our way. The walk to the aforementioned falls usually takes about 2 hours. Under the fine winter sun, we arrived at the falls in good time, taking time to admire our meandering past beautiful mature Kauri trees. Fairy Falls is stunning, with a beautiful pool scooped out

of the rock over thousands of years that looks inviting even now in the middle of winter.

We sat down and had lunch next to the falls, visited by curious little fantails hopping around on nearby *Dracophyllum*. Jon Deverill had brought a guitar along, and played us some tunes as we ate our lunch.

Afterwards, we walked around to the base of the falls to exhaust the group's film and digital memory. Then, we made our way back through bush full of lush Nikau, Pururi and Kahikatea, along a track covered in supplejack, Kanuka, Mamaku and Karaka. The walk itself was mostly peaceful and tranquil – except for a couple of extremely yappy small dogs (luckily for them they were safely ensconced behind a wire fence). We got back to the carpark refreshed and happy after our lovely walk. As Jacque puts it, this walk was, "a better way to spend a Sunday than doing housework!"

Kaweka Ranges (Makahu – Rocks Ahead – Kiwi Mouth – Mackintosh Spur/Hut – Matauria Ridge)

December 2005

David Hodges

On 24 December I figured I'd be keen enough to drive 6 hours on Boxing Day and start tramping the next day. Nobody had asked to join me, so I drove almost all the way to Napier, then an hour northwest – arriving at Makahu Saddle carpark shortly before 7pm. Makahu Saddle Hut is conveniently located only 2 minutes walk from the carpark.

After dinner, I climbed the small hill just behind the dunny to take a few photos and ring my flatmate for the latest weather forecast. Three noisy keas flew past in the distance, and as I returned to the hut I heard a couple of moreporks. The wind picked up around 9:30pm and I had to bolt the door from inside to stop it swinging open.

Around 7:30 in the morning a hunter came along and tried unsuccessfully to open the door and then bolted it from outside – locking me inside! And the windows in that hut don't open so I would have been really trapped; fortunately, I was awake and got up to let him in. I had just about reached the door when he locked me in and it took some ferocious knocking on the door before he noticed and unbolted it. He said that Hawke's Bay tends to be windier in the mornings than the afternoons, which is what the forecast predicted so I stayed in bed reading until 11 while more foolish trampers set off up the ridge into the teeth of the gales.

By 12:30, the wind seemed to be decreasing so I set off up the ridge. Watching the clouds passing over the top of the range, they began blowing slower as I climbed – by the time I reached the top there was just a light wind. There were good views of Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and

Mt. Tarawera from Kaweka J. - the highest point in the Kawekas (1724m).

Heading west, I descended Back Ridge towards Back Ridge Hut and could see people at the hut. Not wanting to share a hut with this likely group of hunters, I debated whether to continue west, on to Back Ridge Biv – which the sign claimed was only an hour away. I suspected it would take longer (and also wasn't sure whether there would be any water at the biv - the map shows a tarn but the hunter I met that morning told me that one of the other tarns shown on the map was dry) so I settled on the hut.

There were 3 others staying in this 4 bunk hut - one trumper from Napier and two hunters. The hunters had left Makahu Saddle a few hours before me and grovelled up the ridge on hands and knees in howling winds, nearly blown off by the gusts. Surprisingly, they were carrying 2 litres of fresh milk along with tins of baked beans and spaghetti, but they returned to the car park the next morning, carrying most of it back out with them. I guess the concept of dehydrated food didn't appeal to them.

There was an AUTC entry in the hut book – from Andy O'Loan and Claire Gibbs in 2002 – but that was the only hut book to go back that far and apparently no-one else from AUTC had been to this part of the Kawekas since then.

It took me a while to find the dunny, as it was across the creek from the hut, where I didn't think to look as I had never seen a dunny on the opposite side of the creek from its associated hut before. Wouldn't it be a bugger if the creek flooded!

In the morning when it came time to leave, I found locking the door to be difficult; the door was so warped that you had to pull really hard and there was nothing to pull on except the casing for the bolt. That explains the complaints in the hut book about people leaving the door open!

Heading south, it took an hour and a half to get to the junction for Back Ridge Biv (Hah! I knew that sign was lying!). Turning west, it was pretty much downhill all the way to Rocks Ahead Hut, on the east bank of the mighty Ngaruroro River, one of the largest in the Kawekas. As I didn't start walking until nearly 10, it was 2pm by the time I got to the hut. After lunch, it would have been another 4 hours to either Otutu or Manson Hut, so I decided to have another short day and stay in Rocks Ahead – a good choice as rain and lightning soon engulfed the tops.

A couple from Wellington turned up shortly before the rain – they were doing roughly the same trip as me, but in the opposite direction – and they knew a few people from Palmerston North Tramping and Mountaineering Club that I used to go tramping with.

The next day was up onto and along the Manson Range with good views in all directions, although Ruapehu was partly obscured by cloud. I decided to miss the optional 2 hour detour to Otutu Hut, figuring that the views along the way would be no better than what I could already see. The track has been rerouted to within 1 minute of Manson Hut so I stopped in there to write my name in the hut book and caught two old hunters napping (they had been there for two weeks with a gas-powered fridge and portable shower).

By the time I got back down to the Ngaruroro, at Kiwi Mouth Hut, it had been 9 hours since I left Rocks Ahead and I was knackered (the track time was 6½ hours, but I had so far failed to meet the track time

on every section of track – except the “15 minutes” from the main track junction to Back Ridge Hut, which only took 10). If the river is not high, it supposedly takes about 5½ hours to walk down the river between Rocks Ahead and Kiwi Mouth huts; but you need to have everything well sealed in waterproof plastic bags as there are several swims.

After such a long day, I slept in the next morning and started late, taking the dry track over the hill to Kiwi Saddle (the usual route, via the river, is half an hour shorter, but I didn't feel like getting my feet wet). I heard a Sika deer scream close to the track just as it enters the bush. The track becomes briefly invisible at that point but it turned out the deer calls led the way. My cold was slowly improving but it still took me considerably longer than the stated time, so once again, by the time I had finished lunch it was getting a bit late to go on to the next hut (even though the wind seemed to be starting to pick up, so it would have been good to cover as much ground as possible, before it got too windy). So I stayed at Kiwi Saddle Hut, joined later in the day by a hunter from Wanganui.

The wind picked up during the night and some more at 8am so by the time I left the hut it was quite strong, but not too cold. The shortest route from Kiwi Saddle back to Makahu Saddle is over Kaweka J., or there were two alternatives - one entirely off the tops, walking for miles in the wrong direction before turning around and walking back (no thanks!) and the other down Mackintosh Spur, half way along the ridge to Kaweka J.

DOC has erected an interesting new hut at Castle Camp (halfway between Kiwi Saddle and Mackintosh Spur) with a wooden frame and corrugated iron roof covering a dirt floor and walls made from clear plastic sheet reinforced with chicken wire! I would have gone in and written my

name in the hut book but the bolt on the door was very difficult to open, so I didn't dare in case I couldn't close it again.

By the time I got to Mackintosh Spur the wind seemed to be increasing and I was still a couple of hundred metres below the highest point so I decided the route down the spur would be a wise move, even though it's about 3 hours longer than continuing on to Kaweka J.

It turned out I was right. At Mackintosh Hut, I met a Manawatu Tramping and Skiing Club party who had tried to climb Makahu Spur that morning and given up because the winds were too strong, as did the party before them. For once, I was faster than the track times – there was a sign on top of the hill before Mackintosh Spur saying 3 hours to Kiwi Saddle, which made no sense as that's pointing downhill and it had taken me 2½ hours uphill. Also,

the sign at Kiwi Saddle says 2¼ hours to Studholme Saddle, which is *after* Mackintosh Spur! And the sign at the top of the spur said 1¾ hours to this hut but it only took me 1¼.

The track from Mackintosh Hut to Makahu Hut was quite scenic but rather long, especially the arduous steep 300m climb out of Donald Gorge (onto Matauria Ridge), where I saw a couple of kereru.

After another night at Makahu Hut, woken up a few times by the wind again, I drove home after a swim in Lake Taupo on the way back. Lake Taupo had been very warm on the way down, so I figured perhaps it was about to erupt, but it was cooler on the way back so apparently it was just the surface couple of feet being heated by the sun.



Castle Camp – DoC's new budget hut design featuring plastic wrap/chicken-wire walls and dirt floors.

Tiritirimatangi Island

Chantelle Watt, Jane Dudley, Lara

We began our trip early on a Saturday morning. Somehow, we took an unusual route from Uni and found an obscure side street, where we came across a bizarre building. It's built like a medieval castle and apparently called the Kenneth Myers Centre. Subsequent attempts to relocate this building have failed. We then headed north to the Whangaparaoa Peninsula.

Since we were going to arrive early for the ferry, we stopped off at Silverdale. The town is primarily known for its thriving cut-price underwear industry. This Saturday however, there was a colourful market in Silverdale's historic community Hall, with prices and items that were a step back in time: large bags of feijoas for \$1, homemade soap, Enid Blyton novels and out of circulation glass lemon squeezers. After filling up on bargains, we headed off for the ferry.

The road out to the peninsula wound past a large subdivision where the houses all looked like cardboard cut-outs, utterly identical. The grass was perfectly even, the letterboxes were identical, even the people out walking their dogs all looked exactly the same. There was definitely something sinister lurking beneath the surface (some Desperate Housewives?).

We got to the ferry, hopped on, and took off on the short trip over to the island. On the island, we took the guided walk; our guide showed us the Blue Penguin nests, where we could lift the covers off their nests and peer in (they didn't seem so happy to see us though). We walked around the beach, and across to the other side of the island, spotting wood pigeons, fantails, saddlebacks, grey warblers and bellbirds. In the more mature bush we saw robins, tuis (chasing around all the other birds), stitchbirds and tomtits. Some parts

of the bush were seething with birds, depending on what was fruiting at the time. The Supporters of Tiritiri have built feeding stations for the stitchbirds, which are meant to supplement their feed intake; the cages were designed so that only stitchbirds could get in. Some porky stitchbirds were having a bit of trouble squeezing through the holes cut for them in the mesh surrounding the feeders. The guide and our group headed up towards the lighthouse, stopping to have a look for brown teal in the ponds on the way, but because of the dry weather, the ponds were pretty small and there were no brown teal to be seen.

At the lighthouse, we had lunch on the grass, where a takahe and a few paradise ducks came wandering past us; they obviously knew where to get some food scraps! The views from here are beautiful, you can see across to all the other Hauraki Gulf Islands: Little & Great Barrier, Waiheke, Rangitoto, and many others. We visited the gift shop and bought some bits and pieces to support the conservation work. Then we headed back to the ferry via the Wattle Track.

Here, a quail ran in front of us and we were greeted by a friendly little robin. As we got further into the bush, we saw lots of bellbirds and some red crested kakariki, flying around and making their chattering calls.

With 10 minutes to spare before boarding the boat, we walked to the nearest pond and saw a pair of brown teal floating peacefully together! Then it was time to return to Auckland after a great trip to a wonderful island which is a visible testament to the value of conservation.

Note: See colour insert for photos!

Dun Mountain – Pelorus River

December 2004

David Hodges

I flew down to Nelson and caught a taxi to the start of the Dun Mountain Walking Track, on the southeast edge of the city. As it was getting late in the day, I figured it would save time to take the taxi to the end of the gravel forestry road, however a locked gate barred the way about half way up, so it probably took about the same time following the road as if I had taken the track.

I was carrying way too much stuff and it was further to the hut than I thought (I must have misunderstood the times that DoC read me over the phone) so I decided to spend the night at a shelter about 3 hours from the road, instead of carrying on another 3 hours to the hut. This shelter seemed to be designed for maximum discomfort, with concrete floors and seats too narrow to sleep on, so I ignored the no camping signs and pitched my tent outside on the infinitely more comfortable soft grass. Another party that had also been slower than expected did not have a tent, so they slept out under the stars. The shelter/campsite had good views across Tasman Bay to the mountains of Kahurangi National Park.

The next day was quite scenic, with nice views of the Northwest Richmond Ranges, including Dun Mountain (so called because it is full of copper, which prevents most plants growing and gives it a brown colour). I was still recovering from an infection and travelling pretty slowly (with frequent long rest breaks), thus I abandoned my ambitions to climb Mt. Fyfe, the highest point in the Richmond Range (or at least the highest one I could find on my map) a long way to the south and settled for the second hut on my planned route, down on the Pelorus River.

The next morning was extremely windy with showers and drizzle all morning so I decided if it didn't stop raining by lunchtime, I would abandon the rest of the 4 day circuit, have a hut day and go back out the way I came the next day. But around mid-morning a keen & fit trumper named Rebekah Wright turned up; she turned out to be an architecture student from Auckland University. When she asked my plans and I told her, she said, "I think you should come with me!" It was an offer I couldn't refuse, although she had to wait nearly an hour while I got out of bed and packed all my gear.

She was doing a North-South traverse from Havelock to Arthur's Pass and, having already tramped more than 2 hours that morning, she was planning on continuing another 8 hours to Browning Hut that night. When I said that I didn't feel up to 8 hours in the rain, she consented to tramping a mere 4 hours to Roebuck Hut, down on the Pelorus River.

At Roebuck Hut, it rained and rained and rained and we woke up to an impressively muddy and swollen Pelorus River the next morning – with the occasional small tree floating past. Fortunately, there was a swingbridge across the river; otherwise we would have been trapped. Now, under intermittent drizzle, we climbed up onto a ridge which the track sidled along without any open views, although we did see (and smell!) a family of three or four goats quite close to the track. After all that rain, there were a number of creeks crossing the track that weren't marked on the map.

At the end of the ridge was a junction where I could continue along my original circuit route, which would lead right back to

Nelson, but required a long day in order to get back on time for my next trip, or I could continue to Browning Hut with Rebekah. This shorter option with Rebekah meant that I'd have to hitch back, but my left knee had been hurting most of the day so it didn't take much effort to persuade me to follow her. When we reached Browning Hut, Rebekah was keen to continue to the next hut but mercifully the rivers were still swollen and the next one was impassable.

There were a couple of wekas hanging around the hut but they obviously didn't like being photographed as they ran away every time I got my camera out. At this

hut, our already copious supply of reading material was temporarily augmented by numerous Wilderness and Forest and Bird magazines.

The next day the rivers had receded and were at normal levels again, so we managed to cross the deep, fast-flowing but not very wide river to get to the next hut, where Rebekah and I parted company. On the way out to the road, I met a family who gave me a lift back to Nelson - it turned out they lived in the same street as the backpackers where I was staying the night and meeting my tramping partner (also named Rebecca) for my next trip.

Mt. Owen / Wangapeka / Heaphy – Kahurangi National Park

January 2005

Dave Hodges, Rebecca Clarke

MT. OWEN PLATEAU (South – North Traverse)

On New Year's Day, my alarm was set for 6am in order to make it to the Nelson bus station before the bus left at 7:30 am. Rebecca Clarke and I were woken half an hour early by yelling and swearing from across the road – presumably the same boneheads who I had called noise control over at 1am and 2am. This time I didn't mind being woken up as it meant less of a rush.

We rode the bus down to Murchison, taking ice axes just in case the snowpack had not receded. On the way down it was drizzling, but we managed to catch a few glimpses of the tops through the clouds and decided we didn't need the axes; they were left in Murchison, along with books and food for the Heaphy Track.

I had figured the cheapest way to do both Mt. Owen and Thousand Acre Plateau was to catch the bus down to Murchison and

get the owner of the Murchison Motel to drop us off at Mt. Owen and pick us up at Lake Matiri, tramping from one to the other along the ridge between Stone Hut and Hurricane Hut - the map doesn't show a track but DOC informed me that there is a track of sorts, which takes 12 hours (must be quite rugged as it doesn't look very far on the map) [Ed. Note: *Yes, there is an unmarked route along the Matiri Range between Hurricane and Stone Huts. It takes 11 hours because the ridgeline constantly undulates up and down 200m, sometimes over rock rubble, but it's quite easy (though you need superb navigation skills, even in fine weather), with only one semi-razorback area (the south ridge of Nugget Knob). However, the real challenge of this route is the abhorrent condition of the Matiri Valley "track" between Lake Matiri and Hurricane Huts – it gets used less than 10 times a year*].

It rained for a while on the way to Mt. Owen and the forecast was predicting lightning. As Mt. Owen is the highest point in



Mt Owen, 1875m, on a 2006 trip

Kahurangi National Park, we decided it wasn't the best place to be in a thunderstorm so we took the alternative route up Frying Pan Creek and the Fyfe River to Branch Creek Hut, which made for a shorter first day but a much longer second day. The sign at the start of the track said 6½ hours to the hut but it had already taken us quite a while to figure out where we were and find the start of the track (my abysmal navigational skills were being severely challenged already) and the track was little used and hard to follow in places.

There were only about half a dozen entries in the hut book each year, with gaps of 6 months during winter when no-one went there. Several parties complained that the sign should read 7 to 9 hours instead of 6½. It had taken us 8½ hours, although we did waste a lot of time trying to figure out where we were and where the track should be by studying the map. However, it would have been quicker to just scout around until we found it - basically the track stays quite close to the river and not far above it all the way. After getting a sore knee on the previous trip, I decided to minimize

weight by leaving my tent in Murchison, along with all my reading material, except for a single AA magazine, which I had planned on leaving in one of the huts as soon as I finished reading it. Rebecca's leaky water bladder leaked all over the magazine while we were having dinner, so I abandoned it here at Branch Creek Hut (hanging it up on the inside washing line to dry) without reading a word.

The next day took much longer than expected to reach Granity Pass Hut. The track disappeared soon after emerging from the bush into the leatherwood belt, so we dropped down into the tussock-covered alpine valley of Nuggety Creek, which was easy walking and headed up the valley until the leatherwood disappeared and we were able to climb straight back up onto the ridge and rejoin the track, which would have taken us to Mt. Owen and from there to the hut. We figured it was much quicker to take the direct cross-country route suggested in the hut book and left the track further up, rejoining it atop the hill just above the hut. Again my navigational skills were shown to be somewhat deficient – I thought I had identified all the landmarks

and the correct route, until I got my compass out and found I was 45 degrees off - oops! With the aid of the compass I got to the right hill and arrived at the hut without a hitch.

It was a hot and sunny that day and we had fine views of the whole of Kahurangi National Park - there was a small patch of snow on Mt. Owen and more snow on some high mountains far to the Northwest. Mt. Owen is made of marble / limestone, which is what most caves are made from, so the first part of the plateau was like crossing over the top of a maze - little micro-ridges going in all directions and we'd try to pick the shortest path between ourselves and our destination. Just before the hut we saw the biggest Speargrass bushes I've ever seen - 5 or 6 feet tall!

There were about 10 people at Granity Pass Hut from about 3 different parties - apparently it is one of the most popular huts in the park. We stopped there for afternoon tea (after 7 hours walking), then continued on another 5 hours to Rolling Junction Hut, with dinner on the tops.

Along the way, we encountered the most dangerous stream-crossing of the trip – the track crosses a waterfall and the water is only 5cm deep, but if you slip, it's a steep 20m drop. The last 3km to Rolling Junction Hut is along a road, and someone Rebecca knew turned up in a car and gave us a lift to the hut, saving half an hour's walk, but he got the car stuck turning the corner at the hut, and it took more than half an hour to free the car!

WANGAPEKA TRACK

The next day we headed up the Wangapeka River to Stone Hut, passing historic Cecil King's Hut along the way - it is made from timber felled on-site and has a lot more character than the usual DOC huts. Our feet were sore from the previous 12 hour day.

We awoke early the next morning, ready for another 12 hour day, but when we got to Wangapeka Saddle we saw that the difficult Matiri Range that we were intending to follow was covered in clouds.

Granity Pass Hut, Mt Owen Plateau.



With no tent and no bivvy bags, I didn't relish the possibility of not making it to the hut that night, so we aborted that plan in favour of continuing along the Wangapeka and wandered down to chilly Helicopter Flat Hut for a leisurely lunch.

It rained during lunch but stopped by the time we finished, and then it was just a short stroll down Lost Valley Creek to the new Trevor Carter Hut (which is where the old Luna Hut used to be). We spent a lazy afternoon in the hut while it rained again outside.

The next day (it rained all day) and we met a very slow and totally clueless old couple ten minutes below Little Wanganui Saddle.

"How far is it?" the old man asked.

"Ten minutes," I replied.

"Ten minutes to Taipo Hut?"

Whoops! It was ten minutes to the saddle and probably more than 3 hours (at their pace) to Taipo Hut, or more than an hour to Stag Flat Hut (incorrectly labelled as a shelter on the map).

The streams flowing into the Little Wanganui were all flooded, but crossable. I kept an ear open for flash floods while crossing the streams. We caught up with a party of Australians and Poms at Little Wanganui Hut – they had stayed at Taipo Hut the night before. The fire was lit, so the hut was very warm and everything dried out quickly, including Rebecca's wet sleeping bag.

In the morning, the stream outside the hut had gone down a lot, but there was one other stream to cross on the way out. It was just above the Little Wanganui, which was quite flooded, as was the main river, thus slipping would mean being swept into the Little Wanganui. So we waited a few minutes for the other party to catch up so we could all link arms and cross together. Later on, the track went up and over a big hill and the other party decided to continue following the river bank. We never saw

most of them again; one turned up while we were waiting at the road end to be picked up by Little Wanganui Hotel where we would stay the night (only \$15 per person), but he hadn't seen the others for some time.

I rang Murchison Motel and got them to leave my bag full of food at the Information Centre, where Atomic Shuttles supposedly stopped, so they could pick it up and take it to Westport, where Karamea Express would pick it up and bring it to us. Atomic didn't pick it up – apparently they only stop in Murchison if they have someone to drop off or pick up there – but after several phone calls and some arguing, I managed to get the afternoon Atomic Bus to pick it up. As for the rest of the gear in Murchison, Rebecca would pick up the ice axes and pay the Motel owner on her way back to Nelson (she wasn't continuing along the Heaphy Track). Unluckily, the Karamea Express driver thought I was in Karamea instead of Little Wanganui and took my pack there instead. Fortunately, it was a Friday and there is only one pub in Karamea so half of Karamea's population comes to the pub at Little Wanganui on a Friday night so my pack was brought down, with my supply of books, just as I had finished the book I found in Trevor Carter Hut.

HEAPHY TRACK

The next morning it rained heavily and I almost decided to cancel my Heaphy trip, but it eventually stopped raining and I miraculously had no rain for the entire track (except one afternoon, after I had already reached a hut).

The Heaphy Track is a tramping highway, very easy with masses of people (about 30 a day in each direction). This is because it is quite scenic – much more than the Wangapeka – with the hillsides covered in

nikau palms and profusely flowering rata and pohutukawa.

On the first day, I saw a party not far from the start carrying a duvet on the outside of their pack! I wondered if they were planning to do the whole track and doubted they would get very far – apparently they had no clue that it rains about 5 days out of 7 in this area. Not surprisingly, I never saw them at Heaphy Hut that night (the first hut, although there is a shelter at Katipo Creek).

There were a couple of very tame wekas at Mackay Hut (which has great views back down the Heaphy River to the Coast) - apparently people had been feeding them. I was staying in my tent every night, as it's cheaper – \$10 a night instead of \$20.

However, I did use the Goulard Downs Hut, which has crappy wooden tent platforms, instead of tenting on the ground. It's a relatively small hut (10 bunks) with no gas cookers, so not many people stay there, compared to the other huts (most people doing the Heaphy Track don't carry

their own stove). I was joined there by a German, and two girls (one was American and the other was Kiwi) travelling together. The two girls had borrowed a stove but had forgotten to bring matches and just as I was leaving at 11am the next morning they asked me if they could borrow my matches to light the stove and cook breakfast – lucky for them I hadn't left already!

The last 5 hours from Perry Saddle Hut out to the road is the only boring part of the track - a long trudge through uninteresting bush with almost no views.

At the end, I caught the K-Bus back to Nelson airport. Rebecca had picked up the stuff I'd left at the backpackers in Nelson and taken it back to Auckland for me so I didn't have to rush into town and back to collect it. The bus drove past heaps more profusely flowering ratas and pohutukawas - the bus driver said she'd lived down there 20 years and never seen them bloom so spectacularly before. There were still patches of snow on the mountains, visible from the road as it wound over Takaka Hill.



Nikau Palms at Heaphy Hut, June 2005

Experiences on the Dusky Track

January 2005

Jeremy Gabe, Rebecca Gentry, Annette Trieger

PROLOUGE

Pre-trip planning typically involves a set of assumptions on what to expect during the trip, but there's one thing clear about the Dusky Track – one could probably walk it multiple times and tell a different story every time. With many a trumper and group using an entire page of the hut visitors' books to tell their accounts of that day's events, it's clear that walking the length of Fiordland's longest and most notorious marked track adds that ever elusive sense of raw adventure in addition to all those other incentives to go have a walk in the bush.

To highlight this, DoC in Te Anau is astringent about trying to dissuade any group who puts in an intention to walk the track. Newspaper clippings of the latest helicopter rescues, tales of those who nearly starved when flood waters stranded them in a hut for days, and pictures of a walkwire – which normally sits 6m above the river – being swamped by the rising flood are par for what the ranger makes you contemplate before accepting an intentions form. Similar tales of woe (freely available to anyone typing 'Dusky Track' into Google) encouraged us to wait in Te Anau for some favourable weather before beginning. Our scheduled starting date, on Thursday 20 January, was scrapped with the DoC Fiordland forecast predicting an excess of 200mm of rain on Friday & Saturday.

It was a very smart move, as it allowed Annette to join us, and for me to see what it was like to walk again, after spending two

months on crutches rehabbing torn ankle ligaments suffered on a super-easy tramp in November. Thankfully, a mostly painless warm-up walk through Twelve Mile Delta near Queenstown gave me some more incentives to ignore an Auckland physiotherapist's advice against a multi-day tramp (let alone one on the fitness level of Dusky). And lastly, that forecasted rain wasn't just an overcautious weather report - throughout the hut-book diaries of those on the track at the time, the track lived up to its worst reputation.

Boat transfers across Lake Hauroko on the southern end of the track only take place on Mondays and Thursdays, hence most choose to walk it from south to north, as tourist interest in Doubtful Sound provides daily services at the north end. This left us with a small problem, as Saturday's forecast seemed like a dream – fine weather from Sunday all the way through Wednesday! Expecting to have some atrocious weather, it seemed silly to spend Sunday amongst the clichés of the tourist chatter in Te Anau ("*Wasn't Milford Sound stunning?*") while the sun was shining on the track. So we all agree to head off first thing Sunday morning to the northern end



of the track and walk it backwards from Manapouri to Hauroko. Thus at 6:00 that Sunday morning, it is finally time to end the waiting and begin to write our story.

ACT I

A Walk from Lake Manapouri to Upper Spey Hut

We disembark the Real Journeys boat at the Visitor Centre on the West Arm of Lake Manapouri. Fog is beginning to clear from the forested mountains, revealing a blue sky dotted with high, wispy clouds. Louis Loncke, a short Belgian trapper with blonde hair and dark, scruffy beard, greets us on the shore – smelling like a rank, mouldy tent. Sandflies too numerous to count buzz around his head while the tourists bound for Doubtful Sound pass and make their way into the Visitor Centre, leaving the four trappers, all holding packs, standing on the concrete & timber pier.

The relief on Louis's face says it all – we'd been smart to wait those few extra days, and he confirms this with a beaming smile and strong French accent, "Voila, it's finally come! Take me away from these sandflies!! Ha-ha ha-ha! Walking the Dusky, eh?" After smiles of anticipated adventure from us, he continued, "Oh the fun you'll have! I hope you've brought your scuba gear! I don't know what I would have done without it!" (*We look at each other, puzzled*) "Ah, oui! They do not lie when it comes to floods! Here's me swimming between Loch Maree and Kintail huts just three days ago! (*Believe it or not, Louis takes out a digital camera stored inside a waterproof map holder. He turns the power on and shows photos of him, wearing a scuba wetsuit and hoodie, swimming through forested terrain which had been flooded with water above his head. An orange speck in the water appears to be a submerged track marker.*)

After finding out that Louis was heading off to Tonga as soon as he could get to Auckland, Becca beams, and since we're oddly on the subject of scuba diving, she begins to talk of the amazing diving she had done there the past April. It doesn't last long, as the sandflies around Louis begin to notice the new blood and then suddenly we're being ruthlessly swarmed and in full sprint to the visitor centre (which is full of sandflies anyways). As any trapper in Fiordland quickly realises, nothing keeps these buggers away; Ultraguard 40 is absolutely worthless, the only success was some Aussie formula of 80% DEET, repelling them for at most five minutes – probably not worth it after seeing it melt a mark on the plastic handle of my trekking pole. "These sandflies are nothing compared to the hut over there," Louis quips as we say our goodbyes, "Be sure and read my hut book entries for some good advice!!"

Although the Real Journeys® ticket-sales staff had been complete arseholes (*"Remember, any tourist to Doubtful Sound takes precedent over you, so you may not get a space today...And don't even think of getting a ride to the start of the track, that's not our policy!"* they said when telling us that the 7:00am boat was full. As it turned out, reporting it half-full would have been cooking the books), one bus driver turned out to be quite amiable after I apparently did a good job acting as if we were lost. There's only one road away from the visitor centre, but there is an intersection, and at this intersection, I pulled the old "Oh, let's look at the map" trick, and the driver fell for it. "Are you guys looking for the Dusky Track?" he said after stopping the bus (*We nod in unison*) "It's this way, hop on in!"

And we're suddenly the subject of his diatribe to ten tourists aboard the bus, "These three will be spending the next week or so in the bush, walking Fiordland's longest track, staying in huts with only what they can carry with them...It will take them

all the way to Dusky Sound and on to Lake Hauroko... Dusky Sound was one of James Cook's first anchorages in New Zealand on his second voyage here..." The tourists seem terribly interested in this – I guess they feel as if they're getting more than they paid for and I could imagine the conversation on the Doubtful Sound cruise, "Well, on **our** bus, not only did we hear of the hydro-power history of Manapouri, but all about Dusky Sound, too! Ha!" Ten minutes later, we're on the side of the road, with only a sign to break the monotony of metal road and dense bush edges. "Fiordland National Park. Dusky Track. Upper Spey Hut 4.5 hours. Kintail Hut 10 hours." The diesel hum of the bus continuing on to Doubtful Sound is the last unnatural sound we'd hear for nine days. After some photos, we part the bush and look for the track. After about five minutes, we notice a faint ground track in the dense bush and follow it to an orange triangle.



Jeremy demonstrates how the floodwater washes off the deep mud lurking below

Slogging through knee-deep mud about an hour later, I begin to recite some of the advice on the track, "the mud isn't that bad compared to Stewart Island, because with all the flooding, there's usually a layer of water on top, which washes your gaiter off as you pull it out." (*Just then, as if on cue, we begin to wade through a thigh deep backwater left from the weekend's heavy rain. The Spey River is raging to our left.*) The beech forest in Fiordland is probably my favourite in all of New Zealand – absolutely everything is green and draped in moss, with a perfect understory of ferns, and in this remote setting with a dearth of visitors, it almost warrants a skip of glee and applause.

Seeing other trampers on the Dusky is so rare that it is always an event (and given the roughness of the track, a good excuse for a break). On most tracks, the common practice when meeting other trampers is to give a quick, friendly hello, maybe ask how things are going, but nothing much more is

expected. But on the Dusky, a five minute conversation is too short and seemingly anti-social. Given that we're going "backwards," we'll run into everyone going the normal direction, and our first lot was on their last day; a group of two Israelis and three United States Marines. Of course, we'd get to relive each group's stories as we reached each hut, through the hut book entries, so it was interesting to see (later) that the Marines fancied that they were going to *kayak* across Lake Manapouri, rather than take the Real Journeys® boat. But when we saw them today, it looked like they were having a rough time just reaching their kayaks (couldn't stop complaining about the weather), and desperately wanted to know how far away the road was.

One common theme from our conversations with those five is that the DoC sign times are a load of bullshit: the



Fun times in the mud

Marines bragging that they were for grannies, the Israelis saying that they must be for adventure racers. We'd come to agree with the latter, and would soon find out that the 1:50,000 topo maps marking the track are also as accurate as a pile of bull faeces, showing the track on the wrong side of the Spey River for most of this first day. This made for some frustrated companions, as Becca and Annette would both be curious, "How far away is it that we cross the main river?"

"Well, it is less than 1 km from the start," I'd say after looking at the map.

"Crap! We've been going for two hours and aren't even close!"

"Hmmm... maybe the map is wrong?"

An hour later, Becca shouts in delight, "Hey, a walkwire!!"

Jeremy: "Oh, we must be up here," (*points to the map*) "this map is wrong! Thank goodness!"

"Uh, that still means we're not even halfway to the hut..."

"Oh... well I guess the Israelis were right about the track times."

The first walkwire spans a fast-moving 20 m wide side-stream, one which could be easily forded, but some of these wires were going to be necessary, so we spent a half-hour getting used to them – not very hard as this one was well-supported (something which could not be said for all future crossings). I found them to be akin to a kindergarten playground in the middle of the bush. Becca, not the fondest of heights, leapt for joy when she made it successfully across, happy with her ability to remain calm with only a thin steel cable preventing a 4m fall into a rocky streambed. The second walkwire follows soon after. This one is necessary unless you fancy a swim, and another occasion of smiling pleasure follows Becca's second successful crossing. "Almost there, that's the last one for today," I say after we take a short break on the other side.

How quickly I learn that you never say the words "almost there" on the Dusky Track. While the map makes a straight line between the second walkwire and Upper Spey Hut, the track has other ideas, heading way off to the true left of the Spey River at times. This section of track, though gaining no net elevation, is not exactly a flat walk either – up and down spurs, traversing through gullies – constantly requiring us to be aware of foot placement on the wet, slippery tree roots that make up the track. Eventually we come to a walkwire that shouldn't exist (one that finally crosses to the true right of the Spey River), and begin the obvious 120m climb up to the "clearing" on which Upper Spey Hut is marked.

Our first lesson from Dr. Dusky Track is that he always has the last laugh, and up until the last day, we would face a rather daunting obstacle almost immediately prior

to arriving at any of the huts. Today's surprise is not the fact that the hut was marked in the wrong place (after the track errors, we're expecting this, so that could hardly be a surprise), but that the "clearing" is one of the most thigh-busting swamp crossings I've ever undertaken. The moss carpet looks deceptively solid, but one step, and *glug, glug, glug* the swamp swallows up your entire tibia and fibula. An hour later, we are across the swamp and swatting sandflies outside the empty hut – seven and a half hours in total!

Unlike Great Walk huts, Dusky huts do not have much protection to keep sandflies out, and given that we are tramping where the sun set around 11pm, there's no way of going to sleep before the sandflies. And while most standard huts have indoor sinks, Dusky huts have a tap on the outdoor tank, which, keen as they are, is where the thickest cloud of sandflies awaits. But after the first day on the Dusky, I'd probably have a good night sleep out in the clutches of Mr. Swamp, *glug, glug, glug*, so Upper Spey Hut, dirty and sandfly infested as it was, provided some of the most sound sleep possible.

ACT II

A Walk over Centre Pass to Kintail Hut

If only we knew what today was going to be like. On the map, it's a paltry six kilometres. The sign outside: "Kintail Hut.

7 hours." (*"Maybe today, the Marines will be right...no way can that take 7 hours!"* I thought to myself)

Next Dusky Lesson: forget the alarm clock in summer. As soon as the sun rises, *bzzz, chomp, bzzz*, the sandflies provide an alarm clock which even the most tired trumper could not sleep through. Up at half six, out the hut door at eight, right after the daily DoC weather forecast on our 2kg mountain radio (*"A large high approaches the lower South Island...Fiordland regional forecast, Today: fine w/ cloud about the fiords, Wednesday-Friday: fine..."* Am I dreaming?)

Apparently, Dr. Dusky Track decided that trampers going the normal way could use with some planks across the swamp at the end of their 7 hour day, so our first km takes a "quick" 30 minutes, and we've suddenly crossed what remained of the Upper Spey Swamp and are beginning the steep ascent. In a few places, the tree roots are necessary handholds, but for the most part, this track up is quite normal for a steep NZ tramping track, especially once it breaks out of the bush. Only fatigued thighs, crappy fitness and heavy packs are preventing us from steadily ascending with dreams of halving that seemingly overestimated DoC time. Just after noon, we all meet up on top of Centre Pass and have one of the most stunning views for a lunchtime picnic, where Annette and I



Mitre Peak in the bush: Tripod Hill

discuss climbing another 500m to the summit of Mt. Memphis – an easy ridge leads right up to the top from the pass. “Nah, I’m a bit tired,” I said, and for a while Annette thought she’d solo it, until she, too, heard her thighs complaining. This would turn out to be one really smart decision.

We begin our pleasant descent through the tussock with an incredibly picturesque view of Tripod Hill – reminiscent of Mitre Peak but covered in lush green bush all the way to the top. Its ridges went steeply down into the Seaforth Valley, a river that was about to become our next companion, and the subject of all the horror flooding stories. But as soon as the picturesque tussock ended, so did our dreams of making Kintail hut in less than seven hours.

The track goes straight down, assisted by chain cables in a couple places. But, with caution, it is “easily” negotiable. However, Dr. Dusky Track is about to test our psychological stamina, for this track is remarkably exposed and any mistake would mean at least a 20 metre fall into places where it’s better not to think of going. Metre by metre we work as a team to get safely down – soon we begin to look up at the peak of Tripod Hill rather than down on it. Progress is well less than 1 kilometre per hour, but we’re thankful for the good weather and long daylight.

It is here, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down, where Becca would get her final exam; one of her goals on this trip was to overcome her fears and prove that she could push herself in any way possible. But with physical fatigue adding to the realisation that the seven hour mark had just passed with still at least 200m of descent left (the benefits and hindrances of an altimeter watch at the same time!), the test begins to get tougher and tougher and teamwork to shuttle packs and to provide [psychologically] safe holds becomes essential. The track soon levels out somewhat and the supports of a walkwire raise our spirits. Relief seems

imminent. The hut is now only about 800 m away along the flat valley bottom.

But Dr. Dusky Track always has the last laugh of the day, and this one turns out to be rather macabre.

The walkwire ahead spanned the stream draining Centre Pass. The track had been on the true left and the hut is on the true right. But here the stream is in a gorge, 20-30m below the banks, and the right hand anti-torque support of the walkwire is missing. As a trepid Becca gets on, the wire suddenly torques 20 degrees to the right, quickly accompanied by a scream of terror. She managed to hold on and get off safely, leaving all of us emotionally distraught, “*we MUST cross this... but how?*” While I get ready to rig a harness and rope for Becca to clip into the wires for safety, Annette comes back saying we may be able to bash down to the stream and ford it, then clamber back up a side stream draining from the other side. Becca immediately was keen (the idea of dangling from a harness, clipping two karabiners in and out at every V was making her quite distraught). To help her, Annette and I drop our packs, grab hers, and began to follow this route. We get most of the way down, and a 5 m drop is the final obstacle to enter the gorge. Thankfully the landing was a dry, flat, stone and we all make the jump safely (though I had a nice sear of ankle pain...*somehow, I don’t think this was what the physio would advocate!*), with the help of a tree stump to lower us down the first 2 metres. The crossing is remarkably straightforward (thanks to low water levels), and so was the ascent up the side stream. Becca had made it across, and the tension was slowly cut just like the support wire – until Annette and I realised we were going to have to use the wire to get our packs which we’d dumped to find the ford. There is no way to get up that five metre drop, so the wire was the only way.

After some of the most terrifying moments I've ever lived through, Annette and I both manage to cross the wire twice, twisted anywhere between 10 and 20 degrees from vertical so that we could easily see the 30m drop. *Slow and steady, rest at the Vs and wait for the bounce to secede. And don't forget to breathe.*

An hour later, we arrive at Kintail Hut as the light was waning, over twelve hours since leaving Upper Spey... *500 metres per hour?* It seems impossible, but a hut has never looked so welcome (even one crowded with Aussies, as this was). After managing to cook some two minute noodles and eat copious amounts of chocolate, we scare the others (headed up the pass, of course) with our tale of that walkwire, then promptly pass out after deciding to take a day off tomorrow to calm nerves and recover.

INTERMISSION I – Kintail Hut Day

After disappointingly realising that the sandflies prevent us from lazing in the grass and stones alongside the pacifying Seaforth River, we have a pleasant day of Scrabble Cards and other hut games. Possibly the most interesting hut book entry is the story that the Belgian (Louis Loncke) had left in this book, taking a whole page to tell of his journey between Loch Maree and Kintail. He did this (the most flood-prone section) on the day it rained 200mm, and, it goes something like this:

...left the hut at 9am, and lost the track underwater after 200 metres. Then, 20m later, the orange triangles disappeared underwater (very muddy water) so I put on my scuba suit and swam up the lake about 800-900m, but could still not find track, so I swam some more until the valley opened out much wider. Swam to shore and opened map to see that track was way to the true right of river, so I bashed to the hillside and still could not find track. Climbed ridge, probably 150m up, and still couldn't find track, so I followed ridge upstream. Had to cross a 100m high

waterfall and almost slipped off, but was OK and soon realised that track must be down in the valley, so I went back down (13:00). Ate lunch and then managed to find orange triangles in flooded part of river. Found walkwire after wading & swimming upstream (16:00). Made it to Kintail Hut around 19:30. Lesson: Do not forget scuba suit and hoodie!! Dusky tramper's best friend. If you cannot see the stumps in Loch Maree, track is *flooded!!*.

No visitors tonight... another blissful night of solitude in the Fiordland bush, rested and ready for another day!

ACT III

A Walk from Kintail to Loch Maree (or When Not to Shit in the Bush)

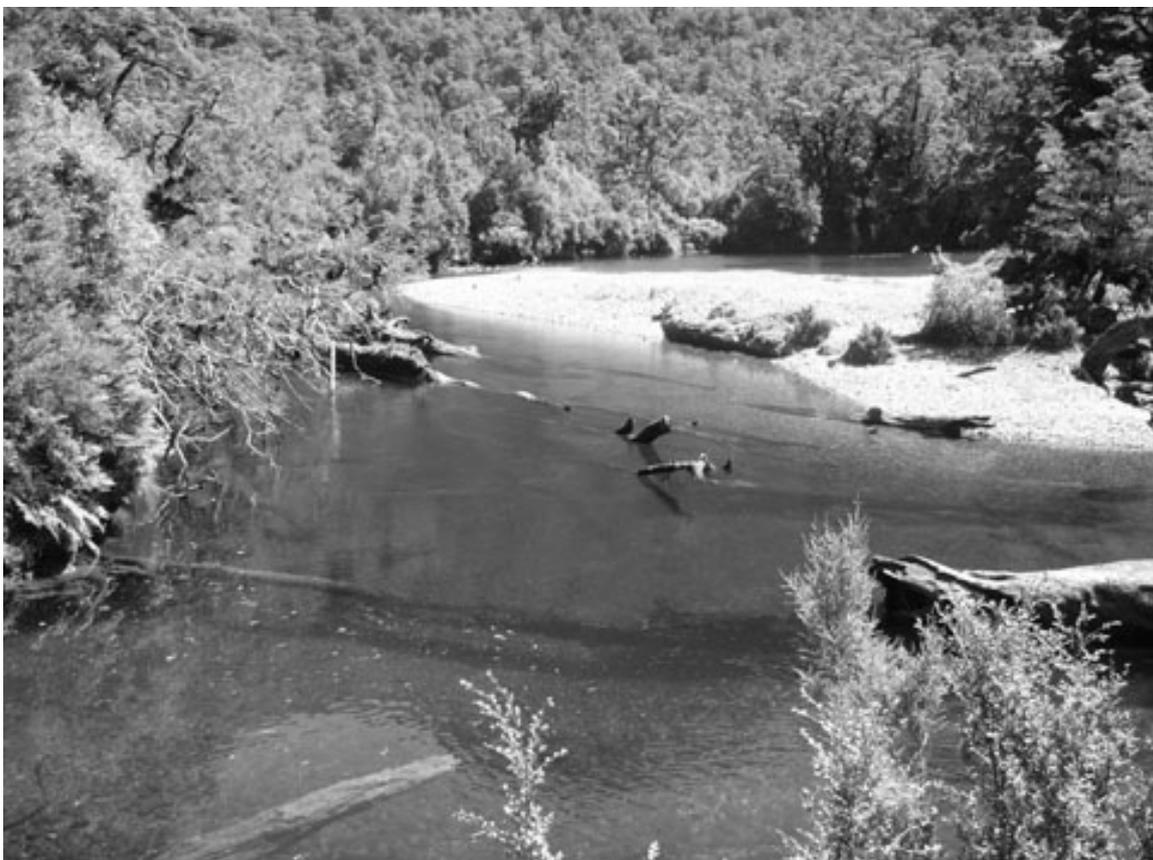
Another 6:30 sandfly alarm. Or was it? This morning, we were a bit more lackadaisical and heard the daily DoC check on their wardened huts over the mountain radio, "*...Mintaro?... Yes this is Mintaro, we had 40 tonight...Clinton? ...Clinton here, we had 40 as well... Dumpling?...G'day, I collected 40 tickets, over...Routeburn Falls?...Morning, we had 48 last night, over...MacKenzie?...Ditto! We had 48 as well, over...Luxmore? ...Calling Luxmore Hut, um, Andy?... Sorry mate, pressed the wrong button, Luxmore had 45 tonight...Iris Burn?...23 slept here, over...*" It's amazing how the realisation of just how much we had found solitude in such a peak time gave us a jolt of energy – we wouldn't trade our spot for one in any of those high-demand huts even though there are many long days ahead for us. I was almost begging for them to suddenly say, "Kintail?" and I'd say something stupid like "Oh, just three here, thanks." But the reason why I doubt my consciousness soon came through the radio as the weather forecast began, "*Situation: A large high sits, stationary, over the lower South Island...Forecast for Fiordland...Today through Tuesday: fine with light winds*" What? Is this possible?

“Loch Maree Hut 7 hours.” After a pair of blue ducks see us off from Kintail Hut, our spirits took a hit going around the first lake on the Seaforth River. No flood, but there was some serious mud. This bit is analogous to Mr. Spey Swamp, but without the swamp vegetation, just pure thigh-deep mud. Becca soon discovered one way to rapidly get through it – scream and just take a berserk attitude to quickly march through. After catching up to her, the track gets really rough as the valley wall closes in and we climb up and traverse a steep cut-bank before sidling down to a remarkably serene river, Rebecca Stream. The bush along Rebecca Stream is low scrub growing out of gaps in human-size boulders (no mud!), so needless to say the track is well overgrown and difficult to follow, but our sense of caring seems to have diminished and we enjoy the absolutely blue sky and seek shade to escape the sun for lunch, in a spot which looks back at the dramatic Rebecca Falls.

Soon we find the one walkwire of the day

and descend to that flat that had sent our crazy Belgian friend into the hills. It's nice and dry (except for the omnipresent bogs), and we soon find why he ended up on the ridge. Sure enough, the actual track hugs the true right bank of the river, around every single bend (so it must have been underwater in the storm), but the map shows it making a straight line across the flat, very near the ridge Mr. Loncke must have climbed and almost fallen off. I guess that's what you get for believing these maps – Land Information New Zealand could do well to hire some good mapmakers for this region. The track here in the flats is sometimes quite well made, *sans* tree roots, mud, and other obstacles. A “superhighway” compared to the rest of what we had been through so far.

About halfway across the flat, we meet a group of trampers and our story suddenly switches from tales of the bush to foreshadowing others whom we were about to meet. This group of four trampers are all from Europe (Italy, Spain, UK &



Placid swimming spot on the Seaforth River flats

France), had met during the Kepler Track, and all had fallen for the misrepresentation given of the Dusky Track in the Lonely Planet; and hence were miserable and doing it in a rather odd fashion. Lonely Planet recommends *flying* into Supper Cove (Dusky Sound) and walking out to Manapouri, making an expensive 4-day trip, and LP describes the Dusky as just slightly more difficult than the Kepler and other Fiordland Great Walks (a description which obviously these chaps had learned wasn't exactly accurate by this point). They seem to need a break, and are glad to talk with us, letting us know of what lies ahead:

Italian: "You all going to Loch Maree Hut?" (*We all mumble, "yeah"*).
"There's some crazy guy staying there."

We all look at each other confused, and then one of us says, "oh you mean the guy looking for the moose?"
(*Aside: Mr. "Crazy Belgian" Loncke and the group of Israelis we met on Day 1 both told us of meeting someone who had been looking for "lost" Canadian Moose [released in 1909 in Supper Cove, not seen since the late 1950s]. Apparently this guy was "living" in Supper Cove Hut, and had all sorts of video contraptions in the bush and photographs of broken branches he claimed could only be the work of a "lost" 2m high moose.*)

"No... this guy kept yelling about shit and Israelis... at night, he tracked some shit into the hut and smeared it all over the bunks, yelling about how Israelis need to learn how to take a shit... some old German, no maybe he said he was Austrian, but he's really crazy... this morning he had his alarm go off at 5am or something and he ruffles through his pack for about 20 minutes really loudly, then goes back to sleep!"

After explaining how they had met and why they were on the Dusky Track, the Spaniard decides to let us know that the long drop is really filthy at Loch Maree, in fact, it had been one of the most disgusting

things he's ever seen. We part company, and they trudge on in their mud-caked trainers, not too happy to hear that we've been going for about five hours since leaving Kintail Hut.

With trepidation and speculation, we continue along the flats and Annette takes advantage of one nice and deep section of the Seaforth to have a cooling swim. With the map being completely inaccurate in regards to the track, we have no idea quite how close we are to the hut, but soon the decent track abruptly ends as the valley walls come charging in, and Dr. Dusky is about to give his test at the end of what turns out to be a ten hour day. Again, the worst line any trumper can say on the Dusky Track is, "Almost there!" and I manage to make this mistake again, seeing that the hut is only about 1km away from where the flats end. Suddenly we're sidling a cliff, holding on to a rope which prevents us from falling ten metres down into a deep pool of water, then the track is going straight up and down, clambering over tree roots suspended in mid-air. Progress is back to 500 metres/hour – swimming in the river/lake below would have been much quicker. This is the section of track that was incredibly underwater when our Belgian friend passed through, and it's amazing to see that the lake must have rose about 7 or 8 metres to hide the orange triangles that were on almost every tree because of the lack of ground to form a track on. After seeing the hut on a peninsula which sticks into the lake, we slowly trudge on to the hut in anticipation of our "crazy" hutmate.

Loch Maree Hut is in a stunning location, containing a forest of dead tree stumps and vistas of the mountains behind. It's too bad that we can't enjoy any of it thanks to the maddening swarm of sandflies so thick that it *blurs* the view out the front door. The only protection is to put on our rain gear and be covered from head to toe – which



Loch Maree. The hut is perfectly situated on the bush peninsula (centre)

makes things very hot and steamy given the sunny weather.

On our arrival, the hut was not anything like the pigsty, smelling of faeces, that we anticipated. It was empty and spotlessly clean, with only a sleeping bag and pack neatly placed on the upper bunk platform. Furthermore, the long drop was so much cleaner than the past two that we began to wonder if the European trampers had been messing with our minds. Suddenly we hear rustling, and in walks our hutmate, sweating profusely with just a water bottle in his hand. "None of you are Israeli?" he asks in perfect English with a German accent after we say hello.

"No," we all say in unison.

"Oh, good. There was this group who stayed here last night, and all they did was complain about how dirty the toilet was and how much nicer the Kepler Track was... Before they arrived, I went for a walk to the long walkwire over there (*points south*) so I could make photos of the lake, and when I returned, I found this Israeli guy squatting just to the side of the track, pulling up his pants. I ask him, 'What are you doing?' and he says, 'Uh... I'm looking for something.' Then as I walk back, I realise that I have stepped in some fresh shit, and know that this Israeli had just shit on the track, just 20 metres from the toilet. When I get back to the hut, I cannot find the Israeli, but his three friends are there and I tell them to tell their Israeli friend how

to shit in the toilet and not to defecate on the track."

We suddenly realise what had happened the previous night. The Spaniard, the one who complained about the toilets, had shoulder-length locks in his hair, and really did look like a somewhat stereotypical Israeli. He must have seen the "filthy" toilet (Kepler Track has flush toilets) and decided to shit in the bush just after arriving at the hut. At the same time, the "crazy" Austrian returned from his photo sojourn, and the Spaniard hadn't gone far enough off-track, and the Austrian happened to both catch him with his pants down and later step in the fresh shit (something that would make most trampers crazy). So instead of greeting the new arrivals with, "Hello," it's no wonder why the Europeans thought he was crazy, greeting them instead with, "Tell your Israeli friend how to shit in a toilet." Having no Israeli friends, this Austrian must have seemed like some crazed bushman to them.

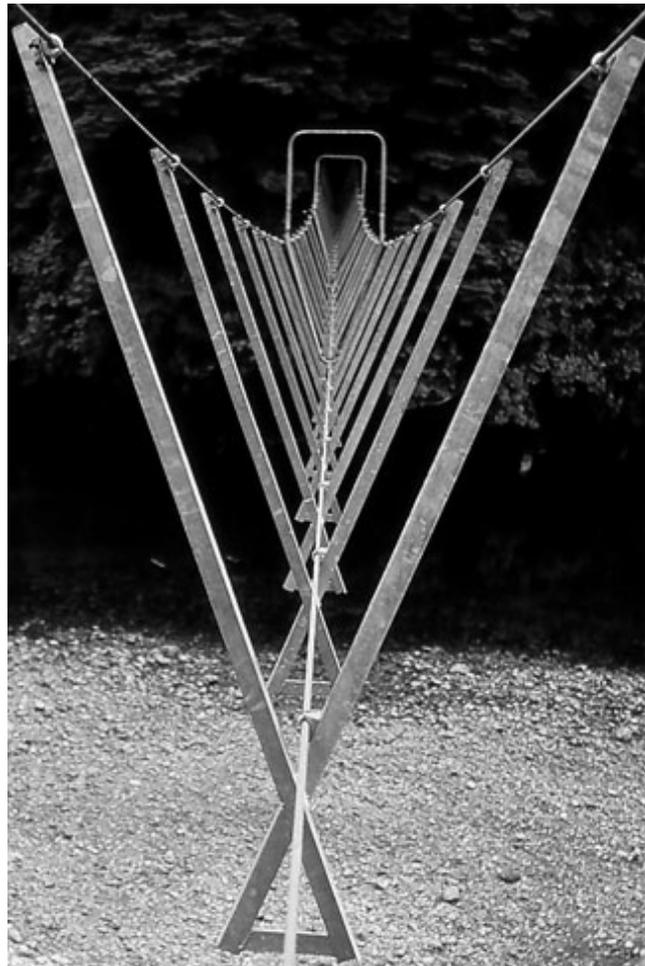
As it turns out, the Austrian is one of the nicest guys we've ever met tramping. He's also one of the most fit, having done a day trip to Supper Cove (14 hrs return) that day, and having skipped the first hut (Halfway Hut) on his way from Lake Hauroko. Tomorrow, he's going to skip Kintail Hut and go straight to Upper Spey (a journey that took us about 21 hours in total) – and, interestingly, catch up with those Europeans (*If anything, I want to re-*

do the Dusky Track just to read the Kintail Hut book for that night! We never reminded him of his mistake nor did we tell him that the Europeans thought he was a nutter). When we told him that he's up for another night with those four trampers, he continued his rant, "Oh shit...those four were the rudest people I have met in this country. I had some shit remaining on my sandal and it rubbed off on the ladder as I was climbing to my bunk. They told me to clean it off, and I told them that it was the Israeli's shit, so why doesn't he clean it off? ... Just to annoy them, I set my alarm for 5 in the morning, and rustled through my pack for no reason until I heard that they had woken up, he-he (*large grin on his face*). Of course, they left without cleaning up, so I spent this morning cleaning the hut before going to Supper Cove, where I met this crazy guy looking for moose... he took me out to fish and told me all about how he's going to find a lost 2m high moose! Crazy!"

Yes, crazy indeed...Annette and the Austrian rabbit on into the night as the sun set and the sandflies finally went away. Apparently, to be as fit as this Austrian, your diet must be no breakfast, no lunch and then two whole cucumbers with 500g of Basic™ pasta and tomato sauce for supper.

ACT IV **A Walk from Loch Maree to Lake Roe** **(or The Best Day of Tramping Ever)**

After the sandfly alarm (particularly aggressive sandflies, this Loch Maree clan), we decide to bag the trip to Supper Cove. Our Austrian friend said that it was endless bush to get there and that once there, the sandflies were too bad to enjoy it. As much as we loved the Fjordland bush, we had been getting tired of the obstacle course it presented when trying to walk through it, and with Becca and Annette absolutely spotted with sandfly victories, we decided to skip the 2-day side



Getting wired on the Dusky Track

trip and head for the tops with another cloudless day developing.

About 50 metres from the hut towards Lake Roe is the longest walkwire on the Dusky Track – 70 metres spanning from the peninsula to the other side of the lake. Although it is 7 metres above the current level of the lake, this is what DoC claims is frequently underwater, which would match with how high the lake must have been the previous weekend during the storm for our Belgian friend to lose the orange triangles. Unless you fancy a swim, this one is necessary to use. It is Becca's first go at a walkwire since our descent from Centre Pass, so, slow and steady, she manages to make it across. Eager to get to the tops, Annette runs ahead as we begin the steep 1,100m ascent up to the tops. Just like our descent from Centre Pass, this is incredibly steep (though not as exposed) and going up is so much easier, so in about 2 hours,



A Pleasant Range view of Dusky and Breaksea Sounds

we're on top of the aptly named Pleasant Range, with nothing but mountains and fiords on the horizon. Near the bushline, there is a seven meter vertical rock face to climb, with only a chain for assistance. Becca lets us know how lucky we are for going backwards, "Gee, there's no way I could get down this... we would have probably turned around here had we have gone in the normal direction!"

Later, we would discover that this climb was essentially the last major obstacle on the Dusky Track, and we were now wandering along the tops in utter joy and awe of the scenery which lay in every direction – Mt. Tamatea straight ahead (east), Seaforth Valley & Loch Maree (north), unlabelled wilderness and endless mountains (south) and Dusky Sound behind us to the west. The view of Dusky Sound just gets better as we walk on, and atop the track's highest point, we could see its entire length – the longest fiord in New Zealand – as well as the entire length of adjacent Breaksea Sound. And not another trumper for miles – we passed no one and would end up with Lake Roe hut to ourselves. It didn't really matter that we were taking nine hours for a six hour day and that physical exhaustion had begun to creep up on us. Going up and over all the peaks (the track doesn't just sidle the rises, but goes from summit to summit), waltzing around thousands of unnamed tarns, then

through a narrow isthmus between two lakes, it is an incredible day. No wind, no clouds, snow-capped peaks... a day that will be one of the best I'll ever have and never forget.

Lake Roe Hut is perched near the bushline and the source of our final companion river, the Hauroko Burn. To make things even more blissful, the sandflies don't like it much this high up, so we spend the evening lazing around outside, gazing at the incredible vistas.

INTERMISSION II – Lake Roe Hut Day

With four days left until the Lake Hauroko transport boat would turn up, it's a no-brainer that we'll be spending the extra day here. Without the sandfly alarm, it's possible to sleep as much as possible and we certainly did that, having a lie in until 8-ish. Reading the hut book provides many ideas for some day trips, the highlight being an ascent of Mt. Tamatea, though it seems as if the rapidly changeable weather has caught a few parties by surprise, as one entry (a full page) attests:

Any party of reasonable experience can easily make it to the top of Tamatea (6 hrs return). Views are stunning. However, be sure and bring essential survival gear. As we were descending, the fog suddenly engulfed us and, thinking we were already on the correct spur, we kept descending,



The U-Shaped Hauroko Burn from Peak 1054 near Lake Roe

but soon realised that the bushline had come too quickly and that we were lost. None of us had brought bivvy bags – all we had was the map and some water. Miserable, cold, night in the bush, and gratefully, the next day was clear and we saw that we were well north of the hut, descending into Deadwood Stream. Had to traverse peak and finally made it back down.

Since the morning fog is taking a long time to stubbornly burn off and noting that we were quite fatigued, the decision not to climb Tamatea seems like a wise idea, so we laze away the morning and then head up to Lake Roe, which sits well above the hut (Lake Laffy Hut would be a better name for the hut, as it sits adjacent, but Lake Roe

is much bigger, so I guess size matters more than position). The short snowgrass around the lake is ridiculously easy to meander through, and one small peak on the map caught my interest, marked only as elevation 1054. While Annette and Becca are having a swim, I took about 40 minutes to scramble up from the hut, and the view is as amazing as you can imagine – this peak is positioned to overlook the end of the remarkably straight valley made by the Hauroko Burn 700 m below. The view stretches all the way down to Lake Hauroko, with nothing but mountains capped in snow and blanketed in bush fading into the horizon. I highly recommend it to anyone lucky enough to



Lake Roe Hut in the early morning fog

factor in a hut day at Lake Roe – in fact it would probably be easy enough to spend two or three extra days here as there are endless opportunities for exploring the Tamatea Range.

ACT V

A Walk from Lake Roe Hut to Halfway Hut

Another lie-in, up in time for the weather radio, “A large high pressure system is slowly moving away from the lower South Island, but continues to strengthen...Forecast for Fiordland Mountains. Today: Fine with light winds. Sunday-Monday: Fine with increasing cloud...” Wow, we just may make it out of a nine-day trip in Fiordland without ever seeing a drop of rain.

“Halfway Hut. 4½ hours.” And so our time on the tops ends abruptly, as we descend along the trickling Hauroko Burn, along a gentle slope, a rarity in these glaciated valleys. After the breathtaking and incredulous previous two days, going back into the bush seemed to be relatively dull – the Pleasant Range is an extraordinarily difficult act to follow (and to think that the Lonely Planet guide suggests skipping it!). The dry weather has also begun to have effect on the forest. The bush down here seems to need a good dosing of rain to look its best, and it just doesn’t seem to be as magical on these last two days. The moss just crumbles in our hands, rather

than having that picturesque drop of water just waiting to fall off.

The one walkwire is hardly necessary, and the track is remarkably mostly in its “superhighway” state, so much that incredulously, we manage to arrive at Halfway Hut in 4½ hours, just as DoC suggests! Rather than an obstacle before the hut, our test for the day was the hut itself, having to spend the rest of the afternoon there with the hungry horde of sandflies that were eager to pounce on us. Halfway Hut is by far the worst hut on the track, with rubbish everywhere, rat piss and droppings all over the mattresses, and a giant hole in the door which lets both sandflies and possums in. Furthermore, there is nothing very interesting nearby, so we sweat the afternoon away in our raingear to escape the sandflies.

That evening a group of about six from the Otago University Tramping Club showed up (having been dropped off by someone’s parents who had a boat), so we got to hear about their Uni trips (almost always involving copious amounts of alcohol) before going to bed. Then the rats woke up and kept most of us awake all night.

ACT VI

A Walk from Halfway Hut to Lake Hauroko (or A “Beery” Unexpected Trip)

The sandflies were prompt at 6:30, and antsy to leave this crappy hut, we didn’t



Tasty! Well-fed insectivorous sundew plants near Lake Roe Hut



Lost in a sea of ferns

bother listening to the radio and were off by 7:30.

Today's walk is much rougher than yesterday's, climbing up and over bluffs with only tree-roots, then sidling above the river as it turns into a gorge. The forest near the bottom is incredible, a perfect ground cover of ferns, carpeting the floor like grass, with no square metre left uncarpeted. Out of this blanket rise some healthy beech trees with lots of epiphytes and [dry] moss coating them. After taking some fun pictures of us in the "sea" of ferns, we soon pass the last walkwire and emerge on to another "superhighway" track and notice that the river is sluggishly slowing and becoming stagnant, a sign that the lake was near. Then, suddenly, every small viaduct is bridged by a wooden footbridge; the last forty minutes are remarkably easy, a reward for passing Dr. Dusky Track's many tests (or a cruel jolt of confidence for anyone going in the normal direction – forty minutes of easy track followed by roughly sixty hours of mud and tree-root scrambling).

Finally, the bush ends and we pop out at the Hauroko Burn Hut and see that we've run out of track – it's all water to the south of here. What a trip! Now we just had to endure the sandflies in a hut that was much nicer than those in the middle of the

track (it even had an indoor water spigot!) and wait for tomorrow morning's boat back to civilisation. But our incredibly good luck was *far* from over.

Rumble...rumble...rumble...chug, chug...
A strange noise outside and we look at each other in confusion but can only hear the buzzing of sandflies. "What was that?" we all communicate via our facial expressions. *Knock-knock-knock*. Startled, we realise that someone's at the door and the rumbling must have been the first engine noise we had heard since the bus left us back at the track's Manapouri end. In walks an older man, obviously not a tramper, surrounded by a dense cloud of sandflies. With a beaming smile, he looks surprised, "Hoa! There's people here!"

We describe that we've just been in the bush for the past week and are waiting for a scheduled transport to Tuatapere in the morning. He mentions that his name is Mark and that he and his mate Alistair are just checking out Lake Hauroko's fishing potential for their upcoming week on the lake. "Don't wait, we're driving back to Invercargill, so you're welcome to come with us and we'll drop you in Tuatapere!"

Stunned, we couldn't believe this was actually happening until biting sandflies made us realise that Mark had let nearly

every sandfly in Fiordland into the hut. That made our decision obvious, and soon we were jumping on this rather nice private motorboat, slowly zooming away from the Dusky Track among the soaring mountains bordering Lake Hauroko. To make it even more incredulous, Alistair and Mark had about 2 cases of Export Gold in the boat, so suddenly they're forcing beers into our hands (I guess "force" is the wrong word, we eagerly said yes as soon as they offered).

On the way back, Alistair (driving the boat with an Export in his hand), has a crack at being a tour guide, pulling up to a cliff on one of the lake's two islands, and telling us to climb up and have a look inside a cave that has a locked gate over the whole opening. "This was an old Maori burial island, and in there is the bones of a princess – it used to be sitting upright, but we've heard that a possum got to it. Why don't you check it out? Let us know if that's true," Alistair beams. (I think all three of us are thinking, *Gee, this sounds a bit odd... but has anything on this trip been normal?*). Smartly, Becca decides to stay in the boat while Annette and I climb up and look at a pile of human bones, the pelvis very distinct, behind the gate (Yes, a possum must have gotten to it).

Finally, Alistair motors to the other island, where he deftly pilots the boat into a quaint and calm inlet littered with tree stumps. He tells us that this is his opinion of the most beautiful spot on the lake; thus, it's his favourite spot to fish if the winds are bad, as well as being a nice place to camp. Then we head back out and to the beach where their 4x4 is waiting to pull out the boat and take us back to Tuatapere. As we say farewell to Lake Hauroko and the Dusky, the sky has clouded over and it looks like it may finally rain.

For the ride to Tuatapere, Mark falls asleep in the front seat, only to wake up as we pull into Tuatapere and mention the one-liner of the day before passing out again, "Tuataperrre hasn't changed much, eh?" Shortly after, Alistair drops us off at the brand new backpackers in town, and we thank him profusely as he refuses to take the money we were going to pay the tour company picking us up in the morning. What legends these guys are and what a wonderful trip this was. On top of eight straight days in the heart of Fiordland without *any* rain, we get these two to take us across the lake and quench our thirst with a few beers on the way!



Annette, Becca & Jeremy: "And wouldn't you know it, these lovely chaps showed up with a boat and some beer!"

There's Gold in 'dem Hills! – Croesus Track, West Coast

February 2005

Chantelle Watt, Andy O'Loan

We arrived at Punakaiki hoping to do the Inland Pack Track, but unfortunately it was flooded (as happens frequently!). So the Croesus was our second option and we drove to Greymouth. We then waited 45 minutes for visitor centre to open, only to discover that they didn't have any topo or park maps of the area (out of print) or an intentions book to sign. We were pretty flustered by this waste of time. (Tip: if you are driving from the North, the Punakaiki DoC office is very good – go there instead). Then we drove to Blackball, now a tiny town which had its heyday with the gold mining boom in the 1920's, to an isolated carpark. There were some other nicer, shinier cars there so we hoped the locals would break into them first.

Note for people considering doing trip: The proper Croesus track goes from near Blackball to near Barrytown [another barely there town] but they are both miles from a main road so it's near-impossible to hitch and no buses go down to the roadends either. So you would either have to pay for private transport to drop you off and/or pick you up, or have 2 cars and do a key swap in the middle of the tramp. We chose to stay at the hut, explore the tops a little, and retrace our steps the next day back to the car – a much cheaper and easier option.

The track is in a condition similar to, or maybe better than, Great Walk standards – it was wide enough for 2 people to hold hands for most of the way. The track is so wide because it was made for horses and carts, which also means that it is a gentle gradient the whole way, even though it ascends several hundred meters. Also, in stark contrast to a Great Walk, there are hardly any people – we shared the 16 bunk hut with just 4 others.

The walk to the hut takes about 4 hours, not including side trips, but these diversions are excellent! First, there is nothing left at Hotel Site # 1 and #2. Second, there is a track up to an old hut from the 1940s, which is pretty interesting. Another trip is up to the gold mining battery – which is enormous and remarkably well preserved. There are all sorts of interesting bits of machinery lying around. Don't bother going to see the remains of the mine – there's nothing to see.

The main track gradually ascends through some lovely bush until it breaks out onto the tops. Soon we arrive at the first hut – another one from the 40s with 3 sacking bunks which are remarkably comfortable! I would have slept there if it hadn't started raining so hard – there are a few holes in the roof. A minute further up is the main hut, which has the most stunning views of the whole range. It had the best view from a dunny that I'd ever seen – it would be sinful to close the door!

With visibility starting to recede as the weather began to worsen, we had decided that tramping further along the ridge and climbing to the high point would be a bit pointless. Then, a daywalker arrived from the tops side, asking if we'd seen her boyfriend who was in front of her on the track and whom she hadn't seen in some time. We hadn't either, so we decided to go up to the high point to see if he'd taken a side track without telling her. After a while, we saw a figure on the ridgeline heading in the opposite direction! He saw us and stopped; he was on the way back to his car, assuming his girlfriend would eventually head back there too. We told him that she was at the hut and quite worried about him, then he asked us to tell her to meet him at the car (so he wouldn't

have to bother making the 20 minute trip back to the hut to get her!) I managed to persuade him that it would be better if they walked together back to the car – especially as it was very late in the afternoon and I'm pretty certain they didn't have a torch (some people shouldn't be let into the bush by themselves...).

Anyway, Andy and I felt quite smug having accomplished our good deed for the day and returned to the hut, where a guide kindly shared some of his bottle of boysenberry wine with me – delicious!

The next morning we slept in nice and late and had a gentle stroll back down to the car (untouched) and to "Formerly the Blackball Hilton" pub/backpackers for a beer and a burger. It's a great place with amazing history and atmosphere; excellent to have a wander around – they even have an art gallery! Unfortunately, beds start at \$35, so it's a bit on the pricey side to stay over. A friend we had picked up on the gravel road into town thought it was worth it, as he'd been tramping for fourteen days straight!

5 star trip- go there!

Travers-Sabine Circuit – Nelson Lakes

February 2005

Chantelle Watt, Andy O'Loan

Day 1: St. Arnaud – Angelus Hut

We were lucky enough to get a lift up the gravel access road in a packed out van, which saved us 45 minutes. I literally had to sit on Andy's lap to fit both us and our stuff in!

On the track up to Robert Ridge, there was a steep slog up to the ridge – scorching hot, but the views of the lake definitely made it seem worthwhile. We had lunch at Bushline Hut on the ridgeline, a welcome break to get out of the sun; Andy's thermometer was reading 28 degrees! The walk along the ridge was fantastic, great views with bits of rock scrambling here and there as the track occasionally dipped off the ridgetop. There were lots of grasshoppers about, who seemed to want to play chicken, and see how close they could get to being stood on. This part of the track would make a great day walk.

Eventually, we got to Angelus Hut – which was very busy and has the most stunning location right next to Lake Angelus. And it's too high up to have any sandflies –

perfect for lounging on the very large deck and watching the sunset. We made the whole hut envious with our pikelets as a pre-dinner snack; and again with our breakfast, which was bacon, garlic pita, tomatoes and mushrooms.

Day 2: Angelus Hut – Sabine Hut.

Another very hot slog up to the ridgetop, though this time we got to play in a patch of snow on the way. It was very immature of me to shove a handful down Andy's shirt, but I couldn't resist! Again, amazing views all around when we got to the ridgetop. Then, it's a very steep descent back down to lake level; we re-entered the forest and a robin was so friendly it just about got some of my snack. When we entered the mountain beech, the buzzing got louder and louder – there were dozens of wasps in every tree, feeding on the black honeydew, and all over the ground feeding on the tree-roots (which was where the "track" was, too). It was very steep with lots of places where I wanted to hold onto the tree roots and trees but I couldn't, because the wasps were everywhere. All I

could hear was their buzzing. I wanted to escape but there was nowhere to go and wouldn't let Andy stop for a rest. I didn't even notice my knees – we got to Sabine Hut and I was so relieved (and we had made record time!) that there was no question of continuing to West Sabine.

Andy used the can of fly spray he had insisted on bringing (good thing!) in the dunny and must have killed thousands of sandflies that were hiding there! Luckily, it was 30 degrees – too hot for them – so they weren't around to bother us, which was fantastic; I was able to bathe in the lake and not get bitten. We had the hut to ourselves that night – a big contrast to thirty people on the previous night!

We went for a wamble up the track to West Sabine to see if it was as badly wasp infested. Thankfully, it was much better. (Eventually we found out that DoC thought the wasps were such a problem, that they had baited the whole track, EXCEPT the side track we came to Sabine Hut on, so there were hardly any wasps whatsoever on the rest of the track)

Day 3: Sabine Hut – West Sabine Hut

We had a nice 4 hour walk to West Sabine Hut and a lovely afternoon nap. We then decided not to go to Blue Lake – apparently there was an icefall from winter which was covering the track, melting rapidly and developing crevasses!

We shared the hut with a group of 6 trampers, doing a 12 day tramp (with one food drop). They were all over 60 years old, with 2 over 70! I hope I'm that fit then!

Day 4: West Sabine Hut – John Tait Hut

The day began with an amazingly deep stream canyon and a big uphill over Travers Saddle. It just seems to go up and up and is quite ridiculously steep! Luckily, grass and plants have consolidated much

of the scree. It felt like a real achievement to get to the top. More great views from here, and we soon head down to get to a new hut.

After a quick lunch and afternoon nap at Upper Travers Hut, the thought of being able to get out a day earlier and have a hot shower is inducement enough for me to get Andy out of bed, put my boots back on and continue to the next hut – even though it had just started raining. It was really lovely bush and I was motoring – Andy was actually having trouble keeping up with me!

We got to John Tait Hut in less than two-thirds of the track time. The hut had 2 fishermen in it eating fresh fish.

Day 5: John Tait Hut – St. Arnaud

This day is a blur in my memory because I was so focused on getting out to my hot shower! We had lunch at Lakehead Hut, where Andy just missed being stung on the bum by the wasps who'd made a nest in the dunny!

From here, the track along the lake became wide and day-walky and we both felt so tired and slow, like we would never get to the end. My feet just ached. Then we came across a DoC worker who took my mind off my feet – he was going to check his cat-traps.

Soon, it was all over. Back in civilisation we ate our iceblocks very happily, temperatures still in mid to high 20s. And then on we drove, with the windows wound right down, to the Moteuka Top Ten Holiday Park. I must have been in the shower for 45 minutes, and then it seemed like hours spent cleaning all our stuff!

If you are ever in Motueka, I would fully recommend Hot Mama's for a cold Monteith's Radler, a huge bowl of crunchy wedges, and plates of food so generous we couldn't even finish them. Bliss!

So, Did it Rain Much? – The Heaphy Track

June 2005

Maja Aspaas (rock lover), Kylie Brewer (pep squad leader), Jeremy Gabe (token foreigner)

A conversation on tramping aspirations while strolling along the tops on the Umukarikari Track back in April led us to plan this trip in the inter-semester break, which handily coincided with the quietest time of year on the track.

On the 24th of June I arrived in Nelson courtesy of Air New Zealand (hooray for Airpoints!) and landed at sunset on a crisp clear evening, glad to be away from the cold clamminess of home. I met up with Jeremy and we began our acclimatisation for the trip by going to a Thai restaurant – the 20min walk from and back to the backpackers was freezing!

After exploring the fantastic and highly recommended Nelson markets on Sunday morning, we caught up with Kylie and embarked on the most challenging part of the trip – supermarket shopping! That night, we completed the final phase of preparation for our tramp by going to the pub and watching the first All Blacks vs. Lions test.

We left the backpackers at 8am on Sunday, picked up by a shuttle which would take us all the way to the start of the track in Golden Bay. The driver (Rory Moore) had had AUTC members in his van

before, but could only remember one – who else but the widely travelled Mr Brian Rolls? The drive was relaxing and scenic and seemed shorter than the 3hrs it took to get to Brown Hut at the northern end of the track.

The tramp to Perry Saddle hut took just over five hours. The track was wide, dry, and gently graded, climbing up through light bush without much of a view until we reached the beautifully positioned Aorere Shelter with its views east over the valley and north to Taranaki.

A little further along at Flanagan's Corner, the highest point on the track, a side track provided views to the south and west of the forested mountains and jagged peaks of Kahurangi National Park. The final stretch before the hut was notable for the stalactites which dangled from overhangs on the side of the path. We reached the hut not long before dark and were thankful that a couple had arrived before us and got the fire going. We feasted on delicious quesadillas, thanks to our in-house Canadian-Mexican chef, and then soon were off to bed.

Two of our party were disturbed in the morning by sounds of love coming from the



Mt. Perry and the Goulard Downs

other bunkroom. After putting the image out of our minds and having breakfast, we packed up and headed for the Goulard Downs. The architect decided to climb nearby Mt Perry for the challenge, the view and the photos. Kylie and I went on ahead and took our time walking through the bush, eventually emerging at a fantastic spot with views over the Goulard Downs, a huge expanse of red tussock intersected by ice cold streams and surrounded by low bush covered hills. We arrived at Goulard Downs Hut after crossing a beautiful river, and sat down to eat lunch while we waited for Jeremy to catch up.

He arrived, just as visions of him tumbling down a scree slope filled my head, and informed us that he had spent the last ten minutes watching blue ducks down at the aforementioned river. This would be the only blue duck encounter of the entire trip, and sadly our usually brilliant cameraman let us down this time. When the photos came out the ducks looked more grey than blue! Ah well, just another reason to go back to Kahurangi! We pressed on, exploring the limestone features near the Goulard Downs Hut and reached Saxon Hut mid-afternoon. A lack of newspaper in the hut (and in our packs) meant it was a struggle to get the fire going, and it was looking like we would have a long cold night ahead, until finally, a couple of hours

later, a miracle happened and it started, thank goodness!

On day three, it finally clouded over. We waited for rain all day but it held off til late afternoon and even then, it was just drizzle. The geologist in me was excited, I knew this would be my first encounter with granite on the trip, and I know this sounds incredibly geeky, but I just love the stuff, it's so pretty! The first half of the day was spent walking through a scrubby hummocky landscape highlighted by huge weathered granite outcrops that looked like elephants trying to hide amongst the tussock. We lunched at Mackay Hut, which is reputedly haunted. There was a good view of the Heaphy river mouth from a hill behind the hut. We had proposed to stay there but I objected, a) because it was only lunchtime, b) it looked like it might rain and c) no way I was going to spend the night with a ghost!

So, we agreed to move on to Lewis Hut and three hours later we arrived. Lewis Hut is at the confluence of the Heaphy and Lewis rivers, and has a bad rep because of the large population of sandflies in the area. But, with it being winter it wasn't so bad and the view was lovely. A couple of minutes from the hut I could smell smoke and realised we wouldn't be alone that night. We marched in and were greeted by



Just another carnivorous *Powelliphanta superba* near Heaphy Hut

Hamish, a dairy farmer from Akaroa. He obviously hadn't expected company, and was fairly ill prepared – all he had was a torch and some muesli bars – but I think he was glad to see us and we had an enjoyable evening playing cards.

Sometime during the night it began to rain, but by the time we left in the morning, it had stopped again. Heaphy Hut was only three hours away, so we took our time on the track, meandering alongside the river. Kylie spotted a baby deer running off into the bush, and we saw some enormous native pigeons up in the trees. The highlight of the walk though was our first *Powelliphanta superba*, the native giant land snail, about 7cm wide and with a beautiful caramel coloured shell. They must have liked the cloudy weather because we saw ten more live snails and as many shells before we reached the Heaphy Hut at lunchtime.

Heaphy Hut is in a beautiful spot, with a huge front lawn overlooking the sandbar at the mouth of the Heaphy River. On arrival we found some rather expensive looking camera equipment standing outside and it transpired that Andris Apse, one of New Zealand's great landscape photographers, was there for the night attempting to take some good sunset photos at the river mouth. We explored the area around the hut in the afternoon, accompanied by several very friendly fantails, including a stunning black one, and a weka which hung around looking for food.

As the sun set we sat out on the sandbar and watched the sea and sky slowly change colour. That night, after dinner, we spent several hours playing cards with Andris and a few others who joined us in the afternoon.

Our final morning on the track was sunny and calm, and we headed down the coast looking forward to fish and chips at Karamea in a few hours time. The coastal

scenery was absolutely stunning, blue waves gently crashing onto wide white sandy beaches tainted pink by feldspar, interrupted by large granite boulders which had long ago tumbled down from the cliffs on our left. Quite often, we came to points where nikau palms framed the view, making it seem even more tropical. This view stayed with us until we reached Kohaihai Bluff and the final climb before the end of the track.

At the end of the track, we called our shuttle bus and sat on the grass to wait in the afternoon sun, surrounded by fantails. That evening we had our fish and chips at the Karamea Hotel, then caught a ride with an NZ Post driver down to Westport in the dark – a few near misses of weka on the way there.

After an uneventful night in Westport and a trip to the local brewery, we caught a bus to Renwick and finished off our trip there, hiring bikes from the backpackers and spending a sunny Marlborough day visiting vineyards. The perfect end to a fantastic trip, I think!

Kohaihai Bluff and Scott's Beach



Beginner's Snowskool, 2nd Course – Mt. Ruapehu

September 2005

Instructors: Andy O'Loan, Jian Sun

Snowskoolers: Caroline Ashenden, Deborah Jones, Mildred Tan and Stephan Labsch



Day 1

Our first view of Ruapehu was picture-card quality: blue skies, white snow and no clouds near it. We drove to the road end, got organised and walked up, practising kicking steps in the snow. I learnt early on to not step too close to rocks. When we were nearly at the hut, we used an ice axe to climb the slope with two points of contact at all times. For uncoordinated people, such as me, this involved finding a rhythm so that I wouldn't trip over my ice axe, but I soon got into the swing of it.

The sun was going down soon after we entered the hut and the sunset turned the snow a spectacular orange colour. It was at this time that I began to regret not taking a camera, but others took pictures. Ryan and Bradley, two snowboarders, had arrived at the hut before us and had left their gear on the lower bunks.

In the NZAC Hut, I couldn't believe that I was walking on water (i.e. the water tank), so Andy lifted the trapdoor to show the

water and tell us about dead animals that were in there at one time, and the possibility of getting into the hut through that opening.

We started making dinner on the gas stove, using heavy cast-iron frying pans. From memory, there were lots of onions, bacon and mushrooms. I can remember this because I was one of those standing at the stove stirring them, my mouth watering at the smell. Our dinner drew Ryan and Bradley's envious looks of longing as they ate an instant-something. Andy offered them some of our food, but they declined and Sun finished it off. Andy gave a mini-lecture and we all trooped out into the cloakroom and fitted the crampons to our boots.

Day 2

When we left the hut to practise using crampons and ice axe, Ryan and Bradley were still sleeping, but when we came back for lunch and a siesta, they had gone.

This day was spent mainly sliding down the slope next to the hut, which was loads of fun. I felt like an Eta Bluebird penguin on TV (I'm not being sarcastic here. It really was fun being on a giant slide that you can't fall off the side of.). The few bruises acquired were a small price to pay for a day of sliding down on the snow. Plus, we learnt how to break our fall in case we happen to be sliding down unintentionally or even if we might just decide to throw ourselves down a snowy mountainside but then wanted to stop.

After a busy afternoon going down the slippery slope, Andy explained what the layers were in a snow pit. We went to explore some snow caves (there was more than one chamber, with tunnels between them, so it was worthy of exploration). I was very glad that, unlike the Advanced Snowskool, we'd be sleeping in the hut and not in the snow caves.

There seemed to be more dinner this night and Ryan and Bradley willingly finished it because, horror of horrors, Sun was actually full. Andy gave mini-lecture no. 2, in which there were many big words that I can't remember.

Day 3

We walked up to the summit of Ruapehu via the plateau, practising our crampon and ice axe techniques. On the way up from the plateau there was a very strong wind and someone nearly lost her camera case

which Andy managed to retrieve for her.

Lunch was at the scenic and sunny, but windy, spot next to the shelter, overlooking the Crater Lake below. I thought that all the skiers down below were committing suicide at the lake as they seemed very close to its perimeter, but there were no shrieks of agony. After the requisite group photo, we were on our way.

We walked along the ridge for a short way then glissaded down to the hut (Andy on the shovel in front). The seat of my waterproof pants was no longer waterproof and a pocket had ripped, but I had never liked those pants anyway. On our return, Ryan and Bradley had already left and had left a note for us. They had kindly swept the floor and done some tidying already, making clean-up a breeze for us.

We were soon on our way down via the ski lifts. From the view up on the lifts, there were many brown patches, and the snow generators were scattered here and there, making snow for the snowsports enthusiasts.

We found the van in one piece and set off home, stopping for fish'n'chips on the way. Stephan took photos of the receding Ruapehu, but a few clouds obscured the top.

Beginner's snowskool was a lot of fun (and educational, too) and I'd recommend it to anyone.



Bush Tucker

Jane Dudley

Lost in the bush?
Didn't pack enough food?
Simply have an irritating bout of scabies?

Here is Jane's guide to bush tucker and bush medicine;

Bush Tucker

- Kawakawa berries (see picture below), orange when ripe.



- Coprosma berries (picture below): Tasty orange berries, that can be made into juice.



- Kahikatea berries (just don't eat the blue bit. It is not deadly poisonous, it is just not edible)
- Rimu berries.
- Renga Renga lily roots, scrubbed and cooked.

- Boiled Tawa kernels.
- Puha, you can just grab it and eat it. You don't even need to pull it out of the ground sometimes.
- Wild Spinach, found by the sea, tasty ground dwelling treat.
- Raupo roots, simply dug up from a swamp and roasted.
- Seaweed. The commonly found "Neptune's Necklace" is edible. Entire rock pools can be consumed in one sitting.
- Mamaku, cut open the stem and yank out the pith (white stuff inside). Munch away. The fact that it kills the tree for your tasty treat is of no consequence.

How to catch an eel in the bush.

1. Get a large clear plastic bottle (e.g. a Coke bottle with the label taken off).
2. Attach a string to it.
3. Enlarge opening by cutting it slightly larger.
4. Lower into the stream.
5. Wait.
6. Presently (or soon), an eel will swim into the bottle and become trapped.
7. Then lift eel out of the stream, bang on the head with a rock.
8. Skin and fillet the creature, then fry, or smoke and eat.

Possum tucker.

1. Go to Waitawheta hut in the Kaimais.
2. Wait until nightfall.
3. Go outside the hut at nightfall armed with a thatch of supplejack, 20-40cms in length.
4. Wait for 5-8 minutes. A possum will come ambling along, hit the creature repeatedly until it dies.
5. Skin, cook and eat possum and make pelt into a Davy-Crockett style hat.

Sea tucker.

The sea writhes and squirms with edible goodies, some bury themselves in the sand, some swim around and have to be caught with a fishing line, which you can make yourself with a bit of flax twine, a stick and a piece of sharpish bone or stone.

Bush seasoning: Dried pepperwood leaves.

Bush tea: Make tea from Manuka leaves (picture below) and Rimu leaves.



Bush coffee: Make coffee from ground Coprosma seeds.

Bush chewing gum: The resin produced by Kauri trees.

Bush breath freshener: The sweet smelling sap from the Lemonwood (Tarata) tree

Bush medicine

Pestered by mozzies? Nasty outbreak of Dysentery?

Insect Repellent

- A. Rub your skin with Ngaio leaves.
- B. Burn dried kawakawa leaves.

Bush Plaster

Moss, or the leaf of Rangiora tied on with a piece of flax.

Scabies Treatment

Scrape the bark off a kowhai tree, burn it, then apply the ash to the scabies infected area.

Venereal Disease Treatment.

Boil the bark of Ongaonga along with some Kawakawa leaves. Drink the resultant liquid and use externally.

Cuts and Scrapes

Squeeze the sap of a Clematis vine onto the wound.

Sore Throats

A boiled infusion of Pururi leaves

Pain-killing Analgesics

An infusion of the bark of Pukatea

Skin Cancer Treatment

An infusion of Kumerahou leaves, applied externally.

Eczema Treatment

The sap of Kohukohu, applied to the affected area.

Gangrenous Ulcer Treatment

The boiled leaves of bush lawyer

Dysentery Treatment

Boiled infusion of Tanekaha leaves

Ringworm Treatment

The sap of Patete (Seven Finger).

[Note: This article is intended as advice only. You must be able to positively identify the plant described – consult one of the many books on plant identification in the New Zealand bush. Always seek professional medical advice as soon as possible]