THE BUSHBASHER

NEWSLETTER OF THE NAPIER TRAMPING CLUB INC — ISSUE 14, NOV 2008

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The club meets every second Thursday, before the weekend tramp, at Port Ahuriri School

www.napiertrampingclub.org.nz

A promising start for Sparrowhawk Bivvy - and it got better

One fine day in fairyland

Sparrowhawk Bivvy, Saturday, August 9. Map: U22

Trampers: Ted Angove, Julia Mackie, Garry Whincop, Denise Payne, Murray White, Paul Exeter, Carol Finch, Arthur and Penny Mead, Melinda Chapman, Colin McNatty, Paul Hendy, Sue Marshall, Jude Paton, John Gray, Paul Spelling (visitor) and reporter Alison Greer

AS the saying goes, one of the best times to go tramping is on a clearing southerly, and this proved true once again.

The forecast was for cold southerlies and snow showers, but the day dawned reasonably fine after the front had moved through overnight. After leaving the EIT, we drove south on Highway 50 to the Halls' farm off Glenny road to park the vehicles.

Cheers went up when the ranges came into view; the cloud level was high and the snow was low. The temperature was only 3 degrees as we set off over the farm and down to the river. We could hardly believe our luck as the sun came out, giving us beautiful views of snow covering the peaks and right down onto neighbouring farmland. Gold Creek was crossed (why do we always cross rivers in mid-winter?) then we started the steep climb up to Sparrowhawk Bivvy.

Ten minutes up the track, we hit snow in the trees and the further up we climbed, the thicker the snow became. It was like being in fairyland; the trees glistened, already the snow melting in the morning sun. Climbing higher, the snow stopped melting and we were thankful there was no wind. It would have caused great chunks of the white stuff to fall. It was picture-postcard stuff, lots of photos taken,

Walking in a Winter wonderland...

always with the thought that the next one would be better.

The group got strung out, with the faster members making the bivvy by 11.15am, others arriving 10 or 15 minutes later and a couple not quite making it. Dropping our packs, we ventured onto the tops to admire the view.

It was stunning. The sun was out, no wind and snow all around. More photos taken, then it was down to the bivvy to sit in the sun and have lunch. The group was buzzing that we had finally struck it lucky after the previous few tramps in such bad weather.

Reluctantly, it was time to retrace our steps back down the ridge.

It was just as beautiful going down, the cold temperature not melting the snow quickly or making the track too slippery. The tricky part around the edge of a large slip didn't prove as difficult as feared.

Some of the group had waited at the river and all wandered back to the cars together, arriving around 4pm.

We had had a spectacular day and everyone went home in high spirits.

And another fairyland, as we walked in Waipatiki

From cold grey skies to warm sub-tropical

Waipatiki Beach - Aropaoanui, Wednesday, August 13.

Trampers: Manfred Hausler, Jeanne Van Den Hout, Rosemary Jeffery, Vic Bullock, Ron Morison, Keith Moretta, Jenny Bray, Paul Exeter, Ken Ross, Vietta Siagian, Peter Youren, Roz Snijders, John Marshall, Gordon Tapp, Arthur Mead, Alison Greer, visitors Robyn Smith, Liz Stringer and Allison Martin, and Loretta Pearson (reporter)

TWENTY walkers set off from the car park at the Waipatiki Reserve in grey skies, with a cool wind blowing, but once we entered the sub-tropical-type atmosphere of the Nikau palms - the main delight of the reserve - we soon warmed up. The area is also host to delicate lichens that hang in long, misty-green curtains from the trees; it's like being in another fairyland.

Russell Greer looks back in anguish, while Paul Exeter defies nature and bashes on towards Cascade Hut, during a tough winter challenge

We came out onto Waipatiki Road and then tramped through the Waipatiki Domain, where we climbed to the top of the look-out; the view down to the beach and back to Napier was great. We had morning tea on the beach and then headed along the track just above the shore, up to Arapaoanui Beach. The sea was calm and the weather mild.

There had been some minor slips along the way, due to the recent storms. We turned inland and walked across farmland, where we found a sheltered spot to enjoy lunch; we were entertained by a neighbouring farmer rounding up a mob of sheep in an adjoining paddock and eventually bringing his flock past us. They ran at speed when they saw us!

We then headed up Aropaoanui Road and onto the Bridle Track (the old Napier/Wairoa Road). It was very muddy through here, due to recent rain. The views across the valley to a young pine plantation and other greenery were breathtaking as the sun shone down on them. Here we saw wild goats grazing on the hillside.

We rejoined the track up through the Nikau palms, which was harder going up than coming down in the morning, and arrived back at the car park at around 2.40 pm after a very pleasant day out.

Burdened by bad weather

The Lakes - Kiwi Saddle Hut, Saturday, August 27. Map: U20

Trampers: Alison Greer, Graham Bell, Gary Bowler, Vic Bullock, Alex Thomason, Manfred Hausler, Julia Mackie, Loretta Pearson, Kelvin Shaw, Vietta Siagian, Thelma Tasman-Smith, Jeanne Van Den Hout, Garry Whincop, Murray White, Peter Youren, Pete Heaney, Peter Slagter, Rosemary Jeffery, Robyn Smith and Ken Ross (reporter)

THE weather wasn't really bad. It just wasn't very good. The drive to Kuripaponga had raised our hopes, after a poor forecast. We even had some sun for the pre-tramp briefing, but it was short-lived. It was low cloud and rain for the rest of the day. No wind, so the rain was vertical, cold, and heavy at times, with the track running like a small stream in places.

Nineteen left the Lakes car park just before 9 am. Most planned to reach the Kiwi Saddle Hut for lunch. White-out conditions persuaded some to shorten their tramp and stay below the tree line.

Those who reached the hut enjoyed their lunch out of the rain, but it was a short break. Bodies were wet, and they chilled off rapidly. The climb up from the hut soon warmed us, though.

The mainly downhill return trip was a slip-and-slide affair. The left turn off the ridge into the bush caught some people out again, despite a cairn, an orange marker, a Waratah standard and an arrow scratched in the clay. But we were all back, enjoying the shelter of the vehicles, before 3pm.

A tramp with plenty of opportunities to take photos and some time to sit and enjoy the views (or just sit) is always a delight. So this one didn't score too highly on that scale. But it was a good refreshing day in the great outdoors (with the emphasis on refreshing); and that's why we go tramping.

We got some great photos of the moss-edged track through the forests and we enjoyed the colourful bright reds and oranges of the smaller plants on exposed rocky sections.

It's a walk to be repeated, but with a longer parka (if that weather repeats itself).

Cascade: A journey of ups, downs and roundabouts

Cascade Hut, August 23-24. Map: U19

Trampers: Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Russell Greer, Alison Greer, Rosemary Jeffery, Sue Marshall and Julia Mackie (reporter)

IN September 2008's edition of Wilderness magazine, this walk is described as "moderately hard." Indefatigable Paul Exeter describes it as "easy and undulating." But that's how Paul describes all the other tramps…This time, it turned out to be a bit of a challenge.

Seven trampers left Napier at 7 am and arrived at the end of Clements Mill Road (off Taharua Road), just before 9 am. It's a long drive, and we were expecting a wet weekend up in the Kaimanawas.

The walk crosses a swing bridge within five minutes of the start and then continues along the Hinemaiaia Stream. After climbing a small incline, you can hear the roar of a waterfall. The track follows a stream for another hour and requires climbing up and down some short sections using tree roots for grip, before starting up a ridge.

Within a half hour of the climb, Ted felt a twinge in his leg, and declared that he would not be able to continue. He took Paul's car keys and made his way back. Before he set off, Ted cheerily told us we had two more hours of climbing yet. What he may also have realised was that, near the tops, we would be walking in soft snow.

There was tree damage on the track; occasionally, it made the route impassable and some minor bushbashing was required. This, and the snow, slowed us down. On the south-facing ridge tops, the snow was considerably deeper. We stopped for a quick lunch before starting the descent down the river, again walking in deep soft snow which, if you were unlucky, meant going down to your knees. It was hard work at the front, so we shared the task of getting through this section. The track levels off for a short distance and then descends again. There was less snow on this part of the route, but a few tree and bush obstacles.

We finally got to the bottom and the bush track was easy going, near the Tauranga Taupo River. Stanfields whare (derelict) could be seen across the river at one point, but it blends into the bushline behind it, so is easy to miss.

After a half hour, you cross the Cascade stream, and are within a few minutes of Cascade Hut. The trip in had taken us 6 hours and 8 minutes. There was no one in the hut, but it contained some food and binoculars and a sleeping bag. We hoped nobody was returning that night, cleared up and made ourselves at home. Russell got the stove going with dry wood and coal, which is kept in a bunker attached to the hut. We think this is a great way to fuel huts in the back country. With all our wet clothes strung out to dry, we had a great evening. We wondered what option Ted had taken, but were glad to be in a cosy hut. It was like a sauna, if you were up on the top bunks.

The predicted rain came during the night, and we knew on waking the next morning that it would be a wet trip out. We set off, ready to keep walking and not stop for lunch, eating muesli bars and other snacks on the way. The trip back up the hill was easier and we were able to walk in the footprints of the previous day in the deeper snow near and on the tops. The walk out took us 4 hours and 50 minutes. Throughout the tramp, we heard no sign of any bird life, except for some duck calls in the later afternoon after arriving at the hut.

We met Ted about 15 minutes from the track end, and he celebrated with us when we all made the car park - he'd thoughtfully brought along some hot drinks. And then it was off home, in the rain.

Parks was never like this, until now

Parks Peak - Ruahines,
Saturday, September 6. Map: U21

Trampers: Paul Exeter, Simon Hill, Geoff Donkin, Sue Marshall, Rosemary Jeffery, John Dobbs, Peter Steadman, John Gray, Ted Angove, Murray Goss, Murray White, Alison Greer, Matt Green, Denise Payne, Julia Mackie and Jude Paton (reporter)

A VAN and an extra carload set out from the parking point to check out the spankingly brand new Parks Peak Hut. With a cool breeze, showers forecast for the morning and a clearing afternoon, it was anyone's guess what we might encounter.

We headed up over farmland and onto scrubby open slopes, rapidly gaining altitude. Everyone quickly warmed up and before long it was time to admire the farmland far below, while shedding excess clothing. The group slowly spread out, with some forging ahead (not always on the right track), others proceeding more leisurely and two others struggling valiantly on, one with a very sore leg and the other with breathing difficulties.

We made good time, reaching the junction with the ridge track after 90 minutes; then we swung a left and headed the 30 minutes to the hut (an accurate estimate, for once). Along the way, an initial tiny snowflake became a much larger snowflake and it snowed for about 20 minutes, even if it was melting almost instantly. It looked beautiful and was the highlight of the day, the snowfall from the previous week having already melted.

The new-look hut (it's actually more like a little cottage, complete with verandah) is very smart inside, with a new woodstove, mattresses for six, a bench-top and table with window-side views - it's a cosy place to spend the night.

The new Parks Peak hut

Morning tea followed by an early lunch for some was supplemented by yummy fruit cake (a Gossy special!) and chocolate for the lucky ones, with standing room only for the latecomers.

Without the fire (despite Matt's posturing with the axe), we soon began to cool off and five keen folk decided to head for Pohatuhaha trig point at 1368m, 500 metres beyond the junction. It was an impressive lookout, but a chilly wind restricted them to a few photos before heading back again.

With the weather threatening to worsen, we decided to drop down a bit before a brief snack stop, donning raincoats - only to later shed them and continue our downhill descent … not a slide, although one of us (in her hurry to reach the van) had a dramatic finish to the day when she managed to plummet head-first over the stile - much to the horror of her companions. Luckily, only minor injury was sustained.

It was a short day, and we were out by 1.30pm, but it was a good leg-stretch and we were home in plenty of time to do the chores and look forward to long summer days of roaming further afield.

Meeting of minds takes a dim view of events

Makahu Saddle - Middle Hill Hut,
Wednesday, September 10. Map: U20

Trampers: Alison Greer, Rosemary Jeffery, Julia Mackie, Jeanne Van den Hout, Liz Stringer, Loretta Pearson, Robyn Smith, Penny and Arthur Mead, Graham Bell, Gary Bowler, Vic Bullock, Paul Exeter, Kelvin Shaw, Manfred Hausler, Peter Slagter, John Marshall, Ken Ross, Ron Morison, Murray White, Barry Motley and John Gray (reporter)

A GROUP of 22 trampers in two mini-vans arrived at the Makahu Saddle car park at about 8.45 am. Shortly afterwards, 16 set off to walk through and six took the vans around to Kaweka Road to meet them. The weather was cloudy and showers were forecast.

The 'fast' and 'slow' groups soon sorted themselves out and everyone took a break at the Kaweka Flats Bivvy. We pressed on, still dry, and made good progress across the big gorge, but heavy showers began to fall on the other side. It was time for raincoats, because the weather forecast was correct! This was not the right weather for a diversion to Iron Whare, but it will be well worth a look some other time.

We made our way through to Middle Hill Hut, where the fast group arrived at the same time as the bunch that came up from Kaweka Road. We all had lunch, most in the hut, keeping out of the cold and rain - and it was standing room only for some! It was cosy inside, with so many warm bodies…

Groups of walkers left the hut at intervals for the downhill section to the car park and a change into dry clothes. We were soon warm again and on our way home, arriving in Napier about 4.30 pm. Sadly, it had not been a day to stop and savour the views…

Whirinaki, where you wish the walk will never end

Whirinaki Forest Park - Mangamate Hut, Saturday-Sunday, September 20-21. Map: V18

Trampers: Paul Exeter, Murray White, John Gray, Murray Goss, Rosemary Jeffery, Denise Payne, Sue Marshall, Alison Greer and Julia Mackie (reporter)

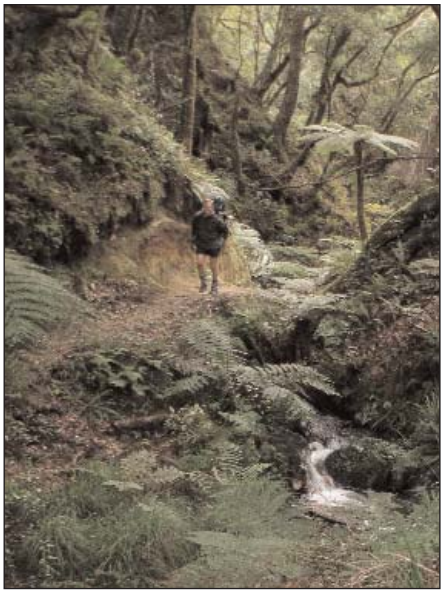
THE omens were good. As we drove down Pine Milling Road, we could see Ruapehu and Ngarauhoe peaks on the south-western horizon in between the pine trees. For the first time in a few weeks, we at last had good tramping weather forecast for both days and hopes were high for a good bush walk.

Nine of us set off from Plateau Road road-end, heading for Upper Whirinaki Hut. The track undulates for a short while, before it descends down to the Whirinaki River crossing where you try not to get wet feet. Easy walking follows a tributary stream and you shortly arrive at Upper Whirinaki Hut. The day party was sitting on the verandah, having a short break. We joined them before they set off for their walk through to Central Whirinaki Hut.

The sun was warming and it was tempting to stay longer, but we had to move on. The track follows a stream, which had a lot of storm-damaged trees on its banks; it eventually becomes the Taumutu Stream. We lunched in a spot where the sun shone into a clearing in the bush. After lunch, we caught up with the day party; they'd had lunch just further on. We said farewell to them at the turn-off for Mangamate Hut at the Kakaiti stream junction. The track was, in places, full of flood debris that probably occurred since the winter of 2006, when our winter solstice tramp in into Central Whirinaki led to the group having to camp out, due to snow-storm damage on the track.

The walk through the tree fern-lined stream was a joy and soon we climbed out of the bush and up a low saddle into the Kakanui Stream, and on to the Upper Mangamate Stream. In quick time, we reached the turn-off up a well-formed track to the hut. The Whirinaki huts are all well designed (except for the top bunks) and have a wide verandah. The sun shone on the surrounding hills; the hut looks down a valley toward the Upper Mangamate River, a great spot and we had it all to ourselves. We had our hot drinks outside until it cooled down. Murray Goss lit the pot belly and we continued lively discussions on all manner of topics (some too naughty to mention). When darkness fell, we listened for kiwi and moreporks and with Ruru singing the club song, and a possum grunting around. Three slept on the verandah - why waste a good starry night?

At daylight, we were ready to set off by 7.30am. We made good time back down the Taumutu River, reaching main track junction at 10.00am. At the junction, we decided to head toward Central Whirinaki, again along and crossing the Whirinaki Stream many times; again, there was a lot of snow damage



Murray Goss, near Mangamate

on the way. We were fortunate to see two blue ducks (whio), and they came towards the reporter for their photoshoot, as instructed. Once we reached the junction, we were persuaded by women's lib to go on to Central Whirinaki Hut for lunch… anything to prolong the great bush walk we were enjoying. Lunch was had in the hut clearing, with the sun warming us. We signed the hut book next to John Marshall's name, and started the walk out up the gentle climb to the Plateau Road car park. You know when you're almost there because there is a magnificent grove of mountain cabbage trees next to the track. And when you get a glimpse through the trees, the surrounding ranges look fantastically wild.

We arrived back at the car park after a six-and-a-half-hour walk. Murray's car did not like the rough road, and had to be towed home by the AA, unfortunately. This did not dim a great trip. It had been a totally tremendous tramp.

Day trip, Whirinaki Forest, Saturday, September 20.

Trampers: Colin McNatty, John Marshall, Penny and Arthur Mead, Geoff Donkin, Simon Hill, Matt Green (firewood collector), Paul Spelling, Robyn Wolfsbaure, Tony des Landes, Alex Thomason and John Russell (reporter)

A VANLOAD of day trippers set off from the Plateau car park about 9am, after a somewhat bumpy ride through the maze of forestry tracks.

Colin decided on a 'shortcut', but it covered some bumpy terrain, so we were not sure how much time was gained. After a quick hello and mingle with the weekenders, we moved on. The forest is always beautiful, especially on a sunny day. This time, the track was very boggy in places, requiring stream crossings and lots of clambering over fallen branches.

At about 12.15, after some discussion, we decided on a lunch stop in a nice sunny spot and Matt entertained us with tales of his aborted trip to Antarctica. At the turn-off to Mangamate Hut, we farewelled the weekenders and continued on to the bridge where Penny and Paul went back to the car park. The remainder of the group continued to Central Whirinaki Hut for a break. We couldn't have asked for a more pleasant afternoon tea spot.

We left for home at about 4pm and on the way back, Matt spied a large log on the roadside at Te Pohue. Never one to miss an opportunity for free firewood, he convinced a reluctant Colin to stop, and with some difficulty the log was loaded on board!

After a great day's outing, we arrived back around 6pm.

The Earth moved - thanks to the blast

Three Fingers - Bobs Spur, Wednesday, September 24. Map: U21

Trampers: Rosemary Jeffery, Alison Greer, Vic Bullock, John Marshall, Thelma Tasman-Smith, Manfred Hausler, Jeanne van den Hout, John Gray, Robyn Smith, Liz Stringer, Penny and Arthur Mead, Kelvin Shaw, Peter Slagter, Julia Mackie and Paul Exeter (reporter)

WE headed south down Highway 50, out through Kereru to Gull Road in the Mangleton Valley, to climb Three Fingers Spur and come down Bobs Spur.

The weather was iffy, wind-wise, but we decided to go for it and not be beaten by the blast once again (it was the third time we had attempted this walk). Thelma, John Marshall and Vic did their own thing for the day, while the rest of us went across the farm paddocks and started up the old track, which is not in great shape. The track is not a DOC one, but is maintained by hunters and trampers.

We had a rest at the first trig, with really great views of Frying Pan Flat and further afield, then went through a patch of bush and came across a well-maintained hunter's bivvy. It had an electric light bulb hooked up to run off a battery.

From there, it was onwards and upwards to the trig at 1172m, where we regrouped with the wind blowing strongly. We did not go to the top, but sidled round, heading southwards, making our way across the tussock tops, dodging a few tarns and boggy areas until we found the track that took us across to Bobs Spur.

We lunched in the bush out of the wind, with the trees swaying madly and the ground moving underneath us. After lunch, we traced our way further across and started to come down the spur, which has not been cut for a long time.

We were on and off the track continually, but knew that we needed to follow the top of the ridge down. It got worse the further we went, with a lot of scratches and blood-letting by most.

We eventually found the scree slopes, which are slowly getting new plant growth. Some of us had a great run down, but most took their time. It was exhilarating. We all met up at the farm boundary fence, having bushbashed our way through to it, then walked out through the pine plantation (without disturbing the deer in the paddocks). It was a very successful day - with much-needed showers to follow at home.

The Anniversary ascent waits another year

Anniversary trip, Saturday, October 4.

Trampers: Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Alison Greer, Sue Marshall, Julia Mackie, Rosemary Jeffery, Ron Eagle, Carol Finch, Alec Thomason, Matt ("The Horned One") Green, Arthur and Penny Mead, Melinda Chapman, John Russell, Kelvin Shaw, Murray White, John Gray, Peter Heaney, Vic Bullock, John Marshall, Les O'Shea, Daniel Fraser, Fiona Green and Colin McNatty (reporter)

THE turnout was good, with 24 members in a Eurocar van and three private vehicles. We set out with low expectations of climbing Kaweka J, based on past experiences of high winds, which were once again the order of the day.

As we sighted the main range, it was evident that the high points were smothered in white, rolled cloud that was initially stationary.

At the car park, it became clear that the lull had been a fluke; it turned very gusty. The Brains Trust decided that scaling Kaweka J was again not on. So it was back to a drop-off point known as 'The Quarry'. Four decided to return to the Makahu car park for some less strenuous trips in that area. They also ferried vehicles, so the others could do a round trip.

Club Captain's briefing revealed that we would go down to the Makahu River via a little-used track, which began in scrub and grasses, down the clay pans and into the kanuka stands. 'Stands' is a misnomer, because much of the kanuka had been blown over by the high winds common to this area.

The route was indistinct and progress was impeded by spears of wind-blown kanuka, so it was left mainly to three old tuskers to bulldoze through, diverging when each believed they had 'The One True Way'!

After crossing the river, the advanced guard waited for the rest and took time out for snacks and a drink. It was pointed out by those who joined us that there had been an easier way down to the river, via a clay pan that was clearly visible on the spur we had come down on. To our left, some were studying a fern and moss-covered cliff from which water was dripping down. Attached to its face were tiny whisker orchids. It would have taken out the supreme landscaping prize at any international flower and garden show.

With all 20 back in the party, we climbed up the other side of the river, through open beech forest and on until the goal was in sight: the elusive and historic Iron Whare, a ramshackle musterers' hut that the Department of Conservation has worked to preserve. Some poked their heads inside. 'Crude' probably covers it, compared to today's huts. Another photo opportunity arose when one of the party sprouted a set of deer antlers.

It was clear why we had struggled to find the Iron Whare from the track leading to Middle Hill via the Makahu Bivvy, as the forest has a very open aspect and there is a regularity to the contours near the top of the ridge which would have made navigation difficult. From

The historic Iron Whare, preserved by DoC

there it was 20 minutes to Kaweka Bivvy, where we met Vic Bullock, Peter Heaney and John Gray, who had travelled via the Makahu car park. It was midday, and time for lunch in the shade. The sky had cleared, revealing a great view of Kaweka J and the ridges and high points to its North and South. Those with good eyesight could see Dominie Bivvy and everyone could clearly see how eroded the eastern side of the range is at that point. One stood transfixed, gazing into space. He was listening to the croak of frogs in a patch of algae-covered water. Those sounds were familiar to many of us in bygone years; it is a pity that frogs are now also endangered.

We started back, again intersecting with the upper reaches of the Makahu River. It was a steady but easy climb out from the river, through outstanding beech forest and back to the vehicles. We were joined by John Marshall, who had investigated the area closer to the car park. After some time enjoying each other's company and the sun - and changing into clean gear - we made an uneventful trip home. While we hadn't beaten Kaweka J, it was an enjoyable substitute.

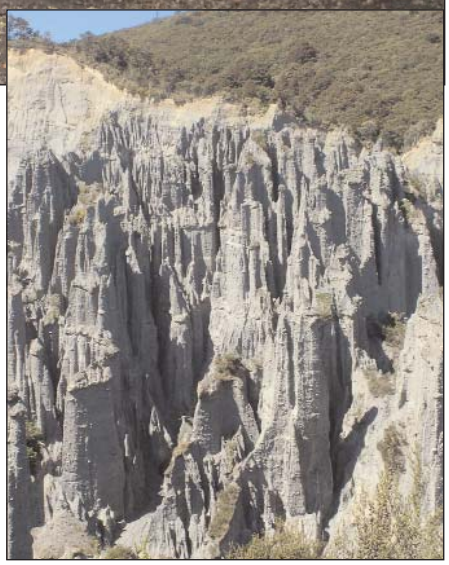
Now, somewhere completely different

Aorangi Forest Park and Lake Ferry, October 13-16.

Trampers: Vic Bullock, Graham Bell, Gary Bowler, Paul Exeter, John Gray, Alison Greer, Julia Mackie, John Marshall, Arthur and Penny Mead, Les O'Shea, Loretta Pearson, Thelma Tasman-Smith and Ken Ross (reporter)

A GROUP of 14 set out to explore the Aorangi Forest Park/Palliser Bay area from a base at Lake Ferry. We enjoyed some good tramps in an area that was new to most of us, in good weather and with good company; not to mention some ballcock moments.

After driving down, we went directly to the Putangirua Pinnacles; a valley full of fantastic geological formations (hoodoos). This area featured in The Lord of the Rings and it's easy



The Pinnacles at Putangirua

to see why. We enjoyed an afternoon tramp before checking in to the Lake Ferry Camp and a relaxed meal at the conveniently located 'local'.

Next day, we drove to the end of Haurangi Rd in the middle of the Forest Park to tramp in the vicinity of Mount Ross. Most set out to do a high level circuit which included Mount Ross, while a smaller group set out downriver to Sutherlands Hut. Anecdotal evidence has it that this group, while later looking for Averill's Hut, actually got higher on the mount than the first group who had had trouble locating an acceptable route up. All members were back at the vehicles at around 3pm.

Day three was our opportunity to explore the Palliser Coast. Our first stop was at Ngawi, a small coastal fishing hamlet with an interesting boat launching technique off a steep shingle beach. They use huge trailers towed by big semi-retired bulldozers. Next was the fur seal colony at Cape Palliser and the adjacent rock formations known as Kupe's Sails. Then it was off up the 250-step climb to Cape Palliser Lighthouse for fantastic views and the T-shirt (but there wasn't one).

Our tramp north along the coast toward White Rocks started from the lighthouse. Along the way, we had great coastal views and a detour to check out a waterfall. Lunch was at the

Fishermen's tractors at Ngawi, on the Wairarapa coast

DoC Ngapotiki Lodge, a nice enough hut with a good view - but hardly a lodge. Then it was back along the track to the cars. It had been another great day, the turquoise sea being a highlight.

It was good to be in a new area with different features, different bush and more bird life. Once again, this was a great club event that resulted in a number of people getting into a different area, enjoying new tramps. Thanks to Alison, our leader, motivator and organiser. And thanks to all the others on the trip for their company.

Gut-busting climbs or squalls? What fun!

Makino Hut, by-passing Ballard Hut down to Middle Hill Hut, October 18-19. Map: U20

Trampers: Ted Angove, John Gray, Paul Exeter and Sue Marshall (reporter)

THE day party was away promptly and over the first rise before we weekenders headed off at 8.15am. Steadily we climbed, enjoying those flatter sections between each ascent, arriving at Makino Bivouac for a breather, foot repairs and photographs.

Still heading up through bush, now and again popping out onto clay pans and great views - it was a pretty good day out there. Ted disappeared for a while and then turned up in front of us. Having found 'the short cut', he was smugly waiting at the junction with that 'what took you so long?' look on his face. We met up with Murray Goss and Nicole Brown at Makino Hut, a warm sunny spot for morning tea.

The walk from the hut to Mangaturutu turn-off went well, although a few large trees are yet to be cleared. Kakariki flew overhead - in fact, we heard two groups. Longtailed cuckoo were also heard and, not far away, the distinctive raspy call of whiteheads.

The weather started to change, getting decidedly cooler, but our uphill pace kept us warm until we stopped for lunch. Extra layers were needed then. From there, it was another hour or so until we broke out of the bush to follow the poled route, sidling round Whetu. We timed that to perfection, just as the southerly squall hit! It was a race to get into our parkas,

Beech tree in flower, near Mount Ross

battling against the wind to zip up… Mumblings were heard about Middle Hill sounding like a good option for the night.

At one point, Ballard Hut could be seen off to our right tucked into the bush edge... so near, yet so far! To get there, we would have to battle a full-on headwind and we were only just managing to keep upright. Huddled together for a quick conference, a retreat to Middle Hill was agreed… and it was a couple of hours away. Off the tops, off with our extra gear, and it was down into the shelter of the bush and an easy descent to the hut.

We arrived at 4pm, after 7 ¾ hours. Three trampers who were spread about the hut gathered their gear together and made us welcome. They'd met our day party, so were up with the club's comings and goings. Paul cooked pancakes topped with squishy cream and maple syrup, combined eats were shared and we sat on the porch, chatting until the sun dropped behind the hut and we started to chill down.

Sally had cut neat piles of wood with her new saw and had the fire set and ready to light…not that it was too cold, but she insisted that we needed the ambience of a fire. Our hut-mates all cooked evening meals. We'd had enough snacks, so we sat and watched, taking turns to read out our pile of jokes. Ted and Paul chose to sleep on the porch. Paul bore the brunt of a few heavy showers overnight and awoke in a rather damp sleeping bag. Another indignity for Paul was watching him struggle to eat his cardboard noodles as Ted tucked into sumptuous bacon and eggs.

We farewelled our hut-mates and, who knows, our paths may cross again sometime. As we departed around 8.30am, looking back up to the cloud-shrouded tops with an overnight dusting of snow down past the bush line only confirmed that we'd made the right decision to wimp out and head down to Middle Hill Hut. We arrived at the car at 10am and got home early.

Makino Ridge to Middle Hill Hut, Saturday, October 18. Map: U20

Trampers: Colin McNatty, Daniel Fraser, Murray Goss, Nicole Brown, Carol Finch, Alex Thomason, Garry Whincop, Denise Payne, Ali Hillington, Matt Green, John Russell and Alison Greer (reporter)

The day trip was very well camouflaged on the trip list as Makino to Middle Hill; but it soon became clear that this was the infamous Three Gorge Trip.

It's a gut-buster, straight upwards for the first 20 minutes. The track soon flattened out and it was time to take stock of the day and conditions. It was sunny and warm, with a strong breeze from the north-west, which led to discussions over whether the weekenders would make Ballards Hut.

The turn-off was reached in just over an hour and two members decided to continue on to Makino Hut to spend the day. The rest plunged down our first gorge, taking care on slippery roots and loose dirt. It's a long way down, but seeing we had started from the Makino side, the first gorge is the biggest. Crossing the stream at the bottom, it's a couple of false climbs before starting the big one, which takes you to the next ridge. We all managed it in our own time and a well-deserved rest was taken looking out towards Whetu and back to Makino Ridge.

Moving on over 'the flatter section' of the track, the walking was easier - although this plateau of lovely beech forest is still littered with wind-fall, making you wind your way up, around and over fallen branches. The second and third main gorges do not appear to be as big as the first, but it was with sighs of relief that we all made it past the sign to Middle Hill and on to the hut.

As we sat lazing in the sun, a party of three wandered in, having come over from the Makahu car park; they were staying the night. One of them was known to us, so it was some time later before we finally got up and began the long trek down Middle Hill Ridge to the car park.

We met Murray and Nicole at the bridge over the Mangatutunui stream and after a group photo stop, it was on to the last section and out to the cars. Everyone was very pleased with their efforts. One or two hadn't been on this tramp before, but still that remark of "never again" was heard.

Labour Weekend Trip, DoC Kawhatau Base, October 24-26. Maps: T22 and U22

Trampers: Alison Greer, Julia Mackie, Sue Marshall, Denise Payne, Paul Exeter, Ted Angove, Les O'Shea, Geoff Donkin and John Gray (reporters)

NINE club members in two vehicles left EIT at 7.30am on Hawke's Bay Anniversary Day, heading for DoC Kawhatau Base, via Taihape and Mangaweka. The weekend weather forecast was not promising, with rain forecast over much of the country. We stopped for coffee in Taihape and collected the hut key in Mangaweka.

The weather was cloudy but clear, so the group drove to the end of Mangakokeke Road and all headed for Purity Hut from the car park, at about 11.30. It's quite a steep climb through farmland, then native bush and finally into tussock, near the tops. Purity Hut is a nice, new, six-berth DoC hut just above the bush line, with wonderful views towards Taihape, Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro. Unfortunately for us, cloud shrouded the tops above the Central Plateau.

The weather was improving all the time and Julia and Geoff decided to do an overnighter via the Hikurangi Range to McKinnon Hut. The others returned to the cars and headed for Kawhatau Base, arriving about 4 pm. We soon had hot water on, the coal-fire range going and hot drinks and nibbles set up.

Geoff Donkin surveys the scene, at Iron Peg

Meanwhile, writes Geoff…

The two of us headed on up the spur, which was not as steep as the climb to Purity Hut.

There was no wind, good visibility but dark clouds about. We got to the first high points: Wooden Peg, then Iron Peg where we checked out possible routes to Waterfall Hut via Iron Peg Stream. We also had good views of Waipawa Saddle and could see the Wakararas.

There were quite large remnants of the winter snow around. We then headed onwards towards the Mangaweka high point. In the distance, we could see Mt Hikurangi.

From Mt Hikurangi, we could see the next high point and just discernable was the sign to McKinnon, but we could not see the hut. Descending from Hikurangi, we had to go through big clumps of tussock with plenty of Spaniard. We made rather slow progress, but the sign was growing more obvious. A few spots of rain kept us moving. The sign said McKinnon Hut 20 mins (although it took us 30). Shortly, the hut came into view and we reached it at 6pm. The trip had taken six and a half hours from the road end. It was a relief to get there, because we were getting tired.

First thing next morning, we could see much of Ruapehu and most of the ranges were clear except for the tops. We headed off at 7.50am. At the high point by the sign, the visibility had reduced to perhaps 50 metres. There was a cool breeze, so it was on with the parka, hat and gloves. The track was clearly defined by regular waratahs and passes a large tarn, dropping steadily through tussock lands and the turn-off to Crow Hut.

Shortly after we entered the bush, we met the others on their way up to McKinnon. John Gray agreed to come come back with us. As we went lower, the rain seemed to increase and the descent got steeper. Finally, we got to the trolley on wire across the Kawhatau River.

We got across OK, with a fair bit of elbow grease required to get up the last 10 metres or so. Back at the base, the mission was to heat the water to have a clean-up before the others got back.

John takes up the story...

The main party had left base at about 8am, having decided to climb up to the tops and hopefully McKinnon Hut. Everyone managed the cage cableway crossing of the Kawhatau River and then climbed slowly up the steep ridge towards the tops. We met Julia and Geoff at about 10am, by which time light rain had started. We were being sheltered by the beautiful native bush around us but found how wet and windy it really was when we left the bush cover and made our way along the tops in tussock country, until the turn-off to Crow Hut. It was here that the decision was made to return to base - and dry clothes. We arrived back at Kawhatau at about 2pm and enjoyed hot drinks and a good wash in hot water, heated by the range fire. As usual, a lot of stories of past trips were told.

Sunday dawned overcast but otherwise fine and we decided to walk into Kelly Knight Hut, to 'bag another hut'. So lunches were prepared and everyone was ready to go by 8 am. We had a short drive to the end of Mangakokeke Road, but could not obtain permission to walk through the farm to the forest park, because the farmer was away. Curses! So it was back to our base, to make the next decision. But the wet weather had closed in, so we decided to clean up the house and head for home a day earlier than planned.

The DoC keys were returned to Mangaweka and we had the compulsory shopping and coffee stops in Utiku and Taihape. Our drive home over the Gentle Annie was pleasant, thanks to good weather and very little traffic and we arrived home about 2pm. Despite the poor conditions, we'd enjoyed a good weekend and fine company.

Bird-spotting at Taraponui

Taraponui, Friday, October 24.

Trampers: John Dobbs, John Russell and Noleen Blair

THREE members went to visit Taraponui. The lovely uphill bush walk made for very pleasant spotting and watching of native birds. We changed plans at Bell Rock, due to the unpleasant and strong wind. We arrived at the Boundary Stream loop track, noting the flowering clematis, Rangiora trees and kaka beak, then drove on to Lake Opouahi and lunched at the shelter, before walking to Spooners Hill lookout. We came across a Sika deer quietly grazing in a peaceful spot; it soon fled.

An especially nice day was rounded off with large ice creams at the Tutira store.

Smith Stream, Saturday, November 1. Map: U22

Trampers: Paul Exeter, Ted Angove, John Marshall, Rosemary Jeffery, Carol Finch, Daniel Fraser, Kelvin Shaw, Penny Mead, Arthur Mead, Nicole Brown and Julia Mackie

THE initial walk is over the Waipawa river bridge and then up a farm track before the real track start for Middle Stream Hut. We headed off-track and bushbashed down to Middle Stream. Up the other side, we found the track proper, crossed open tussock and then back into the bush. At Smith Stream, we knew we would not have time to reach the hut and back, so turned around. This time, the wind on the open grassy area was fierce. We used the proper track and found the turn-off was only 50 yards further on from our turn-off in the morning. What bad luck. We'll put the Smith Stream hut on the trip list again soon.

Gold Creek Hut, Wednesday, November 5. Map: U22

Trampers: Paul Exeter, Gary Bowler, Alex Stevenson, Andew Ridler (new), Murray White, Peter Slagter, Julia Mackie, Les O'Shea, Robyn Smith, Kelvin Shaw, Ken Ross, Keith Moretta, John Marshall, Manfred Hausler, Graham Bell, Barry Motley, Rita Motley and Vic Bullock

WE decided to walk to Gold Creek Hut instead of Sparrowhawk Bivvy. Some took their time and others took a shortcut over farmland to cross the fenceline and get onto the track proper. The walk is up a small ridge and then down to Gold Creek. It had started to rain, so we all ate our lunch in the hut, in shifts. The option to return down the creek was ruled out, as we'd heard that a lot of tree windfall made going difficult. Best left for another warmer, sunny day. A short day walk, and back home early.

Hunters drop in at Central Te Hoe hut...

Thrills and spills on the Te Hoe River

Central Te Hoe River from private land through the Mokaha Forest, Sat-Sun, November 15-16. Map: T23

Trampers: Paul Exeter, Ted Angove, Simon Hill, Murray Goss, Murray White, Sue Marshall and Julia Mackie (reporter)

THE weekend party of seven left the day team after lunching on the riverbank. We were all looking forward to new vistas. With no clear track, we weaved in and out of the river, reaching a gorge. Murray White and Paul used the side bank, gradually getting deeper and then finally up to their top chests (even tall Murray's). We all made it through but not without a little drama, when I started drifting back downstream. (Paul leapt into the river to save me.)

After 5½ hours, we saw the swingbridge that meant that we had gone 300 metres too far. The exit from the river to the hut was not clearly marked, although some had noticed the track. We made it there (what joy) and backtracked. We sat out in the sun, and rested our weary minds and bodies. It's amazing how tiring river tramping can be.

In the early evening, we were surprised by a helicopter which landed and dropped off a passenger and some avgas. The hunter came over to let us know that it was going to pick up a deer which had been shot earlier. On the chopper's return, two deer were slung below it. It topped up with fuel and took off with the hunter. The load must have been heavy; it only just missed the trees.

None of us were looking forward to the return down-river the next morning. More onga onga, slippery river stones and boulders, and the gorge. But it proved a breeze, except for the cold water. With long daylight hours and a very warm night, it had been a great summer tramp.

Day trip - Te Hoe River - Maungataniwha, November 15.

Day trampers: Nolene Blair, Bridget Seque, Carol Finch, Murray McIndoe, Les O'Shea, Alex Thomason, Gordon Tapp, John Dobbs, Ray Slavin, Colin McNatty, John Russell, John Marshall and John Gray (reporter)

FIVE vehicles left Pan Pac, heading for the HB Palaeontologist camp on the Te Hoe River, Maungataniwha. The drive in was long, first through farmland, then huge forested areas, then into wonderful native forests.

It was fine and warm as 13 left Charlie Janes camp and started upstream. The Te Hoe was clear and not cold, but the many crossings were made more difficult by slippery rocks. We picked our way slowly upstream, without any real tracks. Everyone seemed to have a different view of where to cross the river, so we were well spread out!

We all had lunch in a nice warm spot, before farewelling the weekend group as our day party set off for the return journey. Travelling downstream was easier, so we made good time back to Charlie's camp. Charlie gave us a look around and showed us his airstrip, and he told some tales from the past. He's a real character!

The group made its way slowly back to the Palaeontologist camp for another chat, before heading home after a great day.

Awatere - Happy Daze, November 19.

Trampers: Graham Bell, Gary Bowler, Vic Bullock, Paul Exeter, John Gray, Manfred Hausler, Rosemary Jeffery, John Marshall, Keith Moretta, Kelvin Shaw, Vietta Siagian, Ray Slavin, Peter Slagter, Thelma Tasman-Smith, Barry Motley and Ken Ross (reporter)

OUR tramp to Awatere Hut then down the North Branch of the Makaretu River to Happy Daze Hut would normally start from Moorcock Saddle at the end of Kashmir Road. Not for us, though. The last steep section of the road had been recently remetalled and was only suitable for 4X4s. So we, the van 12, had the doubtful pleasure of walking to the road end before joining the other four of our group there.

Section one was a brief climb out of the saddle and then south along a ridge with great views east across Hawke's Bay and west to the main Ruahine Range to Longview Hut and Rocky Knob. Then it was a steep drop down into the Makaretu River and across it to Awatere Hut for a chocolate stop.

Next, it was down-river for a brief visit to Black Stag Hut - a flash name for a not-so-flash shelter. The riverbed was good, easy going except for all those rocks and stones. Scenery was great, with a new vista around every bend. Our lunch stop, Happy Daze Hut, was a climb above the river. We enjoyed a sunny rest before retracing our steps.

The third section back up the river was easier because we didn't need to try to keep our feet dry. Then it was a climb back up to the saddle. Back up on the ridge, it was windy and cool, so no time to stop, and we set off down to the vehicles to dry socks and a coffee before the drive home.

Kaweka J - Mad Dog Hill - Studholme Saddle/Mackintosh Spur - Donald River - Matauria Ridge, November 29.

Trampers: Alison Greer, Carol Finch, Denise Payne, Julia Mackie, Jude Paton, Nolene Blair, Murray White, Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Geoff Donkin, Vic Bullock, John Marshall and John Dobbs (reporter)

A BAKER'S dozen left Whararangi Road in warm and still conditions. A few kilometres short of Makahu car park, we dropped John Marshall for a photo foray. There wasn't a breath of wind as we set off up Trials Spur. A suspected bout of food poisoning left Paul at the back, along with Vic. The rest made good time on the grunt up the J, and a patch of buttery ranunculus brightened the scene.

A mist came and went, revealing the tops in clear outline and once up to the signpost, a wonderful clear view out to Ruapehu and companions. We gathered for photos near the memorial cairn and a snack break. Paul decided he would not go further, and Vic and Nolene decided the same.

So the rest carried on, aiming to complete the full circuit. How wonderful it was to be on the open tops in such mild and calm conditions. It seemed a shame to soon be descending off the tops and down off Mad Dog Hill. The knee joints let me know just how steep it was!

Then it was the descent down Mackintosh Spur, with most doing their bit to pull up contortas on the track. A lovely spot with great views was found for lunch-hour but after the usual 25-minute break, we were off again.

A steep section followed (oh, the knees!) down to the Donald, which was in low flow and easy to cross. Then for the dreaded ascent to Matauria Ridge - and what a grunter! This probably took 45 minutes and a stop was made at the so-called top... Murray was really feeling the effort. Ted helped by taking his pack and John carried Ted's and his own the rest of the way.

At last, we descended to the Field Base area and into a patch of bush. Just across the little bridge, Nolene had made a clear sign out of broken twigs, pointing to a superb cabbage tree with a perfectly formed and large flower bunch. A little way further, there were others - but none quite so perfect. It was back to the vehicles around 4.20pm, after a good workout.

The club thanks Band Limited, Waghorne Street, Ahuriri, Napier, for helping to publish this newsletter