THE BUSHBASHER

Somewhere beneath that clag lies the Heretaunga Plain. Alison Greer captured the scene from Te Mata Peak, during Wednesday trampers' Winter Solstice walk on June 22

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We return to an old favourite

The Hogget, Wednesday February 2 2011.
Map: BJ37

Trampers: John Marshall, Ron Morison, Ken Ross, Murray White, Peter Slagter, Paul Exeter, Kelvin Shaw, John Gray, Rosemary Jeffery, John Burrell, Dianne Hills and visitors Viv Pinkham, Sam Emery and Pete Matson, along with reporter Alison Greer

A FAVOURITE tramp was on the programme for today - maybe the reason for the large turn-out. Our trip took us up the Taihape road, over the 'Gentle Annie' to Timahanga Station, the property of Jenny and Jack Roberts. With their permission, we drove through the station to a park near the old homestead site.

The track starts out as a farm road, turns and crosses a small stream, then leads into a large stand of native bush. Here you pass by some magnificent trees, mainly beech (red and silver) but also a number of large rimu. We were sheltered from the wind here but as we gained height, finally emerging into the open, we met the predicted strong westerly. However, the wind wasn't as strong as feared and as we made our way through scrub that was high and scratchy at times, it was nice to stand in the breeze to cool down.

We reached the sandy Hogget area in time for an early lunch, then spent some time studying the wonderful views of the western side of the Kaweka Range, followed by a side trip over to an old signpost for a group photo with Mts Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe in the background and Ngamatea Station in the foreground. We decided that a dust cloud by Mt Ruapehu was caused by strong winds blowing over the Rangipo desert, quite an amazing sight.

High on the Hogget trail, trampers pause to admire a dramatic high altitude cloud formation

We retraced our route, stopping to take in as many views as possible before descending back into the bush where, even though it was shady, it was still very warm. The group arrived back at the car park around 3pm, pleased to get their boots off and have a cool drink. A great day out, and thanks so much to Jenny and Jack Roberts for continuing to allow us access to this wonderful area.

Longview: Long day, without the views

Longview Hut - Rocky Knob - Makaretu Hut - Moorcock Saddle, Saturday February 12.
Map: BL36 Norsewood

Trampers: Denise Payne, Sue Marshall, Julia Mackie, Ruth and Rowan, John Marshall, Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Ray Slavin, Geoff Donkin, Gordon Tapp, Simon Hill, Marc Marchal, Peter Slagter, Matt Green, Murray Goss and reporter John Gray

SEVENTEEN club members slowly assembled at EIT and the mini-van, plus one vehicle, departed for Moorcock Saddle before seven o'clock. The weather had been very hot and humid, but possible morning showers, clearing, was the forecast – ideal for a tramp in this area!

We arrived safely at the Moorcock Saddle car park and by 8.30am we were all sorted and ready to go. Low cloud looked menacing, but at least the day was cooler than past weeks and with no hot sun.

Our club Trip List described this tramp as easy and our Club Captain mentioned 'a long day', in passing at our meeting. Well, it wasn't too hard, but it was a good long day tramp.

Longview Hut was reached before 11am, admiring and eating the snowberries which were prolific along the way. Some of the group checked out the hut, which is just off the main ridge. Four Swedish hunters >P2

were there and just on their way out for the day's hunt. We continued on along the undulating ridge lined with the eyebrights and gentian flowers, and in places walking through thick leatherwood. The cloud had persisted due to a lack of wind, and therefore we did not get the usual views. An early lunch was taken at the track junction and much appreciated by all.

We continued the descent down the track to the Makaretu Hut on the Makaretu Stream, where we had a short break to replenish water bottles and inspect the tidy hut. We were soon on our way downstream, and the water was warm as we picked our way carefully around and over the larger rocks and fallen trees. A streamside waterfall beckoned and some of us had a good shower underneath; there, the water was cold. At the junction with the main river and the sign to Happy Daze Hut, we turned upstream and headed slowly for Awatere Hut. Fortunately the stones on this stream were generally smaller, making our progress slightly easier.

We all had a water and snack break, before heading steadily uphill again to get back to the vehicles. We arrived before five, met up with the three who had not done the complete trip and changed into clean, dry clothes again. Good conditions on the road had us back at EIT just before 6.30pm, where everyone said their farewells and we all headed for home - tired, but well pleased after a good day out.

Happy and weary, but a gorge too far...

Makino Hut – Three Gorges, Wednesday February 16

Trampers: Kelvin Shaw, Gary Bowler, Paul Exeter, John Marshall, Murray Goss, Ron Morison, John Burrell, Isabel Holdaway and reporter Keith Moretta

THE previous period of high temperatures and humidity, typical for February, was replaced today with cooler, overcast skies and occasional drizzle.

Eight members headed towards Makino Hut from the Makahu Road, Makino car park, while Ron ambled around the base for the day, and he was assigned to bring the van to Middle Hill car park. The steep Makino ridge is never the best way to begin the day's walk, but we were quickly among low scrub, bracken and manuka that had colonised the ridge.

After an hour, we entered beech forest where we passed Makino Bivouac, and after 90 minutes we had morning tea at the Middle Hill Hut/Makino Hut intersection. Paul, Murray, and John M had planned to go to Makino Hut, while the remaining five decided to cross the Three Gorges, to Middle Hill Hut track.

The Three Gorges crossing is mostly covered in beech trees. The geology is mainly metamorphic sandstone, often with cliff outcrops. The track is carpeted thick with beech leaves and the scene is completed by mature trees covering the region as a backdrop. There are signs that deer numbers have reduced, with huge numbers of horopito trees growing where beech trees have fallen.

Top: Lunch in the leatherwood on the Ruahines Range tops, and above, Simon Hill showers in the waterfall on the Makeretu Stream

Our descent into the first gorge was steep and eventually we arrived at a small stream. The ascent took us onto a wide plateau, where we stopped for lunch among some of the beech trees and leaves. There was little bird life, and we didn't not stay long as people began to cool and stiffen with the cooler weather.

Our trail repeated the descending and ascending with two more gorges. We crossed the Mangatutuanui Stream in the third gorge; beech trees were slowly replaced by manuka trees as we neared the top. The trail returned to clay with loose rock, but it was welcomed by all as we joined the Middle Hill Hut trail, four hours from the Makino Ridge track.

Views of the Three Gorges from Middle Hill Hut trail gave everyone a sense of the day's journey. We quickly descended the ridge, and upon reaching the Mangatutuanui Stream bridge, a short riverside walk to Middle Hill car park was completed by five weary but happy hikers after a wonderful seven hours.

Great weather (on the way home)

Ruapehu 2011, March 4-10

The small but select party who enjoyed a week at Ruapehu this year: Noeline Blair, Jennie Burns, Vic Bullock, John Marshall, Peter Slagter, Ken Ross (reporter) and our reluctant but very able leader, Kelvin Shaw

Day 1 - We arrived on the mountain early in the afternoon after a brief stop at Turangi for perishables and coffee. On the mountain, we were greeted with rather unpleasant weather so it was only the very keen who ventured out for a look around that afternoon.

Day 2 - The weather was atrocious so, like the previous day, it was reading, table tennis and The Big Jigsaw.

Day 3 - Snow had fallen overnight but not down to the lodge. All were champing at the bit, so we decided to head down the mountain to some better weather. Ice crystals were on the track and car windshields needed defrosting. We enjoyed reasonable conditions on the Whakapapanui, Silica Rapids, Tawhai Falls and Taranaki Falls tracks. We were hailed on, though, as we returned to the lodge. High winds were again forecast for the next day.

Day 4 - The day dawned beautiful so, despite the forecast, we set off early for the Mangatepopo Valley with some hoping to climb Mount Ngauruhoe. We were only a short distance along the valley track and already battling into a cold fierce wind when those plans were abruptly abandoned and it was back into the car and heading for Wairere Stream. Good choice. We had a great day, with some going as far as the waterfall and Cone Crater despite the cold wind in places.

Day 5 - We believed the weather forecast today and decided on the shelter of the Round the Mountain Track on the Ohakune side: Mangaehuehu Hut and return. Again a good choice, as it was sheltered and we had great views. The southern flank of the mountain was well covered in snow and the cloud had

Ruapehu... our days on the mountain are an annual highlight

lifted. The two ladies left to return to Napier that night.

Day 6 - The weather was the best yet. Kelvin and Peter headed for Ngauruhoe and claim they 'knocked the B… off'. The photo they took of clouds at the top would not have convinced a judge but met our somewhat lower standard of proof. Vic and Ken opted for the more sedate Whakapapaiti Circuit and John explored the Mangatepopo area. Judging by the inactivity after dinner that night, four consecutive days tramping was quite enough. However, The Big Jigsaw was completed, thanks to the dogged perseverance of Peter and constant help from others.

Day 7 - Up early - even earlier than normal. We had a good breakfast and then got into clean-up mode. As normal, the weather was beautiful as we headed home.

How lucky we are to be able to spend time on the mountain - so thank you to our hosts, the Auckland Tramping Club. We really enjoy the luxury and the chance to tramp on the wide variety of tracks, so even when the weather isn't perfect we can still have a good day out. Thanks for the company, everybody, to our leader and to John for his experienced helping hand.

So good to be back in the bush...

Te Puia Lodge, Saturday March 26

Trampers to Te Puia via the Mohaka River Track: Paul Exeter, Ted Angove, Geoff Donkin, Marc Marchal, John Marshall and reporter Sue Martin

IT rained and was blowing all the way out to the Kawekas, and it didn't look promising for our tramp to Whetu. So we decided to have a leisurely trip to Te Puia and return. This was ideal for me as I haven't tramped for more than three months (and I believe the others all had very good excuses too). As we pulled up in the 'blue gums' car park, two vans full of school kids from Taupo arrived, heading the same way. We played cat and mouse with them most of the way and often could hear them before sighting them. I have been on that route many times but learned about two new useful things this time. 1) The Terrace Bivvy, which is ideally positioned and showed signs of recent inhabitants, as there were still eggs in the carton and 2) The Arches - a natural caved arch which is upstream about five minutes from the small wooden footbridge, a place where one can access water. Many of the students desperately needed some, so our Ted was able to direct them to this spot.

The Mohaka River had flooded onto the track in many places and often we were walking in thick silt. The river still looked as clear and spectacular as it always does but we didn't spot any trout. Although the rain didn't come to much, it was a nuisance because it was very muggy inside our parkas.

When we arrived at the hut, Malcolm (a Wellington hunter who has been almost everywhere in the New Zealand bush) enjoyed chatting with us for several hours. When the school kids arrived, they busied themselves setting up. After morning tea, lunch, chats and visits to the brand new board walk, 50 metres from the hut (and sighting the new bridge to the hot pools), we decided it was time to head back. Just as we were leaving, the other very wet group arrived from Makino.

An easy, relaxing tramp doesn't hurt us from time to time. Yes, and it's great to be back in the bush with friends.

Trampers to Te Puia via Makino Ridge; Matt Green, Simon Hill, Jenny Burns, and reporter Alison Greer

FOUR hardy trampers decided to have a longer day than the rest and exited the van at the Makino Hut car park. It was a steady climb in good conditions, even though the raincoat was 'on again, off again' and we reached the turn-off in good time.

The low cloud cover lifted, giving us a quick view of the Makino and Mohaka rivers as we descended carefully over the wet clay pans. As it was only 11.30 and not raining, when we arrived at the new bridge over the Makino River, lunch at the hot springs sounded nice. Hmmm, no such luck! The predicted rain arrived, so it was back to Te Puia Lodge where the rest of group was just leaving.

A quick lunch, then the pleasant walk along the river, being amazed by the evidence of floods in January. We arrived at the Gums car park, changed and headed home.

Perfect Sunrise: It's all about the sights

Sunrise Hut, Te Atuaoparapara, Ruahine FP, Saturday April 9. Map: BK36

Trampers: John Marshall, Julia Mackie, Colleen Perreau, John Gray, Ted Angove, Matt Green, Sue Martin, Paul Exeter, Jenny Burns, Jude Paton, Sue Marshall, Denise Payne, Ali Hollington, John Russell, Alison Greer, Viv Bramley and reporter Marc Marchal

A GROUP of 17 set off in the direction of Sunrise Hut. The weather was absolutely perfect, with lots of sun and no wind. Good progress was made and we had morning tea at the hut around 10am. After this, most of the group carried on to the Armstrong Saddle, completely wind-free!

From the saddle, we continued our ascent and a little later the group split in half. Eight decided to go to Te Atuaoparapara (66) and the Waipawa saddle and river, while the rest decided to take a shortcut and use a large shingle slide (got to do that one some day) back down. Climbing up got a bit slower as we had to find our way through some low bushes and grasses. However, once we made the ridge it was a fairly simple climb all the way up to 66.

The views from the top were spectacular. And as there was no wind, we decided to have a lunch with a view. Thirty minutes later, we were ready to make our way down. >P4

Te Atuaoparapara trig, with the main range in the background...

A small shingle slide leads to a couple of tarns from where we took a left turn. Unfortunately, we were a bit eager to get to the Waipawa saddle and started our descent too early. Half an hour off-roading later, we got back to the track and the saddle.

A reasonable path took us down to river, which we reached after a couple more views. The river was much more overgrown than I remember and our initial progress was quite slow. To keep the spirits up, Alison decided to show us of a couple of dives, quite spectacular really (and thank god without doing damage). Once the river widened, we could pick up the pace and by 16.15 we reached the van.

On a good day, this must be one of the better one-day walks in the Bay. An easy path to a great hut, spectacular views from the rugged Ruahines, a bit of bushbashing, great views from the top, a shingle slide and some river work: what more could one want?

Clockwise from left: The tarn, passed on the route from Te Atuoparapara to Waipawa Saddle, with Mt Ruapehu in the background

Geoff Donkin's technique on the three-wire bridge crossing Rocks Ahead Stream

Te Pohue trig and the microwave transmitter

Leaps and bounds of improvement

Boundary Stream - Heay's Deer Farm, Wednesday April 14. Map: BH39

Trampers: John Marshall, Vic Bullock, Peter Slagter, Ken Ross, John Burrell, Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Diane and David Hills, Jenny Burns, Gary Bowler, Alison Greer, visitors Jane Thomson and Anne Addsett, and reporter Rosemary Jeffery

WHAT a great day to be tramping. As we set off from Church Road, there was a bit of fog around but by the time we got to Heay's Farm, it had cleared and the scenery was fantastic.

Alison, Vic, John Marshall and the two new ladies left the remainder of us and went back to Boundary Stream to meet us at lunch time at Shine's Falls. The rest of us climbed steadily up the fence line to the trig, passing a monument where a hunter Jim (can't remember his full Maori name) had his ashes buried. Further up, we looked over the gully which had a very steep drop down to where the stags were roaring. Beatrice Heay's plaque was also located at the highest point of the farm.

We stopped for morning tea in an ideal sunny spot and then carried on towards the area we thought looked like the road to the start of the track to Shine's Falls. We couldn't have picked a better day, warm and no wind. We arrived at the start of the track up to the falls and we all decided that it was much steeper than the last time we had been through. DoC personnel were in the process of maintenance work being carried out on the track, with a lot of gravel being laid, and there looked like some sort of rubber matting tiles in a pile ready to be put down. There were no workers around; it must have been their day off!

We arrived at the falls at 12.15pm and met up with the others. Vic and John had already been there and were heading back up the track again. Those guys are amazing, a real inspiration to us all. We had our lunch and then headed back up the track with the sounds of birds all the way. We were pleased to be under the trees, even though there was a lot of perspiring going on.

Great to get to the car park and a change of clothes. DoC has certainly spent a lot on the Boundary Stream area, with impressive information boards and a big shelter area, even a toilet with a deck.

Three days of Kaweka wanderlust

Kaweka Forest Park, Friday - Sunday April 22-24. Map: BJ37 Kuripapango

Trampers: Geoff Donkin, John Dobbs and reporter Julia Mackie

WITH the Whirinaki FP now seemingly inaccessible, we decided to do a multi-day tramp in the Kaweka FP. Yes... even in the middle of the 'roar', the hunting peak season.

On Friday morning, we left from Makahu Saddle car park and headed for the tops. We accidentally walked up the Makahu Spur; however, as we hadn't been up for some time, it was a change. On arriving at Dominie Bivvy, we stopped and checked inside and refilled our water bottles. Onwards to Kaweka J, with only slight winds (at least not gale force).

On the tops, the visibility was minimal - about two waratah standards. A few small pockets of snow remained from snowfall earlier in the week. John and Geoff had a snowball throwing competition, and then we decreed that silly photos were OK on this trip.

The track to the Back Ridge Hut branched off on reaching Stern's Saddle, and we got some great views as the cloud was clearing. Venison Tops, Manson Tops and Mt Meany could be seen. We kept on tramping up the saddle, coming out of the bush into an open area where we found a spot out of the wind for lunch.

Then it was back into the bush, on a relatively flat track through to the Rocks Ahead junction.

We got a good view of the track to Kiwi Saddle Hut, and then around the ridge and up to Kaiarahi. Good to see it from Back Ridge this time around. We guessed that Castle Camp would be in the bush on the bottom

Above: Several members did a recce of the access road we once took to get into the Whirinaki Forest Park. From Pohokura Rd, and then Waipunga Road, no signage indicates a problem. We had been told by DoC Murupara that there was a road washout.

Six km down the road, we came across it. This is a massive washout, and will affect the travel time and distance into one of our favourite parks. We are investigating the alternatives but, at this stage, things do not look promising for those travelling from Hawke's Bay.

Right: The boys on the Southern Ruahine Crossing, in the leatherwood corridor

flank of Kaiarahi. We met a hunter, who was trying to catch up to his girlfriend somewhere in the Kawekas. The wind was biting and so we quickly descended off Back Ridge and headed down to Rocks Ahead. The DoC timing was for two hours from the junction, and was spot on. We arrived at 3.45pm, having left Makahu Saddle at 8.45am; we had taken seven hours, just as we had anticipated.

Rocks Ahead is a four-bunk, old forestry-style hut with no verandah or water tank. Water is collected in containers from the Rocks Ahead Stream or the Ngarururoro River, which the hut overlooks. John elected to pitch his tent on the edge of the helipad platform, whilst Geoff and I got bunks inside. Two other hunters/fishermen had gear already claiming the other bunks.

We all washed and then relaxed over a cuppa, and when light began to dim, had our evening meals. Ruth, one of the other guests, arrived and we all had a good chat. As we got into our sleeping bags, John arrived back from a long day and evening hunt. No luck or deer noises on this night.

The following day, we all got some excitement walking over the three-wire bridge to the start of the track up to Tira Lodge. The bridge crosses Rocks Ahead Stream, which was easily navigable on foot, but we wanted to keep our boots dry this trip. Ruth and John looked on, assessing our technique on the bridge and ladder.

The DoC track time for Tira is two hours, and again was spot on. The track climbs through beech forest heading for Venison Tops. Just before leaving the bush, an old tin sign nailed to a tree directs the tramper to Tira Lodge. The hut was full of food and the necessities of a home away from home for four hunters. They were away, presumably hunting, so we decided to have a good half-hour break and a hot brew. We did not have far to tramp today. As we were leaving, one of the hunters returned and offered us a cup of tea, but we were already on our way. They had been choppered into the lodge and were there until Thursday. He did not seem to be happy about the long stay, but with all the gear surely that would be survivable.

The track to Ballard Hut descends off Venison Tops and then is level for a while, before you walk along a small saddle and then start ascending to the main Kaweka Range.

Before leaving the bush, we put on overtrousers as the cold wind was up again. Visibility was also down to 100 metres. The track over to the Ballard Hut junction is easy and we soon descended to the hut. With the lack of visibility, the way was not quite clear from above, but we made our way down the shingle and tussock. Geoff spied the hut in the bush, when he was 20 metres away. Hoorah... no one else here as yet, although it was only 1.45pm. We made our beds and then cleared the ash and debris from the Wagoner. I don't think it had been emptied for some time.

We got the fire going and replenished the woodpile. These are all things you can do when you arrive early at the hut. Soon we were all as warm as toast, and enjoying the afternoon and evening. With the clag and drizzle on the tops, we doubted if we would have hut companions tonight.

On Sunday, we were all awake early, and left around 7.20am. The visibility was again poor, but still we decided to go to Whetu, as we usually bypass the trig. We met two hunters, a father and son who had walked up from Middle Hill. By all accounts, the hut was full, a tent pitched and bodies on the verandah. This is a hut to avoid in the hunting high season.

As we made our way around the tops, the cloud swirled around and then lifted. The last small climb up and around the western flank of Kaweka North, and we had closed the loop. With the wind a little cold, we descended until clear of it and found a spot to have a break and enjoy the views from Mahia to Cape Kidnappers. Hawke's Bay was bathed in sunshine.

When we looked back, we could see the tops which were now clear, and marvel at the distance we had travelled so quickly. This time we took the Trial Spur track, as it is easier on the descent, and we decided to stop and have a brew and break at Makahu Saddle Hut, before returning to the car.

The trip had taken John and Geoff to some new huts and tracks, and for me the track from Rocks Ahead up to Tira was a first. We had all enjoyed the trip and the company, and being outdoors for three days.

Our window of nearly-blue skies

Southern Ruahine Crossing, Saturday May 7. Maps: BL35 / BM35 / BM36

Trampers: Julia Mackie, Sue Martin, Jude Paton, Ted Angove, Geoff Donkin, Simon Hill, John Russell, Matt Green and reporter John Gray

NINE members gathered at EIT and got away on time, heading for the Pohangina Valley on the western side of the Ruahines. Unfortunately, two others had already withdrawn on the strength of a wet weather forecast. Sure, the forecast wasn't great, but **>P6**

we were looking for that 'window of opportunity', south of Mt Egmont and north of Levin - and we found it! Nearly-blue sky became the tramp catchphrase.

The trip over was damp and we considered a change of location as we passed through Tikokino but, being a good keen bunch of hardy trampers, we carried on. We did miss the turn-off as we travelled up the valley, but very soon corrected our bearings and arrived at our destination on Opawe Road before 10 am.

Six prepared for the Southern Ruahines crossing and were soon on their way across farm paddocks. It was noted that the western side of the ranges was much drier than the tops and the eastern side.

We enjoyed a steady climb through some nice bush typical of the area - rimu, kamahi, and tawa forest, and a few grand old rata trees. As we gained altitude, shrubby horopito, flax and pink pine prevailed. The track to Mt Maharahara is obvious from below. The leatherwood corridor begins at Mt Maharahara, and covers the tops to Matanginui, after which the junction for the track to Kiritaki Hut turns south.

We got some beautiful views out to the west coast. The tops were foggy but clearing, and we enjoyed a 20-minute lunch close to the track junction to Kiritaki Hut. The track had been well maintained on the Hawke's Bay side, but was not too good on the western side.

Very soon after lunch, we met the remaining three members and everyone enjoyed a steady but uneventful trip down to the Mangapuaka Stream and back to the van at the Kumeti roadhead.

Thanks to driver Ted. We all had an enjoyable day, arriving back at the EIT about 5pm.

GPS comes in handy up on Moorcock

Moorcock Saddle – Daphne Ridge, Wednesday May 11. Map: BL36 Norsewood

Trampers: Vic Bullock, John Marshall, Ken Ross, Kelvin Shaw, Gary Bowler, Peter Slagter, John Burrell, Robyn Smith, Ron Morison and reporter Alison Greer

NAPIER was shrouded in fog, and the strange sound of what seemed to be a ship's fog-horn woke many in the early hours. The further south along Highway 50 we drove, the better the day became and by the time Kelvin had us safely at Moorcock Saddle car park, it was calm and fine.

The main group of six quickly ascended the ridge to Longview, stopping for morning tea above the large slip. Instead of going to Longview Hut, we turned north, taking the tussock-covered ridge that leads to Daphne Hut. Low cloud started drifting over the ridge but visibility was still pretty good. Although unmarked, the ridge is reasonably easy to follow, a few well-placed cairns reassuring you that you are on track.

The view east from the Makahu Spur track to the tops, mist hanging in the valleys. Below: The Kiwi Mouth Hut six, l to r, Geoff Donkin, Julia Mackie, Alison Greer, Sue Marshall, Denise Payne and Ted Angove

With the help of GPS and the cloud lifting at just the right moment, we found our way down and across the small saddle and onto the Daphne Track.

Lunch was had at the signpost and after a discussion about the lowering clouds, it was decided to descend to the car park instead of carrying on along the tops to the farm track. We were back at the van by 2.30pm, waited a little while for the rest of the party to arrive from Longview Hut and then headed back to Napier.

Longview Hut track top junction, in cloud

A fantastic tramp in new territory

Kiwi Mouth Hut, Sat/Sun May 21/22. Map: BJ37

Trampers: Via Kaweka J, Geoff Donkin, Alison Greer and reporter Julia Mackie. Via Smith Russell, Ted Angove, Sue Marshall and Denise Payne

WE'VE gazed at Back Ridge from the opposite ridge when walking the Kiwi Saddle - Castle Camp - Kaiarahi circuit. Now, thanks to Ted's suggestion, we are walking some new tracks.

Thanks to Brian for dropping us off at Makahu Saddle; we start the weekend on a gloriously sunny and calm day. The climb up to Kaweka J is steady, with stops to take in the views. The mist is hanging in the valleys and we can see Mahia and the Cape. Unfortunately, the sun is straight into the lens, and so photos are difficult.

On nearing the tops, a light dusting of snow covers some ridges, and only small pockets of snow remain from earlier in the week. From the top, we get a splendid view of Mts Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe. We stop near the memorial cairn for a photo opportunity, and then move on down to Back Ridge. There is one gnarly bit of scree, otherwise the steady descent is easy going. Once the junction for Back Ridge Hut is reached on Stern's Saddle, it's a small grunt back up again to emerge from the bush to great views. We picked out all the major features such as Venison Tops, Mt Manson, Mt Meany and back to the main Kaweka Range. It is too early for lunch, so we press on to the next junction.

At the Back Ridge Bivvy and Rocks Ahead junction, we stop and find a spot for lunch out of the wind. Where did that come from? The temperature has dropped and the sun seems to have disappeared. We can clearly see the

track down to Kiwi Saddle from the tops, and then the ridge track around to Castle Camp and Kaiarahi. Due to the cold, lunch is brief and we decide to continue. I had estimated that it would take us three hours to Kiwi Mouth. The DoC sign indicated 3hrs 45. The track is not marked, but is obvious on the ground. It follows the ridge on the western side. From the Castle Camp ridge, it looks like the track is in bush, but in fact, it is on open ridge tops. We hear a deer squealing close by and see a lot of deer sign. No wonder Back Ridge Bivvy is favoured by hunters. The track ahead can be viewed easily with a few undulations up to the final high point 1258. It has been cut wide through low scrub, and calls for a stop to muster some energy before this last climb. On 1258, we get out the GPS, just for fun you understand, and note that according to it, we are at 1288m. Ah well, we get the map out for some more orientation, and a break before the downhill.

At 3.10pm, we get our first view of Kiwi Mouth Hut. No smoke as yet, from the other Napier Tramping Club party tramping into Kiwi Mouth Hut via the Smith Russell track and Cameron Hut track. My right big toe is on fire from the downhill. I dream of cooling off in Kiwi Stream. The bush is typical of the Kawekas, with kanuka providing cover. At four o'clock, my wish is granted as we cross Kiwi Stream. We did it in three hours.

The hut is 50m downstream, and there is smoke. The advance party had arrived at 3pm and got the billy on for us. But wait, there are only four bunks and there are six of us. Geoff opts to use his bivvy bag and fly (if you could stretch your imagination) and I opt for the floor. But first the usual wash and change while we're still warm from our downhill. Kiwi Stream and the Ngaruroro River converge 50m downstream from the hut where there are some big boulders. Having a wash by Kiwi Stream is a joy, as I never mind the cold water. It doesn't feel too cold yet.

After a hot cappuccino and some chocolate gingernuts, life feels good. This is my third visit to Kiwi Mouth Hut; each time is different as I've had different company, and arrived from a different direction. After dinner, we're in bed by 7.30pm. More chatter in the dark before we all fall asleep.

The next day, we have a one-hour climb to 1238m, after which you enter the bush and come to a track junction to Cameron Hut. We follow the track to Kiwi Saddle Hut via the High Level track, which I have not done before. It crosses some clay pans and scree and then descends into bush. You can hear water rushing and eventually cross a tributary to Kiwi Creek. From here, it's a climb all the way to Kiwi Saddle Hut, passing the junction for the track to Kiwi Mouth Hut via Kiwi Creek.

We arrived at the hut at around 11am, and decided to have a hot brew and early but long lunch. We sat outside in the sun, as the hut was in shade and too cool. Ted checked out the hut book and saw the entry from yesterday's club day tramp. We hope all went well for them, with some of the party making a last-minute decision to do the loop from Kiwi Saddle to Kiwi Mouth via the High Level track, and then back up to the tops via the Smith Russell track.

After lunch, it began to cool, and so we made our way up to the ridge and out to the Lakes car park. For the three of us who tramped in via Kaweka J, we were grateful for the chance to walk the Back Ridge and out via Kuripapango. We all felt a great satisfaction with our efforts, and had enjoyed the chance to explore new tracks.

Footnote: We also survived the prediction that the end of the world would begin that weekend. The earth didn't move for us...

A break on the porch at Hinerua Hut: l to r, Keith Moretta, Simon Hill and Ken Ross

Kiwi Saddle Hut, Saturday, May 21.
Map: BJ37

Trampers: Matt Green, Paul Hendy, Marc Marchal, Murray Goss, John Marshall, Sue Martin, Sue Titter, Rosemary Jeffery, Julie Briassc and reporter Paul Exeter

A FULL van left for the Lakes car park and the trip up the Taihape Road was uneventful, now that it is tar-sealed for most of the way.

We made the steady climb up to the radio mast on Kuripapango, with good views all around, including the lakes. We chatted to the three weekenders who were heading for Kiwi Mouth Hut, when they caught up to us having morning tea and admiring the views. We also stopped and chatted to two hunters who hadn't had any luck and commented that the winds were extremely strong up there earlier in the morning. There was very little wind now.

As we climbed higher up the Smith Russell track, Ruapehu came into view but vanished in cloud soon after. We had a photo shoot on high point 1357m.

Pinus contorta is doing well in this area so we pulled as many out as we could along the way. At the high point junction, we parted with the weekenders who were heading along the Cameron track then cutting across that track about half-way to head towards Kiwi Mouth.

Through small patches of snow, eight of us made our way down the steep decline to Kiwi Saddle Hut. Then the three lads decided to walk the circuit from the back of the hut on the Kiwi Mouth track and return on the track in the opposite direction from the weekenders.

The other five of us (lucky me, being the only male), walked out of the bush that surrounds the hut, to the track going to Castle Camp. We managed to get high enough to spot all the tracks, including Back Ridge where three more of our Napier trampers were walking from Makahu Saddle to Kiwi Mouth. We even spotted a lone person high on the ridge above Kiwi Saddle Hut. We assumed it was Gossy who, for some reason, had remained behind. But he never came down.

We walked back to the hut to get our packs, then found a warm spot to enjoy a long lunch.

After lunch, we headed back up that steep section and made the return trip back along the same tracks. At the Cameron track junction, we couldn't see the three lads, so made our way to the Lakes car park. The snow hadn't melted, as it was still quite cool out of the sun. But there was none of the forecast rain.

We arrived at the car park at 3pm, where Gossy and John Marshall had already returned after doing their own thing for the day. It was only an hour's wait before Paul Hendy, Matt and Marc returned. However, during this time the car park was a very busy place with cars pulling up, hunters destroying fresh animal footprints and what seemed like party goers. It kept us all entertained.

A great day out, with Julie doing very well on her first outing with our club.

Well, blow me down, what lovely views...

Hinerua Hut, Wednesday May 25.
Map: BL36

Trampers: Kelvin Shaw, John Marshall, Alison Greer, Rosemary Jeffery, Peter Slagter, Vic Bullock, Robyn Smith, Paul Exeter, Simon Hill, Ken Ross and reporter Keith Moretta

BLUSTERY winds and cloud greeted 11 members at the Oakley farm airstrip, a very long and winding drive off Hinerua Road.

A steep ascent was made along the farm road, starting from the old fertiliser holder, then passing the resident house, and finally we exited the farm through deer gates into the Ruahine Forest.

The group steadily ambled through the undulating track, covered in mountain beech, >P8

cabbage and cedar trees, with a base of ferns, bracken, horopito, totara, putaputaweta and much more. There was little bird life, but tuis chorused occasionally.

We arrived at the Hinerua Hut for morning tea after a short walk from the Hinerua–Tukituki Stream junction. After a good break, many took the one-hour steep track to Tussock Hill. Winds blasted us after leaving the protection of the beech forest, and some turned back.

The remaining five carried on a short distance to the top of Tussock Hill to views of the surrounding tracks and rivers: Tarn Bivvy, the Tukituki River and its Khyber Pass, Black Ridge and parts of Sawtooth Ridge. In the distance, Kahuranaki, Mt Erin and Te Mata Peak to the east, with the Wakararas and the Three Johns to the north.

Returning from Tussock Hill, we had lunch at Hinerua Hut. After that, we quickly retraced our morning tramp back to the airstrip and the van, with more views of the Waipawa in the winter sun, and then we headed home.

High winds above, gentle land below

MacIntosh Hut to Lawrence Road, Saturday June 4. Map: BJ37

Trampers: Julia Mackie, Jude Paton, Sue Marshall, Sue Titter, Denise Payne, Rosemary Jeffery, Colleen Perreau, Ted Angove, Geoff Donkin, Paul Exeter, Matt Green, Murray Goss, John Dobbs, Colin McNatty, James Farrell and reporter John Gray

SIXTEEN club members gathered at EIT and headed for the MacIntosh car park. We had an unfavourable weather forecast again, but everyone was keen to get out there. Arriving by 8.15 at the car park, we soon sorted the drivers to take our two vehicles around to the Lawrence Road car park. Four trampers went with them and did their walk from the Lawrence Road bridge.

The day was cloudy and cooler than the recent mild coastal climate, providing comfortable conditions for our day out. But low cloud and fog obscured the views as we made our way steadily towards the MacIntosh Hut and a welcome smoko, just before ten, along with the usual friendly banter.

Soon we were on our way steadily uphill. The wind thundered through the tops of the pinus contorta. Evidence of a recent tree being 'topped' lay beside the track, which followed the ridge line dropping down into the Donald River, beside which we had an early lunch. A brief shower meant some coats were donned, but they were quickly discarded as we made our way uphill again. Then we were down to the Tutaekuri River, queueing to cross the footbridge and make our way up the hill to the top Lawrence Road car park, for a change of clothes and an early finish.

Rosemary showed us all how to 'plank' on the bonnet of Paul's vehicle. Thanks to Geoff and Paul, our transfer drivers. Everyone enjoyed the day.

Several hours on an upturned boat

Te Waka, Wednesday June 8

Trampers: Gary Bowler, Vic Bullock, John Burrell, Paul Exeter, Alison Greer, Rosemary Jeffery, Julia Mackie, John Marshall, Kelvin Shaw, Robyn Smith, Murray White, Dermott McCaughan, Hillary Caldwell and reporter Ken Ross

TE WAKA, the canoe that turned to stone, dominates the skyline above Te Pohue on the Napier-Taupo highway and is visible from nearly everywhere in Hawke's Bay with its distinctive shape and microwave transmitter structure. Our day's tramp wasn't from the Taupo road, but from Potters Road out near Puketitiri to the west of the range. (Potters Road was once considered as part of the Napier/Taupo route via Rissington, to link with the current route west of Te Pohue.)

The weather forecast had seemed OK but by the time we got out of the vehicles by the woolshed at the end of the road, there was misty rain in the air and we stopped to don raingear almost immediately after setting off (and it stayed on all day). The route steadily climbed up the west face of the Maungaharuru Range, mainly on farm tracks. We quickly had views back into the Inangatahi Stream, a tributary of the Mohaka. The valley was now filled with swirling mist. The changing weather throughout the day was clear enough at times to give us good views with interesting lighting. Vic was lucky enough to get a Brocken Spectre photo.

After reaching the rim of the escarpment, we headed nor-east across the undulating plateau. We stopped near one of the many tarns for a well deserved mid-morning break. Dead reckoning was required at times when we were enshrouded in cloud but our instincts did us well and we found the high radio mast exactly where we expected it. The top was well and truly lost in clouds. From there, it was north along an undulating farm track to the microwave transmitter site at the Te Waka trig (1039m). We encountered many orange-painted waratah standards seemingly randomly implanted, probably the locations for future wind turbines as we were crossing the site of the second stage of the Unison wind farm.

During lunch, the cloud lifted, affording great views back to Kidnappers, Napier and Mitre 10 and to look down on the Taupo road below us. We then generally retraced our morning route, but with improved weather, views were a little more expansive. I enjoyed the distinctive weathered limestone rock outcrops and sculptural cabbage trees more as we descended than when gasping my way up. We even had a nice vivid rainbow as we headed down to the van to cap off a good day's tramping and visual experiences.

We are again grateful to get permission to tramp on this farm as it affords a great day out in this geologically and historically interesting area.

i TRAMP
www.napiertrampingclub.org.nz

President: Julia Mackie
Club Captain: Alison Greer
Secretary: Jude Paton
Treasurer: John Dobbs

Committee
Julia Mackie 844 0540
trans@ction.co.nz
Alison Greer 844 8152
greer.fans@xtra.co.nz
Jude Paton 835 4649
jude.paton@clear.net.nz
John Dobbs 844 2285
DobbsDJI@xtra.co.nz
Kelvin Shaw 836 7094
y2kshaw@farmside.co.nz
Sue Martin 835 8144
petesuem@googlemail.com
Colin McNatty 844 4144
colvalm@slingshot.co.nz
Marc Marchal 845 2717
mmarchal@xtra.co.nz
Murray White 845 3316
jomel@xtra.co.nz

New members contact:
Kelvin Shaw 836 7094
Transport co-ordinator:
Alison Greer 844 8152
Bushbasher Editor:
Brian Mackie 844 0540
Bushbasher stories to:
trans@ction.co.nz

The club meets at 7.30pm every second Thursday at Port Ahuriri School, before each weekend tramp. Please check the club website for dates and upcoming topics.

This newsletter is also available as a PDF file. Email trans@ction.co.nz for a copy.

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