THE BUSHBASHER

John Dobbs enjoying the view of the Ruahine Ranges from the Sentry Box - Parks Peak track

MAGAZINE OF THE NAPIER TRAMPING CLUB INC ISSUE 23, MARCH 2012

Outwitting that winter weather

Te Puia Hut/Mangatainoka Hot Springs, Saturday June 18 2011. Map: BJ37

Trampers: Marc Marchal, Colin McNatty, Murray White, Matt Green, Denise Payne, Ruth Shaw, visitor Mike Cooper and reporter Jude Paton

THE forecast was dire and the Kaimanawa trip abandoned in favour of Te Puia and the chance of a soak in the hot springs.

Eight of us headed off, wondering what the day was likely to throw at us. Fortunately, the ford was fordable and Colin handled the van well on the greasy road. Four folk opted for Makino and a rendezvous at the springs. The others, including newcomer Mike, left the Gums after a brief stop to check out the road-end hot springs.

The weather was cool and exceptionally still, with grey overcast conditions but no rain. Layers were shortly discarded. Wreaths of cloud hung in among the hills, making for brooding vistas. The natural arch proved elusive. A lone young guy was hightailing it out after starting from the Desert Rd seven days earlier. Chocolate was declined in anticipation of the beer awaiting him at the road end.

We found one young female (complete with skirt – which she wears tramping) in residence at the hut, intending to head up onto the tops and possibly out to the Taihape road. She seemed unperturbed (no PLB or GPS – map and compass hopefully!) despite her obvious unfamiliarity with the area and the low visibility. She assured us she was capable of dragging herself to the nearest hut if she broke her leg. Colin was not impressed and neither were we.

We chugged on up to the hot springs to find them cold and dirty. A scrub and refill ensued while we ate lunch. Then it rained… and thoughts of a soak rapidly evaporated! We met three of the others as we headed back to the hut for a bite before heading out in dribs and drabs. Denise and Jude are still unsure how they circumvented the last hill… wings on our feet? The guys had another theory.

Back in town, we discovered it had rained most of the day and felt smug that we'd outwitted the forecast and enjoyed a good stretch in good company yet again!

The snow trip in August 2011. Plastic bags are put to good use...

Solstice of fog and sunshine

Te Mata Peak Walkway, Wednesday June 22

Trampers: Ken Ross, Kelvin Shaw, Dianne Hills, John Marshall, Ron Morison, Vic Bullock, Murray White, Paul Exeter, John Burrell, Robyn Smith, John Gray, Rosemary Jeffery, Julia Mackie, Les O'Shea, visitor Gizenna, and reporter Alison Greer

ON many previous Winter Solstice trips, there has been a lot of snow on the ground - sometimes nearly knee-deep. Not so this year: a record mild start to winter had kept the ranges bare of the white stuff. So it was rather ironic that we chose to stay away from the ranges and tackle Te Mata Peak instead. >P2

Thick fog enveloped most of Hawke's Bay and the markers for the walkway that starts on Waimarama Road were hard to pick out at first. A steep climb up the grassy ridge brought us out above the Black Barn golf course and what a view! The cameras came out as we broke through into bright sunshine and looked down across the whole Heretaunga Plains covered in fog.

The group regathered and set off up the fence line, where we seemed to pick up the walkway markers again after losing them down below in the thick grass. Smoko was had at the water tanks just above the Peak House restaurant, then it was down the track to the main gates following the "nature trail" leading to the Redwoods. It was a lot cooler here under the trees, so we did not linger - although Ken was tucking into his early lunch and had to pack it away quickly.

From the Redwoods, it's a climb up the Goat Track that leads to the trig atop the Peak. What a fabulous day, so good that Ken flattened the battery on his camera taking so many photos! After the compulsory group photo under the trig, we made our way down, retracing our steps to the vehicles. Here we were treated to chocolate birthday cake, courtesy of Ron, then it was off on a tiki tour around the Tukituki valley, arriving at Clifton Bay café around 2pm for a late social lunch.

It had been a wonderful day, and good to have a big group out enjoying it.

The track to Kaweka Flats Bivvy, on a wet and wintry day. Below: The pile of deer carcasses on the No-Mans track from Golden Crown

We go hut-hopping: Three in one day

Makahu Saddle Hut to Middle Hill, Saturday July 2. Map: BJ37

Trampers: Colleen Perreau, Murray White, Rosemary Jeffery, Sue Martin, Alison Greer, Denise Payne, Sue Marshall, Matt Green, Sue Titter, Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, John Gray, Oswaldo Rojas, Simon Hill, Julia Mackie, Les O'Shea, Murray Goss, John Dobbs, James Burrell, Geoff Donkin, Ruth Shaw, Jude Paton, Colin McNatty, one guest visitor and reporter Marc Marchal

A GROUP of 25 keen trampers left Park Island car park and made their way in four vehicles to the Makahu Saddle car park. The forecast was for nice settled weather but a cold wind greeted us and we started our walk well layered up. We reached the Kaweka Flats Bivouac at 9.45. The weather had not improved, which made for a short morning tea at the bivvy.

Not too far past the bivvy is the turn-off to the Iron Whare Hut. Most of the group decided to go and have a look. DoC has recently re-cut and marked the track and cleared the space around the hut which now looks quite attractive. The hut has been renovated, keeping its original style. An information noticeboard inside tells the story of the hut. We had a good scout around, and after about 45 minutes we were back on the main track on our way to the Middle Hill Hut. Most of us by then had decided to have lunch at the hut. I seemed to remember the hut not being too far past the turn-off to Iron Whare, but had forgotten about the steep descent down into the valley to cross a small side stream of the Makahu river. Once over the stream, there is a long, and in places quite steep, climb back up.

We stopped briefly at the turn-off to Ihaka Spur for a drink and a snack and arrived at Middle Hill for lunch. Murray Goss, who had not visited Iron Whare, had reached the hut well before us. He had started the fire in the open fireplace, which dried our clothes out a bit. Shortly after, while others arrived, others moved out and on, to make their way back to the car park while we stayed a little longer to finish lunch.

The way back to the car park was uneventful. After five minutes or so, we were all happy to see the vehicles coming down the road. Thanks to Paul, Ted, John Gray and Simon for volunteering to drive the cars around. Not the nicest weather, but still an enjoyable tramp.

Snow at last...

Parks Peak Hut, Saturday July 16. Map: BK37 Tikokino

Trampers: Murray White, Matt Green, Murray Goss, John Dobbs, James Farrell, Sue Titter, Sue Marshall, Mark Marchal, Simon Hill, Jude Paton, Rosemary Jeffery and reporter Geoff Donkin

TWELVE of us set off in the van to Mangleton Road and the start of our route. We went up past Sentry Box Hut, with its recent bright orange coat of paint. Someone had managed to paint NTC in orange on the chimney.

It was a steep climb, with the cold wind apparent on open parts of the spur at Rocky Knoll. As we climbed, we got into the fresh snow which was dry and powdery, making it easy to slip on concealed tree roots.

At the track junction, some decided to go directly to Parks Peak Hut; the rest went on to Pohatuhaha, perhaps 20 minutes away to the north. We went up to the trig for a quick look, as you get 360 degree views. Someone suggested a group photo. No thanks. It was too cold to hang around and we were off there very quickly. Along the track to Parks Peak Hut, it was relatively sheltered. However, it was certainly cold in the wind. A few snowballs were thrown around.

At the hut, the others had finished lunch. We had ours on the small porch with good views of clouds, due to the north-western pattern coming across. Soon, we were off again. Just below the track junction, we met a young hunter heading up in the snow. It seemed a bit high for deer. We gradually got out of the snow as we descended.

A good trip for a short winter day, and nice to be in the fresh snow.

Kiritaki Hut, with the track on the opposite ridge passing next to the slip

Feet that felt like the icicles on the leatherwood

Ketatahi Road-end to Kiritaki Hut, and Fairbrother Road-end. Saturday/Sunday July 16-17. Map: BM35 Woodville

Trampers: Ted Angove, Sue Martin and reporter Julia Mackie

SUE and I have not been to Kiritaki Hut before, so let's go. However, 15 minutes in Mangapuaka Stream got my boots and feet wet. At 9.15am, we were at the start of the ridge track to climb to the turn-off to Kiritaki Hut which turns south, just below Matanginui. I disturbed a deer on the way up, and saw plenty of deer sign on the track. The bush looks like a great place to hide for deer. It had been one of the coldest mornings so far this year, but the sky looked blue and clear. There were only small amounts of snowflakes near the tops. The leatherwood icicles reflected the way my feet were feeling.

At the turn-off, we got fantastic views of Mts Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe, but there was a cold wind blowing; so after a photo stop, we moved on out of the wind and had an early lunch break.

A short while down the track, we got the first glimpse of Kiritaki Hut on an opposite ridge. We had a steep, greasy downhill and extra care was required. We finally reached Oruakeretaki Stream, and clambered down it for 100m before we saw the sign for the track to go up to the hut. The track here was very slippery and steep. Holding onto grass, I clambered up. No stopping until I got to the hut. I did not notice the track going off to the right, which Ted spotted. He checked it out, and found that we could have avoided some of our stream travel and the gnarly bit of the track at the bottom. We will remember that next time.

On reaching the hut, I had a chat with two hunters who were doing a recce. They had come up Oruakeretaki Stream and were impressed with the hunting options in the area. Once they had departed, the billy went on and I checked out the hut with a more critical eye.

It needed some swift attention because the novalight roof had holes in both sheets, and the water on the floor and damp in the hut was not good. The bench tops and walls were also in a dirty and sorry state. Yuk. Covering the bench top with newspaper and giving the walls a wipe dealt with some of the visible issues. The hut is in a lovely spot, and the grass area is a good place to sit in the summer, I'm told. The club has come through on day trips in summer; however, we were now basking in winter sunshine.

A hot cuppa was called for before Ted and I collected firewood, although there was not much that dry around. He had carried in some redwood kindling. A great idea, and well worth the effort.

I checked out the track above the hut, and from afar the ridge track that the Manawatu Tramping and Ski Club members have hacked. It is not a marked track, and care is needed when navigating, we are advised. It would be the one way of getting here without getting boots wet. The afternoon and evening passed and we were in bed by 7pm.

The next morning, we decided to walk out via the Oruakeretaki Stream, taking the hunters' track from the hut. This cut out a small amount of stream travel. We reached the stream, and negotiated some tricky bits downstream. At one point, there was a rope which provided assistance. The stream is very pretty, but I did not spot any of the trout which the hunters had mentioned the previous day. They were swimming upstream to spawn and were a good size, too. We also passed a recently shot deer carcass. The stream had a steep gradient, and there were lots of little waterfalls. We only had our raincoats on for a brief passing shower.

Gradually the valley floor widened and the last ridges were visible, before we reached farmland. We made the end of the track, and Ted's positive thoughts bore fruit. The farmer was getting some firewood onto his ute and after a brief chat, he offered us a lift back to our car. Well done, Ted.

We finished the tramp elated, after seeing some wonderful vistas, bush and streams.

Kiwi Saddle on a glorious winter day

Kiwi Saddle Hut, Wednesday July 20. Map: BJ37

Trampers: Kelvin Shaw, Peter Slagter, Murray White, Julia Mackie, Alison Greer, Paul Exeter, Vic Bullock, Robyn Smith, Les O'Shea, Ken Ross, John Marshall, Sue Martin, Anne Mahoney, Kate Millner, John Burrell, Rosemary Jeffery, Hillary Heath-Caldwell, Michael Ward , Murray Goss, Viv Bramley, Patrick Ward, Taylor Shakeshaft, Kaylem White Miller and reporter Keith Moretta

A GROUP of 25 trampers arrived at the Lakes car park, Kuripapango at 9am, on a beautiful clear and calm morning with lots of ground frost and fine ice crystals. Some morning mist blanketed the distant Kaweka valleys.

From the pine trees around the car park, the group ascended Kuripapango, the track often icy and carpeted with crystals in shaded areas. At the lower level, an assortment of pittosporums, kanuka, tree ferns and many forms of bracken and scrub grew. This gradually changed to mountain beech and pine remnants, as we neared the top of Kuripapango.

After a short walk along the Smith-Russell track to Kiwi Saddle Hut, the group suddenly exited the beech trees, and we were treated to panoramic views of Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and the Kaimanawas, plus spectacular views of the snow-covered peaks of the Ruahines and Kairahahi. The track had some snow cover, and large patches of ice encouraged everyone to step carefully.

A 30-minute, steep descent from the Cameron Hut/Kiwi Saddle Hut sign took us to lunchtime. Due to the cooler, tree-sheltered Kiwi Saddle Hut, we moved to a warmer, sunnier spot outdoors, overlooking a view of Ruapehu.

After lunch, the group retraced its route up the to the Smith-Russell track in sunny conditions. Here, younger (and some of the >P4

older) members enjoyed snowball playtime, with observers having no immunity.

It was a day with many new to the tramping club and the stunning views, sunshine and calm conditions made the trip very enjoyable. After a rest stop below the Kuripapango aerial mast, the steep descent to the car park left many quite weary and hoping they could still walk the following day...

A Rogue forecast gets it all wrong

Lakes Road car park - The Rogue - Mackintosh Spur, Saturday August 13. Map: BJ37

Trampers: Sue Martin, Ted Angove, James Burrell, Jude Paton, Sue Marshall, Murray Goss, Marc Marchal and reporter Geoff Donkin

THERE were only eight out today; possibly the poor weather forecast earlier in the week put some people off. But we started out in the sunshine! Whatever happened to the bad weather?

The top section of the track down to the Tutaekuri River is now a fully bulldozed logging road. The Tutaekuri was too high to avoid getting wet feet while crossing it. We headed up the track and up The Rogue, with the rearguard pulling contorta on the way up but not much effort in this area from the front markers.

We stopped for smoko at the first knob on The Rogue. There was some discussion about photography. Apparently the new rules are:

- No pictures while people are eating or have their mouths full.

- No pictures until person ready and posed and agreeing to be photographed.

Then it was onwards to the top of The Rogue with patches of snow around, and past the drop-off to the Kaweka Hut site. Cooks Horn looks a bit worn down. We carried on up to Kaiarahi through reasonably deep drifts of snow. The main range of the Kawekas was obscured by cloud.

We headed down to the turn-off to Mackintosh Spur for lunch. Then we moved down the spur through patches of snowdrift. Great fun going down these. Just dig your heels in a bit and take big steps. Towards the bottom of the spur, three trampers went for a skate on the greasy clay. A good full pack helped to take the impact here. We were too busy talking or listening or thinking of something else and not looking where to put our feet.

At the first track junction, a decision was made to not go the Mackintosh Hut but to head around via Kaiarahi Stream and bottom of The Rogue to avoid the climb out of the Tutaekuri and a walk along the road. However, this way proved to have a lot of ups and downs.

At the track junction to the Kaweka Hut site, the old track was blocked off. We walked some way towards the hut site before changing our minds and going back to the direct route down to the stream. The old map shows the tracks in this area better than the new one.

A party of one decided he was going to the hut site (it's not far, he said; except if you look at the old map, the dog-leg to the hut site goes for perhaps 600m each way). At this time, there were a few spits of rain. Onwards to the Tutaekuri with more wet feet and we could see the end of the line of Douglas firs where the van should be.

Walking up the hill onto the forestry track, we spread out a bit as we were getting tired. Glad to be back at the car park and we didn't have to put parkas on even though the rain was gradually increasing in strength.

To those who thought the weather would be bad, we had a good day in fine weather starting off in sunshine, with it getting more cloudy as the day went on. The light rain only started at about 3.30pm, perhaps half an hour before getting back to van.

Thanks to Sue Martin for picking up the van.

Bell Rock, Maungaharuru Range

Below left: A break on the Macintosh-Lawrence Road loop track, Kaweka FP

Below right: The cascades, near Cascade Hut, Kaimanawa Range

Out in the dark, and back in the gloom

Titiokura Summit, Taraponui, Bell Rock and Pohokura Road, Saturday July 30

Trampers: Sue Titter, Ted Angove, John Dobbs, Viv Bramley, Paul Exeter, Sue Martin, Paul Hendy, Rosemary Jeffery, Geoff Donkin, Jude Paton and Julia Mackie.
Drivers: Alison Greer and Colin McNatty

A COLD and dark start to the day ended with a dark evening. We arrived at Titiokura Summit on the Napier to Taupo Road at 7.30am. This was the earliest we had started for some time, but we did not have far to travel from Napier. We began tramping at 7.45 with a slight threat of rain, so the raincoats came out. The wind was also cold. The forecast southerly was passing through. There were patches of snow around.

We had the kind permission of the local farmer to cross his land and make our way up to the Maungaharuru Range. This is on a farm track initially, and at the shed by the quarry, we took the left farm track heading northwest. We soon reached a point where deci-

sions needed to be made as to where we leave the farm track; however, the visibility was difficult. Out with the GPS, and the old topo map. None of us had the new Topo50 map of the area. Thus the settings on the GPS had to be changed back to the old mapping system. We figured out where we were and thought that we were about 1km off our direction. We were heading for the basin at the bottom of the high point Ahuateatua (1271).

The weather improved and we at last could sight the range and basin. The landscape looks like Central Otago here, with low hills intersected by gullies. The weather had cleared and the sky became blue, with even a wintry sun. We had to search for a way through to get to the basin, passing the remnants of a farm building. We needed to head east to get through, otherwise we would be bushbashing up and down more gullies. At last we came to the tributary of the Esk River. This proved to have a lot more water than normal, and the girls baulked at jumping across. We developed a means whereby the packs went over first, then we leapt across, trying to grab some grass to keep ourselves from falling back into the stream. A bit of a palaver, really, that cost us time.

From here we could see the farm track we needed to get onto. At 12.30, after a delayed lunch, we could see Taraponui and Galbraith Hut down below. We had great views of the Kaweka Ranges and Kaimanawa Range, with Makorako clearly visible. To the immediate west lay Te Kooti's Lookout, and the north radio mast on Taraponui and the escarpment. What a wonderful view from up here.

After lunch, Paul, Ted and Sue Titter decided that they would go down to Galbraith Hut. Paul was not feeling so good. The rest of us continued around to the saddle, and up to the radio mast at Taraponui. We reached it at 2pm and made a mobile phone call to Alison to confirm that we were going to be a bit later than expected, should anyone be concerned.

From the radio mast, it is a straightforward walk along the roadway, where the escarpment becomes visible again. A deviation from the road to Bell Rock is required, but we managed that with good navigation, and we could see the farm track to use.

At 3.30, we reached Bell Rock and met up with Colin, who had kindly driven the van to collect us and had a small walk. From here, it was an hour back to the van, through bush. We all appreciated the change after walking on farmland all day. The bush is very dense, and there were some tree falls, which hampered progress; we were glad to reach the van at the end of a long day's walk, 8 3/4 hours in total.

We drove around and picked up Paul, Ted and Sue, who had walked out to the Brooks Road/Waitara Road junction. We reached Napier back in the dark, and none of us complained after a full-on day of walking. We all slept well that night.

The Kaweka Ranges from the Lotkow Road to Littles Clearing track after recent snow

Black Birch Range: Did we see one?

Lotkow Road to Littles Clearing via Black Birch Bivvy, Southern Kawekas, Wednesday August 3

Trampers: Murray White, Viv Bramley, Peter Slagter, John Marshall, Ken Ross, John Burrell, Kelvin Shaw, Ann Mahoney, Keith Moretta, Rosemary Jeffery, Murray Goss, and reporter Robyn Smith with visitor Barrie Ridler assisting

THE semi-independent authors in their ute caught up with the iTRAMP van at Rissington but after the second ford on Lotkow Road and with only a kilometre to go, we came to a halt. Kelvin kindly walked all the way back to assist in changing a very flat tyre.

Most of the group waited for us, so it was up and away at 9.15. Up being the main event, pulling pinus contorta out by the roots as we went, some of it voluntary and some involuntary as we grabbed them to pull ourselves up the steep, slippery and seemingly never-ending climb.

A "there and back" trip, and the word has it that it is club tradition to start that end and not at Littles Clearing. "Just to make sure we wouldn't pike out on that hill," we grumbled. We got to the top in time to find the advance party who had fed and watered themselves and were starting to get cold.

The pace was set through remnants of snow plus icy puddles until the next break as we went down to view the Black Birch Bivvy. It was in very good order, but broken arrows sticking out of some logs showed that someone had been there before us.

The view over to the main Kaweka range was somewhat obscured by passing clouds and these only added to the cold and bleak appearance of the snow-covered terrain towards Kaweka J.

Onwards and mainly downwards (bad news here, as the return would be upwards) until we reached Littles Clearing for lunch. There were picnic tables, no less, with some weak sun breaking through the clouds to warm us up. But as we finished lunch, that departed, and so did we.

The return journey featured a very fast pace set by the front "runners" who just had to wait for the others at the van as a reward for their effort. We caught them in various stages of undress as we dropped down the last part of the track, thigh muscles quivering and eyes widening in shock at the sight of cold, white, semi-naked bodies.

Overall, it was an enjoyable, short but fast tramp and an uneventful road trip home. The timing was great: windscreen wipers were needed most of the way. Ah, home to a hot shower and a lovely warm fire going before tea.

Kakas, cascades, and beech forest

Cascade Hut, Kaimanawa Forest Park, Saturday/Sunday August 27-28. Map: BH36 Motutere

Trampers: Les O'Shea, Alison Greer and reporter Julia Mackie

THERE were only three of us for this weekend trip. We arrived at the end of Clements Mill Road (off Tahaura Rd), all looking forward to the tramp. There were a lot of vehicles parked in the bays off the road, which worried us a bit, but hunters like to keep to themselves, or at least the good ones fly camp. So we walked along the Hinemaiaia Stream, past the waterfall and along more river flat.

The Hinemaiaia (also known as the Hatepe River) is an inflowing eastern tributary of Lake Taupo which joins the lake at the **>P6**

settlement of Hatepe, just off SH1. It drains the western boundary of Kaimanawa Forest Park between the Waitahanui and Waipehi watersheds and flows north-west until it enters Lake Taupo. The Hinemaiaia has three hydro stations, the first of which acts as a barrier to fish moving upstream to spawn. Just before the start of the climb, we encountered hunters who had set up camp. They'd had no luck yet.

The climb was steady and we had no snow, compared to our last trip into Cascade Hut in August 2008. On reaching the ridge top (1240m), we got fabulous views south. Lake Taupo is a distant view west. Once we started the downhill (from 1159), views were occasional through the beech trees, but still spectacular. We stopped to get a GPS heading, and orientate the map. That enabled us to identify the distant snowy mountains. Our old favourites Makorako, and Te Wetenga, we thought.

Once down on the Tauranga-Taupo river flat, we savoured the river views, with lots of deer footprints on the river sand. Fortunately, Cascade Stream which we needed to cross just two minutes from the hut, was low, and Alison and I were able to cross without getting our feet wet. We arrived at Cascade Hut at 2.30pm and it was empty (aren't we lucky?) and we soon set up and had a hot drink in the sun on the verandah.

We decided to go look at the Cascades, and what a sight. The river has eroded a narrow channel through ancient lava flows (350,000 years and older) of andesite and ignimbrite rock. Two big trees were stuck in the lower reaches, but we looked further up, and saw the fascinating rock shapes and thundering water. Some beautiful blue pools too. The brown on the submerged rock also made the picture quite unusual. Back at the hut, we washed and had another hot drink and got the Corker stove going. What a bonus to have coal available. On darkness, we prepared our dinners and had a comfortable evening hearing about Les's recent travels.

After breakfast, and the usual clean-up, we left Cascade Hut on a beautiful blue-sky day. The climb back to the ridge top was a pleasure, turning around now and again to get those distant snow mountain views. On our descent, we heard the kaka which is mentioned in the hut log book. Les did a splendid imitation bird call, and we saw the bird land on a beech tree nearby. They are big birds, and the call is not melodious, but distinct. Too far away for a photo, but just seeing it was a bonus. The most common native birds in the park are the pigeon, fantail, bellbird, rifleman, robin, grey warbler, tomtit, whitehead and kakariki. I am sure we heard them all.

We continued on down, and soon reached the Hinemaiaia River again, before reaching the swing bridge where we stopped and had a break in the sunshine. A relaxed trip, and wonderful forest with many beech trees.

Heading down Don's Spur, Kawekas. Below: A Kidnappers gannet takes kelp to the nest

A snowy trip to Kaweka J

Wednesday August 31. Map: BJ37

Trampers: John Marshall, Paul Exeter, Vic Bullock, Ron Morison, Keith Moretta, John Burrell, Dermott McCaughan, Peter Slagter, Les O'Shea, Robyn Smith, Rosemary Jeffery and reporter Alison Greer

THE day started with a major hiccup. The van broke down. Fortunately, we were still in town and we managed to get a replacement; along with another vehicle, we were soon on our way, only 30 minutes late.

It was a beautiful spring day, with just a small patch of low cloud covering the Kaweka range. The main group made their way up Trail Spur, stopping every now and then to keep an eye on the three in the rear. Large drifts of snow were not reached until after Dominie Bivvy. In places, the snow was hard enough to walk on top, but in others we sank through - sometimes up to knee level.

The cloud had lifted by the time we made it to the top and it was easy walking over the hard-packed snow to Kaweka J. Lovely views to the east but the west was very cloudy and a cool breeze sent us looking for a sheltered spot for lunch. The plastic bags came out and a few of us had fun sliding down the small hill behind the basin, before lunch. We waited for the other three to arrive, including our latest octogenarian who sat in the sun looking over the Bay - what a lunch spot!

The main group decided to return via Don's Spur, a more open slope, so more snow to skid over or sink into. One or two took a tumble, and there was even a nose-dive. We picked our way through the contorta and down through the lovely beech trees over the stream and back to the car park.

Not long after, the other three arrived back safely and we left the car park around 3pm after a very successful day.

No one was home at No Mans Hut

Golden Crown - No Mans, September 10

Trampers : Colin McNatty, Les O'Shea, Rosemary Jeffery, Jude Paton, John Dobbs, Marc Marchal, Sue Martin, Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Sue Marshall, Sue Titter, Denise Payne and reporter Geoff Donkin

We set off from EIT with 12 in the van, as planned. Les joined us at Masters Shelter and we soon headed off up the hill, a steep climb. We went past rocky outcrops before reaching the track junction after about two hours.

We seemed to have split into groups by then. Heading north just past the track junction, there was a clear area where we could see Ruapehu. Further on, we could see a helicopter buzzing back and forth. Then we came across a hunter with 10 deer carcasses. We stopped and had a talk with him. They had shot eight deer that morning and eight the day before.

Further on, there was a good gully to cross.

There was no wind, with fine views all around. We could see Potae and a different view of the Kawekas. We crossed another small gully through tussock before getting onto rounded tops which led to the trig. Some decided to stay at the trig for lunch and the rest of us pressed on, taking about another 30 minutes to get to Masters memorial where we decided to have lunch, as there were good views all around.

After lunch, we made a quick visit to No Mans Hut, where there was no one at home. It seems that the better-equipped White Hut further up the road is now more used.

We headed back across the tops, enjoying the still conditions, passing the hill where six deer carcasses remained, on our way to the track junction. We made a quick descent down Golden Crown Ridge.

At Masters Shelter, a family group was enjoying a barbecue. We were back at the van by about 4.30, where the others had changed and been waiting perhaps 20 minutes. Rather tired at the end of a long day, but it had been a good trip.

Time and tide... we had plenty of both

Cape Kidnappers, Wednesday September 14

Trampers: Vic Bullock, Ken Ross, Keith Moretta, Paul Exeter, Peter Slagter, John Burrell, Jenny Burns, Anne Mahoney, Denise Greer, Kai Kyle, Robyn Smith, Murray White, Sandy Lamb, James Farrell, Tara Fairfield, Dermott McCaughan, Rosemary Jeffery, and reporter Kelvin Shaw

WE arrived at the car park opposite the Clifton Café at about 9am. There were 18 of us in total, using the van plus two cars. The weather was sunny, a little breezy and quite mild, as per the forecast. The objective of the day was to reach the gannet colony. Our "insider" information was that the repaired track up the hill was accessible, and we would be able to see the colony. Failing that, it was going to be a beach walk only.

This particular tramp had been arranged to fit in with the tide timetable and to start an hour later than normal.

Walking through the motor camp, we saw evidence of the flooding that swamped the area earlier in the year. New storm water channels and diversions have been installed to protect the sites. There is no way a little bit of rain is going to get these campers to move.

The greyhounds at the front of the group (Peter and James) soon came to a halt because when we arrived at Black Reef there was no way of getting around the corner without getting more than your legs wet. After about a half hour of team bonding (more like Russian Roulette to find a volunteer to go first and Vic didn't agree that the oldest should go first either), the first and most impatient got around and set off to the colony, leaving the others to wait a bit longer.

There was a DoC employee and a volunteer working on the track from the beach up to the shelter. When finished, it will look very good. New signs, rope handrails and sleeper retaining walls. He advised that access was OK and that they were almost ready for the opening of the season in October.

Heading out to the Cape, in search of gannets

After a short break at the shelter, where we had an early lunch and the stragglers caught up, the majority headed for the track to the colony. The steep track from the shelter up to the farm paddocks had been the area most affected by slips from the deluge. The track would have been impassable. Unfortunately, the hillsides above the track look far from stable, so further slips are a possibility.

The number of birds in the colony was only about a quarter of what to expect in the egg laying/hatching season. The birds that were there were adult males sitting on empty nests and waiting for their females to arrive. There were a few, as-yet unattached males standing around the perimeter.

The return to Clifton took about two hours. There was a strong headwind for part of the way. Overall, the walk was easier because there were more sandy areas exposed by the tide to walk on. To get around Black Reef this time, the water was only ankle deep.

The café was still open when we got back, so the majority had a cuppa and a cake to celebrate an excellent day in the sun.

Morepork, and much too much more port

Hinerua Hut, Saturday/Sunday September 24-25. Map: BL36

Trampers: Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Les O'Shea and reporter Julia Mackie

THE four of us walked with the day party to the hut, with pig-feeding starting an easy day. Once we reached the hut, Les (weekender), John and Geoff (day party) and I continued up past the bushline to check out the route to the tops. It looked straightforward, even though we could not see them. The ridge line up looked an easy ascent, albeit very exposed - as are most of the Ruahine tops. We struggled to stand up, but continued up 100 metres or so. Then we ducked out of the wind and sat in the sun for an early lunch, enjoying the views over the southern Hawke's Bay farmland.

Before we got too cold, we went back down to the hut and joined members of the day party for an impromptu meeting to plan future trips. El Presidente made a note of all the suggestions.

Once the day party had departed, another recce along the Smith Stream track was called for. As a huge amount of firewood had been collected, we started the Corker and settled down in the cosy hut. T-shirts were donned, and a toast to the Irish was made. Thanks to Paul's daughter Lisa for her contribution to the ambience.

The forecast rain did not arrive until late evening, but the wind continued to blow. The stars still shone brightly in the night sky. There is something special about an evening hut atmosphere, with its candlelight and warmth, and Ted and Paul's port...

On Sunday, we awoke to drizzle. The walk back to our vehicle was quick, and Les and I took the zig-zag path which is visible on the opposite side of the valley. It is a 4WD track too, and we saw a herd of deer which included several big stags. These are the farmed deer, for which the high fences were made. The track rejoins the main track near the house.

We had some high jinks with Paul's vehicle, but fortunately had Les's mechanical knowledge to get us out of the problem. By then, the drizzle had stopped and it was a dry but windy day.

An easy and relaxed walk, and we went home with a good list of future walks.

Hinerua Hut... and about time too!

Saturday September 24

Trampers: Colleen Perreau, Murray Goss, Sue Titter, Rosemary Jeffery, Tara Fairfield, Sue Marshall, John Dobbs, Sue Martin, Geoff Donkin, Denise Payne, Marc Marchal and reporter Jude Paton

SIXTEEN trampers, including four weekenders, set off for Hinerua Hut at 8.40am after a long, winding and rutted farm road drive necessitating some careful manoeuvring - and some passengers looking the other way.

Our first obstacle saw packs and poles being tossed over an extra-tall gate, followed by an ungainly scramble up and over by their owners. Further up the road, we passed by a getaway bach, complete with small deck, picnic table, outdoor bath, TV aerial and panoramic views... what more could you ask for? Pig feeding was next on the agenda. Rosemary made a fine job of heaving pumpkins over the fence and the pigs came running! And while we admired the rainbow to the south, we weren't quite so enamoured with the threatening murk and the likelihood of rain later in the day.

We left the 4WD road behind and ambled through the mossy, sun-dappled bush. At a sunny morning tea spot, most people decided they had indeed done enough for a choccy biscuit. By 10.30, we'd arrived at the orange four-bunker forestry service hut set in a sunny clearing, and agreed this must be brunch!

The latest in weekender t-shirts, featuring a morepork, was displayed and attracted great hilarity (you had to be there). Twenty minutes later, we set off for "Tussock Tops", a little steep and narrow in one or two places. The odd patch of snow dotted the trackside. We made a brief stop to rug up before emerging from the bush. This was short-lived for most, who decided to save the strong, gusty, chilly wind for another day and head back down to warmer climes, leaving a handful to push on.

A leisurely lunch "hour" (almost unheard of) ensued while we basked outside the hut in the sun with Paul's wood-cutting antics to keep us well entertained. A reconnoitre with our more hardy mates, coupled with a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the longer return route via the Tukituki, saw all 12 of us retracing our tracks back to the van. The pigs got lucky and were rewarded with a second feed and the packs and owners were not so lucky as they got heaved over the gate once more. By 2.30, we were back on the road again, heading for the highway and the finer things in life: The Chook and Filly turned on the sunshine and we relaxed… again!

A easy day out with jolly good company, plenty of hilarity along the way and barely a sprinkle. And Hinerua Hut has been demystified now that I've finally been there and done that… I just need the t-shirt to go with it (no, not that one, thank you very much).

A rainbow adds to the view towards the tussock tops on the Ruahine Range

Ted Angove and Paul Exeter in their moreport (oops, morepork) T-Shirts at Hinerua Hut

The Kaweka J anniversary tramp

Kaweka J to Studholme Saddle Hut, Saturday October 8

Kaweka J Anniversary trampers included Murray Goss, Colin McNatty, Goff Donkin, Colleen Perreau and her guest Di Compton, Alison Greer, Rosemary Jeffery, Sue Titter, Sue Martin, Matt Green, Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, John Marshall, Marc Marchal, John Dobbs, Jude Paton and Vic Bullock. The Mad Dog trampers were: Ted, Matt, John Dobbs, Murray Goss and reporter Geoff Donkin

AT Kaweka J, group photos were taken and then we divided into groups, ours setting off for Mad Dog Hill at about 10.30. We could see some rain clouds in the distance and there was a cool wind.

The first part was an easy descent. Further on, the drop-off grew steeper. A signpost showed where to turn off to the hut, and we could see a patch of bush where the hut lay, but it was concealed by bush.

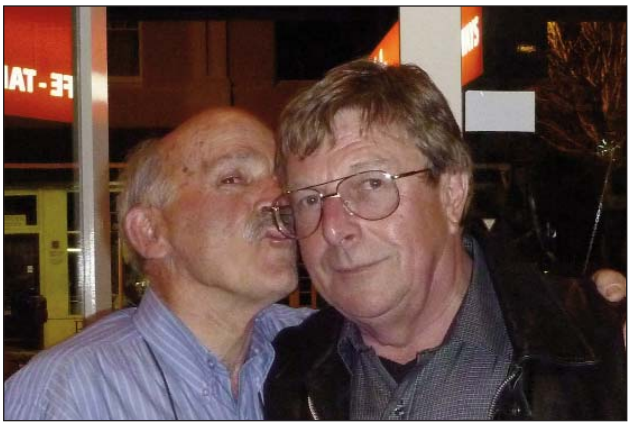
After a steep drop-off out in the open, part of it on a shingle slide before entering the bush, we spotted the hut through the trees and soon arrived at the tidy four-bunker. We sat outside on the hut stools for lunch, before Johnny Dobbs suggested we should be getting back so as not to keep others waiting.

It was a steep climb up to Mad Dog Hill, after which the going got easier, and we were back at the J after about 70 minutes.

We headed down the usual route, catching up with Vic who was cruising along, savouring the moment.

At the track junction, we decided not to go down the normal Trials Spur but down Makahu Spur instead. We could see a bright orange pack cover in the distance. It was Colleen's friend Di, who was with her and Paul.

We were back at the van at about 2.20pm, and the others turned up about 20 minutes later, having come via North Kaweka and Boulder Stream.



Club stalwart John Gray has gone to live in Thailand, but not before a grand club send-off. Big hugs all round, and one of the best from Paul Exeter. Below: John bids farewell to Bushbasher editor Brian Mackie

Three great days in pastures almost new

Kaimai-Mamaku Forest Park, Labour Weekend, October 21-24

Trampers: Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Sue Marshall, Sue Titter, Denise Payne and reporter Alison Greer

THE year's long weekend trip was to revisit the Kaimai Range. It had been several years since the club had been to the area and some tracks round Te Aroha had been changed. This forced us to head through the Karangahake Gorge to the Franklin Road car park.

Access to the Waitawhetu Valley crosses over private farmland, then follows the Waitawhetu River via the old logging tramway. The track is flat but underfoot it's like walking on small round rocks, a bit hard on the ankles! Several new swing bridges provided great photo stops with the old abutments from tramways still visible. As well as bridges, there are several river crossings of the Waitawhetu River. There was no getting away from wet feet as the crossings were wide and at times a little deep, with slippery rocks.

The new 26-bunk Waitawhetu Hut is situated on a grassy clearing at the old mill site. Relics lie all around, some out in the open and others buried in grass and soil. Just before the hut, a bridge crosses the river from which you can watch the water drop spectacularly down a small chute into what looks like a washing bowl; it would be quite a sight in full flood. Two minutes' walk from the hut, there is a large wet bank down by a small stream; this was covered in Spider Orchards - the biggest mass of such plants in one place we have seen. Later that evening, with torch in hand, we went back down to the same bank which was now a mass of beautiful glow worms.

Next morning, it was up early and we left round 8 o'clock to complete the long loop out via Ananui Falls. We were now on a true tramping track, watching our feet on the slippery roots and muddy ground. The track climbs and winds its way through lush forest before climbing more steeply through a stand of young kauri to the junction to the waterfall. A few minutes along here brings you to the top of the falls and what would have been great views out over the range - if only the mist and drizzle wasn't so low. Not long after a saddle, the high point is reached and then it's quite a steep descent. Near the junction to the Dalys Clearing Flat hut are three large kauri trees which must have escaped the loggers. They would be several hundred years old and well on their way to being massive trees. Before too long, we met up with the Waitawhetu Tramway and after seven hours made it back to the car park.

That night was spent in Te Aroha and the next morning saw us leave from the Domain, taking the ridge track up to the Te Aroha summit. On a well benched track, the Whakapipi lookout is soon reached; from there, it's another two hours over some steep and sometimes rough track to the summit. We were all very glad to emerge onto the grassy knoll and, at 952 metres, it's the highest point in the park. A radio mast soared high into the cloud and the view was a bit hazy, but it was well worth the effort!

From here, we dropped down via stairways and steps to Dog Kennel Flat, crossed the Waiorongomai Saddle and descended into the Waiorongomai Valley. There has been a huge amount of restoration in the valley and many different tracks taking in the many historic tramways, inclines and machinery left behind from the gold-digging days. We descended past the Mary Queen Incline, and picked up the Piako County tramway which brings you to the head of the amazing Butler Incline. Further along the tramway, the Fern Incline then brings you down to the road end at Waiorongomai Loop Road. It had been another longish day through some amazing country.

On our way home, we stopped to check out the Wairere Falls. The track winds its way through beautiful moss-covered rocks and tree roots, crossing several bridges before stairs that take you to a lookout. The falls drop 152 metres and are a spectacular sight. Quite a fitting end to three great days exploring just a fraction of what the Kaimai–Mamaku Forest Park area has to offer.

Plan B, featuring lunch-on-the-run

Daphne Hut, Saturday November 5. Map: BL36 Norsewood

Trampers: Colleen Perreau, Les O'Shea, Sue Titter, Rosemary Jeffery, Ted Angove, Matt Green, Marc Marchal, John Marshall, John Dobbs, Sue Martin, Colin McNatty, Paul Exeter, Murray Goss, Ray Slavin and reporter Julia Mackie

THE forecast did not mention high winds and snowy sleet, but that's what we had to contend with. It was evident on travelling up Kashmir Road that the planned trip up to Pohangina Saddle and then dropping down into the South Branch of the Tukituki was not going to happen. The van door could hardly stay open in the high winds. So Plan B, up to Daphne Hut track, was the next best option.

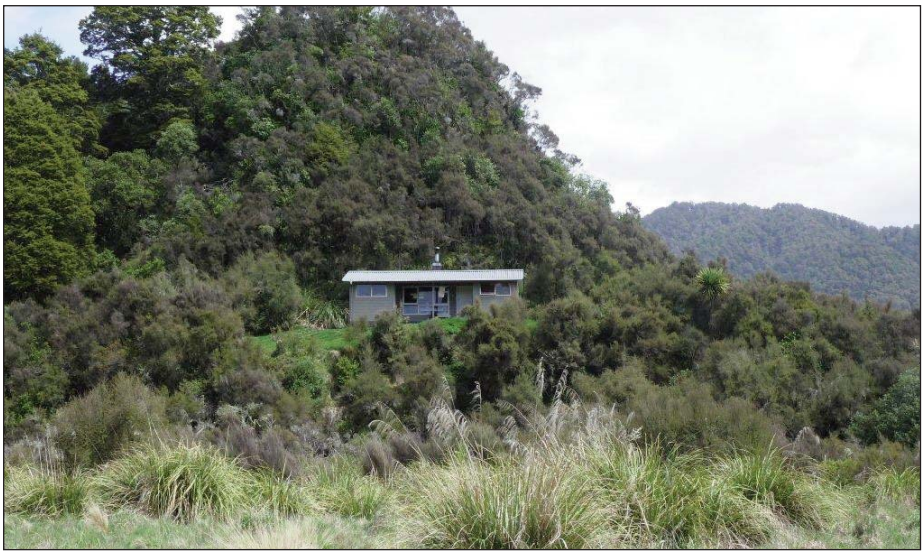
There were 15 out, and 13 set off over the Moorcock Stream, through the bush reserve and up the ridge on the now-defunct track over farmland. The ridge track is not marked but you enter the bush near the high point 948. We got snowy sleet on the way up and donned rain jackets. Once we entered the bush, the track soon descended to a stream, and then sidled around to join the main track at E692N763. The main track continued the descent to the junction of the South Branch with the Tukituki. There, five of us decided to go and visit Daphne Hut. The route is about 20 minutes upriver on the true left. The track sign to Howletts Hut can be seen just across from a small tributary stream before reaching the hut.

We lunched inside, and watched a squall pass through, glad that we were under cover. The others who had also dropped down to the Tukituki had not wanted to get their feet wet, and probably had a quick lunch before returning back up the main track.

Some returned via the old track, and Ted and Sue T continued up the main track. Paul and Colleen had elected to head up the main track, and not drop down to the river. They had their lunch on the run, as the weather near the tops was miserable.

For the five of us, the walk downstream seemed much shorter than the walk up. The rain had also stopped. We made short work of the climb back, electing to return on the farmland track, as there is not so much climbing and we needed to make up time.

We reached the van and were all soon on our way back home with a coffee at the Chook and Filly, after several weather seasons in one day. Jackets on and off, all day...



Oamaru Hut sits above the confluence of the Oamaru and Kaipo streams

To Clements Mill, with no inclemency

Poronui Station, Oamaru Hut, Te Iringa Track to Clements Mill Road – Tahurua Rd, November 9

Trampers: Paul Exeter, Vic Bullock, John Marshall, Gary Bowler, Alison Greer, Jenny Burns, Sam Dickson, Ken Ross, Graham Barrie and reporter Keith Moretta

INSTEAD of the forecast rain, clear skies greeted us at the Poronui Station gates on Taharua Road.

John Marshall was dropped off at the Taupo orchid plantation for the day, while six set off at the Poronui Station gate to Clements Mill Road car park. The remainder of the group - Ken, Vic and Sam - drove around to where we would finish. They planned to have a leisurely walk through the beech forest, returning to Clements Mill Road later in the day.

A steady pace was required for the main party to reach Clements Mill Road from Poronui Station and not have Ken *et al* waiting too long for us at the end of the day. A fast pace through the private lands from the Poronui Station gates had us reach the Oamaru Hut in a little over two hours and cover much of our 30km journey before encountering the Kaimanawa bush.

Leaving the Oamaru Hut after a short break, we walked along the Kaipo River track, covered with beech and kanuka trees. We passed a group fly-fishing, and further upstream a possum trapper, all of whom were staying back at the hut.

We stopped for lunch on the forest track along the Kaipo River. Then we reached the swing bridge 30 minutes later, near the junction for Kaipo River and Tiki Tiki Stream. Crossing the bridge, we followed the Tiki Tiki Stream to reach the base of Te Iringa. By mid-afternoon, strong winds and cloud were slowly increasing.

Our ascent through the beech canopy was long, steady but beautiful. The track passes below Te Iringa, and along the ridges were beech and mountain cabbage trees, with ferns and bracken in abundance. A few in the group were beginning to tire or suffer calf strain, but kept going, knowing that the others were waiting at the end of the track.

After many hours of slow ascent along the ridge, we stopped for a drink break at an old hut site, burnt down many years ago, its only remnant a cleared grass knoll. The track descended from there to the Clements Mill Road car park, and after an hour's walking we all met up at the van. A very tired but satisfied group exchanged their day's stories on the return trip home, with drizzle just beginning to fall as we entered the city limits.

The Kaimanawas at their best

Kaimanawa Forest Park, Sat/Sun November 19-20

Trampers: Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, Sue Martin, Sue Marshall, Denise Payne. Via the Urchin: Les O'Shea, Alison Greer, Geoff Donkin, Simon Hill and reporter Julia Mackie

TEN of us started from the Umukarikari car park on Kaimanawa Rd, heading for Waipakahi Hut, which has 12 bunks. We were all carrying sleeping mats and prepared for a night out. The Umukarikari track heads uphill for about two hours, with views of Lake Taupo on the way. On emerging from the beech forest, there are fantastic views of Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro and the central Kaimanawas to the east, and Urchin summit to the south. State Highway 1 is also clearly visible, and the cars travelling along it.

So we had the best views for our two days tramping on the tops, and the new blue track markers signified that track maintenance had been carried out. Just out of the bush, we decided to have lunch in a spot out of the cold wind. The Umukarikari range is a rolling landscape of rock with the occasional tussock. The Kaimanawa Mountains, with their series of ranges, looked vast and endless. The track sidles around the base of Sharp Cone, and then it is up a scree slope to the top. From here, it is a steady walk admiring the views all the way along the tops. Side ridges obscure the Waipakahi Hut and the river, but in the early afternoon they came into view.

I ducked behind a rock trying to get out of the wind, whilst waiting for Les to join me. We decided to carry on until we descended off the tops and found a place that offered more wind protection. We met a young hunter out for a day's walk/hunt, and a couple also heading for Waipakahi Hut that night.

The walk from the Waipakahi River crossing up to the hut was filled with anticipation. We were last here in January 2009 when we did the Kaimanawa–Kaweka traverse. Wow… things had improved, with a newly extended deck. We settled in and enjoyed the afternoon sun. Another two trampers arrived, and we organised the sleeping arrangements. They had never encountered such a large and noisy group.

Our original plan had been for some of us to return via the Waipakahi River, and then up to the Urchin; however, we decided to do the re-opened track between the Umukarikari Track and the Urchin Track. We had two vehicles and two trampers/drivers prepared to connect us.

The next day, we returned to the tops of the Umukarikari Range, again stopping to take photos and take a bearing on what we thought was the Kaweka Range in the far distance. From the track junction, the ridge and Urchin tops were clearly visible, an easy walk to a small saddle and then a small ascent back to the tops. The DoC track timing is 2.30 – 3 hours, but we walked it in 2 hrs 10 mins. It was easy going, but we marvelled at how difficult the track-cutting must have been, as the bush is dense. The track wound its way through trees and a few undulations before we reached the bushline, after which it met the junction for the river track. We stopped and had lunch overlooking the river, again out of the wind, which was thankfully warmer than yesterday.

Walking across the Urchin tops, Simon saw a shiny object on an opposite ridge top. He had spotted it yesterday, and we had speculated about it being a hut or space ship. It probably is a solar panel for a weather station, and it glinted in the sun. We quickly made the trig post and posed for pictures (again), and then made a quick descent off the tops, through some lovely bush and trees. At times, the Urchin track is 10ft wide, a contrast with the ridge track we had just traversed. At last we heard voices and arrived at the car park. We had done the whole walk in 6 hrs 40 mins and were all pleased that we had walked the loop track, and covered new ground.

The weekend had been one of spectacular views, new tracks, improved huts, and – best of all – 10 of us enjoying the weekend tramp.

The J is left for another day

Hot Springs via Makino Ridge, Saturday November 19

Trampers: Ray Slavin, Rosemary Jeffery, Matt Green, John Marshall, Colin McNatty and reporter Marc Marchal

SIX left Napier in mixed weather, heading for Kaweka J. As we came closer to the Kawekas, the rain set in and the clouds looked quite threatening. We all agreed that the J wouldn't be a sensible option and decided to drive on. Even in good weather, we might have struggled to get there in our replacement van, which puffed and huffed as soon as a hill came in sight.

Four of us hopped out at the Makino car park and John and Ray carried on to the road end. We made good time climbing the hill to Makino, on occasions having to use our rain jackets. It stayed dry during morning tea though, allowing for a hot drink and a good chat.

We decided to target the hot springs for lunch, skipped Makino Hut and descended straight back to the river. Lunch was lovely in the sun, with time to get our rain jackets dry and enjoy the river.

On the way to the lodge, we met a group of 26 girls heading for the springs for an overnight. Good to see young people making use of our backyard paradise. There were few people at the hut, where we had a drink and a snack.

The weather gods now smiled and the rain jackets stayed in the packs. The walk along the river is surely one of the most picturesque in the Bay. We reached the van around 3.30 and Ray brought us safely back to Napier. Not the walk we planned, but still a nice alternative.

No gale-force winds, but no views either

Sparrowhawk Range, Wednesday November 23

Trampers: Vic Bullock, Paul Exeter, Rosemary Jeffery, John Marshall, Peter Slagter, Murray White, Sam Dickson, Viv Bramley, Jennie Burn, Gary Bowler, Graham Barrie and reporter Ken Ross

IF we had believed the weather forecast, we would have chosen an alternative trip for the day – but we didn't. When we got out of the van at Taruarau River Bridge on the Taihape Road, there was hardly any sign of the predicted gale-force winds. But the sky was a little ominous.

So 12 optimistic trampers set off up the north end of the range on what I'd recalled as a moderate, shortish climb to the trig. Well, my memory and/or my legs aren't what they used to be. It was a stiff climb and it took nearly an hour. I enjoyed the chance to catch breath at the trig and savour the view back down to the river and the road and the valley on the west of the Gentle Annie.

From the trig, the track follows south along the length of the range, undulating but more up than down. We were generally in open grass and tussock but unfortunately the great distant views of the central North Island mountains were not to be had. They were clagged in. We could see down into the gorges of the Taruarau River down below us, though. The end of the range is a steep drop-off down to the river and marked the end of our morning's tramping.

Lunch was taken early in a tussock basin sheltered from the strengthening wind. It was a bit longer than the norm as we had time (and in my case at least, I wasn't looking forward to the climb to the high point of the track on our way back).

The top of the range is a broad ridge, previously in grass but now regenerating bush. The ground cover is tending to alpine with mountain daisies – Celmesia – dominant. Three different orchids were in flower and a number of small but mature Spaniards (a bit like hedgehogs) were found.

Everyone was back at the van by about 2.30, with the earlier group enjoying a rest out of the now boisterous wind at the "hut" site at the track end. It was disappointing not to have been able to see Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe, as that is a feature of this trip.

Te Kooti's Lookout for lunch

Te Kooti's Lookout, Saturday December 3

Trampers: Weekend - Ted, Paul, John M, Ray, Simon, Sue Marshall and reporter Geoff Donkin. Day - Jenny Burns, Mark Marchal, Colin McNatty, Val McNatty, Denise Payne, John Russell, John Dobbs, Ken Ross, Alison Greer, Jude Paton, Sue Titter, Rosemary Jeffery, Les O'Shea, Matt Green, Sue Martin and Julia Mackie

WE headed up the Wairoa road, over the new Matahora bridge and turned off into Willowflat Road. Stopping at the Willowflat settlement and the old schoolhouse buildings, we met Kevin Frances, who was in charge of the accommodation. Ray decided to stay behind to relax and keep topping up the chip burner for our hot water.

We drove further on with an escort and parked near the stockyards, then headed off down the farm track to the Honeymooner's Cottage. Some posed for photos, in a romantic embrace! Further on, we walked past a marker post depicting the water level for a proposed dam on the Te Hoe River from many years ago. We headed down through farmland to the Te Hoe River and crossed it without difficulty. There was a brief bush-bash up to a metal road. Walking along it, we could hear gunshots nearby. As we got higher, we could see two guys on the road above who must have been shooting into a nearby gully. Onwards and around the corner, where we eventually headed up a spur which had been recently replanted with pine trees. A long time ago during the last visit, we had walked up this spur through mature pines.

When we got up above the forestry, we had to look around for the start of the track which was between the main spur and a smaller outcrop. From this point onwards, it was a steep climb. The track was overgrown through minimal usage, but it could still be picked out. We were mostly in bush on the way up but occasionally there were clear patches which enabled us to see out. At the top, there was a small clearing with a couple of poles nearby. A little further on, the top opened out into a clear area with good views just before the lookout started to drop away to the north. A good place for lunch.

The trip back down was a lot easier, with the track more obvious after a large group of people had been through. Eventually we got out into the recently planted pine trees. In this area, one tramper had both soles come off her boots. There was some attempt to tape them back on. This did not work, so she had to walk back without the soles.

We headed off down to the Te Hoe and >P12

The memorial to John and Mary Halliburton, with Te Kooti's Lookout behind

after crossing it, split up. Some went back the same way as we came. Others returned via a zig-zag to the top of the hill, walking past Halliburton's farmhouse and plenty of horses in adjacent paddocks and back past stock yards to where the vehicles were parked.

After changing, the van headed back to Napier and the weekenders returned to the schoolhouses to have a hot shower, socialise, play with Ray's skittles (specially imported from England) and enjoy the BBQ facilities. It was very pleasant, relaxing outdoors in the late afternoon sun. Our host, Kevin, joined us for a while.

The next day, we had a relaxed start with a cooked breakfast for some. We went for a walk down to the bridge and the river. The valley had interesting rocks with shell fossils embedded in them. We had another talk to our host, who had a large garden behind his house.

We stopped to view the Ross family memorial, before heading home. Thanks to Sue Martin for organising the access and to Kevin Frances for accommodation.

History: Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki - Māori resistance leader Te Kooti sheltered in the upper Mōhaka area between 1871 and 1872. He spent time on the Tataraakina peak at the junction of the Te Hoe and Mōhaka rivers, also known as Te Kooti's Lookout.

The gorge slipped away from us

Manawatu Gorge Track, Wednesday December 7

Trampers: Kelvin Shaw, Murray White, Vic Bullock, John Marshall, Viv Bramley, Jenny Burns, Ron Morison, Keith Moretta, Ken Ross, Peter Slagter, Doug Matheson, Rosemary Jeffery, Les O'Shea, John Burrell and reporter Alison Greer

THE last tramp for the year was a more social event – a short tramp along the Manawatu Gorge track, followed by lunch at the café. Driving down through the picturesque Central Hawke's Bay, we arrived at the Ballance Bridge car park at the eastern end of the gorge track. Light drizzle was falling, but not enough to penetrate the thick bush canopy above.

With the intention of trying to reach the massive slip that had already blocked the gorge for more than four months, a leading group set the pace. It's a steady ascent up many steps on a well-kept track, through some very nice bush. The first lookout at Windy Point revealed lots of mist covering the windmills on the opposite side of the gorge.

We popped out onto the western side to check out the windmills over the fence, not one moving in the still air. The track seems to go on climbing gradually until reaching the Te Apiti lookout, a platform giving spectacular views over the road and river. There was no sign of the slip; it was still further round, much closer to the Ashhurst end, so as we were on a time restraint, we turned around and headed back.

Going no further on the Manawatu Gorge road. L to R, Viv Bramley, Rosemary Jeffery, John Burrell, Ken Ross, Doug Matheson, Alison Greer and Les O'Shea. Left: The track sign for Barlows Hut from the Parks Peak track, from Yeoman's Mill

Arriving at the upper bridge track, we detoured, dropping down to a car park on the gorge road just by the bridge. It seemed strange with no traffic and to be able to walk on the road and over the bridges back to the van.

We were planning on lunch at the café but found it was closed due to lack of business, so we piled into the vehicles and set off back to Dannevirke for a most enjoyable lunch. The gorge track is an easy walk and well worth the stop-off if time allows when travelling to Palmerston North, or makes a good day out when combined with lunch somewhere.

Snap, crackle, plop into the Waipawa

Waipawa River Gorge, Wednesday January 18 2012

Trampers: Alison Greer, Vic Bullock, Kelvin Shaw, Gary Bowler, Dennis Mitchell, Pamela May, John Marshall, John Burrell, Keith Moretta and reporter Ken Ross

THIS tramp began at the end of North Block Road in the Ruahines. We had checked the water level in the Waipawa River on the way in and it looked ideal. Even so, some chose not to get their feet wet but instead climb to Sunrise Hut and beyond in search of alpine flowers. This suited the six of us who wanted to do the through trip downriver to the Pendle Hill Bridge, as they would be able to relocate the van for us. The weather was perfect: a clear sky and a little wind down the river, although possibly a little too warm in the open latter part of the trip.

From the car park, it was off down the riverbed with countless crossings, past a waterfall then into the bush-enshrouded gorge. Over and around big rocks, in the main heading downstream but with some diversions to sort out a 'do-able' route. We exited the gorge onto more open farmland at about the point Middle Stream joins the Waipawa and stopped for lunch at the confluence with Smiths Stream. We guessed that there wasn't much shade ahead so had lunch under a tree before the second section, the open riverbed through farmland.

The flow from Middle and Smiths streams had more than doubled the flow in the Waipawa River, so caution was still needed on the continuing numerous crossings. As well as the constant babble of the river, we were hearing the snap, crackle and pop of lupin seedpods, lupins being the main vegetation along the river. At times, we got views back upstream to the ranges, which confirmed we had actually travelled quite some distance.

I had just been starting an internal debate about the difference between a tramp and a trudge but I didn't need to conclude it as the bridge that signified the end of our tramp hove into view. I think we were all relieved that that section of the tramp was over. With perfect timing, the van arrived as we were enjoying getting wrinkled white feet out of our boots.

Strange case of the missing track

Barlows Hut, via Parks Peak Track, Saturday January 28

Trampers: Peter Slagter, Marc Marchal, Kelvin Shaw, John Dobbs, Colin McNatty, Sue Titter, Rosemary Jeffery, Matt Greene, Ted Angove, Murray White, Dennis Mitchell, Denise Payne, Jude Paton, Ray Slavin, Geoff Donkin, Les O'Shea, Derek and Linda Sparrow, Jenny Burns, Murray Goss and reporter Julia Mackie

THIS is the story of the disappearing track. The scheduled loop tramp is a club favourite, and so 21 keen trampers arrived at the end of Wakarara Road, at the Yeomans Historic Mill site. Some opted to ford the Makaroro River in their sandals or river shoes, before donning their boots for the ascent up the Parks Peak track. The track has recently been given a scrub-cutter treatment, which has made it extra-wide. We all tramped at our own pace, and caught up with each other after our respective breaks. The weather was cool in the bush, but it was forecast to be a hot day.

But what track? On the now-defunct 260 Topomap U21 (Kereru), the track is marked from a turn-off on the Parks Peak track, and descends down to Barlow's Hut on the Makaroro River. But it's not shown on the new Topo50 maps. So, to aid those who look after groups tramping in the area, I took a GPS reading at the junction of the Parks Peak track being 773/994 with an elevation of 1196m. At the Barlow's Hut end of the track, the GPS reading was 753/991 with an elevation of 548m. The track emerges from bush on the Makaroro River, 50m upstream on the true left of the river from Barlow's Hut. There is no big orange triangle, only a sign for Parks Peak Ridge, which is easy to miss.

We arrived at Barlow's Hut for lunch, and a stretch out in the sun. A few of us lay on the helipad, but there was a whiff of dead deer.

After our lunch break, we had a good easy walk down the river. It is 30 minutes downstream to the turn-off up Colenso Spur. We ambled the next hour to reach the confluence with Gold Creek, where we regrouped. The last 30 minutes were a bit tedious but the sun was warm, and the wind light. In all from Barlow's Hut, 2 hrs 10 mins.

Tolkein's forest in Tuhoe territory

Urewera National Park, Saturday/Monday February 4-6

Trampers: Ted Angove, Denise Payne, Sue Marshall, Geoff Donkin and reporter Julia Mackie (Manuoha Hut), and Paul Exeter, Simon Hill, Jude Paton, and Gillian Dalton and guest Neil (Sandy Bay Hut)

FIVE of us planned to complete a three-day circuit in the Urewera National Park. Geoff and I had not done the Mt Manuoha Track, while the three others had done it some time ago (10 years, perhaps). It's a bush walk extraordinaire.

Tolkein's forest, Urewera National Park, near Manuoha Hut

Our Waitangi weekend began with the drive up to the Waikaremoana camp ground, where five of us pitched our tents on Friday night. The next morning, we woke to a very loud native bird chorus, which lightened the heart. So it was strange to see a stoat scampering around the toi-toi near the shop/office. There are 20,000 of them in the park, said the manager – a portent of the silence to come.

A shuttle picked us up and took us to the start of the Manuoha tramp. It is off SH38, on the true right of the Waiotukupuna Bridge (SH 38), 16km west of the Aniwaniwa Visitor Centre.

The track starts with a climb up to a ridge, through dripping-wet bush. If you hadn't had a leg wash this morning, you needn't have worried. One other tramper in the shuttle was also going our way (Jim from Gisborne). After the initial climb to the ridge, the walk is easy, passing through silver and red beech forest, with an under-storey of ferns and patches of dracophllym. Jim showed me where deer had already begun to rub the side of trees, a little early for the roar. As he was planning to walk as far as he could to Sandy Bay Hut, we parted company.

On reaching some major slips, it was possible to get a good westerly view and it was time for lunch in the sun. Shortly afterwards, the track emerges from the bushline and you reach the summit of Mt Manuoha, the highest peak in the National Park, with views of Lake Waikareiti and Lake Waikaremoana. The hut chimney is also visible, and only three minutes away from the trig. Surprise, Jim was having a break in the sun, too. He thought he could see Ruapehu from the trig and took a bearing. I wonder if he was right? He left soon after, and the rest of our party arrived.

Manuoha Hut is a six-bunk hut in dire need of a facelift and repairs to the verandah, and behind it sat a temporary hut which Ted told us would have been helicoptered onto the site. Another couple arrived, so Geoff opted for taking a mattress and sleeping on the verandah of the temporary hut. We dried our wet tents on the line, as they had a lot of condensation on them from the morning dew at the campsite. With time to enjoy the afternoon, we went back up to the trig to take more photos, and tried to get cellphone coverage. No go. We had a relax in the sunshine on the track out of the wind, and looked at the tops of all the trees and their green variations. You felt that you could just hop on them. We all took photos of the 'Goblin forest', old gnarled trees hanging with moss and lichen. They certainly do look rather Tolkein.

The next day, we headed for Sandy Bay Hut, leaving at 8am. The DoC track time is eight hours. The track begins the descent, through more Goblin forest, and then undulates. At the high point 1138, a gap allows a view of Lake Waikareiti. This is the only one you get before you arrive.

The track is well marked, with old tin markers that help in navigation through some dense ferns in parts. After three and half hours, it drops down to the Kaipo Lagoon, where there is a flat area which has been used for camping. From the lagoon, there is a well-defined track down to Sandy Bay Hut. The track meanders past Sopps Hollow, Lake Henrietta and the Clay Patch which, along the lagoon, make up "The Tundra". From above, it looks like the dried pig fern. The weather had been fine when leaving Manuhoa Hut, but after an hour or so, a light drizzle started. Not enough to put the raincoat on.

I arrived at Sandy Bay Hut at 1.15pm; the drizzle was a little heavier, but still nothing to worry about. I had completed the day's walk in 5hrs 15 mins, not even running (honest, running is not possible with a 16kg pack). Time for lunch and a swim. You have to walk a fair way out in the bay, but 60cm of water is enough to have a lie down, enjoy the views and have a splash. The rest of the Napier Tramping Club team – Simon, Paul, Jude and Gillian – arrived to spend the Sunday night at Sandy Bay Hut along with Ted, Sue, Denise and Geoff from Manuoha Hut.

More swims, and Geoff and Jude borrowed a dinghy and rowed to the island to look at its lake. There is a ladder to assist the climb up the rockface.

The Manuoha five pitched tents in the bush, about 100m past the hut. We had no hut **>P14**

booking, and prefer the quiet anyway. It rained during the night, on and off, but we all survived, albeit with wet tent flys.

The walk back to SH38 passes some lovely big beech trees and, in some sections, there are glimpses of the lake. From the shelter, there is an easy downhill walk to the end of the track, 200 metres west of the visitor centre. This section passes through beech, kamahi and tawari with horopito, wineberry, putaputaweta and five-finger below. Kotukotuku, the world's largest fuchsia, can be seen from the track and I found some of its dark red flowers on the track. The flowering time is around November.

We all enjoyed great bush walking over the three days, seeing the big variety of lush bush and forest in the Urewera National Park - well worth the visit.

Simon Hill nestles in the base of a huge beech tree on the Lake Waikareiti track to Sandy Bay Hut

Another Plan B, to Top Maropea Hut

Sunrise - Top Maropea, Saturday February 11. Map: BK36

Trampers: Carolyn Rigg, Marc Marchal, Colin McNatty, Matt Green, Jenny Burns, Ted Angove, Paul Exeter, John Marshall, Dennis Mitchell, Kelvin Shaw, Viv Bramley, Sue Titter, Sue Martin, Denise Payne, Jude Paton and reporter Julia Mackie

SUMMER'S La Nina weather pattern affected yet another tramp. The scheduled trip along the tops from Sunrise to Sparrowhawk Bivvy was out, due to complete clag in the Ruahine ranges. So it was Plan B, up to Sunrise and then on to Top Maropea Hut for lunch.

There were 16 on this trip, including Carolyn, newly arrived from the UK. As this was her first tramp with the club, the trip was a good one to test her ability. (Carolyn did well, and we hope to see more of her while she is in NZ on a doctor's secondment for one year. We should be in good hands if anything goes medically awry.)

At the start of the Sunrise Hut track (one that DoC keeps open as a superhighway), a lovely young rimu tree stood proudly. Unfortunately about 500m further up the track, an old rimu had come a cropper and fallen over. But it was good to see a lot of regenerating trees on this track.

The track zig-zags for a short while, and then winds its way around the hillside. In 30 minutes, you reach the Waipawa Forks turn-off. From there, a steady climb continues to the hut, passing some patches of creeping eyebright (Euphrasia revoluta) and some fading Senecio (Senecio bellidioides).

Once we had all reached Sunrise Hut and snacked and watered, nine of us continued on to Top Maropea Hut. This part is exposed, so we felt the drizzle. Making our way past Armstrong Saddle, we moved around the top of some seriously big slips, a feature of the Ruahine ranges. We reached the turn-off for Te Atuoparapara, and the start of the descent to Top Maropea Hut. The track winds around a few rocky bluffs, before it enters the bush for a steep descent to the hut.

Top Maropea Hut is a small NZFS four-bunk hut. A back porch has been built over the doorway. It is dark inside, but has a small open fire. All nine of us found a seat inside for an early lunch, after which we headed back up the steep bush track to the tops, and took a group photo. We all seemed to be enjoying the walk, even though we were getting wet. A tramper should be able to cope with all weather conditions, and still have fun!

We reached Sunrise Hut again, and found that everyone else had already departed, so after a quick drink stop, we headed off downhill. Somehow the return downhill seemed much longer than the uphill. We were happy to get out of our wet gear, back into the van, and head home. A good day trip, and a pity that we never got any views, but all the more reason to put the original trip on the list again. Better luck with the weather next time.

The Great Unknown was oddly familiar

Apiti Track - Mangatewainui River, Saturday February 25. Map: BL36

Trampers: Kelvin Shaw, Marc Marchal, Sue Marshall, Denise Payne, John Marshall, Viv Bramley, Sue Martin, Sam (student), Linda (student) and reporter Jude Paton

TWO carloads of trampers headed south for unknown pastures (or so we thought) inland from Norsewood, accompanied by two Rotary exchange students from Canada and Switzerland.

The further south we travelled, the less murky the hills and the higher the spirits became. John Marshall headed off over the farm, intending to walk upstream, take pictures and catch up with us later in the day. The rest departed at 8.30am, climbing leisurely over regenerating, scrubby farmland and pausing for occasional views. The girls were impressed by the pace of us oldies. Once in the bush, the track degenerated, with plenty of windfall obstacles to negotiate, erosion in places and greasy underfoot, leading to some slipping and sliding. It's been a while since DoC did any maintenance in these parts! Kelvin's gadget came in very handy for those plagued by unwanted hangers-on that attached themselves to hairy legs (and my head).

A sheltered clearing presented itself with perfect timing for lunch… and the subsequent raindrops disappeared as soon as people donned their raincoats. Two of the team backtracked, with the girls intending to meet us at the other road end with the vehicles.

En route to the river below, one of the party recognised a mossy 'wall' and later recalled a 'Keep Out' sign… not so unfamiliar after all! We crossed the stream repeatedly, knee-deep at worst, occasionally faster-moving but without needing to link up. Only one person managed to get wet and one unintentionally laid himself out on the river stones. A couple of clear deep pools would have been perfect on a hot summer's day… but it was not to be! However, the sun shone and blue skies and white fluffies prevailed at our afternoon tea spot before it clouded over again.

Rounding the last bend, we spotted John on the farm track above the river and hailed him to wait for us. We took to the paddocks, clambering over electric fences to avoid the frisky young bulls on the other side and a granddaddy bull who kept bellowing at us. It started to sprinkle again as we approached the road end to find… no vehicles. We soon spotted the others still descending the track and continued walking along the road, arriving just before 4pm. A quick change (the rain came to nothing) and we were back on the road again, heading for The Sawyers Arms at Tiko. The sun came out again and we relaxed outside before heading back to town to find there'd been a couple of heavy showers which we'd missed. Lucky us!

Eye-popping views around Cattle Ridge

Roaring Stag Hut, Cattle Ridge Hut, Saturday/Sunday, February 25-26.
Map: BN34 Shannon

Trampers: Ted Angove, Paul Exeter (the old fellas), Alison Greer and reporter Julia Mackie (the girls)

TWO old fellas and two girls (young at heart) set off from Putara road end. The first thing we noticed was new signage for the tracks in the Tararua Range: 'Welcome to the Mangatainoka Valley'. The bird's eye map and layout is much better than the old.

We have all been to Roaring Stag Hut before, so we knew it was a three-hour walk. The track runs along the Mangatainoka River, crossing two swing bridges. From the second, the track commences the climb up to the junction for Roaring Stag (south) or Herepai (north) huts. We had left the car park at 9.30am and reached the junction at 11.00am.

The track to Roaring Stag is now a downhill, at first gradual, through some very muddy stretches, before dropping to the stream. It does not cross the stream at this point, but sidles alongside. When the time comes to cross, the best spot is just above a big log that straddles the stream. Soon there is another crossing, but much smaller, and you're at Roaring Stag Hut. Alison and I arrived at 12.30 and had our lunch.

The two old fellas arrived and decided that this was to be their final destination for today. We posed for pictures, and then Alison and I set off. The ridge track to Cattle Ridge Hut is a 2km climb of 600m. The ridge is directly opposite the hut, after crossing the swing bridge, and both of us had wanted to get to the top of Cattle Ridge.

We set off at 1.30pm, and after a steady climb of about 45 mins, on a clearly marked track, we came across a huge rimu tree, which had fallen across the track. It had also brought down some other trees. There was an orange marker amongst the debris, and an orange marker further up on a fallen tree. We decided to go up to get around the debris, but then could not find the track. We checked out each side, but could see no marker. The GPS came out, but really was of no use (we knew where we were). We decided that the best option was to bush-bash our way up the ridge, and hope that at some point we would reconnect with the track. So, after around 15 minutes, we were reaching the edge of the bushline, lo and behold an orange marker. Yeah! But we had wasted at least 20 minutes. It was the marker above the debris that had put us wrong. We should have gone further back to the marker amongst the debris. Ah well, lesson learnt.

Spot the crucial marker... we didn't, until the next day

The view south-west towards Mt Bannister from Cattle Ridge

The track continues to climb through low scrub, and then eventually grass. Ted had advised us about some rocky sections near the approach to the hut. There are some stretching sections, which required leveraging up, so you can't tank along. Alison was counting down the humps. Through the leatherwood and scrub, the track is easily discernable. We had a passing shower, and stopped to view the Roaring Stag Hut below.

After climbing over another high point, the top of the range is visible, and another 'lo and behold': a tarn and the hut. It is not quite your orange hut as found in the Kawekas, but still a welcome sight. A radio mast is attached at one end.

On walking inside at 4.05pm, we saw that the clock on the bunk was showing the right time. This is a small five-bunk hut, maintained by the NZ Deerstalkers Association. The fire has been removed, along with the sixth bunk. After a hot drink, during which a rain shower passed over, we poked our heads out the door, and it was fine again. Cloud was swirling around, but we decided to check out the views from the top. A brisk, 10-minute climb put us on Cattle Ridge. Initially, we could not see a thing, but the clouds swirled away, and allowed us a view of the Tararua Range opposite. Eye-poppingly amazing.

We decided to get further up the ridge and follow cairns up to a high point, Pukeroa (1318). Cattle Ridge is broad, and we got glimpses of parts of the main range. We returned to our hut, cooked our dinners, and hopped into the sleeping bags to keep warm. A kind tramper had left a lot of women's magazines, which helped pass the evening. They were the type you'd never buy yourself but are happy to read at times like this.

The next morning, we woke to a cloudless sky, and made our way back up to Cattle Ridge. This time we got the full panoramic view. What a treat. We'd taken the map, and identified the peaks. Mt Dundas (1499) is directly opposite (yesterday we had noted the standards that mark the track down, and the smaller ridge up to Dundas Hut). To the north are East and West peaks, to the south-west, Mt Bannister and in the distance, Arete (1505).

We made our way down, and retraced our steps to Roaring Stag. We were intrigued as to where we had missed the track, and discovered that the marker amongst the debris was where we should have crawled through, to pick up the track which traverses the ridge, heading south, before heading steeply uphill.

We had a break at Roaring Stag. The old fellas had had the hut to themselves, and had collected and cut firewood. They said that a lot of ears would have been burning during the evening, but not Alison or mine. Phew...

We made our way steadily back up to the ridge junction, and then commenced the downhill over the mud and tree roots that are part of the tramping experience in the Tararuas. On the way, we met another tramping party with a dog who did not like me. Tough. We passed them, and picked up the pace to get back to the old fellas, who had made their way out 45 minutes earlier.

Alison and I loved the challenge and were rewarded with superb views. My muscles took a few days to come right, but I'd love to do more tramping in the Tararuas.

A-frame Hut, providing a sunny spot for Dennis, Alison and Keith

At last, an A-1 day for the A-frame Hut

A-frame Hut – Stanfield Hut – West Branch Tamaki River, Wednesday February 29

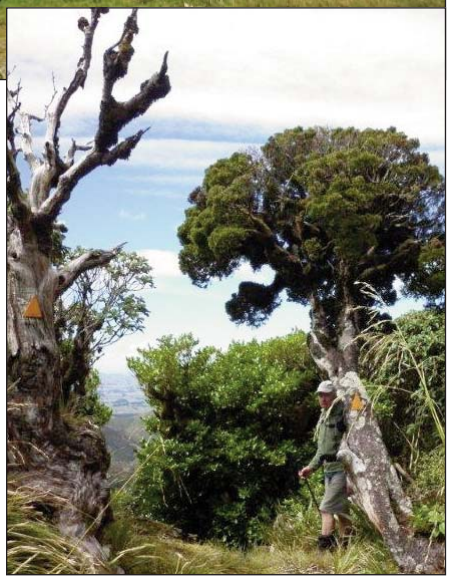
Trampers: John Marshall, Ken Ross, Vic Bullock, John Burrell, Keith Moretta, Kelvin Shaw, Paul Exeter, Dennis Mitchell, Gary Bowler and reporter Alison Greer

WOULD you believe it? It's tramp day and there's not a cloud in the sky! Quite a change from recent trips. The Ruahine Range stood out against the blue sky as we travelled south down Highway 50, turning off at Dannevirke onto Umutaoroa Road, left into Top Grass Road and right at Tamaki West Road, arriving at the car park around 9am.

Looking up, we studied the 600-metre climb, trying to pick out where the track goes; then it was off to tackle the climb. It was new territory for many in the group and we were determined to get to the A-frame in good time. The track is in pretty good condition, with only a couple of deviations around fallen trees and a bit muddy in places after recent rain. It does not take long to gain height with the steep climb and after some tricky rocky sections, you emerge from the bushline into low scrub.

From here, there are some views back down and out over Southern Hawke's Bay but the track still goes onward - not as steep but seemingly endless. Just as you think "it can't be far now" and "I need morning tea", you reach Takapari Road and 50 metres on, the A-frame or Travers Hut. Sitting at just over 1100 metres, it's sparse inside and the concrete floor does not look that inviting for sleeping on.

A longer-than-usual late morning tea while we waited for the last of the group to catch up, then we carried on along Takapari Road (a well-kept 4WD road) turning off at the signpost to Stanfield Hut. We passed the old track down to the river that is no longer open and



Gary heading down to Stanfield Hut

had lunch on a sunny slope a bit further down. Great views to the west, some cloud just covering Ruapehu, but beautiful sunshine to the east. We were in a long corridor of leatherwood, the tough plant that grows along the Southern Ruahine Range.

It's a steep drop down to Stanfield, knee-jarring stuff, but we made it and after a short break headed down the river. The Tamaki River bed is not hard to walk down but is full of buddleia and a type of wattle, plus lots of logs washed down in recent times - so we had a lot of crossings. It was hot and still, so walking in the water was not so bad.

It was great to finally complete the trip, as we had tried many times before - only to be turned back by high winds or rain. It was a very quiet van that drove back to Napier with some very happy trampers!

It's almost The End of The Bushbasher

THIS bumper edition of The Bushbasher is our last-but-one. It's more cost-effective to put trip reports and pictures on the club's website, and it works better for the latest news and members' feedback.

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

The club thanks Band Limited at 50 Ossian Street, Ahuriri, Napier, for printing our magazine.

Napier Tramping Club also thanks The Lion Foundation for its financial support to produce The Bushbasher and the club's website.

For the latest information, visit
www.napiertrampingclub.org.nz

To stay right up to date - just click and get RSS alerts via email