

SIMON'S TRIPS

A man wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, a cap, and sunglasses is wading through a river. He has a large backpack on his back. The background features a rocky riverbank, green hills, and snow-capped mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

Peak Bagging and
Mountain Adventures
2009–2015

compiled by Colin & Jeni Bell

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Cover photo: Simon crossing Lake Stream on the way to Jagged Peak, October 2014. *Nina Dickerhof*

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by Colin & Jeni Bell

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Simon Colin Bell set out to climb Pikirakatahi / Mt Earnslaw on the 15th January 2015 and did not return.

This work is to honour Simon, keep his memory alive and be a gift to his friends and family. It is also to introduce and thank some of the many people who enriched his life.

Simon wrote most of this book and provided most of the photographs. His family, friends and fellow climbers contributed the rest.

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.*

J. R. R. Tolkien in Lord of the Rings.

On the 15th January this year, our son Simon left Esquilant Bivvy in the Mount Aspiring National Park alone and early in the morning to climb Mt Earnslaw. Maybe to traverse from the West to the East Peak. He never returned and is assumed lost. This has left a huge hole in our lives.

Three months later we were back in our sunny Nelson home. Colin was trolling through thousands of mountaineering photos found on Simon's computer extension drive and Jeni was sorting through his climbing magazines, paper trip reports and electronic copy of his adventures. They looked really interesting so she printed some off and started filing them all in a nice blue ringbinder. The folder grew bigger and bigger and had to be read, illustrated with some of the amazing photos and shared. It insisted on being turned into a proper book. So here it is.

Simon had seized every opportunity in the past five years to explore wild mountain places with fellow members of the Tararua Tramping Club, NZ Alpine Club and Canterbury Mountaineering Club. He'd forged close friendships and entered upwards of 100 trips or peaks climbed on the club blog sites, together with photos. He'd written trip reports and given presentations. We found his reports and speaking notes lively, exciting and fun to read. His enthusiasm, logical analysis and sense of wonder were always evident.

Simon was on a quest to climb all of NZ's most notable peaks (the '100 Great Peaks' challenge) but that was really just the excuse. As his friend Steve Dowall put it, "While he had ambitions with climbing, his real joy came from just appreciating the wild places of our beautiful country."

This book features 23 trips ranging from gentle tramps to challenging alpine rock or ice climbs. Simon's own trip accounts or presentation notes form the basis of 18 chapters and he took all the accompanying photos unless otherwise attributed. The complete list of Simon's trips and his 67 Great Peak climbs are found in Chapters 32 and 33.

Lorraine Johns, Simon's closest friend, climbed 22 of the Great Peaks with Simon as well as acting as chauffeur and behind the scenes organiser for many of his trips. Three of Lorraine's reports are included as well as reports or stories from Gina Andrews, Steve Dowall, Rob Hawes and Stu Hutson, all of whom shared many adventures with Simon. Rob and Simon climbed 17 of the Great Peaks together and in doing so became close and good friends, as their happy and humorous trip accounts show.

Sylvie Admore, Jackie Delaney, Nina Dickerhof, Don French, Dave Grainger, Helen Liley, Stuart MacDonald, Dan Pringle, Heather Rhodes, Daniel Rogerson, Marta and Andrew Scott, Neil Sloan, Vaughan Snowdon, Björn Striebing, and others have so willingly contributed memories or photos.

Our role has been to introduce Simon in Chapter 1, add several linking chapters, arrange everything chronologically and carry out minor editing. Simon liked writing and photographing and talked of writing a book himself one day - though he wouldn't have had so many photos of himself in it! We've tried to make it happen for him with help from his friends and from Dave and Suzanne of The Copy Press, Nelson. Thank you so much everyone for all your kind efforts. We hope you enjoy *Simon's Trips*.

Colin & Jeni Bell
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September 2015

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Early Life

Simon was surrounded by love and action from the time he was born in 1981. He was the youngest of our five children, his elder sisters being Heather (8), Kiri (6), Mary (5) and Sylvia (3). Jeni was the centre of family life and Colin taught maths and science at Motueka High School.

We lived in North West Nelson on a 20ha farm in the Orinoco Valley. Simon watched his sisters draft sheep, look after their pets and ride their ponies. He had lots of fun with them and later explored the farm with friends like Callum McFadgen who wrote:

I was reminded of all the great times I had as a child at your farm out (in) the valley and of the crazy adventures that Simon and I would get up to, usually involving climbing things, getting soaked or whacking thistles. Those memories are golden in my mind and I feel very privileged to have had those experiences and to have had Simon as such a good childhood friend.

Simon was absorbed by Lego and delighted in the gentle humour of his favourite adventure series, Tintin. On family tramping trips he lagged behind wearing a little pack and enjoyed playing on swing bridges. At home in the evenings he listened drowsily in his sleeping bag as we read Lord of the Rings and other favourites. He loved to talk about everything at almost incomprehensible speed.

Turning 5, Simon leapt the gate, ran down the hill and caught the bus to school. "You just go there to eat your lunch," he said. Mountain bikes became his passion and he spent months perfecting his technique of leaping over the handlebars. He jumped ramps with his friend Floyd Grooby, studied manuals and did all his own repairs. He loved anything electronic and was enthralled by the video games he discovered during an 8 month family working holiday in England.

High School

When Simon was 11 we left the farm, living briefly at Fairlie and Takaka before settling at Te

Anau. During this unsettling time, Simon's uncle David gave us his old computer. For Simon it was the ultimate interactive toy and he altered its settings almost daily, to our frustration. When we upgraded, he talked us into buying the best graphics card possible so he could play Doom with Peter Ericsson, Shun Hashiba and other friends. Simon went on many school camps, especially enjoying a 5 day bike trip from Te Anau to Queenstown and back.

When Simon was 14, Jeni, Sylvia, Peter Ericsson and Simon walked the Milford Track. On the last day 300mm of rain fell and they raced rising flood waters in a narrow river gorge for hours while waterfalls poured from every cliff and previously tiny creek crossings became challenging adventures. Simon and Peter remembered this experience of nature at its most powerful years later.

One sunny spring day later that year Colin, Jeni and Simon launched kayaks at Lake Manapouri township, paddled an hour, then portaged the kayaks across an isthmus to the Hope Arm. They paddled on, then scrambled up a rocky outcrop called the Monument before returning the way they had come.

Kiri took Simon tramping through the Kepler Track and we tramped with him to another local landmark, Mt Titiroa. Colin's diary records:

Last week Heather, Simon, Jeni and I climbed Mt Titiroa, and what a tramp it was. By boat to Hope Arm, then 2¾ hrs to Garnock Burn, a classical river valley. Then bush-bash straight up through bluffs to ridge (1¼ hrs), and bush bash 1½ up ridge to a classic camp site: tongue of bush, small stream, massive rock – and above, the tussock and the strange rock of the mountain. It took us 3½ hrs to reach the top, just Heather and I arriving at 8pm. Granite pebble, rock and weather eroded massive boulders. The view – Manapouri at sunset, and mountains forever. Next day, Simon led us down the stream through a beautiful moss garden and then pioneered a brilliant route back to the Garnock Burn.

We often returned to Nelson, exploring and camping on the way. Simon came to love the mountain landscape and ultimately viewed the entire South Island as home.



On the farm with his sisters Kiri, Heather, Mary and Sylvia. *Colin*



Trafalgar Square, London on a family working holiday, England. 1990. *Colin*



Heather, Mary, Simon, Jeni, Sylvia and Kiri on the summit of Mt Arthur, Nelson. *Colin*



Playing chess with his grandfather, Alan Williman. *Jeni*



On his new Specialized Stumpjumper. *Colin*



At home on our Orinoco farm, Motueka. *Carla Campbell*

In Form 6 Simon thrived at maths, physics and electronics. He was a natural and meticulous investigator, winding his own coils to study electromagnetic effects. Trance started to feature in his music collection. Mary had told him about “The Gathering” dance festival on Takaka Hill. He saved assiduously from his after school job as a school cleaner and at Christmas drove to Nelson with friends to take part himself – and loved it.

For his final year, Simon chose to enrol at Logan Park High School in Dunedin, staying with Sylvia until we arrived. He was much happier there and thrived socially saying “It’s OK at this school, you’re allowed to be different.” He took a singing part in the school production and discovered that what they smoked outside the hall was not tobacco. He drove his friends to solstice raves in his Morris Marina, bringing his own sound system. Sometimes they’d all sit up on the hill above Dunedin North Cemetery brewing up hot chocolate around a little fire and chatting with friendly police. Simon passed Bursary and decided to study physics at Otago University while we moved to Christchurch.

Learning about life

Living in a student flat was an eye-opener for Simon. His brand new bike was stolen and he was upset by flatmates in conflict. He stopped attending lectures to busy himself building a sound system and didn’t do well enough in mid-year exams to warrant continuing. To pay the rent, he cleaned offices and packed exam papers, getting RSI in his wrists. Attending a WINZ job-seeker course, he encountered school dropouts who were surprised that he was on the course when he had not only School Cert but Bursary. Equally, he realised they were trapped in a situation he didn’t want for himself. He enjoyed work experience fixing sound systems for a specialist but said “It was time I left because they were starting to rely on me.”

That Christmas Simon had fun putting his skills to use as a volunteer sound engineer for the Visionz Dance Festival in Golden Bay. Peaceful, frugal, true to his values and master of his destiny, he decided to study electrical engineering at Canterbury University and to live with us.

Getting a BE

After completing a holiday catch-up course in chemistry, Simon worked non-stop during his intermediate year, achieved excellent grades and won a Transpower Scholarship. As well as financial independence the scholarship provided summer holiday work and the offer of a position on graduation. That Christmas he took us dancing at the Visionz Festival which he’d again helped organise. During the next 3 years he worked hard, tramped, took up rock climbing, built another sound system, assembled a computer, went flatting for a while and bought his Nissan Bluebird. His work experience varied from painting safety lines around equipment on a warehouse floor to refurbishing generators at Manapouri Power Station.

Simon revised carefully for his final exams, calculating how much each hour’s study was worth if he gained a post-graduate scholarship. In 2004 he completed his BE with first class honours and became the first Electric Power Engineering Centre scholar to be awarded a PhD scholarship.

Post-graduate student

“Just 8 to 5, Monday to Friday” said Simon casually about being a research student. Artificial lightning was fun but had military applications. Electric-arc displays were fun but were really art. The real work as Simon saw it, lay in the design of more efficient high voltage resonant testing transformers. Improvements there would have practical benefit to the electrical industry and hence New Zealand. Simon was lucky to have Pat Bodger as his PhD supervisor. Pat gave Simon a lead and Simon followed it up. Pat later wrote:

From an initial direction of research that I had prescribed, Simon contributed original analysis and evaluation. In the end he was informing me as to where he was going and what needed to be done to get there. This is a hallmark that is looked for in research, for anyone entering what is an international fraternity of doctorates.

As well as analysis, Simon excelled in practical design, manufacture and experimentation. He produced a kitset of high voltage resonant testing transformers, much smaller than had been done before. We have

INTRODUCING SIMON



Checking out Kiri's computer at her Dunedin student flat. *Jeni*



Junior student at Fiordland College. *Colin*



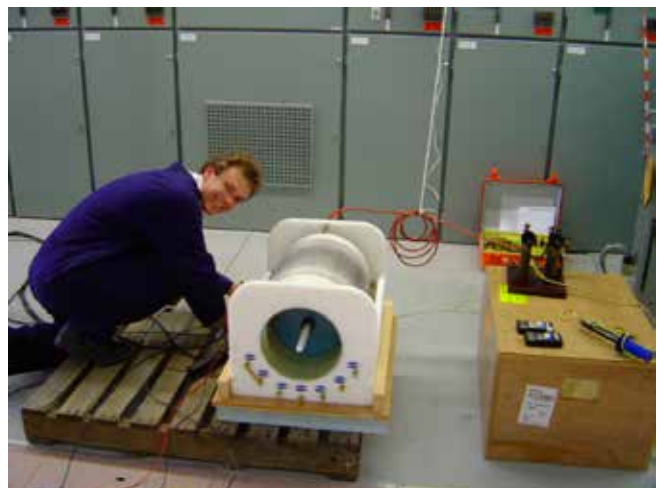
Playing Mary's didgeredoo at her Dunedin student flat. *Colin*



First car when at Logan Park High School, Dunedin. *Jeni*



Fun on wheels. *Floyd Grooby*



Simon testing for Energy Australia, Sydney using his purpose built partial core transformer, 2008. *Pat Bodger*

used them in industry ever since; they can test any and every generator in New Zealand.

Pat also referred to one of Simon's papers published in a top international journal and held in the university's digital research repository:

At last count over 12,000 researchers around the world have accessed this paper for their use. This ranks in the top 30 for the university. It is a statistic I know he took great pride in.

Reflecting on his research years

Simon was grateful for Pat's help. In the acknowledgements section of his thesis he reflected:

The final reading of this thesis has prompted me to review my initial goals and ambitions as a post-graduate student. My original thesis topic was superconducting transformers, which, for reasons beyond my control, I never quite managed to study. My original timeline of 3 years was exceeded by more than 7 months. My anticipated savings over the study period were not quite achieved. Nevertheless, I am very happy with the outcomes of this thesis. The years spent as a post-graduate student have been some of the best of my life so far (but I hope for even better times in the years to come).

None of this would have been possible without the technical and social support of the other students and staff. I would like to give particular thanks to my supervisor Pat Bodger and co-supervisor Wade Enright. Thanks also to the technicians, especially Jac Woudberg and David Healy for building the transformers, and Ken Smart for general advice and constant loaning of equipment. The postgraduate students in the department have also made my life more interesting. Some of the best conversations I had were at the small hours of the morning. I recall, on more than one occasion, having the cleaning ladies tell me to go home when they arrived at 6am.

Special thanks to my friends in the industry who kept telling me to get a real job, and my family, who always managed to appear interested when listening to me talk about my research. Thanks to Geoff Cardwell for informing us about the conference in Slovenia, which I subsequently attended, and for arranging the site visit to an ABB transformer factory in Germany. Thanks also to Mirko, Anna and Rayk for showing

me around Germany during my holiday in Europe. I would also like to acknowledge phdcomics.com and dc++ for the much needed distractions from research.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the financial support I received through Scholarships from the University of Canterbury and the Electric Power Engineering Centre.

After submitting the thesis, Simon did some contract work for the university while awaiting the examiners' report and contemplating his future. During his research years, Simon had enjoyed many activities with friends including regular climbing in the gym or in the Port Hills. He did yoga regularly with a Hare Krishna group and enjoyed the delicious vegetarian meals they provided. He walked or biked around town. During holidays, he'd biked from Dunedin to Nelson (joined by Sylvia, Jeni and Colin from Hanmer to Lake Rotoiti) and later biked from Wellington to Auckland. He'd rock climbed at Castle Hill and especially at Takaka. Research had taken him to Australia, Slovenia, Germany, Sweden and England. He'd enjoyed flatting but often lived with us and we enjoyed his peaceful, contented presence. He shone with enthusiasm and the joy of life. He was offered a job in Christchurch but thought he'd lived there long enough already - time for a change!

A new life in Wellington

Early 2009, aged 27, Simon left his beloved South Island and headed north to Wellington to start a new life as an electrical engineer with the Grid Development Section of Transpower. He was now well qualified, had no student debt, no family or emotional commitments and great career prospects if he wanted them. Time to get a life!

Simon had originally gone to Wellington to check out a position with Industrial Research Limited. While there he'd gone to the pub with a friend from Transpower, was introduced to the general manager and offered a job on the spot, which he took. He found a flat with two others in Newtown, got a fast bike to get around on and looked around for after work fun. One of his flatmates was an ardent born again Christian who tried hard to convert him. Otherwise, life was fine but a bit lonely at first. He tried a little squash, rogaining, biking, running,

walking in the hills and so on. The Transpower office was a friendly crew, he enjoyed their social activities and joined their soccer team. He usually sat next to the 'boss' Stuart MacDonald on the 9th or 10th floor of their big building with great views looking out over the hills and inner harbour. "Yeah, it's OK," he said on the phone.

PhD graduation

Shortly afterwards Simon received a letter from the University of Canterbury which started:

Dear Simon

You will recently have received advice of the successful outcome of your PhD examination, and I am writing to congratulate you on that achievement, but more particularly to advise you that, having completed in the judgement of the examiners, a PhD thesis of the highest quality, you are to have your name entered on the Dean's List.

In early April 2009, Simon flew back to Christchurch to attend the capping ceremony at the Town Hall and collect his PhD. He'd arranged for Jeni to pick up a gown, hood and cap in advance. The hood was to be fastened under his tie at the front. "I don't know if he'll have a tie," Jeni ventured nervously to the efficient and confident lady in charge of regalia. "Oh yes, he must have a tie!" she insisted, horrified. As he was number one on the awards list and was to lead the procession accompanied by a Ngai Tahu honour party, she felt some decorum essential. When he arrived at the airport the night before the morning ceremony, not only did he have no tie, but he had no shoes or long trousers. Only shorts, tramping boots and outdoor gear. He was going on a tramp, leaving early afternoon and needed to buy his food first. That was much more important to him. Colin's best clothes and shoes more or less fitted. If you did the belt up tight, they'd do.

Meeting Lorraine

A few months later he met Lorraine. This is how she later told it:

Well, our story started on his birthday, in 2009. That day he turned up at Fergs, the rock gym in Wellington. Of course he didn't tell anyone it was his birthday. I was climbing with two friends and he was by himself. Somehow I ended up climbing with him. I had been climbing for a year and I told him that a group I was in had been caught in an avalanche a few weeks prior. Unintentionally, this turned out to be a great pick up line - we were together from then until last November.

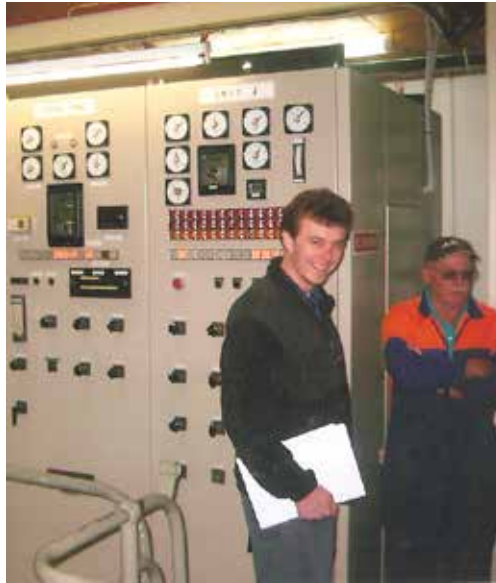
The day after we climbed with Simon, my friend observed that my avalanche story had caught his attention. She also said, "Simon's very cute, but he could dress better." Simon was wearing a Tintin t-shirt. He loved that t-shirt to pieces. Literally. Even though it was falling apart, he wore it until one day he went to take it off and he ripped it in half. If Simon liked something he didn't need society to approve. Clothing was a good example of this. In the early days, economy was the most important consideration. On our first climb in the North Island, Simon wore togs and proudly told me that his overtrousers were an ill-fitting hand-me-down from his sister. Once I even caught him wearing a disastrously ripped up icebreaker to work.

His awesome tent turned out to be a \$50 tent from the Warehouse, and I remember waking up outside a stormy Kime Hut to find it had collapsed on us. I think Simon knew that the best things are wild and free. However, over the years, economy gave way to a burning desire to climb, and to climb well and safely. And his wardrobe and gear suddenly began to outpace mine, as he became the consummate climber.

Soon Simon and Lorraine were spending weekends tramping and climbing together. Lorraine was a member of the Tararua Tramping Club and Simon joined too. Lorraine introduced him to the Tararua Ranges and the friendly challenge of visiting all 47 huts. Simon moved out of his Newtown flat to a new address in Thorndon just round the corner from Lorraine and with an easy walk to work. He enjoyed living there and became friends with Mark Hooker and several other keen outdoor types.

Climbing gym

Fergs climbing gym was on the waterfront, not too far from the Transpower office on The Terrace. Simon often joined Lorraine and other friends there for lunchtime practice. A challenge Simon



A Transpower visit to Waihi power station.
Stuart MacDonald



Colin, Simon and Jeni, Capping Ceremony 2009.
Kerry Tunstall



Colin by Simon's car at Russley golf course,
Memorial Ave, Christchurch. *Jeni*



Lorraine and Simon off to Hopeless Hut, 2010. *unknown*



Lorraine and Simon climb Mt Annette. *unknown*



Leaving Wellington airport with the blue
bags for the last time, Oct 2014. *Lorraine*

enjoyed was to lead climb all the grade 19 routes in one session. There were nine of them, including some difficult overhanging routes. That took him a while and was another first! He joined Lorraine and several of her female climbing buddies one rainy weekend, and they spent a day at Fergs working on their own projects. “Yet, everyone was on tenterhooks as Simon attempted each of his climbs, and jubilation reigned when he nailed the final one,” Lorraine explained.

Mike Dalzell, Simon’s close friend and fellow Transpower engineer was another keen rock climber. In 2010 they arranged to join their friends Rowan Sinton (another electrical engineer) and James Collett for a week’s rock climbing in the Arapiles. They had a great time and went back together in 2011. Simon’s skill at trad climbing continued to improve as he climbed around the North Island, including trips to Kawakawa Bay and Mangatepopo (where he led the classic multi-pitch climb, Bomb Arete). These skills served him well when he began to undertake more difficult climbing in Fiordland and the Southern Alps.

Work as a Transpower engineer

Simon enjoyed the positive atmosphere of Transpower, learning new skills and the variety of work involved, describing it as “like doing PhD research without writing a thesis.” His work involved computer modelling and analysis of grid transmission systems, including writing business cases. Simon’s major projects included the Christchurch reactive power controller and the upper South Island grid upgrade investigation. His boss, Stuart MacDonald valued Simon’s commitment, writing:

I could count on him to do the really difficult technical stuff. The modelling and analysis requires heavy duty maths/physics – and he had the ability in spades. While engineers tend to be good at maths and physics, they often suck at writing reports. Simon was an exception – he was very good at documenting this work. In work no task was beneath him, he was flexible and unassuming enough to tackle anything. For his outside activities he asked for and received flexibility.

Simon was lucky to have such an accommodating boss as Stuart. At times he was flown to Canada or

Australia to check out new purchases and ideas. He worked hard, was trusted, appreciated and given lots of flexibility in work hours and additional unpaid leave for trips.

At the beginning of 2014, Simon was promoted to Senior Asset Engineer at Transpower. Some time after this his team were having a workshop discussion time. People analysed their personal skills and work style preferences to see how best to work together. There were eight suggested roles to choose from. At one end of the spectrum were the visionaries, researchers, communicators, networkers and forward planners, at the other the finishers, the nuts and bolts and details people, and the people managers who held it all together. Right in the centre was the “thruster-organiser” - defined as “the analytical, results-oriented person using action via deadlines. He/she exerts pressure, is impatient if need be and can overlook people’s feelings while making things happen”. Simon guessed that described him and his team agreed.

An inner need for adventure

Simon’s fulfilling professional life as a grid planner was complemented by his passion for mountaineering. He enjoyed the contrast, noting that “in planning the consequences are so far away as to seem disconnected to reality - in mountaineering everything has consequences and you often find these out quickly.” Mountaineering satisfied Simon’s inner need for adventure. It was, he wrote:

Good to be in an environment where your decisions have a real and immediate impact on your and your partner’s safety. Mountaineering is about the journey not the destination – the people that get too fixed on the end goal end up pushing their luck and misreading the signs based on their desire to summit - i.e. increased chance of death. ‘If I get home I’m going to sell my gear and never climb again’ moment - have to see things through - no short cut or easy opt out option.

Go to a place where our own judgement or the environment and our skills determines whether we live or die. Where only the present moment is of importance – no time to think of anything but the current task. Fear is a quality that can be managed just like everything else and put in perspective. Do something everyday that scares you. No one is going to feel satisfied looking back on a life of mediocrity

and low ambition, excess safety net and cotton wool. In 20 years from now you will be (more) disappointed with the things you didn't do than the things you did.

At the end of 2011 Simon calculated he'd taken 7 ½ weeks leave and spent more than 75 days in the hills. He'd done a high alpine skills course, an avalanche awareness course, and was starting to make close climbing friends including James Wright, Lisa Wynne, Rob Hawes, Steve Dowall and Vaughan Snowdon. Lorraine and Simon had made lots of trips together, including visiting 33 of the 47 Tararua huts together during weekends. He'd got used to packing his bags ready for a quick getaway after work. His friend Jackie Delaney from Transpower recalls:

The Blue Bags! Those blue bags in the change room. I would see them just before I went home on a Friday. That was a sure sign that Simon was travelling that weekend to do what he loved to do. I would walk over to the airport bus with Simon and he would be dashing to catch it to take him on those weekend adventures down south. The bags wouldn't appear back in the change room until about 9am on Monday mornings. Later on that day I would get an email with some fantastic photos and hear all about his adventures.

Sometimes Simon could even arrange to spend the day at Transpower's Christchurch office if it suited his weekend climbing plans better. He didn't really need his car in Wellington. He could always walk, bike, bus or borrow Lorraine's. So he decided to leave it permanently parked by the road near Christchurch airport ready for a quick mountain get away. As Stuart MacDonald put it:

He'd often plan weekend trips down to the South Island and I suspect that his car was a home away from home, sleeping by the side of the road at Christchurch airport before getting an early flight back to Wellington on the Monday morning. I think he was often pleasantly surprised when he went down to Christchurch that his car was still there, hadn't been broken into or towed in his absence.

Arriving in Wellington on the early flight, Simon would go straight to the office, shower and have breakfast before starting work. His friend, Jessie Kievom-Lockhart wrote:

I miss walking into the level 10 kitchen and not seeing Simon sitting at the table with no shoes on eating smelly meat flavoured two minute noodles with a big smile on his face.

Of course not all of Simon's weekends were spent away from Wellington. As Lorraine recalls:

It wasn't all about the outdoors! Nothing could distract Simon from plans to go rock climbing or into the hills like the possibility of minigolf and bacon and eggs, and a lazy day filled with sleeping, movies and hanging out with friends.

In remembering Simon, it is understandable that people might focus on his remarkable achievements in the outdoors and in the field of electrical engineering. But for the girl who loved him so very much during those Wellington years, climbing was a significant but small part of daily life. Time spent curled up snugly on the couch, long chats, cooking meals, taking a stroll into town to dine at their favourite restaurant (Restaurant 88), and tracking down gelato for Simon, was just as important as their mutual love for the outdoors. For Lorraine, simply enjoying each other's company at home, with Simon's playful and inquisitive nature and cheeky grin, easily rivalled the joy of moments such as standing together on the summit of Aoraki/Mount Cook.

'100 Great Peaks' challenge

In December 2011 Simon became aware of the NZAC '100 Great Peaks' challenge. Don French had conceived the idea 10 years before and listed 100 of NZ's most challenging or noteworthy peaks. In his article 'Peak Bagging from Wellington' (Ch 19), Simon referred to Don's list noting that it:

... is the ultimate peak bagging list and no-one has ticked them all off yet...

An idea entered Simon's mind and began to grow. He had already climbed 12 and the challenge of climbing all 100 appealed greatly. It would be a huge undertaking involving some very difficult climbs in very remote places.

Simon's preparation was meticulous. Google, Samsung and Jetstar helped with researching, coordinating and travelling. Weather windows were identified, plans shared and flexible tickets bought.

Simon downloaded all the NZ topo maps and used Backcountry Navigator to supplement paper maps and route guides. He bought top quality, ultra-light equipment, often online. Over the next two years he made 48 trips and climbed 34 more Great Peaks. Lorraine and Simon climbed 22 together and also 'bagged' the remaining 14 Tararua huts. But most of the time, for both of them, was spent working.

Giving something back

Simon gained tremendously from his involvement in the TTC and the NZAC. He made new friends, took part in alpine training courses and was invited on challenging trips with experienced leaders. He enjoyed sharing his adventures and encouraging others.

As well as writing accounts and posting photos, he started giving presentations for some of his more exciting trips. Large numbers of TTC or NZAC members would turn up at the club rooms after work, lured by enticements such as (in Simon's words) hearing about "eating OSMs for breakfast, crackers for lunch and Backcountry for dinner." One popular talk was advertised by the Wellington Tramping & Mountaineering Club as follows: "Come and hear if Simon is still sleeping in borrowed hut blankets."

Dan Pringle, chairperson of the Wellington Section of the NZAC put it this way:

Simon always seemed full of joy, energy and enthusiasm. He was universally liked and will be very sadly missed. Most Wellington climbers admired and envied how Simon managed to get south so often with his car parked in Christchurch and flexible work arrangements. What many of us dreamed about, Simon made it happen. Stories of three hour runs after work, bagging all the Tararua huts and red-eye flights back

to work on Monday morning all spoke of his absolute passion and boundless energy.

Simon regularly attended and presented at our Wellington section club nights. Always with a spring in his step, a little shuffle, a sideways glance and grin, followed by understated trips and plans. Simon's articles and photos have nearly outnumbered all the other members combined in our monthly Vertigo newsletters over the last few years.

Simon also became a volunteer instructor for the Tararua Tramping Club. Dave Grainger, TTC's convenor of alpine instruction later wrote:

Simon was an alpine instructor for TTC and gave his time unequivocally to assist others learn and enjoy the mountains. AIC students of 2012-2014 recall Simon's patient, thorough yet motivational style.

Mountaineering was something special for Simon. It was, as Lorraine wrote, "a way to express himself, and the only way to be who he really was." Simon had dedicated his life to mountaineering. Giving something back by sharing his passion was a real joy.

Reading ahead

Now that we've introduced Simon, the story of his trips begins. Many of the trips he made while living in Wellington are described in Chapters 2 – 23.

By mid 2014 Simon had become so excited by the '100 Great Peaks' challenge that he negotiated six months unpaid leave from Transpower to spend a summer season tackling the more distant and demanding peaks. Then in mid-October, aged 33, with great enthusiasm and a car full of climbing gear he moved to Wanaka to follow his dream. That story begins in Chapter 24.

April 2010

A gentle start to peak bagging. Lorraine and Simon on a week's visit to Arthurs Pass National Park. Lorraine wrote this account for The Tararua Trumper.

Section members Simon Bell and Lorraine Johns tripped down to Arthur's Pass in April for some Easter peak bagging. Possibly more Easter eggs were bagged than peaks, but all activities were thoroughly enjoyed anyway (particularly when combined).

Day 1 saw a traverse from Mt Bealey to Avalanche Peak through a mixture of sunny and whiteout conditions, and with some enjoyable tops travel. The rocky ridge is quite varied which possibly makes it a more interesting trip to do before the snow falls.



Lorraine on the summit of Avalanche Peak.

Our series of summit successes ended there as **day 2** saw an aborted attempt on Mt Philistine via the Warnock bluffs (conditions were such that we couldn't see the turn off to the road end). The mountains were replaced by a saunter up Hut Spur from Top Bealey Hut in the Black Range to point 1581 in sunny, though windy conditions. We enjoyed clear views of the surrounding hills and valley below, as well as thick clag enveloping the mountains around the township.

Day 3 saw us join David Jewell and Sharron Came's Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club (WTMC) trip to Mounts Murchison and Harper. Ideal summiting conditions were encountered on the walk in with great views of Rolleston and

Barker Hut on the approach. We camped in a very sheltered, flat spot, on an attractive patch of grass behind the Barker Hut tarn.



A saunter up Hut Spur, Bealey. Lorraine

Views disappeared from **day 4** on, although we still headed up Mt Murchison to check out the crevasses in the White Glacier and the Murchison summit rocks. We couldn't really see too much of either, but we did notice the crevasses when we poked our legs through snow bridges and the summit rocks got our attention when we heard them crashing down on the helmet-clad head of an unfortunate climber ahead of us. That night the weather took a further turn for the worse and we discovered that the grass growing under our tent was doing so well due to being in the centre of the tarn overflow.

Day 5 saw no improvement in the weather. Even the wind direction didn't change - which really wasn't good news, as the toilet had no door and the wind and rain both came from a sub-optimal direction, all things considered. There wasn't much to do except eat too many jellybeans for breakfast and cheat in a pull up competition initiated by the boys, both of which made a quick exit to take a trip up to White Col quite necessary. This also gave me the opportunity to check out the few metres I could see of the Harper route

from the saddle. I thought it looked puzzlingly intimidating for an easier peak, but this turned out to be because I was looking at the 3- instead of the 1+ route. Better to read the route description before, rather than after, you recce a climb I guess. We headed down to Carrington Hut in the late afternoon when the rain began to lessen.

Day 6 saw us walking out in the clag (which naturally cleared once we reached Klondyke Corner) to discover what they say about parking your car at an Arthur's Pass road end is pretty much correct.

We drove back to Christchurch on **day 7**, discovering that travelling with no rear window makes things a bit drafty, especially when it is cold and raining. The combined effect was to sabotage our plans to bag another peak in a whiteout. Instead we spent the day drinking hot chocolate, catching up with Canty-Westlanders, and gear shopping. Best discovery was a \$2 curry shop, though I might wait 'til I'm quite hungry on the next adventure before trying those curries out.



"It rained on night four and the tent was in the centre of a tarn overflow." Lorraine

October 2010

Four young blokes get technical. Rowan Sinton, Mike Dalzell, James Collett and Simon spend a week rock climbing in Australia. These are the notes from Simon's presentation to the Tararua Tramping Club in October 2013.



Rowan leading on Kachooong.

“Arapiles is NZ’s best multi-pitch trad climbing destination. 1200+ routes (1 – 33), bolt free (mostly), 1 to 4 pitch climbs, trad anchors, walk off / rap off, pretty good weather.”

Arapiles is actually in Australia and not alpine rock climbing at all. It is crag climbing. People camp five minutes’ walk away from the base of the crag. However it is all trad climbing, where you place your own gear as you lead, and there are over 1200 climbs! It is also multi-pitch – most routes are two or three pitches long. It is in my opinion the best place to learn trad climbing in Australia.

I went to the Arapiles in October 2010 and 2011. Before I went I had only done a small amount of trad climbing, although I had been sport

climbing since 2005. Araps is the best place to learn multi pitch trad. And it is cheap to go. We paid \$1000 each and took four days annual leave to go climbing for 6.5 days. We went late October and made use of Labour Day. There were four of us. We hired a flash car, stayed in a cabin in Natimuk (10 mins drive to the crag) and cooked dinner each night. You can go much cheaper. Camping is \$2 per night at Araps if you are keen! We worked out we paid \$25 per pitch of climbing! On the second trip we went to the Grampians for two days (about 2 hours’ drive away).

We bought heaps of trad gear along for the ride! Way too much actually. Mike was very much into gear, so in addition to the usual nuts, cams and



Simon on belay. *Jimmy*



Mike Dalzell – It's all about the gear.



"Chimney climbs are way more scary when you lead them!" - Simon.
Rowan



Simon belaying. *Jimmy*



The party: Simon, Rowan, Mike and Jimmy. *unknown*

hexes we had ball nuts, link cams and the big bro. Pictured is Mike wearing all the gear at once.. Not recommended for actual climbing. We also had RPs or micro nuts, which are required at Araps. The rock is very solid, even with a tiny nut placement.

Another tip, when going to Araps, bring your passport to get into Australia. One of our group forgot it! It was a disaster for him, lost him a day and \$800. (We didn't wait for him in Melbourne as was suggested!)

Araps is also all about building trad anchors, which you get to do every pitch! Most of the belays are on a ledge and there is plenty of gear. We did one or two climbs where we were on a hanging belay which was a lot of fun! In theory you are supposed to have a 3-point anchor system. However, some of the pro is so good, it doesn't really matter. I wouldn't recommend using the rope as an anchor however, as the rock is very abrasive. You also get pretty good at your systems. I normally bring up the second in guide mode as you can let go of the rope when they stop moving and take good photos.

So I am just going to talk about a few of the fun climbs that we did to give you an idea of what it is like. The grades at Arapiles are quite stiff at the low end. An 18 in NZ is the same as an 18 in Arapiles in my opinion, but the lower grades are much harder at Arapiles. Our first climb was a grade 11. It was pretty steep and exposed. Grade 14 climbs can be vertical with small overhanging sections! Part of the reason is historical ... when the first climbs were put up at Arapiles, the hardest climb in the world was maybe an 18. So even if a climb was hard, they didn't want to make it anywhere near 18 or they would cop some flak.

One climb we did early on, I can't remember the grade, had two pitches. The first pitch was really straight forward. The second was an awesome chimney, maybe grade 16. Chimney climbs are way more scary when you lead them!

While we were at the Arapiles we typically climbed routes with 3 or 2 stars. i.e. the absolute

classics. We didn't repeat anything, so if we had to take a rest or change gear, we weren't worried about trying to do it again clean. No one fell on gear which was cool.

Everyone has different limits. In our group of four Rowan was our guru. This (*photo, p13*) is him leading Kachoong. Kachoong is a single pitch grade 21. It is the most popular climb at Arapiles. It was awesome, but a little hard for me to lead. Maybe next time. Rowan led this climb and we seconded it. We all fell off it when seconding. We all had our excuses, like it was the end of a week of climbing and our hands hurt and it was hard seconding as we had to take the gear out! It would have been a stiff lead, but the gear is good!

I fully recommend going to the Arapiles if you want to lead trad climbing and multipitch. It really is NZ's best crag climbing destination.



Mike on a classic climb in the Arapiles. Rowan

4 ROLLESTON VIA THE ROME RIDGE

July 2011

First Tararua Tramping Club trip – harder than expected. A tricky climb of Mt Rolleston with Rob Hawes, Stu Hutson, Daniel Rogerson and Simon. This account, written by Simon for The Tararua Trampler (Vol.83, No. 7), is followed by Daniel's memory of the trip.



Mt Rolleston.

Simon's account

"Imagine," I said to my climbing partner, "if we just keep cruising up the ridge. It looks sweet, aye. Hang on, I'll just run over to the last rock buttress before 'the gap' and check it out."

This was in March 2011 and we had just walked up the Coral Track and along the first part of Rome Ridge to the ridge which joins with Avalanche Peak. Having set off from the carpark at the leisurely time of 11am, and having no technical gear, the continuation of the climb up Rome Ridge was unfortunately at the time, just a dream.

Fast forward to July 2011 and I'm standing at the base of the last rock buttress before 'the gap', same place and still imagining climbing the rest of Rome Ridge. This time it becomes a reality.

Rome Ridge was my first trip with the TTC since becoming a member in May. My climbing companions were Stu, who had climbed Rome Ridge before but was back with the lure of High Peak, Dan and Rob. The schedule for the Rome Ridge trip was something like this:

12:30am Finally get to bed in NZAC hut (Arthur's Pass) after working, flying, shopping, driving and packing.

2:47am My alarm goes off – a loud "Cock a doodle do."

3:40am We start walking up the Coral Track.

6:00am After charging up the hill we come to the first major rock buttress on the ridge. We decide to traverse left and drop to avoid it. After traversing some of it and seeing some alarmingly large cracks appearing in the snow above us as we load a snow slope we decide to head up to the gendarme instead. This makes for interesting mixed climbing with just enough snow and ice to make it difficult. Half way up and it's starting to get light.

7:30am At the top of the rock buttress there is debate whether to stay high on the ridge as I did in March or drop down and avoid the last rock buttress as Stu did last time. We decide to drop but after a while it becomes apparent that this will involve a lot of height loss and we decide to go back up again!

8:00am The climb up to the final rock buttress before 'the gap' looks much worse than last time when I climbed it on rock. We get a rope out and I offer to lead the pitch. It's maybe 15m high with no protection except almost at the top where I place a sling before climbing out of a cave via some nice under-clings. Climbing mixed is pretty new to me. It's pretty fun in a focused, run-out kind of way. I belay the others up. This pitch ended up being the crux of the ridge.

9:30am We are all on top of the last rock buttress and walk along, then start downclimbing it most of the way towards 'the gap' and rap off a sling and piton for the last 15m or so.



Simon leads the crux of the climb. *Daniel*

10:30am After rapping down to 'the gap' we drop 20m towards the Goldney Glacier on an easy snow slope and then traverse and regain the ridge. We find a piton here and I use it to belay up Dan.

11:30am Lunch time. We all feel we are making kind of slow progress due to the mixed conditions but Stu reassures us that we have got the hard stuff out of the way.

3:30pm Having spent the last few hours cruising up the ridge in poor snow conditions and loose rock we are finally getting close to the low peak. The weather has been excellent but alas winter days are short. We have to traverse from one ridge to another via a snow gully. We decide to pitch. It turns out the snow is well frozen here but given the poorly bonded snow we had encountered below this was a good call.

4:30pm We all arrive at Low Peak! Sweet, Rome Ridge done. Nice. A quick look west shows the

usual access route to High Peak via the Crow Glacier is out of condition with large crevasses. According to softrock.co.nz there is only 10% of the snow in Arthur's Pass for this time of year. High Peak via Middle Peak is theoretically an option but we are all keen to get off the mountain ASAP. Descent is down Goldney Ridge for a few hundred metres and then down 'the slide'. We set off at a frantic pace with the aim of getting to the top of 'the slide' before dark. We end up doing one abseil just above the Goldney Glacier. I head off around the corner and then climb back up to the col which is at the top of 'the slide'. Poor Rob later admitted to being somewhat dismayed when he saw me climbing up again so soon after an abseil. He thought we had dropped into the wrong place. But have faith Rob. It all works out. I see the top of 'the slide' just before dark.



Near the summit of the Low Peak.

6:00pm We downclimb the col and arrive at 'the slide'. The snow is waist high in a few places but generally OK.

7:00pm It's about this time that I start telling the others "It's only about 30 minutes to the top of the Otira Valley," and then one hour or so later, "It's only about 30 minutes to the track." The Otira Valley is slow going. The snow covered rock goes on and on and my claims are believed less and less as time wears us down. At 9:15pm we finally hit the track.

10:00pm We finally hit the road. Just a nice 3km walk along the highway back to the car to finish things off.

10:40pm We are back at the car and no one has broken in. Nice.

10:50pm The pub is closed so we head back to the lodge and cook dinner. It's been a 19 hour day on two hours sleep. Totally worth it though. It's been another great day in the hills!

Sunday was spent recovering and a few hours at Castle Hill doing some easy climbs and boulder problems with no boulder mat and no energy! Monday proved to be another excellent day weather wise. Rob and Dan made light work of Mt Philistine while I got on a bus to Hokitika and Stu took it easy. Thanks guys for making me feel welcome on my first trip. Plenty more to come!

Daniel's memory

I wanted to share a brief story from one trip I did with Simon back in July 2011 which I think demonstrates the kind of person he was.

I was 20 years old at the time and had been climbing for a few years. The objective was to climb Mt Rolleston via Rome Ridge, with Rob Hawes

and Stu Hutson as well. We arrived at Arthur's Pass at 12.30am after flying down from Wellington in the evening and driving a rental car to Arthur's Pass. After sleeping for 2 hours, we were up again and leaving the lodge to get to the start of the track.

The climb took much longer than expected. By 4:30pm we had reached low peak, but since it was so late we had to abandon our objective of getting to the top of high peak. I found the climb along Rome ridge quite terrifying. There was significant exposure and the conditions were pretty bad - new soft snow on top of loose rock. It was the hardest climb I had done so far. At one point, I knocked a rock about the size of a microwave loose, and I lost my nerve and called out to Simon to ask if he could lower a rope for me. He did, very quickly, and for the rest of the climb he reassured me in his steady, encouraging voice, that I would get through the climb OK. It made a world of difference to know that he had my back. We finished the climb late but I was so stoked to have finished it!

Simon was a much better climber than me, but I think this demonstrates that for him the whole experience was about making sure the team enjoyed the climb, which I am grateful for.



High views from Mt Rolleston.

November 2012

Walk in, walk out, with lots of snow and heavy packs. Lorraine and Simon join Rob Hawes's club trip to climb Mt Aspiring. Others in the party were Richard Davison, Steve Dowall, Stu Hutson, Nina Sawicki (teapot) and Lisa Wynne. Stu wrote this account for The Tararua Trumper (Vol. 84, No. 1). Then there's some pieces from Nina's NZAC trip account and a memory from Marta and Andrew Scott.

Stu's account

On the 4th November I flew down to Queenstown then caught the shuttle to Wanaka with Richard. We were the last to arrive for the climb of Mt Aspiring. After meeting at Rob's place we shopped and packed for the climb. At Raspberry Flat we all packed and finished our dinners, donned those heavy packs (7 days of food) and cruised to Aspiring Hut. It was snowing further up the valley. The weather was predicted to still be bad the next day, worsening.

We woke to Nina drinking tea. The day was cool but clear and it was decided to go up French Ridge as Bevan Col was expected to be avalanche prone. We took off early and headed for the ridge leading to French Ridge Hut. After crossing the river we headed up the ridge and dragged those heavy packs up over the roots, mud, rocks and eventually the snow. It was great to break the bush line and view up, down and across the valley. We pushed on through the soft snow and eventually made the French Ridge Hut. The bad weather had not arrived.

Later in the day a guide and client arrived from Mt Avalanche. They had been caught in an ava-

lanche. The client had saved the guide, - they were understandably somewhat subdued. On the radio that night, a couple of Aussies had said it took them 10 hours to get to Colin Todd Hut. Good grief the snow must be really bad!



Mt Aspiring viewed from Quarterdeck Pass.

The next day we left the hut and headed for the Bonar Glacier, via the Quarterdeck, 2140m. As we approached the deck we roped up for glacier travel and headed over the pass onto the Bonar. We made a straight line for the hut and on a fine day arrived at the hut within seven hours in total. We found that, with us, there were 19 people at the hut: us 8, the 2 Aussies and guided groups. Luckily Rob had told the guiding groups we were coming and they had set up tents outside the hut so that we could use the hut bunks. We were very thankful. Rob set up Simon's tent and slept there. Nina had got into a tea zone and was taking all tea offers.

Bad weather came in and the next day was a write off until later in the day. Rob and Simon put in a track to the bottom of the ramp. The guides had got the next day's weather via their sat phones and one decided to get his clients to bivvy at the top of the ramp while another group decided to camp at the Kangaroo. The radio schedule confirmed that the



A snack at Quarterdeck Pass, day 3.

next day was the go day and we all set to preparing for it. The weather was only going to be good until mid afternoon. There were going to be a lot of people on the mountain tomorrow. People pretended to sleep this night while Nina drank more tea.

The first group (Rob, Nina, Lorraine {sick} and Simon), had brekky, completed getting ready and left at 1:00am. The second group headed out at 2:00am (Lisa, Steve, Richard and Stu). As we headed for the Ramp we could see lights bobbing to and up the ramp. There was a bottleneck at the start of the Ramp as all groups all converged. Richard and I got our turn and we soon got into the rhythm of pitching. There were multiple lines going up the ramp, sometimes getting in each other's way.

After 8 pitches we were at the top of the ridge. Richard put the rope away and we joined the ascent. 19 people were at various stages to the summit, sometimes walking through soft snow, hard ice and rime. Rob and Nina reached the summit first (in our groups) and were treated to great views. We were not so lucky. We all pitched the last 60m. Ropes were everywhere and we were treated to clouds everywhere. The clouds rolled in big time and the wind started to rise, the bad weather had arrived 6 hours early. We only spent a small time at the summit (3033m).

Visibility got worse, the wind became stronger and it started to snow. We started to lose definition of where the big drops were. Richard and I roped up to make sure if one of us stepped into space that the other would arrest the fall. Everyone kept behind us as we pitched down. At times we couldn't see much of the rope and definitely not the end of it. Eventually we were at the top of the Ramp again and after some calling everyone was there. Rob and Nina missed all this fun owing to their summiting earlier.

The wind was blowing hard and we were getting cold so we jumped back onto the Ramp and started heading down. The Ramp sheltered us from the wind and we warmed up again. Richard and I sped down the Ramp. Due to the snowing and the drop in temperature the Ramp only spat at us occasionally with only a few chunks of ice bouncing off our helmets. We jumped off the Ramp and roped up again for glacier travel and headed through the clouds, following our morning footsteps back to the hut. After a couple of hours we were all back at the hut with big grins on our faces and a smiley face drawn in the snow. As each group came in

there was high-fives, hugs exchanged and lots of tea. (Yes please says Nina.)

The next day most people relaxed; Simon, Rob and Steve climbed Rolling Pin.



Rob, Steve and Simon climb Rolling Pin, day 6.

The day was the finest of the trip with great views everywhere. The radio that night told us that the weather was turning bad again and that we had better get off the mountain. So we all got up at 4:30 in the morning, and after brekky and packing, headed for Bevan Col. We sped across Bonar, over the col, and headed for the dreaded gut.

When we got there we saw it had been almost completely filled with snow. This allowed us to get down to the valley quickly. Thank goodness for that.



The 'Dreaded Gut' was filled with snow.

At the bottom we had a rest, ate, packed our climbing gear and headed for Aspiring Hut. Not long after that the rain started and by the time we got to the river crossing it was starting to pour. The river was still low so we all got across easily and we spent a few hours trudging through the heavy rain. We stopped at the Aspiring hut, for a break, a bite and more tea. (Yes please says Nina.)



Descent to Raspberry Flat.

We then completed the trip by walking back to Raspberry Flat and headed back to Wanaka. After a shower, we had a dinner to celebrate another great trip and Nina had swapped tea for a glass of wine. Thanks Rob for organising a great trip - everyone had a great time.

Nina's account

Eight climbers and a melee of alpine gear and food in varying states of disarray congregated in the garage of Rob's family bach in Wanaka on Saturday 4 November. There had been some recent heavy snow fall and so after numerous cups of tea and discussion we elected to add shovels, probes and transceivers to our already heavy packs. Steve had a minor trip on a slippery rock and bravely continued with a torn gastrocnemius muscle and never once did we hear him complain. Tears rolled down my cheek with the pack weight, and angel Lorraine kindly produced a pink coconut ice lolly. She has become a friend for life! Thanks so much to Rob for his exceptional leadership (and decision making) and all in the group who supported each other over the seven days.

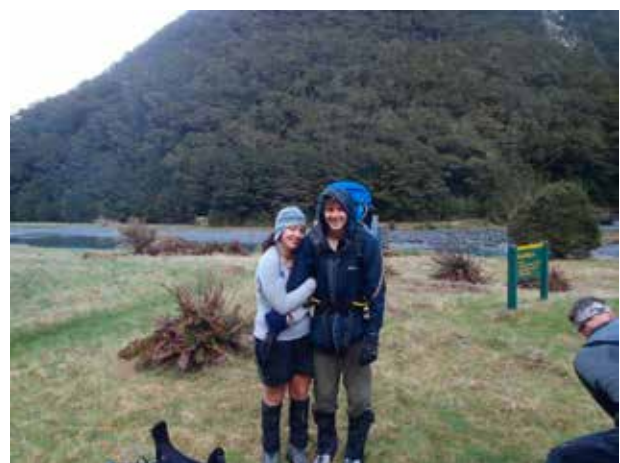
Marta and Andrew's memory

We met Simon in 2011 at Colin Todd hut. We'd walked in across the Bonar glacier in a total white out and through soft fresh snow trying to stay ahead of a group of eight that was also making their way to the hut. The next day we watched the group (which included Simon) make quick progress across the glacier and arrive at the small hut. We spent a few days in the overcrowded hut and sat out some miserable weather waiting for a clear day to climb Mt Aspiring. Aspiring is on the 100 peak list though we're not sure if Simon had begun his pursuit of those mountains.

We remember that Simon slept a lot in the hut, almost excessively but maybe being well rested was his secret to climbing well! He seemed to spring up as soon as it was time to climb. There was only one day suitable for the climb of Aspiring which meant that 19 people summited on the same day!

Simon was climbing with Lorraine and we seemed to climb near them for most of the day. The weather turned earlier than predicted and it started snowing before we got to the summit. Surprisingly, no one wanted to turn around even if it meant that we got no view from the summit. The visibility was terrible on the descent and we were glad to have other people around with people yelling out trying to locate the top of the ramp.

We kept in touch with Lorraine and Simon after this trip to do some climbs or get trip information. We were amazed with the climbs that Simon did over the years and how natural he was in the mountains. Simon was always cheerful and had a spring in his stride when we bumped into him in the hills. It was clear that he belonged in the mountains.



Lorraine and Simon – "We made it!" unknown

November 2011

Stormy weather but sweet success. Rob Hawes (leader), Steve Dowall, Richard Davison, David Grainger, Stu Hutson, Matt Knarston, Mike Pryjma and Simon on a joint NZAC/TTC club trip to climb Mt Cook. Stu's NZAC presentation advertisement introduces the trip and Simon's presentation notes to Transpower tell of the climb. Rob's amusing story finishes the chapter.

Mount Cook Madness (Stu)

The Wellington eight fly into Plateau Hut on a very windy day with the goal of climbing Mt Cook. The eight have 10 days on the Plateau and sit through storm after storm. Avalanches tumble and rumble off the Divide onto the Plateau. Every night the eight listen to the radio hoping for their chance. Come and see what the eight got up too. Stu Hutson will reveal all.

Climbing Mt Cook (Simon)



"This is the view of Mt Cook most people get to see." - Simon

This is the view of Mt Cook that most people get to see. I was lucky enough to climb Mt Cook this November and this presentation will give you a feel for the trip and what's involved.

Mug shot photo. Eight men, all from Wellington but one. Average age - maybe 40?

Where is Mt Cook? Height is 3754m. It's NZ's highest mountain. In the South Island! Near Mt Cook Village which is also close to Fox Glacier as the crow flies. Mt Cook has a High Peak, Middle Peak and Low Peak. It is a huge mountain. This photo of the High and Middle Peak was taken from

Plateau Hut. Look around the Grand Plateau. You can see Mts Silberhorn, Tasman and Lendenfeld. Look around some more and you can see Dixon.

It was a 10 day trip and we flew in by helicopter for \$175 and walked out. This way we could bring excellent food, bury meat in the snow and bring in some fruit and veges. Plateau Hut has 33 bunks in 3 different bunk rooms. It's huge and \$15 a night for NZAC members. It has a radio so you can get the weather forecast every night at 8pm.

The Haast Hut is the old hut not used much anymore or at all but the radio still works. Broken windows and full of snow. Only one hour from Plateau Hut but access is tricky! People have died trying to get to Haast Hut.

Which route to climb? Mt Cook is a huge mountain and there's probably over 50 different routes to climb it. In mountaineering, it is not about getting to the summit but about climbing an awesome, technically challenging and/or beautiful route or line. This is a strange concept for non-mountaineers who often wonder why if you have been up one way you would want to climb again via a harder route. A classic example, people ask me if I want to climb Everest. Answer is no because it is not technically interesting. If Everest was the same height as Cook it would be a much easier climb than Cook. The challenges of Everest are no oxygen, it's very very cold and very expensive (\$80k).

From Plateau Hut common climbs are Linda Glacier (guide's route), Zurbriggen Ridge, East Ridge and traverse, also East Face. There are also some difficult rock routes up Zurbriggen and Bowie Ridges which look awesome. This time we planned to climb the Linda Glacier route to ensure we all got up, then maybe to try different routes if the weather allowed. The weather is poor in spring!

The Linda route involves high objective danger, i.e. ice fall. Otherwise it's reasonably straightforward



Back: Mike, Steve, Rob, Dave. Front: Richard, Matt, Stu, Simon.



View from Plateau Hut across Grand Plateau to Mt Cook.



Map of the climb.



At the summit rocks.



Nearing the summit.



View from the top.

and only requires a bit of pitching. Guides take clients on a short rope for most of it. The afternoon before climbing the Linda route you need to put in a track otherwise you won't get through the maze of crevasses in the dark!

Summit Day The summit day starts at midnight. It's hard to get much sleep when you've listened to the forecast at 8pm to decide if the weather is good enough to climb. Depart hut 1am.

First photo of the climb is at Summit Rocks. When we got there it was -9 degrees. Prior to this it was much colder, maybe -12 or -15 degrees? Water was freezing and it was very hard to keep hands and feet warm. I wore a down jacket for a few hours. First time I've done that!

Summit Rocks was the first and only real bottle neck. There were 17 people climbing the mountain that day. Us eight, a solo guy who was crazy and lucky not to kill himself, and some guided parties. Two of the parties camped half way up the Linda Glacier so they could sleep in. Summit Rocks was the first place where we roped up except for glacier travel. Nice views as the sun came up and cleared the fog. After the Summit Rocks it was quite straight forward again.



A selfie from Summit Rocks.

The summit is very close now but walking is quite slow because of altitude. You get short of breath.

Arrive at the summit and see another one! We are on the summit 'Chandelier'. The true one is just over there. But it is very corniced. If you stand on the top of that it will break off! The summit used to be 10m higher but it fell off in 1991. Not many people go over to the summit plus it is tapu. Nice views. You can see Tasman Glacier and for miles.

Cannot easily spin around 360 because I would fall off!

Getting to the top is only half of the story! It is more dangerous on the way down because of the sun making the snow soft. Much more likely to get avalanches or ice fall. Also you are more tired so more likely to get into trouble.

We had lunch just before the Summit Rocks at around 11am. We abseiled off the Summit Rocks and beyond. Some of the stuff we climbed up with no rope was more difficult to climb down. We left some slings behind. There are also fixed wire cables here because this climb is so popular.

'Easy' traversing is actually a bit difficult in the soft snow. And you don't want to fall over the ice cliffs! Speaking of ice cliffs, twice these released and hurled debris over our tracks. This was while people were walking down. If you got hit by a big block of ice it would kill you. If you hear ice fall, run!



Back after a 15 hour day and we party! *unknown*

Summary

Everyone climbed Cook.

Four hut days.

Some days so windy we couldn't walk to the toilet without holding the rope.

Played lots of cards.

Spent a day climbing Anzac peaks.

Three of us also climbed Dixon.

Three of us visited Haast Hut.

We all walked out in about 10 hours.

Mt Cook is not the hardest mountain to climb in NZ, just the highest. I've climbed harder routes on other peaks. Cook was a good one to tick off though.

Great trip. Back next year to climb more routes and to get Tasman!

The Food Box at Plateau Hut (Rob)

All of the high alpine huts have what is called hut food, and it always lives in a box (usually a banana box) labeled 'Hut Food' on the floor. With no pests like rats/mice etc in the snow at 2000m+ the food creates no problem in the hut.

The food accumulates when people, often guided parties, fly into a hut and plan to stay say 5 – 7 days. They do some climbing and then after 4 or 5 days the weather may be due to turn bad, or they might have climbed what they wanted so they decide to walk out. They will leave any food that won't go off (pasta/soups/porridge/tea/coffee/noodles/rice etc) as they look to lighten their packs for a long walk out. Due to this food always being there Simon and I had got into the habit of taking say 4 days food for a 6 day trip knowing that we could rely on the hut food. Sometimes with a little imagination for our menu I would have to add, but we never starved!

So one day, Steve, Simon and I and a few others were in Plateau Hut in the Mt Cook NP late in our trip. We became stuck for two or three days due to the weather so we prepared to sit tight, read, chat, sleep and eat. Steve and I still had food we had taken but Simon must have taken less as he was out of food so it was time for 'hut food' to make up Simon's menu.

Neither Steve nor I can recall which meal started this off, as we did not realize what was going to follow, but let's say it was breakfast. Plateau Hut has 3 big long tables (it's a big hut) and in fact often has two hut food boxes.

Simon announces its time for breakfast and extracts both food boxes and tips them out on to one of the tables, Steve & I watch on. Simon diligently spreads all the food out down the table so he may examine it all and select something nice. As far as hut food goes 'nice' probably means 'acceptable'.

Simon proceeds to work his way down the table announcing his verdict on each piece of food. It goes something like this – "No good – rubbish - that's bad – crap - can't eat that - that's rubbish," etc etc then "Hey that's OK. That will do me."

In fact after this examination Simon tells us that there was only one good thing in the boxes and now Simon had it and he was happy and soon to be fed. Life was good. All of the remaining food which remember was no good, rubbish and crap etc was loaded back in to the boxes and deposited onto the floor where it lived. At this point Simon's life was good, and the next few hours passed happily.

Well of course about four hours later, it was lunch time, Steve and I happily prepared our lunch from the food we had ... and yes Simon was back to where he was four hours earlier. So out came the food boxes. Steve and I again watch, this time with a slightly heightened level of interest in how this will play out as remember there was only one good thing in the boxes and that was eaten four hours ago!

Simon tips the boxes out on the same table, again he diligently spreads all the food out down the table so he may again examine it all and again select something nice. Simon proceeds again to work his way down the table using the same selection criteria based on: "No good – rubbish - that's bad – crap - can't eat that - that's rubbish," etc etc and suddenly, "Hey that's OK, I must have missed that earlier."

Simon now has lunch and again life is good. Well a little later in the afternoon, not yet dinner time but as often happens when climbers are 'hut bound' and it's cold, blowing and snowing outside, eating seems to bring relief and happiness, so it was time to eat something ... and yes Steve and I had our food and it was time to make our snack, but as we prepared our snack we now had a high level of interest and anticipation to watch Simon's efforts to extract something 'nice' from the hut boxes.

Out came the boxes and they are again tipped onto the same table. Steve and I now stop what we are doing. We have to see this. The contents again are diligently spread down the table, and the same examination takes place using yet again the same selection criteria and the same words are muttered: "No good – rubbish - that's bad – crap - can't eat that - that's rubbish," etc etc and blow Steve and I down we hear Simon say, "Hey that's OK, that will do me."

No way think Steve and I. Three times in the box and three good things. What's the chance of that?

A few hours later it is now dinner time, and Steve and I do not only have a high level of interest, we are now looking forward to watching this process all over again. There can't be 'something good' in the boxes again can there? So by now you have the picture.

On reflection Steve and I cannot recall exactly how many meals this went on for, but each time Simon found some 'nice' food in the boxes and was

happy. Steve and I massively enjoyed the process and looked forward to it each time Simon needed to find food, and of course we all realized that really what was happening was Simon's level of expectation was simply dropping to lower levels. What would have happened if we had been stuck there a few more days would have been most entertaining but the weather broke and we walked out to Mt Cook village. It was a very funny time that we all laughed about back at the village. Steve and I still very fondly remember Simon and food boxes.



Rob and Si get up to tricks. *unknown*

December 2011

Lots of peaks and an awesome week. Rob Hawes leads a party of six climbing from Pioneer Hut, high above Fox Glacier in Westland National Park. Other members are Michael Archer, Tony Ruzek, Lisa Wynne, Mark Yeo, and Simon. This is Simon's account written for The Tararua Trampler (Vol. 84, No. 6).



Sunrise on Haidinger with Mt Tasman behind, day 1.

Day 1 (3 Dec) Saturday. We first met at NZAC hut in Fox Glacier Township. Rob, Mark, Michael and myself had come over from Wellington on the ferry on Friday night and spent the night in Murchison, while Lisa and Tony had both independently made their way to the West Coast. Our plan, to fly in straightaway, was sidelined by the ominous clag which had started to gather around the Fox Glacier. The first helicopter trip made it half way up the glacier before turning back. Grounded! My mind returned to the long breakfast we had in Greymouth and I wonder if this stopped us from making it to Pioneer Hut today. We spent the day lounging around in the NZAC hut.

Day 2 Sunday. We fly in and make tracks to the base of Haidinger. Forecast for the week is looking pretty good.

Day 3 Monday. We all climbed Haidinger via the West Ridge (grade 3). Things went smoothly on the way up. From hut to summit in just over 4 hours, despite poor visibility and covering steep and exposed ground. We took one pitch to get up the final snow/ice gully and had a bite to eat on the summit.

The fun began when we rapped off. We got the double ropes stuck. I climbed up to sort them but when I rapped down they were stuck again! Rob climbed up again and changed anchor. The lesson

here being that we had used existing slings, which, while looking to be in great condition, were too tight and wouldn't let the rope be pulled through at all. In the meantime, the others were standing around on steep ground in the shade getting cold! After this, the ground that we had more or less happily climbed up looked very steep and we did some further raps, with the more confident members taking the snow stakes out and downclimbing. The terrain eased off eventually and after a lot of downclimbing we arrived at the base of the mountain in time for a late lunch and an easy walk back to Pioneer Hut.

Day 4 Tuesday. The weather looked average due to the westerly system of high winds. The others eventually decided on a half day trip to Halcombe (North Couloir, 3-), which should be reasonably sheltered. I decided, based on the weather, they wouldn't make it and stayed in the hut. To my dismay they returned several hours later having succeeded although they didn't quite top out properly due to being blasted by high winds when they hit the summit ridge.

Day 5 Wednesday was also a bad weather day and I wished I'd ventured out to climb Halcombe with the others on Tuesday!

Day 6 Thursday. Glacier Peak (grade 2+) looked very steep when we approached it in the dawn. Rob



Pioneer Hut – inside shot.



High on the tops of Haidinger.



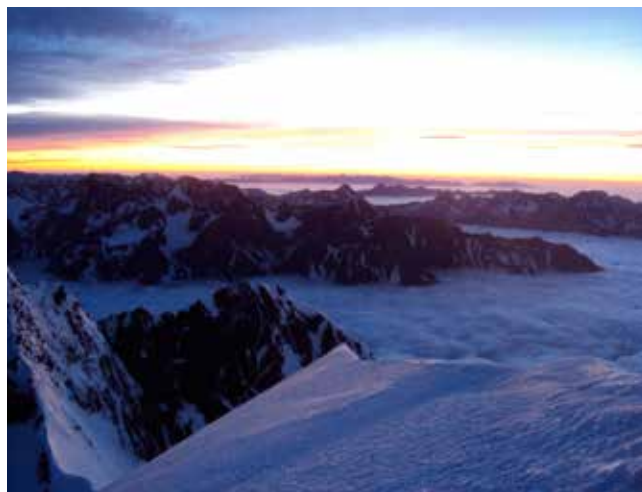
Glacier Peak just before the rock step, Day 6.



Rob and Lisa off to have a play on Haast, Day 7.



Tasman North Shoulder at first light, Day 8.



Dawn from Engineer Col, Day 8.

assured us that it would look less steep once we got closer. Fortunately, he was right and we had no real issues climbing to the summit. The terrain didn't require pitching and the crevasses were huge but easy to avoid. Douglas looked quite imposing from Glacier Peak, and we were only climbing the 'descent route'! (Still a Grade 3-!) The only serious obstacle was a 30m rock step, which we pitched. The snow ridge after this was straightforward but exposed. On the summit we stuck our head down to look at the South Face in horror. (I was told at the hut that the grade 5 ice routes were in great condition!)

Day 7 Friday was only ever meant to be a half day. Rob, Lisa and myself headed off to 'have a play' on Haast with the vague idea of getting to West Peak (3065m). The others decided to spend Friday resting in preparation for an ascent of Tasman the following day.

We were at the start of our chosen route (Route 14.53, grade 3) just on daybreak. The climb is up a steep snow couloir which later links into the West Ridge proper and the fun rock section begins. The ridge was mostly rock scrambling although we did two shortish pitches to get up a slab and later a difficult one move wonder. We found a flat section maybe 100m from West Peak, had lunch and decided to call it a day.

As we hadn't topped out on West Peak (the common descent route), we rapped down part of the route then rapped off the west of the mountain onto steep snow. We eventually arrived back at the hut around 6pm after 12 hours on the go. So, yes Rob, technically a half-day still! Not quite a success summit wise but a great day out nevertheless and we felt we had completed the crux of the climb. Only a complete traverse of Haast would confirm this – anyone keen next year?

Day 8 (10 Dec) Saturday. This was it! Last climbing day and we left Tasman till the end. Owing to the 'half-day' Haast experience, a late-ish dinner and our early start (midnight) I ended up with a total of 2 hours 'bed time' before getting ready for the super summit.

We had heard the conditions on Tasman were not great due to a huge chunk of the North Shoulder of Tasman having fallen out a few weeks prior, leaving behind rock and a steep ice cliff. We had also seen a party successfully climb Tasman the day before, but still being high on Lendenfeld around

8pm. The freezing level was above 3000m. We didn't let any of this worry us and headed off in the slush towards Haast corner at a cracking pace.

We successfully climbed Lendenfeld (grade 2) and headed down to Engineer Col to inspect the North Shoulder. It was barely light, but already the shoulder looked imposing. We decided to wait 15 minutes until it was lighter to get a better look. We were still not too happy with what we saw and after a vote with only 3 in favour of continuing we made a relaxed retreat and snapped some amazing pictures of the dawn. Back at Marcel Col we contemplated climbing to the high peak of Haast (only 150m vertical distant to the summit) but decided to cut our losses and headed back.

In hindsight, the decision to turn around from Tasman was the right one. During the descent we bumped into the party who had climbed Tasman the day before and tented below Engineer Col. They had run into problems with the high freezing level and had to pitch most of the way down Tasman, despite having climbed up most of it solo in the morning.

We returned to Pioneer Hut around 8am, flew out just after 10am, had a shower courtesy of NZAC hut in Fox, drove to Picton, caught a late ferry and were back in Wellington by 1:30am! While lying in bed, I tried to imagine what would have happened if we had decided to carry on. Would we still be on the mountain now, at 1:30am? Given the progress of the other party, almost certainly! I was happy to lie in my bed in Wellington and recall the awesome climbing week, without having a final epic. Save that for next time!

Thanks so much for organising the trip Rob. Looking forward to the GTTT trip this year.



View from Pioneer Hut steps.

December 2011

Thoughts on mountain safety. Simon gave a presentation to Transpower about his recent climb of Aoraki/Mt Cook and included at their request this discussion on safety. He illustrated it with the photos shown.

Safety in the mountains is no joke! It often comes down to judgement and experience. Consider the following questions:

1. Should this man be using a rope? (Solid rock but huge exposure, a fall probably fatal). We were happy to solo this unroped. (See opposite page).

2. Should this woman be climbing unroped? Solid 55-60 degree snow with ice crust but huge exposure, fall probably fatal. Everyone 'reasonably' happy to solo this. (See opposite page).

3. Mt Dixon with Rob Hawes using a rope. But what happens if he falls? Still could fall 100m or more. Will get bashed up on rocks. Probably will need a helicopter out.



3. Rob Hawes on Mt Dixon.

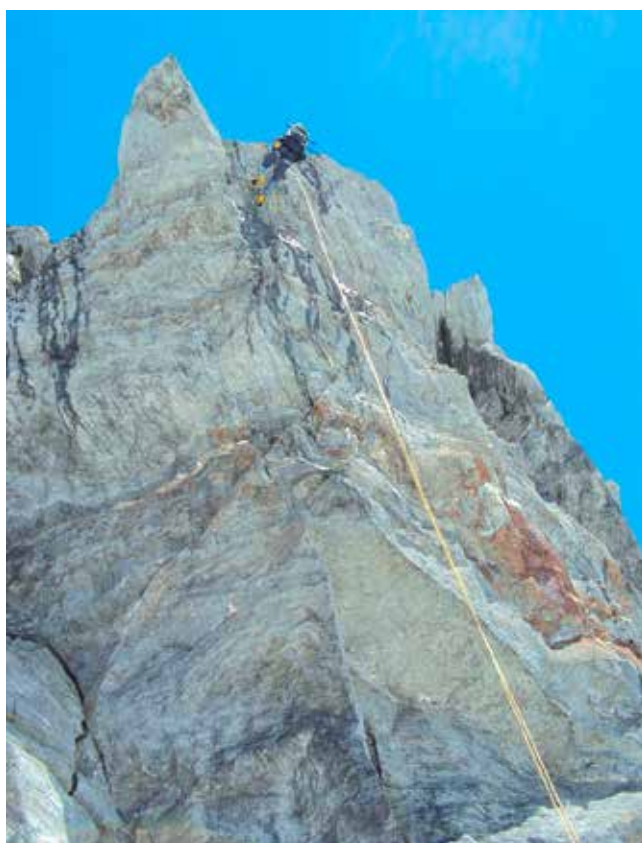
4. This is me rock climbing in Australia in October. I've placed gear. But still a long way to fall and will the gear hold. Did I place it right? You need to have confidence in your climbing skill as well as your ability to make solid gear placements. You also need confidence in your climbing partner. (See opposite page).

5. This is a large crevasse in the Southern Alps. Would you cross it in the late afternoon? What happens if the bridge collapses?



5. A big crevasse in the Southern Alps.

6. Abseiling – did you make solid anchors? If not, it is a long way down! Would you trust someone else to make the anchor or would you double check?



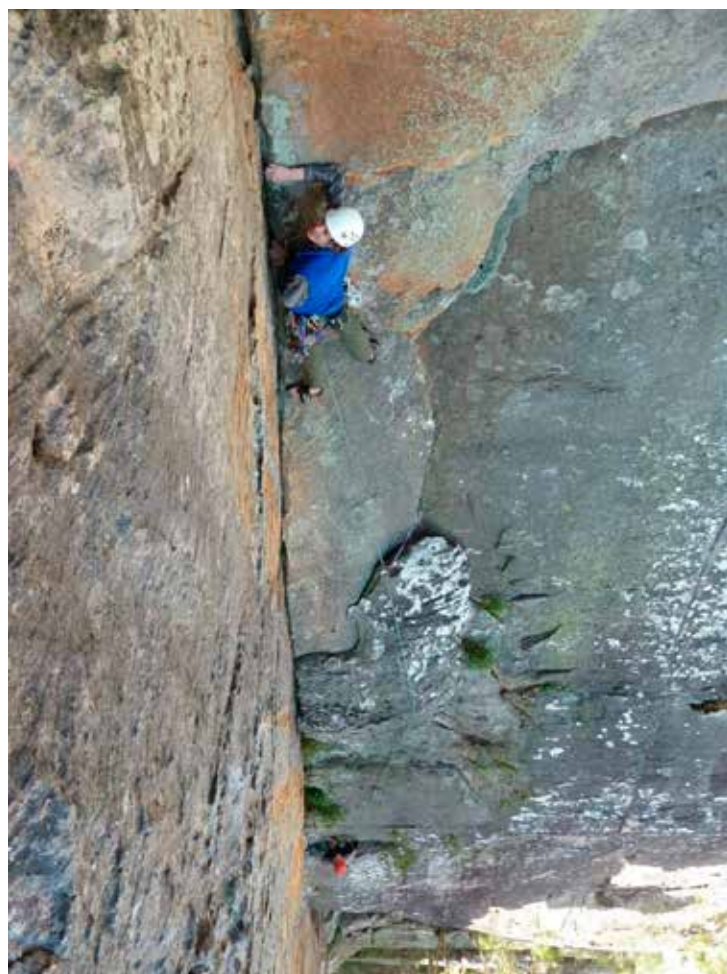
6. Simon abseiling on climb of Rolling Pin.



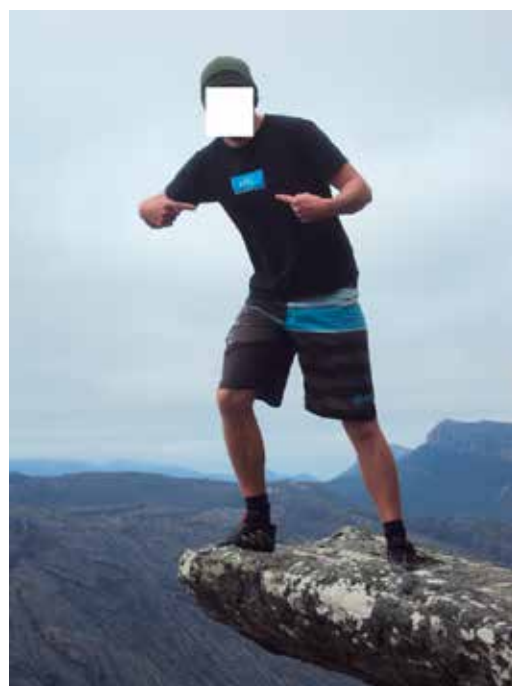
1. Rob Hawes on Mt Haast.



2. Lisa Wynne on Mt Haidinger.



4. Simon rock climbing in Australia.



A Transpower work colleague!

February 2012

A glorious account of a victorious trip. Lorraine Johns, Nina Sawicki and Simon tackle the Fairie Queene in the St James Conservation Area near Lewis Pass. Written by Lorraine for Vertigo (No. 748).



The Fairie Queene. Lorraine

To celebrate Waitangi Day this year, Nina, Lorraine and Simon decided to launch a covert mission to conquer the crowning glory of the Spencer Mountains, 'the Faerie Queene' (named after Britain's Queen Elizabeth I, or more precisely, named after a 16th century poem by Edmund Spenser, written in her honour).

On the way to the road end, plotting over pies and hot chocolate at the Culverden Bakery, I warned my fellow adventurers that, in the mystical realm of the Faerie Queene, there would be no cute elves, singing pixies and laughing unicorns. Little did we know, however, that we would encounter an evil host of treacherous vampires (also known as sandflies) and terrifying creatures with sharp pincers (also known as spiders), which guard the Queene's flanks in summer.

Inconspicuous, with helmets, ice axes and crampons dangling from our packs, we slunk down the St James Walkway to Camera Gully Gorge. Once there, like in a game of chess, we would commence a series of strategic manoeuvres to take out the Queene.

For those who cross Waiau Pass or wander the Saint James, the Fairie Queene dominates the

landscape in Lewis Pass, sprawling the length of the valley as it opens up nearing the Waiau River. However, once we were opposite the entrance to Camera Gully Gorge, all we could see were some rather hostile looking bluffs. A closer examination of the map confirmed that the best option for a high camp was right where we were standing, despite difficulty in finding a single spot which was not host to a spider's nest. As the area was swarming with the Queene's spies, we retreated early to the 'safety' of our tent, trying not to think too hard about everything else that had retreated with us.

We were up and off in the dark, still being chased by creatures set on extracting our blood from our bodies. The first challenge of the climb was to gain safe ground above an eight metre waterfall. Here, the top secret mission planning document we were using (also known as a guidebook), suggests that you bypass the waterfall on the true left of the river. Of course, going up on the true left would have been what the Queene was expecting. Cunningly, we went up on the true right. After a sidle on some grade 14 grass (aye, there is such a thing), Nina and I declared we would rather climb up the waterfall than retrace our steps, so it was on

the true right we continued, emerging well above the river and the route.

The next challenge was to interpret the guide book's directions, which commanded us to strike out above a tarn and gain a ridge south of Gloriana. There was a slight hitch in that the ridge south of Gloriana leads you to ... well Gloriana. Not Fairie Queene. The only tarn in existence also led to Gloriana. We could have been confused, but we knew this was all part of the Fairie Queene's mischievous plan to mislead us.

Following our noses, we continued north, as the river disappeared under our feet below a towering mound of scree. At this point, the Queene woke to the realisation that her outermost defences had been breached. Suddenly, cloud began to roll in. At the same that Nina and Simon speculated, "This doesn't look ominous," I exclaimed, "This looks ominous!"

We then lost visibility for the climb, at the same time as discovering that the Queene suffers from serious choss outbreaks in summer. We followed Simon through the crux of the climb, which turned out to be the 200m just below the summit ridge. The rock wasn't too bad, but it wasn't too great either, and visibility was down to 20m, which did not help with assessing the best line. We were wondering if the Queene was going to turn out to be a bit shabby, in her summer garb. Once on the ridge, it was checkmate for the Queene. Despite a deep, narrow, rock crevasse (the words 'nasty rash' came to mind), and a tiny, almost cheval-like section, the rocky kilometre long ridge was a straightforward pleasure to traverse.

However, the Fairie Queene did have one final trick up her royal robe. Upon reaching a pole we thought marked the summit, and dropping our packs, Simon pointed out that he could see another pole on a rocky outcrop that looked slightly higher. Dutifully, we continued on. A little to our surprise, despite the grade of Fairie Queene, there was something bordering on a grade 10 rock step leading to the true summit. We noticed someone had left gear for an abseil. On the summit, some little sort of geodactic trig, complete with graffiti, persisted. It looked like the Queene had lost her temper with its predecessor, which was smeared over various rocks.

Despite the limited visibility we got at the trig, the weather had cleared in some directions.

It was a stunning place. The gnarly ridge leading along the Spencer Mountains is striking. The wide Saint James valley is picturesque. But most of all, I appreciated the view into the Matakitaiki, with shining little tarns; the gleam of a larger lake; large tussock benches with sweeping rock slabs above; and mountains looming through cloud everywhere, black and white and jagged. I think Fairie Queene would be a dream to ascend from this side, with a high camp based near one of the many tarns.

Soon, however, it was time to head down. This was largely due to the plague of sandflies that had congregated on our sweaty packs at over 2000m, while we were detouring to the real summit. As everything else was tucked away under clothes and gear, they had reached a new low of feasting on our faces. Perhaps, sufficiently appeased by the delight we displayed on summiting, the Fairie Queene permitted us an uneventful and quick descent, despite some rain. The scree crux hadn't really improved since we last saw it, and we were grateful to Simon who picked a safe route down.

We had ditched the ice axes and crampons the previous day, but it turned out that there were still a few very deep, compact basins, that were impassable for our group without gear. Thus did we ultimately end up grovelling between a rock and a hard place (a shrund, hugged by steep, loose choss), using some pointy rocks as ice axes to downclimb the last ten metres of snow to easy ground. This time we took the true left of the waterfall, a route plagued by speargrass. Nina then, queen-like, commanded a sleep in, after we consumed her delicious dinner.

We eventually woke the next morning to discover little red welts all over our legs. The Queene's vicious little vampire army had bitten us a multitude of times through trousers and whatever else we were wearing. The head to toe insect repellent I had been wearing seemed to do little more than season me to taste. Perhaps the Fairie Queene had also detected my irreverence for her beloved Spencer, as I managed to get bitten by a spider that crawled down my gaiter during the walk out – turns out that I am allergic to spiders.

However, the feeling of being under siege (and in pain) soon passed, as we were already daydreaming about visiting a snowy Gloriana and conceiving other grand adventures in the spectacular Spencer Mountains.

February 2012

Some great rock climbing and a real adventure. Vaughan Snowden and Simon climb Mt Tutoko in Fiordland National Park. This is the presentation Simon gave to the NZ Alpine Club in Wellington.

Tutoko (2723m) is the highest peak in Fiordland National Park. The South East Ridge is widely considered to be one of New Zealand's finest alpine routes.

Slide 1

- Hi everyone, thanks for coming along. This presentation is about climbing the SE ridge of Tutoko with my friend Vaughan, who is also an NZAC member and lives in Christchurch.
- Just a bit of background about me. Last February I completed the excellent high alpine skills course, which we will hear about in one of the coming presentations. I spent a week in October last year trad climbing at Arapiles in Victoria, Australia and about one month climbing in Aspiring NP, MCNP and Westland NP in Nov and Dec.
- Tutoko is a great mountain as it requires a huge range of mountaineering skills and I used all the snow and rock skills I learnt last year.

Slide 2

- This slide shows where Tutoko is in relation to Milford Sound. Homer Hut is down here. Homer Hut is about 20 minutes away by car.
- We chose to fly into Tutoko to save a 1.5 day walk in and to ensure that we didn't miss our weather window. We got dropped off in Milford on a Sunday morning. Ten minutes later we realised we had left a pair of crampons at Homer Hut and nearly had to call the trip off! It's a long story but eventually we found someone who was willing to lend us some crampons so we were on our way!

Slide 3 Day 1

- At around 2:15 we finally took off. I think the helicopter pilot was glad to get rid of us, after

we had spent most of the day sifting around the base, swatting sandflies.

Slide 4

- It is a very short flight in and before you know it, we were on snow. We were a bit lucky, as the pilot had landed us 300m or so higher than Turners Biv which is the designated landing area. This somewhat made up for the time lost trying to get crampons!
- Vaughan had been to this area, having climbed the neighbouring peak Madeline a few years ago. I'd briefly looked at the route description and the map but wasn't really prepared for what I saw when I turned around...

Slide 5

- Tutoko looked massive and the rock steps looked narly! We planned to get to the col at the start of the SE ridge you can just see in the right of the picture.

Slide 6

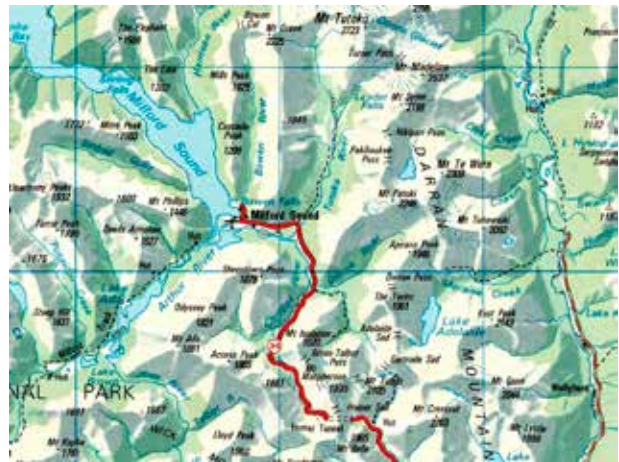
- This map should make things clearer. We landed at the start of the orange line just above 1900m and ended up at point 2139m. This is only 240m height gain but still took about 5 hours.
- The route description talked about going to Turner Pass but we decided to take a shortcut and bypass some of the ridge. Without giving too much away, the black line shows what we did on summit day and the blue line shows what we did on the following day.

Slide 7

- This slide shows us high up on the Age Glacier and looking towards pt 2139m. We headed more or less straight ahead and climbed the rock



Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3



Slide 4



Slide 5



Slide 6



Slide 7



Slide 8

in the middle of the screen, then up some snow and on to the ridge.

- The rock was about grade 14 but was a bit awkward and mossy at times with sparse protection. We did find some abseil slings indicating that this route has been used before.
- We traversed along the skyline ridge to pt 2139m.
- We had originally intended to rap off pt 2139m and bivvy on the snow at the col. However at the top of 2139m we found this.

Slide 8

- We were stoked to find this bivvy rock. It looked like it had had quite a bit of use, and someone had even left a sleeping bag there (which was now completely rotten).
- There was no water at this altitude and we had to walk a few minutes to collect some snow and melt this using the Jetboil.
- We had decided to travel 'fast and light' meaning that our dinners were Backcountry, our breakfasts were One Square Meals and our lunches were crackers and cheese.
- Vaughan had a $\frac{3}{4}$ mattress so used the rope to keep his legs off the dirt.
- I had a 4 L pack which was JUST big enough to carry everything if I wore my harness and carried my map bag.

Slide 9 Day 2

- When we got up, we were treated to this view.
- Our first concern for the day was the 30m abseil onto the col.
- We were happy with the abseil but not sure how to climb back up again!
- Eventually we left some slings which we could use to 'Aid' the climb if needed.

Slide 10

- The SE ridge was three rock steps. Each step involves one or two pitches. The crux is around grade 14 and the rock is solid!
- It is very difficult to take good pictures on the crux moves with only two climbers. I tried putting my belay device in 'Reverso' mode but it won't lock properly with the 7.8m half rope we had.

- Also, we only had one camera (mine) and I'm not really a photo person – this is probably the best rock 'climbing' photo I took on the trip!

Slide 11

- In between the rock steps there is a easy rock ridge to follow.
- Madeline is in the background.
- We got dropped off from the helicopter about here.

Slide 12

- This slide shows the bivvy rock where we had just spent the night.

Slide 13

- Once we passed the three rock steps we were onto the snow!
- In the photo you can see pt 2608m and the summit which is 2723m.
- The first section up to pt 2608m is quite steep and exposed.

Slide 14

- When we got towards pt 2608m we started to get some great views! We are looking into the Hollyford Valley.

Slide 15

- We got to the top of pt 2608m and got our first views of the summit.
- We also saw a huge schrund which we abseiled over. We used some very new looking abseil tat which was in the rocks ahead.
- The final summit was relatively straightforward although we did use two tools and had to sidle around a couple of crevasses.
- We had some debate as to exactly where the true summit is but eventually decided it was to the right of this picture.

Slide 16

- The final summit is on rock which is very straightforward.



Slide 9



Slide 10



Slide 11



Slide 12



Slide 13



Slide 14



Slide 15



Slide 16

Slide 17

- This is Vaughan looking out north.
- The 'neve' is about 1000m below us I think and the valley floor is about 2200 m below us.

Slide 18

- This is me! With Lake Iceberg in the background and the Hollyford Track is in the valley.
- The weather deteriorated for a period and it started snowing just as we left the summit.
- Despite this, we had an uneventful return to the bivvy site and got there just before dark (around 13 hour day). We did nine 30m abseils on half-rope.

Slide 19 Day 3

- Day 3 ended up being an even longer day than summit day!
- We started with a few abseils and snow crossings, with the aim of getting back to the place where we were dropped by helicopter.
- When we got closer to the rock slabs we decided to try and sidle these instead to save some height gain. This is pretty much what the route description says, although it is a bit vague and hard to follow, especially in reverse. We had also studied the route from the bivvy rock.
- Crossing the slabs was at first straightforward but slow, as we also had to cross patches of snow and put on crampons for this.

Slide 20

- Eventually we got onto the glacier and had to downclimb some steep blue ice, using two tools. We dropped a bit of height and abseiled off a V-thread.

Slide 21

- The rock slab on the other side of the glacier was even worse!
- We downclimbed steep slabs in the hope that it would end well!

Slide 22

- Eventually we got bluffed out!
- We were obviously off route but we really didn't want to climb to the top of the slab and sidle around the glacier!
- It took a while to find anything to attach a sling to. Once we had done this, we rapp'd off, slightly into the unknown!

Slide 23

- I'd say we were 95% sure we would get down in one 30m rap, but couldn't tell till we went over the edge! I had a piton handy just in case!
- After this we got to one of the rock bivvies that make 'Turners Biv' – we were probably 100m or more below the main one, which we didn't visit.
- We picked up a cairned route and headed off down the valley. Still difficult and involved another rap off slabs and the final set of slabs involved a nervous downclimb, especially the last 3 or 4m which steeped up a bit! Not recommended in rain!
- We then walked down Leader Creek for a bit, found another large rock bivvy and then a track.

Slide 24

- We quickly bashed through the track and then followed a dry stream before coming to the main Tutoko River!
- I'm still wearing my harness and helmet which Vaughan thought was quite funny. Actually I didn't really have any room in my pack so I wore the harness for the next couple of hours until we got to the road end.
- We then had a final 25 minute walk along the highway to Milford Sound where we were hoping for a bed in the hostel! They were full up and offered us a camp site. We accepted (for the showers!) and bivvied out once more. I was woken at 3am by a possum trying to get into my pack!
- What a trip. Couldn't have hoped for much more on my first trip to the Darrans.

I'll be back next year for Sabre. Thanks for listening.



Slide 17



Slide 18



Slide 19



Slide 20



Slide 21



Slide 22



Slide 23



Slide 24

October 2012

An insight. Published as 'Our Club Profile: Simon Bell' in The Tararua Trampler (Vol. 84).

When did you join TTC and why TTC? I joined the club mid 2011. The main reason for joining was so I could participate in some of the club trips being offered, particularly the mountaineering trips in the Southern Alps. Last year the club offered a trip to climb Mt Cook, which I thought was pretty awesome! Prior to joining I'd already been on a couple of club trips in Nelson Lakes and in the Tararuas and really enjoyed these.

What is your main activity with the club? Climbing trips, be they mountaineering or sport/trad climbing at the North Island crags. Having said that, I had a great time on a southern crossing club trip last winter. Off track exploration is good too. This year I put my hand up to be an assistant instructor for the club AIC so I'm hoping that will be a lot of fun!

Your favourite tramping breakfast? Hot coffee and Berocca (in the same cup) and instant porridge (with dried fruit). I would usually munch on a One Square Meal (OSM) as we start walking. If I'm short of time, an OSM and coffee powder added to cold water is sufficient. Makes for a fast start in the morning!

What constitutes a 'good trip'? Good weather. Light and fast approach. A big day out – ideally heading off before day break and returning after dark. Minimal stops. A sense of adventure, exposure, commitment and remoteness. Technical terrain. A night spent out in a bivvy bag or tent above the bush line.

Best dinner in the hills? Back country meal with added cashew nuts, cheese and salami. No dishes, no waiting, no worries! Normally by the time dinner comes around I'm pretty starving so anything tastes great!

Your most miserable night out? None that bad but I have spent a couple of nights having a few hours' sleep on the side of the track in the Tararuas when going on solo missions and running out of steam.

The Marchant Ridge goes on forever in the dark!

More recently I spent an unplanned but not altogether unexpected night out on Malte Brun at 2700m. After 20 hours on the go we decided to stop at a safe rock section rather than risk a complicated abseil in the dark. My down jacket was great but I did still get pretty cold after a while. Fortunately we had lots of gas so I made us 'hot water bottles' by melting snow and putting the hot water in our drink bottles. Every half hour or so I'd get too cold lying still so I'd have to walk around and jump on the spot to warm up. I guess it wasn't that miserable as we had great weather. The stars were really bright and the moon lit up the Tasman Glacier nicely but a sleeping bag would have been nice!

Where to next? I'd like to bag the rest of the Tararua huts - 4 to go! There is still plenty of off track and tops travel to cover after that and I'd like to go on a rafting trip down the Otaki River too. I'm also keen to bag some more peaks in the Southern Alps and do some more alpine rock routes. There are still quite a few North Island sport and trad climbing crags I haven't explored yet. So still plenty of things to look forward to. I'd also like to get a flash camera and start taking some better photos.



Simon rock climbing at Arapiles, Australia. James Collett

November 2012

16 days of adventure climbing. Steve Dowall, Rob Hawes, Lisa Wynne and Simon climb Mts Cook and Tasman on their traverse from Mt Cook Village to Fox Glacier Township. Simon gave a trip presentation to the Taranui Tramping Club in June 2013. His presentation notes tell the full story.



Steve, Rob, Lisa and Simon about to set out. *Steve's camera*

Intro

GTTT stands for 'Grand Traverse, Tasman Traverse'. The reason the 'g' is in lower-case will become clear later on in the presentation. The GTTT was a trip from Mount Cook Village to the Fox Glacier Township. I would consider this adventure climbing. It was an adventure, because, while we did have quite solid plans, we weren't sure if we would be able to pull it off, due to weather and conditions.

It was also an adventure because we walked in

and walked out, and spent 16 days in the mountains –the longest trip I've been on. None of the individual climbs we did were overly hard –most were grade 3 / 3+. We didn't do any new routes. However, by linking together several climbs, and by spending such a long time in the hills, we really felt we'd achieved something with this trip.

The team

Steve, Rob, Lisa and I had all climbed together in

Nov 2011. We did a trip to Aspiring with Walk in / Walk out. Then a trip to Plateau Hut with climbs of Cook and Dixon. Then a trip to Pioneer Hut with climbs of Glacier Peak, Douglas, Haidinger, West Peak Haast and Lendenfeld. We failed on Tasman and were keen to return.

Rob and Steve had both climbed Cook a few times via Linda and wanted to do something different. We also wanted to get Tasman. They came up with the idea of getting both on a single trip. Walk in up the Hooker, do a grand traverse of Cook, traverse Tasman and walk out to Fox, climbing some other peaks on the way. On the ferry back to Wellington Rob asked if I was keen – of course! Lisa too.

Logistics

The logistics for this trip were quite fun to figure out. The map (p138) shows just how close Fox is to Mt Cook Village. About 25km. We set aside 2-3 weeks in Nov and the trip ended up taking 16 days. Food was the first and biggest issue. We solved this problem by getting food boxes flown into Plateau and Pioneer Hut. Rob got the boxes to Plateau by buying the chopper pilots a box of beer. I did a similar thing with my flatmate and his friends, who happened to be heading to Pioneer Hut at the right time.

Well before the trip, we all spent some time thinking about what gear to take and not to take. We ended up making a shared spreadsheet in Google Docs and listing what we were thinking of taking. Me and Lisa got really into getting tech, lightweight gear. I got paid my bonus at work in Sept and spent a lot of it on gear. Rob and Steve spent less time looking at our tech gear lists; and Rob later admitted not knowing what half of the items we were writing about actually were. Things like a 'BD Spinner leash'.

I decided to go as light as possible, and got my gear into a 45L pack, had no spare clothes and no sleeping bag. We all had full bivvy gear to spend a night out and I got some lightweight down-pants should we get caught out high up. With 4 days food, the pack started off around 20 kg. Once we got higher up, ate some food, put on our harnesses and crampons plus got our tools, rope and gear out for the steep climbing, the pack was nearly half that, which was good for climbing.

To top it off, work had me going to Canada for the week prior to the trip. I had to pack all my gear, bring it to Canada and then fly direct to Christch-

urch (bypassing Wellington) and drive straight to Mt Cook Village to meet the others. I got to the Village and it was a cold southerly, and snowing! I was cold just standing around at Unwin Hut, and was seriously starting to wonder if I would be warm enough up high with the gear I had.



View up the Hooker Valley.

Walk in

This was the first time I'd walked up the Hooker Valley, except when I visited Hooker Hut last summer. Compared to the Bash up the Tasman, which I've done a few times, the Hooker is Luxury. The moraine doesn't go on as long, the views are better, and it is a no fly-zone, so you don't have to put up with annoying choppers and planes. You also get to see Turner Peak, Pibrac and Nazomi, all peaks I'd love to climb soon. The Hooker Valley still has some moraine bashing, but it quickly turns to a nice glacier. In November, travel is easy up to Gardiner Hut. This photo (*below*) also shows La Perouse, another great peak I'd love to climb.



Hooker Valley with La Perouse in background.

Gardiner to Empress

At Gardiner Hut you get a great view of the Low Peak of Cook and the West Ridge. The West Ridge would be an awesome way to climb Low Peak, but in November it is pretty mixed – I have some friends who climbed it in February, and did it all on rock with no crampons needed. We were climbing via the NW couloir. Because we had to wait another day for the weather to be suitable, we checked out the base of the NW couloir and walked up to Empress Hut the following day. This allowed us to get another 600m or so of height gain done before the day of the GT. We heard on the radio sched that our food boxes to Plateau Hut had been successfully delivered – yes!

Empress Hut sits at about 2500m, and has awesome views. I was stoked to get here – it's an awesome place to chill out. The long-drop probably has the best 'poo with a view' in the country! In this photo (*below*) you can see Hicks, Dampier, Fyfe's Gut and Green Saddle, and the Sheila Face of Cook. All good stuff. Hicks was looking pretty lacking in the ice department – the start of the climbs looked pretty much impossible and there were no records of ascents this year.

Low Peak and blue ice

The NW couloir route to Low Peak of Cook is generally straightforward. Our biggest problem was that we got slightly off-route in the dark. That put us onto some slightly steeper and mixed ground for a bit. Rob and I soloed up this section, and passed a rope down to the others. Our other problem was we all simultaneously really needed a toilet stop – we blamed the 'altitude', the 'cold' and instant porridge. Once we'd 'made our mark' on the mountain (sorry)!, we sidled and traversed back into the couloir we should have been, and headed up to the West Ridge. We ended up doing a bit more pitching on some rock as the sun poked its head over Cook.

Once we hit the snow and were pretty close to the Low Peak, we grabbed some food and took in the views. Unfortunately, one of the views was of the hard ice on the Summit Ridge between Middle and High Peak. We had asked a guide about the conditions a few weeks prior and had been told about the hard, boiler plate ice, created by strong westerly winds.

Rob was obviously pretty stoked to reach Low Peak! I was too, but I couldn't help looking at how blue the GT looked. I've heard stories of people climbing the GT when it is covered in snow. It is quite straight-forward, and only requires the occasional pitch. I've also heard stories of people trying to do a GT when it is blue, and getting only 1 or 2 pitches into it and taking a fall. But we also had weather on our side, and I thought we would at least go to 'Middle Peak Hotel', and maybe check in there for the night and see how things were going tomorrow.

This (*p44*) is Low Peak from Porter Col. The ridge from Low Peak to Porter Col is totally different from the ridge from Middle Peak to High Peak. It's all rock and snow – it's funny – you turn around 180 degrees and it looks like a completely different mountain. We did a bit of pitching along some of the rock ridge, as the covering in soft snow made the footwork a bit challenging at times.

This (*p44*) shows Middle Peak and the famous Middle Peak Hotel. Even the parts that don't look blue, are. There is a tiny amount of snow covering the ice. There was the same ice at the col. In some regards, this was a low point of the trip. We had found exactly what I knew we would find, but we weren't ready to admit it. I tried hitting my axe into the ice and found it would take 2 or 3 blows in the same spot to get a tool in. The crampons would go in maybe 1mm.

I was initially keen to give it a go and push to Middle Peak Hotel and spend a night there. After all, the Hotel is only a few hundred metres away! I soon changed my mind when I tried putting an ice screw in. I needed two hands to place one – such hard ice. I'm sure some parties have climbed the GT in these winter conditions but we weren't up for it.



Views from Empress Hut long-drop.



Lisa and Steve at Gardiner Hut. *Rob*



Lisa and Steve downclimb to Empress Shelf.



Rob, Lisa and Steve just below Low Peak.



Rob celebrates on Low Peak. *Rob's camera*



Low Peak viewed from Porter Col.



Blue ice at Middle Peak.

We rapped off Porter Col on a V-thread and took the Empress Shelf back to Empress Hut. After a couple of raps, we downclimbed some frozen snow then walked down the shelf. We actually made really good time – it only took about 1.5 hours from Porter Col to Empress Hut. We just got there before dark.

A new plan

Interestingly enough – once back at Empress Hut – I took a look at my phone. Not only had it managed to accidentally turn itself on, but I had a text and someone had tried to talk to me on 'g-chat'. It turns out that there is excellent reception and full internet access at Empress Hut! I told Steve this, who updated his Facebook profile so quickly that by the time I rang my girlfriend Lorraine, she already knew where I was! Lorraine had just been at Pioneer Hut and was able to confirm that our box of hut food had been successfully delivered.

She also had some bad news in that my flatmate and his friends had tried Tasman and turned around 60m from the summit due to hard blue ice! So the next day we had perfect weather, and we sat out on the decking, trying to hatch out a plan. We had to get over to Plateau and to our food boxes. No-one was keen to walk back down the Hooker to the Village. If we were going to do that, we may as well head home.

Our solution was to climb Fyfe's Gut to Green Saddle. This leads to the North Ridge of Cook and was the first way Cook was climbed. We thought we'd flag climbing the North Ridge part of it as most of us had already been to High Peak, and we weren't sure if we would hit the same hard blue ice on the top. Instead, we were hoping to be able to drop down the other side of Green Saddle and link up with the Linda Glacier. Hopefully the other side was easy to descend!

We'd never heard of other parties traversing Green Saddle, although I'm sure they have many times. So, there is where we get a lower case 'g' in the gTTT name. We did a Green Saddle traverse instead of a Grand Traverse! Not as cool perhaps, but it ended up being an excellent climb. It's

funny as we knew the height of Green Saddle to be 3348m, which is only 400m lower than High Peak, and still a 850m climb from Empress Hut. But, from this angle, it looks like a piece of cake. We were wrong!

Climbing Fyfe's Gut

Fyfe's Gut is fore-shortened. The closer you get, the bigger it gets. The guide mentioned you could climb the snow line (left) or in the Gut (right), which is ice. We favoured the ice line. I'm not sure which line was taken on the first ascent of Cook. The guide did however, say to watch for stone fall in the Gut. We felt like we had already gained a lot of height when we reached the ice.



Steve belays Rob onto Fyfe's Gut.

This (*above*) was pitch one and we thought it would get us half-way up to the saddle. But the ice pitches just kept on coming. We really should have taken a look at our altitude at the start of the ice. I lost count of the number of pitches we did. It was at least 6 full 60m pitches. The pitching was quite slow going. Rob and Steve climbed as a 2 and did swinging leads. They would leave the ice screws in for Lisa and I to use when we led up. We got into a rhythm. As the sun hit the Sheila Face, we got a few small stones funnelling into the Gut as promised! We were pretty stoked when we did finally get to Green Saddle. And even happier when we saw the way down would be an easy downclimb on snow.



The ice pitches kept on coming.



Rest pause on Fyfe's Gut. Rob



Rob, Lisa and Steve on Green Saddle.



Tasman and Silberhorn, blue as.

The only thing that made us unhappy was when we got our first view of Tasman. Tasman and Silberhorn looked blue as! We could see why others had a hard time on the Summit Ridge! The walk down to Plateau Hut was straightforward. Once we got to the lower Linda, we followed some tracks as others had climbed Cook that day.

We read in the hut book of a GT last year that had gone wrong. The expected NW storm came early. The party ended up rappelling over the East Face, building a snow cave and waiting out a storm! The following day Rob and I did a half day trip to traverse Anzac Peaks and take in the views of the East Ridge, which also looked blue higher up.

We then spent a further 2 days at Plateau Hut, waiting out a storm, which deposited quite a bit of fresh snow. It was quite frustrating and we weren't sure what sort of conditions we'd find on Tasman.



Tasman from the Grand Plateau.

Tasman via Syme Ridge

This photo (*opp.*) shows Tasman from the Grand Plateau. On the afternoon of the 4th day, things had settled down and we made tracks to the base of Syme Ridge, and dug a pit to assess the snow conditions. The route we took is to the climber's right of Syme Ridge. You don't actually get onto the ridge until quite high up. Lower down the ridge is quite rocky and looks awkward. Gaining the ridge was quite hard work due to deep snow. It also got pretty steep higher up before we reached the ridge. The sun hit as we gained the ridge. Once gained, Syme Ridge is actually pretty chilled out.

The higher up the ridge, the more chilled out it gets. The only difficulty in getting to the North Shoulder is the schrund. We managed to climb up this OK, but Lisa was cursing us with our long legs! Once on the North Shoulder, we walked across to to check out the Summit Ridge. We were hoping that the new snow had bonded to it and that it was no longer blue! We were in luck! The snow appeared to be well bonded to the ridge.

The others dropped their packs here, although I kept mine as it seemed the easiest way to carry snow stakes. I got to lead the two pitches which was great fun! I managed to use snow stakes as anchors. The other team put in an intermediate



Deep snow adjacent to Syme Ridge.

stake as well, to stop the rope getting snagged in sastrugi. The last part was pretty straightforward so we took off the rope, cruised to the summit and enjoyed the views!



Rob and Lisa reach Syme Ridge at sunrise. Steve



Rob and Steve high up Syme Ridge.

I think the view from Tasman is awesome! We were all pretty stoked to make it here – particularly as we hadn't made the GT and as we knew that even one week ago, the conditions would have made the Summit Ridge very difficult. Since I was first up and last down, I got to spend about 1 hour on the summit which was great!

The descent via the North Shoulder to Engineer Col and over Lendenfeld Peak was straightforward. I managed to send a text message from Tasman. On our way down, Steve managed to call his wife from the summit of Lendenfeld. She has great news for him – he'd been offered the job he'd been applying for. It started snowing and turned to a white-out at Pioneer Pass and we ended up using a GPS to navigate to Pioneer Hut. In the fading light and fog we saw something strange near Pioneer Hut and joked about it being a plane crash.

Helicopters and hut radios

The following morning we awoke to the sound of helicopters. We were beginning to think that there might be some truth in the joke we had last night about seeing a crashed plane. There was also a bag of broken eggs in the hut which was strange. We



The view from Tasman with Lisa approaching the summit.

saw the remains of a crashed chopper being flown out by other choppers! It turned out there had been a crash. This has been kept very quiet in the media – hardly anyone at Fox knew anything about it. We got the full story when a guide and 3 clients flew in for an ice climbing course. It turns out they were the ones in the chopper crash – which was tipped over when a skid got caught in the snow during landing! Very lucky that everyone was OK.

The other interesting thing was that there was no radio at Pioneer Hut. It had been taken out by lightning a couple of weeks earlier, but DOC in Mt Cook hadn't mentioned this, even when we said we were heading over to the West Coast. I don't have any pictures of the crashed chopper, but the guide did show us a video of the wreckage.

The following day, Rob, Steve and I headed up to climb Haast Peak. Lisa had an injury and hadn't been sleeping well in the huts and decided to fly out – using the guide's sat phone to call the chopper.

Haast Peak

I haven't got too much time to go into the climb of Haast High Peak but it was really enjoyable. We had to climb a steep ice gully for half a pitch, then cruised up a couloir and up onto the Divide Peak. It was then a couple of full 60m pitches and some soloing along the ridge to the High Peak. The ridge travel was pretty mixed and good fun!

From Haast High Peak we traversed to the col between Middle and High Peak. It started snowing and got a bit miserable – it was hard to know just how the day would turn out without a proper weather forecast.

The next day we attempted Barnicoat but got shut down when it started snowing at the base of the route. Then we waited out a storm, which deposited quite a bit of snow, for two days.

By this point in the trip we were running short on lunch food. We had taken to cooking pasta the night before and having it cold for lunch. To make it nicer, we added soup mix to it. Back at the hut we had some Weetbix with butter and salami as a pre-dinner snack!

It was taking considerable time for the avalanche risk to drop so we decided to walk out. The walk out was really enjoyable and pretty straightforward. I'd do it again in these conditions for sure! It was about 8 hours from Pioneer Hut to Fox Glacier – faster and easier than walking out from Plateau Hut. These are some of the pictures on the walk-out (*overleaf*).

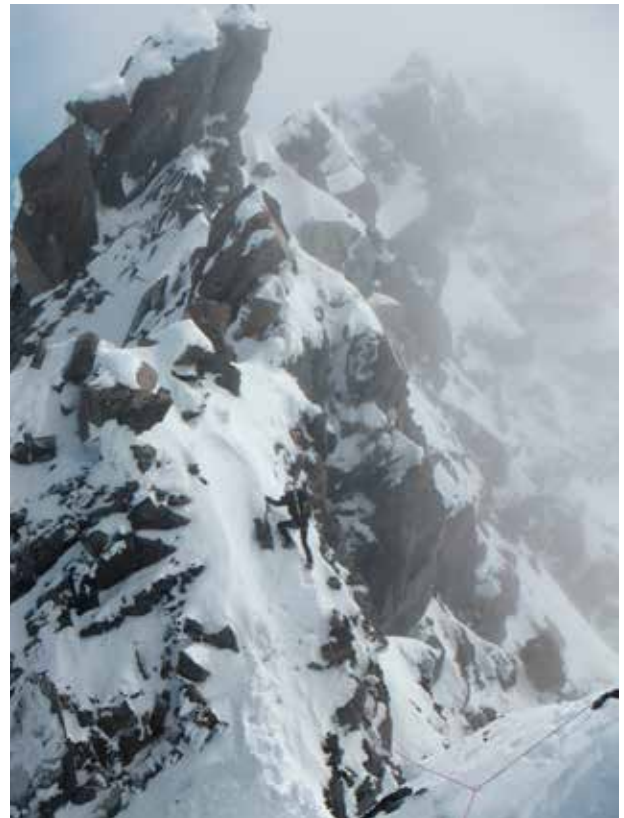
Thanks for listening!! I hope this presentation has been good motivation to get out into the hills and have some adventures!



Steve, Simon and Rob on their last afternoon at Pioneer Hut. Rob



A choice belay spot. Steve



Traversing to the High Peak of Mt Haast. Steve



Steve and Rob descend Mt Haast in a storm.



7:50am: Looking back across the neve.



8:33am: Fox Glacier.

The Walkout to Fox



9:40am: Approaching Chancellor Hut.



10:46am: Descending a rock face.



11:39am: Crossing lower Fox Glacier.

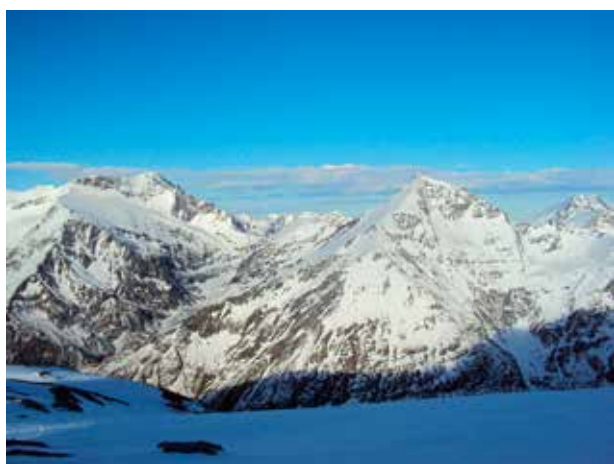


1:06pm: Rob, Simon and Steve at the roadhead. *Rob*

January 2013

Simon sleeps in! Rob Hawes, Lorraine Johns and Simon climb two peaks one long Wanaka weekend. Rob's account shares Simon's FOMO moment with his friends.

Lorraine, Simon and myself (with others) had been into Colin Todd Hut in the Mt Aspiring National Park and climbed Mt Aspiring. On that trip we had taken note of a nice looking peak on the other side of the Matukituki Valley called Mt Barff and thought 'one day' we must climb that. In January 2013 that day came along.



Mt Barff on right looking across from Quarterdeck Pass of Mt Aspiring.

Simon and Lorraine flew to Christchurch and drove down to Wanaka for what they must have made into a long weekend. The plan was finalised that would see us on day 1, drive into the road end and walk up the Matukituki Valley, then climb up to Liverpool Hut. (It was Liverpool Biv, but now is a nice new hut that DOC have put in to replace the Biv). Day 2 we would climb Mt Barff (an early start and return to Liverpool Hut early afternoon) then walk back to the car and sleep at the road end. Day 3 we would walk up the East Matukituki Valley, climb above the bush line and camp at around 1600m/1700m below Dragonfly Peak. Day 4 an early start and climb Dragonfly Peak, then return to our camp, pack it up, walk out to the car and return to Wanaka.

It is worth me pointing out at this point that Lorraine and I were very keen for Mt Barff, Simon not quite so keen. However Simon was very keen for Dragonfly Peak as this was on the '100 Great

Peaks' list so between the 3 of us it would be a great weekend with two climbs.

We arrived at Liverpool Hut as per our plan with enough food for dinner that night, breakfast and lunch the next day. Dinner the next day would be back at the car so the rest of the food for the trip was left in the car. This had meant lighter packs for getting to Liverpool Hut. The weather was a little unsettled but forecast was for a nice high to push on to the park.

We prepared ourselves for an early 4am start. The alarm went off at 4am and I climbed out of my sleeping bag and put my head out the door to see what was happening with the weather. Simon and Lorraine awaited my report. I returned with news, "It's windy and wet," so the 3 of us remained warm in our sleeping bags and agreed, "Let's give it an hour and check again."

At 5am the very technical weather forecasting system aka 'head out the door process,' was repeated and the report was the same. "Let's give it another hour." At this point I think Simon's enthusiasm was beginning to reduce but I was unaware of that at the time.

At 6am nothing had changed and I remember saying to Lorraine as Simon appeared not to even wake at 6am with the alarm and weather check, "The weather is rubbish and we are not climbing anything today." We were a little disappointed but sometimes that is life in the mountains. We settled back down in our sleeping bags and readied ourselves for a sleep in.

Simon and I were woken up at 8.30am by Lorraine's excited voice saying something like, "Hey it's fine and sunny outside, let's get going!" and indeed the weather had cleared and indeed it was a climbing day, even though we were now 4 to 5 hours behind our planned schedule.

Lorraine and I quickly pulled on gear and set about a fast breakfast. Simon however didn't move and after a while raised his head and simply said, "I am not coming climbing" and remained steadfast and warm in his sleeping bag. "Suit yourself," was

our reply, “but we are, so what you do is up to you.” At this point I thought that was the end of matter. I would go climbing with Lorraine. Simon would stay at the hut.

What I did not realize was the Simon was beginning to suffer from the ‘fear of missing out’ which we call the ‘FOMO’. It’s a mind event where you think someone else is going to have fun and you are going to miss out! So as Lorraine and I prepared for our day, Simon while lying in his sleeping bag was having this massive mind battle with himself. “Those two guys are going to have fun and I am missing out.”



High camp up the East Matukituki. Rob

Suddenly and totally unannounced, Simon not just emerges, but almost leaps from his sleeping bag. I don’t know what Lorraine thought but I had no idea what was going on until Simon tells us, “I’m coming climbing.” “Great!” was our reply. “Smash some breakfast, get your gear and let’s get going.”

So we did have a great day, the sun shone, we climbed Mt Barff and returned to Liverpool Hut. Of course we did not return

by early afternoon as we had planned. It must have been 9am, not 4am before we started, so we walked out that evening back to the car on empty stomachs. The food was all in the car. From memory we arrived at the car at around 11pm, had dinner, put tents up and went to sleep.

We continued the next day after breakfast up the East Matukituki Valley, put our high camp in and the next morning stood as planned on Dragonfly Peak. We returned to Wanaka after what was a fun and successful weekend.



On the Summit of Dragonfly Peak. Lorraine

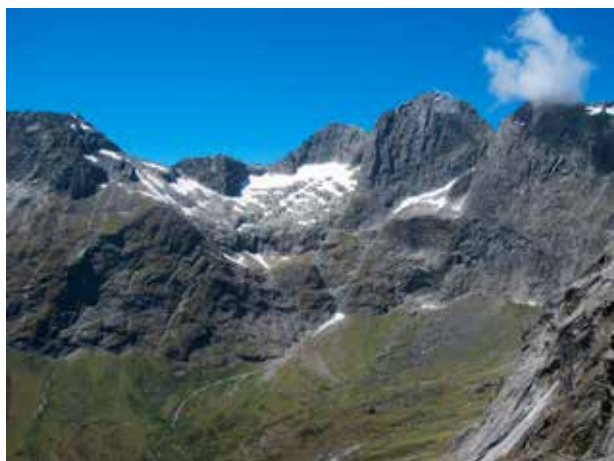
I do look back fondly on Simon’s FOMO moment and I only ever saw him suffer from FOMO on the one occasion. He was (apart from Mt Barff) always quite firm and either was 100% going climbing or 100% was not.



Simon climbing Mt Barff. Lorraine

February 2013

Trail runners, rock climbing shoes and bare feet. After climbing Tutoko in 2012, Vaughan Snowdon and Simon team up again to attempt another peak in the Darran Mountains of Fiordland National Park. Simon's account appeared in Vertigo (No. 760) and he gave a presentation to the Wellington Tramping & Mountaineering Club in September 2013. Here is an abridged version of his notes.



Sabre Peak and the North Buttress.

I've wanted to climb Sabre for ages. It is in the Darran Mountains which means the rock is quality! Also, I like the fact that, while the start is quite hard, it gets easier as you go up. Sabre is near Milford Sound. Other cool peaks around there are Mitre Peak, which is a great peak to climb I've heard! The highest peak is Tutoko. There are heaps of great peaks here. Also, many awesome rock climbs, ranging from single pitch sport routes and up.

Day 1 is the walk in from Homer Hut to Gertrude Saddle, up to Barrier Knob, along towards Adelaide Saddle and down Gifford Gap. Then past a nice rock bivvy, which we didn't have time to find, through a cliff band and to our bivvy site. Day 2 is the climb and return to bivvy site, with Day 3 being a nice walk out. It is pretty big country and wouldn't be any fun in bad weather! Walking up to Gertrude Saddle is quite popular with tourists, although still difficult if the rock is wet. Once we got to Gertrude Saddle we met some tourists who had walked up and tented there for the night. It is a nice spot and there are some nice views on the way. The only problem is that there are helicopters flying past here quite often.

After Gertrude Saddle we went up and over Barrier Knob. Getting up to Barrier Knob involves snow travel. We did this trip in trail runners but we were

prepared! You can follow a sidle track and avoid the snow. I know people who have done it, but it looked terrible to us! If you have flexible crampons, with some cunning you can attach them to trail runners. Just don't try and front point. This really only works well on permanent snow in late summer. The snow is quite hard – there is no need for boots or gaiters! This made the trip better for us as we didn't have to take boots at all – just trail runners for the approach and rock climbing shoes for the climb.



Mitre Peak from near Barrier Knob.

This is a nice shot of Mitre Peak. I sent it to Lorraine just before she climbed it in order to try and psych her out! It didn't work.



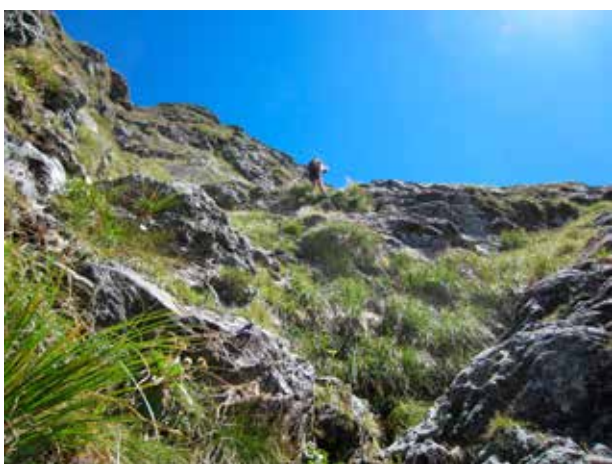
Vaughan walking along towards Adelaide Peak. Gifford Gap is on the right.



Quite mellow: Lake Adelaide.

Some of the country is quite steep, but other parts are quite mellow, like in this shot.

However, to get down Gifford Gap requires some work. We are rapping it in this photo (*below*). This terrain is quite big – even if you are going into this area for tramping, a rope still comes in handy. This section was bolted, although it is possible to downclimb this stuff when it is dry. When it is wet – don't go near it.



Abseiling down Gifford Gap.

This is Sabre and the North Buttress (*lead photo*). It is a reasonable amount of work just getting to the base of the route. We had the time, so walked up to the base of the route on the day we walked in. Other people I know have stayed in a nice rock bivvy in the valley. The problem is, this then requires you to climb through cliff bands in the dark, and also risk spending a night away from your bivvy gear.

Getting over the snow was quite fun. Glad we did this in the day light! If the snow bridges collapsed it would be bad news – although they are pretty strong. The bluff systems were OK, but could be a very different story when it is wet or in the



Vaughan at the 'flattish' camp site.

dark. After the cliffs, we got to a 'flattish' section and we ended up setting up camp here. Then we walked up to the base of the route. We spent ages trying to figure out the route. The photo below shows the approximate location of the first four pitches. We did pitch one and took a look at pitch two. Once we thought it was OK, we downclimbed pitch one (abseil wouldn't work) and went back to base camp. We left our climbing ropes and gear at the base of the route.



Approximate route of the first 4 pitches.



Vaughan tops up before the climb.

The cool thing about camping close to the route is you get to sleep in! We didn't get up till 8am and we didn't start climbing till 9:30am, once the sun was starting to hit the route. We did the climb with just one pack – meaning the leader doesn't have to worry about weight on their back when climbing the harder sections. We left our trail runners at the base of the route. We were doing the climb and abseils and small snow section in rock shoes. We had a down jacket each and 4 L of water. We also drank heaps of water before we set off! By the time we actually got moving, there was sun on the whole bluff, and things were nice and dry.



The crux pitch.

This is the crux of the climb, although it is a bit hard to see this. It is a long crack – maybe 25m or so. After this, it backs off quite a bit. Most pitches were 60m. It depended slightly, if you found a great belay ledge near 60m, that would do! We spent most of the climb, climbing in cloud!



Vaughan belays as Simon disappears into the clouds.

This is one my favourite photos of the trip (*above*). I was leading the third pitch and was lucky enough to lead the first four pitches. As soon as I went around the corner, I completely lost contact with the belayer and just climbed myself, up in the clouds! Sometimes it cleared and I managed to take a photo or two before the cloud came back in again. By now we felt pretty high up and exposed. The steepness was backing off though. After simul climbing the last pitch (the 6th?) we took off the rope and started scrambling.



Simon's Brocken Spectre.

This is a funny selection of things near the summit. The Brocken Spectre was cool! There were one or two rock bivvies near the top. People sometimes get caught out and have to spend a night at the top,

normally without proper gear. We wouldn't have had much fun, having only rock shoes and a down jacket each. We drank the last of our water and ate the last of our food at the top, and got ready for the descent.

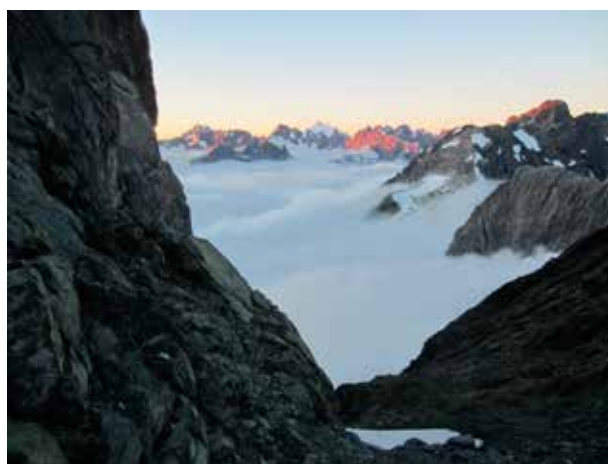
The descent was not too involved, but would have been very challenging in the dark. We were in bare feet – we were pretty sick of rock shoes by now. It was maybe four or five 60m abseils (some were not full length) to the col. From the col we had about 30 minutes of daylight left. We still had two abseils to go. First was on a rock anchor and onto snow. This put us in the middle of a snow field.

The snow was soft from afternoon sun but starting to go hard again. I downclimbed it with rock shoes and no ice axe but it was quite hard. Vaughan used the ice axe to make a snow bollard and abseiled off this which was the sensible thing to do! After this we had about a 10 minute walk in the dark to get to our trail runners. Then about 80 minutes to get back to the bivvy site. It would have taken 30 minutes in daylight but hey!

The walk out was uneventful and I flew back to Wellington the following morning from Queens-town.



Vaughan celebrates on the summit.



Final views.



Rock bivvy near the top of Sabre Peak.



Smiles on the summit. *Vaughan*



Bare foot abseil

February 2013

To rope or not to rope? A key question for Don French, Dan Pringle, James Wright and Simon when confronting the massive Strauchon Face of Dilemma Peak on the edge of Aoraki Mt Cook National Park. Simon describes this challenging rock climb in these notes prepared for his presentation to the Tararua Tramping Club in June 2013.



Sussing out Dilemma (centre) and Unicorn (centre right) on the descent from Baker Saddle.

I was quite lucky to hear about this trip, because it was advertised on Facebook and I don't have Facebook! Anyway, my girlfriend Lorraine saw it and I got in contact with Don French. I had had my eye on this trip for a while but hadn't sorted out climbing partners, so it was a lucky break. I was partnered with James Wright who has done some pretty cool rock climbs before. Don French and Dan Pringle were the two other climbers. Everyone in the group was pretty experienced. The Strauchon Face of Dilemma is a big slab. About 1200m in total, with a small hanging glacier about 300m up the route. Average angle is 46 degrees – this is a very similar angle to the ramp route on Mt Aspiring, but instead of climbing snow with ice axe

and crampons you climb warm rock in rock shoes. Some sections are steeper and some less steep.

So a couple of weeks after climbing Sabre I flew down again to Christchurch and met James there. I'd met him a couple of years ago at the Darrans. We drove to MCNP in my car, which I keep stashed in Christchurch near the airport for a handy get away. Don had just come from the Darrans on another climb and Dan flew to Queenstown. We had a mint forecast! The others decided to do some cragging at Sebastopol Bluffs for a day and relax. So I managed to pretend to do some work on my laptop, sent a few emails and claimed back some annual leave, right from Unwin Hut in MCNP!

Dilemma and Unicorn are near Mt Cook, up the Hooker Glacier. It was a 4 day trip.

Day 1 Up to Gardiner Hut.

Day 2 Up to Baker Saddle, down the Strauchon Glacier for 1000m or so and up a few pitches of rock. We bivvied near a hanging glacier!

Day 3 Was doing the climb – about 800m face and a traverse to Unicorn and back. Then descend and back to Gardiner.

Day 4 Just walking out.

We set off just before day break and walked around the Hooker Lake and got onto the moraine, which is gravel that sits on top of the glacier. I have only been up the Hooker once before and that was in November. It is much faster in November to get to Gardiner Hut. Gardiner Hut is on the top of the rock in the right of the photo (*below*). Baker Saddle which we would cross the next day is just before La Perouse, another great peak I'd like to climb. In late summer, the soft snow is gone and the glacier is permanent snow / ice which is hard. It is very open - like a big maze to travel through.



Crossing the Hooker Glacier moraine.

Like I said, in November, it is easy to get to Gardiner Hut. The icefall you can see (*right*) is covered in snow and you just walk around the rock and there is an easy snow ramp around the back. In summer it is quite fun. You get to scale Pudding Rock. Higher up there are some cables which you can clip into to stop you from going so far if you fall. Climbing Pudding Rock was actually pretty good practice for the climb ahead, although we did it in mountain boots, not rock shoes.

It took us maybe 8 or 9 hours to get to Gardiner

Hut. We got there early afternoon and got to chill out for a bit. We checked out some of the entries in the hut book. There had been a couple of other parties that climbed the Strauchon Face in the last month or two. Jane Morris, a guide who lives in Mount Cook Village, soloed the route and did it in 8.5 hours hut to hut. She then walked out in the same day, meaning that her entire trip from the Village was under 2 days.

We weren't going to go anywhere near that fast or travel as light. I guess if we had really backed ourselves to solo the route, a day trip from Gardiner



Scaling Pudding Rock to Gardiner Hut.



Simon chills out at Gardiner Hut! Baker Saddle and La Perouse in the background. James

Hut would be an option. But I wouldn't recommend it unless you know the area well, the conditions well, and are pretty confident at slab climbing. Our plan was to bivvy at the base of the hanging glacier. That means we had to climb the face with our bivvy gear, along with our ice axe and crampons etc. We spent ages deciding what to take and what to leave behind. I convinced the other guys to leave their sleeping bags behind - just wear a down jacket and long-johns inside the bivvy bag. I had down pants too.

We got our first look at Dilemma and Unicorn once we got to Baker Saddle (*lead photo*). You can see the slab going off to the right. The edge you can see has an average angle of 37 degrees. The part we climbed has an average angle of 46 degrees. Unicorn is the next peak on the right. Unicorn has an even steeper face 52 degrees, it is one or two rock grades harder. I think it would be too hard for me to free climb and too long to pitch. I'm not planning to go back and try it! From Baker Saddle we had to descend 800m or so on nice snow. We were worried it would be broken up and out of condition as it is some years, but this summer the snow was still good. If you carry on down the Strauchon Valley past the lake, you can get out to the Copland Valley. But it involves some serious bush bashing I have heard.

There are quite a few different options for starting the climb. We weren't sure if we had found the 'correct' one. However, we didn't like the look of the other ones, so we decided this would do. If we went further to the right there was the risk of rock fall. There was supposed to be a bolt at the base of the route, but we never found it! Transitioning from the snow to the rock is quite challenging! The schrund was pretty big and looked very dangerous if you fell down it! Not really an option just to jump over to the rock unless you were very brave! It goes down about 5m and narrows up a lot. We transitioned to our rock shoes and got lowered down the snow and then bridged over to the top. It worked pretty well. Once we got onto the climb, it was about 4 pitches to get to the hanging glacier. The climbing was quite straightforward and easy angled slabs! I think the slab in the photo is about 40 degrees.

We had a nice bivvy spot with running water and great views. When we got there it was very misty and we couldn't see the face. We heard a rock falling, it sounded big and coming from very high up. We could hear it crashing on rock and then on snow. We saw it for about 2 seconds as it came out of the mist, off to the right of where we were camp-



Don belays Dan across the schrund.



Dan leads the first pitch up to the hanging glacier. Don

ing. It was huge! The guide wasn't lying when he said watch for rock fall! We had an average night's sleep. We were all slightly cold with no sleeping bags although it probably wasn't a very cold night, maybe 5 degrees. It was a pretty cool place to spend a night - feels pretty remote! It was a bit intimidating to wake up and look at the face once more.

We set off maybe 30 minutes after daylight. Don and Dan started pitching the route right from the bottom. James and I decided to start off soloing



James prepares for a night at the bivvy.

the route and see how we went. We each had some nuts and cams on our harnesses and could build an anchor if we saw a steep bit ahead. I had the rope and set off ahead. Pretty soon we were 100m off the deck. There were enough places where I could relax and take at least one hand off the rock to take photos. The first crux of the climb was traversing to the major crack system. I remember one section where the slab was getting quite blank. I could climb up OK but was not really able to traverse. James thought he could see a better way lower down. He asked if I could downclimb and join him. I had to say that I wasn't happy to downclimb the section I was on, but I was happy to climb up a few metres and build an anchor, then drop the rope down to him. Once I got up there I could see an easy traverse too, so he came up the same way unroped and we carried on. Once we got to the crack system the climbing was a bit easier again, grade 12 to grade 14. Having a 10kg pack on your back doesn't help though! Still you need to focus a lot, one slip and it's game over.

Once we got a bit higher up again – now maybe 600m from the hanging glacier, I found a nice flat ledge where I could take my pack off and we took some photos. We could see the other guys. They were pitching the entire route and it took them 12 hours or so to climb to the top of Dilemma. It took us about 3 hours. They completed 28 or so pitches from the hanging glacier! It is a massive route!! Given how many pitches they were doing, they actually moved really fast.

We had another crux section – maybe grade 15 for 40m or so. I remember thinking at the time just how sustained it was. I was happy being on it, but if it stayed like that for another 30m I probably would have considered building an anchor. You

definitely don't want to get pumped on a route like this. By now we could see the top of Unicorn and the col between Unicorn and Dilemma. Once we got to the col I had to consult the guide book to find out how to climb Unicorn! Actually, this is a great Tintin book that I used to read as a kid. After this trip, I decided to give the book to my nephew! This video gives a good look from near the col – we had found a flat ledge which you could bivvy on. It is called Hotel Hilti.



Amping up on the Strauchon Face. James

Once we got the col we chilled out for a bit – we were both in mild shock having just completed the route. But we didn't want to sit still for too long in case we lost courage. We dropped one pack and climbed to the top of Unicorn. We took the same approach as before. It looked quite steep but was OK and we didn't get the rope out. While doing the traverse, you can see the big Strauchon Face below, which goes on and on! I got some cool shots of James during the traverse (*over*). The first one is a shot of Dilemma with Mt Cook in the background. The other ones show just how blocky the final grunt up Unicorn is.

It was pretty cool when we got to the top! You can see Sefton in this pic – the North Ridge is another objective that sounds cool. We had cell phone coverage and so thought I'd give Lorraine a call. As it turned out, her phone was on at the



James on the Strauchon Face.

DILEMMA AND UNICORN

time but had no coverage as she was climbing a peak in Lewis Pass. Never mind. Once we got back to the col we started to chill out a bit. There was a patch of snow there so we melted snow and had a big drink. After waiting for maybe 1 hour and the other guys were nowhere in sight, we decided to press on. Even if we wanted to help them we wouldn't be able to rap down and help!

While we were up here, we saw an impressive ice fall and snow avalanche. The traverse to Dilemma was fun. Once we got to the top we downclimbed the ridge for a bit then abseiled down onto the snow. Once we got near Baker Saddle we heard the other guys call out – they were on the top of Dilemma. It was a pretty cool trip. Anyway – that's enough from me, hope you enjoyed it.

Wherever you are Simon we'll always remember the secret of the Unicorn. Best climb! James.



Checking the 'guide book' before climbing Unicorn. *James*



The Secret of the Unicorn discovered!
Mt Sefton in the background. *James*



James at the summit of Unicorn.



James traverses to Unicorn from the Strauchon Face.
Dilemma Peak in background



Descending from Pudding Rock on Day 4. *James*

March 2013

A magical Easter trip. Lorraine and Simon visit Kahurangi National Park in NW Nelson. Lorraine vividly recalls their journey through a bewitching landscape in this specially written account.



Lorraine heads across Thousand Acres Plateau, The Needle and The Haystack on the skyline.

Kahurangi National Park is a realm of contrasts. Sinkholes lurk just beneath tranquil meadows, and vast alpine plains conceal a labyrinth of the deepest caves in the country. Gentle tussock slopes terminate abruptly above distant valley floors, while rugged ridgelines such as the Dragon's Teeth are at odds with the distinctive backdrop of flat top peaks like Mount Owen. Anyone who has walked the length of the Heaphy Track can understand that Kahurangi is a place where just about anything could be around the corner.

For me, nowhere is this sense of diversity and visual splendour more present than Thousand Acres Plateau, which lies just above the Matiri Valley near the southwestern entrance to the National Park. I accidentally stumbled across this mystical place during an idle hour browsing old trip reports. Long

afterwards, the mysterious allure of the landforms known as The Needle and The Haystack lingered in my mind. Even if the first fleeting vision to strike my imagination was of an unusually large stack of tussock, rather than a mudstone mountain of gargantuan proportions!

Some years later, a misty forecast, with the promise of both sunshine and rain, brought my partner Simon and me to the doorstep of the Matiri. A gentle walk on a humid afternoon led us to the shimmering lake. Many a pleasant tale has been recounted about gorging on the blackberry bushes that adorn the route to Lake Matiri Hut. However, we dared not stray a step from the beaten trail to claim a single berry. It was early autumn and the wasps, having left their nests, buzzed belligerently around us, drunk on the excess consumption of rotting fruit.

Past this point, the country became more rugged, and the real adventure started like all the best ones do. That is, painfully, with an unrelenting grunt up a timeworn track. Yet our spirits were lifted by the occasional glimpse through foliage of the steep flanks of karst country beyond.

Breaking out from bush into alpine shrubbery, a place of frugal beauty lay ahead. Poles led across a small tussock plateau, the red and gold colours of the palette punctuated only by the odd splash of vibrant green. Poor Pete's Hut is directly below Thousand Acres Plateau, built to take advantage of the scenic little plateau which benignly terminates above the valley floor. Recently replaced, this immaculate hut is anything but a poor choice for a weekend escape, and with its sheltered picnic table, was difficult for us to bypass. Yet, beckoning mere minutes beyond, lies one of the most stunning horizons in the country.

Nothing prepares you for your first view of the astonishing landforms which guard the northern edge of Thousand Acres Plateau. The hulking Haystack rises like a fortress above the rolling meadow. Its shingle slopes cast such a long shadow that Larrikin Creek Hut, at its base, is bereft of sunlight during the winter months. The dainty little needle on the adjoining ridge contrasts sharply and, on a fine day, the first golden rays of the sun warm its spaniard-clad slopes. There is an Egyptian feel to this place, with the sphinx-like Haystack watching over the pyramid-like Needle. Or is it paradise in the witching hour?

Evening fell as we pressed on to Larrikin Creek Hut, the soft alpenglow framing the peaks on the skyline. A hearty fire and friendly faces greeted us as we arrived at the hut, and we slept cosily, our dreams full of weird and wonderful things.



The Needle viewed from The Devil's Table Top.

It would have taken very little to remain thus, sound in sleep, appetites well-fed on the delights of the day before. But my body was restless in its longing to wander across my mind's obsession: The Needle and The Haystack. And so we rose at dawn to venture out and upwards into the chilly autumn air.

While no track is apparent on the map, a few hundred metres to the north-west of the hut, a large orange triangle signals the start of a well-marked trail leading safely to the bushline. The entrance is directly across a dry creek, and the story goes that the odd trumper has been tricked into following this upwards to their peril! From here, access directly to The Needle is as comfortable as anything can be that passes through a gauntlet of speargrass!



Lorraine heads along the undulating summit ridge of The Haystack.

A climb of The Haystack poses more of a challenge, primarily due to the disintegrating nature of the rock from which it is made. In keeping with the surrounds, the way upwards is both straightforward and severe. The ridge is generally broad, with a dark, scoured rockface plummeting to the south, and ordinary tussock slopes leading gradually downwards to the north. Even greater is the contrast between the Thousand Acres Plateau below, where sheep once grazed, and the rim of impenetrable bluffs entrapping its furthest reaches. A thick cap of weather-resistant rock overlying the limestone has prevented the plateau eroding, while the earth at its edges has crumbled away over deep time. It is only from this vantage point that Thousand Acres Plateau can be fully understood.

Our senses were heightened as we travelled over The Haystack, passing through a small world of contorted arches and karst sculptures as we made

our way up to the little grassy knoll that signified the summit. The sky had darkened a little so we did not pause long before continuing back along the ridge toward The Needle. A narrow pinch was shortly followed by a scramble around some small gendarmes, before the ridge broadened once again into a walk. The little bump of The Needle's summit was not threatened by any sudden drops, and we were able to relax in the sun as our neighbours from Larrikin Creek began to arrive.



Simon heads toward the summit of The Haystack. *Lorraine*

A full day at our disposal, we decided to venture on to Hundred Acres Plateau, the misshapen miniature of Thousand Acres Plateau. This little plateau is also known as the Devil's Table Top or the Devil's Napkin, most likely because it is populated by sinkholes! We dared not venture near any of the suspicious depressions in the thick tussock, as we headed toward Mount Misery for our final panorama. We finished our day lying alongside the tarns of the plateau, amusing ourselves with the discovery of cushion plant!

The next day the weather finally turned, and we hastily retraced our steps to recross the West Matiri before its waters began to swell - the cableway marked on the map is no longer there!



Simon avoids a depression on The Devil's Table Top. *Lorraine*

However, not before Simon discovered the Easter Bunny had visited during the night (resulting in a methodical search of every nook and cranny to uncover chocolate treasures)! The heavy downpour could not drench our high spirits as we marched back to the road end, and we were left to muse on the wonders of the tramping world while munching on Easter eggs. The conclusion reached as we drove away was that a little bit of this journey goes a very long way and is within the reach of most outdoor enthusiasts.



Lorraine crosses The Devil's Table Top.

17 SOUTH FACE OF DOUGLAS AND FRIENDS

July 2012 and August 2013

Missing gear makes things harder on Douglas Peak high above Fox Glacier on the main divide. Simon reflects on his first attempt with Vaughan Snowden and later success with Rob Hawes when they also climbed Mts Barnicoat and Spencer. Simon wrote a report for Vertigo (No. 766) and gave a presentation to the Tararua Tramping Club in June 2014. This account draws from both sources and ends with Rob's story of some 'fun' on the descent of Douglas.



South Face of Douglas, 30 August 2013.

First attempt (*Simon's presentation notes*)

I managed to climb the South Face of Douglas on my second attempt. In many ways however, I learnt more on the first attempt. I'd arranged to go into Pioneer Hut at the start of July with some friends from Christchurch. We didn't plan to climb Douglas when we got there. We just wanted to practice ice climbing. We were hoping to do a few pitches on Mt Alack or something like that. However when we flew in we could see that most routes had not formed up with ice yet.

The South Face Douglas route had, so Vaughan and myself thought we would give it a go. Vaughan had done more ice climbing than me. I'd done very little before – in fact I'd never

actually led on ice before. I had built a couple of V- thread anchors and placed a few ice screws before but that was it. We scoped out the climb on the day we flew in. It appeared to be free from objective danger so our plan was just to climb as far as we could and then abseil down the route when we had enough. We didn't think we would actually get to the top.

Ice climbing on this route was a new experience for me. I figured out that many of the systems I had for ice climbing weren't that good. Like my crampons, my ice axes and and ice axe leashes. With the setup I had I found it very difficult to release my hand from the leash to place an ice screw. And the more tired I got, the more closely I wanted to place ice screws, which is a vicious cycle.



Vaughan on the South Face of Douglas.



A new experience. Vaughan



Placing ice screws every 3m or so. Vaughan

This photo shows me with ice screws placed every 3m or so apart. This is not a good way to ice climb! When you can see that there is a step above, even if it is 5 or 10m away, normally the best approach I have found to is carefully but quickly climb past the crux without getting tired. Of course that doesn't work for ice routes that are vertical or more than 10m but fortunately I haven't climbed any like that!

The next photo was taken by helicopter at about 4pm. This was shortly before we started to descend! It was quite funny. Once we realised where we were and we knew the route was backing off, we actually considered carrying on to the top in the dark. We thought we would be able to rap the route in the dark (We were going to be anyway). However, I was pretty cold and dehydrated so I insisted that

we got the stove out and melted some ice and had a hot drink before carrying on. Then we established that the gas had been left on the bench at the hut! Once we knew there was no drink, I wasn't keen to carry on. I didn't want to risk spending the night on top of a 3000m peak in the middle of winter with no hot drink!

Vaughan and Simon high on the South Face of Douglas Peak.
unknown

Second attempt (*Simon's Vertigo account*)

Day 1 – Recce on Douglas. During our flight in we did get bumped around quite a lot and the pilot didn't dare to turn and look at us as we unloaded our gear from the helicopter outside Pioneer Hut. We spent Friday afternoon checking out the route on Douglas. Having already been up most of the route, I was mainly trying to get used to the new conditions at the bottom - more snow, less ice. Others had tried and failed on the route the day prior to our recce, citing continuous snow and ice fall in the lower sections. We encountered the same issue on our recce but vowed to continue on the following day, the logic being that the snow/ice fall was limited to the lower gully and this would not be an issue if we pushed past this before the sun hit.



Return to Pioneer Hut after the recce.



Rob gets ready to belay Simon to the start of the crux pitch above.

Day 2 – South Face of Douglas. We left the hut at 5am for our ascent of Douglas. Snow shoes are an essential item for backcountry travel in winter and we were glad to have them. Due to the excellent snow conditions and our recce of the route the day prior we travelled to the base of the route unroped and soloed the first 40% of the route. Once the route tended leftwards and steepened up, we began pitching. We hit the second and crux pitch at 9am. About 6 hours earlier than on my attempt last July! “You will cruise up that,” said Rob. Having climbed part of the crux section before (cutting it short due to the difficulty) I didn’t quite agree, but said nothing. Besides, this time around I had more experience, better ice climbing gear, and daylight was on our side.



“This time around I just focused on getting to the slightly flatter ground ahead.” - Simon. Rob

The crux felt just as I remembered it. I didn’t place much protection as I recalled just how energy sapping it is to place ice screws on near vertical ground. It is much better to run it out until the natural ‘rest’ is found at the next ice bulge. With some relief I finished the crux pitch and built an anchor to bring Rob up. “Nice lead!” he said, as he came up, with blood dripping from his forehead. It turns out the damage was self-inflicted (courtesy of the ice adze) and was the result of overdriving on the crux and then yanking the axe out. I was surprised to learn I was bleeding from the nose too. I hadn’t felt anything and put it down to falling ice. From what I had read, we had 3 pitches to go to the summit (making it a total of 5 pitches for us - it would take 10 if you pitched from the bottom). The first 1.5 went well, then we hit the snow. 70 degree snow. It was not pleasant Give me ice any day! Still, we carried on, replacing ice screw anchors with snow stakes.



Bleeding but still smiling!

At 12:30pm we arrived on the summit in perfect blue skies and no wind. After a quick photo stop and drink, we discussed our descent options. Rap the route or walk off? In the end we decided to rap the route, mainly as we didn’t want to walk back around to the base of the route to pick-up our snow shoes! We had taken 7.5 hours from hut to summit and expected a much quicker descent. In the end, the descent took another 7.5 hours and was probably as challenging as the ascent, and we were battling tiredness and dehydration.

Things started off well, but our luck was running out. First up was a dropped belay device! Lucky we



"Topping out on Douglas is pretty cool. Awesome views of both the West Coast ..."



"... and the head of the Tasman." - Simon.

know about the Munter hitch! Second, I decided we would downclimb the lower snowfield, but started to get hit by falling snow and ice. I tried to build a V-thread in the small amount of ice, but the hole kept filling up with snow! So we continued to downclimb to a V-thread lower down from the previous day. I got hit hard on the head by a block of ice and took another blow to the shoulder (an impressive bruise would develop later). We got to the V-thread from the previous day and thought our troubles were over. Then we lost our second belay device. Unbelievable! Both abseiling on Munter hitches worked out great though. Unfortunately the ropes got stuck just when we thought we were home free! It turned out the rope knotted itself on the way up (we never knot them on abseil).

By the time we got to the schrund, it was just starting to get dark and we were in no mood to look for the belay devices (they may have been in there or out on the plateau). We didn't care, and trudged back to the hut, arriving back at 8:30pm. The others in the hut were stoked for us and gave us hot drinks

and some thar sausages. Delicious! They were a bit surprised to see us packing our bags again. "We're off to climb Barnicoat tomorrow," I explained. Two were kind enough to lend us their belay devices and recommended 'Tigger' the route on Barnicoat's South Face, which they had completed the day prior.

Would I rap the route again? Maybe. If the snow or ice was falling in the lower gully, probably not. The walk off is OK. I've ascended and descended that route before.

Day 3 – Barnicoat. Being somewhat tired and with sore calves, we were hoping Barnicoat would be a shorter and easier day than Douglas. We had been recommended the route 'Tigger' but when we got closer we decided to find our own route up. 'Tigger' did not top out on the summit and by this stage we were more keen to climb to the summit than climb an ice route. Our route was further left on the South Face than the marked routes, and topped out on a flat spot left of the summit.



Mt Barnicoat near the Summit Ridge.

We encountered steep snow and one steepish ice pitch heading up to the flat spot. The final section to the summit contained more steepish ice which we soloed. Rob was happy to be on the summit of Barnicoat. However, I was sure the other peak of Barnicoat looked higher. My GPS confirmed this and I suggested we traverse along the ridge. It looked quite far but was only about 70m. We dropped our packs and were standing on the true summit 15 minutes later. Again, a perfect day with no wind or clouds and beautiful views of the Tasman Sea. We completed the trip in 7 ½ hours hut to hut. Later, I discussed the route with Don French. He said we had mostly followed his descent route when he climbed 'Rope Boy'. I estimated our climb to be 2+ / 3-.



Rob traverses Barnicoat Ridge from the true summit.



Rob weaves through the rock bands on Mt Spencer.

Day 4 – Spencer. We got a good look at the South Face of Spencer from Barnicoat and didn't like what we saw. The 'ice' routes consisted of 60-70 degree snow with very little actual ice on them. We decided to climb the 1+ North Ridge instead. Three hours after leaving the hut we were on the summit of Spencer. Most of the time was the longish

walk across the névé. We opted to leave our packs halfway up Spencer, just before the main climbing difficulties arose.

The climb proved to surpass its 1+ grade! I've climbed easier 2+ and 3- grades. With its northern aspect, the snow was soft even 30 minutes after the sun hit the slope. The crux involved weaving through exposed rock bands covered with sastrugi and only loosely held in place by soft snow! We were on the summit by 9am and didn't wait for long before descending – we had to get off before the snow turned to porridge!

The descent was tricky: many of the rocks were loose, and we had to use a mixture of dry-tooling techniques and plunging our ice axes. Once past the rock bands and the worst of it, we downclimbed the steep snow section, being careful to stop ourselves from sliding down the slope. There was a hard layer of snow 30 cm below the soft snow layer – climbing this late in the afternoon is not recommended! On the walk down to the glacier we almost got hit by blocks of ice which were now starting to drop off

the rocks as the sun warmed them! We got back to the hut at 1:30pm and joked about walking down to Chancellor Hut after lunch. We soon abandoned that idea and had several cups of tea and put the seats outside the hut, enjoying the sunshine and clear skies.

Day 5 – Walk out. We set out the door at 6am and, thanks to our snowshoes, we were at Chancellor Hut by 8:30am. The walk out to Fox Glacier also went well and we spotted a thar (mmm, thar!) on the way down. Suicide Alley was inactive (beware of falling rocks the size of houses when it is raining) and we were at the carpark by 12:30pm. After a spot of lunch we started the long walk back to Fox Glacier Village but fortunately we scored a ride with the glacier guides. After a shower and second lunch at Porter Lodge, Rob and I paid our share of the helicopter fare and parted ways. I eventually got back to Christchurch that night at 9pm and had a dinner of, wait for it - thar sausages! It seems that many people share a love of thar. I flew back to Wellington the following morning and back to work. What a great way to finish winter off – 3 great climbs and a nice walk out, all in excellent weather and with good company! I can't wait for spring!



Rob approaching Chancellor Hut with the Fox Glacier below.

Descent of the South Face of Douglas (Rob)

Of all the climbing Simon and I did together, there are two individual climbs and one trip that stand out as most memorable, as great climbing. The South Face of Douglas is one of those climbs - the other climb being the South Face of Mt Aspiring (Aug 2014) and the 17 day trip in late 2012 from Mt Cook Village to Fox Glacier Village (no helicopters) that went via Mts Cook and Tasman and a few other peaks.

We had planned a winter ascent of this highly regarded and technically quite challenging face of approx 500m of steep to very steep ice. This face is far from a beginners climb and on the odd occasion it is guided it is two guides to one client, this is seriously steep ice. We waited all August for the right weather window and flew into Pioneer Hut on the 30th Aug, and on the last possible day (31st August) we got our winter ascent – as Simon and I both realized that the 1st Sept would be a spring ascent and that was not our plan!

The climb went super well, we had a great day on this face. We were at the base of the face at about 6am with daybreak starting to threaten. We soloed on great ice the first 250m or so and then roped up and pitch climbed the following 250m to summit, which we were on just after 12 noon. Being on the summit was the first and only time we would see the sun that day as all great NZ south face ice climbs sit in the shade all day at that time of the year (which is why they are great ice climbs).

The fun began on descent. We decided we would 'rap the route' or abseil all the way back down (as we had left our snowshoes at the bottom) on something we call 'V-Threads'. Which is a piece of 6mm cord threaded through 2 holes we have made in the ice with ice screws, that meet in behind the ice. Probably to a non climber that sounds really dodgy, right!- but correctly made these are very safe anchors. We had carried a second 60m rope so we could tie it to the main climbing rope and rap 60m at a time.



Rob places a V-thread during the recce on Douglas.

Two raps into the descent and all was well, until I went to take the rope out of my belay plate and with heavily gloved hands, as I removed the rope from the belay plate with the carabineer open,

off went the belay plate. As you could imagine, on an angle of 70 degrees or more, and on solid ice, anything you drop bounces once about 10m below you and that's about the last you ever see of it. Well, Simon looks at me and says something like "Well, what are you going to do now, Rob?" My answer was "No problem, I have a big carabineer and I can put both ropes through it and rap on an Italian Hitch." "Sounds good," is Simon's reply. I tie the Italian Hitch and Simon and I both spend more than a few moments checking it out – "Looks right to me," Simon said, "Me too," I replied. I tested it while still hooked onto the anchor (just in case we both got it wrong and the Italian Hitch was not tied correctly) and all seemed just fine, and it was, and so the descent continued.

Two raps later I arrived at the next V-thread that Simon was busy making, and Simon had a big grin all over his face. You know the one he had, sort of a bit funny, a bit mischievous, and bit am I going to be in trouble. At first I didn't take too much notice of this until Simon said "Rob – I just wanted to be like you." I didn't get this comment and after a moment Simon filled the gaps in by saying "I threw my belay plate away just like you!" I said something like "You've got to be kidding me," but no, we had now both dropped our belay plates. This just doesn't happen but today it did. So now we are both wrapping on Italian Hitches but we are still making solid downwards progress and we thought we should be off the face before or just on dark (a real consideration when climbing in the winter with shorter days).

So downwards we go, a little lower (maybe the next rap even) a repeat of Simon's grin awaited me. However this time I was awake to the fact that this would likely mean something funny was about to come my way and it did. Simon said "Rob, I dropped something else, one of my carabineers." I thought to myself that's no big deal, it's only a carabineer and after all it is Simon's not mine. However Simon's grin remained as large as before and I just felt I did not have the total story yet, and I awaited Simon's sense of humour to catch up, and it did. Simon next said to me "Actually Rob I have some good news and some bad news for you." "Oh yea, here we go," I thought "so tell me, what's the good news?" Simon happily repeated that he had dropped his carabineer – this did not faze me at all but that cheeky grin was still there so I had to ask "Oh yea, so what's the bad news then?" Simon

then told me that attached to his carabineer was my ice screw! Both, just like the belay plates, bounced once and that was the last time we saw that gear.

It did not matter, we got down safely, just on dark, put on our snowshoes (did not bother looking for the gear we dropped) and headed to the hut 45 minutes away. Dinner was on our minds!! In all the other climbing we did, we never once dropped any other gear – it all happened on this one climb. Simon did drop his cell phone into a crevasse - but that's another story.

Other climbers were flying out from Pioneer Hut the next day and they lent us their belay plates for the rest of our trip and we couriered them back once we were out. Trust me, we were both very careful not to drop those belay plates also!!

Footnote. The South Face was the key climb we went for but the weather held. We both had time (or at least I did as I was not working and Simon, as sometimes would happen, would just arrive back at Transpower a few days late, work the next wet weekend and all would be good), so we added on and climbed both Mts Barnicoat and Spencer before we walked out. Why?– they were both on the '100 Great Peaks' list of course, and Simon never lost the chance to bag some peaks on the list when we could.



Time for a break. Rob

November 2013

A serious accident, successful rescue and recovery. Heather Rhodes joins Vaughan Snowdon and Simon to attempt Jagged Peak in the Arrowsmith Range of South Canterbury. First is an extract from Heather's account in Women's Day magazine (July 2014). Next is Simon's report which formed part of Paul Maxim's article on personal locator beacons (PLBs) published in The Tararua Annual 2013-14. We have added our understanding and an update on Heather's recovery.

Heather's Account

For three years, Heather, 36, worked training soldiers for the army, but before her fall last November, she left her job and took some time out to explore the mountains of the South Island while contemplating a career change. Through a mutual friend, she met mountaineers Vaughan Snowdon, of Christchurch, and Simon Bell, from Wellington, and joined them on a climbing trip. "I met them in Christchurch the night before the trip, but I knew straightaway we were going to get on," recalls Heather.

On the first day, the trio hiked into the Arrowsmith Range for about eight hours. They camped on the Cameron Glacier that night, intending to climb the treacherous passage between Mt Jagged and Mt Upham the next day. But after setting out the following morning, they found they were met with falling rock and ice as they climbed. "We decided we should turn around, but we had to wait because there was too much stuff coming down," says Heather. "We found a relatively sheltered place and hung around, all of us tied to an anchor for eight hours."

At about 6.30pm, the temperature had plummeted and because less rock was falling, they decided it was safe to descend the mountain. Heather tells, "I banged in the anchor, and Vaughan and Simon abseiled first. I came to abseil to meet them, but either the ice broke or my anchor pulled out and I flew past them."

.....Despite the damage, Heather is happy it was she who'd last touched the anchor before she fell. She explains, "We don't know if I made a mistake or whether the anchor failed, but I'm glad it's not someone else who banged it in and is feeling guilty about it, given that I got so broken. Because the two guys had abseiled with the anchor

just fine, we suspect something unusual may have happened. Maybe all the ice ripped out from under it, but we'll never know."

Simon's Report

On 3 November 2013 our party of three was descending the Jagged-Upham Couloir in the Arrowsmith Range after an aborted summit attempt. While Heather Rhodes was abseiling her anchor failed and she fell 300 metres down a steep ice slope. The ropes went with her. We initially assumed she had died in the fall. We were able to reach her after 1 hour of challenging downclimbing. We immediately set off my PLB (she was wearing my pack at the time of the fall).

Her injuries were severe. Both legs were badly broken (one had an open fracture). She had lost her helmet in the fall and she was unconscious when we found her (she remained in a coma for the following week). Heather's immediate risk was hypothermia. We were able to erect a tent beside her and move her in. We then used body heat and hot water bottles to keep her warm.

The Westpac helicopter arrived about 11.30pm, 3 hours after we set off the beacon. We were fortunate that the helicopter was equipped with a spotlight and able to fly at night. The helicopter could not land beside us so we had to put Heather on a stretcher and drag her 600m across snow. The paramedics told us her injuries were extensive and they were not sure if she would survive. If we did not have a PLB her chances of survival would have been very low. It could have taken 8 hours for one person to walk out to raise the alarm. The walk-out involved crossing glaciated terrain which would be risky for one person to do without a rope, particularly at night.



Vaughan and Heather on the tramp up the Cameron River.



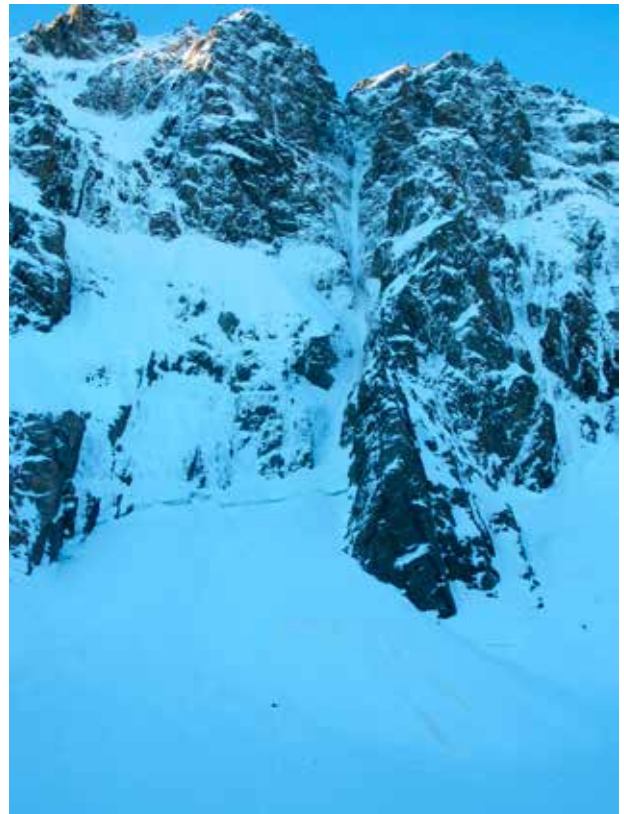
Heather crosses the schrund below the couloir.



Anchored to the mountain, Vaughan, Heather and Simon wait for conditions to improve.



Vaughan and Heather at the campsite on the Cameron Glacier, directly in front of the Jagged – Upham couloir.



Vaughan tends Heather after the accident. Taken from campsite as Simon retrieves tent.



Rescue helicopter on the Cameron Glacier.

Six months later Heather is recovering but it is a slow process. Her speech and memory were affected but mostly right now I believe. Six months after the accident she was still having ankle surgery and skin grafts. She is now swimming but walking is challenging without a crutch. In 1 year this may be OK – will wait and see.

Our understanding

After walking up the Cameron River the party set up camp on the Cameron Glacier. Next morning they crossed the glacier and started climbing. After encountering falling debris in the couloir, they abandoned the climb, sheltering for eight hours under a ledge until the ice and rockfall reduced with cooler evening temperatures.

When they judged it safe, they commenced their descent anchoring the first abseil pitch with a snow bollard. For the second pitch, a snow stake was needed. After they had agreed on the technicalities, Heather drove in the stake at the correct angle with about 20 strong blows. They all agreed it provided a safe anchor. Vaughan abseiled the

pitch, followed by Simon. Heather followed last. They didn't see what happened next except to see Heather flash past them down the slope.

Although Simon was very shaken by the accident, he had promised Lorraine months ago that he would accompany her up Mt Cook about ten days later and she had been eagerly preparing. At first they considered calling the trip off. But after much thought and soul searching, Simon concluded the accident was not a result of poor safety decisions. He could see no obvious technical reason for the failure of the anchor and said that the true cause would never be known. He and Lorraine decided to continue with their planned trip (described in Chapter 20).

Update

Heather has continued to make an impressive recovery. At Simon's memorial gathering in February 2015, she told us she had recently climbed to Mueller Hut - on crutches! It was somewhat odd she said to be at a memorial service for someone who (together with Vaughan) had saved her life.

2009 – 2014. 4 Years 3 Months and 50 Peaks

A milestone. Simon's summary of climbing the first 50 peaks from the '100 Great Peaks' list was published in The Climber and Vertigo in 2014. Simon later used these notes in his presentation to the NZAC (Wellington Section).

Not everyone has the desire or talent to push forward the standards of mountaineering in New Zealand, putting up new routes and repeating hard classics. Peak bagging is a fun alternative which is a great way to explore new areas, develop fitness and skills, and meet new friends. The NZAC 100 Peak list, available online, is the ultimate peak bagging list and no one has ticked them all off yet...

The 100 Peak list has five peaks in the North Island (Hector, Hikurangi, Taranaki, Ngaurahoe and Ruapehu). There are a few in the Nelson Lakes and Kaikoura areas. Most are in the main part of the Southern Alps. This means lots of flying to the South Island.

Here's my story for the first fifty.

1. Ngauruhoe. Nov '09. Side trip from the Tongariro Crossing. I didn't know there was a list but I sure was grumpy after a bad night's sleep in a tent. Why would you drive half the night to get up early and walk up a hill when you could stay at home, sleep in, and have bacon and eggs? I came from a rock climbing background in Christchurch where you can have your cake and eat it too.



Simon on the summit of the first peak (Ngauruhoe) in Nov 2009. Lorraine

2. Taranaki. Nov '09. North Ridge. A solo day trip from Wellington. Spent more time driving

than climbing. I had so much fun glissading that I missed the turn off to the lodge. Someone I met on the 'round the mountain' track commented that I looked out of control on the descent. In hindsight she was right!

3. Travers. Feb '10. North East Ridge. We had two teams, the other going via the Summit Creek route. Walkie Talkies between the groups provided much entertainment. There were plenty of man hugs on the summit.

4. Avalanche Peak. Apr '10. From Bealey Peak. A nice traverse as part of an Easter trip. I got nervous when visibility dropped though.

5. Tahurangi. Sep '10. A traverse from Girdlestone. On a small section of ice, the lead climber was directly above me as I belayed (poor form from both of us) and I hoped he wouldn't fall on me.

6. Rolleston. Mar '11. A summer traverse from Philistine with a Polish gent I met through a friend. He bought a big camera and tripod which I thought was funny. Afterwards he said he was so glad he didn't bring his wife (a non-climber).

7. Aspiring. Nov '11. A big crew from Wellington on a club trip. We walked in with 7 days of food and big packs. I worried the ramp would be soft on the way down, but it was harder than on the way up. The storm hit before we even got to the summit but we carried on. I almost didn't bother going to the very top - there was nothing to see.

8. Cook. Nov '11. Via Linda Glacier. My first mountain in Mt Cook National Park. Another big crew from Wellington (club trip). I took my light and fast 700g tramping pack to the summit but it came down looking worse for wear.

9. Haidinger. Dec '11. West Ridge. A club trip to Pioneer Hut - thanks Rob. Four hours up and six

hours down. Got the ropes stuck, twice. About this time I learnt the value of having a mantra to calm you down while climbing steep ground.

10. Douglas. Dec '11. From Glacier Peak. We were on a roll. Easier than we thought. In July '12 Vaughan and I attempted the central couloir route. We failed, not too surprisingly, this was my first time leading on ice, but Rob and I succeeded in Aug '13.

11. Lendenfeld. Dec '11. Via Marcel Col. After 2 hours sleep while doing a 'half day' on West Peak of Haast the day prior. We wanted Tasman, but didn't want it hard enough. We were back at the hut by 8am and back in Wellington the same day. As I lay in bed at home I wondered if we had attempted Tasman if we'd be back at the hut yet.

12. Annette. Dec '11. Via Sebastapol Ridge. The peak is just a bump off the Annette Glacier but climbing the ridge was fun. About this time I became aware of the 100 peak list and started to record what I had done.

13. Nun's Veil. Jan '12. Via Gorilla Stream. For the New Year. I climbed in tramping boots and found front pointing challenging. The price for the boat ride was a bottle of wine.

14. Faerie Queene. Feb '12. Divide route. From a camp at the valley floor. We decided not to bring crampons or ice axe and ended up holding sharp stones in our hands for a short downclimb on a moderate, but firm, snow slope.

15. Tutoko. Feb '12. SE ridge. We forgot some crampons. We got some from someone at the motor camp and the pilot felt sorry for us and flew up higher than the designated landing spot to make up for lost time. When I got out of the helicopter I was blown away, even walking out looked challenging - and it was!

16. Malte Brun. Mar '12. West Ridge. A 3 day trip I thought. But we spent a night out at 2600m with one down jacket between two on a perfect clear night. We melted snow and put hot water in our bottles to keep our hands warm. Fittingly, we descended back to our high camp on April Fools' Day.



Lisa on the West Ridge of Malte Brun.

17. Phipps. Apr '12. West Ridge from the road. Not for everyone in summer due to the poor rock quality and steepness. I loved it.

18. Double Cone. Apr '12. A solo climb after my friend invited me down for a rock climbing trip and then unexpectedly went home early. I was relaxed but glad to be wearing rock shoes.

19. Scotts Knob. Jun '12. Standard route. My climbing partner got something stuck in her throat which I initially thought was funny but then she threw up and I felt bad for laughing.

20. Hikurangi. Jun '12. Standard route. A thirtieth birthday celebration. I didn't know the mountains were this high so far north (1752m). Still, most of the height was gained from a farm track. The first place in the world to see the morning sun but we couldn't see much through the fog.

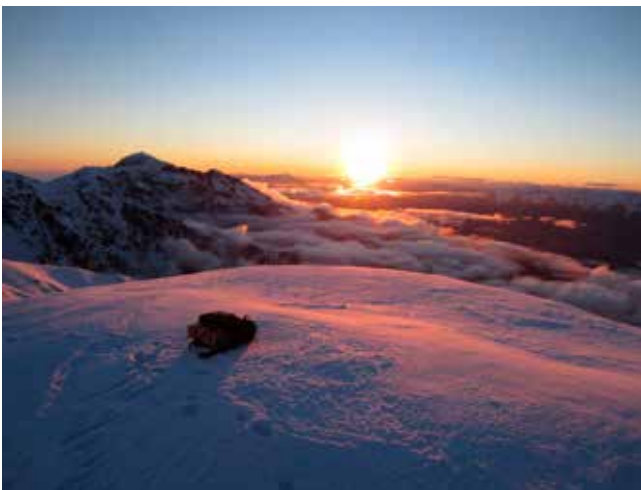
21. Tapuae o Uenuku. Jul '12. Staircase Stream. Ended up being a solo climb after my climbing partner slipped on black ice in the stream just above the hut and got wet / frozen feet. Her saturated overtrousers froze to the rock seconds after we took them off.

22. Murchison. Sep '12. White Glacier route. Sometimes things go to plan, in this case a plan hatched for a particular weekend months in advance, with two people from Christchurch and two from Wellington.



Ascending Mt Murchison at sunrise. We were back at Barker Hut for the 8.30am radio schedule.

23. Te ao Whekere and 24. Manakau. Sep '12. A two day solo traverse to celebrate my 31st birthday. I flew to Nelson early morning and drove to the road end before summiting Te ao Whekere later that day. I tried out my down jacket and down pants / no sleeping bag combination and suffered. Started the traverse at 4am with frozen boots but a lovely bright full moon. I called the farmer from the summit of Manakau and he kindly agreed to pick me up from the road end to save a 14km walk!



Sunset near summit of Te ao Whekere with a cold night ahead.

25. Anzac Peaks. Nov '12. Traverse. Part of a 16 day trip where we walked up the Hooker Valley from Mount Cook Village and walked down the Fox Glacier into Fox Township. We got shut down on a Grand Traverse attempt when we struck a mile of hard blue ice from Middle Peak to High Peak. We accessed the Grand Plateau via Fyfe's Gut and Green Saddle.

26. Tasman. Nov '12. Up Syme Ridge, down the North Shoulder. Felt good to get this one, especially after missing out on the grand traverse. We got to Pioneer Hut and found the remains of a freshly crashed helicopter. Everyone was OK, but I never heard about it in the media and the pilot was back flying the next day.

27. Haast. Nov '12. Gully between Divide Peak and High Peak: High Peak is quite far from the Divide Peak and involves a ridge traverse on mixed ground. We descended between Middle and High Peak just as the weather closed in. We didn't know the forecast because the hut radio had been damaged by lightning.

28. Hector. Dec '12. I've done this before but this time we bagged it while running the southern crossing. We were training for the race, which I never did. I went climbing that weekend instead.

29. Alarm. Dec '12. From saddle. A solo weekend trip from Wellington. My flight to Christchurch was late and I napped on the side of the road at Kaikoura. Grabbed a free snow stake from the summit.

30. Franklin. Dec '12. Travers Range, West Sabine route. Second time lucky for me, third time lucky for my climbing partner. On her first attempt she was in a party where one member was caught in an avalanche and was lucky to walk out of it.



Finding a geocache on Mt Franklin.

31. Brewster. Dec '12. West Ridge. Second time lucky. A high-ish camp helped. I poked my tent pole through my single skin tent. We descended via the face and had to jump the schrund.

32. Dragonfly Peak. Jan '13. We got told off when we used the long drop toilet at the private Whare Kea Chalet (1750m), but we wondered if their clients would have preferred the alternative...

33. Ropeless on Hopeless. Jan '13. From Hopeless Hut. We bumped into another Wellington party who had completed the traverse.

34. Mt Barth. Jan '13. East Ridge. Who says you can't get hard snow in summer when the freezing level is higher than the mountain you are climbing? Two tools came in handy.



Marta, Nina and James cooking dinner on Mt Barth trip.

35. Sabre. Feb '13. North Buttress direct start. Walked in in trail runners and attached crampons to them to get over Barrier Knob. We evened out the hours-per-day on our three day journey by camping near the base of the route instead of staying at the rock bivvy.

36. The secret to climbing **Unicorn**, Feb '13, is to solo the Strauchon face of Dilemma. The party who pitched it (all 28 pitches, crux 15, mostly 10-12) were too tired to traverse to Unicorn and bag the peak.

37. Tamaki. Mar '13. Another weekend trip with a friend from Christchurch. His Subaru Legacy got most of the way to Memorial Hut, but at a crawl. Better not to take the risk without a proper 4WD.

38. Paske. Apr '13. South East Ridge. Fresh snow on the ridge slowed me down. Walked in from Lake Tennyson.

39. Dasler Pinnacles. Apr '13. North Ridge. For this weekend trip I managed to depart Wellington on Saturday morning and still make it to the bivvy just on dark. A great solo climb quite short and easily achievable in running shoes in high summer.

40. Barnicoat. Sep '13. Unmarked route. We made our way up a relatively straightforward and obvious line which to our surprise wasn't marked in the guide.

41. Spencer. Sep '13. North Ridge. Snow shoes came in handy to approach from Pioneer Hut. The snow conditions up high were terrible, not a 1+ at all in these conditions with falling ice and snow which turned to porridge at the first rays of sunlight.

42. Vancouver. Nov '13. East Face. We almost didn't leave the hut because I couldn't find my crampons. Maybe the mountain was trying to tell us something. Almost got hit by rock fall on the descent. I dived out of the way (it was 50/50 which way to go) and self arrested above the schrund.



Rob descending Vancouver with Torres, Tasman and Silberhorn in the background.

43. Hochstetter Dome. Nov '13. Standard traverse. Climbed in the afternoon after flying from Plateau Hut to Tasman Saddle Hut just before noon.

44. Green. Nov '03. East Face. In claggy and deteriorating weather. First time I've borrowed warm clothes off my climbing partner after deciding to leave my down jacket at the hut.

45. Footstool. Nov '13. Divide route. This is the only time I've seen a family of five all on one rope for glacier travel. They did well but turned around 20m from the summit.

46. Nazomi. Dec '13. Couloir route. We walked up the Hooker with 6 days food and big plans. We settled for Nazomi, a great climb, and a walk out on an average forecast. (There's cell phone coverage at Gardiner Hut.) Forecasts are open for interpretation however, and our friends climbed the East Ridge of Cook while we headed for the cafe.

47. Rabiters Peak. Jan '14. East Ridge. A solo day trip to beat the approaching NW storm.

48. Franklin. Jan '14. Via Good Luck Creek. Climbed solo from Goat Pass Hut and out in a long day. Not as chossy as I was led to believe but I still wouldn't recommend a group of more than 2 people climb this in summer!

49. Lean Peak. Jan '14. From Copland Pass. Yes, you can still access Copland Pass from Mount Cook Village and Hooker Hut too, just don't try and go from Hooker Hut to Copland Ridge. That is not possible. On another trip in Apr '12 we spent the night of Friday 13th at Hooker Hut. The ghost didn't make an appearance.

50. The Warrior. Feb '14. South Ridge. This is where I learnt the value of a motor bike for long river walks. More useful than a 4WD and cheaper too. Despite what I'd read, the Warrior is a total choss pile in summer and not recommended without a snow covering.

More than 25 people have accompanied me to at least one summit. Thanks in particular to Lorraine (21), Rob (13), Lisa (7), Steve (4) and Vaughan (3 - plus several attempts, a couch to sleep on in Christchurch and has offered to store my future motor bike!)

The remaining 50 peaks are generally more remote and weekend options are becoming increasingly limited. Maybe I'll get to spend some more time in Wellington on the weekends! Contact me (simon.colin.bell@gmail.com) if interested in joining me on a future trip or if you would like some beta.



Vaughan motorcycling up the Clyde River towards the Warrior & Glory. (Peak no. 50)

November 2013

A friendly laugh at Simon. Patrick Arnold, Rob Hawes, Lorraine Johns and Simon have just spent a week at Plateau Hut in Aoraki Mt Cook National Park, climbing Mt Cook and some other nearby peaks. Now they're at Tasman Saddle Hut with Mt Elie de Beaumont in their sights. Lorraine's NZAC presentation advertisement introduces the trip, then Rob tells three stories.



Lorraine beside the crevasse on the Anna Glacier.

Lorraine's introduction

Lorraine Johns will talk about surviving ten days on the loose in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. Just like Freda before her, Lorraine was surrounded only by the company of men and very large spiders.

On such a trip, she needed to be able to fend for herself, which included estimating the minimum amount of chocolate required to retain the appearance of sanity, conducting stealth raids on the hut food boxes (and discovering the culinary delight that is instant mash), learning Swahili, exploring the range of cellphone reception around the Tasman Valley, and managing to exist in the same clothes for just a little too long ...

When they weren't busy lazing in the hut and beating South Island climbers at cards, Lorraine and her team also climbed the Anzac Peaks, Cook, Vancouver, Glacier Dome, Aylmer, Hochstetter Dome, Green, Walter, Elie de Beaumont, and The Footstool. Lorraine will focus mainly on the ascents of Mount Cook and Elie de Beaumont, but steel yourself for gratuitous shots of other mouthwatering alpine vistas.



Lorraine on the summit of Mt Cook.

Rob's account

Simon, Lorraine, Patrick and I had taken a trip into Tasman Saddle at the top of the Tasman Glacier. We stayed at Tasman Saddle Hut and had a few objectives. I think for the others the focus was on Elie de Beaumont (East Peak) and then Simon and I planned to tackle the more difficult West Peak (the West Peak is on the '100 Great Peaks' list of course).



The hungry guardian of the Anzac Peaks.



Tasman Saddle Hut perched above the Tasman Glacier. *Lorraine*



Simon inside the hut. *Lorraine*



Lorraine, Patrick and Rob near the summit of the East Peak of Elie de Beaumont.



Lorraine and Patrick on the summit of East Peak.



Simon above the Anna Glacier crevasse. *Rob*

We settled into the hut and the first day climbed Mt Walter (Patrick & Rob) and Mt Green (Lorraine & Simon) and all went well. The next day the four of us all summited Elie de Beaumont (East Peak) and had a good day. Conditions were icy and we all took care on our crampons. This climb however was good for Simon and me as to climb to West Peak (which we planned to attempt the next day) you need to go almost all the way on to the East Peak summit, and then traverse a long and very exposed ridge to the West Peak. We therefore had a 'track' we could follow easily in the dark and we had had a good look at the traverse we would need to make. So the scene was set for the West Peak attempt.

After another early start, from memory 3 or 4 am, we were out of the hut within 45 minutes of the alarm going off and on our way, roped up for glacier travel. We followed yesterday's steps as we traversed rolling terrain heading for the Anna Glacier that leads us up to the slopes of Elie de Beaumont. All was running to plan.

The Anna Glacier is home to a very large crevasse that is always in the same spot and can completely cut off access to the route. The crevasse runs the entire width of the Anna. As the Anna steepened we dropped the rope off. We knew the way across the crevasse as we had crossed it only the day before so it was not going to be an issue, and Simon and I were more than happy soloing at this point.

Simon was out in front by about 10m. We had crossed the crevasse and continued on and upwards. I noticed that Simon had stopped and was doing something, which I could not quite make out, but he seemed to have his jacket undone and I assumed it was OSM time already. I continued upwards myself but suddenly noticed a rock sliding quickly towards me. The rock was between Simon and I and falling rocks are bad news. Even a small one travelling at speed can be a serious problem. It can injure you, knock you off your feet, knock you unconscious and cause you to fall, and remember we were above the big crevasse on the Anna. I quickly scanned the area above us both to check for more rock fall but it was all clear and no more rocks were falling. Simon seemed totally unfazed by this rock that I thought must have passed very closely to him.

As the rock passed me I noticed it was sliding quite smoothly, it was not, as rocks often do, rolling and kicking up, changing direction and being

generally unpredictable. I carried on climbing and I soon had caught up with Simon and I said something like, "Did you see that rock, it must have been really close to you!" Simon again seemed completely at ease about this rock. Simon's jacket was still undone and he looked at me and said, "Rob, that was no rock.... that was my cellphone."

"You must be kidding," I said, but no it was Simon's cellphone. He had been checking for signal (which you can get in places around the top of the Tasman Saddle area) and had put it back in the top pocket of his shirt but with his jacket undone. As he leant forward to continue climbing it slid from his pocket and out of his jacket. This now explained to me why the 'rock' was sliding so smoothly. The phone had carried on past me and there was only one place it was going to stop below us and indeed the phone had now found its way directly into the crevasse on the Anna Glacier.

I looked at Simon and simply said something like, "I could have told you had you asked me there is no cellphone coverage in the bottom of that crevasse. You didn't have to throw your phone in it to find that out." Simon just smiled at me and said, "Rob, I will just buy a new one." And he did, as simple as that.

Just out of interest, we continued climbing, reached East Peak (for the second time in two days), and began the traverse. However we did not like the snow conditions on the traverse, it was far too long to try and use the rope the whole way, and using the rope and snow anchors in poor snow conditions would not really have improved our safety at all. With a massive amount of exposure below us on the traverse, we decided that West Peak of Elie de Beaumont was not going to happen that day, so we turned back and headed for Tasman Saddle Hut, a relaxing hut lunch and an afternoon of resting.

One Square Meal Bars (Rob)

Simon was without doubt the greatest eater of the mighty OSM bar that I have come across – Chocolate being the 'flavour of choice'.

I remember well, and it was with the utmost pride that he informed me that he had stopped at the Cookie Time factory just south of Christchurch while the factory was having a 2 for 1 sale, and having spent \$60 on OSM bars he walked out with \$120 worth of the bars. I never saw the size

of the bag but I can picture it and Simon smiled with glee when he told me of the deal.

On Simon's Fitness (*Rob*)

This is something I did not share with Simon but like me many people that knew Simon, we all talked of just how fit he was, and it just seemed to come from always being 'out there doing it' – like they say the best way to get fit for anything is to do that exact thing. He was one fit man!

Simon always reminded me of the TV advert for Energizer batteries, you know the little guy running around I think playing table tennis against all comers, then when no one can beat

him he plays against himself, and when he gets tired you just replace the batteries. Well that was Simon Bell except you did not replace the batteries – no, you just made sure he had enough food and enough sleep, and then, just like the Energizer man, he would just go and go and go!! Other than guys I know here in Wanaka that do things like the Wanaka Ironman and the Coast to Coast, I did not know anyone else that had Simon's fitness and ability to just keep going.

Putting aside whatever accident took place in January, because sometimes accidents just happen, in the mountains, at the beach, driving a car etc, etc, Simon made great decisions in the mountains and I think his fitness played a massive part in his ability to make those great decisions.



Rob attempts the West Peak.

March 2014

A challenging 35 hour rock climb with a sleepless night spent anchored to the mountainside. Lisa Wynne and Simon climb Mt Magellan, a remote peak bordering Aoraki Mt Cook National Park. Simon's account first appeared in Vertigo (No.772) and featured in his presentation to the Tararua Tramping Club in June 2014. Lisa's tribute introduces Simon's account.



"I really like this photo. If you look closely you can see a small dot in the glacier which is our tent!" - Simon.

Lisa's Tribute

I had the enormous privilege of sharing with him both of our first trip to the Balfour. For him another of his 100 peaks that saw him travelling far and wide, and a delightful alpine rock route in an exquisite location. For me a chance to climb again with the consummate climbing partner, we never talked whilst climbing, a smile or look said it all. The perfect companion on an overnight sitting bivy, and great company in the tent. We'd chat for too long and yes, Simon could gossip but only benignly of course.

Simon has left a great legacy with those fortunate enough to climb with him, I have no doubt he will be a part of all their future endeavours as he will mine. My thoughts are with you and hope you find strength in Simon's gentle competent delightful person.

Simon's Account

Preamble

Ever since I started sport climbing, almost a decade ago, I've heard people talk about the rock routes on Mts Magellan and Drake in the remote Balfour Glacier of Mount Cook National Park. However, it wasn't until last year that I personally talked to someone who had actually been rock climbing in the Balfour! It is a much talked about region but ascents of Magellan and Drake are relatively uncommon.

The 'modern' rock routes in the Balfour were established in the late '80s and '90s. So what's the appeal? Where else in New Zealand can you rock climb 8 or more pitches on trad gear, top out on the summit of a 3000m peak while leaving your heavy snow climbing gear at the base of the route,

and safely abseil off double-bolt anchors?

A period of settled weather in March arrived and I sent out a last minute email to try and get a climbing partner to come into the Balfour. I was stoked when Lisa agreed, particularly as I had already had one attempt to get into the Balfour this summer (that trip was aborted due to a poor forecast).

Accessing the Balfour (Day 1)

The Balfour Glacier is a no-fly zone. Parties climbing the rock routes on Magellan and Drake most commonly access the Balfour from Katies Col. This route is quite favourable in late season conditions (i.e. when the rock routes aren't covered in snow) and is more suited to carrying in large amounts of gear. I hesitate to say access is easy, particularly with a large pack, but navigation is straightforward and it beats climbing over Mt Silberhorn, a 3000m peak!

We drove to Fox township and the next day (day 1) at 10 am caught a helicopter to the designated landing strip near Big Mac. From here it took about one hour to reach Katies Col and a further four hours to traverse into the Balfour. The last part of the traverse involves descending a steep and icy snow slope. Fortunately this section is equipped with stainless steel double-bolt anchors at the top and halfway down. We left a 8.1mm rope hanging at the lower bolts (we flew in with 3 ropes). The decision to leave a rope here was based on a recommendation from someone I met at Pioneer Hut last winter. His party had downclimbed the snow slope. While they were busy rock climbing in the Balfour the schrund at the bottom of the slope collapsed. The party had to exit the Balfour via Mt Silberhorn and take the long way around to Katies Col to catch their flight out!



Descending to the Balfour Glacier from Katies Col.



The second abseil down to the Balfour Glacier.

We set up our tent in a flat part of the Balfour Glacier and took a good look at Magellan and Drake. We had come in with some ideas about which route to climb but we soon changed our minds when we saw the mountains up close!



Our camp on the Balfour Glacier. Lisa is uncoiling the aerial of the mountain radio.

Choice of route

Our initial plan was to climb the Balfour Buttress on Magellan. This is the longest route (15 pitches) but also the easiest (crux 15, mostly 10-12). However, while we noted the condition of the bolts we encountered while abseiling into the Balfour was excellent, we couldn't be sure about the quality of the bolts on Magellan. The bolts were placed in 1996 and are on a route called 'Anyone Can Play Guitar'. I hadn't been able to confirm if anyone had actually climbed Magellan since 1996 and used the abseil line.

My concern with climbing Balfour Buttress was that we could get to the summit of Magellan and then find some bolts were deteriorated or had been

sheared off with ice movement in winter (I've seen this before on Pudding Rock). We then changed our objective to 'Anyone Can Play Guitar', the logic being we could inspect the bolted anchors while we climbed the route. As a bonus, if we had enough of the climb we could simply abseil off.

Of course, the main problem with this choice of route was the difficulty. This route is a grade 6-! Would I be able to climb the 'punch in the guts' first pitch? (a 45m crack which approaches vertical for the last 15 metres, a sustained grade 19). Probably not I thought, but at least the gear is good!

The 35 hour guitar lesson (Days 2 and 3)

Day 2 probably didn't start as early as it should have. We convinced ourselves that as it wouldn't take long to access the base of the route (we allowed only 1 hour), and that since it would take a few hours after daylight for the sun to touch and dry the rock, we didn't need to get up too early. Actually, we were simply tired from the walk in and from our everyday lives and didn't want to get up too early!



Mt Magellan (3049m, left) and Drake (2960m, right) from the Balfour Glacier. The 8-pitch route we climbed 'Anyone Can Play Guitar' is marked in green.

Although March is pretty late season, we had met some guides at Fox who were about to take clients up Lendenfeld Peak, the sort of climb that is normally done in November / December. Snow conditions were great in general, but we still managed to reach a couple of dead-ends (wide crevasses) and getting to the base of the route was somewhat challenging and time consuming.

We found a bolt at the start of the route and it was in excellent condition. This was very reassuring.

There was some evidence that it had been hit by stones, but it was only slightly chipped. By the time we had stashed our snow climbing gear and actually started to climb it was 1pm! We each climbed with a bag. I had a small running bag (15L) with a down jacket and some food and water. Lisa had a bigger bag but it was mostly empty. In addition to what I had she carried the PLB and Jetboil stove. Half-way up the route there was a snow patch which would provide us with plenty of water from our stove and single gas canister.

I stared up at pitch one. It looked every bit as difficult as I had imagined. I normally avoid crack climbing or just try and climb them via a lay-back. This almost works on a 10m crack, but not so well on a 45m one! Of course we didn't tape our hands up (or even have spare tape available) so I just did my best to keep my skin. I think it is fair to say this is the hardest pitch I've ever climbed in the mountains. When I say pitch, I mean 3. That's right, once I ran out of gear at 25m I simply built an anchor and bought up Lisa. I repeated this again before finally completing 'pitch 1' and finding the first bolt anchor.



Looking up at the 50m 'punch in the guts' pitch 1 (crux 19) on descent.

On this climb I had 13 cams and managed to use about 10. On a 50m pitch that would give about a 5m spacing between gear. I'm happy with that on climbs where I'm very unlikely to fall but not when I'm climbing at my limit and beyond. After several hours, many rests, quite a bit of pulling on cams, some loss of skin and one lead fall just as I was topping out, we finally arrived at the top of pitch one! If only I had taken guitar lessons! By this stage I was fairly sure that there was no way we would reach the summit before dark. However, we both ignored this fact, finished the last of our water in the hot afternoon sun and continued on with the climb.



Lisa on pitch 1.

Pitch 1 had left me shattered but I carried on leading the remainder of the pitches to the summit. Pitch 2 (16) was really enjoyable, although the fatigue from pitch 1 made it challenging. The last part involved climbing a massive semi-detached block about 10m high. The block was very solid, but don't be below it in a major earthquake! Interestingly, the Shogun route on Drake now has a new start as the bottom 20m or so of the buttress has fallen off. Pitches 3 (15) and 4 (14) were quite easy but I managed to mess up the route finding a bit and had to downclimb almost half of pitch 3.

It was starting to get dark by the time we started pitch 4. We were hoping to find the snowy slabby area soon and kept an eye out for a good bivvy ledge. Towards the end of the pitch we found an 'acceptable' rock ledge which was a few steps away from snow (our source of water and warmth). We put in an anchor and got ready for a night of star-watching!

This is the second open bivvy that Lisa and I have shared, the first being on Malte Brun. I simply



Lisa on pitch 2 (16), climbing the massive semi-detached block (great trad anchor on top, bolted anchor a little higher up).



Forced bivvy at 2600m near the top of pitch 4. Everything was secured to the anchor.

won't do the kind of route where an open bivvy is a possibility without an excellent forecast. In this case, we could have descended in the dark and got back to our tent. But that would have spelt the end of our climbing trip. Neither of us would have been keen to get up the next day and repeat pitch 1! Fixing a rope was an option but it seemed easier to spend the night on route.

The evening started with an amazing sunset over the West Coast. Cloud covered the ocean but over land the sky was cloudless. This was followed by several hot drinks to rehydrate and warm us. A moon accompanied us for the first half of the night and psychologically made us warmer. Speaking of warmth, there wasn't much. The down jackets were great but we had no shoes except our rock shoes. Lisa had the large (30L) bag and used this for warmth. I had to make do with some dry thick socks and my climbing pants (no long-johns). There was no wind overnight.

Every hour or so we would boil water and put it in our Nalgines. These make excellent hot water bottles and once the water has cooled down a bit, drinking it provides further warmth. As the moon descended over the horizon so did our spirits. Sleeping for more than a few minutes at a time wasn't possible due to the cold and the fact that whenever I fell asleep I'd lean over from my sitting position which would wake me up. Everything was secured to the anchor so we couldn't actually fall off our ledge but we could slide down it a bit which was quite uncomfortable.

We got going shortly after light on day 3. The sun wouldn't be on the rock for hours but we were eager to get moving and warm again. The remaining 4 pitches to the summit were quite

straightforward (13, 15, 13, 8) and we made good progress to the summit. We summited at 11:30am and soaked up the excellent views. I scoped out Mt Torres, the Balfour Face of Mt Tasman and the North Face of Mt Hicks as possible future climbs while we enjoyed another drink and the remains of yesterday's lunch.

The abseil descent was relatively smooth, although I had managed to drop my belay device on the ascent (a habit of mine) so I had to abseil on a double Munter hitch. The resulting rope twist may have contributed to us getting the rope stuck once. Getting this free required me to ascend some of pitch 2 again which was quite unappealing, particularly in our tired states.



"The descent was quite challenging." - Simon.



Lisa abseiling in the gap between the rock and the snow.

Once off the rock pitches we still had quite a bit of work to get back to our tent. The afternoon snow was very soft and we did some further abseils off rock bands where possible. Our last major obstacle was a schrund type feature near a rock band. We had sidled this on ascent but abseiling this way would be problematic. Fortunately we found a novel solution, which was to abseil through

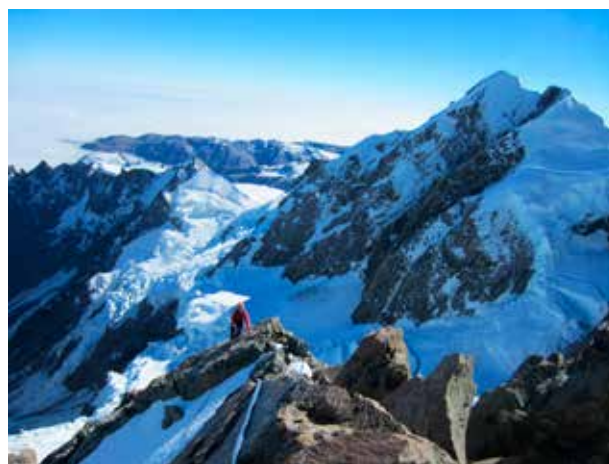
a narrow gap between the rock and the snow. We finally arrived back at our tent at 7pm. It was great to finally be back and have a proper meal and a good night's sleep. We promptly abandoned any plans for climbing Drake the following day and our thoughts turned to home.

Aftermath (Days 4 and 5)

Day 4 saw us depart the Balfour around 9:30am. Three hours later we were at Katies Col and set up the mountain radio to ask for a ride out. Unfortunately, the cloud had already come in from the sea and covered Fox township making flying impossible. Helicopters were flying earlier in the day and we wished we had gotten up earlier. We descended to the landing strip and set up camp once again. The remainder of the afternoon was spent eating, drinking and enjoying the excellent weather and views. Actually, it was actually neat to spend one more day in the hills before returning to civilisation!

On day 5 we were picked up at 8am and returned to Fox for a much deserved shower and hot breakfast. Later that day in Christchurch we met Peter Dickson who put up many of the routes in the '80s and '90s and told him about the climb we had done. We managed to do about the only climb on Drake and Magellan that he hadn't done!

I really enjoyed our trip into the Balfour. Despite the first pitch of our chosen route being a bit too hard for us, we managed to tick the peak and, more importantly, have a great adventure on the way. I'll be back for Drake. In the meantime, I'd better take up guitar lessons - aka crack climbing!



Lisa approaching the summit of Mt Magellan. Big Mac (left) and Torres (right) in the background with the access route from Katies Col mostly visible.

22 TURRET PEAK

May 2014

A fun, sociable weekend. Nina Dickerhof, Rob Munro, James Thornton, and Simon visit the Rolleston Range at the head of Lake Coleridge and climb Turret Peak. Here's Simon's account which was published in NZAC's Vertigo.

The Rolleston Range is rarely visited by climbing parties. To paraphrase the NZAC Canterbury / Westland guidebook, 'Most peaks almost never see an ascent, even the more frequented peaks are rarely climbed.' This knowledge added to the appeal of climbing Turret Peak. It also gave me a much needed break from the '100 Great Peaks' challenge.

Some Christchurch friends, Nina and James and I decided to attempt this peak via the NE ridge (Grade 2-) as a social weekend trip sometime in May. This trip was confirmed for 10/11 May a couple of days prior once sighting the excellent weather forecast. What better way to get to know the last minute and fourth member of the team (Robert) than by spending Friday night on his couch? Over dinner we came up with a plan to make this a loop trip up Boulderstone Stream and down Kakapo Stream with a high camp at the tarns below Turret Peak.

We didn't expect the route to be technical but decided to each bring a harness, a short rope and a few slings 'just in case'. I volunteered to bring my 30m 9.1mm joker, but on seeing the sight of it (a few nicks here and there) and the fact it was a bit damp (my car boot has started to leak!) an alternative rope was soon provided! Funny thing was, the rope we ended up taking was over twenty years old! It belonged to James's dad who possibly didn't climb much, based on the seemingly excellent condition of his rope! As it turned out we ended up taking this rope 'for a walk' so its condition wasn't put to the test.

Early Saturday morning we drove to the head of Lake Coleridge, passing Darfield and Windwhistle on the way and drove to the start of the Wilberforce Canal. True to the guidebook's comment we didn't see any other climbers at the road end. We met some duck shooters instead and they advised us that crossing the Wilberforce further up the valley was possible at that moment. That was great news as the alternative is to take a detour to below where much of the Wilberforce is diverted into the canal on route to Lake Coleridge.

The river is quite braided but one of the braids was quite big. We finally managed to cross near the start of Boulderstone Stream (our attempts lower down were aborted). The main difficulty was the water wasn't flowing clear (snow melt?) so while it wasn't actually flowing that high or that deep it still looked intimidating. It was also very cold!



Simon on a saddle between Boulderstone and Kakapo Streams. James

Heading up Boulderstone Stream was straight forward although we encountered a bit of verglas on some of the river rocks higher up the valley. We crossed onto the ridge north of Boulderstone near pt 1611 and sidled around pt 1892, before heading towards our intended campsite near pt 1731. We ended up camping 200m below this as it looked cold and snowy higher up!

We arrived at our camp easily before dark and had all the modern luxuries – running water, comfy beds and dehy kangaroo meat for dinner! This was the trip where I finally accepted that it is no longer summer. I resolved that on the next trip I would pack a warm base layer instead of a glacier shirt! Nevertheless, we still got plenty of sleep and the alpine start wasn't too bad (up at 5:30am).

The actual climb was fairly relaxed. There was a small amount of snow around but it was not well consolidated, rendering our crampons useful only for pack weight training. Possibly the climb is actually better with some snow on it, as some sections of the ridge were a bit chossy. Not too bad by NZ



James, Rob and Nina at the road end near the Wilberforce Canal.



Nina and James crossing a braid of the Wilberforce.



The luxury campsite with comfy beds and running water.



Rob preparing kangaroo stroganoff. *James*



Up and well on the way by sunrise.



The descent.

TURRET PEAK

standards though! There were one or two sections where a rope could have been used, but care would have to be taken to ensure that it didn't dislodge rocks if abseiling.

As they say reaching the summit is only half way and in this case I definitely agree. That problem was not with the descent of Turret Peak itself, it was with our descent of Kakapo Stream. The guide does mention a 500m bush bash and we found this quite slow going. I'd definitely recommend descending this instead of ascending it - or avoiding it all together!

We arrived back at the car just on dark, and checked out the new (for Christchurch) Burger Fuel on the way home. I returned to Wellington on the red-eye flight Monday morning. This was a fun, sociable weekend trip. I recommend it if you want to check out a new area, don't want an epic challenge and don't like arriving back at work on Monday feeling totally shattered.

Note: Nina has posted some excellent photos of this trip on the internet. Search <Turret Peak Nina Dickerhof>.



Rob, Nina and James crossing Kakapo Stream.

August 2014

Two fit friends enjoy winter climbing in Mt Aspiring National Park. Rob Hawes and Simon start by climbing the exposed South Face of Mt Aspiring, then climb Stargazer Peak, Mt Aspiring (again!) and Somnus Peak. Here is Simon's report which first appeared in Vertigo (No.776), followed by Rob's recollections.



"We were putting the ropes away as the sun went down." - Simon.

Preamble

A few weeks ago I excitedly opened a package shipped to me from an online gear store. At the bottom of the box I found a free shot of 5-hour energy drink. 'It's quick, simple, and made to help hard working people' that label claimed. Last week I got to put that claim to the test... Rob Hawes and I had a plan to head into Colin Todd sometime in August to check out the South Face of Aspiring and tick off Stargazer (highest peak in the Haast range). An unusually long fine spell was spotted, which started on about the 15th of August and is still holding as I write this on the 27th.

As I carried my gear from Christchurch airport towards my parked car on the 14th I passed some

youths of questionable character milling about the Russley golf course and I immediately thought of my car. Sure enough, while approaching I noticed the fuel cap was open and the back window broken. For the second time, my trick of disengaging the mechanism which allows the lever under the driver's seat to open the car boot has paid off. The car started fine and no fuel was taken. Yes!!

Later that evening I rolled up to Rob's house in Wanaka and we made plans to fly in the next day (15th). I left my car with the Smith and Smith agent to get the window replaced for free. This made me feel a bit better about us dropping \$900 on a helicopter to fly into Bevan Col.

The forecast was for 80km/h southerly winds on the summit of Mt Aspiring when we flew in.

This made me somewhat nervous, particularly as the pilot appeared to be rather new to the area based on the conversations we overheard at the hangar. However, the flight was only a little gusty and without incident.

South Face of Aspiring

After we were dropped at Bevan Col on the 15th we put on snow shoes and headed over to Colin Todd Hut. This was to be our home for the next six nights. Unlike my regular home, this one required a shovel to dig out the snow from around the front door and did not have running water. The last entry in the hut book was from Guy McKinnon. He had checked out the snow conditions on the Bonar Glacier before his successful winter ascent of the East Face of Pope's Nose in July. His entry mentioned poor snow conditions, deteriorating weather and a 'nasty bivvy'!

After a cup of tea we headed outside again to check out conditions on Mt Aspiring. We noted that even though a significant amount of snow had recently fallen (one metre was reported at Cascade Saddle a few days prior), most of this snow had been blown away by strong southerly winds. Snow shoes were useful in the afternoon to travel around the Bonar Glacier, but not essential.

The Ramp, South West Ridge and upper sections of the South Face were all wind stripped and the avalanche risk on these aspects was judged to be low. We also noted that even late in the afternoon the South Face was still completely in shade at this time of year. This is a good thing as it means the risk of ice falling due to solar activity is minimised. The light southerly breeze forecast for the following day would also help to keep things cool.

On the 16th we departed Colin Todd Hut shortly before 5am and headed to the South Face. At

about 8am we started weaving our way through the crevasses at the bottom of the face. We were forced out left a long way. This meant that after climbing over the schrund we had to traverse back right about 100m on slightly soft snow before reaching the ice proper. We were both glad to reach the ice which turned out to be fantastic 'climbing ice' (i.e. probably not so great for accepting ice screws).

With Rob ahead, we soloed up the first half of the face. The exposure was terrific. However, the climbing was relatively straightforward with each ice tool only requiring a single swing to stick. As we progressed up the slope I thought it was about time to sample the 5-hour energy product and took a swig and scoffed a few lollies. Now I was really in the zone. As I continued up the steep ice slope, Rob went out of sight and I became lost in the moment, focused only on my feet, tool placements and breath.



Rob solos the South Face.



Mt Aspiring with our approximate lines shown (green is the South West Ridge and red is the original route on the South Face). Rob

As I reached the end of the lower section, Rob came back into view and we discovered that the traverse section which looked short from the Bonar Glacier was actually quite long. We started pitching at this stage. I led the first pitch which was a 60m horizontal traverse. Going up is much easier! During the second pitch we probably only gained 20m vertical. Pitch three ended up being the crux pitch and was highly enjoyable to lead.

As I belayed Rob up to the top of pitch three I could see that we were getting quite close to topping out on the Coxcomb Ridge. Sure enough, pitch four brought us to the ridge and from here it was a short walk to the summit. We were on the summit about 3pm. It was great to finally get out of the shade and we quickly started to overheat. Just below the summit we stopped for a late lunch and we melted some snow to rehydrate for the descent.



Leading the crux pitch. Rob

Rob wandered off ahead as I took some more photos and I met him again at the top of the Ramp. We discussed our descent options. We knew from the recce day that the Ramp was quite icy. It would require pitching, especially given our tired states. We chose to continue along the North West Ridge until we reached the end of a large buttress. From here it is possible to rap off using 2 x 60m ropes onto snow slopes above the Bonar Glacier. I hadn't done this before but Rob had seen guides use this as a descent route in summer.

The ridge traverse was interesting but not overly challenging and we reached the buttress in about thirty minutes. The abseil went smoothly and we were putting the ropes away as the sun went down. Once back at the hut we decided the following day would be a rest day! Interestingly, my calf muscles were fine, but my quads felt similar to when I did the 50km Tararua peaks loop in a day - sore!

Stargazer

During our rest day (17th) it lightly snowed. I spent my time reading Paul Hersey's book 'Where The Mountains Throw Their Dice' (found at Colin Todd Hut) which was a very thought provoking book on climbing.

The following day (18th) we headed towards Stargazer, initially staying on the west side of Rolling Pin and subsequent peaks until we got to the col between Mainroyal and Pt 2296. However, within minutes of the sun hitting the eastern slopes we observed, from the safety of the col, the new powder sloughing off. In some cases these sloughs were initialising small point releases on the main slopes, which would have the potential to knock a climber off their feet.

With some disappointment we returned to the hut to try again the following day. We were successful on the 19th and I'm glad we chose to wait a day as our old tracks were lightly covered in snow in places from the solar-related activity the previous day. The biggest drama was that Rob initially started climbing Skyscraper, not Stargazer! I confirmed my gut feeling with a GPS and we continued onto Stargazer without incident. In the wintry conditions the East Ridge was straightforward and did not require a rope, except for glacier travel.



On the East Ridge of Stargazer, with Skyscraper behind and Mt Aspiring in the left background. Rob

South West Ridge of Aspiring

That afternoon, with our two main objectives already completed, we managed to contact DOC in Wanaka via the radio and get an updated forecast. “We don’t normally do this,” she said, but we were grateful that she did on this occasion. We were a little scared calling her back though after I realised I’d forgotten to record one key bit of info - the situation for tomorrow! The forecast was good for climbing the next day (20th) which was coincidentally the date I had said I’d be back at work. Not so! The South West Ridge was too tempting.... Also my partner Lorraine had just climbed Kilimanjaro (5895m). Climbing Mt Aspiring (3033m) twice makes 6066m right?!

Having already been past the South West Ridge on the way to the South Face, and knowing the descent route, we had a rather relaxed approach to this climb. The lower sections of the ridge were pleasant and we rapidly gained height. We also had a prime view of the South Face and it looked rather imposing from this angle. We were glad we did the harder climb first! At this time of year the crux was totally filled in with fat ice and it was an enjoyable lead.

We kept pitching past the crux and towards the summit (three pitches in total), mainly because it seemed easier to continue pitching than try to put the rope away. We summited Mt Aspiring for the second time on this trip at 11am and Rob promptly made a phone call to his daughter. As it turned out, tomorrow was his birthday and he was confirming that we’d be out tomorrow for the celebratory dinner!



Rob on the summit of Mt Aspiring for the second time on the trip.

Walkout

“Happy birthday!” I called out to Rob after the 4:30am alarm woke us up. Outside it was clear

but a strong southerly was blowing. We left the hut around 6am but only made it as far as the toilet before returning! The spindrift stung our faces and we could barely stand. However, we knew the hut was on a windy spot and it probably wouldn’t be as bad lower down. We put on sunglasses to protect our eyes from the snow and set out once again!

The trudge across to Bevan Col in high winds was pretty average and we were running on empty. After finding a sheltered place for a drink and an OSM bar we felt a little better and continued on out. The lower sections of the Bevan Col descent route were very straightforward in winter conditions (what slabs? what waterfall?) and we were back in Wanaka before dark, with plenty of time to freshen up before heading out for dinner!

Somnus

During a rest day in Wanaka (22nd) I decided another peak was in order before returning to Wellington. Fortunately, Rob agreed. We set off from Wanaka at around 6am on the 23rd for Somnus, the highest peak in the Humboldt Mountain Range. We accessed Somnus by driving to the start of the Routeburn Track, walking to Routeburn Falls Hut and then up the North Branch.



View on the walk in to Somnus Peak.

Wikipedia told me that “In Greek mythology Hypnos was the personification of sleep. The Roman equivalent was known as Somnus.” What I knew about Somnus was that it has a magnificent feature – the Somnus Couloir. The climb is about 1800m vertical from the carpark to the summit and about one half of this is gained via the couloir. Step plugging up this sucker really started to wear



Rob climbs Somnus Couloir.



Setting up camp on Somnus Plateau.



Rob reaches the summit of Somnus Peak.

us out, even with light packs (no ropes, just a stove and some overnight camping gear).

We arrived on the plateau late afternoon and were able to pitch the tent, drop our gear and summit before dinner. A pleasant night's camping followed before a gentle walk out on Sunday 24th. I'd left my car in Frankton for a 'quick' dash back to Christchurch. This ended up taking ages, particularly as every hour or two I'd stop and buy delicacy items such as

sushi, real-fruit ice cream, coffee & a muffin, fish and chips, Red Bull and chicken chips! Sunday night was spent in a motor park cabin in Christchurch, before catching the early morning flight back to Wellington and the world of work.

Postscript

Back in Wellington I read there had been a spate of break-ins and car thefts near the Christchurch airport. The police have arrested someone in relation to this. So hopefully the old dunger will be safe again...

Rob's Recollections

Like winter 2013, when we climbed the South Face of Douglas, Simon and I planned to repeat a winter climb in August 2014. For 2014 we chose the South Face of Mt Aspiring. Of course the best ice climbing NZ offers is mid winter and on south faces. These climbs are steep and technically challenging, more so in fact than the standard routes on peaks like Mt Cook & Mt Tasman. So from a climbing perspective they are deemed as excellent climbs. However, they are only for experienced climbers.

Simon and I had also come to realise and appreciate three other really important positive factors surrounding mid winter climbing which are:

- 1) it is not really that much colder than any other time of the year
- 2) access around the glaciers and to the foot of the climbs is excellent with most crevasses being filled in or totally bridged with the winter snow
- 3) the huts are pretty much empty of other climbers.

The biggest downside to manage was short daylight hours so this meant having a clear and firm plan on how we would 'get off' the summit and not to be caught out in darkness still high on a mountain.

So into Colin Todd Hut we go in August 2014, with the key objective being the South Face of Aspiring. If the weather allowed we would also climb the South West Ridge and of course we would also climb Stargazer because as you would correctly guess it was on the '100 Great Peaks' list.

The week played out really well and all three objectives were climbed successfully (no lost belay plates, ice screws, carabineers or cell phones so it



Rob digging out the snow around the door to Colin Todd Hut.

was a good week indeed). However on the last morning as we prepared to walk out three things happened, all within 90 minutes that I won't forget. They happened in this order:

The walk out from Colin Todd to the car, although downhill, and with lighter packs (no food in them) is still a solid day even for two fit blokes and for us we knew that would be 10 hours plus stops. We planned to be under way no later 6am, earlier if we could manage it after packing everything up. Remember it is mid winter so still pitch black till about 7:30am. The alarm was set for 4am.

The first thing that happened was personal to me and I will always remember Simon for this, he remembered something I did not think he would. The alarm goes off, it's cold and pitch black, Simon was on a top bunk and I was on one of the lower bunks. (We had the hut to ourselves the entire week and anyone who has been to Colin Todd Hut knows how unusual that is – it's a busy hut over spring/summer with sometimes more people sleeping outside than inside this 12 bunk hut.) I hear Simon stirring, click - his head torch turns on, and rustle rustle he is climbing out of his sleeping bag and then to my delight I hear the first words of the day, and those 3 words are "Happy Birthday, Rob."

Simon had remembered it was my birthday and it was a great way for me to start the day. Because of that, I don't think I will ever now have a birthday that I won't think about Simon Bell.

The second thing that morning took place over breakfast. Simon and I sat facing each other over the small wooden table in the hut, the light was dim as we had the solar hut light on. The air was cold with lots of steam rising between Simon and I off our hot porridge and hot drinks. Simon peers at me through the steam and I can see Simon is deep

in thought, so I did not interrupt his thoughts but after a short while Simon says to me, "Rob, what day is it?" I knew what day it was as I also knew my birthday was on Thursday so I told Simon, "It's Thursday today."

Simon again thinks about this for a short period and then begins laughing. It was a total mystery to me what he was thinking at that point until he peers at me again though the steam and says, "I'm supposed to be back at work today." He thinks about this a little longer and then adds onto his original comment, "I guess they will figure out I'm not coming to work today when I don't turn up."

We finish our breakfast, finish our packing and are ready to depart and the third of the three things begins to unfold. It was actually not only cold and dark, it was really blowing a gale – really blowing hard, hard enough that Simon had even asked me if I thought we should stay and not try to walk out. After chatting about it we agreed that the hut, being on the Shipowner Ridge, is in a windy spot and often once you get off the ridge the wind is a lot less. We agreed we would battle it out with the wind and, using one of our sayings from an old TV cheese advert, "It's worth a crack, Nigel!" we prepared for our departure.

It was just after 5:30am as we put our crampons on, roped up for crossing the Bonar Glacier and pulled on our packs. This was all done inside the gear room section of the hut with its metal floor as we readied ourselves as much as we could before opening the door and taking that first step outside into a cold and bitter world!

The door was opened, the wind flew in to meet us, Simon led out, carefully and with difficulty down the steps, across some rock outside the hut that was not covered with snow and I followed.



Rob cooking at Colin Todd Hut.

The first 25 or so steps is around the back of the hut with our backs to the wind. We had around 10m of rope out between us for the glacier crossing (standard amount of rope for glacier travel).

As I followed Simon the wind grabbed the rope and formed a 10m arc of rope between us that had an enormous pull on it and we immediately coiled the rope in our hands to control it until we only had around 1m left between us. We made our way around the hut, onto the snow and faced directly into the wind for the first time and Simon immediately stopped dead in his tracks! I caught Simon up, faced the wind, looked into it and knew exactly why he had stopped.

It was pitch black, we had helmets and head torches on and nothing covered our eyes – we had not taken storm goggles and as we looked into the wind, with the snow and ice that was being blown directly into our faces, it was totally impossible to open our eyes. We took the only option open to us a very hasty (but very slow due to the lack of ability to see) retreat to the hut!

“Well, what now?” or words similar to that Simon said to me, “Um?” No storm goggles – no – however we did have our climbing glasses. If we were going to make any progress at all we just had to cover and protect our eyes somehow. So as you would realize, climbing glasses and glacier glasses are designed for the brightest sunlight and reflection off the snow that there is, they are not actually designed at all to work in the pitch black.

As you can imagine, after fitting our glasses and making attempt number two to depart the hut, as we again looked directly into the wind, snow and ice, we could now open our eyes. The problem was with the heavily tinted glasses, and using head lamps we could see pretty much nothing at all – it was all just black, so back to the hut again!!

Inside the hut we looked at each other and we both burst out laughing, it seemed to dawn on

us that in the pitch black light, with our heavily tinted ‘shades’ on that we could fit right into any public bar of any doubtful hotel in South Auckland. As we prepared for the 3rd attempt to depart (yes still with our ‘shades’ on) I said to Simon “You ready to go Bro?” and he laughed, looked at me and said, “I’m ready to go Bro, are you ready Bro?” and off we went laughing at ourselves.

We had decided that if we could just drop the 100m or so down from the hut down onto the glacier then the wind would be less lower down. It wasn’t really and what should have taken us about 1 hour to cross the Bonar Glacier took around 2 hours but we made it across and down into the Bevan Col route and back to Wanaka.

Back in Wanaka on the Friday, Simon took a look at the weather maps. It was good weather over the weekend and Simon said he could see little reason to fly back to Wellington on a Friday with a good weather weekend upon us. So after a quick check on the ‘100 Great Peaks’ list we picked Somnus Peak in the North Routeburn Valley as our target and off we went and climbed that over the weekend. Simon drove back to Christchurch on Sunday evening, then flew back on Monday morning to Wellington and work. Another great week with Simon!

Simon was not just a trusted climbing partner. Out of our climbing together a close and good friendship grew. I will miss him, I will miss our climbing together and I will miss his company.



Simon tops the South Face onto Coxcomb Ridge just below the summit of Mt Aspiring. *Rob*

October 2014 – December 2014

Living the dream. Our understanding of Simon's life in Wanaka as a full time climber.

Settling in

Simon arrived at Wanaka in mid-October with great enthusiasm and a car full of climbing gear. Shortly before he left Wellington Lorraine had introduced him to a new friend, Gina Andrews. Gina was spending the summer exploring the Wanaka district with the view of starting a new life there and was staying in her caravan at Twizel Motor Park. She and Rob Hawes both looked after Simon for a few nights until he arranged private board in Wanaka with Lucy Lin, a kind Filipino lady and her husband Philip. Simon needed a safe base to leave his gear and to return to after his wide ranging trips. He felt a bit odd there at first but it worked out fine.

During this time Lorraine and Simon's relationship broke up, a sad and difficult time for them both. So Lorraine didn't join Simon in Wanaka on her summer holiday as planned, climb with him or watch for his safe returns from climbs. Simon became more focussed on peak bagging and drove himself hard. At times Simon missed his life in Wellington. One day he rang his friend Mike Dalzell from Transpower and told him he was looking forward to returning to Wellington and his job at Transpower in April.

Photography

Before leaving Wellington, Simon bought a new camera enabling him to correct images using Raw Therapee software. He was excited with the results saying that the photo 'Midnight under a full moon on the Olivine Ice Plateau' (page 103) looked as it really was. The trick was to use the colour temperature of the moon in making adjustments.

Lorraine showed some of Simon's photos to her friend Joanna Gordon of Ballance. Joanna thought they were stunning and ordered some prints. She recently wrote:

We are The Store@Ballance Bridge and we have hung Simon's pictures (A2 size) in the Bridge Café next door.

(We have these and his large prints for sale. We made a donation to Mountain SAR earlier in the year in anticipation of these beautiful images being sold to hang on other people's walls.)

Simon would be chuffed that people like his prints. We look forward to seeing them ourselves.

Texting via satellite

Simon preferred climbing with partners but realised he'd have to make some climbs alone. His new DeLorme satellite phone provided an extra safety margin when out of cellphone coverage. With it he could not only alert SAR in an emergency but also send and receive texts provided there was a clear view of the sky. Texts like this one from Simon to Rob Hawes provided valuable safety information:

Hey radio at gardiner worked perfectly yesterday but we didn't hear schedule today. Can you mention to doc we are ok please. Cheers.

And Simon made Jeni's day with this text:

Happy birthday Mum from near summit of Eyre Peak hope your Day is good!!

Great Peak climbs

Simon had already bagged 55 Great Peaks and wanted to climb as many more as possible during his six months leave. Weather and circumstances permitting, he estimated maybe he'd reach 80 by April and then hopefully finish the challenge in the next year or two. The more remote and difficult climbs were to come first, the ones that couldn't be climbed in a long weekend from Wellington. He applied for a DOC permit to climb Mt Irene in a protected area of Fiordland National Park and discussed lots of climbing possibilities with friends on his smartphone.



Colin, Simon and Gina, Sebastopol Bluffs. *Jeni*



Lunch break at Sebastopol Bluffs. *Jeni*



Jeni and Simon study an old climbing book. *Colin*



Gina on summit of Mt Clarke.



Simon at tent site on Mt Clarke trip. *Gina*



Nina Dickerhof and Neil Sloan on route to Jagged Peak.



From the summit of Jagged Peak.

Things started off well and on 22nd of October Gina and Simon climbed Mt Clarke in the Rees Valley, on what Simon described as a 'nice overnight trip'.

On 25th of October, Nina Dickerhof, Neil Sloan and Simon climbed Jagged Peak in the Arrowsmith Range. For Simon this must have been a very different experience from his earlier attempt described in Chapter 18. Nina's photos (and some of Simon's) can be viewed online by searching <Nina Dickerhof Jagged Peak>.

Then followed a frustrating period to be waited out while old man nor'wester howled in the mountains and dumped lots more late snow. The good side of this was that we got to go rock climbing with Simon and Gina at Sebastopol Bluffs (Mt Cook Village) and spend time with him in Wanaka. We'd gone there to stay with Jeni's brother Dick and cousin Andy at Dick's shared holiday home. We walked up Mt Iron together, had a game of golf and spent an evening playing 500. A precious time for us.

The weather gradually improved and Simon climbed seven more Great Peaks before

Christmas, six with friends and one alone. With combinations of Gina Andrews, Lisa Wynne, Peter Dickson, Rob Hawes and Steve Dowall, he climbed Climax Peak (Mt Aspiring National Park), North Peak (Arrowsmith Range), Mt Pi-brac, La Perouse and Mt Chudleigh (Aoraki Mt Cook National Park) and Torres Peak (Westland National Park).

Despite setbacks due to an unusually persistent nor'west weather system, a combination of careful planning, help from friends, good luck and sheer hard work was paying off. Things were going well and peaks were being climbed. Of course we didn't care if Simon didn't summit anything as long as he came back safely and we told him that.

Chapters 25 – 27 cover three of the climbs Simon made during this time. In Chapter 25 Gina tells of magic mountains on the Olivine ice plateau. In Chapter 26 Steve reflects on the climb of La Perouse and in Chapter 27 he discusses the planning and preparation behind the climb of Torres Peak and shares his memories of Simon. In Chapter 28 we recall our family Christmas with Simon and his enthusiasm for further climbs.



Selfie at Cowshed Hut, Eyre Mountains.

5th to 11th November 2014

Magic Mountains. Gina Andrews and Simon on a six day trip to climb Mt Climax from the Olivine Ice Plateau in the wilderness area of Mt Aspiring National Park. Gina has written this account in fond memory of Simon.



Midnight under a full moon on the Olivine Ice Plateau.

I met Simon in October last year. Both of us new to Wanaka, both without jobs to interfere with life, and both with a love of the mountains. So we climbed. Mostly mountains and rocks, but if the weather was marginal we tramped with oldies, (they loved him), did body balance classes, and just walked my dog. Simon and I hung out and went out. We shared food - well I shared mine. His resolve to have no more 'fat whites' was instantly forgotten when we first met at Kai's to plan our first trip. Coffee before and after every trip was instantly the norm.

It was Simon's choice where we went. Honestly, I didn't care, these obscure peaks I had never heard of they were his, but the journeys were mine. This is the story of our trip to Climax Peak.



Dying trees under floodwater, Dart River.

Day 1 As usual this trip started with 'fat whites' pastries and a little last minute shopping at Frankton - no rush, while Simon's car is left outside Queenstown airport (that car has spent more time outside airports than most). With heavy packs we eventually leave Paradise after lunch. Simon photographs all the way in on trips, never out. The new slip was worth many photos, ghostly trees dying in water. Daley's Flat Hut is luxury for night one.

Day 2 Early start next day, in classic Simon style he's talking a mile a minute, surfing randomly between subjects without pause. Moving from one to the next and then a few minutes later returning to the original subject. We both did that in the jumble of conversation. I'd say we walked 20 minutes past the bridge turn off before I turn on the GPS - just to check. Back track and then a little bush bash before becoming acquainted with Margaret Burn, intimately. Downclimbing with pack kilos on wet scrubby rock - more than once, before accepting you cannot cross unless you find the natural rock bridge - a quick back track and oh so easy then.

It may have been an early start but with a few unexpected side trips (full body workouts) when Si suggested we could camp early at Seal Col I quickly agreed. Although I know he's knackered too when I'm plugging steps.



Simon at lunch break, Day 1. *Gina*



Gina at lunch break, Day 1.



Gina near Climax Peak summit.



Climax Peak.



A full moon rises on the Olivine Ice Plateau.



The camp at Seal Col.

Day 3 Over Stefansson Peak, Derivation, Thunder and Climax Glaciers and camp on the Olivine Ice Plateau. An expansive alpine environment all to ourselves. My perfect day, and following, his perfect night. With a full moon Simon is up at midnight running around outside like a big kid with his camera. After a hundred photos taken on every camera setting he's impatient for a summit. Sorry Si, the only thing happening at 1am is more sleep.



About to head off to Climax Peak.

Day 4 Magic mountains, magic bluebird day. Climax Peak is the perfect summit, in the middle of our white wonderland. Simon and I share salad croissants and point out peaks in every direction. But with a poor forecast coming we are retracing our steps, packing up and in deteriorating weather, departing. At Derivation Col only just able to see Simon beside me, we make camp.

A snack at Derivation Col. *Gina*

Day 5 When things get a bit shit, there is no one else I know that I'd prefer with me than Simon. He is the epitome of cool, calm and collected. We discuss options (he explains the options to me) and we're off. My forte is navigation and with most of our steps covered in windblown snow and no visibility we follow our exact line out on GPS. Lunch at camp one and we are off to find soft shoes and a very direct and quick crossing of Margaret Burn. It's tempting to walk out, but good company and a night at Daleys Hut is a great choice.

Day 6 We walk sharing the high of a successful trip on the well-made Dart track, and then as is our way, spend time walking out alone to the car. Simon's retro taste in music is played out loud and I pass the K's singing to my ipod.

I think we rub off on the people we spend time with and I'm lucky a little bit of Simon will forever be with me. He gave me many memories, but also allowed me to be myself no judgements or expectations. Ours was a rare friendship, never to be forgotten.



Setting up camp on the Olivine Ice Plateau.

27 November to 1 December 2014

Six hours up but twelve hours back. A wrecked hut makes a good climbing base. Steve Dowall and Simon tackle the East Face of La Perouse in Aoraki Mt Cook National Park. Rob Hawes starts the journey but runs out of time. Here's Steve's specially written account.

Arriving at Gardiner Hut

As I looked up there was Simon disappearing around the side of a large boulder wedged into the back end of Gardiner Hut.

We had just taken our crampons off after making our way up the ice of the Hooker Glacier from our uncomfortable bivvy on the moraine the night before. The weather was clagging in and our plan to make Empress did not look likely. We figured a shelter in the remains of Gardiner Hut, after its near demolition by a recent rock fall, had to be better.

Gardiner with a hole in the roof was full of snow. If we were to shelter here there was going to be much shovelling required. "Well it's no different from digging a snow cave," said Simon. "Let's give it a go."

After a good couple of hours we had cleared the kitchen end of the hut with enough space to put a couple of mattresses on the floor. We found the tool box and after a few running repairs reckoned we had ourselves a fairly good shelter for the rest of the day and night. It was in fact to be our digs for the next two nights. We even got a call through on the 7.00pm radio schedule that evening to a surprised DOC operator not expecting to hear from Gardiner!

Despite the many false starts to the trip thanks to the weather, we had now settled on sitting it out to give the East Face of Mt La Perouse a go. This was a new summit for both of us and a good climb from Gardiner. Why bother going to Empress when the weather window is going to be too short anyway?

The weather had been the bane of our lives for the last 4 days, in fact for Simon and Rob Hawes, our third partner, for the last two weeks. They had originally planned to go into Empress Hut a good 10 days earlier. They had only managed a climb of Mt Nazomi after which they left a gear dump on the moraine before departing Mount Cook National Park and heading east for better weather. By the time I joined them after returning from work

in Myanmar a few days earlier, they were getting increasingly frustrated and wondering if this trip was ever going to happen. In the end Rob, with commitments at home, decided he would bail out. First he had to make the 9 hour return trip to the gear dump up the Hooker to retrieve his gear.

Simon and I nearly turned back with Rob that day. By the time we got to the gear dump it was blowing a gale and snowing. Simon and I looked at each other in indecision and both speaking at the same time said, "What's it going to be?"

I was desperate for this trip after waiting the last 12 months with my work overseas and was just about ready to sit anything out. Simon was dead keen to bag another summit towards his '100 Great Peaks' mission. "Yep, let's bivvy," we said, "and trust it will be better tomorrow." After waving Rob goodbye we set about making a rock shelter. It was going to be a long and cold afternoon and night.

With two bivvys behind us just to get half way up the Hooker, we were finally in position and ready for our climb as soon as the weather permitted. A reconnaissance across the glacier to the East Face of La Perouse was all we could squeeze in after our first night at Gardiner, but back at the hut for our second night we were satisfied that the snow was good and the weather finally set to clear. We also had a good set of tracks in for our early morning start the next day. Simon got a message out to Rob on his satellite messaging service to update him and let our plans be known.

Simon always came well equipped on his climbing trips with phone, satellite messaging and personal locator beacon. He would hook up his sat messaging to his smart phone and be in touch with family and friends from the most unlikely of places.

The climb

Alpine starts always come hard to me, especially



Gardiner Hut – back view.



Gardiner Hut – front view.



Inside after two hours of shovelling snow.



Steve on the summit ridge.



Simon on La Perouse, west side. Steve

the first one after 12 months. Not Simon, he was one of the most efficient I know in the wee hours, whether in the comfort of a hut or the discomfort of a bivvy. Once up, every move counted towards getting onto the snow in the least possible time. I found myself matching my moves with his; over trousers on, sox, boots, then out for a leak. Water on for a brew, some for the porridge. Oh how I hate Uncle Toby's at 3.00am! Gear away, rope on and there he was, ahead of me out the door. Oh well, a few more of these alpine starts and I might have him matched by the end of the trip if I'm lucky!

It took only 45 minutes retracing our steps across the glacier on good firm snow and we were on the lower slopes of the East Face, taking the rope off, and with head torches scouting the route up through the seracs that littered the first section of our climb. Just above these we had our first view down country to the rising sun. I took a deep breath.

"Fantastic!" I thought. Finally here, feeling good, and settled into the climb with much anticipation, we agreed to solo the face. This would allow faster climbing and we wanted to be as far up as possible before the sun hit the face and softened the snow. Simon and I shared the lead as we front pointed our way up to our predetermined point to break out left and across to a barely distinguishable snow rib that would lead us up the top half of the face.

Simon was climbing fit and so slowly started to break out ahead of me as we gained height. We both knew we had to move fast as the longer the sun was on the face the greater the risk of avalanche. Within 100m of the summit ridge a small slab of snow let go to my left just to remind us not to mess about. We both lifted our effort a notch or two and made for the ridge. Front pointing on a 55-60 degree slope makes for quick height gain and we finally poked our heads over the ridge and took in the incredible vista down to the west and the Tasman Sea.

After the flat calm on the east side the wind pounded us as we looked up the last of the south ridge to the summit. Jackets on, we made a break for it, and climbing back onto the face for the last 50m, we stepped onto the summit plateau of La Perouse at 3078m. Yeh! Another of New Zealand's 3000m peaks!

"What a climb! But what's that?" I said to Simon. Two yellow patches in the snow were a sure

sign that we weren't the first there that morning. "Maybe they came up the West or Southwest Ridge from the Gulch Glacier." Simon said. Surprised that they had summited and gone from sight and it was only 10am, we noted that our face climb had taken us 6 hours after our 4.00am start including the 45 minutes across the glacier from the hut. Not bad, we both agreed, but with not a cloud in the sky and the sun softening the snow we both knew there was no way it would be safe to descend the face.

It was going to be the long way home via the main divide route. I had studied that on previous years from Empress Hut and knew just how far it was. Clearly getting down was going to be a much longer and harder effort than the climb up!

The views were dramatic. I'd never seen the west face of Aoraki /Cook from this aspect before. We spent a while just standing, taking photos and soaking it all in, retracing the routes of previous climbs we had done on Aoraki from Empress. I could see the fulfilment on Simon's face as he rested in the satisfaction of stealing such a good climb after the disastrous, poor weather start to the season.

We must have spent well over an hour on the summit plateau. It is atypical for a Southern Alps summit which is usually small and abrupt at best. The La Perouse plateau is expansive with just a gentle drop off to the west.

The descent

As expected, the descent was long and arduous. At times it seemed to go on forever, especially when we broke through the soft snow to our thighs. The day got very hot causing us to suffer and layer ourselves in sun block at every stop. Traversing along the west side of the divide we made the ridge on occasion to see whether the Hooker side was a go or not. Finally late in the day we topped out on the north side of Mt Jellicoe and with the face iced up for the first 50m or so decided to see whether a descent to the glacier below was possible.

Dropping off the ridge onto the 70 degree slope the ice was bullet proof. We both front pointed down about 20m and could see this wasn't a good idea with a good 400m drop below us through an ice fall to the glacier. Back to the slog we agreed.

Looking from the divide we could easily see Empress Hut which seemed so close yet so far. It was to be our resting place that night. Thankfully



Looking for a way off.



Steve and Simon on the summit of La Perouse.
Aoraki/Mt Cook behind.



Still traversing the endless ridge.



Not this way. We summited and then descended west.



West Coast cloud spilling over the Divide.



Simon departing the moraine bivvy. Steve

it was well supplied with a couple of duvets and a spare sleeping bag. Further along the ridge we finally decided dropping down under Mt Sturdee was on and so metre by metre we front pointed our way down, and negotiating around a few slots and seracs, finally dropped onto the Sheila Glacier.

The sun was setting as we lost height down the face. Dramatic was the cloud rolling over the divide on the south side of La Perouse. Tired but not done we both grabbed for our cameras to catch the moment. "Sensational shot!" Simon said.

The final slog across the glacier had us dragging our feet, but we made Empress about 10pm, a full 18 hours after departing Gardiner that morning. It had taken us eleven hours from the summit, "And we're only at Empress!!" Simon said. "Always knew that divide was going to be a long way if I ever had to do it!" I said.

Afterwards

Arriving at Empress Hut was like a visit home again. It has to be one of the most idyllic yet dramatic spots New Zealand has to offer. This night it was heaven as we slumped onto the bunks after raiding the little hut food that was there. Actually we did better than that. Simon, always prepared, said "I'll send Vaughan a message and tell him we're raiding his stash." Five minutes later he appeared from the outside room with a stuff sack in hand.

Tipping the contents onto the table he fingered through the goods, but concluded there wasn't much of substance to be had. We both downed a cup of soup, sent gloating messages of our climb off to family, and collapsed into two snoring heaps on the bunk to recharge for the long walk out the next day.

It was a long but uneventful trek out. An hour and half saw us back at Gardiner Hut to collect our gear stash and then on down the glacier and onto the moraine for the last gear stash under the rock from our first bivvy. Our heavy packs and Simon's fitness began to show as we started the big grunt up the 250m of moraine wall at the head of the Hooker Lake. I found him at the top lying back relaxing and, as was often the case, chewing on a chocolate OSM bar, the famous One Square Meal bars from Cookie Time.

Simon was eternally patient. We often say that the only way to get fit for climbing is to climb. Simon had been doing plenty of that and I none for twelve months. Simon, in his quiet patient way accepted my pace, knowing that he was fitter than I was, and that I would be building back confidence to exposure on the climb. He was a considerate and safe climber, and always ready to lead or second according to the wish of his climbing partners. His sense of humour and wish to absorb the wonder of the wild made for pleasant rest stops. I couldn't have hoped for better on my first climb for the season.



Looking back at La Perouse.

12th to 15th December 2014

Reward for effort. Steve Dowall, Peter Dickson, Lisa Wynne and Simon climb Torres Peak high above the Fox Glacier in Westland National Park. A new account by Steve.



Torres Peak and its West Ridge in centre of photo.

It had been a flight of contemplation as I landed in Christchurch to meet Simon again. The weather was clearing and the much anticipated weather window was said to be on its way. We were both determined to tackle our long planned Torres - Tasman traverse. We had looked over at Torres Peak West Ridge from La Perouse summit a week earlier, anticipating the route, the rock steps on the ridge, the col beyond Torres Peak (3160m), and the options for the bivvy that would be required.

I had been in Wellington for a few days seeing my wife, Sovann, and a couple of days prior had agreed with Simon that a weather window was on the way and that we would meet in Christchurch on the 11th of December before driving to the West Coast and Fox Glacier. Simon hadn't needed to drive to Christchurch. He could more easily have gone over the Haast Pass from Wanaka where he was staying, a much shorter way round for him. In his typically obliging way he had proposed that he drive via Christchurch so we could meet up there, prepare and drive together to Fox. "You pay the petrol for the extra miles and I'm happy to drive," Simon said. There was also Lisa and Peter to meet, the other two in our party.

Day 1 The next day we launched into our long drive to Fox with lots of good reminiscing to do from our La Perouse climb, along with reflections each of us had done at different times on fun climbs in the Arthur's Pass region, as we climbed to the pass and headed for the coast. We weren't too concerned if a flight into Katies Col wasn't possible that evening, but we would make sure we were at Fox in time to do so if the weather allowed.

We met Lisa and Peter in Hokitika getting some last minute supplies, and of course had a final latte and hot scone. Simon loved his pit stops when on the road. Invariably it meant a roadside cafe for coffee and something sweet.

We pulled into Fox about 3:00pm and sure enough the chopper would fly. It was going to be a quick sort and pack of our gear to make the proposed 4.00pm take off. As usual Simon beat me to the line with all his gear on board and me still messing around with my boots and putties. We had changed on the roadside at the helipad with not a concern in the world for passing traffic! With all four of us aboard, we were soon hovering above the glacier and rising to our intended bivvy that night at Katies Col. The chopper would set us down on the Fox Neve at the base of the col.



Lisa and Peter at Fox ready for the chopper ride.

We had a party of four but we roped in two pairs. Lisa and Peter had laid plans to head directly for Pioneer Hut after the traverse and so had arranged for an extra box of food to be flown in.

Simon and I on the other hand had made best use of the drive over and came up with quite a different scheme. Our packs were ready with two supermarket bags of food supplies that we planned to dig into the snow at the base of the col. After the traverse we would circle back and across the neve to Katies Col again. Simon, with a bit of cajoling, and faith in the weather, had proposed that we then make a 'quick' side trip into the Balfour and give the Balfour Face of Tasman a go. He'd been there earlier in the year when he'd nailed a classic and rarely climbed route with Lisa Wynne called 'Anyone Can Play Guitar' on Mt Magellan. (*Chapter 21*).

So Simon was familiar with the route into the Balfour and convinced that if we had a weather window of three days after coming off the traverse that it would work. Not without a hint of anxiety, I had agreed, thinking who better to do it with than Simon. If necessary we could always bail out right off the face and onto the Silberhorn - Tasman ridge. The Balfour Face would be a challenge for me, but with a bit of "You'll be good," encouragement from Simon we agreed to give it a go - if the weather allowed and we still had the energy after coming off the Torres - Tasman traverse.

After burying our food stash and marking the GPS coordinates we began our plod up to the col, about 350m elevation gain. Lisa and Peter were already well up but with a good pace we closed the gap and after cautiously crossing two or three slots reached the col. "Great! We're here. Plenty of room for a good bivvy site so choose your spot," I said. The views were fantastic, back across the Fox Neve behind us, down the glacier to the coast and, most of all, over into the Balfour and across to the North Face of Mt Hicks.

Simon and the others had great pleasure in laughing at my renaming of 'Big Mac' up to our right beyond Receveur Peak off the col. Being away in very different environments overseas for long stretches on work assignments means that I often get names round the wrong way. My first reference to Big Mac was to call it 'Hamburger Hill'! "Oh that's right," I said, "That's in Viet Nam. What do you call this one?"

We busied ourselves digging out a bivvy platform big enough for the four of us and our gear. Getting a flat area good enough for a comfortable sleep meant shifting the snow dug out at the top and packing it on the bottom area for our feet. This made for a natural wall at one end but we had

to cut ourselves lumps of snow to build up a wall around the windward side of the platform. This took a while but after a couple of hours we had our bivvy site sorted, bivvy bags out and dinner on.

Simon and I were sharing a Jetboil cooker, as were Peter and Lisa, so it was a one by one process to get a meal. I had brought three backcountry meals with me, two dinners and one breakfast. I figured that would provide for the easiest cooking; the second breakfast would just have to be the same old same old Uncle Toby's porridge, if I could force it down in the icy cold at 3.00am in the morning.

The Jetboil was Simon's. This was a very well used Jetboil. It came on all our trips, and the many that Simon did in between with others. It was always in his pack on summit day and religiously came out for a hot drink when we stopped for a breather. I never bothered with hot drinks during the day when with other climbing partners but I had to admit I was getting used to the ease with which the Jetboil could get a brew ready, even when perched precariously at a belay station! Simon's advice was good. A hot drink goes a long way to restoring your energy and warming you up.

Simon was very protective of his Jetboil though. My efforts at sharing the work always got a "No worries," reply from Simon. "Gotta be careful when boiling snow without any water in the bottom," he frequently reminded me. He had it down to a fine art - drop a small handful of snow in, light up, swish it round, and only add more snow once the first snow is melted and a good cover of water is in the bottom.

With dinner over and another layer of clothing on we sorted our gear, agreeing who would carry what. Torres West Ridge is a good mixed climb with a fair amount of snow and ice, and rock. We had brought four ice screws and two snow stakes each, two of Simon's double action cams for the rock, a set of nuts, and a piton or two along with all the usual slings and quick draws. The idea was to keep our packs as light as possible, especially given we were carrying the bivvy gear as well.

By the time we were ready to climb into our bags the sky was growing dark. It was going to be a perfect starlit night. As for all such bivvies the stars became a subject of conversation. At least this time we could see them. Our bivvies up the Hooker on the La Perouse trip the week before had been dim, dark, wet, windy and cold affairs. This time the bivvy site was a picture of organisation. We each



Lisa, Steve and Peter ascending the West Ridge of Torres.



Stairway to Heaven – Lisa and Steve on the West Ridge.

had our sharp gear; crampons, ice tools, snow stakes and shovel lined up at the head of the bivvy. Packs were at the ready beside our heads, and the essentials needed when first rising in the morning; head torch, gloves, jacket, and full bottle of water, all inside our bags to avoid them freezing. Head torches off we all settled back in anticipation of the big climb ahead. This was one of New Zealand's classics.

I was the only one of the four of us that had been on the West Ridge before. Tom Wilson and I had given the ridge a go in 2008. The day had been perfect, but we decided to climb Torres from Pioneer Hut. That added another two and a half hours to each end of the day. Although we got high on the ridge we realised that the most time consuming part of the climb was the last 200m of elevation and that was still ahead of us. We had turned back and finally stumbled into the hut about an hour after dark. It had always bugged me that we had not made the summit that time.

Day 2 Setting our alarm for 2.30am, we planned to be away from the bivvy by 4.00am. We wanted to make the Torres summit early enough for us to carry on and make our second bivvy high on the shoulder of Tasman. We broke camp with Lisa and Peter leading out followed by Simon and me. The snow was firm and the going good. Simon was striding it out in front but for some reason I was making hard work of it. Clearly my muscles were still stiff from the La Perouse climb and were going to take a bit of work to warm up. It's a long grunt on front points up to the West Ridge and so the muscles were well warm by the time we topped out.

Problem was that we topped out into a howling gale. The wind was a good 60km/h or more up high. As I stood up on the ridge or rather tried to stand up, Peter looked at me and said, "No way I'm going on in this." Simon on my other side just looked at me. We exchanged looks both thinking the same. Peter's right. We would be stupid to go on in this wind. Parts of the ridge are well exposed and we didn't want anyone blown off.

All four of us turned tail and started front pointing down again. We made a beeline for the bivvy site. Arriving an hour later, the sun was well up; it was flat calm and fast warming up. "Second breakfast it is then," said Simon, and we all set about reorganising the bivvy site.

It was exceptionally hot as we waited the day out. We spent much of the time stripped down and

hiding under our jackets. A conference discussion on what to do became an on again off again affair. The wind needed to abate up high, but with the temperature rising so much during the day and the freezing level well above 3000m, the snow conditions on the summit ridge of Tasman didn't bode well for doing the traverse. We eventually dropped those plans and decided we'd be satisfied if we could score at least the West Ridge and Torres summit.



Back at the Bivvy at Katies Col and cooking in the sun.

Day 3 The next morning saw us away again well before dawn, this time with our bivvy gear left behind and much lighter packs. We moved fast and topped out on the lower West Ridge early at about 7.00am. Today it was flat calm so we basked in the sun and the contemplation of a great climb ahead. The views across the Fox Neve were just as I remembered them - dramatic. We looked up the Balfour and across to Aoraki/Cook's ice cap. Peter had us all study the North Face of Mt Hicks as he pointed out some of the climbs he had done in his heyday. Simon studied Mt Drake, picking out the route he hoped to do later in January.

Away again, we agreed to climb solo, roping up only where the exposure was too much for comfort. Fortunately all four of us had similar tolerance levels and so the decision to rope up was usually mutual. We made good time on the lower section of the ridge. The snow was firm and front pointing was fast. It's easy to understand why it's labelled a classic. The ridge rises through a series of steep ice arêtes and rock steps. As we topped each, more would be revealed beyond, providing for a zig zag climb as if a stairway to heaven. The views off both sides are majestic and the drop to the glaciers below dramatic, Abel Janszoon on the Fox side and Balfour on the south side. The vistas steadily grew as we rose towards the summit.



Simon leading the crux of the West Ridge. Steve



Lisa, Peter and Steve on the summit of Torres Peak.



Lisa and Peter gain the knife edge ridge.



Simon arriving at Torres Summit. Steve



Approaching the summit.



Steve descending West Ridge of Torres.

The crux of the climb had us all perched at the base of a rock step about 50-60m high. I recalled that this was probably the rock step where Tom and I had turned back seven years earlier. Peter was on for a lead so agreed to work his way round on the Balfour side. The first 20 metres was snow and ice and with Lisa belaying and Simon and I watching he inched his way up to the rock. Not liking the step onto the rock he dropped back and searched for a route further round on the ice. Feeling increasingly exposed and unhappy to be only on a single rope he retreated to our perch.

Simon with a simple smile and reassuring look volunteered to give it a go, and so with me belaying him on a double rope he moved out onto the slope and confidently up to the base of the rock.

Here his double action cams came in handy and with protection placed, he manoeuvred his long legs with typical agility onto the rock. Metre by metre he moved up the crux placing protection every few metres until he topped out, almost out of sight, onto a large rock high on the ridge. "What a lead!" we all agreed.

I followed and with Simon belaying from above had no trouble topping out beside him at his comfortable stance against his anchor rock perched on the knife edge ridge. With Lisa and Peter following below on the same rope, I unclipped and moved on up the ridge. There was no room for all of us there.

With the crux behind us and only a few more scrambles ahead we soon arrived at the summit arête. So often I had studied this knife edge line on the horizon from across the Fox Neve, wondering just what it was like on top. Finally we were here, on a nice rounded arête leading to the high point where Lisa and Peter had already perched themselves for a late lunch, with legs hanging down the Balfour side. Simon brought up the rear with his head popping up above the snow arête just 20m below us. "Stop!" I called out. "That's a great photo." Simon duly stopped and waited with a big grin as I caught the moment along with a vista to end all vistas stretching out behind him to the West Coast and Tasman Sea beyond.

Lunches were usually cracker affairs. A few crackers that is, cheese and salami or a tin of tuna. Simon always had a great array of snack food, usually in three or four snaplock bags from which he picked and poked until he got his fill. I, with trusty gerber in hand, fiddled with half broken crackers and pre-cut slices of cheese and salami.

Simon, always with a seemingly endless supply of 'One Square Meal' bars, always finished with a chocolate OSM!

The sun was strong and it was comfortable on our perch studying the many lines and routes on Drake, Magellan and Haast in the distance, with the long and cut up Balfour Glacier winding away below us to the coast. We had no trouble passing half an hour on the summit. As nice as it was though, no summit is climbed until all are down and back at camp. We agreed that the quickest way down was to retrace our steps but this time with a series of rappels on our two 60m ropes.

Rope length by rope length we quickly dropped altitude, covering ground with our rappels that had taken much caution and effort on the way up. While rapping is fast, with four of us it still took time to get all of us down each rap, gather the rope, re-set the anchor and toss the rope for the next drop. Needless to say we had a few tangles and found ourselves perching in precarious spots untangling the rope. By the time we reached the bottom of our last rap the setting sun was giving us a beautiful golden light, the light that pro photographers dream about. For us the backdrop on the lower West Ridge was dramatic, with the snow appearing a fiery orange and the sky darkening out across the Tasman.



Simon descending in the golden light of sunset. Steve

The drop back down to Katies Col and our bivvy site was uneventful. As we stood up off our front points to turn and walk down the last slope, I noted that getting off the West Ridge seemed to go on for ever this time. Neither Simon nor I were losing any time as we moved fast with long backwards strides off our front points, but we both agreed that it was further than it looked, and that was probably exaggerated by it being late in the day with our minds firmly fixed on the bivvy and dinner.

Back at the bivvy we once again had a perfect starlit evening. Having all agreed that we were satisfied with our achievement and that we would call for a chopper in the morning, we set about packing and organising for clearing camp. Our earlier thoughts of doing a side trip into the Balfour faded. We agreed there was good prospect of getting caught at the head of the Balfour as the weather window closed.



Back at Katies Col Bivvy. Steve

We had done well to steal two good climbs from a season with such poor weather. It had taken us six bivvy nights to do it. As I settled down in my bag I drifted off into a satisfied sleep to the sound of Simon sorting his gear and getting everything into its right bag and properly stowed for the morning. Simon - always perfectly organised I thought.

Day 4 I always feel as if I'm cheating when lifting off in a chopper, this time with the flight off the neve covering the otherwise long and full day's trek out in a mere ten minutes. In fact in the time we could have trekked back to Fox Township, Simon and I were already back in Wanaka. After landing, changing, calling family, and having the compulsory latte and scone, we parted ways, with Peter and Lisa heading north for Christchurch, and Simon and I south for Wanaka.

The drive to Wanaka is always a treat from Fox Glacier. The last time I had done it was also with Simon and after a satisfying alpine traverse from Mt Cook Village to Fox Village. Today it was perfect and as we made our way south along the coast to Haast we drifted in and out of conversation, reflecting on climbs and new routes for the future.

Postscript

We arrived back in Wanaka in nice time for me to catch the Budget shuttle back to Fairlie where I would meet up with family. I had said to Simon after agreeing how we would square up, that I reckoned I still had a debt to pay. One last coffee before we go our separate ways. "Sounds good," said Simon, "but how about we do an ice cream instead? Wanaka's Night 'n Day Store does the country's best ice cream."

So we sat together there and enjoyed ice cream as we watched the Budget shuttle pull in across the road. Little did I know that would be the last time I would see Simon. Those last reflections on our La Perouse and Torres climbs, along with my words of gratitude as I remembered how much I appreciated Simon's skill and company, were God given. The news that Simon did not return from his Mt Earnslaw climb just one month later came very hard.

December 2014

In Nelson for a family Christmas. Our recollections of Simon's visit.



Christmas dinner in the garden. Heather

Two days before Christmas, Gina and Simon were descending some long rocky slopes after climbing Mt Chudleigh. It had been a long tiring trip. Gina decided Simon was looking exhausted and needed a break. So she feigned exhaustion and volunteered to pay for a helicopter ride out from the base of the mountain to her parked car near Mt Cook Village. Next came a long drive through the night to her home in Blenheim. Simon snatched a few hours' sleep then made a successful hitch hike from Blenheim to Nelson with a happy clappy Samoan family in a minibus. He pulled into Richmond, Nelson by 3pm Christmas Eve. We were sitting there in our car waiting. There came Simon, striding along the footpath, pack on back. He spotted us and broke into a joyful run.

There followed a family Christmas spent in two nearby family homes. Long, hot, chaotic days with three of his sisters and their partners, his parents and seven of his nephews and nieces. They thought he was cool if a bit strange in his long cream clothing and floppy hat looking like a French foreign legionnaire on an expedition. (Simon had a thing about not getting sunburnt).

He ate lots, trying to regain 3 kg he'd lost. And slept a fair bit, usually in a tent in our garden under a shady tree. He climbed Mt Arthur with Heather

and Sylvia and they talked all the way, feeling very close and happy. One evening he took us out to dinner. Great! He went to the beach, played with the kids, had a hit around with the golf clubs on the local College grounds and spent time reading, thinking and planning.

Simon's plans for the rest of summer included climbing Mt Irene, Flat Top Peak, Mitre Peak and Mt Pembroke, all in Fiordland National Park. Perhaps Gina would accompany him on some of these climbs? In Westland National Park there was Mt Drake, possibly with Lisa Wynne, Rob Hawes or Don French. Mts Sibbald and Loughnan up the Godley River could be climbed solo.

Malcolm Peak was another challenge up the headwaters of the Rakaia. In Mt Aspiring National Park there was Sir William and Mt Earnslaw. All these peaks captured Simon's imagination and he was itching to get back to them.

After just four days in Nelson Simon got restless and took off back down south. He promised to spend time with us on his way back to Wellington in April and then intended to visit Kiri in Australia. He still looked tired to us, very preoccupied and in his own world. But he was quite sure of himself, very focused, and excited to be going back.



Jeni, Simon and Colin at Rabbit Island. *Mary*



Showing Mary his new camera. *Colin*



A board game with nephews Eli and James. *Heather*



Relaxing at Christmas. *Jeni*



Simon and Sylvia up Mt Arthur. *Heather*



Simon, Mary, Colin, Heather and Sylvia just leaving for Mt Arthur. *Jeni*

January 2015

Nine days in the wilderness. Sylvie Admore, Helen Liley, Sam Richardson, Björn Striebing and Stephen Waite (Auckland University Tramping Club) meet Simon early in their trip to the Adams Wilderness Area and invite him to join them. Helen and Sylvie recall their memories of Simon on a trip that he described as 'spontaneous and excellent'.



The AUTC team approach the summit of Newton Peak.

Helen

We met Simon on the second day of a planned 12 day trip to the Gardens of Eden and Allah. We left from Erewhon station, and arrived at Lyell Hut two days later, after a horrible bushbash down from Butler Saddle.

It was a pleasant, and somewhat serendipitous surprise to find the fairly isolated hut occupied on arrival. Simon had spent that day climbing Malcolm Peak - a 15 hour solo effort. This was after his climbing partner Alan had to retire from the trip early after losing his boot on their approach.

After talking to him for awhile about our plans, Simon expressed his interest in joining us for the remainder of our trip - I think mostly due to there being a chance to tick Tyndall off his list! I think it is a testament to his character that we unanimously agreed that this would be an awesome idea, despite having only known the guy for a couple of hours. Simon gave a first impression of being really good value, with a wry and brilliant sense of humour. Something that only strengthened the more we got to know him.

Our group had another 9 days of food with us, and Simon only had about 6. He decided to solve

this problem by going through some abandoned food drops at the hut from pre-2008. This landed him with a huge bag of alcoholic smelling scroggin, some orange coloured bacon bits and some other unidentified dried things. These were ordered into levels of emergency - with the scroggin being last. We spent the following day relaxing at the hut, before heading up the Lyell the morning after.

I had warned Simon when he was keen to join us, that he was putting himself in for many days of terrible attempts at jokes and awful banter. This didn't seem to worry him at all, and indeed, I think it was very soon that he joined in on the general piss-taking. At one stage, while talking about the Girdlestone - Tahurangi traverse, Sylvie mentioned that she would "feel like such a huge boss if I did that", Simon quietly commented, "Oh, I did it... felt like a huge boss."

It was also on the way up the Lyell that Simon somehow got established as the group photographer. We only had two other cameras in our group, and mine stayed forgotten in my pocket for most of it. He did an outstanding job of this, taking over 650 photos throughout the trip. I think Sylvie sent you (Lorraine) the link to this, and he is indeed very talented - the photos are amazing!

Throughout our trip, we were constantly reminded how lucky we were to have picked up such a knowledgeable, fit and entertaining companion. Whether it was plugging steps up slushy hot snow slopes, discussing camping spots or navigation, or planning summit routes, Simon was an integral and valued part of the group.

He was a careful, and obviously highly skilled climber, and although we didn't come across any difficult terrain on our trip beyond one fairly exposed pitch, we were all suitably awed when he showed us his route up Malcolm Peak on the way past.



Sam, Björn, Sylvie, Stephen and Helen at 'The Fortress of Allah'.

We spent a few days on the Gardens, mostly just doing half day trips, and playing a lot of 500. Stephen and I, not being coffee drinkers, had previously banned all coffee breaks as time wasting and annoying. Simon was quick to change this, beating us to every waypoint and whipping out his Jetboil, having the brew prepared by the time we got there. Bjoern, Sam and Sylvie were loving it.



Setting up for a morning brew. Björn

Eventually we decided to head down, having climbed a good number of peaks, the highlight of which was probably Mt Farrar - which had a brilliant rock scramble to the ridge, and a fun run

down a slushy slope, and concluded the trip with a pleasant exit down the Clyde.

From Erewhon, we all jammed into the car somehow, and headed for Twizel, where we said goodbye to Simon, with the promise of meeting up again in a couple of days to do the Single Cone - Double Cone traverse. This turned into climbing at Wye Creek, due to road access problems. It was after this that Simon told us his plans of climbing Earnslaw, and it was the last time we saw him.

It's funny how some people you can know for years, and they don't really leave a lasting impact on your life, and some people you only know for such a short while, and they strike you as being really special and unique. Simon was one of those people. I have been following all your (Lorraine's) posts on facebook, which are so beautifully put, and speak of such an amazing individual. I wish so much we had a chance to know him better.



Last day: descending the Wee McGregor Glacier.

Sylvie

The drive back to Helen's house in Alexandra feels like no time at all because I sleep the entire way. Helen's border collie welcomes us back with much tail-wagging. We're knackered but keen to chat about our trip to Helen's inquisitive parents as well as anyone else over the next few weeks who seems as though they might be remotely interested. The first thing we mention to these people isn't the spectacular climb up Newton or Farrar, it's not our self-built fortress on the Garden of Allah or the cascading icefalls below Snowy Peak, it's not even the amazing days we spent at Adams Col; our first sentences all go something like: "It was incredible and, funny story, we met this awesome dude on day two who decided to come along for the rest of the trip!"

As a general rule the New Zealand backcountry is not a great place to meet new people, in fact I would say that it's fairly unlikely that you meet anyone at all. Meeting someone who didn't complain about the layer of our gear spread across the entire hut and who patiently tolerated our barely smirk-inducing jokes would have been enough. The fact that we were lucky enough to meet someone who subsequently contributed to our gear explosions at each campsite and who actively joined in on our often subpar banter is really quite special. An example of this was his explanation of his unique approach to 'smart-casual' dress codes- "These are great," he explained, indicating his beige zip-off trousers. "If

you go on a trip and then come back to the pub you can just flash them up by zipping off the muddy bit." We're fairly sure this was a genuine piece of advice, unfortunately the image of a beige-shirted Simon in beige shorts and mountaineering boots with two buffs obscuring most of his face trying to get into a Ponsonby bar was just too funny to be taken seriously.

Simon also taught us a hell of a lot about moving in the mountains. His calm, careful approach to alpine climbing won him a quiet admiration from all of our party; while his laid-back manner, sense of humour and a common love of being in the mountains ensured him our friendship.



Walk out down the Frances River to the Clyde.

10th - 15th January 2015

A happy day rock climbing with friends, then a solo trip to Pirirakatahi / Mt Earnslaw. Our understanding of Simon's last days.

10th January

Simon and his five AUTC friends completed their trip to the Gardens of Eden and Allah and all crammed in one car to drive back to Twizel where Simon's car was parked. They agreed to re-meet in 2 days' time at Queenstown and to climb in the Remarkables. The AUTC members drove on to visit Helen Liley's parents at their home near Alexandra and Simon drove to his boarding home at Wanaka. He rang us from Twizel and joyfully told us about his trip to the Gardens.

11th January

A quiet day at Wanaka, unpacking, sorting and repacking gear, emailing, viewing and sharing photos of the Gardens Trip, and collecting gear from a storage unit.

12th January

A brilliant sunny day. Simon emailed Gina:

Awesome. Sounds really amazing! im heading to wye creek today with the group I met at the garden of eden. We were going to do double cone/single cone traverse but road is still closed! Will do sir william next two days, also possibly west peak earnslaw or pluto peak. Will gladly come back for earnslaw east. A nice spot there I reckon

Helen Liley, one of the AUTC trip members, describes their day:

That day we had planned to do the single cone - double cone traverse of the Remarkables with Simon. However, we found the road was closed off so changed our plan, and went climbing at Wye Creek instead. Wye Creek is a climbing crag about 20 minutes south of

Queenstown on the Remarkables range. Even though our original intention was the fairly taxing double cone traverse, the day climbing at Wye Creek was really pretty relaxed. We each led a couple of climbs, and spent most of the day sitting around in the sun, with a very long lunch break! I think we headed back about 3-3:30, and went into Queenstown and got pies and ice cream. We said goodbye to Simon around 4:30.

In terms of future plans, we had planned to meet him to climb Mitre Peak with us on the 23/24 February, and he was considering running the Shotover half marathon with us on Saturday 21st Feb. Although I am not sure he was really keen on the marathon!

Beyond all of our natural inclination to lie around in the sun instead of climb, I wouldn't say Simon seemed tired or weak at all. His climbing was very strong, both on the Gardens and on the couple of routes that we did at Wye Creek. I seem to remember us all spending most of the day eating, so I don't think he was going hungry!

Sylvie Admore, another trip member, added:

The day at Wye Creek was just what we all needed, very relaxed sport. (Simon climbed the hardest climb of the day, Chocolate Treats, grade 18) with lots of lounging in the sun. We all climbed The Mission (16) the classic climb on the main wall. Simon belayed and then followed me up The Quest (15). He was good enough to point out that I was clearly looking for some excitement (not true, I'm the biggest wuss on lead) as I'd missed the second to last bolt. Luckily he only mentioned this after I'd climbed past it and clipped the next one.

That evening Simon drove back an hour to Wanaka and told his landlady, Lucy Lin he was going to Mt Earnslaw. He put away his rock climbing gear, packed for the trip and collected some food.

Mt Earnslaw / Pikirakatahi is just north of Glenorchy. Lying between the Rees and the Dart rivers, its East Peak (2830m) is slightly higher



Rock climbing at Wye Creek. *Björn*



Mt Earnslaw, West and East Peaks viewed from Glenorchy. *Jeni*



The Rees Valley, just past Muddy Creek. *Jeni*



The old Earnslaw Hut. *Jeni*



The bluffs above Kea Basin. *Colin*

than its more challenging, seldom climbed West Peak (2820m). Both the West Peak and nearby Sir William Peak are on the '100 Great Peaks' list and were Simon's focus. Tiny Esquilant Bivvy (6 bunk) situated high on the mountain would be his climbing base.

13th January

In the morning Simon drove about two hours from Wanaka back to Queenstown and on to Glenorchy. By early afternoon he was sitting in a Glenorchy café looking out at Mt Earnslaw. He emailed Don French suggesting they do some climbs together and listing details of 66 of the '100 Great Peaks' he had climbed. Don, the instigator of the challenge, had now climbed 95 but the last few, especially Mt Drake up the Balfour, were very difficult. Simon wrote:

Currently on 66 – aiming for 80+ before I head back to work on 28 April. Will see!

Could be keen for drake. Think I was going with lisa Wynne though. Will have to ask her again to confirm. Also rob hawes was keen. I was thinking drake astrolabe would be the plan and rely on the bolts to rap off. Only thing is I have a permit booked to visit irene (Mt Irene in wilderness area of Fiordland NP) on 9- 13 and 23 – 27 feb - was just going for 3 days but wanted to ensure I got ok wx so did 2 x 5 day bookings. So irene would take priority for first wx window.

So will get back to you once things firmed up with lisa (or not). You better update me on what you've done. Where's your list. Interested in a return trip to the Balfour, Mid Feb.? Know anyone who is? Simon

An hour later, after Don's positive reply, Simon sent him a second email:

Cheers. West Elie aye? My uncle brin (Williman) climbed that and sent me a photo from west peak looking to east peak and there was a double cornice on the ridge!

In glenorchy cafe about to think about walking up to the biv for a look at sir william and maybe earnslaw west. See how I go. It is a bit late, hot and im tired. May end up at earnslaw hut tonight which would still be ok.

Is quite intense doing trip after trip. Just been at

the gardens of eden allah with a group from Auckland university tramping club. Met them a lyell hut after I soloed malcolm peak (my friend walked in but lost his boot bush bashing so walked out again!) So the gardens trip was spontaneous and excellent.

After lunch and the emailing, Simon drove half an hour up the Rees Valley along a narrow winding gravel road to Muddy Creek carpark. He parked his car under some big old beech trees at the road end then walked upstream, crossing the Rees River just above Lennox Falls. He probably stayed at the old Earnslaw Hut three hours on and part way up the hill but may have slept under a bivvy rock at Kea Basin, a little further up.

14th January

Up and away early and about an hour further on Simon met two descending climbers. He told them he intended to climb Sir William Peak and return via O'Leary Peak to Esquilant Bivvy. He arrived there in the evening after a successful climb. Chatting with the two occupants he said it had been a long day and that the next day he intended to do a West to East traverse of Mt Earnslaw. He sounded confident. They spoke of a northwest storm due to arrive by the evening of the next day.

15th January

Simon was heard to get up about 6:30am, make a hot drink and leave the hut. He had warm clothes and jacket, boots, gaiters, crampons, his orange helmet, his Jetboil, lunch and one climbing tool. Around his neck was his DeLorme phone with its SOS emergency button which could summon help with a quick push. Although he had mentioned a West – East traverse, if conditions were not favourable the West Peak, his original intention, was a shorter, easier option.

It had been the hottest summer in Otago for many years. There was less snow than usual, crevasses were large and plentiful, avalanches could tumble and rocks, freed from their icy grip, could fall without warning. At the edge of the couloir he would most likely climb were large gaps between the soft snow and the rock face. Simon would have been very aware and careful.

His sleeping bag, mat, storage battery and a little food were left at the hut awaiting his return. He was probably planning to descend to a lower hut or to his car after the climb. Bad weather was coming, he had little food left and would want to cross the Rees River before it rose.

He didn't return. The other hut occupants all left to go down so did not note his non-arrival. Although he'd told several people of his intentions, no one had been briefed carefully or knew to raise the alarm. A nor'west gale set in that night, then changed to the south and dumped a lot more snow on the tops. Simon's car at Muddy Creek carpark was slowly carpeted with beech tree leaves. Searchers found it there more than two weeks later when the alarm was finally raised.

Extensive searching all over the mountain in two

independent attempts has failed to reveal any trace of Simon. We are grateful to all those who put in so much dedicated effort looking for him. Chris Prudden is a leader of the Wakatipu Alpine Cliff Rescue Team which conducted the second search as part of its training programme. Chris believes the permanently glaciated south aspect below the traverse and the West Peak is the probable resting place for Simon. We are sure he's up there somewhere, lying in peace in a place he loved.

Pikirakatahu / Mt Earnslaw is sacred to Ngai Tahu. It is a place where earth meets sky and the physical world meets the spiritual. Lying at the end of a greenstone trail, it is the guardian of pounamu, their most precious resource. To those who knew him, Simon was most precious. There is no more fitting place for him to rest at the end of his trips.



Pluto Peak and Esquilant Bivvy on Wrights Col, below Mt Earnslaw. *Lorraine Johns*

A memorial gathering was held for Simon at Lake Hawea Holiday Park on the 21st of February 2015 in a marquee beside the lake. Family and friends came to honour Simon, tell and listen to stories, laugh, sing and cry together. We were hugely comforted by the strong love, the great pride and the powerful joy in coming and sharing together.



Simon's rainbow viewed from the marquee window at the close of the ceremony. *Colin*

All known trips 2009 – 2015

2009

Jan 2009	trip to Dunedin, Silver Peaks tramp and rock climbing at Long Beach	
Feb 2009	Kahurangi National Park	
Mar 2009	weekend trip to Mt Adams, Whataroa, Westland	
July 2009	trip to Arthurs Pass	
Aug 2009	trip to Mt Ruapehu, OPC Christiania Lodge	
1 Nov 2009	Ngaurahoe and Tongariro	Lorraine Johns
14 Nov 2009	Taranaki	solo
6 Dec 2009	Southern Crossing	
Dec 2009	St James Walkway	
Summer 2009–2010	Cascade Saddle, Mt Aspiring NP	solo

2010

Jan 2010	Arthurs Pass trip	
15 Feb 2010	Mt Travers, Nelson Lakes Trip	M. Dalzell, R. Sinton, J. Wright.
Late Feb 2010	Long trip to Kahurangi NP	
14 Apr 2010	Avalanche Peak and Mt Bealey	Lorraine Johns
31 July 2010	Winterslow Peak, Mt Somers	
Aug 2010	trip to Australia, working and walking	
Oct 2010	Devil's Den Biv, Tararua	Lorraine Johns
Oct 2010	Mt Taranaki	
Nov 2010	Rock climbing, Arapiles, Australia	R. Sinton, M. Dalzell, J. Collett

Simon's own summary of trips done in 2011

day trips	Mt Cook trip (Mt Cook, Mt Dixon, Anzac Peaks, Haast Hut, fly in / walk out)
7 day trip	Mt Aspiring trip (Mt Aspiring and Rolling Pin plus walk in / walk out)
7 day trip	Rock climbing in Arapiles and Grampians, Victoria, Australia
6 day trip	Pioneer Hut trip (Haidinger, Glacier Peak, Douglas, Haast, Lendenfeld)
6 day course	High alpine skills course in Mt Cook NP
5 day trip	Tramp from Lake Rotoiti to Lewis Pass via Waiau Pass

4 day course	Avalanche course in Mt Ruapehu
3 day trip	Arthurs' Pass trip. Rolleston via Rome ridge and climbing at Castle Hill
3 day trip	Pinnacle (Raglan range)
3 day trip	Mt Owen (Kahurangi NP)
Weekend trip	Tramp Wangapeka Track (Kahurangi NP)
Weekend trip	Arthurs' Pass trip - Mt Rolleston (via Philistine)
Weekend trip	Mt Taranaki East Ridge
Weekend trip	Girdlestone – Taharangi Traverse and high Pinnacle (Mt Ruapehu)
Weekend trips	5 or 6 w/es in Tararuas, incl. Southern Crossing (now visited 33 of 47 huts)
Weekend trip	Rainbow Hut (poor attempt on Mt Paske, Nelson Lakes)
Weekend trip	Castle Hill Peak (Arthurs' Pass)
Weekend trip	Mt Fishtail (Richmond Ranges)
Weekend trip	Attempt on Bruce Peak
Summer holidays	Attempt on Mt Brewster

More trips I can't remember. Approx 75 days in the hills. (20% of the year) 7+ weeks leave

2012 – 2015 Information from CMC and TTC Log Sites

1 Jan 2012	Nun's Veil	Lorraine Johns
5 Feb 2012	Faerie Queene	Lorraine Johns, Nina Sawicki
15 Feb 2012	Tutoko	Vaughan Snowden
31 Mar 2012	Malte Brun West Ridge	Lisa Wynne
9 April 2012	Phipps Peak	solo
11 April 2012	Double Cone	solo
2 June 2012	Scott's Knob	Lorraine Johns
4 June 2012	Mt Arthur	Lorraine Johns, Colin Bell
9 June 2012	Hikurangi	Lorraine Johns
21 July 2012	Pinnacles Traverse	Mike Phethean
29 July 2012	Mt Tapuaenuku	solo
23 Sept 2012	Mt Murchison via White Glacier	L Johns, James Thornton & Nina Dickerhof
28/29 Sep '12	Te ao Whekere / Manakau traverse	solo
6 Nov 2012	low peak Mt Cook (bailed on GT due to HARD blue ice), Lisa Wynne, Rob Hawes and Steve Dowell. Sixteen day trip	
9 Nov 2012	Anzac Peaks	Rob Hawes
13 Nov 2012	Mt Tasman	Lisa Wynne, Rob Hawes, Steve Dowall
15 Nov 2012	Haast High Peak	Rob Hawes, Steve Dowall
16 Dec 2012	Mt Alarm	solo
28 Dec 2012	Mt Brewster	Lorraine Johns

2013

4 Jan 2013	Mt Barff	Lorraine Johns & Rob Hawes
6 Jan 2013	Dragonfly Peak	Lorraine Johns & Rob Hawes
20 Jan 2013	Mt Hopeless	Lorraine Johns
21 Jan 2013	Angelus Peak	Lorraine Johns
27 Jan 2013	Mt Barth	Lorraine Johns, Marta Scott, James Thornton & Nina Dickerhof
7 Feb 2013	Sabre	Vaughan Snowdon
24 Feb 2013	Dilemma and traverse to Unicorn	J Wright
10 Mar 2013	Mt Tamaki	Kieran Parsons
23 Mar 2013	Belvedere Peak	solo
30 Mar 2013	The Needle and the Haystack, Mt Misery (the Devil's Dining Table)	Lorraine Johns
7 April 2013	Mt Paske	solo
14 April 2013	Dasler Pinnacles	solo
27 July 2013	Girdlestone Peak, Ruapehu	Lorraine Johns & Elizabeth Claridge
28 July 2013	Dome (summit plateau camp)	Lorraine Johns & Elizabeth Claridge
31 Aug 2013	Douglas Peak (south face/central couloir)	five day trip with Rob Hawes
01 Sept 2013	Mt Barnicoat (south face)	Rob Hawes
02 Sept 2013	Mt Spencer (north ridge)	Rob Hawes
19 Oct 2013	Mt Hector	Lorraine Johns
3 Nov 2013	Attempt on Upham Peak, Arrowsmiths	Vaughan Snowdon Heather Rhodes
11 Nov 2013	Anzac Peaks traverse	Lorraine Johns, Rob Hawes & Patrick Arnold
12 Nov 2013	Aoraki/Mt Cook	Lorraine Johns
14 Nov 2013	Mt Vancouver	Rob Hawes
15 Nov 2013	Mt Aylmer to Hochstetter Dome	Lorraine Johns, Rob Hawes & Pat Arnold
17 Nov 2013	Mt Green	Lorraine Johns
18 Nov 2013	Mt Elie De Beaumont	Lorraine Johns, Rob Hawes & P Arnold
19 Nov 2013	Mt Elie De Beaumont	Rob Hawes
23 Nov 2013	The Footstool	Lorraine Johns
14 Dec 2013	Nazomi	Lisa Wynne
23 Dec 2013	Turner Peak (from Ball Pass)	solo

2014

25 Jan 2014	Mt Franklin (APs)	solo
2 Feb 2014	Lean Peak	solo
18 Jan 2014	Rabbits Peak	solo
07 Feb 2014	Warrior	Vaughan Snowdon
02 March 2014	High Thumb/The Thumbs	solo
11 March 2014	Mt Magellan	Lisa Wynne
22 March 2014	Mt Sibbald (northern summit)	solo
16 Aug 2014	Mt Aspiring - South Face	Rob Hawes
19 Aug 2014	Stargazer - East Face	Rob Hawes
20 Aug 2014	Mt Aspiring - South West ridge	Rob Hawes
23 Aug 2014	Somnus - Couloir	Rob Hawes
31 Aug 2014	Mt Arrowsmith - Central Couloir	Lorraine Johns, R Popovici & J Andric
22 Oct 2014	Mt Clarke - South Ridge	Gina Andrews
25 Oct 2014	Jagged Peak - North Ridge	Neil Sloan Nina Dickerhof
7 Nov 2014	Climax Peak - Solution Col	Gina Andrews
17 Nov 2014	Pibrac - Mona Glacier / divide	Rob Hawes and Gina Andrews
24 Nov 2014	North Peak - North Ridge	Rob Hawes
27 Nov–1 Dec 14	La Perouse - East Face	Steve Dowall
8 Dec -2014	Eyre Peak - from Cowshed Hut	solo
12–15 Dec 2014	Torres - West Ridge	Peter Dickson, Lisa Wynne, Steve Dowall
23 Dec 2014	Mt Chudleigh	Gina Andrews

2015

2 Jan 2015	Malcolm Peak - NE Ridge	solo
5 Jan 2015	Snowy Peak - From Garden of Allah	+5 members of AUTC
6 Jan 2015	Newton Peak - From Garden of Allah	+ 5 Members of AUTC
6 Jan 2015	Mt Tyndall - From Garden of Allah	+ 5 Members of AUTC
8 Jan 2015	Mt Farrar - From Angel Col	+ 5 Members of AUTC
14 Jan 2015	Sir William Peak	solo entered by Lorraine to record Simon's 67th of 100 Peaks
15 Jan 2015	Attempt of West Peak of Earnslaw	solo

33 SIMON'S 67 GREAT PEAKS SPREADSHEET

No.	Peak	Date (approx)	Gde	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Notes
1	Ngauruhoe	01/11/2009	1	Lorraine Johns			With Lorraine went up Ngauruhoe and Tongariro + I completed the crossing (She went back and got car)
2	Taranaki	14/11/2009	1	Solo			Solo day trip from Wellington. 5 hour 45 return to carpark
3	Travers	15/02/2010	2	Michael Dalzell	Rowan Sinton, James, Others		Up the grade two rock route - our second party went up the standard route. Date is estimate only
4	Avalanche Peak	10/04/2010	1	Lorraine Johns			Traverse from Bealey to Avalanche Peak. Had done 3 times prior to this as well.
5	Tahurangi	11/09/2010	2	Lorraine Johns	Mark Henderson		Traverse from Girdlestone
6	Rolleston	13/03/2011	2	Polish guy			Philistine / Rolleston traverse in 10.5 hours return to car. Didn't go on to glacier (over middle peak) or down low slide.
7	Aspiring	07/11/2011	2	Lorraine Johns, Rob Hawes, Nina Sawicki	Steve Dowall, Lisa Wynne, Stu Hutson, Richard Davidson		Walk in / walk out trip. Up and down via Ramp. Storm came in early, so no views on top - just snow and wind in your face! Also climbed Rolling Pin on the same trip
8	Cook	14/11/2011	3	Stu Hutson, Rob Hawes, Dave Grainger	Mike Pryjma, Steve Dowall, Richard Davidson, Matt Knarston		Fly in / walk out. Also climbed Dixon via south ridge and visited Haast Hut on the same trip.
9	Haidinger	04/12/2011	3	Lisa Wynne	Rob Hawes	Others	Fly in / fly out. Haidiner via 3+ face route. Douglas via Glacier Peak. Lendenfeld was on the way to Tasman but bailed. Also climbed most of the way to West Peak of Haast. Also did South Face Douglas on 31 Aug 2013 via central couloir
10	Douglas	07/12/2011	3	Lisa Wynne	Rob Hawes	Others	
11	Lendenfeld	09/12/2011	2	Lisa Wynne	Rob Hawes	Others	
12	Annette	29/12/2011	1	Lorraine Johns			Up Sebastapol ridge. Poor attempt at Sealy but return due to setting off late and wx not looking good.

13	Nun's Veil	01/01/2012	1	Lorraine Johns			Did in 2 days. Camp on rock between the two glaciers. Nice views. Challenging in tramping boots + flexi crampons
14	Faerie Queen	05/02/2012	1	Lorraine Johns	Nina Sawicki		Tented in valley. Long down and average visibility most of way. 50% views on the top.
15	Tutoko	14/02/2012	3	Vaughan Snowdon			Fly in. Then 3 day trip. Found wicked bivvy ledge. Rock steps really fun and summit snow / ice good. Walk out huge!
16	Malte Brun	31/03/2012	3	Lisa Wynne			4 day trip walk in, walk out. Spent a night out (up West Ridge to summit and down Fyfe's couloir) on a ledge. Great!
17	Phipps	08/04/2012	1	Solo			Lorraine and Nina S were on the trip but didn't go to summit.
18	Double Cone	12/04/2012	cx 13	Solo			Quick solo trip to Double Cone then rap down central gully. Was planning for rock climbing trip but partner bailed.
19	Scotts Knob	02/06/2012	1	Lorraine Johns			Walk in thru night to hut and out Sunday. Very cold with some verglass and longish day but good.
20	Hikurangi	09/06/2012	1	Lorraine Johns			3 day weekend (was Lorraine's birthday). Easy trip - quite fun but a lot of driving!
21	Tapuae o Uenuku	29/07/2012	2	Lorraine Johns			Plan was for Alarm but conditions no good + Lorraine fell in the stream! I soloed Tapi instead. Ice falling from the top!
22	Murchison	23/09/2012	1	Lorraine Johns	Nina Dickerhof	James Thornton	Longish weekend trip. Excellent wx and conditions - back at hut by 8:30am for the 'sched!
23	Te ao Whekere	28/09/2012	1	Solo			Climbed Te ao Whekere on day one and camped up high.
24	Manakau	29/09/2012	2	Solo			Traversed to Manakau from Te ao Whekere & walked out in the same (long) day. Excellent wx & full moon!
25	Anzac Peaks	09/11/2012	1	Rob Hawes			4 hours return from the hut. Nice views of the East Ridge (blue at the top)

SIMON'S 67 GREAT PEAKS SPREADSHEET

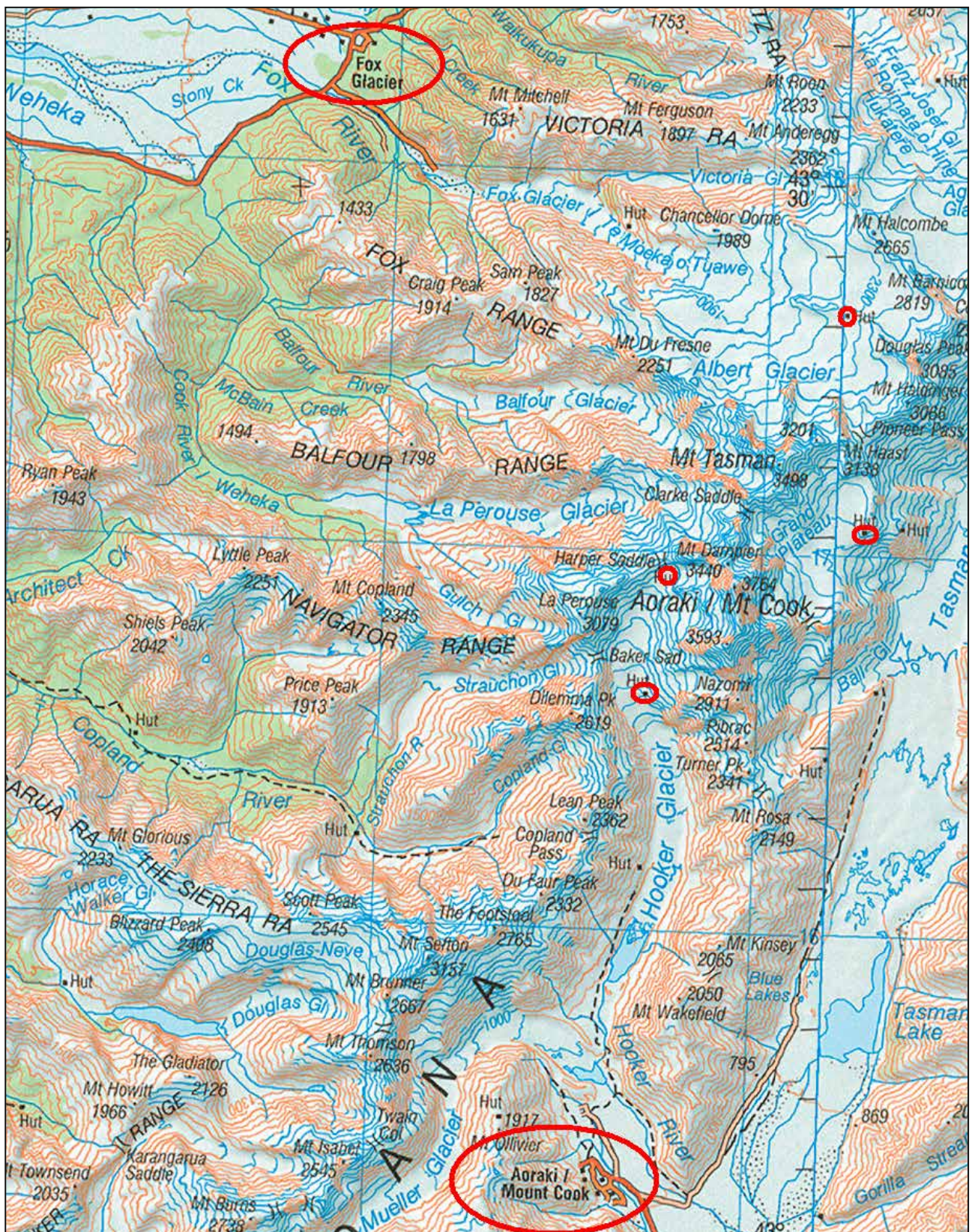
26	Tasman	13/11/2012	3	Rob Hawes	Steve Dowall	Lisa Wynne	Up Syme ridge and down north shoulder. Fresh snow bonded to summit ridge. Wicked!
27	Haast	15/11/2012	3	Rob Hawes	Steve Dowall		Up via couloir then traverse high peak and down via col between high and middle peak.
28	Hector	09/12/2012	-	Mark Hooker			Practice run for TMR. Ran southern crossing from south to north in 8 hours 9 minutes. Have done previously too.
29	Alarm	16/12/2012	2	Solo			Solo weekend trip. Summit was all rock (easy), lower down there was snow, which made for quick travel.
30	Franklin (Travers range)	23/12/2012	1	Lorraine Johns			Good conditions - enough snow on top and the scree below wasn't too bad. Better than in spring with avo danger!
31	Brewster	28/12/2012	2	Lorraine Johns			Up ridge (not full ridge though) and down the face. Really good conditions - better weather than the first attempt!
32	Dragonfly Peak	04/01/2013	1	Lorraine Johns	Rob Hawes		Tented on the ridge. Nice views. Also did Barff prior to this (but it is not on the list!)
33	Mt Hopeless	20/01/2013	1	Lorraine Johns			3 day (Well. anniversary weekend). In around the lake and out via Angelus Hut. Nice loop
34	Mt Barth	27/01/2013	2	Lorraine Johns	Nina Dickerhof	James Thornton	Long weekend trip. Up via ridge and down via the face. Great climb. Back to Chch 1am though
35	Sabre	07/02/2013	cx 19	Vaughan Snowdon			3 day trip + the driving. Did direct start to the north buttress. Wicked!
36	Unicorn	24/02/2013	5	James Wright	Don French	Dan Pringle	4 Day trip. Solo the face of Dilemma via Direct route (grade 5) then solo traverse to Unicorn and back. Awesome!
37	Tamaki	10/03/2013	1	Kieran Parsons			Easy weekend trip. Subaru to 5km of Memorial Hut (Cass). Easy scramble. Chossy

38	Paske	07/04/2013	1	Solo			Weekend trip (left Wellington Sat morning). Lorraine came along to climb Princess. Snow on the ridge made progress slower but still OK.
39	Dasler Pinnacles	14/04/2013	2	Solo			Weekend trip (left Wellington Sat morning). 5 hours of driving each way. Cool to visit the Hopkins valley for first time. 4WD would come in handy next time.
40	Barnicoat	01/09/2013	3	Rob Hawes			Climbed unmarked route on south face (mostly steepish snow with some ice), traversed to true summit
41	Spencer	02/09/2013	1	Rob Hawes			Climbed north ridge 3 hours to summit from Pioneer Hut
42	Vancouver	14/11/2013	3	Rob Hawes			Climbed via Couloir. During descent there was rock fall - not recommended to descend after sun hits the slopes
43	Hochstetter Dome	15/11/2013	2	Rob Hawes	Lorraine Johns	Patrick Arnold	Traversed Alymer to Hochstetter Dome
44	Green	16/11/2013	2	Lorraine Johns			Climbed as wx was deteriorating - did not attempt Walter
45	Footstool	23/11/2013	2	Lorraine Johns			Climbed divide route
46	Nazomi	14/12/2013	2	Lisa Wynne			Couloir route to high peak
47	Rabbits Peak	18/01/2014	2	solo			11 hour return solo day trip. Ascent and descent via circ
48	Franklin APNP	25/01/2014	1	solo			Friday night walk to goat pass hut 3 hours. Sat climb via good luck creek. Hut to hut in 11 hours and 2 hours 20 mins walk out.
49	Lean Peak	02/02/2014	2	Lorraine to Copland pass			weekend trip. Sat night in Copland Shelter
50	The Warrior	07/02/2014	1	Vaughan	Ryan		3 day trip from Erewhon Station
51	High Thumb / The Thumbs	02/03/2014	2	solo			weekend trip. drive to end of Lilybank Road. 8 hour to walk in. 13 hour to summit via south ridge and out.

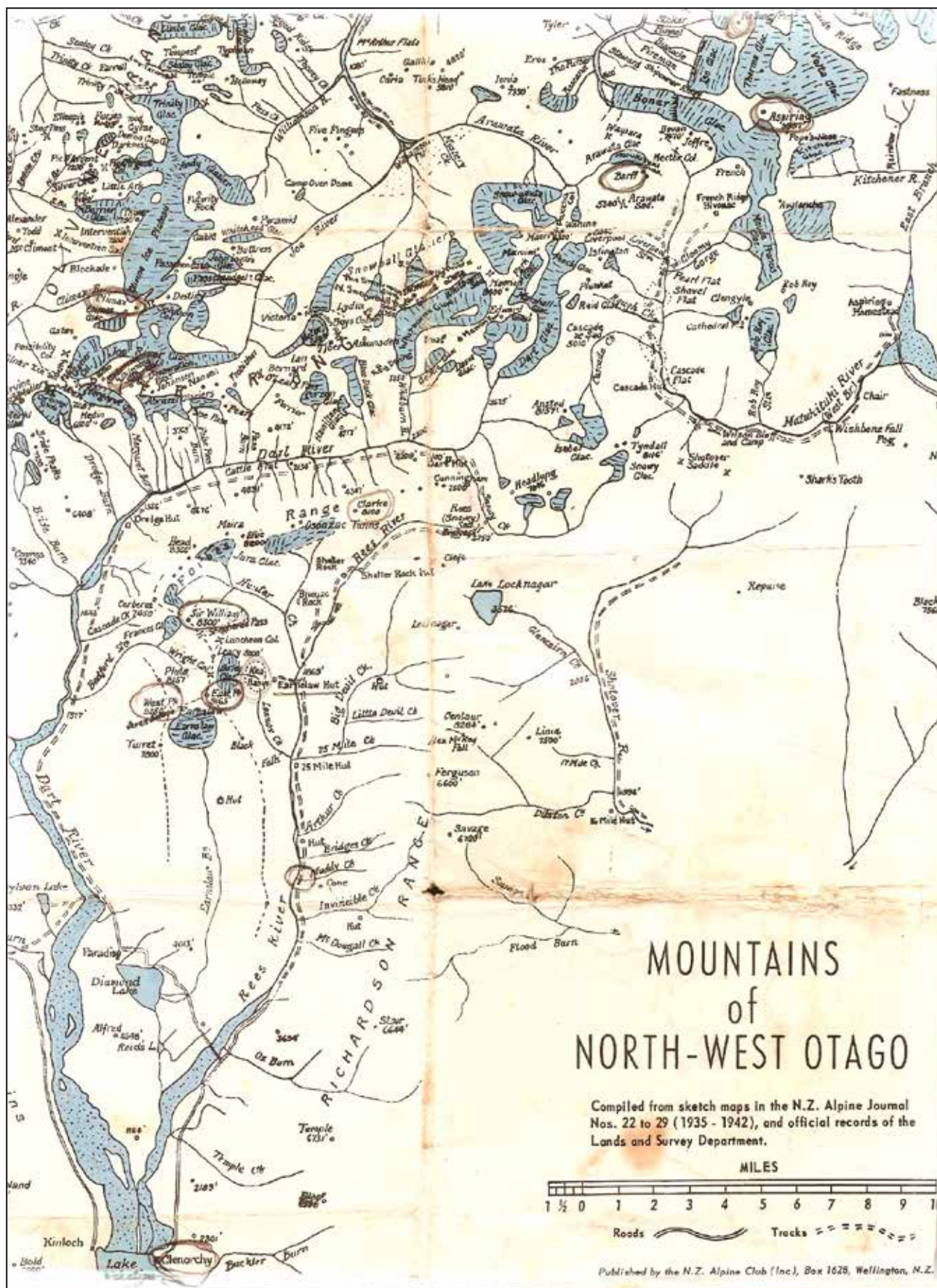
							Sun = fly in to below Katies Col 10am and walk into Balfour took 6 hours all up with rests. Mon = depart 8am, start rock climbing 12pm. Pitch 1 very hard (crack climb, 50m, crux 19, sustained). Had to cut it into 3 and it took 4 hours, lots of aid and rests. Got to near top of pitch 4 and had a shivy. Completed rest of climb and descent on Tuesday, got back to tent 19:00 or so (35 hours after leaving). Wed = walk out to helicopter land area in 4 hours. Stay night there as could not fly out. Thu = fly out and back to Chch. Fri = work in chch office
52	Magellan	12/03/2014	6	Lisa Wynne			
53	Stargazer	19/08/2014	2	Rob Hawes			
54	Somnus	23/08/2014	2	Rob Hawes			
55	Arrowsmith	31/08/2014	3	Lorraine	Radu	Jovan	via couloir
56	Clarke	22/10/2014	1	Gina Andrews			nice overnight trip
57	Jagged	25/10/2014	2	Nina Dickerhof	Neil Sloan		via Jagged Stream with high camp on Jagged Glacier (north ridge)
58	Climax	07/11/2014	1	Gina Andrews			Day 1 = walk from Chinaman's car park to Daleys Flat Hut. Day 2 = Camp at Seal Col. Day 3 = Camp on Olivine ice plateau, access via Stefasson / Derivation / Thunder. Day 4 = summit Climax Peak and camp at Derivation ice fall. Day 5 = stay at Daleys Flat Hut. Day 6 = out
59	Pibrac	17/11/2014	1	Rob Hawes	Gina Andrews		Bivvy at base of Mona. Climb via glacier/divide. Used the walk in to stash food and gear for future to Empress.
60	North Peak	24/11/2014	2	Rob Hawes			
61	La Perouse	02/12/2014	4	Steve Dowall			via East Face from Gardiner Hut. Traverse ridge and sidle to Sturdee then to Empress Hut. 5 day trip.
62	Eyre Peak	08/12/2014	1	Solo			

63	Torres	14/12/2014	4	Steve Dowall	Lisa Wynne	Peter Dickson	via West Ridge from Katies Col
64	Chudleigh	23/12/2014	2	Gina Andrews			
65	Malcolm	02/01/2015	2	Solo			
66	Tyndall	06/01/2015	1	Helen, Sylvie, Sam, Steven, Bjoern			
67	Sir William	14/01/2015		Solo			<i>Entered on the CMC website by Lorraine</i>

The full list of the 100 Great Peaks can be viewed online on the NZAC website.



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