



NEW ZEALAND
ALPINE CLUB

The Otago Climber

August 2017

Shelter from the storm – Sam Waetford using the overhang at Little Babylon to advantage at the 2017 Darran's Winter Climbing Meet. Story page 9 Riley Smith photo



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*The monthly newsletter of the
Otago Section of the New Zealand Alpine Club*

August 2017

Meetings

1st Wednesday of the Month, Staff Club, University of Otago (Leith St).

Wednesday, 2 August

Ex-Yacht Captain Kali Kahn will give an illustrated talk about how she got into sailing at 20 years old and how she ended up doing expeditions to remote places in the high latitudes such as the Antarctic, Greenland, Spitsbergen, Iceland, Baffin Island, South Georgia....and more.



Wednesday, 6 September

Our September meeting will be our AGM and our guest speaker will be adventure racer Chris Forne.

Trips and Training

Awakino tramp/ski, 29 - 30 July. Riley Smith is leading a winter trip, which has been changed to Awakino Ski-field on the St Mary's range behind Kurow. This is a great opportunity to visit the ski field, to ski, climb or to try out the section's snow shoes. Contact Riley by email – rileychallis@gmail.com for details or to book a place.

Avalanche awareness, Wednesday 2 August, 6 – 7.30pm. Bivouac Outdoor are hosting Andrew Hobman from Avalanche New Zealand who will hold an avalanche awareness session – no need to book, just bring \$5 to help with costs. This session should end in time for everyone to make it to the Staff Club for Kali Kahn's talk to the Club Night. If you'd like transport from Bivouac, please give Lindsay a call on 027 404 8911.

2017 Snowcraft Course will be held 4 – 6 August and there are details in the newsletter below. This year's course is almost full, so we suggest you book early to avoid disappointment. Contact Heather by email – heathermayrhodes@gmail.com for details or to book a place.

Eyre Mountains; 25 – 27 August. Danilo has begun the early planning for a trip to the Eyre Mountains. This trip will be ideal for those who are new to mountaineering, especially those who have just completed the Snowcraft Course. Contact Danilo by email danilo.hegg@hotmail.com for details or to book a place.

Annual Snowcraft Course almost full

Otago Section's popular Snowcraft Course will be held from 4 – 6 August this year, based at the Remarkables Ski-field. The course is planned to give new mountaineers the basic skills they need to get started in the mountains and an appreciation of risks and challenges involved in this wonderful sport. Skills covered include ice axe and crampon use, avalanche avoidance and rescue, camping, and navigation.



2014 NZAC snowcraft course

Reasonable fitness, but no prior snow experience, is required. Once the course has been completed, new climbers will be able to join the Section on appropriate club trips, such as the one Danilo is organising to the Eyre Mountains.

The course costs \$150, which covers gear rental (axe, crampons, helmet, avalanche transceiver, shovel, probe), accommodation in Frankton for Friday and Saturday nights, and the latest snowcraft manual. Climbers will need to provide their own food, clothing and boots suitable for crampons but the instructors can help with advice as to what is OK.

The section is fortunate to have experienced mountaineers Heather Rhodes, Jaz Morris and Raluca Ana available to teach this year, and those who sign-up can be sure that they will have a fun weekend learning the skills they need to get started in the mountains. If you are interested, contact Heather by email – heathermayrhodes@gmail.com for details or to book one of the 12 places on this year's course.

Remarkables Ice and Mixed Climbing Festival, sponsored by NZAC, is on again the 17th – 20th August and more info on the event can be found at www.iceandmixedfestival.co.nz. In previous years various NZAC sections have coordinated an annual section trip to the event and if you're keen on an Otago Section trip just email us at Otago.climber@gmail.com and the organisers will put us in contact with other sections that have shown interest. They try to get the various sections staying together to help members get to know each other a bit more. Usually this has been at the Frankton Motor Camp.

Time to Restart an Ancient Tradition.

Ever since Edward Whymper climbed the Matterhorn in 1865, one of the first things climbers have done on their return home, is to write of their exploits and tour the country speaking of their challenges. For some the writings and lecture tours were a way to gain fame while for others, they were a way to raise money to fund the next gear purchase.

In recent times this tradition seems to have declined or has been limited to posting a couple of photos on Facebook. The Otago Section is keen to see the writing tradition return and is prepared to help deliver fame and fortune to anyone who contributes to this monthly newsletter. Whether a trip report, a gear review or a discussion of a technical issue, we would love you to share your material with our world-wide audience. (The Section Newsletter is on the Internet, so could well be read by climbers in Spitzbergen and you could become famous).

All you have to do is email your article, photo or internet link to otago.climber@gmail.com and you will be well on your way to fame and fortune. Fortune? – Yep, we're offering a \$50 Hunting and Fishing voucher to the best submission each month.



EDWARD WHYMPER, ESQ.
LAWSON GARDIN.



The Duke of Wellington

Queens Gardens, Dunedin

A fine venue with the best imported ales
for your next committee meeting.

A big thanks to Michael for making the Section committee meetings even more enjoyable. Your chance to join the Committee at the AGM on Wednesday, 6 September.

Editorial

Sometimes you keep getting the same message, time after time, no matter what medium you are perusing. This month, it seems that every time I check Facebook, pick up a magazine or attend a Section meeting, I keep getting messages about climbing and the loss of access.

It began early in the month when incoming NZAC President John Palmer talked to the section Club Night about the death of rock climbing in New Zealand. Even in the face of ever increasing interest, and the inclusion of the sport in the next Olympics, climbers in New Zealand are steadily being locked out of crags which they have been using for decades. A keen and accomplished rock climber himself, John listed a series of significant crags which have been closed to access or where access has been threatened in recent weeks. And in this month's Wilderness magazine the theme continued with example after example where access is being limited to crags, mountains and the back country. Then a click on Facebook took me to Access Fund, an American organisation facing the same challenges there. www.accessfund.org

In general terms, the reasons given by landowners for the restrictions fall into two categories; they either quote health and safety or abuse of the access "privilege" by those who haven't respected the land or landowners. Changing land-ownership patterns round the world and a belief that the ultimate risk mitigation is banning an activity, means that we can no longer take access to our climbing for granted. As climbers we can continue down the present path of passively watching our sport shut out of access or we can take action. At the Section Club night John made it clear that he has no intention of giving up and outlined his two main areas of focus for his presidency and for our Section.

The first is to build and formalise relationships with those who control access to our crags. At a

local and national level, the Alpine Club needs to put proper plans in place to identify the owners of our crags, build relationships with them and, where necessary, develop formal written access agreements. As an interesting aside, a quick check after the meeting shows that there may be five different owners of the land underlying Long Beach crags and we have no agreement to use the land with any of them. As has been seen throughout New Zealand, we could be locked out of Long Beach tomorrow with the stroke of one, risk-averse bureaucrat's pen.

The second area of action is our own behaviour as climbers accessing others' land. It does nothing for our reputation when climbers get off-side with landowners as a result of our thoughtlessness or outright damage. John listed example after example where landowners could point to dogs on farmland, reserve bush being cleared for belay or access routes or culturally offensive actions on Maori land. If we are trying to build relationships with landowners, we just can't be seen to be guilty of these actions, nor should we stand by and watch others ruin our access for us. The American Access Fund also recognises this responsibility and has a useful reminder they call the Climber's Pact. www.accessfund.org/learn/the-climbers-pact

While sports like mountain biking are seeing millions spent on an extensive, national network of tracks through public and private land, climbing appears to be facing an increasing number of locked gates and lost opportunities. Our challenge is to turn this situation around by supporting John's plans as incoming NZAC President and by taking actions at a Section and personal level to maintain and build our access and our profile as one of this country's iconic sports.

Lindsay Smith
Otago Section Newsletter Editor

A Journey with X - From the summit of Mt Aspiring to Kai Whaka Pai

Dave Brash remembers a Big Day Out

It is a hoary climbing cliché that getting to the summit is only halfway there. In this case it was about 10% there, with 90% to go. My mate, let's call him X, called me. 'Hey, the South Face of Aspiring is plastered, let's go.' I was working in Wanaka at the time, building a deck, and more than ready for a distraction from my labours.

Great, I'd be in, but there's a nor'wester forecast, maybe we should wait for a better weather window? X is a persuasive character. 'No problem, we'll beat the storm, the South Face is short and a piece of piss in these conditions, we'll be up and off in a jiffy.' Well OK, if you say so, so off we went.

X was right about one thing, we were up in a flash – rope on for the 'shrund at the bottom of the face, then rope in the pack and soloing beautiful plastic ice gullies and runnels all the way to the top, with possibly the best ice conditions I had ever encountered. This was too good to be true of course. The moment we hit the summit, the storm hit us, and we were engulfed in a maelstrom. Oh shit, we didn't quite time this right.



We fought our way down in the near zero visibility, forming pretty cartwheels in the snow on the Ramp, until we were on relatively level ground, which suggested we might now be on the Bonar. We did have a compass and map, though not much else as light and fast had been the plan. With the visibility at no more than a few metres, and the atmosphere dark, we couldn't see at all with our glacier glasses, so took them off so the back person could point the front one in the (hopefully) right direction. Did I mention that the date was December 22, the summer solstice? This fact was soon to become significant.

By some miracle we hit the Quarterdeck perfectly. If you have read the current issue of the Climber, you may be aware that navigation is not my strong suit, so I must give credit to X for this. In another half hour, we were back at French Ridge Hut, and half an hour later we were snow blind for two days. I still wonder occasionally what our chances would have been if we had not made it off the Bonar before the blindness hit: no biv bags, no food, no water, minimal clothing, in a storm that lasted for several days.



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However, our trials were not over. Apart from the intense pain that comes with severe snow blindness - concentrating on not moving the eyeball is key because when it moves, it's as though it is being scratched with 40 grit sandpaper, and the pain is exquisite - we had landed among a group of particularly sadistic Australian climbers sitting out the storm at the hut, who, while admittedly feeding us their food and leading us by the hand to the toilet, delighted in getting us to walk into things, finding it quite hilarious. This was a small price to pay for avoiding severe hunger and hygiene problems.



Eventually the pain reduced and we regained some vision. Another problem with snow blindness is the extreme sensitivity to light, even with eyes closed, so we taped up our sunglasses to eliminate all light except for a narrow slit so we could barely see, and stumbled half blind downhill and out to Raspberry Flat. By now, the skin on our faces had bubbled and was falling off in strips due to the worst sunburn I had ever experienced; we had been too preoccupied with survival to put sunscreen on during our outing on the mountain and glacier.

When we finally got to the car, it was blocked by a carelessly parked SUV. All we wanted was to get back to Wanaka and have a feed. I was angry, hungry, tired and at a loss, but I had underestimated X. Of course I should have known X would have the situation under control. X is the one who could march us into the Hermitage hot tubs when we were filthy stinking dirtbags straight off the mountain without the receptionist blinking an eye. X is the one who could get into the USA post September 11 with an expired passport. 'No worries' X said. He marched straight to a nearby rock and lifted it. Sure enough, the key was under the first rock he looked under, further proof of X's uncanny powers, and we were able to move the SUV. I can't recall where the key to the SUV went, but it could have been a long throw into the paddock.

Ah, back to the car – a Mecca after a climbing trip if there has been some thinking ahead. Yes and no. There was beer, but no food. Food was imperative, as we had been on starvation rations for a few days now, and it was getting late due to our slow blind stumble from French Ridge Hut, so it was imperative to get to Kai Whaka Pai fast before it closed. It was looking good – entering Wanaka half an hour before the town closed up – until we were flagged down by a cop.

It was now that the most memorable moment of the entire trip occurred. Picture the vision that greeted the poor cop when an extremely irritable X wound down the windscreen at 10 pm on a Saturday night: glacier glasses duct taped to his head, with slits for vision, and flaps of skin peeling off his wrinkled and shriveled face, an appearance that would not be out of place in a horror movie. The cop almost fell over backwards, startled and clearly unnerved by this wild apparition. He did well to partly recover his composure.

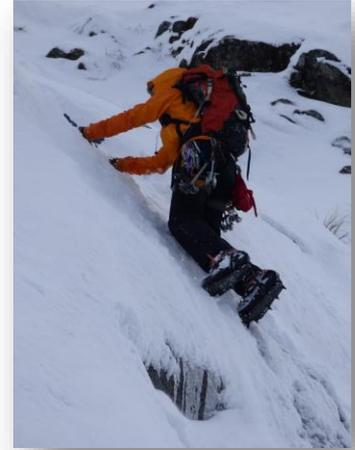
'Aaah, we're doing a random breath test. Have you had a drink?' This polite though nervous question seemed to further enrage X, who aggressively answered, 'Yeah I have, just get it done quick, will you, we need to eat.' I should know never to mistrust X's instincts – the shocked cop just waved him on immediately, no breath test, relieved to be rid of this apparent maniac. Here is a happy ending to this tale of woe – we got to Kai Whaka Pai before it closed and had an amazing meal that I still remember to this day. Good job X.

The Darran's Winter Meet 2017

Riley Smith gives a young climber's view of a 10 year tradition.

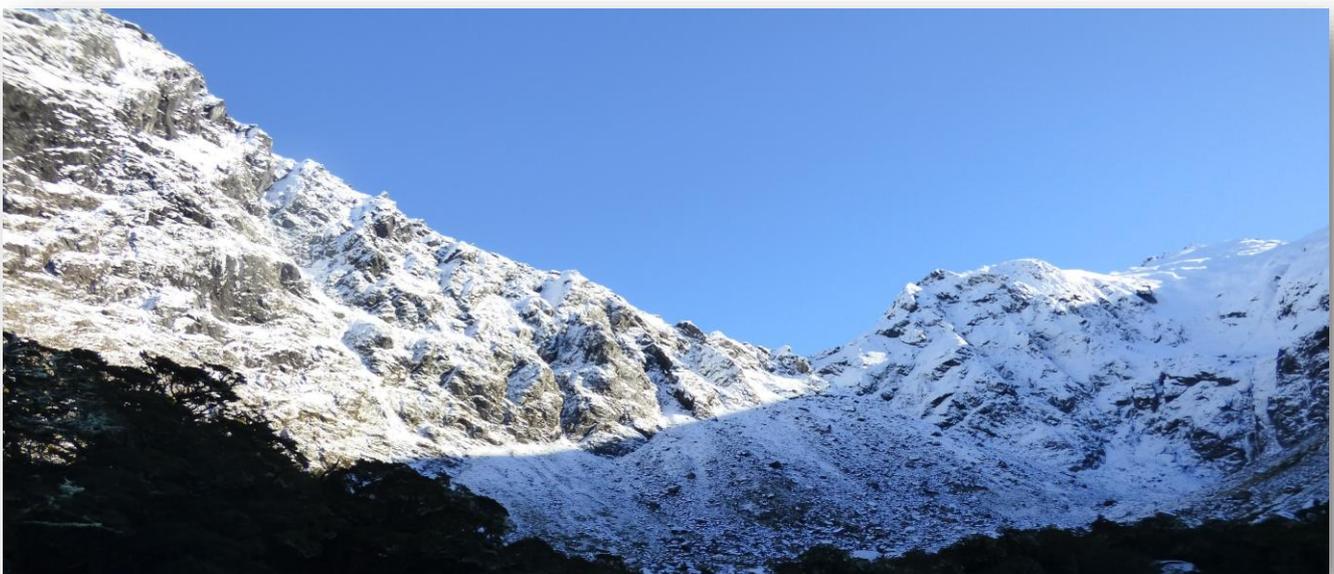
One of the things that I love about climbing these days is that experienced climbers are more than willing to share their knowledge of the mountains to young newbies like me. This especially became true for me when I was allowed to go to the Darrans Winter meet this year to improve my skills and knowledge in alpine and mixed climbing.

After a long, sketchy drive (due to some nasty ice - particularly between Gore and Te-Anau) with a car FULL of gear, dad and I finally arrived at Homer Hut where Al (Walker) fortunately had the fire and the kettle going. For the rest of the day, we adventured down the Gertrude valley listening to many rock falls hurtling down the mountains around us. After meeting the rest of the climbers, drinking cups of tea, beer and whiskey - we got some sleep ready for the first of many big days to come.



Riley tests his new skills

On the first day, the group all headed up to the Tunnel Bluffs, where we all split off and climbed separate routes. Al, Gary and I headed up "Failing Vision", a two/three pitch route that climbs to the top of Homer Saddle, while other parties climbed routes like 'Double Vision', 'Tunnel Vision' and 'Grovelly Chimney of Joy'. Due to my complete lack of experience in mixed (turf) climbing, I was happy to let Al and Gary lead (drag me) up the pitches up to the Homer Saddle! The snow conditions for the first day, and more or less the rest of the week were absurdly average. A rough 20cm layer of powder covered everything, making some of the slabby climbs much harder and more like dry tool routes. By the time we reached our original planned route (after an alpine start at 8:30 a.m - then tea, coffee and biscuits), the snow had 'turned to custard' due to the early day sunlight. When we did finally reach the top of the saddle on a superb windless afternoon, typically, my bloody camera didn't work.



Tunnel Bluffs at Home Face, with a fresh dusting of powdery snow.



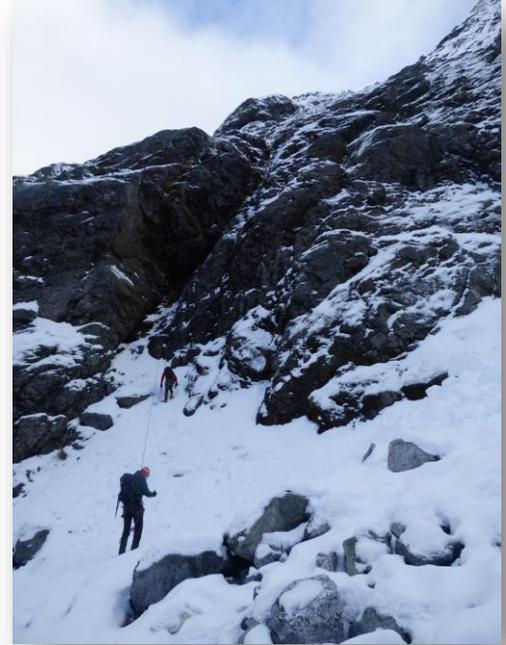
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After a few days of climbing, the weather packed up and it snowed and rained for most of a day. Five of us decided that we couldn't handle sitting inside for the day, so we packed the climbing gear and headed to Little Babylon. I still can't get over this place. Not only is it a spectacular drive, the approach would easily beat any other in terms of views, gradient, wetness, and just sheer awesomeness. The crag is located just out of Milford Sound in the native bush.

Those of you that have been there will know how hard the grades are at Little Babylon, but for those of you who don't, rock climbing grades (in New Zealand) start at about 11, where anything under is too easy to bother grading. Generally on Tuesday night climbing, people can get up a 14 on their first night. From there the scale reaches to something like 35. From about 22 onwards it starts to get serious, where you need to know what you're doing. (According to the old guidebook), the hardest climb in Dunedin is a grade 30. The easiest climb in Little Babylon is a 23 Called 'Rua Tahī'. Pretty tough!

Three of us started off messing around on 'Rua Tahī', while the other two smashed out 'Fly My Pretties' - 25. Coming from Dunedin's mediocre rock, I couldn't believe how nice solid rock is to climb on - you can actually trust the holds! After flailing about on both routes, I decided to watch the pros. Josh then

climbed a 30 (I'm not exactly sure on the name) while the rest of us gaped at how damn good he is! My claim to fame with this is that he used MY quickdraws!!



Riley resting on 'Fly My Pretties'

To sum up the next couple of days, we went climbing! Some cool routes such as 'Tunnel of Love', 'Home Turf', 'Blurred Vision' and 'The Visionary' were climbed in some less than average conditions. We got quite a bit more snow, but it was all quite unconsolidated and fluffy... ideal for skiing and avalanches!

Without being too deep and meaningful, I totally believe that taking people out at around my age is so beneficial to the future of climbing. For example: when someone taught me how to multi pitch climb, I could then bring that knowledge to my climbing partners, who also learn and gain these new skills. So, thanks to people like Al, Gary, and the rest of the climbers who are willing to share your do's, don'ts and how to's when it comes to climbing, you're

doing so much good! Also, thanks to everyone who helps new climbers, it's awesome to have such great people around, and secondly to all the people who came along and made the week happen, I can't wait to come back next year! Finally, thanks Al for running these events, it's awesome to have the opportunity to meet some cool, like-minded people!

Trip Leaders Wanted

The Otago Section is always keen to encourage members to become Trip Leaders and would love to hear from you if you are interested in leading Section Trips; mountaineering, ski-touring or rock climbing.

We would expect you to be reasonably experienced but can offer a huge range of formal and informal training and support to ensure you have everything you need to make leadership enjoyable and safe. The Section can offer payment for everything from your First Aid Certificate through to Instructor Development weekends run by professional guides for the NZAC.

But most importantly we offer the support of the Section Committee, most of whom are experienced Trip Leaders themselves. New Trip Leaders would usually be mentored by one of our more experienced leaders until both of you feel comfortable about you leading a trip yourself. And full training and support is available with trip planning, risk management documentation and extensive NZAC online resources.

If trip leadership interests you, just email the Section Committee at otago.climber@gmail.com and one of the team will be in touch to discuss the next steps with you.



Section Safety Gear Rental

Our eight sets of avalanche equipment and eight sets of snowshoes are now available for rent from the new Hunting and Fishing shop, now at 141 Crawford Street, in Dunedin. The new shop is open seven days till 5.30 weekdays, 5pm Saturday and 4pm Sunday. More details at www.huntingandfishing.co.nz.

The rental costs are \$5 per day for an avalanche set of transceiver, probe and shovel and \$5 per day for snowshoes for all Alpine Club members. You **MUST** show your current membership card to receive that rate. Not a member, or don't have your card? Then the fee is \$10 per day and you will be required to pay a \$20 deposit.



Members are welcome to collect gear on Friday and return Monday and two day's rental will apply. If you wish to make other arrangements, please contact Keith or any of the committee and we will sort things out **BEFORE** you go into the shop. If you have any issues with the gear or rentals, please don't hassle the staff at Hunting and Fishing as they are doing us a huge favour by running the rental scheme for us

No Ordinary Sheila

If you haven't already heard of Sheila Natusch, prepare to be inspired at this year's International Film Festival. The life story of this nonagenarian natural historian, illustrator and writer is a beautiful, truly Antipodean journey. Growing up in the deep south led to an adventurous resilience which saw her climb multiple mountains, cycle from Picton to Bluff and write dozens of groundbreaking natural history books, including her magnum opus, *Animals of New*



Zealand. Featuring beautiful historic footage of the lower south in the 30s and 40s, this film offers fascinating glimpses into life as one of few female students at Otago University. The NZIFF is in Dunedin 8 – 30 August.

PLB Hire – free for NZAC members

We have two PLBs available for hire, and this service is free for current NZAC members. Contact Keith Moffat moffat.k172@gmail.com or 027 664 4037 a few days in advance if you want to hire a PLB. \$5 per day for non-members.

Section Sponsorship Grants available

This year the Otago Section are again calling for applications for three, personal sponsorships for 2017. We expect to contribute around \$500 per grant but could go higher for something spectacular! The rules are simple: the winning sponsorships must contribute to climbing in the Otago Region and the project must have wider benefits – not just for the individual concerned but also for the wider climbing community.

In recent years, we have funded Alpine Training for a climber who went on to lead section trips, helped fund a trip to Nepal in return for on-going contribution to the Section and funded a young rock climber's winter training costs; he has gone on to develop and run a youth training programme attracting new climbers to the section. Your project could be next. Send us an email to otago.climber@gmail.com and tell us about your personal project; who's involved, what it will cost and how your sponsorship will benefit both you and the section.

2016-17 Otago Section Committee			
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