

Vertigo

No 829 July 2019



NEW ZEALAND
ALPINE CLUB

Wellington Section Monthly Bulletin

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**2019 PHOTO
COMPETITION
NOW OPEN**

Chair's Report

July 2019

Who cares about climate change when you can eat meat, drive cars and fly to the Himalaya to go climbing.

I was talking to an old hippie now rabid capitalist last week. He said he didn't like Trump but would vote for him again because he had to look after his own self interests. Namely, making more money. How do you deal with that? Maybe I should join the naysayers. Humans aren't having a negative impact on the planet or contributing to global warming. Species are killing themselves. Like the Dodo. It wasn't us, they just uped and committed suicide on mass on their own. Deforestation has nothing to do with us either. Trees are cutting themselves down and setting themselves on fire. Anyway, there are lots of trees left. There's one at the end of my street. As a Yugoslav guy who picked me up hitchhiking in the 80s said to me 'Why are you complaining about trees, in Yugoslavia we hardly have any at all and it's never been a problem for me'.

That reminded me of the capitalist hippie and the me thinking that appears to be prolific these days. So long as there's enough fish, enough trees, enough snow covered mountains for me to enjoy when I want - why should I give a shit about anyone else?

Finally an old but apt quote for these times:

'The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness'.
John Kenneth Galbraith

Or maybe better still from William E Gladstone writing in the 1800s:
'Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race'

Any comments on what you like or don't like - send an email to wellington@alpineclub.org.nz or tweet us @NZACWellington.

Simon

From the editor

There's still time to pick your favourite alpine and climbing images and enter them in this year's Wellington Section photo competition - more details [here](#). We have two new judges this year - Peter Ambrose and Guy Dubuis, so be part of this brave new world. Remember, the more entries, the better it is for everyone.

Following my piece about climate change in May, then some stimulating responses in June, I'm glad to feature some more very thought provoking and informative responses in this July issue. Take time to consider what's being said and have your own say in a future Vertigo. I know I've certainly learnt a lot through this dialogue.

Peter

Section News

All Section night talks are held at The Third Eye, Tuatara Brewery, level 2, 30 Arthur Street, from 6pm. With prior arrangement, also a good place to collect or return hired climbing gear. If you would like to make a presentation at a future Section night, or have a suggestion about someone else to present, please let Peter know - occasionalclimber@gmail.com.

August Section night

Tues 20th Aug, Peter Ambrose and Guy Dubuis will take us through their judging of the Wellington Section 2019 photo competition.

Section nights beyond August

Tues 17th Sep, James Warren will present some challenging ascents in 2018 of some of New Zealand's biggest mountains.

Tues 22nd Oct, Simon Williamson, Eric Duggan and Stacey Wong will present tips on how to lead alpine trips.

Tues 19th Nov, Penny Webster will take us through her recent climb of Mt Everest.

There are no section nights in December or January because we're too busy climbing.

Discounted PLBs

skippersmate.co.nz offers a 5% discount to all NZAC members for NZ purchases of PLBs. Two brands are on offer - KTI SA2G and McMurdo Fast Find 220 (not always in stock). To use the discount, the coupon code on the website is **NZAC05** and the owner, Peter, asks you to send a copy of your membership card to peter@cooeebay.com

Letters

To cover all of your response to my article [in June Vertigo] would need another long paper, so here's just a few points.

You place a great deal of trust in renewables to replace fossil fuels but wind and solar are, by their nature, intermittent and even hydro can fail when reservoirs aren't replenished.

Wind and solar need backup or storage for when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine and the backup has to be some more reliable generation method. The technology doesn't yet exist to store electricity on a large scale despite claims to the contrary. You quote China as making big advances in adoption of renewables but the most recent figures I can find show hydro is by far the biggest component of that, accounting for about 19% of their overall generating capacity. Wind is about 5% and solar 2%. They continue to build coal burning power stations. They are also building nuclear power stations, which is the obvious way to go if CO2 really is a problem.

You think that respected figures like theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking and natural history film-maker Sir David Attenborough hold the views they do because they have studied the details. I think this very unlikely. Once upon a time I was also a 'believer'. I trusted the word of my climatologist colleagues. What changed my mind was reading the papers that the leading proponents had written. but in any case, science does not depend on authority and consensus, it depends entirely on evidence. The measures being taken to combat the supposed danger of climate change threaten to drastically change our way of life. Drastic measures demand compelling evidence, but in the case of climate change this is distinctly underwhelming.

I agree that there are real environmental issues and I think that the vast sums of money being spent on the supposed 'climate crisis' would be much better spent on real problems.

Roger Coombs

See more responses next page >>>



Simon Williamson
Chair: NZAC Wellington

Letters

Editor's response

Since the June Vertigo I've learnt some more about net energy flows and how fossil fuels provide much greater net energy than renewables. As Roger rightly points out, our developed (and developing) economies are greatly dependent on fossil fuels and, assuming current technologies, renewables can't get close to replacing them. So I now understand better why some, such as Roger, have big concerns about the implications for the fossil-fuel-enabled lifestyles we've become accustomed to, if an 'un-intelligent' response to the threat of climate change is pursued. While not supporting it myself, I understand why he raises nuclear power as an option too.

So the question is, what is a reasonable and realistic response? Our Government is realising that 100% renewable generated electricity by 2035 is probably not the smartest target to achieve the best outcome. There is a dawning realisation that a bigger picture, encompassing all forms of energy and all carbon generating and reducing impacts, must be understood in order to set the best targets and actions. Some of what Roger raises in his letters helps to inform this discussion. Even so, I can't see why humans should not move in a less environmentally harmful direction, even if the benefits of this will take longer to accrue than climate change 'alarmists' claim we have. While we will be reliant on fossil fuels for some time to come, why not work to reduce that reliance if there are environmental benefits in doing so and we do have at least partial alternatives?

Does it ultimately then just come down to what your 'world view' is? My world view - whether or not we're doomed to globally warmed purgatory, is that there is no defensible excuse to not move towards a more environmentally respectful approach to living anyway. We can do that without flushing our civilised lifestyle baby out with the bathwater. Perhaps if the debate shifted emphasis, it could be less divisive and thereby encourage more cohesive, collective action? Could a shift away from 'respond to the threat of climate change', to 'shift away from short-term focused economic growth at any cost to a more environmentally respectful and sustainable long-term approach to living', encourage a better human response? It sounds reasonable, but then again, us humans don't tend to change our ways unless there's a big hairy threat, or shiny big incentive, right in front of our faces. If the climate change threat is providing that impetuous then, regardless of the holes that can be picked in its rationale, it is still a force of good. Behind its call to action though, responses must be well informed and pragmatic. It does appear that this is what's finally starting to happen in New Zealand and around the world. Governments, businesses and individuals have moved from discussion and debate to taking tangible, positive actions. Whether this is going to 'solve' climate change 'in time' or not is one conversation. But climate change or not, at least finally, we're moving in a more holistically sustainable direction after a period (between the industrial revolution and very recently) where only the God of economic growth has ruled supreme.

Having followed the recent letters about climate change here in Vertigo, in the next two columns is a letter from Harry Keys, Earth scientist and ex DOC volcanic risk manager. This letter is a summary of [a more detailed paper you can access here](#).

Climate change is important, so it provokes debate. Earth climate and sea level have always changed. What is important to us is how much the climate suited to us humans will change over time.

Building an understanding of climate change is a global effort.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988 to provide objective, scientific advice on climate change to member governments. This has under IPCC, hundreds of scientists from all over the world in many specialities assess the thousands of scientific papers published each year, fact checking data sets and conclusions to summarise what is known and identify the strength of scientific agreement. A significant proportion of the scientific community are engaged in such work, not simply a small clique of activist climate scientists.

Limitations do not invalidate scientific models about climate change. Climate scientists are unable to perform controlled experiments on the planet to observe results. Instead a combination of observations, comparisons and mathematical models of interactions in the climate system can be used to test hypotheses.

Repeated examination of uncertainty and model comparisons have refined our understanding, with underlying theories either rejected or improved. This inherent self-correcting nature of science contrasts with social media and the internet which do not necessarily distinguish facts from unproven statements.

CO2 does cause global warming. Testing models against the existing instrumental record indicates that carbon dioxide (CO2) in the atmosphere must cause global warming, because the models could not simulate what had already happened unless the extra CO2 was incorporated in them. All other known change drivers like large volcanic eruptions, solar variations, atmospheric and oceanic circulation, and albedo (related to sea ice extent and land use/cover) are adequate only for explaining temperature variations prior to the rise in temperature over the last 30-50 years.

It is crucially important to understand CO2 impact lag. After spectacular advances of the Fox and Franz Josef glaciers in the 1990s those glaciers have also retreated dramatically. Like most of the world's glaciers, they have responded to climate change as they have become out of equilibrium with climate. They will continue to do so in a characteristic response to changing climate, whatever the cause. Like that time lag, global climate change lags behind increased emissions of greenhouse gases including CO2, methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated carbons.

Humans are influencing climate change. We have known for 60 years that the measured concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere has been rising above preindustrial levels. From the mid-1950s it became clear this is due to fossil fuel combustion. Given the long legacy of our emissions of CO2 in the atmosphere and the thermal inertia of the oceans, we are currently experiencing the climate effects of our fossil fuel use decades ago. It will take decades more (perhaps 40 years) for the impact of our current emissions to be felt in sea level. Whether we view the most important greenhouse gas, CO2, as a pollutant or not is just semantics.

Even with uncertainties, human influence on the climate system is now clear. Evidence includes the increasing greenhouse gas concentrations, positive radiative forcing (aka enhanced greenhouse effect) driven by that extra gas, observed warming, and understanding the climate system with recent advances in model-based climate studies supported by proxy studies of past climate. Though imperfect, climate change projections are valid. Projections have been a basic thrust of models of climate change science. Early projections of fewer or less intense frosts, receding snowlines and accelerated thinning/retreating of glaciers as temperatures warm, have generally been matched by recent observations. Synoptic weather events and natural variability such as ENSO obscure some trends.

Escalating sea level rise was also an early projection. Sea level has the potential to affect many people living near vulnerable coasts. IPCC conclude that by the early 20th century, the mean rate of sea level rise had transitioned from relatively low mean rates of rise to higher rates, reaching 3.2 [\pm 0.4] mm/yr between 1993 and 2010.

Some climate variations do matter. Statistically significant changes in some kinds of extreme weather and climate events have been observed since about 1950. These include the number of cold days and nights (decreased) and the number of warm days and nights (increased) on the global scale. There are likely more land regions on Earth where the number of heavy precipitation events has increased than where it has decreased. Studies are starting to suggest that increased greenhouse gas concentrations partially drive some extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones.

Some extreme events and projections are overemphasised by both sides of the debate. Even if some trends and extremes in temperatures, rainfall, etc can no longer be discounted as natural variability, this does not prove that individual events are caused by human-induced global warming. But equally, arguments that weather-related disasters are completely unrelated to climate change often misrepresent the situation too. A projection of increased temperature or reduced snowfall does not mean snow will never fall, or that there will be no extreme snowfalls or periods of extreme cold.

The pace of recent warming is significant. A huge body of climate science has shown that the warming trend over the last 150 years is significant because it is relatively large. It is also proceeding at a rate that appears unprecedented over decades to many millennia. Global temperature has risen from near the coldest to almost the warmest levels of the last 11,000 years in little more than the past century, reversing a long-term cooling trend that began about 5000 years ago. Global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate.

Climate warming increases sea level. Sea levels are projected to rise between 0.55 and 1.25 metres above pre-industrial levels by 2100. The 1986–2005 average IPCC (2018) model-based projections of global mean sea level rise suggest an indicative range of 0.26 to 0.77 m by 2100 for 1.5°C of global warming, 0.1 m less than for a global warming of 2°C. The implication of a reduction of 0.1 m in global sea level rise is that up to 10 million fewer people would be exposed to related risks, assuming no migration or adaptation.

Climate change impacts can be good and bad. Benefits include improved agriculture at higher latitudes and increased vegetation growth in some circumstances. However, sea level rise, extreme events and threats to water will be expensive to adapt to. Developed economies will be able to afford the costs but there will be opportunity costs in doing so. Poorer countries affected will struggle.

There is no doubt we need to make faster progress in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Reduction in emissions is much discussed, and some European countries appear to have made some, but so far there has been no sustained reduction in the growth rate of CO2 in the atmosphere.

We are bequeathing serious impacts like sea level rise to coming generations, which make it clear that the sooner we reduce fossil fuel emissions the better. Penalising developing countries, or where pastoral food production is more carbon efficient (like in NZ), is not the answer.

In NZ part of the solution has to involve stronger incentives of various kinds to reduce carbon emissions and increase the use of renewable energy. Advances in technology, like vanadium redox batteries reducing problems with storing renewable energy, will help. We have significant geothermal energy generation already consented to help the transition. Decoupling GDP from emissions appears to be possible.

Harry Keys

Section News

Gear Hire

The Section has gear for hire: avalanche transceivers, ice axes, shovels, stakes, hammers, helmets, crampons, probes, PLBs, ice hammers (entry level). Each item costs \$5 per week with the exception of PLBs – PLBs are free but require a deposit of \$50 refundable on return.

To hire gear please fill in the form [here](#). You can find out more from [Genevieve](#).

Some advance notice, especially over the Christmas period, is appreciated as gear is in higher demand and often needs to be retrieved from the gear store. To collect or return your gear liaise with Genevieve.

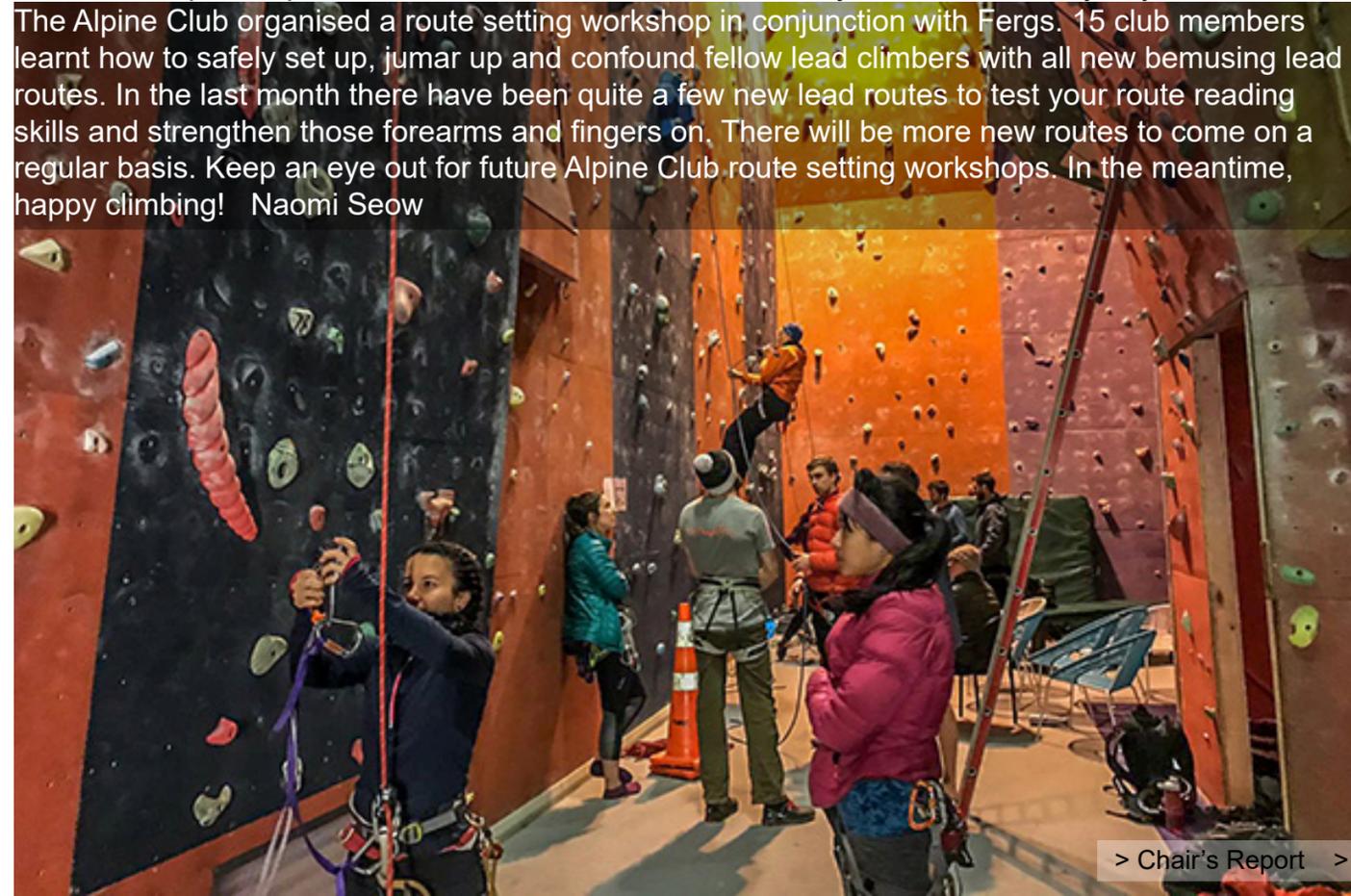
Accommodation on Mt Ruapehu

Our snowcraft courses for the past few years have been run out of the Manawatu Tramping and Skiing Club lodge on Whakapapa. We're always made to feel welcome and the lodge is well situated a short walk from the top of the Bruce Road. Membership to the club is extremely reasonable - \$35 per year or \$50 for a family membership. Members stay at the lodge for \$36 a night including food. If you're looking for somewhere to base yourself for your winter pursuits or rock-climbing over the summer months go to www.mtsc.org.nz/joining.php to find out more about joining the club.

Design your own route

Brrrrr....winter is here! And for those of us avid rock climbers, that means one thing...training hard indoors for those sweet sending summery climbing trips. But sometimes it can be difficult to stay motivated to pull on plastic indoors. Unless...it's a route set by a mate or better yet, yourself!

The Alpine Club organised a route setting workshop in conjunction with Fergs. 15 club members learnt how to safely set up, jumar up and confound fellow lead climbers with all new bemusing lead routes. In the last month there have been quite a few new lead routes to test your route reading skills and strengthen those forearms and fingers on. There will be more new routes to come on a regular basis. Keep an eye out for future Alpine Club route setting workshops. In the meantime, happy climbing! Naomi Seow



Notices

NZAC instruction courses

Click for more details [Ice Climbing](#) [Ski Touring](#) (and the new guide [here](#)) [High Alpine Skills](#)

New opening date for the Paparoa Track

Was end September, now 1 December. More [here](#).

FMC Affiliation Discounts 2019

For members who have 'FMC yes' and received the Bulletin with their *The Climber* magazine the updated FMC discounts are now available [here](#). Some companies have online discount codes and to view those you need to be logged in as a member of NZAC. There are six new company discounts this year from: Earth, Sea, Sky; Good Rotating; Intents Outdoors; Kai Carrier; Westport Shuttles and Small Planet. Keep an eye out for your 2019 discount cards with the upcoming winter issue of *The Climber* coming soon.

New Zealand Mountain Film Festival National Tour

In Wellington Monday 5 and 12 August 2019, 6:30pm, Victoria University Memorial Theatre.

Two programmes - Kiwi Made films and the Best of the Film Festival films.

The Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club (WTMC) and Victoria University of Wellington Tramping Club (VUWTC) are jointly hosting the Wellington screenings.

\$20 general admission, \$15 WTMC and VUWTC club members and \$10 student with ID.

Tickets and the full list of films are available here: <https://app.vuwtc.org.nz/nzmff>.

NZAC – surplus books for sale

A further secondhand book listing has just gone up on the NZAC TradeMe account. This time books have been selectively paired up with similar interest titles. [Check it out here](#)

There are also other surplus titles listed on the NZAC website as well for free (+ p&p). [Get a PDF list here](#).

Operation Tidy Fox – help needed

Volunteers are urgently needed to clean rubbish out of the Fox River, following the collapse of Fox landfill in late March. While many volunteers have been working hard to clean the rubbish, there are still around 5,000 tonnes left and time to clean it is running out. If rubbish is not removed before the annual spring floods (from September), these floods will wash tonnes of rubbish out to sea, where it will have a catastrophic impact on wildlife. DOC is aiming to complete the clean-up by early August, but we need more people on the ground. You can help by volunteering, helping us spread the word, donating transport resources to help us shift volunteers, or donating to the Operation Tidy Fox project fund. [Find out more](#).

New films available [here](#)

The Mueller and Tasman Glaciers 1929 with commentary by Frank Drewitt.

Alpine Guides Reunion held at the Hermitage, Mt Cook 10-11 November 1981.

2019 International Climbers' Meet, Yosemite Valley

The American Alpine Club is now taking applications for the 12th annual International Climbers' Meet to be held in Yosemite Valley during the week of Oct 13th - Oct 19th, 2019. More [here](#).

Diary of a 1930's mountaineer

Herbert Merle Sweeny photography, Chamber Gallery, Rangiora Library, 14 July to 15 August.

Coming Trips, Courses, Events

All our planned South Island trips come with the added bonus that rental vehicle costs for Wellington Section members are covered by the Section.

If you're uncertain about the skill level required with any of the trips, would like to register your interest or to find out more, email us at wellington@alpineclub.org.nz.

Also, please contact us if you're keen to run a trip yourself – the Committee can help with advertising and logistics.

When	What and where
June to 31 July	Annual Wellington section photo competition entries open Details here >>>
26th-28th July 2nd-4th August 16th-18th August 23rd-25th August 6th-8th September	Snowcraft 2019 - all full, waitlist only Beginner course - Whakapapa Beginner course - Whakapapa Intermediate/Advanced course - Whakapapa Intermediate/Advanced course - Whakapapa Post-course trip - Tukino To find out more contact Nish - catchnishie@gmail.com Click to join the waitlist.
4th-6th October	North Island Ski Touring Meet Run by Auckland Section. Accommodation TASC Lodge, Tukino. Registration and full details here.



Matthieu Laloup grimaces high above a watery atmosphere on The Moai. Ancient Astronaut (24), Fortescue Bay, Tasmania. Rock Climbing Category and overall People's Choice winner, 2018. Derek Cheng

Annual Photo Wellington Section Competition

The 2019 competition is now open to enter, so polish up your favourite contenders and get them in.

Image submission requirements

- Images must be submitted to dropbox link <https://tinyurl.com/Photocomp2019NZACWgtn>
- Please name your files following this format: Photographer_Category_Date.jpg and email a clearly file-associated caption and location to nzac.wgtn.photocompetition@gmail.com.
- Please ensure you have permission from people in your photos that their image can be used and possibly published in Vertigo.
- The closing date for the competition is the 31st July and the winners will be announced at the section night on Tuesday 20th August.

Image Specifications

- All images must have been taken and processed by the competitor and be his or her property.
- Images need not necessarily have been taken in New Zealand.
- Entries are permitted in digital format only. Files must be JPEG format between 500KB and 5MB (at least 2000 pixels on the long side).
- Digital processing should be mostly restricted to dust removal, cropping, resizing, global exposure and tonal adjustments. HDR, and exposure, focus or sequence blending are permitted. Obvious modification of images is not in keeping with the objectives of this competition and may result in disqualification.
- Images not meeting these specifications will not be judged.

8 categories to enter. Up to 3 images per category:

- Alpine Activity • Alpine General • Alpine Nature • Rock climbing
- Mountain and Climbing Culture • Humour • Alpine Kids • Novice

[More details next page >>>](#)

A stunning sunrise with Plateau Hut and east face of Mt Cook. Alpine General Category winner 2018. Peter Ambrose



Annual Photo Competition

Wellington Section

Entry into the annual FMC photo competition
Category winners and selected honours awards will be entered by NZAC Wellington into the FMC annual photo competition in September.

Category details. Up to 3 images per category

Alpine Activity: climbing, skiing, whatever you do up high

Photographs where the main subject is people engaging in activity in the alpine environment (e.g. climbing, skiing, tramping, camping). Emphasis on careful composition and 'capturing the moment'.

Alpine General: scenery and views that make you want to come back

Photographs that display mountain landscapes. Images should be strongly composed with great light. Judges will be weighing technical excellence, colour, tone and detail along with the image's subject and composition.

Alpine Nature: the little gems of beauty along the way

Photographs of natural subjects in the mountain environment, where the emphasis is on artistic rendition. Subjects may include geological features, plants, animals, water, snow and ice formations, etc.

Rock climbing: hardest moves, slickest lines

Photographs of rock climbing and bouldering that have strong visual impact and creative composition.

Mountain and Climbing Culture: climbing life, places and people

Portray climbing life, places and people encountered by climbers. Entries might include travel photography (as long as it's strongly related to climbing) or documentary-style images, covering any aspect of climbing.

Humour: whatever makes you smile

Don't forget the caption. Particularly in this category it can make the difference.

Alpine Kids

Alpine / climbing-related photos taken by kids aged 6 to 14 (please include age of the child when submitting entries in this category).

Novice

Alpine / mountaineering / climbing-related photos taken by members who are not photo comp category winners in previous years or professional photographers. Pick your favourite that is not entered in any other category.

Judging criteria

1. Category relevance – is the shot on subject, or should it be in a different category.
2. Technical competence/excellence – is the shot exposed well – right balance of dark and light, no burn out. Is depth of field used well/is the shot appropriately focused.
3. Creativity – what is different about the shot. Does an idea/story come through in the shot. Does it draw the viewer in/have emotional impact. What makes it more than just a pretty snap - unusual angle, choice of exposure settings, inclusion (or exclusion) of person or object to give context.
4. Difficulty to shoot – dawn/dusk, challenging light, difficult to reach angle.

1. and 2. are essential just to be accepted in category. 3. is what will define a winner, unless there are two winners, in which case 4., while not essential, might be the decider.

Prizes will be awarded to the best photo in each category.

Judge profiles

Having judged the competition for the past four years, Peter Laurenson and Nigel Roberts hand this role over to some fresh eyes and ideas.

Peter Ambrose

Peter is a passionate hiker and landscape photographer. He and his wife love travelling around the world and hiking some of the best mountains and landscapes this fantastic planet has to offer. We're lucky to be born and live in New Zealand, where we're blessed with such fantastic opportunities to capture nature's beauty in our own backyard. Landscape photography always takes Peter back to those moments, even years down the track.

Guy Dubuis

Physicist, musician and photographer of the underworld, Guy moved from Switzerland to New Zealand in 2015. He has been a member of NZAC since 2017 and is on our Wellington Section Committee. Whether caving below ground or climbing above, he has a keen interest in photography.

Sunrise over Aoraki/Mt Cook, from Hooker Lake
Peter Ambrose



The longest night

A Wellington Section trip to the Grand Plateau, June 2019

Words Simon Williamson, pictures Peter Laurenson

The Maltebrun Range viewed from Plateau Hut

I wasn't that worried. It was getting colder and the snow was building up on the dark boulders around us giving them a soft fluffy look. The thwack of the heavy flakes hitting the outside of the Bothy bag was partly comforting in that it wasn't rain. The calm was broken by a sudden powerful gust of wind that threatened to rip the Bothy out from under us. My pack was sitting between me and a cliff. The wind was pushing it in the wrong direction. This wasn't going to be a good night.

We were hunkered down behind a small boulder on a narrow rib of scree on the steep slope of the Boys Glacier. We hadn't made it all the way down before dark and couldn't see a safe way down in the gloom. The sound of large boulders whizzing down didn't help. The bivvy site was the least vertical place we could find. There was nothing flat about it. The sound of basketball size boulders ricocheting down a metre away was a constant reminder of the random threat to our lives. An apprehensive mood was taking over along with the subzero temperatures and constant need to keep propping ourselves up to prevent sliding down the slope. There was no sleep. Then it started to rain.

I was concerned about my toes which were getting very cold. We were in lightweight reflective bivvy bags under the Bothy bag. The instructions claimed that the material 'is not subject to catastrophic rips'. It didn't say anything about sitting on sharp rocks with your climbing boots on. They were soon full of large holes that let in the rain and formed puddles in the bottom of the bags. 'What's the time?', '20:30', 'Another 11 hours till daylight.' How long will our luck hold out before a boulder takes us out? Sometime before midnight the clouds lifted in the east and the moon came out. We could see enough to carry on down the scree slope. Moving seemed to offer a better chance of survival than a static target for the next volley of rocks. 'Let's go down' I said and we all agreed.

Peter stepped off the rise into the boulder race. Though the wind drowned out our voices within metres, I could see the red dot of his torch as he traversed across and down. Another sickening clatter of boulders. I saw Peter duck low in an attempt to get out of the way. The boulders shot past on either side leaving him unscathed. He kept going. We packed the rest of our survival gear and headed across. Skating down the moving scree. Carolyn sat on her bum and tried to bumslide down the scree while I tried to stay upright. Not long later my torch beam reflected the bottom of the climb and we stepped off the scree slope onto the Tasman Glacier. We moved back far enough to avoid the cannon balls bouncing and landing with a thud onto the glacier. The rain was having a short break. It was almost pleasant. The moon added to our torch light. Cold, tired and alive, the Ball Shelter and a warm dry bed was only a few hours away. I got out my GPS to get a fix on its location. Glad that the ordeal was over, our optimism renewed, we began the slow march up and down the frozen wasteland of the Tasman Glacier.

Initially the plan had been to fly into Plateau Hut, climb Mt Dixon, then walk out over Cinerama Col and back to the carpark. The weather window promised two or three good days. The first good day was used flying down from Wellington then picking up a car, driving to Mt Cook and taking a helicopter up to the hut. On the way to the hut the pilot flew over our intended descent route so we could get a look at the slots and identify a way down. At the time this seemed the most challenging aspect of the trip.

Landing on the plateau just outside the hut we watched the chopper fly away and carried our gear inside. There was no-one in the hut when we arrived but we knew Simon and Pippa had flown up earlier. They returned shortly after and we discussed our plans for climbing Mt Dixon, then walking out over Cinerama Col. Pippa offered to collect our car from the airport and leave it at the end of the Ball Pass Road. This would save us some time at the end of a long day not having to try and get a lift or walk all the way back to the airport.

This image - Simon and Carolyn preparing to descend in moonlight to Tasman Glacier

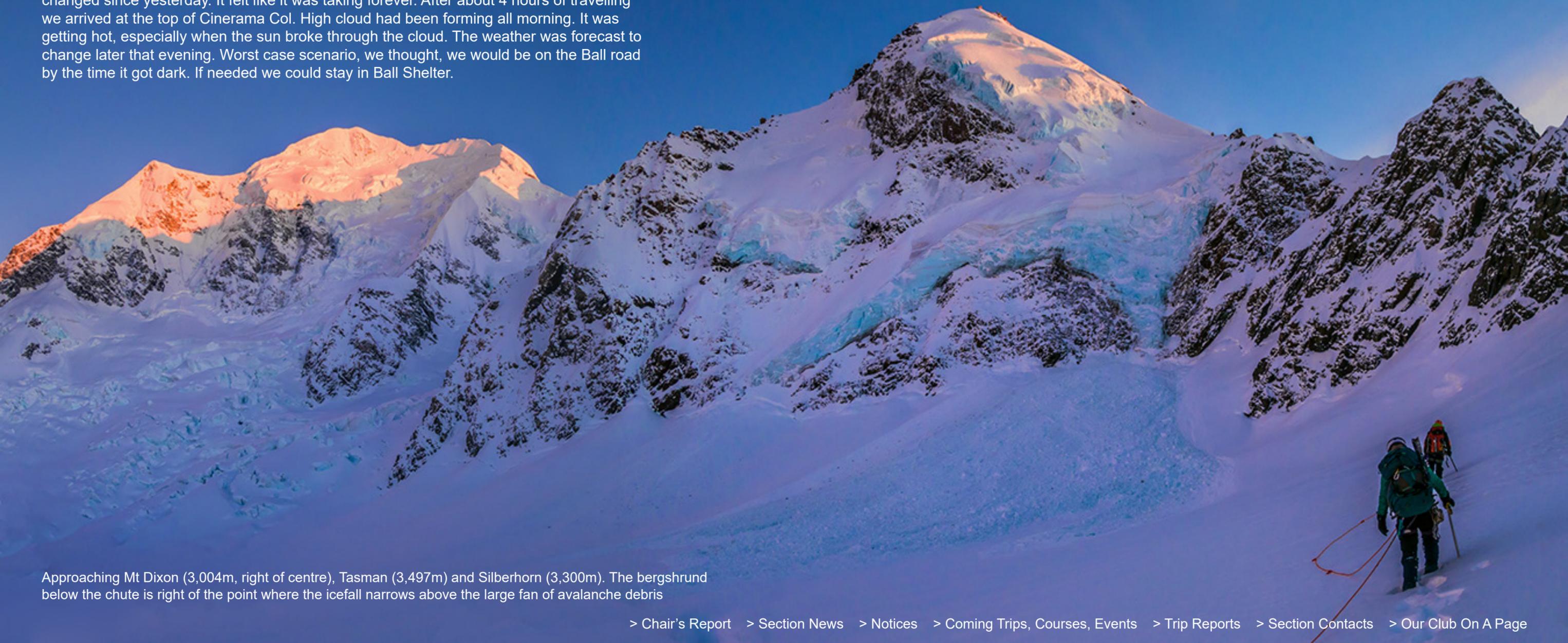
It was freezing in the hut at 4am on Wednesday. We had to melt snow as the water tanks were solid blocks of ice. Crampons on and roped up, we stepped out the door at about 5 a.m. and headed off across the plateau toward Mt Dixon. The going was slow. The snow was soft and dry and wouldn't form a snowball. It took us about 2 ½ hours to get as far as the base of the climb - a steep 200m chute leading up to the ridge. We managed to get over the shrund. Peter led the first pitch. The snow was so soft, we couldn't even get a T slot to hold. Carolyn headed up and took a stand next to Peter, followed by myself. As we weren't able to protect the climb and felt that coming down would be almost impossible, we decided to call it a day and return to the hut. A good decision all round.

The hut was cold and empty when we got back. Pippa and Simon had left, leaving the place to ourselves.

Next day we would tackle Cinerama Col. We decided that we wouldn't leave before daylight so as to see enough to avoid the crevasses on the Hochstetter and Linda Glaciers. Around 7:30 a.m. we roped up and headed out the door. It was still dark but the moon was up which, along with our torches, provided enough light to pick out the shadows of crevasses. I led off with Carolyn tied on to the rope in the middle and Peter at the back. We traversed our way down to the glacier then up and around the top of the crevasse field to avoid the most obvious slots. It was slow going. The snow was still soft and dry. Conditions hadn't changed since yesterday. It felt like it was taking forever. After about 4 hours of travelling we arrived at the top of Cinerama Col. High cloud had been forming all morning. It was getting hot, especially when the sun broke through the cloud. The weather was forecast to change later that evening. Worst case scenario, we thought, we would be on the Ball road by the time it got dark. If needed we could stay in Ball Shelter.



Above - We headed west across the Plateau to begin with in order to avoid the most heavily crevassed terrain. Here Plateau Hut is far left. As the sun rose the moon set behind Dampier



Approaching Mt Dixon (3,004m, right of centre), Tasman (3,497m) and Silberhorn (3,300m). The bergshrund below the chute is right of the point where the icfall narrows above the large fan of avalanche debris

At the top of the col we looked over the edge but couldn't see far. It dropped away suddenly. As we moved closer still roped up I could see a large crevasse cutting across the col. We eased our way down. The light was flat, making visibility very poor. I didn't know if I was going to step over an edge or into a hole.

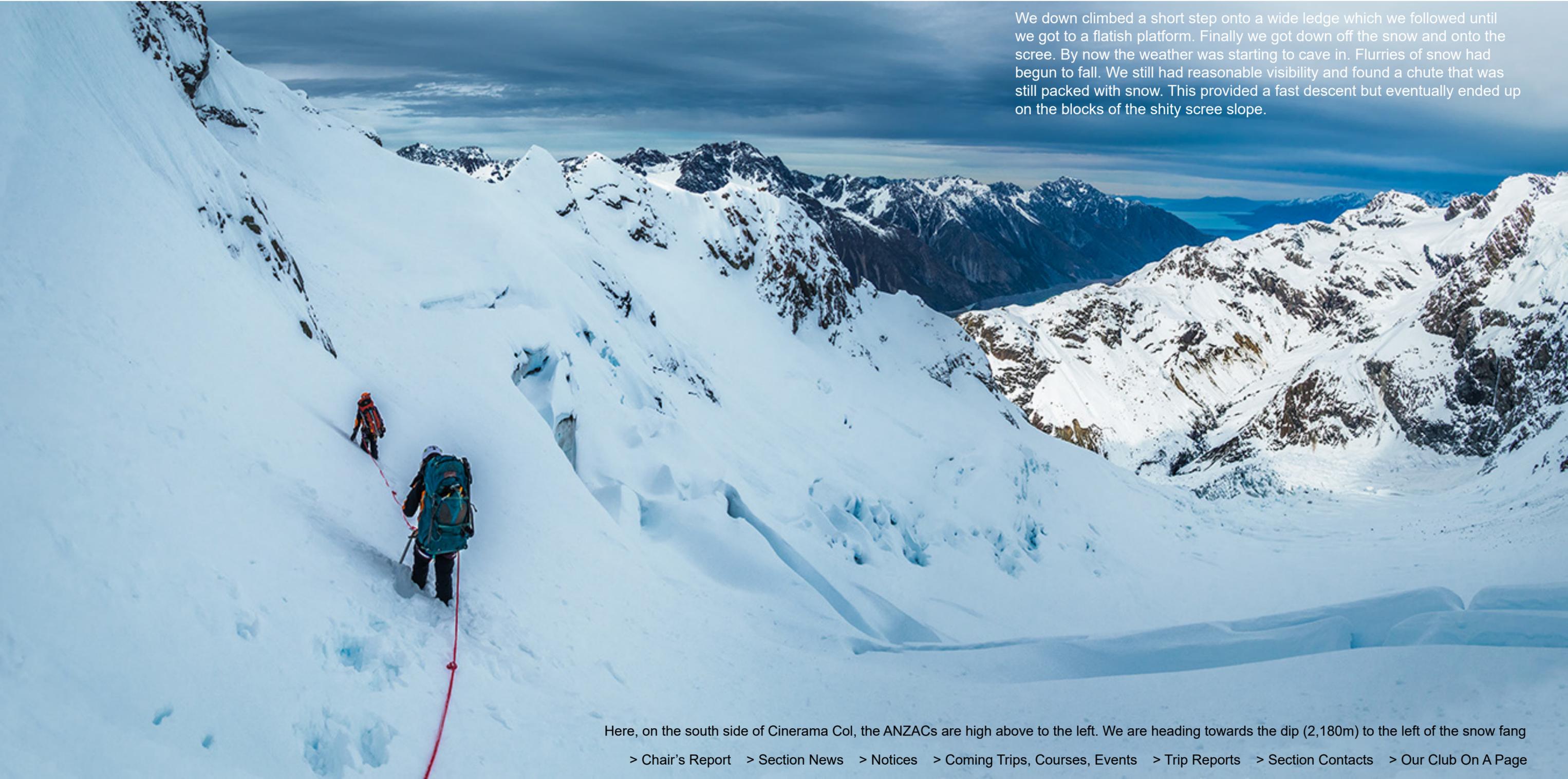
I could see a large crevasse cutting across in front of us. We edged down and around and then down another steep slope. The flat light was making me uneasy. It was very difficult to see which way to go. We zigzagged down between the crevasses until we got close to level with the buttress. Every now and again the light improved and I could see where the ground dropped away. I slowly crossed, heading toward the bottom of the buttress.

Looking down it seemed bottomless. The snow was still really soft, not providing much support. As I stepped into the head of another crevasse my right foot went straight through. I could see a dark hole leading straight down. I lifted my leg out carefully and moved further down the crevasse to where the snow seemed to provide a little more purchase. I gradually traversed across the head of the crevasse and up the other side where I took in the rope as the others came over. The ground was really steep here. The combination of soft snow and steep ground felt like it could easily avalanche. I moved closer to the buttress but found that my route was blocked by another deep crevasse.

Peter took over the lead here. We dropped down the steep slope and underneath the crevasse, then traversed beneath the buttress and sidled up toward the top of Boys Col. Finally standing on top of the col we could look back and see our steps weaving between the crevasses. It was a perfect line of descent. The day was still fine. We rested on top. Peter took more photos and we had a bite to eat. We thought we'd done the hard part.

Traversing on down the Boys Glacier, Carolyn said we needed to stay as far left as we could. Last time Carolyn had been down here it was in the summer. Now there was a lot more snow. We tried to stay on the left as most of the crevasses were on the right. I don't think we stayed far enough on the left as we ended up being bluffed and had to reverse on a number of occasions.

We down climbed a short step onto a wide ledge which we followed until we got to a flatish platform. Finally we got down off the snow and onto the scree. By now the weather was starting to cave in. Flurries of snow had begun to fall. We still had reasonable visibility and found a chute that was still packed with snow. This provided a fast descent but eventually ended up on the blocks of the shity scree slope.



Here, on the south side of Cinerama Col, the ANZACs are high above to the left. We are heading towards the dip (2,180m) to the left of the snow fang

From here it seemed likely that we wouldn't make it off the scree and onto the Tasman Glacier before dark. Peter and Carolyn had taken to bum sliding while I tried to stay upright as much as possible. Peter's pants would later reveal the consequences of that approach along with his bare bum. Then it started to snow in earnest. Peter had gotten ahead but he was only able to get the red light working on his torch which made it difficult to see. He thought his batteries had gone flat but, as we later discovered, it was a user error and the batteries were fine. By the time Carolyn and I got down, Peter had found a small ridge on the edge of a cliff which he suggested we use as a Bivvy site. Boulders had already started pelting down the scree slope as we got out our survival gear in the accumulating snow. We got under the bothy bag and tried to keep warm. All the time boulders were whizzing down the scree slope too near our heads for comfort.

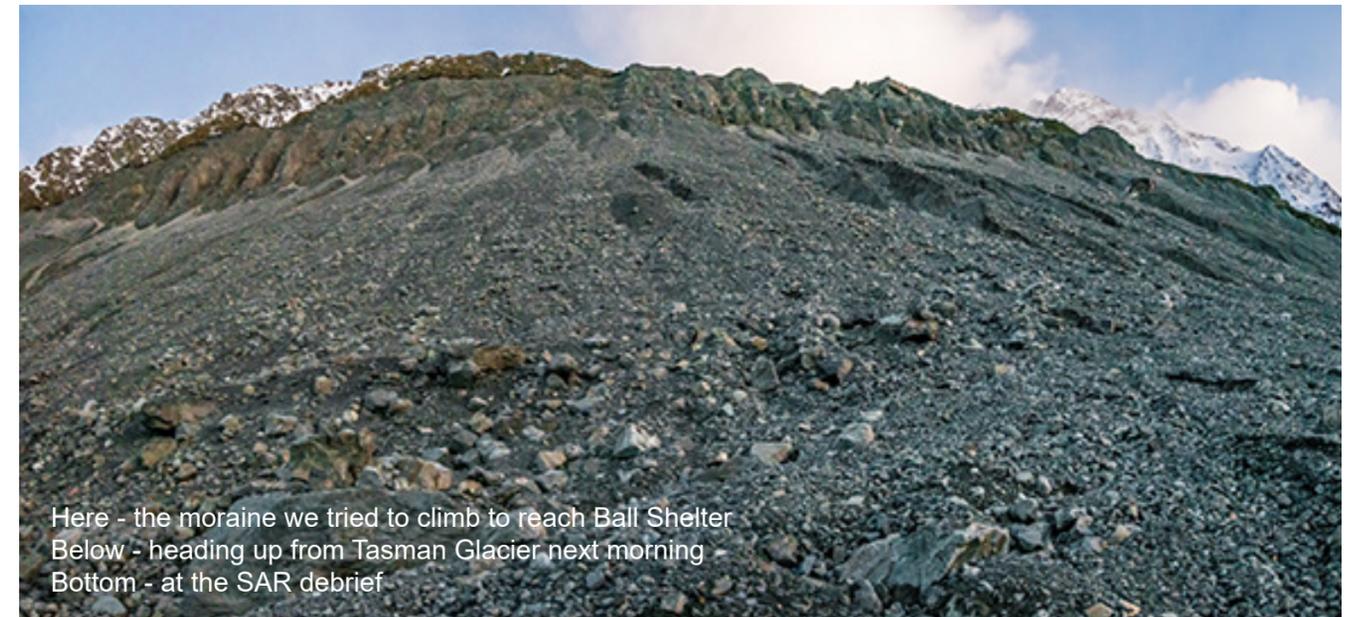
Later, once the moon came out, being down on the frozen wasteland of the Tasman Glacier wasn't as bad as expected. Stumbling up and down and over and navigating by torchlight we were able to negotiate our way toward Ball Shelter. Our expectation that, in a few hours, we would be warm and dry in the shelter kept our spirits up and kept us moving. A strong northerly was blowing. Fortunately this was behind us and clambering up and down the troughs and peaks of this rocky sea warmed us up. Around three hours of this activity landed us opposite to Ball Shelter. The GPS indicated we were within a few hundred horizontal metres.

The rain had eased but the boulders were still flinging down the moraine wall. The beams of our torches (Peter's torch working again) illuminated what looked like a narrow rib leading up in the direction of the shelter. The boulders shot down in the gullies on either side but seemed to be avoiding the rib. It was steep and hard going. Carolyn was reaching exhaustion and wanted to stop. I checked the GPS, we were about 120m from the shelter. Peter pushed ahead to within about 25m of the top. Here the walls of the moraine were near vertical. The loose, wet silt releasing a continuous bowling alley of rock. Too dangerous to continue climbing. Daylight was still four hours away. Defeated by the boulders, rain and lack of visibility we made the depressing call to go back down.

Back on the glacier we found a large truck sized boulder to protect us from the worst of the elements and hopefully from the random boulders that continued to land with a loud thud at the bottom of the slope. Dawn was a long, cold wait. Slowly, very slowly, the dawn began to appear. Low cloud kept the light flat so it wasn't until nearly eight that we could see enough of the moraine to know that we needed to find a break in the vertical walls if we were going to get up off the glacier. We headed off down the glacier toward the terminal lake. Time was swallowed up staring up and imagining a way through. We had also run out of water. Small puddles in the rock provided occasional sips. I had forgotten to bring my straw (note to self to add it to my packing list) so had to filter the silt through my teeth. It was enough to keep us going. Finally we saw what we thought was a rising traverse up to a ledge and a possible exit. The rain had stopped some time during the night. Not long after that the boulders stopped. It was as if a switch had been turned off.

Finally we got to the ledge. The last 20m of wall was broken by a steep gully. I belayed Peter up to the top where he built an anchor and hauled up our packs. Finally we were on the top of the moraine. Not quite. I had forgotten to clip the second rope onto my harness when I came up and had to rap back down to get it. An extra bit of type 2 fun to add to our adventure. We landed across from a waterfall. Carolyn walked over to collect some water but came back with three bottles of ice - totally frozen - no running water!

We were well past the shelter at this point so decided to carry on down the Ball road to the car which Pippa had hopefully left at the road end. By now we were feeling the effects of lack of sleep, water and being on our feet for over 24 hours. Peter had gone ahead. Just past the large wash-out, which we had to sidle up and around, we stopped to take a breather. In the distance we could see Peter waving at us from behind a clump of bush. As we moved closer we could see something white. Is that the car? Yes! Pippa had dropped the car well up the road. That would save us several hours of walking. There was hot soup and food on the front seat. It was a welcome sight. Or maybe not. We couldn't find the key. Frantic searching under the car, under surrounding rocks and behind bushes produced nothing. There was no cell phone coverage. We were about to draw straws as to who would drop their pack and walk out when the sound of a helicopter distracted us. It flew past then circled back and landed next to the car. "Where did you come from?" SAR had been looking for us all day. We had seen a helicopter early in the morning but it didn't take a look at us so we assumed it was a tourist flight. We had a PLB, and though overdue, we were not in danger and could get ourselves out. They were sure glad to see us. To be honest, we were glad to see them. It was good to know that SAR had our backs, and the keys.



Here - the moraine we tried to climb to reach Ball Shelter
Below - heading up from Tasman Glacier next morning
Bottom - at the SAR debrief



We could have saved ourselves some effort and a cold night out if we had studied the exit route up the moraine wall so we could find it in the dark. Knowing that the scree slope would turn into a first world war battle ground when it rains may also have influenced our plans. But mostly it was our slow pace and fixation on Cinerama Col's crevasse field that left us on the scree slope in the dark and rain. Being fitter wouldn't have hurt either. It was a great experience. I'm glad we did it.

A big thanks to Simon and Pippa and to the Mt Cook SAR team. I will always endeavour to self rescue. But you never know when the mountains and bad planning will get the better of you. Though we didn't need them this time, I'm really glad SAR were out there looking for us.



For more captioned images and route maps
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Success in a small weather window

A Wellington Section climb of Nuns Veil, November 2018

Words and pictures Carolyn Ellis

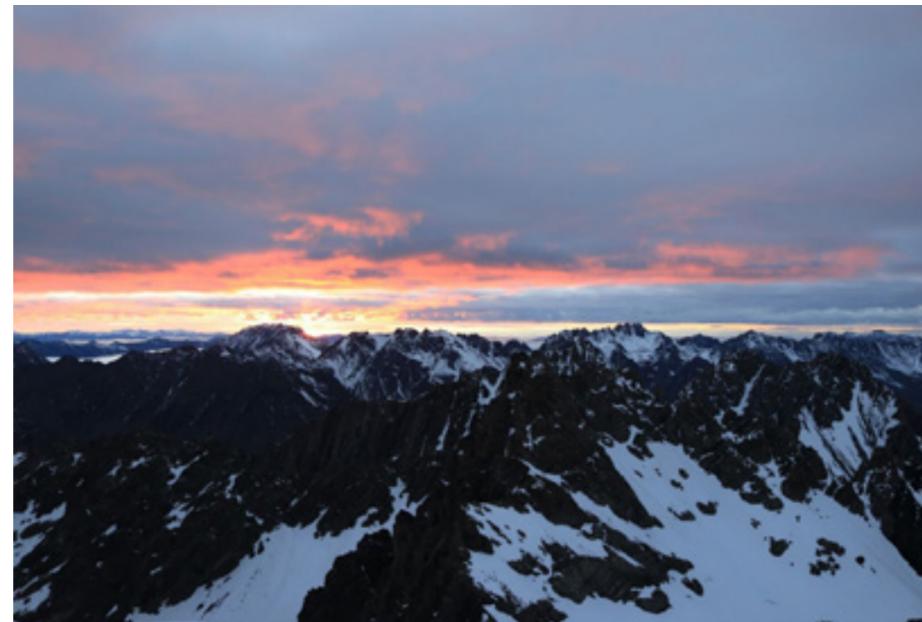
As with many alpine trips, the weather forecast for the Mt Cook area was the focus of attention in the week leading up to heading to the South Island. To maximise the chance for success a helicopter was booked and the plan was to get dropped up the Jollie, travel up Pinnacle Stream, climb Nuns Veil, descend and exit out the Gorilla - obviously with a camp or two along the way. Our group of four headed down from Christchurch to spend the night at Unwin. The following day was not looking promising with low cloud and, after discussion with the chopper pilot, the plan was altered to get dropped up the Gorilla instead of the Jollie.

After being dropped off close to the rock bivvy at the bottom of the glacier we started to climb with the intention of camping high in preparation for the summit attempt the following day. The weather stayed cloudy but it was pretty warm climbing up. The weather started to close in more and the day was ending, so we set up our camp and settled down for the night. When the alarm went off the next morning a quick look outside revealed improvement in the weather conditions, so it was time to head off to the summit. The snow conditions weren't brilliant, fairly soft underfoot. The sun came up while we were walking and in a bit over three hours our group was on the summit enjoying the 360 degree view. We spent a bit of time taking photos before heading down to break camp and descend to spend the night down in the rock bivvy. We made it to the rock bivvy and managed to get our tents up just as the rain started in earnest.

The following day saw us heading up towards Mt Bruce, where we got up on to the ridgeline for a peek down into the Jollie, before packing up for the trudge down the Gorilla, then around to the lake to catch a boat. We were four happy climbers as we hopped into the car and back to Unwin Lodge for another couple of nights, before returning to Wellington via Christchurch.



High camp



Our sunrise view



A tarn on our return from Mt Bruce

Section Contacts

Powered by volunteers

We're always thankful for volunteers and members stepping forward to help the section run smoothly. A lot goes on to keep our club going, virtually all powered by volunteers. On the back page is our "Club on a page" summary. It gives an at a glance description of all the things we do, how and why. Feel free to print a copy and pass it on to anyone who might be interested in becoming a member or volunteer. And if you'd like to learn more about how you could get involved, please email us at wellington@alpineclub.org.nz.

Role	Name	Contact
Chair person	Simon Williamson	021 054 7684
Treasurer	Carolyn Ellis	021 574 287
Secretary	Stacey Wong	staceycolleena@gmail.com
Gear custodian	Genevieve Luketina	gluketina@hotmail.com
Trip co-ordinator	Eric Duggan	021 350 161
Section nights, Vertigo, Banff	Peter Laurenson	021 446 725
Club liaison	Keith Munro	keithm@mtgelab.co.nz
General Committee, Photo comp	Guy Dubuis	guy.dubuis@gmail.com
General Committee	Alexis Belton	belton.alexis@gmail.com
General Committee	Rosie Percival	calicoanne@gmail.com
General Committee, Reel Rock	Naomi Seow	naomiseow@gmail.com
General Committee	Derek Cheng	derekcheng.nz@gmail.com
General Committee	Scott Harper	scott.harper@hotmail.co.nz
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Image and diagram Peter Laurensen www.occasionalclimber.co.nz