

July 2020

NEWSLETTER OF THE OTAGO SECTION NZAC



NEW ZEALAND  
ALPINE CLUB



**Ski season is starting! Hope you're excited for great trips like this one. Aaron Whitehead and Juliet Meldrum on the Roundhill to Fox Peak ski traverse, August 2015 Photo: Ryan Thomas.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Club Nights

Club nights are at the Otago University Staff Club, Union St. at 7:30pm, usually on the first Wednesday of every month.

Have you been somewhere interesting? Do you have someone you'd like to hear from? Suggestions for speakers are always welcome! [Contact us](#)

### July Club Night, Wednesday 1 July 2020

Graeme Hall is coming to speak on his recent "Last Degree To The South Pole" expedition in January 2020. This involved two weeks living in an extreme environment (up to -37degrees Celsius), with strenuous physical exertion (skiing pulling a sled) for 8 - 10 hours a day, at an altitude of 3200 metres, from 89°S to the South Pole (118 kilometres).



### Upcoming Club Nights

Wednesday 5 August 2020: Simon Noble will be speaking about some of the recent bike packing trips he's done, including the Kopiko Aotearoa ride (1,050 km East Cape to Cape Egmont in the North Island), the Reinga to Bluff ride (3,000 km), and a trip up to Godley Hut.

### Two Thumb Range Ski Touring based at Rex Simpson Hut 24-26 July 2020

Open to ski tourers and split-boarders, mostly gentle terrain with some opportunities for steeper runs. You will need to have an intermediate level of fitness (able to climb 1000m+ vertical) and off piste skiing abilities.

Basic knowledge of the use of transceiver, probe and shovel is required. Limited spaces and filling up very fast! Sign up [online](#).



↑ The Two Thumb Range above Lake Tekapo

## TRIPS AND EVENTS

When	What
27-28 June 2020	<b>Mid-Winter Christmas at Homer Hut</b> Joint gathering with Southland Section.
1 July 2020	<b>Club Night</b> Graeme Hall recounts his January 2020 expedition "Last Degree to the South Pole."
24-26 July 2020	<b>Two Thumb Range Ski Touring based at Rex Simpson Hut</b>
5 August 2020	<b>Club Night</b> Simon Noble on bike packing trips in New Zealand

### Request for News and Information

We (Nick Shearer and Neil Sloan) are working on a new edition of the Mount Aspiring Region guidebook, expanded to include the Forbes Ranges.

The four major blocks of peaks we aim to comprehensively cover are:

1. Humboldt Mountains – Barrier Range – Snowdrift Range - Bryneira Range - Waipara Range – Dart Glacier Peaks.
2. Forbes Mountains – Richardson Mountains – Rees Valley head.
3. Matukituki Valley Peaks
4. Wilkin / Siberia peaks and peaks around to Haast Pass.

If you have been in these areas and can provide updated information, we want to hear from you. If there are climbers out there looking for a challenge and wanting to explore less-visited alpine areas on a fact-finding mission, we can help by providing a list of peaks that need revisiting.

Some of the things we are looking for include:

- High resolution colour photographs
- information such as errors and omissions in the current (2016) edition
- suggestions for improvements to the current edition
- Changes to existing routes, access and huts
- New routes

Please contact the authors directly:

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## NOTES FROM MEMBERS

# Reminisces on a First Season Skiing in New Zealand

By Ryan Thomas

Sastrugi at Awakino

I arrived in New Zealand a little over six years ago at the end of March. While I had skied nearly all of my life in Canada, I had only started ski touring in the two years prior to coming to New Zealand. I was quite enamoured with the sport, and the one problem with coming to New Zealand in March was that I missed out on all the best spring ski touring in Canada! So when winter came to the South Island, I made sure I was ready to partake of the fabulous ski touring available in New Zealand.

I had brought my ski boots with me, as well as my avalanche gear, so the only things I needed to buy in New Zealand were skis and skins. The lack of used touring skis available for purchase was my first hint that ski touring wasn't that popular in New Zealand. I ended up finding a pair that would fit my boots and for a reasonable price. The only downside is that they were/are excruciatingly heavy: a hefty 3 kg each. When I bought them I was unaware of their weight, and even after I had them I figured that, while annoying, the weight wouldn't be a big deal – it's not like I would be carrying them anywhere!

Gear in hand, I now needed to find people with whom to go. Still being quite new to Dunedin, I didn't know anyone, but I was fortunate that Matteo ran a section

ski trip to Awakino in late July. Driving to the lodge was an experience – I was unused to New Zealand's "club ski field" aesthetic with the steep, slippery, and very narrow gravel road. This time around the snow was so low that we had to park the car below the lodge and walk up before we could start skinning. The nominal objective of the trip was to ski up Mount Kohurau, but it was decided that the snow levels were too low to make it worthwhile. We should have done it then because in the years since I have never seen more snow on Kohurau than on that first trip.

There still wasn't that much snow in the upper basin above the ski field, and I remember all the rocks we had to dodge on the way up. I remember skinning up Ice Cream, clinging to sastrugi with the barest edge of my ski, finally understanding why people had ski crampons. I especially remember all the rocks I had to dodge on the way down.

One might think that, coming from Canada with its much deeper snowpack, that I would have simply written off ski touring in New Zealand from that first experience, but quite the opposite: I had a blast.

The second ski trip I did that year was entirely different, if only because there was no carrying of the skis. I organised it with another person I had met on that first trip (Carla), and together with Danilo on snowshoes we headed for the mellow terrain of the Pisa Range. It was my first trip skiing with an overnight pack, and that was certainly an experience. Carla and I found some mellow



Carla skiing the Cromwell faces

slopes the first day, shared the Kirtle Burn Hut with – surprise, surprise – Matteo and two of his friends, and then found some excellent snow on the Cromwell faces. By my standards, the snow was still quite thin, but I quite enjoyed the experience of threading a line through the narrow patches of snow between rocks and tussock.

The last trip I did that year really brought home just how heavy my skis were and how much of a problem that could be. Lara and I headed up to Brewster Hut for a weekend's touring. If you haven't been up to Brewster Hut before, you first cross the Haast River before sweating your way a vertical kilometre straight up the bush. Challenging enough with a normal overnight pack, but add an extra 6 kg of skis catching on both branches above *and* roots below, and it was an excellent example of Type 2 fun.

It was a surprisingly hot weekend for the middle of winter, and that meant that there was even less snow to ski on than usual. We climbed Mount Armstrong on skis the first afternoon and had the most ridiculous ski run back down to the hut. I'm still not entirely sure how we linked all the disparate patches of snow

together, but I do remember a lot of sliding on tussock and a lot of hopping of rocks.

We found better snow the next day along the ridge to Mount Brewster. Our final run down the Brewster Glacier, with the wind streaming past our faces and the beautiful, sunlit mountains rushing by, ranks as one of the best runs I've ever had.

With the exception of one winter spent enjoying the glorious Canadian summer and its attendant forest fires, I've spent every winter since ski touring in New Zealand. I've packed those skis on my pack more times than I can count; I've skied on both water ice and deep powder; and I've managed to ski nearly 200 m below what could charitably be called the snowline. But despite the vast differences in skiing between New Zealand and Canada – the snow, the lack of trees, the avalanche hazard, the snow – I haven't had an unenjoyable day skiing in New Zealand yet.



Lara on Mount Armstrong

## A MOMENT OF LEVITY

*There haven't been any club trips this month, so there are no trip reports to share. I came across this article about "ski mountaineering" a while back in the 1937 New Zealand Alpine Journal. Given Ryan's piece on encounters with skiing in New Zealand, I thought it was somewhat relevant – how much has skiing in New Zealand changed in the last eighty years?*

*For the full version, see Vol 7 Issue 24 (1937) of the Alpine Club Journal.*

### **Ski Mountaineering (Excerpts) by G.G. Lockwood, with editorial comments by Alex Weller**

#### ***Introductory remarks. What is this "ski-ing" thing anyways?***

... as far back as 1893, those indefatigable pioneers and experimenters, MJ Dixon, GE Mannering and TC Fyfe used ski in their siege of Mr Cook. This was a really extraordinary piece of prevision on their part, for at that time Alpine ski-ing was entirely unknown, save in a small corner of Austria ...

To show how clearly they foreshadowed the proper use of ski in climbing, I quote Dixon's own account in the 1894 Journal:- "Near this place (Glacier Dome) we tried for the first time the art of ski-lobing. ... A 'ski' is a thin, light and strong batten of wood, about six feet (1.8 m) long and three and a-half inches (90 mm) wide, slightly turned up at the front end, so as to 'ride' over the snow and hummocks as they are slid along. The feet are fastened on to them by strong lashings over the ball of the foot and instep, with the heel free to move up and down. The method of using them is to slide the feet parallel to each other, in a half-running, half-sliding attitude. So expert do the Norwegians become that, under reasonably favourable conditions of snow, sixty to seventy miles a day can be easily accomplished, and there is a record of 136 English miles (215 km) being accomplished in 21 hr 21 min. There I think I was justified in giving the 'ski' a trial on the great plateau. ... On hard snow we found them to travel a little too fast for us downhill, and we succeeded in landing on our heads a few times before we attained that confidence which is the first step to perfection. On soft snow we went grandly, and one can travel straight on over all the small crevasses without fear of going through. Considering how cheap and easily made these 'ski' are, it is surprising that they have not been used in the Mackenzie Country in times of heavy falls of snow as, with a very little practice, I am sure travelling would be much faster than on foot, or even on horse-back."

#### ***Trip planning was a bit different in 1936. They went from where to where in a day?!?***

In September last, Colin Wyatt and Mick Bowie used ski either wholly or in part for the ascents of Mts Hamilton, Elie de Beaumont, Wilczek (a first ascent) and Annan. They then skied over the Minarets and down the Franz Josef Glacier to below the Defiance Hut and so to the Waiho in the one day. Their next objective was Tasman, from the Fox, but the weather defeated them, and they had instead to make a forced retreat from the Chancellor Hut, over the Pioneer Pass, and down to the Tasman Glacier and the Hermitage, also in the one day. [*Down the Tasman Glacier... that would be so much fun!*]

#### ***Some notes on equipment:***

...frost and wind combine to make many of our slopes hard and icy, so that crampons and metal edges for one's ski are essential items of equipment... So many ascents will be done over the hard-frozen snow of early morning that these are even more essential than in summer... A Bergan rucksack is also essential. It is the only one on which ski can be carried with any steadiness where both hands are in use. Don't rely on the leather tags on the bag of the



rucksack; run straps through the top of the frame and strap the blades to it tightly and in perfect balance. ... As to the ski themselves, their size and kind may well depend on individual fancy. For the climber who is merely using ski as aids to his climb, I should recommend short ash ski – even as short as 4ft 6 in. (137 cm) ... The downhill runner, however, will probably cheerfully put up with the extra weight and clumsiness in carriage of his hickory ski for the sake of the extra speed and steadiness in the descent. But in either case metal edges should be used, especially for two or three feet at the centre of the ski. Only these can give the necessary bite on icy slopes. The climber should also devote great care to his bindings, first to make sure that all straps and joints are sound, and second to see that they cannot come undone in action. ... A fall on ski is bad enough – in fact it may be fatal; but to have to chase one's ski down thousands of feet or rescue them from the depths of a crevasse is far, far worse. Lastly, there is the vexed question of sealskins. Skins are essential – all are agreed on that, but of what kind? ... we have come to the conclusion that the latest tie-on plush skins are the best. They are the cheapest too. *[Plush skins? Don't know what this refers to exactly, but interesting description]*

***Okay, we've the trip planned, equipment gathered, let's hit the slopes!***

Let us assume then, that our party, having learnt the elements of ski-ing on the

practice slopes, are going for a climb at the head of the Tasman Glacier *[still jealous!]*. This will mean an early departure and a steady climb over the frozen slopes of the glacier. So long as the crust is hard enough, the best way is to go on foot, trailing the ski by a stout string from the waist to the toe of the ski. *[Wait, what?]* This is far easier than carrying them. *[I mean, okay, but... what?]* But as soon as the crust begins to give way under foot, climbing on ski and sealskins is the only way. Climb in single file taking turns to break trail...

As soon as the slopes steepen and crevasses appear in any number the rope should certainly be put on, care should be taken to keep a line of ascent on which ski and skis will grip firmly, and the ice-ax and rope should be used as in climbing on foot. If there is any doubt about a secure track, remove ski and strap them across the top of the rucksack...

I head some climbers say "Why carry ski up to this point? They are safer left below." *[Why are we concerned about the safety of the skis?]* There are, of course, a number of reasons but one above all to which I should like to refer. That is that the steep frozen slopes of the morning, on which the slung ski are nothing but an encumbrance, will provide perfectly safe ski-ing as soon as the surface has been thawed by the sun. A great part of the enjoyment of ski-mountaineering in spring depends on this fact...

On the descent, though far less necessary under ordinary conditions, the rope must still be worn in dangerously crevassed ground, with intervals of up to 75 feet. *[Skiing with a rope... that sounds like a horrible idea]* The best number on the rope is two, with the weaker runner leading. A wide track and an instant readiness to stem are the prescriptions for such running, so that one should not try to ski fast *[I should say so]*. In this extraordinarily stable position, I have dragged a fallen companion along behind me, quite unconscious of his fall. *[Didn't I say this sounded like a horrible idea?]*

***Some closing remarks***

I have never been able to understand why ski have not become a matter of course on the Grand Plateau, and particularly on the Linda route. Their only disadvantage is the extra labour of varying them; but, if one gets tired of that, a pound or so for a porter is no extravagance. *[Okay...]* After the example I have given, there should be no need to stress the merits of ski as an amusement for off-days. In a season such as the last, which was made up almost entirely of off-days, ski-ing made many converts on that ground alone, and I cherish the *sotto voce* remark of one well-known climber as he strolled up the Lendenfeld Saddle on borrowed ski and skins, one nor'-west morning "I'm never coming up this b--- glacier without ski again." *[Hear, hear sir!]*



LOOKING DOWN THE GODLEY GLACIER FROM BELOW STEWART SADDLE

Photo :  
C. C. Benzoni

## NEWS & NOTICES

### Guide Books Available

The Section has an up-to-date set of guidebooks available to members. Priority goes to trip leaders, however these are available to all members. Contact us to arrange use.

**Aoraki Tai Poutini**, *Rob Frost, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2018*

**Backcountry Ski-Touring in New Zealand**, *Shane Orchard, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 2018*

**Barron Saddle – Mount Brewster**, *Ross Cullen, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2002*

**Mount Aspiring Region**, *Allan Uren and Mark Watson, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2016*

**The Otago Southern Alps**, *Danilo Hegg & Geoff Spearpoint, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., 2013*

**Queenstown Rock Ice & Boulders**, *Guillaume Charton, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2018*

**Rock Deluxe**, *Ivan Vostiner and Kate Sinclair, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2015*

**Wanaka Rock**, *7<sup>th</sup> ed., 2014*

### Gear for Hire

#### PLBs (Personal Locator Beacons)

The Otago Section has two PLBs (Personal Locator Beacons) for use by Section members. Rental is free for NZAC members and \$5 per day for non-members.

Fill out the [online booking form](#), then contact Keith Moffat or Ryan Thomas to arrange to collect a unit (contact info in Section Contacts).

#### Avalanche Equipment and Snowshoes

Available for rent from Hunting and Fishing, Dunedin (141 Crawford Street).

Rental for members is \$5 per day for an avalanche set (transceiver, probe and shovel), and \$5 per day for snowshoes. You MUST show your current membership card to receive that rate. Fees for non members are \$10 per day with a \$20 deposit. Members are welcome to collect gear on Friday and return Monday and two day's rental will apply.

If you have any issues with the gear or rentals, please contact the Section. Hunting and Fishing are doing us a huge favour running the rentals: please don't hassle the staff!

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## DISCOUNT PAGE

Kiwi businesses such as these are going to need all the help they can get in the next year or so! For some of these discounts you'll need your NZAC Card, for others you'll need your FMC Card. Check the [NZAC Website](#) for a full discount list and details.

### Gear/Clothing

Note that most of these discounts are off the regularly priced gear only, and that a lot of gear will have a better discount when it goes on regular sale. Just saying retailers.



**Aspiring Safety 10% off**

In-store and online, wide variety of climbing gear and snow/ice tools



**Bivouac 10% off**

This one seems variable – ask at the till and you may get more



**Cactus Outdoor 10% off**

In-store and online, a range of clothing/gear, made in New Zealand



**Climbing Equipment NZ 25% off**

Rock climbing and mountaineering gear, free freight orders over \$20



**Earth Sea Sky 15% off**

Free freight in NZ



**Further Faster 15% off**

Online or in-store (ChCh)



**Gearshop 10% off**

Phone orders, online outdoor gear retailer



**GoNative 10% off**



Wellington based with ready to eat food (not freeze dried) and energy fruit bars



**Good Rotating – Up to 10% Bicycle Shop**

Bicycles, packrafting, accessories in Wanaka. Sale and rent.



**Kai Carrier 25% off**

Entire pouch range. Reusable pouches and packaging to make your backcountry trips waste free



**Koaro Packrafts \$50 off**

Discount off any new packraft, Christchurch Company



**Macpac 30%/15% off**

30% off Macpac branded gear, 15% off everything else



**Monster Merinos 10% off**

Kids merino clothing built to last



**North Face 15% off**

In-store (Qtown and ChCh)



**Outfitters 10% off**

Extensive range of global outdoor adventure brands



**Small Planet 10% off**

Gear, clothing and equipment in Queenstown

### Other Services



**Peak Safety 15% off**

Courses and medical supplies



**Twin Needle Repairs 10% off**

Gear repairs including packs, tents, sleeping bags, tents, rainwear clothing

### Travel/Experiences



**Snow Farm 20% off**

Cross country skiing, snowshoeing, bookable huts and more. Two for one prices on hut bookings!



**DOC Annual Backcountry Hut Pass 30% off**

Show your hut pass and NZAC Card and get 10% off Great Walk fees



**Real Journeys 10% off**

Cruises in Milford or Doubtful Sounds, TSS Earnslaw



**Stewart Island Experience 10% off**

Ferry services (we tested this: includes ferry to/from Oban)



**Whale Watch Kaikoura 50% off**

Whale watching tours between 1<sup>st</sup> May and 31<sup>st</sup> October. Makes it reasonably affordable!